

MULK RAJ ANAND

# APOLOGY FOR HEROISM

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## APOLOGY FOR HEROISM

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MULK RAJ ANAND

# APOLOGY FOR HEROISM

An Essay in Search of Faith



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LINDSAY DRUMMOND



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To  
OLAF STAPLEDON  
and  
E. W. MARTIN



## PREFATORY NOTE

I HAVE allowed this book to go to press, because I feel that it may perhaps be useful as a statement of belief by a contemporary Indian and as a very tentative introduction to the humanism which I have been evolving for myself through the jig-saw puzzle of my Indian upbringing and my Eur-Asian experience.

I should like, however, to emphasize the tentativeness of my essay. For, as is well-known, confessional writing tends to be assertive. The very attempt to overcome vacillations leads one to conceal uncertainties and to build up a façade of protective egotism round oneself. And there is also the danger that a person may seek to adumbrate an aura of self-righteousness in the very act of searching for truth and discussing fundamental values.

I have tried, as far as possible, to be honest and to put down the reasons for the kind of worship of humanity in which I have come to believe. I am well aware that I have yet to work out the fuller implications of this humanism. So if some of the ancillary ideas and opinions I have put down seem too opinionated I can plead that the struggle from which they have arisen has not been easy, in view of the crises in which I and my generation have been involved. Only, there is a future, especially for India. Anyhow, nature abhors a vacuum. And one must say one's say, if only by way of an apology for heroism.

*London, 1945*

M.R.A.



I WAS born in a Hindu family of Kshatriya, the second highest caste in the old, four-fold scheme which divides men into Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishas (tradesmen), and Sudras (menials). It is not very well known that Hinduism has tended for a long time to be more and more the social organism of caste and less and less a unified religion. And, latterly, it has been breaking up even in its caste aspect, through the coming of modern industry and the social and political ideas and institutions associated with it. So I grew up in a hotch-potch world of which I early began to perceive the inconsistencies.

I remember how, when I was a child, my mother would place little brass idols of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon side by side with a crucifix which she had picked up somewhere, a picture of the Aga Khan and of Guru Nanak, the first saint of the Sikhs, on a raised platform for worship on various festivals. That always seemed to me to be incongruous, and I do not think I learnt much about religion from her.

As a matter of fact, I do not believe she knew very much about any religion, or even about the rules of the traditional Hindu ritualistic worship. She did, indeed, take lessons in reading the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Hindu prayer-book, from my father, but I do not think she ever got beyond the stage of being an amusement to us. I recall many a time when I won a prize of a shiny

silver coin, from my father or the visitors, for the prodigious feat of mimicking my mother reading the *Gita*. And in retrospect it seems to me that she merely affected the mumbo-jumbo, the incense-burning and the holy-water-sprinkling of the priests in her worship, while all of us, my father, my brothers and myself, laughed at her as we waited for the time when the ceremonial was finished and we received shares of fruit, sweets and other offerings from her. Sometimes, when we joked about her assortment of idols, my mother said that there was one God behind all gods and religions; but even her pantheism was vague and untrustworthy.

My father's attitude in such matters was a compromise between traditional beliefs and the secular life he led in the British-Indian army. Side by side with the Hinduism into which he was born, he had inherited from his forefathers, who were copper-smiths and silver-smiths by profession, a family devotion to the peculiar Ismaili religion. This was a faith elaborated by the grandfather of the present Aga Khan to combine Islam and Hinduism, by claiming a direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad on the one hand, and an incarnation of the Hindu Gods, Vishnu and Krishna, on the other.

A short time after my father had entered the army and begun to live away from the brotherhood of copper-smiths and silversmiths, among the semi-educated professional and business men in the cantonments of northern India, he had begun to feel self-conscious about his belief in the personal godhead of the Aga Khan, who was even then known to be spending colossal sums on luxurious living in the various European capitals and on the Riviera—a queer kind of deity who

kept studs of race-horses and declared that it was no beer and skittles being a God!

As a reaction against this my father had joined the Arya Samaj. This was a reformist movement of Hinduism, started by a Gujerati Brahmin named Dayanand Saraswati, for the revival of ancient Vedic religion combined with certain social reforms such as widow re-marriage, raising the age of consent, conversion from other religions, particularly from Islam. The whole movement was a reaction against the latter religion, and it became an attempt to re-group the professional lower middle classes of northern India for an offensive against the British Government, which was already discriminating against the Hindu *petite bourgeoisie* in choosing cadres for the subordinate services.

Actually, my father did not formally cut his connection with Aga Khan Ismailism till 1913-14. Meanwhile, however, he attended the services at the Arya Samaj, which had in practice come to be a social club for respectable professional and business men.

I remember him reading the *Gita*, but I don't remember him practising any of the ideals laid down in this prayer book. Nor was he addicted to saying prayers every morning, except that he mentioned the various names of God while he was rubbing himself with a towel after his bath! No, I do not think my father was particularly troubled by the necessity to discover a way of life. In fact so great a portion of his time was spent in reading the clauses, sub-clauses and paras of orders from Headquarters that the Army Code seemed to have become his Bible and interpretation of it his means of livelihood. And, for the rest, he accepted the conventions of his coppersmith-caste brotherhood without even

attempting to relate them to the ideas he must have come across in his readings in literature.

Sometimes during my childhood I heard my father complain against the intrigue, the graft and brutality of Indian army life. And he looked forward to his retirement, when he would spend his life visiting the holy places. But in other moods his love of money and the habit of work made him averse to the other-worldliness of the famous ideal of Hinduism which urges dedication to God on the approach of old age. And he reconciled God with Mammon in the inimitable way of his English masters, of whom he was a loyal subject, enjoying the rich foods prepared by my mother on all religious festivals, doing the bidding of the priests in the arrangements of betrothals, marriages, births and deaths, paying lip service to the tenets of Hinduism while he sought to amass a fortune through efficient service, as well as through various sidelines in moneylending, buying and selling houses, accepting mortgages of property and bribes.

There was no religious instruction given in the British-Indian schools which I attended, though on the festivals of all the main religions of India we were given holidays which were very welcome. And, as the education imparted in these schools was imitative, giving very little idea of Indian tradition, but mainly a bastardized version of English curricula, in English, with particular emphasis on English history, ideas, forms and institutions, deliberately calculated to show everything relating to Indian history and tradition as inferior, I early acquired a bias against all indigenous customs and grew up hating everything Indian.

Sometimes, indeed, I ran into a temple in the evening

at prayer-time when the bells rang and the dismal conch still wailed, but it was mainly to collect the offerings of holy water and fruit which the old priest distributed after the ceremony.

Occasionally, I saw regimental padres in military uniforms, with clerical collars, or in strange, long gowns, with cords, girdles and solar topees, riding to the Officers' Mess for tiffin on brand new bicycles. As I naively associated religion with the simple, unostentatious, even ascetic life, I could not think of these well-fed priests as religious men at all. And because they, like other English officers, seldom talked to Indians, but lived the superior expensive life of Sahibs, I didn't regard Christianity as a religion at all, but as some mysterious convention of the Sahibs which was observed on Sundays and at which these priests officiated.

Sometimes, out of sheer curiosity, I stole into a church to see what was happening inside, but Indians were generally discouraged from entering churches if the Sahibs happened to be there. The few Indian converts to Christianity I knew were either the poor regimental bandsmen or untouchables in the Church Mission schools, who seemed to have been attracted by offers of scholarships, clothes and the superior status which the Sahib's religion conferred rather than by any curiosity about, or love for, the teachings of Christ. Once or twice I listened to a Salvation Army officer preaching, but it all seemed to me at that time to be an arid, meaningless discourse, insisting on the unique Godhood of an ugly, tortured image on the cross.

I felt equally bored by any serious lecture I ever heard delivered by a Hindu, Muhammadan or Sikh religious divine. I abominated the fasts my mother

kept, the long-drawn-out prayers in which she indulged, the visits to the Aga Khan's Jamait Khana, as well as the ceremonials on marriages, births and deaths, which disturbed the routine of our lives through my mother's absences from home.

A tour of the holy cities of Hinduism with my parents is only memorable to me for the vivid recollections of the disgusting ascetics who abounded in these places, of my first view of the lilies in the pools by the Taj Mahal at Agra, of how I nearly got drowned as I dived into the Ganges after my father, and of how the voracious monkeys at Mathura deprived my father of his loin cloth as he held some cakes in his hand, and left him standing naked in the courtyard of the holy place.

Thus I did not imbibe any faith, religion or belief in my early life. The reason for this seems to me now, as I have said above, to be implicit in the muddle created by the impact of Europe. The British had made very little attempt at a synthesis. They merely carried on the administration of the country and professed tolerance for the religious beliefs, castes, creeds and customs of the people, a tolerance, of course, which worked in their favour because it allowed the sores of old superstitions to fester and kept the country divided. Since, however, the traditional forms of Indian culture were disintegrating in any event, philosophy and religion, as well as poetry and art, became orthodoxies without a deep relation to ordinary life, escapes from the more onerous duty of obedience to the Sarkar, consolations for a despairing and hopeless lot.

So I grew up, like most of my contemporaries, a very superficial, ill-educated young man, without any bear-

ings. My only ideal, if ideal it can be called, was one which my father had accepted as a gift from the benign Sarkar—to pass all examinations and to secure a good subordinate job in the pay of the Government.

## II

ONE or two critical illnesses during these years had, however, given me a rather reflective bent of mind, and, apart from my school courses, I had been reading voraciously in Hindustani and English literature. All this reading was, of course, discursive and mainly snobbish, a kind of aid to cleverness so that I could show off as a more important person than most of my fellow-students, who kept strictly to the school text books. But the cumulative effect of my extra-mural work was to stimulate the genuine inquisitiveness which I had and to give me speculative interests. And then a weakness in arithmetic, due to a disturbing illness and bad teaching, made me abandon the original intention to study science at the University and forced me to take up an arts course, including philosophy.

But during the first two years of my college life, I felt cheated, because none of the questions about the world which I wanted to ask were answered. Instead, our appointed task, according to the syllabus, was to mug up Professor Sharma's two elementary text books on Logic and to cram Professor J. S. Mackenzie's *Outline of Ethics* for the First of Arts examination. The method of teaching adopted by our lecturer was to read these books aloud to us, chapter by chapter, asking us to underline various passages for cramming with a view to vomiting them out in the examination hall. He did not explain what logic was good for and why ethics was

necessary; he merely paraphrased the difficult English of the texts into his idea of simple English!

It was my habit, in order to pass an examination, to read copiously on a subject rather than merely the appointed texts. Through this kind of extensive reading I began to see, very vaguely, the need for Logic and scientific method in philosophical inquiry, and I began also to apprehend some of the questions with which philosophy was concerned.

I had also, about this time, just come through the experience of Amritsar, 1919, when the Imperial Government, having imposed the repressive Rowlatt Act on India, had suppressed with bloody violence the protest movement organized by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of a man whose name had hitherto been unfamiliar to us, M. K. Gandhi. I became vaguely interested in his ideas, particularly in the ethics of simple living that he was insisting on in the Press, spinning, weaving and the wearing of homespuns, travelling in third-class compartments, the campaign against untouchability, and the great doctrine of *ahimsa*, non-violence, as practised in the liberation movement.

After Gandhi's withdrawal of the 1921 campaign of civil disobedience against the Government I, like a great many others of my generation, turned to consider the possibility of terroristic violence as a means of achieving national freedom. Our attempts were as ludicrous as they were abortive.

I read some extracts from the works of Mazzini and Proudhon, and Gorki's *Mother*. But these only encouraged my taste for continental, especially Russian, literature, rather than confirming me in any particular view of experience. Someone gave me *Value, Price and*

*Profit* to read and the first volume of *Capital*. As, however, I was reading these books surreptitiously, I could not get down to the basic theory of Marx and tended only to talk of him because it was fashionable among the students to do so. But certainly I was reading widely at this time, going through the novels of Victor Hugo about the French Revolution, Abbot's *Life of Napoleon*, Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, the works of the romantic poets, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Goethe and Heine in translation.

It was not all this promiscuous reading, but my friendship with a new lecturer in philosophy, L. R. Puri, who came to teach in Amritsar in 1925, that first integrated me to any extent. Puri's father had written a commentary on the Guru Granth, the Bible of the Sikhs, and, apart from his interest in speculative philosophy, he was absorbed in religious mysticism, having been initiated as a *chela*, disciple, to a Sikh Guru who lived on the banks of the Beas. But I was more interested in his exposition of the problems of philosophy than in his Guru at Beas, because Sikhism seemed to me a comparatively unrelated jumble of Hinduism and Islam without any coherent system of thought behind it. I, however, learnt to look at life seriously through L. R. Puri. I remember, for instance, how when he told me about the doctrine of *bhakti*, devotional worship and service of others, as a way of living, I was much more inclined to listen to him than I had been when a maternal uncle of mine had talked to me about it.

I now sought to be sincere, to practise kindness in my relations with others, to be good, to perfect myself, to search after truth, to know, to realize all that there

was to understand in the world and feel all that there was to feel.

There was an element of egotistical exhibitionism in this attempt at altruism and knowledge, which had developed in my adolescence from the pronounced egoism of my early youth. I wanted to be important, to be unique, especially as I saw about me a vast mediocrity which I then considered to be due to lack of initiative among my contemporaries rather than through the lack of opportunities open to us all. Some of this urge for perfection may have been due to an excess of animal spirits, but mostly it arose from a love of power, influence and prestige, which was no less ambitious for being a dedication to truth rather than the current ambition for office, worldly success and money. Indeed, while mainly concerned with enlarging my own ego through reading and questioning, as well as physical exercise, I was not altogether averse to the ordinary ambitions, being quite as keen to secure government service as the other students. Only, I wanted to be no less than a Lord Chief Justice or something quite out of the reach of others and certainly beyond my father's modest ambitions for me, which were to obtain for me a sub-judgeship, an Extra Assistant Commissionership or a Naib-tehsildari.

But while I was dedicated to these vaulting ambitions, I was also being brought to earth by the snobbery of people from other castes and classes about the copper-smith's profession to which my family had once belonged. And I was appalled to discover how privilege and position dominated everything in the life around me, as I was disturbed by the mendacity, the ignorance and superstition of our coppersmith brotherhood.

Unable to understand all these contradictions, I began to write. But an impulse which had arisen from the necessity to reform Indian society soon became the attempt to show off. I had read a great deal of Hindustani poetry, particularly that of Iqbal. I soon began to copy the most popular mannerisms of the favourites and tried to excel at quoting stanzas in conversation like most other Indian poets. The themes of this poetry tended less and less to be philosophic, religious or social, but more and more to be amorous, for the general taboo against social contact between the sexes in modern Indian middle-class society made most of us sublimate our desires in long, empty pleas of passionate longing addressed to the nearest beardless boy. All my earlier sincerity seemed to be evaporating in the company of vain, superior, fashionable young poets whom I sought at this time.

The necessity to prepare for my finals brought me back to serious problems again. And even though my desire to get a good Honours Degree prevented me from enjoying the full fruits of Literature, Philosophy and Economics at this time, I had already decided to research in philosophy. I was particularly impressed by the ingenious theory of scepticism which Hume had elaborated in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Not having read either of his predecessors, Locke or Berkeley, or his successor, Kant, in the original, I could not, of course, understand the full significance of his denial both of mind and body and his relegation of all knowledge to mere association of ideas and impressions. But as a reaction against L. R. Puri's idealistic criticism of Hume, I considered myself a Humian.

I was fighting many hard mental battles at this time,

not only in reading philosophy, but through my self-disgust and my revolt against my family. They seemed set on their petty ideal of my becoming a Sub-Tehsildar or something, while I was determined, again partly through my inordinate vanity and partly through sheer curiosity and love of knowledge, to prosecute higher studies.

I had realized after graduation that the educational system in which I had been nurtured was not only false, stupid and barely adequate even to fulfil the standards set for subordinate services, for which it was a kind of recruiting ground, but that I could never have got anything out of it if I had not accidentally met men like L. R. Puri and the historians C. W. S. Harvey and Lalla Man Mohan. I knew that if I continued to read for a higher degree in India I would, one day or another, have to compromise with my father's desire that I should study law and put in for a judicial job, and that the whole of my search for truth would be lost in the search for position in a country which abounded in the largest unemployed intelligentsia in the world. Far better, I thought, even from the point of view of jobbery, to research in philosophy in England, as a degree from abroad still seemed to have a scarcity value, apart from the superior opportunities it would offer me for reading at the original sources. Besides, there was the snob value of a European excursion.

After a long tussle with my father during which I learnt to hate all the compromises which he had accepted, all his ideas of flourishing in the world, of obeying the Government, of marrying a girl of his choice and settling down like a respectable person; after a summer during which I suffered the tedium of an

empty banal life, bound and constricted on every side, where growth and self-awareness were thwarted from the start and the vast bulk of the people condemned to ignorance and a sub-human life, while the few privileged persons preyed upon others like strong birds on the weaker members of the flock; after realizing that I should die or disintegrate if I could not satisfy my curiosity for truth, I left India at last in the autumn of 1925.

### III

ON my arrival in London, I registered at University College for research for a Doctor's degree in philosophy, under Professor G. Dawes Hicks, the famous Kantian scholar and co-editor of the *Hibbert Journal*.

Professor Hicks set me to work on the theory of knowledge and, in particular, on the treatment of such relations as cause and effect, identity, etc., by Hume and his predecessors.

I used to attend fifteen lectures a week with him, ranging from Greek philosophy to the history of Modern philosophy in general, and seminars on Kant, Hegel, Bradley and Bertrand Russell. And I realized, in the very first few days, what I had sensed acutely enough before, in how poor a state the teaching of philosophy was in the Indian universities, and how hopeless it would have been for me to cope with the research I had now undertaken, if I had not independently in India developed a taste for probing into the fundamental problems of Reality, Knowledge, God, Immortality, Survival, Evil and Suffering, even though I had not been able to find any answers to them.

During 1925-26 I read some of the original classics of Modern Philosophy. For a while I hungered for the methods of Indian religions and philosophies and wished I had learnt Sanskrit and researched in one of the schools of ancient Indian thought which gave more rounded answers to life's questions. Then, however, perhaps because I had been infected with Professor

Hicks's bias in favour of scientific modes of philosophizing, or because my early study of Hume had coloured my thinking, I began to appreciate the emphasis laid by modern European philosophers since Descartes on epistemology, on the question of how we know as a preliminary to asking the question what is reality.

But I was also rather puzzled by the European tradition. For those parts of the works of the great western philosophers, like Berkeley and Malebranche, which sought to explain the nature and qualities of God, the meaning of existence, etc., seemed to be based on such insecure assumptions and to be so hopelessly contradictory in the attempt to fit the trappings of Christianity into neat, little philosophical patterns, that they had little value for me.

My interest in philosophy had arisen mainly from sheer curiosity but partly from the desire to know, from the natural desire to know myself and the world of which I was a part. I had been trying, very vaguely, to correlate the ordinarily-accepted ideas of religion, such as God, Immortality and Pain, with some degree of conviction. I had been alienated from the traditions of India. And I was not attracted by the traditional faiths of modern Europe because of their narrowness and sectarianism. Nor was I particularly impressed by the academic formalism of much of modern thought. I felt that philosophy should answer problems set by our human needs and interests, that it should do so through reason. In fact I was already inclined towards rationalism and a humanist view of experience.

And yet, through the influence of Professor Hicks, I found myself, for a time, accepting a theoretic view, according to which philosophy had nothing whatever

to do with the nature of human needs and interests, though the problems which it posed arose from human needs and interests; that it aimed, in the actual solution of its problems, to be completely unbiased by considerations of utility or subjective satisfaction.

Therefore I was plunged, soon after my arrival in England, into the welter of that historic controversy which had been going on in British thought for a generation: I mean the see-saw between the general schools of Idealism and Realism.

There were some thinkers, I found, who approached philosophy from the point of view of the greater faiths of mankind and who were seeking confirmation in their own experience of the validity of these faiths. And there were others who, imbued with the spirit of modern science, approached scientific problems from the side of facts. There were, of course, further differences between the adherents of these views. There were the idealists, for instance, who took their start from the world that is experienced as containing something of which the process of experiencing itself is a revelation. And there were those who seemed to find the clue to Truth, Reality, Beauty and Goodness in the temporal processes of the human mind, such as thinking, willing and feeling. The first of these emphasized the element of permanence, the non-temporal unity of the world; the second stressed the plurality of the essentially changing world.

Professor Hicks belonged to what is generally known as the realist tendency in contemporary British philosophy, a tendency in the direction of scientific analysis which seemed to have arisen as a reaction against the romantic, mystical movement in nineteenth-century

literature (particularly the Platonism, associated with the names of Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth), and against the influence of German philosophy, especially of Kant and Hegel.

But, of course, Professor Hicks's realism was a uniquely acute and original interpretation of the facts of knowledge, and different in form and content from the realism of other British philosophers. He took his start from the theory of knowledge and was concerned to maintain the existence of things independent of knowledge, both sentient and conceptual, as against all kinds of subjectivism; whereas other realists started from the world as it presents itself to science and were concerned to analyse and describe its contents. But while he did not deny that there were other departments of philosophy than merely the theory of knowledge, as, for instance, metaphysics, whose task was to elaborate the kind of systems that would be compatible with what we know of Reality, or the sciences of Ethics and Aesthetics which analyse man's evaluating experiences, or Religion which sums up the total response of man's personality towards Reality, he was prejudiced against the kind of speculation which concerned itself with large and rounded statements and betokened attempts at system-making.

There resulted from my temporary partiality to this and the other Realisms a scientific bee in the bonnet, and philosophy became for me, essentially, a criticism of the basic assumptions of the sciences. In this I was only following the current fashion, though the scientific bee was useful to me in so far as it gave me an opportunity to study the sciences, even though amateurishly. But I began to concentrate my attention on the problem

of the justification of knowledge and belief and tried to see the popular conceptions of God, Reality, Immortality, etc., in the light of the most up-to-date scientific research.

I have said, "tried to see"; it would be truer to say that "I saw", in the sense that I began to "notice" certain facts which had been obvious enough to me before. For instance, although I had been vaguely aware that there was very little in common between the postulates of religion and the discoveries of science, it was now proved to me that the assertions of both these were, in spite of those brave apologists who tried to reconcile the two, fundamentally antagonistic.

I did not know the doctrine of Christianity comprehensively, but it seemed to me that in general this religion suffered much more from the impact of science than most others. It was, of course, much more vulnerable, if one took the first chapter of Genesis literally. For those who have not been born and brought up as Christians and inured to all the metaphorical decorations with which men have sought to rationalize Christianity, the theory of physical life as given in the Bible at once seemed absurd in the light of the doctrine of the mutability of the species and natural selection. But, apart from that, and the popular "three-storeyed" geography which talked in terms of heaven above, the horizontal earth and the hell below, there were other fundamental assumptions of Christianity which brought it into conflict with science. For instance, the argument that nature shows a design, which cannot have come into being without a creator or God, could so easily be answered by the contrary assertion that there is little

evidence of design or order in the universe, that in fact life is continually bursting from the contours of the known world in the most unforeseen and wanton manner; and that whereas the God who created such a universe piled up evil and pain, science and human knowledge seek to limit them. And every atom of intelligence in me was forcing me to accept the evidence which the new spotlight of scientific theories cast on the many inexplicable human problems.

For, if the publication of the *Origin of Species* had been one of the great moments in the history of thought, then these great moments in the history of human speculation and action seemed to be occurring more frequently. So that men like T. H. Huxley, who had been courageous enough to accept the shock administered by Darwin but still believed that science might reorientate traditional religion and philosophy in some way, had been left behind long since, in my mind, as far back as the orang-outangs from whom men sprang. Certainly there were attempts like those of Sir Arthur Eddington to interpret the nature of the physical world idealistically. Eddington believed that we cannot know anything very much about the real nature of matter, and that most of what we know about it is the result of our own thinking. But, as Professor Hicks always pointed out, from the point of view of common-sense realism, though certain aspects of reality may be rational, it has other, material characteristics and exists outside our own minds. That we don't know much about it does not mean that reality is not objective, and because its behaviour is uncertain and unpredictable, it does not imply that it is not real or has no free will. In view of this and in view of Einstein's theory of Relativity and the recent researches in biology,

it seemed to me impossible that there could be a deep friendship between religion and science.

I have mentioned this rather crude criticism of Christianity because it has become common currency in our time, though I shall come to consider it in a little detail later on. But there is hardly an invention, major or minor, of the last half-century which has not corroded the basis of accepted religions and moralities. For instance, the fact that Heap had succeeded in transferring embryo rabbits from one female to another, or that Haldane was trying to grow embryonic rats in serum, tended to show that the whole relationship between Man and the other animals and plants, which it is the special function of biology to study, promised several revolutions in the manners, methods and modes of society. Apart from generalizations based on already known facts about individual organisms and their parts, discovered by Mendel and Weismann, which are overdue and which, when made, may profoundly affect philosophical and social theories, the practical applications of biology were already evidencing miraculous changes in human behaviour. The fact that infant mortality was higher a hundred years ago than it is to-day, in spite of the terribly bad housing conditions still existing in the industrial areas, showed that the social order which the various religions regard as static and outside the scope of their exalted approach, is something to reckon with.

One could only speculate on the results which would follow for human psychology and social life from the separation of sexual love and reproduction, which may become possible with the advance of ecto-genetic research. But already this was putting many popular

ideas of eugenics in the shade. And it was quite certain that many new virtues and vices would appear from the application, on already known lines, of biological principles. For instance, it is already known how the proper functioning of our mental faculties is contingent upon the proper functioning of certain glands, notably the thyroid and sex glands, and how the changes in such glands affect our characters. The inevitable results of further knowledge of these would be to change the ethics of punishment from the stupid forms practised in our society to the application of the methods of physiology and psychology. After the abolition of a group of diseases, following upon Pasteur's discovery of the nature of infections, it seemed anything might be possible in coping with the ills of the body. Similarly, Freud's daring postulates seemed to extend our knowledge of the ills of the mind, and Dr. Jung's interpretation to trace us further to our sources in the vast unconscious.

My sympathy towards this scientific attitude may have been due to the enthusiasm of youth. Also, the progressivism implicit in science and history appealed to me, perhaps, because applied science had rendered possible such things as sanitation, electricity, the aeroplane and, in fact, all the props and gadgets of industrialism so lacking in India. And it was helping to produce a civilization more complex, more varied and potentially richer than any that had gone before. . . . I was not altogether unconscious, of course, of the evils that would certainly follow the misuse of science. But there was the great attraction of its cogency and reasonability for a mind emerging from the morass of superstition, into which Hinduism had fallen, and making of Reason the supreme God. Besides, there was

its appeal to the imagination: all the elements of the universe seemed to have been developing, and humanity, which was part of this world, was changing, in spite of the checks and handicaps imposed on it by the survival of traditional prejudices in men's minds—moving if not always forwards, then at least gaining depth and intensity and enlarging its perspective.

I was not quite so sanguine and happy, however, about the fundamental assumptions of science. The philosophical problems, "What is Reality?" "Who am I?" "How do we know?" "What is the Universe?" "How can space, time, matter and motion be explained?" These were not solved. The greatest discovery in modern science, Einstein's theory of Relativity, had only deduced the consequences to space and time of their ideality, which had been assumed by philosophers for a long time. It had not altered the character of Kant's four-dimensional "thing-in-itself": It had only shown that time, space and matter were the shadows of a fifth dimension, the reflections of an unknowable reality. And the basic hypothesis which scientists took for granted still continued to be the idealism of Kant, though, already, contemporary British and American realists had gone beyond Kant and Hegel in their analysis of experience.

#### IV

I WAS still involved in these academic questions when an event happened which was to have a profound influence on my life. This was the general strike of 1926.

Suddenly, quite out of the blue, as it were, the whole of the outside world seemed to impinge itself on my awareness. Here was I in a country where the miners and their sympathizers among the people had openly challenged the British Government at whose hands my own country had suffered for long generations. There was "something rotten in the state of Denmark". And it was no use speculating on the beneficence of science, if its discoveries were to be manipulated to their own advantage by a small group of individuals who controlled the key industries and had an absolute say in matters of domestic and foreign policy. It seemed to me that though science had developed, the state was in the grip of a conservatism so reactionary that it could put back human progress for a thousand years, if it liked.

And, curiously, I found that almost all the students in the University of London, barring a few, were acting as blacklegs, helping to run trams and buses and tubes and sabotaging the General Strike.

I did not fully understand all the principles for which the strike had been launched until much later. But, because I associated with a group of students who refused to be bullied by the others into helping to run the essential services, I was attacked in a free fight which developed in Gower Street and suffered a minor injury.

This experience filled me with a terrible sense of grievance, and I was thrown back for a while from my high quest in justification of knowledge and belief, to a realization of the fact that my philosophical studies had, since my arrival in England, taken me completely away from the immediate problems of morality and politics at home, and that I had forgotten my position as an Indian.

This revelation was somewhat of a shock to me. For on my arrival in England I had been struck by the peculiar dignity and self-respect with which the porters, sweepers and other workers bore themselves here as against the coolies in India who were always being kicked about and intimidated by some high caste or high-class person, and who were, therefore, often abject in their humility. I admired the way in which those who did unpleasant work seemed to recognize the dignity of labour. And the manner in which the workman washed off the taint of menial work after hours and walked off to his leisure and pleasure had given me the illusion that he was a free citizen of a democratic society.

But this illusion of mine had been shattered with a bang. I now knew that what democracy there was in Western Europe had been achieved by the continual sacrifice of generations of men. Certainly there was a deeply ingrained sense of personal freedom in Britain, as there had seldom been in the old India, and one could say or think what one liked here. But all these liberties seemed to evaporate in a crisis. And the phrase "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" became very much an aspiration and did not seem anywhere near becoming a reality. True, the British enjoyed a democratic form of government, with

its ballot boxes and franchise laws and its elaborate constitutional machinery. The Mother of Parliaments seemed to encourage in the outsider the belief that here grievances could be aired and redressed. But what had happened to the spirit of democracy during the "angry summer"? And where was the faith in democracy, that confidence of the government in the people and that faith of the people in the government, without which democracy became a sham, a catchword, a mere phrase? As the Great War, so in a small way, this clash of interests, had shown that the great idea which had grown up with the liberal and industrial movement of nineteenth century England, and which seemed to offer such hope to people, had broken down and revealed the philosophy of selfishness implicit in the competitive profitmaking commercial civilization, with its greed for wealth, its love of self and self-interest, its gospel of each for himself and devil take the hindmost.

It seemed to me that perhaps the chief failure of democracy lay in the incapacity of the electorate to control the acts of its elected representatives once it had put them in power. Whereas the government of the people by the people was a beautiful poetic ideal, the actual technique of working democracy had found no way to check the defection of men whom the people put into power from their responsibility to the public to love of power as an end in itself. A handful of cabinet ministers, allied to vested interests, could, and often did, defy the will of the people with the greatest ease and assurance. They had the armed forces and the propaganda machinery at their beck and call, as well as the prestige that goes with authority in the eyes of the people. And they were clever because they did not

make too much show of force, always keeping the sword well sheathed while they talked of "law and order" and cowed the people by a mere bluff of words. So that the fundamental premise of British democracy that the best men, trained to rule, could be trusted, was highly questionable, and the self-righteousness of men who put it forward as the acme of progress to "half awakened" people stank of hypocrisy. The General Strike showed me that the people of Britain, no less than the people of India, had yet to win their liberty.

The failure of the General Strike during that tense week hastened my disillusionment and I began to reconsider my position. I was reminded of the slave status of the India in which I had grown up, and of all the humiliations which my generation had suffered since Amritsar. Somehow the problem of India seemed to me to be connected with the problem which I had seen fought out with such bitterness in England before my eyes. And, in the light of this, my own position, and that of the other Indian students in England, seemed to me suddenly false and ridiculous.

Most of us were absorbing portions of an alien culture which we wanted to use only in order to get better jobs on our return home and to secure personal preferment. I had beguiled myself by thinking that I had been pursuing philosophy like some of the English students out of a pure love of learning, but all my pretences broke down when I realized in my innermost self that I was not above jobbery. And, as jobs were getting scarcer and scarcer in India, on account of the deliberate policy of the British authorities of choosing and selecting individuals with influence and connections on the principle of preferring one community to another, I soon realized

that I had a deep kinship with my own countrymen and the few English students who had stood by the miners in the General Strike.

After this, I began, increasingly, to be conscious of that tension in English life which seemed to have resulted from the clash in this country of two strains of influence: On the one hand there was the jingoistic, deceptive and fraudulent propaganda of the ruling class; on the other hand there was the aspiration of the "ordinary man" towards social security, though it was weighed down by the traditions of his chapel-going, Bible-reading ancestors, and by his swallowing a great deal of the upper-class bluff so naively that he would die for them or go and oppress other nations for his masters.

Later, I began to see more and more clearly that for all its show of national unity, the State of Britain was the expression of that great struggle between "the two nations", in Disraeli's phrase, which had been going on since even before the Industrial Revolution. The Strike of 1926 had shown me categorically that Britain was organized and run in the interests of a small minority which could suppress the majority as violently at home as it did in the Empire.

I could also see that the Modern State had lagged behind the internationalism implicit in modern science; that the peoples of Western Europe had not made the necessary adjustment to modernity in spite of the fact that housing conditions had, according to Mr. Rowntree, improved vastly during a hundred years and kitchen maids could buy silk stockings at Woolworths and pass off as ladies of the manor; that the cultural awareness which makes a civilization worth its name

was even farther behind the tardy material and social progress.

To some extent these ideas may have arisen through the sympathy and friendship of a young Communist girl, Eltie Helman, from whom I bought a few pamphlets one day in Gower Street and with whom I developed one of those friendships which alleviate the lot of the lonely Indian student, who comes from the close intimacy of family life in India and finds himself plunged into a highly individualistic, selfish society, where friendship is difficult, exclusive and rare. But, more than Eltie Helman, it was the British Government which, by breaking the General Strike, demonstrated to me the class nature of society.

## V

I HAD come by this time to think of academic philosophy mostly as an inconsequential disabuse of terminology expressly invented for the purpose; and I had begun to reach out in all directions for a re-orientation, as people do in a time of mental and moral stress and confusion. My preoccupation with India after a period of research led me towards a rediscovery of Indian ideals.

Through an exposition of the Hindu View of Art which I attempted, I saw the development of Indian thought in some kind of perspective. And I got to grips with the religious and philosophic ideas which had survived beneath the débris of all those complex and intricate schools of thought which had developed from the Vedas and Upanishads through the humanistic revolt of the Buddha, through the Epic and the Classical periods, and the codes of medieval times into the later schools of Brahmanical theism, Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism.

It would be false to generalize about contemporary Indian religions or philosophic beliefs and practices. The exaltation of Vishnu, the blessed one, Siva, the destroyer and creator, and Sakti, the mother, respectively, by the three dominant forms of Hinduism has brought about accretions of all kinds. These cannot be easily sifted in order to discover a pure enough doctrine. Further, the whole tradition is over-laden by various layers of survivals, of completely unrelated ideas and influences,

inevitable to a long cultural heritage. I have already mentioned my childhood reactions to the curious Pujapath and recitation from sacred books by my mother. So I was not looking so much for any comfort for my soul when I began to rediscover the meaning and the significance of this worship and the traditional ideals which lay behind it. Rather I was trying to understand the mainsprings of religious emotion and philosophical belief. I read the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the stories and the fables of the *Puranas*. What did I find?

Apart from the evidence which these old books give of earlier ages, through the semi-historical and semi-mythological records embodied in them, no single doctrine emerges from their vast store-house of culture. And as it is difficult to look in the grotesque fancies and superstitions of contemporary religious ritual for much meaning, I had to fall back on modern interpretations.

I realized that in so far as the traditional Vedantic ideal can be summed up from the protagonists of neo-Hinduism, such as Radhakrishnan, Reality is an Absolute, infinite and unconditioned state of being, knowledge of which is derived rather through mystical intuition than sense perception. But while the Absolute is the transcendent total Reality, the cosmic spirit, it is revealed through God who manifests Himself in the world process through Lila, sport, even as the artist expresses himself in a work of art. As to why the Absolute expresses itself thus, there is no answer, except that it is an expression of the freedom of the Absolute. The spirit of God moves upon the waters, like the human breath, until it becomes manifest. And then begins the world with Time, though not in Time. God

then, is in man and nature, not quantitatively but qualitatively, as, for instance, the numerical unit one is in all other units 2, 3, 4, etc. He is a unity who expresses Himself in multiplicity. And as the Absolute, or God, expresses himself in duality, so man, who partakes of the spirit of God, but who has lost the infinity of his higher self in the complexity and the chaos arising from the process of creation, desires to move towards the Creator, to become absorbed in the Absolute.

In the light of this Absolutism, the Universe seemed to become the tiniest speck in the æons of the historical process in which all things were tending towards the Divine. And the whole activity of man which is bound up in those habits of emotion, action and thought, which spring from human needs and interests, seemed to be involved in an eternal cycle of birth and rebirth through which he is perfecting himself for absorption into the Divine.

So this was man! A kind of nothingness inspired by the spirit of God, but separated from Him as a lover from the beloved, though capable of realizing Him if he so desired.

This negative tradition tended to pull all my newly-acquired ideas askew. For, according to this, there seemed to be at least two different species of desires, high and low, the reflections of the self-will of those who aim at union with God through the battles of the mind, or through propitiation of priests, and the small desires of those who wanted to escape from the miseries of the earthly state, such as poverty, disease and frustration. And, apparently, a man who docilely accepted his position within the framework of traditional Hindu society, however low and humiliating that position, was

a good citizen, whereas those who consciously questioned tradition and suffered unwillingly were moral lepers. Everyone was born to his position and had to accept his lot through the cycle of birth to rebirth. Except, of course, that you had the right to ask the eternal questions and to see yourself as part of Reality even though you could not alter your position in the everyday world of appearances. So that you remained a frantically agitated, impetuous, fictional being trying to realize that you were capable of being filled with God and thus seeking to become one with the omnipotent, omniscient, all-pervading free spirit, the Absolute above, but really consigned to the iniquities of hell on earth, without a hope of bettering yourself.

So this was man! Bound up in the life of personality, weak and poor and dwarfed into insignificance, eternally afraid of the proud privilege he had lost when God split himself into the Universe and introduced the element of desire in his creatures, limited and humiliatingly circumscribed in every way.

For a while this vague conscience, which oozes from the works of the neo-Hindu writers, kept on accusing me and the new sense of values I had acquired from Europe, the sense of time, the taste of alcohol, tobacco and the craving for life, until I found a half-interrupted colloquy going on in myself:

*Conscience*: All your search for truth, all your desire for beauty, all your ideals of service and social justice are attempts to serve your own ego, to enlarge it, so that you may look important, so that you may flourish. Your much-vaunted objectivity is not really a liberation from the ego but a rationalization of your self-interest in

order to give your *personality* a higher value. You cannot escape from personality in a world of personalities; you cannot be free from the bondage of self unless you cut out desire. . . .

*I, Me and Myself*: But I am in no sense a disinterested searcher after truth and I am full of desires, as are other people.

*Conscience*: Then you are doomed to be imprisoned in this temporal universe. You will always remain shackled in the chain of cause and effect, for one set of desires leads to another set of desires. And desire is potentially evil.

*I, Me and Myself*: Let me tell you that desire generates good as well as evil.

*Conscience*: No. Real good is Absolute: it is outside Time, it is also the highest ideal.

*I, Me and Myself*: But, surely, if your God created the Universe and manifested himself in the world, He must have introduced into it potential good as well as evil. Surely, if He split himself through sheer joy of freedom in creation, and creation is tending towards Him, then the personality of God is dependent on the created order and is only possible with reference to an imperfect world which is capable of progress.

*Conscience*: The Absolute is above God in His creative aspect, is beyond Time. All the potential values, Goodness, Truth and Beauty, cannot be realized, except outside Time, without the practice of Yoga. Liberation from Time, desire and personality alone can actualize the verities.

*I, Me and Myself*: First of all you presuppose an Absolute. Then you say that contact with Him is only possible through control of breath and the adoption of

some ridiculous posture like the juggler balancing himself on his head or looking at his navel. This is manifestly absurd and contradictory. And if there is a conscious will in man to attain values, if men are active agents and not passive participants in the return of all things to God, then why doesn't your God help human beings to achieve Goodness and Understanding through a little tilting of the scales in favour of potential good rather than keep all the potential evil for the world to shoulder? Why does he remain a bloodless, pure, disinterested Consciousness outside Time? And what about those who strive to live, to enjoy the fruits of this world?

*Conscience* : The Absolute is beyond Time, Goodness, beauty, Truth and desire. Above everything; the human and animal level, transcendent, supreme, devoid of personality; while man's very desire to rise, to transcend personality, to realize the spiritual and timeless good condemns him to the eternal bondage of personality. . . . And so on, and so forth.

There seemed no escape for man according to the exalted, yet somewhat pedantic, Vedantic ideal. And as for the religion based on it, there was required an ultimate surrender of reason to faith and mystical intuition as well as to a pernicious social organization.

Was Christianity any better?

Certainly the hundred or so pages of the essential Christian gospel in the New Testament contained perhaps some of the simplest and most beautiful truths about life. And more than the truths he preached, since they are often contradictory and partial, the personality of the Galilean carpenter's son, tender, wise,

gracious, human and devoted to the point of martyrdom, is one of the "goodest" the world has known.

But the Christian theorists are not content to make their plea for the greatness of their religion on the basis of the mere goodness of Jesus, but claim that he was the only Son of God, whom the Divine Father sent here to save the world. This exclusiveness is hard for the intelligence to concede in view of the equal heights of moral and spiritual beauty of character achieved by a man like the Buddha.

And to dismiss Gautama, merely because he did not define his attitude to God or claim direct connection with Him was a further difficulty. It made the acceptance of Christianity contingent upon the acceptance of the dogma of a personal God, the real father of Jesus and not merely a metaphorical, symbolic father. And since the only proof or verification for belief in such a God was the assumption that "He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," it meant that we had to begin our religious life by assuming that God exists and desires to be known. The ultimate test of this kind of belief lay in revelation, in the questionable hypothesis that God wishes to communicate with mankind, and in the evidence of the various saints who are alleged to have had mystical communion with Him.

Besides, a personal God who dispensed forgiveness and only accepted the recommendations of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the prophets and priests of his Church, before sending people to heaven or hell (even though this Church often promised entry into the kingdom of heaven to anyone who left his property to it at death, however he had earned it), would seem a plausible

enough deity only to those who believed in their essential sinfulness. But to me the whole presumption about man being born in sin, which lay at the root of Christian ethic, seemed obnoxious. For whatever criticism may be levelled against the Vedantic Absolute, who is above all human considerations of morality, there is in the Hindu and, particularly, in the Buddhist view, an insistence on light and knowledge as against the Christian insistence on darkness and sin. Gautama became the enlightened one when he attained the highest state, whereas from the start Christianity seemed to condemn human beings to an abject and ignominious position.

And to those who were believing Hindus or had been fascinated by the subtleties of Indian thought, the Indian personal God, Krishna, and his teaching in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, seemed at least as convincing as the author of the Sermon on the Mount. The leniency of the gracious phrase, "Come all ye who labour and are heavy laden and I shall give ye rest," was fairly well matched by the concession:

"For though exceeding great is the toil of those whose minds are attached to the Unknown . . . as for them who having cast all works on me and given themselves over to me, worship me in meditation, with whole-hearted Yoga, these speedily I lift up from the sea of death and life, O Partha, their minds being set on me."

The record of the Christian missionaries in the Colonial and semi-Colonial countries was, except in rare cases like that of C. F. Andrews, not a happy one,

in so far as, until very recently, they bore the Cross to the far-flung places of the earth in the wake of the Imperial sword.

So that, in spite of all the reverence one might feel for the beauties and graces of the life of Jesus, conversion from the Hinduism into which I was born, and which I had outgrown, to another religion so pronouncedly negative as Christianity, did not seem to me very worth while. I was deeply impressed by the Christian conception of the development of human personality through unselfish service, but this was only a confirmation of the Hindu doctrine of *bhakti*, devotion through works. I was not so stupid as to regard Christianity as merely an insurance society against the pains of hell. But to me there was something lacking in a religion which was so much on the defensive as to put more emphasis on the superstructure built round a prophet's varied and contradictory opinions and to uphold his God-head through thick and thin when the greatest thing about him was his goodness and his grace.

## VI

I REMEMBER saying to Bonamy Dobrée at lunch one day about the year 1931, "I want to believe." "If you feel like that, do so," he said very understandingly; "personally, I don't feel the need for it." I respected Dobrée's position because I knew he had arrived at his standpoint of artistic disinterestedness, the fascination of studying a mind for its own sake, if I may so put it, through a great deal of scholarship and research. And he had the courage of his experience when he wrote a little later: "Many, including myself, are in the position of the sick man (though not too unhappy about it, and by no means bedridden), and, moreover, are not prepared to pay the price our cure would require." But for me, who had come through the social and mental disintegration of contemporary India, through some years of academic philosophical study, particularly in Hume and Bertrand Russell, and then through the years of the world economic crisis, my sickness was a very unhappy business indeed. For, if I was to write, as I had just decided to do, with a view to discovering the causes of the mental and material chaos in India and the world, and of my own failure as well as the failure of my generation in the face of it, if I was to act as seemed necessary because of the oppressive political and social authority in India and the emergence of fascism in Europe, I must believe, I must have some touch-stone of values to discriminate between the

various problems before me. I must have some hypotheses.

What was the aim I was to set myself in my work? What was my relation to writers, in India and Britain, to my own Indian cultural heritage and to the heritage of Europe which I had come to acquire? Was I to be a pure artist or would I have to play some part in the political life of the day?

I might begin to answer these questions by tracing, very briefly, the mental climate of Western Europe during the years 1931-36 during which they arose in my mind.

As may seem obvious from my friend Dobrée's remarks quoted above, the period was certainly not a congenial one. The world crisis had indeed sharpened all issues before the intellectuals, and they were eagerly searching for some kind of faith, or even lack of faith. But as their own economic position was more or less secure under *laissez-faire* capitalism, they were chary of questioning the *status quo* and were predominantly interested in certain aspects of the æsthetic problem, the problem of classicism versus romanticism, rather than in relating these questions with the broad moral issues of the time.

Mr. Russell was urging men to secure only such ends as appealed to the purely rationalistic mind, D. H. Lawrence was advocating a Rousseauistic naturalism through which men were to surrender themselves to the dark gods of the unconscious. Mr. Middleton Murry insisted upon the supreme beauty of poetical experience and evolved a personal mysticism. Mr. Wyndham Lewis was satirizing everyone. Mr. Eliot alone was for a more comprehensive philosophy, and he had just

announced that he was Anglo-Catholic in religion, Royalist in politics and Classicist in literature. But almost all the intellectuals lacked centrality of vision; for none of them, in spite of their great sincerity and earnestness, had as yet been able to achieve a synthesis or to call for the intellectual and moral revolution which was necessary to set life on a new and more secure basis. They had the tolerance of academic thinkers about each other's attitudes and acquiesced in, or were partially sympathetic to, a wide range of facts, but were unable to take a total view of man. This disability of front rank Europeans to take a whole view of man, a view of man in the round rather than as scientists, economists, philosophers and artists, seemed to me to be the real *trahison des clercs*. And although it seemed presumptuous, I said so rather loudly, because I had taken my miseducation in the humanities to heart and was more concerned with men and all the values they live by than with any single value or set of values in themselves.

It seemed to me, then, looking on, as it were, from the glare of the tropics rather than through the fogs of the North Sea, that nineteenth-century liberalism and the complex and diverse civilization arising from the industrial revolution had encouraged a very pernicious form of specialism in Western Europe, through which a physicist had become relatively uninterested in chemistry, a biologist in mathematics, a philosopher in poetry, a novelist in philosophy or religion, and the whole lot of them in politics or economics. The world had been arbitrarily, split up into a number of categories, and further subdivided; and there was little or no attempt at relating the data of one set of observations to the rest. The wise man who in the East still had a

sanction in the minds of men, had here become an inessential fool.

So far indeed had this specialism gone that some intellectuals asserted that it was a good thing for Indians to remain under British rule as, the executive business of Government being relegated to others, the natives could occupy themselves more usefully in cultivating their ancient genius in the arts and the humanities. Knowing how little influence intellectuals could exercise on politicians and business men, the intellectuals and other men of letters had perhaps accepted their own position as outcasts, or voluntary exiles in Bohemia. And, as they enjoyed comparative immunity from the censorship and possessed the freedom of speech and opinion won for them by their predecessors, they could well cultivate their sensibilities. But, economic and political frustration apart, those of us in India who had had to read the masterpieces of Russian and French literature surreptitiously, for fear of the British-Indian police, felt differently about it: we would have to interest ourselves to some extent in the struggle for liberation from British imperialism that was going on in our country, because it was the only way in which we could achieve the liberty to read and write at all freely. And we would have to look at the whole of the European and Asiatic traditions, compare and contrast them, even if from a bird's eye point of view, and get to work to build the new India.

Thus, though primarily interested in human values, I knew I would have to face the problem of politics and economics, particularly the wretchedness of the human beings in India which had been the background of my early life.

As I recall it now I must confess that on account of these vague preoccupations I always felt a considerable gap in my relations with the English writers I knew. For, somehow, although I received great kindness from them and enjoyed the gift of the most genuine and loyal friendships, there was always a certain kind of self-consciousness in our discussions about India between my friends and myself, at least until well into the thirties. It may have been partly due to my own inferiority complex, ingrown through insults and humiliations at the hands of authority in India, and leading to a sensitiveness which bordered upon touchiness; but partly, I am sure, it was due to the acquiescence (conscious or unconscious, I don't know which) by most British writers I knew at that time, with the *status quo* and with the arguments used even by the most obtuse of publicists against the advancement of the under-privileged both in Britain and the Empire.

I remember a particular instance of this which happened in a casual discussion about India with Professor G. Dawes Hicks who had asked me to come and stay with him for a week-end in Cambridge. I found that this kindest and wisest of teachers believed in an unrelieved Kiplingism, and in the doctrine of "trusteeship", except that he was dead set against the military caste in Britain and India for some reason. Bonamy Dobrée seemed to me a static liberal at that time, though he was to become much more sympathetic later on. Herbert Reed had not yet come to anarchism. And other British friends of mine, though guilty and ashamed, were mostly noncommittal.

I don't want to exaggerate the significance of such differences of opinion as I had with them, because there

can be no friendship between people if they do not agree to differ about many things, but I am also firmly convinced that there can be no dignity in the personal relations of British and Indian intellectuals unless British writers realize that the freedom of speech and opinion which they take for granted is denied to their Indian friends, and unless they see to it that intellectuals everywhere enjoy equal rights of citizenship, so that chauvinist nationalisms can break down and give place to a fraternity of new men with new ideas. For who should be more universalist in his outlook than the intellectual, the poet? And isn't there already through the shrinking of the world through improved communications and the spread of science, an emerging world civilization, a world tradition, at least in the minds of the few *avant-garde* intellectuals?

Of course, there were not wanting, even in the twenties and thirties, a few men of a liberalizing tendency who had definitely repudiated sectarianism and the Nationalist-Imperialist idea. Leonard Woolf, H. N. Brailsford, Lowes Dickinson, E. M. Forster. Tracing their intellectual ancestry to the Greeks, they declared Society to be greater than the State, and were convinced that free men were better than slaves. And they fraternized with anyone who talked in a civilized language in any corner of the world, especially with anyone who tried to question, and inquire and speculate, who sought to break down the frontiers. They were not content to be deaf mutes and blind to the harmony and beauty of civilization whenever it sprouted forth. Perhaps they were considered by others to be fools who rushed in where angels fear to tread. But I was with them—one of the fools and very happy in my folly.

I did not need to whip myself into a frenzy of hatred in order to criticize Nationalist-Imperialism. It came naturally to me because it not only summed up my instinctive reactions to British rule in India, but was the result of my most reasoned thinking at that time. For I had come to believe that the notions of Empire and freedom are absolutely inconsistent, that the rule of one people by another 'is not freedom but slavery. I had grown up in the ferment of a great moral and political movement in which I had learnt, through the fifteen stripes on my back, that alien authority constricted our lives in every way. I can't say that there was no bitterness in my hatred of imperialism, because I remember how often waves of fury swept over me to see hundreds of human beings go to jail daily after being beaten up by the police for offering civil disobedience. But I did not let my imagination blind me to the fact that my hatred of imperialism was bound up also with my disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian feudal life, with its castes, creeds, dead habits and customs, and its restrictive religious rites and practices. I was one of many groping young men of my generation who had begun to question everything in our background, to look away from the big houses and to feel the misery of the inert, disease-ridden, underfed, illiterate people about us. The more authority humiliated us and insulted our intelligence by suppressing books and ideas, the more hungrily we devoured knowledge of the outside world, the more avidly we sought to contact others in Europe and Asia who we knew were thinking like us. And whether our dearest friends and nearest relations liked it or not, whether the Sarkar tortured us or talked to us persuasively, we had set our hearts on our libera-

tion and those of other oppressed peoples, whoever they were, wherever they were and of whatever shape, size and colour.

I had come abroad, not merely with the purpose of sightseeing, but with the vague and genuine ambition to learn the secrets of European civilization, to reside for a time in a world where ideas of social and human equality could at least be discussed freely, if they were not quite sincerely accepted. I had emerged from the old Indian civilization and was deliberately searching into the values of the dominant European civilization. But I had found that those very people who were the real custodians of European culture, the intelligentsia, were betraying it, by accepting defeat at the hands of the manœuvring party politicians and by devoting themselves to their own petty concerns, be these egotistical self-realization, salvation or poetry and art as mere forms of selfish amusement. I was not unmindful, however, that the failure of the best minds of Europe to exercise any moral influence, however direct or indirect, on the perpetrators of the first world war, as well as the peace which followed that prolonged slaughter, had had a great deal to do with the cynicism with which the intellectuals shrugged their shoulders whenever political or social questions were mentioned.

The individual naturally tends to turn inwards in quest of his own safety, pleasure or integrity when all around is violence and greed and fear. And there are limits to the interest a person feels in another, short of becoming a sentimentalist, or emotion-monger. Also a person may disclaim all social responsibility if he does not believe in the state of which he is a citizen, and he may evolve his own rules and criterions. And there is

the enduring fascination of the perpendicular approach which lures one on and on until one can touch the stars.

But it was because a great many European intellectuals were inclined to forget about the horizontal position altogether, to escape from the realities of the time, and become involved in means to the exclusion of ends, in the tributaries to the exclusion of the main stream, that I felt disappointed. They were prepared to enjoy the fruits of science and the industrial revolution around them, but not worry themselves over-much about the meaning of life. On the other hand, they recommended to the Indians the merits of an idyllic peasant existence and paid lip service to the virtues of the more vertical flights of Asiatic civilization while neglecting its present degeneracy. They did not seek a synthesis between Asia and Europe. And in order to preserve their own superior way of life they were fond of instituting that crude distinction between a materialistic West and a spiritual East which was such an utter vulgarization of the true facts!

It seemed to me, through my association with Indian and Chinese friends, that the intelligentsia in Asia had already moved ahead of European intellectual circles in the realization both of a sense of locality and a wider, more human outlook. The vast public opinion of that part of the world had seen through the "white man's burden" stuff and was beginning to ask the leaders of European culture whether they would underwrite the claim to freedom of the oppressed peoples and declare their faith in the moral, social and intellectual values of their own civilization.

We in India had done a great deal of thinking about qualitative aspects of the universe. The great religious

and cultural tradition of India was of immense consequence to us; and we were very concerned to rescue it from debasement in the currency of ordinary practice and to take from this heritage of ours what was useful to us to-day. But we were not willing to let our pre-occupation with the values of our past prevent us from achieving new ones. The very basis of all civilized living and thinking—education, health, political and economic freedom, were denied to us with the familiar excuses that being “natives” we would not appreciate “anything better,” that we were “fatalists,” “corrupt” and “inferior” and so couldn’t use the new gadgets; whereas we were intent on perfecting the only world civilization that there is for good or evil, the new industrial civilization, so as to lift ourselves from the degrading, sub-human levels at which our masters preferred to leave us, to a human awareness, to the mastery and control of ourselves as well as of the natural forces which surrounded us, to a new synthesis of values.

This search for a comprehensive, many-sided attitude remained a lone one. I used, however, to meet Eric Gill, the sculptor, a great deal about this time, and was particularly interested in the kind of outlook he had evolved. We generally agreed on the fundamental idea of the human and ethical equality of men, and I found his critique of capitalism fascinating. And, coming from a tradition of craftsmen, I also shared his insistence on the value of the inventive artist, the man who is responsible for the whole of a job. But the fundamental faith to which he had tried to relate all his ideas, Catholicism, was too much like traditional ritualistic Hinduism to convince me as a final view. Besides, the ultimate basis of the Catholic or the Hindu attitude lay, as I have said,

in its claim to possess the Absolute Truth and in the mystical test. I was not questioning the Christian Dogma or the honesty of its saints when they gave evidence of the sudden visions or trances through which they achieved union with God. But I had never had such an experience myself. Nor could I believe that the vast majority, or even the most sincere, sensitive and talented men, could be vouchsafed these visions. And a view of life, built on the testimony, howsoever uniform, of a few saints, could not be recommended as a realizable value to a civilization out of joint. Like Jacques Maritain, Gill was conscious of the limitations and ignorances of Christianity and welcomed the friendship and co-operation of even those who did not share his religious faith. Also, he was willing to consider "the common good" as a necessary consideration following from the fact that man lived in society—he even emphasised the communism of the early Christian communities. But though he considered man and everything concerning his needs and interests the supreme values, he felt that not the secular world but the kingdom of God alone could properly house man. And, as a believing Catholic, this drew Gill into the orbit of the Pope. I believe Gill never resolved the contradiction between his Catholicism and the socialism of William Morris, to which he subscribed, especially as the reactionary tendency of the Pope's encyclicals, and his open intervention on the side of fascism, kept pulling Gill away from the Church on the one hand, and the Communist insistence on machine, even though for service and not for profit, as a means and not as an end, frightened him back to the craft system on the other. I was more inclined to accept his master, Morris, because

the latter had accepted political values as part of his system of human and artistic values, even though to the end he remained an enemy of the machine.

I found myself, then, working out the implications of the various systems of values for living, with great difficulty. Nothing seemed certain in the post-crisis years, in Europe or, in fact, in any other part of the world. All the old standards, tests and values of religion, philosophy, science, political and social morality had broken down and nothing positive was being put in their place. I had certainly decided that the mere desire for personal happiness and the longing for superficial pleasures on the sensational level encouraged by European civilization was not the *summum bonum* of life. Only, a destructive critique of naturalistic hedonism was not enough, for it meant a snobbish contempt for the ordinary pleasure-principle which dominates the life of most people, and it ended in an idealistic concern with spiritual values to the exclusion of all material concern. Whereas, it seemed to me that the more vertical triumphs of mankind had a meaning, only because they could enrich life, the ordinary workaday life of ordinary men. This was more particularly so because the whole of human history had so far been a record of the struggle of men for power and glory and wealth, with the vast bulk of humanity merely figuring as pawns in the hands of a few, while any attempt at honest living in the present and the future would have to include the well-being of the many.

The casual anarchism of much of contemporary European liberal thought seemed to me rather distressing in view of the difficulties we had to face in India. We had been anarchists long enough, accepting every-

thing, looking for God equally in cabbages and roses, in the highest flights of the fancy as well as in dung, pantheists who, moreover, lay about in the sun, licked our sores and complained in doleful poetry or fatalistic phrases about the hopelessness of our lot. Parmatman and Allah were always on our lips and what we didn't have of the goods of this world we put down, often hypocritically, to our distaste for them and to our preference for the things of the spirit than to our lack of will. A defeated people, we had become defeatists and made our contempt for the rigid mechanical order which the bureaucracy had imposed on us, a contempt for all orderly human achievement. Addicted to the certitudes of intuition as a final test of awareness, we suspected the intellect. And the way we reclined on nature and sprawled about in our leisurely civilization, resolving everything to its ultimate constituents and finding meaning only in the hidden unities behind everything, was charming but ineffectual. As against the people who were so busy "thinging" that they had no time for "thinking" at all, for asking what man is here for, we had been eternally arguing about *Moksha*, release from the trammels of existence. Our elders were a tired people who did not even ask the fundamental questions anew, but merely repeated the old answers on the rosaries. The concrete problems of why the world was made, how evil came into it, what we are to do with our lives, and in what respect men are superior to the beasts, the vegetables and inanimate things—these issues were seldom faced in a new way. Enlightened Europeans, like Heard and Huxley, duly sympathized with Indian aspirations for the higher life, for they themselves had come the full circle and ended up with the

riddle of the sphinx dangling before them. Transcendentalism based on nothing—specially in the face of death.

But what about Life? Was the notion of human improvement just a middle-class myth built up by H. G. Wells? And were we always to remain enclosed in the vicious circle of the old world merely because some of us, saints and artists, had tasted the ultimate and enduring satisfactions of qualitative living? And were all the potential great spirits among the millions of illiterates to remain mute Miltons?

I found on thinking things over that the fundamental difference in this connection was between youth and age, that in many ways European civilization was already the old world and the contemporary Asiatic world the new one. Certainly the mental climate of Western Europe in which I found myself seemed to be different from that of the India in which I had grown up. If it is not a simplification I may say, generally, that the youth of India during the last quarter of a century had been going through a kind of heroic age. All our gestures, all our thoughts, all our talk—everything that we did—had been inspired by the *belief* that we must create a new India, build a new world. A great deal of our talk, and many of our gestures were, of course, falsely heroic. Some people claimed that we had aeroplanes in ancient India because the God Rama had flown on the back of the bird Garuda when he went to fight Ravana, the king of Lanka. Others said that because we were one of the oldest peoples in the world, we were, therefore, the greatest. But apart from such aberrations, which were obviously in the nature of compensations for our present-day inadequacies, we had

other beliefs which were sincere and vital. For instance, we were all, to a greater or less extent, stirred by the spectacle of the moral force which often shamed brute force. Also, we were aware that a great many of our people suffered from poverty and squalor around us with a patience that was truly heroic. No one in India has yet written the epic of this suffering adequately, because the realities were too crude for a writer like Tagore, and it was not easy to write an epic in India while all the intricate problems of the individual in the new world had yet to be solved. But the important and significant thing was that everyone, even those who were for finding compensations, or side-tracking the issues, believed in recovery, in a rebirth or renaissance.

Here in England I had found that there was prevalent a profound distrust of heroism or belief, a kind of polite scepticism, a tiredness and a boredom and hopelessness about the future.

But I could not, in view of my Indian background, afford to take a pessimistic view or to be complacent, even though I passed everything through the sieve of philosophical doubt.

It became increasingly clear to me then, through the stress of this moral struggle, that I could not think of the old philosophies and religions of India as eternal, that if we had acquired a faith in new values such as democracy, personal freedom, etcetera, we must inquire into the European tradition. And in that sense I tended to regard the hopes and aspirations which had found form in the lofty abstractions and beautiful poetry of our religions and philosophies as the quintessence of dreams, reveries and wisdom which arose from the concrete facts of the time, and as a tradition which

needed to be deeply understood and if possible re-interpreted before being used to-day.

For though there can be no exact correspondence between the mental flights of a civilization and its physical well-being, the acuteness and subtlety of the questions asked in a time do reflect the struggle of that time, and indeed, of the particular generation by whom they are asked. Thus the religions which seem to be everlasting and more than human, turn out to be the products of men's lives, of the clashes of tribe and caste and class and nation. The metaphors in which they are couched certainly testify to the actual problems and the conflicts in the world at various periods: the continuation and development of the history of nature, interrupted for long periods by the attempts at synthesis with the superstructure of new faiths and beliefs, but always developing, even though slowly, through all the intricate strands, implications, and issues of man's battle for life and more life and a higher one.

## VII

**I**F this was so, I was committed to the historic process, and to the appreciation of culture as the efflorescence of all the contradictory impulses of civilization, which formed a loose kind of pattern. For it seemed to me that the historical approach was the best yard-stick which had so far been discovered.

What then, had happened in India and how was it situated to-day in the light of world events? And what relation did I bear to it all?

At the risk of seeming obvious, I may say that the answers to these questions could not be given from an abstract analysis of the motives of human behaviour and psychology, as if human nature were an unchanging, timeless entity. This would only lead to a flatulent grandiloquence about eternal moods embodying nothing, except that some minute and spurious truism about one or two intense moments might result from the metaphysical wrappings of dissociated states of awareness. Equally, the historical process was too complex and intricate, and there was no licence for the wild hopes for the coming of the millennium to-morrow if only one understood history—for it is not easy to know all the facts, and febrile gestures fall flat through the tests of time.

But human relations seemed to have developed through the ages from one fairly distinct social stage to another. And, in spite of the redundancy of much human experience, the individual to-day was the result

of all the forces that had been working for billions of years from the time when the first spark lit certain inert, inorganic matter into life and which then developed through the interactions of various organisms to the more complex organisms of contemporary societies.

That there was inanimate matter before there was life most philosophers and scientists seemed nowadays to be agreed upon; but it was the question of the occurrence of life in the world on which they broke down.

Some philosophers found it easy to have recourse to the intervention of a deity, while others, even realists and materialists, were inclined to believe in a vital life force. There is, of course, such an unmistakable similarity between the chemical processes that occur in living and non-living matter that philosophers, who compose a closely guarded company union in favour of co-operation with the great boss, God, are inclined to interpret this phenomenon so as to give idealism the benefit of the doubt. And the fact that life has evolved through millions and billions of years, the colloidal viruses of atomic movements, bacteria, specks of jelly, plant, mobile organisms living in other organisms, fish, the amphibian creatures of the air and mammals to that lemur-like creature, the ape ancestor of Homo Sapiens, through further millions of years to the tool culture of the various ages—all this made even the scientists so dizzy that they were inclined to posit some kind of vital push in nature.

But once admit the fact of the transformation of energy, the organic cell and evolution, and then the Marxian hypothesis makes things fairly easy to understand. At first natural processes go on, punctuated by sudden "leaps," when quantities change into qualities

and vice versa. Then Man makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of substances in order to make other substances subservient to his aims. Nature becomes one of the agents of man's activity, that is to say, man annexes nature to his bodily organs. And one can see how, through the interaction of the vastly complicated and contradictory aspects of things or processes has developed the whole of pre-and past history, all life on earth before the tool-making stage and the stage of civilized human society. The animal reacts to his environment; adapts itself to nature; man acts to satisfy his primary needs and sets going the economic processes which can fairly satisfactorily explain the complex and intricate strands of his activity in history.

The exploitation of the means of production creates production relations which, on account of the constant interaction between man and nature, and between the various parts of society, creates those contradictions which are inherent in the development of society. And, as in nature, so in society, when the disequilibrium among the conflicting forces reaches a stage at which it is choked up for want of further development, there occurs the social revolution which by a "leap" takes the property relations through the dynamic opposition implicit in them a stage further. And property being an economic, social, as well as a political fact, that is to say the basis of the political power of the State, we find those continual alterations in the balance of power which leave wrecks of people behind as the fade-outs of history, shadows in the obscure background of changing world forces.

For instance, six hundred years ago the greater part of the world had trembled at the name of the Tartars

and fled in terror before the flashing swords of the Mongol cavalry. Three hundred years ago the Mughals seemed to be set on the throne of Delhi as if forever. And now British imperialism holds sway from Kashmir to Cape-Comorin, from Burma to Sindh. . . . In one country of the world, Russia, the capitalist class relations had been upset by the proletarian revolution and a classless society was on the way till fascism, the advance guard of rationalized capitalism, attacked this socialist country.

It was in this way that the immense and incomprehensible jumble of facts, of fallen empires, the French Revolution, liberalism, capitalist-imperialism, the German Reich and other world systems could be at all explained with some plausibility. It was a dialectical study of the causative factors which could perhaps explain some of the so called "mysteries" of history. . . .

I was, then, an Indian, a British subject by birth, born of a father who had broken away from the hereditary profession of artisanship and joined the mercenary British-Indian army, and of a peasant mother.

I had been educated and brought up as one of the privileged few in British-Indian schools and colleges under a completely pernicious system of education, which had sought to keep the realities of life at bay from me. But the realities had come home to me after all, and I had become dimly aware of the disintegration and social anarchy produced by British imperialist domination in India.

Like rising sap had been the urge in me to break away and to escape, to roam the world over, to adventure in search of romance. But the gaudy flower had not always smelt sweet. Perhaps the bitterness on the tongue of

remembered experience had tainted the fruit and nothing that could be plucked from the branches of poverty, of danger, humiliation and darkness could taste anything but sour. Or perhaps the luscious fruit, heavy and rounded and ripe, would only grow from other roots, the roots which grew from the fecund soil of clash with authority,—parents, school, college and prospective employers, etc.

So I struggled to weigh up the double burden on my shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalayas of my Indian past, all my senses aching to realize the significance of the history of my country, all my heart and brain devoted to the search of those causes which had led to its present degeneracy. And everything in me concentrated on maturing the first dark revolt which was to enable me to see behind the subterfuges of reactionary megalomaniacs, the truth about the facts of experience.

By one of those coincidences which happen to those who are habituated to discursive reading, a series of letters on India written by Marx to the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1853 fell into my hands at this time. I discussed these in detail with my friend Ralph Fox, who had just then written on the colonial history of British Imperialism. And a whole new world was opened to me. All the threads of my past reading, which had got tied up into knots, seemed suddenly to straighten out, and I began to see not only the history of India but the whole history of human society in some sort of interconnection. The fact that Marxian dialectic had naturally developed out of Hegel, whom I had read, added to the zest of my preoccupation with it. And, of course, the happiest thing was that Marxism was no dogma of a

church militant—in spite of the calumniators who declared it to be only another religion with Marx as its prophet—but a scientific and rational method for the study of society, a hypothesis which was leading to new discoveries.

I understood now how the British in conquering India had, *unwittingly*, brought about a social revolution in India, a vast upturning in the age-old economic order of Asia.

How had a handful of British achieved this?

The Barons, the first revolutionary “middle class” in England, had obtained the *Magna Carta* from King John. The scions of this Baronial order had overthrown the first revolutionaries and brought about a second middle-class revolution through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During the hey-day of this triumph Elizabeth Tudor gave to the merchants of the city of London on 31st December, 1599, a charter to trade with the Indies.

These merchants and their heirs, who were to become a highly organized middle class, had set out on those great exploits on the oceans, piracy on the high seas and attempts to discover those new routes to the Indies which, after their successive struggles with the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French, had resulted in the English mastery of Indian trade. Adventurers, freebooters, traders and gentlemen, lured by travellers’ tales of the fabulous wealth and extraordinary civilization of India, by rumours of the gold, the diamonds, the silks, calicoes and spices abounding in it, these merchants of the East India Company had gone there and conquered the land and enjoyed dividends of from a hundred to two hundred and fifty per

cent, apart from the plunder they and their servants gathered while engaged in the services of the Company.

The absence of an organized middle class in India gave the English conquerors opportunities which the "feudal" Mughal Empire, with all the magnificence of its rich courts, its patronage of art and literature, could not exploit because it remained a gigantic but fissiparous machine for devouring the fruit of the toil of the countless ryots, who lived and died in small communal villages, while the royal court flourished at the capital. And between the two there was hardly any connection, except that the tax-collector came now and then from the court of the provincial chieftain to collect revenue in kind and then drove away.

Apart from the absence of close ties between the Raja and the Ryot and the lack of initiative on the part of the State in regard to giant irrigation works and safe communications as the instruments of centralized power and economic advance, the Mughal Empire was breaking through the weakness of its links with the outlying areas, thus providing irresistible opportunities for the revolts of local chieftains and the aggrandizement of foreign traders.

Then followed the primary accumulation of capital and the development of capitalist enterprise in England through the plundered wealth of India in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the consequent flooding of the world market with cheap machine-made goods, such as textiles, metal gadgets and the rest, produced in the first flush of the third English middle-class overturning which matured in the Industrial Revolution.

So India, the country which had been the Mecca of all freebooters from the West for the beauty of its tex-

tiles and fine handicrafts, became the dumping ground, the colony of British capitalism. Native industry was ruined, the handicraftsman thrown on the scrapheap of unemployment, and the land converted into a supplier of raw materials for the factories of Bradford and Manchester.

The gains of this trade were so enormous that the big business men of Britain thought it fit to end the anarchy created by the plunderous rule of the servants of the company in India and helped to transfer the administration to the Crown. This brought about the complete subjugation of India, the complete destruction of the primitive Indian village economy, the development of a more efficient bureaucracy, the unification of the country through a central administration, railways and roads. The stage was now set for that epic of misery which has resulted from the intensive exploitation of India and its peoples.

For, having developed the manufacturing industries at home to a high state of efficiency, the British *bourgeoisie* had sought to export capital to the subject country and started a manufacturing industry in India, to pile up bigger profits by getting nearer the source of raw materials, nearer the source of cheap labour, nearer the market. After a period of tremendous gains they had found that a part of their capital in India was cutting the throat of the part invested at home. So they had begun automatically to cut down the industrial development of India. The handicraftsmen who were put out of employment by the flood of machine-made goods and the early industrial effort in India, had been pressing the land, which was already heavily pressed. There were millions of unemployed expropriated

peasants roaming the roads, and an agrarian crisis needing more than a few poultices to cure it.

The era to which I had been born was, thus, the historic turning point of my country. For, having gone so far through the sheer logic of its own acts of aggression, the British *bourgeoisie* refused to go any further, while the Indian people, growingly conscious of the exploitation of their country, had begun to challenge authority and to demand their right to carry out the social revolution in India to its inevitable conclusion. We wanted to win control of the means of production, to abolish the profit system and to undertake large schemes of industrial and social planning with the help of the latest researches in science and technology, through which alone we could appease the great hunger in our country and become dignified members of the human family.

## VIII

**I**T was as simple as that but also a great deal more complex.

Nothing less was involved than a reorientation of one's outlook on history as well as a complete transformation of present-day society from the new point of view. For in India we are faced not only with a renaissance but with an enormous reformation.

The consequences of this view for human society were so tremendous that the imagination staggered even at a glimpse of the vision of the new world it promised.

For, if reality be material, evolutionary and incomplete; if man and the mind of man be the products of this reality; if there be a constant interaction between the mind and the reality of which it forms a part, resulting in knowledge; if, further, this knowledge be achieved through action; and if, finally, ever new aspects of reality be always brought within the range of human action and human knowledge, then the range of knowledge inevitable to the socio-historical process is limitless and the fallibility of man an indubitable fact.

The obligation to extend knowledge was imperative, because it was inherent in the historical process: if man wanted to master his destiny and to extend the heritage he had acquired then he had to do something about it. As Marx had caustically said: "Philosophers have so far interpreted the world, the thing is to change it."

But where was one to begin?

One could not, of course, bite at the whole of human society and devour it by way of understanding it. No, one had to begin somewhere and do something by which one could contribute, even if it were ever so little, to the application of this new view of the universe, to change and transform the realities of one's time even in the obscurest corner of the world, so that life could begin to have a new meaning for oneself and other human beings.

Even this seemed an enormous task, especially if one had grown up in a muddled society where the realities of life lay buried beneath the thick crust of mendacity and superstition, of dogma and unreasoned belief, where knowledge had been sedulously built up only in the interests of the few, where the whole tendency to light was consciously or unconsciously choked up amid the perversions of faith, in order to avert a change of the current social order.

It was necessary, therefore, first of all, to study the causes of one's frustration, the reasons of one's failure, to get to grips with realities. For failure it was, and nothing could make it seem like a success, to find that, after years of schooling, during which one's main occupation had been the study of philosophy, one should have been denied, through a faulty education, a knowledge of the realities of one's time, and given little more than a vague apprehension of the rudimentary principles of human experience, failure to know, failure to dream, failure to get hold of one's destiny!

And when one looked at the lot of the less privileged populations, for instance in a country like India, one noticed how they had been deliberately kept at a level

of sub-humanity. And in view of this all one's presumptions about theory of knowledge and philosophical doubt seemed to become mockery, a series of private jokes!

It never seemed to have entered the heads of our masters to give the coolies the slightest chance of bettering themselves. They were supposed to be sub-human. They worked from dawn to dusk, old and young, male and female, for their masters, but they were treated like dogs. There was no social or health insurance to relieve their lot, no old age pensions and grants for children. They had no holidays with pay, though they were never let off their jobs during long working days. They could not be spared, so their masters believed. . . . And to send a coolie's son to school was not only folly but almost a grievous sin! It was folly because the coolie's son might turn out to have more knowledge and ability than the master's son; it was sin because book knowledge was supposed to undermine hereditary skill and character. And the general feeling was that when an Indian was educated you could not say where it would end! The more one looked at it the more the degradation of man in Asia and Africa seemed to afford an object lesson. For, if it was the question of higher wages and shorter hours for the coolie, at once the employer's exalted philosophy of life gave the demand a lie: was not the honour of being allowed to work in a world rife with unemployment enough? Did the coolie need clothes? Yes, a rag would do; he had "gone without" all his life and he was used to it and knew no better. A bed? But why? He was accustomed to sleep on earth, on the doorsteps of shops and by the drains in crowded cities. Anyhow, what was the condition of

these people before “we came and gave them plenty”? “Think of the enormous sums we have spent on them!” “The Empire costs a great deal to keep up, you know!!!” The inequalities of the capitalist system were thus taken for granted at home. But out here in the Colonie: men were not supposed to be men at all, but lemurs, chimpanzees and gorillas!

If, however, the workers got together to put forward a demand, then the employers made a great song about it in their papers, and passed laws like the notorious Act which made the General Strike in Great Britain illegal. And the private-property-cum-profit system became embodied, by the consent of the elected representatives of the people, in the constitution of the State. And the whole paraphernalia of a legal system was bolstered up to protect the rights of the rulers. It was not surprising that public prosecutors and high police officials were paid extensive salaries and held in honour when school teachers and professors were merely allowed a subsistence wage! For it was the duty of the prosecutor and the policeman not to serve but to overawe the people. . . . In fact, almost all the organs of the capitalist State, the bureaucracy, the army and the police, were devoted to the preservation of, and to imbue people with respect for, private property, religion and the State, all of which were said to constitute the height of civilization!

The question then was whether man, who had evolved through thousands of years to the stage when he could increase his knowledge and his power to undreamed-of limits, when he could change his rudimentary nature and refine it, was going to accept the present state of world development as final, or whether, with his capacity for mastering nature and for syn-

thesizing experience, he would adapt his social and political obligation to his private life so as to abolish the inequalities of class and caste and evolve a more equitable civilization in which he might be free from the restraints which frustrated him, and think of utilizing his leisure for the cultivation of his mind. The issue whether man's need for bread came first or his need for the soul was a simplification, because both bread and soul were necessary to man and interdependent, for the first and foremost question was the mere fact of life, whether it was not more valuable than a living death.

I began intensely to realize now that I was not only a member of a family risen into the well-to-do middle class, but that I was one of the millions of human beings, a member of the human race who had inherited this terrible and beautiful world of the twentieth century where everything had to be paid for.

I could not, of course, sense the suffering of the poor directly because I had always been comparatively better off. No, mine was a secondary humiliation, the humiliation of seeing other people suffer. I do not know to what extent envy of the rich on my part was disguising itself as a hunger for social justice. Perhaps there was an element of this. Also the inadequacies of our life in India may have contributed something to my pre-occupation. But I do not apologize for this because it is not easy in the face of such wretchedness and misery as I had seen in India to believe that material happiness and well-being had no connection with real happiness and the desire for beauty. So I sought to recreate my life through my memories of India in which I grew up, with a view to rediscovering the vanities, the

vapidities, the conceits and the perplexities with which I had grown up, indifferent to the lives of the people around me. I felt guilty, for needless suffering was no matter for complacent pride or gratitude.

## IX

I STARTED on a long autobiographical novel. And I lived in an ecstasy of sensitiveness, remembering the past, speculating about the future. Meanwhile, in the very search for the meaning of life I found myself studying the various aspects of the fact of servitude. As I set out to recall the lives of the human beings I had known, the most important fact that struck me was not so much the passion of religion or ambition among men, as the insults they heaped on each other, the pain they extracted out of each other and the almost Buddhist compassion through which alone one could understand this. The problem, then, that I tried to face as a writer was not strictly a private, but a private-public problem. And as my media as a writer were the memory and imagination, and the substance of my work the whole of my varied experience, the theme of my work became the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationships, rather than only one single part of it.

Such an approach to the human crisis is suspect among many who do not like a philosophic taint in the novel and abhor all forms of prophecy and speculation like the plague. But whatever apologies European middle-class writers may have to make for including philosophic, social, or moral as well as personal, cause, within the radius of their inspiration, I am not called upon, in the face of my own individual experience, to offer any excuses for going straight to the heart of the problem of our time, the problem of human sensibility

in the present complex, the tragedy of modern man. The twentieth century is a great turning-point in human history. And though our main struggle remains the search for individual values, in so far as these are increasingly open to re-interpretation and discussion, it is necessary to explore the sensibilities of all human beings, whether in the factory, in the village square or in the drawing-room, in so far as they have been affected by the "iron" age. This does not necessarily mean a departure from imaginative creation to didacticism. Rather does it mean the introduction into creative narrative of whole new peoples who have seldom entered the realms of literature in India. And the whole becomes an attempt at poetry even though the result is a somewhat ragged rhythm. I believe that there is a great deal to be said for this approach, which I may call the flight of winged facts, to poetic realism.

As I grew up in the period when fascism, the quintessence of chauvinist capitalism, had begun to encroach upon the elementary liberties of human beings and had already begun that series of aggressions in Manchukuo, Abyssinia, Spain and on the Continent of Europe which were to lead to the second world war, my realization of the responsibilities of the writer as a citizen increased. Though in this respect, I did not, as an Indian, need many lessons. For in India life was politics and politics life, especially as most of us have grown up with some awareness of the method of the internment camp, of torture and prison and the suppression of civil and political liberties during the last quarter of a century.

If the response of the older European writers to these and kindred problems was limited, there was ample con-

firmation in the thinking aloud of the younger writers like Aragon, Malraux, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and others that the questions they were asking themselves were more or less similar to ours in India, and irrespective of race and colour we shared similar concepts and aspired towards kindred objectives. The economic crisis of 1931, and to a greater extent, the menacing rise of fascism in Europe, through the connivance, if not the active assistance, of the western "democratic" rulers, had begun to disclose the corruption of the capitalist system to us, both in its imperialist and its fascist forms. And freedom, like peace, seemed indivisible. All of us were united, wherever we were, with thousands of others in the faith that we could defend world heritage from the attacks of the fascists of Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as the reactionaries of our own countries, and help to build a new healthy civilization on the reserves of enormous potential power for good of human beings; that we could help to achieve political and economic freedom for all and change our environment and ourselves in the process of this struggle. It is quite true that a few writers like Mr. Eliot were convinced of the essential sinfulness of man and stepped aside, but even they in their curious way preferred democracy to fascism. A few of those who like the talented Céline distrusted the very idea of good will towards men soon ended up on the side of fascism.

In England, where I was most of this time, the younger intelligentsia were at last awakening. I tried then, with other writers, to face up to the crisis before us, the great all-enveloping crisis which had not only to do with Hitler and Mussolini, but with the British Imperialists, the orthodox churches, and all the decaying

spiritual and cultural values, with life itself in view of progress or utter destruction.

I could see that in the ensuing struggle to defend culture the writer would, in common with other people, have to exercise great vigilance, both as a citizen and as an artist. It seemed to me that precisely because modern commercial society had forced the writer into isolation, it was necessary for him to link himself with the disinherited, the weak and the dispossessed, as a human being and as an artist with special talents, to help transform society. No betrayal of the artist's genius was involved in this, for each person must follow the bent of his own temperament in choosing the form of expression best suited to him, but the old specialist attitude which regarded art, philosophy, morality and religion as ends in themselves, to be pursued for their own sake, only betokened fear of responsibility. While actually most people, even the purists, unconsciously reflected their lovers' quarrel with society.

The illustrious example of Goethe struck me at this time with particular force. For here was a poet who had also been a scientist and a citizen, a man whose great genius encompassed every aspect of experience with all-seeing eyes. And in my own country Tagore had been such a man. It is true that the vast increase in all the specialized branches of human knowledge precluded any man to-day from speaking with authority on everything; nor could an artist, philosopher, or scientist, being a man, refuse at this time of peril, to shoulder the responsibility of family life, citizenship, etc., common to all men. But any writer who said that he was not interested in *la condition humaine* was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism—a

perverse and clever defence of the adolescent desire to be different.

It was not only the negative defence of human culture against fascism which was, however, of immense consequence to any sincere and vital artist, but also the positive advantage of reintegrating himself in society through a criticism of the old values and the evolution of new ones. Everywhere the old world was collapsing and everywhere the dead in heart were clinging to the orthodox values, unable to understand the new "fate" which dominated them and which had destroyed their world, and yet attached to it with all the sentimentality of the weak making a brave show of strength. An honest life for the individual in the old-style Christian, Hindu or Moslem community, for instance, was no longer possible because of the divisions of class and nation which had cut across the old loyalties. And yet no religion was willing to make the sacrifice of its sovereignty, or to renounce its dogma and embrace the questioning men who could not give their allegiance to anything which they suspected of insincerity. Most of the younger writers of my acquaintance had given up any hope of returning to the old religions, and while some looked round for a new one, several of them had come to believe that only in socialism could the harassed individual find some hope of realizing himself in a community. Anyhow, the young shoots of a new life were bursting, and many of us began to adapt ourselves to the new circumstances, accepted the changing world and tried to live in and through it. The chaos within us was not altogether neglected because those of our generation were seeking illumination for their inner troubles from the new psychology, even as they

were reorientating themselves to the outer world, by asking themselves if progress wanted them or they wanted progress.

But writers are not particularly heroic people: they find it easier and pleasanter to write epics than to live them. And many of them in Europe were so concerned for their skins that they indulged merely in petty variations of the Proustian æstheticism, trying to make Revolution by throwing a flower. Some of them, however, accepted their responsibility as citizens and went to fight fascism in Spain. And a few learnt to relate their own problems with those of the writers and intellectuals of America, France, India, China and Russia. At least one thing was certain, they became interested in the march of time, in the transition that was going on before them. I think it would be true to say that in the thirties social problems tended to supersede the problems of the individual in literature. The old "Fates," "God," "Evil in Man" and "Nature" almost gave place to the new "Fates," "Economics" and "Politics" as they affected the "Common Man," though as the quotation marks with all these words show, the intellectual concept tended to dominate imaginative literature and made for abstractions in poetry and fiction.

As the interests of men had already, among other things, begun to dominate the mind of my generation in India, this belated recognition of the dignity of man and the values of their civilization by European writers, brought us much nearer. And their realization of the fact that fashionable polite scepticism was playing into the hands of those extreme moral cynics, the fascists, made for a very brief period of hope.

Unfortunately, however, there was always a time lag

between the slowly gathering forces which wanted peace and decency and bread and culture, and the fast organizing forces of the fascist egoists who build on the philosophy of "I," of the "noble" man as a higher species than the ignoble "common man," just fit to be the herd, and eternally wanting to be led by the leader. The survival of such egotism in the intellectual ranks of the democratic countries made the Nemesis inevitable.

Aesthetically, the period of the thirties, now called the "pink decade", was a failure, for there was less heroism but many more heroic gestures. And yet because the significant poets and novelists of that period sincerely sought to understand the causes of spiritual decay as well as the potential sources of poetry in the emerging mass feeling, they foreshadowed the approach of a new era when writers could integrate and reorganize their cohorts.

But the second world war came and scattered the writers. Some were called up and had to accept compulsory heroism. Others were too disillusioned to act. Still others took to magic and Yoga and occult practices or began to attempt more profound evasions from the facts of the present battle with nightmares of their own making.

## X

PERHAPS the vacillation of a great many writers and artists during these years had been due to the fact that although in a vague, general and remote kind of way they subscribed to the idea of human, social and political awareness, they never succeeded in defining the exact function of the artist in contemporary society.

There were the simpletons who believed that an art form like the novel, for instance, was nothing else but reportage about social conditions. There were the subjectivists on the other hand who believed that it was enough skilfully to describe the phantasmagoria of one's psychological states, particularly the subconscious, dream, or clinical experiences. And, of course, there were always the vast bulk of those others, the low pressure artists, the whores of literature, who wrote to provide escape and relaxation to the tired ladies and gentlemen of our suburban civilization. And they all bandied words with each other.

The real issue, however, was not as between these obvious and somewhat naïve people. It was rather between the formalists or aesthetes who believed that art, though generally influenced by life, was essentially more self-contained and propelled by its own inner logic than by outside forces; and the realists, who believed that the artist of to-day, being in the midst of a complex which embraces the whole world, could only create if he got to the roots of things, burrowed deep, and allowed his insight to be conditioned by the time,

the place and the circumstances of his age. The former doctrine culminates in complete subjectivism where a few highly sensitive and cultivated people could commune with a few others of their sort and enjoy, as far as possible, pure contemplation, unsullied by the cares of life or the "vulgarity of the herd." The latter, called by the unappetizing name of "social realism," had the merit of being wider and more generous in its sympathies, though it has remained largely experimental and more successfully preached than practised.

I have not the space to discuss the nature of this controversy which has raged for many years amongst writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Though I believe in realism, I am, as I have said, for a poetic realism. I would like, for instance, to stress the importance of the desire image or the romantic will in writing, and I stand altogether for art against literary photography. And just as I found myself insisting on a synthesis of the values so far bifurcated in Europe, just as I desired a total and truly human view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind of revolutionary human may arise, so I have been inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist art commensurate with the needs of our time.

A great deal of the function which the writer has always fulfilled in society is anyhow integral to his temperament. For instance, he has sought in all societies in the past, and will seek in all societies of the present and future, to communicate his unique and original vision of life to other people, to intensify their awareness by way of confirming and heightening their own observation. And he will stand as an interpreter of one human soul to another, and by his peculiar talent

for revealing the unity in diversity of human nature, create real bonds of sympathy between nation and nation, one people and another, and in fact between every genuine layer of life seeking to understand another.

But in the contingencies of the modern world he has an even greater rôle to fulfil in my estimation. By virtue of that gift which he possesses, of perceiving people and things in their true uniqueness and individuality, by his capacity to comprehend all and possess all, whether it be the beauty of a flower, the rhythm of a musical mode, the emotion of jealousy as well as the whims of little children, a writer is precisely the man who can encompass the whole of life. And since he sees so many aspects of the universe, since he is concerned with people and things in their completeness, in all their rationality and irrationality, and since he does so without sacrificing his personality or mutilating it, as does the moralist by his emphasis on conduct, or the scientist or the philosopher by insisting on a narrowly rational view of all experience, the writer is uniquely fitted to aspire to be a whole man, to attain, as far as possible, a more balanced perspective of life, and to reach the apogee of human development. It is conceivable that any attempt at realizing this kind of manhood, of the heart, the head, the imagination, the will and the act, may only end in making the writer a jack of all trades and master of none. But I believe it is precisely what Shelley had in mind when he called poets the "unacknowledged legislators of mankind." For the writer alone, if he is honest and brave, is in a position to understand the world qualitatively, to perceive the most delicate processes of the human sensibility, on the

aesthetic as well as the cognitive and conative planes. And, if he is possessed of true creative ability, he can transform his knowledge into a vision such as can claim the loyalty of men in his own locality and across national frontiers and lead them to a universal awareness of life, thereby possessing them with the will to renew it and change it.

I want to emphasize this revolutionary aspect of art, I mean the way in which it can change life. Throughout the period which began with the isolation of the poet during the development of capitalistic society, the æsthetic attitude has been generally considered by scholars to be essentially contemplative, disinterested and non-practical. Indeed, it has been held, as it was in the case of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, that if a beautiful love passage in a book is likely to arouse passionate desire in the readers then it ought to be withdrawn from the library shelves; that if a colourful picture of good food makes our mouths water then our enjoyment of beauty has been ruined. This kind of puritanical taboo, reacting against the pleasure-seeking attitude, has led to the elaboration of an abstract ideal of beauty completely divorced from life. But one has only to issue a questionnaire in a newspaper like the *New Statesman and Nation* asking, "what book has had most influence on your life?" and in come hundreds of quite sincere answers purporting to inform us of the inspiring influence exerted on men by Ralph Waldo Trine's *In Tune with the Infinite* or Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the rest. Manifestly our appreciation of a work of art is not, therefore, merely disinterested contemplation. It is true that the connection between art and life is not as direct as that between

newspaper propaganda and life. That kind of connection is just about on a par with the influence a gentleman declared the dictionary had exercised on him when it fell on his head and dented his skull in the process. Nor is it like the connection between delicious food and mere physical well-being. It would be a purely mechanical way of looking at both art and life which would argue thus. On the other hand, there is a genuine and vital connection, as even the writer who feels most detached, and least seeks to influence anyone, will admit. Like Monsieur Jourdain he is "talking prose without even knowing it," and certainly melts a little ice if he can't quite cut any.

But what actually happens when a work of art is created? Ostensibly, the artist imaginatively extracts the significant aspects of a given experience from all that he knows about it, and expresses them in certain polychromatic images transformed through the desire in his mind. In so far, then, as an art work results from the reflection in the mind of the artist of all the aspects of his experience, it is fundamentally related to life, only improving on it, or rather intensifying it through the "creative myth," so as to change life in the deeper centres of other people's experience and thus in an integral way.

It is because the artist knows how to choose and select the centre of his attack, it is because he knows how to pierce the core of reality by looking at things from a fresh angle (which turns out in fact to be an angle from which the most comprehensive vision is possible), that he achieves a work of art. The extent to which this work confirms our own real vision, the extent to which we are able to project ourselves, our moods,

emotions, passions, thoughts and desires into it, to receive and extend the full flow of its sympathy, is the measure of its greatness as a work of art. And the significance of such a work, resting as it does on its heightened communication of the most intense vision of life, through a new myth, is revolutionary. Only, there is a living myth and a dead myth, and the desire image, which is the basis of revolutionary romanticism, must be really creative and must help men to integrate in society and not provide a formula for escape. Poetry must become a kind of courage.

If this conception of the function of art in society approximates to the real needs of people in our time, then the artist is a revolutionary in the true sense. And as he can perceive reality at its highest, and disclose the way to a new life, the artist stands as an inspiring force behind all those men and women who face the tasks of reconstructing the future society out of the shambles of the present.

This is no mere phrase, but a statement of which the implications must be properly understood. For, though it is obvious that capitalism based on the idea of private property, the exploitation of labour for profit and competitive national interests, has utterly failed to stabilize itself and to solve its inherent crises, except through fascism and war, the hold of this system and its ancillary ideas and institutions on the minds of a great portion of the world still persists. So that a fraudulent use of the word 'Democracy' is made to cover all the defaults of reaction.

Thus, one of the first things to be done in the modern world is to educate the people, to place the vast accumulation of knowledge collected in the researches of the

past at the disposal of everyone, so that men can thereby learn to recognize the fundamental principles of human living and exercise vigilance in regard to the real enemies of freedom.

Because of his addiction to truth, the writer can help to educate humanity in this way far more enduringly than can the scientist or educationalist. For, as I have insisted before, the creative writer or the poet is in a position to expose the perverters of words, to aspire to truth, to take a whole view of the world, a view which is both extensive and intensive. And he is possessed of the necessary apparatus to help to exalt men to the full heights of their dignity, to equip them with the necessary spirit to tackle the tasks before them. By giving vent to their inmost desires, by revealing to them the true nature of men and by informing their will, the writer thus helps men to take part in the drama of revolt from which emerges the new society. And he trains the higher type of human being who may not always have to seek sanction for his behaviour in the external and arbitrary rules of conduct enforced on him by others, but is an individual with the inward monitor of his own conscience, who will bend before no tyrants but only follow his own enlightened will.

The revolutionary writer can help thus not only in the development of the individual, but in conjunction with his brother artists, also take forward the history of the human race from the elementary struggles of the present to the more complex and subtle realizations which denote real cultural development.

I do not think that this is a utopian ideal to be dismissed as a vague aspiration. I believe that the world has reached a historic turning point, the beginning of a

revolutionary era which will either bring to birth, through all the screaming and blood, a more egalitarian society based on justice, humanity and a civilized morality, or the human race will be wiped out, as on several occasions in the past, through prolonged fratricidal conflicts, till life survives only at the most primitive levels and remains steeped in the crudest barbarism for long generations, as though the clock of history had stopped because men had lost the strength to wind it.

So that whether we take the task of destroying the spurious elements of contemporary civilization or of reconstructing the future society, the creative artist occupies an important role in both spheres. And any attempt on his part to shirk responsibility is a betrayal of his own powers and the acceptance of mental and spiritual death. Above all, it is a betrayal of the common humanity to which he is committed as an individual born to live in community with other individuals, a denial of all human relations, a secession from society.

## XI

AS a result of all this thinking a few concrete beliefs have occurred to me, in no sense marked by finality, which would perhaps be premature at the beginning of one's progress towards light but which are based on certain tentative assumptions for a humanism such as I would like to underline at this juncture, specially as an Indian, as I am conscious of the need to help raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and the other suppressed members of society, to human dignity and self-awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy and despair in which they are sunk.

Let me summarize these beliefs by way of conclusion :

I believe, first and foremost, in human beings, in Man, in the whole man. For, in the light of my experience, I have found that not only did my curiosity about life spring as much from inquisitiveness as from my preoccupation with human needs and interests, but that I reverted again and again from my researches to this central fact of the universe, Man, the maker and the breaker of worlds, the entity in whose constant attempts at renewal and adaptation lies all the poetry and grandeur of life.

Man—what a small, puny creature he seems among the other giant structures of brute matter which continue to exist after his short, transitory life is over! What a mean, low creature, selfish and petty in his devil-take-the-hindmost opportunism in a greedy,

competitive society. At his worst, under fascism, how much more beastly than the beasts he is, preying upon the weaker members of his flock, jealous and malicious, eager to see the other man down, bestial, selfish and full of lust for inordinate power, insensitive and cruel—be he tight-lipped Kramer or any hatchet-faced Anglo-Indian policeman!

And yet how great a force is man in his ability, above all animal and material life, to adapt himself to the highest point in the evolutionary process under a better dispensation. He can become not only the vehicle of the most perfect beauty of form and movement, but he can acquire the capacity to assess nature. He can measure the ages and all the intricate processes which have gone within them, weigh the sun, and ascertain the qualities of the stars. He can conquer Nature and harness it to his purposes in giant electrical works. He can record the most evanescent moods within himself and create the likeness of things in paint and stone. In fact, he can master himself and the universe, create new values and transcend, through imagination, memory and will, all his own highest and deepest awareness, all his past works and struggle to attain the newest and most vital life.

The miracle of the mere existence of an organism of such varying qualities is marvellous enough. And as the human race has always in its peak periods of achievement lifted itself from the lower passions to heights of splendour, it behoves us to have faith in man in spite of all the adverse qualities that keep him bogged in the mire, even because of them. For the world is constituted as it is, neither black nor white but mainly grey. Only, more often than not, it tends

to be a darker rather than a lighter grey. And as it is man who is called upon to restore the balance, to tilt this universe of good or evil towards the good, he has to cultivate self-respect, by which I mean belief in, and knowledge of, himself rather than allow himself to remain sunk in apathy and despair. Perhaps in the search for balance, man will deepen his awareness of himself to such an extent that with the fullness of knowledge he can even break away from the vicious circle of a number of inhibiting instincts and ideas like property, possession, jealousy and power, and discover a new society which may help to bring about a new sense of equilibrium. But, first of all, there must emerge among us a new conception of the rôle of man, an emphasis on the importance of a human being as such, a profound respect for man, love for him and faith in his capacity to straighten his back and look at the stars.

I am conscious that much of my insistence on the rôle of man in this universe derives from European Hellenism. For the traditional attitude of India in this regard is essentially non-human, superhuman. "This Atman (the vital essence in Man) is the same in the ant, the same in the gnat, the same in the elephant, the same in these three worlds . . . the same in the whole universe." So says the *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* (1,000 B.C.).

As against this, throughout my own life, I have been addicted to the ideal of Protagoras (500 B.C.): "Man is the Measure of all things." And even when I met parallels of Indian idealism in the Socratic dialogues of Plato, I was inclined to ignore them and preferred to read Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Aristophanes.

But my mere debt to Europe does not invalidate the beauty of this ideal which Asia had accepted, just as Eastern religions, especially Christianity, did not become debased when Europe accepted them. Nor is humanism entirely new to Asia if we remember the Buddha. And as for a modern statement I could hardly do better than quote the words of the Bengali poet-saint Chandidas :

“Listen, O brother man,  
 Man is the supreme Truth,  
 For there is no higher . . .”

The humanism which I prefer, however, does not rest on a Divine Sanction, as does the mystical humanism of Gandhi, for instance, but puts its faith in the creative imagination of man, in his capacity to transform himself, in the tireless mental and physical energy with which he can, often in the face of great odds, raise himself to tremendous heights of dignity and redeem the world from its misery and pain. And it offers this reverence to him not because of those false conceptions of dignity which only make the rich, the powerful and the greatly gifted individuals the object of adoration, or considers him worthy because he belongs to some superior race, religion or colour, but because he is a man (never mind how degraded he be at present) and therefore potentially creative, howsoever low in the hierarchy of the conventional structure of society.

I believe that man's greatness is baulked, particularly at this juncture of the world's history, by such adverse circumstances that any realistic view must, by taking

into account the comparative slowness of his advance and the precariousness of his grasp of his own and the world's history, emphasize the need for a reverent attitude towards the last members of society, towards the weak and the fallen and the under-privileged everywhere. For it is only by extending the range of our sympathies to all human beings and by concentrating on all that exalts them that we can rescue the disinherited from the morass of superstition and poverty in which they are steeped. But mercy and generosity and love for humane causes ought not to blind us to the evils, the falsities and stupidities that prevent goodwill from emerging among human beings. Nor should false notions of personality as a mere bundle of personal desires limit the conception of man as an improving animal.

Does man really improve? the cynic asks. As I have already shown, the answer to this question is that if he were not potentially an improving animal his desire for beauty, truth and a higher moral order as well as for bread and wine would not have manifested themselves so often and so consistently throughout history, and he would never have developed from the stage of being a carnivorous anthropoid to struggling for life on other planes. Has he not howled down Versailles or upset the throne of the Czars and the Manchus? Has not humanity joined to destroy Hitler, pushed Mussolini off his perch on the Pallazio Venezia. . . ? It is true that for long periods the naked struggle for power and similar desires overcomes man's subtler love of goodness; or the desire to be good itself becomes so wrapped up in the pious phrases of insincere priests, politicians and propagandists that the urge to rise to

the highest pinnacles of human achievement lapses altogether.

But I believe that the decay of values arises primarily when the myths which clothe the desires of men, which embody in the form of art the inner aspirations of men to grasp the realities outside them, become outworn, and inept prophets go on using the old legends, catch-words and clichés without making any attempt to reinterpret values in the light of fresh knowledge. Nothing, for instance, has caused so much confusion in the modern world as the continued use of the old categories, soul and body, to describe certain opposed tendencies in human beings. For loose talk of spiritual versus material values, with attendant simplifications, obscures man's humanity, the sense of the whole man, man in the round. "Open the inner world," say the idealistic publicists. "To hell with——!" say the mechanical materialists. And they both forget that the inner and the outer are one and the same thing in a human being, that the mental is not necessarily higher and the material lower, but that the two are only different aspects of the same reality. If the human being is to-day submerged in a welter of chaos so that he is hardly able ever to keep his tuft knot above the water, that is due rather to the fundamental human crisis in which he is involved and the putrefaction of his ideas, that is to say, to his lack of ideas and the ability to act on them in bringing about the institutions which may produce a new order out of chaos, than to his loss of humanity and courage.

It seems to me that the world is as unlikely to be set right if we sit and contemplate our navels as by mere violence. The world has never been lacking in men

who are mainly concerned with their own selves, in the pursuit of their petty satisfactions or in the search of the subtler delights of self-hypnosis and self-realization. Nor has it been lacking in violence, especially to-day. But it is often lacking in a balanced view of man, in a view which embraces reason, emotion and imagination as well as knowledge of the facts—a view of the whole man. .

It is possible that this generation and the next, in Europe as well as in Asia, will have to fight to preserve past culture in the period of chaos that stretches before us. And that we shall have to build a new culture on the fragments of decency and civilization which we may save. That is a task which will require all the energy, intelligence and devotion of men. Only, they have got to be new men, whole men, who have the critical spirit to see the machine age for what it is worth, to distinguish technology from the spurious ideas which have become associated with it, to sift the grain from the chaff. And they will have to be men who are sincere, disinterested and free, men who are willing to save the world so that they can live in and through it, men who are human, who represent humanity everywhere and seek a new way of life.

Perhaps through the world battle such men are already arising. But what is required in them is the integration of idea and act, so that knowledge is not merely knowledge but will, so that what a man professes he acts upon, thereby becoming an *example* to other men.

This awareness of the crucial point where a man joins issue with other men or with nature, and of the exact moment when it is possible to dramatize an inner

impulse and make it an *example* is given to a very few people. Because the creative artist is perennially searching for symbols or words to relate the inner and the outer forms of human experience, because his apprehension leads to a continual and intense realization of the focal centres, he integrates thought and reality more constantly in his work than any other person. And as the highest art expresses the desires and aspirations of many human beings, the prototypes of the artist himself, the artist offers in the myths he builds up the best *examples*, the most disinterested truth, the truth above all personal truths. The influence of such an *example* maintains the equilibrium of civilization until such time as a particular art work begins to date or until some cataclysmic event like a war sweeps aside the subtle truths, crudifies life and intensifies the potential disequilibrium. Then there may be periods during which the gulf between the artist and the people who are influenced by him widens.

Perhaps our present era evidences to the last phenomenon in a more acute form than any other. Gone are the books which could supply an integral sense of values to whole generations as the Sermon on the Mount did or Ruskin's *Unto this Last*. Instead, we have the spectacle of half-dead, negative writers or debilitated men making wild but unconvincing gestures to draw attention to themselves. And as self admiration or, in the more significant cases, self-realization becomes the ideal of the artist, the connection between the artist and his audience tends to break altogether and there is a complete contradiction between the few and the many, living parallel lives but without exercising any real influence on each other. And this dis-

sociation leads to the complete destruction of the individuality of the writer, the loss of faith in his vision and in the compensatory exaltation of some technical problem; while the audience escapes into the chaotic world of make-belief entertainment, and tends to lose its sense of values. The world which was dead has by this time lost all meaning and mere cleverness has replaced the wisdom of the proverb. The prophet who was the *example* has become a posturing mountebank.

I believe that the schism between the poet, as an oracle, as an *example*, and the people will have to be healed. It is likely that before this happens the poet will have to end the schizophrenia in his own nature, restore his faith in himself and thus attain the certainty or conviction with which to make his prophecy. For, face to face with the breakdown of all standards, he cannot afford the luxury of being a neurotic and must needs accept his mission as the conscience of the race, the guide, the mentor.

When the ancient Hindus said that there is one saint to a million men, who keeps the balance of the universe, they meant this kind of integration of idea and act by an individual, this kind of realization by a devoted person, through which he can show to other men what a man can be.

Now, it is possible that in our complex modern world no single person can achieve the necessary perfection without the newspaper build-up. And such heights of splendour when achieved are, in fact, the very negative of all the potential decencies in ordinary good and evil men—bluffing heroes, strong men and stars, turn out mainly to be the trussed-up ghosts of their dead selves, waxworks in a giant Madame Tussaud's Exhibition!

It is conceivable, therefore, that the very imperfect human beings in whom a great deal of natural strength and decency survives may more easily become aware of their incipient humanity than their leaders. But before the knowledge in them becomes active, there must dawn in them the awareness of their own strength and comparative aliveness. For certainly there is often a great deal more life in the sightseers at the waxworks than in the models held up to their estimation, as they have suffered storms of humiliation and arrogance and their flesh and blood have not dried up with mouthing dogmas.

The responsibility devolves upon all men, therefore, to seek to become examples, to question themselves so that they can become themselves, men, and discard the pretensions, the false values and the fraudulent promises which they are always accepting from others. And it is possible, if this kind of awakening arises among a large number of people, that humanity can rise out of the quagmire in which it is embedded to an entirely new kind of life, a renaissance far bigger than the one of which our present dead or dying world was the product.

I repeat, then, that the first hypothesis for a new condition of life is respect for man, not necessarily as a unique individual, but as a man, and the encouragement in him of all the qualities which go to make him a living, kicking, vital human being, devoted, sincere, personal-impersonal, an example.

For I believe that a truer and more adequate view of man than that which regards him as an unchanging, incorrigible brute is to watch this limited and as yet only half-aware factor in the flux of things and, by

insisting on the inherent dynamism of his nature, on what is called the spirit of man, hope that he will transform himself and the world quickly, rid the world of the oppressive tyrannies which inhibit his flowering, so that he can gather all the worthwhile things in his past heritage, the wealth of knowledge that lies about him in the present, get to the roots of his deep seated conflicts, and relate himself to other men, to all the suppressed human possibilities, get out of the bogs and the marshes on to the roads and the airways of the world, a sublime and enlightened hero rather than a stupid mercenary with the courage of the beast.

Thus alone will life be worth living, by an insistence on the values of this world as against the next one, of the here and the now as against the never-never-to-be-here-after, on man and the values he evolves in his relations with other men rather than on the redundancies of religion and power politics which have ceased to mean very much. For it is by this shifting of the emphasis from the dark mysteries, so carefully obscured and made darker by churches and priests, to man and the universe he inhabits, by the reassertion of man and his powers of imagination and vision, that the new life will be revealed which is to be lived.

I have taken for granted, of course, that life is worth living, that suicide of all kinds, physical and mental, is a negative conception born of the sickness and frustration of human society, that the desire to live is biologically more natural and efficient, and that the great object of living is to create more life, and a higher, fuller and better one. . . . Since it is a short life that man lives, life becomes the dearest possession of man, the most sacred thing, a gift not to be wasted, so that the per-

fection of oneself and of the universe in which one lives becomes the highest value: the greatest achievement of man consisting in his capacity to say to himself at the end of his career, in the words of a great philosopher of the new world, "All my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world—the liberation of mankind."

If then this life is worth living what exactly is one to do to make it more fruitful? Obviously one has to look round, see the darkness which has been enveloping the world and ask oneself, why is the life of civilized man plagued by war? Why has the life of organized society descended to the kind of refined gangsterism which is running amok in the midst of peace-loving, laborious populations? Why has the world come to this barbaric era? How long will this go on? And where will it all end? Where are we drifting?

The crisis of civilization which is war naturally tends to make people question themselves a great deal more than anything else. It shakes and stirs all, even the most backward and unthinking peoples, out of the old ruts. And, since it brings suffering and hardship, it gives a certain intensity to such questions and even tilts the balance of opinion in favour of humanity, truth and justice.

Of course, all the old and dying orders of society put out their old wines in new bottles, trumpet up all the shibboleths and slogans anew, put out spirited visions in the tinpan vacuities of a grandiloquent style and hope for the best.

Says the Neo-Brahmin, Gerald Heard, for instance: Modern man has sold the pass because he has developed his consciousness at the expense of his uncon-

sciousness. Look at all this hankering after materialism, individuality and democracy, the result of consciousness, look how they have banished spirituality and "loyalty" from the world! What we want in order to rid the world of all its problems, failings and uncertainties is to elaborate a new caste system. Let us have at the top a few disinterested Pandits or Yogis who by contemplation, renunciation, asceticism and mystic practices achieve vision, intuition and revelation through the unconscious and help the politicians to rule. Second in this hierarchy will be the middle-class technicians, engineers, administrators and artists, with reason as their chief weapon. The lowest caste will be the mass of workers whose main role is to copulate, work and obey. Not unlike Hitler's Fascistic Republic this "integrated democracy," or the Golden Age of the Indian revivalist hypothesis! For, after all, how does it differ from Rosenberg's blue prints for Hitler's new order?

Mr. Heard is, of course, addicted to a more dramatic manner, since he has been practising navel-gazing and mumbo-jumbo for some time, but there are others who, demented by the difficulties of our age, are finding comfort in old myths and superstitions of various kinds.

All these tendencies are evasions and half-truths. And, in fact, they coincide less and less with what people are thinking. For, at no other time have the facts of history shown the working of causes and effects so dramatically than during our day. And, at no other time have people been so earnestly and anxiously seeking to understand what is going on around them, and to find a way out of the present impasse. And a new sense of values is emerging from the very desperate yet con-

crete issues which have arisen among men. So that people are quicker to see through the charlatanism and trickery of the spell-binders. I believe that these new values will be intensified through the troubled period that stretches before us.

But, concretely, what are these new values? And how is civilization affected by them?

I believe that the chief crisis of our civilization lies in the seemingly recurrent and unwholesome need of every generation for a new and better war. Now, it simply is not true that "human nature being what it is there will always be wars." Man is inherently neither good nor bad. His capacity for good and evil depends to a great extent upon the institutions he evolves, or, as Professor J. B. S. Haldane puts it, his virtues or vices depend *largely* on technical development. And this is exemplified by history. In the old primitive community all men were brothers within the confines of a particular group, but had little hesitation in killing the members of another community or tribe to whom they owed no duties. The coming of the division of labour and the trading in goods brought about larger communities and broke up the small communities, as well as feudalism and serfdom in turn. At the present juncture, the progress of science seems to show that socialism will be a better system than unrestricted capitalism.

But the paradox arises in the minds of most men: Can we have the large degree of regimentation and uniformity which socialism will bring and yet retain our spiritual freedom?

I believe that the deepest socialism is the only basis for perfecting the deepest human personality, that the two should be mutually inclusive, and that it is only by

combining the two that a richer and more stable civilization will arise.

For the state control of the primary means of production, of basic industries, railways, mines, etc., is the only way to end the chaos of competitive economy which leads to monopolies, cartels and large-scale unemployment, with its attendant frustration and consequent blood-bath. Whereas full employment can only be assured by production for need and not for profit. That axiom few can gainsay.

As a corollary of this first axiom, it follows that socialism alone can restore dignity and real freedom to every man, because it ensures him economic freedom and renders him able to fight for political and cultural freedom, i.e. real democracy.

But it becomes incumbent on all of us in effecting the transition to see to it that the spiritual and human values, the quality of civilization as I should like to call it, is not sacrificed by admitting any limitations of the human personality.

This looks like an attempt on my part to eat the cake and have it. I do not deny this. But to me the passion for social justice is as real as the poetry of living. And I insist that they are both parts of the same whole human being to whom we are aspiring.

I contend that our inability to evolve a wide, generous and fine civilized order is to a large extent due to the past repressions of our emotional life, the hangover of the petty restraints imposed by the old system of life. Equally, our priggishness, intellectual bullying and an insensitive emphasis on reason often destroys us in the process of destroying the very dark feudal habits and impulses which we seek to abolish. So what is needed is

the big, the understanding, the generous, the wise heart, informed by passion and schooled by a knowledge born of love.

Another thing to remember during our struggle for the deepest socialism and the deepest human personality is that this very struggle will generate fresh problems, new contradictions, even vacuums which would need to be filled by the creative vision of the individuals who aspire to such a new society. Particularly important is the tension between these delicate and subtle entities, ideas and emotions, which form the quality of existence. Thus special care is needed to preserve intellectual freedom, so that they may be discerned fully, openly and without restraint. And in this regard it is better even to have too much freedom than too little, for the atmosphere needed for the creation of works of art, philosophy and science is very different from the conditions necessary for other kinds of work. In fact, the amalgam of progressivism, conservatism, prejudice, courage and fear that is in the make-up of most intellectuals is an inevitable pre-condition of clear and intelligent thought. And the critic Desmond Macarthy's slogan is a good one in this connection: "Those who love freedom are not afraid of licence." For in art it is not enough to measure the end entirely by the means; rather the biblical phrase applies: "By their fruits shall ye judge them."

If a new, rich, various, intricate, subtle and just society is to be born, however, I repeat that war as an instrument of policy must go, for war, itself arising from the chaos and frustrations of the old society, carries in it the germs of future suppressions and suicides. But the paradox faces us that only the new socialist society can

make an end of war. And that has yet to prevail. And how costly it will be to bring it about not many people realize.

The concrete thing for people to do in the present era is to force their respective Governments to carry out peace policies side by side with constructive measures of social reform so as to avoid the vast blood-lettings to which we seem to have become accustomed.

But I am aware that no one can tell how precisely this kind of positive programme will come to be practised. Will it mean the plucking of the flower of youth of another epoch? Or shall we have to sit yawning with boredom in concentration camps until the revived Imperialisms put us one by one on the scaffold after summary trial?

Or will humanity sweep across the land and possess themselves of all the ears of corn! No one knows.

For the sharp turns and the surprises of this time, the contradictions which abound in it are all waiting for simplification. Whether a great many more people will become enlightened and harden themselves before the hurried pace of contemporary events brings them face to face with the revolutionary situations is for the future to tell. But it is certain that the confusion and bewilderment of modern society can only be solved by great overturnings.

I am not so naïve, however, as to think that these revolutions will result in a Utopia or in the promulgation of certain absolute values, for revolution is an aspiration to the new life and, in spite of the major operation it performs, it always leaves many survivals of the past for adjustment. Only it breaks the vicious circle, mends the schisms of the old life and reveals a new

pattern of life, giving a shove here and a push there, so that men go forward into another age.

It would be impossible for any single effort to abolish all conflict in history. Rather does revolution make men conscious of the tentativeness of human progress and inure them to fresh struggle.

Those who abuse socialism, for instance, for wishing to establish a completely just and peaceful society at one stroke by abolishing capitalism insult their own intelligence. For they presuppose that the plausibility of a rational view is alone sufficient to make people abandon their ties with the older order. There is nothing in the whole of human history to support this kind of utopianism. For, it is obvious that human relations offer occasion for conflict on many different levels, and the road to the most perfect mechanism for social justice and the most equalitarian social structure is strewn with thorns.

The supreme value of life consists rather in the attempt to live as part of the whole of things, in the awareness of the struggle and the constant attempt to work and lessen the time lag between the awakening of men and the urgency of events. All moral values then become revolutionary values, the values of a revolutionary life. And revolution can be seen, in this sense, as a need for togetherness, as the attempt by men to resolve, in common with other men, the social and moral ills of society—it becomes a need for brotherliness, for tenderness among men as against the time when you couldn't hold Robinson's hand.

The emphasis I have put on the function of the creative artist in this essay must not be taken to suppose that in my opinion a few self-conscious men, inspired or

uninspired, can alone solve the ills of society. Not everyone can be a creative artist of high order, and the crisis of our society affects every human being, in so far as we are faced with the problem of a new way of living. I have only been at pains to analyse the position of the writer because he affords a good example of the kind of creative action that, I believe, is needed to-day. And since every human being is potentially possessed of that creative ability which is dramatized in the artist, the question arises how best can the individual cut through the inhibitions and frustrations which have been enforced on him and realize himself as a healthy, living and vital person in the community?

From what I have said in the foregoing pages it will be obvious that no single branch of human activity, however well organized, can realize the creative abilities of men and fulfil them in society. The Churches and the orthodox religions cannot do this, because, as I have suggested before, they ultimately base their beliefs on the mystical test, the realization of union with God, which has seemingly only been vouchsafed to a few people in the world's history. Besides, their dogmas are so varied and conflicting that each one is claimed to be a royal road to success. Nor can science alone be the magic sesame to open the doors of the new life, nor art alone. No, I believe only a many-sided approach, which partakes of human values, can restore man to his true dignity in the new society.

There is a certain vagueness in the idea of a many-sided approach which I must guard against. I do not mean by it merely the casual attitude of the cultured, but an attitude which is incipient in all human beings,

and, though not revealed, is sufficiently concrete from our everyday experience. I am well aware that all attempts at a definition of metaphysical unities which can fit the world into a neat, all-embracing principle with various categories, is bound to remain questionable. But what I want to suggest here as a formula is sufficiently well known to all human beings as a living, pulsing feeling in one form or another so as to recommend itself as a possible basis for happiness.

What is this principle?

I have nothing very spectacular in mind, nothing strange or alien, but a fact which is the very basis of our lives, the thing which binds us to our friends and relations as well as to the real jobs we want to do, a kind of tenderness or love which is the creative centre and root of all human living. The most sought-after emotion on the naturalistic plane, love, has been killed by the cash nexus in the home and reduced to abject sentimentality through the cheap commercial arts of our civilization. The supreme value behind the researches of those who seek knowledge, few scholars or scientists would claim to be inspired by it when working for profit-making combines. The inspiring centre of a poet's vision of nature and man, few poets would be so naïve as to apply its name to their calling in a society which has reduced poetry to a luxury for the *élite*, written by men outcasted by the *bourgeoisie* into Bohemia or exalted to Boar's Hill. The dominating urge behind every conceivable form of human behaviour and striving, it is thwarted and inhibited through the evolution of highly self-conscious individualist types of men. Love alone, or the absence of it, is the common feature in all human association—to use a trite expression which is

really not so trite after all, love, literally as well as metaphorically, does "make the world go round".

I suggest that a new society will only be born through the coming together of all the multifarious peoples of the world, inspired by this tenderness for each other, to build new democratic communities of the various free nationalities and peoples, local collectives which, while retaining their own languages and cultures, might emerge into the bigger collectives and federations in which there is room for adjustment of the economic and social needs of peoples through free exchange and barter.

I insist that by democracy I do not mean the kind of aristocratic democracy which involves "the rule of the best man", or "the Manager". I mean by democracy *a way of life* in which the moral and material urges of the people can have the fullest play. Democracy in this respect becomes a method of ensuring the recognition and the preservation of the dignity of man, the concrete political control by them of their own lives, and the securing of their economic and spiritual freedom.

Obviously, such a democracy cannot be brought about without upsetting the present social order based on *laissez faire*: it can only be achieved by breaking away from the vicious circle of the old society. For as I have insisted before, it simply is not true that the modern western democracy, with its government by trained hands, and experts, elected on trust by a gullible electorate, works. I have suggested that those who are supposed to exercise ultimate control in such a democracy have been found, in fact, to have little power to make their will felt in higher places. And the

opportunities for growth, for reform, for developing a free life, are baulked on every side by the restrictions imposed in favour of a few families in love with power and wealth and privilege.

There are among these people, some who see the emerging awareness for a new democracy among men as a menace. They, therefore, dismiss the whole thing with a caricature of the new conception profusely punctuated with exclamation marks. According to them the basic principle of the new democracy is that "all men are equal", that "everyone should vote for the things he wants", and that "whatever the majority votes is right"! "If they prefer drink and tobacco and the dogs to education or freedom; if they put the bitch-goddess before all other goddesses; well, that is the people's will, and there it is"! And having poured contempt on the aspirations of the people, they suggest that since the ordinary citizen is too busy to be constantly preoccupied with public questions which he cannot master, he should get on with his own affairs and leave government in the hands of people who like that sort of thing and are competent to work democracy. And they regard a public which is supposed to get on with the process of living and not to bother itself with politics as the ideal electorate, so that they can get on with their own nefarious designs and wield power effectively. No suffering, no sacrifices on the part of men seem to convince them of the worth of freedom in the eyes of these ordinary men.

But the "aristocratic" idea of democracy has been out-dated in the revolutionary era in which we have seen so many examples of the corrupt use of their power by the elected representatives of the people. And the

men who have fought for democracy everywhere are determined to build the institutions which will best fulfil the moral and material needs of themselves and their neighbours.

In this regard the lessons of the Russian Revolution, which broke away from the old life of Western Europe, have been paramount. Not only did it destroy at one fell swoop the profit motive, but it discovered a way of relating the fundamental sense of locality and vocational brotherhood among men. And it elaborated a technique by which good neighbourly relations could be established among the various nations on a basis of self-determination and mutual cultural and economic exchange, which are an object lesson especially to peoples dominated by "Imperialist Democracies". The philosophy of selfishness has there given place to an era when men build together, some of the most backward peoples of Asia and Siberia, who hardly had a written language or dialect of more than a thousand words, have been liberated, till they have now, in twenty-five years or less, elaborated vital literatures and arts, the expression of a new life based on a new sense of brotherhood. No wonder then that Professor Laski considers the Russian Revolution potentially as important an influence on the history of civilization as was the Sermon on the Mount to the world when Christianity was born.

The truth is, as I have already stated, that few can deny, in the face of the disintegration and breakdown of western society and its values, that the world will have to make the passage from the acquisitive form of living to a socialist economic organization. But many cavil at the argument that such a socialist society can

supply the faith and the standards of value of civilization.

I believe that it is a narrow and prejudiced view of socialism which regards it as concerned solely with the economic organization of society. I emphasize the fact that socialism implies a spiritual change, which will evolve its own internal checks, its own standards of value and its own ideals. It is possible that the evolution of these new standards and values will take place only after a great deal of experimentation. And I am not unconscious of the dangers of a headless and heartless bureaucracy. But the thing I want to drive home is that adequate internal fulfilment is difficult, if not impossible for a large number of people, unless there are adequate external circumstances to create the conditions for it. Just because the emphasis of the thinking men of our age is on the economic relations of men, it does not mean that the potential human relations are completely outside the orbit of a society which they may help to create. Life is far too rich, subtle and comprehensive a business to preclude everything else but bread and butter questions. Only, the regenerative power of a radical change in economic relations is a basic pre-requisite if a new civilization is to be born.

Thus by my insistence on the need for a new sense of community, by the coming together of people in the struggle to bring about a new way of life, I do not mean any namby-pamby coming together of people who avow friendliness and brotherhood in churches on Sundays, while they are cutting each other's throats in business on other days. There is no real goodwill possible among those who believe in a society run for

private profit, among the financiers as between themselves, or the industrialists and the victims they might exploit; and any compromises between their mutually conflicting interests will not yield the new society, but will merely postpone the real struggle for awareness. I believe, in fact, that those who have the interests of a society based on true democracy at heart, will have to educate themselves and others into a sense of reasoned criticism of all those forces which stand in the way of the new life.

I do not demand any more than these elementary conditions because I am fully aware that there is no straight road to progress. The integration of individuals in a community depends on many factors which go to give human beings a deep awareness of themselves and the world about them, and it demands such a genuine sense of responsibility, that it would be futile to outline a more detailed programme. The flame cannot be harnessed or an ideal conquered merely by casting the vote in the right box and going home to sleep well.

It is not enough here merely to wish for this enlightenment to happen, but it is for men to achieve it, through the struggle to emancipate themselves, to wake from their long sleep, to be born and delivered into a new era. For the political and moral censorship imposed by the owning classes on the educational and cultural life of society, as well as the deliberate perversion of it in the interests of their propaganda, cannot be wished away, but has to be fought against in an organized way. It is true that the sanction for the belief in a new life lies in the general similarity of temperament. But all the same a mere Wellsian "open conspiracy" will not effect the necessary change.

I believe that the unity of the exploited, defrauded and the deprived, and their affiliates in society, whether light or dark, is important, if collective action to achieve the new life is to be brought about. In society, as it is at present constituted in the different national sovereign states of the world, no single, all-pervading, uniform body of men can come together, however, even on a minimum programme, because the uneven social, mental and political development of the various states necessitates adjustment to local aims. Also, a great many gifted individuals whom the new way of life will benefit are either too frightened of the price which they will have to pay to achieve it, or have been so conditioned as to hate the prospect of change to an egalitarian society. So that the only thing common to the greatest number of people remains the desire for happiness which is only a form of the desire for personal relations, for love and tenderness among men. But while the tension inherent in the contradictions of the old society aids the development of the forces which are working towards the new life, (and even the most static and the most complacent people are stirred in the remoter centres of experience), I believe it is only the coherence and unity of the enlightened peoples in the various countries, in voluntary organizations based on a minimum basis of common aims, and a broad common philosophy, that can achieve the new way of life in our time, or prepare the way for it.

I believe that from this very attempt at tenderness will spring the dynamic of the new life, a new humanism. For it will bring a realization of the dignity of manhood, of the urge for men to rise to the full heights of their individual and collective genius from the mutila-

tions and frustrations they have suffered so long. Because if happiness is the greatest good then its realization lies in the asking of the question, what is man, and in the recognition of his responsibilities to other men in bettering society, in making life more vital, vivid and more intense, in adding the soul to the mind, in recognizing the lightning flashes by which the genius reveals the truth.

And from this follows a new and different way of living. From this follows a recognition of the duties of individuals to each other. From this follows a sense of dedication and service, not to some abstract god or symbol but to other human beings, the flame of life in them.

And, through this, the kind of selfishness which springs from wanting to buy a place in heaven, by feeding the priests, or donating money to the churches or temples, will yield to the unselfishness which considers its greatest reward to be the act of giving oneself to others, the act of losing oneself in service in order to find oneself, richer, newer and more wholesome.

There are two different moralities, then, the morality of the old order based on the choice of the few, and the morality of the humanity at present consigned to the dirt, squalor and ignorance of the lower depths, but capable of rising from the living hells in which it is enclosed, to the recognition of its rôle as the vanguard of the democracy of the future, as the inheritor of the past and the creator of a new meaning of right and wrong for the future.

I believe that this morality will throw into the shade many of the tendentious categorical imperatives of the

dying world. It may abolish many primitive impulses, like tribal hatred, fear, the sense of sin and the exaltation of suffering. It is possible that pain can never be eliminated altogether, for without the resistance of pain there could be no evolution. But the abolition of sterile pain by medical research and science, for instance, has shown that needless suffering can go. Evil, however, is a much tougher nut to crack. For, since it is incidental to evolution, and good often comes out of it, it is difficult to envisage a world that would overcome its existence. But we could certainly control the needless cruelties, hurts, fears and hatreds more actively as we achieve rational human progress:

I believe that once the elemental facts, the fundamentals have been resolved to any extent there will open out in human history a period of cultural development which would advance us from our puny infancy to a more graceful and worthy selfhood. A great deal of the morality of the old world has already gone by the board, because the facts of natural science, technology and psychology have revealed the inadequacies of accepted values. But scientific humanism is not enough, because progress is not to be measured by the head alone but also by the development of the heart. Reason can take hope from the fact, however, that the analysis of emotion and subconscious impulse is proceeding fast and the struggle against ignorance has been intensified. But virtue is its own reward, and ought not to wait for visible results or badges of honour to recommend it in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others. And creative work and the service of others is the only intoxication, for in and through it is achieved not only the maintenance of life, but real

happiness and that integral progress of civilization which becomes the heritage of future generations.

I believe that these new principles of human behaviour are implicit in the shifting of the emphasis from partial views of man to man himself, the whole man which the sum of human knowledge has made possible. And I believe that man is already becoming aware of it and will struggle to realize the meaning of his humanity in sudden spasms if not all at once.

I believe in Man.

POSTSCRIPT

The discovery of the Atom Bomb makes it necessary for me to add something to this little book, for such a sensational entry into a new age would seem to invalidate most of the conclusions about man and his place in the universe which I have drawn in the foregoing pages. But I came across the following passage in a story by Nathaniel Hawthorne at random and I feel that, by and large, it sums up my attitude about the times in which we live.

“‘Poh, poh, my good fellows,’ said a dark complexioned personage. ‘Be not so cast down, my dear friends; you shall see good days yet. There is one thing that these wisecracks have forgotten to throw into the fire, and without which all the rest of the conflagration is just nothing at all; yes, though they had burned the earth itself to a cinder.’”

“‘And what may that be?’ eagerly demanded the last murderer.

“‘What but the human heart itself?’ said the dark visaged stranger, with a portentous grin.”













