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AN ESSAY ON THE NATURE OF  
CONTEMPORARY ENGLAND



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THE NATURE OF  
CONTEMPORARY  
ENGLAND

*1*

By  
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## INTRODUCTION

THERE are two obstacles to the description of any people in any age.

The first is the difficulty of presenting what is obvious from the outside but not perceived from the inside : what is obvious to the foreign onlooker but unappreciated by the native.

The second is the difficulty of presenting what is obvious from the inside but not perceived from the outside : what the native takes for granted and what is yet to the alien so novel and unsuspected as to be nearly incredible.

Nations have qualities which are glaring to the foreigner, but which they themselves never suspect; they are also so familiar with things of their own as to think these universal and obvious, and thus not worth describing; so that the foreigner never hears of them. In either case the reader of a true statement is shocked and incredulous. The native cannot believe that his own image of himself is imperfect; the foreigner cannot believe that the picture he has commonly received is distorted. To these difficulties is added a third peculiar to our time, the danger of shocking our intense modern patriotisms.

When men abandon the worship of God and His Saints they take to worshipping themselves.

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Self as an object of worship is very suitable, for oneself has every perfection, and what is more, one's own existence is indubitable. When we worship ourselves, we worship something which certainly *is* ; which is also certainly *present*, at hand, and (to us) wholly admirable.

But worship is of its nature a tribute paid ; it must regard some outward object. Therefore we can only worship ourselves in a projected form.

The most thorough way of doing this is to worship humanity. It is from the worship of humanity that we get such religions as Socialism and Universal Brotherhood and the Gospel of General Kindliness—and the rest. But these are thin food, and men commonly prefer to worship themselves in a more concentrated image. Now for this purpose the best object of worship is one's Nation.

Whether it be a small city state or a tribe of a few hundred men, or a vast polity of millions, the Nation affords a highly definable, vivid, real Personality—an ever-present and living God.

When man's imperative necessity for a religion has taken this form, the worship of his own Nation, any description of that Nation involves a risk of blasphemy. You can sing " Glory—Glory—Glory " without limit. You can tell all the truth and more than the truth upon things flattering to the citizens ; but so much as a hint of things less flattering is an impiety.

All this makes it difficult for the modern man to write anything of interest upon politics ; for

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research into the character of anything involves the mention of unpleasing as well as of pleasing matters. Nevertheless, the task ought in the case of modern England to be attempted, because it is of the first practical moment. Not to understand what modern England is may, if the error be prolonged, lead the foreigner into dangerous collision with it; it may lead the native into what has already proved to be failure and may become disaster.



# MODERN ENGLAND



## THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS

MODERN England is Aristocratic, Protestant and Commercial.

There is very much more than this in England, for England is a living organism, and no living organic thing can be defined by a formula. The factors of any organism are almost infinite in number and can only be seen as one whole by experience of it.

This one of the modern States, England, is remarkable not only for Class Government, for Protestant Morals and for Commerce, but also for its spontaneity, for its humour, for its sudden enthusiasms, for its increasing segregation from Europe, for the growing action upon it of what is called "The English Speaking New World," and innumerable other things.

Moreover, every function and attribute of a living thing, and of a nation as of an individual, is coloured by underlying character, so that when we say of a man or of a people that they have such and such a quality, that quality is true in their case only in a particular form which makes it their own.

Whatever we predicate of modern England—that it is maritime, for instance, or that it is urban—means not maritime and urban at large, but maritime and urban in a particular way.

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The English handling of ships is a thing of a special kind, not the same as the Breton or the Scandinavian ; and the Englishman formed by the large modern English industrial town is of a different sort from his parallel as formed in the great industrial towns of Northern Germany or the United States of America. But an appreciation must begin by an outline. Therefore we say that the three main characteristics of England as she now is are, that she is Commercial, that she is Protestant, and that she is Aristocratic : this last character in particular making her individual among all the peoples of our time.

Next let us define our terms, for when the same word is used in two or more senses all conclusions drawn from it grow confused and contradictory.

I here use the words " Aristocratic State " to mean a State in which the citizens are ordered, laws made and administered, customs preserved and developed, by a comparatively small governing class.

We must be clear on this point to begin with, for it is the first essential to the comprehension of our subject.

Words like " aristocratic," " democracy," and so on are used to-day to mean anything or nothing ; they are applied to a hundred different and conflicting conditions. The phrase " Aristocratic State" left unexplained might connote any one of fifty ideas. I do not use it here to mean a State the direction of which is in the hands of a restricted number of men clearly

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distinguished by special titles, still less am I using the word in the old Greek sense of "government by the best." I mean by "Aristocratic State" a community in which it can be seen that an oligarchy directs public affairs, controls domestic and foreign policy, the Courts of Justice, education, and, in which such a social structure is found natural by all citizens.

Aristocracy is from below. Government of this kind is not merely acquiesced in by the governed; still less is it imposed upon the governed. Rather does it proceed from the appetites of the governed.

On this account the Aristocratic State has been called "a society where the poor desire to be governed by the rich." -

This is not a perfectly accurate definition; for though the governing class will be, in practice, mainly the richest class, yet the desire for government by that class is not a desire for government by rich men merely because they are rich. There enters into the structure that which must always be present in human political arrangements, the mystical or sacramental element; an admixture of worship, a recognition of quality. An individual typical of the governing class in such a State may be quite poor; another individual, immensely wealthy, may obviously lack the characteristics of that class. Further, when one uses the word "class" one does not mean a definable body, restricted by fixed limits; such strict limitation would destroy the quality of the thing. The test of a governing

class lies not in any formula, but in an appreciation parallel with the appreciation we make of something by its taste.

Human societies—tribes, nations, city-states, empires—fall into two main divisions throughout history. The first are those in which the sense of human equality is paramount ; they may be called " egalitarian states " ; the second " non-egalitarian."

When egalitarian societies are small (and only then) they can be organised as Democracies, that is, societies governing themselves by a meeting of the citizens, public discussion of any change and the general acceptance of it in such a meeting, the appointment of magistrates in the same fashion. Where you have to deal only with a few thousands (whether of independent workers or of slave-owners), democracy is feasible. Elsewhere democracy is impossible for mere mechanical reasons. Hence, where you have to deal with very large numbers and great spaces, egalitarian feeling expresses itself in concentrating the ruling power upon one man. The States we come across in our experience of to-day and in our records of the past are in a vast majority of this egalitarian kind. The opposite type, the non-egalitarian, aristocratic states, in which an oligarchy is not only tolerated but revered, in which the feeling for equality is absent or weak, are rare indeed.

Again, as to the second characteristic of modern England, when we say that contemporary England is Protestant, we mean that the nation is

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strongly attached to a certain religious spirit, to be discovered over the greater part of Northern Europe and Northern America ; a spirit which had its origin and has maintained its character from reaction against the central authority of the Church of Rome.

The general savour of a religious attitude, however strong, escapes definition ; but there are certain social and political consequences following on the Protestant spirit which can be clearly perceived wherever it colours society, and which can be stated and described. The Protestant culture as a whole is a characteristic of North Germany, Scandinavia and Holland in Europe ; of the United States, and of the British Oceanic Dominions. Everywhere the Protestant culture has something in common, whence arise certain bonds of sympathy. Its main centres in Europe are London and Berlin.

The effects of Protestantism upon the character of a State vary with the racial and other elements of the community ; it has not the unifying force that Mohammedanism has, for instance, for it is of its nature a protest—as the name which historical accident has given it implies. It has everywhere, of course, certain common effects, due to the isolation of the soul ; notably a reliance upon self ; a promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem ; but one cannot say of it that it makes for this or that political quality, save indirectly. Where Protestantism affects a large and numerous society it undoubtedly makes for the power of the few ; but in many simple

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societies, as for instance the Norwegian, it makes for the extreme of the democratic spirit. One effect it everywhere and necessarily has, which is the promotion of sympathy with other portions of the Protestant culture, and of increasing a feeling of superiority combined with mistrust against the Catholic culture. It might also be argued that the attachment of England to the Protestant culture has much to do with the commercial character of the English State ; but it would be an error to exaggerate this, for great commercial polities develop under all forms of religion.

What is more certainly true of English Protestantism is this :—

That it started the history of the nation, the national memory and consciousness, afresh from the moment of its inception. Through Protestantism the English nation has been radically separated from its remote past, and it understands itself well only during the last three hundred years.

In a nation of barbaric origin this would not be of such moment as it is in the case of England ; but England being essentially a province of the Roman Empire and her civilisation going back for two thousand years, so recent a remoulding is of great consequence. A Frenchman, an Italian, a Spaniard, is actively in touch with the Middle Ages—to an Englishman they are a foreign country. Every revolution tends, of course, to break national history thus ; but a religious revolution most of all.

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Let it further be noted that the Protestantism of England is complete and homogeneous. There is in England less experience, political and social, of the opposing Catholic culture than in any other of the great Western nations.

And England, we say, is also Commercial. This is the third main political character of the Modern English people ; and when we say Commercial we mean " organised for the increase of material wealth by exchange." There is a profound difference between the commercial and the productive spirit in the economic character of a nation.

A peasant, a craftsman, is productive ; a community the tone of which is given by peasants and craftsmen considers wealth as a thing connected with personality, and as being the reward of industry. Underlying such peasant and craft production is the permanent idea that the immediate end of production is consumption. The peasant may grow his crops in order to sell them, the craftsman may create his products—such as chairs and tables, clothing, iron implements, etc.—in order to sell them ; but he presides over their creation, sees them coming into existence as objects for consumption, and some part of what he produces he will commonly consume himself. The herdsman will eat his own cheese, the cobbler will make and mend his own boots. But where the main economic idea is that of exchange, the creative faculty takes an inferior place ; personality and production are divorced, consumption becomes a remote object,

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and the immediate economic activities of the citizen are concerned not with making but with salesmanship.

The productive type of economy makes for stability and for property well divided ; the commercial type of economy makes for competition, for the increasing concentration of the means of production, transport and exchange into few hands, and the reduction of an increasing number of citizens to a proletarian condition.

Again, the commercial spirit of a community, in proportion as it is active, gives the leaders of that community a wider knowledge of the world than a government inspired by craftsmen and peasants can possess.

Again, the commercial state will be more averse to arms than the productive ; it will engage in war directly for markets or (of course) for defence ; whereas the productive state will engage in war not only for defence but even aggressively for the expansion of its direct revenue, its recruiting field and the satisfaction of an appetite for political power.

Again, the citizens of the commercial state will tend to measure civic excellence more by wealth than will the citizens of the productive state. For among the latter the quality of the produce and the personal character entering into the process of production makes men exceptionally consider the excellence of the product, and revere the excellent producer. But the process of gaining wealth by exchange is impersonal, save as regards skill or good fortune in trade ; and

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admits a large element of chance. Success in the productive state may connote success in craftsmanship or tillage, though the reward be small ; success in a society devoted to exchange can only be measured by wealth and wealth therefore becomes in the commercial state almost the sole criterion of civic excellence.



## THE STUFF

THESE three characteristics of the English State, Aristocracy, Protestantism and Trade, work upon a certain underlying national character or material, physical and moral. This character is inherited from forgotten generations, Roman and Mediaeval, and developed ages before that great change (only three centuries old) in which English class government, English commerce and English religion were all three established together.

This underlying general national material, upon which the three influences just mentioned have worked, cannot of course be defined any more than can be a savour or a colour, but qualities deeply marking it may be noted.

On the physical side we discover in the English a largeness of bone and stature beyond the average of Western Europe, wherein they form a chief unit. The type deteriorates in large towns and, very recently, England has become mainly an England of large towns ; but the characteristic Englishman is still an Englishman of the countryside and is of this large build and handsome breed. There would seem to be something in the climatic condition of the British Islands which produces physical excellence of this kind ; for it is found in Ireland as well as in Great Britain

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and extends indeed not only to human beings but to the animals trained by man. In general, the nations of the world come to these islands to renew their herds, flocks and horseflesh.

This quality of largeness and physical excellence is, in the Englishman of England proper—not in the Irish man nor so much in the Scottish man—accompanied by lethargy and love of ease. But these are thrown off at once upon occasion : they are permanent in the sense that they are permanent tendencies, but they are not continuous. On the contrary, the same man whose gestures are slow and whose processes of mind sluggish can at will excel in all those things which require immediate and very rapid co-ordination of hand, eye and brain. This is apparent in the appetite of the English for games, and their continual practice therein. It is also apparent in their handling of ships and their horsemanship.

In qualities not physical, the most remarkable and permanent characteristic of England is the intensity of the English visual imagination.

This is a point specially to be emphasised in any study of England and the English. It has marked them from the beginning of their story, it long pre-dates the beginnings of the England we know to-day—Aristocratic, Commercial and Protestant—the product of the Reformation flowering in the XVIIth century.

The quite exceptional power of the English visual imagination is the more to be stressed by anyone who would describe to others or understand for himself the nature of England because

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it has been so little appreciated. The evidence for it is to be found in many characteristically English activities—in the English feeling for landscape, in the superb achievement of English lyric poetry, in the recurrent English enthusiasms divorced from experience and from reason, but most of all in the characterisation of English fiction and biography.

From the first efforts of English writers to put before their readers real or imaginary characters, those characters take on a vivid personal life after a fashion not to be found in rival literatures. There are flashes of it in the Venerable Bede. In the Border Ballads you find the same tradition. You find it also in the native chronicles and hagiographies from the IXth to the XIVth century ; and at the end of this last you find it most marked in the highly English creative work of Chaucer.

The word "imagination" is used in many senses, and there is one sense in which the English possess it less perhaps than any rival—I mean the power of putting oneself in the place of others and of conceiving what is passing in an alien mind. But imagination in the sense of forming interior pictures and projecting inward personal emotion upon external nature the English possess in a superior degree.

This living and driving power in the English mind accounts for a hundred things in the nation's existence as well as in the national literature—notably the episode of Biblical enthusiasm and the more enduring episodes of adventure overseas.

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It is seen in the newest manifestations, such as the discovery of adventure in mountain-climbing, or the modern English devotion to sailing small craft. It is seen in the historical myths which the English cherish more passionately than any other people—making of sundry characters something quite other, and far more glamorous, than sober record warrants. It is seen also (and I trust the value of the paradox will be appreciated) in the sudden disappearance of such enthusiasms. For though imagination can create, what it creates is subject to capricious and immediate dissolution.

Let this profound, intimate, instinctive English mark never be forgotten in any appreciation of English activity—the violence (as one may call it) of English vision. It is the more likely to be forgotten or misunderstood because the modern Englishman has created yet another legend with regard to it. He prides himself on his stolidity. Foreigners take him at his word, and seeing him to be undemonstrative miss the interior flame. But the fruits of the English imagination are, I repeat, manifest to anyone who will consider reality rather than conventional phrases : that body of verse, particularly lyric verse (all great English poets, including Shakespeare, are great in proportion as they are lyrical), those religious excitements which have often been frenzies and manias, that glorying in an imaginary past—and I know not how many other things more—spring from this capital national root of visual imagination.

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Directly connected with this prime quality of visual imagination is the remarkable development of the comic sense in Englishmen.

It is this which has puzzled many foreign critics under the title of "humour."<sup>55</sup> An appreciation of humour is one of the tests of character which every Englishman makes in judging others, and the average strength of that sense among Englishmen stands very high indeed. It is even so strong that at times it seems to mark the English spirit off from all others.

Now this unceasing contemplation of the comic and this sharp appreciation of it under every circumstance is a direct function of the English imagination. The comic is essentially a contrast between reality and the ideal—between what should be (according to an agreed pattern of morals, of cause and effect and what not) and what is. By a paradox which it is absolutely necessary to understand if one is to grasp the English character, that very faculty of imagination which enables the Englishman to see imaginary things and even to believe in them in the form of myths (or at any rate to persuade himself of them) breeds its own contrary—a vigilant, instinctive, sense of the comic contrast between what he imagines and what is.

You see this contrast, for instance, in the way animals strike an Englishman. As everybody knows, no people have pushed sympathy for animals further than have the English. You will find many so exaggerated in this regard as to ascribe to animals human characters and rational

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minds. Yet in no literature will you find the appreciation that animals are comic and can be presented as comic characters so strong as in English literature and its derivatives.

\* \* \* \*

Let me conclude these preliminaries by a perhaps necessary qualification. Whatever we discover to be characteristically English will not be only discoverable in England. When we talk of the influence of an upper class, of religion, of the commercial character, of fancy, of the sense of the comic and all the rest of it, we predicate things which are true not only of England but of the Japanese, the Esquimaux, the Hottentots, let alone the fellow states of Christendom, of which England is only one. All these characters enter into the general make-up of humanity. But they enter in different proportions, and it is precisely this difference of proportion in the ingredients of things which accounts for differences in their quality.

Every ancient and highly developed society has a class system. Class government is only peculiar to England in the sense that it is there far more emphasised than elsewhere. Every nation has some commercial activity ; but the intensity of that activity and the way in which it has affected the whole national mind differentiates England from her neighbours. All men have the sense of the comic, though different individuals, different races, have this sense in different degrees, but the English in a very high degree. All men combine

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slower and quicker reactions ; but the English present the sharpest contrast of lethargy in certain activities and promptitude of reaction in others.

As with the positive qualities, so with the negative. No nation has so thoroughly abandoned the idea and use of a governing Monarchy as has England ; yet the English retain a remnant of it which may well expand in the future. All nations nourish historical myths, but the English hold to theirs with an especial tenacity and unanimity. If we predicate this or that quality of the English—or indeed of any other people—we are not saying that it is unique in them, but present in them more emphatically than in others.

It is a very obvious point, but one to which I shall have to return more than once even in the course of so brief a study as this.



## ENGLAND IS AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE

IN developing our discussion of the three main characteristics of England—Aristocratic, Protestant and Commercial—I begin with the first : England as an Aristocratic State.

It might seem a better order to begin with the religious matter, for it is the religion of a society which determines its culture ; and the foreigner who would appreciate another country, still more the man who would appreciate his own, must first discover the religious basis of the State—that philosophy of life by which the citizens live, that conviction which renders one thing intolerable, another adored ; which makes such and such morals seem part of the nature of things, and their opposite an abomination.

But it is better in the case of England to take as the prime character upon which first to fix one's mind the character of England as an Aristocratic State : that is, as a State organised under class government, and not only organised under class government, but having made of class government something instinctive and part of the nation's very soul.

The reason one should take this order, and begin with the aristocratic character of the English State, is that it is at once the most

highly differentiated mark of England and the least appreciated.

It is the least appreciated by the foreigner because there is no parallel in Europe with which he can compare it. He is acquainted with no other modern society which can teach him by a parallel instance what class government in England means. It is the least appreciated by the native because men never appreciate the air they breathe ; they always (and necessarily) take it for granted. Yet to a man who shall steep himself in English habits, social and political, and observe them with his own eyes and ears, continually on his guard against that warping of judgment which comes from print, this highly characteristic English political temper—*class government*—will be apparent and even glaring.

Class government arose in England historically during those generations which produced modern England as a whole ; the generations of the religious revolution, 1536-1688. Class government began to oust the old National Popular Monarchy after the confiscation of the ecclesiastical lands—the property of monastic corporations, colleges, hospitals, guilds and the rest—for the benefit of the squires and greater territorial lords.

This new state of affairs was but partly and precariously established and the rising power of wealth not yet fully conscious of itself, when the great William Cecil, the chief maker of modern England, protected its origins under Queen

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Elizabeth (1559-1603). It triumphed in arms in the next generation when the squires and wealthier yeomen, relying on the money power of the City of London, not only conquered the Crown in the great Civil War (1642-1646), but put the King to death (1649). ^ firmly established itself immediately, in the second half of the XVIIth century, from the return of the murdered King's son, Charles II (1660) to the violent deposition and expulsion of his brother James II by the rich merchants and nobles who replaced him by creatures of their own (1688).

Class government was by that time already the rule in England. The Crown, already thoroughly inferior by 1660, sank lower and lower in power through the next generation. An attempt to revive it failed ; and from 1688 onwards the change was fully accomplished. The Crown had become a puppet, and an oligarchy of wealthy men henceforward determined the affairs of England.

This oligarchy presided over the great commercial expansion of England and her great corresponding colonial expansion. The English gentry have created the whole story of England up to our own time. Though they and their power are no longer quite what they were, yet they in the main (though more and more mixed with incongruous elements) still furnish its direction to the English State.

I have said that Aristocracy is from below. Class government was not imposed upon the English people, nor even accepted by them, but

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—as it were—"grown" or "bred from" the very thing which the English people had become through the effects of the Reformation, acting upon the original national material.

There went with the great change a decline of the yeomanry, which at last virtually disappeared. The typical English village became the property of its lord, its soil came to be hired from him by farmers at a competitive terminable rent; the descendants of those who had once been the landowning peasants became an agricultural proletariat tilling the ground for a weekly wage. The process was at work long before the expansion of English commerce began under the Stuarts, and still longer before the beginning of the industrial movement. It was the root of what later developed as capitalism; but from the beginning this preponderance of the wealthy and the substitution of their power for that of the King was organised under a ruling class, and so remains organised to this day.

It is a class into which men were accepted through the prolonged action of wealth, and out of which they would fall through the *prolonged* (but only through the prolonged) effect of poverty. To rise into that class required a couple of generations; to fall out of it altogether usually took more than two generations, for the struggle to remain a gentleman was (and is) desperate: as desperate as a struggle for life. Just before losing such a quality the last descendants of a line of gentry would (and will

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now) attempt to recover their status by any means at their disposal. The gentry as time proceeded came to be marked by a special social manner, and, above all, a special accent in the speaking of the language so that one member of the class could immediately recognise another. This was till lately a universal rule, and it still largely applies. Even to-day, few men not gentlemen can effectively pass as such in daily speech.

To accent were added, of course, a vast number of small social habits and traditions, all of which in combination marked the gentleman. It grew to be the ambition of all men who had the thing at all within their reach to become gentlemen, or at least to be called gentlemen. Before the end of the XVIIIth century the word had even acquired a moral connotation, and during the XIXth century that moral connotation was universal. The gentleman had become more than a lifetime ago the *national* ideal of the perfect man, and therefore government by gentlemen appeared as a natural and respectable thing in the eyes of all.

The continuation of a system so different from any other in Christendom was guaranteed, accentuated, and crystallised by a very remarkable institution—the body of what are called the "Public Schools."

These are the seed plots of the English governing class, moulding its character and stamping it with all that differentiates it (though no longer by a sharp boundary) from the rest of the nation.

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The Public Schools are in their modern form, as seminaries for the English governing class, an utterly different thing from the little old places with which they are historically connected and whose names they bear. All up and down England there had been Grammar Schools, especially numerous towards the end of the Middle Ages, for the teaching of a few scholars, mainly such lads as could not afford to pay for their own education. The average number of scholars in each school was quite small, but the total number of local foundations was very great. Each of them was, of course, endowed, and all the original few scholars were lodged and fed at the expense of the school's property. Those so maintained were said to be "on the foundation/" that is, paid for by revenues settled upon the establishment by its "pious founder."

In the general loot of the Reformation a great mass of these schools disappeared, the revenues passing to the public robbers who enriched themselves upon every side out of clerical endowment. But a certain proportion were re-founded under Edward VI, though shorn of much of their revenue. They continued to play this humble domestic *role*, grounding poor scholars in Latin and passing some on in their teens to the two Universities which had escaped by a hair's breadth, though marked down for confiscation before Henry VIII died. The colleges of the Universities were also endowed and could therefore receive poor scholars who still formed the bulk of their members. Later, in the early

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XVIIth century, the number of scholars in each school somewhat enlarged, a greater proportion of the middle classes appeared among the pupils and less of the populace. Later still—in the next lifetime—the squires<sup>5</sup> sons began to attend the local Grammar School lying convenient to their fathers' houses, while wealthier men would send their sons further afield, especially to the Royal foundation of Eton, which already had a considerable prestige.

The idea of the already rapidly growing Public Schools as being connected especially with the education of gentlemen strengthened continually, but the great change did not come until the first half of the XIXth century. It was then, during the modern expansion of England, that the aristocratic spirit instinctively produced that new and highly distinctive type which we call to-day the "Public School man,"<sup>55</sup> the best known name in the formation of which is Doctor Arnold of Rugby (died 1842).

The numbers of scholars henceforward (from, say, 1840, onwards) grew prodigiously. Those "on the foundation"—the "scholars,"<sup>55</sup> specially so called, provided for partly out of the school property and originally the only pupils—became but a small minority, and even so were of the same social class as their fellows whose parents paid the whole of the very high cost of education and maintenance in these places.

More than a lifetime ago the system was fully established, counting thousands upon thousands of members, indeed all the youth of

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that class, upper-middle and gentry, which has formed one kind of character present throughout England, and is used everywhere for purposes of government, direct and indirect. Nearly all the officers of the Army, the vastly expanding Civil Service, the very great majority of both Houses of Parliament, much the greater part of the exceedingly powerful Lawyers' Guild, the administrators of the Colonial Empire—the governing class in general—were formed in the Public Schools and proceeded thence to the administration and ordering of England and her possessions.

There is among the Public Schools, as among all things English, a hierarchy, Eton being given a sort of primacy and a dozen or so superior names sufficiently familiar following it : Harrow, Winchester, Rugby, Marlborough, Shrewsbury, Westminster, etc.

Here, again, as with all things English, one cannot draw a dividing line and say, " Here the Public School stops and here begin those smaller institutions which hardly rank as Public Schools." Some small traditional local foundation which no one has heard of—the Tudor or Stuart " Grammar School " of some local town—may, under a vigorous new master, spring into fame and gather a great number of scholars to it from the directing classes. New " Public Schools " also are founded from time to time. But the character remains the same and has profoundly impressed itself upon the English polity. The Public School at which a gentleman was brought

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up from the age of, say, thirteen or fourteen to eighteen, remains the chief memory of his life ; it has as a rule more effect upon him than his home, and engages him into a wide corporation of fellow " Etonians,<sup>55</sup> " Harrovians,<sup>55</sup> etc., and that still wider corporation known under the general term of " Public School men."<sup>55</sup>

Some are now saying that this system, which lies at the very root of English social and political organisation, is changing or imperilled ; but there are as yet no signs of its breaking down. " The Public School System "<sup>55</sup> as it is called, is still fundamental to the English State, and is the very mark of England as an Aristocratic State. The lesser school may be looked down upon by the more important school, but the line of cleavage lies not between this or that stratum in the Public Schools, but between the Public Schools as a whole and the mass of the population.

The institution is of course directly connected with wealth, and those who desire to understand England from the outside should appreciate upon what basis of wealth the Public School System reposes. To send one's son to Eton for, say, four years will cost you first and last more than £1,200, but not necessarily as much as £1,500. To send him to a much less important Public School at quite the other end of the scale will cost certainly not less than £800, possibly nearer £1,000. Badges and emblems distinguish present and former membership. Foreign readers of English fiction may, for instance, have been

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puzzled by the term " old school tie."<sup>5</sup> It comes from the fact that every school has now a neck-tie in some particular combination of colours, which ornament is worn not only during school years, but often all a man's life. Special customs attach to each school, to each a particular tradition, and to the whole body of Public Schools the consciousness of superiority over the rest of the nation.

But it must not be imagined that this sense of superiority excites envy or protest : on the contrary, since aristocracy is from below it is in the very nature of the English polity that this sense of superiority which the wealthy have in themselves is admired by all.

Since the Aristocratic State is highly exceptional among human organisations, it is essential to our understanding of it to note certain marks which, to citizens of another kind, are so unusual as to be hardly understood.

Here is a list:—

The Aristocratic State enforces unity more solidly and more thoroughly than a despotism. It has been well said that England enjoys all the social advantages of Fascism without any of its unnatural restrictions. England has all the fruits of Despotism without the inconvenience of a Despot. Full unity marks the whole nation.

Aristocracy works thus because the governing class provides a model for all to imitate and because its members are in perpetual communion for purposes of administration and decision, for the making of laws, and the framing of foreign policy.

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With this unity goes a fierce and universal patriotism ; and at the same time (what is not at all the same thing) a tendency to create " national institutions."

All the English Press is official, but one paper in particular is a national institution—*The Times*. There is even a comic paper which is a national institution ; it is called *Punch* ; and though it should print nothing comic it would still remain the national comic paper. There is a national shrine for the great dead, Westminster Abbey. There is an official national history taught in all schools and taken for granted throughout English literature, whether permanent or ephemeral. It is invariable in the gravest historical books as in the newspapers. This achievement of unity without rigidity is indeed the capital triumph of the aristocratic system.

If it be asked how class government makes for unity, apart from the intercommunication of the governing class and its mutual support, the answer is that the governing class acts to its society as do the *Cadres* of officers and non-commissioned officers to an army. The whole nation is organised under it, and one of the most remarkable features therein is its dispersion over the whole territory. Nearly all English villages have present in them a chief owner of their land and houses who not only acts as the local magistrate, but takes the lead in the whole life of the place.

Though rural England is but a small fraction of the whole—a tenth to an eighth—yet this conception of an established governing class,

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originating in the villages when the villages were nine-tenths of England, two hundred years ago, maintained when they were still a majority of England only a long lifetime ago, is still vigorous in the modern England of great towns and a wholly urban population.

The head of the Stanleys is still the chief man in Lancashire, though Lancashire is now one vast manufactory.

Note further that in such a system the governed participate not only by their own consent but by the careful moderation of their superiors. The system is accepted, not so much enthusiastically as inevitably ; it seems, to the governed and the governing, alike, part of the nature of things ; but it includes the claim of the governed to subsistence and to a certain minor measure of self-administration, as for instance, within the great trade unions, etc. Also—what puzzles all those who have no personal experience of such things—citizens so organised enjoy, *without* equality, a considerable personal liberty. They will sincerely boast that they enjoy such liberty to the full ; indeed, in a greater measure than the citizens of other nations.

After unity, with its main fruit of a violent and universal patriotism, perhaps the most important consequence of the aristocratic system is the effect it has upon the attitude men bear towards public servants.

In every other form of polity the public servant is (as a private servant is), suspect; he is regarded as a man under temptation and he is

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watched and checked ; but in the Aristocratic State the public servant is revered. The Politicians, the Judges, greater and lesser, the Bureaucrats, the Policemen, enjoy respect in spite of failings.

One remarkable result of this temper is that Parliaments are only possible in an Aristocratic State. They are just as corrupt as elsewhere, but because they exercise a public function they are respected. It must also be remembered that in an Aristocratic State Parliaments can even be representative. Of course, all Parliaments are talked of as " representative " and government by them is called, by convention, " representative government." But in every other country where the decaying and unreal pretence of Parliament still survives, the representative fiction is exploded. Parliament is known to all to be no more than a clique of politicians each advancing his own fortunes. But in England, Parliament, though far gone in decay, has still some representative flavour, because it is still largely formed out of the governing class, and that class is thoroughly representative of the nation. Parliament in England used to act entirely as a Senate, not as an elected assembly. It still largely does so. That is why in England alone Parliaments are not destructive of the public good, or rather, have not been so in the past.

Yet another characteristic of the Aristocratic State, and perhaps the most important of all after its unity, is its continuity and permanence. These are also achieved elsewhere by monarchy,

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but they are even more fully achieved by the unceasing control of a governing class perpetually recruiting itself, and never dying. Such a class can never suffer from "regencies during minority" as do monarchies, and its numbers correct the folly of individuals.

Be it remarked that one factor in the particular case of the English Aristocratic State is the exceedingly powerful lawyers<sup>5</sup> corporation.

In all ancient European States the legal profession plays a great part: we know the part it played for instance in the old French monarchy. But in England it plays a far greater part than in any other. The Bar is one of the chief modes of entry into the governing class for men not born into that class. Opportunities for enormous earnings, on a scale quite different from what may be found in any other country, are open to the English Lawyers' Guild. Every member of the Bar who is elected to Parliament and remains there for more than quite a brief period has a prescriptive right to live off the taxes when he retires. There are innumerable posts kept for them, varying in income (paid by the tax-payer) from £1,500 *or* £1,800 to £20,000 a year. All the higher magistracy—and all the lower magistracy except the petty jurisdiction of the village squires—is drawn from members of the Bar.

Since it is a further mark of the Aristocratic State that in it there is no separation of powers, and that the Judiciary can and does act on occasion as a part of the executive, the active political force of the lawyers is far greater in

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England than in any other country. It is not arbitrary, for it is checked by the Jury system ; but under the effect of the aristocratic temper the Jury is generally prepared to do what it is told by the Judge—and it can only decide on questions of fact. Let it be remarked in this connection that English justice, though hugely expensive and its administrators enormously paid, is prompt beyond any other. Its other salient quality, the emphasis on order, will be dealt with later.

It is also continuity, the certitude of continuity, in the English State, a certitude deriving directly from the aristocratic arrangement of the English polity, which gives it a certain advantage apparent to all observers. With the exception of the Vatican, there is no power in the modern world so certain of a continuous future, reposing upon an unbroken tradition. In every rival country policy, especially foreign policy, is at the mercy of revolution, and even of shifting electoral majorities. England alone has been, like Venice, unchangeable, because she was aristocratic.

Here a word may be useful on the complicated system of titles for which England is notorious. It is *not* identical with the governing class. It is rather a symbol of class government and, by its effect on the public mind, a support of it. But many a man not decorated with any title (Mr. Gladstone, for instance, all his life, or Mr. Balfour till quite the end of it) may be among the highest of this governing class, while numerous men with titles of ancient honour remain insignificant—usually from poverty, sometimes (though rarely)

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from indifference to publicity; occasionally, even, because their open vices are too disreputable to be forgiven.

This system of titles has become a labyrinth.

There is, at the summit of it, what is called the Peerage ; some hundreds of men with the hereditary right to sit in the upper legislative house, the national House of Lords, and (theoretically) to check the decrees of the Commons. But to these are added many of equally high title in the Peerage of Scotland and of Ireland, of whom some may sit in the House of Lords by the choice of their fellows. In this same " House of Lords " sit the more important Anglican bishops, the head of the Lawyers' Guild (called Lord Chancellor, drawing an enormous salary and pension and given an hereditary tide) and, for purposes of forming the highest judicial Court of Appeal, a number of other lawyers, some present only for life, others hereditary.

The Peers (as Lords in general are called), whether with a right to sit in the House of Lords or no, are of five classes, each distinguished by a separate etiquette. They are Dukes, Marquises (also spelt " Marquesses "), Earls, Viscounts and Barons. The eldest sons of the first two carry a separate imaginary title " Lord " this or that : they are not real Lords. The daughters of the first two are called " Lady " so and so, followed by a Christian name, and this followed by their family name, thus : " Lady Amelia Dodd." The sons of the first two classes (not the third) are called " Lord," followed by their Christian

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name in similar fashion, as " Lord Launcelot Dodd." Sons and daughters of Peers not called " Lord " or " Lady " (younger sons of Earls and all sons and daughters of Viscounts and Barons), are called Honourable—" The Honourable Gueneviere Dodd."

This intricate system, which has grown up during the last two hundred years, serves a certain social purpose. To be able to use it exactly, without error, is a test of social status.

After this batch come the Baronets : called " Sir " followed by the Christian and family name, as " Sir Tristran Bates.<sup>55</sup> This title is hereditary, but carries no legislative power. There are many hundreds of Baronets.

After the Baronets come the Knights, more numerous still. These are called after the same fashion, " Sir," followed by the Christian name ; but their titles are not hereditary. Thus " Sir John Gubbins " remains " Sir John " during his life—but his son Harry, after his death, will be Mr. Gubbins, not Sir Harry Gubbins.

Knights again, are of two classes. Knights of an Order, and Knights Bachelor.

The first (much the more highly considered) are drawn from the more distinguished Generals, Admirals, Civil Servants, Diplomats, etc., and belong to such Orders as the Star of India, St. Michael and St. George, the Order of the Bath, the Order of the British Empire, and perhaps a half-dozen others.

The Knight Bachelor, on the other hand, may be an actor or local mayor, or a doctor, or even a

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poet, to whom the prefix " Sir " has been added for his gratification, and that of his wife. For the wife of any " Sir " is a " Lady."

After the host of Knights come the innumerable non-knighted members of these Orders, with the right to bear the distinguishing letters of the Order after their names : O.B.E., C.B.E., C.M.G., etc., etc., etc. Thus : Henry Hobb, Esq., O.B.E.

After these again, follow a vast quantity of distinctions marked by letters following a man's name ; University degrees (B.A., M.A., LL.D., D.D., etc., etc.). Membership of Societies (as, the Royal Society of Teachers, R.T.S., of the Royal Geographical Society, R.G.S., and I know not how many others). These letters are affixed on the envelope of a letter after their owner's name, if he be of a position to find such mention advantageous, but they are carefully omitted if he is too highly placed to desire the compliment.

The whole of this remarkable complex of honorific labels is worthy of note by any who would seek to understand modern England, because it testifies to an appetite for diversity in unity, or (as some would call it), for inequality, which marks the English people.

Such then is the aristocratic quality of England, with all its advantages.

These advantages are so apparent that the knowledge of them is now fairly widespread. The error made by foreign observers in the past, (notably by the French), especially the absurd idea that England is in some way especially

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" democratic," is disappearing. On the contrary, the wealthy classes of other countries, particularly of the United States, find in England a refuge from egalitarian society.

It would be unwise to omit the corresponding disadvantages of aristocracy, which are less obvious, and the intermediate effects which may be either advantages or disadvantages. Examples of these are the following :—

That strict though elastic unity which is the mark of aristocratic society and therefore of England (a block of vulcanised indiarubber rather than of granite), by eliminating all active criticism, permits evils to grow unnoticed.

No society is less capable of reforming itself than an aristocratic society. This is most apparent in the fact that there no longer exists in England a free Press, such as is present in America, France, Belgium, Holland—indeed everywhere outside the areas under arbitrary government. The Law does not actually forbid active criticism or the printing of opinion, however unofficial ; but the general spirit of society condemns all such anomalies to oblivion. The result is a uniform deadness of judgment and a general public ignorance, especially upon foreign affairs, and the acceptance by all the public of any official myth presented to it.

There were, in the past, conditions of invulnerability through England's island quality and her invincible fleet which made errors due to public ignorance, and national myths, less dangerous; to-day they are very dangerous indeed. During

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this very year, in which I write (1936), they have nearly landed us in what would have been a perilous and might have been a disastrous war.

Further, in an aristocratic society the well-to-do—for the governing class is, as a whole, nearly identical with the wealthiest class—give the tone.

The nation thinks of itself as wealthy ; it even thinks of itself as having the habits of the wealthy. Thus there is perhaps no country in Europe where a smaller number of citizens have anything to do with handling horses or have any experience of riding them ; yet the great mass of Englishmen feel as though the national interest in horses were their own. That is, of course, only one minor instance ; but the same thing runs through the whole of English life ; the governing class gives the tone to all thought. This has been called by one of its own most prominent members (Professor Trevelyan, the distinguished historian of Cambridge University) "beneficent snobbery." He is himself a typical example of the governing class both by birth and by academic distinction, and the view he expresses is almost universal in England.

This submission to and copying of the wealthy by those below them has indeed certain beneficial effects, as the Professor affirms. But there is another side to this acceptance of wealthy guidance, as any foreign critic could tell him. Illusion has certain limited advantages, but the perils attaching to it are great. For instance, in that matter of horseflesh, if one acted on the illusion and tried to raise rapidly a million

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mounted men the gulf between the myth and reality would soon appear.

The men responsible for the fate of England should consider the rise and decline of other Aristocratic States—those rare phenomena in universal history—of which Carthage and Venice are the two great examples. They, too, enjoyed continuity, they, too, enjoyed internal order, great wealth, maritime power, a widespread Empire based upon the sea ; and with them, too, the conduct of the State was inspired by an intense patriotism. They lived for centuries in glory and safety, and no State can ask for more than that. But when the final perils appeared, the one, Carthage, failed—probably through illusion and underestimating its foe—to react with sufficient vigour against foreign menace ; the other, Venice, accepted a slow decline which ended in unresisted extinction. Savoy fought Napoleon and made modern Italy. Venice lay down and died.

There are many who ask whether the aristocratic quality which is not only the particular mark, but also the strength of the English State, is not now in decadence. The gentleman, as we all know, is to-day less sharply differentiated from his inferior. The old tests of manners and accent count less ; mere money—crude, " uncooked "—counts more. Demagogy has appeared, especially in the Press. The reaction of transoceanic communities of English speech (especially the United States), to every one of which aristocratic government is wholly alien, is

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beginning to have powerful effect upon the body of England itself through a most disturbing, confuting, misleading, identity of language.

Close critics might also ask whether many of the advantages which class government has procured for England are not now, as they grow old and crystallised, doing more harm than good : the absence of a critical Press, for example : the unity which imposes silence even upon the small body of educated men ; on all sides pretence at issue with reality.

It may be so. But at any rate no one now writing on " contemporary England/<sup>5</sup> of England as she still is, can fail to emphasise and re-emphasise that major note : *England is an Aristocratic State ; the only Aristocratic State in the white civilisation.* England is the only State where the sole alternative to Aristocracy—Active Monarchy—is forgotten and feels foreign.

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THE use of a term so general as " Protestant " will be almost useless unless we again define our terms. When we say a man or a society is Protestant we speak of two things : a negative thing, something the definition of which depends upon a knowledge of its opposite ; and a positive thing, something which can be appreciated in itself.

The word Protestant in each sense, negative and positive, most thoroughly attaches to contemporary England.

In the negative sense, the word " Protestant " signifies " In reaction against, and contradictory to, the claims of the Catholic Church." And here again the modern ambiguity of language renders definition necessary. When we say, in terms of general conversational English, " the Catholic Church,"<sup>55</sup> we mean the Roman Catholic Church—that is, the body which has remained in communion with the Bishop of Rome called the Pope, which admits his supremacy and claims that within such communion alone is to be found full continuity with the Christian past. But the word is also used by some in England to mean the Christian body as a whole—undefined by any test and presumably including all who claim the title of Christians.

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It is also used to mean all who are organised under a hierarchy bearing the title of Bishops, whatever their doctrine of Episcopacy or their communion. The word Catholic is also used in other senses, notably in recent times to mean those members of the English State Church who desire to return to orthodox and ancient tradition and the whole body of Roman Doctrine coupled with a refusal to admit the supremacy of the Roman See.

As far as mere verbal definition is concerned, this negative definition of Protestantism—the reaction against Rome—is sufficient ; but we all know that the rejection of a particular doctrine or rather the reaction against and difference from a particular body—social, political and religious (and every body of human beings is all three)—concerns much more acutely the effects of doctrine on character than the doctrine itself.

There is a certain known atmosphere and quality about all that is or has lately been within the Roman communion, a certain savour in the culture proceeding ultimately from that religion ; it is the cultural savour of Belgian, French, Irish, Italian, Spanish life. Against this quality or savour the English spirit is arrayed. It is hostile to the social effects of the Catholic Church.

The positive meaning of the word " Protestant " as applying to a whole body of habits in thought, intercourse, social arrangements and all the rest is clearly incapable of definition for it is the manifestation of an organism and a

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living thing—we know it very well when we meet it, and we must leave it at that. We say justly that the United States are Protestant, the Scandinavian nations, the Prussians and many of the North German States ; the Dutch also on account of the long direction and formation under Protestant Government, though they boast a very large Catholic minority. We contrast Belfast with Dublin (as they are to-day) and say that Belfast is Protestant and Dublin Catholic, though in each there is a large minority of the opposing religion.

In both these senses, the positive and the negative, England is and has long been fundamentally Protestant. So far, the weakening of doctrine, the growth of indifference to religious dogma, has not affected this very strong social savour. Since the nature of any culture depends upon its religion, and its religion depends upon a body of doctrine, the loss of doctrine will ultimately affect the whole character of any society, and this is true of what still are to-day Protestant societies. But in the case of England, such loss of Protestant doctrine, though far advanced, has not yet diminished in any way the strongly Protestant character of this country.

Few Englishmen to-day refer to the English Bible as a final authority. Indeed no large proportion read the Bible habitually. But the mass of English agnostics and atheists are, in morals and outlook, of the same Bible-Christian kind as were their fathers.

The historian will notice that every Protestant

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society has taken on a special character of its own, separately marked, from the fact that Protestantism is based upon the idea of individual judgment, and therefore upon the acceptance of separate bodies and the denial of one corporate religious discipline. England, like all other Protestant societies, has this highly particular tone of its own. For instance, there is in English Protestantism a very large and almost universal element of Puritanism, which varies in intensity with varying districts and classes, but is present nearly everywhere. It is now strangely confused in the matter of sex ; but it is still prominent in other sensual matters, notably in the consumption of fermented liquor.

Another far more particular and local mark of English Protestantism is the powerful effect upon it of one particular translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. But with all these particular aspects we will deal later, for the moment let us consider the general Protestant characteristics.

The most prominent of these is that for which the good name is self-confidence and the bad name vanity. The name matters not: a feeling that one's own type is superior to the rest of the human race is the essence of the affair, and therefore a conviction that one's own society, or nation, enjoys this superiority. Further, it is felt that more or less similar societies, enjoying a similar Protestant temper—the United States, Holland, Scandinavia—are necessarily superior to nations of Catholic culture—France, Belgium, Poland, Spain, etc.

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Now this confidence in superiority, to be remarked in every Protestant nation, is particularly and strongly marked in England.

Here, as throughout this essay, I must repeat to weariness the proviso that what is affirmed is a matter of degree. Every nation naturally feels itself superior to the foreigner ; every citizen tends to admire the foreigner who does well those things which his own people do well, to despise those foreigners who do ill those things which his own people do well. Every man tends to consider unimportant the well doing by an alien people of things in which his own people have no skill.

These tendencies are found everywhere. They are common to the whole human race, but they happen to be particularly strong in England.

With Englishmen the term " foreigner " is a general term of depreciation, and, addressed to nations of Catholic culture, a term of contemptuous depreciation. Thus the Englishman respects the Prussian (called " German " ), though he dislikes many Prussian characteristics ; he does not respect the Italian ; in his own Islands he respects the Scotchman, but not the Irishman. This feeling is so strong that it even affects in some degree the foreign policy of the country, for it profoundly though obscurely stirs that general opinion in contradiction with which no Government can act.

Not only is this self-confidence (to give it its most friendly name) a special stamp of the English character due to English Protestantism,

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but you will often hear it defined by Englishmen as a strength in itself. They will say that even if a body of men are wrong in imagining themselves to be superior to another body, yet that imagination itself will strengthen their mutual relations—"Think yourself superior and you will tend to be superior." This is, of course, part of the subjectivism which came in with the Reformation, and is so marked in the nations drawing their traditions from the religious current of that epoch.

If this character were natural to England as a Protestant Nation, it was of course greatly strengthened by the material and armed advance of the Protestant culture during the XIXth century. In the last third of that century, after Prussia had achieved her decisive victory over France; after the United States had survived civil dissension and had become a strongly united, very rapidly growing society; after England herself had enjoyed continual expansion of wealth, population and dominion for three generations, the idea became axiomatic. The superiority of the Protestant culture over the non-Protestant was taken for granted. The Englishman was as convinced of this superiority as he was of the external world witnessed to by his senses. He thought of himself as the highest in his own Protestant group of peoples, but of that group as still further separated from the countries which had rejected the Reformation.

Here must be noted a very interesting phenomenon. This sense of superiority is never

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alluded to in terms of religion ; it is not even spoken of as being connected with the secular effects of religion. It is spoken of in connection with *race* ! Contempt for the Catholic culture is expressed by speaking of the Catholic Germans as " South Germans/<sup>5</sup> of Italy, Spain, France, and Belgium as " Latin," of the Catholic Irish as " Southern Irish " or " Celts."

The reason for the use of these euphemisms is clear enough when we consider the nature of the original Protestant thesis. Private judgment involves a conception that religion is an individual affair : it seems indecent to speak of it as a prime factor in corporate affairs. Nothing is commoner than to hear men who detest and despise the Catholic culture affirm sincerely their indifference to Catholic doctrine. Though it is the fruits of doctrine which they are noting, they do not know on what tree the fruit grows.

Another general characteristic common to the whole Protestant culture and shared by England is a special insistence upon material order, which you will find in the general tidiness and neatness of a Protestant society, more mechanical and less domestic than its rivals.

The Protestant spirit of England, growing more and more powerful during the XVIIth century, overspread the Nation as a whole by the opening of the XVIIIth, and thenceforward led, among other effects, to a considerable suppression of ritual in worship. The intensity of the English imagination made it impossible to maintain such an attitude indefinitely. Alien—and therefore

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distasteful—as elaborate ritual in Divine Worship was deemed, it began to return in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, and one main factor in the modern movement called "Anglo-Catholic," is the desire for, and practice of, such ritual.

But though the English are still in great measure suspicious of ritual in their churches, that violent imaginative strength of theirs develops ritual to the utmost in social and political life.

The most elaborate ritual permeates both the society of the governing class and the functions of the State. Ritual of the most complicated kind rules all the action of Parliament, the Courts of Law and the Universities. So native is ritual to the English people that even their most recent pastimes will adopt it in minute detail. In these it acquires a sort of sanctity exactly comparable to the externals of a religion. No one can pretend to understand the English until he has not only registered this universal and most active presence of ritual among them, but also ascribed it to its true cause.

From that digression let us pass to remark the influence of Protestantism upon English Official History. This Official History is taught with characteristic national unanimity by every agency at work : not only by all educational authorities from the elementary schools to the highest University, but by all the Press, all Drama, and *nearly* all conversation. As with history, so with literature. The whole body of English literature is Protestant, and one effect of this has been the

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impossibility of establishing a classical English. The English contemporaries of Louis XIV and Louis XV attempted it; Dryden, Swift and Pope came nearest to success; but the attempt failed. The romantic spirit even before the year 1800 was carrying all before it.

It is also undoubtedly due to the Protestant culture of England that the commercial character of the country developed as it did, but that I treat of separately later on, as also of the intimate association between England and the Jewish people which also began in the XVIIth century and became of such extreme importance by the end of the XIXth, until it reached its climax in the Zionist experiment of our own day.

This last point, the highly developed and increasing effect of the Jews upon English society, is rather special to England than general to Protestant countries. It is true that we find something of the same kind (much less intense) in Holland; but little of it in the Protestant Scandinavian countries including the Protestants of the Baltic. In the United States there is not much Jewish influence outside New York, in which capital indeed the numbers and influence of the Jews is most striking. No other town outside Poland and Russia has so considerable a Jewish population. In the Protestant Germanies the dislike of the Jew is to-day notorious, and the recent triumph of Berlin over the mass of the Reich has led to a persecution.

Of the particular points in which English Protestantism has manifested itself, undoubtedly

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the most characteristic is the effect produced upon it by the vernacular translation of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. The modern English were cast and set in the mould of the English Old Testament.

The thing would not have happened, of course, but for the Protestant contention that Scripture was the sole criterion of faith, and that Scripture should be interpreted for himself by each individual reader. But the astounding strength of Biblical influence on England, the depth to which it has penetrated the English mind, the universality of its effect and the extraordinary persistence of it in our own generation, when all the old religious basis of it is disappearing, proceeded from a special factor which only those to whom the English language is native can understand.

This factor was the power of the Word. It so happens that the translation of the Old Testament, drawn up by a large committee of Protestant divines in the early years of the XVII th century under King James I, is written throughout in the most striking prose style and contains frequent, and often prolonged, passages of the finest rhetoric in the language.

The religious effect was more than doubled by this literary charm ; the emotional soul of the English, highly impressionable and allied with their powerful visual imagination, was stormed by this splendid monument of the Muses. No other rival nation, no nation recorded in history, has been thus affected by the literary quality of

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one book. Its language was already archaic when this Jacobean translation (the Authorised Version) was published more than three hundred years ago. It already had about it that flavour of antique diction which so greatly adds to poetical value. Its incomparable rhythms were inherited from the masters of the preceding century.

This astonishing document had its first effect upon the Puritan minority of Protestants between 1620 and 1650. It did not till later affect the mass of the nation and you do not find its style as yet impressed upon general writing ; but those who were steeped in it were the directors of the successful rebellion against the Crown. English Protestants of every shade (and a very large minority who at heart were not Protestant at all) heard long passages from it read week after week in the country churches, for all attended the Parish Church in what was then an almost entirely agricultural society. Something like a third of English folk were more or less in sympathy with Catholicism under Charles I, but they heard the Bible week after week in their worship, and it permeated the whole nation.

After the middle of the XVII th century and the victory of the Puritans over King Charles I, the influence of the English Old Testament spread rapidly. By the beginning of the XVIII th it was universal. But even so the English Bible had not yet reached its maximum effect either upon literature or upon morals. That was reserved for the XIX th century. Even as credence in the

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oracle declined its impression upon the English mind deepened, and still more its impression upon English letters. It caused the average English gentleman to demand and admire confused rhetoric in prose ; it became the general quarry from which all fine writing was drawn.

Here is a conclusive example. Two writers of verse, the one of them a great poet at times, the other never, each the most famous at his trade in his day, and each of our own generation, differed as much as it is possible for men to differ in manners, birth, outlook—everything. Their names are familiar to the world, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Rudyard Kipling. Well, these two utterly different and contrasted writers of English verse are both soaked in the rhythms and actual wording of the English Old Testament.

Here is another example. In the dreary debates of the House of Commons (which are of a third-rate level) terms and phrases from the Book are unceasing—and at the same time the good English rhetoric of our day (there is exceedingly little of it) repeats the same echo.

The Bible is now everywhere woven into the very stuff of the English. It has powerfully supported, of course, that other Protestant conception of racial superiority and has led great masses—indeed the bulk of the nation—to consider themselves a Chosen People.

Lastly, let this be fully recognised—it is a point already made and one to which I shall return at the close. The decline in religious belief, the growth of scepticism and indifference have in no

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way affected as yet, and will not (presumably) for a very long time to come, the Protestant character of England.

We shall find this Protestant character at work throughout the future as throughout the past. England grew great, wealthy and powerful through the difficult rooting out of Catholicism in her midst. Englishmen feel instinctively that the change of religion begun at first by a small unpopular despotic governing clique under Elizabeth—the clique led and controlled by the Cecils ; later continued by the descendants of those who had enriched themselves under the Reformation ; later enhanced by the influence of the City of London and soon by an increasing majority of the nation, has made them what they are. Protestantism, it was, which gave Englishmen all those qualities and possessions of which they are so proud.

It was a very long business, for England (unlike Scandinavia and the German States and cities of the North) began as a province of the Roman Empire and had enjoyed the high culture of Europe for fifteen centuries before the Religious Revolution of her later years. England had not even been captured, as Scotland had been, by that highly organised Calvinist effort to found a counter-church. In England Catholicism was only extirpated from a reluctant people in the course of a hundred and fifty years ; the space between Henry's schism and the expulsion of the Stuarts. Even at the moment of this last catastrophe, only two and a half centuries ago, a good

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quarter of England was in various degrees of sympathy with the old national religion, and half that number boldly and publicly avowed their continued loyalty to Catholicism in spite of the most heavy social and financial burdens and unceasing persecution.

But during the period 1688-1720 English Catholicism collapsed. A spluttering flame remained until the unsuccessful Stuart attempt in 1745. Thenceforward English Catholicism disappeared. A very small and scattered number of the middle classes and a few landed families (most of whom had apostatised at one time or another) still boasted their Catholicism as a sort of picturesque proof of their antiquity, and had each about them a group of dependents ; but by 1790 barely one Englishman in a hundred had any knowledge of the Mass ; the tiny handful of Catholic clergy were reduced to the outward appearance of lay men. The ancient thing was gone.

To-day, in spite of those Anglicans called "Anglo-Catholics" the essential feeling of hostility against Rome and all the Catholic culture of Europe is as strong as ever ; the Catholic Church is just as much an alien thing to these, its imitators, as it is to the strongest evangelical or dissenter. It is odious because it is foreign.

It is true there has been a considerable revival among educated men and through them among certain sections of the less wealthy, not of Catholicism indeed, but of affection for Catholic forms and phrases.

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Many Anglican ministers call themselves priests, as indeed they are legally entitled to do ; for every ordained Protestant minister in Anglican orders is entitled a priest in the original Statutes which give the Anglican Church its constitutional definition. Some few go further and announce themselves by the conventional title of " Father " so-and-so—a title of Irish origin which spread to English Catholics in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century after the great famine, and is now universal among them. Many speak of their communion service as " The Mass," very many copy the Roman liturgy more or less closely (though nearly always in English) and vest themselves more or less as do the Roman clergy in offering the Holy Sacrifice. They even practise post-Reformation services, such as Benediction. They establish confessional boxes, Stations of the Cross, and other comparatively late developments of the Roman Communion. Not a few admit the primacy of Rome, and I myself have heard of (though I never met) one such who admitted Papal infallibility.

Yet in spite of this vigorous, and still somewhat increasing, " Anglo-Catholic " feeling and practice among Anglicans, the Catholic Church itself, the Roman Catholic Church (that unmistakable and unique thing) is held in detestation, and its members, in proportion to their activity, are made to feel the weight of this feeling, even more in the company of practising Anglicans than in that of other Protestants.

In other English-speaking centres, notably in

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the United States, this is not so. There the Anglo-Catholic is a member of a small but wealthy and therefore influential body sharply distinguished from the rest, and in no little sympathy with the Roman Communion. But in England Anglo-Catholicism, invented there a century ago as a safety valve against French and Irish influence, is but part of the National Church, to which (as to all things national) international things, Roman or other, are hateful.

For Protestantism is not the religion of the English. Patriotism is the religion of the English.

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I HAVE said that the third main mark of modern England is that the community has become commercial. It is a vast change, comparatively recent. For centuries, from the beginning of England as a Roman province, during the gradual reconstruction of English Unity in the Dark Ages, and throughout the Middle Ages, until the Religious Revolution of the XVIIth century, England was agricultural. It remained a country of husbandmen living by tillage and governed by the noble class that received manorial dues and demesne produce until, in the XVIIth century commerce began to expand rapidly, until with the XVIIIth, industrial activity becomes important, until with the approach to the end of that period industrial manufacture for export, banking, and the exploitation of foreign markets become the chief interests of the State.

At a rough estimate five-sixths of working Englishmen were on the land till at least 1650. Over three-fourths were still agricultural by 1780 : and even as late as 1830 quite half were on the fields, though they had long lost possession of the soil. My own generation remembers an England of which most old people belonged by birth to villages or country towns. To-day the

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whole country is industrial and proletarian in character.

When this transformation was achieved, England had already increased enormously in numbers. The population grew from the six millions which had mustered when the Catholic religion was definitely crushed in 1688, to double that number in little more than two active lifetimes—to over thirty millions in another century, to over forty millions to-day ; and the towns came to outweigh the countrysides altogether. To-day the little surviving body of husbandmen, an ineffective and small minority, is town minded, trained in the school of town thought, and informed altogether by a town Press and town recreations.

With this development there progressively advanced the Commercial Spirit. Clearly no more than a small minority could be engaged personally in purchase, sale and negotiation ; but the rest were organised under them, and the whole country took on the Commercial Spirit and habit.

Let us consider what the consequences of such a spirit and habit may be.

*First*, the Commercial Spirit tends to make wealth the test of excellence. This is not because a Commercial people will love money more than others do : all men love money, and all highly-developed societies suffer from that root evil as much as it is possible to suffer. But wealth obtained indirectly as profit out of other men's work, or by exchange, becomes a thing abstracted

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from the process of production. As the interest of a man in *things* diminishes, his interest in abstract wealth—money—increases. The man who makes a table or grows a crop makes the success of the crop or the table a test of excellence. The intermediary who buys and sells the crop or the table is not concerned with the goodness of table or crop, but with the profit he makes between their purchase and resale. In a productive society the superiority of the thing produced is the measure of success : in a Commercial society the amount of wealth accumulated by the dealer is the measure of success.

This mental attitude has a variety of effects. It creates violent competition to obtain wealth, and is therefore a factor of instability in possession. Permanent wealth naturally attaches to ownership of land. Commercial accumulations are impermanent.

Again, this state of mind makes the confiscation of private possessions, whether partial by excessive taxation or total by State-ownership, seem less unnatural than it seems to a society of owners and producers. For since wealth has become unstable under the action of competition, its coming and going seem natural—its permanence exceptional. The banker acquires a greater moral right to his credits than has a landowner's son to his patrimony.

Again, wealth being taken as the test of excellence, the possession of it is attached by the imagination to the possessor's own self: he appears in the eyes of his fellows a greater and a

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better man because he is a richer man. All men suffer this illusion in some degree : it is found in all societies. But it is found especially strong in Commercial societies. All men feel wealth to be an attribute, but, under the Commercial Spirit wealth becomes a quality : it is regarded as Courage Beauty or Strength are regarded elsewhere.

*Secondly*, it must be clear that the Commercial Spirit militates against the existence or survival of a peasantry. A peasant State is primarily productive : it cannot survive instability of ownership, nor does it envisage wealth as figures but as things. It will even regard money itself as a thing and cry out against a debased currency as a form of theft—an injustice. It will insist on a currency of real materials—such as the precious metals. But the Commercial State is content with an imaginary currency the unit-values of which fluctuate at the will of the authorities. To the one a king who issues false money is a criminal: to the other he is a statesman. So antagonistic are the spirits of Commerce and of Husbandry that the preponderance of the one endangers the very life of the other. Commercial habits will be clumsy and impeded in the peasant State. In the Commercial State the peasantry will be destroyed.

A *Third* obvious effect of the Commercial Spirit is the efficiency with which it conducts the survey of economic opportunity, domestic and foreign. The few great merchants and financiers who direct its main operations have a wider and

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longer view, better information, more rapid decision than a multitude of small owners can achieve. Such advantages are manifest in contemporary England. The nation displays them to a far greater extent than does any rival. All other nations have a peasantry present among them, a body of small permanent owners who hamper speculation and are refractory to what we call "business habits." In modern England, such a body, once typically English under the English terms of "Yeomen" and "Craftsmen,"<sup>5</sup> has disappeared. Cognate to these advantages possessed by a Commercial State is the rapidity with which discovery and invention proceed and are immediately adapted to life. Here also modern England excels. We note upon every side discoveries peculiar to England. England made steam. England later adapted electrical science thoroughly and quickly to civic life. England continually takes over new foreign discoveries, great and small, improves them and makes them general.

A *Fourth* effect of the Commercial Spirit, which all observers recognise, is efficiency in Administration as opposed to Government. This owes part of its value to the Aristocratic Spirit and its trained class, but more to the Commercial Spirit. So true is it that England excels in the Administration both of domestic affairs and of alien communities under English authority, that the difference between Administration and Government is forgotten: the two are identified in the modern English mind. An Englishman says of a

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well-administered province that it is "well governed." The definition of government as the moulding of the *mind* of the governed to the form of the governing mind is not accepted : it is hardly even conceived. Thus the Roman ideal of government which transformed our civilisation is hostile to the English ideal, and the triumphs of those who were the successors of Rome are not appreciated by the average Englishman. The governing class in England has indeed moulded the national mind to its own image in the past, but it has not had, nor desired to have, such a result upon alien subjects. The French have profoundly affected their alien subjects, notably the Mohammedan. The Spaniards were more successful still. The language, the social methods, the very cooking of the Peninsula have wholly permeated the old Spanish Colonial Empire and are to-day the permanent habits of half a continent. But because Administration has here fallen far below the English level, the governing power has, in the eyes of Englishmen, failed, while English Administration triumphs all over the world.

Closely connected with this genius for Administration comes the English conception of *Order* in its relation to Justice.

Here a close examination of the ideas involved must be made if we are to avoid error. All human authority must and does recognise Justice as the supreme object of its courts. Order can only be the handmaid of Justice : a necessary condition and no more. But in the action of its

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courts every nation must discover a certain conflict between Order and Justice. You cannot have complete justice or complete order in human affairs : the insistence upon the one element weakens the other. Every people must, in its courts, sacrifice Order to Justice in some measure, and Justice to Order. It is but a question of degree, in what measure the one shall yield to the other. Now the Englishman has, for generations, both at home and abroad, tended increasingly to emphasise the element of Order. The whole world is witness to the result. Life is more secure in England than in any other country, and Administration by England overseas is everywhere a masterpiece of Order.

A test of this ultimate effect of the Commercial and Aristocratic Spirits combined is to be found in the working of the Criminal Law. In England it is swift and inexorable. If a murder is committed, retribution follows with a rapidity and regularity superior to those of any other society. Elsewhere there is perpetual delay, through a multiplicity of appeals and prolonged, minute examination, because it is thought right to emphasise justice to the utmost. To the Englishman such slow criminal procedure seems so exaggerated that he can hardly understand it. The consequent lack of security is not only alien and odious to him, but incomprehensible : a mere weakness of function. Foreign criminal trials in societies such as the American and the French, are, to an Englishman, a spectacle of ineptitude. In other societies where the conduct

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of criminal trials, or rather sentences, is despotic, *that* form of celerity and certitude in obtaining order, the despotic form, is even more repulsive to the instincts of the Englishman. He will with difficulty believe that men of a temper other than his own actually prefer the risk of insecurity and delay to the risk of injustice, or prefer order to be immediately imposed by the executive.

Two very different effects of this Commercial Spirit may be noted and contrasted as examples : the universal prevalence of gambling, from the betting on horse and dog racing by the population as a whole to the ceaseless speculation in shares and currency among the richer half of the community, and the superlative smoothness and efficiency of English banking. The first proceeds from the Commercial Spirit because that spirit regards wealth less as a thing to be acquired by labour and accumulation than as a thing to be acquired by opportunity—a thing that comes and goes. The connection between an intense Commercial Spirit and excellence in banking is obvious, and England owes to it a banking system which is everywhere supreme, not only at home but abroad.

There are certain other effects of the Commercial Spirit, less apparently connected with it, but none the less its consequence. Of these one of the most striking is that to which I have already alluded, the attitude of the Englishman to the Jewish problem. He will still to-day, after forty years of increasing anxiety on it abroad, sincerely deny that there is any problem at all. Those who

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speaking of a Jewish problem seem to him to be suffering from illusions born of irrational hatred and fear, and, at home, he is puzzled by the exasperation of the people of Palestine.

Many would ascribe this attitude to religion. The secure and often dominating place enjoyed in English society by the Jew, his great influence in every leading function of English society, the large admixture of Jewish blood in the governing class, is set down by foreign critics to a natural alliance between a Protestant people and persecuted Israel; by Englishmen themselves it is regarded, for the most part, as the fruit of their toleration and love of Justice—which are to them but aspects of the national religion. England fought Catholicism at home and abroad, destroyed it within her own realm and attempted to do so in Ireland, because Englishmen found Catholicism irrational and intolerant: opposed in spirit to virtues specifically English. One of the greatest living masters of English prose and (what is astonishing) a none the less influential writer, Dr. Inge, former Dean of St. Paul's, the Cathedral of London, put the national attitude crisply in a famous sentence when he called the Catholic Church "a bloody and treasonable corporation." What more natural than that men so inspired should welcome, mix with, and support a persecuted people especially hostile to the Roman Church?

But if we look around us and into the past, I think we shall find the basis of the close alliance between Israel and England to lie less in Religion

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than in the Commercial Spirit. For where do we find parallels to it in the past? Always in societies where commerce demanded it.

The Jews had a privileged status for generations in the Papal States, in Spain during her first commercial expansion before the Ximenes reaction (the Spanish aristocracy is visibly full of Jewish blood), and notably in the Dutch Commercial State of the late XVIth and the XVIIth century. It is true the latter was dominated by an anti-Catholic group—the Calvinist millionaire traders of Holland who successfully rebelled against their original monarch; but their religious sympathy with the Jews as an anti-Catholic force was not the deciding factor in their Judaic alliance: the deciding factor was Commercial. The Jews were in tune with the new Dutch function of international trade and exchange.

Witness also the refuge offered to the Jews by late mediaeval Poland when Israel was suffering one of those recurrent brutal assaults which she so strangely tolerates at the hands of the Germans. The Poles were not Commercial—they were much the other way—but their original fond reception of millions of Jewish refugees is proof that an understanding between Jews and Europeans is not based on a common animosity to the Catholic Church.

Whatever the cause (and I believe it to be mainly the sympathy of a Commercial State) Israel still finds in England not only a warm friend, nor even only a permanent ally, but an enthusiastic supporter.

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This was most evident during the violent Dreyfus excitement. The whole white world (as men of my generation can well remember) was divided on that question into two bitterly hostile camps : the one maintaining with quite insufficient knowledge, that Dreyfus was innocent ; the other with equally insufficient knowledge, that Dreyfus was guilty. In England alone was opinion not only nearly unanimous but deliriously excited. With the exception of Lord Russell of Killowen (the then Lord Chief Justice) my elder acquaintance, Sir John Conroy, a Fellow of Balliol, and Henry Labouchere (the politician editor and proprietor of the newspaper *Truth*), I met hardly any people of note in England who did not conform with the popular excitement. The handful of English Catholics were, in particular conspicuously silent, though all over the world the quarrel was made one between Catholics and anti-Catholics—for it was on these lines that the original discussion had arisen in France, where that quarrel arose.

Englishmen were determined, almost to a man, that Dreyfus was innocent ; an heroic martyr ; the victim of colleagues in the French Army who had been brought up by Jesuits, and they were convinced that he was martyred because he was a Jew.

England was unique among all the nations of the world in this unbroken attitude. Yet an examination of the matter was worth while even for Englishmen, since out of it came the Great War, which has not been without its effect upon

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the fortunes of England. The furious religious quarrel which divided the French people gave, during the Dreyfus case, advantage to that anti-Catholic half of Frenchmen who were also the enemies of the Army. The successful politicians upon every side took the opportunity to destroy the Intelligence Department of the French Army, through the agency of which Dreyfus had been condemned. With the Intelligence Department of the French Army destroyed, the military power of France grew less and less able to discover the plans of its Prussian enemy, and, within a few years, that enemy thought itself secure of victory and struck. But for the Dreyfus case and its consequences, Prussia would never have attacked in 1914.

The thing is now nearly forgotten, as is commonly the case with special incidents of the first importance to mankind ; but it is worth recording.

There is yet another consequence of the modern English Commercial temperament worthy of note, because it has puzzled contemporary opinion abroad. Everyone has noticed that the corruption which is natural to Parliaments—the sale of honours, policies and contracts, the bribery and blackmailing of individual politicians, the degradation of the Press, and all the rest of the nasty business—passes under the English Parliamentary system without suffering any violent criticism. English public life goes peacefully forward without any exciting discussion of financial scandals, even when these are excessive. A German

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politician was killed a few years ago by men indignant with his financial trickery. A French President had to resign merely because his son-in-law had sold minor decorations. But in England no parliamentarian has ever been punished for things of this kind. At the worst he must—and that very rarely—ask to resign, but he keeps the benefits of his operations, "the swag" as it is called, and all are agreed upon proclaiming that each scandal as it arises is exceptional and that our public life is a model for the rest of the world.

Now this peculiar attitude is, in part, due to aristocracy, or rather to its fruit, an intense patriotism. Men are convinced that it is better to hide the scandals of public life than to proclaim them, because to hide them, or even to pretend they do not exist, is to safeguard the honour of the country. But this attitude is mainly due, not to the Aristocratic Spirit of the English people, but to their Commercial Spirit. For men say on all sides, and with some justice—"He did but take advantage of his position to make money, and that is what, after all, men must do if, under stress of competition, they are to survive. His private enrichment did no great harm to the State, and to enrich one's self is the principle occupation of man. Moreover, he caused no individual loss. He showed no spite. There was an element of risk in his operations—so let us pass them over in silence."

I still believe that the major factor in the determination of Englishmen to remain silent

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upon recurrent scandals connected with public life, is patriotism. For patriotism, I repeat, is the religion of the English ; but it is the Commercial Spirit that works for the *condonation* of personal corruption. Were a public man to act openly against his country for gain, then indeed you would find all Englishmen pitiless in their condemnation and exposure of him, but when it comes to no more than taking a bribe or (what is less to be blamed) using " inside information " on the Stock Exchange, the matter is not thought to be very grievous.

Let it be noted that for some time past this attitude has served to make the foreigner respect English public life. In the same way private individuals who are reticent upon family disagreements earn the respect of their neighbours, while those who advertise family disagreements earn their contempt.

What other points may be considered in connection with this Commercial Spirit of modern England ? Many will suggest themselves, but most are minor points, and perhaps too numerous to be catalogued in so short a study. I will conclude with two, which seem to me to be of some real importance.

The first of these is the natural aversion to arms, which runs throughout the Commercial State.

Here again, we must be very careful not to confuse our categories. An aversion to arms does not mean that a Commercial nation will be less tenacious in war than another. Still less does it mean that such a nation will be less courageous.

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Even less does it mean that such a nation will shrink from defending itself, or from actively extending its power by arms. What it means is that the military spirit, properly so-called, is not native to a Commercial State.

The English produced during the Great War an army of millions, created, as it were, out of nothing. The personal courage of these men is famous throughout Europe. That may be taken for granted. What was more singular, was the very rapid adaptation of such millions to conditions of which hitherto they had had no conception. Yet it remains true that the English as a Commercial nation have little sympathy with the military spirit, and are correspondingly out of sympathy with nations of a military temper, such as the Irish or French, or the Poles. Whether this attitude will prove of advantage, or disadvantage, only the immediate future can determine.

The last point I have to make in connection with England as a Commercial Community, may seem insignificant, but I believe it to be of ultimate importance. It is the reaction of the Commercial Spirit upon English letters.

How great English literature is it would be waste of paper to emphasise. All know it. Yet it is now in peril through the highly-developed Commercial Spirit of modern England. Aristocracy, producing a small class well fitted to judge and criticise should be, and was for long, of great advantage to the selection and stimulation of English letters. To-day, aristocracy in that particular field of action is dead. English letters

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are judged principally by the numbers in which a book may sell. English letters have become thoroughly commercialised.

That is only one aspect of the matter. Another, is that fiction has "drenched" the English literary field, whether as fiction pure and simple or as theatrical biography and History ; and the third is that the English reading public is mainly made up of women.

With this new and ominous development in English letters there goes the decline—it would be more accurate to say the extinction—of English criticism, whether on books or on public affairs.

In so far as letters determine the soul of a people, this radical change (arisen within a lifetime and grown universal) should be seriously considered. There is no door now open in England whereby sound history, for instance, in all its multiplicity and delicate shades, can be approached by the reading public of England. They will buy by the ton such things as Professor Trevelyan's history of their country, because he repeats to them what they have already been told ; but books such as those with which the continent of Europe is filled, books judging the European past from all sides, and appreciating historical characters in detail, have, as a rule, little influence, and, usually, when they are most excellent they are unknown.

Now the Greatness of a nation, said Dr. Johnson, depends upon its writers. He might have added " as also upon this : by whom these writers are read."

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I HAVE excluded from this study all consideration of good and evil—at least I have attempted to do so. It seems to me that for the understanding by foreigners of a particular society or even for the understanding of that society by its own citizens there is required a certain detachment wherein the qualities recognised and drawn are neither praised nor blamed.

Thus in making a negro comprehensible to a Chinaman who had never known negroes, it would be necessary to mention the black colour of the negro, but not necessary to show preference for it over the yellow of the Mongol. The negro also cannot even understand himself in a world of Mongols and white men until he learns that his own complexion is not universal but of a special kind. He will presumably prefer that complexion, but the statement of it is not a statement of good or of evil.

I have further avoided in the main, though not altogether, considerations of change. My object being to estimate a contemporary phenomenon I have left on one side any special consideration of the future.

But no fruitful statement on any political truth can be static. It must be dynamic. And to what we know of England as she is and has been

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made by her past—especially her re-creation, as it were, through the religious revolution of three to four hundred years ago and the expansion following it—we must add some hint of what change may be now apparent in the three factors of her spirit : the Aristocratic, the Commercial, the anti-Catholic.

Of these three we may begin by affirming without hesitation that the last is fixed as far as one can affirm the permanence of anything human. It is not fixed for ever ; nothing human is. But there has not appeared throughout all the vast economic changes of the last lifetime—say from the Crimean War onwards, or since the Indian Mutiny—any deflection in this regard. The Roman, Catholic and Apostolical Church (to give it its own title) remains an object of instinctive hostility to Englishmen, and even to those who feel no direct religious antagonism the culture derived from Catholicism, whether that culture be in its clerical or anti-clerical form, its traditional or revolutionary mood, is equally odious and despised. The number of Catholics in England, lacking any Irish connection, does not appreciably increase ; on the other hand their social tone and colour do take on the tone and colour of the Protestant world around them. The purely English Catholics are but a small minority within the minority of English Catholics, for the bulk of these are directly or indirectly connected with Irish descent or marriage. The very high distinction of the purely English converts does not affect the volume or direction of

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the main stream of their purely English co-religionists who remain of much the same temper as the anti-Catholic English world around them.

As to the Commercial temper of the English, it remains the same unless indeed it be slightly more emphasised as time proceeds through the increasing urbanisation of the populace and the disappearance of the last of the English peasantry ; of the last, that is, who retained the spirit not of the great towns, their Press and their mechanisation, but of the lonely sky and the fields.

It remains true and will perhaps ever so remain that the Englishman is at heart a man of the countryside ; but the active and living Englishman of to-day is quite other. His external life and operative habits are urban, and are those of the salesman or of the salesman's supporters. He thinks in terms of salary, wages and income, rather than of property and tradition in land. If the commercial character of England is affected at all, it will be affected by forces not under the English control, which forces will make rather for a diminution of commercial volume than of commercial quality. English wealth has been declining and may continue to decline ; but it will continue as did the wealth of Venice and of Carthage to be the wealth of exchange, or of production for exchange.

It is in the last factor, politically the most characteristic and essential—the factor of Aristocracy—that the most notable signs of change are appearing.

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Let not the thing be exaggerated. It has not yet gone very far. England is still an Aristocratic State, and certainly the only Aristocratic State in the white world. Equality is still odious to an Englishman ; hierarchy is still identified in his mind with cultivated wealth, and such wealth with greatness.

But there are factors of change already clearly apparent. Though apparent they are difficult to comprehend because they come from widely different sources. One is the effect of universal compulsory mechanical official education, which appears at last, after half a century, to be bearing fruit of a sub-egalitarian kind. The fruit is not desired, but it is borne.

Next there is the effect of the New World speaking the same language as England, largely interpenetrated by the same literature, sharing in part at least the same religion and something of the same law ; and the main factor herein is of course the United States, with English-speaking Canada, though the Australasian communities have also some weight.

This influence of the New World upon England, subde and ubiquitous, has already gone far. It is powerfully affecting the language, and what that means every student of civilisation knows. Now that the English gentleman has begun to say that " he will not *stand for* a thing " instead of that " he will not *stand it*" we discover in him a sign of change of thought as well as of speech.

But the greatest effect in this connection is the effect of an unmistakable transformation pro-

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ceeding in the view of their own class held by the gentry themselves.

The test is here twofold. A gentry maintains itself by two main instinctive activities ; first, it demands that its associates and equals should be of one accent and manner with its own members ; next, it fosters and supports culture and the arts.

Money is at the basis of a gentry of course, but it had to be "cooked" money, not "raw" money, before the gentry of an older generation would accept it into their intimacy. There has here been a change which is still proceeding. You may now meet, more and more frequently treated as equals or even as superiors, men who would have been left on one side by the fathers of those who are to-day their hosts and often their parasites.

The second test is but another aspect of the same thing. A gentry to remain in the saddle and to remain itself must cultivate the arts, it must revere learning, it must have a traditional taste in letters, painting and architecture, and apply clear standards for the judgment thereof. It must value high talent in the writer of prose, the poet, the historian and even perhaps the rhetorician. It must compete for the society of those who excel in literature and all forms of creative art because it is by these that a social structure is informed and made living.

Now in all this a great change is appearing, just as it is appearing in the attitude taken in England towards mere wealth. The decline of that instinctive self-preservation which had so

## NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLAND

long been the chief mark of the English gentleman is to-day apparent in his choice of associates, in his indifference to the degree of social usage they may have absorbed, and in his increasing contempt for the traditions of European culture. The conservators of that culture have always been the members of the liberal professions, especially the writers. These are, in bulk, members of a class somewhat lower than the gentry, but a class which formerly the gentry knew to be vital to their own interests. Men of long inherited wealth would mix with artists and writers as equals, regardless of their earnings. To-day this social support of culture is disappearing.

We may sum up our review of the tendencies immediately at work, and destined therefore to affect the future fortunes of England by saying that of the three factors which between them mark the English State, two are still secure but one is failing. The two which are secure are the traditional hostility to Catholicism and the long-established very vigorous Commercial Spirit ; but the one which would seem to be failing is that aristocratic quality which has been the vital force of the country since modern England began to be, three hundred years ago.









