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HEAVEN-AND EARTH

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SON OF WOMAN
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WILLIAM BLAKE
REMINISCENCES OF D. H. LAWRENCE
ASPECTS OF LITERATURE
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS
SHA KESPEARE

HEAVEN—AND EARTH

by

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY

'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy'

HAMLET

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PREFACE

WHAT I seek to show in this book is that the civilization in which we live is a Christian civilization and that it can be understood only if we are prepared to think of it in those terms. Very obviously it is not a Christian civilization in the sense in which most people understand that phrase — that is, a civilization in which the morality and religious belief of the New Testament is the standard of conduct and right thinking, which is not merely accepted in theory but obeyed in practice. No such civilization has ever existed; and it is possible that no such civilization could ever exist.

What I mean by saying that ours is a Christian civilization is that Christianity has been its distinctive motive force: not its only motive force, but its distinctive one. It is no matter of mere convenience that we call the epoch in which we live the Christian era; it is the true description of the great period of human history of which our modern civilization is the latest phase. There were many civilizations before this Christian civilization, and perhaps — though it is by no means certain — there will be many civilizations after it. But just as the civilizations which went before it were not Christian civilizations, so the civilizations which may come after it will not be Christian civilizations. Either this civilization of ours will preserve its continuity as a Christian civilization, or it will give way — after a period of chaos and barbarism such as is truly beyond our capacity to *imagine* — to a civilization which is not Christian at all.

Now, a civilization which is not Christian at all will not be what we mean by a civilization. I do not know how many millions, or hundreds of millions, 'we' are. 'We', in the sense in which I use the word here, are at least a hundred thousand times more numerous than the conceivable readers of this book. They include millions of people who never dream of thinking the thought, 'civilization', or of using the word. Therefore to speak of them as

meaning anything by 'a civilization' is a figure of speech. But though they do not frame the thought or use the word, they pay some sort of real though fitful homage in their hearts to an ideal of justice and of goodness. Without that ideal there would be a kind of chaos in their being. It may be that the ideal has no actual effect of any kind upon their conduct; nevertheless, it is obscurely present to them and has an influence, if only the negative effect of preventing them from believing that they are good. They may be, and they may be conscious that they are the passive victims of circumstances, creatures of an environment in which the law of the jungle prevails, yet they are never wholly reconciled to this. Lurking somewhere within their hearts is the obscure sense of a more perfect, or more human condition. In this sense, they too 'mean' something by 'civilization'.

But, it may be said, there is nothing specifically Christian in such a 'meaning' of civilization. Some such idea or ideal of justice and goodness would emerge in any civilization. The Chinese, the Hindus, have their own civilizations, which not only have endured far longer than the Christian civilization, but contain within themselves ideas of justice and goodness at least as valid, and probably more genuinely accepted, than those contained in the workaday version of Christian civilization. This I do not deny. All I am concerned to assert is that their civilizations are giving way to ours, not because of the ethical superiority of our Christian civilization, but because of its superiority in physical power — in a word because our civilization has produced the Machine.

Then would it not be better to discard this equivocal phrase — a Christian civilization — and speak simply of a Machine civilization? In some ways it would be better; but to do so would be to blunt the point of all I shall try to say. For I hold that the Machine is specifically the product of a Christian civilization. That is manifest, as a simple historical fact. The other civilizations, the Indian, the Chinese, the Amerindian, did not produce the Machine, or produced it in forms so rudimentary that it could not convulse their forms of social existence nor revolutionize

their morality. Only the Christian civilization has produced this monstrous and awe-inspiring instrument of perpetual change.

But the connection, it may be urged, is accidental; between a Christian civilization and the invention of the Machine there is no necessary connection. I grant that it is impossible to *prove* that such a connection exists, or to demonstrate that only a Christian civilization could have produced the Machine. Nevertheless I believe it to be almost self-evident that it was so. If we ask ourselves why it was that neither the previous Greco-Roman civilization, nor the contemporary Indian or Chinese civilizations invented the Machine, we can find no answer at all, save in the fact that the invention of the Machine was the outcome of an immense invigoration of the total life-activity of the individual man, and that this invigoration of the individual was the outcome of the new conception of man promulgated and disseminated by the Christian religion.

But, it may be said, the invention of the Machine coincides not with the introduction of the Christian religion itself, but with the beginning of a particular phase in the history of that religion — namely, the Reformation and the Renaissance: so that, if the invention of the Machine is claimed as the specific and necessary achievement of a Christian civilization, it can be said to belong only to a particular form of that civilization.

I do not deny that. I merely maintain that this particular form of Christian religion from which the invention of the Machine did in fact arise, was essentially a repetition — a new and creative repetition — of the original religious impulse which created the Christian civilization of Europe. That Christian civilization was slowly built up during the space of fifteen hundred years; but its origins are manifest. We do not have to deduce them, we can hold them in our hands. No .religion in the history of the world possesses such remarkable documents of its own origination as does the Christian religion in the Epistles of St. Paul. They do not describe the origins of Christianity; they *are* its origins. The man who wrote those amazing and inexhaustible letters was the man who founded the Christian Church, and those letters are part of the very act by

which he founded it. Believe what we may of the narratives of the life and teaching and death of Jesus in the gospels, the letters of Paul are beyond all possibility of cavil or challenge. Explain as we will how Paul, the orthodox Jew of Tarsus, came to believe what he did believe concerning the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, it is quite impossible to deny that he did believe it, or that his belief completely changed him, or that by the prodigious and heroic activities to which that belief compelled him the Christian Church was founded.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that all the moral and spiritual energy which created the original Christian civilization streamed out of that Paul whose voice we hear, whose big short-sighted signature we seem to read, who pleads with us and argues with us out of the infinite patience of an inexhaustible love, in his letters. True, it is not he, Paul, who thus works upon us, as he worked upon the world of antiquity; it is not Paul, but 'Christ in him'. And again, whatever opinion we may hold as to what he meant by this, it is impossible to deny that he meant something of supreme importance and absolute reality to himself. We may call it nonsense if we will — remembering that he knew it was like nonsense: 'to the Greeks, foolishness' — but we cannot deny that his belief in it had created in himself a new man whose power and passion and love we feel. There he *is,* and so far as we can tell there had been nothing quite like him in the world before.

Not only are those letters of his a part of the living gesture by which the Christian Church was founded; but they refounded it again and again. They reinspired St. Augustine, who in his turn reinspired the Church. And when at last the time came that those letters of his, translated into the vernacular, spoke once again to ordinary men with something of the same directness and immediacy with which they had spoken to his converts in Ephesus and Thessalonica and Galatia and Rome, then once again the impact of his amazing spiritual energy was felt, and men became new men.

I am not attempting to penetrate or explain the secret of this perennial source of spiritual energy. I am only concerned to

establish the fact that this human focus of spiritual energy was the original founder of the Christian Church, and that at the time of the Reformation he was the source of its re-foundation. I am not implying that Paul alone originally founded the Christian Church, though his letter to the Galatians shows how he had to struggle against the timidity even of Peter to make prevail his determination that Christianity should not be confined to a sect of Jews and Jewish proselytes. He, by far the most eminent and learned and orthodox Jew who adhered to the early Christian community, was the one whose conviction determined that Christianity must be a universal faith which made no distinction of person or of race. Still less am I implying that the new influx of inspiration from the letters of Paul at the Reformation was confined to Protestantism. The counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church was at least as remarkable a movement as the reformation of the Reformed Churches; while the claim of the Reformed Churches to be authentically Pauline was no more than half-justified. They absorbed much of the spiritual energy of Paul, but not so much of his charity; and for a large-scale manifestation of the authentic Pauline spirit I would go rather to the counter-movement which arose in the Roman Catholic Church in response to the challenge of Protestantism — namely, the memorable Roman Catholic missionary movement led by St. Ignatius, which strove to colonize the new world of East and West for Christ, instead of exploiting it for trade.

But the two great movements which finally clashed in the struggle for the mission settlements of the American West, only a hundred years ago, were alike in this, that their initial spiritual energy was derived directly or at one remove from St. Paul. It was he who set the *Mayflower* sailing from Plymouth; it was he who sent the Catholic missions up the Californian coast. If, by some miracle, those two impulses could have been combined together, then the world would have seen something worthy of Pauline Christianity. As it was, two contrary and complementary movements of spiritual energy were set in motion: of which one was individualistic, excessive in energy and defective in tolerance, while the other was

patriarchal, excessive in compassion and defective in its teaching of independence. But of the two there is little doubt that the Catholic mission movement was the more loyal to the charity of Christ.

As, alas, we should expect, energy, individualism and intolerance trampled on energy, patriarchalism and compassion when they directly met. The subject races were blotted out of the book of life in the North American continent. No cherished belief of the Protestant mind needs more correction by the facts of history than its assurance that it has stood for tolerance against the intolerance of the Catholic Church. What it stood for was independence and individualism against the patriarchalism of Rome. And the Protestant mentality is so strong in us — for I belong to the tribe — that we take it for granted that independence and individualism are inherently superior to patriarchalism and subordination. It is not so certain. Protestant tolerance (save in exceptional men) is by no means the same as Christian charity. It is true that, in England and America, the Protestant sects came to demand some degree of tolerance. But it was tolerance between themselves, as the various and warring sections of an elect and ruling race: tolerance as a political necessity lest they should go on fighting till they had exterminated one another. Of tolerance towards the subject-races they hardly dreamed. It was the Roman Catholicism of the counter-Reformation which preached and practised this; it was under this new Catholic inspiration that the conquering Christian race intermingled and married with the subject-races, and gave to them the only true evidence of a real belief in Christian equality, in which there was 'neither Jew nor Greek, nor bond nor free'. Only Catholic Christianity ignores the colour-bar.

What Protestantism chiefly meant was the adaptation of Christianity to the psychology of a ruling race; or rather, it created a ruling race. It released mainly into an ardent individualism vast stores of energy which had been accumulating in the Germanic tribes during the long centuries in which Christianity had brought them into some kind of subjection to civilization. It justified this individualism, as major changes in the

human psyche will always be justified, on religious grounds. There was now no intermediary between man and God. Men — whole tribes and sects of men — were directly inspired. They had only to do all they could do, to do all they wanted to do, and God was with them. From this prodigious impulse to self-expansion derived both the pragmatic notion of political liberty and the new and unprecedented development of science and invention. Christian, in the spiritual sense, this reinvigoration of the individual was not; yet it cannot be conceived as developing save in the matrix of a Christian civilization — that is to say, a civilization based on a religion which sets the seal of supreme value upon the individual man, and whose distinctive sacred books contain so much of the record of the intense spiritual struggle of a great man striving at the same time towards individual self-perfection and towards a prodigious act of outward creation — the foundation of the Christian Church. It is this intensity of the individual life in Paul — the incessant conversion of the powers of the self into selfless activity — that makes him a perennial source of renewed activity. Of the life of Jesus we have no more than glimpses; but the life of Paul is our own life, in the sense that it is what we men of the Western world have come to believe to be the highest form of living. When Keats speaks of his readiness to jump down Etna for some great human purpose, when Bernard Shaw speaks of the supreme felicity of being 'used[5] for some great purpose, it is the pattern of Paul's mysticism of action that they are unconsciously repeating. And the tension and the aspiration, which in such men we can allow to be not altogether incongruous with the effort of Paul himself, has been, in cruder forms, the spiritual ideal of Western life. No doubt it is a grim parody of Paul to invoke him as the inspiration of all who set the goal of life in 'getting things done'; nevertheless, even in this debased form, the impulse does derive from him. His example has set the pattern of creative activity in the West, and established an indissoluble association between a maximum intensity of individual life and an outward-going and creative activity.

§

Thus, as I read our Western history, it consists of two great movements of which St. Paul is the origin: Paul of Tarsus changed into a mighty, selfless, outward-reaching power by his belief in Christ. The first of these movements is the foundation of the Christian Church as a universal Church, that is to say, a Church which, no matter what compromises with human nature it was compelled or induced to make, did recognize as the source of its life and the guide of its conduct a God who had died to save all men without distinction. By what miracle it was that Paul seized the essential meaning of Jesus where others would have let it go, it would be presumptuous to inquire. He did seize that intention, and he lavished his life and his amazing gifts on fulfilling it. That new impulse to universality infused new life into the structure of the Roman Empire; it gave to the forms and organization of the Empire a new spiritual significance, and a new claim on the intimate loyalty of men. It made of the material Roman civilization the apparatus of a spiritual power. So Christianity, with the Roman tradition of administrative organization sanctified and incorporated into itself, civilized the new Europe of the barbarians, and created the unity of Europe, in the last resort controlled by the spiritual power of Rome.

That spiritual power reached a zenith; then it began to decline, primarily, I believe, because those to whom it was entrusted could not rise to their superhuman responsibility. I do not blame them — nothing could be more impertinent than to blame mortal men for failing to control and guide the whole development of human life, which was the responsibility to which the medieval Popes were called. And probably it was inevitable that sooner or later material force would rebel against subordination to spiritual authority. But it is important, for a true understanding of history and of the world to-day, to make clear to our minds the nature of the power which compelled that subordination while it lasted. The spiritual authority of the Church was supreme in medieval

society because men really did believe that they would undergo **a** Judgment after death, and that except by membership of the Church and obedience to its commands there was no avoiding eternal damnation. Membership of the Church and obedience to its commands did not guarantee salvation: the Church never claimed that. But separation from the Church and disobedience to its commands did ensure damnation. Those who obeyed the Church could never be *certain* that they were saved. All that was certain was that those who were wilfully separated from the Church were damned.

On this basis was established what was, potentially, the highest form of large-scale social organization which man has achieved. By this religious belief the powers of humanity were maintained at their maximum pitch of tension compatible with social stability; and a spiritual principle was introduced into the very substance of human life. Paradoxical and reactionary though it may sound, I regard it as a major disaster that men should ever have grown out of the belief in a Judgment after death. That belief, it seems to me, is the only means for keeping the inordinate appetites of men under control. What men, as they are at present, need to save them from destruction is less spiritual guidance than spiritual menaces of which they are afraid. If they cease to be frightened by Hell after death, they have to be frightened by Hell in this life —- by a Gestapo or an Ogpu. Since it seems evident that men are not going really to believe in Hell after death again, for a long while anyhow, I fear that the human race will have to endure its Hell in this life, and that atheistic totalitarianism will sweep over the world — unless ... To show what is required in that 'unless' is the main purpose of this book.

But although it is unlikely that mankind will come to believe in a real judgment after death for a long while to come, it is by no means impossible that such a belief may possess men again. Modern men, who are singularly ignorant of their own past, seldom realize how astonishing it was that the great Greco-Roman civilization, with its scepticism, its culture, its philosophy ~ not one whit inferior to ours — should have passed away **and**

been replaced by a Christian civilization. A Europe at least as wise as ours which did not believe in Hell, came to believe in Hell: it may happen again. But there is a better way.

§

The second great movement in the history of Christian civilization, again inspired by Paul of Tarsus, was based on a repudiation of the Catholic belief in a Judgment after death. For its own obscure purposes, of which it was itself unconscious, Protestantism proclaimed and believed that chosen men could be, in this life, quite certain of their own salvation: they were predestined to salvation. Others were likewise predestined to damnation. But this was not the important part. The possibility of a secure knowledge that one was predestined to salvation was the thing that mattered, for manifestly, if that were true, the whole foundation of the Catholic civilization was shattered. The conviction that this was true men derived from a one-sided interpretation of a part of St. Paul's exposition of his faith in his letter to the Romans. Men discovered in the Bible what they wanted to discover. They wanted to overthrow the doctrine of the universal Church that outside itself there was no salvation. It was true that that doctrine was not Scriptural'; but neither was their own. And the Catholic doctrine did not pretend to be 'scriptural', in their narrow sense at all. It was the necessary Doctrine of a Christianity which accepted responsibility for the spiritual ordering of the whole human race; it was, in a word, the doctrine of a universal Christian civilization. On the Puritan and Protestant doctrine no universal civilization could be built, simply because, in the last resort, by assuring men of the certainty of their salvation, it made truth and morality entirely subjective. Protestantism and Puritanism were essentially individualistic, naturalistic, anarchic, and antinomian. The moral and material chaos of the world to-day is the product of the essential antinomianism, the ultimate lawlessness, of Protestantism, which has been the determining creed of the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic world.

I am not contending that this was all there was in Protestantism—the chapters on Cromwell will correct this impression — or that the disintegration of the universal Christian civilization of Europe was due solely to the new Protestant persuasion that the individual could be absolutely convinced of his ultimate salvation. The power of the Church had been steadily diminishing for many years before this Protestant belief took hold of large bodies of men: and the causes of this diminution are to be sought mainly in the Church itself. The princes of the Church themselves had ceased to believe in the spiritual power of the Church. For the condition of continuing to wield such an immense spiritual power of compulsion is that it should be visibly used towards Christian ends; and the condition of such a use of the power was true Christian saintliness at the centre of the Church seeking outward expression in a continuous effort to defend the poor. It is perfectly true that the actual Reformation was an act of unscrupulous spoliation of the Church; but this spoliation would have been impossible if the Church had still retained the affection and the loyalty of the simple man. It had lost them entirely. The peasant was quite indifferent to the fate of the Church. That was the fatal evidence that the Church had abused the unparalleled spiritual power which she had once enjoyed.

This discrediting of the Church as a genuinely *Christian* authority, its failure to control or to try to control towards simple Christian ends the evolution of the village-community, the simple unit of the universal medieval society (which is the theme of the chapters on Chaucer), was the psychological environment in which the upsurge of the Protestant belief in the certainty of assured salvation outside the Church was possible. That belief, wherever it took hold, dealt a final blow to the pretensions of the Catholic Church to effective control of European society: it abolished the Church's power of damnation on which its power of control was founded. Against a believing Protestant the Catholic Church had no power of compulsion at all, besides that of the secular arm. It could, if it could get hold of him, have him burned as a heretic; but it could do no more.

The medieval Church could have retained its power only so long as men really did believe it held the keys of eternal life. The condition of men continuing to believe this — and I am of the opinion that it is quite conceivable that men should have continued to believe it — was that the works of the Church, which held this superhuman authority over men, should have been themselves superhuman, in the simple sense that its power should have been exerted towards establishing a nobler justice among men than any other authority was concerned to establish. For then it would have been self-evident to men that the power of the Church was from God; and the millions of the poor whom it would have protected would have defended it with their lives. Indeed, it would never have been attacked.

The downfall and disintegration of the medieval Church was a disaster: but the blame belongs to the Church itself. It was not the wickedness of men that destroyed it, for the wickedness of men had not prevented it from being built, but the unworthiness of the Church. But once it was destroyed, the acknowledged spiritual authority of the world was gone, and the floodgates were thrown wide for the uncontrolled development of the individual man — for his science and his inventions, for his liberty and his democracy, his imperialism and his nationalism, and his final spiritual and social chaos. As far as one can tell the end of Christian civilization is imminent, unless it is averted by a tremendous effort of imagination; it will destroy itself, more swiftly, more completely, and more cruelly than any civilization has ever been destroyed before. All its stupendous technical discoveries, which individualism has fostered, have resulted in the effective abolition of the individual *person* as a real power in the world. He is become the blind creature of blind and mutually hostile social organisms, which have conceived no nobler end than to prey upon one another by peace or war. By 'liberty', the individual has destroyed himself.

This is the theme, and this is the background of the history of the second phase of Christian civilization which is presented in this book. It is an attempt to show the emergence of the modern world from the medieval one, as the process was lived by some of

the prophetic men who were involved in it. It is an attempt to make plain that the main hope of saving Christian civilization from total disaster is the rebuilding of the universal Christian Church —- the re-creation of an acknowledged spiritual authority.

§

To discuss what chances there are of doing this, is outside my purpose in this book. But I have little doubt in my own mind about the way it must be attempted, if it is to be attempted at all. It is through yet a third return to the creative genius, 'the incomparable power of edification', of St. Paul. Yet once more, by his power, which was the power of Christ in him, the Christian Church must be re-founded: not by vain attempts to set up a new institution, but by gradually and patiently working to bring the Christian Churches and the Jews into a single Church once more. And it seems to me that we, Americans and English, who have 'profited' more than any other peoples by distorting the teaching of Paul into a teaching of schism and separation, who have exalted individualism into a dogma, are the appointed instruments whereby the truth of Paul's teaching — his passionate conviction that without Christian unity there is no Christ — shall be promulgated again. We, too, must proclaim his doctrine of the unity of Jew and Gentile, in Christ.

In a word, this book is a plea that the Protestant nations shall repent of their destruction of the Catholic 'idea'. I am no Roman Catholic; but I am convinced that it is a paramount and urgent necessity that the best minds in the great Protestant nations should understand the significance of the great medieval Church, and in the light of that understanding clearly perceive that the goal of every man who is concerned that this Christian civilization of ours shall not collapse into sheer barbarism, is the re-founding of a catholic Christendom. That I am convinced is the only means **by which** a collapse of civilization can be prevented, or by which if

such a collapse cannot be prevented, the elements of a civilization can be restored.

I am told, by critics who have the interests of this book at heart, that the opening chapters on Chaucer and the medieval world are too difficult: people will not read them. If it were possible, I would willingly have excluded them; but were I to do so, I should ruin my book — not in the sense of spoiling it as a literary whole, for that would not trouble me in the least, but in the sense that my essential meaning would be lost. Unless we have some notion of the strange medieval world out of which our modern world was born, we cannot really understand ourselves; we have nothing with which to compare our modern society. I know well enough, that it costs a real imaginative effort to pass backward into the medieval world. An abyss has to be crossed; we have, as it were, to strip ourselves naked of all the garments of individualistic thinking which are native to us. It is not easy for oneself; and it cannot be made easy for others. But I beg of those who are repelled by their strangeness to pass these first three chapters by at the first reading, and return to them when they have struggled (I hope with less discomfort) to the end of the book.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER 1340-1400

CHAPTER I

THE PLEINE FELICITEE

THE last of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is one which few, save professional students, ever read. It is *The Persones Tale* — the parson's tale — and it is not a tale at all, not even a moral allegory, but a downright and interminable medieval sermon — a Christian guide to the life everlasting. It is methodical, and it is comprehensive. Point by point it expounds the nature and necessity of Penitence; and passes to the consideration of the Seven Mortal Sins, and the safeguards of the Christian man against them. Finally, it proceeds to the nature of true Confession, as the necessary means towards Penitence; and so it ends where it began: save that in a brief epilogue, 'the makere of this book taketh his leve'. Geoffrey Chaucer speaks, as William Shakespeare (in the person of Prospero) was afterwards to speak at the end of his writing. The differences are great; but part of the substance is the same. As Shakespeare-Prospero appeals to his audience:

> And my ending is despair
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,

so Geoffrey Chaucer to his reader:

> Wherefore I beseech you meekly for the mercy of God, that ye pray for me, that Christ have mercy on me and forgive me my guilts — and namely of my translations and inditings of worldly vanities, the which I revoke in my retractations: as is The Book of Troilus; The Book also of Fame; The Book of the Nineteen Ladies; The Book of the Duchess; The Book of Saint Valentines of the Parliament of Birds; The Tales of Canterbury — those that whisper to sin; The Book of the Lion; and many another book if they were in my remembrance; and many a song and many a lecherous lay.

> But of the translation of Boethius de Consolatione, and other books of Legends of Saints, and homilies, and morality, and devotion, that thank I our lord Jesu Christ and his blissful mother, and all the saints of heaven; beseeching them that they from henceforth unto my life's end, send me grace to bewail my guilts, and to study to the salvation of my soul: — and grant me the grace to do verray penitence, confession and satisfaction in this present life; through the benign grace of him that is king of kings, and priest over all priests, that bought us with the precious blood of his heart; so that I may be one of them at the day of doom that shall be saved: *Qyi cum patre, etc.*

Without we understand and can participate in that prayer, we shall not fully understand Geoffrey Chaucer. And perhaps the leap — whether we call it backwards or forwards (as I believe it to be) — that we have to make towards true comprehension of him is never more evident to us than when we come at last, at the end of our pilgrimage through *The Canterbury Tales*, upon *The Parson's Tale.* How completely then is our expectation frustrated! We have admired, we have loved the 'povre person of a toun'; he is become, perhaps, our ideal of what a parson should be. And from him, when he comes to tell his tale, we expect we know not what — something teaching Christian charity, for sure, something tending to edification, perhaps; but something gentle as grace itself and as comely, something, let us say, like a tale of Tchehov, wherein 'everything is forgiven, and it would be strange not to forgive'. Instead of this enchantment, a treatise, methodical and detailed, concerning the one right road to Heaven.

Our disappointment is profound, and significant: for it is a disappointment of the modern man — the modern man who, if he reads Chaucer at all, reads him for what he can receive from him without disturbance of his composition. He reads, for instance, the marvellous *Book of Troilus and Criseyde*, with a momentary wonder at the unwavering subtlety of the psychology in the greatest narrative-poem in our literature, and he says to himself

amazedly: 'But how modern', meaning how real; but he hurries through the end of it. Chaucer, he says to himself, had lost interest. The compulsions of his 'matter' were too hard for him at the last, and he must needs wind up perfunctorily with a *Qui cum patre.* But listen again!

> Oh yonge fresshe folkes, he or she,
> In which that love upgroweth with your age,
> Repeyreth hoom from worldly vanitee,
> And of your herte up-casteth the visage
> To thilke god that after his image
> You made, and thinketh al nis but a fayre
> This world, that passeth sone as floures fayre.
>
> And loveth him, the which that right for love
> Upon a cros, our soules for to beye,
> First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;
> For he nil falsen no wight, dar I seye,
> That wol his herte al hoolly on him leye.
> And sin he best to love is, and most meke,
> What needeth fayned loves for to seke?

That is lovely: but it is something besides and beyond. It tells of something which compels loveliness; it has a root of which loveliness is only the flower. It sounds clear as a ship's bell at night upon the ocean — remote and pure, yet the very heart-beat of the world, linking all men in all places together with a knowledge of a common and unspeakable aspiration — a judgment, a measure, and a guide: an absolute star. We hear the note, and glimpse the star, again in Shakespeare; and then to my ear and my vision, at least, they fade out of our literature, beneath our horizon. The star of the absolute is set, and the twilight of modern clarity has begun to descend upon the world.

§

Was there then no need for Chaucer to retract his 'litel book' of *Troilus and Criseyde?* If it dealt with the vanities of the world, the

lust of the eye and the pride of life, it did not fail to sound the note which brought these turbulent atoms into pattern, and into subjection to the order of divine beauty. Nevertheless, retract he did. For what? For having portrayed an unlawful love, and for having sympathized so tenderly with the little human creatures? But, if in the ardour and delight of sharing their life of the heyday in the blood, his mind had forgotten 'the plein felicitee that is in hevene above', his being had not: his very tenderness was a medieval and Christian tenderness. That is why it has never been recaptured. It is the tenderness of the eternal for the temporal, of the Christian for the pagan.

Dites-moi ou nen quel pays
Est Flora, la belle Romaine?

A tinge of Villon's regret, indeed, there is in Chaucer's story; but none of Villon's bewilderment. Chaucer sees his creatures so little and so lovable and so clear. He has his distance, and his perspective glass, for these lovers whose consciousness is indeed untroubled by eternity, but whose love becomes a pure pain without it.

One rushes in as a fool; but it was, I conjecture, less the vanity of his 'litel book' than the despair of it that troubled Chaucer when he decided that it was a sin to be repented. So much breathing human passion, with blank darkness for an end. It is the very human beauty of the story, the fidelity to love of 'yonge fresshe folkes', and the poet's fidelity to their love, that makes the heart-break. 'The moment of desire!' sighs William Blake's Oothoon, and we know, or should know, what she means. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the moment of desire is, as it were, made eternal: it utters the very innocence of earthly passion, and its tragedy. What if the tragedy was forced, compelled by the story ('Men seyn, I not') — still the seed of tragedy was there: in the immortal love that is, after all, mortal as all human love must be. The purity and nakedness of the love is its spiritual nemesis. For the love of Troilus and Cressida, as Chaucer imagined and experienced it, is a Christian love, conceived by an imagination that had been

touched and changed perdurably by contemplation of the Cross. A Christian love, not set upon Christ, but upon a creature, portrayed by a man capable of understanding both: that is the source of the agonizing perfection of *Troilus and Criseyde,* or near it. It is something anyhow which will not easily happen again. Not merely that we know too much to be guilty of such anachronism: Shakespeare knew little more than Chaucer, but he could never have done quite what Chaucer did. He had lost the certainty of sin, because he had lost the certainty of perfection. Why, perhaps even the solidity of earth depends on the surety of heaven.

That is not an incrimination. One would need to think very hard, impossibly hard perhaps, to be sure that one wanted an earth so solid as Chaucer's. The ending of *The Reeve's Tale* calls nowadays for more than a strong stomach — a stomach of triple brass rather. Yet it is not cruel. Nevertheless, a modern composition that is merely, though truly, distressed by the bombing of Guernica, will heave the gorge at Alleyn's swyving. We gain and lose: as by slow degrees men have raised themselves above the immediate governance of earth, in their livelihood and their living, so the contrast between earth and heaven has become less glaring, less simple — and less comforting. For a clear vision of distinct and unattainable perfection does not lead, as some believe, to despair. That condition cannot be desperate, to which *all* men know they are condemned by the nature of existence. It gives men true unity instead of false, for one thing. Men who are united by the common knowledge that their imperfection is such that it can be redeemed only by an act of the divine mercy, are united indeed. Unity is born of humility, not of pride. The modern world is proud, proud unto death; and perhaps it is only when it has been trodden under in the mire of its own spiritual degradation, and has endured a terrible and universal humiliation, that unity among men will be a reality again.

The earth will be solid for us again, when we are sure of our distance from heaven: not with the same solidity as of old, for that would signify the eternal recurrence and everlasting despair. The old solidity of earth was experienced by men who knew they

could not escape from it. We know we can; and nothing will ever obliterate that knowledge from the memory of the human race. Their father's home was not the same place to the prodigal son and to the son who had never left it. So will it be with a prodigal generation of men: they will discover that far from the earth is not safe for forgetful men to be. They lose the habit of humility; they forget the clay they are made of. When memory returns to them, they will see that release from earth is an advance towards freedom on one condition, namely, that the discipline of earth be refined into the discipline of heaven. Under that discipline we shall acknowledge the earth again, and ourselves as earth's children: children of earth, brothers of man, and sons of God. For heaven bids us be simple. 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom?' And if men do not care about the Kingdom, they will find the same lesson taught by life itself. Life cannot be abused; it has no end beyond the living of it. To the judgment seat of God man can take with him only a life that was lived: and the judgment of God and the judgment of life are the same.

There neither will nor can be a return to the old bondage of earth. We may allow and rejoice that, in certain favoured regions of the world, some surcease of the old unending toil is granted to men. But unless we see that in respect to perfection our progress is as nothing, we shall be incapable of using that freedom except to our destruction. It is the paradox of existence that material progress must turn to man's damnation unless it is viewed in the perspective of the fundamental truth that a thousand years are as but a day in the sight of God. Man's material progress is a retrogression unless there is a spiritual progress to support and control it: for material progress is, in the last resort, merely an increase in the energy at the disposal c fmankind. A child with a child's force is a comely thing; but a child with the strength of a turbine is a monstrous and dangerous thing. How much spiritual progress is required before mankind can be trusted with the physical forces even now at its command is probably not merely incalculable but unimaginable. But those who make an honest

effort to imagine it, and then to judge how far they themselves are from their part of the achievement that is required will have very little difficulty in grasping the meaning of the doctrine of original sin; and no more difficulty in understanding how relatively blessed, and how basically healthy was the condition of a man like Chaucer who was never even tempted to believe that perfection was attainable by man on earth.

§

His untroubled vision of the absolute and divine over against the relative and human is the source of our frustration and disappointment when at the end of the pilgrimage to Canterbury we come upon *The Persones Tale.* It is not natural to us to ask ourselves what other kind of thing could we expect at the end of a *pilgrimage:* what other consummation could there be? The shrine, the glory, the miracle?

> I shall report,
> For most it caught me, the celestial habits,
> Methinks I so should term them, and the reverence
> Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice!
> How ceremonious, solemn and unearthly
> It was i' the offering.

That would not be wholly out of tune with a modern expectation; but that is the report of a pagan oracle, and by Shakespeare, in whom the vision was fading.

> But of all, the burst
> And the ear-deafening voice of the oracle,
> Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense,
> That I was nothing.

But to a Canterbury pilgrim, or one at least of Chaucer's mind, the sense of nothingness came otherwise. The voice of the Lord is not in the fire, the earthquake and the thunder: it is the still, small

voice — incommensurable with earthly magnitudes and unutterable by earthly magnificence, the royalty whose diadem was a crown of thorns.

And so the modern mind, accustomed to soaring in the empyrean of secular optimism, or to grovelling in the cynicism of secular disillusion, but on both repudiating the essential otherness of Perfection, crashes at the end of *The Canterbury Tales.* No linked sweetness long drawn out, but the hempen homespun of a matter-of-fact guide to the strait and narrow path. Once more the modern mind has the solution to the unpalatable mystery. Chaucer was tired: he saw no way of ending. So he patched up a conclusion to his masterpiece, with the reckless carelessness of a genius, and threw in a translation of a guide to Penitence, part of which he had translated from Brother Laurens some twenty years before.

But, granted that when Chaucer made his version, he had no thought of the use to which he would one day turn it, why did he make it at all? If for an artist's exercise in prose, he could have found better. He had already found better in Boethius. It is only perversity that will deny that he laboured on it, because he believed it was worth his labour. And if, when he came to the end of *The Canterbury Tales,* he found it ready to his need, why, there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will. Nor in this case is there any mystery about the shaping. If in respect to the absolute, all is relative, and in respect to perfection, all is stained, the gesture of true humility towards absolute perfection is for ever final. We learned to say: 'Our Father which art in Heaven' at the beginning of our lives. No matter what we may suffer, or endure, or think, or write, or create or achieve, if we say it at the end, there will be no anticlimax.

> And ye shall understand, that orisons or prayers are to utter a piteous will of heart, that amends itself in God and expresseth itself by word outward, to remove harms and to have things spiritual and durable: of which orisons, certes, in the orison of the Pater Noster hath Jesu Christ enclosed most things.

> Certes, it is privileged of three things in his dignity, for which it is more digne than any other prayer; for that Jesu Christ himself maked it; and it is short, for it should be learned the more lightly, and for to hold it the more easily in heart, and for a man to help himself the more often with the orison; and for a man to be less weary to say it, and not to excuse himself from learning it, it is so short and so easy; and for it comprehendeth in itself all good prayers. The exposition of this holy prayer, that is so excellent and digne, I betake to the masters of theology: save thus much will I say: that when thou prayest that God should forgive thee thy guilts as thou forgivest them that be aguilten to thee, be full well ware that thou be not out of charity.'

'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, *and are in love and charity* with your neighbours . . .' There are few Christians surely to whom the summons has not given pause — few men who have not hesitated to rise from their knees, and learned at that moment, if at no other, the connection between Faith and Hope and Charity. We cannot be in charity with our neighbours save by grace divine: then we know that 'we, in our Selves, are nothing'.

Just as the Lord's Prayer, muttered sleepily and uncomprehendingly by us as children, is nevertheless the only fitting speech for us at our lives' end, whether or not our achievement be visible to the world, so *The Persones Tale* with the Lord's Prayer at the heart of it, though it was translated years before Chaucer conceived the idea of *The Canterbury Tales,* is yet the perfect fulfilment of them. 'This orison must eke be said with great humblesse and full pure.' Away then with the Book of Troilus and the Book of the Nineteen Ladies, and the Tales of Canterbury — 'thilke that sounen into sin'. In the presence of the Absolute, there must be absolution and penitence.

> Our sweet lord God of heaven, that no man will perish, but will that we come all to the knowledge of him, and to the blissful life which is perdurable, amonesteth us by the

prophete Jeremie, that saith in this wise: 'Stand upon the ways, and see and ask concerning old paths (that is to say, old sentences) which is the good way; and walk in that way, and ye shall find refreshment for your souls. Many be the ways spiritual that lead folk to our Lord Jesu Christ, and to the reign of glory. Of which ways, there is a full noble way and a full covenable, which may not fail ne to man ne to woman, that through sin hath misgone from the right way of Jerusalem celestial; and this way is cleped Penitence, of which man sholde gladly herken and enquere with all his heart: to witen, what is Penitence, and whence it is cleped Penitence, and in how many manners be the actions or working of Penitence, and how many species there be of Penitence, and which things appertain and behove to Penitence, and which things disturb Penitence.[5]

CHAPTER II

THE VILLAGE-COMMUNITY

THERE is much of the medieval mind into which we can never enter. However long, and however profitable, may be our poring over customals and cartularies, there is that in medieval life which it seems must escape us for ever. It has escaped record, because it was so obvious and ubiquitous that no one dreamed of trying to record it. It was below consciousness, or what we call consciousness. Yet it was in a real sense, the very life of medieval England — the beating of its heart, the pulse of its blood-stream, the feeling within its bowels. This was the life of the peasant, the villein, the churl — *adscriptus glebae:* legally and in deeper fact, part of the earth: the earth's child and husband.

> Only a man harrowing clods
> In a slow silent walk
> With an old horse that stumbles and nods
> Half-asleep as they talk.

He is everlasting, said Thomas Hardy: he would go onwards the same, though dynasties pass. Yet he has not gone onward the same. The English peasant even of Hardy's time is very different even from the peasant of a bare century before him, whom we glimpse in the pages of John Clare. How should he not be different? The land itself is changed. In Clare's time the last of the common-fields were disappearing fast. That alone might well have been all to the good. But with the common-fields — so clumsily cultivated in a bewildering variety of strips — disappeared also the wastes and commons proper, wherefrom the peasant had gained his margin of livelihood, his fringe of independence, that stuck so hard in the throat of capitalist agriculture.

In Hardy's time, the land — all the land — had finally become the property of some one or other: his property, like his money:

something with which he could do what he would. What indeed was property but that? Yet once in his lifetime at least, when he made his will, he may have become aware of a faded distinction, now unintelligible and preserved only in lawyers' jargon, between real and personal estate — a distinction which pointed back to days when land was regarded as generically different from other forms of property. If you owned land, you owned human beings who worked the land; and yet you did not own those human beings — not at any rate in the same way that the Roman proprietor owned his slaves. In some mysterious fashion the serf had his rights — substantial rights embodied in the custom of the manor; and what was more, it lay with the body of the serfs on the manor to declare what the custom of the manor was. The ownership of land in medieval England was a relation to a community with its own independent laws of existence. It fairly bristled with safeguards of the labourer. Not that it was an earthly paradise for him. His work was hard and incessant (as work on the land has always been) and his luxuries were few. But he was secure. Indeed, in so far as the villein may be said to have been owned at all, he was owned rather by the land than by the lord of it. His little holding, whether it were thirty acres or five dotted about the common-fields, was at least as much his as it was his lord's.

Above all, relatively to the standard of living in the country generally, he was not badly off. Though in fact he may have lived no better than the Russian *moujik* before the Revolution — the life portrayed in such a story as Tchehov's *The Peasants* — he was not degraded and brutalized as the *moujik* was by the knowledge that in the great cities there existed an entirely different *kind* of life from his own, yet enjoyed by a class of folk essentially the same as he. There were men of high degree, lords and prelates. But such had been since the foundation of the world; and it was impossible to conceive life without them. It would have been fantastic to compare his lot with theirs. They belonged to another sphere — but a necessary sphere; and seldom indeed did their orbits intersect. The only lord who was much of a reality

to the medieval peasant was the lord of the manor: and he was often absent and always far from being absolute. The peasant owed him services, but the services were precisely defined. They varied in rigour from place to place, but by and large they were not too onerous.

§

Medieval ownership was ownership of the land: there was nothing much else to own. Yet this ownership was essentially and vitally different from any ownership we know to-day. Sometimes the modern landowner is inclined to make paternal pretensions, and to profess that his ownership of land is not just a matter of bare owning. He stands towards his tenant *in loco parentis,* as the house-master in Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* used to say when he was meditating something 'unusual dam mean'. But perhaps there may sometimes be a vestige of truth in it. Nevertheless, modern land-owning belongs, in kind, to modern owning in general: it is fundamentally individualistic and irresponsible.

Just as it is exceedingly difficult to pass the abyss backwards to the medieval belief in God, so it is difficult to recapture the medieval idea of ownership. They are not unconnected with one another; and it may help us, if not actually to make the former leap, at least to be conscious that a gulf exists and that a leap is required, if we try to grasp the nature of the most elemental and most widespread kind of 'ownership' in medieval England. The use of the word begs the question. What *was* the relation of the villein in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to his strips in the common-field? No matter whether he was a holder of the standard virgate of thirty acres, or of some smaller piece, the relation was the same. But what was it? He did not own it, he 'held' it. And it is notable that the Franco-Latin and legal form of the word *tenens, tenant,* has degenerated into the modern 'tenant', which the medieval holder was not; whereas the English form, 'holder', has retained its element of independence, and rather increased it, as in 'small-holder': which again the medieval holder was not.

First, then his 'holding' consisted of scattered strips of the big arable common-field, which were more or less fixed, and a strip in the common meadow, which changed every year, when the meadow was re-distributed by lot. From the sowing of the arable each year until the inning of the crop, the holder really 'held' his strip of arable; likewise from the closing of the meadow till the hay-harvest, he 'held' his strip of meadow. But from corn-harvest to sowing, the arable field; and from hay-harvest to the spring closing, the meadow, were common: as was the great piece of the arable which lay fallow for the year. So that for half the year the village-community held its common-field and its meadow veritably in common. But not even the village-community 'owned' either common-field or meadow. Neither did the lord of the manor. Each villein-holder held by right, so long as he performed his services on the lord's demesne: and the village-community held by right so long as it (roughly speaking) performed the total service of cultivating the demesne, and the different service which fell equally upon lord and villeins of rendering tithe to the Church. In return for these services the lord gave the villeins his temporal protection, and the Church gave her ghostly protection to both.

This is certainly not the place, and I am certainly not the man, to attempt a detailed picture of the English medieval manor. I leave out all consideration of the varieties and vagaries of tenure, the many approximations of the villein to the 'free-holder', and the equally numerous approximations downward towards a condition so onerous as scarcely to be distinguished from slavery; I leave out also the vague, but very real claim of the villein to the use of the 'wastes' — of which there is a tenuous survival in many of the 'commons' we English know to-day. I am concerned merely with the average — the norm that is always also, in respect to any individual instance, the ideal. I have merely sketched the rough general structure of the ordinary cell of the organism that was medieval England. It is immediately evident that it is incomparable and incommensurable with anything that exists in England to-day.

The most impressive thing about the medieval manor, by far,

is that it is a community, in a sense entirely different from any in which that word is used to-day; and the next most impressive thing is that it is a very complicated and intricately balanced community. The lord, the parson, the villeins; the manor-house, the vicarage, the cots; the demesne, the glebe, the common-fields — all these are parallel and interlocking patterns; but one thing stands outside the pattern, as we might say a keystone stands outside the pattern of an arch, unique and indispensable: namely, the church. Yet, quite plainly, the arrangement would be altogether more symmetrical without the church; and so far as any economic calculation goes, the arrangement would work perfectly well without the church. Yet, for some reason, the church *was* in fact indispensable to the life and growth of this very peculiar organization. Its taking shape was precisely coeval with the Church's taking shape; and as the Church ceased to be *the* Church, the village-community also ceased to be the village *community*.

A modern historian of the English manor (to whom I am in other ways indebted) thus states the nature of the change: 'the year 1350 saw England with more than half its population serfs, while the year 1600 saw England without a single serf left in the realm'. That is a characteristic modern way of putting it; and it sounds most comforting. But the gilt flakes rapidly off the gingerbread — if anything so pleasant as gingerbread can be said to remain — when we remember that the year 1601 saw the Elizabethan poor-law established in England. It sounds good to abolish 'serfdom'; not quite so good when you know it had to be replaced by the poor-law. It sounded good when the Russian Alexander abolished serfdom in the 'sixties of last century; but nobody ever observed that the *moujik* was benefited thereby. On the contrary, his condition grew steadily worse: until there had to be a revolution.

So it is that we have to be very much on our guard against such a hypocritical little modern word as Tree'. It is a whited sepulchre, and inwardly is full (alas, too literally) of dead men's bones. The villein 'holder' was a bondman, technically, but he was secure, he could not be dispossessed; when he became Tree', he became a

tenant, at his landlord's mercy. What the Cambridge historian registers as the emancipation of the serf from bondage into freedom', appears from my angle of vision as the emancipation of the lord from any human obligation towards the peasant. By Treeing' the villeins, the lord became the *owner* of the land of the manor, which he never was before. Before, he was head of the village-community; by far the greatest and most powerful member of it no doubt, but still essentially a member of it. It was not his property. In a very definite sense he could not do what he liked with it: the villein held his virgate not merely *ad voluntatem domini* (at the will of the lord) but also *secundum consuetudinem manerii* (according to the custom of the manor), and the custom of the manor (of which the villein and his fellows were the custodians) was as powerful as the will of the lord.

It is unfortunate, and it may even prove to be disastrous, that the notion that the real process which is concealed behind 'the emancipation of the medieval serf was the emancipation of ownership, is not one that can easily find lodgment in a modern mind. We take modern ownership as an absolute; we cannot believe that there really was a whole past epoch of society during which modern ownership did not exist; neither can we easily conceive a future epoch when it may cease to be. Or if we do conceive such a future possibility, we conceive it only according to a Marxist orthodoxy, which intolerably simplifies past, present and future together. Yet, if we have regard to the uniqueness in every nation of the process by which, out of the complex unity of the medieval village-community were separated the emancipated ownership of the lord, the freedom of status of the peasant, and the modern non-authoritarian but property-owning Church, we have some solid warrant for supposing that the evolution of society towards a communal future (which I believe to be inevitable) may be just as recalcitrant to anticipation by the one-way mind.

§

I have no desire to idealize the medieval village-community. When the struggle is for a bare margin of subsistence, there cannot be much energy to create or time to enjoy what we call the amenities of life. Nevertheless, the fact is that the peasant had many holidays — ten times as many as the agricultural labourer has to-day; and another fact is that substantially life was the same all over England. Above all, the peasant (in spite of all the legal and liberal fictions of the history-books) never sought to emancipate *himstlffrom* the village-community. What he did seek was to change within it, to his own greater security, the relation between himself and his lord. He desired the status of a 'free' man as regards his lord: that is to say, he desired to retain his holding in the village, while commuting the services he owed his lord for a fixed payment.

Now this payment, which developed under the fostering care of the lawyer and the landlord into rent, was profoundly and radically changed in that process. No wonder the medieval peasant was bewildered, seeing that the modern historians (whether liberal or Marxist) are incapable of understanding it. We must try to understand this mysterious process in which the peasant was involved by his desire for a degree of real 'emancipation' — a process which he felt to be the infliction of a monstrous injustice, but one which he could not define. This sense of injustice culminated in the great Peasant revolt at the end of the fourteenth century, with its passionate hatred of 'inky blots and rotten parchment bonds' and its fury against the Scribes.

What the peasant really wanted, in striving for emancipation, was a little more security. His customary services were not so much intrinsically onerous as disorganizing: he was liable to sudden calls for a day's work when he could least afford to give them, particularly at harvest. If therefore he could commute these services at *a fair* rate, the gain would be considerable on both sides. The peasant's own work would no longer be disorganized;

and the lord would receive, instead of grudging labour, the money to pay willing work. We can clearly see what the peasant was groping after if we consider the manor as a whole. As we have said, what the village-community as a whole owed the lord was the proper cultivation of his demesne. What the villagers now desired was to replace their bodily services by a money payment which would enable the lord to hire labourers to do the work which the community owed him. The work on the demesne would be better done, so would the work on the common-fields. The peasants' demand — though it was not formulated in this fashion — was essentially just: and had it been secured, it would have allowed of a natural progress in the economy of the village-community. The demesne would have become, as it were, the model farm, demonstrating the advantages of a consolidated instead of a scattered holding. The villeins would have paid a small charge for their holdings, which in fairness to the lord — and they were by nature inclined to be more than fair to him — would have increased or decreased according as the price of labour rose. The village-community would have remained a community; it would have grown into a finer one.

The possibility of this evolution obviously depended on the commutation of their services at a fair rate (an aspect of that intrinsic and objective economic 'justice' which haunted the medieval mind): and what was fair was not difficult to estimate. The essence of a fair arrangement was that the total payments by the villeins should be equal to the cost of cultivating the lord's demesne. All that was wanting was an independent authority, fully acquainted with the needs of the village, to arbitrate justly. Such an authority existed — the parson, backed by a still greater authority — the Church. The Church was by far the greatest landowner of all. It was the lord of manors innumerable. And, in all the manors which it did not own, it had the parson. Thus, it was in an incomparable position of spiritual and actual authority. It had only to prescribe the just settlement and the just settlement could not have been resisted.

Instead of this, it acted as the grasping lord. It too was con-

cerned to establish its ownership of the village-community. No doubt in this it was not merely driven by self-interest, but genuinely perplexed by the existence of a condition which was neither slavery nor freedom, in the case of the villein, and in the case of the lord was neither ownership nor guardianship. But in this matter the Church's perplexity was no different from the lord's. Its manifest duty as a Christian institution was to set the weight of its decisive influence, when the fluid and anomalous condition had to be crystallized, on the side of justice to the peasant, so that his organic relation of membership of the village-community should not be altered to his detriment. The Church did nothing of the kind. It did the opposite.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH AND THE PEASANT

I THINK there can be little doubt in the mind of anyone who surveys the evidence that the Church was guilty of the great betrayal of the medieval peasant. To hold that is not to maintain that the Church actually behaved worse than the lay lord; its unforgivable sin was that it behaved no better, and that never for one moment (as far as I can judge) was the idea really entertained by the Church that it was appointed to be the guardian of the peasant. And, alas, the Church had a double grip upon the peasant; and its grasp upon him as a Church was heavier than its grasp upon him as a lord. No matter whether it was his lord or not, it took his tithe — the tenth part of the yearly produce of the earth won by the peasant's labour: a truly *tremendous* tax in a purely agricultural society, quite incommensurable with what remains of the tithe in a mechanical and capitalistic society like our own. Not that the toll was excessive, if the Church which received it had done its duty in return. But too often instead of returning the bounty of God and the earth to the man who toiled for it, in the shape of a parson, like Chaucer's who was a true shepherd to his flock, it suffered the collegiate church or the monastery to appropriate three-fourths of the parish tithe, while leaving the residue for an ignorant and ill-educated vicar. Not that I believe that Chaucer's parson was a mere dream: on the contrary, I believe that there were many who were like him, or who strove to be. But the Church did not help them: the Church did not make it its main concern to shape such men, and establish them with her great authority throughout the countryside. Such men emerged much more in spite of the Church than by its aid.

A good man was ther of religioun,
And was a poure Persoun of a toun,

But riche he was of holy thought and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parisshens devoutly wold he teche.
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,
And in adversitee ful pacient;
And swich he was y-preved ofte sythes.
Ful looth were him to cursen for his tythes,
But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,
Unto his poure parisshens aboute
Of his offring, and eke of his substance.
He coude in litel thing han suffisaunce.
Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer a-sonder,
But he ne lafte nat, for reyn ne thonder,
In sikness nor in meschief, to visyte
The ferreste in his parisshe, much and lyte,
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf.
This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.

It was my love for this man which first awakened in me the dim notion that in the medieval village-community of England was contained the promise of a beautiful and natural organization of society — a promise that was unfulfilled; and it aroused in me also the suspicion that, if the Church had set itself, as it ought to have done, to multiply and encourage and strengthen such men, the history of England, and of the world, might have been very different from what it has been. I am not to be deluded by the abstractions of the liberal historians who confuse the legal status of the free man with freedom and represent, to their satisfaction, the march of history as a triumphal progress towards themselves; neither am I to be deceived by the kindred abstractions of the modern materialists who regard human history as fatalistic and determined in the past, yet miraculously capable of complete autonomy in the future. I believe that history is not *human* history at all until it is regarded as the record of great

opportunities missed — opportunities that must be understood, in order that, when they present themselves again in new forms and on more desperate occasions, some conscious effort may be made to seize them.

§

It seems to me that Chaucer, who had a sense of reality if any man had, saw the thing that was foreshadowed in the English village-community — natural and lovely, solid and true, a tree of human life, into whose branches duty and obedience flowed up as it were from the ground, and in whose humble glory Earth the mother and God the father joined, and the Son was alive again.

Then something happened and the image of perfection slowly withdrew. What was it that happened? It is idle to think that there is any single way of describing a happening so elemental. There are innumerable angles from which we regard this profound change: and there is some aspect of the truth to be seen at the end of every perspective. It was a change in the very staple and substance of human life. The very development of Chaucer himself is a mirror of the change. In his work we can watch the emergence of individuality.

G. K. Chesterton, with characteristic insight, fastened on a phrase used, in condign praise of him, by a French contemporary:

O grant translateur! Geoffroy Chaucier!

It sounds to a modern ear, said Chesterton, much as though one were to praise a man by calling him 'a great scrivener' or 'a great stenographer'; but in Chaucer's world and to Chaucer's mind it was praise indeed. There was a common fund of wisdom and achievement: and men were conscious rather of what they drew from it than of what they added to it. Yet add they did; and Chaucer added royally, but as it were impersonally. His 'translations' were free, because the substance was not his own. He was spared the burden of individualized achievement, therefore he was

free in a way we can but dimly understand, with the freedom of a natural humility.

This basic communality of which Chaucer's work is the flowering in the realm of language, was the reflection of a communal substance in the elemental life of men. The common-field was the ground in which this great harvest grew. Men depended on earth and on one another; they were knit to earth and to one another; one common gesture united them all. The individual, in our sense, scarcely existed. Not even in name. If I, for example, had been one sort of man — a tiny tot of a feudal underlord, able to furnish myself with a horse and armour and one retainer with a sword, I should have been John de Lading; if I had been another sort of man, I should have been John Scrivener. But, of course, if I could be conceived as existing at all in 1350 or thereabouts, I should certainly have been in the Church — a subordinate monk or friar, or a poor parson. But in any case I should have had only my Christian name. And if, as one may suppose, I had wanted to think the kind of thoughts I am most inclined to think, it would have been hardly necessary for me to write and publish them. Those activities of mine would have been expressed probably in a long and patient copying of Boethius, uplifted by a more or less continuous meditation on the life and death and resurrection of Christ. The impulse to break through the benign atmosphere of anonymity would have been very feeble. Why should I?

This natural submergence of the individuality, this undisturbed latency of the conscious personality, which now appears so calm and comely, was not peculiar to the Church, or to the 'makers' in words or stone, but was diffused throughout society. The individuality was there, but it was not conscious. For the vast mass of people, whatever their vocation, existence was primarily communal. This living, natural and universal community is indeed singularly hard for us to imagine. We think of communal existence at a boarding-school, or in a regiment, or quite exceptionally, of life in a voluntary community. But such community is artificial. Life in a voluntary community is perhaps the nearest we can get to the medieval reality: and that brings us near (not very near)

to one form only of the medieval communal society, the monastic: a very widespread form, indeed, but still the medieval community at the point where it was most conscious, and most separated from natural ties — of common toil and local habitation. The monastic community in regard to the village-community was a feudal overlord — the lord of many manors.

I believe that the village-community could have expanded naturally into a flowering of its own. I do not believe that it was necessary and inevitable that it should have been disrupted as it was, or that its complex and organic harmony should have precipitated, into unrestricted ownership on the one side, and insecure tenantry on the other. Neither do I believe that the choice lay between a victory of the lords and a victory of the peasants. The peasants did not want victory; they wanted justice — but real justice, not the formalistic parody of it which the lawyers offered them, by which, in essence, they were compelled to change their anomalous and impersonal security, for 'freedom' to be rack-rented and dispossessed.

The only kind of justice which could have served the peasants was imaginative justice. Essentially, the village-community was inarticulate, rooted in custom, not in law: and the law, even when honestly applied to it (which was seldom), was incommensurable with the reality. Bond or free? asked the Law. The answer was Neither. It was the answer of the community to the Law which recognized only 'persons'; the Law could not hear it. Because of this it was impossible that the Law could do justice to the peasant, because, in fact, the service which the peasants owed the lord could only be understood and estimated if the community were regarded not as a collection of separate persons but as a living whole.

There was one person in the village — the person *par excellence* — the parson. He was the man marked out to represent the community. He belonged to it, in a way the lord did not. In perhaps most manors the lord was perforce an absentee — a cathedral chapter, or a monastery, or a great soldier fighting for the King in France, or a courtier. The parson belonged to the village: he

lived in it, and as like as not farmed in it as well. But on a higher plane than this he represented precisely what we may distinguish as the community of the village-community — its simple and mysterious organic wholeness. As a person, he was supported by the tithe of the community as a whole; because he represented an authority as superior to the lord as it was to the villeins. The villeins owed their services to the lord; but both owed their tithe to the humble vicar of God.

One may freely grant that it was necessary that not all the tithe in every parish should have gone to the vicar alone; but it was utterly wrong that so much of it should have diverted to the upkeep of a parasitic Church establishment. The Church was rich enough in all conscience, from the innumerable manors with which the pious munificence of kings and lords and humbler men had endowed it. Its lordships should have sufficed it. The tithe should have remained to enrich and bless the country-side. It would have been simple enough, if the will had been there, to take some of the tithe of the rich and fertile parish to add to the parson's living in the poor one. What at any rate should have been manifest to the Christian conscience of the Church was that its many lordships were the true and sufficient source of the revenue to support it as a magnificent and splendid institution over and beyond the parish church and the parish priest. When it diverted tithe from the village-community to increase its institutional opulence, it was bleeding the village-community to death.

§

Let us look again at the picture of society in Chaucer's Prologue — remembering that it may have been exaggerated by the artist in Chaucer, and that it was probably socially exaggerated, because pilgrims are in the main likely to be the relatively well-to-do. That is so even to-day: it is not the working-man who makes the trip to Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, even when **full** allowance is made for such exaggeration, it is very remarkable

how preponderant in the picture are those whom one must describe as ecclesiastical parasites on society.

In these I do not include the Prioress, not merely because she is elegant and charming — a sort of English Marie Antoinette — but because economically she is no worse than the equivalent of the lord of many manors. She belongs with the Knight. Economically, both might be called parasitic; but surely, not morally. Economically, even the 'povre person of a toun' is parasitic; but he is a spiritual *necessity* — a necessity for more abundant life: and those who can see in such a man merely an economic parasite are blind and far astray. To have no formulable religion is one thing: to have no imagination, quite another. If men allow their incapacity for formulated religion to become incapacity for imagination, they will forget a truth profounder than any economic truth: a truth which, if it is disregarded, will assuredly turn even the recognition of economic truth into a diabolical force making not for the salvation but the devastation of mankind. The truth is simple: 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' This truth the poor parson represents in Chaucer's great picture of medieval English life. He gives to a meaningful life a consciousness of its meaning.

When I say that the Knight and Prioress are not morally parasitic, I do not mean that they fulfil a necessary function in the same simple and sublime sense that the parson does; but that they have a secure place in the upper ranks of the hierarchy without which medieval society could not conceive itself as existing at all. They are the aristocrats; and they are not unworthy of their privilege. And with his unfailing instinct Chaucer makes us aware of his feeling that they are sound. So, at a different point in the hierarchy, it is with the poor clerk of Oxenford. He also is a worthy member of what Coleridge called 'the clerisy'. But then comes a procession of real parasites: the hunting and hard-riding Monk:

> What should he studie, and make himselven wood
> Upon a book in cloistre alway to poure,
> Or swinken with his handes, and laboure,

As Austin bit? How shall the world be served?
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.

The Friar, whose one purpose it is to make money out of the simple and gullible — above all, from women; who devours widow's houses:

For though a widwe hadde nought a sho,
So pleasaunt was his 'In principio',
Yet wolde he have a ferthing ere he went.

The Somnour — that is, the server of summonses to appear before the Archdeacon's court:

And if he fond o-wher a good felawe
He wolde techen him to have non awe
In swich cas, of the erchedeknes curs,
But if a mannes soul were in his purs,
For in his purs he sholde y-punisshed be.
'Purs is the erchedeknes helle,' seyde he.

The Pardoner — the man licensed to sell Papal indulgences, and pig's bones, and a gobbet of St. Peter's sail when he met our Lord walking upon the water, and a pillow-case which he said was our Lady's veil. It is very funny; but old Chaucer knew the reality behind it.

But with these relikes, whan that he fond
A povre person dwelling upon lond,
Upon a day he gat him more moneye
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye.

Maybe our own 'povre person', who, thinking no guile, trusted a man with the Pope's own licence. It was the doings of the Pardoners and of the Popes in this matter, when the business has assumed truly modern proportions, and was conducted in the truly modern manner — so many hundred thousand indulgences to be sold in Germany on a fifty-fifty basis by the great banking-house of Fugger for their loan of half-a-million to the Papal Curia — that set ablaze the reformation of Luther.

Put together the Shipman and the Merchant, whose one concern

was that the sea between the Low Countries and the Orwell be kept open; add to them "the Wife of Bath who, with her five husbands, seems to have been something of a female pioneer among the west-country clothiers, who were beginning to enter on a big way of business in those days: then the fraternity of Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer and Carpetmaker, whom Chaucer significantly describes not individually, but corporately — all made 'to sitten in a yeldhalle on a deys', all with ambitious wives eager to have their husbands made aldermen, and themselves be called 'Ma-dame' — and you have the rising bourgeoisie in so far as it fulfilled a positive economic function. Perhaps we should add the Franklin to them — the country squire and M.P.

> At sessiouns there was he lord and sire
> Full ofte time he was knight of the shire.

He was the direct ancestor of the men who began the Parliamentary revolution but could not, or would not, finish it. The Franklin is emphatically the freeholder. He is outside the village-community. His labourers are all wage-labourers; and there are few wage-labourers in the village-community. But he is not the lord of many manors, or even of a few. In respect to the aristocracy of the manorial system he is a bourgeois; so is he in respect to its economy. He produces primarily for the market and the town.

Of the manorial economy only the Parson, the Plowman, his brother, and the Reeve are representative. Notably, the Parson and the Plowman are ideals of Christian neighbourliness. And the Reeve is not too bad. He is the steward who manages the manors for the absent lord; and very well he did out of it, as agents to this day have a way of doing.

> His woning was full fair upon an heeth
> With grene treës shadwed was his place.
> He coude bettre than his lord purchase.
> Full riche he was astored prively.

Parasitic? Hardly. We may allow him as one who fulfilled, though at an exorbitant price, a necessary function of co-ordination and management.

Now we have passed them all in brief review except four: the Doctor, in league with the Apothecary for their mutual advantage, who 'kepte what he wan in pestilence'. None the less, the germs of the man of science and the dietetician are in him: and notably, 'his studie was but litel on the bible'. The Manciple — the domestic steward or man-matron of one of the Inns of Temple; and one of his masters — the Sergeant of the Law, a master of the intricate and wordy art of conveyancing. It is significant that Chaucer's emphasis is on this. Land is beginning to change hands freely. And finally, the Miller, who, though Chaucer does not say so, appears to have been the freeholder of his mill. He is at the bottom of the particular class within a class of which the Franklin is at the top.

The Knight has one yeoman to attend him, besides his son the squire; the Prioress has a nun and three priests; the band of budding aldermen, their cook or rather their chef. Even by aristocratic standards we must put down two of the Prioress's retinue as superfluous. They were not rogues perhaps, but they were parasites. So, out of a company of twenty-nine all told, there were no less than two superfluous priests, one parasitic hunting monk, and three downright ecclesiastical rogues. The proportion is tremendous. Mark well, we have allowed, as Chaucer would have allowed, that an aristocracy of religion was necessary. It is only after that has been supplied, as well as the poor parson and the Oxford clerk, that I talk of ecclesiastical parasites; yet the pure ecclesiastical parasites compose nearly one-fourth of the company. People like statistics nowadays. Then let us say that the percentage of those in Chaucer's cross-section of society who derived their living from the Church is 38 per cent; while the ecclesiastical parasites make 21 per cent. We have thus allowed as a legitimate percentage no less than 17 per cent.

§

In that parasitism of the medieval Church, I find the cause why the village-community was disrupted instead of advancing

into a fuller flowering. Had the village parson not been starved, he might have become a man of independent authority, with the capacity to understand the subtlety of the village-community, and with the resolution to defend the rights of the inarticulate peasantry against the exactions of the lord and the irrelevant intellectualism of the lawyers. The village-church might have fulfilled the function that so manifestly belongs to it, of gathering her children under her wing, as a hen her chickens. Instead of that the village-priests were starved and degraded and stupefied. Innumerable are the protests of medieval prelates against the ignorance of the parish clergy. But it was the fault of the Church, not of the priests, that they were ignorant. It suffered the village-priest to be degraded in status beside the extra-parochial priest or the ecclesiastical official; it impoverished him and thrust him down to the level of peasant illiteracy, until for the most part, even had the will been there, he was in plain fact incapable of giving the simplest spiritual instruction to his flock.

The Church, by its economic and spiritual exhaustion of the parson, had made it impossible for him to be more than a peasant, and for his religion to be more than a superstition. Had it tended and cared for him, he would have been led to care for his people. Had he been taught his own spiritual dignity, he would have been the spokesman of the dignity of the community whose consciousness and conscience he was called to be. That this is not an idle dream, Chaucer's picture of the Parson and his brother the Plowman is witness. The possibility was there.

It was a possibility at once economic and spiritual, as was the reality of the village-community itself; and the rejection of the possibility was a spiritual and an economic process, too. By that rejection it was decided that irresponsible ownership and not responsible ownership should be the pathway by which men travelled into awareness of themselves as individuals; that the not merely un-Christian but definitely anti-Christian doctrine should be established that personality was a function of possession; that the conception of individuality should emerge only as contaminated and debased by individualism. What might have

been saved from the village-community, saved, expanded and universalized, was the instinctive sense that obligation was inherent in all possession, and that ownership was essentially trusteeship. That was to become the pious sentiment of the E*lite* of an individualistic and acquisitive society, as it became uneasily conscious of its spiritual emptiness. But the gospel of 'service' — before and after sales — is only pious cant. It is not, and never can be, a reality in an irreligious and capitalistic society. It might have been in a different society; but the compulsive power which could have made it a reality, and could have shaped the society in which alone it could be a reality, vanished long ago.

That compulsive power was possessed by the medieval Church; and it frittered it away by its own unworthiness. The opportunity that was lost was very great: how great we are dimly beginning to realize to-day when mankind's need of a universal spiritual authority invested with compulsive power is desperate, and the difficulty of creating such an authority is superhuman. We begin to glimpse how unique and irrevocable was the destiny which for a period established a spiritual authority as king of kings, lord of lords, and the only ruler of princes. Of that period, for the English race, Chaucer is the only voice. It is no accident that he, the first of our great poets, should be the sanest and the wisest of them all. He is, before all else, untroubled. That 'order* which was to become for Shakespeare mainly a secular and desperate necessity, has in Chaucer's world a divine origin. Its source is an eternal reality; it is not precarious. There is security. The older Chaucer grew, the more secure and solid he was, although his worldly fortunes suffered a precipitous decline. But Shakespeare, though he progressed from poverty to estate, passed also from happy security into a tempest of doubt and despair, and if he emerged from it, as I believe, to a final serenity, it was a serenity too deeply disturbed by a doubt of its own validity to bear the name. It was no accident that Chaucer ended where Shakespeare began — with creative innocence. *The Tempest* is lovely; but with the loveliness of a dream. The beauty of *The Canterbury Tales* is the beauty of reality.

Part of the modest fortune of which Shakespeare died possessed consisted in a portion of the impropriated great tithes of Stratford. Most things occurred to Shakespeare; and no doubt it occurred to him to ask himself what the great tithe of Stratford was doing in his hands. I would give much to know his answer.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL

No other equally great writer in the world's history makes so slight an initial demand upon us when he seeks our complicity in re-entering existence, as Montaigne. He is like a gift of Nature: a sunshine day. We have nothing to do but to bask in it, and him. There is nothing to pay, nothing to wrestle with, nothing to be endured. The path to enjoyment, and to the essential Montaigne, seems to lie open on every page. 'The bees plunder the flowers,' he says, 'here a little, and there a little; but afterwards they make honey of them which is all their own: it is not thyme, or marjoram, any more.' That is the perfect figure for the kind and quality of delight which Montaigne distilled. His honey is neither thyme nor marjoram any more; it is honey. But it is honey which always faintly reminds us of where it was gathered, and has so many subtle tones of flavour that we can never forget how widely ranging was the creature who made it. And not in books alone.

That easy approach, that natural familiarity, that sense of belonging to the family which Montaigne bestows upon his reader, is not fortuitous. When gradually it has begun to dawn upon us that Montaigne is not merely a friendly man but a great one, indeed a Colossus, we begin to realize at the same moment that he has grown into a giant almost by accident — or rather by that divine necessity of nature which always wears the appearance of a 'happening'. He starts, so to speak, where everybody started; he is compiling yet another enormous common-place book; he is gathering the truth, as so many had gathered it before him. Slowly we become conscious that the emphasis has shifted; he is doing something different, or rather — such is the massive and impersonal force of his accumulation — something different is being done through him. The Man is not exploring the **Truth, but** the Truth is exploring Man. In creating a book, he **had**

created himself. He knew it. 'I have not made my book any more than my book has made me.' And in responding to his book, we have been witnesses, accomplices, collaborators almost, in the work of a demiurge — the creation of the first conscious Individual man.

Not the least mark of Montaigne's peculiar greatness is that nothing he tells us directly about himself cannot be corroborated, and given amplitude and richness from the body of his work. Therefore when he explains, 'Je ne dis les aultres, sinon pour d'autant plus me dire', it seems as though his book itself were speaking. What we have long dimly felt to be the true cause of the amazing felicity of his quotations is, in a moment, quite simply declared. He uses them because he admires them; but he admires them because they corroborate his experience of life. Not merely this, but they have helped him in the obscure purpose of his own life, which was to become fully conscious of his experience.

> I have not studied at all in order to make a book, but I have studied to some extent because I had made one, if it be any kind of studying to skim over and catch, by the head or the feet, now one author and now another, with a view not to forming my opinion but to assist those long since formed, to second them, and to be of service to them.

A thousand subtle gradations, differences, distinctions in his experience had thus been recognized, and by being thus recognized had been in some sense created. The quotations were not merely his own, they were himself. And this again in no perfunctory or vaguely metaphorical meaning. The Montaigne of whom these quotations were part was a man who grew, and who never ceased to grow; and the quotations were part of that growth.

§

It is at first astonishing to realize how well Montaigne himself knew all this. To save ourselves from being altogether over-

shadowed by the masters of the past, we incline to credit ourselves with some small accession of consciousness beyond theirs. We are willing, even eager, to admit that it is an excess, an exaggeration, a quality which we should be better without. When Mr. Eliot pipes that we are 'the hollow men' we accept him as our laureate not least because we feel that there is something distinctive about hollowness, and that it has overtaken us because we, more than others, have been condemned (or privileged: it comes to much the same) to 'look before and after'. We know more, we have seen the works, we carry the burden of history. Montaigne quietly pricks *jhc* bladder of this self-esteem. Had he not calmly looked forward to the time when the Copernican revolution should be superseded by a generalized theory of relativity? And what possible effect of modern scientific scepticism had not been anticipated and discounted by the author of the *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde?* If the ardent spirit finds the humanism of Montaigne intolerable, there is nothing for it but to take the mortal leap into superhumanism. If Pascal is contemporary, as indeed he is, it is because Montaigne is more contemporary still. Pascal is the only escape from Montaigne; and he is only the escape from him. When the fumes of intoxication by 'enlightenment' are cleared away, they emerge to put the everlasting issue. As between Montaigne and Pascal one can hardly hesitate in pronouncing who is the stronger, and the more secure in his strength. Beside Montaigne, Pascal is a tortured man.

One feels, indeed, that there was something in Montaigne which could put Pascal almost beside himself: that Montaigne was the devil with whom Pascal had to wrestle. Not much of human potentiality would escape the bounds of ah Imaginary conversation between those two men, if there were the genius to compose it. He would need to be a genius indeed, for what are Pascal's *pensies* themselves but the notes for the first (and not the last) chapter of such a book. The notes for the last are to be sought in Montaigne; perhaps in the conclusion of the *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde,* where, after celebrating Plutarch's paean to the One, Montaigne adds his own equivocal comment. 'Therefore',says

Plutarch, 'we must conclude that God alone is, not according to any measure of time, but according to an immutable and motionless eternity; before whom nothing is, and after whom nothing will be; but one real being, that with one single Now fills the Forever; and there is nothing that truly is but He alone; of whom we cannot say "He has been", or "He will be"; without beginning and without end.' Says Montaigne:

> To this so religious conclusion of a pagan I would only add this observation from a witness of the same condition. 'Oh, what a vile and abject thing is man,' he says, 'if he does not raise himself above humanity!' There you have a good saying and a profitable desire but, for all that, absurd. For to m*ake* the handful bigger than the hand, the armful bigger *than* the arm, and to hope to stride farther than our legs will sp?etch is impossible and unnatural. Nor can a man rise above 'himself and humanity; for he cannot see but with his own eyes, nor take hold but with his own grasp. He will rise if God will extraordinarily lend him His Hand; he will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means and by suffering himself to be uplifted and upraised by means purely celestial. It belongs to our Christian faith and not to his Stoical virtue to aspire to that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.

To which we can but apply his own words concerning his beloved Plutarch, and call it 'cette conclusion si religieuse d'un homme paien'. Verily, there is no criticism of a merely institutional Christianity more subtle than Montaigne's acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith. He is ceremonious to it because it has ceased to mean anything to him. Sometimes, no doubt, his irony is almost as deliberate as Voltaire's: but it is never quite so calculated, or so smart. It is a lithe and animal movement in Montaigne, and when it is most disturbing we cannot be quite sure whether it is ironical or not: as when after presenting Julian the Apostate as a pattern of most of the humane virtues, he concludes: 'In the matter of religion he was at fault throughout/ Montaigne turns away from Christianity as a flower turns to the

sun. And since the motion proceeds from a nature so manifestly brimming and ripe with humanity, the motion is the more impressive. Nature herself, in him seems to be waking from a dream.

§

Yet, so far as Christianity is a matter of behaviour — and surely no small part of it is — it might well be argued that Montaigne was farther advanced along the path of revolutionary Christian conduct than any of his contemporaries. What else are we to make of his extraordinary conduct in leaving his château unguarded in the midst of civil war and brigandage? He was not making a virtue of a necessity. He quietly tells us that he has heard of no other château whose master did the like; yet he had suffered no attack, no loss. 'Et n'en ai jamais *ost6* ny vaisselle d'argent, ny tiltre, ny tapisserie.' The outward sign was truly correspondent to the inward grace. Instinctively, from the beginning, he had obeyed the maxim: 'Become what thou art!' and he had not spared the pains necessary to abide by that supremely difficult injunction. It meant for him, over and above the honest acceptance of what he was, to have the courage of his own intuitions, to keep unblunted the fine point of his soul wherewith he explored life for a meaning, 'sounding himself, in Wordsworth's phrase, 'to know the destiny of man'. So he left self-defence to the righteous, and wars to the religious. 'Je ne veulx ny me craindre, ny me sauver a demy.' He took the risk that his nature impelled him to take. Was it that he was wise beyond his time, and calculated that this was the safest way of being safe? If it had been no more than that, still it would have been astonishing courage. But it was more than that. It is only after the event, as ever, that he ruminates his reasons.

> That so many fortified houses have been destroyed, while this of mine still endures, makes me suspect that they were lost because they were guarded. That gives an assailant both the desire and the justification. All defence carries a face of war.

> Let them fall upon my house, if it is God's will, but at any rate I shall not invite them. It is my retreat for repose from the wars. I try to withdraw this corner from the public tempest, as I do another corner in my soul.

The motive more and deeper than instinct or calculation which moved him is in that final sentence. He had made the quiet corner in his soul whence he could regard his fortunes with indifference; he was unattached. By his effort to know himself entirely, he had lifted himself above the flux of circumstance. He was under no illusion that he did know himself entirely: that was impossible. Like Socrates, he was as ignorant as other men save in his knowledge of his own ignorance: but, being Montaigne, he gives the famous saying a turn of his own. 'Je me tiens de la commune sorte, sauf en ce que je m'en tiens'; 'I am an ordinary man, except that I know it.' The lingering trace of Socratic intellectualism departs. Montaigne, to himself, is simply a man, who knows it.

But the process and achievement of that knowing — how great it was! And he makes it so easy for us to forget that it was great. The Montaigne we meet is already mature. The storm and stress are over. He has already learned the secret; he is a man, who knows it. The manner of his coming to a knowledge so simple and so rare has been all his own. It seems familiar enough. 'Moy, qui m'espie de plus prez, qui ay les yeulx incessamment tendus sur moy.' An Amiel, surely, might claim to be as perfect in the art of self-examination? So it seems; but only seems. For Montaigne's method has been to find himself in the men of old time. He has been guarded by a prophylactic against egoism. From the beginning his discovery had been, not how much and how strange there was in him, but how much of what was in him had been in other men. He was looking for the truth, searching out all that in the experience of the ancients had been ratified by his own, establishing how completely he had been anticipated — in all, except the occupation. And the exception is the essence of Montaigne. To the extraordinary essay in which he describes the

sensations of his nearly fatal accident, he subsequently added pages which perhaps more directly than any others convey the sensation of this conquistador of the human personality — 'silent, upon a peak in Darien\

> We hear but of two or three ancients who have travelled this road, and yet we cannot say it was at all in this manner, since we know nothing of them except their names. No one since has rushed into their path. It is a thorny undertaking, and more so than it seems, to follow a movement so wayward as that of the mind, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and arrest so many of its little breath-like stirrings. It is a new and extraordinary occupation, that withdraws us from the ordinary employments of the world, ay, from those most in repute.

But this was, as it were, the unexpected and residual quintessence in Montaigne's alembic after a process of self-discovery through self-cancellation. So little of himself was indeed his own, he found, that there was nothing left but 'the corner in his soul' where he could rest in the recognition that he belonged to the common sort. In his own inimitable way, following his own natural bent, having for his native bias that passion for the total truth which he regarded as the one basic human virtue, Montaigne had undergone an arduous spiritual discipline before the composition of the *Essays* began. He was already capable of looking upon himself dispassionately as an object. He had had a glimpse of Montaigne *sub specie aeternitatis;* irresistibly he followed the gleam, and organized it into a vision.

§

He had discovered a profound philosophy, and in his book we watch him taking complete possession of it, or it of him. As his book grows so does he. Degree by degree, trait by trait, he comes under the lucid scrutiny of his own increasing awareness. What is happening he knows well, far better than most of those who have

sought to expound his philosophy. The philosophy of a man who understands by the word philosophy the seeking of wisdom is always elusive to those for whom the word means a systematic doctrine. They look down upon Montaigne as an amateur; they do not notice that he is smiling at them as professionals. It seems to them that he cannot be really serious when he says: — 'De quel regiment estoit ma vie, je ne l'ay apprins qu'aprez qu'elle est exploictée et employée: nouvelle figure, un philosophe impremed*ite* et fortuite.' He must be taking the name of philosopher in vain.

But not at all. He is serious, while he smiles; he is serious, because he smiles. He is establishing, a *bon escient,* a solid and unsuspected claim to have climbed to the very pinnacle of philosophy, to have become a man so imbued and pervaded with awareness that he can put reason in its own subordinate place without having to invoke the aid of faith, if by faith is meant something different in nature from experience. He is become a man, who knows he is only a man, and is content; because the knowledge is of such a kind that it fills him with happiness. And that, for Montaigne, is the end of all philosophy, if philosophy would but know it.

> The soul that lodges philosophy ought by its healthiness to make the body healthy too. It ought to make its tranquillity and gladness shine forth. It should fashion the outward behaviour to its own mould, and consequently arm it with a grateful pride, an active and spirited carriage, and a contented and gracious countenance. The most manifest sign of wisdom is a constant joy; her state is like that of superlunary things, always serene. It is *Baroco* and *Baralipton* which make their disciples so dirty and smoky, and not she; they know her only by hearsay.

That encomium is as splendid as it is famous; yet it is too often looked upon as a kind of magnificent commonplace extracted from antiquity. It is nothing of the kind. It is Montaigne's own, and is of his essence. Philosophy for him is the pursuit of perfect consciousness, which when achieved returns, by virtue of its own purity, to be the finer life of the body. Then there is no division

any more. The total man is, as it were, redeemed and purified by the imaginative spirit, so that he is made whole and made one, not with an enforced but with a natural unity. And this unity of the man, being a natural unity, is not a uniformity; it is compact of variety and animated by conflict.

> Such discourses are, in my opinion, infinitely true, and reasonable: but we are, I know not how, double in our selves, so that what we believe, we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn.

Once more, it is not the utterance of an easy scepticism; it is the self-knowledge of a great man who knows that 'without Contraries there is no progression', and that there can be no finality in the growth of a man indeed. Those who seek finality can have it at a price: they must eradicate some part of their humanity. To Montaigne that was sacrilege. To let die an appetite was one thing, to mortify it quite another; and to him they were as different as life and death. Not to conceal oneself from oneself, not to hide one's secret shames by violence, but to look serenely upon them, was the way of life. It was also the way of truth.

The doctrine is not an easy one; nor is it easy to be a Montaigne. Many have found that to their cost, who, charmed by his transparency, have sought to emulate him. They have proved to be as wide of the mark on one side as have been on the other those austere interpreters who have believed that Montaigne taught men 'to follow Nature', which seems to them an easy and dangerous doctrine. Perhaps it is; but Montaigne did not teach it. His doctrine is not dangerous, and is very difficult. It is that, if you have a nature like Montaigne's, you were best to follow it, because you will not be able to do otherwise. The essential requisite, for a nature to be like Montaigne's, is that it should possess, and be possessed by, a fundamental generosity of soul. With that to start with, you will meet Montaigne somewhere; because from that beginning the conclusion is inevitable. Finally, one is a man and knows it, and that is to have become a man.

> A generous heart must not disown its own thoughts; it desires that its inward parts be seen; everything in it is good, or at least, everything is human.

Nothing more simple, nothing more difficult. In that transparent dictum is unambitiously expressed what philosophers have meant by passing beyond good and evil, what mystics have meant by passing beyond creatures, what Blake meant by declaring that 'Art could not exist except by naked Beauty display'd[5]. Montaigne's *Essays* are, precisely, art in this high sense. 'If I had lived among those nations which are reported still to live under the sweet liberty of the original laws of Nature, I assure you that I would very willingly have painted myself entire and naked,[5] *tout entier et tout nu.*

Montaigne is the standing confutation of all that is excessive and inhuman in Pascal. By his mere being he dissolves the menace of the judgment: 'le *moi* est toujours ha'issable' — 'the Self is always hateful'. Not that Montaigne would deny it, exactly: but he has something more to tell us than that, something wiser and therefore less distinctly formulable. It is that the Self is lovable, if a man can bring himself to love it. What the Self becomes depends on how we behave towards it. It can be lovable, because it can be loved; but it can be loved only by the not-Self. In his early manhood Montaigne knew the secret of love. Self-obliteration came to him naturally in his friendship with fitienne de la Boe'tie. 'If I should be pressed to say why I loved him, I feel that that cannot be expressed.' And afterwards he added the immortal phrase: 'except by saying, Because it was he, because it was I[5]. The very pulse of human love beats in those words. To have felt it is to have known that, in spite of all, life is blessed: for love is the vision of the incomparable, the nonpareil, and the vision is seen only in self-forge tfulness.

To have turned his power of self-forgetfulness upon himself—this was Montaigne's triumph. He looked upon the Self with the eyes of the not-Self. And the history of that singular achievement is written at large in his book; indeed, the *Essays* are the embodied

process of that achievement. Montaigne knew that also better than posterity has known it. His book is one long and infinitely various act of self-discovery, self-objectification, made possible only by self-forgetfulness.

> And though nobody should read me, have I wasted my time in entertaining so many idle hours with thoughts so useful and agreeable? In modelling this figure on myself I have been so often compelled to arrange and compose myself in order to bring myself out, that the pattern has thereby gained in firmness and has to some extent shaped itself. In painting myself for others, I have painted myself in myself, in colours clearer than those of my original nature. I have no more made my book, than my book has made me; a book consubstantial with its author, with an occupation peculiar to itself, an organic part of my life, not with a tertiary and alien end and occupation like all other books. Have I wasted my time in taking account of myself so continually, and so curiously? For those who survey themselves in thought only, and occasionally in speech, do not examine themselves so radically nor penetrate so deeply, as he who makes it his study, his labour, and his profession, who pledges himself, with all his faith and all his force, to a record that will endure.

Montaigne touches his greatest heights in such a passage as this where he surveys his own activity as the writer of the *Essays*. At such moments the paradox of his achievement comes into full view; where he is ostensibly most personal, there he is most impersonal. Compare him at such moments, with the later masters of self-revelation, with Rousseau of the *Confessions*, with Châteaubriand of the *Mémoires d'Outretombe*. The difference is not of degree, but of kind. In Rousseau and Châteaubriand we are interested; we read avidly all that they have to say; nevertheless, at the end, with Pascal at our elbow sternly demanding our final judgment, we are forced to confess that 'the Self is always hateful'. But with Montaigne it is quite different. Where Rousseau and Châteaubriand blench before the sentence of Port Royal, Montaigne stands secure

and invulnerable, as though he had been refined in the fire, and all the dross purged away. Because he defends nothing, conceals nothing, he has nothing to defend or conceal. He is proof against all the acids of modern analysis; he has applied a radical scepticism, not to others, but to himself.

§

As the features of such a man —- head and shoulders above his great age, with only Shakespeare for his peer — began to define themselves to Montaigne's consciousness, it was impossible that he should not see the significance of his instinctive enterprise. His book stood then before him as a work to be completed 'with all his faith and all his force'. He dedicated himself to it, and his sense of the spiritual significance of his 'attempts' is conveyed in his suggestion that his book is a new and more exacting form of the practice of Christian confession, as though it were a solitary and unprecedented effort to bring religion into the stream of life. 'I hold that it requires wisdom to make an estimate of oneself, whether it be high or low, impartially, and conscientiousness to publish it.' Yet such was the unerring natural genius of the man that not even the strong determination which speaks in such phrases could corrupt his own spontaneity. Returning home to his work after a year and a half of travel, he said:

> Meanwhile, I do not correct my first imaginations by second ones; yes, it happens that I correct a word, but to vary it, not to take it away. I wish to represent the progress of my humours, and desire each piece to be seen as it was born. I should like to have begun earlier, and be able to recognize the process of my mutations.

Beneath the apparent carelessness is the scruple of the new completely conscious man. Montaigne, who knows what he is doing, knows also the dangers of such knowledge. He must be faithful to his own growth. He must not prune, he must not trim, above all

he must not suppress what he had written. It had come from him spontaneously, 'naturally, as the leaves to a tree'; therefore it had its place in the final pattern. The scruple did not prevent him from making his language more vivid and nervous, and saying more exactly what he had meant to say. That would have been a fanaticism. As artist, and as man, Montaigne knew when not be bound by his own rules. Since his style had always been one in which 'les choses surmontent', in which things 'showed their back above the element they lived in', it was his duty to let them rise still sharper and clearer if he could. But in the essential substance there must be no change. He felt not merely that right and proper reverence for his own past which is the privilege of men who know their own integrity, but also the peculiar obligation of his own great work.

Indeed, the *Essais* are wonderful — a book of destiny, that had to be. 'A man's life of any worth', said Keats, 'is a continual allegory'; and the obvious and exoteric side of the allegory of Montaigne may be found in the history of the word which his book launched into European currency — the word 'essays'. How startling and mysterious is the contrast between the sense of the urge and heave of creation which the word awakens as the title of Montaigne's book, and the meagre and finical connotation of the word to-day!

> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs and peer about
> To find ourselves dishonourable graves.

The *Essays* and the plays of Shakespeare complement one another. They are personal obverse and impersonal reverse of a single medal that imperishably commemorates the inward spirit of the high Renaissance in Europe. It is, in my eyes, far from an accident that in *The Tempest* Shakespeare turns to Montaigne for help in his great and final argument for Forgiveness. In that halcyon moment it was as though in Montaigne and Shakespeare, Nature had come to her own in man once more, and inspired him,

as she must in her perfection, with a new kind of reverence for man.

> Nativity, once in the main of light,
> Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,
> Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
> And Time that gave doth now the gift confound.

But the conscious Individual who emerges in Montaigne's *Essays* was saved from eclipse by his own spiritual humility. That is the fragrance which preserved this great man from corruption. Beside him we feel that even Pascal was proud, and for very lack of humility was driven desperately to redress the balance by humiliating himself and man. But, alas, in this man of a second Nature, who takes shape as concrete individual in Montaigne, and as imaginative creation in the works of Shakespeare, the religious impulse takes forms which are too generous for the age in which they live. They, like Hamlet, are beyond revenge; they cannot be fanatical. They are too aware of the individual for that.

They saw too far and too wide. Conscience made cowards of them; they could not be men of action. Yet the man of action is necessary if the crust of custom is to be upheaved. Yet what conceivable action could express the universal tolerance which blossoms out of their recognition and realization of the Individual? Tolerance, it seems, can only suffer; its activity is passivity.

Hamlet's question is real. It is the one real question for humanity, henceforward.

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing, end them?

Cromwell will have no doubt about taking arms; and he will be able to take arms for tolerance and for life individual, because he does not see too much or too far. He believes in a God of vengeance still. Shakespeare and Montaigne cannot. Yet CromwelFsnGbdT

of vengeance is divided against himself; he calls for vengeance only on those who will not abandon vengeance. He is the authentic 'God of the Bible, revered as a work of total and uniform inspiration. What comes after the Bible? The Gospel of Christ? Or the gospel of Man? But these are the same gospel — the gospel of the Divine Humanity. In another three hundred years it will be not a dream of the individual, but a necessity of the world, if it is to escape catastrophe.

Of that universal church of Christ, Montaigne is a forerunner. He liberates the individual that the individual may know his limitations; he makes man free in order that man may surrender his freedom, knowing that he must. He rediscovers — in a new world of freedom and responsibility — 'the misery and grandeur of man*.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY OF ORDER

IN the Paston Letters, towards the end of that precious correspondence, there are two letters written to John Paston the younger, by Margaret Brews, the lady who (I am glad to think) eventually became his wife. The letters were written while the match-making was going on over Margaret's head. Match-making is itself a romantic name for the process: it was a tough piece of marriage-bargaining. At the moment of Margaret's two letters the negotiations were hanging fire. Her father, Sir Thomas Brews, has reached his limit, and given his ultimatum. So much will he give with his daughter and no more. And Margaret writes to her suitor:

> Right reverent and worshipful, and my right well-beloved Valentine, I recommend me unto you, full heartily desiring to hear of your welfare which I beseech Almighty God long for to preserve unto His pleasure and your heart's desire. And if it please you to hear of my welfare, I am not in good health of body, nor of heart, nor shall be till I hear from you.
>
> > For there wots no creature what pain that I endure
> > And for to be dead, I dare not it discure.
>
> And my lady, my mother, hath laboured the matter to my father full diligently, but she can no more get than ye know of, for the which God knoweth I am full sorry. But if that ye love me, as I trust verily that ye do, ye will not leave me therefor; for if that ye had not half the livelihood that ye have, for to do the greatest labour that any woman alive might, I would not forsake you.

A little later she writes this :

Right worshipful and well-beloved Valentine, in my most humble wise, I recommend me unto you. And heartily I thank you for the letter . . . whereby I understand and know that ye be purposed to come to Topcroft in short time, and without any errand or matter, but only to have a conclusion of the matter betwyxt my father and you. I would be most glad of any creature alive, so that the matter might grow to effect. And thereas ye say, an ye come and find the matter no more towards you than ye did aforetime, ye would no more put my father and my lady my mother to no cost nor business for that cause a good while after, which causeth mine heart to be full heavy; and if that ye come, and the matter take to none effect, then should I be much more sorry and full of heaviness.

And as for myself, I have done and understand in the matter that I can or may, as God knoweth; and I let you plainly understand that my father will no more money part withal in that behalf than an ioo pounds and 50 marks, which is right far from the accomplishment of your desire.

Wherefore, if that ye could be content with that good and my poor person, I would be the merriest maiden on ground; and if ye think not yourself so satisfied, or that ye might have much more good, as I have understood by you afore — good, true and loving Valentine, that ye take no such labour upon you, as to come more for that matter, but let it pass, and never more to be spoken of, as I may be your true lover and beadwoman during my life.

No more unto you at this time, but Almighty Jesus preserve you, both body and soul,

By your Valentine,

MARGARET BREWS.

I think those letters are singularly simple, touching and beautiful. They were written in 1477. A hundred years later Shakespeare was a schoolboy of thirteen; quite probably he was ceasing to be a schoolboy, for the year 1577 is the exact year when we

first hear of his father's financial troubles; and one of the oldest traditions is that Shakespeare was taken away from the Grammar School because his father was impoverished, and his work was needed at home.

The letters of Margaret Brews are the letters of a girl in a social station superior to Shakespeare's. We may take it that her father, Sir Thomas, was more or less in the position of Shakespeare's old enemy, Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote Hall; and the man whom she so badly wanted to marry, John Paston, was the younger brother of Sir John Paston, who had inherited the noble castle at Caistor in Norfolk, built by Sir John Fastolfe — the same Sir John who lent the name at least to the immortal Jack Falstaff. Sir John Paston had been put out of his castle, without a shadow of right, by the Duke of Norfolk, who fancied it. He felt that one of the finest castles in Norfolk ought to belong to the Duke of Norfolk. So he just took it. When at last he did give it up again, it was an act of grace on his part. Perhaps that is why a Duke is still addressed as His Grace — in memory of the time when a Duke was a man who, if he acted justly, acted not under compulsion but only out of grace.

In the hundred years that followed, most of this had changed. In 1577 it was not possible for a Duke to dispossess a local landowner of his castle without legal process. Yet in the fifteenth century that kind of thing was continually happening. There is instance after instance of the same lawless behaviour in the Paston Letters: and we need to remember that the Pastons lived in Norfolk, the richest outlying county in England, and the most civilized — so civilized indeed that Charles II (or it may have been his father) wished that the roads in Norfolk could be spread out all over England. The lawlessness of England which is revealed in the Paston Letters, and the accompanying sense that, to use a frequent phrase in them, it was a 'queasy world', compose the background — or the backwoods — from which the best approach to the whole phenomenon of Shakespeare can be made.

A hundred years separated the England of Elizabeth from the England of Henry VI and Edward IV: just the same space of time

as separates me now from England at the accession of Queen Victoria. When I was a schoolboy of eleven, Queen Victoria died. True, she was an august and remote figure to me; but neither then nor since have I been able to think of the year of her accession, or the England of 1837, as otherwise than near. No doubt the changes during Victoria's reign were tremendous, and in the economic sense anyhow, revolutionary; nor are they strictly comparable with the tremendous change which England underwent in the hundred years between 1477 and 1577: but the change between the reigns of Henry VI and Elizabeth was likely to have been even more impressive to a man of Shakespeare's spiritual discernment and imagination.

§

The great and blessed change — sensible to all — was a change of which people like ourselves have no experience: the change from lawlessness to law, from social chaos to social order. If we can make that change real to our imaginations, we shall not wonder at the extreme reverence paid to the virgin Queen, as the fount of this blessed Order; nor at Shakespeare's own evident feeling — curiously and potently revealed in *Richard II,* the first of his historical plays in which he spoke freely — that social Order was in itself almost divine, or rather that royalty did, in some real sense, rule by right divine so long as it maintained Order. Thus we have in Shakespeare's own experience, digested by a mind of incomparable sensitiveness and sanity, the source and inspiration of the magnificent eulogy of Order by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida;* and, from this instinctive pre-occupation of his, we derive a powerful argument, in addition to those from style and palaeography, that the speech by Sir Thomas More to the rioters, in the play of that name, is Shakespeare's authentic work:

> Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise
> Hath chid down all the majesty of England —
> What had you got? I'll tell you: you had taught

How insolence and strong hand should prevail,
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern
Not one of you should live an aged man.
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,
With the self-same hand, self reasons, and self right
Would shark upon you, and men like ravenous fishes
Would feed on one another.

Wherever we may put this in the scale of Shakespeare's poetic style — and I reckon it a fine example of the natural, almost impromptu manner of his maturity — it is a memorable expression of one of Shakespeare's dominant thoughts, or dominant fears. We can follow the clue, this way and that: for this thought belongs to the core and quick of Shakespeare's being. One might compare, for example, the great phrase: 'Your noise Hath chid down all the majesty of England', with the Bastard's words in *King John* when he looks on Prince Arthur's dead body:

Go bear him in thy arms.
I am amazed methinks, and lose my way
Among the thorns and dangers of this world.
How easy dost thou take all England up!
From forth this morsel of dead royalty
The life, the right and truth of all this realm
Is fled to heaven; and England now is left
To tug and scramble and to part by the teeth
The unowed interest of proud-swelling state.

There the miracle and mystery of Order is incarnate in the little murdered prince; and with the departing of his spirit, the divine principle — 'the life, the right and truth of all this realm' — is fled back to heaven. Such a thought may easily strike a contemporary mind as rhetorical: I am certain that Shakespeare was in deadly earnest about it.

Or we may compare the final phrase of the lines from *Sir Thomas More:* 'And men like ravenous fishes Would feed on one another' with the terrible lines in *King Lear,* when Albany turns on Goneril:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come
Humanity must perforce prey on itself
Like monsters of the deep.

There is an intimate connection in Shakespeare's mind between social order and the moral law. A twofold stream descends from God — one of social order, diffused over society by the instrument of the temporal power, the other of moral order, diffused over society by the instrument of the spiritual power. These preserve humanity from the beast that lurks within it, and the world from chaos. In another famous speech in *Troilus and Cressida,* Ulysses lauds the principle of order under the name of'degree':

How could communities,
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividáble shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows: each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy . . .
Strength should be lord of imbecility
And the rude son should strike his father dead.
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.

There is echoed, or anticipated, the actual words of Albany in *King Lear:* 'perforce . . . prey'. And from these words of Ulysses a thread passes backwards and forwards. 'Strength should be lord of imbecility; And the rude son should strike his father dead.' Involuntarily almost, one's mind turns back to the scene in *Henry VI,* Part 3 — the scene in which Shakespeare first begins to sound his own individual and unmistakable note as a poet-dramatist, and the King gives voice to his longing for

> the shepherd's homely curds,
> His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle.

(Which, in spite of all that was to come, remains one of the loveliest lines in Shakespeare: and therefore in all poetry.) The King's wistful meditation is broken by the grim entrance of 'a Son that has killed his father, dragging in the dead body'. The deed was done in ignorance. The humble folk, pressed to the wars, pay the penalty of the lawlessness among the great. And, I repeat, this was not some dead historical material which the apprentice Shakespeare was trying to hammer into a play; but an experience that was vivid in the memory of the countryside.

Just as Ulysses' words reach back to that scene, so they reach forward to the more terrifying lawlessness of *King Lear.* And from these scenes, or from the whole living tissue of imaginative experience which is expressed in them, we derive the hint that we moderns are inclined to interpret that great tragedy too individualistically — too much as the tragedy of an individual human being. I will not correct one bias by another bias, and say that *King Lear* is primarily the tragedy of a King; but I will say that King Lear is as much, and as essentially, the tragedy of a King — or perhaps more truly of Kingship — as it is the tragedy of a Man. Lear is, for Shakespeare, the embodiment 6f irresponsible Kingship. He divides his kingdom, as though it were a personal possession, and not a divinely bestowed responsibility. That was, I think, in Shakespeare's intuitive conception, an offence at least equal with his dividing it according to momentary caprice. The fount of Order betrays the principle of Order. And if we approach the play from this per-

spective, which is unfamiliar to modern experience, we have a natural solution of the psychological problem which has been found perplexing. Why are Cordelia's words so cold, so reticent, when her father turns to her?

LEAR

Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least: to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interess'd: what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak.

COR.

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing!

COR.

Nothing.

LEAR

Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

COR.

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

LEAR

How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

COR.

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed
That lord, whose hand must take my plight, shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters
To love my father all.

More than a little cold it is to a modern sense, which is individualistic and romantic. Yet it is nothing else than the utterance in the language of simple affection of the truth majestically expounded by Ulysses: 'Take but degree away: untune that string, And hark what discord follows.[5] In her sudden distress, Cordelia clings to the rock of the divine principle of Order, which her father, the King, has so ruinously abandoned. She is asserting the truth of it in her own world. She cannot indict her father, the King, for his dereliction of majesty: that is beyond her sphere. All she can do, now that the world is already made chaos by his act, is to assert her loyalty to the principle of Order in the sphere which was all her own — the world of woman's love and duty. She loves 'according to her bond'. To a modern ear that is almost a contradiction in terms. But it belongs, unless I am badly mistaken, to the essence of Cordelia. Love and duty really do go hand in hand in her; they are one. This is not some abstract principle which she represents in the drama. In the first place, that is not Shakespeare's way of working (as it was, for example, Ben Jonson's); in the second place, no small part of the harrowing beauty and truth *of King Lear* lies in the fact that this is how Cordelia *feels*, and that her feeling impresses us as something more than natural: it is nature kept in beauty, truth and harmony, by obedience to the divine power.

That is not a familiar conception or form of experience, to-day. It would be foolish to gainsay it. That is why the behaviour of Cordelia strikes a contemporary sensibility as cold and strained; and why the instinct of modern criticism is to seek a purely technical explanation — in Shakespeare's desire for a sudden and striking dramatic contrast. Nevertheless, there was a time when such a feeling as that which I have imputed to Cordelia was really second nature. And that is the reason why this chapter begins with the quotation of the artless love-letter of a simple well-bred girl, of a hundred years before Shakespeare's time. In that letter we cannot doubt the genuineness of Margaret Brews' love for John Paston; but neither can we doubt the firmness of her determination to accept her father's decision with implicit obedience. Her father will give with her, for a marriage portion, no more than 100

pounds and 50 marks — perhaps somewhere about £3000 in to-day's values — and if that is not enough for John Paston, she says: 'Let it pass, and be no more spoken of, as I may be your true lover and bead woman during my life.'

That resignation, that unhesitating acceptance of the supremacy of duty over love, is the part that fell to the experience of a simple girl like Margaret Brews, of the universal obligation of obedience to Order. She is one who, like Cordelia, will love 'according to her bond'; and I certainly do not believe that such love is less deep, or less enduring than the more romantic sorts which have come to prevail since then. And note the simple and subtle distinction that she makes. If she is not allowed to marry according to her desire, nevertheless she will remain John Paston's 'true lover* — that is, of course, his loyal lover — and his 'beadwoman' during her life. She will pray for him. So romantic love was sublimated, as we should say in the rather inadequate phrase of modern psychology. In fact, it was purified and placed under the direct protection of Heaven.

Unless these conceptions are real to our imagination, we miss much that is essential to the full understanding of Shakespeare. For instance, modern critics are fond of saying that *Romeo and Juliet* is not really a tragedy, but much rather a disaster; because there was no sin —- no tragic ' — in either of the lovers. But there was. The fact that we admire Juliet for disobeying her parents, and regard the feud between the Montagues and Capulets as barbarous, does not abolish the other facts: first, that according to the morality of the age, she was undutiful in disregarding her parents' desire that she should wed 'the county Paris'; and, second, that the hostility between the two houses, however barbarous it may seem to us, was a development of precisely that primary loyalty to the family, of which implicit filial obedience was the immediate expression. The yoke of inauspicious stars hung heavy on the love of Romeo and Juliet from the beginning: the fact that it was a passion so tumultuous that it overbore in Juliet's heart all sense of duty, that she never dreamed of being content with being Romeo's 'true lover and beadwoman during her life', made it a

tragic passion in the exact sense of the term. From this point of view *Romeo and Juliet* is not a disaster but truly a tragedy.

§

The feud between the houses of Montague and Capulet is germane to the consideration with which we began. It seems to us quite barbarous, and it was beginning to seem barbarous to a man of Shakespeare's generation; but to him it was a condition from which society had only just emerged, and which had been scarred deep on the body of England by the fearful feud of York and Lancaster in the fifteenth century. That feud was ended by Henry of Richmond pledging himself, if he defeated Richard Crookback in the field, as he did at Bosworth Field, to marry Elizabeth of York. Actually the terrible English feud was ended by a marriage: so, but tragically, by the death of the two who had entered the marriage, the feud at Verona was composed.

Thus the feud between the houses in *Romeo and Juliet* is, indeed, a condition to be surpassed: even the careless and debonair Mercutio passes judgment on it when he dies: 'A plague on both your houses!' But Juliet's marrying Romeo in defiance of her parent's wishes —that is another matter altogether.

These two conditions of loyalty to the house rather than to the Prince or King, on the one hand; and of loyalty to the family rather than the indulgence of the private and personal desire, on the other hand — are obverse and reverse of the same medal. We must, of course, distinguish between the 'house' and the family. The 'house' is a feudal enlargement of the family; it is composed of all the retainers of a great noble — the many knights and their tenants — who owe their loyalty only indirectly to the King, but directly to the great noble, or the minor gentry under him. And in England in the fifteenth century (whatever may have been the position of feudal theory in that time) this direct loyalty to the 'house' was a very real thing. There was by that time nothing high-minded about it: it was a matter of grim necessity to get

somebody powerful to protect you. Not only was the King's justice uncertain in the extreme; there were many years when the machinery broke down altogether: and even when the machinery was nominally functioning, it was often completely under the control of a great territorial magnate. The election of the Sheriff of the county, for instance, upon whom the actual execution of the King's justice depended, would often be determined entirely by one great noble massing sufficient armed retainers to overawe any possible rival. Then, the Sheriff was quite openly known to be his tool; and even when, as sometimes happened, a just man was made Sheriff, he drew the line at becoming a martyr for even-handed justice. At the best, he would guardedly whisper to the victim whom he would have liked to help, that it was as much as his life was worth to do so. So throughout the Paston Letters, we find everybody, above the condition of a simple labourer, trying to attach himself to somebody more powerful in the social hierarchy, beseeching a plain esquire to be his Very good master', or one more august to be his Very good lord' — Very' in the old sense of Verray' — in return for which protection, the beseecher will reckon himself among his master's or his lord's 'true men', and turn out in arms whenever the master or lord had need of him — to attack or to defend a manor, or to make a demonstration in force at the election of a sheriff or knight of the shire.

That was virtual anarchy; and the reason why the anarchy was not more serious than it was, was simply that England was almost entirely an agricultural country. There was precious little wealth of any kind except that which came from ownership of land, and the yearly increase of the land under cultivation. The substantial country gentleman, who owned say a dozen manors, had surprisingly little margin of fluidity. He would have his house, built and repaired by his tenants; he would have his furnishings, the tools and weapons for his men; he would have a certain amount of gold and silver, locked up as it were in the form of plate, but of what are now called 'liquid resources' he would have hardly any at all. A good picture in miniature of his actual condition is given by the will of young Walter Paston. He was one

of the youngest of the family, it is true; but it was a decidedly wealthy family. Walter was at Eton — then newly founded — and at Oxford, where he took his B.A., and shortly after, he died. In his will he bequeathes separately every article of clothing he possesses — even his two bolsters. A man on relief to-day would have more material possessions than this young gentlemen of 450 years ago. Money, evidently, he had none; but instead of money in the bank or 'the blessed security of the 3 per cents', he had a certain number of sheep, whose yearly produce of wool was in fact the only income — as distinct from a tiny allowance — which he possessed.

From that vivid little picture of the actual circumstances of one of the earliest members of the great and distinguished tribe of Eton and Oxford men, we gain a glimpse of the reason why the apparent anarchy of England during much of the fifteenth century was not so serious as it sounds. If you wanted to be a robber baron (and most of the nobility had no other ambition, however decorously they draped it), it was palpable insanity to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. If you interrupted the elemental processes of agriculture you merely destroyed the only wealth available to you. You might steal another man's manor, or a dozen of them; but if you wanted to profit by your robbery you had to see to it that the manor was properly stocked and farmed — both the demesne, which as lord of the manor, rightful or unrightful, you cultivated by deputy, and the much larger portion which was held of you by the customary tenants. If you wanted profit from the demesne, or rents from the customary tenants, who still paid largely in kind, you had to let the farmer and tenants alone. The fifteenth century was very insecure indeed for the man who lived by *owning* land; but for the man — after all the great majority — who lived by working on it, life was probably as secure as in most periods of English history: perhaps rather more *secure*, in reality, than England is for some of the working-class to-day.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

THE probability is that the labourer, through all the lawlessness of the fifteenth century, was rather better off and quite as secure, as he was during the great epoch of Elizabethan order. What the reign of Order, which the great Queen established, primarily meant was a new security for the small gentry, and above all for the rising middle-class. To that rising middle-class, Shakespeare belonged. True, his father had run pretty thoroughly on the rocks: his prosperity as a 'dealer[5] had suffered a sudden decline. But hard cases make bad law; and the fact that Shakespeare senior was in a poor way when Shakespeare was a schoolboy does not in the least invalidate the claim on his behalf that he was a member of the rising middle-class. And his famous son was a representative of that class, *par excellence.*

He was, indeed, in more subtle senses than the Marxist dreams of in his philosophy, a symbolic representative of that class. Whatever may be the true story of his relations with the young Earl of Southampton on the psychological side, on the social side the story is crystal clear. After seeking Southampton's patronage and protection, Shakespeare sought it no longer. The moment of separation, we need not doubt, was a crucial moment in Shakespeare's career. Probably, it was a crucial moment in the personal and individual sense. But the precise point I am trying to make about Shakespeare here is that the personal element in what we may call the total phenomenon of Shakespeare has been suffered unduly to outweigh the impersonal, and that, as a result, even the personal Shakespeare is impoverished. We moderns can hardly help doing this: personalism and individualism are in our blood. But they were not in Shakespeare's blood. In him they were only beginning to declare themselves. He belonged, much more completely than we are generally aware, to a period of real

transition, in which the old struggled with the new. Of this struggle, Shakespeare was less the personal than the impersonal embodiment and vehicle. And from this angle, the question whether Shakespeare abandoned his patron or his patron abandoned him, is less important than the fact that Shakespeare and patronage parted company.

For Shakespeare's relation to Southampton — underneath all the personal and emotional relation, about which we may have our opinions — was a substantial social relation : it was the very solid survival of the social relation which, as we have seen, was so eminently typical of fifteenth-century England: the seeking of the great man's protection by the small man. Shakespeare, in seeking Southampton's patronage, was doing exactly what we find everybody (who claims to be anybody) doing in the Paston Letters: he was hunting about for some great man who will be his Very good lord'. And he found one. Then after a brief period he abandoned the relation, or the relation abandoned him. After that dizzy experience, during which we may imagine Shakespeare as something more than Southampton's 'man' (one of his 'counsellors', rather, as he would have been described a century earlier), attached in a pretty intimate capacity to the young Earl's household — it would have been understandable if he had taken up an attitude of superiority to the common stage, as most men of literary talent were inclined to do. After all, in the past, Shakespeare had not behaved very circumspectly. As the son of a once thriving member of the middle-class, the natural thing for him to do, in those days, was to seek to repair his fortunes by a substantial marriage. It is plain that he did nothing of the kind. Whether or not he was romantic about Anne Hathaway — and having regard to his total attitude towards women as revealed in his plays, I should say it was very probable that he was romantic about her at the beginning — he was, most certainly, careless in the extreme, judged by the standards of his day and class. Penniless himself, he got hopelessly entangled — probably by way of betrothal, which was then a binding engagement — with a penniless woman. One would have expected, I think, that after the severance of his relation with

Southampton (which again, for all its realistic basis, was also idealistic on Shakespeare's side) Shakespeare would have betaken himself to an attitude of aloofness from the common stage. Of course, he would have written for the stage — there was nothing else for him to do — but in an attitude of slightly contemptuous detachment from its crudeness and vulgarity. That the potentiality of the attitude was there, the player-scene in Hamlet can witness; and, I think, there are plain evidences in the plays as well as the Sonnets that he suffered bitterly indeed from the degradation of being a player whose conceit did not lie in his hamstring.

Nevertheless, he identified himself completely with the hard business of the Elizabethan theatre. I do not mean that he became a business-man: that whole conception really belongs to a later period of history. But, economically, he became a successful member of the rising middle-class. As a shareholder in the new London theatre he was one of the pioneers of an original capitalist enterprise. If he did not actually invent this new theatrical way of establishing his fortunes he hitched himself on to it. He had a flair for the new thing that was happening; and he, to a surpassing degree, had an instinctive sense of its extreme potentialities. In this spiritual-economic sense we might compare him with Dickens 250 years later. Just as Dickens had an incomparable flair for the existence of a vast new reading public, which he in part created, so Shakespeare had a prophetic flair for the great new seeing-and-hearing public of Elizabethan days. And he took advantage of it:

> There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

§

Whence came this new great seeing-and-hearing public with which Shakespeare was moved to put himself into direct — one might fairly say, naked — contact? Before answering that question, let us follow the imagination a little farther. No-one, I conceive, would gainsay the fact that at the heart of Shakespeare,

however much he may have concealed it, was one of the most exquisitely sensitive natures which have been born into the world of men. Take any one of his great contemporaries, take almost any one of his great successors; the finest, the noblest: a Sidney or a Spenser, a Milton or a Wordsworth — they are not sensitive as Shakespeare is revealed to be. They are fine spirits, touched to fine issues, and imbued with a moral and religious ideal; but compared with Shakespeare, they are men who are dreaming a dream, which veils them from the impact of reality. Shakespeare is absolutely distinguished from them by one simple thing: his suffering, and his capacity for suffering. Whether it was through his sensitiveness that he suffered, or through his suffering that he became sensitive, is a barren question. Once he was sensitive and happy; then he was sensitive and suffering; finally he is sensitive and tender. The sheer tenderness of spirit that half-reveals itself in Shakespeare's tragic and final plays is, to me personally, almost unbearable. It is poignant, absolutely; and I can compare it with nothing save the impression that Keats and Father Hopkins and D. H. Lawrence make upon me.

Shakespeare makes upon me the impression of a man who has known what it is to be crucified, and of a man marked out by Providence to know what it is. He is, in his gaiety, his spontaneity, his trust and his suffering—- Galilean; and in my imaginative picture of him he is crucified as a player on the common stage. There is, to my ear, the accent of agony in his stifled cry:

> As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
> After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
> Are idly bent on him that enters next,
> Thinking his prattle to be tedious;
> Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
> Did scowl on gentle Richard; no man cried 'God save him!'
> No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home:
> But dust was thrown upon his sacred head,
> Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
> His face still combating with tears and smiles,

The badges of his grief and patience,
That had not God for some strong purpose steel'd
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted
And barbarism itself have pitied him.

To-day the theatre is refined; the thread which connects it with the Elizabethan playhouse is almost too tenuous to be a connection at all, so that the naked force of such an image does not pierce us. We need to invoke the memory of some pathetic troupe of tumblers begging for the mercy of a continental market-place in order to feel the brutal indifference which it implies.

This is no more than a fleeting glimpse into the soul of Shakespeare, deliberately heightened to make it perceptible. But it gives depth, a penumbra of dimly discerned significance, to our answer to the question: Whence came this new great seeing-and-hearing public with which Shakespeare was compelled, as by the inescapable will of God, to put himself in such unmitigated and agonizing contact? What were its origins and derivations? To a much greater extent than we easily conceive, those origins were religious. The Elizabethan dramatic spectacle was, very largely, the social, emotional and imaginative equivalent of the Mass a hundred years before. As the service of the Church became impoverished in immediate sensuous and imaginative appeal, in sacramental significance, so the Elizabethan theatre arose. And how grievously impoverished the Church liturgy was, can easily be established if we consider how really modest were the 'innovations' — towards the ideal of 'the beauty of holiness' — which Laud tried to introduce in the years immediately following Shakespeare's death. These reforms were not opposed by the people; but they were resisted by the middle-class; by the same middle-class which resisted the theatre, and did its utmost to persecute the players out of existence. They, at least, were instinctively aware of the intimate connection between the theatre and the old religion. But the phrase must not be misinterpreted. The old religion does not mean the Catholic religion with a capital C; it means the catholic religion with a little c: the universal Chris-

tianity, with its appeal to all men, and not merely to the elect and the saved, or those who were so troubled about their souls that they wanted to be elect and saved. By the old religion I mean the Christian religion in its universal form, which satisfies Milton's definition of poetry (though not his requirement of religion) and is 'simple, sensuous and passionate' — a worship in which heaven and earth meet naturally together.

To this religion, as to the theatre which for a brief and glorious moment to some extent took its place, the rising middle-class was bitterly opposed. Yet I have said that Shakespeare was pre-eminently a member of that middle-class; even a symbolic member of it. The contradiction seems glaring. I believe that this contradiction lies near the heart of the unique greatness and significance of Shakespeare. The new business, the new trade or profession, to which he instinctively attached himself was precisely the satisfying of those fundamental religious-imaginative appetites of the people which the middle-class desired to smother. Exactly why the middle-class desired to smother them would be a matter for intricate inquiry. As ever, materialistic and spiritual motives were inextricably involved with each other; Puritanism had the ambiguity of every great historical 'movement'. But in the main, I think, the hostility of the middle-class to the satisfaction of the religious-imaginative appetite of the common man was due to a half-conscious realization that on the satisfaction of that appetite a spiritual authority could be, as it had been, builded — an authority independent of the powers that the middle-class could influence or might hope to control. Modest and unassuming though it was during Elizabeth's reign, content to humble itself before the great Queen's prerogative, the middle-class had the vague feeling that Parliament was destined to be the ultimate authority. Get religion under the control of the middle-class Parliament, and all would be finally for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The religious-imaginative appetite of the common man was the root from whence the real opposition to the individualistic, acquisitive, atomistic and ultimately totalitarian mentality of the middle-class had sprung and might spring again.

It was a potential source of menace to the new, and hardly conscious desire for a uniform system of Values' — the hankering after the scarcely definable common substrate of the 'scientific' and the 'nationalistic' attitude, which was to prevail.

Fundamental to this attitude was a desire for order, but order of a very particular kind; a desire to have a world rid of all radical heterogeneity. Probably this is a very deep-rooted human appetite. The obvious social expression of this appetite, which clearly shows how necessary and how dangerous it is to the human psyche, is the urge to reduce all things to a money-value. That brings order into apparent chaos; and to anyone who reflects upon the matter for a moment it is evident that the predominance of a money-economy is the social and common-sense counterpart of the prevalence of the scientific idea. Both, in their urge for order, choose what may be called 'the way of abstraction'; and both are unconscious that the uniformity which they pursue as the *summum bonum* is only one kind of order, and that the most remote from the 'order' of a living organism. Just as the infinity of different things whose differences money dissolves in a common medium are in reality incommensurable with one another, so are the things that science reduces to a common substance. Therefore, the 'order' which is created by the abstraction common to money-valuation and scientific thought is very perilous to life, which *lives* only in the individual. This abstract order is the enemy of the instinct for simple living, for making contact, whether joyful or sorrowful or just direct human contact, with the real. The only power which can guard men against the deterioration of their primary faculty for simple living by this demonic urge towards 'abstractionism', is the power of imaginative religion. Not all religion so-called; because the religious faculty can just as easily become a prey to the demon of 'abstractionism' as any other vital human faculty. Essential to imaginative religion is the knowledge that Order is much more than uniformity, and that the One foundation of all reality is revealed in the richness of all the infinite variety of things as they simply are. To name this power which holds the Universe together, and makes it a Universe and not a chaos, and yet by an

evident law forbids it — on pain of dissolution into nothingness — to be other than a universe of infinite variety, men have no other name than God. Imaginative religion, which is the awareness and worship of this power under that name, does not deny Science, or entirely reject money-valuation; but it keeps these in their place, and it is the only power which can. Imaginative religion is the recognition of the controlling power without obedience to which the abstraction of Science and Money must inevitably destroy the world of life. Except the uniformity of the 'order' of Money and Science is consciously subordinated to the variety of the living order of God, it is mortal to man.

Towards this true or religious order, the religious-imaginative appetite of the common man turns naturally, until it is hopelessly denatured, because his primary life depends upon an incessant acknowledgment of the differences of things, and of his entire dependence on the almighty Power who created and maintains them in their indefeasible uniqueness. This natural piety of daily life had been gathered into conscious expression by the universal Church. But now in Shakespeare's day, the authority of the Church was crumbling. That authority had had a profound significance; for by its very existence as an independent spiritual-temporal power the Church made palpable the principle of heterogeneity to the daily experience of the simple man. Into the texture of his daily life was wrought the acknowledgment that the specious unity of uniformity was not God's plan; and in the sacrifice of the Mass, he beheld, in the realm of imagination 'which is spiritual sensation', the mystery of Transubstantiation. And Transubstantiation, in some sense, is a self-evident necessity in a universe that is both really One, and really Many. To put it at the lowest, Transubstantiation is the miracle on which physical Life itself must obviously rest; and to make that miracle apprehensible to the imagination of our common humanity, no more potent symbol will ever be devised than the mystery of the Eucharist. It was not made; it grew.

It is notable that Shakespeare, in all his references to the old religion, which are many, sounds a note of magical tenderness.

RELIGION AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

If one should seek a quick way of gathering an anthology of Shakespeare's inimitable poetic felicities, one would only have to gather these passages together: for example:

> True prayers
> That shall be up at heaven and enter there
> Ere sunrise, prayers from preserved souls,
> From fasting maids whose minds are dedicate
> To nothing temporal . . .

Or

> And to relief of lazars and weak age
> Of indigent faint souls past corporal toil
> One hundred almshouses right well supplied . . .

Or again

> Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay
> Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
> Toward Heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
> Two chantries where the sad and solemn priests
> Still sing for Richard's soul.

And even when the drama calls for an argument against the vocation of the religious, when the prose-meaning of the words indeed *is* such an argument, the same magical beauty cannot be hid:

> Whether . . .
> You can endure the livery of a nun,
> For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
> To live a barren sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

I do not know whether anyone has based on these things an argument in favour of the dubious tradition that Shakespeare 'dyed a Papist'; but to my sense, they point the other way. They are the utterance of a wistful admiration for the pure essence of institutions that are no more; their romantic beauty springs essentially

from a conditional romantic regret. But that of which the passing is regretted is not remote: it is as it were half-remembered, half-imagined.

As I interpret this remarkable and beautiful phenomenon, it is the half-conscious gesture of the man who feels, more deeply, more completely, more purely, than others, the passing of an old world, He feels it on his pulses; the profound change is like a change in his own blood: he has *suffered* it. By yet another miracle, the brief moment when the old world was changing, and had not Yet given place to a new, found in him its incomparable recorder. It was, I believe, the profoundest change which the English-speaking people has ever undergone; a change which was gradually to communicate itself to the entire world, but of which England experienced the first onset. It is hard to make the nature of this change real to ourselves; but, I think, the word Order, in the sense in which I have tried to use it, gives us the clue. It is the change from one kind of Order to a quite different kind of Order; and it is, in itself, an orderly change. For this breathless, delicate moment the old fabric remains. It is a moment of unprecedentedly rich and precarious unity, of which the evident symbol is the transfer of the spiritual authority of the Church to the monarch of the secular state. For this halcyon magical moment, the Queen — *could* any other than a virgin Queen have achieved this miracle? — is endowed with the two powers. They are still real; they are in brief and unstable equipoise, united in one person, who receives a double reverence. It is unity, not uniformity. But it will not last. Fifty years after the great Queen's death, the ruler of England will be an obscure country gentleman, called Oliver Cromwell, and there will be a New England in America; fifty years after that, the new oligarchy of wealth will have established its control of Church and Monarch, and the age of Reason will lead on towards the age of Insanity, when uniformity and unity are the same thing.

At this precarious moment, as by a parallel process, the theatre takes the place of the old Church: the very choir-boys turn *players*. And the purpose of playing, as Shakespeare discerned it, in the year of the Queen's death, 'both at the first and now, was and is,

to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature'. At once, that was, and was not, the purpose of the drama of religion: for in that mystery the mirror itself was also a divine light, which illuminated Nature to herself. The marvel of Shakespeare's genius is that in his secular mirror the divine light also shines. Only by a great straining of the historical imagination can we make faintly real to ourselves the dual majesty of the Virgin Queen, as it was felt in the hearts and minds of her subjects, our forefathers; but in Shakespeare we ourselves make contact with that dual power, translated wholly into the world of imagination, and eternized there, to be a memorial of what we have lost, and what we must seek to regain.

CHAPTER VII

THE CUGKOO-GALL

IN 1936 I first heard the cuckoo in the early morning of April 24th. Twice at least in the four previous years I have heard it first on April 23rd. By tradition, April 23rd is the date of Shakespeare's birthday in 1564. It is challenged nowadays. Sir Edmund Chambers has pointed out that all we have legal evidence for is that *Gulielmus Jilius Johannes Shakspere* was baptized on April 26th, 1564. But a tradition is something, after all.

Anyhow, its uncertainty does not worry me. On the contrary, it pleases my fancy to think of Shakespeare's arrival as a little uncertain, like the cuckoo's. Somewhere roundabout April 23rd, Shakespeare was born — on that day, also, he died — somewhere roundabout April 23rd, the cuckoo is pretty sure to make itself audible again in my part of the country.

The coincidence is satisfying. Its mere simplicity is magical. It is positively childish. Not too good to be true, but too good to be false. I think of Keats' nightingale:

> Thou was not born for death, immortal bird,
> No hungry generations tread thee down —

and, God knows, that is wonderful enough. But more wonderful still is the fact that Shakespeare's nightingale — if I may put it so — is the cuckoo. For the voice of the cuckoo is at once unearthly and elemental: the more unearthly because it is so elemental. Could anything be simpler than that call?

As if on purpose to reassure me that my imagination is not fantastical, Shakespeare himself (and Shakespeare alone to my mind) has captured in words the simple magic of the cuckoo:

> The finch, the sparrow and the lark
> The plainsong cuckoo gray.

'The plainsong cuckoo gray.' That *is* the cuckoo; that is the true answer to the question of a lesser, but a true and noble poet:

> Shall I call thee bird
> Or but a wandering voice?

It is typical, too, of Shakespeare's answer to most questions. To 'Either, or?' he replies, 'Neither, both'. And just as Shakespeare alone has caught the essential cuckoo between the opposites of earthiness and ethereality — of which last Father Hopkins was the magician — so I feel he alone has recorded, with a simplicity in tune with the nakedness of the fact, what in the human world would be called the tragedy of the cuckoo.

> He was but as the cuckoo is in June,
> Heard, not regarded.

When, in June, the cuckoo's voice is become familiar, monotonous and importunate, I find myself automatically repeating those words. They are just a bare statement of fact. 'The poetry,[5] as Wilfred Owen said of a greater theme, 'is in the pity': and that is where, in this matter anyhow, it ought to be.

But if the cuckoo is the victim of a tragedy, he is no less the villain of one. That also is duly recorded, without emphasis or exaggeration, by Shakespeare.

> And being fed by us you used us so
> As that ungentle gull, the cuckoo-bird
> Useth the sparrow; did oppress our nest;
> Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk
> That even our love durst not come near your sight
> For fear of swallowing; but with nimble wing
> We were enforced, for safety sake, to fly.

The phrase, 'that ungentle gull, the cuckoo-bird[5], satisfies me wholly. Not only does it fit and harmonize with 'the plain-song cuckoo gray[5], but there is in it a happy suggestion of the hobbede-hoy clumsiness of the young cuckoo. No cunning plotter he, but just an 'ungentle gull[5] — a loutish force of Nature.

For you know, nuncle,
The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
That it had it head bit off by it young.

That is the cuckoo in its own world — the rather grim world of pre-human Nature to which the human world in *King Lear* is on the point of reverting. But there is a realm between, where the human becomes animal indeed: non-moral, immoral if you like, but by no means red in tooth and claw. It is the human lapse into this reprehensible but not cruel animality of which the cuckoo is the time-honoured harbinger. And of this also Shakespeare is the infallible poet.

When shepherds pipe on oaten straws
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks;
When turtles tread and rooks and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer frocks,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo! Cuckoo! O word of fear
Unpleasing to a married ear!

It is all very terrible, and natural, and delightful. A charming but a dangerous time this, when the sap begins to rise freely in the veins of Nature. Cuckoo-time, indeed. The cuckoo, whose note is the veritable voice of spring, teaches a subversive lesson in morality to the human whose pulses are stirred by it. Shakespeare, it must be admitted, shows no sign of being perturbed by the menace of the cuckoo. He seems distinctly indulgent towards the heyday in the blood of primy youth; and I suspect that he had no particular sympathy towards a domestic morality which harboured the conception that a wife was her husband's property. 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.' The house comes first.

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There is a great gulf between Shakespeare and Milton in this delicate and intangible matter. Milton's violent championing of the unlimited right of the man to divorce was, on one side, merely the reduction to absurdity of the conception of male proprietorship in the female. Beneath all his eloquence and his Scriptural casuistry is the demand that the man, if he found he had made a bad bargain, should have the right to divest himself completely, and completely without obligation, of his embarrassing acquisition. And it is the bare truth to say that Milton's real idea of the relation between man and wife was in fact more inhuman than that of the average decent Englishman of his day. The difference between Shakespeare and Milton here is gross and palpable; but the difference between Shakespeare and any whatsoever of his contemporaries, though less easily definable, is just as evident. It is, indeed, a commonplace to declare that Shakespeare had a higher conception of womanhood than was current in his age. And that is true, provided we have the honesty to admit all the elements that were contained in Shakespeare's ideal of womanhood. Shakespeare's woman has singularly little in common with that fugitive and cloistered virtue which appears to have been the ideal of those who have praised Shakespeare most for his lofty conception of womanhood. And the element in Shakespeare's woman which his respectable critics are most careful to obliterate is one which any unbiased reader of his works cannot fail to recognize as essential. It is that his woman is physically passionate, and unashamed of her passion. This is true of Juliet, it is true of Miranda; of first and last it is true, and it is true of all between.

It seems to me that Shakespeare's imagination of woman was in advance not only of his own age, but of every succeeding age, including our own. Only in Blake do I find a conception of woman which belongs to the same kind as Shakespeare's; and Blake's conception is rather abstract whereas Shakespeare's is concrete. But both alike, I feel, carried in their minds as a living reality the

image of a free woman. It is the measure of our failure to realize the idea that the phrase — a free woman — sounds meagre, uncongenial and angular. We have, alas, met too many of them already — these free women, who are slave-bound to the egotistic assertion of a mechanical equality with unfree men, and secretly chafe against the idea of accepting the function which is imposed upon them not by man, but by Nature herself. Shakespeare's free woman, on the contrary, is free in the only way a human being can be free, through acceptance not through rebellion: free, ultimately, only through love, and the mutual surrender of love to love: for 'love alone can lend you loyalty'.

Of other loyalty between man and woman Shakespeare, it seems to me, took little heed. Since where that loyalty was, the cuckoo could never come, he was gaily indifferent to the cuckoo's depredations. For anything I know, he may have participated in them, and 'robb'd other's bed's revenues of their rents'; for anything I know, Shakespeare's ideal of woman may have been partly shaped by his own failure to find the woman who could arouse in him the total loyalty of which he felt that he was capable. But that he felt the human need in himself of such total loyalty, and that he believed that a kind of woman did, or would, or could exist who was able at once to inspire and to feel it — of this I have no doubt at all.

Faithfully to describe this essential Shakespeare is clean beyond my powers. I can only say that I have a feeling of its reality. This reality is paradoxical and contradictory, because it is living. In two quite simple lines he expresses the change from animal to human love — a change without a diminution — from a stirring of the blood to a loyalty of the heart, which is the peculiar motion of love in Shakespeare.

> Love is too young to know what conscience is;
> Yet who knows not conscience is born of love?

And yet it is, to my sense, characteristic of him that those two lines should be the opening of a sonnet of the sort that is called obscene. I can easily conceive Shakespeare addressing precisely such a

sonnet to the woman, if ever he had found her, who was the embodiment of his ideal.

To put it simply, it is as true of Shakespeare's ideal of woman as it is of his whole world of which that ideal is a part, that he doesn't leave things out. Perhaps he ought to have done. My experience of life is that, however much I may subscribe ideally to the faith that a way of life is possible which does not leave things out — and that is my faith — I find that in fact I have to run in blinkers. That is, I suppose, the difference between the actual and the ideal, between the world of imagination and the world of men. But that this discrepancy is final, something obstinately myself will not at all acknowledge.

And Shakespeare is one of the chief of those who keep alive, or keep articulate in me that faith in a way of life more comprehensive than any I have achieved or encountered. I do not know how to describe it: and the word which for me, by long association, has been chiefly charged with the meaning I cannot formulate, is unlikely to convey anything of that meaning to others: it is the word 'spontaneity'. I can imagine a world of men and women who acted by impulse alone, yet whose impulses were so educated and purified by Love that their enaction created not chaos but harmony. That such a world is very far ahead, if indeed it is certainly ahead of us at all, I know quite well; just as I know how far away I am from being a fit member of such a world. None the less, it seems to me that human nature can never be at peace if it ceases to strive after the creation of such a world for itself.

Of the men in such a world I have but a hazy notion; but about the women I am clear. They are like Shakespeare's women. And it is their existence — in whatever realm it is they do exist — and their all but universal acceptance as the ideal of womankind which is a substantial warrant of the faith that the ideal is the natural.

'The Imagination,' Keats surmised, 'is like Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth.' There is something in that. But this process of awakening, which the prophet and the poet can bring to consummation with a wave of the wand, is likely to be grievous to the generations in whose flesh and bones and blood it falls to be

accomplished: to these generations we belong. If we are only drowsily responsive to the workings in Shakespeare of

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,

we lose his present meaning in the haze of an opium-dream. True, it would be wonderful — and it would be unimaginative and inhuman to deny the refreshful delight of dreaming it — if we could at the price of a mere shipwreck, without a casualty, emerge from the renewing sea as creatures in whom a Miranda's eyes could discover — what Miranda did discover:

O brave new world
That has such creatures in it!

And it is notable that Mr. Aldous Huxley should have chosen this glad transported cry of Miranda to be the sardonic title of his own bleak vision of future humanity. I shrink from this surrender of a sick Imagination to its own disease; but I am even more repelled by the feeble self-delusion by the dream which seems to be its chief alternative in the cultured world to-day.

CHAPTER VIII

IMAGINATION AND THE MACHINE

THE Imagination is like Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth.' That is true, I believe. But the condition of knowing it for true, is to know that the process of awakening may be pretty fearful, and that the sleep is likely to include within it the substance of all our mortal lives, and our children's also. We have not awakened yet, nor shall we awaken for years to come. The peculiar quality of our sleep now is that it begins to be too full of dreams. The good ones grow few; the bad afflict us nightly. The centuries of deep and natural sleep belong already to the past. To-day, in a thousand different ways, men are the prey to strange feelings which derive from a profound, unconscious, and almost physical awareness of some prodigious life-change that is working, like the old mole, in their depths — the beginning of the end of a whole epoch of human history.

I sit in a country inn and listen to the talk of the Norfolk farmers. What is the use, one of them asks, of using machinery to reduce the cost of the product, when the effect of that same machinery is to reduce the wages which enable men to buy the product? They all agree, and sigh, and give up thinking. 'It's a mad world, my masters.' And I, who am a sort of Socialist, should seize the opportunity to explain to them that the only remedy for the impasse in which they are caught is the abolition of private property in the means of production. Yet I don't do it. Why? Simply because I feel that the conception is too revolutionary, too abstract, and somehow false. They have been brought up in the faith that hard and honest work should bring a man security as his just reward. To pretend that that is an ignoble faith is impossible to me. I know it is not ignoble. Yet to try to demonstrate that the economic structure of the world to-day is such that it must deny validity to that faith would be merely to demonstrate to

those who hold it, simply and naturally, as these men do, that the world *is* mad.

But it is not. The world is not mad; it is merely growing. The earth-tremors of which men are dimly and variously conscious are the grumbling, menacing summons of the Machine that men should develop a new intelligence, a new awareness, a new morality, if they are not to be crushed by the Machine. What is happening is terribly simple: indeed so simple that Imagination alone can comprehend it. We take the Machine for granted; we cannot look upon it with lucidity and directness; we cannot see it for what it was, and is: a titanic revolution in the whole basis and fabric of human life. The weavers who broke the stocking-frames, the red-skins who fled in terror at the locomotive, saw things more truly than we. But their simplicity of vision, if we could recapture it, would not avail us. Where they simply saw, we must imagine. And men cannot imagine; and the men whose business it is to imagine are smitten by an unknown fear. They dare not imagine.

§

What is the Machine, what did it do? What will it do? For it is the Machine that divides us from Shakespeare.

The social body which is the earthly substance of Shakespeare's world was still a comely, organic and natural thing. We feel it, we know it. It is a world still growing with a natural order. Head and limbs are still in some sort of vital harmony with one another. Suddenly, by the Machine, the whole harmony of human life was subverted. As it were in a single night, the sheer muscular strength of the social organism was multiplied a thousand-fold. Suddenly this comely, organic, natural body of mankind became a monstrosity: the hands and limbs and thews were grown vast and colossal, yet the head remained what it was before. The transformation was fearful. Gestures which used to have a fierce animal grace and beauty, like war, became nightmarish and hideous. The brain, which was once the brain of a healthy, natural man,

by the mere fact that it had not changed, became the brain of an idiot. And that great idiot, with the tiny head and the huge limbs, is the true image of a nation to-day. That is the simple fact; and, alas, it takes Imagination to see it.

And that great idiot, which is a modern nation, can think of nothing to do with its huge limbs but use them murderously. There is nothing else it can do with them, since to move at all by the old habits is to move murderously. Murderous motion is its only motion, so long as that monstrous parody of an organic relation which now exists between the tiny head and the giant body remains unchanged. Either the head must grow capable of controlling the body, by finding in itself room for thoughts of a new kind and creating in itself the tissue to be the vehicle of those thoughts; or the body will ignore and deny the head altogether. Either the head must govern the body, or the body will govern the head. Then, the body will cast out of the head the faint remnants of potential change, annihilate the last vestiges of the ideal and the imagination, as it is doing in Germany to-day. Germany is merely the first of these monstrous bodies which has elected to live totally without a mind, rather than endure that revolutionary development of the brain which is the unescapable price of a new organic wholeness, a new natural community. Germany is merely the first of the monstrous bodies to choose to *be* wholly monstrous. But only that nation can avoid the same ghastly destiny which has the will and strength to pay the irreducible price of avoiding it — a revolutionary development of the brain.

Refusing to pay this price, there is ultimately no other way for the monstrous body of a Machine-society to move than the way of Germany. Germany has destroyed Socialism; Germany is destroying Christianity. That destruction is inevitable, for these are the two forms which the revolutionary development of the brain must take. For myself, I do not distinguish between them. If they are real, they are one: for both are revolutionary, and to the same end, which is Love. I call them both current universal forms of the Imagination. The nation which refuses to accept them, **and**

to accept them both together, will finally be driven to murder them.

The Imagination is that power of life, operative in man, which actualizes the Ideal. We are at a point in history to-day where the ideal has become the natural for mankind as a whole: only mankind does not know it. For certain chosen individuals the ideal always was the natural; but they knew it. They are the heroes, the poets, the prophets of the world. They could not live save in a world completed by their Imagination. That is the real, and quite simple secret of the creation of Shakespeare's world: that he needed to create it, in order to live and to be himself. In this world of his creation he could breathe and move. It was a necessity of life in him; just as the world of Jesus of Nazareth, with a loving Father for its God, and a Kingdom to be entered by those who could achieve in themselves the capacity to love their neighbours as themselves, was a necessity of life in him. And the world which those men created to satisfy the need of the life that was in them afterwards became necessities of life to other men.

It is the custom to say that these created worlds satisfy the need of men's Imagination, and that is true, but it is a dangerous way of putting the truth at a time when the function and nature of the Imagination is forgotten. Only those intend the truth when they say these worlds satisfy the need of men's imagination, who believe, and are ready to declare, with Blake, that the Imagination is the Human Existence itself. And this not merely in the sense that where Imagination languishes, the life of Man dwindles to the sub-human; but in the concrete physical sense that the Imagination is a vital completion of the Life which, at any moment, actually is. It *is* that life in its essential livingness, in the power and beauty of its striving to be still alive, and therefore *more* alive.

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In saying that the ideal is to-day become the natural for mankind as a whole we are in evident danger of paradox. For if the

ideal were indeed the natural, why should I be impelled to keep silence in a snuggery full of Norfolk farmers? For them at least, and for the great majority of their fellow-men, the ideal is quite unnatural. But never was there a word so packed with potential equivocation as this word 'natural'. It means habitual; and in that sense the one obvious remedy for the economic disease of to-day — the supersession of unlimited private ownership and control of the instruments of production — is unnatural, because it runs counter to the whole current habit of life and mind. But 'natural' also means, in consonance with the effort of life to maintain and advance itself; it is natural in a living thing to adapt itself to a changed environment. In that sense the ideal is become the natural to-day. Humanity is faced by the necessity of adapting itself to a totally changed environment.

That the adaptation will come, is not in doubt. What is in doubt is *how* the adaptation will come. We are at a major crisis not merely in the history of human life, but of life itself. To find anything comparable in biological significance to the emergence of the modern Machine we have to go back (it seems to me) clean beyond all the recorded history of man. And the story of prehistorical adaptation, so far as we can read it, is not encouraging. The waste and destruction at every major advance of life appear to have been colossal — a tiny remnant alone surviving, by virtue of its power to adapt to that change in environment which involved the rest of the race in ruin. It is a crisis of this order with which the human race is faced to-day. And the chief reason why we cannot comprehend it, is that the human race has never been confronted with a problem of this order before. More exactly, now for the first time, a major adaptation of Life is *a. problem:* something posed to the conscious intelligence of mankind. In the past, Life went blindly ahead, through waste and destruction. Now we see the waste and destruction before us, and we are appalled. Yet we prepare for it. We are not conscious in doing this, although we are conscious that we are doing it. We feel that we are driven by **a** malignant destiny. In fact, just enough consciousness has been infused into Nature's grim method of making **a** major **adaptation,**

for the instruments to be bemused by the horror of it. Yet on they go.

A biologist from Mars, observing the process, would find it conforming very exactly to the ancient pattern. Only for him, instead of some geological convulsion, such as the advance or retreat of an ice-cap, the revolutionary change in the environment would be the establishment of the Machine. The Machine has knit the human race together; the Machine is a living web of humanity which has been, in the tiny space of a mere hundred years, flung over the terrestrial universe. By its instrumentality, Man, not Nature, has become the environment of Man. But to the dispassionate Martian eye the Machine would simply appear, first, as a major change in environment demanding a new adaptation of Life and, second, as a means of accomplishing the necessary destruction of Life, which would appear to him the only method employed by Nature for enforcing a major advance of Life. He would look back into the history of Life upon the earth; he would note how precisely the present was conforming to the pattern of the past; and he would prophesy, calmly and scientifically, that not until the human race had been reduced to a few desolate millions, would a majority be found with the newly developed capacity of *living* with the Machine.

From the terrestrial point of view, one might say with truth that there was a difference between this process in the present and its analogues in the past. For the first time, a major biological adaptation was being demanded *of conscious* beings. That is true; but to the Martian biologist the distinction would be meaningless. All that he could see would be that the process was happening, for the first time — or perhaps the second, if he counted the War of 1914-1918 as a separate event — to *machine-making beings.* He would observe a difference; but it would simply be that for the first time in the terrestrial life-process a race of creatures had arisen who were themselves capable of convulsing their whole terrestrial environment. That would be his rather bleak reading, from his objective view-point, of the fact which Goethe imaginatively expressed in the words: 'Man is the first speech that Nature holds

with God.' The equivalent Martian generalization would be that, through his self-multiplication and self-diffusion by means of the Machine, Man had replaced Nature as his own environment; and his disquieting deduction would be that henceforward, Man-and-the-Machine, not Nature, must be the means of the necessary destruction of Man — the destruction necessary in order that a new type of Man may emerge.

To nothing more than this the human claim that human consciousness is an essential difference between the present crisis of adaptation and the former analogous biological crises, would be reduced in the Martian's eyes. His view may seem a grim one, but it is surely much more in accord with the reality than any that is current in the terrestrial world to-day. We humans, it is true, pathetically cling to our minor and unessential discriminations, as a drowning man clutches at his straw. There are millions of men to-day who are genuinely horrified by the steadily advancing menace of international world-war. If to see and to quail is to be conscious, they are conscious; they are indubitably more conscious than the other and more numerous millions who are not aware of the menace and are not horrified by it. But a consciousness that makes no objective difference is a merely subjective reality. It would be non-existent for the Martian; it is next to non-existent for ourselves. The blind process goes on. Consciousness without consequences, what is that?

The only consciousness that counts, the only consciousness that is effective, is the consciousness which has objective consequences, and changes action. In the biological crisis in which mankind is now involved, consciousness, in order to be real, must have the effect of retarding that universal movement towards destruction. For consciousness can validate itself as a universal human reality only if it can secure that the major adaptation now demanded of *homo sapiens* is not achieved by the bloody evolutionary way. Nature is prodigal. Her method of producing a race of men capable of living with the Machine is to kill off all those who can't and most of those who can as well. She is preparing that method to-day. Every hour, every day, every week sees her preparations

intolerably advanced. And every one of us is the blind instrument of Nature's blind design.

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Of all this vast and simple process Shakespeare's cuckoo is to me a parable. Savage, prodigal, unmoral Nature breaking, as the sap rises within its veins, into simple, magical and unearthly song: both Nature. Imagination the authentic speech of Nature's growth. And demanding fulfilment in the human world to-day as never before — in vain.

The Imagination impotent precisely at the moment that it is supremely necessary, and impotent precisely because it is supremely necessary: because, being necessary, it must change and be itself by becoming other than it was. An imaginative understanding of Change becoming an understanding change of Imagination. Instead of this, adulation of Shakespeare's letter the disguise of resistance against his spirit. The imagination unconsciously turned towards destruction of itself.

Imagination is the consciousness of creative Life. When that consciousness can *do* nothing, and knows it can do nothing, then it creates Art, to be the symbol of what Imagination will do, when the time comes for it to do. The time is come. But where is the act of Imagination?

> Is there so small a range
> In the present strength of manhood, that the high
> Imagination cannot freely fly
> As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,
> Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
> Upon the clouds?

Not strange deeds are required, but simple ones. Nor yet upon the clouds, but upon the hearts and minds of men, and first upon our own.

Imagination, I believe, must be act to-day, or it is not Imagination. That does not mean that every artist must relinquish his

gift and take to politics and religion; but it does mean that every utterance of Art to-day is a political and religious act. Either it helps to create human consciousness and the consequences of Consciousness, or it helps to create bestial Oblivion and the consequences of Oblivion. If the former it is Imagination, if the latter it is the enemy of Imagination. And Art helps to create Oblivion if it is informed by anything less than a complete awareness of the situation of Humanity to-day.

There is one overriding duty on the man of Imagination now: to pit himself, in every fibre of his being, against the unconscious motion of mankind towards Death. He alone can see that motion in all its vastness and inevitability; he alone can understand that the motion is a motion through Death towards more Life; he alone can comprehend that the choice before which Life in Man is trembling now is whether to advance through mass-Death to Life, through all but universal catastrophe to the enforced salvation of a remnant; or through Life towards more Life, by the individual dying his death within. Is he, or is he not, surrendered to the service of that Word which said, once and for ever, 'I came that ye might have Life and have it more abundantly'? That is the question. In the world of to-day it is not vague, but definite, not abstract but concrete, immediate, not remote, heard not in dream, but at our doors.

When, by virtue of the Imagination of which he is the instrument, the man of Imagination comprehends the vastness of the crisis in which mankind is involved, he may despair at his own insignificance in regard to the mighty motion which rolls him on. And indeed, he is insignificant; nevertheless he is the instrument of the Imagination which is the consciousness of creative life. He cannot escape his destiny. If Imagination is real in him, and not false, that is, if it comes to him as unchallengeable summons to submit himself wholly to the Life with which he makes contact by its means, he will discover his act. It may still be merely the Word, but it will be the Word which is act.

God knows, it is no easy task that falls upon Imagination to-day; and the futility of the modern Word is as much an evidence of

the magnitude of the obligation as of the insufficiency of those who are called to underbear it. I truly believe that no comparable necessity has ever been imposed upon conscious Man. It is not to be wondered at that Imagination collapses into triviality under the strain of a duty which it feels, although it cannot acknowledge and obey. And yet I cannot but believe that if the health were in us, if we could not immediately learn to do well, we should cease to do evil, and that some beginning of spiritual humility would dethrone the intellectual arrogance which pervades our 'intellectual' class to-day. For the malignity of our disease is in nothing so apparent as in the numbness of our spiritual discernment, and the confusion which attends it. Religion, for our 'intellectuals' to-day, is become the last refuge to which men flee not to be purified of their Ego, but to support it with authority.

CHAPTER IX

THE REDEMPTION OF GENERATION

RELIGION is still the simplest and most universal speech of Imagination, and the attitude of Imagination is humility, real humility, an emptying of one's self in order that a greater power may take possession. Of such Imagination I believe that Shakespeare was one of the most perfect vehicles humanity has known. I find in his work the destiny of man writ large and delicate in the pattern of the fabric of an imaginative world — a world of creatures, yet obedient to the rhythm of a single creature. There is in him the age of Innocence, the gleam of the golden age, not chequering the Forest of Arden or the Athenian woods alone, but gilding Sir John Falstaff and the Bastard and Harry Percy with its radiance, and by its heavenly alchemy making them children of the sun. Then there is in him the age of Experience — of the bitter knowledge of good and evil in the world and in himself, that comes to the

> limèd soul that, struggling to be free,
> Is more engaged.

The tragic period, it is called, nor do I dispute the name; but I believe it is truer and more comprehensive to see it as a period of fearful awareness of the serpent Evil that lurks in Nature, unless it be redeemed: an awareness that can be real and consuming and redemptive only when it is accompanied by the agonizing and despairing sense that one is oneself totally involved in the serpent folds. In the order of this awareness we need make no distinction between the achieved tragedies, which are the pinnacles of European poetry, and the 'failures' — *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon* or the 'bitter' comedies; for the spiritual difference between them is only the difference between a spiritual man when he is convulsed by loathing at his own intimate implication in the evil of Nature,

and when he has attained a momentary serenity by a creative contemplation of it in a projected world.

But over the Shakespearian struggle in and against the sensual flux hovers a pale star. Ophelia, smirched and drowned, is born again as Desdemona and Cordelia. There *is* innocence, and loyalty, and love — somehow redeeming the world. But why did Shakespeare conceive it as Woman? It seems to me that one knows there is an answer, and indeed that one knows what the answer is, and yet the answer can hardly be uttered so as to be understood. But in part I think it is that the figure of a Man who shall redeem the world is fixed for the epoch of humanity — in Jesus Christ; he cannot be re-created, but only recognized. Unconsciously, negatively guiding Shakespeare's hand in the last period, when he sought to express the third phase of his experience, which is human experience — reconciliation, and forgiveness, and innocence renewed — was the impossibility of imagining a regenerated and regenerating Man save in the form of the Christ. A like compulsion was at work in the final phase of D. H. Lawrence. *The Man Who Had Died,* in its place following *Lady Chatterlefs Lover,* is the profoundest commentary I know on Shakespeare's final period: it wakens in us thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls.

On the one hand in Lawrence is a despairing surrender to the sensual flux — an absolute and unmitigated surrender to Generation; on the other, a dream, or it may be a prophecy, of the redemption of generation in the world of time. The risen Christ and the virgin priestess of I sis are reconciled in a new generation and a new kind of generation; and we are to imagine, if not to believe, that from this new and utterly unpossessive love a new humanity will arise. No more than Shakespeare did Lawrence write for 'the shallow minds which take things literally', or the equally shallow ones which find in so lovely a work of the purified imagination a blasphemy. Like Shakespeare, I believe, Lawrence was reconciling Eternity with Existence, and battling on our human behalf once again with the old necessity, which Christianity reveals and conceals under the mystery of the virgin Birth: the necessity of redeeming Generation.

That, it seems to me, is still and will ever be the profound and elemental necessity of the world. Christianity made the world conscious of the terrible tension, the everlasting contradiction, between the sexual and the spiritual in Man. We may call it the eternal opposition between human love and divine love. Unless men remain conscious of that tension, then human life slowly, but totally and ruinously, descends to one vast, all-pervading and insatiable Desire. Love, which in the state of innocence is an unconscious union of the divine love and the human love, sinks suddenly and unawares to an appetite for possession, and possessions, and devastates the world. Historic Christianity is among other things the acknowledgment of the terrible and tragic ambiguity of innocent love.

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The rebellion of the Protestant Church against celibacy — the re-vindication of the married priest — was as it were the counterpart in gross of Shakespeare's final insight: that the struggle to regenerate generation had assumed a new urgency, a new intimacy, and that the struggle of the Church must now be renewed in the individual man. The main effort of the old universal Church had been to redeem the world of Generation. That had been the task imposed upon it by divine providence, when at the end of the third century the primitive Christian expectation of a cosmic change and another world had finally faded. At that moment Christianity was compelled to a new task, namely to redeem this world: the world of Generation. Life on the earth was not suddenly to cease, as three centuries of Christians had believed, ever more faintly, indeed, but nevertheless believed. Generation would go on, and the life of the Kingdom of God must be built upon the foundation of that knowledge; in other words, the divine life must somehow be accommodated to the human.

The Puritan and Protestant mind, which condemned this 'compromise' as a betrayal thirteen hundred years later, could not

realize that it had itself been created by the long effort of the universal Church to achieve this task. But in its rebellion the Puritan and Protestant movement was also the instrument of divine providence, or if we prefer it, of historical necessity. 'There are outward things in the worship of God that are temporary,' said John Donne, 'and they did serve God that brought them in, and they do serve God also, that have driven them out of the Church, because their undeniable abuse had clogged them with an impossibility of being restor'd to that good use which they were first ordained for.' In this sense, though hardly in this spirit, Protestantism took up the task of redeeming the world of generation in a new form. The catholic Church had, for the time being, reached the end of its inspiration. But I believe it had been truly inspired when, at the moment that it was acknowledged as the universal Church, it imposed celibacy on its priests. Without that evident symbol (crude and harsh as it may appear to some) of the supremacy of the spiritual over the sexual, the idea of the Kingdom of God would have been swallowed up in the sensual flux, as to-day it is threatened to be swallowed up in the apotheosis of the secular state. The replacement of the fertility goddesses by the Virgin Mary would have ended in the degradation of the Virgin Mary to a goddess of fertility, had it not been for the celibacy of the priesthood. As ever, the contemporary mind, which is the product of dangers overcome, cannot believe that the dangers ever existed, far less that they still exist. The enlightened collectivist of to-day rejoices over the steady diminution of the sanctity of Christian marriage, which cost God and man so much to establish, as an advance in human morality. He does not know that he is surely preparing for the destruction of the sanctity of the human individuality. But the angels know it, and weep.

In us is being accomplished the decay and corruption of the Puritan and Protestant idea which, on its divine and creative side, expressed the partial accomplishment of the Church's superhuman task of the spiritualization of marriage. The time had come when the celibacy of the priesthood created more evils than it prevented. Such ambiguity is the mark of every crucial

moment in history. It is indeed the mark of *every* moment in human history; but the separate moments of human history are lived only by individuals, and *known* to them only in so far as they are aware of the unending struggle between Good and Evil in themselves. That knowledge is Life, and it is also eternal Life. But this essential nature of human existence is manifest as History only in moments when institutions are at the point of major change; because institutions are a gathering together, into a concrete and super-personal being, of the experience of multitudes of human existences. The ambiguity of the individual existence is then revealed in majestic terms as the ambiguity of the institution.

Thus the great institution of the celibacy of the priesthood was revealed as ambiguous (but not as wrong) when, as an ordinance of the universal Church, it was felt to create more evils than it prevented. Then it was evident that the universal Church must include both a celibate and a married priesthood: a celibate priesthood, for those whose *vocation* was celibacy, that is to say, those priests of God who did not feel that it was their mission to struggle to regenerate generation in their own living experience, and a married priesthood for those who felt that they had the strength to regenerate generation in themselves. But a dire confusion was created when the universal Church split on this issue: for it obscured the truth that the married priesthood and the celibate priesthood both belonged to the universal Church. It would, one thinks, have been far better if the Church of Rome could have admitted this, if only by way of contrition for the hideous profligacies of the Renaissance Popes. But the Divine Providence is not amenable to the judgment of mortal man; and even a mortal man may discern that more wonderful things were intended.

§

In order that the Church should *be* universal, it had to abandon now the appearance of universality. There was the Roman

Church of the celibate priesthood, and the Protestant Churches of the married and celibate priesthood. (I leave the Eastern Church out of account, as having but little part in the destiny of Christian Europe.) The new purity of morals achieved in the Protestant Churches called forth a new purity of morals in the Church of Rome. By this means was accomplished the divine purpose of universalizing that redemption of Generation which the Church had undertaken. The appointed time for the apparent breach in the universality of the Church was the moment when, on the side of evil, the celibacy of the priesthood created greater evils than it prevented, and, on the side of the good, when married love, or love in marriage, had at long last emerged, under the fostering care of the Church, from between the opposites of marriage as a pagan property-bargain, and the unlawful, unwedded love of the courtly and chivalric ideal. We have seen its emergence in the pure feeling of Margaret Brews; it was to receive an incomparable poetic expression in Spenser's *Epithalamion.*

> There dwells sweet love, and constant chastity
> Unspotted faith, and comely womanhood,
> Regard of honour, and mild modesty;
> There virtue reigns as Queen in royal throne
> And giveth laws alone,
> To which the base affections do obey;
> And yield their services unto her will;
> Nor thought of thing uncomely ever may
> Thereto approach to tempt her mind to ill.

When such an ideal of marriage had been achieved by the layman, priestly celibacy, *as a universal rule,* had verily begun to be an anachronism. It had done its work, and its work had been to make possible the *Epithalamion.* The rejection of celibacy as a necessary condition of priesthood by a great portion of the universal Church was the visible mile-stone on the road to the acknowledgment that generation must be regenerated in the world of time: that the reconciliation between human and divine love must be

attempted anew. 'The Negation must be destroyed, to redeem the Contraries.'

That does not mean that the struggle *will* be ended in the world of time. We do not and we cannot know. The struggle is not easy, and the victories which men are certain have been finally won for them are never won at all; indeed that is the moment when they are beginning to be lost again. And it is only so far as individual men are conscious of what we have called the essential ambiguity of life, and aware 'on their pulses' that the struggle between good and evil is incessant, and incessant in themselves, that they can hope to defend their heritage at all. I believe that to-day each individual man who strives to be a warrior for the Good must re-live within himself all the experience of the Christian Church. Unless he can become simply aware that the past history of the Church is his present history, that the perils which the Church — the universal Church — has apparently overcome are his perils now, he cannot do other than unconsciously serve the evil. 'We conquer our eternity anew day by day,' said Goethe. I would say: 'We re-live the history of the eternal Church day by day'; and though my saying is perhaps even more incomprehensible than Goethe's, I believe it contains the one thing needful to make Goethe's saying *true.*

However that may be, unless we see that the establishment of the sanctity of marriage is a precarious conquest of regeneration over generation, which needs to be reconquered over and over again, we have but a dim understanding of the world to-day. The deadly opposites which lurk in unredeemed generation: on the one hand, sexual indulgence at the caprice of the individual without desire for procreation, and on the other, procreation at the ordinance of the secular state for its diabolical ends — confront one another to-day. They are not enemies, but kin, ready to pass into another; for they are a form of the 'hermaphroditic Satan', of whom the despised Christian prophet, William Blake, spoke to an uncomprehending world. The outrageous individualism of the decaying Protestant world is ready to turn at any moment into a fearful and anti-Christian totalitarianism. And the peculiar

ambiguity of the present is evident in the grim fact that our mightiest symbol of the universal Church — namely, the Church of Rome — has compromised with the new totalitarianism.

Its struggle against the corruption of generation by scientific contraception will therefore be turned to its opposite: the unlimited procreation of children for the express purpose of destroying and being destroyed. No Christian Church can compromise with a State that denies the divine-humanity of the created individual without becoming diabolical. Its very good becomes evil. Christian marriage is sacred because the begetting and birth of a child is a sacred process — the creation of a member of the Kingdom of God. More than ever to-day, it is necessary to re-assert the eternal reality of the universal Church, and its undying function of struggling to regenerate the world and the act of Generation.

§

That, as I apprehend it, is the meaning of Shakespeare's final plays. He prophetically uttered the message of the eternal Christian Church, and perfected by an act of imagination the teaching of the actual and fallible Church — in a vision of generation re-generated. Reconciliation, forgiveness, yes: but these are of eternity, and life must still be lived in time. To bring eternity into time, to redeem human love by divine love, not merely in the worship and reverence of the Christian religion, but in regeneration of Christian marriage, and of the very act by which life is perpetuated, on which, whether we know it or not, the whole life of Man is founded and by which it is determined — this is the meaning of Marina, Imogen, Perdita, Miranda: virgin and married mothers of the divine and human Man, the ever-incarnate Christ.

So the Imagination in Shakespeare redeems *all* human life. It brings Christianity into the world completely, and thrusts upon the individual the burden of the Church which the Church could no

longer bear. At the moment that the visible universal Church was broken in fragments, Shakespeare created its universality anew, in the self-less imagination of an individual man, where alone it could be prefigured at the moment when Europe and England were about to be torn in sunder by Christian wars. At the moment when Archbishop Laud will have his head cut off for seeking to bring 'the beauty of holiness' back into the parish Church, Shakespeare makes the secular theatre the refuge for the divine mystery — the redemption of the world by the Imagination of divine Love. While the Church of England dwindles into secularity, until even a son so devoted as John Wesley must be thrust out of it, the plays of Shakespeare gather and grow in significance. At last for a Coleridge they become the very Word of God; and through his imagination they begin to replenish the Church again. Through Coleridge Shakespeare is a main source of that rebirth of Imagination within the English Church which we call the Oxford Movement, which more than any other single happening has made the English Church conscious of itself once more as a potential vessel of universal Christianity. The Imagination, as Blake declared, is always and everywhere the Christian Imagination; and it will always return to the Christian Church, as the Church grows able to receive it.

CHAPTER X

CROMWELL: FROM THE LAMB TO THE BULL

ON a wall in Ely hard by the Lamb Inn I saw three years ago an inscription, or an advertisement, about 150 years old. I had not time to copy it exactly, but the upshot of it was that from the Yard every day 'Vans, Flys and Stage-Waggons' set out for London, for the conveyance of passengers and goods to the Bull **Inn,** Bishopsgate. I was charmed by the old notice, spacious, dignified, leisurely, and pleased to think that some one in Ely felt about it as I did, and had foreborne to obliterate it with whitewash. I made that journey to the Bull in Bishopsgate. And this is an account thereof.

§

Why was I in Ely? To tell the truth, I had gone there on a sort of Cromwellian pilgrimage. Cromwell moved his household to Ely from Huntingdon in 1634, and, in the early days of the famous Eastern Association — that confederation of the Eastern Counties which was throughout the Civil War the Parliamentarian stronghold—he was appointed by Parliament to be Governor of the Isle of Ely. While he was Governor there, he had a short sharp passage of arms with the Precentor of the Cathedral.

To the Reverend Mr. Hitch, at Ely: These

Mr. Hitch, *10th January 1643*

Lest the Soldiers should in any tumultuary or disorderly way attempt the reformation of the Cathedral Church, I require you to forbear altogether your choir-service, so unedifying and offensive:—and this as you shall answer it, if any disorder should arise therefrom.

> I advise you to catechise, and read and expound the Scripture to the people; not doubting but that the Parliament, with the advice of the Assembly of Divines, will direct you farther. I desire your Sermons where usually they have been, — but more frequent.
>
> Your loving friend,
>
> OLIVER CROMWELL.

The Rev. Mr. Hitch paid no attention. In the middle of a choir-service the Governor marched in, with soldiers behind him. He walked up to the choir, and said: 'I am a man under Authority; and am commanded to dismiss this Assembly.' Then he withdrew a little to give the assembly room to disperse with decency. Seeing this, Mr. Hitch, who had paused, began again: 'As it was in the beginning. . .' 'Leave off your fooling and come down, Sir!' said Oliver. And Mr. Hitch came down.

I wanted to stand in that place, and hear the echo of those words spoken nearly three hundred years ago. Most of the places where the great Oliver stood are changed, but here in Ely Cathedral my feet would stand on the very flag-stones he trod, and my voice, if I lifted it, would echo from the walls that echoed his. I did not lift it. I looked instead on the bare walls of that glorious nave — made bare, I venture, by Oliver and his men — and then I stepped forward into the Choir.

It was dusk. The vergers were lighting the candles in the choir-stalls for Vespers. The service would begin in twenty minutes. I had the impulse to stay, to listen to the singing. The necessity of getting home before the dark alone withheld me. As I came out of the Cathedral, and walked through the Close, a top-hatted beadle carrying a silver-tipped staff went before me, knocked with his staff on the Deanery door and entered. 'Leave off your fooling'? Was it so simple? Did not the same Oliver, six years afterwards, set out to conquer Ireland 'in that state and equipage as the like hath hardly been seen; himself in a coach with six gallant Flanders mares, whitish grey; divers coaches accompanying him; and very many great Officers of the Army, his Lifeguard consisting of eighty

gallant men, the meanest whereof a Commander or Esquire, in stately habit; — with trumpets sounding, almost to the shaking of Charing Cross, had it now been standing'?

What's in a ceremony? A little more even by his own reckoning, than Major-General Cromwell believed in 1643. A good deal more, by mine. Two hundred and ninety years had passed since the Governor of Ely put his foot down on the choir-service, 'so unedifying and offensive'; yet there it was, just beginning to sound in my ears, as it sounds at this hour every day, and I, Cromwellian though I was and on a pilgrimage to the hero, had been beset by no small desire to stay to listen. A Laodicean, I fear he would have called me: a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, the victim of a 'carnal mind'. But might I not have said the same to him? Very brave and godly men, men who had fought and wrought with him, were to say it of the Lord General.

Things are not simple; or their simplicity is of a strange order. When I went up to the choir, and stood where the Reverend Mr. Hitch had stood, looking on General Cromwell, and General Cromwell looking on him — 'As it was in the beginning . . .' 'Leave off that fooling, and come down, Sir' — I wondered: On which side were the Eternities? No doubt at all, if it were a matter of words alone. A very eternal word cut short by a very temporal one. Not very much doubt, if it were a matter of mere endurance. Two hundred and ninety years: yet the voice of Mr. Hitch is sounding in that Cathedral and the voice of General Cromwell is forgotten. And yet . . ,

The Eternities are queer things; presences rather than embodiments, like that which troubled the face of the water at the Pool of Bethesda. General Cromwell, filled with the sense of Eternity in the transept, the Reverend Mr. Hitch, filled with the sense of Eternity in the choir, looking on one another, and a tension between them. And the tension renewed, re-created, after two hundred and ninety years, in a single human creature with grey flannel trousers, dreaming, at the end of a pilgrimage. And on the way to Ely, strange things happening at quiet Mildenhall. New yellow signs on every hand, so that I need not bother about the

tricksy fenland road. Mysterious yellow signs pointing out the way, all the way, with not a word about Cromwell on them. Far from it. 'To Mildenhall Aerodrome' — and Karachi and Singapore and Gharleville and Melbourne, in two days and twenty-three hours. And a forked biped in grey flannel trousers conscious of it all. All focused, and suffused, and fermenting in a brain. And that peripatetic brain, why there? In search of Cromwell. But why?

Oh, just the hatch and disclose of another such brooding silence — another gestation, a dim premonition that the secret was in Cromwell. But what secret? The secret of Change — incarnate Change: of the moment when the body of the World heaves and writhes, and a Man is born, a Demiurge, who grows to impregnate the womb of the Nature that bare him: of the miracle by which the dumb striving for growth and newness becomes a man of destiny and an Act: an impulsion whose momentum endures through the centuries. At last it flags. The leaven has leavened the lump. There is need of a new leaven. And men's minds, dimly conscious of the need, turn to the old leaven, to find its secret.

> Cromwell, thou shouldst be living at this hour,
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters . . .

Wordsworth's address to Milton: Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth. We can't invoke Milton to-day. He is not the man, he does not speak to our condition. We ourselves have undergone something like the change which came over Milton, and put an end to the loveliness of L'*Allegro*. If we were men of genius and had the opportunity, we should as eagerly resign the joy of being the supreme poet for the job of Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth. There are times, alas, when poetry is a full man's job no longer. Milton's time was one; this is another.

'A fen of stagnant waters.' It sticks in the mind, anew, with a new meaning, subtly apposite, something of a hieroglyph. The Fens round Ely, drained in Cromwell's time, leaving the dull sordid fertile country, that lies between Mildenhall and the

Isle. This was a great doing in Cromwell's early world. He fought for the rights of the commoners and fishermen and fowlers whose livelihood was destroyed by the old Bedford Level, and won. That was in 1638; in 1653 he is sending a troop of horse to 'persuade to quiet' a later generation of small folk making another protest against their ruin by the new Bedford Level. He is now a member of the Company of Adventurers that does the draining, and Lord General to boot. I am no cynic; and I do not doubt he meant to do them justice. But Justice is always a harsh word to the poor. And I cannot help wondering what Mr. Cromwell would have said in 1637, when he was fighting for the petty-commoners, if King Charles had sent a troop of horse to persuade him to quiet.

Again, that great capitalist enterprise — the draining of the Fens — was typical of the times: as far as the internal economy of England was concerned, *the* economic event. The Fens were thenceforward up till now the home of capitalist farming in England. Hence the sordidness of the Fen country to-day: an old industrial squalor. Mean houses, poor churches, little warmth or natural dignity of human habitation, so that I who travel through the Fen country often escape from it eagerly and breathe freely again only when I touch the heathland, where I live. A deep parable is there. But the draining of the Fens was a great Adventure, in Cromwell's day: and he one of the Adventurers.

We see the connection, where Cromwell could not. We see that it was something more than a coincidence that Cromwell arose out of the midst of this native New Found Land. We see that it was more than an accident that, at the moment when miles of flat and fertile land had risen out of the watery waste, over which the great Cathedral had towered for centuries, a veritable beacon, majestic and comforting, a Hill whereunto men lifted up their eyes for the help of the Lord — it should have been entered by General Cromwell, sword in hand, commanding its singers to desist from their unedifying and offensive chants. Those chants of centuries, those gleaming windows, that high and starry tower, and those watery wastes — they were a living whole: the mystery

of Nature, the mystery of God, and the latter mystery a refuge from the former, and a mystery of Architecture to enshrine it, to gather under its brooding wings the little people, yet made by the little people, and filled by them with all the marvel and magic of their unutterable aspiration. But now the waters are withdrawn, as at the Creation on the third day.

> And God said, let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
> And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
> And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

The great drama of Creation enacted again there about Ely; and a new Adam — Oliver Cromwell — and a new God. It means somewhat.

Let us think, let us imagine, let us understand. This earth-creation is the work of a new God, whose name is Man. The watery waste of old, that was God's handiwork; this new earth is Man's. That former God created Man after his own image: with a mystery in Man's soul to reflect the mystery of himself, a sense in Man's soul that the presence of God must be sought like a flame in a cloud, a candle-light in the dark, in the dusk of many arches, the murmur of muted song, the mist of incense: all gathered into a point of radiance and meaning ineffable, the Beacon of God in the waste of the world.

But this man-made earth — what God shall be its mystery? Not a God seen through a cloud, but a God seen face to face. Not a God whose word needs to be mediated, but a God who speaks directly. Not a god whose mysterious mercy falls like the wind and the rain on all men, but a God who chooses out his own Company of Adventurers, charges them with missions, seals them with seals, the God of a Covenant.

Oh, a mysterious Covenant, no doubt. Let us hear the Lord Protector expound it to the husband of his daughter:

> Bid her be cheerful, and rejoice in the Lord once and again: if she knows the Covenant, she cannot but do so. For that Transaction is without *her;* sure and steadfast, between the Father and the Mediator in His blood: therefore, leaning upon the Son, or looking to Him, thirsting after Him, and embracing Him, we are His seed; — and the Covenant is sure to all the Seed. The Compact is for the Seed: God is bound in faithfulness to Christ, and in Him to us: The Covenant is without *us;* a Transaction between God and Christ.

A Covenant, a Transaction, a Compact — what words are these? 'God is *bound*' — perilously near a blasphemy, even to my ears, my Lord Protector. Such a God never entered the mind of the dweller in the watery waste. They are the words of a man who is conquering the earth, conquering his God. To declare that 'God is bound' is to bind God. It cannot be helped; it is necessary: to drain the water from the waste *is* to drain the mystery from God. God *is* bound. But not for ever.

But now He is bound — to the few who bind Him. Not bound 'in faithfulness to Christ'; but bound to the few who take Christ to themselves. 'The Compact is for the Seed.' But how does one become of the Seed? Ah, by knowing that one *is* of the Seed. If you know that God reserves his Covenant, and his seals, for the few, how should you not be one of them? It is not easy; but it is inevitable. If you believe that God chooses thus, you will surely be one of the Chosen. You will pay for it, with wrestlings of the spirit, with godly and terrible fears: but the moment will come when you *know* that you are sealed.

A strange doctrine; a strange experience: not quite obsolete, even yet. The dialect changes. A doctrine that must emerge, in some form or other, when the world is brooding change — a doctrine that spans the gulf between man and God, and makes them one; purges the man with fire, till he becomes an instrument for the unknown purpose; charges his acts with a divine validity,

at the moment when nothing less than divine validity will avail to do the necessary deed: when the laws of man and the laws of God have to be broken, because they no longer can contain the life of Man. A doctrine that sanctifies the emergent newness. Crude, grim, stark, as new things are: stark as those new lands about Ely, the religion of those lands, and like them, not beautiful.

Watch him now, as he rides up the Hill in Ely, out of the New Found Land, with a troop of sealed horsemen by his side, into the great Church that grew out of the wild beauty that was once and is no more: part of that wild beauty, the magic garment of the unbound God, the meaning of that beauty and that terror, the essence of it and the refuge from it. All gone. And in its stead, a new Earth and a new Heaven, according to the Promise. Promises are grim things, when they are fulfilled. A new Earth, a new Heaven, a new God, and a new Man. 'As it was in the beginning . . .'

And is not now, nor ever shall be again.

'Leave off that fooling and come down, Sir!'

§

In Ely still. A long way from the Bull in Bishopsgate. It cannot be helped. If I were to tell *all* this journey . . .

Yes, the Lord was with Oliver. I had no doubt about it: for he had none. That was the point. The greater Faith prevailed. Ah yes — I know my Marx — the rising class prevailed. But I know a thing or two besides. A rising class does not prevail because it is a rising class. When it comes to push of pike and charge of horse, it is not the knowledge that 'we are the rising class' that holds men firm: it is something different, something more like the great battle-cry at Dunbar, when Oliver's men, surrounded by twice their numbers, crashed through the Scots at dawn between the Doon hill and the sea: 'The Lord of Hosts! The Lord of Hosts!'

What was the secret of that strange transmutation which changes economic necessity into spiritual compulsion? In those

days what was it that created and nerved the New Model to conquer where the old militia had failed and would have failed again? The reality of their religion: it was the Anabaptists, the Independents, the Sectaries, who made Cromwell's army a new thing in history, a new and terrible weapon: men who could charge, and reform, and charge again. Rupert's men could charge; but the charge itself went like wine to their heads. They were drunken with it, and they needed to be drunken. But the Ironsides were drunk not with the charge, but with God: *Gott-betrunken,* like Spinoza. When a man is drunk with God, he can keep his head. The Ironsides kept their heads, and their grim, inspired control was gathered up in Oliver: the Lord-General. Listen to him again on the night before Dunbar — trapped, if ever an army was trapped.

To the Honorable Sir Arthur Haselrig at Newcastle or elsewhere: These,
Haste, haste. *2d September 1650*

Dear Sir,

We are upon an Engagement very difficult. The Enemy hath blocked up our way at the Pass at Copperspath, through which we cannot get without almost a miracle. He lieth so upon the Hills that we know not how to come that way without great difficulty; and our lying here daily consumeth our men, who fall sick beyond imagination.

I perceive your forces are not in a capacity for present release. Wherefore, whatever becomes of us, it will be well for you to get whatever forces you can together; and the South to help what they can. The business nearly concerneth all Good People. If your forces had been in a readiness to have fallen on the back of Copperspath, it might have occasioned supplies to have come to us. But the only wise God knows what is best. All shall work for good. Our spirits are comfortable, praised be the Lord — though our present condition be what it is. And indeed we have much hope in the Lord; of whose mercy we have had large experience.

Indeed, do you get together what forces you can against them. Send to friends in the South to help with more. Let H. Vane know what I write. I would not make it public, lest danger should accrue thereby. You know what use to make hereof. Let me hear from you. I rest,

Your servant,

OLIVER CROMWELL.

It's difficult for me to send you this. Let me hear from you after.

Such was the Lord-General. One of his Majors, a Yorkshireman, tells how in the night before the attack he heard 'a Cornet praying in the night' — not alone, but leading his men in prayer. The Major turned aside to listen; and was spell-bound, so heartfelt and full of trust was the prayer. It lifted up the Major's own heart, and he in turn strengthened his own men merely by telling them of it. 'I met,' he said of that prayer, 'with so much of God in it as I was satisfied deliverance was at hand.' Such were the men. And their leader on that night is visible still, through the memory of an old man who fought under him, and long years after used to tell how he saw the Lord-General riding through the regiments 'by torchlight upon a little Scottish nag, biting his lip till the blood had ran down upon his chin'. An engagement very difficult, of which the very thinking drew blood.

The Battle of Dunbar, when Oliver cried as the sun rose over the sea 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered!' and it was so, was fought on September 3rd, 1650. Now, we go back to the April of the year before, 1649— three months after Charles Stuart, by the Grace of God King, had been enforced to lay his head upon the block: an act terrible and unprecedented in Christendom, grim with naked destiny, an act which required an aweful courage in the men who condemned him, an act which (I truly believe) set even the great Oliver's nerves on edge so that, after guiding the pens of some of the faint-hearts to sign the death-warrant, he inked Henry Marten's face. Crude buffoonery! Coarse devilry! say some. I say: The strain of a kingly man

enforced to kill a King, to kill his King; the conflict of a diviner right with a right divine. A thing which once done, was history; but in the doing was a blind leap clean into the justice of the living God.

It had taken Oliver long months to reach that resolution. He had sought diligently to make a composition with the King, once the King's forces were beaten off the field. He was, essentially, a man who dealt with the immediate problem. He experienced history in the concrete, and therefore made it. He felt his way — or the Lord's way — among events. Once the 'rebellion' had begun, his path was clear up to the point where the King's forces had been beaten — not beaten in the old traditional sense of the word in the warfare of that day — but utterly beaten, annihilated. And alone of the Parliament-men Oliver had grasped this necessity from the beginning — not as a military, but as a political, moral, and religious necessity. There was no room for the half-hearted campaigning of an Essex, a Manchester or even a Waller. The King had to be beaten to his knees, beaten out of his notion, which he bravely proclaimed on the scaffold itself, that 'the liberty and freedom of the people' did *not* consist 'in their having a share in the government, that is nothing pertaining to them. A subject and a sovereign are clean different things.'

Not while the King had a regiment in arms in England to fight for him in that cause, did Oliver hesitate. He set to work to build an army that could shatter the King's army, and until that work was done the path was straight before him. But when the work was done, what then? When the King was taught his lesson, what then? What if this King, for all his frowardness, was every inch a king and would not learn his lesson?

That was a situation for which Oliver was not prepared. His strange massive genius, which began to move into action only when he was completely pervaded by the inevitability of his act; which was set in motion only by the conviction of being an instrument of the Divine Will; which groped afterwards for corroborations and indications of God's purpose in the issues of events — 'dispensations' as he called them — was ill-prepared to meet a man whose

faith was as real as his own, but utterly different. It was a wonderful encounter this, between Oliver and Charles: one of the most significant single combats ever fought on the stage of history: a conflict manifest in consciousness as the conflict between two faiths, a new faith and an old one. The new faith was Cromwell's: a faith which knit itself into the very texture of events, which planted itself among concrete happenings and nourished itself from them. The old faith was Charles's: a faith which could and did ignore events, because it had a sanction beyond events: a terribly irresponsible faith, in a sense, but yet if passionately held, as Charles Stuart held it, a very splendid one: as indeed he himself is very splendid in his silver and black on the scaffold in Whitehall.

Was this faith of Charles Stuart irresponsible, or was it transcendent? It was both. Those two words are descriptions of the same essence, seen from different angles. But to this irresponsible, transcendent faith—the faith that he, the King, was appointed by God directly and responsible to God alone — what were the 'dispensations' and the 'evidences' which meant so much to Oliver? What could they mean? If the King of Kings had hearkened to 'dispensations' and 'evidences', would there have been a Calvary? That he, the anointed King, was beaten and captive — what did that prove? Surely, not that God had forsaken him, as Oliver believed; but that God had anointed him indeed. Charles Stuart *had* learned his lesson; but not as Oliver would have him learn it, but as Christ would have. King Charles the Martyr is not an idle phrase.

Let us pause, imagine, and understand. Those two faiths are necessary. One does not, because it cannot, annihilate the other. As Blake would say, they are not Negations, they are Contraries: without which is no progression. One is the faith of the Ideal that cannot prevail; the other is the faith of the Ideal that can. Both are necessary. Because the moments when the Ideal can be real are terribly rare, men need to be assured that defeat also is triumph. But when the rare moment comes when the Ideal can be made real, then the Faith that turns from the Event must go down before the Faith that feeds upon the Event it helped to make.

And Christianity is the greatest of all religions because it contains both these Contraries: therefore it has, in itself, the secret of Progression, which is life. Therefore, the time will never come when Christianity will be dead; it will die, but only to live again.

We come a little nearer to a glimpse of the sublime issue in this great conflict, the strange and wonderful fatality by which, as the conflict cleared itself in the souls of these two kingly men, Charles as he grew weaker, grew stronger, and Oliver as he grew stronger, grew weaker — up to the great decision. When that was taken, and the King was killed, Oliver moved like a destiny once more: struck Ireland like a planet, smote the Scots at Dunbar, and scattered them as dust at Worcester.

But in between the end of the first civil war and the King's death Oliver hesitated. He groped after a compromise with the King who, he hoped, had learned his lesson: God's lesson. He groped after the compromise that was achieved, far less nobly (sordidly, if the truth be told) in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. There was nothing glorious about that: that was a commonplace piece of bargaining between 'interests'. But if that compromise had been realized between Charles and Oliver, at the moment when that compromise was potentially achieved but could not be embodied, there would have been something glorious about it. If only those kingly natures *could* have understood one another at the last. . . . But Oliver could understand Charles better than Charles could understand Oliver. 'A subject and a sovereign are clean different things.' Not so, your Majesty, though it is an ancient and a noble faith, identical with that faith which held that a priest and a layman are clean different things — indeed, the workaday form of that faith: against which Oliver, with the absolute conviction of experience, pits another: which he proclaims, magnificently, after Dunbar to the Scots Kirkmen, who take offence that in the New Model army ordinary men preach the Gospel as the spirit moves them. Says Oliver:

> Indeed you err through mistaking the Scriptures. Approbation [i.e. ordination] is an act of conveniency in respect to

> order; not of necessity, to give faculty to preach the Gospel. Your pretended fear lest Error should step in, is like the man who would keep all the wine out of the country lest men should be drunk. It will found an unjust and unwise jealousy, to deprive a man of his natural liberty on a supposition he may abuse it. When he doth abuse it, judge. If a man speak foolishly, ye suffer him gladly because ye are wise; if erroneously, the truth more appears by your conviction [i.e. your confutation of him]. Stop such a man's mouth by sound words which cannot be gainsayed. If he speak blasphemously, or to the disturbance of the public peace, let the Civil Magistrate punish him: if truly, rejoice in the truth.

A great doctrine emerges there; posits itself squarely and with authority in the high argument which is History. This is the doctrine and the faith which set Oliver in motion and created the New Model. A faith which has a mighty corollary: for if the laying-on of hands does not bestow upon the priest a supernatural gift to mediate Christ, or a superhuman faculty to preach the Gospel, how shall the anointing of a king endow him with a supernatural authority to rule his subjects? In this Religion there is Revolution. It has for its corollary: 'Coronation is an act of conveniency in respect of order.'

Had he accepted that, Charles would have kept his Crown. He could not accept it. He would have been false to *his* God. One cannot even desire that he should have accepted it. And yet . . . If only Charles could have understood that in Oliver was bodied forth a new sovereignty: the sovereignty of the people, diviner than his own: uncouth and majestic, never to be embodied again so splendidly in English history as it was in Oliver, triumphant and manifest in him as it were before its time, so that what follows, even the slow act of implementing that assertion which was incarnate in him, is sordid by comparison. If only Charles could have a glimpse, in the swiftness and strength of his great antagonist, of the truth of Oceanus:

Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain.
O Folly! for to bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
That is the top of sovereignty. Mark well!
As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
Than Chaos and blank Darkness, though once chiefs;
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful,
In will, in action free, companionship,
And thousand other signs of purer life;
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we
Thereby more conquer'd, than by us the rule
Of shapeless Chaos.

That is the top of sovereignty — but a sovereignty that has no subjects. Charles had it not. Oliver had somewhat of it: more than any leader in our history has had.

It shaped itself in him as a watching of events for 'mercies' and 'evidences' and 'dispensations'; as a self-less self-submission to the creative process of events. A very mysterious behaviour, wonderful to study and be lost in contemplation of.

§

Which brings us on the way to the Bull at Bishopsgate. Oliver had hesitated, hesitated for months, his slow massive mind in travail of that new order which obstinately remained in the womb of time, and when delivered after forty years was an ugly and misshapen thing, not a glorious birth, but yet with stubborn strength enough in its crooked body to be, by its endurance, the wonder of the world. Tor conveniency in respect of order' there must be a king. Ah yes, Kings were obsolete: Oliver knew that. But the people did not know it. And God alone knew how many years it

would take them to learn it. They must have a King; but he must be a King who had learned his lesson, that he was King by virtue of the people.

But who were the people? Every man who dwelt in the kingdom? That could not be. Leave the choice to them, and they, in the wantonness of their idle hearts, would have Charles Stuart again, divine right and all. This had been no popular rebellion. The populace was indifferent; but hostile to civil war. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.* Nor was it the rebellion of Parliament. Parliament had been half-hearted, when it came to the pinch. No, the rebellion was the rebellion of the Army. But the Army did not exist before the rebellion. True, but the rebellion created the Army. The Army was the people in the dynamic sense: not the actual people, but those among the people in whom the stirrings of a new order were manifest. The men who had a faith and were prepared to die for it: in Oliver's own immortal phrase, the men 'who knew what they fought for and loved what they knew'; prepared to die fighting for the right to hold their faith in their own way, against a king who denied it them.

In the last resort the rebellion was carried to victory by men who believed that there was no barrier between themselves and God, and who therefore regarded the interposition of an official intermediary between God and themselves as the work of the Devil. To these men Cromwell belonged. He shared their faith; he was their leader, but he was consubstantial with them. And in this faith they conquered. Did they conquer because of this faith? No; there were other causes, too. But without this faith, they would never have conquered.

But the faith is obsolete, meaningless to us. That depends. Its forms are obsolete. Maybe its substance is not. What does it *mean:* this immediacy between man and God? It means: man's equality before God. But before *God:* what about that? Who dreams to-day of being anything, before God? It's not a contemporary location. Granted. But in those days, it was a real condition. Men walked with God, for a while, or tried to. **And** God was over all, and in all. Charles Stuart could not have **done**

what he did, without God. If he died rather than surrender his prerogatives, it was because he truly believed God had given them to him. Equality before God was not equality in some moonshine realm, but equality in the realm of the ultimate and only reality. Immediacy with God meant naked contact with the source of all sovereignty, the everliving fount of all honour, the dayspring from on high that made men kings.

When men believe that God is the real and ultimate authority, immediacy with him, equality before Him, is a world-shattering claim. When He is not real it doesn't matter. That is why you can have religious equality — as much as you like — to-day. Nobody cares. Nobody believes that a king is a king because he is closer to God than anybody else: he is a king, if he is a king and not a corpse, 'for conveniency of order'. But so long as God makes kings, religious immediacy and equality are not to be had for the asking — not at all. They have to be fought for and died for: have finally to be paid for by the courage to kill a King — killing him properly and completely, not with a revolver or a bomb, but solemnly, calmly, with wide-open eyes, with all the form of justice that an awe-struck country has the nerve to muster. For in that world — that forgotten, but once terribly living world — immediacy with God and equality before Him have one ultimate meaning: that all men who have that immediacy and equality are themselves Kings, by right divine.

Nay, more than kings. And they made no bones about it: they called themselves Saints, and they meant it. Then men fought for God as they now fight for Money: and for the same reason, because God was power, as Money is to-day.

So we get another glimpse — a glimpse worth having, I think. These men who fought and died for their immediacy with God, were fighting and dying to be kings — all kings, kings together, in the kingdom of the Saints on Earth. Furthermore, they fought, and died, for this immediacy with God, because they had known it, because they had it. They were sealed, they had found Grace. And make no mistake about it, Grace was not easy to find. It was found only after hard and desperate searching, long lonely

journeys through the waste land, dark nights of the Soul, fearful convictions of sin, and all kinds of strange experiences that do not count in Hollywood and are not broadcast on the Radio, grim experiences — revolutionary experiences.

Such were the men Cromwell welded together to be the heart of the New Model; he was one of them himself. A new and portentous thing, this formidable equalitarian army of godly men who were Kings, wherein tailors became Colonels, and ostlers Major-Generals, and all men prophesied. Strange to think, is it not? that this was the beginning of the armies we know to-day, and that Cromwell's red-coats with their new discipline, their new tactics, their new potentialities, their new divine fury, are the authentic first parents of the red-coats we still see in Whitehall. This immediacy with God, this equality before God, are terribly potent and creative forces. Their strong sap is withered in three centuries; but it fed and built the very structure of the world we know. It is all there — this once mighty England — in the New Model. All its life flowed from that upswelling, that strange precipitation into concrete reality, into a swift and fearful instrument for doing, of man's immediacy with God. That was the acorn, of which we — mouldering twigs most of us — this country, this British Empire, and even those United States, are the oak.

Understand the New Model, think about it, dream about it, make it real, and you will understand what you are as you never understood it before; you will understand how strange and wonderful and uplifting and terrifying is History. Then you will begin to understand what Oliver and his men were doing when they scanned events for 'dispensations', and 'mercies' and 'evidences' — as we shall yet have to learn to do, or we shall be merely a dead-rotten, leprous-white, soft and spongy branch on the oak. If you want to understand what a 'dispensation' is, watch the New Model; watch its birth, comprehend its elements, feel its growth, be carried along on the strong wings of its invincible destiny to Dunbar and Worcester — 'The Lord of Hosts! The Lord of Hosts!' That is the beginning of a 'dispensation': most of what the great

Oliver *knew* of it, for the most of the rest was incarnate and unconscious in him, took centuries to grow after he was dead. And the end of it is — England and New England, you and me.

§

But the Bull in Bishopsgate? What a long journey this, from the Lamb at Ely to the Bull in Bishopsgate!

I admit it. But these are stirring times to be abroad, when the earth seems to tremble, and the future to be big with unknown things. It is not easy, in the spring of 1649, to get from the Lamb at Ely to the Bull at Bishopsgate without turning aside, or pausing, struck spell-bound in contemplation and conjecture, at the birth of a 'dispensation'.

The first Civil War is over; the martyr-King has lost his head. Oliver had not wanted this; but at last the necessity had been manifest to him. It was God's will that the king should die. The Army demanded it, and there was not in Charles that yielding of the soul to events which might have made it possible for Oliver to withstand the Army. He was with the Army and of it: consubstantial with it, but as the head is consubstantial with the body. He was its consciousness, and he looked before and after. As the head of the mighty body that had raised itself, he-now saw beneath him the state of England: saw things that had not been apparent to Colonel Cromwell, the cavalry commander. He had become a Statesman.

He knew the necessity of Order, and he knew that only that Order could endure which was within the compass of the people's habits. England needed a king. And the thought must have come to him far oftener than the recorded once: 'What if a man should take upon him to be King?' In him, I believe, that thought was a supremely unselfish thought. Yet finally he put it away. I think he must have wrestled in prayer very grievously to know the will of God in that sublime matter; and I do not think he ever knew it. Perhaps it was not to be known. To be known it demanded an

upsurge of total conviction in himself. What Oliver at that moment could do with the whole of him — that was the will of God. Such total act was not possible for him in that moment. Was that necessity of state he saw, from his eminence, only a 'carnal thought'? Could that conclusion which would have made him King be other than the conclusion of a 'carnal mind'? Was the authentic voice of God to be heard in the growing murmur of the Army that now the time had come to enact the consequences of that immediacy with God by which it had grown and fought and conquered? Religious equality must become political equality. There were even those who declared that it must become economic equality: Winstanley and Everard — the True Levellers or Diggers — who began a primitive Communism by digging waste-land at St. George's Hill in Surrey. True primitive Christians these, who repudiated force and had none to repudiate: gentle dreamers, who could be treated gently. Not that they were.

But the political equality men were fighters. They stood by 'The Agreement of the People', which the Army had drawn up, demanding annual parliaments, manhood suffrage, complete religious freedom. Simple, logical, irresistible — in very truth the political embodiment of the Army's faith, if the Army had been political: the Charter two hundred years before its time. But Oliver the Statesman knew that such a Parliament, on such a franchise, would undo the Revolution. 'We are under a more absolute arbitrary monarchy than before,' cried the Political Equality men. It was Fact; but it was not true.

Let us get things clear. The Army had not fought for political equality, it had fought for religious equality. Parliament (so far as it had fought) had fought for political control: for the political victory of the bourgeoisie. And Parliament would have been beaten. The political supremacy of the bourgeoisie is not a faith; it is an interest. And it would have been overcome by the embers of a real faith on the King's side, fanned to flame by despair. What I have said, boldly and by imagination, of Charles and Oliver, that as Charles grew weaker he grew stronger, and Oliver as he grew stronger grew weaker, was literal fact of King and

Parliament: because Parliament had no faith. It was the Army's passion for religious equality that won the struggle. That religious equality had for its ultimate corollary political equality (which has since been won), and beyond that, economic equality (which has not been won), is true; but it is an abstract truth. And living truth is never abstract. The Army as a whole fought for religious equality for all men, political equality for all men was desired by some, economic equality for all men by a tiny handful. But the universality — the divine strength of the Army lay in its passion for religious equality. And Cromwell represented the Army, was the Army, because this passion was in him devouring. He uttered it in unforgettable words, which breathe the very soul of the inward man:

> We should be pitiful and tender towards all though of different judgments. . . . Love all, tender all, cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good. And if the poorest Christian, the most mistaken Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you — I say, if any shall desire but to lead a life of godliness and honesty, let him be protected.

Those were new accents from a Prince's lips. The man who spoke them was King by right divine. No Christian Statesman had ever spoken thus.

Parliament did not stand for that. On the contrary. Parliament stood for religious intolerance: for the infliction of a Presbyterian uniformity upon the people. Presbyterianism — it behoves us to know what it is, or was. Presbyterianism is or was the prefect bourgeois Christianity. Roughly, there were three rival forms of Christianity in Cromwell's day: first, royalist Episcopacy, wherein the control of Church affairs was entirely withdrawn from the people —Tudor Christianity; second, Presbyterianism, wherein the control rested with a council of official elders chosen by the people; third, Congregationalism or Independency, where the control was entirely exercised by the people of each separate congregation. No wonder, then, that the Parliament was Presbyterian, in favour of that form of Church organization which gives Christianity over, lock stock and barrel, to the bourgeoisie: to

money and to property; no wonder that Parliament proposed to impose it rigidly upon all men — to make the bourgeoisie omnipotent. Cromwell was bourgeois — most of the men were bourgeois — but they were bourgeois with a difference. They believed in religious freedom. And that difference, which enabled the Army to win the War for Parliament, enabled the Army to crush Parliament when the War was won; and that crushing of Parliament was a victory over the bourgeoisie, by the power of a religious truth.

But what was to be done? The Presbyterian Parliament was crushed. King gone, Parliament gone, what was left? Cromwell and the Army. Cromwell did not like it. It felt all wrong to him. But to some of his men it felt all right. These were the Fifth Monarchy men.

Four Monarchies they knew — for they read history by the Book of Daniel — the Assyrian, the Persian, the Greek, the Roman. And the Monarchy that had been fought and conquered in England was the Roman: the head of its last monarch in England had fallen at Whitehall. Now for the Fifth — the Monarchy of Christ himself, ruling through his Saints for a Thousand Years: the great Millennium. In fact, it meant an autocracy of the Army enforcing religious toleration: a very astonishing Army, as we have seen, but yet for the English people as a whole, simply a burdensome Army, though an invincible one. Oliver sympathized with this notion not merely because it was, in a sense, practical — a military theocracy did mean Order — but because it was in accord with his own mystical mind. It expressed, nakedly and crudely, the thoughts he dared not bring into his own full consciousness. To the True Levellers and Diggers he was not entirely antagonistic: he thought nothing of their doctrine — 'a weak persuasion' — but he was inclined to be gentle with the men. They were dreamers, only. To the political Levellers he was sternly opposed; he knew that their plans — because they were not mere dreams —- were fatal. But the Fifth Monarchy men were after his own heart. It was their doctrine, I believe, that caused him an inward struggle: in it alone, of these three doctrines, appeared the possibility of accord between the unknown Design and the dispensation of events.

§

The Bull in Bishopsgate? Only a mile or two to go.

The first two doctrines came to a head in April 1649. On the 20th the leaders of the Diggers were before Oliver, refusing to unbonnet before him. On the same day, Oliver agrees to go to Ireland to suppress the Rebellion there, and lots are drawn to decide which regiments shall go. Whalley's regiment, which is to stay, refuses to quit London, as it is ordered, until its demands are satisfied. A troop from the regiment comes to the Bull at Bishopsgate — at last! — where their Cornet is lodging, and seizes its colours, which are in his custody. It is rank mutiny, of the political Levellers. Oliver has to hasten to the Bull at full speed, to quell the mutiny. Fifteen of the troopers are seized for court-martial; five tried straightway at the drum-head and condemned to death. But four are pardoned. One alone, Trooper Robert Lockyer, pays the full penalty: and is shot dead in St. Paul's Churchyard on the morrow. He was only twenty-three. He had served seven years, that is, ever since the Civil War began; he was 'religious, of excellent parts and much beloved'. One may guess, from this and the sequel, that he was a perfect type of the young New Model trooper.

That was on the Friday. Trooper Lockyer's body lies as it were in state until Monday, 'watched and wept over, not without prayer', by his comrades; and on the Monday the funeral procession moves westwards through London.

> About one hundred went before the Corpse, five or six in a file; the Corpse was then brought, with six Trumpets sounding a soldier's knell; then the Trooper's Horse came, clothed all over in mourning, and led by a footman. The Corpse was adorned with bundles of Rosemary, one half stained in blood, and the Sword of the deceased along with them. Some thousands followed in rank and file: all had seagreen-and-black Ribbon tied on their hats and to their breasts. At the new Churchyard in Westminster, some thousands more of the

> better sort met them, who thought not fit to march through the City. Many looked upon this funeral as an affront to the Parliament and the Army; others called these people 'Levellers'; but they took no notice of anyone's sayings.

It moved me deeply when I first read this passage from Whitlock in Carlyle: stuck in my memory, as well it might. For this was a great proletarian demonstration at the moment of the triumph of the bourgeoisie; and a singularly noble one. But these words — proletarian and bourgeoisie — strike a false note. That is why I use them: to prove it. It is not so simple as all that, not so jejune, not so mechanical, not so crude. There is something very wonderful about Trooper Lockyer's funeral; and something majestic about the necessity under which he suffered.

Charles on the scaffold in Whitehall, Trooper Lockyer against the wall in Paul's Churchyard, and Oliver, man of destiny, between them, feeling for them both, the old King and one of the new ones, the one dying for his loyalty to the kingdom that was past, the other to the kingdom that could not come. Things are not simple.

No wonder I stared at the inscription at the Lamb in Ely, promising me and my goods conveyance by Stage-Waggon to the Bull in Bishopsgate, where Trooper Lockyer seized the colours and was drum-headed. I had gone to Ely to find Oliver, and I had found him: not only where I thought to find him, in the Cathedral, where the vergers were lighting the candles in the choir for the very service he forbade; but I had found him on the wall of the Lamb. I looked at the old notice and dreamed. By such a Stage-Waggon Trooper Robert Lockyer's sisters and friends had journeyed to London to weep and watch over their brother's body, got down from it at the Bull in Bishopsgate, where all the trouble had been. The Bull at Bishopsgate was as familiar to the East Anglian in the seventeenth century as Paddington Station was to the Westcountryman in the mid nineteenth; it was the terminus of all East Anglian traffic to London, the rendezvous of East Anglian men.

And Whalley's regiment, to which young Lockyer had belonged, since he was a boy of sixteen, was one of the originals of the New Model. Edward Whalley was Oliver's cousin, lieutenant-colonel of Colonel Cromwell's own regiment when it was first formed. As the New Model had grown, he had been given his own regiment, and it fought with glory. It was recruited from the parts about Cambridge, Huntingdon and Ely. And Whalley himself was a lesser Oliver. He and his regiment had the guarding of Charles at Hampton Court, where he had mitigated the rigorous injunctions of the Presbyterian Parliament and refused to deprive Charles of his chaplains. Like Oliver, he was a man to whom religious toleration meant something real. Like Oliver, he meant well by the king; and like Oliver, when he was convinced that the king's transcendent faith with God was of the kind that dispensed him from keeping faith with man, he turned against him finally and became one of the Regicides. From all that we can discern, Whalley was a true man, whom the Dispensation did not lift to Oliver's eminence: therefore a little less of the Statesman than his kinsman, a little more inclined, I guess, to sympathize with the political Levellers, a little less prompt to quell them. He was loyal to Oliver to the last, and with him on his death-bed. It was characteristic of Whalley —- characteristic of his failure to rise to the height of a Statesman — that, though he supported his kinsman in all things else, he opposed his proposed assumption of the Royal title. It was, I believe, Cromwell's great mistake; and he made it out of deference to men like Whalley — men who had fought at his side from the beginning, who believed in and trusted him implicitly, whose simpler hearts and minds were perplexed by the threatened paradox that the man who had led them in long fight against the king should himself become a king.

Yet that was, I believe, the last and necessary accommodation to the things that are which was required of Cromwell if the maximum of the potentiality embodied in him were to be realized, without loss, in the texture of history. He would not have been more powerful as king than he was as Lord Protector, but less;

and that was what he wanted. Perhaps never in history has there ever been a man more reluctant to assume power, and more anxious to diminish and circumscribe it, once assumed, than he.

> I called not myself to this place. I say again, I called not myself to this place! Of that God is witness —and I have many witnesses who, I do believe, could lay down their lives bearing witness to the truth of that. Namely, that I called not myself to this place!

And, again:

> I can say in the simplicity of my soul, I love not, I love not — I declined it in my former Speech — I say, I love not to rake into sores or discover nakedness! The thing I drive at is this: I say to you, I hoped to have had leave, to retire into a private life. I begged to be dismissed of my charge; I begged it again and again; — and God be Judge between me and all men if I lie in this matter. That I lie not in matter of fact is known to very many; but whether I tell a lie in my heart, as labouring to represent to you what was not upon my heart, I say the Lord be Judge. Let uncharitable men, who measure others by themselves, judge as they please. As to the matter of fact, I say, It is true. As to the ingenuity and integrity of my heart in that desire — I do appeal as before upon the truth of that also. But I could not obtain what my soul longed for. And the plain truth is, I did afterwards apprehend some were of opinion (such the difference of their judgment from mine), that it could not well be.

To me, as to Carlyle long before me, these knotted, sinewy, wrestling speeches of the Lord Protector, are very wonderful. In them, one feels the dumb creative force of life striving for utterance, striving to say things that cannot be said; the great instrument of Becoming struggling to make comprehensible to men the Necessity that was upon him; the terrible effort of the spirit of Prophecy to achieve its final consummation, its complete embodiment, in political act, and all the agony of soul that

attended this painful metamorphosis. Thrice on his deathbed he was heard to murmur, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'. A fearful thing indeed, my Lord Protector! But where else have you been since you began? We know it, if you could not. We see the Dispensation that was hidden from you. You felt, at that dread moment, only the agony of the man who knows that once he had been with God, and that it was an unspeakable beatitude of joy and certainty, but that, afterwards, following that certainty, there was no end to the dark and doubtful places to which it brought you. Terrible places; fearful decisions. The storming of Tredah? Two thousand living men put to the sword, and none spared — no, not one. 'Tell me, is it possible to fall from grace?' he asked a chaplain. 'It is not possible.' 'Then I am saved,' said the Lord Protector, 'for I was once in grace.'

And Trooper Lockyer, my Lord? That godly young man, whom you killed for being immediate with God? And Charles, that godly king, whom you killed for forbidding immediacy with God? Is it that the ways of the Lord are indeed mysterious and past finding out?

They are mysterious, but as the centuries move on, we disentangle a little more of the pattern. We, little men, have glimpses that are hidden from the mighty ones. The mystery grows, and in growing, grows more plain. We see you, wrestling like a giant, to urge the world to growth and to save the world from chaos in the growing, struggling, like a Titan, for that accommodation between the earthly order and the divine, which eludes us yet, and will elude us for ever. But watching you, my Lord Protector, we know that it comes nearer. We see that all you had it in your lion heart and noble mind to do—all that was swept away, it seemed, at the very moment of achievement, has yet been done. You carried the divine necessity, whose faithful servant you were, to the limit of the possible, until the texture of events burst by the weight of meaning you would thrust into it, burst and fell apart, but gradually gathered itself again clumsily to fulfil the pattern of your prophecy.

And now the time is come to begin the work again: one more brave push towards that accommodation between the earthly

order and the divine, which will never be accomplished, but must always be attempted. My Lord Protector, have a thought for us. You prayed for us on your death-bed. 'Give Thy people consistency of judgment, one heart, and mutual love, and go on to deliver them, and with the work of reformation, and make the name of Christ glorious in the world.' But see, my Lord, we are a generation that cannot believe in God as you believed in Him. Perhaps some of us, in our strange fashion, have been in grace; perhaps some of us, in our strange fashion, study evidences and dispensations; perhaps some of us, in our strange fashion, understand you. But all is changed.

We too shall have to create our New Model. But that for which your New Model fought, that which knit it together to be an instrument of destiny, the new army of a new faith — immediacy with God — is no longer real to us, because no-one denies it us. What we are denied, my Lord, is a different thing: immediacy with Man.

Look now, my Lord, at what was hidden from you then. Your immediacy with God, which you conquered and by which you conquered, has divided man from man. Those Scriptures which were the word of the living God to you, and in which each man found his own message, have ended by making the word of Christ of none effect. Less than ever are we members one of another. In seeking freedom, we lost unity. The unity in Christ of which you dreamed, is more than ever a dream.

I say: immediacy with Man is our need, my Lord Protector. It did not trouble you. You had it, though you did not know it. It was in the world in which you lived; it gathered itself in you and became a flame of fire. It kindled men's hearts around you, when you went up and down in the Eastern counties gathering your men about you — a man speaking to men, human essence to human essence: till your regiments were bands of brothers. And even when they fought, they fought with brother-men: hand to hand, horse to horse, human essence against human essence. Yes, even the battle-fire itself was a conflict and conflagration of humanity.

All this is gone, and gone for ever. **And** not least by your great doing, who freed the individual and unleashed the Self; so that man's invention and man's self-destruction went hand in hand. Until there is no manliness in war, any more. Your simple path is closed to us.

No human man dare cry 'The Lord of Hosts!' while he drops a bomb from an aeroplane on a city of women and children. The sword of the Lord is broken in men's hands. If it is the sword, it is not the Lord's, and if it is the Lord's it is not the sword. The mustard-gas of the Almighty! It cannot be.

And yet we must fight; the necessity of one more brave push is upon us. And what we have to fight for is Immediacy with Man. For that is what we have lost: the sense of human relation with our fellow-men, of human responsibility, of human love. We are in the grip of the terrible devil of impersonality. What *we* would, that we cannot do. The machine has made impotent our humanity. We are not men, any more; we are unconscious or conscious slaves of a mechanical necessity. Though we do not know it, we are dying.

Some of us know our aim: to help men to become the human masters, not the inhuman slaves of the Machine. But that is abstract, remote. It means nothing to men; it is only words. Men who have lost their humanity do not know what it is they have lost. For the barrenness of their lives they seek a remedy in more barrenness; from deathliness they fly to death. Even if they dream, they have forgotten what to dream. It is here, my Lord, that we must begin the fight. This is the work and the call for our New Model: men who know the need, and have the will, to enter on a new human relation with their fellow-men; men for whom Immediacy with Man is as present and as real as that Immediacy with God was for your Saints; men who will fight for Immediacy with Man because they have it, as your troopers fought for Immediacy with God, because they possessed it. Men cannot, and will not fight, for an unknown thing. The seed, the earnest, the reality of the newness must be in them, and among them.

CHAPTER XI

'I AM THAT SATAN'

'I HAVE but lately stood on my guard against Milton,' John Keats wrote to his brother at a turning-point in his history. 'Life to him would be death to me.'

The inward conflict of which this striking phrase records the resolution was a struggle between Shakespeare and Milton in the soul of Keats. Those two poets represented, for Keats, two opposed principles; or rather he experienced them as the embodiment of two divergent attitudes towards life. These attitudes were alike in one thing only: that both were essentially religious, in the sense that they were attitudes towards the ultimate mystery of existence. Furthermore, the very fact that during the crucial months from June to September, 1819, they did contend with one another for possession of the soul of Keats indicates that they are perennial potencies in the human soul. They are, I should say, elemental and ultimate forms of spiritual experience; and because they are elemental and ultimate they are not easy to define.

For the Shakespearian attitude we cannot do better than turn to the words of Keats himself:

> I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke on various subjects, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from tho Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.

We cannot turn to an equally succinct meditation of Keats on Milton; but there is a letter to Reynolds which reveals how intimate to his thought concerning Milton is this matter of 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts'. He is comparing Milton, not with Shakespeare, but with Wordsworth; and he confesses his 'uncertainty whether Milton's apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth.' Wordsworth, he says to Reynolds, is true to our experience 'as far as we have experienced'; and in a famous passage he represents the unfolding of the sensitive human consciousness as the exploring of 'a mansion of many apartments' — two only of which he himself has passed through. The first is the Infant or Thoughtless Chamber; out of which we 'are imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us'. We pass thence into the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, which for the moment is full of delights.

> However, among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man — of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression — whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darkened and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open — but all dark — all leading to dark passages — We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist. *We* are now in that state — We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'. To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote *Tintern Abbey,* and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them — he is a Genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries, and shed a light in them — Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton — though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of mind — From the *Paradise Lost* **and**

> the other works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves to say, that his Philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years.

One is struck by the almost physical nature of this imaginative experience of Keats — this 'breathing', this 'convincing of one's nerves'. Such language is more than a vivid turn of phrase. It corresponds to the reality of the experience itself; which is an instance of what Keats meant by 'sensation', when he cried, 'Nevertheless, O for a life of Sensations rather than Thoughts!' We may bear that idiosyncrasy in mind, for it will help to illuminate a distinction between Milton and Cromwell.

But in this passage at any rate we have what Keats felt to be one essential difference between Milton and Shakespeare: that Shakespeare was content to be conscious of and submissive to the mystery of life, where Milton was impelled to demand a solution of it. To Keats, moreover, Milton's solution appeared to be almost schoolboyish.

Something of the sort we all feel in reading *Paradise Lost.* The mystery of the world's being 'full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression' is solved, but only by ignoring it. Satan, who falls through pride, successfully tempts Adam through Eve; and the miseries of the world begin — to continue until the voluntary descent of the second Adam, who differs from the first theoretically by being the co-equal son of God, but humanly by his power to resist the second Temptation. That inflexible resistance to the second Temptation is the theme of *Paradise Regained.* It would be difficult to conceive a more forbidding picture of Christ than that with which Milton presents us there — or, which is more important, one more curiously alien to the picture presented in the Gospels. The Temptation in the Wilderness, as Milton represents it, is no temptation at all. Jesus is torn by no inward struggle: he is impassive, and conscious only of predetermined victory. To me that is an incredible, and a meaning-

less Jesus: a conception which empties the Incarnation of its brooding mystery.

The theological pattern of Milton's divine drama is perfectly symmetrical. But it is strangely remote and alien from human experience. If, as we are required to believe, the deliverance of the human soul from the burden of the mystery is to be achieved by believing all this, we could hardly resist (as Blake did not resist) the thought that it might well be more consonant with humanity to be damned than saved. And where, we may ask, in all this steely and foreordained perfection, is the warmth of the specifically religious experience, which was not unknown even to the sternest Puritan? There *is* human warmth in *Paradise Lost:* no-one can mistake the breathing human passion of Adam and Eve in Paradise. But it cannot breathe in the atmosphere of Milton's theology. Whatever his God may be, he is surely not a God of love, who yearns toward his own wayward creation.

§

To a modern sense, it is perhaps a childish criticism to make of Milton that he was deficient in love; nevertheless, it is substantially the criticism made of him by two of the greatest poetic minds that came after him in England — Blake and Keats. Blake's *Milton,* despite its outward incomprehensibility, is the most searching and inspired criticism ever made by one great poet of another. In it Blake does what Milton could not do: he *loves,* and he loves Milton. And this love of Blake for Milton is marvellously imagined as the achievement of love by Milton himself. Thereby, Milton is regenerated, and ascends to Eternity. The greatest moment of a poem that is all one great moment, is the moment of Milton's recognition:

> Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate
> And be a greater in thy place and be thy Tabernacle,
> A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes
> And smites me as I smote thee and becomes my covering.

> Such are the laws of thy false Heav'ns; but Laws of Eternity
> Are not such; know thou, I come to Self Annihilation.
> Such are the Laws of Eternity, that each shall mutually
> Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.
>
> *(Milton,* p. 43)

Love, as Blake experienced it, consists in an incessant sacrifice of the incessantly re-created Selfhood. This is the reality of love between individual human beings, and it leads and expands inevitably into the loving service of God. So Milton, at this moment of his discovery of love, returns in Blake's transcendent imagination to earth, in order that he may

> discover before Heav'n and Hell the Self-righteousness
> In all its Hypocritic turpitude, opening to every eye
> These wonders of Satan's holiness, shewing to the Earth
> The Idol Virtues of the Natural Heart, and Satan's seat
> Explore in all its Selfish Natural Virtue, and put off
> In Self-annihilation all that is not of God alone,
> To put off Self and all I have, for ever and ever. Amen.
>
> *(Milton,* p. 43)

By love, which is self-annihilation, man becomes the creative instrument of God. This is the simple essence of Blake's sublime theology, which, to my mind, is final and all-inclusive. The means of that creative union with God is Jesus; and for Blake Jesus *is* that creative union, wherein we participate in 'the Divine-Humanity, the One Man, even Jesus'.

Blake's *Milton,* therefore, records — as the imaginative experience of an eternal creative moment in the mind of an obscure and despised poet — the redemption of Milton by the power of love, which is the Divine Humanity of Jesus. And an essential part of this process of self-redemption is Milton's true forgiveness of his wife. At the moment of his decision to return to earth — the counterpart of the decision of the Son in *Paradise Lost —he* cries:

What do I here before the Judgment? without my Emanation?
With the daughters of memory and not with the daughters of inspiration?
I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One . . .
Then Milton knew that the Three Heavens of Beulah were beheld
By him on earth in his bright pilgrimage of sixty years
In those three females whom his wives, and those three whom his Daughters
Had represented and contained, *that they might be resumed*
By giving up of Self-hood.

(Milton, pp. 18, 19)

Thus, in Blake's poem, Milton's mortal life is consumed and transmuted in the fire of the divine love. He sees that he, in his Selfhood, *is* the Satan whom he has outwardly condemned, but with whom (as Blake had discerned in an earlier flash of illumination) he was unconsciously identified. 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.' So Blake had said ten years before, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* Nor is this insight denied in *Milton;* it is included and transcended.

In Blake's vision, the God of *Paradise Lost* is a false God, against whom humanity itself must rebel. And in his magnificent picture of Satan, Milton is unconsciously uttering the rebellion of his own creative humanity against the false God whom his mind has enthroned. Blake's name for this false God, in his poetic mythology, is Urizen, the god of Law; and the false God reveals his nature in *Paradise Lost* by making the fall of Man dependent on the breaking of an arbitrary tabu. For Blake's imagination, on the contrary, the fall of Man consists precisely in this deposition of the true God by the false God, Urizen: the dethronement of the divine Imagination by the human Reasoning power. One of the crucial moments of illumination in *Milton* is thus the realization that 'Satan is Urizen'.

It may sound complicated: but that is because it is the utterance of a bewildering simplicity. Blake, if ever man did, saw not , through a glass darkly, but face to face. He saw that Milton's God and Milton's Satan are counterparts one of another: the one inevitably creates the other. Therefore they are one. The Good that claims the power to annihilate the Evil, is itself Evil, and creative of Evil. There is only one Good that is not self-righteous, destructive and Satanic: that is the Good which knows that it lives not by annihilating others but by annihilating its Self. No man in these latter days has seen that simple and profound truth with the same blinding clarity as William Blake. For him it was the key to all things, as it veritably is, to those who can receive it. This is at once the reality of the Christian mystery of the indwelling Christ, and the condemnation of its fearful perversion into a gospel of justification of the Elect.

> And it was enquir'd Why in a Great Solemn Assembly
> The Innocent should be condemn'd for the Guilty. Then an Eternal rose
> Saying: 'If the Guilty should be condemned he must be an Eternal Death,
> And one must die for another throughout all Eternity.
> Satan is fall'n from his station and never can be redeem'd,
> But must be new Created continually moment by moment.
> And therefore the class of Satan shall be call'd the Elect. . . .
>
> *(Milton,* p. 12)

Perhaps that, too, is difficult: but it contains the undying life of the Christian faith. The world is redeemed not by punishment but by love; nor can it be redeemed by any other means. The Elect who presume to destroy in the name of God create anew the Evil they claim to destroy. Therefore it is their destiny to be 'new created continually'. So also the Divine Humanity is new created continually, but by mutual self-annihilation. The interweaving of these two incessant creations, of Evil by the false Good, and of the Divine Humanity by mutual forgiveness, is the cosmic drama. In *Milton* Blake, in virtue of his divine inspiration, raises

up Milton from the false world to the true: from the world of self-righteousness to the world of self-sacrifice.

> The Bard replied: 'I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I sing
> According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
> Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
> To whom be Glory and Power and Dominion Evermore. Amen.

I should be lacking in elementary courage did I not acknowledge that to me this claim of Blake's is irrefragable.

§

I have justified my statement that Blake's criticism of Milton is that he was lacking in love. I have now to justify my statement that it is also Keats's criticism of him. Even our perfunctory examination of Blake's imaginative thought concerning Milton has prepared us for the crucial perception that Love is a potency which consumes and transmutes the whole of a man's faculties. No man can love with a part of himself. He loves with entire self-dedication, or not at all. He may love, and apparently cease to love, though even an apparent cessation of love will be at the cost of an inward convulsion. But Blake's belief (and mine) is that love is veritably eternal, in the sense that once it has been experienced it cannot be annihilated: it abides as the standard of experience, the norm of reality, rejecting all that is not consonant with itself as in some sort appearance and belonging (to use Blake's language) to the Sexual Threefold and not to the Human Fourfold.

Now the essence of love, whether it be love for a child, a woman or a friend; or whether it be love for a daisy, like Chaucer's, or a grain of sand, like Blake's, or for a Grecian Urn, like Keats's; or whether it be the artist's love for the object of his imagination, or the love of the man of religion for God, or the love of the man of

science for Nature — the essence of love in all these so various manifestations, whereby we know that it is identical in all, is self-annihilation. We are nothing, and the loved object is everything — literally, everything, not merely in the sense whereby love cannot be divided, but in the deeper sense whereby love includes everything. To love is to be consumed, in an eternal moment, by love; and that fire makes a holocaust of the universe. That is a metaphor; but the condition is a reality. Just as no man has ever really forgiven anybody without forgiving everybody, so no man has ever really loved anything without loving everything, or loving God. As the great mystic, Meister Eckhart, said: when the Self is annihilated, God *must* enter into possession. For the one, and the only obstacle to God, is the Self. That is the spiritual significance of the mystery of life whereby, in order that we may exist, we are separated from God by birth. The Self must be, in order that we may exist; and the Self must be annihilated in order that we may live. Love is the divinely appointed means of our return to God during existence. By love we 'die into life', as Keats said. Except for this dying into life, life has no meaning.

Now Keats knew all this: he had learned it fully during the writing of *Hyperion* and the *Odes*. But love, of which he knew so much, had visited him now in the shape of a woman; and his mind told him that it was like to destroy him. For the woman whom he loved did not love him as he loved her — with utter self-surrender. 'Withhold no atom's atom or I die,[5] he cried to her in anguish, in the name of 'merciful love, that tantalizes not'. And, though I observe that the wise of the world are against me, it is still my conviction that because Fanny Brawne withheld herself Keats sped like a comet to his death. True, had she not withheld herself she would have been a different woman. I do not blame Fanny Brawne for being what she was: but she did not *love* Keats.

So Keats, whose self-surrendering love met with no self-surrender in return, was forced out of the kingdom of imagination. He had to calculate and reason. How could he become the eligible

suitor in a marriage-bargain? His reason told him that his only chance was to write a successful play. He had no notion how to write a successful play, but his friend Brown had once written one. So he decided to follow Brown's instructions, and take his plot, and try to clothe it in language. He went away with Brown to accomplish this. This was the beginning of an immense effort of will. 'There is no good Will,' said Blake. And Keats who knew this also before, discovered it again. In order to secure his love Keats was forced into a posture of being that would have destroyed love within him, if love could be destroyed. But love, because it proceeds from the annihilation of the Self, is unannihilable. While he was engaged in this immense effort of will, he made Milton his hero.

That was alien to Keats. Wordsworth, as we have seen, was far more intimately real to Keats than Milton, because Wordsworth was faithful to 'the burden of the mystery'; more intimate still to him was Shakespeare, with his capacity for remaining in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' unto the end. No man, of Keats's nature, can make a hero of one who is not thus intimately real to him, save by a prodigious and finally self-defeating effort of will. The effort of will, in one so constituted, was inevitably as all-pervading as the surrender of love: the difference was that Keats's nature was to love, to obey great Nature by loving. The effort of will was supremely unnatural to him. But it was at work on every level. By will he kept himself far away from Fanny Brawne; by will he kept himself at his task of writing an unmeaning play; by will he wrought his being to such a condition of tension that at one moment the very sentences of his letters are, as he recognized, like 'so many strokes of a hammer'; and the final outcome of his effort was that he found himself trying to inure himself to separation from Fanny Brawne: yet his effort of will was made, in the beginning, in order to come closer to her. The tension reached a climax when, being compelled to go to London on urgent business connected with his brother George's desperate situation in America, he avoided seeing **Fanny** altogether. 'I love you too much to venture to Hampstead,' he

wrote to her in deadly earnest, 'I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire.'

Intimately connected with this clenching of the will was a crescendo of admiration for Milton, who represented to Keats at this moment the creation of art for its own sake: a sublimity of self-assertion. Half-consciously, he identifies himself with Milton's Satan.

> I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is next to fine doing the top thing in the world, the *Paradise Lost* becomes a greater wonder. The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect; the more does my heart distend with pride and obstinacy — I feel it in my power to become a popular writer — I feel it in my strength to refuse the poisonous suffrage of a public. My own being which I know to be becomes of more consequence to me than the crowds of shadows in the shape of men and women that inhabit a kingdom.

That is the note, and it is sustained in a sequence of letters: and the imaginative picture that he employed to steel himself is Milton and Milton's Satan.

> And now his heart
> Distends with pride, and hard'ning in its strength
> Glories.

It was Milton with a difference, as it was bound to be; and we owe to this Miltonic mood, or rather to Keats's struggle to maintain it, the precious fragment *The Fall of Hyperion,* in which the sense of his ultimate isolation becomes heart-rending.

Then suddenly, for no apparent cause, Keats surrendered. To what did he surrender? There is only one possible answer. He surrendered to love, on every level and with every faculty of his being. He wrote the *Ode to Autumn;* and he repudiated Milton in the memorable words which are quoted at the beginning of this chapter: 'Life to him would be death to me.'

CHAPTER XII

LEAR WITHOUT CORDELIA

THE nature of the connection between Milton's deliberate and splendid art and a certain inflexible posture of the self is not a subject for exact inquiry. That the connection existed, I am certain; I feel it, and Keats, whose experience was far deeper and whose sensitiveness far more delicate than mine, also felt it. Keats, as a poetic artist, second to none since Shakespeare, and Blake, as a prophet of spiritual verities unique in our history, both passed substantially the same judgment on Milton: 'Life to him would be death to me.' And whatever may be our verdict on the development of English poetry since Milton, we must admit the justice of Keats's opinion that Milton's magnificence led nowhere. 'English must be kept up,' said Keats. To be influenced beyond a certain point by Milton's art, he felt, damned the creative flow of the English genius in and through himself. In saying this, I think, Keats voiced the very inmost of the English genius. To pass under the spell of Milton is to be condemned to imitate him. It is quite different with Shakespeare. Shakespeare baffles and liberates; Milton is perspicuous and constricts.

Just as it has been with Milton's poetry, so it has been with his politics and his religion. They have been swept aside by the current of English history and English experience. No-one who is sensitive in matters of religion can regret the virtual extinction of Milton's form of Christianity. And his politics seem to have been hardly more than an aberration, a sort of projection into the field of politics of his own immense conviction that he was a good man. One feels, at moments — so hard it is to be just to Milton — that what was magnificent and prophetic in his political utterance, namely, his noble vindication of freedom of thought and speech, was the outcome less of an aching concern for the true welfare of human society than of an overwhelming but perhaps inordinate

belief that it would be intolerable if he, John Milton, were to be silenced by an Archbishop's chaplain or a Westminster divine.

It would have been intolerable, indeed: and to others than John Milton. Yet, almost in spite of myself, I have an uneasy feeling that, if ever a revolutionary pamphlet deserved to be refused an *imprimatur*, it was Milton's tractate on Divorce. It is characteristic of that element in Milton which lies heaviest on my stomach: it combines a plea for liberty with a fundamental lack of charity which so grates upon my soul that I have been sometimes tempted to suspect that the underlying purpose of all the glory of the *Areopagitica* was to clear a passage for the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Restored, to the Good of both Sexes from the Bondage of Canon Law and other Mistakes, to Christian Freedom, guided by the Rule of Charity*. The rule of Charity, indeed! Socially, not to speak of spiritually, Milton's new doctrine of divorce was a pure retrogression. The man could put away the woman for incompatibility, but not the woman the man. The man's obligation to the woman was contingent on her pleasing him; her relation to him was one of mere subjection. It seems never to have occurred to Milton that a wife might be miserable with her husband, as well as a husband miserable with his wife. I have an uncomfortable vision of the first Mrs. Milton (who was, after all, a child-wife) crying quietly to herself. Nor am I surprised at the fearful nemesis that overtook him in his three daughters, not one of whom felt a motion of love for him in her heart.

One cannot ignore the grim evidence against Milton on the level of common humanity, that is provided by the behaviour of his three daughters. Here is a Lear with no Cordelia. Whose fault can that have been but his own? And a Lear without a Cordelia is no Lear. He may have the pride of Lear, but he has not that potentiality of a final humility, which makes Lear so wonderful: that which justifies and makes divine Cordelia's utter loyalty to him. She sees the child in her father. That is to love, indeed. It is the essence and very motion of love to see the child in the loved one — the divine and unspotted creature of Innocence, the evident child of God, who is bewildered (as we all must be)

in the world of experience. It is the final triumph of the child in Lear that breaks our hearts into fragments, and redeems the world anew.

> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.
> *When thou dost ask me blessing, Vll kneel down*
> *And ask of thee forgiveness:* so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court-news; and we'll talk of them too,
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
> And take upon us the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out
> In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.

No daughter of Milton's ever saw the child in him; and that was because Milton had never seen the child in his wife.

There is something inhuman about Milton — perhaps not absolutely, but relative to any ideal of human behaviour that makes an intimate appeal to me. I respect him, but I cannot like him: still less can I love him, save as Blake loved him, by changing him. And the difference between Milton and that which claims the loyalty of my affection is in nothing more apparent than in the inevitable contrast between *The Tempest* and *Samson Agonistes.* It seems to me strange and revealing and pathetic that at the end of his days a great poet (as Milton surely was) should be meditating a drama on such a theme as that of Samson's destruction of himself and the Philistines.

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

I respond to that. **But** then I read on:

> Let us go find the body where it lies
> **Soaked in** his **enemies' blood;**

and I straightway wonder whether my response has not been cheated out of me. So, likewise, I read and respond to:

> Come, come, no time for lamentation now
> Nor much more cause, *Samson* hath quit himself
> Like *Samson,* and heroicly hath finished
> A life heroic,

only to read:

> on his enemies
> Fully reveng'd, hath left them years of mourning,
> And lamentation to the sons of *Caphtor*
> Through all *Philistian* bounds.

And I feel that the majesty of poetry has been prostituted and degraded.

Cromwell did things as terrible in Ireland, and I count him a hero still. But Cromwell was no poet. Milton was. And Cromwell was caught up in the grim necessities of action. Milton's part was contemplative, or hortatory. What chills my soul is the thought of the aged, sightless poet, austerely meditating the satisfaction of divine revenge. Had he learned nothing at all from Shakespeare? Was *Hamlet* written, so far as Milton was concerned, entirely in vain? Was *King Lear* nothing to him? And what of *The Tempest?* Did that mean absolutely nothing to him?

> *Art.* If you now beheld them, your affections
> Would become tender.
> *Pros.* Dost thou think so, spirit?
> *Ari.* Mine would, sir, were I human.
> *Pros.* And mine shall.
> Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
> Of their afflictions, and shall not myself
> One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
> Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury

Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

Whether or not Shakespeare would have called himself a Christian — and I see no reason whatever in his works to suppose he would not have done, and a great many for supposing that he would have done — there can be no doubt whatever of the spirit of charity in *The Tempest.* There have been many who have called themselves Christians who have had no charity: and many men of charity who have not called themselves Christians. But charity is the very dayspring of Christian virtue. As St. Paul said: 'Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' A charitable soul is the *anima naturaliter Christiana*\ and though I believe it is wellnigh impossible to retain one's charity without becoming a self-confessed, if not an openly avowed Christian, I look upon the charitable man, whose soul is sweetened and softened by *caritas,* yet who refuses the profession of Christianity, secret or avowed, as a Christian who knows not what spirit he is of. He is the second servant, who said 'I go not, Sir' and went; and like him he truly does the will of his Master.

In Milton's final meditation I find no charity at all. I am prepared to allow that he may not so definitely have identified himself with Samson as I feel he did. But the whole tenour of *Samson Agonistes* fits too exactly with the words at the end of *Paradise Lost* to allow me any effective doubt that in the triumph of Samson, Milton was gratifying his desire for vengeance. He had said in *Paradise Lost:*

So shall the world go on
To good malignant, to bad men benign,
Under her own weight groaning, till the day
Appear of respiration to the just,
And vengeance to the wicked.

In *Samson Agonistes* the just man respires. How far, if at all, Milton found in Samson's betrayal by Delilah, a picture of his own

inward breaking by his marriage, one cannot presume to conjecture. But again the picture of Samson fits exactly with Milton's polemic for divorce. Samson acknowledges responsibility for his own downfall, precisely as one imagines Milton acknowledged responsibility for his. He was guilty, but only of the sin of weakness. 'The woman tempted me and I fell.' It is a kind of self-accusation that tends to indurate the Selfhood; it is entirely lacking in the spirit of true penitence. The notion that Milton might have failed in simple charity towards his girl-wife did not enter his head, still less his heart; or if it did, it has left no traces.

And what had Milton to complain about? He was, like Samson, blind — and the deprivation was terrible. His cause had failed; but it deserved to fail. He was not imprisoned or persecuted. Compare Milton's lot after the Restoration with that of George Fox or John Bunyan or a thousand humble and forgotten sectaries who sought nothing more than to preach the gospel of Christian charity as it had been revealed to them. He, though he took little trouble to conceal his attitude of unrelenting opposition, was left undisturbed in his sullen aloofness; while they, who asked no more than to be suffered to worship God in their own fashion, and prayed for nothing worse than that the divine truth might illumine the souls and soften the hearts of their persecutors, were whipped and jailed and pilloried till their lives' end. Cromwell, at least, would have pitied them, and been moved by a tenderness towards them. It does not appear that Milton ever thought of them at all. His woes appeared to him so enormous that they swallowed up the greater woes of smaller men. Yet, as the world went in those days, he was a fortunate man in having escaped the scaffold.

§

'He had ceased to attend any church,' says David Masson of Milton's last years, 'belonged to no religious communion, and had no religious observances in his family. His reasons for this

were a matter of curious surmise among his friends, because of the profoundly religious character of his own mind; but he does not seem ever to have furnished the explanation.' I suspect that this is no such problem as Masson imagined; and that the solution of it is simply that the character of Milton's mind was not profoundly religious. That suspicion is confirmed by the posthumous work *De Doctrina*, where Milton develops his views without controversial exaggeration or acrimony. Not that the *De Doctrina* departs, in any essential, from the doctrine of his poems, but it expounds and expands it naked of the verbal and rhythmic splendours that sometimes conceal what it is all about.

Milton's real theme is the absolute freedom of man. The Atonement has disposed of the sin inherited from Adam. The second Adam has come

> Proclaiming Life to all who shall believe
> In his redemption, and that his obedience
> Imputed becomes theirs by Faith, his merits
> To save them, not their own, through legal works.

It *sounds* all right; and no doubt many a fervent Christian, of the Calvinist persuasion, would have accepted the creed thus stated for his own. But no fervent Christian, I believe, would have been comfortable with Milton's sublime confidence in his own infallibility. What it all comes to, for Milton, as his treatise on Divorce makes evident, is that the coming of Christ has cleared away the awkward inheritance of the past, and left Man free to follow Reason. That Milton calls Reason God is just a habit of his: he lived in an age when men had to call Reason God — partly, because it saved them from trouble, and partly, because it was natural, in the same way that it is unnatural to-day to call Reason God. But that does not alter the character of Milton's 'religion'. It is an apotheosis of Rationalism. And Christ, for him, is in the realm of things spiritual a sort of leader of the Barebones Parliament whose mission it was to clear away the lumber of the historical past.

That there was an element of this kind in the historic Christ

is indubitable. Christ was and is a revolutionary. 'The Sabbath was made for Man, not Man for the Sabbath.[5] There never was and never will be a more revolutionary utterance than that. But, at the same time, he came 'not to destroy, but to fulfil'. Unless we hold these two elements together in our experience and imagination, we pervert Christ to the service of our Selfhood. There is no way of holding those two things together except by the experience and imagination of Love: which is the experience and imagination of the living Christ. Christ came to destroy by love; and to destroy by love is to fulfil. It is, as Blake knew, to destroy Evil by destroying the Selfhood: ultimately, to destroy it in the only place where it can be destroyed — in our Selves. This is — and nothing else is — the gospel of Christ.

One does not blame Milton as a man for being ignorant of it; but I cannot but feel that it was to deny his own genius as a poet to refuse this truth. Of the necessity of this ultimate surrender of the Selfhood the poetic experience is premonitory: and a man of commanding poetic genius who denies satisfaction to this unconscious urge of his own creative nature — to become pregnant and fruitful by surrender of the Self— betrays and starves the divine power of life within him. Nothing can shake my final judgment that *Samson Agonistes* is a monument of poetical desiccation. 'Life to him would be death to me,' said Keats, as he surrendered himself to destiny. I believe it was death to Milton, too.

Milton's Christianity was a Christianity which disposed both of Adam and Christ. Christ's function was to cancel out the sin of Adam: and so to leave Man free — free to obey Reason. That is the real substance of Milton's theology, for all its paraphernalia of scripture learning. Nay more, this liberation of the human Reason was the real, though unconscious, purpose of Milton's outward reverence for the Scriptures. For the Scriptures, used without the guidance either of wise authority or of the new values revealed in the gospel of Christ, inevitably become a vast assemblage of discrepant moral injunctions and examples whence every man can take what seems good to him. The sacrosanct

Bible then becomes a singular and often sinister apparatus for investing the Selfhood with divine authority. No real comprehension of the great and various Puritan movement is possible unless this inward ambiguity of the basis of its morality and religion is understood. Milton's significance is great because he represents the pure and extreme case: of a man in whom Puritanism was in fact operative, beneath its professions and appearances to the contrary, as a complete emancipation from Christianity, and the incentive to a purely secular individualism.

One cannot study the history of the period without being impressed by the singular confluence of legalism and Scripturalism on the parliamentary side. On the one wing the Common Law, on the other the Bible, is searched for precedents; birds of a feather, the lawyers and the puritan divines — the brethren of the short robe and the long —play into one another's hands; they are spiritually indistinguishable. The common Law, as read by the lawyers, the Bible, as read by the divines, became instruments to enable the prosecution of interests under the aegis of Authority. The Law, on the one hand, and God on the other were the only rulers of princes: the lawyers declared the maxims of the one, the divines the oracles of the other, and not unnaturally they were in harmony.

Such was the condition in the relatively unanimous early days of the Civil War; and an illuminating history of it could be written from this perspective. This perspective is quite necessary for the understanding of Milton: for Milton, like Cromwell, though quite otherwise than he, was moved by something nobler than interest. Each according to his nature experienced the upsurge of a great creative moment in human history. In the early days of the Civil War, the alliance of the legalists and the Scripturalists flourished. They represented the homogeneity of the great new middle-class, the *grande bourgeoisie,* which was to become the aristocracy of the eighteenth century. The Law and the Scriptures enabled them to clothe their revolutionary doings with transcendent Authority. Their real though unformulated purpose was precisely that which they finally achieved in 1688 —

the substitution of their own authority for the royal authority in Church and State. After 1688 they controlled both; thenceforward they consecrated the bishops, from among themselves, appointed the ministers of state, from among themselves, and divided among themselves the enormous profits of governing a kingdom, at a price fixed by themselves.

Cromwell and Milton strove for something nobler than that. It was because Cromwell strove for something nobler that the Civil War was won by his men. At the back of his mind and the bottom of his heart Cromwell cherished a passionate desire for religious toleration. That was entirely outside and indeed alien to, the purposes of the great middle-class; they wanted merely to appropriate the existing authority in Church and State to themselves: they were not more, but rather less tolerant than the royal and episcopal authority they fought against, and would have fought in vain had it not been for Cromwell. It may seem paradoxical to insist on the reality of Cromwell's passion for toleration, and the dynamic part it played in the Civil War, when we consider the grim war of extermination which he waged against the Irish Papists. But we must remember that the Papist professed intolerance; it was fundamental to his creed that the heretic should be exterminated, and that all things were lawful against a heretic nation: so that it was no wonder that Cromwell felt that toleration of the Papists was a contradiction in terms. The same moral dilemma has recurred, in a purely secular form, to-day. Can a democracy afford to tolerate two such political movements as Fascism and Communism, whose avowed intention is to destroy democracy itself? Cromwell, in refusing toleration to the Papist, was in the position of the man who believes that Fascism and Communism are beyond the pale of democratic privilege; but there is this significant difference, that in Cromwell's day any degree of toleration was a revolutionary novelty, whereas the Fascist and the Communist have proclaimed systematic intolerance in a world that has painfully groped its way to toleration.

CHAPTER XIII

TENDERING THE WHOLE

IT was at the point in the development of the civil war when Toleration had begun to emerge as the dynamic ideal of the Parliamentary army — an ideal actually *embodied* in the composition of the New Model army, which was Cromwell's creation — that Milton and Cromwell converged. It is at this point that Cromwell in the realm of act, and Milton in the realm of imagination, became the vehicles of a single vast creative urge: and the responsive beholder is thrilled by the act and utterance, in these two great men, of a nation in travail of a new and universal truth. *Paradise Lost* is magnificent; but it is, to my sense, only fitfully alive compared to the prophetic urgency of the *Areopagitica* — those marvellous periods of 'a venturous edge, uttered in the height of zeal, and who knows whether it might not be the dictate of the divine spirit'. I have no doubt that the author of the *Areopagitica* did write at the dictate of the divine spirit, and that he was not the less authentically inspired by God because in him spoke the creative genius of the English nation at a moment when it was creative indeed: when England became New England, beyond the seas and at home.

> Lords and Commons of England, consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to.

I do not wonder that, as a young man, I could not read the *Areopagitica* save through a mist of tears; and I am proud that among my not yet forgotten selves was a youth whose heart, in the years before the war, was swollen to bursting, not as he then

imagined — seeking to account for his own incomprehensible reaction — by the organ splendours of the prose, but by the divine creative spirit that gathers and soars into incandescence in that magnificent poem.

> Behold now this vast City: a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with His protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguered Truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. What could a man require more from a Nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies? We reckon more than five months yet to harvest; there need not be five weeks; had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already.
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> While there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions, for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city. What some lament of, we should rather rejoice at, should rather praise the pious forwardness among men, to reassume the ill-reputed care of their Religion into their own hands again. A little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity might win all these diligences to join and unite in one general and brotherly search after Truth; could we but forego this prelatical tradition of crowding free consciences and Christian liberties into canons and precepts of men. . ..

> It is a lively and cheerful presage of our happy success and victory. For as in a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital but to rational faculties, and those in the acutest and pertest operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is, so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has not only wherewith to guard its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest points of controversy and new invention, it betokens us not degenerated, nor drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrinkled skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious ways of truth and prosperous virtue, destined to become great and honourable in these latter ages. Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam; purging and scaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.

I would give all *Paradise Lost* for the *Areopagitica.* That may be Art; but this is Prophecy — wherein the Artist forgets himself, and speaks at once for God and a People. If they would experience what it feels like to be carried on the topmost wave of a creative revolution, those who speak the tongue that Milton spake have a simple way: read the *Areopagitica.* If they would know what, at its noblest and fieriest, the great movement of Puritanism really *meant* — read the *Areopagitica.* If they would know a little of what power it was that enabled a simple country gentleman to gather about him men who fought as no Englishmen had fought before, to create a New Army, and to lead it to victory after victory — read the *Areopagitica.* If the time for Ironsides is over, and the New

Model must verily be made anew, still we shall do well to read the *Areopagitica.* It is the very breath of the spirit that made Toleration a possibility in the actual world; the surge and urge of the life that brought the new and equivocal child to birth.

§

This then was the point where Cromwell and Milton met, fused in a common striving for something beyond all interests, beyond the comprehension of lawyers and divines, but not beyond the comprehension of the russet-coated captain 'who knew what he fought for and loved what he knew'. This was the growing tip of the great tree of Life in those days, whose urgency was embodied in the men of Cromwell's army — which was itself the City that Milton describes.

So the force of life — of life striving at a crisis in human history towards more life — carried Cromwell and Milton clean beyond the 'whole noise of timorous and flocking birds', the lawyers and the divines. Together they discovered that 'new presbyter was old priest, writ large'; and they moved together as the crest of a great wave of divine inevitability, Cromwell acting, Milton understanding, interpreting, justifying the ways of God to man, through one prodigious happening after another, through — let Cromwell's own words tell through what:

> The bringing of offenders to justice — and the greatest of them. Bringing of the State of this Government to the name (at least) of a Commonwealth. Searching and sifting of all persons and places. The King removed and brought to justice; and many great ones with him. The House of Peers laid aside. The House of Commons itself, the representative of the people of England, sifted, and winnowed, and brought to a handful, as you very well remember.

That comes from Oliver's speech to the Nominated Parliament, the Barebones Parliament, as it is called. I know of no more wonderful political speech than that; it is the companion-piece to

the *Areopagitica.* On this matter I am wholly with Carlyle, in his conviction that those who find it either hypocritical or incomprehensible are very shallow people indeed.

Parliamentary continuity had come to an end: at last the Rump had been sent packing. And now the nominated Parliament had been summoned to be what an age more accustomed to revolutions would call a Constituent Assembly. It was the revolutionary middle-class of England, purged of its interests, purged of its lawyers, purged of its divines — purged almost, one might say, of itself. There was the rub. The Rump had had to go because it could not, or would not, renew itself, except on a class basis: and that meant imperilling the thing Cromwell held most dear — Toleration. The middle-class as a class was Presbyterian: in it only the boldest thinkers like Milton and Sir Harry Vane, or the tender-minded Christians, like Cromwell himself, were Independents. The strength of the Independents was in the lower classes: not indeed the very poorest, but in the small free-holders and small traders and craftsmen who composed the rank-and-file of Cromwell's army.

No conceivable Parliament, elected on the middle-class franchise, which was all that a responsible statesman could dream of without plunging the country into chaos, would pass a Toleration Act. Yet the Army, which had won the victory, had fought for Toleration, and was itself Toleration in arms. Yet again the one necessity was to bring to an end the rule of the Army, and establish a civil government. The dilemma was cruel indeed. For a moment the Nominated Parliament seemed to be the one solution: created by destiny itself, as manifest in the convergent necessities of establishing Toleration, and restoring a *civil* government. This was Cromwell's hope: and how great, and anxious, and tender, and wistful the expectation that inspired him can be felt by anyone who reads his speech to that remarkable assembly. For a remarkable assembly it was, despite its nickname, despite its inadequacy, and despite the jeers of generations which have never experienced, in act or imagination, what it costs to make a revolution that helps to liberate the world.

And truly it's better for us to pray for you than counsel you . . . that you may exercise the judgment of mercy and truth. It's better, I say, to pray for you than counsel you; to ask wisdom from Heaven for you . . . yet truly I think of another Scripture, which is very useful, though it seems to be for a common application to every man as a Christian —- wherein he is counselled to ask wisdom; and he is told what the wisdom is that's from above. It's 'pure, peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits'; it's 'without partiality and without hypocrisy'. Truly, my thoughts run much upon this place, that to the execution of judgment you must have wisdom from above; and that's pure. That will teach you to exercise the judgment of truth; it's without partiality. Purity, impartiality, sincerity: these are the effects of wisdom, and these will help you to execute the judgment of truth. . . .

Truly, the judgment of truth, it will teach you to be as just towards an unbeliever as towards a believer; and it's our duty to do so. I confess I have said sometimes, foolishly it may be, I had rather miscarry to a believer than an unbeliever. This may seem a paradox — but let's take heed of doing that which is evil to either! If God fill your hearts with such a spirit as Moses had and Paul had — which was not a spirit for believers only, but for the whole people! Moses, he could die for them; wish himself blotted out of God's book: Paul could wish himself 'accursed for his countrymen after the flesh': so full of affection were their spirits unto all. And truly this would help you to execute the judgment of truth, and of mercy also.

A second thing is, to desire you would be faithful with the Saints; to be touched with them. And I hope, whatever others may think, it may be a matter to us all of rejoicing to have our hearts touched (to speak with reverence) as Christ, being full of the spirit, was 'touched with our infirmities', that He might be merciful. So should we be; we should be pitiful. Truly, this calls us to be very much

touched with the infirmities of the Saints; that we may have a respect unto, and be pitiful and tender towards all, though of different judgments. And if I did seem to speak something that reflected on those of the Presbyterial judgment — truly I think that if we have not an interest of love for them, we shall hardly answer this, of being faithful to the Saints.

In my pilgrimage, and in some exercises I have had abroad, I did read that Scripture often, forty-first of *Isaiah*, 19; where God gave me and some of my fellows, encouragement what He would do there and elsewhere; which He performed for us. He said, He would plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle and the oil-tree; and He would set in the desert the fir-tree and the pine-tree and the box-tree together. For what end will the Lord do all this? That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it; — that it is He hath wrought all the salvations and deliverances we have received. For what end! To see, and know, and understand together that he hath done this and wrought all this for the good of the whole flock. Therefore, I beseech you, — but I think I need not — have a care of the whole flock! Love the sheep, love the lambs; love all, tender all, cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good. And if the poorest Christian, the most mistaken Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you — I say, if any shall desire but to lead a life in godliness and honestly, let him be protected.

It is very marvellous to me: and it tells me what Cromwell had at heart when a little afterwards he took the title of the Lord Protector. Yet how different it is from Milton! Cromwell's speech is imbued with the one quality that the *Areopagitica* has not — tenderness. Nevertheless they meet in a point. Milton claims freedom for the individual to think as he will, Cromwell claims freedom for the individual to believe as he must. They come to the one centre from opposite points of the circle, reach the

same conclusion from different motions — Cromwell's of the heart, Milton's of the mind. Cromwell is Christian; Milton is not. But both are splendid.

§

Such was Cromwell's expectation of the Barebones Parliament: it was indeed even more than this. But I forbear to quote the throbbing climax of his speech in which he feels, and makes us feel, that the miracle may happen and the Kingdom of Heaven may be brought down to earth by this assembly. His disappointment, as it must needs have been, was bitter; yet I think it was more bitter than it need have been. The Nominated Parliament was an assembly of good men; but it was not an assembly of Cromwells. It was, as I have said, the revolutionary middle-class of England, purged of its interests, purged of its lawyers, purged of its divines, purged almost of itself—a godly, goodly, ghostly body, endowed with all that the mind could carry of Oliver's purpose, yet perhaps greatly lacking in the quality which he possessed so enormously, and for which he had pleaded with them — the humility which brings the sense of the whole.

It was not their fault. They strove manfully: they sought to perpetuate the purgation out of which they sprang. They had courage, to strike at all that was interested in the lawyer and the divine; they strove simultaneously to abolish the lawyer's fees and the parson's tithe. It was, at least, a symbolic act. They also strove to reform taxation in a manner that threatened the security of the Army's pay. But I think their real failure was that they were too proud to recognize the great man, and he too humble to impose himself upon them. The solution to the mystery of the collapse of the Barebones Parliament is contained in Oliver's 'unbowelling' of himself in a letter to Fleetwood:

> Truly I never more needed all helps from my Christian friends than now! Fain would I have my service accepted of the saints (if the Lord will), but it is not so. Being of

> different judgments, and of each sort most seeking to propagate their own, that spirit of kindness that is to them all is hardly accepted of any. I hope I can say it, my life has been a willing sacrifice, and I hope — for them all. Yet it much falls out as when the two Hebrews were rebuked; you know upon whom they turned their displeasure.
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> But the Lord is wise, and will, I trust, make manifest that I am no enemy ... If the day of the Lord be so near (as some say), how should our moderation appear? If everyone (instead of contending) would justify his form by love and meekness, Wisdom would be justified of her children. But, alas, I am, in my temptation, ready to say: 'Oh, would I had wings like a dove, then would I, &c': but this, I fear, is my haste.

At bottom the trouble was that it takes great men to recognize a great man, when he is also a humble one. Even Milton himself was a smallish man beside Cromwell; yet, in his heart of hearts, he thought himself a greater. Nor did he keep it to his heart of hearts. In the second *Defensio,* wherein he approves of the supersession of the Barebones Parliament, he eulogizes Cromwell indeed; but in terms which show that he knew a greater man. 'He alone is worthy of the appellation [great] who either does great things, or teaches how they may be done, or describes them with a suitable majesty when they have been done.' The point was not lost on his contemporaries.

> All which (wrote Morus in his reply to the *Defensio)* has so elated you that you would be reckoned next after the first man in England and sometimes put yourself higher than the supreme Cromwell himself. . . You grant him arms and rule; you claim genius and the gown for yourself. He is to be called great, you say, who either does great things, Cromwell, to wit; or teaches great things, Milton on Divorce, to wit; or writes worthily of them, the same twice great Milton, I suppose, in his *Defensio,*

The Barebones Parliament was a gathering of little Miltons, with much of his confidence and little of his genius — good men and godly, but persuaded that when saintliness and inspiration were in question they yielded place to none. They could neither understand nor admit that Cromwell towered like a Colossus above them all. When he, in all sincerity, handed over the civil government to them, they verily persuaded themselves that they were greater than he. They were neither humble nor imaginative enough to see that their function was unselfishly to help him in his superhuman task of at once saving England from chaos and establishing the simple and revolutionary principle of Toleration. They wanted to be independent and sovereign; so did he desire them to be. But he knew that they must take account of the fact, first that he alone could hold the army together, second that he alone could hold England together. If they had worked with him, and accepted the service he wished to give them, something more (I believe) might have been accomplished than the government by Major-Generals to which in despair he had to resign himself at last. Instead of narrowing the basis of government, he might have been enabled to broaden it.

But they behaved like an assembly of ideologues. They could not, in Oliver's simple and all-meaning phrase, 'tender the whole*. They could not understand what he meant when he said (confessing it a paradox) that he would rather 'miscarry to a believer than an unbeliever'; that it were better to do injustice to themselves, the Saints, than to others; that having fought the fight, it was their duty to be humble towards the prejudices and interests of others. In short he called upon them to feel their way, with his vast sensitiveness to grope before them. They did what their logic compelled them to do — to challenge the divines, and the lawyers, and the army itself. What they might have done more modestly with Oliver behind them, they could not do with him against them: and that they compelled him to be.

§

It is not easy to convey the difference between Milton and Cromwell: like most of the distinctions that are paramount in life, it is either obvious or imperceptible. Milton was a master of expression; Cromwell was not. But Milton's sublimest period is not so deeply moving as the sentences wherein Cromwell struggles to express himself. Imagination, in him, as it was in Keats, is almost a physical sensation. It is the travail of a total man, who speaks from the bowels — bowels of tenderness and compassion. He speaks from the bowels, and speaks of them, too. He 'unbowels' himself to Fleetwood, and in one of those simple and inspired phrases that sometimes came to his lips he urged toleration upon the kirkmen of Scotland, and urged it in vain; 'I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, bethink you that you may be mistaken.'

Cromwell was always ready to bethink himself that he might be mistaken. Not so Milton. Cromwell was endowed by nature and by God with that Negative Capability which to Keats was the quality required for supreme achievement — 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason'. He experienced 'the burden of the mystery'. And though it was manifest in him, and to him, in categories that are unfamiliar to men of to-day — as the inscrutable workings of God in events and wrestlings with the spirit in his humble chosen servant — his experience was, I believe, intrinsically the same as the creative experience of the Shakespearian poet. Nor could it well be otherwise, for, as I read history, Cromwell was the demiurge of the modern world, upon whose massive shoulders the private and individual man was heaved into the centre of European history, for weal or woe.

The miracle of history is that, as Keats said of Milton, 'a mighty Providence subdues the mightiest minds to the service of the time being'. I am far indeed from defending all that Cromwell did. His cruel war against the Papists is terrible to me.

But I must acknowledge that my sensitiveness is that of a modern man, and of one who can find the solution of a like perplexity in the contemporary world — shall Toleration be given to Intolerance? — only in a difficult but absolute acceptance of Christ's teaching of non-resistance to evil. Those who do not accept that teaching cannot judge Cromwell; while those who do accept it will not desire to judge him.

The world struggles ignorantly and desperately towards Christ. That, to me, is the meaning of history. Were I to read history otherwise, as I have striven to do, I should succumb to a final despair. Either Christ will triumph, or humanity is doomed. That is to me no sectarian conjecture: men whose sensitiveness was infinitely greater than mine have been compelled before me to the same conclusion. Shakespeare was compelled to it; Keats was compelled to it; Blake was compelled to it. For Christ^means acceptance, and forgiveness, and love. Whenever a man is driven to acknowledge that those things are necessary to human life, and that without them men become as the beasts that perish, but without the innocence of the beasts, then he has accepted Christ. He knows that either Christ will triumph, or humanity is doomed.

By this standard I finally measure the greatness of men. And Cromwell to me is the man who strove to realize as much of Christ as was possible in his age. Through him the seed of Toleration was kindled to grow into a tree. That it did not grow beyond Toleration of those who would tolerate others is no marvel. The most enlightened conscience of to-day has not passed beyond that point; those who do pass beyond it are visionaries still. But toleration, in Cromwell's day was a veritable revolution: and when, by his means, it became a massive power in history, it was in consequence of his struggle to bring Christ to earth — a tiny fraction of Christ, it may be, yet infinitely beyond the capacity of the average men of his day. I do not pretend that I can enter wholly into the experience of Cromwell; I do not pretend to understand, on my pulses, how the Christian tenderness that was in him was reconciled with his grim vengeance in

Ireland. Indeed, I believe it never was reconciled. But, in spite of the contradiction, I am convinced that Cromwell's tenderness was real, and Christian. Christ was a living reality to Cromwell; Christ was not a living reality to Milton. Milton's passion for toleration was primarily assertive of himself, not, like Cromwell's, primarily protective of others. That is not to say that Milton's impassioned assertion of his own freedom to think and utter as he felt was not valid, 'in the service of the time being'; it was. No matter whether the origin of the passion for Toleration lies in a conviction of one's own worth, or in a 'sensation' of the preciousness of others, it is effective as a passion for toleration when that, at the moment of history, is the one thing needful. There is the moment of fusion and incandescence, when disparate motives and divergent ideals fuse into the elemental power necessary to upheave society with a new leaven; when idiosyncrasy and individualism are veritably subdued to the mighty workings of divine necessity in the breaking and making of nations. Of such a moment the *Areopagitica* is an imperishable witness.

But when the wave had spent its force, and the impossible, the unimaginable, had been achieved, then the creative unity was sundered again, and the deep difference between Cromwell and Milton was manifest once more. They advanced side by side to the Nominated Parliament; and I think Cromwell in his speech to that assembly spoke for Milton, too, for a copy of that speech was found among Milton's official papers. But then they parted. Milton really desired a government by an intellectual and republican aristocracy, such as was adumbrated in the Barebones Parliament; but Cromwell did not. And it was not merely because Cromwell, in his instinctive sagacity, knew that it could not be; he really desired something different — something perhaps impossible to define or describe, something more humble and less subversive, more conservative and less opinionated, more tolerant and less challenging. It is so easy to read the mere externals, and to decide that it was the actual proposals of the Nominated Parliament that turned Cromwell against it. I do not believe it. It was the spirit of it that was the stone of offence. It was too

rational. Now that the grim struggle was over, Cromwell wanted conservatism leavened by love (fantastic though the phrase may sound). He wanted to maintain the structure and the loyalties of society, with a changed spirit. Perhaps what he desired and dreamed was impossible. Who can say? But what seems to me certain is that there was, in fact, only one possible way by which it could have been achieved: namely, if Cromwell had been invested with the royal dignity. The 'historical mission' of the Barebones Parliament was to make Cromwell, King Oliver I.

It was the last thing they dreamed of. It was against their principles; and still more it was contrary to their self-conceit. In this matter they were like the American lady who said to D. H. Lawrence: 'In my country we are *all* kings.' By an irony of history they were confronted with a man who was so kingly that he was too humble to make himself one, except by their expressed desire. And that alone, I think, might have mitigated the rigours of the Protectorate, established toleration as an axiom, and spared England the squalor of the Restoration, and the sordidness of the Great Revolution.

§

Some measure of disillusion was inevitable. The reality of no earthly society could have satisfied all the expectation that utters itself at the end of Cromwell's charge to the Barebones Parliament. But Milton's disillusion was more acute than the Lord Protector's. Cromwell was tender to the weakness of men; he was more than tinged with the belief that it was the privilege of the just man to suffer fools gladly. He felt himself primarily to be a shepherd of the flock of the whole people; and he was inclined to love men for their infirmities. He came as near to loving his enemies as any great ruler of men has done. He 'tendered the whole'.

But to Milton weakness was wickedness; and in his curious version of Christian morality it is hard to discover any other sin.

As he interpreted the failure of the Barebones Parliament, the cause of the just and righteous, on the point of triumph, had been defeated by the perversity of men. Fools! They ought to have known that it was good for them to be ruled by the Saints. In his heart, Milton was far less democratic than Cromwell. He looked upon a theocratic republic as the ideal. Cromwell did not; at best it was for him an uncomfortable necessity to save society from chaos. And, though it would be a misnomer to speak of Cromwell as a democrat, he had that in him without which democracy becomes a mere mechanism — the Christian sense of compassionate brotherhood. Milton, on the other hand, was the authentic intellectual aristocrat, with an unconcealed contempt for the weaker brethren.

The Commonwealth, which was for Cromwell an interregnum, during which Toleration might become an English habit, was for Milton in itself perfection. As its prospects of permanence diminished he became embittered; and he loomed more largely in his own eyes as the one faithful defender of the cause. 'Among the faithless, faithful only he'. With Milton, as the years go on, it becomes strangely difficult to separate the Cause from himself. When he speaks in the *Areopagatica,* we have no doubt that he too is the servant of something far greater than himself; we have no doubt that it is 'the noble and puissant Nation[5] whom he sees 'rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks'. The Samson of his vision then was a regenerate England, a New England. But what of the Samson in *Samson Agonistes?* Is he still the Country and the Cause, waking from the sloth and sleep and sordidness of the Restoration? Professor Grierson thinks so; and perhaps he is right. But if it be so, the generosity of the cause is gone: the warm flesh and pulsing blood has withered, and a grim ghost remains — calling for vengeance upon its enemies. No doubt, the exigencies of the chosen story were compulsive. Samson cannot be more than Samson. But why did Milton choose that story? The Samson, who is half-discerned and not named in the *Areopagitica,* is strong with futurity. The Samson of the final poem is huddled and shrunken into the past,

backward-looking, and 'drooping to a fatal decay'. It may be that, as Professor Grierson suggests, Milton's main purpose was to justify the divine necessity which had led on Cromwell and his followers, and to reveal the God who

> hath full right to exempt
> Whom it pleases him by choice
> From national obstinction, without taint
> Of sin, or legal debt;
> For with his own laws he can best dispense;

but it remains true that the implicit morality of the poem is far beneath the level of that for which Cromwell and Milton himself had once striven. Whoever he may be, the Samson of the poem is but a ghost of the half-seen figure of the *Areopagitica.*

Nor can we escape the fact that he is very like Milton himself. And the sense of constriction I receive from the poem, the feeling that it has no far horizon, opens up no 'illimitable depth of speculation', sets quivering no responsive chord, but leaves me coldly admiring its marmoreal perfection — this (I cannot but conjecture) derives from the fact that in Milton the Cause and his Selfhood are identified. Divine necessity is one thing; but coldly meditated vengeance quite another. To my sense the Self triumphed in Milton; and *Samson Agonistes* bears on it the marks of a long brooding over injuries, in the spirit of self-righteousness. It may be perfect, but it does not live. It has no charity.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MIRAGE OF PROGRESS

A STORY is told of the late Jules Lemaitre's undertaking to give a course of lectures on Rousseau to some Royalist society in Paris without having read his works; yet even so, with all the large licence of abuse that his ignorance allowed him, he did not satisfy a lady in his audience. She seriously complained: 'Monsieur, vous n'avez pas été assez injuste!' To be sufficiently unjust to Rousseau is, perhaps, an ideal impossible of attainment by the Right in France where the Left has made him the patron saint not merely of the French Revolution, which has some justification, but of 'La République des Comités', which has none at all. But it is attainable in countries where Rousseau is neither the Messiah nor the Devil of active politics; and in recent years it has seemed to be attained in the works of the late Mr. Irving Babbitt and his 'Humanist' disciples. For the disciples, at least, Rousseau has become the prime author of all the maladies from which civilized society suffers to-day.

This is not criticism, but credulity; and in a healthy reaction America itself has lately produced some of the sanest and solidest attempts to stem this tide of superstition and sciolism. Mr. Wright's *The Meaning of Rousseau* was memorable: Mr. Josephson's biography was at least serious; and Mr. Hendel's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Moralist* was a beautifully patient exposition of the gradual development of Rousseau's thought. He followed its growth as the true naturalist follows the growth of a living thing; and he traced the subtle influences upon Rousseau's thinking of his chequered and embittering life-experience. It is the best evidence of Rousseau's genius that he does continually arouse this kind of critical loyalty. It is not possible, as he himself foresaw, to be deeply moved by his work — perhaps one should say to be

moved by his work at all — without recognizing his passionate sincerity. Of that sincerity his very contradictions are the evidence; for apparent contradictions are necessary in thinking of the kind towards which Rousseau incessantly strove — the thinking which seeks to be faithful to the total verity of human experience. Rousseau's mind was central; it never wandered far from the simple, profound and permanent problems of humanity. These problems were to him never abstract speculations of the intellect as they so often were to his colleagues, the *philosophes;* they presented themselves to him as immediate experience, in the form of urgent moral issues. The acquisition of that equivocal faculty (for it involved a miserable and harassed life for him as a man) was the real content of his 'illumination' on the road to Vincennes. Suddenly he stepped out of contemporary society; he looked upon it with genuine detachment — and he was dismayed. Ever afterwards his dominant concern was to imagine, in the creative sense of the word, a society in which a good man could live without being stultified by his environment. Since that is indeed the most permanent concern of human kind, and since Rousseau concentrated all his singular powers upon it, it is scarcely surprising that his spirit is mighty yet.

§

It belongs to the essence of Rousseau's insight — and no doubt also to the enduring influence of his youthful study of Plato — that there should be a manifest analogy between society and the individual man. The three ages, or phases, of the development of the individual into full awareness — the phases which William Blake distinguished as Innocence, Experience and Imagination — have their counterpart, according to Rousseau, in the history of society. The age of Innocence is the state of Nature; the age of Experience the condition of actual society; the age of Imagination is the condition of a society based on a true Social Contract, wherein society as a whole is animated by the moral purpose

which the individual, in so far as he has reached the status of true manhood, knows to be that without which he cannot be truly human. The society of the true social contract is, in fact, a society in which, on entering, each individual covenants to love his neighbour as himself. In a society where such a compact was real, the individual would surrender himself in order to gain possession of his humanity. Those who have attacked Rousseau's doctrine as the charter of mob-democracy and frenzied nationalism are entirely ignorant of what he was trying to convey.

It might fairly be said that Rousseau's doctrine is vision and not politics. He would have been the first to agree; only he would have added that without vision politics is a process of inevitable degeneration. And by vision he would have meant a constant and undimmed insight into the moral purpose of society, and the will to be loyal to that purpose to the end. Nothing could be a more fantastic parody of Rousseau's doctrines than that which proceeds from those who persuade themselves that in emphasizing the necessity of an 'ethical will' in the individual and in society they are opposing Rousseau. Not since Plato himself has there been a political philosopher who so emphasized the truth that unless the ethical will is dominant within it a human society is merely a negation of its own idea. His starting-point was the fundamental Greek principle (of which the enduring monument is Plato's *Republic)* that in order to become a completely ethical being a man must become a conscious political being also; that the good life is possible only in society, but only in a society which is created and maintained by the deliberate purpose of making the good life possible.

This, for Rousseau, was the justification of society: that society was necessary to the fulfilment of the moral being of man. 'The happy age of gold was ever a state alien to the human race, which failed to apprehend it when it was to be enjoyed, or else lost it when it was to be known.' In other words, the social state and human self-awareness arrive together: the one is the condition of the other. This self-awareness, which eventually enables man to discern how profound and ineradicable are his moral impulses —

and this is what Rousseau meant by the 'natural goodness' of man — imposes upon him the new duty of making society the vehicle and instrument of those moral impulses. The society he discovers surrounding him is one which frustrates those impulses and makes their fulfilment impossible. It is an 'unnatural' society.

§

This conception of Rousseau's that contemporary society was 'unnatural' is based on his affirmation that men are 'naturally good'. That assertion infuriates a certain kind of orthodox Christians, and also the ultra-modern tribe who are orthodox without even being Christian by profession. The reason why it infuriates them is obvious: for the Catholic dogma is that man is 'naturally bad' and labours under the burden of Original Sin. If these two affirmations are simply set opposite one another, they bristle; and it is a cat-and-dog fight between them. That is what generally happens. Astonishingly few people understand what Blake meant when he said: 'There is a Negation, and there is a Contrary. We must destroy the Negation to redeem the Contrary.'

The dogma of Rousseau that men are 'naturally' good, and the Catholic dogma that men are 'naturally' bad, are 'contraries' not 'negations'; they simply cannot conflict with one another, because they do not touch one another—if you look upon them both from Rousseau's point of view. For Rousseau was not saying, what he is generally represented as saying, namely, that men *are* good; but that there is a deep, natural desire in men's hearts to be good.

> *Emile* (Rousseau wrote in 1764) is a quite philosophical work on the principle advanced by the author in other writings that *man is naturally good.* To reconcile this principle with the other truth, no less certain, that men are bad, it would be necessary to show, in the history of the human heart, the origin, of all the vices. This is what I have done in that book.

His simple proof of the natural goodness of man shows plainly what he meant by it. It was proved, he said, because man, when

he is not good, is always miserable. If there is not a bent towards goodness in man's nature, what on earth should make him miserable when he is not good? Nothing on *earth,* says the Catholic — but something in Heaven. Rousseau would never have dreamed of denying this; but its significance depended on what was meant by Heaven.

Well, said Rousseau, since there is this bent towards goodness in man's nature, and since there is no denying that on the whole man behaves pretty badly, what is the matter with him? There must have been a Fall, somewhere, somehow. The Catholic agreed about this. The question is: What was the nature of the Fall? The Catholic said that man fell by being born. The entry into corporeal existence was the Fall. (Blake and Shelley both inclined to agree with Catholicism on this point.) Rousseau said: No, the entry into society was the Fall. Neither the Catholic nor Rousseau, remember, was talking history. People are rather dense in these matters, these 'scientific' days; they tend to assume that a man must be talking either Tact', or nonsense. But the question here belongs to a quite different order — whether we call it the order of Imagination and Truth, or the order of Myth and Dogma. The real issue was whether human existence was good enough for man. Was it, *intrinsically,* sufficient or insufficient for his needs?

We must not run away with the idea that this is a stupid question. Rousseau and the Catholic were both agreed that things were, in fact, pretty bad. The difference was that whereas the Catholic believed that it was impossible that things should become, essentially, any better, and that therefore the only chance of a radical improvement was to be sought in a different order of existence altogether, Rousseau held that there was a possibility of an essential improvement in temporal existence — of an improvement sufficient, in the main, to relieve men of the need or the necessity of looking exclusively to another order of existence to have their heart's desire fulfilled.

Again — since I hate to be unjust to Catholicism, and being a Rousseauist in this matter, I may be — I must point out that the Catholic belief, which seems so pessimistic, is not so really.

For, even if the Rousseauist view is the true one, what of the people like himself, like you and me, and a few thousand million others, who are destined to die before temporal existence becomes relatively satisfactory? It seems that, on any showing, they get a dirty deal. Justice appears to demand that they should not be deprived of a stake in the millennium. The Catholic scheme provides as it were a long-term justice in the universal economy. But Rousseau did not bother about this. He said to himself, as a greater than he had said to himself before — that it was hardly in accord with the idea of a different and better *kind* of existence, if people in it were still to be bothered about justice. If the case for Heaven was that justice demanded it, he knew of something better himself. In his own best moments, he passed *beyond* justice, and entered into a condition 'where everything is forgiven and it would be strange not to forgive'. That would do for and probably was, Heaven; and man's instinct for justice had better get busy on things more relevant to itself. Justice for temporal existence; and forgiveness for Heaven, and man's heavenly moments.

But it is odd what different things Justice means to different men. For Rousseau the notion of Justice was blindingly simple. First, it was obviously an affair of society. For suppose men did not live in society, but in isolated independence — Rousseau did not say that men actually had lived like that, as his crasser critics assert — there would be no need of and no desire for justice. Justice is a social necessity.

Now by saying that Justice was a social necessity — necessity that arose from the congregation of men into civil society, Rousseau was not saying that, as historical fact, men congregated into society for the purpose of obtaining Justice— how could they, when in 'the state of nature' they had no need and therefore no conception of Justice? — but that, once they were so congregated, a new need developed in man's nature — the need of social justice: which was negatively expressed as a condition in which society did not actually impede the natural goodness of man, and positively as one in which that natural goodness was fostered and cherished. Unless this need was satisfied, man was not better off in society

than he was in the 'state of nature', but worse off. In other words, only if society became the means by which man could live in the bond of equal justice with his fellows, did life in society represent a moral advance upon life in 'the state of nature'. Unless society were a society of equal justice, or at least were consciously striving to become such a society, life in society was bound to be an insidious process of moral degeneration.

§

This came to Rousseau with all the force of a religious illumination in October 1748 — precisely a hundred years before the *Communist Manifesto* — while he was walking from Paris to Vincennes to visit Diderot in prison. It completely overwhelmed him; his eyes streamed with tears, and when he had done weeping, he sat down under a tree to make hurried notes of all that he had so suddenly and strangely understood. It was an authentic and momentous case of conversion. The scales had fallen from his eyes; and the famous *Discourse on Inequality* was the first result.

It is curious that the historians and the critics of Rousseau should be bothered, as they are, by this experience of Rousseau. Generally speaking, they can make nothing of it. What was it (they wonder) that Rousseau then saw and understood? And they incline to the belief that it was a sort of sentimental brainstorm, although they cannot help suspecting — for indeed it is obvious, and Rousseau categorically affirms it —- that all Rousseau's subsequent life and activity, which was (they allow) in some way epoch-making, grew directly out of his sudden certainty.

What was the great idea? as the Americans say. We can put the answer in American, also. Rousseau suddenly saw that the Idea of Progress was 'all bunk'. And that was, I submit, a tremendous realization — so tremendous that very few people can really get hold of it even to-day. So we must try once more to get hold of it: for it is even more important to-day than it was in 1748, Some people imagine that Rousseau's realization was superseded by Marx's realization one hundred years later. They are quite

mistaken, as I will try to show in another chapter. No one **(I hope) will** accuse me of depreciating the significance of the *Communist Manifesto;* but I am convinced that it cannot be really understood, either in its advances or its retrogressions, except by those who equally understand the great previous charter of social revolution — namely, *Du Contrat Social.* That was the charter, and Rousseau the 'prophet', of the first great modern European revolution — the French Revolution; the *Communist Manifesto* was the charter, and Marx the 'prophet' of the second great European Revolution— the Russian Revolution. (Speaking as an Englishman, I should call them the second and third, and make the first the Revolution of 1649.)

Others will say that Christianity has always insisted that Progress is 'all bunk', and that Rousseau's insight was nothing new. That may be true enough in theory; but in fact Christianity had capitulated, just as completely as secular society, to **the** idea of Progress. The visible Christian Church had become an apparatus for endorsing secular and nationalist society. It may have used the old phrases concerning human corruption, but it did not believe in them. The *abbis* were *philosophes.* It will be true to say that Rousseau was reaffirming the fundamental insights of Christianity, only if we simultaneously admit that the visible Church had forgotten all about them, and that Rousseau himself was the true defender of the faith, the solitary and disregarded prophet of the invisible Church against the secularism of the visible one. This was to be proved by the event. Rousseau was the main source of the revivification of Catholic Christianity in France.

However, the important fact is that Rousseau in October, 1748, suddenly saw that the idea of Progress was 'all bunk'. What was this Idea of Progress? First, it was not so much an Idea as an unconscious, instinctive faith. It was part of the intellectual and moral climate of the few in Rousseau's early days; but it was **to** become part of the intellectual and moral climate of Europe **for** two centuries — a rosy haze which only now is beginning **to** be dissipated. And even to-day, a prodigious number of **intelligent**

people simply cannot accept as *reality* any social or political phenomenon that does not fit in with the Idea of Progress. They, somehow, raze from the book of memory the Great War, the Russian Revolution, and the advent of Fascism and Hitlerism. These things, for them, have not really been: and the simple reason for this startling non-existence of the real is that to allow existence to these realities would mean to uproot their unconscious faith in the Idea of Progress. It is, for the vast majority of intelligent men to-day, whether they call themselves Christians or Rationalists, Liberals or Marxists, the only *faith* they have.

There is a story of a little boy who, when taken to see the great Emperor in procession, called out that he had no clothes on. Rousseau was like that little boy; he, alone of his age, had seen through the garment of Civilization to the sorry skeleton beneath. The idea of automatic moral progress was a mirage. It was essential to the Idea of Progress that moral progress was automatic, since the Idea of Progress was none other than the idea that every advance in mechanical and material Civilization was self-evidently an advance for humanity. Since this was the common assumption of the *ilite* of Rousseau's day and of the whole civilized consciousness of the epoch which followed him, and an assumption so unquestioned that it took nothing less than a European war to knock it out of me one hundred and seventy-five years after Rousseau — I have never had much difficulty in understanding, first, that it must have come as an overwhelming illumination to Rousseau, in a time of peace and prosperity and general intellectual enthusiasm, and, second, that once the conviction that the Idea of Progress was a mirage had become basic to all his thinking, the foundation of all his works, it was inevitable that those works should be revolutionary in effect — in so far as they had any — **and** that he himself, who tried hard to live by his new conviction, should be accounted mad. It is glibly said that he succumbed to persecution-mania towards the end of his life. In a sense, it is true. He was faced with the awful question which always does face these solitary pioneers of the human consciousness — the question that **surely** faced Jesus of **Nazareth at the crucial moment of his earthly**

career: 'Am I mad? Or is the whole world mad? It must be one, or the other.' I do not believe it is possible for a man who has been faced squarely by that question to keep his sanity, in the common or garden sense. He is bound to go a little queer, or very queer. But he may be able to keep it to himself. Rousseau kept it to himself; he never became 'mad'. If you would like to know exactly what he was, read the *Riveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire;* they are 'queer', and they are magnificent.

§

Now what was the consequence of having seen 'in a vision' that the Idea of Progress was a mirage? Or, to put it rather differently, that progress in the externals of Civilization—in inventions and amenities — meant absolutely nothing for the moral progress of Humanity? The first consequence was that Rousseau straightway became an exile from Civilization. By this discovery he had put himself outside society. He became, morally speaking, an outlaw. He was abruptly severed from the whole unconscious ethos of his age. At first, as one can understand if one understands his 'illumination' at all, he was bewildered by the fact of his own sudden isolation. He did things which seemed clumsy and bizarre and outrageous to his contemporaries and even to his friends, but which appear (I hope) merely simple and honest to us who owe him at least some measure of the understanding he never got in his own lifetime. He tried to put himself outside that Civilization of which he had seen the deception. He wore the simplest clothes, abandoned all the prestige and emolument that would have accrued to the literary equal of Voltaire, and took to earning his living by the only manual talent he had — that of copying music. He had a fortune in his grasp; he simply and deliberately let it drop. As far as it was possible he was determined to sever his connection with a sham civilization. He stuck to his determination to the end.

So much — and a bare allowance — for the personal consequences of Rousseau's realization. Now for the impersonal, ideal,

or ideological ones. He had seen the absolute distinction between external and material civilization, and inward and moral civilization. The next step was inevitable. If, as was obvious to him, external Progress was completely independent of moral advance, then it followed that mechanical progress necessarily tended towards a large-scale moral degeneration. To take an obvious example: if a savage is armed only with a bow and arrow, there are obvious limits to the harm he can do; but put a modern incendiary bomb into his hands, and give him the modicum of instruction (of which a chimpanzee is susceptible) necessary for dropping it, and he becomes ten thousand times more potent for evil. Strictly speaking, this multiplication of the savage's potency for evil is not a moral degeneration of himself; but unless it is totally suppressed, it involves a fearful degradation of the moral condition of mankind as a whole.

More subtly, the great economic invention characteristic of Rousseau's day — the 'division of labour' — over which the economic optimists waxed eloquent, the elementary form of what we now call 'mass-production', whereby each individual workman repetitively performs some fractional part of a total productive operation, was to Rousseau, now he had seen the light, little short of diabolical. It turned a human being into a machine, and totally deprived him of his 'natural' birthright — creative joy in his work. Moreover, it took him from his 'natural' occupation (which was 'to cultivate the earth and live by its fruits'), and drained the countryside of its sturdy peasantry to heap them in the foul slums of great cities. The progress of the 'arts and sciences' of external Civilization was, to his awakened vision, merely a progress of moral decadence. It is plainer to some people now; but still only to few, although the really formidable advances of material civilization were only beginning in Rousseau's day. Put in a single phrase, he warned men against the fatal moral consequences the fatal human consequences, of that industrial era into which they were so confidently plunging. Naturally, they did not listen to him; they did not even understand him. He was to them simply a barbarian, with a genius for paradox, who wrote divinely.

CHAPTER XV

THE NATURAL SOCIETY

ROUSSEAU foresaw the danger; he tried to turn Europe back from its blind onward drive into the industrial era, into capitalist society. But he did not merely warn men; he showed them the remedy. The remedy, or what Rousseau believed to be the remedy, is in *Du Contrat Social:* than which few books have been more fantastically misunderstood. I cannot here expound that book as it should be expounded. I will merely underline the real gist of it. It is quite simple. Such works of genius are simple if you have the clue to them — if you have in some sort *experienced* their central and germinal 'idea' — but if not, then they inevitably shatter into a mass of contradictions and logical absurdities. At Oxford I had to listen to lectures on Rousseau's *Social Contract;* it seemed to me one of the dullest of dull books. But the time came when I understood it, and I knew it was one of the most exciting.

For its fundamental idea is this: that, under an advancing material civilization, unless society becomes a moral entity, it becomes a madhouse. It must be one or the other. That recalls the former dilemma of Rousseau: 'Am I mad, or is the world mad?' *The Social Contract,* is, as it were, the explication, or the magnification, of that same dilemma: or a posing of the same central problem from another angle. Many lines of real creative thinking — the thinking, not of the mere intelligence, but of the total being, which is the prerogative of creative and prophetic genius — converged to bring *The Social Contract* to birth. But one was central. It proceeded directly from Rousseau's realization. Thus. Must he go on being an outlaw from society? Obviously he must, so long as the morality of society was totally different from his own. Society, so long as it was that it was, and he remained part of it, compelled him to acts which filled him as a

moral being with abhorrence. One act in particular smote his conscience terribly, as well it might, the act by which he had handed over his new-born children to the Foundling Hospital. There had been nothing else, it seemed, for him to do. He was extremely poor at the time; and he had not done it with a light heart. But it had seemed to him then that the existence they would have in the Foundling Hospital was better than any that he could secure them. Was he, Jean-Jacques, responsible for that act? He looked into his heart as honestly as he could and declared that he was not. I do not propose to discuss the question whether his answer was true, that society was really responsible. Since it was an act which he afterwards bitterly repented, it is plain that he did *not* altogether convince himself. But, indubitably, there was a solid amount of truth in his answer. He was a man with a mission: he was faced with a choice. His children or his mission. And he chose his mission. Certainly, he would have chosen differently had he been a little more certain of the nature of his mission at the time. But the fact was that, if the society in which he was entangled had been based on any sort of social justice, there would have been less need for his mission and still less compulsion to sacrifice his children.

§

Theoretically, there were two remedies for this internecine and crippling conflict between 'moral man and immoral society'. One was to cut oneself off from society altogether. This is the one his contemporaries, and a great portion of posterity, have accused him of advocating. Clever young men and middle-aged men will be found writing big books to-day on this assumption: that Rousseau advocated a return to the splendid savage. He did nothing of the kind. He was, by far, the profoundest political thinker of his age, and he was a man who experienced life for himself. Such men sometimes appear to take a long while to reach conclusions which are taken for granted by commonplace intelli-

gences; and it took Rousseau some time to reach the conclusion, first, that it was impossible to cut himself off from society. If he did by some desperate expedient succeed, he would cease to be a man. The second conclusion was that it was impossible for society as a whole to return to the state of nature. But when Rousseau had reached these conclusions, they were real conclusions: not notions, but experiences. He had found that he could not cut himself from society without inflicting a mortal wound on his own nature; and that the true meaning of his first excited notions that society must return to the state of nature was that society should 'advance to nature' — in other words, that society should become 'natural'.

This was Rousseau's one remedy for the conflict between moral man and immoral society. What did it mean — that society should become 'natural'? It meant that society must correspond to the better nature of man. For the nature of man was that part of him wanted to be good, decent, just. Society, instead of exerting, as it now did, a steady pressure on man to be worse than he is, must exert an equally steady pressure on man to be better than he is. There was no point of indifference, as was assumed by the dupes of the Idea of Progress, where man in society could remain simply what he was, plus the accumulating advantages of an advancing mechanical Civilization. That was a fatal fallacy. The truth was that entry into society faced man with an inescapable dilemma: in society, he must either degenerate, or be regenerated. There was no standing still. And only if society became an instrument of man's regeneration was it a 'natural' society.

The thought was subtle and simple. And Rousseau, in a flash of genius, expounded it in *The Social Contract* with all the amazing lucidity of a pure idea. Man was a creature of a mingled yarn; there was perhaps more good than bad in him, but far more than either good or bad was the enormous amount of sheer inertia. It was this inertia which was the devil in the new social condition. The inerta did not greatly matter in the hypothetical condition of the state of nature, or in more rudimentary societies; but in the condition of highly organized society it became positive evil —-

for inertia had direct consequences for all the other members of society. Thus for me as an isolated individual it did not greatly matter whether I kept my drains in order; if I caught typhoid by my slackness, it was my funeral. But in society such a sin of omission brought pestilence upon my neighbours. What was mere inertia in isolation, becomes positive evil in society. There is a radical change in the moral nature of man-in-society, which is well expressed in the language of Christian morality; sins of omission become in society sins of commission.

That was a fact, patent to observation, if only men had sufficient love of the truth to observe it. Thus — and here comes a crucial point — in demanding that society should become the instrument of man's regeneration, by exerting a steady compulsion upon him to transform his inertia into a positive force for good, instead of allowing it to become a positive force for evil, Rousseau was not making some extravagant and idealistic demand upon man-in-society. On the contrary, this demand was inherent in the very idea of society. Unless society were inspired by this conscious moral purpose, it became irrational to the imaginative Reason; irrational in the sense in which a stunted, cankered plant is irrational — not because there are not sufficient causes for its condition, but because its condition is alien to its intrinsic nature, and it is become incapable of fulfilling its own inherent purpose. The trouble with society was that there was no authority outside except rare freaks like Rousseau, or his great master Plato, able to pass judgment on it in the name of the Imaginative Reason, as a gardener on his tree. The Christian Church, whose sublime function was precisely this, had capitulated to the existing order. Now a renewed consciousness of the whole, without which society was irrational, could arise only from within.

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The Social Contract may be described as being, after Plato's *Republic*, the greatest attempt of the European mind to create

a consciousness of the social whole — and so to bring the social whole into being. It is the effort of society itself, working through the sensitiveness, the imagination, and the reason of a single man, to achieve self-awareness: it represents, and itself is, the creative struggle of society to pass from unconsciousness into consciousness. Therefore, because it is real, not an intellectual day-dream but a prophetic achievement, it necessarily takes the form of a demonstration that the elements, the germs, of the consciousness of the social whole are already present in society. There is, so to speak, an instinctive and unconscious striving towards wholeness in society, which only needs to be purified and gathered together by the consciousness to become decisive. This is the meaning of Rousseau's great and epoch-making demonstration that sovereignty resides in 'the general will' alone and is inalienable from it; and of his crucial distinction between 'the general will' and 'the will of all'. First and foremost, this was a demonstration of the essential autonomy of society. It is very hard for us to appreciate the colossal innovation which was made by Rousseau's imaginative insight at this point. For it seems to us almost a commonplace to insist the sovereignty resides in 'the general will' — that society is its own sovereign, its own ultimate authority. Having degraded Rousseau's doctrine to a democratic commonplace, we cannot understand it; neither can we be surprised by its newness, which is not ephemeral, but eternal. Indeed, we have only to watch the vain struggles of Rousseau's predecessors in the theory of society to reach this idea to realize how inordinately difficult it was to compass it. Yet they were not fools; they were at least as clever as we are. It suggests that there is more in Rousseau's doctrine than we dream.

The 'social contract' was an accepted term of previous political theory; and always the theorists had to conceive two contracts: first, the contract by which men formed a society, and then a further contract by which they corporately assigned sovereignty over themselves to a monarch or a government. They were trying, in vain, to rationalize the religious theory of 'right divine'. Rousseau brushed the legal rigmarole aside, and reasserted a

religious doctrine of society. Sovereignty resided always in 'the general will' of the members of any true society. There were only two possible theories of state-authority: one was that it derived from a supernatural source — 'the divine right of kings', whereunder the relation between the sovereign and the people (however it might be glossed over by benevolence or responsibility) was the relation between master and slave; the other that all authority derived from the people itself. If you abandoned the former, you must accept the latter. There was no legal and contractual halfway house between. Whether the people was conscious of its own authority was another matter. But until it became conscious of its own authority and capable of exercising it responsibly, society would be conscious and rational in 'idea' only, unconscious and irrational in fact.

But that was only the first step. This step corresponded to the period of adolescence in the individual, when he emancipated himself from paternal authority and knew and claimed and exercised his own independence. The further and far more serious lesson had to be learned, that freedom did not consist in following appetite, but in being obedient to those alone of one's impulses that could be universalized. (From this Kant derived his theory of morality.) This was the meaning of the vital distinction between 'the will of all' and 'the general will'. To use our former phrasing, 'the will of all' might perfectly well be the expression of the inertia of the people; the 'general will' is the expression of its desire for good. To secure that 'the general will' should be really expressed and truly obeyed — this and this alone was the true problem of politics. Until it was solved society would remain unnatural and irrational.

Rousseau was not optimistic about the solution. To him the mere outward form of democracy meant little; because the spirit of democracy meant everything. A democracy which merely expressed 'the will of all' was no better than a tyranny. Further, a democracy whose members did not rise to the conception that a very great measure of economic equality must be imposed by the 'general will' in order to safeguard the sacred reality of political

equality, would quickly cease to be a democracy. And, in practice, looking at the world of his own day, it appeared to him that the most probable chance of achieving a natural society lay in a small, predominantly agricultural community. What Rousseau was absolutely clear about was that the achievement of a true society depended on an unremitting moral effort on the part of its members, on their being permeated by the understanding that the health of the whole depended on the health of every individual part. A true society was a society determined to overcome all inertia, and the symbol of this determination was the new and sacramental understanding of 'the social contract' — the new contract, whereby the individual surrendered himself absolutely to society, to receive a new self back again; he made a complete sacrifice of his independence to achieve his freedom. For true freedom consisted in obedience to the moral law within us; and in a true society our evanescent impulses towards the good would be consolidated and made permanent in the universal laws that were the expression of the 'general will'; they would be removed from the contagion of individual inertia.

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Here is a paradox against which the most violent criticism has been directed for two centuries; it rages still. Rousseau is accused of being the prophet of the omnipotent State, the demonic enemy of individualism and Liberalism. And, if individualism and Liberalism mean *laisser-faire* — and that is what they generally do mean — why, there is no denying that Rousseau is its bitterest enemy. There is no possibility of reconciliation between them. *Laisser-faire* is simply the Idea of automatic Progress in its most sordid form. We need not worry about it: it is dying, if it is not dead. But to the germ of moral value that lurks in the core of Liberalism there is something terrifying in Rousseau's apparent demand that the individual should surrender all his 'rights' to society, and something too specious to be trusted in his assurance

that by giving up his independence, the individual gains his freedom. We must examine the nature of this moral resistance of Liberalism.

Now, what is the germ of moral value which, I have admitted, lurks within the core of Liberalism? It is the conviction that the conscience of the individual is finer and more sensitive than the moral conscience of any known, or any conceivable society, and that if the individual is required to surrender to society the right of acting and speaking according to his conscience, the most potent of all the influences that work towards the moralization of society is made null.

One thing is quite certain: that Rousseau never dreamed that the effect of entering into a true social contract could be the stifling of the voice of conscience within the individual. If 'the general will' was truly general, it was inconceivable that it should enact a law so patently contrary to the interest of the whole. But that is superficial. Rousseau saw deep and clear; and he would, in reply to this objection, simply have asked: *How* can any right of the individual to speak and act according to his conscience possibly be secured to him except by society as a whole? If such a right exists, it exists simply because society allows it. To think and argue as though the individual had, or could have, a prescriptive and indefeasible right *against* society, is to be guilty of an elementary confusion between what is a 'moraP right, which may be conceived to exist, though it is not allowed or effective, and an actual right, whose reality must depend on its being allowed and effective. The real and effective right to freedom of speech obviously depends upon the state-authority in any society; and in a rational society that state-authority depends upon the 'general will*. The only right that does not depend on the authority of the State is the right to die for one's convictions. In fact, under the Rousseauist 'social contract' the Liberal is asked to surrender nothing that he has not surrendered already. His inalienable 'right* to freedom of speech is a mere illusion. He enjoys it, where and in so far as he does enjoy it, precisely because it is granted to him by society. What Rousseau is really asking is that he should

recognize this fact, and not live in a dream world, and prate about illusory individual 'rights' when they are, in reality, dependent on the permission of society.

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This is a hard doctrine; and people fail to understand it because they conceive the State as something alien to themselves — something hostile and inimical which, even in the Marxian millennium, has to 'wither away'. Rousseau is therefore accused of divinizing the secular, and anticipating the totalitarian, state. His doctrine is in fact the absolute antithesis of this. For him the State — in either the ordinary, or the Marxist, sense — is withered away at every moment that an individual enters into a true social contract, and only in such a moment. Socrates may serve as an example of the relation that Rousseau teaches. Socrates entered into a true social contract with the city of Athens — not the perishable, but the eternal city of Athens. He refused to be silent, and he submitted to the punishment ordained by the law. The simple paradox of that famous historical happening lays the ghost so eagerly conjured up by a false Liberalism —- the ghost demanding in Rousseau's name a surrender of the individual conscience to the State. Such a surrender is humanly impossible, for the man who has the courage of his conscience. The Rousseauist obeys his conscience, and accepts the punishment of the Law. There are, for him, two sanctities: his conscience and the Law, provided it is veritably a Law, and not an arbitrary edict. Thus the necessary condition of any actual state containing a potentiality of the eternal one is the reign of universal Law. The Laws may be unwise but provided they are universal, and there is no privilege before the Law, the possibility of etérnizing the temporal society is given. The totalitarian states of to-day, which deliberately reject the universality of Law, are, from Rousseau's point of view, so many reversions to political barbarism.

The only practical safeguard (and that a terribly flimsy one)

of the universality of Law is the establishment, as a fundamental and unchangeable law of the constitution, of equal political rights for all men. If that could be made sacrosanct — and Rousseau came to the conclusion that there was no way of ensuring the sanctity of universal Law, short of individual regeneration — but if it were possible, then the hard task of educating men into the knowledge of what that principle really means could at least begin. As men achieve this, individual by individual, so will the eternal city take substance in the regenerated fabric of the temporal city, and the Laws will gradually be improved until they come to be the expression of the deepest human will for good in society. The totalitarian states, Fascist or Communist, are an absolute negation of Rousseau's principles: but even the democratic-liberal states are passing into the same condition. All particular legislation by edict of the executive is anathema to Rousseau.

The instinctive Liberal objection to Rousseau's 'Social Contract' thus proceeds from a complete failure to understand what that doctrine really is. It may, at first sight, seem strange that whole generations of political thinkers have completely misunderstood Rousseau, and perhaps presumptuous of me to declare that they have. But, in saying this, I am merely echoing Rousseau's own words concerning his hostile critics:

> 'It is possible (he wrote) that they have replied to what I have said, but they certainly have not replied *to what I meant to say.* If, therefore, someone would take the trouble to search for my real convictions among my unsatisfactory expression of them, he might find that I am wrong, but he will certainly not find that I am wrong for the reasons my adversaries give, for these reasons are totally ineffective against me.'

It seems, perhaps, queerer still that the author of a book so lucid, so logically rigorous, so famous as *The Social Contract,* should make a remark like that long after it was published. But it is a case of the secular conflict between the Imagination and the Intellect, the everlasting incomprehensibility of the Reason by the Under-

standing, the incessant effort to compel the Idea into the Concept. Rousseau was a man of Imagination, Reason and Idea; his hostile critics have always been men of the Intellect, the Understanding and the Concept. And by some compulsion of their nature they have always been forced, so to speak, to visualize Rousseau's 'social contract' as an actual agreement made by the kind of men they think they are. Inevitably, they see Rousseau as a kind of State-Moloch, grimly demanding: 'Give me everything,' and since they imagine that they possess, absolutely possess, all kinds of rights and properties, they are simply horrified. Just as ordinary people, who call themselves Christians, are always horrified by the notion that they should be compelled to take seriously the demand of Jesus — that they should lose their lives to save them. Rousseau's social demand and the religious demand of Jesus are counterparts of one another.

Rousseau's demand was simple. It was that men should understand that in society their rights were not really theirs as atomistic individuals. They had to see, with the eye of imagination, that all the 'rights' they believed they had were in fact so many permissions from society, which, so soon as society became conscious of its sovereignty and capable of exercising it, might be revoked, changed, re-changed, in order to make a better and more human order. Further, that in the degree to which men came to this imaginative understanding of their complete consubstantiality with society, so society would advance towards the condition of being conscious of its sovereignty and capable of exercising it. For, since society was a whole, the attainment by any individual of the consciousness that it was a whole and that he was no more than a part of it, meant one more atom of self-awareness achieved by society, one step of advance to the formation of a true 'general will'. And only by that means could society pass out of the condition of adolescence into the condition of manhood. In other words the formation of a true 'social contract' was, actually, an epoch-making and revolutionary event in the life of the individual man, Rousseau knew precisely what he was about when he made his theory of the social contract the culmination of his great treatise on

education — the *Emile.* There it is Emile's final initiation into **the** wisdom of a good man. It was the product of what we may call Rousseau's second 'illumination'.

By the first he had seen the illusoriness of Progress and in consequence declared himself independent of a society which was automatically doomed to degeneration; by the second, he reintegrated himself into society, and with the same imaginative completeness with which he had formerly severed himself from society he now delivered himself up to society again — not indeed to existing society, but to the society of the future. Of that society of the future he became one of the chief architects: he discovered the moral and imaginative law upon which it must be builded, and he expounded it to those who could understand.

CHAPTER XVI

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

ROUSSEAU'S great effort was to make men understand society and themselves. This was the purpose of E*mile* and the *Contrat Social:* the understanding of the true social contact is the culmination of an education not into the acceptance of social conventions but into an understanding of social reality. If this were understood, one would hear less of the objection that it is too abstract, too logical. It could not be otherwise, for its sole theme is the 'idea[5] of society. To interpret it as recommending certain political institutions (and in particular those of the totalitarian state) is simple misinterpretation: what it recommends, as M. Gustave Lanson has said, is 'a certain way of understanding and estimating political institutions, whatever they may be'. Rousseau claimed that only when society was thus understood could it commend itself to the imaginative Reason and become the object of the highest endeavour of conscious man. That means — and Rousseau made no bones about saying it — that, once they understood society in this way, men must put into politics what they put into religion. And, as might be expected, the Church was up in arms, as it generally is at any suggestion that religion should be put anywhere but into the Church. Precisely for that reason, Rousseau contended, society is so profoundly irreligious. There was in all Europe in his day a bastard alliance between Church and State, which was legitimate enough when the theory and practice of the State was based on the divine right of kings; but became a source of evil when the divine right of kings was being challenged in theory and completely undermined in practice by the bourgeoisie. Then it became imperative that the earthly ci£y should be the object of man's highest endeavour, and community become the reality of communion.

The existing **Church, in** Rousseau's view, served merely to

distract the human mind from criticism of society. In fact, it had become an organ of the irreligious state. It affected independence of it, but was really subordinate to it; and its sublime function had been degraded into diverting the moral impulse of man from attempting to correct the monstrous deficiencies of the earthly city. Again, the real point of Rousseau's criticism has been entirely missed. He is represented as the advocate of a purely secular 'religion of the State', by people who have never troubled to discover what he meant by the state — namely, a 'natural' society — the *civitas Dei.* He was simply saying what Blake said: 'Religion is Politics, and Politics is Brotherhood:' that religion could not be real unless it had a natural and organic connection with the social order. The kind of thing of which he was the absolute opponent was the alliance between a corrupt Church and a corrupt State which was to be so zealously defended against him by Coleridge and Wordsworth. In respect to such accommodation his attitude was entirely revolutionary. The obvious function of the Christian religion was not to sanctify the rights of property, but to insist on their subordination to the rights of persons; and the rights of persons could be established only in a society whose purpose was recognized to be the good life for all. But this was not to be achieved by abolishing the right to possess property, but by controlling it with the aim of preventing wealth from disturbing the equality of political rights on which a rational society must self-evidently be based.

In reality, Rousseau posited and defended as the ideal society the natural community which Wordsworth was to glimpse and then abandon in terror for the defence of Property, the Constitution and the Establishment. What Wordsworth theoretically deplored — the decay of the personal relation in society — Rousseau set out to remedy before Wordsworth was born. The notion which Burke and Wordsworth and Coleridge came to defend, that 'property' was the basis of a rational society, would have seemed to Rousseau a diabolical equivocation — a merely specious attempt to conceal the 'unnatural' social relations of an industrial civilization under the once natural sanctity of a paternal feudal system.

The real opposition was not that falsely put forward, between property and no property, but between kinds of property — above all, between the property that was a means to the natural development of the personality, and was the basis of a reciprocal creative and personal relation between it and its owner; and the property that was mere accumulation, carrying with it no human obligation whatever. Rousseau believed it was natural for man to possess property towards which he stood in such a creative personal relation; to possess the other kind was unnatural; and he believed it was the function of the Christian religion to defend the former and condemn the latter. A healthy and a Christian social order, he believed, could be firmly built on an economically independent and morally vigorous peasantry, flourishing in a small society, not too big for every man to have an immediate consciousness of his personal responsibility for the commonweal.

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Economic forces, working on moral inertia, have swept Rousseau^ ideal into seeming oblivion; but that is no argument against the ideal, least of all in the case of Rousseau, whose contention from the beginning was that unless men were prepared to make a moral effort to withstand the advance of a false 'civilization', they must face a future of continuous degeneration. This was treated as a delightful paradox by his contemporaries. But there is nothing at all delightful in the paradox by which those who have belatedly become sensitive to some of the disastrous shortcomings of a condition of'civilization* against which Rousseau was warning men nearly two hundred years ago should denounce him as the author of their woes. He stands clean outside the dispensation under which they suffer. On him, least of all men, can be justly fastened any responsibility for the diseases of modern civilization, moral or political.

Thus it is that, in the most important sense, Rousseau has been irrelevant to the social and political history of the epoch that

followed him. The main determinants of that history have been precisely those which he said would be disastrous, if men submitted to them. His position, consciously and bravely taken, was that, if these were to be the determinants, history could not be a moral process; and he, for his part, would have nothing to do with it on such terms. Therefore, to charge him with having no practical guidance to give in the problems of practical government in the nineteenth century, as John Morley did, is merely to confirm his own prescience. He was not, nor could be, concerned with showing men the way out of the bog into the morass. His mission had been to show them how to keep out of the treacherous country altogether; to require of him that he should be the guide on the path to perdition was unreasonable. He would, moreover, have retorted that the effort to got out of the slough was precisely the same kind of effort that was necessary to avoid it altogether; and that to postpone it would not alter the nature of the effort required, though it would increase the magnitude of the obstacles. But as at the first, so at the last, the creation of a social order which should encourage instead of frustrating the best in man would in the nature of things depend on the capacity of the members of a society to conceive it as a moral entity.

As we have shown, Rousseau was the solitary opponent of the Idea of Progress in his age. It is a grim evidence of the prejudice or pettiness of modern estimates of Rousseau that it is precisely this idea of automatic moral progress which, in some of its protean forms, the hostile critics of Rousseau — with the conspicuous exception of Morley — seek to father on him. That is because the Idea of Progress is still the main element in the intellectual climate of the modern age. Because we cannot think ourselves free of the Idea of Progress, whether we are for or against Rousseau personally, we unconsciously insist on dragging him into this alien circle of ideas and making him speak the language. It can be done only by violence. For, we repeat, the most crucial fact concerning Rousseau is that his career as a mature thinker began with his complete repudiation of the Idea of Progress. To him the idea of automatic progress is a moral insanity, a fearful corporate illusion,

which could only be entertained by men who had forgotten the true nature of man, and had never had the courage 'to examine the human heart', as he would say. For only by such oblivion could be explained the delusion that by increasing the inertia of man, by multiplying his wants in proportion as his own individual ability to supply his needs is diminished, he became a better man, or more truly fulfilled the 'idea' of himself which he was compelled by nature to conceive.

This violent repudiation of the Idea of Progress, this sudden and final rejection of the instinctive, unquestioned faith of his century and the century to follow, sets Rousseau clean apart not merely from his contemporaries, the *philosophes*, but from the main currents of subsequent political thought. If he appears to contribute to these, it is in appearance and not in reality: and the appearance is made specious only by the arbitrary isolation of strands in a texture of creative ideas which is, as he knew and declared, singularly homogeneous. One may say categorically that where the Idea of Progress is assumed, as it is not only by Benthamism and *laisser-faire* Liberalism, but by the antithesis of those creeds, Marxian Socialism, there Rousseauism is not.

By a crowning irony Rousseau is now invoked or denounced as the prophet of the totalitarian state. *Du Contrat Social* is held to be its charter. And, characteristically in the case of Rousseau, it is not easy to *demonstrate* that the modern Fascist state is the sheer antipodes (as it certainly is) of all that Rousseau meant by a true and 'natural' society. Did not Rousseau profoundly mistrust representative democracy? Has not the totalitarian state succeeded in ousting the democratic *volonte' de tons* for the mystical *volonti generale?* Does it not demand precisely that complete surrender of the individual to the social whole which Rousseau demanded? And has it not engendered precisely that 'civil religion' which he thought necessary to the maintenance of society? And to reply simply that Rousseau meant all these things quite differently seems as ineffective as to murmur 'il n'agit jamais qu' au niveau de sa source'. None the less, the apparent resemblance between a society in which Rousseau's Social Contract was an

actual instead of a potential moral reality and the modern totalitarian state conceals an absolute abyss which separates them. The notion that the 'general will' should be embodied in an individual 'Leader' would have been to Rousseau a blasphemy. There was indeed a moment when, in Rousseau's theory, or mythology, the 'general will' could be represented by a single man. It was when the acknowledged Legislator — like Lycurgus or Solon — appeared. He framed the Laws, and withdrew. And the essential characteristic of the Laws he framed was that they were 'general' — universal in scope, touching no man in his particular. A Law that was not general was not a Law. Only by the fact that he enunciated general Laws which had their sanction in the 'general will', could the Legislator be recognized as the vehicle by which the 'general will' found utterance. Therefore, when Adolf Hitler, in his apology for the 'clean-up' of June 30th, 1934, declared that on that grim night he in his own person represented the Laws of Germany, and 'solemnly protested against the suggestion that there should have been a legal trial and exact weighings of guilt and blame', he was revealed, so to speak, as the Antichrist of the dispensation of which Rousseau was the prophet. For all his pessimism, we doubt whether Rousseau in his most sombre forebodings could have imagined such an absolute and explicit negation of his 'idea'.

The society to which Rousseau demanded that men should surrender their independence to receive back their freedom is the antithesis of the totalitarian state of to-day. When Rousseau said that 'it is necessary to oblige the individuals to conform to their reason; it is necessary to teach the public to know what it wants', he little dreamed what meaning that second phrase would come to convey to men born to a civilization of mass-suggestion and salesmanship, of radio and circulation and publicity. He meant real education of the public to its real needs; and those real needs he believed to be at once simple and profound. He summed them up in the tantalizing phrase — Nature. It had many meanings for him; but he was surely not mistaken in believing that these various meanings were intimately connected with one another,

from the simplest — 'la condition naturelle de l'homme est de cultiver la terre et de vivre de ses fruits' — to the most apparently recondite — to live in a society where equal justice is established and safeguarded by sacrosanct Laws which embody the finer conscience of all its members. When society becomes the instrument by which the highest impulses and desires of the individual are removed from the flux of individual mutability and made permanent in Laws: when the 'constitution' becomes the repository and the living record of the 'happiest moments' of the citizens who in obeying it obey their true selves, then the miracle has been achieved. Society has been made 'natural', in the deepest Rousseauist meaning, because it reflects, consolidates and encourages that goodness in man which he knows to be natural to him, yet cannot achieve unaided. The hostile critic may remark sardonically that it all ends in this: that society is to the Rousseauist what the Kingdom of God is to the Christian. Rousseau would have welcomed the criticism, and retorted that he also was a Christian, and knew by experience that a Christian could never rest content, and never be at home in the world, until the Laws spoke with the veritable voice of God.

And since, by the same experience, he found that man was naturally Christian, he believed that this was what men really wanted, and that they would find it to be so, if ever they had the courage to know themselves, to 'interrogate their hearts' as he had done. His business was to try to teach them how to do it. In order to understand society men must understand themselves; in order to transform society they must transform themselves. Hence the one authentic path from the false society to the true was education; and *The Social Contract*, in its original form, is the culmination of the E*mile*. *E*mile, by his understanding of the true social contract, becomes a conscious 'citizen' — the one title which Rousseau claimed for himself, and which we seek to vindicate for him here. Behind this culmination of the E*mile* lay no doubt an idealization of his own native republic; and his subsequent persecution, exile and excommunication by Geneva for the crime of having exhibited to it the moral beauty of its own hidden idea was certainly

the bitterest blow that Rousseau ever received. But to us it has something of the inevitability of the condemnation of Socrates.

After that unkindest cut of all, Rousseau became perforce a solitary. He had done his work, and persevered with it to the end. If he had, as he believed, many things with which to reproach himself, failure to fulfil his mission as a conscious 'citizen' was not among them. The world had been at his feet, all that men understood then and now by success had been his for the taking. He had had the courage not to compromise with a society which he believed to be fundamentally rotten; yet he had not withdrawn, or given himself over to despair and hatred. He had toiled patiently on, living with the utmost simplicity, weaving his pattern of a society to be, in the sure knowledge that until at least the rough foundations of such a society were laid, so long would the conflict between 'moral man and immoral society* continue to gnaw at the heart of the world, and men, whether or not they knew it, be divided fatally against themselves, struggling blindly — as children tossing in a feverish sleep — against their bondage to a society that had grown, in the main, from their own moral inertia, and in its institutions reflected, at best, the negative desire to avoid death, and not the positive will to achieve life. The death of society cannot be avoided merely by eluding it; it only becomes the more insidious and fearful. It can be overcome only by the constant will to make society embody the highest morality of the individual. That was Rousseau's message. It has gained, not lost, in urgency.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

1749-1832

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEW SACRAMENTALISM

THE vicissitudes of Goethe's reputation abroad — in England anyhow — have been prodigious. They have also been amusing. De Quincey was kicking hard against the pricks in 1824. 'Not baseness of Egyptian superstition, not Titania under enchantment, not Caliban in drunkenness, ever shaped to themselves an idol more weak and hollow than modern Germany has set up for its worship in the person of Goethe.' In 1859 he suppressed that essay, realizing that he had been on the losing side; and the fury of his extravagance, which even in a calmer moment dismissed Goethe's lyrics on the one hand and *Faust* on the other as completely unworthy of notice, is now a literary curiosity. But probably there was some substance to De Quincey's jubilant assertion that Goethe was not read in England. 'Enough that it *(Wilhelm Meister)* has not gained and will not gain any attention in this country.' It is well worth remembering, however, that the two great charges which De Quincey brings against his *bite noire* — for Goethe was hardly less to him — are first, immorality, and second, impiety.

Of far more real consequence are Carlyle's own misgivings while he was struggling with the task of making the translation of *Wilhelm Meister* to which De Quincey gave the monstrous slating.

> I am busily engaged every night in translating Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister:* a book which I love not, which I am sure will never sell, but which I am determined to print and finish . . . There is poetry in the book, and prose, prose for ever. When I read of players and libidinous actresses and their sorry pasteboard apparatus for beautifying and enlivening the 'Moral world', I render it into grammatical English — with a feeling mild and charitable as that of a starving hyaena. The book is

> to be printed in Winter or Spring. No mortal will ever buy a copy of it. 'N'importe'. I have engaged with it to keep the fiend from preying on my vitals, and with that sole view I go along with it. Goethe is the greatest genius that has lived for a century, and the greatest ass that has lived for three. I could sometimes fall down and worship him; at other times I could kick him out of the room.

Probably there is no genuine reader of Goethe who has not some first-hand experience of Carlyle's feeling. It is an authentic and perhaps inevitable phase of any real reaction to Goethe. De Quincey's is not an authentic reaction at all. It is *a priori* prejudice, human enough — we all have moments when we are sick to death of hearing Aristides called the just — but it is not criticism but petulance. Carlyle's irritation is criticism; and it is more impressive in that it comes from the man who, more than any other, made Goethe's real reputation in the English-speaking world.

Goethe's reputation waned with Carlyle's own, and quite as unjustly. Not that we need to associate the men beyond remarking that there was an element of true greatness in Carlyle which responded to the greatness in Goethe. It was noble in Carlyle, who needed to overcome a real reluctance in himself— the natural envy felt by the battered warrior of literature (envy which Schiller also found it hard to overcome) towards the darling of fortune — to bow himself before the genius of Goethe. He was, it is true, a hero-worshipper. But hero-worship, when it is genuine, is an intimate and private thing. Reverence, 'that angel of the world', comes as angels do on soft and silent wings; and, seeing that she visits the human mind only in its most serene and lucid moments, she dwells in benign peace together with a most impartial acknowledgment of imperfections in the object of her worship. And that, for the public, will hardly do. Adulation it knows; but reverence is a bird of a stranger breed. So Carlyle, perhaps with too much of the wisdom of this generation, pocketed up most of his reservations with regard to Goethe and presented him for

adulation. Goethe became one of the Victorian idols; and he has disappeared with them.

Almost it seems that a new beginning has to be made with the task of establishing Goethe's reputation outside Germany. For the conventional picture of Goethe, now that the nineteenth century valuation of him is discarded, is romantic in the most naive sense of the term: it presents a spectacular combination of the inspired lyric poet and the indefatigable amorist. A sigh is heard as soon as Goethe gets to Weimar, and from that point onward we are invited to be sympathetic assistants at the funeral of a great genius — a funeral that lasts for fifty years.

Behind all this are two unconscious assumptions: first, that a genius has to behave like one, and, second, that we know precisely how a genius does behave — like Byron, in fact. The consequence of this naivety is that when, as so notably in Goethe's case, fortune has enriched us with detailed knowledge of a great man's life and thought, the gift is not accepted gladly as a precious documentation on the nature of genius, but rather eyed askance and hurried out of sight, with the almost audible implication that it would be better for everybody if geniuses stuck to the rules of the game and died young.

Goethe did not die young; and criticism has found it hard to forgive him. It has no real use for his science or his wisdom. Yet this limited conception of Goethe, as a man who wrote some remarkable lyric poetry, and then pottered gently into hobbies and optimism and respectability, is in striking contradiction to the attitude of his own countrymen towards him. Indeed, of all the influences active in contemporary German thought, up to the advent of Hitler anyhow, Goethe's is by far the most powerful and distinctive. We can mark its traces, without much difficulty, in paths ostensibly so remote from one another as Husserl's 'Phenomenology', Otto's religious psychology, Spengler's 'historical morphology', and Tillich's religious philosophy of history.

That is, at any rate, an indication which element in Goethe satisfies his own criterion of the true work of genius — that 'it lives and works on'. Yet if we were to say, abruptly, that it is Goethe

the philosopher and not Goethe the poet who is thus creative to-day we should beg an important question by the separation. We can make the distinction satisfactorily only if we provisionally accept the emphasis laid by Goethe himself in his later life on the immediate occasion as the true source of poetry. 'Beware,' he said to Eckermann, 'of attempting a large work.'

> *That* is what injures our best minds, even those finest in talent and most earnest in effort. I have suffered from this cause and know how much it has injured me. What have I not let fall into the well! If I had written all that I well might, a hundred volumes would not contain it. *(Sept.* 18, 1823)

Goethe, of course, was not condemning large works of poetry. Masterpieces had been written, and he revered them. *'Alles grosse bildeC* But he believed that the time for premeditated, sustained, constructed poetry, in 'the grand style', was past. Now, if a poet was to be productive, he must be content to seize his moments of vision. Behind this sincere and sound advice to Eckermann was Goethe's sense that, so soon as the poet left the narrow realm of the immediate and the occasioned, he must perforce become a philosopher. He must seek an answer to the riddle of existence, and the search and the answer must be his own. The old synthesis had broken down. The datum of accepted belief which is essential to sustained poetry of the highest order was no longer forthcoming.

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There seem to be, or to have been, two principal conditions under which poetry in the grand style has been written in the Christian era — conditions represented by Dante and Shakespeare respectively. One is the universal prevalence of a systematized religious faith offering comprehensive symbols which express the mystery of human life, so that poetry can, without any sense of derogation or limitation, make itself ancillary to religion and 'justify the ways of God to man'. The other is the occurrence of a moment

naturally associated with the decline of a universal religious faith, when the individualistic view of life prevails, and the mystery of life finds expression in tragedy. These moments are not simply opposed to one another. Their relation is 'dialectical'; they are phases in an historical movement. While Christianity was the universal faith, tragedy was impossible; since Christianity, obviously, does not permit the tragic view of life. As Christianity weakens, tragedy emerges. But manifestly the tragic view of life has itself no finality. As an individual and prophetic man, Shakespeare passed beyond tragedy. It would be forcing things to urge, as is sometimes urged, that he returned to Christianity; he seems rather to have passed from a sort of natural paganism with Christian overtones, through tragedy, to a reconciliation of a kind which, no doubt, was naturally found in former days by chosen spirits in Christian orthodoxy, but could no longer be confined within it. The growing compromise between the Christian Church and nationalism made necessary a prophetic enlargement of Christianity. Of all this movement in Shakespeare, Goethe, the first philosophical student of Shakespeare, was conscious. His recognition of it found definite expression in his deliberate use of Christian imagery and symbolism at the end of the second part of *Faust.*

> You will agree (he said to Eckermann) that the conclusion where the soul soars upwards was very difficult, and that I might easily have failed in dealing with such elusive and super-sensuous things if I had not used the clearly circumscribed forms of the Christian Church to give my poetic intentions the firmness of outline they needed.

'It would be difficult,[5] says Professor Fairley, 'to overstate the degree of sophistication which these words imply.' Sophistication is, we think, an improper word; but its intention is correct. Goethe was using the Christian forms deliberately as imaginative symbols, only. It was a bold expedient, and created some misunderstanding among those capable of reading the letter only; yet it is difficult to imagine what other he could have employed.

The significance of *Faust* as a whole is that it is a great poem which in itself marks a conscious end of great poetry. Goethe's inability to make progress with it, its lingering on over the space of fifty years and more, was not due to any flagging of the creative spirit in himself. He was at the end of an epoch, or rather an epoch was living itself through to an end in him. A reconciliation was being accomplished; and this was no longer a reconciliation of the individual man with his destiny, but a reconciliation of Man as a whole with Nature. The two decisive influences on Goethe were Shakespeare and Spinoza; and the influences of these two great spirits converge in him to create a new attitude whose emergence is waveringly depicted in *Faust,* and which can only be definitely apprehended by the contemplation of his work as a whole. There is a perceptible progress towards a new synthesis.

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This progress is extraordinarily difficult to describe. It corresponds to the progress which we can observe historically in the Christian epoch, from religion, through art, to science. But, we hasten to add, the science towards which Goethe was feeling his way was profoundly different from the 'science* which generally claims sovereignty to-day. It was a science which always returned with awe and a sense of finality to what Goethe called 'the pure phenomenon' — the thing given in all its simple and sacramental immediacy. It was a science which was preparatory to a renewal of the religious consciousness; not a science which foolishly plumed itself on having abolished religion. And above all, it was genetic and dynamic both in its investigation of Nature, and in its effect upon the man who practised it. With the growth in himself of true scientific knowledge, in Goethe's sense, the knowing man must himself inevitably grow as a whole; he became a more perfect because more conscious and obedient, servant of the living process of Nature. By the delicacy of his response to the total conditions of his own day-to-day self-creation, by the completeness of his

dedication to becoming — to the service of that 'divine power which is manifest in the living and not in the dead' — he conquered his own eternality. Hence, the fundamental impossibility of Faust's losing the wager; because for the truly growing man there never can be a moment to which, from the bottom of his heart he can say: 'Stay with me!' —- *'Verweile doch, du bist so sckon'.* The divine power forbids that his consciousness should thus negate the life of which he is the instrument.

This, as Goethe was well aware, was not a doctrine for everybody in his day; and it is not a doctrine for everybody to-day. But certainly it must be appreciated if we are to deal with Goethe at all in a comprehensive and critical spirit. It is against the background of this doctrine, which was an experience and not an idea, that his poetry must be set, and the true meaning of his insistence on its 'occasional' nature sought. Professor Fairley puts it well:

> Instead of turning into an accomplishment, a vocation, a faculty separate and circumscribed, as poetry usually does, Goethe's poetry retains from first to last its crucial importance — functional more than cathartic — for his mental and bodily health. It is as deeply rooted in him as the instinct for food and the instinct for sleep; it is equally necessary to him; and it operates with the same infallibility.

Infallibility is somewhat excessive; but the essential estimate is true. And it is of importance. For it is to this 'functional' character of Goethe's poetic impulse that *Faust* owes its curious unity. Whatever may be said of the chief characters, however severe may be the judgment on its dramatic insufficiency, however radically mistaken the efforts to vindicate its construction, it cannot be denied that the poem grows. In spite of appearance it has life more abundantly at the end than at the beginning. We may admit that it is a different kind of life: a life more and more suffused or even diffused by consciousness; but it is real. Perhaps the simplest clue to it all is to be found in *Advice to Toung Poets: Ein Wort fur junge Dichter,* where Goethe claims that he has been a. liberator,

> Through me they realized that, just as men live from within outwards, so the artist must work from within outwards, since he, no matter what disguise he wears, can bring only his individuality to light . . . The root of the matter can be briefly put. Let the young poet utter what lives and is active in himself, no matter what form it takes; let him put strenuously aside all spirit of contradiction, all ill-will, all carping, and all that ends in negation: for nothing comes of it.

Like so many of Goethe's most pregnant utterances, this has a deceptive simplicity, almost an obviousness. It will recall to some Wordsworth's teaching concerning 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' and may at the first glance seem inferior to that phrase in suggestiveness. But on longer acquaintance Goethe's 'word of advice' makes an indelible impression. It is altogether singular in that it is at the same time advice on how to write poetry, and how to live. It is not a combination of these two elements; they are one and the same thing.

> You make no headway when you incessantly lament a beloved lost by separation, unfaithfulness or death. That is worth nothing, however much cleverness and talent you put into it. Hold fast to life as it strides on, and test yourself when the impulse comes, for then it is revealed at the moment whether we are alive, and, when we look back on it later, whether we were alive.

Poetry is, thus, an exploration of life, indeed a way of life.

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Whether we finally accept Goethe's view or not, we must allow that it is original. It is also completely unprofessional. We may, if we are niggardly, ascribe this to his own peculiar and fortunate circumstances. But in reality it belongs to the essence of the man. Moreover, if we consider it as prophecy, it has been fairly well justified by events. Professional and deliberate poetry, the dedica-

tion of a lifetime to poetry as an art, has become more and more an anachronism since Goethe wrote. It really seems as though the destiny for which Goethe was prepared, and which he himself experienced, was being accomplished in the world of European culture at large. For such a theory of poetry, or rather of poetic originality, may obviously lead to the cessation of the poetic activity as such. It might perfectly well be that the vital and creative experiences — *'was lebt und fortwirk'* — would be less and less capable of specific poetic expression. It was so with Goethe. But he certainly would have repudiated the notion that in turning more and more constantly to the scrutiny of Nature (in the widest sense) he was engaged in something essentially different from the writing of poetry. The distinction made by his romantic critics between 'scientific discovery', for which many minds are qualified, and 'the more precious discoveries in the realm of spirit and the imagination', which are the privilege of peculiar and poetic genius, was, for Goethe, an improper and meaningless distinction. And this was not a late-found theory with him; there is no justification for regarding it as a kind of excuse for the diversion of flagging poetic powers. (There is no evidence that Goethe's specifically poetic power did flag: the *Marienbader Elegie* is among his supreme felicities.) On the contrary, the conviction was fully formed in 1783, when Goethe was at the climacteric age of thirty-four. In *Der Granit,* he wrote:

> I am not afraid of the criticism that it must be a spirit of contradiction which has led me from contemplation and portrayal of the human heart, the youngest, most intricate, most disturbed, most variable, most fragile piece of creation to the contemplation of the oldest, firmest, deepest, and most unshakable of the sons of Nature. For it will be granted me readily that all the things of Nature are exactly related to one another, and that the inquiring spirit will not willingly suffer itself to be excluded from anything it can attain.

It is significant that 'the spirit of contradictoriness' which he here justly disclaims is precisely the spirit against which he gives

warning in his *Advice to Young Poets.* And, in a quite obvious sense, *Granite* is as much a nature-poem as *Uber alien Gipfeln.* It also marks the beginning of Goethe's *Welt-und-Naturforschung,* his investigation of Nature and History. Its intrinsic merits may not be great, but its significance certainly is. It is a crucial poem, written at a crucial moment: the more crucial in that it is not, and is not meant to be, a poem at all.

It cannot be denied: there is henceforward in Goethe a growing tendency towards what French intellectual purism calls 'confusion of kinds'. The question is whether this is a strength or a weakness in him. To that question there must be a definite answer, if there is to be any definite judgment of Goethe. To use the term 'confusion of kinds' is, in itself, to have begged the question. Goethe would have denied absolutely that he did 'confuse kinds'; he would have claimed that he had transcended specialism. For our part we admit his claim; and on the justice of this claim, we believe, Goethe's title to present and future greatness will necessarily be based.

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At this point we have to grapple directly with the problem of Goethe's many-sidedness. And it is important to admit, without reserve, that the vast mass of his production is not of the first order. In poetry, he was not merely not a Shakespeare, but nothing like one; in science, he was not a Darwin; as a critic of art, he was definitely inferior; as a technical dramatist, in spite of the fact that he had a theatre at his command, he was no more than second-rate; his prose-style is laboured and heavy, it cannot be compared with the prose of a Heine or a Nietzsche. In only one recognized province was he the genuine master: the province of the *Gelegenheitsgedicht* — the 'occasioned poem'. To judge him by his positive achievement, it seems that we must conclude that he was jack of all trades and master of none. Yet such a judgment would be fantastically mistaken; and it would be mistaken in the

same way as the judgment (against which De Quincey was really kicking) that he was an all-round master. The fact is that perfection, which is the standard by which Goethe is measured in both these estimates, is really irrelevant to his particular achievement. Yet he was no amateur. It misses the point entirely to regard him as the last of the great dilettanti, a figure possible only at the very dawn of the epoch of modern science. Nor will it do to look upon him as a master of 'the art of living', whatever that may mean. He was fortunate, and he lived long. Those were his circumstances, not his achievement.

Yet he was, as much as any man in these latter days, a master of life. He was conscious, as perhaps no other man has been, of the new responsibilities which were coming to men — responsibilities to which humanity in the hundred years since his death has been so markedly indifferent. Of these responsibilities the chief, and the one to which Goethe was marvellously responsive, was the responsibility of consciousness itself. Those moderns who owe him much, who may say of him, as he himself said of Spinoza, that they 'discovered themselves (or part of themselves) in him', know well the strange and salutary experience of being overwhelmed by the miracle of his 'awareness'. At such moments, it seems to them that there is only one judgment to be pronounced on Goethe: that he was the first man who was really aware of man's true place in the realm of Nature. Seen in that perspective, his cumbrousness, his failures, even his magical felicities — all are irrelevant. They are merely the skins sloughed by his growing consciousness. It is the growing consciousness itself that holds us enthralled. In him, humanity becomes abidingly aware of its own past. His historical consciousness is a new event in human history. No doubt it was, in detail, imperfect, and sometimes even mistaken. Hegel, Darwin, Strauss, Marx, Frazer — a whole galaxy of explorers — were to map out the provinces which he glimpsed from his mountain-top. But all the germs of their knowledge were in him, and he was not overwhelmed by it. Perhaps it was a happy accident that he lived just at the moment when it was impossible for him to be engulfed by separate research; but

it is difficult even to imagine such a fate befalling him. Again, he was too conscious. He was too well aware of his responsibility to himself, to 'the subject', as he would have put it in his detached way. His reverence for Nature was entire; so entire that it admitted, with the utmost simplicity and directness, that he himself was Nature, too, demanding the same reverence from him as Nature herself. In himself was the growing tip of the great historical creative process he discerned in Nature. The more complete was his consciousness of that process in the world without, the more positive was the growth of the process within him.

This is the substance of his doctrine of 'gradual ascent' *(Steigerung)* and 'polarity', which some think mysterious. There is nothing mysterious about it, except that it is generally neglected. Or it is misinterpreted into the admission of some internecine conflict in Goethe himself which prevented him from being what his critics desire that he should have been. There was conflict in Goethe, but it was the inward conflict of a man who knew that inward conflict was necessary, that in and through conflict was manifest the forward urge of life itself both in the individual man, and in the outward Nature of which he was a part. 'Without Contraries there is no progression,' as Blake put it pregnantly. Conflict, thus recognized and ratified by consciousness, and acknowledged to be the indispensable condition of growth, is different by a whole order of experience, from the debilitating conflict of the unconscious man. It is not merely a condition of inward growth, it is a discovered principle of harmony between man and the universe about him: the law which both alike obey.

Thus it is that what some have condemned as Goethe's conflict, others have praised as his balance. It is the same element or quality in him which is being appraised; yet, as the words themselves suggest, it is being only obliquely recognized. The impact of the new thing which Goethe represented is glanced aside. He was, in reality, neither a divided nor a balanced man; he was merely a consciously living man. To that essence we have to penetrate if we are to comprehend him in his unity. Then his baffling and contradictory manifestations trouble us no longer.

We become aware of the subtle simplicity of the phenomenon he presents to us, and grateful for his lifelong refusal to allow himself to be committed to anything more definite than the unutterable. The place that Eckermann's *Conversations with Gcethe* have come to take in the corpus of Goethe's works is significant. Nietzsche's verdict has been fully endorsed by after-generations: the book seems to be infinitely more actual and alive to-day than it was when it was published. Then, it had barely more than a 'succes d'estime'. To-day Eckermann himself seems to deserve a centenary. For by the magic of reverence he captured the exquisite evasiveness of Goethe's incomparable mind. In his pages we hold the quicksilver in our fingers. The enchantment is indescribable. But, if we insist on analysing it, it comes back always to the sacramental quality, the simultaneous duality, of Goethe's thought. He is at once aware of the thing that is, and of that which is behind the thing; of the 'idea' and the manifestation, of the process of becoming and the thing become. He makes the separation only by an act of thought which is immediately surpassed. The intelligence is become an instrument, and is conscious of itself as an instrument. One might collect a whole bookful of phrases in which Goethe feels after an expression of this simple mystery; one might indeed write a whole bookful of phrases oneself in the attempt to describe this native process of Goethe's thought. 'The supreme thing,' as he said, 'would be to comprehend that everything actual is in itself theoretical . . . We must not try to get behind phenomena — they themselves are the lesson.' This thought, which is in one form or another recurrent in Goethe, seems outwardly to conflict with another which is an equally persistent thread in his thinking.

> No organism corresponds completely to the Idea that lies at its root; behind every one the higher idea is hidden. That is my God, that is the God we all seek after and hope to find, but we can only feel him, we cannot see him.

The conflict is superficial only. God is apprehensible, not comprehensible. The creativeness of Nature is not exhausted in the specific creation; the living object looks, as it were, beyond itself.

The intuition is in part biological, in part metaphysical and religious. Thus, 'in the true symbolism, the particular represents the universal not as a dream or shadow, but as a living, momentary revelation of the unfathomable'. *Omnia abeunt in mysterium.*

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Here, in the philosophic and conscious language in which Goethe loved to express himself, is the realization which Blake uttered in his *Auguries of Innocence.* 'To see a world in a grain of sand' is precisely that Supreme thing' which would be 'to comprehend that everything actual is in itself theoretical'. It is significant that only Christian thought has an adequate expression for Goethe's belief: which is, simply that *everything* is 'sacramental', and that the 'supreme thing' would be to be permanently conscious of this. The object of immediate apprehension is ultimate, satisfying, awe-inspiring — other. In the terms of Schiller's famous essay, *Vber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung,* which gave Goethe potent aid in his progress towards the awareness of his own nature, this sense of the finality and mystery of the object of immediate apprehension is a reconquest of poetic and religious naivety — an achievement beautifully expressed by Blake in the very phrase: *Auguries of Innocence.* Goethe would have agreed with Blake that poetry, in this sense in which the reconquest of imaginative naivety was its final purpose, was not a particular art of literature, but rather a type of the pure creative and religious activity of man. This activity was not self-originated; it was the creative consequence of a new and immediate contact with the real and objective world. To break down the conventions of thought, which interposed a veil between the subject and the object, and so prevented the life-giving interchange between the parts of Nature by which alone real growth was possible — this was Goethe's ideal. Hence the meaning of his mistrust of the 'word', that speaks in the opening line *of Faust,* and again in Mephisto's ironic advice:

Vor allem haltet euch am Worte.
Dann geht ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewissheit ein;
Denn eben, wo Begriffe fehlen
Da stellt ein Wort sur rechten Zeit sich ein.

> Above all, cling to the word. Then you enter the temple of Science by the infallible door: for when ideas fail you, a word fills the gap.

It was not, of course, that Goethe despised the 'word'; still less, as has often been hinted, that his inward dissatisfaction with his security at Weimar issued in a romantic hankering after the life of the man of action. Just as for him, there was a difference between the truly creative action and a mere doing, so there was a difference between the living word and the dead one. And the creative action and the living word were of one kind and nature; they were, so to speak, blood-brothers, while their relation to mere doing and the dead word was purely formal.

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But what was, finally, the test of the creativeness of the act or the word? It was its continued power to operate. In the process of history the evidence of creativeness was visible: the deed or word emerged, and the necessity of its emergence was manifest by the permanence of its effects. This was the manifestation of the 'divine'. This power was, said Goethe to Eckermann, 'more or less inherent in mankind generally, but to a high degree in a few eminently gifted minds'.

> These have, by great deeds or doctrines, manifested their divine nature; which then, by the beauty of its appearance, won the love of men, and powerfully attracted them to love and emulation.

There Goethe was speaking specifically of spiritual achievement; but his conception of the 'divine' as the *fortwirkende*, the continually

operative, was by no means thus restricted. It was also something 'beyond good and evil', for which he often used the name of 'the daemonic', or simply 'the great'.

Goethe's test of the creative, in history, might thus be called pragmatical, though the epithet seems far too meagre for the imaginative penetration it pre-supposes; and the test of his own creativeness, for the individual living man, was to be applied by regarding himself also as a historical process. This attitude lies behind the *Advice to Young Poets.* The poet is to discover, in the process of life in himself, 'was lebt und fortwirkt', and cling to that; he is to discover whether he is, or whether he was, 'alive', that is whether the same creative process which manifests itself on a vast scale in history is manifest also in the individual man. He himself alone can be the judge. Life is the final criterion of life.

> Das Leben ist des Lebens Pfand, es ruht
> Nur auf sich selbst und muss sich selbst verburgen.
>
> Life is the pledge of life; it rests on itself alone, and must supply its own security.

Thus the doctrine of Goethe seems to resolve into the simplicity of a truism. Indeed, it is very simple; but behind it lies a lifelong submission to experience, a continuous effort towards an ever-increasing objectivity, a gradual subordination of the subjective, a new kind of humility. This was at first instinctive rather than deliberate, and hardly to be distinguished from that peculiarly 'romantic' seeking of solace and self-abeyance in Nature, which is often regarded as the 'note' of romanticism. Goethe's attitude to Nature was, or came to be, entirely different from this. It was a conscious submission to Nature in its unique particularity, a process of increasing differentiation in the objective reality and in the subject responsive to it. It was, in fact, the precise opposite of that undifferentiated identification of Nature and the Self which is supposed to be characteristic of romanticism.

This gradual turning of himself from the subjectively to the objectively romantic (for certainly the term 'classical' is irrelevant

to Goethe's achievement) he rightly regarded as his great achievement; and one can find in his later works many traces of his belief that in this progress he was prophetic. He felt that he was battling, more or less single-handed, against the tendency of the age.

> All eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective; on the other hand, all progressive eras have an objective tendency. Our present time is retrograde, for it is subjective: we see this not merely in poetry, but also in painting, and in much besides. Every healthy effort, on the contrary, is directed from the inward to the outward world; as you see in great eras, which were really in a state of progression and all of an objective nature.

As a poet Goethe did not accomplish this progress from the subjective to the objective. He made more than one attempt to do so; but it cannot be seriously maintained that the *Iphigenie* or *Hermann und Dorothea* are works of the highest intrinsic significance. Goethe's deliberate poetical classicism is to be regarded simply as an experiment. The experiment was necessary, and we should be deprived of invaluable evidence for the nature of Goethe's progress if the experiment had not been made. But the significance of Goethe lies, fundamentally, in the emergence of an attitude, a *Weltanschauung,* and the self-creation of a great man. It is not in the least to be deplored that his poetical genius became diffused over investigations that were not poetical; it is not even to be regarded as an aberration that he considered his *Farbenlehre* of more importance than any other of his works. He was not quite so deluded as he is supposed to have been. He was asserting a truth in his rejection of the Newtonian theory of light — the truth of the incommensurability of the immediately apprehended phenomenon — which science has been ever since in danger of neglecting.

This attitude of Goethe's is so far from being outmoded that it belongs still to the future. So far from having to lament that he did not write more poetry, we have to congratulate ourselves that Goethe consciously outgrew the limitations of poetry. He knew, as few of his critics have known, that poetic genius of the highest

order is manifest rather in a total flexibility and responsiveness of the being to the created world than in the continuous production of poetry; that there had been times when this rare capacity could be satisfied with a poetic career; that such times were past; and that it was his privilege to be conscious of their passing. Curiously enough, of our English romantics it was the one whose life was most nearly contemporaneous with Goethe's own whose realization was most closely akin to his. Keats and Shelley died too young for serious comparison, but while Wordsworth and Coleridge fell wearily back on the Constitution and the Establishment, Blake alone made no retreat, but battled on to inward secuiity. And it is no accident that Blake also is accused of having deserted poetry, of having allowed the waters of inspiration to be lost in the barren sands of 'prophecy'. It would be absurd directly to compare the *Farbenlehre* with the *Prophetic Books;* they are as different as the lives of the men who wrote them; yet their significance for their authors was of the same kind. Both were protests against the enslavement of the human mind by scientific rationalism; both were disregarded warnings against the spirit which was to be triumphant in the nineteenth century. The contrast between Goethe's Olympian authority at Weimar and Blake's complete obscurity in London is as extreme as such a contrast could be; yet one might well hesitate to pronounce which was the happier, or which the lonelier man. But just as Goethe would have understood at a word Blake's fundamental doctrine that the Toetic Genius is the True man', so it is to Blake that we must go for a decisive statement of one of Goethe's own most unshakable beliefs:

> The worship of God is: Honouring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best: those who envy and calumniate great men hate God; for there is no other God.

Goethe would have been proud to have said that so well. But, though the resemblances between the two men are essential, in spite of their superficial contrast, there was in each something that was not in the other. Blake was a great artist, where Goethe

would have liked to be one: Goethe had a profound historical sense, of which Blake was completely innocent. Goethe combined with his reverence for individual greatness, a splendid awareness of the world-process. On the other hand, Blake knew more fully than he, the inward struggle of the spiritual hero, and was, of the two, the modern master of the spiritual life. Moreover, Blake's experience of the modern world was more actual and intimate than Goethe's. Weimar was an oasis of benevolent feudalism; the England in which Blake lived belonged to the new world of industrialism. The despairs with which Blake had to contend were deeper than any Goethe could know.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DÆMONIC AND THE DIVINE

THE two great intellectual or spiritual influences in Goethe's life were Shakespeare and Spinoza. One may say, without much exaggeration, that Spinoza was for Goethe the philosophic consciousness of the spirit which he found at work in the creations of Shakespeare's art. And indubitably the clue to Goethe's 'philosophy' is to be sought in Spinoza. But that must not blind us to the fact that Gcethe is a 'philosopher' only in the noble but now rather old-fashioned sense of the seeker after life-wisdom. Spinoza, also, was primarily that, though he is generally (though frigidly) admitted to the histories of Philosophy, understood with the lamentable modern bias — as the science of epistemology: the somewhat sterile investigation into how we know.

Epistemology had no charms, neither had it any terrors, for the man who cheerfully and comfortably sang:

> Mein Kind! ich hab' es klug gemacht
> Ich habe nie uber das Denken gedacht
>
> My child, I did what I didn't ought:
> On Thinking I never wasted a thought.

That is, for philosophy in the modern sense, a shameless evasion of responsibility. No epistemology, no philosophy. Gcethe laughed at the notion. Therein lies the advantage of being a poet-philosopher, 'pour qui le monde visible existe'. It is, we believe, also a decided philosophical superiority. For the diversion of philosophy into epistemology has had one lamentable consequence: it has ended by making philosophy irrelevant to ordinary human experience.

Against this growing tendency, which Gcethe immediately detected when, on his return from Italy, he came into contact

with the Kantians, he was bound to react; his reaction was philosophically instructed as well. He had long since been under the influence of a greater philosopher than Kant, namely Spinoza. And it is in terms of the conflict between Kant and Spinoza for the decisive influence on Goethe's thinking, that his own philosophic originality can most clearly be distinguished. Nevertheless, to speak of a conflict between Kant and Spinoza in Goethe's soul is an exaggeration: the conclusion of such struggle as there was, was foregone. And this was natural, because the specific problem of philosophy for Kant — the problem of knowledge — does not exist for Spinoza, who denies to the subject-object distinction all ultimate validity. That is, perhaps, a misleading description, since it could be asserted of also the post-Kantian German idealists. But the difficulty of describing Spinoza is not due to the difficulty of his distinctive views, but rather to his unique simplicity. To understand Spinoza, we need to undergo a sort of spiritual metamorphosis. The mere intelligence does not suffice. For, the crucial step in Spinozism is to recognize the intelligence itself as merely an animal faculty, and for the human being to see himself in his own totality as object. To this object there is, and can be in the ordinary philosophic sense no subject. The philosophic subject itself is become object. This notion of an object without a subject is a kind of nonsense to the non-religious philosophic intelligence, largely because it is not strictly a notion at all, but a spiritual experience.

§

On this essential of Spinozism, Goethe seized eagerly; and by the simplicity and directness with which he grasped it he became a truer Spinozist than many who were better able than he to explore Spinoza's subtle distinctions between substance and mode. The most famous acknowledgment of Goethe's debt to Spinoza is that which he made in *Dichtung and Wahrheit;* but the real nature of Spinoza's decisive influence is declared most clearly in Eckermann's record:

Jesus conceived of one only god to whom he attributed all the qualities which he perceived as perfections in himself. God became the essence of Jesus's own inner beauty, full of goodness and love like him, and such that good men might surrender themselves to him with perfect confidence, and embrace this idea of him as the most precious point of contact with things above.

• Since, however, the great being we call the godhead not only manifests itself in mankind, but in a rich and vast world, and in the mighty processes of history, a conception of him founded on human attributes is naturally insufficient, and the close observer will soon run up against inconsistencies, shortcomings and contradictions, which will lead to doubt, possibly even to despair, unless he is small enough to be comforted by artificial explanations, or big enough to lift himself up on to a higher plane of thought.

Goethe, in his early years, found such a lofty standpoint in Spinoza, and acknowledges with joy how fully the needs of his youth were satisfied by the views of this great thinker. *He discovered himself in him,* and consequently could consolidate himself in Spinoza in the most natural way.

Since further such views were not of a subjective kind, but had their foundation in the works and expression of God throughout the world, they were not merely a skin which had to be sloughed later as useless in his own thorough investigation into the world and nature, but were the original seed and root of a plant which developed through the years in the same healthy way, and flowered at length into a rich knowledge. *(Feb.* 28, 1831)

Goethe regarded Spinoza as one who, being the true lineal successor of Jesus, had expanded and given comprehensive substance to Jesus's conception of God; he had disentangled it from its apparent anthropomorphism, and reaffirmed it. This pregnant interpretation of Spinoza and his doctrine, which Goethe expressed to Eckermann at the very end of his life, had been reached

in his early maturity. No less than fifty-seven years before, Lavater had noted in his diary (June 28, 1774): 'Goethe told me a great deal about Spinoza and his writings. He thinks that no-one has spoken concerning the Godhead so like the Saviour as Spinoza.' Eleven years later, writing to Jacobi, Goethe says of Spinoza: 'He does not demonstrate the existence of God, but that existence is God. And, for this, if others denounce him as an Atheist, I call him *tkeissimurriy* yea *Christianissimum'*. His homage was to have received poetic expression in a poem of the Wandering Jew, of which the supreme moment was to have been the hero's encounter with Spinoza. The man condemned by the theologians as a heretic was to have been revealed as the one true disciple of Jesus.

In the diary of the Italian journey, Goethe records how Herder — himself a great Spinozist — used to laugh at him for reading but one Latin book: Spinoza's *Ethics.* Goethe explains there that he was afraid to read any other, for fear of the longing for Italy that it would arouse in him. Even in this regard Spinoza would not have failed him: for the message of Spinoza, as Goethe understood, was not simply, or mainly, a doctrine of Pantheism, but a doctrine of renunciation. The metaphysical doctrine *Omnis existentia est perfectio,* has for its moral corollary that any mode of human existence, however limited, is completely satisfying to the man who can achieve sufficient detachment to contemplate it *sub specie aeternitatis.* It is an authentic fragment of Eternity. But renunciation of this kind, as Goethe again understood, does not imply asceticism. A full existence is as welcome to the Spinozist as a narrow one; more welcome indeed, for the spiritual detachment from the fortunes of the animal body which is essential to Spinozism involves a recognition that the preferences of the animal body are not only real, but valid. But it is important to understand that this animal body is not quite the same as the flesh as opposed to the spirit by the traditional dualism of Christian orthodoxy. On the contrary, to this animal body not only the flesh but much of the spirit, in the orthodox sense, equally belong; as perhaps it also did in St. Paul's conception of the *sarx.* The hunger of the soul for a personal God in the simple sense is, for Spinoza, simply an appetite

of the creature. Appetites of soul, appetites of body — these are alike 'passions', from whose domination, but not from whose incidence, we are liberated when we recognize that they are 'passions' and understand them as such. That fine point of understanding is the truly active, and manifestly impersonal, Reason: which is the spirit, indeed.

§

From this fundamental Monism of Spinoza, in whom he 'found himself, Goethe never departed; for the good reason that, once it has been apprehended, it is impossible to depart from it. No genuine Spinozist has ever completely abjured his faith. What Hegel called 'the bath of Spinoza' is an irremediable happening to whom it comes; and the mere fact that Hegel was aware of this, implies that unusual circumspection is necessary in interpreting *his* philosophy. All that Goethe did, or conceived himself to have done, was to examine the ways of existence, which were the ways of the infinite substance which was God. This 'divine[5] substance was equally present in himself and in the objective world. The separation between these two was unreal; the only moment of real separation in the One was that non-temporal moment when the individual subject became a complete object to itself—the distinctive human moment when in and through man Nature achieves self-consciousness, or, in Spinoza's language, God knows and loves himself. As Goethe expressed it, 'Man is the first speech that Nature holds with God'.

Between such an attitude and the Kantian there was a gulf. What he learned from Kant, Goethe said, was merely an increased knowledge of the subject as object; it fell into place as a kind of natural science of the subject, on a level with, but more restricted than, the natural science of the objective world to which the subject also belonged. The inherent tendency to subjectivism which was in Kant he decisively rejected. Spinoza had made him proof against the epistemological illusion; so that he could speak

in *Gluckliches Ereignis* with clarity and concision of 'the Kantian philosophy, which so exalts the subject, while apparently confining it'. And in a letter of 1831 — during that last year of his life in which his awareness of his own past attained a maximum of lucidity — he wrote:

> I am grateful to the critical and idealist Philosophy for having made me aware of myself, for that is an immense gain; but it never gets to the object: this object we must accept, as does the reason of the ordinary man, in order that, in a stable relationship towards it we may find the joy of life.

'But it never gets to the object.' The objection was, and is, fatal. But, naturally, Goethe did not make it in the spirit of a narrow 'materialism'. He, like Spinoza, would have had no patience with the meagre modern sophistry which passes under that name. The subject and the object both had to be given their full rights in a true wisdom. The attempt to reach the subject from the side of the object was as unsatisfying as the attempt to reach the object from the side of the subject. As he wrote to Schiller:

> It always seems to me that, if the one school of thought can never reach the spirit working from without inwards, the other, working from within outwards, will only with great difficulty, attain to the body, so that one always does best to remain in a philosophic state of nature, and make the best use of one's undivided being until such time as the philosophers agree how they can unite that which for the moment they have separated. *{June /, 1798)*

For that moment we are still waiting. Meanwhile, those who follow Goethe's advice and remain in 'a philosophic state of nature' have the best of it. But Goethe believed that the 'state of nature' is itself the highest achievement of philosophy. It is the sacramental reverence for the 'pure phenomenon' which, according to Goethe himself, was the highest that man could attain. It is not the innocence of the child, but the second innocence of the grown man; and it differs from the innocence of

the child most palpably in this, that its light is turned by the man upon his own nature also. It is an immensely subtle naivety, and as such incapable of direct description. As Schiller put it, in the essay: *Uber naive undsentimentalische Dichtung,* 'They (children) are what we once were. We were once Nature, and our culture must bring us back, by the path of Reason and Freedom, to Nature once again.' The reminiscence of Jesus's teaching concerning the condition of entry into the Kingdom of God is not accidental. But such an expression, necessarily metaphorical, is only to be understood in virtue of analogous experience; it will not abide a purely intellectual analysis. Yet intellectual analysis is necessary, and may help to bring us nearer to the crucial point of Goethe's philosophy. For, if we accept Schiller's simple formulation: that we were once Nature, and must return to it, we are bound to remark that in the period of separation from Nature we have not ceased to belong wholly to it. This is the burden of the famous *Fragment on Nature* inspired or written by Goethe, which T. H. Huxley translated and accepted as his own creed. What distinguishes this period, and makes it possible for us to call it a period of separation, is that man is unconscious that he does belong wholly to Nature; and often (or even generally) he is not merely unconscious of his complete penetration by the natural, but actively resentful of the imputation. He persists in believing himself to be, according to Spinoza's words, *imperium in imperio:* 'a kingdom within a kingdom'. And this is the source of the particular kind of transcendentalism and supernaturalism which Spinoza and Goethe so persistently rejected. But their rejection carried with it no refusal to recognize the specific humanity of man. Man was, indeed, an animal, but he was a human animal. The difference was essential. 'In the subject there is everything that there is in Nature, and something more.' There was no trace in this doctrine of that false simplification, which so completely vitiates vulgar materialism — the reduction of man to an order below the human. On the contrary, it demanded a lucid recognition of human nature: of Nature in its specifically human form. Thus it purified human nature in man of the

dualistic impediment, and liberated him from the cramping tyranny of a merely external and authoritative morality. Man must learn to know and to accept himself.

This attitude to experience is not easy to describe; or rather it can be described from different angles. It is the pursuit of wisdom by knowing Nature, and by knowing Nature in oneself. This twofold pursuit, giving full rights to both the object and the subject, but with the primary and ultimate emphasis on the object, so that the final knowledge of the subject is a detached awareness of itself as object, is dynamic and creative. It is a true process of evolution: of subjective growth through objective experience. *Jeder neue Gegenstand, wohl beschaut, schliesst ein neues Organ in uns auf:* 'Every new object, steadily contemplated, creates a new organ in us.[5] There it is expressed in terms of an almost purely 'scientific' knowledge of that *Welt-und-Naturforschung,* that genetic inquiry into the total history of the world, the pursuit of which was, in Goethe's view, the true prophylactic against 'spiritual sickness'. But it expands immediately, beyond these limits. The *Gegenstand* — invaluable word — that which stands over against us, is not merely the scientific object, but the subject as object also; and the subject not merely as developed by its contemplation of the scientific object, but by its own most intimate life-experience. The continually growing subject, continually becoming object for itself, continually relegated back to the Nature which it is and to which it belongs — such was the 'dialectical' process of human growth as Goethe experienced and conceived it.

This process of growth, because it was indeed a process of growth, cannot be analysed beyond a certain point. As Goethe put it in *Glückliches Ereignis:*

> Those who view the snug certainty of human reason from a loftier standpoint (the innate reason, that is, of a healthy human being, which doubts neither objects and their relationship, nor its own capacity to know, understand, judge, value and use them), such men will certainly gladly admit that it would be almost to attempt the impossible

> were one to try to describe the innumerable paths to a purified, freer, self-conscious condition. It cannot be a question of degrees of culture, rather of wrong turnings, creeping and slidings, and after that an unpremeditated and joyous leap towards a higher level of understanding.

The ways of this growth were indeed labyrinthine. None the less the main and recurrent pattern is clear enough. On the one side, a continuous opening of the whole receptivity of the subject to all experience, a constant submission of the self to the 'pure phenomenon'; and on the other side, an equally constant relegation of the self enlarged by experience to the status of the 'pure phenomenon'. It was an incessant systole and diastole. Inevitably, there always remained on the side of the subject *something* that there was not in Nature, even when the subject was wholly reintegrated into the matrix. That unattainable *x* had its analogue in another unattainable *y* at the heart of objective nature. Such an *x,* such a y,, there must always be; nevertheless, this was not a fixed and adamantine 'unknowable': it was a continually shifting 'unknown'. Here the distinction becomes as tenuous as it is vital. It is the whole distinction between a dynamic and a static humility of mind.

§

The point of total resolution of the last faint trace of dualism within the human being cannot be reached by any process of knowledge. Although the continual metamorphosis of the growing subject into a natural object does inevitably bring man to a point at which knowledge in the intellectual and philosophic sense is superseded, at which knowledge ceases to be a possible name for the experience, and we must have recourse to Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei,* from which the last element of the personal subject has been refined away; still, this is a condition of contemplation, and, relatively to human life, of passivity. The final

'return to Nature' is activity. *Im Anfang war die That,* 'in the beginning was the Act'; and that primal and final action is not achieved by the pure activity of contemplation. Pure, creative action is necessary for the total resolution of the dualism which Spinoza reduced to the absolute minimum conceptually possible. Spinoza himself, in writing his *Ethics,* would be an example of pure creative action; and so, very justly, Goethe understood his own lifetime's activity. But it was important that the artist or philosopher should understand that true creative activity *(Produktivitat)* was not only not confined to such as he, but might be more perfectly manifested in another type of man.

> 'Yes, yes, my good friend, one need not write poems and plays to be creative; there is also a creativeness of deeds, which in many cases stands an important degree higher. The physician himself must be creative, if he really intends to heal; if he is not so, he will succeed only now and then, as by chance; but on the whole he will be only a bungler.'
>
> 'You appear,' I added, 'to call creativeness that which is usually called genius.'
>
> 'One lies very near the other,[5] said Goethe, 'for what is genius but that productive power by which arise deeds that can display themselves before God and Nature, and therefore have consequences, and are permanent.'
>
> (To Eckermann: *March 12th, 1829)*

The conversation had arisen *d propos a.* prolonged fit of nervous depression in Eckermann. Goethe had urged him to see a doctor, but Eckermann had done nothing. He was — Goethe told him — like Mr. Shandy, who spent half his life being annoyed by a creaking door, and could not summon up the resolution to fetch the oil-can and cure it.

> But so it is with us all! The darkening and illuminating of man make his destiny. What we need is that the daemon should lead us in leading-strings every day and tell us what to do on every occasion and make us do it. But the good

spirit leaves us, and we grow limp and grope **in the dark.** Napoleon was the man! *(Da war Napoleon ein Kerl!)* Always illuminated, always clear and decided, and at every hour endowed with the energy to carry out instantly what he had recognized to be advantageous and necessary.

The connection between this view of history, and Goethe's view of the life of the individual is manifest. It is the duty of the individual to discover and hold fast to the experiences that 'live and have consequences' in himself; by so doing he in his measure becomes creative, and in harmony with the great process of life in history. And this creative process in himself will be largely nourished by his imaginative understanding of the creative process in history: 'loving the greatest men best', as Blake put it. 'Alles grosse bildet'; 'everything great helps to create the individual'.

Whether Goethe's estimate of Napoleon was excessive or not, we shall not do well to follow Mr. Aldous Huxley in his sweeping denunciation of 'hero-worship'. In the first place, to recognize and imaginatively accept a 'man of destiny' is not at all the same as to approve him; and, secondly, in the particular case of Napoleon, it is easy to forget (in our dismay at the littleness of the modern dictator) that he came as a mighty liberating power to Europe. In destruction and construction alike he was a power indeed. To see him merely as the successor of a Tamerlane, or the precursor of a Hitler, is to forget the Code Napoléon, and the self-forgetful enthusiasm which he aroused in the little Jew-boy Heine. Napoleon, at least, meant *la carriire ouverte aux talents,* and freedom for the Jew: he made for the emancipation of Europe. *Alles grosse bildet* is an appeal to the imagination to *understand* the phenomenon of man with a 'daemon' — the instrument of historical necessity, not a command to prostrate oneself before him.

This famous conception of the 'daemon', explicitly adopted from Goethe in modern times by Spengler and Ludwig, and more significantly developed by Paul Tillich, is practically identical with the conception of the creative man. The creative man is

one who is more or less continually guided by the 'daemon[5]. Once more, Goethe's thought is quite incapable of precise definition; for the 'daemonic[5] is emphatically one of those things of which he said: 'We should know many things much better, if we did not try to know them too exactly/ We cannot hope to do more than attain a fleeting sideways glimpse at what was in his mind.

The 'daemonic' has possession of a man when he is completely and significantly active. The young Napoleon is an obvious example. But Napoleon is only the most visible type of the 'man of destiny[5]. The 'productive spirit[5] is manifold.

> To receive a simple pure phenomenon, to recognize it in its high significance, and to work with it, demands a creative spirit capable of taking a comprehensive view of reality, and it is a rare gift, found only in really superior natures.

To see the thing simply as it is, not as it is traditionally or conventionally supposed to be, is a gift of the 'daemonic[5] man, the creative spirit. This power of simple vision may find expression in the knowledge that is action or in action in the familiar sense. The fresh, direct and uncorrupted view of the situation, whether in science, or art, or history, or politics is the privilege of the 'daemonic[5] man. So that from this angle, we may regard him as the man who reacts, with the speed of instinct, to the actual environment, the true circumstances, instead of to the imaginary situation which the vast majority of men, having only a secondhand vision, take for real. His reaction, or adjustment, is therefore in the highest sense 'natural[5], but with a naturalness which appears to the ordinary man extraordinary rather than natural. Thus the 'daemonic[5] is essentially revolutionary in appearance, in whatever province of human activity it manifests itself. But it is at once revolutionary and permanent, because it is necessary. It is the necessary creative outcome, uttering itself through a man capable of responding to it, of the actual situation of Nature. Like Nature itself, of whose creative process he is the spear-head, the 'daemonic[5] man is beyond conventional morality;

he is himself, in Goethe's pregnant phrase, *'eine Natur'*. And this passing beyond conventional morality is evidently also necessary because morality is convention; and no instinctive response to an actual situation is possible in a man bound by the past. None the less, the 'daemonic' man is bound, he is perfectly constrained by the necessity of the true situation; his freedom consists merely in the freedom to be completely responsive to it. He is wholly an instrument of the creative destiny of Nature.

This necessarily inadequate account of one of Goethe's most intimate beliefs may appear dangerously subversive. But we misapprehend it completely if we fail to understand that an understanding of the 'daemonic' is only a means to extracting a true morality from history, and finding an enduring morality for ourselves. There is an essential ambiguity in the creative forces of history: creation and destruction go ever hand in hand. And it is for us to decide, as individuals, what is most permanent and has most enduring and valuable consequences, in history and in ourselves. The truth is that Goethe was, for all his outward semblance of sedateness and decorum, a completely revolutionary spirit. It was indeed, impossible, for one who had such an organic conception of the world-process, or one so conscious of the creative powers within himself, to be otherwise. And even in politics, where he had the reputation and the semblance of being conservative, it is evident that in the situation in which he lived, there was nothing else for him to be. But not Marx himself has spoken with more penetration of political revolution than Goethe.

> Because I hated the Revolution, the name of *Friend of the established order* was bestowed upon me. That is, however, a very ambiguous title, which I beg to decline. Since, with much that is good, there is also much that is bad, unjust and imperfect, a friend of the established order means often little less than the friend of the obsolete and bad.
>
> But human affairs wear every fifty years a different aspect; so that an arrangement which in the year 1800 was perfection may perhaps in the year 1850 be a defect.

> And, furthermore, nothing is good for a nation but that which arises from its own core and its own general wants, without apish imitation of another; since what to one race of people, at a certain age, is nutriment, may prove poison for another. All endeavours to introduce any foreign innovation, the necessity for which is not rooted in the core of the nation itself, are therefore foolish; and all premeditated revolutions of the kind are unsuccessful, *for they are without God, who keeps aloof from such bungling.* If, however, there exists an actual necessity for a great reform amongst a people, God is with it and it prospers. He was visibly with Christ and his first adherents; for the appearance of the new doctrine of love was a necessity to the world. He was also visibly with Luther; for the purification of the doctrine corrupted by the priests was no less a necessity. Neither of the great powers I have named was, however, a friend of the established order; much more were both of them convinced that the old leaven must be got rid of and that it would be impossible to go on and remain in the untrue, unjust, and defective way.

Thus, a revolution is successful because it is necessary. But if it is necessary will it not take place of itself? No, the 'daemonic' man is also necessary to lead the movement, to be, as it were, the consciousness of Nature's unconscious creative-destructive urge. He also is necessary; but the necessity becomes aware of itself in him as a sense of destiny. The doctrine is, in a sense, mystical. Unless it is understood from within outwards, it can be emasculated into a mere doctrine of acceptance and conservatism with, for its motto: 'History is always right'; or distorted into a glorification of 'success'. Such an interpretation would be profoundly unjust to Goethe, who regarded history as a creative process. He was opposed to any attempt to imitate the French Revolution in Germany, because such an attempt would not have grown out of German conditions; it would have lacked creative necessity. This creative necessity, uttering itself in the individual leader as 'the daemonic', and in the larger affairs of society as revolutionary

and creative change, is ultimately what Goethe means by God in human affairs. God was with Christ, and Luther; but he was also with Napoleon and Frederick the Great.

§

But it is not quite so simple. In what sense can it be said that Christ's teaching of love 'prospered'? If it had, Luther's would have been unnecessary. If Luther's doctrine may fairly be said to have 'prospered', another word altogether is required to describe the destiny of Christ's teaching. One can hardly even say that the Christian Church grew out of it: it was a grain of mustard-seed among many that created that fabric. What, it seems, one can affirm is that the world has not been able to forget the teaching, the life and death of Christ, much as it would have liked to do so: *er lebt undfortwirkt* — 'he lives and works on'.

On this crucial matter of the evaluation of the creative process in history and of the men who are its instruments Goethe spoke inconsistently, or at least ambiguously. Perhaps it was inevitable that he should. This was perhaps the most delicate province of that 'science of Nature', wherein he confessed that the man whose intuition was deepest was most perplexed by the incapacity of language to render his insight. The 'language of spirits' was required. The question that is nowhere clearly answered is nevertheless all-important: Was the 'daemonic' for Goethe distinct from the 'divine'? Eckermann sought illumination on precisely this point.

> 'Into the idea of the Divine,' I said by way of experiment, 'this active power which we name the Daemonic seems not to enter.'
>
> 'My dear fellow,' said Goethe, 'what do we know of the idea of the Divine? And what can our narrow ideas tell of the highest Being?'

The implication is plain enough. The 'daemonic' does in some sort enter into the idea of the 'divine', for Goethe, and perhaps it would do no violence to his half-formed thought to say that the

'daemonic' is the creative power of Nature manifest on the specifically human level and is therefore 'divine'[5], in the same sense as the total creative power of Nature is 'divine'. The 'daemonic' man is *'eine Natur'* on the human level. But beyond this there is a further distinction to be made. The force of nature, in human form, has further to be judged by history and the experience of mankind. Does the act of the 'daemonic' man 'live and have consequences' in a positive and creative sense? Is it permanently creative *of good,* of more abundant life? In this high sense there is a real and vital distinction between the mere 'daemonic' and the 'divine', and it seems to have been present in Goethe's mind in a conversation which Eckermann records eleven days before Goethe's death. It opens with a distinction between essential religion and Church religion.

> There are two points of view from which biblical matters may be regarded. There is the standpoint of a kind of absolute religion *(Urreligion)* of pure Nature and Reason, which is of divine origin. This will remain the same for ever, and will endure and prevail, so long as divinely gifted beings exist. But it is only for the elect, and is far too high and noble to become universal. Then there is the standpoint of the Church. . . .

This religion of 'pure Nature and Reason' is that which Blake had seized when he declared that 'All Religions are One'. Yet an older and wiser Blake declared that 'Man must, and will, have some religion; if he has not the Religion of Jesus, he will have the Religion of Satan, calling the Prince of this world, God, and destroying all who do not worship Satan under the name of God.' And, though it is true in a sense and to a degree that the religion of Jesus was based on an intuition or an experience common to all high religions, and reasserted both by Spinoza and Goethe: namely, that the spiritual progress of man is a progress through three phases — unconscious integration with Nature, conscious separation from Nature, conscious reintegration with Nature — nevertheless, in the religion of Jesus there is a unique

accent and intensity which distinguishes it absolutely from kindred religions. The religion of Jesus is not a religion of wisdom, but first and last, a religion of Love: or rather it is a religion which declares that, finally, the only wisdom is to love.

St. Paul, however unlike he may have been to Jesus, did not fail to grasp the simple secret of his Master's teaching. 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing'. And again, 'Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' Insight and inspiration are darkened, knowledge is superseded, but love alone is infallible. The consummation of the historical consciousness, of which Goethe was so splendid a prophet, is Christian love. History, I believe, has finally no meaning without it; and the study of history becomes nothing else than the complex prelude to complete despair. It may be that love, if he had felt it, would have inhibited a Napoleon from his work of destiny, or even a Cromwell, if he had felt it more, from his. But it grows ever more lucid to my imagination that what is truly enduring in human history is that which has grown from the element of self-surpassing love which has found its way into human action: so that the judgment of love and the judgment of history are ultimately the same. That which satisfies the judgment of love completely — the life and death of Christ — is more and more revealed to be the supremely significant and operative event in history, the only light by which the darkness of the world to-day is fully illumined as what it is. To-day we cannot know where we are, or what we are, save through the love of Christ. That is the final clue to history and to ourselves. Although I do not think that such a belief is inconsistent with Goethe's wisdom, I should not care to contend that it is implied in it. But the conversation with Eckermann quoted above, in which he distinguishes 'essential religion' from Church religion, continues significantly. Goethe applies his now familiar criterion to Bible criticism:

> Still, 'genuine or spurious?' with regard to things in the Bible, is a queer question. What is genuine but the surpassing, that which is in harmony with the purest nature and reason and even now ministers to our highest development! What is spurious but the absurd, the hollow, the stupid, that bears no fruit — no good fruit, anyhow. If the genuineness of a biblical book is to be decided by the question: whether something true throughout has been handed down to us, we might in some points doubt the genuineness of the Gospels . . . Yet I look on all four Gospels as thoroughly genuine, for in them is active the reflection of a greatness which proceeded from the person of Christ, which was of as divine a kind as ever the divine has been seen on earth. If I am asked, whether it is in my nature to pay him adoring reverence, I say: 'Certainly! I bow before him as the divine manifestation of the highest principle of morality.' If I am asked whether it is in my nature to revere the Sun, I say again: 'Certainly! For he is likewise a manifestation of the highest, and indeed the mightiest that we children of earth are allowed to behold. I adore in him the light and the productive power of God, whereby we all live and work and are, and all the plants and the animals with us. But if I am asked whether I am inclined to bow before a thumb-bone of the apostle Peter or Paul, I say: 'Spare me and stand away from me with your absurdities!'

There Eckermann's genius has captured the essence of Goethe's attitude towards Christianity. As against Catholic superstition, it is Protestant; as against Protestant asceticism, it is Humanist; and so far it tends towards an imaginative enlargement of Christianity. Where it appears to fall short of something distinctively Christian is in regarding Christ only as the 'divine manifestation of the highest principle of morality'. In any form of Christianity, Christ is more than that: objectively, he is the clue to human destiny, and subjectively he calls forth a far more passionate 'depth of speculation' than can be expressed in such a phrase.

It would be less than honest to claim Goethe as a Christian. And yet, I feel, he had a deeper insight into the necessity of Christianity as the power to transform the world than thousands of Christians eminent for piety and orthodoxy.

> We do not realize what we owe to Luther and the Reformation in general. We are free from the fetters of spiritual narrowness; we have, in consequence of our increasing culture, become capable of turning back to the fountain-head, and grasping Christianity in its purity. We have again the courage to stand with firm feet on God's earth and to feel ourselves in our divinely endowed human nature. Now let the culture of the spirit go on advancing, the natural sciences go on gaining in breadth and depth; and the human spirit expand as it may — it will never get beyond the sublimity and moral culture of Christianity as it glimmers and shines forth in the Gospels.
>
> But the more valiantly we Protestants advance in our noble development, the more swiftly will the Catholics follow us. As soon as they feel themselves caught by the ever-extending enlightenment of the time, they must follow, willy-nilly, till finally all is one.
>
> Also, the mischievous sectarianism of the Protestants will cease, and with it the hatred and enmity between father and son, brother and sister. For so soon as the pure teaching and love of Christ is comprehended, and become part of men's vital being, we shall all feel ourselves as human beings, great and free, and no longer attach particular importance to a degree more or less in the outward forms of religion. Besides we shall all advance gradually from a Christianity of word and creed to a Christianity of feeling and act.

This may fairly be charged with optimism: it has not proved to be so easy. Nevertheless, Goethe's hope remains the only hope of the world; but it would be surer, if it were not so hopeful. In fact and act, the world is farther away from this consummation to-day than it was in 1832. Yet it is, perhaps, true that the

world is more conscious than ever before of the terrible discrepancy between its act and its Christian profession. Nor is it enough to say, with the Marxist believers in the automatic necessity of the millennium, that the profession is mere hypocrisy and illusion. 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' Without a vision of the Good which satisfies and humbles our total humanity, we are lost: we cease to have the power to know or judge ourselves, and we are inevitably surrendered to the sub-human forces of life: which is Death.

To-day the world begins to realize the gulf between Life and Death, in the human order, and the magnitude and revolutionary nature of the effort required if the deathward movement is to be turned towards Life. But just as Goethe had forgotten for the moment that out of the very sectarianism of the Protestants, which he rightly deplored, was painfully born the idea of Toleration, now in jeopardy throughout Europe, so we, in our despair at the condition of the world, may forget that the very extremity of our sickness may be the necessary condition of our recovery, and that humanity now shrieking among the tombs, and gashing itself in its frenzy, may yet be found, when the devils have been driven out of it by Christ, clothed and in its right mind. For must it not be with nations as it is with individual men?

> What is the price of Experience. Do men buy it for a song?
> Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
> Of all that a man hath.

There is the accent which is missing in Goethe; it is the accent of suffering, of the knowledge of the *price* of experience. It is in Blake, it is in Shakespeare, it is in Rousseau. And Goethe is the poorer for lacking it.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PROTESTANT DREAM

WHEN the time came to choose a school for Shelley's one surviving child, his mother was advised to send him to one where he would learn to think for himself. 'To think for himself!' cried the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, the wife of Percy Shelley and the authoress of *Frankenstein*, 'Oh my God, teach him to think like other people!' Mary Shelley had had enough of it; and she wanted to spare her boy. Her mother, her father, her husband and she herself had thought for themselves. There was something heroic in every one of them; they had not ceased from mental fight. Yet she passionately desired for her son a life of golden mediocrity.

So, we think, would any other imaginative woman in her place. She had adored her father, her husband and the memory of her mother; and they had all deserved the love she gave them. Yet what she chiefly remembered, looking back on their lives, was their suffering. Mary Wollstonecraft touched happiness with Godwin only to die; Mary Shelley herself had lost first her babies, then her starry lover and husband; her father had struggled incessantly against poverty and odium and misfortune such that Fanny Imlay, his beloved and self-sacrificing step-daughter, was driven to suicide by the burden. He had, without a murmur, given up writing the only sort of books that interested him to write — the books in which, as Hazlitt said, he 'gave himself, and drudged for twenty years publishing books for children, in the vain hope of establishing some security for his family. When all the intellectual enthusiasts for a radical change in society had faded out, when Wordsworth and Southey and Coleridge had become pillars of the established order, he stood firm by his faith.

Mary Shelley, looking back on her father's long life — the life

of a man who, from beginning to end, had thought for himself, desired to avert such a life from her son. Had she foreknown what was to be the attitude of subsequent generations to her father, or foreseen how her husband's fame was to be enhanced by blackening her father's reputation, she might have been more vehement still *in* desiring mediocrity for her child.

In 1827, when at last the worst of Godwin's troubles were over, and he, with no more children to keep and few more years to live, was working quietly on *The History of the Commonwealth*, 'How differently you and I are organized!' he wrote to Mary Shelley:

> In my seventy-second year I am all cheerfulness, and never anticipate the evil day till to do so is absolutely unavoidable. Would to God you were my daughter in all but my poverty! But I am afraid you are a Wollstonecraft. We are so curiously made that the atom put in the wrong place in our original structure will often make us unhappy for life. But my present cheerfulness is greatly owing to Cromwell, and the nature of my occupation, which gives me an object *omnium horarum*, a stream for ever running and for ever new.

The worst of his troubles were indeed past. The bankruptcy of his publishing business for children's books, which he had gone to such shifts for so many years to avert, was an accomplished fact. He was freed from its encumbrance, but he still found it hard to make a living, although if the copyright laws of to-day had been in existence then, he would have been a wealthy man. His novels were world-famous; his *Political Justice* a classic. *Caleb Williams* had provided Kean and Talma respectively with star-parts in a successful play. Even then, mud was still being flung at him — and mud of the dirtiest. What seems to us one of his noblest works, the memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft, was still reckoned the evidence of his infamy. Still he found solace in Cromwell, and in his own philosophy. *The History of the Commonwealth*, on which he was working, though it had been superseded by later research, is still a valuable book. For Godwin, who (as Coleridge said) 'had something in him that Home Tooke could never have

understood', understood the something in Cromwell that later historians have found it hard to comprehend. Godwin belonged to the breed, and the creed. He was an Independent writing of an Independent; and just as Cromwell had a touch of the Fifth Monarchy man about him, so had Godwin. The vision we glimpse through *The Principles of Political Justice* is perhaps as near as a modern mind can get to what a seventeenth-century Independent imagined by the rule of the Saints.

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Godwin came, like Cromwell, from the Fen country. His father and his grandfather before him had been Independent ministers; and he was trained to follow in their footsteps. He was, at the first offering, rejected from the Dissenting College at Homerton for the heresy of Sandemanianism. Long afterwards, Godwin described Sandeman as one 'who, after Calvin had damned ninety-nine in a hundred of mankind, had contrived a scheme for damning ninety-nine in a hundred of the followers of Calvin'. That was a good joke; but, intentionally or not, it missed the emphasis. The distinctive feature of the Sandemanians (to whom in the next generation Michael Faraday belonged) was their effort to live the life of the New Testament and to restore the communism of primitive Christianity: every member was bound to hold his property at the disposal of the church for the relief of the poorer brethren. As a natural corollary, and equally as part of the primitive gospel, it taught the impiousness of a State Church, and of the use of secular power for religious compulsion. These last were indeed the old principles of Independency. The Sandemanians accepted and re-asserted them both; and further conceived of their Christian community as necessarily committed to follow the example of the early Christians: their Church was a new society within an old one, with which it was not homogeneous. This breach of continuity between the new society and the old explains the paradox that when Godwin left Homerton College, a

more confirmed Sandemanian than when he entered it, he was a political Tory. In other words, the Sandemanian revolution was so revolutionary that it had no immediate implication for 'polities'. From another angle, it signified the complete humanization of Calvinism. The rarity of 'election' in this forgotten little sect corresponded to the rarity, not of a somewhat capricious conviction of grace, but of genuinely Christian behaviour. Of some such material were the finest elements in Cromwell's army made; and on such a belief reposed that distinction between Christian brotherhood and political equality which was the root of much of the trouble between Cromwell and the political Levellers, and the cause of much of his reputation for duplicity. And just as Cromwell saw and felt no contradiction between strong government and his passion for religious toleration, so Godwin puzzled and irritated Crabb Robinson by the vehemence of his desire that Napoleon should be successful in the Hundred Days. As against a Bourbon restoration Napoleon stood for strong government and spiritual liberty, in Godwin's eyes: and readers of Stendhal, at least, will be prepared to believe he was right.

What Godwin inherited, and what he understood instinctively in Cromwell, was a passionate and religious belief in the sacredness of the individual. This sacred individuality, as Godwin understood it, would be far less compromised and corrupted by strong government, authoritative, visible and defined, which took cognizance only of act and left opinion free, than it was by the insidious circumambience of the unquestioned traditions and conventions of society. It is impossible to understand Godwin, or his curious aloofness from the political movements of his day, except we appreciate that he was no more a mere democrat than Cromwell or Rousseau. He was concerned for the integrity of the individual man. Therefore, the political revolutionary or even the moderate political reformer did not know what to make of him. Without the faintest intention of paradox, he was always springing surprises. His denunciation in *Political Justice* of the fetish of majority worship, 'that intolerable insult upon all reason and

justice — the deciding of truth by the counting up of numbers', is of a piece with his spirited attack, forty years later, on the viciousness of vote by ballot in his final book of essays, *Thoughts on Man.* The ballot-box would, it is true, enable a man to vote as he pleased; but what was that compared to the fact that it will encourage him in duplicity and make dissimulation a necessity? That sounds almost fantastical: quite fantastical is his serious doubt at the end of *Political Justice* whether in a true society of real individuals its members would consent to play orchestral music or act in dramas, because of the attaint to their individuality. But what underlies his extraordinary generalization: 'Everything understood by the term co-operation is in some senses an evil' is an impassioned conviction of the worth and potentialities of the individual, and an endeavour to implant in men's imaginations the conception of what human integrity might mean.

It was this strain in *Political Justice* which set young men's hearts on fire. The difference between Godwin and the enthusiasts who fell by the wayside, who (as Hazlitt sardonically put it) 'lost their way in Utopia, and found it in Old Sarum', was that Godwin had the power to endure. He had come to his vision first through a long and peculiar religious tradition, and secondly through hard thinking on the basis of religious struggle of his own. He was thirty-five, and a mature and well battered man when he conceived *Political Justice:* he had fought his way to his faith. Now he rationalized it. It was really all perfectly simple, as genuine religious vision always is.

Godwin saw, quite plainly, that men could be very much better than they are — so much better, indeed, as to be virtually quite different. The means of this regeneration of man was Reason. But Reason in Godwin's argument was a peculiar thing; it was inherently compulsive. Godwin's Reason was, in fact, the same as the faculty of understanding the Truth in Blake's apophthegm: 'Truth cannot be uttered so as to be understood and not be believed.' There is no difference between that and the Godwinian axiom that 'Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error.' Blake, we are

told by Gilchrist, did not like Godwin; and superficially, these contemporaries are antipodal. But, in reality, they are rather close together. In actual life, the connection between them was embodied in Mary Wollstonecraft, whom Blake loved, and who loved Godwin. And all that Godwin meant by 'positive institutions' is symbolized in Blake's arch-enemy Urizen. Yet Reason for Blake was the devil, for Godwin the saviour. They meant quite different things by the word. Reason and Love for Godwin were identical; for Blake antithetical. Godwin's Reason was near to Blake's Imagination. Probably, in the 'colloquial discussion' which Godwin loved, they drove one another mad.

'Universal benevolence' was, in Godwin's system, self-evident. The only problem is to understand why it is not in operation. The answer is, of course, simple. 'Positive institutions'—Monarchy, Aristocracy, the Church, the property-system — have corrupted men, and made them opaque to its illumination. The problem shifts a plane. By what means can these diabolical 'positive institutions' be changed? The answer is by the propagation of'universal benevolence', in idea and act, among those who are responsive to it. The problem shifts again. What are the desirable changes in positive institutions .which the disciples of universal benevolence should pursue? This, more than any other, is the question which Godwin answers in *Political Justice.* And it is intelligible that he induced in his fellow political reformers a kind of uncomprehending despair. He seemed to be answering the same question as they; but, in fact, it was a quite different one. His real answer is that all positive institutions should be abolished. That is to say, his answer is on the same plane as his problem: not political at all, as we (like his associates) understand the word, but moral and religious. And once more Godwin's creed is better summed up by Blake than by himself: 'Religion is Politics, and Politics is Brotherhood.' The real solution, and ultimately the only solution, is the conversion, by 'adequate communication' of the truth, of a number of men to self-evident 'universal benevolence'. Their example will be contagious, and the process of regeneration accelerated.

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But in the meantime? Godwin was only partly interested in the meantime. He did not really believe in the efficacy of transitional measures; he could do no more than allow that they were better than nothing. In practical politics he abandoned his Toryism, indeed, but he was content to be a Whig of the radical kind; and though he was ready to intervene, as he did very effectively in the trial of the twelve reformers with his brilliant pamphlet, *Cursory Strictures on Chief Justice Eyre's Charge to the Grand Jury*, he was not to be implicated in the politics of revolution or reform. He was willing to bear his witness to the evil of the existing order, and the good that might one day be; and he bore his witness bravely; but he profoundly mistrusted political organization towards the good. Let revolution begin at home, in the hearts and minds of men; it would last longer than the enthusiasms and extravagances of the London Corresponding Society. His attitude to the politics of reform was largely coloured by his deep mistrust of State action, which proceeded less from his having imbibed the English political individualism of his century than from his having absorbed the religious individualism of Independency. He imagined that he was the antithesis of Rousseau in this matter; but in fact he did not understand Rousseau, who, it must be confessed, was a much more realistic and revolutionary *political* thinker than Godwin. Rousseau's fundamental axioms that organized society, however calamitous its original advent might be deemed, had become necessary to human existence, and that now the specifically human problem was to moralize the organization of society, so that society might become the means to a new kind of human liberty — these positions were strictly incomprehensible to Godwin. The notion that men might need to be 'forced to be free' was worse than a paradox to him; it was a blasphemy. Nevertheless, the conception is essential to any positive social thinking that is not to be stultified by atomism. That men may need to be 'forced to be free' is merely an extreme

assertion of the necessity of obedience to Law, without which a society cannot be imagined at all. The practical problem is to determine where the power that may 'force men to be free' ought to reside, how it shall be placed there, and how men may be safeguarded from its perversion to quite other ends. These problems, into the consideration of which Rousseau entered as deeply as any man has done, can hardly be said to have been rear to Godwin at all. His thought was, in essence, Independent, millennial and anarchical.

So far as Godwin's conception can be reduced to practical terms, it meant the formation of a society within society — a little nucleus of the elect, practising universal benevolence among themselves and seeking by their example to accelerate the normal process of political development, in which they participated without illusion and without repugnance. In this form, the kinship between his thought and that of the Independents is manifest; Godwinism is secular Sandemanianism. And the much-derided 'perfectibility of man' is no more, and no less, than the re-assertion in secular terms of the possibility of regeneration. That this regeneration ultimately involves the abolition of all coercive government is self-evident: in so far as the regeneration actually takes place what is good in such government becomes supererogatory, what is bad a manifest evil.

But Godwin imagined that all government was coercive government. This is no more true than that all education is coercive, or indeed all experience whatsoever. Government is justified, in the eyes of imaginative reason, as the indispensable means for the formation of beneficent social habit — the habit of well-doing; to reject government, because it has been, and is always liable to be, diabolically abused, is to reject society itself. On the other hand, to accept the necessity of government does not involve rejecting the ideal of 'universal benevolence'. The assumption that these positions are destructive of one another, which Godwin appears always to be making, derives partly from the difficulty of expressing a religious intuition in secular terms, and partly from the evil condition of English government in his day.

Shelley understood better than others the true emphasis of Godwin's peculiar attitude. It was not so much against coercive government, as against coercion in general that Godwin protested. He was convinced that man could not enter the reign of love by compulsion, or even by organization. Hence the apparent paradox that political association for reform was almost as repugnant to him as governmental repression. Persuasion, working from individual to individual, was the only way to achieve a regeneration of society that was not superficial and specious. Godwin's seeming extravagance should not blind us to the element of truth in this. It is more apparent to-day than it was during the nineteenth century that the mechanism of political democracy will not yield more than you put into it in the way of social and moral regeneration. The difference between Godwin and Rousseau here is that Rousseau maintained (as I believe, rightly) that the very process of moral regeneration in the individual involved the recognition that organized society is necessary. The regenerated individual, in Rousseau's vision, works definitely to make society a fitting instrument of individual regeneration: to make secular society an instrument of its own change into a religious society.

This was beyond the range of Godwin's Independent and individualistic thought. But Godwin's faith in persuasion was not really excessive. There is no other process conceivable by which men can learn to love one another. What is odd is that Godwin appears to consider no other kind of persuasion than the least persuasive form of it, namely, logical argument. But that is only appearance. He means something different. 'One word, happily interposed, reaching to his inmost soul, may take away a heart of stone and introduce a heart of flesh,' he says in *Thoughts on Man;* and again, 'sudden and irresistible conviction is chiefly the offspring of living speech'. Probably, it was due to his painstaking endeavour to achieve this miracle that he, although a poor talker, became so enamoured of 'colloquial discussion' and the 'collision of minds'. He was the evangelist, and his message was not altogether different from that of the parables of Jesus. This

explains his queer, but striking criticism of Shakespeare in *The Inquirer:* 'Shakespeare could not make a hero.' We read on amazedly to discover that he means by this that Shakespeare 'could not maintain the tone of a character penetrated with a divine enthusiasm, or fervently devoted to a generous cause'. In that we have a glimpse of Godwin's values, and of the inmost man.

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This is the clue to the apparent paradoxes of his character and his life: to the mutual love between himself and Mary Wollstonecraft, and the lovely reticent tenderness of his commemoration of that love, to the invincible loyalty towards him felt by all his children, to his unfailing generosity to those less fortunate and his unending claims on those more fortunate than himself, and to what Hazlitt described as 'his foible to fawn on those who used him cavalierly and to be cavalier to those who express an undue or unqualified admiration of him'. The acute Hazlitt registered the peculiarity, though he missed the explanation. Godwin really had two scales of value: one, for those who understood and belonged to the new world, another for those who did not. From those who did, or professed to understand, he desired no homage, because what he had revealed to them was not his own; from those who did not, criticism and injustice and abuse were meaningless. With them, since argument was unavailing, example was the only method: he showed them what Christian humility - though he would have called it by another name - really was. Godwin was that rarest of rare beings - a genuinely humble man. Hazlitt, who came nearest of all his contemporaries to doing him justice, was a proud one. But it is in Coleridge's reaction that we can most clearly see the bewildering effect of Godwin's singularity. Coleridge had accepted *Political Justice* with enthusiasm, then rejected it with contempt like the rest; but afterwards he steadily, though reluctantly, came to esteem Godwin more and more

highly: until he was forced to acknowledge that 'there was something there' - something that the vast majority of men could never understand, and something which he himself, though he understood, could never attain: 'Though I did it in the zenith of his reputation,' he wrote in his copy of Godwin's reply to Parr, 'yet I feel remorse ever to have only spoke unkindly of such a man.'

If we wish to understand this puzzling quality in Godwin, it is to that very correspondence with Francis Place whereby his reputation is supposed to be blasted that we should go. The misunderstanding between the men is complete. Or rather Godwin comes to understand Place, but Place never understands Godwin at all. Yet anyone, we think, who has an ear for accent in these matters can perceive that Godwin's integrity is as complete as his patience. The root of the trouble is simple. Godwin had imagined that he was dealing with a man who, having genuinely accepted the principle of 'universal benevolence', was prepared, without making any fuss about it or expecting any soul-corrupting profession of gratitude, to help Godwin until Place himself was no better off than Godwin. It may seem an inordinate expectation; but no one can doubt that it was what Godwin himself would have done. Place thought he had done enough when he had given Godwin all that he could without impinging on the economic security of himself and his family. The world would emphatically agree; the world would pronounce him already over-generous. And Place himself cannot understand how Godwin could have expected anything more. That is the gulf between them. Godwin did expect something more; and perhaps[4] he had the right to expect something more from one who, like Place, professed complete adherence to the principles of *Political Justice*. The odd and significant thing is that hardly anyone has been able to see that, on the plane on which the whole transaction was begun, Godwin is in the right, and Place in the wrong. It is Godwin who has maintained his integrity, Place who has lost it. No doubt, it was a grim misfortune that the teacher of universal benevolence should have been the man who could not practise, but only require it; but, seeing that he had been put in that

position by his teaching and kept in it by his refusal to compromise, it was for his friends who accepted the teaching to spare Godwin the necessity of explaining to them their duty.

As with Place, so with Shelley himself. Unless we can accept that Godwin was a man with a vision, of a new kind of life to which he was loyal to the end and for which he sacrificed every prospect of worldly success, we are bound to fall into the error of judging him by the very standards he repudiated, and by repudiating which he had fallen into the position in which he becomes the object of our judgment. He is accused, as he was accused by Shelley, of being faithless to his principles because he did not condone the elopement with Mary. Shelley's lack of imagination can be forgiven; but not that of Godwin's comfortable critics. Godwin was already being held up to public odium as the moral monster of the age. His beautiful *Memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft* had been received with a howl of indignation. His only hope of making a living was in the anonymous compiling and publishing of children's books: his name was anathema. At this moment one daughter goes off to be Shelley's mistress, the other to be Byron's; because of this scandal Fanny Imlay is no longer allowed to teach in her aunts' school in Ireland, her one hope of ceasing to be a burden to her overburdened father, and she commits suicide. The wonder is that Godwin did not commit suicide too. For surely it is hard to conceive any more terrible position than that of a man, who loved Fanny as Godwin loved her, being compelled, as he was, not even to claim her body, lest the newspapers should seize upon the story to compass his final ruin. The critic who once has courage enough to make real to himself the situation of the household in Skinner Street in 1815-1816 will be as ashamed, as Coleridge was, ever to have written only an unkind word concerning the man who carried the whole burden on his shoulders. But the tradition of cheap, vulgar, and heartless criticism of William Godwin still endures; it will be a long while yet before it is extirpated.

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Posterity owes Godwin a rehabilitation which it will yet have to perform. For the moment he still lives on 'in the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality', and in that deceitful medium he looms vaguely as a sort of fabulous monster of rationality. Yet when we come to regard him closely, he appears as one of the most human figures of his time. We have spoken already of the passionate loyalties he evoked in his children; but it is not that, nor even the evidence that he was beloved by one of the rarest women of his, or any other age, that we would call in evidence. The quality that is diffused through his whole work is rare and human and tender. In the eighteen-thirties, when even Charles Lamb was showing signs of panic at the doings of 'Captain Swing', but no sign of comprehension of the appalling misery of the starved farm-labourer, Godwin was writing that 'the merits and demerits of the public-house were very unjustly rated by the fastidious among the more favoured orders of society'. The country ale-house was a place where discontent was fomented and sedition talked, said the frightened interests. Let them be shut! Godwin turns the tables with a vengeance. He calls the public house the labourer's university, where men are educated into citizenship. Such a degree of imaginative sympathy and tolerance towards the labourer was almost unparalleled among his most enlightened contemporaries. 'Universal benevolence' was not a remote and ideal condition to Godwin: it was the way he felt. So also he really felt that love for children for their own sake, which inspires his remarkable writings on education. No wonder his children adored him. And when the wave of reaction drove him to abandon writing it was to the publication of real books for children that he betook himself. Put the two following sentences together: and we have an attitude towards the child which was revolutionary in his day and is still remote in ours.

> When the destination that is given to a child has been founded on a careful investigation of the faculties, tokens, and accidental aspirations which characterize his early years, it is

> then that every step that is made with him becomes a new and surer source of satisfaction.
>
> It is when the schoolboy proceeds to the playground that he engages in real action and real discussion: it is then that he is an absolute human being and a genuine individual.

Such was Godwin's ideal: that men should be, instead of automata, obedient to 'positive institutions', 'absolute human beings and genuine individuals'. It is remarkable that he finds this ideal condition realized in the boy at play. That means simply that what he believed in and strove to propagate as the goal of education was human spontaneity and mutual tolerance. Somehow the spontaneity of the child was to be re-created in the grown and advised man.

From his noble conception of the individual, Godwin derived a criterion for a swift and searching criticism of the State. 'The only legitimate object of political institutions', he wrote in one of the final chapters of *Political Justice,* 'is the advantage of individuals. All that cannot be brought home to them — national wealth, prosperity and glory — can be advantageous only to the self-interested impostors.' Godwin, who is generally reckoned one of the most abstract of political thinkers, was in some ways one of the most concrete; but it is to be noted that even here his phrasing is deceptive. By 'individuals' he means all individuals; and he takes it for granted that he will be so understood. The 'wealth of nations' is humanly meaningless, and even a sinister equivocation, unless it involves the comfort and security of the individuals who compose the nation.

As often, the visionary is the true realist. He has the innocent eye which sees things as they are. But how was the condition to be achieved in which the welfare of individuals should become the sole object of political institutions? Ultimately, only by increasing the number of those to whom this *raison d'etre* of government was self-evident. And Godwin could hardly help being fascinated by the speculation that, if this became self-evident to many men, there would be no need of government. Undoubtedly he indulged

this dream overmuch and rationalized it to excess; but that was partly because he lacked an idiom and philosophy of growth in which to express his thought. In fact, no man was more patient of the slowness of political and social improvement than Godwin. He was content to work a change in the hearts of a few by putting a vision before their imaginations. Thus a new motive would be introduced into that comprehensive process of necessity which to the last Godwin believed governed the world of men. 'The decisions of our will are always in obedience to the strongest motive.' The acceptance of this psychological determinism Godwin, like Spinoza, held to be the highest spiritual achievement of man; it was for him the sole authentic fount of true tolerance.

> We shall see, according to an expressive phrase, that he 'could not help it', and, of consequence, while we look down from the high tower of philosophy upon the scene of human affairs, our prevailing emotion will be pity, even towards the criminal who, from the qualities he brought into the world, and the various circumstances which act upon him from infancy, and from his character, is impelled to be the means of the evils, which we view with so profound disapprobation, and the existence of which we so entirely regret.

The change would come but slowly as the circumstances and the institutions were changed; and they would be changed only by the slow spread of enlightenment, bringing a new and stronger motive into play. Of the economic pressures which have come to be the preponderant factor for modern political thought, Godwin took no account at all. For that very reason he is less fashionable than ever; but he is a salutary corrective to the naivety which expects the millennium by economic inevitability. Godwin was one who believed that the ideal was also a motive in the process of historical 'necessity', and ultimately the most enduring motive of all. 'What the heart of man is able to conceive, the hand of man is strong enough to perform . . . For myself I firmly believe that days of greater virtue and more ample justice will descend upon the earth.'

CHAPTER XX

OUT OF THE PALE OF LOVE

ENGLISH literature offers few more pregnant themes for reflection than the contrast between the development of Blake and Wordsworth after their enthusiasm for the French Revolution had waned. I think that, if we were capable of grasping *all* the implications of the divergence of these two prophetic minds, there would be little in the spiritual world that would be concealed from our vision.

However uncongenial the admission may be to the contemporary temper, we must accept the fact that the change from revolutionary enthusiasm to a mood of profound disillusion was, in both these men, inevitable. Their revolutionary enthusiasm was generous and human; for a season they really did believe that the Kingdom of Heaven was about to be realized on earth. And Wordsworth at least enjoyed the truly intoxicating experience of a simultaneous self-surrender to a revolutionary love for humanity and to a passionate and personal love for a woman. It is an inestimable loss, that from whatever motives, he tried to expunge all record of the latter from his book of life. All that remains of the glory and the gleam of it is the lines in V*audracour and Julia.*

> Earth breathed in one great presence of the spring;
> Life turned the meanest of her implements,
> Before his eyes, to price above all gold;
> The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine;
> Her chamber-window did surpass in glory
> The portals of the dawn; all paradise
> Could by the simple opening of **a** door
> Let itself in upon him:—pathways, **walks,**
> Swarm'd **with** enchantment, **till his spirit sank,**

Surcharg'd within him, overblest to move
Beneath a sun that wakes a weary world
To its dull round of ordinary cares:
A man too happy for mortality.

That is passionate human love felt with the intensity of the mystic - the authentic rapture that is (I believe) premonitory of the rapture of the soul kindled by the knowledge and the love of God. For Wordsworth it was indescribably blent with his transports of revolutionary optimism. We could gladly have spared a good deal of the politic piety of his later years for a more precisely faithful account of his feelings then. Perhaps it was by the alchemy of his passionate and personal love for a Frenchwoman that he appeared to himself so completely to participate in the upsurge of revolutionary France.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.

If we may trust *The Prelude* (and in this matter I believe we may) the first real breaking of the spell - the first real interruption of the sense of being borne along undivided on a wave of destiny and fulfilment - came to Wordsworth when, at the beginning of 1793, barely four months after he had been compelled to leave France by lack of means to remain there, England declared war on France. Wordsworth's evidence is peremptory on this point; yet it is seldom regarded. When he returned to England from France, he says, he found men full of the struggle for negro emancipation; but he himself was not deeply concerned, because he had

laid this faith to heart
That, if France prospered, good men would not long
Pay fruitless worship to humanity,
And this most rotten branch of human shame,
Object, as seem'd, of a superfluous pains,
Would fall together with the parent tree.

In other words, since he was convinced that the revolution in

France, if successful, would be the prelude to universal humanitarian revolution, he looked upon the abolition of slavery as an inevitable consequence of revolutionary triumph, therefore not to be pursued for itself. Then comes the crucial confession.

> Such was my then belief, that there was one,
> And only one solicitude for all;
> And now the strength of Britain was put forth
> In league with the confederated host,
> Not in my single self alone I found,
> But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
> Change and subversion from this hour. *No shock*
> *Given to my moral nature had I known*
> *Down to that very moment; neither lapse*
> *Nor turn of sentiment that might be nam'd*
> *A revolution save at this one time;*
> *All else was progress on the self-same path*
> *On which with a diversity of pace*
> *I had been travelling; this a stride at once*
> *Into another region.*

That statement is surely very important for the understanding of Wordsworth: it asserts that, whatever may have been his subsequent judgment of his act, his love for Annette Vallon was not experienced by him as a moral lapse. For some, indeed, the glorious language of *Vaudracour and Julia* would be positive and conclusive proof of that; but it is as well to have Wordsworth's plain statement of the fact. His love for Annette was one of the more breathlessly rapid periods of his 'progress on the self-same path' - a headstrong, independent and deplorable path as it appeared to his family.

Wordsworth was not at this moment much concerned with giving himself a testimonial: and his emphatic assertion that the declaration of war by England on France was the first revolutionary shock to his moral being that he had experienced is illuminating. The instinct of family affection was strong in him; yet he had 'wasted' his time at Cambridge, quietly dropped all

thought of taking orders, gone to France with Jones, returned to France, fallen in love, had a natural daughter born to him - all without a qualm. Less than half this was to drive Coleridge into a condition of nervous desperation. Wordsworth was truly a strong and unitary character.

He became a divided man for the first time when his love of his own country and his love of humanity were suddenly opposed to each other. This inward conflict had been, he says, an abstract possibility for him; but he had 'never once foretasted the event', never (to use Keats's phrase) 'proved it upon his pulses'. Now he did.

> Now had I other business, for I felt
> The ravage of this most unnatural strife
> In my own heart; there lay it like a weight
> At enmity with all the tenderest springs
> Of my enjoyments. I, who with the breeze
> Had play'd, a green leaf on the blessed tree
> Of my beloved country, nor had wished
> For happier fortune than to wither there,
> Now from my pleasant station was cut off
> And toss'd about in whirlwinds.

But how came it that Wordsworth's love of his country had not been troubled before? How had he, previous to February 1793, managed to reconcile his enthusiasm for the Revolution with his love of England? The question may suggest that such a reconciliation was peculiarly difficult. Probably it was not. For many generous young Englishmen of 1789 the *ancien rigime* was an appalling tyranny, just as the Tsarist autocracy was to the generous young Englishmen of a hundred years later; and it was natural for them to believe that France was about to establish a liberal republic in which the rudimentary political freedoms of England would be perfected at one stroke - and that the Revolution would go thus far and no farther.

§

But whereas other young men—like Coleridge and Southey ~ were consciously revolutionary in their attitude to their own country, Wordsworth was not. This is the important point to seize. In fact, Wordsworth was a revolutionary Englishman; but he was not conscious of it. He was not a young'intellectual'. His attitude was wholly different from the abstract and undergraduate Republicanism of Coleridge and Southey; it is quite impossible to picture him at any time as a Pantisocrat. He is at pains to explain the difference to Coleridge in *The Prelude.* Most of his acquaintances at Orleans (he says) were monarchist officers, who tried to convert him; but he, though quite unused to argument on political theory, was instinctively reluctant to their Royalism, because

> in the regal sceptre and the pomp
> Of orders and degrees, I nothing found
> Then, or had ever, even in crudest youth
> That dazzled me; but rather what my soul
> Mourn'd for, or loath'd, beholding that the best
> RuPd not, and feeling that they ought to rule.
> For, born in a poor district, and which yet
> Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,
> Manners erect and frank simplicity,
> Than any other nook of English land,
> It was my fortune scarcely to have seen
> Through the whole tenor of my school-day time
> The face of one who, whether boy or man,
> Was vested with attention or respect
> Through claims of wealth and blood . . .
> ... It could not be
> But that one tutor'd thus, should look with awe
> Upon the faculties of man, receive
> Gladly the highest promises, and hail

As best the government of equal rights
And individual worth. And hence, O friend!
If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced
Less than might well befit my youth, the cause
In part lay here, that unto me the event
Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,
A gift that rather was come late than soon.

Here, I think, is the real explanation why the English declaration of war on France struck Wordsworth like a thunderclap. He was, in some real sense, a natural and concrete equalitarian, not a theoretical and abstract one; he understood the French Revolution—and not wholly awry—as the natural effort of the French peasantry to achieve the status of the 'statesmen' of the Dales. His local patriotism, not less because it was at this time unconscious of itself, was profound. It was not the generalized nationalism of the abstract mind, but a passionate attachment to a particular piece of country, to a particular folk, and to a particular way of life. That *was* England, for Wordsworth at twenty-three.

But, though it was England, it was peculiarly untypical of England of the 1790's — which was the land of advancing enclosure and accelerating industrialism: of capitalist agriculture and capitalist manufacture. The undergraduate republicans were, in fact, more in the right of it than Wordsworth when they took it for granted that England must be against the French Revolution, and the French Revolution against England. But they were theorists merely. It is significant that they betook themselves to Wordsworth's dales and Wordsworth's company, though neither Southey nor Coleridge was native there.

It is customary to lump them all together as renegades to their former revolutionary enthusiasm. But there was a vital difference between Wordsworth and his friends. Wordsworth had undergone a real spiritual struggle; they had not. And the reason why Wordsworth had been compelled to undergo a real spiritual struggle was that his revolutionary enthusiasm was intimately connected with his deep affection for his own folk. Very notably,

his enthusiasm was kindled but slowly. He was in France in 1790, yet at the beginning he took the revolution for granted: it was a natural thing—not a frenzied grasp at some unattainable social paradise, but an effort, long overdue, towards a condition of life that he knew as a reality,

> Not in Utopia—subterranean fields—
> Or some secreted island Heaven knows where,
> But in the very world, which is the world
> Of all of us—the place where in the end
> We find our happiness, or not at all.

This natural identification, in the mind and experience of Wordsworth, of his sympathy with the French Revolution and his attachment to the life of his own countryside, was the cause of the upheaval of his being by England's declaration of war on France. It involved a cleavage of his own integrity, a tearing-up of his roots.

Wordsworth tells us—and I believe him—that this was the first real revolutionary happening in his life: a sudden stride into another and an unknown region of experience. If this is true, those critics of Wordsworth who would make his love for Annette Vallon the psychological crux of his evolution commit a mistake in perspective. It is a natural mistake for the contemporary mind, because we have lost all real connection with the kind of life which was Wordsworth's matrix: a life lived in scarce conscious obedience to impersonal law. Even in Wordsworth's own day it was a vanishing mode of life, and he was not unaware of this. Indeed, even in his boyhood he had felt that this 'natural piety' was decaying: the simple worshippers he had known as a boy—

> Alas! even then they seemed like fleecy clouds
> That, struggling through the western sky, have won
> Their pensive light from a departed sun.

But since Wordsworth's day, when such an impersonal way of life was already a survival, the conscious-personal mode has triumphed completely. A man's real experiences, it is taken for

granted, are those in which his self-conscious personality is concerned. And, paradoxically but inevitably, this ascent of the personal evaluation into pre-eminence has been accompanied by a steady diminution of the effective reality of the personal being. Since the time when Wordsworth passed his blessed boyhood among simple people to whom 'Art's abused inventions were unknown', men have become more and more the unconscious instruments of vast economic and social processes which elude their comprehension and control. The increasing emphasis on the personal has been, in brutal fact, an unconscious compensation for the growing unreality of the personality, and for the increasing absence of personal feeling and significance in the substantial relations of life.

Therefore to apply our modern and transitory evaluation to the facts of Wordsworth's biography is a spiritual anachronism. Wordsworth's own emphasis on the essential of his struggle is the right one. His inward revolution came to him in the overwhelming sense that he was being uprooted from England; and that the England to which he was attached by innumerable fibres of his being - an attachment of which he had hitherto been but dimly conscious - was not the real England at all. And it was not. The real England - the effective and acting England - was that which had declared war on France, whose fleet Wordsworth watched gather together at Spithead in a fascinated and ill-boding dream. Every evening, he tells us, during a month spent in the Isle of Wight shortly after his recall to England, as he walked upon the sea-shore, he heard the sunset-cannon -

> seldom heard by me
> Without a spirit overcast, a deep
> Imagination, thought of woes to come,
> And sorrow for mankind, and pain of heart.

And surely we can enter into his pain of heart, and his 'deep imagination'. Which *was* England? That great, gathering fleet; or the folk he had known, and the life he had lived in the Dales?

The historical materialist has his answer prompt. The fleet, of

black-and-white three-deckers bristling with guns, was the real England. And since we must all be in part materialists, if we are not to be mere dreamers, we may agree. But the question remains: What were the folk and the life of the Dales? They cannot be banished into the limbo of illusion, even by us: still less by Wordsworth. The question is inescapable. It visits us with more importunacy and greater pain to-day. Which is England, in 1938? The millions of decent but bewildered men and women who ask for no more than to live their unobtrusive lives in peace, or the vast and steadily growing accumulation of armaments for the extermination of peoples as innocent as themselves?

§

Of such an order was the problem with which Wordsworth now had to struggle. His natural evolution had come to an abrupt and sudden end; and 'the burden of the mystery' - in a form strangely familiar to modern experience—was full upon him. Hitherto, he had been

> . a child of nature, as at first,
> Diffusing only those affections wider
> That from the cradle had grown up with me,
> And losing, in no other way than light
> Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong.

So, I think truly, he describes his former condition. It had been a natural progress to fulfilment, an unchecked unfolding of the being at the impulse of love. He had grown up in 'the genial sense of youth',

> When love is an unerring light,
> And joy its own security.

Love is Wordsworth's word for the condition when 'to be young was very heaven'; 'we who were strong in love' is his name for his comrades in France. Likewise, when the catastrophe had come,

and war was declared, it is with the same word that he describes it.

> This threw me first *out of the pale of love;*
> Soured and corrupted upwards to the source
> My sentiments; was not, as hitherto,
> A swallowing up of lesser things in great,
> But change of them into their opposites.

It is perhaps supererogatory to describe again what Wordsworth himself has described so well; but he was a strange, passionate and powerful being, and it is not so easy as it seems to take his description of himself at face value. For what he is saying is that, up to this moment in 1793, every spontaneous and powerful feeling in himself had been in harmony; he had known no real internal conflict at all. He had trusted in his own instinct, and he had felt that his instinct was endorsed by his whole being - was indeed the voice of his whole being. Few men, I believe, reach the age of twenty-three in such a condition of unbroken integrity, of unchecked spontaneity. Thus it is difficult for us to let Wordsworth's account of himself make its due impression; and doubly difficult because at the back of our minds is the knowledge that he is concealing the facts of his love for Annette.

No-one could regret more than I that he did decide to be silent on this matter; perhaps few regret it so much: for it makes undeservedly difficult the task of one like myself who, after much meditation and much scepticism, has come to be convinced of the integrity of the first version of *The Prelude* - by which I mean that the relative importance he imputes to the events he describes in that poem is faithful to Wordsworth's experience. I am a child of this age, and my bias is strongly towards seeking the clue to Wordsworth's period of barrenness and despair in the history of his love for Annette. Nevertheless, I do not believe it is to be found there; I believe it is where Wordsworth said it was, and that his passion for Annette was subsidiary - to what?

That, indeed, is hard to formulate in a phrase which does not suggest egotism; nor ought we to avoid the suggestion of egotism provided we remember the other term of Keats's phrase, defining

Wordsworth's 'poetical character' as the 'egotistical sublime'. Wordsworth (as he himself says more than once) had gradually come to feel that he was 'a man of destiny', somewhat in the same way that Milton (with whom he acknowledged a peculiar and significant affinity) felt that he was 'a man of destiny'. This feeling had grown in him gradually. At first it was no more than the feeling that he must go his own way, and a very unusual absence of inward conflict in going it. Slowly it ripened into the conviction that he could securely trust his own integrity of feeling; that he could do nothing except with the whole of himself, and that what he did with the whole of himself was valid and good. That was the touchstone for experience, and the key to the mystery of life: his composition was that of a prophet.

This massive harmony of the self, I believe, was not really disturbed by his love-affair with Annette. Not that the happening was a casual episode: a casual *liaison* was impossible for Wordsworth, whose integrity could not have admitted such a thing. But precisely how important it was—that was for Wordsworth himself to discover. And the truth is that there is very little evidence, either in his own story, or in his work at large, that he felt any acute conflict about his actual conduct in this matter. If he did, it was a subsidiary conflict, swallowed up in the greater one. What the greater conflict was, he declares quite plainly: it followed the sudden realization that he was torn up by the roots from his own country.

Wordsworth—unlike his famous contemporaries—had roots. The integrity of feeling to which he had trusted was deeply rooted in a spot of English soil, and in its way of life: thence came the sap of his strong being, and the very nourishment of his 'strength of love'. England—a concrete and local, not an abstract and uniform England—had made him what he was, sent him forth strong in his own derived integrity to participate in the Revolution and to fulfil his mission as an Englishman. Now England denied him. The great fleet he watched at Spithead was like a monstrous Satan, striking at the quick of his own being.

, Unless we understand that this truly was the revolutionary

happening in Wordsworth's life, and participate in it with something of his own 'deep imagination', I think that Wordsworth is bound to be an enigma. But if we do understand it, many things become clear: not least among them, the reason why Wordsworth's 'patriotic' sonnets are incomparably finer than any other poems in conscious praise of England. They belong to a different order of utterance, altogether. We cannot explain their magical and sustained quality merely by saying that Wordsworth *was* a great poet; but we do come nearer a real explanation when we understand that the spiritual struggle out of which he emerged a great poet was a struggle precipitated by his shattering doubt whether he belonged to England at all, or England to him.

CHAPTER XXI

PROPHECY AND PATRIOTISM

THE gradual change of the purpose of the French revolutionary armies from the defence of the liberties won to an aggressive Imperialism was, no doubt, a godsend to Wordsworth. The emergence of Napoleon restored Wordsworth's integrity, or consummated the restoration of it. Thus his patriotic sonnets are the triumph song of a great but divided spirit made whole; they are profound with the accents of a man who has seen his salvation. But if we look below the surface of things, we shall understand that this was no accident. We shall not be tempted to say: 'How lucky for Wordsworth that Napoleon did emerge!' If a militarist, imperialistic and aggressive France had not emerged, Wordsworth's conflict would have been solved differently; for then it would have been impossible for England to maintain her war against France.

The reconciliation with England which finds utterance so splendid in the sonnets of 1802 was only the final consummation of a gradual reconquest of his own integrity. It had been preceded by what some would regard as a more intimate and personal self-integration. But if we are mindful of the fact that his cleavage from England was acutely personal to him, we shall be content to regard this previous integration merely as a different aspect of a single and indivisible process. The process is fascinating indeed; it is the inward history of the five years which separated his first visit to Tintern Abbey, in 1793, immediately after his fateful and sombre watching of the Fleet at Spithead, from his immortal second visit in July 1798; of the space between the time

> when like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers and the lonely streams

Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved,

and the time when the beautiful *Lines* were actually written, when he had experienced

the blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened.

It is not directly germane to our present purpose to unravel the process of the intervening years. But something must be said of it. In the broadest outline it consisted of three phases. During the first, the cleavage of Wordsworth's being precipitated by the English declaration of war worked retrospectively: the integrity of his own past was subjected to an incessant sceptical decomposition, of which the most vivid record is to be found in *The Borderers*. The essential theme of this immature but arresting tragedy is the fearful incommensurability of intention and action. It is the sensation of this incommensurability which gives it such startling moments of reality. Here rather than in *The Prelude* we can find the immediacy of Wordsworth's experience in this phase of retrospective dissolution of his own being. Oswald's words belong to Wordsworth's immediate autobiography:

Action is transitory—a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.

Such scepticism—'felt along the heart'—of one's own being involves all reality: for it is a condition of intolerable discord, of absolute heterogeneity, between the subjective and the objective world.

From this condition, which is not to be simply identified with the pang of conscience or the sense of sin, but is the true metaphysical anguish which (I think) is deeply experienced only by rare natures, Wordsworth emerged into a second phase. In this phase a conviction of his homogeneity with outward reality was gradually re-established, largely by the help of his abiding memory of certain moments of vision which had come to him in boyhood. In *The Prelude*, at this point in his history, he names, and re-creates two of them. One was when he was not yet six, and he came upon a gibbet-pole,

> And reascending the bare common, saw
> The beacon on the summit and, more near,
> A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
> And seem'd with difficult steps to face her way
> Against the blowing wind.

The second was during his schooldays, when he was thirteen, and sat on a crag watching two roads for the horses that were coming to fetch him.

> Upon my right hand was a single sheep
> A whistling hawthorn on my left . . .
> And afterwards, the wind and sleety rain,
> And all the business of the elements,
> The single sheep and the one blasted tree
> And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
> The noise of wood and water, and the mist
> Which on the line of each of those two roads
> Advanced in such indisputable shapes,
> All these were spectacles arid sounds to which
> I often would repair and thence would drink
> As at a fountain.

These are but types of the remembered experiences by whose potency Wordsworth's sense of his unity with outward reality was restored. On their significance this is not the place to enlarge. They were in some sense apocalyptic revelations of the oneness of

reality - 'the Soul, the Imagination of the whole'; but they were also assurances of his own prophetic significance, of the potency of his own creative imagination. And it is notable that the account of these experiences culminates, in Book X I V of *The Prelude* written in 1805-6, in something hardly distinguishable from a profession of complete infallibility. But this was after the event; and we may be certain that, at the time Wordsworth is describing, his actual mood was humbler.

For the third phase was his return through Nature to Man, and his conscious discovery that in men who lived in simple accord with Nature was a dignity of humanity equal to the highest. This was the time at which he wrote *Guilt and Sorrow,* and *The Ruined Cottage* - the beautiful poem about Margaret. He had found

> how much of mental power
> And genuine virtue they possess who live,
> By bodily toil, labour exceeding far
> Their due proportion, under all the weight
> Of that injustice which upon ourselves
> By composition of society
> Ourselves entail.

This condition of unselfregarding love for his oppressed fellow-men - it is well to remember - Wordsworth had reached before he met Coleridge. It is a common mistake to over-emphasize Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth. Wordsworth's restoration to integrity and spiritual health had been accomplished before the two men met: what influence there had been was Dorothy's, with her instinctive tenderness for what Blake called 'the Minute Particulars'. When Coleridge met Wordsworth, he met not an equal but a master, both in spiritual experience and poetical achievement: and his relation to Wordsworth was much more that of a disciple than is generally realized. Coleridge's contribution to the relation was loving admiration for Wordsworth's genius, and an aptitude for intellectual analysis and metaphysical speculation which Wordsworth admired in turn. But I suspect that Coleridge's admiration conspired against Wordsworth's humility.

However that may be, Wordsworth's return to Nature, seeking beyond metaphysical ecstasy to a full satisfaction in

> An intermixture of distinct regards
> And truths of individual sympathy
> Nearer ourselves,

culminated in the advised discovery of an approximation to the true ideal of human society in his own countryfolk of the Dales: they were the nearest to the ideal cherished also by Keats - 'a grand Democracy of forest trees'. In them was revealed how, in the world of action, the high imaginative sense of unity which was the poet's privilege, could be mediated by the 'natural piety' of those who lived in dependence upon, and communion with, the Earth. The effective harmony between man and Nature, the concrete realization in actual living of the truth directly apprehended by the poetic imagination, was to be found in the moral integrity achieved through unquestioning acceptance of those duties which in a simple agricultural society had their sanction stamped plain upon them. In such a society the sense of duty was immediate and insusceptible of sophistication; and the dependence of man on man was a living relation of person to person, not a dead relation of person to process, while the dependence of man on Nature was also a relation between individual beings - between this man and this field, this mountain, this stream.

In this profound sense, Duty was, indeed, the reality of Love: for Love is the discovery of the universal *in* the particular. That society came nearest to the ideal in which this relation, like the quiet joy at the heart of it, was 'in widest commonalty spread'; in which therefore social relations were real and concrete, not remote and abstract. There were two kinds of abstraction to which Wordsworth was now utterly opposed: the abstraction of revolutionary idealism, and the abstraction of commercialism. The nature of the former he more distinctly apprehended than that of the latter. But the essential condition of his reconciliation with England was a vehement repudiation of both. England *was* England, in so far as it embodied the virtues of the society of the

Dales. And, as we shall see, in his great poetic utterances of his love for England - the word 'love' is exact - he was faithful to this imaginative insight.

This poetic utterance of Wordsworth's love for England was in the main the work of a single year, 1802, and of a bare six months of it. The year immediately before it had been barren and unproductive, and evidently occupied by a spiritual struggle. Inevitably with a poet of Wordsworth's stature, his total being was involved. So that it would be a mistake to represent the struggle as centred in the decision to bid a long farewell to Annette and marry Mary Hutchinson. That was, undoubtedly, part of a total decision, but only part of it. Equally important, at least, were his reconciliation with England, and his imaginative realization that Duty was the fulfilment of Love; and no less important, on the side of pure poetry was his sudden cultivation of the sonnet form to such magnificent effect. These are all aspects of a single, total and natural change — a re-birth.

We may compare a verse from *The Ode to Duty* with the first of the *Miscellaneous Sonnets* to make the connection evident. He invokes Duty.

> Through no disturbance of my soul
> Or strong compunction in me wrought
> I supplicate for thy control;
> But in the quietness of thought:
> Me this unchartered freedom tires;
> I feel the weight of chance-desires:
> My hopes no more must change their name,
> I long for a repose that ever is the same.

And here is his sonnet-prelude to his Sonnets.

> Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
> And hermits are contented with their cells;
> And students with their pensive citadels
> Sit blithe and happy . . .
> In truth the prison, unto which we doom
> Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me

In sundry moods 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground,
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace here, as I have found.

Wordsworth's most splendid 'patriotic' sonnets were written in August and September 1802. The August he spent at Calais, in the company of Annette and his natural daughter, Caroline; on October 4th he married Mary Hutchinson. I cannot avoid the conclusion that the barren year of 1801 was one of inward struggle from which emerged a man and a poet newly integrated around the imaginative idea of Duty as the true fulfilment of Love (in the sense I have defined). Of this idea the expressions were various, and organically related: in the realm of pure poetry the sonnet-form, in that of domestic existence marriage and children (less, I believe, in contrast to his passion for Annette, which had long since cooled, than in contrast to the strange, stimulating, but exhausting triangular relation between himself, Dorothy and Coleridge); in the realm of social existence, a new belief in the society of the Dales as an approach to the ideal, and a faith in England — not the blind and unreasoning faith of nationalism, but an intensely sensitive and critical faith, like the faith of a Jewish prophet in Israel.

§

So much (though all too little in regard to the interest of the subject) on the gradual process of Wordsworth's re-integration, which was consummated in his reconciliation with England. What concerns us now is to establish the significance of Wordsworth's achievement in the sonnets of 1802-3. They are probably the completest and most perfect expression of himself that he ever attained — the very utterance of 'the second will more wise'. Here my purpose is to consider them solely under their 'political' aspect, as the record of that final reconciliation with England

which Wordsworth had been seeking. No doubt the dissociation of the political aspect is to some extent arbitrary: Heaven alone can determine, for instance, whether some of the passionate love of England that speaks in the sonnets written at Calais in August 1802 derived from Wordsworth's desire to get the clean break with Annette Vallon over and done with. But I am certain that we do violence to the proportion and temperament of Wordsworth's nature if we see the dominant motive of Wordsworth's reconciliation with England in his desire to bury his personal past with Annette.

Yet how significant is the first of his sonnets, written on May 21st, 1802, on Buonaparte!

> 'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
> The Governor who must be wise and good,
> And temper with the sternness of the brain
> Thoughts motherly and meek as womanhood.
> *Wisdom doth live with Children round her knees.*
> Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
> Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
> Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
> By which true Sway doth mount: this is the stalk
> True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these.

Indubitably, that is Wordsworth's vision of himself in the future on which he had now decided: and the 'egotistical sublime' propounds it as the ideal for an Emperor. Regarded thus, it is a little absurd. But Wordsworth is saying no more than that he has discovered the ideal for Man: *a fortiori* for the governor of Men. This process he calls in another sonnet 'sounding *himself to* know the destiny of *Man*\

It is not easy — even from the sonnets themselves — to form a coherent picture of Wordsworth's mind at this creative moment. At the back of all his new faith is the conviction that violent revolution is not the way to creative change in England, because England has won her liberty. Naturally, that conviction does not involve the repudiation of England's revolutionary past. On the

contrary, Milton is invoked as the pre-eminent type of the moral virtue which Wordsworth longs to see reborn. Milton is, for Wordsworth, the chief representative of 'British freedom'. But here Wordsworth is in two minds: at one moment, British freedom appears to be completely corrupted.

> Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
> Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower
> Have forfeited their ancient English dower
> Of inward happiness. We are selfish men.

And that note of prophetic denunciation is sustained in at least four of the finest sonnets of 1802; yet at another moment, he asserts the very thing that he denies:

> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
> That Milton held.

One might point out that Shakespeare himself did not hold the faith and morals that Milton held; and that Wordsworth's own faith evolved into something very different from Milton's - particularly in the matter of the Established Church. But such criticism would miss Wordsworth's essential point - that the 'freedom' which Milton championed had been at least partly established in England.

What really disturbs him is that what he believes to be the solid basis of this 'freedom' has decayed.

> Rapine, avarice, expense,
> This is idolatry; and these we adore:
> Plain living and high thinking are no more:
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
> And pure religion breathing household laws.

Again, one is tempted to ask whether Milton's pure religion

really did 'breathe household laws'; but again we must forbear. More to the point is to ask whether the commercialism which brought depression and dismay to Wordsworth was not inextricably bound up with the 'freedom' of which Milton was the trumpet-tongue. Between spiritual liberty and economic individualism there is an enormous and fateful distinction: but so far it has passed the wit of human policy to make the distinction a social reality, without destroying both together. Undoubtedly, Wordsworth was groping after this distinction; and he is divided between a bitter loathing of British commercialism and a passionate loyalty to the liberties under which it had come to flourish. Between these two he wavers undecided. At one moment he explicitly withdraws his condemnation.

> Of these unfilial fears I am ashamed,
> For dearly must we prize thee; we who find
> In thee a bulwark for the cause of men:
> And I by my affection was beguiled:
> What wonder if a poet now and then
> Among the many movements of his mind
> Felt for thee as a lover or a child?

But the recantation is double-edged, surely. It is not a weakness to feel for one's country as a lover or a child. On the contrary, the duty of a poet towards his country could hardly be more truly or more simply defined. If Wordsworth surrendered this function, and abandoned the attitude as unmanly or unrealistic, he surrendered his soul. Probably that is what he actually did; but it did not happen without a struggle. In spite of the recantation he returns to his denunciation of the spirit of commercialism in '*These times strike monied worldlings with dismay;* and proceeds to avow that his faith in England is only a faith *faute de mieux,* in a sonnet which deserves a careful reading.

> England! the time is come when thou should'st wean
> Thy heart from its emasculating food;
> The truth should now be better understood;
> Old things have been unsettled; we have seen

Fair seed-time, better harvest might have been
But for thy trespasses; and, at this day,
If for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa,
Aught good were destined, thou would'st step between.
England: all nations in this charge agree:
But worse, more ignorant in love and hate,
Far - far more abject is thine enemy:
Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
Of thy offences be a heavy weight:
O grief, that Earth's best hopes rest all with thee!

That is a very qualified 'patriotism', indeed; and Wordsworth is looking at his country once more with the innocent candour of a child, or the aching disappointment of a lover. In the last resort, so long as he remains a poet, he cannot really reconcile his deep and abiding affection for his native dales with his sensitively critical attitude towards the behaviour of England as a nation; or his passion for English unity with his uncomfortable knowledge of increasing social cleavage. He is constantly driven to take refuge from this contradiction in the past. It is not with present England that he compares present France, but with England of the seventeenth century.

France, 'tis strange,
Hath brought forth no such souls as we had *then.*

The comparison is, of course, just: it is a comparison between revolutionary France and revolutionary England, but it is curious that Wordsworth did not carry it to an explicit comparison between Cromwell and Napoleon. It might have been illuminating to him; it certainly would have been precious to us. But the degree to which the England of the civil wars served his as norm and ideal to steady his own veering mind, and also as a mental refuge to avoid his own problem, is remarkably revealed in the *Lines on the Expected Invasion* (1803).

Come ye - who if (which heaven avert!) the land
Were with herself at strife, would take your stand,

Like gallant Falkland, by the Monarch's side,
And, like Montrose, make loyalty your pride -
Come ye - who, not less zealous, might display
Banners at enmity with regal sway
And, like the Pyms and Miltons of that day,
Think that a state would live in sounder health
If kingship bowed its head to commonwealth -
Ye, too, whom no discreditable fear
Would keep; perhaps with many a fruitless tear,
Uncertain what to choose and how to steer -
And ye, who might mistake for sober sense
And wise reserve the plea of indolence -
Come ye - whate'er your creed - O waken all,
Whatever your temper at your country's call;
Resolving (this a free-born nation can)
To have one soul, or perish to a man,
Or save this honoured land from every lord
But British reason and the British sword.

There, it would seem, Wordsworth reached firm ground. Against the actual menace of French invasion, the poet and the patriot could become one without conflict, as the nation could be united. He recurs to the idea that the country must 'have one soul' more than thirty years later when he appeals to Italy on the eve of the Risorgimento: 'Let thy scope be one fixed mind for all'. That was not altogether untrue of England when Napoleon threatened invasion: and the source of that unanimity was the sense that England had achieved a degree of political liberty worth defending. So that, at the end of his *Sonnets dedicated to National Independence and Liberty,*

the poet claims at least this praise
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days;
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.

That was written in 1811. The poetic afflatus is evidently flagging; but the claim is not unjust. At least Wordsworth, in becoming the great poet of English patriotism, had been faithful to his vision: he had been the poet of true liberty — ordered liberty — in its appropriate poetic vehicle.

CHAPTER XXII

THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE

THE passionate inspiration which attended Wordsworth's reintegration with England was not of long duration. To the brief and astonishing period between 1800 and 1805-7 belong the finest part of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion.* Our knowledge of the dates of the actual composition of *The Excursion* is incomplete; but the first two books (which seem to me definitely the finest) belong to 1802. Roughly speaking, we may say that somewhere between 1805-7 Wordsworth's plenary inspiration had begun to die away, and no such period of sustained inspiration was ever to visit him again. As we have seen, Wordsworth's patriotic fervour of 1802-3 was in no sense a denial of his past; it was much rather the completest flowering of his own integrity. Why did he not continue to advance? In years he was just at the beginning of maturity. Yet after thirty-five he wrote nothing of comparable consequence.

This is too large a problem to fall entirely within the scope of this book. From the personal and psychological side I do not propose to attempt an answer. But it is evident to me that if, as Wordsworth declared and I believe, his estrangement from England was the cause of the spiritual struggle from which he emerged a great poet, and if his acceptance of ordered liberty by his whole being was the sign under which his loving reunion with his country was accomplished, the maintenance of his own integrity depended on the depth of meaning he discovered in or breathed into his new faith. What did the new creed of Duty *mean* for Wordsworth? On the level of daily existence, it meant that he had decided to settle down, marry, and found a family. But Wordsworth, quite justly, always generalized from his own experience; that was the mode of his genius—'the egotistical sublime'. He 'sounded himself to know the destiny of man'. If then the domestic life was a moral necessity for him, it was a

necessity also for his fellow-men. But, unfortunately, his fellow-men gradually slipped out of the picture.

> When I was young (he wrote to Daniel Stuart in 1817) — giving myself credit for qualities I do not possess, and measuring mankind by that standard — I thought it derogatory to human nature to set up property in preference to person, as a title for legislative power. That notion has vanished.

It was right and proper that when Wordsworth discovered that it is property which gives a man the moral independence to be free, he should have revised what Coleridge called 'the Jacobin notion *of personal* rights'; but it was entirely wrong that he should simply abandon it for a defence of the rights of property as at present distributed. The true development of his faith — if it was not to become an apostasy — was towards the demand that every man should have property enough to enable him to be a morally independent being. The obligation upon Wordsworth was to become not less, but differently revolutionary.

No doubt the demand that the expropriators of the English peasants should be partially expropriated was, so far as practical politics went, chimerical at that time. But it was surely Wordsworth's duty to voice it as an ideal, to make the ideal live in his own imagination and that of others, and to become the champion of the English peasant against the appalling injustices which were now being perpetrated upon him. Wordsworth's role was clearly indicated. Whether or not it was immediately practical, his poetic mission in the realm of politics was to set before England, with all the warmth and strength of his imagination, the ideal of 'a nation of free-holders' as the ideal of social justice.

Without this fulfilment, there was bound to be a sudden hiatus in Wordsworth's development, an absolute breach of continuity in the history of his personality — and a lamentable decline in the power and passion of his poetry. The poet who is driven by his whole being into politics — using the word in the comprehensive sense — as Wordsworth had been, must go through with his politics to the end. They may not be 'practical polities': that is no

concern of his. But he is bound, under pain of inward sterility, to imagine and propagate a political ideal in which no element of his experience and insight is denied. The Wordsworth who, triumphant over his own deep misgivings, had glorified England as the land of liberty, and had been the voice of England's united soul, was bound to be, and to know himself to be, an apostate if he did not, when the defence of England was successfully accomplished, make himself the voice of the demand that England should *be* the land of liberty.

Wordsworth did not do this; he did not attempt to do it. We may excuse the later Wordsworth how we will; but the fact remains that he became a timid reactionary, and the life went out of his poetry. What Tchekov said concerning Tolstoy: that we feel, in the work of great genius, that he is always taking us towards a goal, is true of Wordsworth up to a point. Up to a point — which we put in 1805-7 - we feel that we are being taken by him towards some splendid goal. After that point, we feel we are being led nowhere at all. In the deep sense, Wordsworth has nothing more to say. He is become, as no man of genius can become while the genius is alive in him, innocuous — an unctuous and comfortable member of the early Victorian upper middle-class.

§

On the high imaginative level we can see clearly where Wordsworth failed. He had, with evident and passionate conviction, invoked the revolutionary England of the seventeenth century, to glorify England's fight against Napoleon. He had spoken as the heir of the English revolutionary succession. It was incumbent upon him, once the peril was over, to renew the revolutionary impulse. The English revolution had freed the individual conscience, but it had freed property from social control as well. Its good work and its evil work were accomplished together. The task of a prophet-poet who claimed in 1802 to be inspired by the English Revolution of a hundred and sixty years

before was to renew the good and reject the evil, and to proclaim the necessity of making individual liberty a reality instead of a phrase, by restoring to the now finally expropriated peasant his 'birthright' in the land.

Without that, Wordsworth's idealization of the society of the Dales collapsed into sentimentalism, and worse. If, as Wordsworth had believed, and still pretended to believe, that form of society was the ideal, then he must use his genius in urging that it should be restored and universalized. Against Tory and Whig alike, against both the opposing interests of capitalist agriculture and capitalist manufacture, he must be the champion of the oppressed. That was Wordsworth's historical and poetical mission. He failed it completely. In consequence, his poetry was degraded into the quasi-religious opium of the Victorian middle-class. The Lake-country became the playground of the cotton-manufacturers of Lancashire engaged in 'seeing into the life of things'. Wordsworth spent the rest of his life deploring this and deploring that — deploring industrialism, deploring the loss of the man-to-man relation in the abstract relations of modern production, deploring the obsolescence of the spinning wheel, deploring the Reform Bill, deploring Catholic Emancipation, deploring the admission of Dissenters to the Universities — he became the Deplorer-Laureate of England. He pleaded for a new 'moral basis', though none had known better than he that moral independence needed a basis in landed property.

That Wordsworth opposed the Liberalism of the English nineteenth century is no crime in my eyes: quite the contrary. His crime is that, although he was called, by temperament and genius, to be the most powerful and most English revolutionary influence of his time, he refused to fulfil his destiny. He can be defended, and successfully defended, if he is represented merely as the opponent of Victorian *laissez-faire*, because he had always denied its assumptions, economic, religious, and moral. But he cannot be defended from the charge of apostasy to his own genius. He could have become, had he possessed the courage of his own insight, a mighty champion of an organic society against its final

deformation by capitalist agriculture and capitalist manufacture: instead he became perhaps the subtlest defender of the abuses of both, in the name of Christian piety.

§

I have hinted that the real decline began about 1805-7; and I suspect that there was a connection between its beginning and the decision which he must have taken then to suppress the story of his love-affair, when, after a long interval, he resumed work upon *The Prelude* in those years. Spiritual honesty demands a holocaust of the self. Hold back but a little, when the crucial moment comes, and a seed of disease takes root that will corrupt the whole. His refusal to tell himself, or the friend of his heart, the truth about Annette, was a 'great refusal' in a man of Wordsworth's kind of genius — 'the egotistical sublime'. And from it I should date the slow collapse of his integrity.

His faith in England slowly began to fail. The later years of the Napoleonic wars brought ever more bitter hardships to the poor, and ever more colossal profits to the rich. And Wordsworth could not, or would not, face the truth: that the British freedom he had glorified had proved to be, for countless thousands of helpless folk, only the freedom to starve. Where now was the passionate sympathy he once had felt for such as Margaret? It was not that England had belied Wordsworth's hope — from that inevitable disaster a man emerges into a new faith; it was far more serious. Wordsworth had belied himself. As he flinched from the truth about himself, he flinched from the truth about his country. He was writing an account of himself in which there was nothing to be forgiven; he had begun to present to his country a picture of itself in which there was nothing to be forgiven, either. So he tasted popularity and became respectable. He could take no risks any more. He began to be afraid. And his prophetic poems of England began to be prophetic of his own condition. 'Plain living and high thinking were no more.'

Wordsworth had become afraid: afraid of the 'mob', afraid of the poor, afraid of the truth, afraid of his own safety and his own reputation. His belief in England, which by its poetry, by the courage of the truth of the love that inspired it, had had the sign of veracity upon its forehead, dwindled into mere words and empty profession. What had been a real faith, triumphant over open doubt, became a sham faith that admitted no doubt at all. Fear began to eat out the heart of love in Wordsworth; and now indeed he began to pass, irrevocably, 'out of the pale of love'. Blake alone could aptly describe his final condition: in which the very truths he utters are saturated in falsehood. This, on the eve of the first Reform Bill, will serve as an example of them all.

> In the present stage of our affairs, the class that does the most harm consists of well-intentioned men, who, being ignorant of human nature, think that they may help the thorough-paced reformers and revolutionaries to a certain point, and then stop, and that the machine will stop with them. After all, the question is, fundamentally, one of piety and morals; of piety, as disposing men who are anxious for social improvement to wait patiently for God's good time; and of morals, as guarding them from doing evil that good may come, or thinking that any ends can be so good as to justify wrong means for attaining them. In fact, means, in the concerns of this life, are infinitely more important than ends, which are to be valued mainly according to qualities and virtues requisite for their attainment; and the best test of an end being good is the purity of the means, which by the laws of God and of our nature, must be employed in order to secure it. Even the interests of eternity become distorted the moment they are looked at through the medium of impure means.

It sounds profoundly true, though strangely dull if it is true. But in fact the Devil is citing scripture to his purpose: for the 'good' to which all this refers is the 'British Constitution' before the Reform. It is indeed more subtle than that: it is the 'British Constitution' unchanged even by the most peaceful and legitimate

means. *Anything* which involves a change in Constitution is an 'impure means': that is, in fact, the definition of the 'bad' for Wordsworth now. What meaning he could have attached to 'God's good time' for social improvement, in such a context, is impossible to conceive. How 'God's good time' was to be made known to mortal man is undiscoverable. It was a pious equivocation for 'Never'.

§

Fundamentally, this was Wordsworth's attitude till the end of his life. Sometimes, there was a fitful gleam in the ashes. One is the *Postscript of 1835,* in which he proclaimed it the duty of the State to maintain 'all persons who cannot find employment, or procure wages sufficient to support the body in health and strength'; but since it was accompanied by a proviso that 'parochial relief should be administered under the care of the upper classes, as it ought to be', avowedly in order to prevent poor people from having a hand in fixing the rate of relief for their fellows, it is difficult to be as enthusiastic over this 'revolutionary document' as some have been.

Whatever hopes of Wordsworth's continued vitality it might kindle are promptly extinguished by the second half of the *Postscript,* wherein he proceeds to a truly remarkable defence of the Established Church against any reform whatever. His opening phrase provides the key to the whole: 'There is a loud clamour for extensive change in that *department'.* For Wordsworth, the Church of England is simply and solely a department of the British Constitution. Just as *any* change in Parliament is bad, so is *any* change in the Church. He embarks on an astonishing apology for pluralism, on the ground that to abolish pluralities would 'nearly extinguish the order of curates'! Then he reaches the real substance of his argument.

> It must be acknowledged that, among the regulations of ecclesiastical polity, none at first view are more attractive

> than that which prescribes for every parish a resident incumbent. How agreeable to picture to one's self, as has been done by poets and romance-writers, from Chaucer to Goldsmith, a man devoted to his ministerial office, with not a wish or thought ranging beyond the circuit of its cares!

It had once been agreeable to Wordsworth himself, and the notes to his poems still contain his account of the Rev. Robert Walker, the poor curate of Seathwaite, who had once been an ideal to him. But the old ideal is now a childish dream of the romanticist, to be dismissed without a pang. It belongs to a primitive society which has blessedly been superseded.

A 'more complex state of society' now prevails in England, which requires that the parson should be learned — was not Chaucer's parson learned? — and, 'perhaps more necessary', that he must be a citizen as well as a scholar. How admirable! Until we discover what it means. It means, simply, that the parson should defend the British Constitution, and 'appealing to the grounds of Scripture, should place the grounds of its injunctions in so clear a light that disaffection shall cease to be cultivated as a laudable propensity, and loyalty cleansed from the dishonour of a blind and prostrate obedience'. He is to show starving men the folly of blaming the government, instead of themselves, and to dispense the wisdom 'that blunts approaching distress by submission to God's will and lightens by patience grievances which cannot be removed'.

To this noble end it is imperative that the existing extreme inequality of income among the clergy derived from pluralities should be maintained. If any approximation to equality of income among the parish clergy were established, there will be no inducement for the parson to remove from where he first settles, and to acquire that varied knowledge of society requisite for his propaganda against all social change. He might, too, become identified with his poor parishioners, and reach the conclusion that many of their grievances *could* be removed. However, the great guiding principle is that 'the temporalities of the Church

Establishment should bear an analogy to the state of society, otherwise it cannot diffuse its influence through the whole community.'

> In a country so rich and luxurious as England, the character of its clergy must unavoidably sink, and their influence be everywhere impaired, if individuals from the upper ranks, and men of leading talents, are to have no inducements to enter that body but such as are purely spiritual.

Young men of the upper classes are drawn to the Church, so long as pluralities are retained, by the prospect of worldly advancement. They are compelled to study a little for this purpose. So devotion grows in them; and 'what might begin in temporal considerations will end (as in a majority of instances we trust it does) in a spiritual-mindedness not unworthy of the Gospel' — and in a comfortable accumulation of livings.

Let us be quite clear what it is that Wordsworth is defending. It is not the existence of the ecclesiastical hierarchy — of canons, archdeacons, deans, and bishops. Nobody challenged it; every sincere Churchman acknowledged it to be desirable and necessary. Wordsworth is defending, against Chaucer, against Rousseau, against the sensitive conscience of a new generation of Churchmen, the notorious and flagrant abuse by which men without piety nor learning, were allowed to accumulate benefices in their hands, and put in starved curates to do their work. He was deliberately defending the repetition of the old crime of the Church against the village, but now in a new and intolerably degraded form. For the old Church, if it starved the village, did at least glorify the monastery and the cathedral; but the pluralism which Wordsworth defended was merely the organized plunder of village and Church as well by the wealthy families, whose sole aim was to enrich themselves.

Surely, this is the absolute nadir of the Christian religion. When all the swathings of Wordsworth's pompous prose are removed, there remains the ugly mummy of a religion whose sole mission is to prevent political or social or religious change, and

to attract to the priesthood men whose sole interest is to prevent it. The younger son must have his spiritual vocation revealed to him by the prospects of material advancement, and his function is to persuade the simple-minded that any desire to improve the social system which secures to him his sacrilegious plunder is impious. It would, in anybody, be a contemptible parody of Christianity: in Wordsworth it strikes us as a truly pitiful degradation.

Now, Wordsworth has abandoned everything. He who in 1802 felt for England 'as a lover or a child', and uttered his heartfelt cry for simplicity, for a rejection of commercial morality, for a restoration of the personal bonds between man and man, now demands that Christianity itself shall be completely prostituted to the support and enrichment of the classes whose manifest corruption had formerly made him doubt his own faith in England. The lover of the beautiful England has married the ugly England —• for her money. For Wordsworth, the defence of 'Christianity' had become simply the means by which he could escape the obligations of a living faith in anything — in England, or Man, or God. His apostasy was complete; he was the perfect example of his own dictum: 'Even the interests of eternity become distorted the moment they are looked at through the medium of impure means.' The natural man had triumphed over the spiritual man, pretending, as is inevitable in such a case, that the triumph of the natural man is the victory of the spiritual. His inspiring and inspired faith in England as the not altogether worthy instrument of a divine purpose had declined into an utterly irreligious worship of its corrupt political and religious institutions, under the name of Christianity.

With the extinct and prosperous prophet of Rydal Mount we may compare the disregarded and forgotten prophet of Lambeth. William Blake had experienced the enthusiasm and the disillusion of the French Revolution. At about the same time that Wordsworth was turning to Milton for inspiration and support for his new-found faith in England, William Blake also was turning to him again — to understand and love Milton and redeem him from the egotism and confidence in his Selfhood, which, as Blake knew

from his own experience, had endured in him to the end. As Wordsworth slowly descended from a faith in an ideal England to servile acquiescence in a corrupt reality in the name of Christianity, Blake steadily struggled upward, in complete isolation, to a more and more sublime vision of his own country as the place where, as in a type, the redemption of mankind by the Divine Humanity of Jesus would be begun. No one understood him then; but we are beginning to understand him now. Events are battering us till we are permeable to the wisdom of Christian love. Against Wordsworth's denial of his insights and his experience, and his final surrender not to his genius but to his Self, we may set the verses which Blake prefixed to his *Milton* — verses which, by a true inevitability of history, have come more and more to be felt as the voice of the living soul of Christian England.

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEANS AND ENDS

WILLIAM GODWIN'S *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* culminates in a searching and sustained attack, from an unfamiliar standpoint, on the property-system existing in England, in his day. That property-system was not, as its defenders and its enemies alike often imagine, a system inherent in human 'nature', considered as an invariable attribute of the animal called Man. In Godwin's day the property-system of England was changing rapidly, indeed positively galloping towards a moral nadir. For Godwin's long life of eighty years coincided, almost exactly, with the period during which the remains of the common-field system of English agriculture was abolished, the common lands enclosed, and the village-community finally destroyed, and capitalist agriculture set free from its last restraints. Since England was still predominantly an agricultural country, this revolutionary change meant a change in the whole *property-system* of the country. Whereas the greater part of the land had not yet become in the full sense private property, now it became private property indeed — property as completely emancipated from all social or human obligation, as any other kind of property. What seems to the detached imagination the unnatural and inhuman notion that the land itself— the source from which all human life is nourished — could be so owned by individuals that they could, if and when they so willed, prevent their fellow-men from cultivating it, or even approaching it, finally became an institution. The old distinction between real property and personal possession was now merely a legal phrase. With the enforced extinction of the last vestiges of the village-community, *private* property — in the primary necessity of life — had become universal.

It was immensely rational, and immensely inhuman; and its

inhumanity was to be grimly illumined, towards the end of Godwin's life, by the blazing ricks of the last peasant uprising in England under 'Captain Swing'. The ricks guttered out, the poor peasants were transported for life to Botany Bay: and the age of Reason came to a triumphant end, in the beginning of the age of Madness. Godwin, with the paradoxical nature of true genius, was at once the complete child of the age of Reason, and the complete rebel against it. For him, the advent of the age of universal private property was merely the necessary prelude to the advent of the age of universal benevolence. Hitherto men had been, ever more and more reluctantly and over a steadily diminishing area, constrained into some sort of community: now that private property had been completely emancipated, the moment was manifestly come for men to behave as worthy of their final freedom. Now that the private property really was theirs to do as they liked with it, the obvious and rational thing for them to do with it was to give it up. In other words, freedom was the freedom to be human: or rather to be Christian.

Accordingly, this dreamer at the end *of Political Justice* portrays the superior humanity of a society of individuals who have emancipated themselves from the sordidness of production for profit, and among whom the principle, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need', is naturally operative. For all its occasional extravagance of individualistic integrity, Godwin's vision is singularly impressive. It has been derided; it has been forgotten, until it has become one of the major mysteries of literary history that a book whose chief title to modern remembrance is that it enabled its author to sponge on the ardent and youthful Shelley, should have been the inspiration of Coleridge and Wordsworth and Southey and Hazlitt, long before Shelley took the contagion.

Few things, it would appear, are more congenial to the inertia of human nature than the discomfiture of an idealist. That idealists are fools is common knowledge; that they should be proved knaves as well is an uncommon satisfaction to human complacency. And, of course, it needs no demonstration that Godwin was a

knave. He sponged on Shelley. If one were to suggest that Jesus of Nazareth likewise sponged on the devoted women who maintained him, it would be (quite rightly) reckoned bad taste or blasphemy. Yet the cases were not so different. Both these idealists believed and proclaimed that there could be and should be a new relation of lovingkindness among men, and that in a truly human society one individual's necessity should be a sufficient and peremptory claim on another's superfluity. Both acted on the principle in which they believed. Jesus called it 'love', Godwin called it 'universal benevolence'; but it was the same principle. When Godwin was rich — and there was a time when he was, by his own frugal standards, rich indeed — he was open-handed with his substance to others' needs. When political reaction had thrust him into obscurity and he was poor, he asked those who professed to believe in his principles to be as open-handed towards himself.

Why make a mystery of Godwin? His case is simple enough. Once grant his sincerity, against which there is no scrap of evidence, and he is easy enough to understand. But in order to grant the sincerity of such a one as he, we must needs be capable of responding, if only for a selfless instant, to the ideal which he imagined and by which he tried to live. Without this initial sympathy, we make a monster of a man like Godwin. He becomes a master-hypocrite who, by some sinister and inexplicable hypnotism, inspired two generations of men of genius with enthusiasm and the noblest woman of her time with devoted love. Such a monster may be excellent material for the hard-boiled biography that is fashionable to-day, which wins applause in a cynical age by its exclusion from the realm of human possibility of such love between man and man, or between man and woman, as Godwin believed in; but he is a monster, none the less. 'L'idealisme a cesse; le lyrisme est tari.' It is true. But there have been men and generations for whom they were real; and there will be such generations again.

The world's great age begins anew
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew

Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

That expectation will never be wholly banished from the hearts of men; nor even in a barren age, when hope is dim, will there be lacking men who, even if they cannot conceive felicity within their time, will feel sympathy and tenderness and gratitude towards those in whom the desire of it was strong and the expectation near.

To these belonged William Godwin. That he believed that he had only to put his imagination of a nobler order of society before men's minds, for them to embrace it, was a weakness which all great prophets have shared, from the time of Isaiah. If it is an illusion, it is an illusion inevitable to the mind which conceives such an ideal. For evidently it is impossible for the same man to believe in the possibility of universal love, and to believe that the majority of men are inherently incapable of responding to its appeal. It is a condition of his own sanity that he should believe that such a conception is latent in the hearts and minds of all mankind; for without that assumption, the ideal of universal love is the chimaera of a madman's brain. What is it then that prevents men from responding to it? Since, by hypothesis, the ideal is natural to man, the obstacle must lie in something which thwarts or perverts man's nature. This something — which for the Christian thinker is the tendency to concupiscence consequent on the Fall — Godwin found in 'positive institutions' — in government, in monarchy, in established religion, in the family, above all, in private property. This notion of Godwin's had a deceptive appearance of concreteness: in fact, it was curiously abstract, and could hardly have been conceived save by a remarkably innocent mind. Tom Paine, who was a stouter democrat than Godwin, indulged in no such illusion concerning human nature. But the beauty and the unconscious purpose of Godwin's idea was that it placed the responsibility for the depravity of human nature, or the obfuscation of human Reason (which were, for Godwin, indistinguishable) on a source external to man himself. 'Positive institu-

tions' were, in his view, the Devil: and he said so in so many words. As Shelley, who was Godwin's life-long disciple in these matters, put it: mankind had incurred 'the mighty calamity of Government.'

Manifestly, though Godwin did not see it, this was a religious mythology. The Fall of Man consisted precisely in his submission to 'positive institutions'; 'the mighty calamity of Government' was Man's expulsion from Paradise. Whereas the mythology of Genesis offered some imaginative cause for this primal catastrophe, Godwin's mythology offered none at all. Since he refused to accept Rousseau's new mythology of the Social Contract, for him the origin of Government was a mystery: not very different from 'the mystery of iniquity' which has perplexed sensitive Christian minds. Nor was it any weakness in Godwin's thinking that the origin of Government, which was synonymous with Evil, should have remained a mystery. No doubt the orthodox Christian doctrine of Original Sin is truer to the facts of average human nature. But Godwin was not really concerned with average human nature. The idealist cannot be. The true idealist is he who feels in himself the capacity to live in accord with a higher morality than that of the human average. Inevitably, he seeks to express this capacity of his nature, and he is bound to universalize it, since no imaginative man can accept the notion that he is essentially superior to his fellows. Thus passionate idealism lives by turning a blind eye to human inertia. That gives an opening to the cynic, whether political or religious, to deride what he calls the facile optimism of the idealist; but the derision itself is facile. A larger imaginative view will comprehend how necessary, if human society is to be saved from moral stagnation, and the human mind from spiritual despair, is the leaven of men who will believe, and live by the belief, that — as Shelley put it in *Queen Mab* — 'a happy Earth is the reality of Heaven'.

Godwin was not unaware of the distance that separated a society of true freedom and true equality from the society in which he lived — the society controlled by an aristocracy panic-stricken by the French Revolution, wherein wealth accumulated and men

decayed, and his too simple equation of Government and Evil was not altogether remote from the facts. The final chapter *of Political Justice* — 'On the Means of Introducing the Genuine Society of Property' — opens with these quaint sentences:

> Having thus stated explicitly and without reserve the great branches of this illustrious picture, there is but one subject that remains. In what manner shall this interesting improvement of human society be carried into execution?

It is urged, he goes on, that the propagation of such doctrines as this will lead to bloody revolution. Even if it were so, he says, we should not shrink from the prospect: a brief convulsion is no outrageous price to pay for centuries of felicity. Anyhow, the prime duty of the philosopher is to promulgate the whole Truth without diffidence or reserve. The clash, if clash there is to be, will only come from 'one body of men in the community outstripping another in their ideas of improvement and becoming impatient of the opposition they have to encounter'. This is the true moment of crisis. It is incumbent then on the promulgators of truth to refrain from inflammatory language.

> The tidings of liberty and equality are tidings of good will to all orders of men. They free the peasant from the iniquity that depresses his mind, and the privileged from the luxury and despotism by which he is corrupted. Let those who bear these tidings not stain their benignity by shewing that that benignity has not yet become the inmate of their hearts.

So much for the evangelists themselves. But what of the privileged? Those of them who are actuated by self-interest alone will surely see the folly of anything more obstinate than a temperate and yielding resistance. If they do not, on them, at least, will fall the responsibility of convulsion. But there are generous minds among them: above all among the youthful aristocracy.

> The same spirit that has led forth the young nobility of successive ages to encounter the hardships of a camp might easily

be employed to render them champions of the cause of equality; nor is it to be believed that the circumstance of superior virtue and truth in this latter exertion will be without its effect.

§

That was the appeal to which Shelley responded. Godwin's *Political Justice* was published in 1793. Despite its fame and its influence on an earlier generation, so complete was the obscurity into which its author had been thrust by panic-stricken reaction that, in 1811, Shelley learnt with 'inconceivable emotion' and unmistakable surprise that Godwin was still alive. Godwin was fifty-five; he had endured much. The defection of Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey who had made their peace with the enemy, and persuaded themselves that the emergence of Napoleon absolved them from loyalty to their youthful belief in social justice; the continued failure of his own indefatigable efforts to earn a livelihood; the death of Mary Wollstonecraft: these had been more than a fair share of the burdens of life. The sudden declaration of impassioned discipleship by a young aristocrat of genius must have warmed his heart. And there was this vital difference between Shelley and his former disciples, that Shelley really had absorbed Godwin's congenial ideas. They had become part of the fibre of his intellectual and moral being; and Shelley was to be faithful to them to his death.

Nevertheless, though it is to Godwin that we must go to find the clue to much in Shelley, it would be a mistake to call Shelley a Godwinian; though still more mistaken to imagine that the Godwinian elements in Shelley's work are an alien excrescence which can be detached, by a neat effort of critical surgery, leaving the pure essence of Shelley intact and uncontaminate. Shelley was an *anima naturaliter Godwiniana.* He was not, as it is the custom to represent him, the unfortunate victim of the influence of a second-rate mind. Godwin's was not a second-rate mind; and his thought

did not so much influence Shelley's as give intellectual expression to the tendencies of Shelley's own idealistic nature.

The religious mythology which underlay Godwin's political thought was entirely natural to Shelley. The conflict between aspiration and existence, the contradiction between the ideal and real, which tormented Shelley all his life, seemed to be explained by Godwin's theory of the malignant inhumanity of 'positive institutions'. That the apparent explanation was illusory, and, in fact, no more than a re-statement of the contradiction dawned only gradually upon Shelley, who did not accept Rousseau. For a blissful period of enthusiasm it seemed to him that Godwin's political theory had solved the problem of evil itself. The whole inertia of existence, all the reluctance of the material world to be informed by spirit, was segregated into 'the calamity of Government'; so that the secular struggle between soul and body, the incessant warfare between the spiritual and animal allegiances of man, was comprehended in the warfare between political liberty and political tyranny. Hence what appears to us the strange extravagance of Shelley's early writing. He pours into what is, on the surface, the story of a political conflict, the passion that belongs to the struggle between absolute Good and absolute Evil, with a vehemence baffling to a generation like our own. For, even to the extreme political idealists among us, Government is no longer a natural symbol of absolute Evil. Quite the contrary. The extreme form of political idealism that is current to-day — namely, Communism — regards Government as something far more attractive even than a necessary evil. The contemporary dream of the Shelley *de nos jours* is that Heaven on earth can be achieved by Government: all that is required to make the millennium certain is much more Government, and much more positive 'positive institutions'. The only issue among the political idealists to-day is in whose hands the all-comprehending Government shall be — Fascist or Communist. True enough, there is on the Communist side a pleasing little superstition that, if this all-comprehending Government is in the hands of the Communists, it will somehow 'wither away'. But this thing is a mystery.

The strangeness to the contemporary mind of Shelley's identification of Government with absolute Evil, and of the metaphysical and diabolical significance with which he invests 'positive institutions', is a measure of the vastness of the change which has been wrought in social and political life during the hundred and thirty years since Shelley wrote *Queen Mab.* Yet that identification, which is become so unnatural to everybody in England, and to all save the impenitent individualists of America, was eminently natural to an imaginative genius to whom the Revolutionary Terror in France had never been more than a vague memory, and the repressive system of Pitt, Sidmouth and Castlereagh was a grim actuality. Government in those dark days was perhaps as near as it had ever come in English history to being absolutely evil. And Religion was its handmaid. Even a sincerely religious man, like Wilberforce, whose labours for the abolition of slavery are justly remembered, was eloquent in defence of the rigours of political repression and a main supporter of the tyrannous anti-Combination laws. If this was the attitude of a genuine Evangelical Christian, it needs no effort to conjecture the behaviour of the pluralist parson who prospered on his tithe of corn, while the peasant and the worker starved. Shelley's fierce denunciations of religion and his abhorrence of institutional Christianity were as natural as his detestation of Government. Repressive Government and established Religion as glorified by Wordsworth were to Shelley twin manifestations of a single iniquity. It must have seemed as though the aristocracy and clergy of England, even with the example of the French before them, were being driven by a destiny to a similar doom. In his *Philosophical View of Reform,* written shortly after Peterloo, Shelley passionately depicts the increasing degradation of the worker and the peasant.

> They eat less bread, wear worse clothes, are more ignorant, immoral, ignorant and desperate. This then is the condition of the lowest and largest class, from whose labours the whole materials of life are wrought, of which the others are only the receivers or the consumers. They are more superstitious, for

misery on earth begets a diseased expectation and panic-stricken faith in miseries beyond the grave.

For this inhuman condition, Government and Religion, the instrument of Government, were responsible. E*crasez l'infame!* At such a time it was natural that Godwin's gospel that positive institutions were the only obstacle to the true liberty of mankind should appear to Shelley as the good tidings indeed. It was the solution to the mystery of life, the concrete dramatization of the struggle between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness, and the guarantee that the Good would prevail. The meta-physical conflict was embodied in the political struggle. And Shelley, we may guess, scarcely paused to reflect that twenty years had passed since Godwin's gospel had been given to the world, and all that had happened was that things had gone from bad to worse. It scarcely occurred to him that *Political Justice* had a human author: *e coslo descendit.* And this, one conjectures, was the real cause of the strange surprise and 'inconceivable emotion' with which Shelley heard that Godwin was still alive. Perhaps it stirred him hardly less than one might be stirred to learn that the author of the Sermon on the Mount was living in a nearby village.

Shelley had believed that a universal change was imminent. The reign of universal benevolence was at hand. To meet Godwin in the flesh was to realize that the change had not happened. Godwin was not the acknowledged Legislator of the new Republic; he was a battered and obscure journalist, struggling to keep a family alive. He had spoken the veritable word, but men's ears were dull and their hearts were hardened.

§

It is impossible to separate Shelley's political faith from his religious faith, any more than we can separate them in the case of Godwin himself. The society of 'universal benevolence' is hardly to be distinguished from the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Godwin believed in its ultimate inevitability. Possibly he was right; and his

only mistake was in miscalculating the speed of its coming, and the nature of the process by which it would arrive. But Shelley's conception of the true condition of man was more transcendent even than Godwin's, inasmuch as his ideal was metaphysical. Shelley desired the absolute Good and the absolute Beauty; and if for a time he projected these into some condition of human society, which he believed or hoped to be quickly attainable, he outgrew that illusion. The conclusion of *The Ode to Liberty* is already despondent.

> Comes she not, and come ye not
> Rulers of eternal thought,
> To judge, with solemn truth, life's ill-apportioned lot?
> Blind Love, and equal Justice, and the Fame
> Of what has been, the Hope of what will be?
> O Liberty! if such could be thy name
> Wert thou disjoined from these, or they from thee;
> If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought
> By blood and tears, have not the wise and free
> Wept tears, and blood like tears?

But this Liberty, we feel, is already almost a liberation from the bondage, not of political tyranny, but of material existence itself. And in the final chorus of *Hellas* Shelley's doubt is deeper still. The fearful thought of the eternal recurrence rises in his mind to give an unearthly poignancy to his vision of felicity.

> Another Athens shall arise
> And to remoter time
> Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
> The splendour of its prime;
> And leave, if nought so bright may live,
> All earth can take, or Heaven can give.

It is magnificently said. Never was Shelley's utterance of his own essential thought more crystalline. And what does it mean? That the Athens of the future, the City of the Soul, the 'Civitas Dei', will be a visitant from another realm. The white radiance of

Eternity will for a moment of consummation dissolve into its own incandescence the many colours of the dome of glass. But the moment will pass. The Many will reconquer the One. The memory of that earthly city will be as the memory of the heavenly city which haunts men's minds: for they are the same city.

> But Greece and its foundations are
> Built below the tide of war,
> Basqd on the crystalline sea
> Of thought and its eternity.

This is a city which was, and is, and ever shall be. But who shall imagine it established in the hearts and lives of men? Does it not belong to the moment when there shall be no more Time, to the eternal moment when there *is* no more Time, when Time stops and the eternal spirit contemplates the All — when God is All and in All? Between this abiding city and the flux of existence is there not a mortal enmity?

> Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past,
> Oh, might it die or rest at last!

May be the moment will at long last come when men shall not kill; but they shall die. Shelley's cry is that the wheel of existence should cease its motion, and Time be dissolved into Eternity. The thought of Becoming is like an arrow in his heart. For how can Becoming not be the enemy of Perfection?

That peculiar metaphysical anguish is of the essence of Shelley; it distinguishes him absolutely from his great co-eval, Keats, whose mind was naturally bent to discover the supreme of Beauty in the process of Becoming itself, in

> Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips,
> Bidding adieu.

And, at the critical moment of his spiritual development, shortly before writing those lines, Keats faced the problem in intellectual terms, and declared his belief that 'the nature of the world would not admit' of the kind of perfection of which Godwin and Shelley dreamed. The difference between them was that Keats believed, or came to believe, that the eternal element in the human soul was *created* by the resolute contemplation and endurance of the conflict between the desire of the heart and the knowledge of the mind, whereas for Shelley the desire of the heart was itself the eternal element, and the knowledge of the mind the oil on the wings of the soaring bird.

One cannot judge between them; to which of them goes out our greater sympathy depends on personal temperament and experience. But, in the matter of the relation between the philosophies of these two great poets, and their politics, it is to be noted that Keats was, by his philosophy, better prepared to face without flinching the basic inertia of mankind. His vision did not blench at the realization that men and women were, in the main, instinctive and animal still. 'The creature hath a purpose, and his eyes are bright with it.' To Shelley, on the other hand, this admission was intolerable; and so far as he might, he avoided it. His belief in the natural goodness of man was too precious to suffer him to reflect that, when it was erected into an absolute principle, it was self-destroying. His metaphysical and Platonic mind demanded the great separation between absolute Good and absolute Evil; and he saw these powers embattled in the political field: absolute Evil embodied in the tyrants, absolute Good in the oppressed. But what in that case became of the natural goodness of Man? For the governors were also men.

But this very compulsion which was upon him to see the political struggle as a struggle of metaphysical absolutes gave to Shelley a double force and vehemence as a political writer, and at the same time safeguarded him from the preaching of violence. If the oppressed people represented, as they did in his imagination, the absolute Good, then it followed that they must be loyal to the principle which they embodied. Thus it is that Shelley presents

the superficial paradox of extreme violence in his denunciation of the iniquity of the ruling-class, and an impassioned insistence on the necessity of a non-violent resistance to it. That seems strange to the practical politician; but it is a necessary consequence of the metaphysical passion of Shelley's political attitude. The people must be worthy of the ideal perfection with which he had endowed them.

Because of this metaphysical idealism Shelley's championship of democracy is a permanent inspiration; but, still more remarkably, by reason of the moral restraint which this idealism imposed upon his search for a solution to the conflict, his actual treatment of the political problem is splendidly sane. Moreover, he is perfectly consistent with himself *The Masque of Anarchy* agrees at all essential points with his *Philosophical View of Reform.* The former is simply the imaginative and poetic utterance of the same conviction which the latter expounds in argument. The poem opens with the spectacle of Anarchy, like Death on the pale Horse, trampling underfoot 'the adoring multitude'. It is the vision of Peterloo, endowed with universal and symbolic significance. Hope alone is left to confront Anarchy in his bloody and triumphal march, and she prepares deliberately to immolate herself before him. At that voluntary sacrifice the miracle happens.

> Between her and her foes
> A mist, a light, an image rose,
> Small at first, and weak, and frail
> Like the vapour of a vale.

It grows; it gathers strength; with wind-soft step it passes over men's heads, and wakens new thoughts in their minds. They look up. They see Hope walking quietly, and Anarchy dead. Then a mysterious voice speaks to them. It tells them what Freedom is: not a superstition and a name, but

> Clothes and fire and food
> For the trampled multitude —

equal Justice, true Wisdom, Peace, Love, Science, Poetry and Thought are its lamps.

Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art Thou —- let deeds not words express
Thine exceeding loveliness.

This is no freedom that politics could ever win; or the politics which could win such a freedom must be made by men who have already won it. Nevertheless, Shelley is no dreamer; for it is because it contains the germ, and lives by the idea, of such a freedom that democracy is precious. All other systems of government deny the possibility of this condition: democracy asserts it as a human potentiality. When, therefore, Shelley imagines a great gathering of those who suffer oppression and those who feel the sufferings of others, declaring that they are, 'as God has made them — free', though he is imagining the impossible — since no body of men, and few individuals, have ever been in this sublime sense 'free[5], and certainly God did not create them so — he is also positing the inward and spiritual grace of which the action he bids them take is the outward and visible sign.

Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war . . .

And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash and stab and maim and hew
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes
And little fear and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

Such action is sacramental. Men capable of it are capable of the 'freedom' which Shelley imagines. The means is at one with the end.

For that reason, as Shelley knew, this is the only practical politics which can lead men to the condition he meant by 'freedom'. In so far as that high ideal has received political expression, it is in 'the classless society' of which Socialists too vaguely dream. And it is as true to-day as it was when Shelley wrote, that it is quite impossible to impose such a society by violence. Shelley's grasp on the eternal verities was firm; he saw, what too many Socialists have failed to see, that, although it might be true that history had been a struggle between classes and that the replacement of one class by another had been always attended by violence, it did not follow that the final class-struggle must be violent. On the contrary, if this final class-struggle was indeed to bring men into a new *kind* of society, then it was impossible that violence should be the midwife of the new order. Into a classless society men will enter peacefully or not at all.

§

Shelley was more than a democrat; he was a champion and apostle of the democratic social revolution. But precisely because he was a true visionary, he saw that the social revolution could be achieved only through democratic process, even though that meant centuries of apparent delay.

> The first principle of political reform is the natural equality of men, not with relation to their property, but to their rights. That equality of possessions which Jesus Christ so passionately taught is a moral rather than a political Truth and is such as social institutions cannot without mischief inflexibly secure . . . Equality in possessions must be the last result of the utmost refinements in civilization; it is one of the conditions of that system of society towards which, with whatever hope of ultimate success, it is our duty to tend.

Many to-day, beglamoured by the doctrines of scientific Socialism, believe that equality of possessions, so far from being primarily

a **moral truth,** is something more solid even than a political truth, namely an economic one; and that its advent is either inevitable, or can be enforced by 'positive institutions'. They will be disillusioned; they will discover that Shelley was right. Before equality of possessions comes to be in a democratic society, there will have to be a majority of people who *believe* in such equality as a moral or religious truth. Nothing less will serve to establish it. The mere political rule of the working-class as such will not: only the democratic government of men to whom economic equality is a religious faith.

Shelley's insight into fundamentals which are too easily forgotten led him to the essentials of true political wisdom. In *A Philosophical View of Reform* he warns the advanced democrats against making even the demand for universal suffrage immediately. Any sudden attempt at universal suffrage would lead, he says, to 'an immature attempt at a Republic'. 'It is no prejudice to the ultimate establishment of the boldest political innovations that we temporize so that when they shall be accomplished they shall be rendered permanent.' Those who have the conventional view of Shelley as one who was always beating his luminous wings in vain, might rub their eyes at this, and ask: Can this be he? But it is Shelley, and Shelley of the purest. It is the politics of a man whose mind is imbued with the moral beauty of his ideal. The path to a society of peace must be itself peaceful; to a humanef community the advance must be humane. The choice is simple to one who sees as clearly as Shelley saw: either a peaceful growth spurred on by men devoted to an ideal and subdued to its quality, or a sudden snatching at a premature amelioration which must either be lost, or maintained by violence. If the latter, 'the calamity of Government' is intensified, and the last state of the man is worse than the first.

In all his political thinking, Shelley was a democrat of the finest type. Democracy was the vital atmosphere of his political thought. His mind, in these matters, could not breathe any other air. And so far from being a limitation, this was his strength. Political Democracy was for him — as surely it must be for any man who

shares his ideals — the only system of government congruous with the condition of mutual love that he dreamed that men might attain. Of that condition political Democracy might be only a crude symbol, a clumsy paradigm; but it alone pointed towards it tremulously, as the needle to the Pole. Better, therefore, a solid furlong won by democracy and peace, than an illusory mile by absolutism and violence.

> Let us be content with a limited *beginning*, with any whatsoever opening; let the rotten boroughs be disfranchised and their rights transferred to the unenfranchised cities and districts of the nation; it is no matter how slow, gradual and cautious be the change; we shall demand more and more with firmness and moderation, never anticipating but never deferring the moment of successful opposition ... If this reform could begin from within the Houses of Parliament as constituted at present, it appears to me that what is called moderate reform, that is, a suffrage whose qualification should be the possession of a certain small property and biennial parliaments would be a system in which all reformers ought to acquiesce.

The contrast with Wordsworth is striking. But, were this moderate reform to be obstinately refused, then the complete democratic demand for universal suffrage must be pressed; and pressed by the method of non-violent resistance which he imaginatively depicted in *The Masque of Anarchy*. Not that Shelley absolutely repudiated violent revolution. He does not condemn the violence of the French Revolution, which was, in his eyes, 'an additional proof of the necessity of the long-delayed change which it accompanied and disgraced'. But the responsibility for violence is not on the revolutionaries, but on those cruel defenders of privilege who make it inevitable: among whom Wordsworth would surely have been reckoned had the Government proved as reactionary as he. England, Shelley believed, might escape this destiny, for 'the will of the people to change their government is an acknowledged right in the Constitution of England'. Thus in

the conclusion of *The Masque of Anarchy* the Voice bids the assembled people invoke 'the old Laws of England' as arbiters in the dispute.

Despite his metaphysical anguish as a poet, Shelley as a politician made his peace with time. Strange though it may sound, I believe that, if he had lived, he might have been a great political leader; even as he still may be a great fount of true political inspiration. For though he underestimated the inertia of humanity in the mass, he appealed to that element in men which alone is capable of conquering that inertia. It is a matter of familiar knowledge to those who deal with men in the mass, that they are capable of acting either far below their level as individuals, or far above it. And that is an index of the potentialities of a nation. The average man is, in reality, an abstraction. Man in reality is below the average, or above it; and the same man is capable of being either. He is a creature either of self-interest or self-abnegation. And the way to arouse him from the instinct of self-interest, is to appeal to the nobler instinct of self-sacrifice. For the two great opposed religious maxims, that man is naturally bad, and that man is naturally good, are both true: whereas the non-religious maxim that man is a reasonable creature, a creature of calculation and interest, is false. So in the realm of politics the pure appeal to the natural goodness of man which Shelley made, and from which he never flinched, has lost nothing of its power with the lapse of generations. By his instinctive refusal to allow the end to be compromised in the means, his political gospel retains the unsullied purity of a high religious faith; and likewise its efficacy. For there is no point at which we can say: Here, in Shelley's doctrine, the Ideal is degraded into the Real. If in his politics he does, as we have said, make his peace with reality, it is because in his politics the Ideal itself is at peace with reality. For the politics which has the courage to use self-sacrifice for its only weapon is more than politics; it is religion, it is Christianity, it is itself an education into a new order of humanity and its adepts the vanguard of a society to be.

CHAPTER XXIV

SALVATION THROUGH PESPAIR

THERE is, on the face of it, a probability that something of value may emerge from the confrontation of the two philosophers who were, in some sense, the 'prophets' of the two great political revolutions of modern times — Rousseau of the French Revolution, Marx of the Russian. To say that these were the 'prophets' of the two revolutions, does not mean that they 'prophesied' them; they did not: nor that they would have completely approved of them; they would not. But they were the 'prophets' of the two revolutions in the sense that they supplied the nucleus of dynamic ideas to which the leading spirits in either revolution responded and appealed. In this sense, Rousseau 'inspired' the French, while Marx 'inspired' the Russian revolution. One great difference between those two revolutions — to call in aid the Marxist terminology for a moment — was that the French was a bourgeois-and-petit-bourgeois revolution; the Russian was a bourgeois-and-petit-bourgeois -and-proletarian revolution: the sameness was that both alike were anti-absolutist revolutions. That simple analysis brings them into relation with the English revolution — not the great and glorious 'constitutional' revolution of 1688, but the real revolution which was consummated in the falling of King Charles's head. That was the English anti-absolutist revolution, and it was a bourgeois revolution.

That gives us a valuable perspective: the English anti-absolutist revolution, which left all property-rights intact, was 'inspired' by the English Bible, culminated in the dictatorship of Cromwell, and left for its ideal legacy — the annihilation of the divine right of Kings; the French anti-feudal revolution, which being bourgeois *and* petit-bourgeois (more truly, peasant), violendy overthrew feudal property-rights, drastically redistributed property, but left

the *property-right* intact, was inspired by Rousseau, and culminated in the dictatorship of Napoleon, and left for its ideal legacy — a second nullification of the divine right of Kings, and (more important) the assertion of equal political rights for all men as men; the Russian anti-absolutist revolution, which being bourgeois and peasant, and proletarian, violently overthrew feudal property rights, for a moment redistributed feudal property among the peasants, but went on to abolish the property-right altogether, was inspired by Marx, culminated in the dictatorship of Stalin, and left for its ideal legacy a third nullification of the divine right of Kings, but, more important, the assertion of equal economic rights for all men as men.

In order to make that suggestive pattern truly progressive, something vital is lacking to the third Revolution — the Russian. To make the creative pattern perfect: its ideal legacy needed to contain a reassertion of equal political rights for all men, just as the French Revolution reasserted the abolition of 'the divine right of Kings'. For every great, creative revolution which begins from feudal society needs to reassert all that was positively asserted by previous revolutions that began from the same point. The French Revolution thus truly completed the English Revolution; the Russian did not truly complete the French Revolution. No doubt this theoretical expectation is superhuman. But that it was not fulfilled explains why we must, while strenuously combating the fallacy that the Russian system is only a sort of Fascism, just as strenuously deny that the Russian system *is* Socialism. Incidentally it appears to throw some light on the question what, essentially, Fascism is. Fascism is what happens to a capitalist and democratic society incapable of creative political revolution. The English Revolution (of which the American Revolution was a phase) was a creative political revolution; so was the French Revolution; so was the Russian Revolution. The German and the Italian peoples, perhaps because they lived too long under the tutelage of the Romano-Germanic Empire, have proved themselves incapable of any of these three kinds of revolutions. They are apparently condemned to advance backwards under sham

'revolutions'. They have the Duce and the Führer — the counterpart of the great quasi-military leader, whose function in a creative revolution it is to stabilize the new condition of things; but since under Fascism there is no new condition of things to stabilize, the Fascist 'leader' exists for his own sake. The Fascist 'revolution' *consists* in the reversion to absolutism, Revolutionary dictatorship without revolution — that is Fascism; and it is at least as pregnant a definition of it as any in economic terms.

§

That, however, leads aside to another inquiry. The next step in this one is to define, as briefly as may be, the relation of the doctrines of the two prophets to the two revolutions. The French Revolution did assert as unequivocally as is conceivable in an actual historical event the great principle of Rousseau that sovereignty resides in the people alone, and proclaimed for its basis equal political rights for all men as men; it did not assert Rousseau's further principle that in order to maintain this equality of political rights, the 'general will' acting through the Law must impose and *continually reimpose* a large measure of economic equality.

Now, as briefly and summarily, for the Russian Revolution and Marx. Pre-eminently the Russian Revolution asserted: economically, the Marxian doctrine of the social ownership and control of the means of production: politically, it asserted a doctrine which occurs somewhat incidentally in Marx's actual writings — namely, the necessity, in a period of transition to the establishment of the aforesaid social ownership and control of the means of production, of 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'. Though Marx would have been a little astonished to see how that was interpreted in Russia, Lenin was probably right in fastening on that phrase as containing something essential to Marx's doctrine — which the orthodox Marxists of Germany had conveniently forgotten.

We have established, very summarily, the fact that the two

'prophets' really did have a concrete influence on their respective revolutions. Now, to contrast and compare their actual doctrines with one another, and to do this on the basis of a dogma of my own making (though Lessing said something to the same effect long before), namely, that the most fruitful way of approaching the doctrines of creative thinkers — men whose thought is destined to have a creative influence on the process of world-history — is to approach them along the path of the process of their own formation: genetically, or historically.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born an enfranchised citizen of the small city-state of Geneva. Effectively, Geneva was a theocratic oligarchy; it was completely outside the moribund feudal system of Europe. He passed an idyllic adolescence and early manhood with Mme de Warens: few men's initiation into life can have been less painful, more calculated to leave him 'unspoiled' than Rousseau's. He must indeed have been a wonderful young man. And I accept as literally true his own statement that he entered the larger life of society with the naive expectation of finding men as generous and sincere as himself. He found the nearest approach to his expectation in the encyclopaedists — Diderot and D'Alembert; but, as he says, he was discontented at heart. He found himself divided: he found that he loved his friends and hated them all at the same time. He was like them in that he was not an orthodox Christian; but he was unlike them in that he was a Christian. He was uncomfortably conscious that something was all wrong; he did not fit.

One day, in October 1748, he was walking to visit Diderot, who was in prison at Vincennes. He had a copy of. the *Mercure de France* in his pocket to read on the way. He was turning over the pages when his eye suddenly alighted on a question set for a prize essay by the Academy of Dijon. It was this: 'Has the re-establishment of the sciences and the arts contributed to the purification of morals?' That is a poor translation of the question: for our word 'morals' has nothing of the comprehensiveness of the French word *matters,* which is the Latin word 'mores'. It is 'human behaviour'.

The reading of that question had an extraordinary effect on Rousseau. It brought to a sudden explosion his half-formed thoughts and his undigested experience; he received a veritable 'illumination'. He saw, with an overwhelming immediacy, that the Idea of Progress, which was assumed and championed by all his intellectual friends — of which his closest comrade, Diderot, whom he was on his way to visit, was the most ardent exponent — was a mirage. Advance of technical civilization was quite divorced from advance in moral civilization. Beyond this he saw that unless the advance in technical civilization were accompanied, and controlled, by a simultaneous and independent advance in moral civilization the total effect of technical progress was moral and human degradation. It is impossible to recount all that Rousseau understood in that moment of illumination, though in a previous chapter I have tried to give the substance of it. Here are his actual words, which again I believe to be literally true:

> If ever anything was like a sudden inspiration, it was what happened to me when I read that question: suddenly, my mind was dazed by a thousand lights: a crowd of vivid ideas rushed upon me with a force and confusion which caused me an inexpressible distress; my head was heavy as with drunkenness . . . Oh, if I had been able to write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, with what clarity I would have made men see all the contradictions of the social system; with what force I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions; with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is owing to these bad institutions alone that he becomes bad. All that I was able to retain of these thronging truths which illuminated me under that tree are feebly scattered in my three principal writings . . .'

He means the *Discourse on Inequality,* and E*mile* — the great book on education — which culminates in *The Social Contract.* Those three writings have had more influence on the two centuries that

followed them than any others of their time, though Rousseau would have repudiated all responsibility for the nature of the influence; and they all grew out of the one moment of illumination.

The essence of that illumination was the absolute repudiation of the Idea of automatic Progress. From this arose Rousseau's second great creative idea: that there was only one remedy for the otherwise inevitable degeneration of man-in-society, and that was an effort of the imagination to conceive a true and natural society and an effort of the moral will to create it. In *The Social Contract* he gives the principles on which a true and natural society must be based. The society of the true Social Contract is, no doubt, an ideal society, in the sense that it does not yet exist; but when Rousseau says that the effort towards such a society is inherent in the nature of man in society, he means it in precisely the sense in which an effort towards harmonious growth, health and wholeness is inherent in the nature of man as an individual.

This process of human degeneration in modern society, where the tempo of technical advance is tremendous, can be arrested only by society achieving a consciousness of its own purpose and potentiality — which is, in a single word, to make men whole men: instead of making them humanly worse than they would be as savages in isolation, to make them humanly better than they ever could be in isolation. Until that awareness and that purpose really do animate society, the process of degeneration must continue. Man has to develop a new nature —- a truly social nature. At present he is caught between two conditions: he is steadily losing his primitive wholeness, he has scarcely begun to conceive the nature and the necessity of the new wholeness which will come to him when he has made up his mind that in order to create a natural, instead of a false society, he has to learn that he must surrender his illusory independence to gain his freedom, and that a man who obeys 'the general will' (which is of another order than the will of the majority) in a true society of freedom and equality is obedient to his own deepest and most permanent nature.

§

It is profitable to counterpose as rigorously as possible the two 'illuminations' — that of the *Discours sur l'Inegaliti* and that of *The Communist Manifesto* — which occurred at a distance of exactly one hundred years from one another. Let us recall the odd sequence of crucial dates: 1649 — King Charles's head, and with it the divine right of kings; 1748 — Rousseau's vision that the Idea of Progress is an illusion; 1848 — Marx's vision that the Idea of Progress is, after all, a material reality; 1948 — what? There are only ten years to go, and perhaps we are not more than that distance away from a new climacteric in the thought-process and the life-process of Europe and the world.

We have, incidentally, enunciated the basic opposition between Rousseau and Marx, in the words: '1748 — Rousseau's "vision" that the Idea of Progress is an illusion; 1848 — Marx's "vision" that the Idea of Progress is, after all, a material reality.' 'After all'; for Marx was not altogether unconscious that Rousseau had been before him. There was a massive heritage of Rousseau in the great school of German idealist philosophy, for Kant had passed under Rousseau's spell. Kant, indeed, owed his famous theory of morality to Rousseau; the theory of the 'categorical imperative' is the deliberate transposition into the order of the individual of the theory of the Social Contract. And Kant may be said to be one of the few men who have understood Rousseau. One of his remarks on Rousseau is very profound:

> 'We can reconcile with each other and with Reason' — Kant, it is perhaps worth interposing, knew the difference between Reason and Intelligence: he reformulated it — 'the statements of the illustrious J-J. Rousseau, which are often misunderstood and are superficially contradictory. In his writings on the *Influence des Sciences* and on the *Inigaliti des Hommes*, he shows very justly the inevitable conflict between civilization and the nature of the human race, considered 21s an

> *animal* species . . . but in his E*mile*, his *Contrat Social* and other writings, he turns to seek a solution for this difficult problem: how must civilization proceed in order to develop the dispositions of humanity as a *moral* species towards their destination, in such a way that humanity as a moral species may no longer be in opposition to humanity as a natural species.'

It is an entirely accurate description, in Kant's idiom, of what I have described as Rousseau's double illumination: the severance of moral man from immoral society, and the reintegration of moral man into moral society.

A hundred years had elapsed since Rousseau's summons that unnatural society should make itself natural. What had happened? The French Revolution. That was surely something — a second and more resounding blow to the divine right of Kings, a second and more devastating blow to the feudal system which, as theory, depended directly upon the divine right of Kings. Citizen Rousseau safely dead, and safely granted apotheosis. But from his moral-revolutionary point of view, the progress was not so great. A vast development of the external and mechanical fabric of civilization; a vast multiplication of productive powers, a vast increase of new appetites, a vast extension of the distance which separated man from Nature, and from his own nature — from social health and individual wholeness. To set against this, one mighty upsurge of the people inspired by the impassioned faith that sovereignty was in them and them alone. *'Aux armes, citoyens!'* Every man had become a citizen of the Republic, and the faith in human equality had swept ragged armies to victory over Imperial veterans. Napoleon had followed; but the faith in democracy once roused, the spark once kindled, would not die in France. Something *had* happened. From the point of view of *citoyen* Rousseau — the dead patriarch of the revolutionary armies — the French people, though it had travelled farther away from Nature, had nevertheless set its feet on the path of the only possible return to Nature — namely, towards a true, equal, and just society.

There was no going back: Humanity must go forward, or perish humanly. Not to be carried forward, by the automatic advance of material civilization — that was perdition — but resolutely to take a deliberate moral step forward. France had taken that step, half-way.

The phases were three in the great pattern of human history: Nature, outside society; Anti-Nature within society; the new Nature within a new society. France, by vindicating the sovereignty of the people, by conquering equal political rights for all men as men, by redistributing the land among the people, had broken out of the second phase and entered on the stubborn and stormy passage to the third.

§

Young Karl Marx, looking despondently on Germany in 1840, did not underestimate what had happened in France. Compared to France, he proclaimed in a brilliant and withering essay, Germany was 'beneath the level of history'. And it is important to understand how great an influence was exercised on the nascent thought of Marx by his disappointment and despair at the political backwardness of his own country. There is, in his early essay *On Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, a clear indication of Marx's uneasy awareness that an element of 'compensation' entered into the preoccupation of his young German contemporaries with political philosophy. He roundly says, indeed, that they took to political philosophy, because they were incapable of political action. No doubt he imagined that he himself was an exception to the general law. But was he?

It would be a pity (if it were possible) to awaken subversive thoughts in those who have the beatitude to be complete Marxists. Where ignorance is bliss, it is unhappiness to be wise. But Marx's despondent conviction of German political incapacity (which was to be manifest in the abortive German revolution of 1848) counted for much in Marx's development at this crucial moment.

It is inordinately difficult for any man to probe his unconscious motives — to write out his own equation. But it is plain to the detached and sympathetic critic that Marx was animated, much more than he was aware, by the unconscious desire to discover other motives, other effective impulses, to social revolution than political ones. Marx knew that the political motive, as a real driving force, would always be weak in Germany; he was unconsciously bent on discovering another driving force, beside which the political motive should be quite subsidiary.

The suggestion is of importance on its own account. It also gives us a clue to the singular destiny of Marxist Socialism in Germany, where in spite of a numerical strength and an excellence of organization that was the wonder of the Socialist world, it proved to be nugatory as a political force; it may also give us a clue to what is peculiar in the singular phenomenon of German National-Socialism. Besides this, it may give us an insight into the workings and the limitations of a great creative mind like that of Marx, and help to save men from the illusion that Marxism is the end-all and be-all of political and social sagacity. There is more than one revelation of the truth. My own conviction is that we need, above all to-day, the imagination to see how and where the different revelations correct, complete and fructify one another.

The suggestion that Marx, personally, needed to discover precisely what he did discover; namely a determinant force making for desirable political change, independent of the political and moral will, which in the German people was incomparably more rudimentary and apathetic than it was in the French, does not nullify Marx's discovery; but it does imply that we must be circumspect in our estimation of Marxism, and that we must be prepared to examine its emphases with care, and if need be, redistribute them. We should approach Marxism as the theory of a great thinker and the prophecy of a great prophet, but also as the faith of a man who, for particular reasons, was impelled to minimize the importance of the conscious political motive in the process of history.

In this respect the contrast between Marx and Rousseau is significant; and it is not merely a contrast of abstract ideas. There is a historical connection between Rousseau and Marx. Rousseau's doctrine of the sovereignty of the 'general will' had had some practical effects on the course of history. Precisely how far it influenced the French Revolution it is impossible to estimate — perhaps (as we have suggested) about as much as Marx's doctrines influenced the Russian Revolution. But, indubitably, there had been a widespread emotional response in France to so much of Rousseau's idea of society as could be easily apprehended; and Rousseau certainly did supply the ideology of a mighty political revolution, which Marx as a German envied. Precisely this response to the political ideal was completely lacking in Germany, in its period of revolutionary crisis, sixty years later, although the purely economic causes of revolution were not appreciably different. Marx was, in fact, faced with the problem of the different potency of the political ideal in countries whose economic situation was very much the same. Marx solved this problem by ignoring it; or, rather, in his endeavour to get beneath this problem, in order to undermine it, as it were, he managed to forget that the level of reality on which the problem existed was itself none the less still real.

That is, in the historical order, the connection between Rousseau and Marx. In the order of theory the connection and contrast between them is still more striking. Rousseau's doctrine can be reduced to two main elements: first, a complete repudiation of the Idea of Progress — understood as the faith that improvements in technical civilization automatically produce improvements in moral and political civilization -— and, second, a conviction that a satisfying social order can be created only by a deliberate and conscious exercise of the moral will. Marx shifted the ground entirely: and in a remarkable way. First, he seems to accept Rousseau's absolute repudiation of the Idea of Progress, and, substantially, on Rousseau's grounds. Morally, society was going from bad to worse. That technical invention of the division of labour which had filled Rousseau with such sombre forebodings

had realized all his most anxious fears. Indeed, the worst of those fears was substantiated in the very fact on which the whole theory of Marxism was to be based — namely, the emergence of the industrial proletariat. Rousseau had foreseen this emergence of a new social class — the embodiment of that process of social degeneration against which he had warned his fellow-men — and his passionate effort had been to avoid it, to create a social imagination before it was too late. In this immediate social sense, Rousseau's appeal had failed completely. The process of degeneration had continued. In the hundred years between the *Discourse on Human Inequality* and the *Communist Manifesto* the society of technical invention had reached a moral nadir.

All this, Marx, explicitly and implicitly, accepted from Rousseau. He could not do otherwise: it was a fact, but, of course, it was a reality only for people who shared what was common to Marx and Rousseau — namely, a passionate desire for a society which should secure social justice for all its members. The difference is that Marx arrived when the process of social degeneration had gone on unchecked for another .century. He had to start from the basis that the descent into Hell against which Rousseau had warned Europe was an accomplished fact. The new social class — the unnatural social class, the class whose emergence demonstrated that society was unnatural, according to Rousseau's way of thinking — had actually appeared on the stage of history.

§

At this point came the discovery of the great Marxian paradox. Marx discovered that it is this very class that will regenerate society, or be the instrument of its regeneration. Let us recall the actual context of thought in which this paradoxical discovery of Marx's was first expressed, and note, in particular, the actual words of the question to which it is the answer. Marx had been wringing his hands over the political supineness of the German people compared to the French; he had been saying bitterly:

'Each particular class in **Germany** is **barren, not only** of the positiveness, the keenness, the courage, the ruthlessness, which could make it the negative representative of society as a whole. Every class is equally barren of that breadth of soul which can identify itself, if only for a moment, with the soul of the nation, of that touch of genius which kindles material force into political power . . .' (The phrases are worth remembering, as coming from Marx: 'the breadth of soul . . . the touch of genius which kindles material force into political power.') 'In France,[5] he continues with yet more withering scorn, 'in France it is enough that a man should be something for him to demand to be everything: in Germany, a man must be nothing, in order not to resign all claim to be anything.[5]

The paradox is taking shape. He goes on. 'In France every class of the people is politically idealist, and feels itself to be not primarily a particular class, but the representative of the needs of society in general. But in Germany, where practical life is just as unspiritual as spiritual life is unpractical, no class of bourgeois society has the need or the capacity to achieve universal emancipation, until it is compelled to do so by its *immediate* situation, by *material* necessity, by its very chains.' Then comes the question:

> Where then shall we find the positive possibility of German emancipation?
>
> *Answer:* In the creation of a class with absolute chains, a class of bourgeois society which is not a class of bourgeois society; a social order which is in itself a disruption of all social orders; a section which possesses a character of universality because its injuries are absolute, and claims no particular right because it suffers no particular wrong, but is the victim of absolute and naked wrong; which can appeal no longer to any historical title but only to the naked human title; which is in no partial opposition to the consequences of the German state-organization, but in a complete antagonism to all the bases of the German state-organization: finally, a section which cannot liberate itself without liberating itself from all

> other sections of society and thereby liberating all other sections of society; which, in a word, itself represents the complete loss of humanity, and can only regain itself through the complete reconquest of humanity. This dissolution of society, embodied in a particular class is — the Proletariat.

The genesis of Marx's ideas is there quite manifest. Because of the political incapacity of the German people — political capacity being pregnantly defined as the capacity of a class, through a touch of genius, to identify itself momentarily with the need of the nation as a whole — the liberation of Germany must be effected by a class that is not a social class at all, by the new social Non-Thing — we have no word quite like the German *Unding* to express what Marx meant by the Proletariat: the embodiment of a contradiction in terms. But let us grasp the strange sequence of Marx's thought in its germination — a curious admixture of the Hegelian dialectical logic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and Jewish apocalyptic Messianism. The proletariat comes into existence *because of* political incapacity, because of the absence of political idealism. That seems very un-Marxian, unless we remember that the proletariat by definition has no equal political rights. In Marx's mind, obviously, is the French Revolution — of which the equivalent seems to him so unattainable in Germany. In France the peasantry, in liberating itself economically, has politically liberated all men. That is the definition of a revolutionary class. Therefore, France can have, in the original Marxist sense, no proletariat: instead it has a working-class with equal political rights. But Germany will be the country which can only be liberated by the outlawed social class, the class whose *economic* demand for bare subsistence will mean the *total political* dissolution of bourgeois society. In other words, the Marxian proletariat is, in its original conception, a purely German phenomenon.

No matter how this strange and striking blend of dialectics and Messianism may have uplifted Marx, the political idealist, from his own despair, it is manifest that it is a supremely paradoxical faith. And it is important to see quite clearly where the paradox

is concealed. Germany, *because of its* incapacity for political idealism, which is 'the spark which changes material force into political power[5], is destined to be the country of the *complete* social revolution. How can that be? Because, eventually, the material force will be in the hands of a class *outside* society. That will happen in Germany alone, because only Germany is lacking in the political idealism which will inspire the petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie together to translate their material power into the demand for, and the conquest of, equal *political* rights for all men as men. It is worth while to pause and observe how substantially true, on the negative side, the prophecy of Marx has proved to be. The German petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie never did demand and conquer political equality for all. Did political equality exist in Germany before the war? Not in the least. The Reichstag franchise was window-dressing: the franchise for the Prussian Diet was the reality. Was political equality *conquered* after the war? Not in the least. It had to be thrust on the German people by the victorious Allies, because they insisted on having a democratic Government to negotiate with. I have a profound admiration for the many magnificent achievements of the German people, but I should say that the despondent prophecy of Marx concerning its negative political destiny has been borne out to the very letter by events: politically, Germany has remained, according to the withering sarcasm of Marx—'beneath the level of history'. That is an accurate description of Hitlerism. But Marx's phrase has meaning only if history is regarded as a moral process.

If Marx truly prophesied the political destiny of Germany on the negative side, what of the positive? Why was not his prophecy fulfilled that Germany would be liberated by the proletariat? Here is a question which takes us to the heart of the matter. For the proletariat which could fulfil its historical mission in Germany had to be an absolute proletariat: a hunger-proletariat. There never was a hunger-proletariat in Germany: a political-proletariat (if the phrase may be allowed) there was right up to the end of the war. The vast majority of the German people were effectively excluded from equal political rights until 1918. But there was no

hunger-proletariat. Bismarck and Lassalle between them saw to that, with their paternal social legislation and unemployment insurance. Instead of winning political equality, and as a sovereign people enacting their own social legislation, the Germans took the social legislation from above, and let the political rights go hang. The birth of the German hunger-proletariat was aborted by the cynical realism of Bismarck.

Those are the historical facts. But what, in the terms of our discussion of Marx's thought, do they mean? They mean that Marx, in his longing for the social revolution in Germany, connived at his own self-deception. For if, as Marx believed and history was to prove, there was no actual social class in Germany with the spark of political idealism that could kindle its particular economic need into a universal political demand, how could he dare to expect that the German proletariat would ever make more than an economic demand upon German society? That the German proletariat should make the proletarian political demand was, in reality, quite unthinkable: a miracle. Marx was deluding himself by his dialectic and his Messianism. His consolation was purely abstract, inhuman, unreal. He had bemused himself into believing that out of a complete absence of political idealism the very sublimity of political idealism would be born. It was all very well for himself to believe that the proletariat was something utterly different from any other social class: such a generic difference might be conceivable abstractly and economically, but not humanly, not politically, not morally. The Marxian proletariat had to be inhuman, without rights, outside society, outlawed, primitively and savagely destructive — in short, a *Jacquerie,* in order to perform its function. Such a proletariat could be conceived only as destroying society, never as regenerating it.

CHAPTER XXV

SECULAR MESSIANISM AND SECULAR THEOCRACY

THE fatal hiatus in Marx's theory was that it assumed an absolute discontinuity in the moral and political evolution of society. If all classes in Germany previous to the emergence of the proletariat had failed to identify themselves with the demand of the nation as a whole, why and how could the proletariat succeed in doing so, when the spark required to transmute its economic demand into the political demand had to be far stronger and more stubborn than the spark required for the subordinate political revolutions, of which Germany had shown herself incapable? The political demand which the proletariat must make if it were to fulfil its historical mission was the supreme demand for economic and political equality together. How could a people which had never made, with the conviction of its own indefeasible sovereignty, *any* political demand, suddenly rise, out of sheer economic compulsion, to the height of making the supreme political demand? Ah! but the proletariat was not of the people; it was outside society; it was a new thing, a new *Unding*. Now that, with all respect to Marx, was visionary self-delusion as regards Germany. There could be no such absolute cleavage between the new class and existing society; and the possibility could only have occurred to a mind at once in desperation, and seeking consolation for its despair in the imaginary potentialities of an abstract economic man. There is an economic nexus in society, but there is a cultural, a moral and political nexus also. Marx was now ignoring it. His proletariat lived in a social vacuum, as it were reared under a bell-jar filled with an unmitigated atmosphere of misery, oppression and complete social outlawry. This was impossible to imagine in Germany. Nevertheless, imagine it. The consequence of proletarian revolution would be a relapse to complete savagery. Out

of that complete savagery how could the imagination to conceive and the will to achieve the supreme social and political purpose arise? It was impossible.

But let us admit that this moral, political, economic isolation of the Marxian proletariat is abstract — merely the general ground-plan of history to come; and let us suppose that a hunger-proletariat actually came into existence in Germany. Then the new class partakes of the moral and political atmosphere of society as a whole, as it indubitably must. Inevitably, it assimilates the national tradition of political cowardice, of lack of political self-respect, of the absence of all sense of fundamental human equality, of that fatal Lutheran indifference of the *Biedermann* on which Marx had laid his finger when he wrote: 'In France it is enough that a man should be something for him to demand to be everything; in Germany a man must be nothing in order not to resign all claim to be anything.' How should a class reared in that moral atmosphere push its economic demand to a maximum? For, remember, the non-moral, non-political demand of the proletariat is the right to exist — nothing more — not in the least the demand for the right of economic *equality.* Is it not inevitable that a proletariat, reared in such an atmosphere, should make only the pure economic demand — for the means of subsistence? In other words, from the Marxian proletariat of Germany, as Marx himself conceived it, you could get only — precisely what you have got — namely, a readiness to revert to true slave-status: to be kept, fed, sent hither and thither under command, to be free of all individual responsibility. The proletariat which is to be capable of fulfilling its historical mission, must needs be a proletariat kindled and inspired by moral enthusiasm — more explicitly, by a political tradition of the demand for equality, as a moral imperative.

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It may be said that Marx overcame this difficulty by postulating that the proletariat should be 'class-conscious'. That tediously

familiar phrase is an evasion of the difficulty, not a solution of it. For what is a 'class-conscious' proletariat? Precisely a proletariat 'conscious of its historical mission' and inspired by it. Arid what is its historical mission? To be the class that is the means of establishing a society of political and economic equality. But such a society is a moral ideal, and can be conceived only by the moral imagination. It is a moral mission of which the proletariat has to be conscious; and it is more than half-way towards a dangerous equivocation if you insist on disguising the real nature of this mission from yourself, and from other simpler people, by calling it simply an 'historical mission', above all when the main emphasis of your theory of history is on the fact that history is, wellnigh exclusively, an economic and material process. You cannot, however much the particular circumstances of your case make you desire to do so, get a society of political and economic equality by pure economic and material process. At some point in the process, if it is to achieve the end you desire, the economic determinant *must be transmuted* into an overwhelming moral motive; and the longer that transmutation is delayed, the more difficult it will be to accomplish. There is, indubitably, a sheer economic necessity at work in the contradictions of capitalism; but that sheer economic necessity, untransmuted by the moral motive, unleavened by the political tradition of democracy, will carry the proletariat not into a society of freedom and equality, but into a society of acquiescent slavery.

In other words, the conception of a 'class-conscious' proletariat is sufficient on one condition alone, namely, that the particular proletariat of whose historical mission the proletarian is to be conscious should have a real history of political struggle and sacrifice for the moral ideal of equality. Take that condition away and your 'class-conscious proletariat' inevitably sinks 'beneath the level of history'. Never was there in any country a greater number of 'class-conscious proletarians' than in Germany, before, during, and after the war; never a better organized body of Marxist Socialists, secure in the knowledge that the advent of the classless society was as inevitable as the political monopoly of the Junkers

had been, and that the moral motive in history was an illusion. And where are they now? And why are they where they are? Not because they did not follow 'the correct line' — there never was, and never will be 'a correct line' in Socialist politics which men might have taken and just didn't owing to intellectual error — but because they had no moral history, no tradition of political struggle, no invincible belief in themselves and their fundamental human right to be equal members of a free and equal society. It is a fallacy, and a very dangerous one, to imagine that you can exclude the moral motive; and doubly dangerous when you introduce a terminology which potently suggests that the progress towards a better order of society is automatic.

What it reduces to is this: that Marx's theory of the regeneration of society by the proletariat contains a fatal equivocation. The proletariat that is capable of establishing a classless society is not a proletariat in the Marxian sense, at all; that is to say, it is not a class morally, and politically outside society. It is a class which has already conquered equality of political rights within extant society and therefore already to the highest degree of extant possibility has succeeded in incorporating itself in society. In so far as society is a moral entity, the proletariat that is capable of a creative function has already enforced its claim to belong to that moral entity. Henceforward the process of the moralization of society may be slow and laborious, but at every moment (if Marxist Socialism is to *mean* anything) the working-class must be in the van of that process. If for any considerable period it allows itself to fall 'beneath the level of history'.it cannot fulfil its historical mission; for then the necessary economic reorganization of society will come from above the working-class.

That may seem to be a cumbrous way of re-stating the proposition that there is absolutely no way to a society of true equality — that is to say, a society of political *and* economic equality — except through a society of political equality. Nor would Marx have directly repudiated that proposition; but I am certain that he would never have asserted it in the unequivocal fashion in which it is asserted here. He half-deliberately hedged on this vital point,

and there is a good deal of theoretical justification for a particular and pernicious brand of Marxism which talks (or used to talk till Moscow gave it different orders) contemptuously of 'capitalist democracy' and persuades itself that 'democracy' and 'capitalism' are interchangeable terms; so that it follows inevitably in the half-baked minds in which this brand of Marxism finds response that the way to the overthrow of 'capitalism' must be through the overthrow of 'democracy'. And although Marx would probably have repudiated that fantastic extravagance, he cannot be acquitted of having sown the seed from which it grew. Moreover, I have suggested the true source of this dangerous ambiguity in his thinking —- his own personal need as a politically conscious German, deeply and justly mistrustful of the moral and political inertia of his countrymen, to conceive a process by which the creation of a society of political and economic equality should not depend on the preliminary achievement of political equality. That personal, or national, need gave a tremendous bias to Marx's thought—a constantly operative unconscious tendency to minimize the efficacy and the necessity of the moral motive in history.

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It is the duty of those who believe that Marx made a great contribution to man's comprehension of his destiny, to understand the cause and nature of this bias in Marxism, and to correct it: not merely to maintain, quite clearly and unequivocally, the practical proposition that there is absolutely no way to a society of social justice except through the conquest of equal political rights and of the further right to exercise those rights to the full: that there is, in simple fact, no way to Socialism except through effective democracy. They have to understand, not merely instinctively that that proposition is true, but intellectually also, *why* that proposition is true, and how and why the seed of the dangerous heresy which either repudiates or whittles away that truth came to be planted in Socialist thought. And there is no more cogent and

satisfying way of laying firm hold on that truth than by confronting Marx with Rousseau.

Marx has the apparent advantage that he seems more relevant to the actual condition of modern society than Rousseau; he is, as they say, more 'contemporary'. It appears to be obvious that a man who wrote definitely about the society of industrial capitalism should have more to tell us than a man who definitely warned mankind against entering the era of unrestricted capitalism at all. Had mankind listened to Rousseau there would have been no Capitalism. There would have been invention, there would have been technical progress; but from the beginning it would have been completely under the conscious control of a society of free and equal men. 'Ah, but this was Utopian,' says the Marxist. But what does Utopian, in this sense, mean? It simply means that Rousseau was far in advance of his age; that he was appealing to an insight which men did not possess, and trying to inspire in them a social imagination of which they were not yet capable. But, in this same sense, is not every Marxist Socialist himself Utopian? He merely gulls himself into believing that he is not making generically the same appeal. Unless, of course, he really believes that the progress from capitalist society into the classless society is automatic. If not, then he is committed at some point or other to Rousseau's task — of appealing to an insight which men do not yet possess, and trying to inspire in them a social imagination of which they have hitherto been incapable. If that is Utopianism — then the sooner Socialists become Utopian the better, for they *will* never advance towards Socialism without it.

But, it may be said, Rousseau did not understand the class-struggle in history. Therefore he did not foresee the great historical mission of the working-class. That is literally true. But let us not delude ourselves. Whether the working-class will fulfil its 'great historical mission' is still very much in question. History has not yet decided that it *will*. It is, assuredly, by no means inevitable that it will. And if our previous analysis of what the fulfilment of the historical mission of the working-class really involves is correct, its fulfilment depends upon the working-class being animated by

a conviction of the dignity and equality and sanctity of human beings as such. Is it likely, is it even conceivable, that this conviction, which is moral, religious, spiritual, and in the last analysis, Christian, should ever become the *monopoly* of the working-class? Rousseau declared that the establishment of the classless society — which he conceived much more clearly and positively than Marx — depended on the existence of men with the imagination to conceive it and the moral will to achieve it. Does Marxism wish to deny that? In so far as it does, is not Marxism mistaken? Has that been really superseded by the theory that the working-class by pursuing its interests will bring us to the classless society? Everything depends upon what we mean by 'interests' — a kind of discrimination at which Rousseau was a much better hand than Marx. Rousseau's vital distinction between *amour propre* — self-interest — and *amour de soi* — the true self-interest of Man — is completely ignored by Marx. It is in the *true* self-interest of every man that he should work to establish the classless society. It is not, therefore, the interest of that enlightened order that the Marxist means. Does he mean interest in the immediate sense, in which one might say: 'It is to my interest that no one should enjoy a higher wage than I?' But interest of that kind will divide the working-class, not unite it. None the less, there is, of course, a real sense in which the workingman should be the apt disciple of the fundamental doctrine of human equality. It is obvious that the wage-slave of industrialism should see more clearly the inhuman deprivation of necessities and freedoms under which he labours, than the privileged man will ever see how he, by existing in an unnatural society, is deprived of necessities and freedom of a different order. But did Rousseau dream of denying that? It was fundamental to his vision.

Where Marx added to Rousseau was not by the doctrine of the class-struggle, because Rousseau made no claim to be an historian, and the doctrine of the class-struggle, as we have seen, is a broken reed when it comes to making history, instead of interpreting it; nor by his doctrine that political power must correspond to economic power — a very doubtful doctrine, as generally under-

stood — but by his analysis of the actual economic working of Capitalism. Marx proved that uncontrolled Capitalism must break down. But he did not prove, because it cannot be proved, that Capitalism must be replaced by Socialism. There are other ways of controlling Capitalism. Whether Socialism is the chosen one depends upon how far men, and not the working-class alone, are responsive to the doctrines of Rousseau — and of a greater than he: moral and political doctrines, exceedingly profound and everlastingly true, and therefore capable of apprehension by truly simple minds.

§

Here is a crucial difference between Rousseauism and Marxism. Marxism is incomprehensible by the simple mind: and by the simple mind, I mean the mind which feels a profound and elemental distinction between right and wrong. It is pernicious to our humanity if we ever lose the simple mind. Some of us are bound to lose it for a time; it is our destiny that education and experience in this epoch of economic contradiction and spiritual uncertainty should entangle us in a radical scepticism, but unless we regain the simple mind we are lost. The only way by which we can fight to retain or regain the simple mind is by resolutely refusing all merely intellectual conclusions which do violence to our deep, instinctive sense of ultimate right and wrong.

Marxism is a difficult doctrine, and for its true understanding requires a mind habituated to work simultaneously on many different levels — on three, certainly — on the economic, on the political, and on the moral; and I am impelled to add a fourth — namely, the religious. It is folly to indulge the belief that the mind of the average man is capable of this. Implant in the average man, if you can, the belief that history is in the main an economic process, and he is, in most cases, bound to believe it is a purely economic process: you cannot expect him to understand that it is simultaneously *also* a political process, *also* a moral process, *also* a

religious process: still less that the political process, if it is to be regenerative, is precisely the process in which the economic and moral and religious processes are fused together.

The bias of Marxism is towards the elimination of the moral and religious processes from history. Once you have got them out, however, you cannot get them back again; yet you cannot do without them. For material forces do *not* create their political equivalents. There are no political *equivalents* to material forces. An army of 5000 men may be either more than a match for twice, or less than a match for half, its number. God is not always on the side of the big battalions. Napoleon, who said he was, erected an Empire on a Revolution, and detested Rousseau. Material force has to be *transmuted* into creative political power, and the only agent of that transmutation is selfless moral enthusiasm.

Marxism had its origin in a mind inclined from the beginning to despair of the democratic road; it was developed and emphasized by a mind outside the democratic tradition. Marx universalized the particular disability of the German people. Yet no one knew better than he that democracy was not a form, but a spirit. He knew it, but he did not feel it in his own country. He was right. In Germany democracy never was a spirit, but only for a few brief years a form: a mechanical voting apparatus in which no one *believed.* You do not acquire the spirit of democracy, merely by knowing that you need it, as Marx knew. That comes from tradition, from a history of struggle that has always been conceived, in the minds of those who waged it, as more than a class-struggle, as a moral and political struggle which the particular class is privileged to wage on behalf of universal manhood.

Hence the necessity of reasserting the influence of Rousseau, and of vindicating anew his primary, and incontrovertible doctrine that for the regeneration of an unnatural society moral effort is absolutely necessary; that this moral effort and the ideal which inspires it are not alien to the nature of man, but, on the contrary, are rooted in that nature. Marxism has much of importance to tell us concerning the structure of an unnatural society, but very little concerning the structure of a natural one;

and when it encroaches on and undermines those eternally valid doctrines of Rousseau, it is false and dangerous.

Rousseau reminds us that we must put first things first: that there is but one way to a society of social equality. It lies through a society of political equality. Where political equality has not become an instinct, social equality will never be one. For social equality is more than economic equality; it includes it, as the greater does the less. Incredible though it may sound to the Marxist, political equality is really closer to true social equality than economic equality is. Political equality has in it the germ of all true equality. And Rousseau saw deeper than many modern Socialists when he declared that in a true society economic equality would be sought not as an end in itself, which it is not, but merely for the sake of defending political equality. That may be incomprehensible to those who see in Soviet Russia as it is the ideal of society, and sneer at political democracy. They, at least, should beware of Rousseau; for he might teach them that the Socialist who belittles political democracy and jeers at the sanctity of universal law, is undermining the foundations of his own professed ideal.

§

I have said that Rousseau conceived 'the classless society* much more clearly and positively than Marx; and I incline to believe that the origin of the difference between Rousseau's moral realism and Marx's uncritical optimism lay in the difference between their racial and cultural traditions. The element of primitive Jewish Messianism with regard to the future in Marx is very great, though it is paradoxically concealed behind an excessive realism with regard to the present. It is the Jew in Marx, the inheritor of centuries of racial oppression, who proclaims anew the inevitable millennium for the despised and rejected: and the true commentary on the passionate emotional bias of *Das Kapital* (as distinct from the economic analysis which hides it) is the *Book of Revelation.* This

powerful bias is apparent, not merely in the strange, catastrophic conception of the redemptive Proletariat, wherein the Proletariat *is* the Messiah, but also in Marx's signal failure to imagine 'the classless society'. It was, for him, simply the millennium: the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Rousseau's conception of a society based on a veritable social contract is also, in a sense, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. But the enormous difference between the two conceptions is that Rousseau is abidingly aware that the attainment of such a society and the maintenance of it, if ever it were attained, would call for intense moral and spiritual effort on the part of every member of it. Rousseau is acutely, and even despairingly, conscious of the vast inertia that lurks in the human heart; he knows that the struggle between good and evil is everlasting. And this enables him to see that, in concrete political terms, the inescapable problem, as he wrote to Mirabeau in 1767, is 'to find a form of government which will place the law above men'. This problem Marx, blinded by his Messianic optimism, entirely ignored. With a confidence half-sublime and half-pathetic he declared that, on the establishment of Socialism, 'the State would wither away'; in other words, that the moral problem of the possession of political power would automatically cease to exist. This is Utopian fantasy and represents a reversion to Rousseau's 'state of nature', which as Rousseau saw, belonged to the pre-human and unhistorical past. He saw, too, that the human present, and the human future, depended on man's power to achieve a second, and regenerate nature, and be obedient to it: which, in the social macrocosm, must be expressed in the sanctity of good laws and the will to obey them. That any mechanical or automatic means could be devised to secure this end Rousseau vehemently denied. It could be achieved only by the moral will in individuals, enlightened and kindled by an imaginative understanding of the nature of society and the nature of man. That, and that alone, could secure men against the abuse of political power. The wise word of Lord Acton, that 'power always corrupts', was engraved deep in Rousseau's heart.

Marx, to Rousseau, would have seemed like a curious, powerful and prophetic successor of the *philosophes* —just as confident a believer as they in automatic and inevitable Progress (though by the instrumentality of catastrophe,) and just as reluctant as they 'to interrogate the human heart' and to accept the facts of human nature. The means by which, in his analysis of the social macrocosm, Marx managed to avoid the necessity of moral criticism were very simple. He declared that the moral motive was impotent to change society. On the negative side, this is plausible enough, at least to the superficial observer; morality and religion have assuredly not accomplished very much. On the other hand it is probably true that they have accomplished all the enduring *good* that has been accomplished. Marx's simple mistake was to imagine that because morality and religion have done so little to change society for the better, they have done nothing to prevent from lapsing back into the worse. Marx accepted the existence of an inherent tendency to social degeneration only as an eccentric episode in human history: the tendency was operative precisely so long as Marx desired that it should be operative, namely, from the moment that he wrote up to the point at which it produced an intolerable situation of open class-warfare. When that Armageddon was ended, the tendency miraculously ceased to exist.

The arbitrariness of this eschatological conception of an absolute hiatus in the moral history of mankind Marx concealed from himself by the doctrine that humanity, under capitalism, had passed into a condition where the only classes were economic classes — classes distinguished by more, or less, or no control over the instruments of production. Therefore, men had only to abolish *all* private control of the instruments of production to abolish classes altogether. This was positively naive. Economic classes are the means, in one particular form of society, of providing the raw material from which the functional classes necessary in *all* forms of society are recruited. Political power must be exercised by somebody. The abolition of the economic basis of class-distinction means merely that another way of recruiting the functional classes must be found. The new way may be a juster

way of recruiting the functional classes; but they must be recruited. And nothing can prevent the abuse of their power by such classes except the moral will in individuals to which Rousseau appealed; either in the members of the superior functional classes themselves — to control themselves — or in those on whom their power is exercised — to control their rulers — or in both together. The problem of human society in fact begins where Marx believed it ended.

What Marx tried to do was to abolish the problem of human society, which is the problem of human nature, altogether. Society, he believed, would regenerate itself, and maintain itself in a condition of regeneration — both automatically. It is hardly to be wondered at that in practice this strange doctrine ends in legitimating a secular theocracy, which can admit no criticism of itself by the criterion of any absolute ideal outside and independent of itself. A condition is attained in which progress towards perfection is postulated to be inevitable. If the progress towards it involves falsehood, injustice, cruelty, tyranny and organized inhumanity, that is appearance only, for obviously the necessary means to an inevitable good are themselves necessary and inevitable and good. That is to say, Good and Evil are mere words. Good is what enables this secular theocracy of Communism or Fascism to exist, bad is what threatens its existence; but the question whether its existence is itself good or bad is, within this self-sufficient social universe, theoretically meaningless and practically unformulable.

To keep alive within any human society the sense of the reality of Good and Evil as absolutes independent of the convention of the society, or the ordinance of the secular state, is the function of a Church. A Church is, in idea, the community of men and women who recognize an authority independent of the secular state: this is the 'ecclesia', the communion of those who are 'called out' from secular society to acknowledge that their final allegiance lies elsewhere. Therefore the institution of the Church is precious, but precious only in so far as it asserts and justifies in act the claim to possess an authority superior to that of the secular state, because

derived from its knowledge of the absolute Good, which is God. When this authority of the Church is acknowledged, but the Church manifestly abuses it; or when, owing to its own lack of faith in its knowledge of the absolute Good, it surrenders its claim to possess this authority independent of the secular state — in either case it ceases to be precious, and ceases even to be a Church at all. Further, it is self-evident that there is but one safeguard against the abuse of this authority of the Church, namely, that the absolute Good in obedience to which its authority consists should forbid persecution, and command non-resistance to evil. This the God of the invisible Christian Church does command; but not, alas, the God of the visible one. Therefore the visible Church to-day is being revealed as impotent against the apotheosis of the secular state; because it possessed no such self-evidently superior authority. The only Church which can, or will, oppose the secular state of to-day with authority is the invisible Church, which becomes visible just in so far as any part of the visible Church subscribes to the authority, and is prepared to follow the example of, Christ. If no part of it will thus subscribe in deed, the reality and authority of the Church will pass, inevitably, into the new 'ecclesia' of those who will subscribe indeed. In this sublime sense, the Church of Christ is indeed eternal, and the Christian religion, so far from being 'the opium of the people', is its sole preservative against a living death.

Marxism, like Rousseauism, is of positive value, that is to say, truly and enduringly creative *of good*, only when it is conceived as ancillary to the eternal truth of Christianity and the idea of the eternal Church. The difference, in this respect between the two doctrines, is that Rousseau was conscious of this ancillary relation, whereas Marx was not. We may say that Marx reverted to the primitive Jewish-Christian eschatology which flourished while the expectation of the End was general, and that his doctrine is a completely secularized Jewish eschatology. Rousseau, on the other hand, was the inheritor of classical Christianity — that is, of the Christian faith which was slowly adjusted to the realization that the End was not to be: and in fact Rousseau was a convinced

Christian all his life. But the doctrines of both can be fully understood only when they are conceived as a prophetic summons to the visible Christian Church to wake from its lethargy and its cowardice, of which the cause is human inertia, but of which the excuse is a specious insistence on other-worldliness: an actual surrender to this world by a total dissociation of the Kingdom of God from any condition of the world in time. The Church is *the* Church only when it is in a condition of vital tension between the two realizations: that the Kingdom of God *cannot* be established in the world in time, and that the Kingdom of God *must* be established in the world in time.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHURCH RE-EDIFIED

WILLIAM MORRIS was the perfect Victorian. By that I mean that he was the perfect embodiment of all the awareness that a lifetime passed in the Victorian age might be expected to bring to a perfectly unspoiled and receptive man. In the first place, he was a typically Victorian social product. He was a child of the new plutocracy which had been thrown up by the prosperity of the new industrialism; he was carried into life on the crest of the wave of one of the great class-movements of English social history — the vast expansion of the bourgeois aristocracy which was the social expression of the vast expansion of English industry in the early nineteenth century. The educational monument of that expansion is the English public-school system as we know it now. Arnold of Rugby is still the tutelary deity of that economic upward surge. His great 'moral reform' of the English schools was the expression, in characteristically English guise, of the thrust made by the new bourgeoisie into the educational privilege of the aristocracy.

Arnold did not reform the English public schools; there were none to be reformed; he created them. He led the movement of creating new schools (occasionally on old foundations) for the sons of the new bourgeois aristocracy. And these schools had to be strongholds of the new morality — the morality based on the psychologically inevitable discovery that accumulation of wealth through capitalist industry was a moral achievement of the highest order. The new wealth had to be endowed with a certain consciousness of moral superiority over the hereditary wealth of the older 'landed interest'. The great English public-school system, which was a purely Victorian creation, was the instrument of this necessary illumination.

Morris was born a year or two too soon to be exposed to the

full pressure of this mighty, because unconscious, moral machine. The upward surge of the rising bourgeoisie was so great that the new schools could not be made fast enough. Morris's father had to enter William's name some years beforehand — had, indeed, characteristically, to buy him a shareholder's place — in the as yet non-existent school of Marlborough. Happily for Morris, it was in a state of chaos when he arrived there at the beginning of 1848, and it remained in a state of chaos till he left at the end of 1851. Though I believe that Morris was too big a man by nature to have been successfully melted and moulded by the full blast of the new public-school system, there is no knowing what it might have done to him. And it may be that it was only by the skin of his teeth, or through a momentary gap in nature, that he escaped being pruned into something more decorous and less dynamic than he was.

Morris just escaped the new education, which has been the inescapable education of an English boy of his position ever since. He escaped the condescending sense of social responsibility which has been the blight upon the English bourgeois mind ever since. Morris was pure-bred Victorian bourgeois, and he escaped the new insidious bourgeois culture. That is one of the fundamental facts about him. He roamed the downs of Wiltshire as a boy, not as a prig; and he was spared the dangerous diversion of his manliness into organized athletics. Morris never played games; and he never needed to. The devilish division of life into systematic and responsible work, and systematic and responsible play, which was the great and characteristic achievement of Victorian education, passed him by. He was left free to make first-hand his great anti-Victorian discovery, that work could and should be the enjoyment of the total man.

Morris was free to be what we have called the perfect Victorian, precisely because he escaped Victorianism. England is Victorian still. Less cocksurely, less naively, less highly seriously, than in the 1850's; but still at heart Victorian. The public-school expansion after the Napoleonic Wars repeated itself after the War of 1914-18, The underlying economic process has been the same, though

the manifestations (as befits **a** stagnant national economy) **are** less exuberant. What Morris escaped has been the destiny of Englishmen now for nearly a century; the destiny which sends men out to be rulers of Empire and sends them home again with little to do but dawdle on the nineteenth green of golf-clubs, which are one of Arnold's contributions to the moral architecture of the country. The erstwhile pro-consul of a small continent spending laborious days in filing down his golf handicap — that is the crude symbol of what Morris escaped. He escaped what Friedrich von Hiigel called the 'universal Exhibition, Prince-Albert-and-dear-Bunsen religion' of the Victorians; and he also escaped the final forlornness of Matthew Arnold's reaction against it:

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead;
> The other powerless to be born.

Morris passed into a new world by imagination and adoption; he was the first, and I think still the only Englishman to have done this.

Morris also escaped — though in this case we should say he definitely resisted — the diversion of the great English romantic movement into ecclesiasticism. That this derivation was in part authentic we need not deny; and we may see in the High Church movement of the 1830's the unconscious attempt to find some institutional expression for an inspiration which was impotent to deal directly with the appalling social problems of the new industrial age. But, lacking a real sense of historical development, and ignorant of the vast economic forces now set loose by the machine, this romanticism of the second generation declined into an irrelevant religious antiquarianism. It burned tapers, wore vestments, read the *Acta Sanctorum,* wrote new lives of the saints, was mildly Gothic in its taste for architecture, and was no trouble to anybody. The very notion that it was related in a cousinly sort of way to Reform, and even to that horrible Chartism, was unthinkable. And once that was settled, once it was firmly established that no faint savour of Coleridge's early Communism

was lurking in its incense, the great English bourgeoisie left it to its own devices with a mildly benignant eye, and turned to the real business of becoming wealthier still. If the new Romanticism helped to make the Established Church more attractive to its sons, well, that was all to the good. After all, with the tithes of the hungry 'forties, the Church was still one of *the* professions; and it was still distinctly easier to become a Bishop than to be made a Peer.

Young Morris was intended to climb into social sublimity through the Church. His Romanticism was to take Orders. And young Morris had no objection. On the contrary, he was all for Orders; and since Orders of chivalry were no more, he was ready for monastic Orders instead. He adored cathedrals — already they aroused in him he knew not what obscure but profound response — so why not aspire to a cathedral of his own? Or even a parish church would do, provided that it belonged to the period wherein his imagination delighted to wander. Noi was it long before that period was sharply defined. While still a schoolboy he took full advantage of the educational chaos at Marlborough to lay the foundations of that extraordinary knowledge of Gothic architecture that became his second nature. By the time he reached Oxford, fourteenth-century Gothic was his ideal, and he knew as much about it as anybody. He knew so much indeed that whatever shreds of a vocation for the Anglican priesthood still clung about him were blown clean away. For obviously, when a young man in the 1850's really knew something about Gothic, and was capable of imagining most of what he did not know, the real adventure was to build a cathedral, not to preach in one. The quite natural, but very rare, miracle had happened: Morris saw Gothic as new, not as old. The vague romantic antiquarianism which was the aesthetic of the Oxford Movement was refined in him to the distinctness of a creative imagination. He did not share the dreams of dreaming spires, he thought about how they were made. He saw and felt the stone raw from the mason's adze.

§

No conception of Morris is more false, though none more prevalent, than that which makes of him an antiquarian. He loved old buildings because they were beautiful, but he fought for them because they were history made visible; because he believed that a consciousness of the past was necessary to a true living of the present. To destroy ancient buildings was to annihilate the consciousness of history; to 'restore' them — which moved him to the deeper fury — was to show oneself incapable of the living consciousness of history, to prove that one was too crass to understand that 'there is no going back'. Had Morris been the sentimental antiquarian that current superficiality would make him, he could never have been the Socialist that he became — not at all a gentlemanly, sentimental, antiquarian Socialist, but a brand-new, red-hot, revolutionary one; a far more revolutionary Socialist than has appeared in England since his death.

That is to anticipate. But few men have been more grievously — I sometimes think, more deliberately — misunderstood than Morris. For him the past was the past: infinitely valuable if a man had the strength to face it and yet be unconsumed. But if the knowledge of the past were not a means to more abundant living in the present, Morris had no use for it. His real belief was original and profound. It was that, when men have reached the degree of consciousness that they had reached in the nineteenth century, then no right action in the present is possible without an awareness of the past. Once men have become historically minded, then they must go through with it. They can no longer live naively in the moment; the childhood of the human race is over. It must then become adult or go rotten. It must then learn to act both spontaneously and in accordance with consciously recognized historical necessity. A new kind of man, a new kind of society is demanded.

This crucial realization in Morris was largely instinctive; only slowly did it become fully conscious. But it was there from the beginning. Hence it was that in his final period he found **Marx**

congenial. Marx's achievement in rooting the necessity of the social revolution in the historical process, in making his revolutionary appeal primarily to those who had achieved 'a theoretical consciousness of the movement of history as a whole', was one which found a natural response in Morris. In fact, Morris, so far from being naturally alien to Marx's revolutionary philosophy of history, was the one man in England really capable of understanding and completing it. It was the philosophy of his own life-experience.

Yet more anticipation. But Morris was one of those ever-growing men in picturing whom anticipation is inevitable. He was an organic whole; his end is implicit in his beginning. The Morris who naturally and inevitably glided away from the Anglican priesthood, because Gothic was a reality and not a ruin, was the man who glided, just as naturally and inevitably, into Marxism, when through his own direct experience he had learned the necessity of a social revolution. He did not need Marx to teach him that necessity; he found in Marx a ratification of his own conclusions. His former desertion from the ranks of respectability was merely the consternation of his mother; his later the consternation of his friends. Before as after, he was simply the rare man to whom history is concrete.

At Oxford he discovered that the Oxford Movement had been for him merely the porch of entry into the world of his own historical imagination. His love of churches, he realized, was not quite the same as love of the Church; and for him henceforward churches were holy — and to no man were they holier — more because they were the creation of Man, than because they were the habitation of God. Not that there was for him any contradiction between these things. But it was a revolutionary shift of emphasis. Those lovely churches were the authentic habitation of God because, in each stick and stone they were the creation of a natural community of men, each finding joy in his work. God did not trouble him much thereafter. He was fully occupied with being a man; and probably that is the best way of doing God's real business in the world at any time.

Simply and suddenly he found himself a poet. The point at which he picked up the tradition immediately before him was Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Merci.* Morris wrote nothing as good; nor was it possible that he should have done. Behind Keats's poem was the anguish of a life-experience which Morris was happily spared. But in so far as the imaginative atmosphere of a poem wrung from an alien experience could be captured, Morris captured it. But from the beginning he had the splendid sanity not to take himself very seriously as a poet. He wrote poems because he enjoyed writing them; but some swift and subtle instinct warned him that poetry-writing had ceased to be a man's business, as indeed it had. We can see pretty clearly now, what Morris felt intuitively, namely, that English poetry of the first order had come to an end in Keats. In Keats's great *Odes* the voice of the individual man touches a supreme agony of beauty. Essentially, there is no more to be said; and, essentially, nothing more has been said.

But Morris, who adored Keats all his life, was a poet who did know that great poetry was dead. And because he was big enough to know it, it did not matter to him. He set about living in other ways. In putting it thus, we are of course making Morris more conscious than he was, or could have been. The question, as it shaped itself in the minds of Morris and his friends, was different. In actual fact, in the days of which we are speaking, Morris still admired Tennyson. Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel* seemed to him a very beautiful thing, as indeed it is. It seemed to him, at the end of his Oxford days, that the voice of poetry was being naturally prolonged from Keats. It was the discrepancy between the splendour of the poetic word and the daily growing squalor of the world of men, which perplexed the Brotherhood. 'Was no beauty but the beauty of words to be produced by man in our times; was the intelligence of the age to be for ever so preposterously lopsided? We could see no reason for it, and accordingly our hope was strong.'

§

But Morris was a poet. Why did he not remain a poet like Tennyson? We may put it down if we will to his overbrimming vitality that demanded not one outlet, but many. But the simple explanation is, as so often, the superficial one. As a schoolboy Morris had, through the working of his own simple genius on the architecture he loved, conceived the architectural ideal. It had been vague: it had been mixed up in his mind with the new High Church movement; but it had already enough independent existence to prevent him from being turned aside into ecclesiasticism. He had sensed that the vital stimulus which the cathedrals of the fourteenth century brought to him lay less in the supernatural religion which they ministered, than in the natural religion which they expressed; and that the supernatural theology, lacking the natural religion beneath it, had ceased to be real in the life of men. The great churches to which he turned as the symbol of a true society were the work of human hands; and — more essential still — they were the work not of men uplifted into some remote condition of religious or aesthetic 'inspiration' by the final purpose of their task, but of simple, ordinary human beings who were happily doing the job in front of them. 'This talk of inspiration,' he said later, 'is sheer nonsense . . . there is no such thing: it is a mere matter of craftsmanship.'

It took some years for Morris to become certain about this. The famous and beautiful little tale of *The Unknown Mason* belongs to the time of hesitation between a religious romanticism of 'inspiration' and the clear recognition of the ordinariness out of which the magnificence of Gothic had arisen. And the mist was finally dissipated from Morris's vision by one man —John Ruskin. Ruskin's essay *On the Nature of Gothic, and the Office of the Workman therein,* came as the crucial revelation to Morris; and the revelation was crucial precisely because he was prepared for it, because it was already unconsciously his own. It liberated him from the last lingering traces of ecclesiasticism. It confirmed him finally

in his surmise that it was less the monasteries which had built the great churches, than the guilds; less the priests, than the workmen; that the religion of God bore flowers and fruit only from the strong sap of the religion of Man.

This illumination of Ruskin's was not a strictly historical discovery. It was an act of direct imaginative penetration. It might be challenged by pedantic historians. But Morris, by his own imagination, and his now considerable first-hand experience of handicraft, knew that it was true. His imaginative and his actual experience were made one, by Ruskin's discovery that art is utterance of the natural pleasure of a man in his work. It gave Morris a final and satisfying explanation of the depth of his own delight in Gothic. The great cathedral had moved him from a boy because he had unconsciously recognized that it had sprung naturally from the simple and harmonious co-operation of many men finding each an individual pleasure in his work. It was the greatest achievement of art, because it was, in the true sense, the most popular art that has been.

Now, Morris had the key, not merely to history, but to life itself, and to the perplexities of his own life in particular. The attempt in which he and his friends of the Brotherhood had been engaged, namely, to recreate the total pervasive beauty of medieval art in the industrial nineteenth century, was radically misconceived. They had been adolescent dreamers, ignorantly tilting against the necessity of history. The art of any epoch was, in reality, the expression of its social life. The omnipresent beauty of medieval art — and the perfection of the cathedral arose simply from its including more of that omnipresence — was due to the fact that the social life of the Middle Ages was such that it allowed the humblest craftsman to take pleasure in his work, and to find in it freedom enough for individual expression. The effort to recreate such an art in the absolutely changed social life of the nineteenth century was therefore doomed to failure. They were trying to build their cathedral without a foundation. The economic basis of their work was itself a dream.

Once again we are compelled to represent the resolution as more

sudden than it was. Morris, in his efforts — which were in the main single-handed — to recreate an architectural art, was compelled to demand of the capitalist industrial system products which it was no longer capable of producing. Since, in his business of decorative artist, he could not make everything himself (though probably he learned to make, and made, more things than any craftsman in England had made before him) he had to seek from the industrial machine things that were not standardized. It could not supply them. Thus he was involved, by the mere day-to-day practice of his craft, in an incessant battle against the competitive industrial system of the machine-age. Furthermore, though he himself was happy enough in his incessant making, he was compelled ruefully to recognize that only the rich middle-classes could afford to buy his products, and that as often as not they bought them from vulgar motives. In fact, by his craft, he was mainly gratifying the taste for luxury of those classes who were indirectly or directly enriched by the system against which his craft was directed. And, after all, was he himself not, by origin and maintenance, the privileged child of the system he loathed?

Hard practical experience had taught him that living art could only arise out of a surrounding body of living crafts, and the crafts could not be made to live again while the system remained what it was. He was on the brink of Socialism, of a genuine and complete Socialism. But for a moment something withheld him from the final plunge. Nor was this the simple personal reluctance which any genuine convert to Socialism must feel. It was a significant and symbolical dilemma. For Morris was, primarily, a craftsman. He had deliberately and joyfully devoted his life to a revival of the handicrafts. In one sense, as he now clearly saw, his work was finally futile, since, in order to become the complete, the historically conscious artist, he must needs abandon art itself. That was the inexorable logic of his now complete realization: he must devote himself to the cause of social revolution. Yet where, in the England of the late 1870's, would he find men to understand the nature of the revolution he demanded? Between the sordid

squalor of the poor and the vulgar squalor of the rich, what was the essential difference? What chance had he of awakening men to the necessity of a new *kind* of life? Unless they could see with their eyes the fundamental distinction between beauty and ugliness of lines, what change would even revolution bring? Surely his task — since he was only a man, after all — was to labour away at making articles of common use beautiful once more, at educating men by word and deed into the knowledge of what they had lost. Which was his business — to teach Art, or to preach Revolution?

§

Morris made the heroic answer. He to whom Art had meant far more than to any man of his generation, found the courage to say, Let Art go!

> The absence of popular art in modern times is more disquieting and grievous to me for this reason than for any other, that it betokens that fatal division of men into the cultivated and degraded classes which competitive commerce has bred and fosters; popular art has no chance of a healthy life, or, indeed, of a life at all, till we are on the way to fill up this terrible gap between riches and poverty. Doubtless many things will go towards filling it up, and if art must be one of those things, let it go. What business have we with art at all, unless all can share it? I am not afraid but that art will rise from the dead, whatever else lies there.'

That was Morris's final sacrifice, and it was a prodigious one. He made it not merely in imagination, but in act also. Not merely did he accept, as a possible necessary consequence of the social revolution he desired, the disappearance of such genuine art as still remained; but he devoted the vital substance of his remaining days to arduous propaganda for the Socialist cause. And when at last he left the active movement, it was because he

could do no more within it. He was far too complete a Socialist for the Socialism of his day. It was just beginning to pass into Labour politics and Fabianism — historically necessary phases, no doubt, in which the bankruptcy of Socialism that is not at once revolutionary and religious should be made plain to all seeing eyes — but phases with which, though he saw them to be inevitable, the necessities of his own nature forbade him to compromise.

Hence the apparent failure of Morris's life. The conviction in which it culminated, the sacrifice with which it was crowned, seemed to have been wasted. For fifty years the bourgeois and the proletarians alike have turned away from Morris's Socialism. The middle-class have accepted his art and ignored his revolution; the working-classes and their leaders have turned away from his vision to the barren politics of interest. The Labour movement has become an uninspiring and uninspired combination of sectarian Trades Unionism and opportunist Radicalism. And even those within its ranks who have been most deeply discontented with its feeble achievement have been inclined to put the blame not on the Socialists' desertion of Morris, but of Marx. The distinction cannot be made. If the Socialist movement in England could have remained faithful to Morris it would have remained faithful to Marx also; if it could have remained faithful to Marx, it would have remained faithful to Morris also. For to be faithful to a prophetic genius is not to treat his words as dogmas, but to absorb his vision, and to struggle on to new experience. Marx's final demonstration of the inevitability of social catastrophe under capitalist industrialism, and Morris's demonstration of the necessity of an elemental social regeneration, were simply two complementary aspects, negative and positive, of a single vision of the social reality. They are the twin realizations of the central prophecy of Rousseau.

Both men alike were possessed by the historical vision. Morris read history through art, Marx read it through economics; and since it can be as truly read through one sign as the other by the man who has the courage to accept the truth even though it be

to his own undoing, they both found the same story there recorded. The same kind of imagination was in both; both reached the same conclusion. Both were big men. They were succeeded by little men, in action and in theory; by men who did not want a social revolution but the same thing with themselves on top, and who were themselves no less afraid of a social *revolution* than were their nominal enemies. You cannot avoid the revolutionary basis of Socialism. Socialists who dream of Socialism without a revolution have merely succumbed to the vast inertia of the world. But the question is: Of what kind, and in what place, is the revolution to be? The terrible mistake of revolutionary Socialists is to imagine that in a society which has reached democracy violent and external revolution can bring them to their goal. Here Morris saw farther than Marx. He had his moment when he believed that violent revolution was inevitable, and he had steeled himself to that grim prospect. Having made his sacrifice he learned, as men generally do, that it was not required in that form. A different sacrifice was demanded. The revolution that was necessary was within men; and the outward revolution would be illusory except it were the natural expression of a revolution within. And the years have taught us how sound was his instinct, how prophetic his intuition. Socialism begins, and can begin, only in a revolution in the heart and mind of man.

Marx also had known this; but his knowledge was changed by his Messianism to the opposite of itself. The inward revolution, as he came to conceive it, consisted precisely in the fact that for the mass of mankind an inward revolution was neither possible nor necessary. In a different idiom, Marx deepened the gulf between God and Man until it was impassable. God would see to it that the Kingdom of Heaven would come on earth; and all that Man could do — and only the rarest men at that — was to know that it would come.

It was, in reality, the old doctrine of Calvinism again, which brought God so near to Man that God ceased to be. That doctrine had once been necessary to the life of the world; but it had ended by creating capitalist society. Now a yet more ruthless Calvinism

was to get men out of the abyss. The whole vast world was predestinate, and those who had 'achieved a theoretical understanding of the historical movement as a whole' were the Elect; they knew that the world was predestined. The difference between them and the older Calvinists was that the world was now predestined to salvation. But Marx did not understand that, if the world is predestined, salvation and damnation come to the same thing. When we bring God too near us He becomes the Devil. Men can receive God only through Christ.

Morris was saved from this Marxist barrenness by his artist's passionate feeling after the concrete particular, by the tenderness of God in his finger-tips. He felt for the work of men, and he knew by direct experience that when a man was happy in his selfless work of shaping the material of the world, he was in communion with man and with God.

For Morris and Marx were both alike in this: that they had a complete doctrine, and it was the same doctrine under different aspects. They reached the same final unity by different ways, but it was the same unity. Both Morris and Marx were historical materialists, and because they were genuine in this they were revolutionary materialists, therefore, in the philosophic or religious sense, not materialists at all. They saw that they were history, and they resolved to be it. Maix's historical materialism was philosophical in origin, Morris's was aesthetic and instinctive: the materialism of the man who loves material, and knows by direct experience that when a man is happy in his selfless work of shaping the material of the world, he is the servant of God.

> What other blessings in life are there save these two, fearless rest and hopeful work? Troublous as life is, it is surely given to each one of us here some times and seasons when, surrounded by simple and beautiful things, we have felt really at rest; when the earth and all its plenteous growth, and the token of the varied life of men, and the very sky and waste of air above us, have seemed all to conspire together to make us calm and happy, not slothful but restful. Still oftener belike

> it has given us those other times, when at last, after many a struggle with incongruous hindrances, our own chosen work has lain before us disentangled from all encumbrances and unrealities, and we have felt that nothing could withhold us, not even ourselves, from doing the work we were born to do, and that we were men and worthy of life. Such rest and such work, I earnestly wish for myself and for you and for all men: to have space and freedom to gain such rest and such work is the end of politics; to learn how best to gain it is the end of education; to learn its inmost meaning is the end of religion.

Morris's Socialism is often called Utopian by those who have never troubled to understand it; or by those who confuse a mistaken means towards Socialism with the end of Socialism. Of whom there are perhaps more than ever to-day. If Socialism is to be called Utopian because it shrinks from political chicane, then all genuine Socialism is Utopian and all Socialism that is not Utopian is Fascism. Morris did not invent a new kind of Socialism. The fact that he came to Socialism by his own road; that he had an ideal of human social activity; that when he tried to realize this ideal in practice, he discovered that a social revolution alone would make it possible; that he became a Socialist for that end — this does not make his Socialism a private and peculiar thing. It was Socialism which Morris accepted, not some esoteric doctrine of his own, and he accepted it in the full knowledge that the period of transition to a society of social justice might mean the complete eclipse of Art. Knowing what Art really was, he was not afraid for it. He accepted the death of the art of luxury as the price to be paid for the rebirth of the art of work.

The idea was too revolutionary for his friends. They did not know, as he knew, that in a capitalist world his own art, which they admired, was an art of luxury. It has been far too revolutionary for the bourgeois intellectual since Morris's day. The artist has gone on creating ever more esoteric art for the solace of middle-class *acedia* and has been unaware of his own degradation. And the great 'popular' art which has grown up in the no man's

land of escape from the boredom of work and the emptiness of leisure — is the cinema. And even when, in rare cases, the gifted artist has been forced to the recognition of his own futile and unworthy position, he has often sought refuge from responsibility in that detached ecclesiasticism from which Morris broke free at the outset of his career. On every side, in every aspect, Morris's vision has been proved true by events. Not only has art become steadily more remote from the common man; but his prophecy of the immediate future of the Socialist movement has been justified in detail. Six years before his death, in saying good-bye to the movement, he wrote these memorable words:

> The whole set opinion amongst those more or less touched by Socialism, who are not definite Socialists, is towards the new Trades Unionism and palliation. Men believe that they can wrest from the capitalists some portion of their privileged profits, and the masters, to judge from the recent threats of combination on their side, believe also that this can be done. That it can only very partially be done, and that the men could not rest there if it were done, we Socialists know very well; but others do not.
>
> I neither believe in State Socialism in itself, nor, indeed, as a complete scheme do I think it possible. Nevertheless some approach to it is sure to be tried, and to my mind will precede any complete enlightenment on the new order of things. The success of Mr. Bellamy's Utopian book, deadly dull as it is, is a straw to show which way the wind blows. The general attention paid to our clever friends, the Fabian lecturers and pamphleteers, is not altogether due to their literary ability; people have really got their heads turned more or less in that direction.
>
> Now it seems to me that at such a time, when people are not only discontented, but have really conceived a hope of bettering the condition of Labour, while at the same time the means towards their end are doubtful; or rather when they take the very beginning of the means as an end in itself— that

this time when people are excited about Socialism, and when many who know nothing about it, think themselves Socialists, is the time of all others to put forward the simple principles of Socialism regardless of the passing hour.

My readers will understand that in saying this I am speaking for those who are complete Socialists — or let us call them Communists. I say for us to make Socialists is the business at present, and at present I do not think we can have any other useful business. Those who are not real Socialists — who are Trades Unionists, disturbance breeders or what not — will do what they are impelled to do, and we cannot help it; but we need not, and cannot heartily work with them, when we know their methods are beside the right way.

Our business, I repeat, is the making of Socialists, i.e. convincing people that Socialism is good for them and is possible. When we have enough people of that way of thinking, they will find out what action is necessary for putting their principles into practice. Therefore, I say, make Socialists. We Socialists can do nothing else that is useful.

They are the words of a man too great to be a politician. Since they were written, Fabian Socialism has come and gone; the new Trades Unionism has created a bourgeoisie and an aristocracy no less vulgar than the old; the first British Labour Prime Minister has been the chosen Prime Minister of the united bourgeoisie; and to-day the English Labour Party is preparing to repeat the fearful futility of 'defending Democracy' by massacring innocent populations by all the scientific bestiality of modern war. The final bankruptcy of 'political' Socialism stares men in the face. Yet Morris's words are as true to-day as when they were written.

As he was at the end, so he had been at the beginning of his connection with the active Socialist movement. In 1883 he wrote concerning H. M. Hyndman:

He is sanguine of speedy change happening somehow, and is inclined to intrigue, and the making of a party: towards

> which compromise is needed, and the carrying people who don't really agree with you as far as they will go. As you know, I am not sanguine, and think the aim of Socialists should be the founding of a religion, towards which end compromise is no use, and we only want to have those with us who will be with us to the end.

Unless Socialism is a religion, it becomes nothing. Morris was one of the great men to whom it was a religion. Like all true religions, it demanded of him a great surrender; when he had made it, the world of his experience was unified. A final simplicity descended on all his thinking and doing. He had but followed his life where it led, and when it brought him to the realization that he must lose his life to save it he accepted the destiny with the same simplicity, the same generosity which had brought him face to face with it. He, whose life had been devoted to making art real, accepted the possibility of the annihilation of art. It also might have to die to live again. That acceptance was possible for him because of his faith in art. Because he knew that art was necessary to man, he was willing that it should die. 'I am sure,' he said, 'that it will be but a temporary loss, to be followed by a genuine birth of new art, which will be the spontaneous expression of the pleasure of life innate in the whole people.'

The depth of Morris's faith in art, which was the form of his faith in God and in man, made the sacrifice possible for him. It is the feebleness of their faith in art, and in God and man, which has turned his artist-successors aside from the path along which he led them. Because they have been afraid for *their* art, they have declared that they are afraid for art. They have been merely afraid for themselves. And because they have been afraid for themselves, they have suffered the great Socialist movement to be degraded. They have withdrawn from it in fear, and left it to the fearful. Because of their cowardice, it has been cowardly. And what have they gained? They too have gained the world and lost their souls.

§

Had I been writing a book, instead of a chapter, about Morris I should have lingered affectionately over many things which have no record in this brief description. I have insisted on what I believe to be the essence of the total man. He was the greatest of all the Victorians: united, it seemed, by every possible bond to the inmost body of the age, bone of its bone, flesh of its flesh, yet from the beginning outside it. Outside it by a chance hap as a schoolboy; outside it perdurably by his final surrender to the future. Because he was outside it, he was able to understand it; because he was of it, he was able to experience it.

Morris's Socialism is the message of the whole man. It was not a doctrine he embraced, but a discovery he made. Had Morris been the only Socialist in all Britain, still he would have been a Socialist. If he had been the only Socialist in all the world, still he would have been a Socialist. That is, in its simplest form, the difference between Morris and the thousands of others who, since his time, have adopted and profited by the name of Socialist. Unless we are prepared to regard Morris's Socialism as the consummation of all that he did, or failed to do, in other more comely and respectable provinces of human endeavour, we must leave him alone. It takes a man many years to discover what he ultimately and irremediably *is*. Most men go to their graves without knowing it. Morris was the kind of man to whom that destiny was impossible. He had the genius of experience, of experiencing. He at least was doomed to discover what he was. And he *was* — a Socialist.

Just as Marx was the final outcome of the great idealistic movement of philosophy, which was the nationally perfect form of the romantic movement in Germany, so Morris was the final outcome, in an equally perfect national embodiment, of the English Romantic movement, which was poetical and artistic, rather than consciously philosophical. What Marx had passed through as the conscious philosopher, Morris passed through as

the unconscious artist gradually compelled into consciousness. Morris directly experienced the impasse of which Marx had grasped the historical and economic necessity. Morris flung himself into the effort to live the life which Marx had apprehended as the ideal. Morris proved upon his pulses, in the characteristically English way, the truth which Marx had formulated. Marx was the theologian of Socialism; but Morris had lived the life of it. What was theory for Marx was experience for Morris. And Morris thus discovered truths of an order which was concealed from Marx. He discovered the necessity of a religious understanding of Socialism.

§

'The aim of Socialists,' said Morris, 'must be the founding of a religion.' I do not believe that he meant the founding of a new religion; those who have been nurtured amid the debris of a Christian civilization can found no new religion that does not turn out to be a religion of the devil; they can only rediscover Christianity.

And this, in reality, is what Marx and Morris did. They challenged the Christian Church, as it must eternally be challenged, to lose its life to save it. The Christian Church which would not admit the challenge of Marx finds itself to-day either wringing its hands over the advent of Fascism or involved in a diabolical compact with that utterly anti-Christian dispensation. But Morris was not, like Rousseau and Marx, a European prophet; he belonged to the English succession. He can be fully understood only against an English background; and his challenge is to the English Church in particular.

In Morris the wheel has turned full circle from Chaucer. What was in Chaucer's age the actuality has become for Morris the ideal. Wordsworth had groped towards it, Morris tried to re-create it; and the end of his effort was the conviction that the effort of the conscious and devoted man must be towards 'the founding of a

religion[5]. And that no conscious effort can ever do. What Morris meant, as indeed he made quite evident in *The Dream of John Bally* was a complete renewal of the Christian religion. The essential substance of that renewal is clear. The Church must strive to make amends for its betrayal of the common man.

We have quoted, without pausing to enlarge upon them, some words of his, spoken with such simplicity and directness that it is easy to glide over their profundity. Tearless rest' and 'hopeful work' — these were, to Morris, the evidences of religion — the conditions in which man experiences what religion is about. The 'fearless rest' comes in our sense of oneness with Nature and God; the hopefulness of work comes at the moments when 'after many a struggle with incongruous hindrances, our own chosen work has lain before us disentangled from all encumbrances and unrealities, and we have felt that nothing could withhold us, *not even ourselves* from doing the work that we were born to do, and that we were men and worthy of life'. To learn the inmost meaning of such rest and such work is the end of religion.

It is surely magnificent. But what *is* the inward meaning of the sudden uplifting sense that nothing could withhold us, not even ourselves, from doing the work that we were born to do? It is, in the words of William Blake, that, 'we, in our Selves, are nothing*. Our purpose is to be the willing vehicles of the creative compulsion of the divine. We rest, passive and receptive, in Nature to gain the strength to be active in the creation of a new Nature: on either hand, our life, and our reality, lie beyond the Self. This 'religion' of Morris's that the service of God lay in the creative fulfilment of man, is catholic and Christian, though it belongs to a time when Christianity was natural to man, as it is no longer to-day.

To the time when the Church was still the guardian of the common man Morris eagerly and wistfully looked back. His imaginative realization of those days was the foundation of all his thought. It was a time, he believed, when men lived, however hardly, in real community with one another and with God; and religious communion and natural community were in harmony. It was to a new creation of the community that he aspired —

the breaking-down of the impenetrable barrier that had grown, through the licensed and sanctified selfishness of centuries of individualism, between religion and life.

It is significant that Morris, though intended for the Church, went too deep in his medievalism to be content with the Church. He rebelled against the notion, to which Wordsworth and Coleridge had finally succumbed, that the function of the Church was to reconcile the common man to a social order that had become radically atheistic. And so it was that when the religious impulse of Wordsworth and Coleridge had largely spent itself in the liturgical and theological revival of the Oxford Movement, it was magnificently renewed in the radical and religious Socialism of Morris. He, more than any other single man, made the idea of a truly Christian *society* an imaginative reality again; his life-work may be fairly represented as that of one who had seen that the most effective work for the Christian community had to be done outside the priesthood. He was not mistaken. By his craftsmanship he restored to the Church some substance of 'the beauty of holiness', and by his imagination he made the idea of the Church once more central to social idealism. You cannot think Morris's Socialism save as the adumbration of a community in which the Christian profession and social practice are in harmony once again.

EPILOGUE

I WILL not explain what I have tried to do in this book, because the reader will know whether I have partly succeeded or completely failed, without my telling him all that I tried to do. I will say only this: that I have tried to reveal the actual growth of the modern world through the minds of some great men who experienced in act or imagination the travail of its becoming. I am, so to speak, nothing more than the clumsy and humble architect of a great Cathedral, wherein others will design chapels to the host of apostles who have not manifested themselves particularly to me; but I believe that the main lines of the great building, for all their clumsiness, are true; and above all, that the altar is in the right place.

But it will be said: 'These men are not the *creators* of the modern world. The creators of the modern world are the technicians, the inventors, the men of science.[5] I do not doubt that: they are indeed the creators of the body of the modern world. But it is a body that is tearing itself to pieces. It is fundamental to my view of life that if the blind creative process is suffered to continue upon the purely natural, or 'scientific' level, it must end in a living death to individuals, and universal catastrophe to mankind. Unless men turn to God to regenerate and redeem it, the mere process of natural life becomes Satanic. And those I commemorate are those who have striven to regenerate the world by the divine vision, and are therefore apostles of the Eternal Church. For the Eternal Church is founded anew when any man strives to regenerate the world in the spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of selfless love.

Such regeneration cannot be; and yet it must be. To those who demand certainty, that is a hopelessly unsatisfying attitude towards the world. Nevertheless, it is to me the only true one: the only one by which I, as a matter of simple experience, can live and not inwardly die. There is, I am convinced, but one clue to a future

of humanity which I can welcome, and in which I can believe. There is but one thing, as St. Paul said, which never fails either the individual or mankind.

> Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.

Thousands, perhaps millions, of scattered folk are beginning to feel to-day that the only thing which can save the world is Love. If the distinction between Good and Evil is not to perish from the world, if humanity is not 'to prey upon itself like monsters of the deep', the world must be redeemed by Love. It is absolutely demonstrable; and in the chapters on Rousseau and Marx it is demonstrated. The world must be redeemed by Love. It is terribly, fatally, easy to say. But what does it *mean?* Where shall Love begin? Where shall *we* begin?

I have no doubt where we must begin: with ourselves. We must begin by trying to love, and by recognizing our inevitable failure to love. 'Love endureth all things', even that. We must go on to recognize that in respect of Love, there is no health in us. We have not the strength to love. Let us do that, instead of pretending to love. For this is the manifest curse of the modern world, and of the visible Church that is its miniature, that it *pretends* to love: instead of admitting, once for all, that it does not and cannot love. By this pretence of love, life is corrupted at the fountain head. We live strangled in the serpent-holds of a great Lie.

And yet this strange modern world offers us such an opportunity for Love as, I verily believe, has never been offered to Man before. For in this world of vast and all-embracing economic necessity, to discover what we really are is a process of unprecedented spiritual purgation. Those kindly people of good intentions, whom we all imagine ourselves to be, are mere ghosts. We are in fact the slaves of our own unconscious social being. Even to look at the reality of our own unconscious social being, completely subject to the demonic compulsions of capitalist society, is to die a death. Men do not like dying spiritual deaths. And this is only

the first of those which we are required to die. This is the real beginning of the Christian spiritual life to-day—-the bitter knowledge that we are an evil nothingness. 'That which we would not, that we do[5] — *all* the time. The knowledge of ourselves as the passive creatures of the demonry of capitalist society is the divinely appointed renewal, at this moment of history, of the Christian knowledge of the universal bondage to Sin.

This universal Sin, which we are afraid to acknowledge, is driving the world inevitably to Destruction. 'The wages of Sin is Death.' How can we fight against it, in the world and in ourselves? Not by succumbing to the devilish delusion that we can destroy Destruction. Satan can never cast out Satan. There is but one way, the way of Love. And this Love must be faithful enough to know, that unless the mercy of God is vouchsafed to us, it will be the way of the Cross.

This acknowledgment, from which Christianity shrinks, is the beginning of our redemption. We pass away from the dominion of the powers of darkness, which triumph in the pretence of Christian love to-day. Through the spark of a true desire to love, which drives us on to face the bitter truth till it annihilates us, we find at last the courage to know what Love demands, and finally the strength to admit that we are not strong enough to love. 'The spirit indeed is willing,' or it may be, 'but the flesh is weak.' The strength is not in us. That, I believe, is the beginning of salvation for men and for the whole world. For the man who desires to love, and knows that he has not the strength to love, has emptied himself to be filled by the grace of God. That is what men need: to be conscious of their own nothingness, and to be renewed by the experience of the grace of God through Christ.

I know: it has been tried before, it has *happened* before. And Christendom was split into a thousand warring fragments. But it was tried long before that; and it *happened* long before that. And the universal Christian Church was the result of that first happening. Now by all the signs the grace of God is about to be poured out upon the nations — it may be in tribulation the like of which was not from the beginning of creation until now. But whether

in tribulation or in joy, it will be poured out not to divide Christendom, but to unite it. To-day the grace of God, as it comes to us, through the knowledge that, of ourselves, we cannot love, works directly towards Christian unity and away from separation. In the heart and mind of anyone who can suffer himself to *experience* the agony and deathliness of the present world, perishing without hope, the idea of the One Church takes on a new and wonderful meaning. In his imagination it is real, and he knows that it must be. The very grace of God that has touched him in his own utter nothingness, guides him towards unity in Christ. Whatever he does, he does it now unto the Lord, of whom every separation is a denial. He cannot but work for Christian unity; because that is what he represents and is.

Unity in Christ. Is it only another phrase? I appeal to those who have known what it is — to those who have known that in the agony of the Garden and the Cross is revealed the meaning and purpose and nature of Life, if it is not to end in Death — never to forget that unity in Christ is a reality, and is the only reality. There is no unity without Christ; and without unity there is no Christ. And there can be no unity, but only separation and death, without love. In every separated Church of Christ to-day, Christ is being crucified again, by lack of love. In every separated nation to-day Christ is being crucified again by lack of love. But if the Church cannot love, instead of pretending to love, how shall the nations find the way? How shall the blind lead the blind?

Only by ceasing to be blind; only by undergoing the death which lies hidden in every desire to love indeed, every act of love. 'Every kindness to another is a little death in the Divine Image.' We love only by dying, only by being willing to die. Never perhaps was there a greater power of love adrift in the world than to-day. But it is homeless, embittered, changed into hatred and turned towards death, and roams the world only to seek whom it may devour. Because the Church is unwilling to die for love, millions of men in the world to-day are *willing* to die, in a loveless death, in a death without Christ.

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[To a large extent the section and chapter-headings of this book supply its own index. This brief list aims merely at supplementing them. Thus, for example, under **Shakespeare** *will be found only those references to Shakespeare and his works which occur* **outside** *the chapters dealing specifically with Shakespeare: likewise with Chaucer, Montaigne and the rest.]*

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