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CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL

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Christopher Caudwell (on right) with co-drivers of the convoy of the International Brigade on the day he set out from England.

PREFACE

All the material in this edition has been drawn from the collection kept together for many years by Theo Sprigg and since the 1970s part of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. It is with much gratitude that the editors acknowledge the permission of the HRHRC to publish the material and the kindness of Cathy Henderson, HRHRC Research Librarian, in meeting our needs so efficiently.

The selections represent almost all areas of Caudwell's unpublished work, though some are necessarily given little space. We have ignored his two dramatic efforts entirely and his poetry appears only in the introduction because a volume of his poems (both those previously published and some unpublished) is being issued by Carcanet Press.

With the exception of the letters, the material is arranged more or less according to the order of composition. Page references to *Illusion and Reality* are to the 1946 Lawrence & Wishart edition (the reprints in hard cover have the same pagination), to the *Poems* to the 1965 edition, and the various editions of *Studies* and *Further Studies* do not differ in their pagination.

The Wisdom of Gautama lacks narrative interest and its 117 pages of parable and aphorism have only occasionally interesting images or philosophical points, but it illuminates Caudwell's intellectual development. The two chapters we have selected out of the thirty-nine are among the most taut and also most relevant to his theoretical writing.

Heaviside is a novel that satirizes British institutions set among the lighter-than-air creatures of the Kennelly-Heaviside layer of the ionosphere. The selections we offer (11 pages out of 341) are

among the most coherent satirical passages in the work and the section on reproduction can be usefully compared with the essay 'Love' in *Further Studies*.

The eleven short stories are drawn from the two collections, *The Rock* and *The Island*, and they represent 179 pages out of a total of 597. 'Lodgings for the Night' and 'The Device' have clear biographical reference. 'The Bank' is a philosophical conception that has found an imaginative representation, 'The Piston' is an instance of the subject-object manipulation that characterizes *The Island*, and the remaining stories either pick up on theoretical points or have the biographical importance of displaying attitudes.

'Verse and Mathematics' was the first version of what became *Illusion and Reality* and this huge encyclopedic work also supplied the material – and sometimes the text – of some of the later essays of *Studies* and *Further Studies*. We have chosen a short section that illustrates Caudwell's delight in playing with ideas and clarifies his approach to fantasy. 'Heredity and Development' is the one essay from the *Studies* group never published (though 'Romance and Realism' was published only in 1970). Despite being out of date in its science, and the crudeness of some of its formulations, it remains interesting in its philosophical approach to scientific theories.

The stories and essays were left by Caudwell in a rough state, with inconsistencies in such things as word forms, punctuation and capitalization that he could have expected a publisher to correct or would have corrected himself. Rather than exercise such editorial judgement half a century after the writing, we have thought it best to restrict our editorial changes almost entirely to obvious errors, such as typing mistakes, which it would be of no value to preserve. We have printed all the letters from the HRHRC collection. They cover a brief period of Caudwell's life and, while mixing the significant with the trivial, provide information about the progress of his literary work and throw welcome light on his rapidly developing theoretical positions and political attitudes.

Space has obviously been too limited for us to develop many of the points we think important or to make the reference to other work in the field that we would wish. Readers who would like to pursue the scholarly questions may find helpful the very brief selected bibliography that follows the introduction.

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Caudwell's writings have influenced generations of people on the left, although he was never part of mainstream culture or mainstream Marxism. For many readers he offered an integration of theory and the concerns of practical living that they could find in neither theoretical writings nor common sense alone. His vigorous expression of attitude appealed to those for whom the abstraction of theory divorced it from the feeling of everyday life and for whom political argument too often obscured the reasons people struggled for socialism.

Caudwell's theoretical discussion was permeated by the urgency of his life. His emotional quality has to some extent distracted attention from his theoretical insight and often his work has been dismissed by those who cannot accept the personal quality that makes the rigour of his writing only intermittent and allows him to indulge in sweeping statements of greater poetic appropriateness than material accuracy. This lack of control offensive to some scholars, or absence of restraint attractive to others, results from the integration of living and thinking that marked Caudwell's short career. His enormous theoretical creativity comes in part from his freedom from convention. This freedom was preserved through only partial initiation into intellectual institutions (he left school at fourteen), and limited formal training is probably also responsible for his lack of scholarly order.

The value of Caudwell's theoretical contribution is of course independent of his personal history, but how it came about remains an intriguing question – what causes a bourgeois individual to reorder the inherited conceptions of his society in a revolutionary way? He is typical of the period which saw the

birth of the left-wing intellectual; yet he is distinguished by the range of his conceptual framework, the thoroughness of his intellectual pursuit and his eagerness for concrete action. The theories he left us are not tablets brought down from the Mount; they are more understandable, and more useful, when seen as human, historical constructions. Caudwell's political and philosophical stance gains clarity both in terms of theoretical development and personal motivation when seen against the background of his concrete life. His professional and literary interests, his practice as a poet and writer of fiction, can help in understanding and qualifying his theoretical pronouncements. Now, after half a century of their influence, it is more possible to look both at the theoretical value and the personal quality of the construction of the theories. And it is to these ends that the publication of the essays, stories and letters in this volume is directed.

Caudwell was born Christopher St John Sprigg on 20 October 1907, in Putney, in southwest London. His grandfather had been a journalist and his father, Stanhope, had been for a few years the literary editor of the newly founded *Daily Express*. Jessie Caudwell, his mother, drew magazine illustrations and made miniatures of ivory. She was a Catholic and Stanhope Sprigg became a convert to marry her. Christopher was their third child; the eldest, Paula, had been born eight years before, and in between came Theodore.

In the First World War Christopher's favourite uncle was killed and in 1916, when he was only eight, his mother died. In his early verse the theme of the lost hero comes up repeatedly, together with the evocation of a remote and prestigious 'Queen Helen', but how far such poetic figures can be related to the impressions made on the child's mind by these events is a matter of conjecture.

Paula was educated in a convent (and returned there a few years later to become a nun and a teacher) and 'Chris' himself attended a Benedictine school, Ealing Priory. He left suddenly in 1922, for reasons which his brother later suggested were mainly financial. Stanhope Sprigg, whose journalistic heyday was past, accepted an appointment as literary editor of the *Yorkshire Observer* and father and son left for Bradford. Chris, at the age of fifteen, started work as a cub reporter, and occasionally

a book reviewer, for the paper.

He remained in Bradford with his father for more than two years, leading an unsettled existence. This is partly reflected in the importance of boarding houses in his work – in his one 'serious' novel, *This My Hand*, his first 'thriller', *Crime in Kensington*, and in probably the finest of the stories reproduced here, 'Lodgings for the Night'. In 1925 Chris returned to London to work with his brother, Theo, who had settled in London after five years in the merchant navy, and begun editing *Airways*, the first aeronautical monthly. Also in 1925 Stanhope Sprigg, at the age of fifty-nine, married again and a daughter, Rosemary, was born four years later. He died in 1932.

The collaboration between Chris and Theo, which lasted until 1934, gave Chris his first professional involvement with applied science. Under various pseudonyms he reviewed for *Airways* all kinds of books related to aviation – books dealing with technical or commercial matters but also pilots' diaries, war books, novels, etc. He once remarked: 'The ever increasing flow of wars in the air from the presses of British publishers forces one to the amazing, the almost incredible, conclusion that the British public like them.' He seems always to have kept, during these years, an interest in great exploits – polar expeditions, transatlantic flights – but his favourite hero was no doubt T. E. Lawrence. One of the longest reviews in *Airways* is of *Lawrence and the Arabs* (1927) by Robert Graves – all the more remarkable because there is very little about aviation in the book; it raises the question of the distance, in Lawrence's case, between legend and history. Among the books which he praised most in the following years were David Garnett's *The Grasshoppers Come*, St Exupéry's *Night Flight*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In the latest issues he seemed to be more concerned with overseas and colonial problems.

For a short period, in 1926-7, Christopher was sub-editor, and later editor, of the journal of the Association for British Malaya, whose principal aim seems to have been the development of the rubber and tin markets. The views of *British Malaya* were those of the upholders of the British Empire and were probably not uncongenial to the Sprigg brothers, for during the General Strike of 1926 they were among those who volunteered to replace the striking workers.

In 1929 Theo Sprigg married Vida, daughter of the well-known

magician David Devant, and Chris went to live with the couple in their house at Claygate, in Surrey. This arrangement lasted, to the satisfaction of all concerned, till October 1935. In 1930 the two brothers were at the head of a prosperous concern, Airways Publications, which published *Airways* (incorporating *Flying*), *Aircraft Engineering*, a successful specialized journal to which Christopher is said to have devoted much time, and *Who's Who in Aviation*. *Airways* became *Airways and Airports*, with C. St J. Sprigg as its editor. They owned or controlled Air Press Agency and Aeromarine Advertising, and seem to have known their greatest prosperity in the darkest years of the economic crisis. Yet they, too, soon met with financial difficulties: having borrowed extensively, they were mercilessly ousted by their creditors in March 1934.

Chris, who was entirely self-taught in scientific matters, must have acquired a competence in mechanics and engineering, since he was able to publish in the *Automobile Engineer* a highly technical article entitled 'Automatic Gears: The Function of the Moving Fulcrum in Determining Design' (October 1929). The article, which showed a gift for abstract reasoning and a taste for challenging received ideas, was praised by several specialists, and its author took out a patent three months later. Although it turned out to be of no practical consequence, the engineering failure was put to literary use and given a fictional treatment about six years later in his story 'The Device'.

In 1931 Christopher Sprigg's first book on aviation was published, *The Airship*, in which he asserted that the 'lighter-than-air' would supersede the aeroplane on long distance services. Then came four other books on flying: two on piloting, *Come Fly with Me* and *Let's Learn to Fly*, one on *British Airways* and one, *Great Flights*, which extols the airmen's courage:

> . . . the value of long-distance flying is not practical, any more than is that of exploring, sport or mountaineering. All have values that are higher than the merely practical. The justification of long-distance flying is its demonstration of human courage and skill battling against the dangers of a still unknown element. (*Great Flights*, p. 3)

This seems to be hastily written. It reminds us, of course, of his constant interest in human adventure, and that courage was for

him a fundamental virtue. Yet, as an aviation specialist, he could not be blind to the practical side of these exploits, at the very moment when he related the story of the *Aeropostale* in Latin America. Like his detective novels, these books were produced with a view to commercial success: they often remain conventional in their ideas and tone.

About that time Christopher went to see Paul Beard, whom he had not seen since they were at school together at Ealing Priory. Beard was a man of literary tastes who later wrote a 'hiking book' alluded to in the letter of 21 May 1935 and published the following year under the title *English Byways from Land's End to the Wash*. He also edited stories by Mrs Gaskell and poems by Francis Thompson. This renewed friendship seems to have answered a serious need in Christopher's life at this stage. From the age of seventeen he had been writing verse at intervals, but this activity remained more or less hidden from his family. He once wrote to Beard that he lived among people he deceived into believing he was a conventionally-minded bourgeois with a certain ability for superficial journalism and that they would never suspect him of writing verse since they knew there was no market for it nowadays. Here was a man who would share his interest in literature, and give him advice, as can be seen from the correspondence. And when Paul Beard married four years later their friendship grew even closer as Elizabeth Beard became more and more Chris's confidante. Beard, however, developed an interest in psychic phenomena (he was to become, after the war, a respected member of the College of Psychic Studies), a subject which his friend could only make fun of. Although the friendship was undoubtedly beneficial for Christopher, Paul was not likely to understand his friend's changing interests when he turned towards Marxism.

Sprigg wrote seven detective thrillers. Paul Beard said, 'As a schoolboy, his interest both in poetry and in science was already well developed, but more noticeable at the time than either was his intellectual detachment, rather shocking to his schoolfellows, and the marked intellectual dexterity with which he would argue on behalf of views totally different from his own.' The intellectual elements of crime fiction may well have suited his taste for pure argument, but his brother said that the occasion of his first entry into the genre was a challenge to produce one in a few days after Christopher had rashly said they could be written overnight. At a

number of points he suggested that thriller-writing was an irksome task ('The paid craft of writer becomes as tedious and wearisome as that of machine-minder,' he wrote in *Illusion and Reality*, adding the personal instance, 'Let any artist who has had to earn a living by journalism or writing "thrillers" testify to the inexorable proletarianisation of his art', p. 107, and see the letter of 21 December 1934), yet so many pages of his detective novels are written with a relish for human comedy and delight in irony that it is impossible to believe he did not also enjoy writing them. The books were highly fanciful stories with a number of picturesque characters and shamelessly macabre scenes. In 1933 *Crime in Kensington* and *Fatality in Fleet Street* were published. The second is politically the boldest of the seven novels. It is about the murder of a press lord, and Sprigg exercises his imaginative energy against the dictatorial sway of the magnate, who is also a warmonger. Other novels contain criticisms of the armament industry (*The Perfect Alibi*) and of colonialism (*The Corpse with the Sunburnt Face*), albeit in a playful and subdued manner. However, the structure of the novels locates the origins of crime and violence in the corruption of the social environment, rather than in the inborn vices of individuals.

The years 1934-5 were the crucial period in Christopher Sprigg's short life. The Labour government had ended in failure in 1931 and many British people felt that the ideals of socialism had been betrayed. Economic and financial chaos seemed to reign all over the world, barring the Soviet Union. In Britain, although the economic crisis was passing, unemployment was still high. The threat from German rearmament was increasing. The Peace Ballot had shown that a majority of people were in favour of disarmament and collective security, but the governments of the major countries seemed unable to agree on the necessary measures. The British Union of Fascists grew to nearly 20,000 members. Since 1933 the Communist International had supported the idea of a United Front of working-class parties against Fascism, and after the first Five Year Plan, public attitude toward the Soviet Union became more favourable. The convulsions of the political world intruded ever more forcibly on Christopher's considerations.

We do not know when Sprigg became consciously political or when he had begun reading the Marxist classics. There is a legend of a Sprigg totally ignorant of politics who, disappointed

by the financial discomfiture of *Airways* and attracted by Marxist propaganda, found himself 'converted' to communism almost overnight, or, as his brother had it, after having been struck on the head while observing a Mosley rally in Trafalgar Square. In any case, before mid-1934 he had shown little interest in current political debates, even though from his book reviews, from numerous passages in unpublished texts like *The Wisdom of Gautama* or *Heaviside* and also from his detective novels, it can be seen that he was quite aware of the realities of colonial domination, war propaganda and social injustice. His religious faith had collapsed 'some time before' 1932 (see letter of 9 May 1932) and his poetry suggests that before 1934 he had passed through a period of doubt, uneasiness and, finally, rejection concerning most of the beliefs and values in which he had been brought up. 'The Survival' and 'The Unspeakables' convey his sense of hollowness and despair:

The Survival

Shall we preserve intact the fine façade
Or let it crumble – not with age or illness
Or weight of metal, but merely from fatigue?

I have raised and kept it standing painfully
And got no credit for it. Well, the effort
Increases with the years. Then let it drop.

But can I? Do I really lurk behind there,
Scratching or worse, like a red-buttocked mandril
Or do I embody the sculpturesque aloofness,

The mellow generosity of swags,
Marble and undercut, of balanced windows,
Of Roman gravity and long arcades?

I wonder now. And less and less I feel
Myself gesturing lewdly in dark and private
And more in public, calm, impressive, solid.

Hollow: agreed. A sham: let me admit it.
But now I am concerned with decency

And is it decent to allow myself

My once so-frequent wish to let go all
And find I had become the fine façade
And simply vanish in a puff of dust,
Self-monumental cairn of sculptured fragments?

The Unspeakables

We have no secrets. Nothing we can't show
This century has slipped its breeches off.
Even the Sacrament of love is unreserved.
Nothing will come of nothing. Change your mind.
We have no minds; only a local glow
Left by the passage of the frigid worm
That willynilly traverses spacetime.
Have you no signs or wonder in your bodies?
Moore's bosom smelt of violets. Alexander[1]
Relieved him of rose-water. We of money.
It is pure gold. Do what you like with it.
What of the various gods with saving power?
We know those autoerotisms too well.
The soul is saved (and damned) by copulation.
The soul is feminine. She is a bitch.
I have found consolation in great art.
One does indeed. It is a great relief
When some imaginary Grecian bares
His marble skin, or Shakespeare finds the purse
In which the liquid gold of dream is hidden.
You too must die? Have you rehearsed your death?
Good gracious, no. The doctors are at work
And the State hides all the sharp-edged instruments.
There is a well known fondness in the soul
For self-destruction which will pull it through.
That way lies madness so near to great wit.
Nonsense! We gratify our least desires;
We rub our little bellies with delight;
You will expire the day your stifled guts
Explode into your brains; we shall break wind.
Have you no ideals? Why was Plato born?

We have an undigested residue
That our rebellious bowels will not pass.
We must confess we do know what you mean.

To the young Sprigg in 1934, the legendary T.E. Lawrence must have seemed to have escaped the malaise. Lawrence was a cultivated man, a gifted writer with a deep moral sense, a highly efficient soldier and diplomat who was able to keep aloof from the sordid interests of the ruling circles and from the manoeuvres of British policy in the Middle East while having a substantial personal effect on that world. Lawrence had been since 1927 an important recurring figure for Sprigg. The story of Francis in 'Ex-hero' seems reminiscent of his biography, and he is also the subject of the second essay of *Studies in a Dying Culture* – 'T. E. Lawrence: A Study in Heroism' (where he is seen through Caudwell's Marxist eyes as the nearest approximation to a hero in the capitalist world, who failed because his outlook had remained 'bourgeois'), and one of Christopher's last poems is an elegy to him written after his death in May 1935:

In Memoriam

Maker of kings and kingdoms; general;
Scholar; explorer; poet; these are all
Bonds that you broke, preferring slavery
Of body only. Now completely free.
Like you, we dreamed of the impossible
But you achieved it, drank it to your fill
And then turned back to beg our sordid dress,
A hero convert to life's pettiness.
. . .
Was this to warn us that for all we strive
There's nothing worth the pain of being alive?
Or this bad world today is too distressed
To diet the adventures of the best?
We do not know, and your abandoned draft
Mocks us with our long failure at our craft.
. . .
You who of all found the most hardly won
What most men own by birth – oblivion,
But now at last secured, as without thanks

You ply some menial office in death's ranks,
And undistinguished service that supplies
The sombre livery of your last disguise.

It is tempting to infer that for Sprigg Marxism, with its world-view, scientific orientation and dynamic character, provided a way out of this intellectual and ethical morass. By June 1935, supporting himself by writing pot-boilers, he was already engaged in his first explicitly Marxist work, 'Verse and Mathematics', the earliest version of what eventually became *Illusion and Reality*. The development of the work is indicated in three letters. The first, to Elizabeth Beard, is dated July 24; the second, to his brother Theo, and the third, again to the Beards, are undated. They were sent from Porthleven, presumably in September. He had been to Cornwall several times with Paul and Elizabeth, to the old farm they owned at Newton, and the idea of a book on 'the Foundation of Poetry' occurred to him after one of their discussions there. He probably finished the first draft in London in the beginning of August, at which point he left by himself for Porthleven, where the book was largely rewritten.

The Porthleven letter to Theo gently broke the news concerning *Illusion and Reality* and his further intentions: 'the serious work' had been progressing 'at a dizzy pace' and was 'disgustingly erudite', and he described the theories in the book as biological, psychological, etc., leaving out the most controversial. He explained to Theo in the same letter that he was going to settle in the East End for a while, to get the local colour he needed for his fiction, and also said that he would do 'a certain amount of political work'. Christopher eventually took lodgings in Poplar. He told the Beards in November 1935 he had found his 'integrated Weltanschauung', had started learning Russian, and intended to join the Communist Party. A few days later he contacted the small local branch of the party. As far as is known, he had never been acquainted with any Communist before.

Soon 'Spriggy', as he was often called in Poplar, moved to another house where several of his comrades lived. There he wrote *Studies in a Dying Culture* (see letter of 30 November 1935). One of the studies eventually became *The Crisis in Physics* (see letter of 9 December 1936), whose beginning is probably the finest statement of his philosophical and epistemological views (this section is reprinted in *The Concept of Freedom*). He also

prepared a volume of *Uncanny Stories* for which he wrote an introduction (signed C. St J. Sprigg) and wrote his last detective novel, *The Six Queer Things*, published posthumously, which reflects his growing belief in the role of the working classes in a decadent society. The innocent victims, heirs to large fortunes, are interned in a mental hospital through the machinations of an organization of spiritualists, mediums and psychiatrists. One of the victims is a young typist engaged to an honest and courageous worker. The adventure departs from the pattern of the previous thrillers along a route of naive social realism.

In February there appeared his only 'serious' novel, *This My Hand*, which was also the only book published in his lifetime bearing the name of Caudwell (his mother's maiden name). Cyril Connolly, in a warm review in the *New Statesman*, described it as 'the study of a man of violence who always considered himself perfectly conventional and whose murders grow out of the necessities of his own nature, and of those women who are instinctively drawn to him. It . . . might have been written by a gifted psychiatrist.' Sprigg had read extensively in psychology and his interest is focussed on the functioning of individual psychological mechanisms. In the letter of 23 April 1936 he commented on the way people conform to a false image of themselves, shown in *This My Hand*: 'That Fate is just ourselves as ourselves: that this thing that seems compulsive and external is internal.' He added that the central characters are determined by 'their situation and history' and in the final anti-capital-punishment chapter, where the hero is executed, the representatives of the social order are made to seem as guilty as the murderer.

Some commentators have portrayed a guilt-ridden Sprigg who in 1934 had sacrificed his ambitions to the 'new religion' and therefore had renounced every kind of literary work. As his letters to the Beards show, Sprigg, on the contrary, considered himself to be primarily a writer to the end and thought that his literary shortcomings were to a large extent due to the absence of an integrated world-view such as Marxism could provide. The long story 'We All Try' exemplifies what he called 'the failure of idealism, as long as it is only a selfish longing for self-fulfilment' (letter of 21 November 1935), and Barbara in *This My Hand*, an actively altruistic character whose personal relationships always fail, suffers from 'a separation between her aspirations and the common selfish struggling of ordinary life' (p. 79). The heroes of

the long story 'A Great Man' and 'Ex-hero' are similar – all of them are imprisoned in 'the little world of an *isolated* self'. To Matthew Arnold's image of the estranging sea, which he quoted again in *The Crisis in Physics*, Sprigg opposes the feeling of positive relation to fellow humans seen in 'the attitude of men to a drowning stranger' (letter of 21 November 1935). His main contention was that the isolation brought about by 'possessive individualism', as it was to be called later, prevented the development of the very self it was supposed to protect. Devotion to abstract ideas was held in suspicion, pretences of self-sacrifice were denounced. Instead, the struggle to change production relations was to be *at the same time* a struggle to establish concretely, between individuals, more fruitful relations, where everyone would try to understand the needs and wishes of others, and to work out the solutions towards the common good.

During the thirteen months he spent in Poplar, doing his share of the daily routine of party work, Sprigg seems to have been fairly happy according to the opinions of his comrades, although Paul Beard thinks he disliked it. According to one of his friends there, he could be exuberant and funny in company but, still ironical and diffident, he sometimes looked like 'a clown with a sad face'. There was a local branch of the Peace Pledge Union and Sprigg was chosen by his comrades to represent the party on its council. He was also remembered for his success in communicating a political perspective to the Irish Catholic community of the district.

On 7 June 1936, he participated in a counter-demonstration at a Fascist rally in Victoria Park. There was a scuffle with the Black Shirts, followed by police intervention. Sprigg was arrested, beaten, and fined. Shortly afterwards he went to Paris, where he spent one or two weeks, curious to study at first hand the new and apparently promising situation: the Popular Front had won a general election in May, the workers had obtained the forty-hour week and two weeks holiday with pay. He attended the huge and enthusiastic march staged by the coalition of left-wing parties and the trade unions on the 14th of July. Meanwhile, in Morocco, Franco's rising against the Spanish Popular Front had started.

Sprigg attended some lectures on Marxism and literature by two well-known Communists, Douglas Garman and Alick West, and had a few discussions with them, and quite a few pages in his Marxist writings had been inspired by some articles and

controversies in *Left Review*. He wrote a long reply to a pacifist pamphlet by Aldous Huxley, part of which was published by *Left Review* after his death. But he told his friends in Poplar that he did not wish to mix with party intellectuals, some of whom he found 'verbose and dogmatic' (it remains unknown exactly to whom he was referring). Like other young Communists of middle-class origin, he probably felt that for him the most urgent task was to acquire an experience of party activities at first hand, in a working-class environment, without, however, renouncing his main intellectual pursuits.

The typescript of 'Verse and Mathematics' contains many crude passages which he excised from the revision published as *Illusion and Reality*, but they throw light on his basic assumptions, which were common to many Marxists at the time: 'The European Powers seem doomed to see the democratic bourgeois state perish in its inevitable perversion, the Fascist Monopoly State' (p. 403). This society was dying, and its culture was dying too. In this perspective, Roosevelt's New Deal was considered as a move towards the authoritarian state, for America was 'the banner bearer of decay' (p. 433), and American ideology 'made no distinctive contribution to bourgeois culture' (p. 438). Communism would bring, in the words of the Webbs, 'a new civilisation'. In Soviet Russia the hostility of the capitalist world had caused 'the embryo communist social relations to generate at first a stern militaristic attitude to the old culture' (p. 432). But Russia would become 'like Egypt, Athens, Rome and France in their ideological heyday, centres from which new social relations stream outwards, to fertilize outworn civilisations, and create on their wrecks a new society, new science and new art . . .' (p. 437).

This fundamental belief was further enhanced by the adoption of the Soviet Constitution of 1936, as can be seen in *Illusion and Reality* and in the open letter to Aldous Huxley:

> In Soviet Russia – where the corporal punishment even of children is illegal, where the armed forces have exactly the same rights to vote and to be elected as do civilians, where the people elect the Judges and can withdraw them at will – violence *has* begotten peace . . . In Russia (ask the Webbs) there is more continuous and free discussion of every legislative and executive act by every adult than in any other

> country to-day. In Russia complete freedom of conscience, of right to vote, to speak, to demonstrate, is *guaranteed* . . . by the new Constitution. (*Left Review*, vol. III, Dec. 1937, pp. 657-60)

Sprigg was not alone in entertaining such hopes. What is more peculiar in his case, and more directly relevant to the writings published here, is his deep sense of the decay of his own society and his attendant rejection of the new forms of mass entertainment – dance music, American films, detective novels (even his own) – together with modernist trends in the arts.

In September 1936 the British Communist Party, somewhat rhetorically, called 'all able-bodied persons' to participate in the defence of Madrid. A wave of sympathy for the Spanish Republic swept the Left at the time. Europe seemed more and more threatened with the rise of fascism and national-socialism. British opinion was deeply divided on the question of military intervention in favour of the Republic. In the East End, October was a month of agitation mainly due to the marches of the British Union of Fascists, and their raids against Jewish shopkeepers.

Such was the atmosphere in which, rather unexpectedly, Chris decided to join the International Brigades in Spain. Some of his comrades disapproved of the decision, as they thought he would be more useful to the party in Britain. But this was considered a matter of personal choice. Moreover, no one in the party, outside Poplar, knew of Christopher Sprigg. One thing, however, seems certain: he was not asked to go. Various kinds of motivation can explain his resolve, from his sense of urgency in front of the Fascist threat, to his private hankering after heroic conduct. In any case, his engagement was entirely compatible with his idea of what a Communist writer should be: in participating in the common struggle he also prepared himself for his literary task.

In December, he left London to drive an ambulance to Spain, with the firm intention of enlisting in the International Brigades on his arrival. Once there, he spent several weeks in the training camp at Albacete, impatient to go into battle. His letters testify to his state of mind:

> January (undated, to Ella Larmour):
>
> If only we had the right to buy arms in England or France we could push Franco into the sea in a matter of days from the

time the arms started arriving. Even the freedom to get all the machine guns and ammunition we wanted would transform the war into a rout along large sections of Front. How is the arms for Spain going? Have any other unions lined up with the S.W.M.F. [South Wales Miners Federation]? We get almost no English political news here and when we occasionally manage to pick up a bit of English radio news it always seems to be about the Pope's health or Lord Nuffield's latest gig . . .

24 January:

. . . new drafts arrive each day and we *must* go to the Front as a compact, 100 per cent trained battalion. We expect to draw better arms than N°. 1 Company which went straight up with old rifles and suffered fairly heavily. I am n° 1 on a machine gun, or strictly speaking a 'fusil mitrailleuse'; quite a handy little weapon but out-of-date and none too reliable . . . I thought when I came out here that I should throw off the responsibility of Party member and writer too but, as usual, the Party never sleeps. I'm a group political delegate – strictly speaking, a non-party job – instructor to the Labour Party faction and joint-editor of the Wall newspaper.

30 January:

We expect to move off very soon.
We've been here so long now, waiting for new drafts to arrive to bring us up to battalion strength – that I am almost beginning to feel an old soldier, and already act as machine-gun instructor to our group.

England seems centuries away, and we are yearning to get to the Front. No rifles yet – the arms shortage is acute here – but we get them very soon now and will then move off.

In London Theo Sprigg obtained the proofs of *Illusion and Reality* from Macmillan and brought them to party headquarters, pleading for the return of his brother, and alleging, among other things, his complete lack of military training. Embarrassed, the General Secretary, Harry Pollitt, said that Sprigg had been asked only to drive an ambulance; he was not supposed to stay in Spain (see his last letter, 7 February 1937 – it is now confirmed that Sprigg did not violate party discipline). But on 12 February the newly formed British Battalion was brought into action with the

aim of stopping the nationalists' offensive on the river Jarama – which they eventually did, a few days later. They tried to hold the hills over the narrow valley. Their heavy machine guns, old and outmoded, remained silent because they had been supplied with the wrong ammunition. Franco's Moroccan troops, 'the Moors', had new German machine guns and were supported by artillery. Christopher died while covering the retreat of his company. In the words of one of the survivors, 'he never left that hill alive and if any man sacrificed his life that his comrades might live that man was Chris.'

Caudwell (to use the pen name he had chosen) made his first literary efforts in poetry. From 1925 to 1935 he never ceased to write verse 'in spurts' (letter of 21 December 1934). Self-educated, isolated and contemptuous of modernist trends, Caudwell often seems to have lagged behind the times, although his latest work and in particular 'Orestes' (*Poems*, pp. 47-86), a satirical drama in verse, shows that he was capable of bold experiments. His early verse was often reminiscent of the post-romantic and 'Georgian' poets, but he soon adopted a form inspired by Donne and Pope, as seen in 'The Art of Dying' (*Poems*, pp. 37-42), an elegy which he recast several times from 1925 to 1934. He considered the short lyric as the most typical form of twentieth-century poetry; yet his own inclination drew him more and more towards satire, wit and burlesque. The 'Twenty Sonnets of Wm. Smith' (*Poems*, pp. 26-36) are full of subtle and poignant mockery of traditional love poetry. 'Heil Baldwin!' is a long satire in the Augustan manner.

A frequent theme in the early poems is that of a young man who is condemned to live a spiritless life in a degraded present. It is combined with other themes or poetical figures such as the dead hero, the explorer, the lost pilgrim. The tone ranges from stoicism to self-pity, as for instance in 'Arctic Expedition';

O, all man's life is but a barren Pole;
The icebergs move within the human soul,
The explorer strives to reach the desired mark,
In the long silence of the Arctic dark,
And if he reach the mark, or always fail,
Still drop he must, within death's chilling vale,

Clutched by the roving frostbite death, locked tight
In the unrelenting ice of the Pole's night.

The nightingale, whose song will be the butt of the poet's irony in the 'Sonnets' and in 'Orestes', is, of course, at first associated with Keats:

Keats' nightingale sang in the wintry waste
Sang and sang on! I thought my heart would break
Thinking how someone felt that forlorn ache
And now its voice, across time overpast
Reached out, and ancient thoughts came flooding fast,
Not mine, not the divine bird's, but conquering mine –
A pilgrim beckoning across miles of snow.
The anguish, death desired, and foam, and wine!
The oozy eglantine!
Sing on, immortal bird! Pause not! Ah, no! . . .
No intermission! But the songster hastes
And ends in haste his rhyme,
The pilgrim drops beneath his snowy wastes
The poem melts upon the heart of time.

(from 'Soul's Progress')

The craving for reunion with legendary gods or heroes at times turns into a death wish. Mixed with these themes, which partly fall into line with post-war hero worship, are allusions to the beautiful Queen Helen and to the fall of Troy. The fallen city will be found again in 'Orestes'. Incidentally, it can also be found in the poems of Julian Bell, whose literary tastes bear some resemblance to Caudwell's.[2]

Death almost seems to have been an obsessive idea with Caudwell. Whatever the psychological origins of such a disposition, it must have been greatly enhanced by the loss of his childhood faith. This can be seen in 'Smoke and Diamond', a sequence dated between June and December 1926. Social and political considerations do not enter Christopher's poetry at the time – there is not a word which alludes to the recent general strike. But it is already concerned with man's freedom. God cannot be an omnipotent being existing apart from man:

O, man's freewill was never meant
To come from an omnipotent,

Sick with a passion justice-pent.
It makes freewill a jest. Remain
No degradations whose dark stain
You have not worn, and called it gain
Save one – You wait and falter still
To lead man from temptation till
He does not his but heaven's will.

Science explains the universe. God, however, exists in man's heart:

So I at last admit the springs
Chatter their inmost heart right out
And that the world of science brings
    Its final end about:
And that mankind are their own kings;

And call that *Where*-? the God I seek
. . .

In the last poem of the sequence, 'Smoke' and 'Diamond' stand for the two basic principles of existence: the eternity of inert, dead, crystal-like, solid matter, and the fluidity of ceaseless change, life, whose essential characteristics are transience, unexpectedness, creativity. The rising smoke, as a metaphor for life, is the passage from one eternity to another, from the cold dark earth to the pure light of the stars.

Such symbols will be found again in *The Wisdom of Gautama*, but, more interestingly perhaps, they still come up in Caudwell's mind in the midst of his theoretical writings. In *Illusion and Reality* 'concrete living', as opposed to theoretical knowledge, 'is not solid crystal' (p. 9), and the image of the fountain, right at the end of the book, is akin to that of the rising smoke. 'All is fleeting, all is moving', yet changing Man 'has desires as ancient and punctual as the stars'. In *Studies* (p. 147), insect societies have achieved 'the dull immortality of the diamond', and even on such an arid subject as the physiology of the brain we hear about 'the vast Arctic night as the cortex' (*Further Studies*, pp. 192-3).

'Some time' before 1932 (see letter of 9 May 1932) Christopher had lost his faith in the immortality of the soul. 'The Art of Dying' (*Poems*, pp. 37-42) is a stoical meditation on the

necessary acceptance of death, 'the greatest of salvations'. The poem, at the end, equates the dead with the stars of heaven. The final image of peaceful reunion implies the impersonal transcendence of the material universe:

> . . . but in truth all are
> Content and constant as the Polar Star
> There, where the sea from useless labour rests
> And hangs unmoving at the heaven's breasts.
>
> (*Poems*, p. 42)

The Requiem is another instance of his concern with heroic conduct and the significance of death.[3] There remained, however, in 1932, 'one's personal morality . . . one's conscience . . . ideals', as exemplified in the vague idealism of Charles Morgan's *Fountain*.

In the beginning of the thirties the first phase of an intellectual revolution seems to have taken place in Caudwell's mind. It had little to do with Marxism as such. Among possible influences are T. S. Eliot's poetry (from the 1920 *Poems* to *The Hollow Men*), Aldous Huxley's fiction, but also extensive forays into biology, psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, etc. A sentence about his novel, *This My Hand*, in a letter dated 23 April 1936, testifies to the influence of behaviourism on his mind. An isolated fragment in his manuscripts can apparently be interpreted as a criticism of his previous poetry and as a radical change in his approach, as well as in his style:

> High on a bough beneath the moonlight pale
> That over-rated bird the nightingale
> Sang and sang on. I thought my heart would break
> At first, to feel again that forlorn ache
> Across the waste of history – 'Wine, Red Wine!'
> FitzGerald's Nightingale, with voice divine,
> Called out – 'to stain my rose-love's pale cheek red!'
> And Keats arose, among the wintry dead,
> And testified, his sunken eyes ashine –
> The sun; dusk; dream; and oozy eglantine.
>
> But these are dead and dumb. This is a fowl
> Hatched from an ordinary egg. The owl

Like generation owneth. The world wags
And from pure tropism the small bird brags
His vocal chords to something in the air
Reacting, never of the Spring aware,
While still more passive, dumb and deaf and blind
Keats and FitzGerald slumber, clay-confined;
Close-hugged by greedy earth, whose barren vales
Nurse for one Keats a billion nightingales.

'The Survival' and 'The Unspeakables', quoted above, exemplify a cynical, disillusioned (if at times humorous) vein in his output. But he could also deal with more abstruse questions, in a more serene manner. In 'The Object' the speaker imagines himself as an immortal but dead object, in the midst of a world where life is necessarily transient:

Eyed like those ice-bound fishes that, as we skate swiftly over
Stare at our sliding soles – out of the tide of time,
Parted by a clear pane, seen yet separate,
I shall lie at last in the dark ditch of death.

The instant, life as felt, time as experienced, seem to be the realities that matter. This also points forward to the paramount importance which Caudwell (following Bukharin[4]) eventually gave to the subject-object relationship, as seen in Marx's first 'Thesis on Feuerbach'. This was seen not only in his theoretical writings, but also in his stories, particularly those in *The Island* which (like 'The Piston', the single instance we have selected) are based on reversal of usual subject-object relations. See also his letter of 9 December 1936.

Among the published poems, the 'Twenty Sonnets of Wm. Smith', with their mixture of archaisms, literary turns of phrase and scientific jargon, seem to be first and foremost a refusal of the idealized language of traditional poetry and an attempt at facing the realities of 'the hungry flesh' and 'passion's simple gust' in a century when 'Religion fades; art is a dream,/Philosophy is bored to death' (Sonnet VIII).

'Orestes' is a mock-heroic drama in contemporary language with a wide range of poetic forms and styles, combining fantasy, pastiche and burlesque. It alludes to a society of corruption and violence whose myths have become stale and stifling, with

psychoanalysis as the latest substitute for religion. It is also an indictment of modernist poetry, which contributes to these mystifications. At the end appears Athena, Queen of Science, protectress of armaments and moral health, whose successive incarnations have been the wily Aegisthos and the modern psychoanalyst. She pretends to deliver Orestes from the Furies, his inhibited tendencies. But in his madness he throws himself under a tank.

In 'Orestes' as well as in the Sonnets, occasional phrases such as 'love's bourgeois pleasures' (p. 26) and 'the commissariat of the past' (p. 79) suggest a communist outlook, although the political complexion of the poems is as much pacifist-libertarian as red. But *Heil Baldwin*!, written after the signature of the Naval Agreement (June 1935) and before Caudwell's departure for Porthleven, is unmistakably communist in inspiration. There is also a marked difference in the style, which is far more explicit. The Prime Minister is described as the British equivalent for the German Fuehrer and Ramsay MacDonald (the former Labour leader) as a mere tool of the ruling party, just like Van der Lubbe, the half-witted incendiary of the Reichstag:

> Like Hitler, he too had his Reichstag day
> But in a far more gentlemanly way
> Our van der Lubbe – Ramsay – is not dead
> He lives; although it's true he lost his head
> . . .
> He was not kicked to death but kicked aside
> . . .

A few weeks later the Communist International was to 'lay down lines for developing the united front' of Socialist, Communist and allied movements against fascism but Caudwell was still thinking in the terms of the 'class against class' period, where the struggle was seen as equally against fascists, reactionaries, and 'social-fascists'. In spite of the fact that the Labour Party had condemned the National Government's policies, he could write:

> All must admit that our gold standard scare
> Was as effective as a Reichstag flare
> And Socialists are much more impotent
> When prisoned in that maze, a Parliament.

Why wield that butcher's axe, Brutality,
When we've this surgeon's knife, Economy?
Therefore our Liberal-Labour-Nationalists
Embrace the coarser Nazi-Socialists.

When Caudwell wrote *Heil Baldwin*! he had probably begun 'Verse and Mathematics'. A few weeks later, in the final version published as *Illusion and Reality*, he was reproaching Day Lewis and Spender for introducing into their poetry 'crude and grotesque scraps of Marxist phraseology'. 'Such agitational poetry cannot be great poetry', he wrote in *Illusion and Reality* (p. 285), 'because it springs from a divided world-view. It has an obscure bourgeois basis, on which is imposed a mechanical pseudo-Marxist revolutionary formula.' 'It gives rise', he added in the version in *Romance and Realism* (p. 136), 'to a perversion of poetry, self-consciously propagandist poetry.'[5]

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

Pseudo-philosophy

The Wisdom of Gautama was an experiment, a self-consciously archaic, 'Biblical' narration of the life of a prophet which served as a framework for aphorism and parable. It may well have been prompted by the several translations of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* published in 1933-4. Although it employs the symbols of the early poetry, it also reflects a later attitude that is closer to Marxism in its emphasis on change and action. Caudwell stresses process and becoming: 'Whence is Man? *From the Was*. What is Man? *That which is*. Why is Man? *To achieve the Will Be*. Practice is also much more highly valued than contemplation:

> On those whom he hateth he indeed inflicteth peace; he curseth them with ease and oppresseth them with well-being, until they are eaten up with content. To those he loveth he alloweth the privilege of effort . . . he consumeth them with inordinate desires. (p. 24)

At the same time knowledge and history are disparaged – they are, in one of his favourite metaphors, like the diamond, whereas living wisdom is like the smoke that rises – and the stance of the

text is definitely anti-rational, with its preference for instinctive over conscious learning. Elevating the Will as a kind of life force, he draws on the evolutionist philosophy of Samuel Alexander and Henri Bergson, which he later criticized in the essay 'Reality' in *Further Studies* (pp. 233-6).

As with much of Caudwell's hasty composition, the end of *Gautama* has a character different from that of the earlier parts. It develops a pacifist emphasis and, when Gautama is condemned like Socrates, he says 'Verily hast thou trapped and forsaken me, O my wisdom', which throws the entire wisdom of the prophet open to question.

Fiction

Heaviside begins as science fiction – a journalist and scientist exploring the upper air are captured by the transparent beings who inhabit the Kennelly-Heaviside (radio) layer of the ionosphere – and then changes abruptly to satire when the two explorers are exposed to the society of the Heavisiders. The novel suffers from the inconsistency of Caudwell's hurried work, but there is much wit in the satire on such subjects as the royal family, the House of Lords, public schools and their emphasis on games, language theory, the class justice of the courts and, since most of the Heavisiders are engaged in the manufacture or acquisition of 'Objects of Desire', economic organization.

The most significant features of the Heavisiders, in terms of Caudwell's philosophical outlook, are their sexual difference and mode of reproduction. Sexual specificities are mental rather than physical and give rise to differences in labour and social responsibilities. When they approach the limits of their mental development they abandon their usual promiscuous exchange of caresses and seek marriage, which is similar to the conjugation of protozoans and results in annihilation and rebirth. This love and death theme recurs frequently in Caudwell's poems and in the essay 'Love' and he sees sexual reproduction as linking death with the birth of new and richer individualities:

> The immortality of primitive cells, secured by simple fission, vanishes when they conjugate and spawn . . . For greater richness and complexity, hastening the hand of time, we pay the priceless coin of Death. (*Studies*, pp. 142-3)

In *Illusion and Reality* Caudwell made a theoretical distinction between poetry and prose fiction, saying that 'novels are not composed of words. They are composed of scenes, actions, *stuff*, people, just as plays are' (p. 200). To Paul Beard he stressed the importance in prose of the 'skeleton', like a record of moves of the pieces on a chessboard; i.e., he demanded a well-made structure in fiction, based on 'objectively' observable events and characters, and played down the possibilities offered by style. The collection *The Rock*, which takes its title from that of the first story, was written in the manner of what Caudwell described as 'Tchekovian realism'. The stories are often too 'skeletal' and sometimes, as Caudwell felt about 'Thomson', too artificial (see letter of 21 May 1935).

'We All Try', by far the longest story in the collection and painfully schematic, is one of the most interesting documents in Caudwell's intellectual history because it gives a projection of different class attitudes, and it is twice discussed in his correspondence (21 May 1935 and, in its re-casting as a play, *The Way the Wind Blows*, 21 November 1935). The hero, Brian Mallock, turns his back on his privileged family at the age of twenty-seven; he is tired of 'living like a parasite on other people's labours' and seeks 'a stratum where people work and are unhappy but are real human beings', where he can 'pay with sweat and unhappiness for the privilege of existing' and lose his 'guilty humiliating conscience'. Working as a waiter and living over a fish and chip shop cannot purge his class difference – 'I still contained a fictional class-created hypocrite' – but living with working-class Elsie he learns to think 'simply and naturally of needs and pleasures', marks of 'a real person'. A flirtation with Communism fades after four months when he loses faith in the proletariat because they would rather satisfy their material needs than pursue the vision of equality that motivates him. He turns even more briefly to fascism in the hope that it will make people disgusted with materialism, but later accepts the accuracy of the chalked slogan 'Fascists are Ignorent Bastards'.

After a spiral of unemployment and degeneration, Brian becomes a 'respectable' worker and lodges in a north London semi-detached: 'I could no longer understand my sympathy with the Communists, nor my dislike of the Socialist party because of its purely economic conception of national readjustment. I

become a good Trades Unionist and a keen member of the local Socialist Party.' He excuses his rejection to the girl he has been courting for a year with the complacent dictum: 'I have always believed that until one has fulfilled one's duties to oneself – the most sacred of all – one is not entitled to start fulfilling one's duties to other people, which come next in order of sacredness.'

After a middle-class marriage, prosperity, divorce, alcoholism, Brian is rescued by an emigré cobbler who shares everything with him and teaches him the trade. The message of the dangers of egotistical, idealistic proletarianization is less than clear, probably because Caudwell's thinking is cloudy (we might say he is trying to understand social phenomena but has little actual experience) and also because all these transformations occur in only sixty-one pages.

'The Bully' also suffers from abstraction but to a lesser extent, since it is based more on a conception of character than an elaborated analysis of social-political positions. The story also offers a telling dramatization of the tension between Sprigg's own prolific journalism and his only-recently-abandoned ideal of perfect poetic beauty.[6]

Where he had sufficient experience of his subject and had evolved an emotional attitude toward it, Caudwell produces a much richer, more convincing fiction. The kind of memory that is involved in the representation of experience, he theorized in *Illusion and Reality* and 'Consciousness', depends more on affective organization than logical connection, and the stories in *The Rock* seem to bear him out. The finest of them, 'Lodgings for the Night' (which was the title by which he referred to it in his literary testament, the letter of 9 December 1936), owes its force more to the detail that evokes the emotional environment than the organization of 'objective' elements in the narration, as effective as it is.

Similarly, 'The Mother Superior' and 'The Bank', which have as distinct a 'skeleton' as any of the stories, are distinguished by a vital energy and strong attitudes that are probably connected with personal events of the period – the collapse of the Sprigg brothers' publishing enterprise and Christopher's rejection of faith.

In 'A Great Man' an author writes to an admirer to deny the qualities attributed to him and then reveals that his letter is false – ink, not blood, flows in his veins and his emotions are purely

literary. He admits to his fundamental insincerity – to what we might call his narcissism – and he says the autobiography he is going to write 'will be full of big impressive sins, but will omit the mean sins that spring from the essential lie in the soul', his vain boasts, his lies to attract attention, his cowardice, his petty dishonesties. Or, if they are included, the magic of his art will make them glitter with a charming iridescence. The same theme is taken up in 'Homage to Calderon' (printed here): a famous philosopher discovers, lurking behind his intellectual achievements, 'a *petty* principle'. The essential lie in the soul, the petty principle, and Brian's self-regard in 'We All Try', all point to the same deficiency in the relations between the *ego* and others. Whatever the imaginative deficiencies of the fiction, the individual's personality is seen to be to a large extent determined by social relations and, reciprocally, determines the subject's relations to the social environment.

The Island, a collection of stories also taking its title from that of the first story, was in the hands of Caudwell's literary agents in May 1935. He said they were written in the manner of Kafka, which meant in practice they presented an idea from an imaginary perspective (e.g., that of a piston in an engine) carried to its logical extreme. The story functions as an instance of a philosophical notion; attention is focussed on the ingenuity of the conception and not on the creation of a reality. The titles themselves of the stories 'Philosophy of an Apple', 'Speculations of a Caterpillar' and 'The Nature of the Bacterial World' suggest his artistic approach.

Theory

The bulky typescript 'Verse and Mathematics' makes clearer the evolution of many of the concepts in *Illusion and Reality*, of which it was the first draft, and the short extract we print is also one of Caudwell's most charming pieces of theoretical writing. The title itself shows that his starting point was the contrast between the language of science and logic and that of poetry. In his letter from Porthleven (August? 1935) he denies having drawn on the work of Ogden and Richards – we can only take his word for it – but in his letter of December 1934 he acknowledged his debt to Charles Baudouin (whose work is not included in the bibliography of *Illusion and Reality*). A number of Caudwell's

ideas originate in Baudouin's *Studies in Psychoanalysis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922) and possibly some of his other works. For Baudouin, who borrowed eclectically from Bergson, Freud and Jung, condensation and symbolization were the fundamental laws of the imagination and he is responsible for Caudwell's theory of affective associations (condensation).

Caudwell's main contention in the beginning of the extract is that 'private phantasy', the contents of the individual psyche, is a product of social life and, as such, part of the collective ideology. Contrary to Jung's and Baudouin's assumptions, he does not postulate any collective 'soul' or hereditary 'unconscious'. At the same time the meaning of ideology is extended to include all imaginary thinking. Further on, this reference to the 'instinct of attention' and to Galileo's scientific thinking follows Eugenio Rignano's *The Psychology of Reasoning* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

Caudwell tried to use the work of British, American and French psychologists who had devoted much attention to social factors in the patterns of emotions and feelings and to the adaptative functions of cultural activities. His bibliography in *Illusion and Reality* includes a great number of anthropological and psychological works, but it would be inappropriate to accuse him of 'psychologism' – the tendency to explain all human action in terms of individual motivation – because for him the human subject is always 'socio-historical', as his comments on W. H. Rivers show:

> Rivers, the most level-headed of Freudians, as an anthropologist was well aware of the purely social function of the family. It is that organ of society, he said, which directs the child into a functional place in society. In other words, it is the mechanism whereby the child is directed into a class, the class of its parents.

In 'Heredity and Development' the contrast between Caudwell's intellectual qualities and his shortcomings is most vivid. The essay uses a slipshod anthropomorphic vocabulary such as the 'wills of living matter', makes dangerously naive oppositions, such as 'the bourgeois separation of organism and environment' set against 'the communist synthesis of them', and applies dialectics mechanically, as in 'strict Darwinism, in the

form of Weisman's germ plasm theory, had given rise to its opposite, the theory of the spontaneous unfolding of large variations, or "mutations" '. Caudwell's criticism of the term 'natural selection' is supported by the fact that we now know Darwin himself finally considered it an unsatisfactory metaphor. Discoveries since Caudwell wrote in 1936 have distinguished more sharply than he believed possible between genetically-transmitted characteristics and environmental influences (the Lederberg Replica-plating experiment), but his general thesis about the interaction between the living objects and the universe seems to have been abundantly confirmed, as also his contention that the gene is an abstraction which only finds its concrete realization in interaction. And, most importantly, the essay recognizes the part played by the ideologies of scientists in the elaboration of their scientific theories.

'Heredity and Development' was perhaps even more 'imperfect and hasty' than his other 'Studies' and, as he said before leaving for Spain, they all would have to be 'rewritten and refined'. Today, a number of ideas put forward in the ebullient *Illusion and Reality* and in the more mature *Studies* have been developed, clarified and also refined by a host of theoreticians and scholars, many of whom may never have heard of Caudwell. Few, however, have given so much importance to the concrete workings in the mind of the historically-determined subject. But what is really fascinating in the successive versions of *Illusion and Reality* is the tremendous effort he made to extricate himself from a medley of fragmentary scraps of knowledge in order to arrive at a more or less coherent theory within the perspective of historical materialism.

The eagerness and sense of urgency in his work seem to come, primarily, from his rejection of what he saw as the disintegrating trends of capitalist society; and the integration he sought concerned the different sides of his personality as well as the various elements of his 'worldview'. In all of his work Caudwell tried 'not only to interpret the world, but also to change it'. That active purpose, his range of vision and his thoroughness take his analyses beyond mere historical interest and make them still valuable today.

NOTES

1 Samuel Alexander, author of *Space, Time and Deity* (Macmillan, 1920), considered himself a follower of the Bloomsbury prophet G. E. Moore, author of *Principia Ethica*. Alexander recurs in 'Orestes' (*Poems*, p. 85) and the essay 'Reality' (pp. 233-6), linked with Henri Bergson.

2 Stansky and Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier* (London: Constable, 1966), pp. 62-5.

3 For details on 'The Requiem' see D. E. S. Maxwell, *Poets of the Thirties* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

4 He may have been prompted or encouraged by one of N. I. Bukharin's latest works, 'Marx's Teaching' in *Marxism and Modern Thought*, 1935. Bukharin, the best known Marxist of the time, probably reacting against the accusation of 'mechanism' levelled at his earlier work, underlined the importance of the mutual determination of subject and object (see letter of 9 December 1936). He stressed the 'historical' character of any object for man and the role of the 'socio-historical' subject in the evolution of societies.

5 H. Gustav Klaus contends that in the spring of 1935 Caudwell found himself in a blind alley and, feeling the need for clarification, undertook 'a systematic and theoretical inquiry into the premisses of lyric poetry' (Klaus, p. 189). It is difficult to know how far he was conscious of this blind alley. The immediate stimulus for 'Verse and Mathematics' might well have been C. Day Lewis's article 'Revolutionaries and Poetry' in the July 1935 issue of *Left Review* (see Margolies in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, p. 79). But, whatever he may have felt on the subject, there was an obvious contradiction between his ten-year-old literary habits and his desire to participate, as an artist, in the revolutionary struggle. He had been used to writing a poetry very remote from his other interests in life and, more recently, he had taken to a rather hermetic kind of verse (see letter of 21 December 1934).

On the subject of art as propaganda he reached a different conclusion from that of C. Day Lewis. Art could not be propaganda for it did not aim simply at changing people's opinions on current topics. At a deeper level its aim was emotional reorganization – to change their fundamental attitudes and values, their worldview.

6 'The Bully' uses again one of Sprigg's favourite images, the ant's nest, which can also be found in 'Orestes' and the story from *The Island* 'The Man's Nest', which purports to be a study of *Homo parasiticus*.

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from
THE WISDOM OF GAUTAMA

CONCERNING TRUTH

Gautama made for the people a parable:

'A certain king sent his servant to seek for a flower, esteemed the loveliest of herbs. After many wanderings the servant came upon the flower, in a land where it is always day, and the flower was set in a tree that grew fast in the living rock in the earth in those parts.

'The servant therefore plucked the flower and brought it back to his lord with all haste. Now when he returned it was withered.

'Then the king rebuked his servant, for that it was no longer beautiful, being of no worth. But the servant answered him, saying:

'O, king, go thou and seek the flower for thyself, for no servant of thine can bring it to thee as thou wouldest have it.'

The disciples asked Gautama to expound his parable. And he said unto them:

'The flower is Truth, and naught may fetch it for thee, else is it of no profit and withered, but thou must seek it for thyself.'

Gautama taught further concerning truth:

'A lie reverenceth truth and doth homage to truth; but there is naught so damnable as a truth that is no longer true.

'Only one thing remaineth ever true; that which indeed is. Now all things change and pass. That which changeth, that which passeth, only seemeth, but that changing, that passing, indeed is. Therefore is truth called the shadow of perpetual change.

'Hast thou seen the rainbow inlaid in the rain? Hast thou seen monsters in the wombs of clouds? Now the rain falleth, and the clouds are eddying, but rainbow and monster remain. Such is Truth.

'The rain knoweth naught of its bow; the clouds are ignorant of the monsters they create; but the soul knoweth it is man. And the soul bendeth over the River of that which seemeth and seeth Truth floating among the eddies, and lo! the face of Truth is the face of the soul.'

CONCERNING KNOWLEDGE

Now Gautama had returned to his birthplace, the City called 'Ancient'. And as he was teaching in the streets a disciple spake unto him saying: 'Suffer us to write that which thou teachest us, that when thou art gone (which Heaven delay) thou wilt leave a record of thy doctrine, that future ages may read and be instructed.'

Gautama answered: 'My wisdom is not to be learned, it is to be lived. For my wisdom is as all wisdom that is of profit, it is a living wisdom.

'There is indeed wisdom to be gained from books and teaching, but it is the wisdom of the diamond that endureth, not of the smoke that riseth. We may indeed learn the wisdom that can be learned, that we may be as wise as our fathers. The rock is as wise as its forbears, and is man a rock?

'Strive rather to possess the wisdom of thy fathers without learning it. So thou shalt be wise as the beasts. But if thou would be wise as a man, then thou must gain the living wisdom, which is not in books, but which thou createst.

'I call the wisdom that is knowledge a dead wisdom. It is knowledge concerning that which seemeth, and all that which seemeth is past, and is not the past dead? Now my wisdom is a living wisdom, but when I am dead it is knowledge and then it is a dead wisdom, nor will it feed the generations now unborn.

'The living wisdom is truth, the dead wisdom is history. History may instruct, but truth createth. The dog that liveth is better than the lion that is dead, and the wisdom of the fool that is a live wisdom is better than the wisdom of the sage which is dead.

'O my disciples, be not deceived concerning wisdom. Wisdom is like truth in that it is not to be got and possessed as one possesses gold, to spend or bury in a field. Verily it is as the wind. Canst thou capture the wind and possess it? Nay, but by

evermore striving thou mayst evermore keep abreast of it.

'Lo, all that endureth unchanged is illusion – it is like the rock and the diamond, the dream of the dream that is man. Now man may sit down with illusion or he may all his life pursue the real. And ye my disciples may sit down with the dead wisdom of the past that is gone, of a truth that is no longer true, or ye may endlessly pursue the living wisdom of the present that is, of a truth that is wholly true.'

from
HEAVISIDE

(THE ROYAL FAMILY)

'Yes,' Robertson admitted at last. 'The King was not *really* real . . . But in the best sense and most spiritual sense he is real . . . Everyone worships him, would die for him . . . All the posts in the country are filled at his choice . . . Yes, in a sense it is the King's servants that fill these posts, but in another sense it *really* is the King. You may both find it difficult to understand but indeed, it is so . . . The telegrams of condolence certainly are drafted by the King's servants . . . but the people who receive them are not grateful to the King's servants in the least, but to the King *personally* . . . Yes, the king passes all laws without querying them. Naturally he can't query them as he can't speak. But he has the *right* of querying them. Do you understand the difference? It is very important.'

It appeared that once they had had a real King. But, as all their good Kings did, he always took his Ministers' advice. He died young, worn out by his attendance at exhibitions and social functions. Then it had occurred to the Ministers that an image would take their advice just as readily, and would be better able to endure the tedium of social duty. Moreover the country would not be upset by mournings and coronations. Besides there was always the danger of an idiot king. And of course it was much cheaper. They had had the very best sculptor, and while he was about it, he had made them a Queen, always beautiful, a Crown Prince, ever youthful, and the darlingest little family of Princes and Princesses.

But why, we asked, having got so far, why not make a further abstraction, and remove the hypothetical monarchy as well as the hypothetical monarch?

No, that would never do, it seemed. There must be a Court to set the social tone. Then how could loyalty flourish without a King as a common symbol, to bind everyone together? Apparently the image was very important to the Colonies in some way I could not quite follow. And then, it appeared, the army would never like the change. And it would affect the hospitals. And who would approve the laws and appoint judges and teachers without the image?

. . .

Robertson went on to show me how well the scheme was worked out. There was a little group of Heaviside officials, for instance, who wrote biographies of the Royal Family, and sent out little stories about events in their home life, quite touching incidents some of them. How could these stories be true? we asked. Not truly true, admitted Robertson, but true to the Heaviside national spirit, true to its soul, spiritually true.

I probed further. Did everyone know about the images? Most people did, it appeared, but of course it was never mentioned. He himself would never have discussed it, had never discussed it, except with us creatures of the abyss. Many of the lower classes still believe, in a dumb oafish sort of way, that the King is real, or if not the King, at any rate the little Princes and Princesses, bless their sweet jellies! There was something about their little tentacles, it appears, that the lower classes found irresistibly appealing. It all made for loyalty, said Robertson.

(THE 'DEPARTMENT OF OBJECT-PROMOTION')

It seems that in spite of the careful training in Object-Desire given to all Heavisiders, they still prove lacking in the desire for objects, and it is the business of this department to stimulate this Desire. At one time this was done by the makers of the Objects themselves, but eventually the business grew to such a scale that a Government Department was formed to co-ordinate and control Object-Promotion. Quite a tenth of the population is occupied in this industry.

. . .

It appears that they rely for Object-Promotion upon the following factors in Heaviside nature. (I am using his own names): Dread, Inferiority-Complex, Shame, Envy, Hate, Caress-Want. His Ministry is divided into Departments occupied with these factors, Departments of Dread, and so forth. As far as I can gather, the Departments function somewhat as follows.

The Department of Dread for instance has the task of terrifying the Heavisider as to what will happen to him if he does not use, say, a certain unguent. It is done in a diabolically clever way. There will be little photographs dropped in the street of people in agony, and it appears they have omitted to use the Unguent. A mock-funeral passes through the streets, a spectator in the employ of the Ministry mentions in a loud voice that the corpse died through not using the Unguent. Little paragraphs are slipped into the papers – three out of four people, one paragraph might casually mention – suffer from a certain dread disease – unless of course they use the Unguent. Voices whisper warnings from the loud-speakers, drawings depict people with rotting tentacles, and so on. Even the strongest-minded Heavisider would be unable to prevent himself gliding to the nearest shop and buying himself the Unguent, were it not that, as the Minister mournfully told me, the very efforts of the Ministry seem to arouse a kind of answering induration in the minds of the people. This induration is known as Object-Resistance, and the Ministry were considering a new indetectable gas which was believed to be able to daze the Heavisider and so nullify the induration.

I will not particularise the work of other Departments. I gathered that a very successful campaign had just been launched by the Department of Inferiority Complex – which had resulted in making every Heavisider who had not at least two Objects of Locomotion feel despised, and offensive to his neighbours. Several Heavisiders possessing only one Object of Locomotion had killed themselves, thereby proving, said the Minister, that Object-Resistance *could* be broken down by the correct methods. He also mentioned that the Department of Caress-Want had just disbursed a large number of money-units to a famous artist for an image of a very appealing Heavisider, which would appear to frown on passers-by with an expression of disgust and say: 'Unguentless Heavisiders are uncaress-worthy.'

(SEX AND REPRODUCTION AMONG THE HEAVISIDERS)

'I must therefore explain in detail the Heaviside version of these matters. It is, as is natural, a refined and spiritualised business, proving yet again the superior development of the Heaviside race over that of deep-air life.'

'You can hardly expect us to admit that,' remarked Greenage. 'But please go on. Have you really different sexes? Does the term male and female which is applied to different Heavisders mean anything?'

'In a sense yes. That is to say, every Heavisider has two parents. Our scientists long ago came to the conclusion that it was theoretically impossible for life to evolve and progress without biparental reproduction. Each parent brings different hereditary factors into the common melting pot, and thus variety is ensured. Without variety, offering a choice between better and worse, evolution is impossible, and there would be no progress.'

'This is all elementary biology,' snapped Greenage impatiently.

'Quite. But whereas in your imperfect civilisation the sexes are different both in physical structure and mental make-up, there is no physical difference in our race. The difference is a mental one – not that either sex is inferior in mental powers, but they are of totally different kind. One sex (which we call female) is concerned with the art of government, economics, and with material avocations such as building, interior decoration, machinery and with applied art. The other sex, which is the equivalent of your male, is interested in abstractions such as metaphysics, fundamental science, aesthetics, romantic history, dancing, coloured geography, ethics, religion, philosophy, imaginary mathematics, and politics. This mental difference can indeed be expressed in physical terms. For instance the female sex (as I am calling it) does all its thinking on the wave band 7 to 12 cm and the male on the wave band 11 to 16 cm. But of course this physical interpretation does not explain the mental differences between the two sexes, it is a result of it. Do I make myself clear?'

'I'm damned if I understand a word,' I said fretfully to Greenage. 'How can they be different sexes if –'

'Shut up, Silversmith,' he answered. 'This is enormously interesting. Please go on.'

'There is an incessant mutual attraction and antagonism between the sexes. In one sense their two mental fields are counterparts of each other. In another sense of course they are opposed. Thus it is that the relations of our sexes alternate between love and hate.

'The time arrives when this attraction becomes violent between two individuals, and loses its elements of hate. This feeling is generally experienced when the persons concerned have been alive a long time, perhaps more than a century, and have passed the limit of their mental development. Once that limit is reached a Heavisider might just as well marry. But he clings reluctantly to life, although the life force has changed from a friend to an enemy. It no more wants his development. It wants to shed him. One day it catches him unawares. He struggles, as I have struggled, gentlemen, but to this struggle Nature permits only one end. Day after day his mind is filled with only one thought – annihilation with his beloved one – marriage and death. Passionately desired, the image floats suddenly before his eyes. His being incessantly aches with helpless want.'

Robertson raised a tentacle deprecatingly to silence the questions rising to our lips. 'Let me finish the explanation. Then question me.'

'Such passions are always reciprocal, and the time approaches when they must be consummated. Both individuals give a farewell nuptial party to their friends, settle their business affairs, and set out, crowned with blossoms, for one of the Town Halls of Births, Marriages and Deaths. After a short ceremony by the Registrar, in which the ancient traditions of our people are alluded to, and each of the two is saluted, in the name of the grateful Race, by the most august epithets in our language, the final act takes place. Under the influence of passion the wave bands of both individuals approximate, one lengthening, the other shortening. In a veritable tempest of radiation, hidden in the dark and sacred cellars of the Town Hall, both individuals become one – thoughtless, motionless, and without sentience. The moment of union is believed to condense the acute pleasures and sublimest intelligential operations of the Heaviside existence. This is an article of faith, not of experience. The resulting mass, greyish and amorphous, ceases to radiate and appears dead. The individuals are indeed dead. They will never be known again on earth or in universal space. But after a year of quiescence,

activity is discerned in the dark mass, which then becomes shot through with veins of bright radiation. The priestly attendants of the Town Halls, who have been waiting for this moment, hurry forward. Amid the protracted and ancient ceremonial of the Greeting of Birth the inanimate mass splits into several parts, which, with the passage of months of careful tendance, become each a new individual, partaking of the heredities of both parents, but representing a novel combination and showing forth new mutations. In brief, these are new members of our race. They have separate characters, fresh personalities and memories wiped clean of all but a few racial habits. They must now be educated to all the obligations and bright promise of the Heaviside people. In this way the substance of our race is continuously refreshed and renewed and it is possible for us to progress to ever-steepening heights of knowledge and power.'

from

THE ROCK

FRIENDS

Annie Jones, on her first afternoon off went for a walk in Kensington Gardens. Her employer, Mrs. Wells, had carefully explained to her how to get there, and that she would find it very pleasant. Mrs. Wells was young and clever, with clear eyes and a ringing voice. Her husband was also clever, but his intelligence was less noticeable, being all absorbed by his work on a literary review, which he half-wrote as well as editing it; so that he took things as they came, whereas his wife looked at everything sharply before taking it.

The Wells lived in a flat furnished with black glass tables and chromium-plated chairs, except in Mr. Wells' study; where there was a large leather arm-chair, in which he used to sit surrounded by proofs, his hair ruffled, working very rapidly with flurried nervous gestures. From time to time he would put his head round the sitting-room door and ask his wife, 'Angel, check up the date of Dryden's birth for me, will you?' or something of that kind, and Mrs. Wells, slowly but with complete assurance, would look up the reference, write down the correct answer on a slip of paper in a neat hand, and pass it in to her husband, who would fumble over his proofs to find out what he wanted the information for.

Owing to the difficulty of getting servants in London, Mrs. Wells had advertised in a Welsh paper for one, and had received an answer from 'Annie Jones, (aged 18)' among others, a letter that seemed to her to show a little more intelligence and character than the rest, so that she sent Annie Jones the fare and then engaged her.

Annie Jones arrived; a short black-browed girl who grinned nervously whatever was said to her, and always said, 'Yes, I

understand, m'm,' whether she understood or not. Among other annoying tricks of hers, may be mentioned those of holding unwrapped meat or butter in her bare hands on the slightest provocation; always getting telephone messages wrong; refusing to open her bedroom window; never being able to announce visitors correctly; and breathing noisily while she was serving at table. Mrs. Wells, however, was not irritated by these failings, which were just what she had expected from a raw Welsh girl, and she began methodically to eradicate them, not by merely rebuking her, but by trying to get down to the psychological motives which inspired them. Once she tried to discuss Annie's mental make-up with her husband, but as he was then writing an article which necessitated his reading several books on psychology, it was the last thing he wanted to hear about in real life.

It had always seemed obvious to Mrs. Wells that maids must have difficulty in finding anything to do on their afternoons off, without spending money, so she had made a list of possible diversions for Annie. She did not intend to tell her about them, all at once; that, she knew, would only confuse her, but she would suggest a fresh occupation each week. Thus, this first day, she had suggested that Annie went into Kensington Gardens, 'a fine park with some nice things in it, Annie. You ought to look at the yachts on the Round Pond, and the Palace, and the statues. Remember it closes at dusk. Don't sit on the little green seats or you will have to pay, but the long benches are free.'

Annie resolved not to sit down under any circumstances, and to keep away from the Palace, in case she got into trouble. She walked round the Gardens for some time, and liked them very much, for they were not at all countrified, but smart and tidy, and there was a lovely band. The quantities of well-dressed children followed by clean nurses awed her, and she was also surprised when suddenly she came upon the Serpentine. She wondered whether it was the sea, for there were a number of boats on it; but did not like to ask anyone in case she was being foolish. It certainly did not seem so wide as many of the rivers she had crossed on the way to London; on the other hand, people were standing beside it feeding gulls.

Presently she came upon a statue of a small boy, and in front of it were two old ladies, seated on camp stools, sketching. One was drawing with rapid strokes in charcoal, and was nearly finished; the other, working very carefully in pencil, was still in

the stage of holding up a pencil in front of her eye and marking off heights. Annie Jones was far more interested in their sketching than in the statue, and she stood behind them, looking silently over their shoulders for two or three minutes.

'We have an audience,' said the first old lady, in a rough almost masculine voice. She did not, however, look round at Annie, but went on with her sketching.

'I can't work when I'm being overlooked,' exclaimed the other plaintively. Annie was about to walk away when the rough-voiced lady asked her, still without looking round. 'Well, what do you think of it?' at the same time leaning back and looking through half-closed eyes at her sketch, which was very bad.

Annie, however, thought it was remarkable, and even more remarkable, that the two old ladies should be sitting down there, both together, sketching away like mad. She stammered some answer:

'O-o, I think it's wonderful!'

The old lady now turned round on her stool to look at her.

'H'm. Do you believe in Peter Pan?' she asked.

'No,' said Annie, who did not know who Peter Pan was, but had been brought up as a good Methodist.

'Sensible child!' said the old lady approvingly.

Annie could now see that she had a large face. Deep lines ran from the nose past the ends of the mouth and on down each side of the chin, making the face look rather like that of a bulldog. There was a large mole on the left side of the chin, covered with grey hairs. The lady was stout, and dressed in an old and faded black coat. Up to this time her companion had not paid attention to Annie, but had continued carefully estimating the proportions of the statue, with her pencil. She now turned her head, and stared at her companion, and at last looked at Annie, but instantly turned away again. Annie got a glimpse of a kind face with a soft trembling mouth and watery blue eyes.

The old lady with the rough voice continued to talk to Annie, asking her if she could sketch. Annie said 'no' and the old lady talked to her very simply and positively about sketching, as if explaining to a child. She did not wait for Annie to answer. While the old lady talked she folded up her camp stool, and when that was finished, she said to her companion:

'Now then, May, you'll never finish at that rate! Come on with me to the "Physical Energy" statue.'

The other old lady sighed:

'Oh, dear, Connie, I should so like to finish this! I do believe it is coming out for once!' but none the less she at once started to fold up her own stool, darting another timid glance at Annie.

'Have you seen the statue we're going to?' asked 'Connie' briskly. 'A man on a horse?'

'No, m'm. Please where is it?'

'Come with me, and I'll show you. Here, you can take our stools if you like.' Annie gladly accepted them, and so the three went round to the 'Physical Energy' statue, where once again Connie's dashing tactics produced an impressive but inaccurate likeness, while May painfully constructed a scaffolding of much-erased pencil lines. Connie flung occasional questions over her shoulder to Annie, and soon found out that she was in service, and Welsh, and only just come to London. Eventually Annie asked timidly whether they would be in the Gardens next Thursday? and it turned out they would, and Connie even told her where they would be. May would be completing her drawing of 'Physical Energy' while Connie 'took it at another angle'.

Annie went away feeling she had been for a moment in communication with beings from another sphere; the assurance of Connie's manner and the dexterity of their hands had impressed her; but above all she had been amazed by the easy simple way in which they had spoken to her, just as if she might have been anyone, whereas when ladies had spoken to her kindly before, it had been obviously put on, and had made both people uncomfortable.

The next afternoon off, Mrs. Wells told Annie about the South Kensington Museums, and particularly the Science Museum, with machines which worked if you pressed a button. Annie, however, said that she was going to Kensington Gardens again.

This time Annie, after a good deal of consideration, offered them each one of the three buns she had brought in a bag to eat for tea. She was delighted when they accepted. Connie – or Miss Constance as Annie now called her – ate her bun as Annie herself did, taking bites out of it while she held it in one hand (the stick of charcoal was in the other). Miss Mary, however, made a little home for her bun on her lap, beneath a piece of paper, and dreamily abstracted small bits, popping them quietly in her mouth, and consuming them without moving her jaws. 'Quite extraordinarily nice, my dear!' she said

when she had finished hers.

Annie had only brought three buns, having originally intended to eat them all herself. Next time she resolved to buy enough for all three of them. She wanted three buns for herself, but would ladies like Miss Constance and Miss Mary want as many? Finally Annie bought nine, reflecting that she could always eat later any that were left over. Miss Constance took three buns without hesitation, but Miss May had to be persuaded by her cousin before she would take a third.

After this, Annie always brought [three] buns each; and one day Miss Constance said majestically:

'And now, my dear, we have a gift for you. Open it, May!' May carefully undid a brown paper parcel, and inside it was a sketchbook, from which most of the pages had been torn out, evidently because they had been previously used; tucked in the book was a sharpened pencil stub.

'There, my dear,' said Miss Constance, 'you said last time that you wished you could draw. Take this book, sit down beside us on your macintosh, and try.'

So now all three of them sketched. Miss Constance had promised to teach Annie how to draw, but actually it was Miss Mary who really showed her how to do it, Miss Constance doing no more than giving an impressive 'H'm' or some mysterious comment, such as 'Shadow! Shadow! Chiaroscuro!' Or (solemnly) 'You have a gift, my child! Only training is needed!'. This last was said while Miss Constance looked, with her head on one side, at the black smudge that was Annie's desperate attempt at rendering a tree. However, she was more grateful to Miss Constance than her cousin, for the mysterious remarks gave a secret excitement to what would otherwise have been unpleasantly like school lessons.

When she produced the buns one cold afteroon, Miss Constance said:

'Let us go back to our apartments, my dear, and have a party.'

'Oh, Connie, do you think –' began Miss Mary.

'Yes, yes, of course!' said Miss Constance briskly, and together they set off for the apartments. These it seemed were in a dejected house in Bayswater, and consisted of one queerly-shaped attic, with bare flooring which had evidently been stained by an amateur. The two small beds were curtained off from the rest of the room, in which was an armchair – with the stuffing

coming out of it – and a settee made of old sugar boxes draped with casement cloth. As Miss Constance pointed out, this was more useful than an ordinary settee, as clothes could be kept in the open ends of the sugar boxes. As Annie went up the steps from the street, she had seen a notice pinned on the door. 'The Misses Newton; Drawing Lessons; (Top Floor)' and the use of the term 'The Misses' for some reason gave her the vague impression that the cousins were ladies of title. Many of the Misses Newton's productions were pinned to the wall – for the most part dashing views in charcoal by Miss Constance. But Miss Mary shyly took Annie aside to show her a pen and ink sketch she had done herself; the subject was Paradise.

'It took me three years,' she said, and this was quite credible, for the garden of Paradise contained millions of flowers and even blades of grass which had been drawn in with the accuracy of a botanical text-book, while the heavenly host were complete down to the last pin feather. This was not the only thing in the room that impressed Annie; it contained a number of objects which, as she got to know them, (for she took tea there often afterwards) impressed her with the distinction, the uniqueness of the Misses Newton. There was, for instance, a battered lay figure with one arm missing which, until its use was explained to her, she took to be a mechanical toy. There was a stuffed and varnished eagle hanging from the ceiling on a chain. Most of the breast was missing for, as Miss Constance said, 'The white ants got at it before Uncle Jack left India.' There was a painted Japanese fan on the fireplace and a shawl hanging over the head of Miss Mary's bed which, as she said with a simper, had been given her by an admirer, 'many years ago, my dear, and look, it is made of such fine silk it will pass through a ring.' More memorable than these, however, was the marvellous collection of small boxes, on a row of shelving, some covered with beads, others with shells. One was brightly gilt, and there was a nest of lacquer boxes. Their oddness gave a special value to their contents, so that to Annie, tea, or sugar, or buttons taken from them seemed objects out of the ordinary. When Annie thought of the Misses Newton, there always came into her mind these curious boxes full of flour, tea, sugar and pins.

Miss Constance sat down in the armchair while Miss Mary got out three plates, all of different patterns, and three cups without saucers; and a tin of condensed milk, which had already been

opened, but a wad of paper had been stuffed in the hole. Miss Mary also put on a shell-covered box containing tea, and a bead box containing sugar. Then she went downstairs to fill the kettle. When she came back and tried to light the gas ring, there was nothing but a repeated popping.

'Oh, dear, it must want some more money,' said Miss Mary plaintively.

'Put it in then, May,' said Miss Constance.

Miss May looked at her in surprise, and then fumbled foolishly in her purse.

'I haven't got any money,' she said.

'Haven't you any *change*, May? Well, we can't put notes in, that's certain. I will see what I have. I am afraid it is all silver, however.'

Fortunately Annie had some coppers, and these were put in.

'It seems unfair that you should do this,' said Miss Constance with a little laugh, 'but perhaps, as we are providing the tea, it will even itself out.'

It was not much warmer in the attic than it had been outside in the gardens; but they all kept their coats on, and the hot tea soon warmed them up. Presently Miss Constance showed Annie several albums of her sketches, and so the afternoon passed very pleasantly.

They spent many afternoons like this when it was too cold to sketch in the Gardens; and the more Annie knew the Misses Newton, the fonder of them she became. Miss Mary, certainly, she could never altogether understand; she seemed frightened of Annie, and could never bear to see her handling anything – one of the boxes, say, or the fan – without making little plaintive noises.

'Be careful, Annie!' or 'That has a great sentimental value!' and eventually taking it away from her. There was no such nonsense about Miss Constance; her mouth was not perpetually filled with the 'if you pleases', or 'I really thinks', of Miss Mary. It was 'Wash up those cups, will you, Annie?' or 'Can you darn this, I hate needlework?' and so on, just as if Annie were an intimate friend, as indeed she soon was.

Annie now always came provided with coppers in case the gas meter failed, as it generally did, and then her foresight was always the subject of admiring approval on the part of Miss Constance. Once, however, Miss Constance was very indignant

when she found Annie had not been keeping a record of the coppers she had been putting in:

'That's very thoughtless of you, my child. How on earth shall we be able to pay you back?' but Annie was relieved to find she did not mention this again.

Shortly after this, Annie learned that Miss Constance would have been a Royal Academician if the low ideas entertained in her parents' time of women's powers had not made her father refuse to send her to an art school. The more Annie thought this over, the more of a tragedy it seemed.

Annie was not a fool, and she soon began to see another tragedy in the cousins' lives. She caught the drift of it first from hints and whispers between them which, perhaps, they thought her too dense to understand. The Misses Newton were desperately poor, and only their pupils enabled them to live at all. The getting of these pupils was a precarious matter, depending on answers to advertisements pinned on a board outside stationers' shops. The losing of them was easier.

One Thursday afternoon, when they were discussing the marriage of one of the Royal Princes, Miss Mary, for no apparent reason, began to cry. She sat there, her hands folded in her lap, tears trickling down her cheeks, trying to suppress her sobs.

'Don't make such a fool of yourself, May!' said Miss Constance sharply.

'Is she ill?' asked Annie anxiously.

'No,' answered Miss Constance, 'but one of our wretched pupils has been away on holiday, and that has left us short. We have had to do without food for a little – and the sight of those buns –'

Annie felt the tears start to her own eyes. She had often been hungry, but never quite without the prospect of food. And two such dear old ladies! 'Oh, please,' she said, fumbling in her purse, 'let me help you.'

'No, I'm all right,' gasped Miss Mary, wiping her tears away. 'I'm such a little silly.'

Miss Constance, however, accepted a loan of five shillings, with dignified thanks.

The pupil who was away on holiday never returned, and presently another pupil left, so that Annie had to help them again. They never asked her for money, but she would question them as to what money they had, and their precarious position

and privations worried her more than she would have worried over a danger to her own welfare. The rent of the room in the attic was steadily getting in arrear, and there was a danger that the landlady might lose patience, and that they might be ejected, eagle, fan, shawl, boxes and all. In spite of the worry, Annie was glad to be able to help them; for now she could do her sketches with a clear conscience, sitting beside them in Kensington Gardens, 'almost like a family party,' she thought. Miss Constance became less imperious in her tone; more like that of a poor relative. Miss Mary never lost an opportunity to compliment Annie fulsomely, in a plaintive whine; and Annie hated this, but then she had never really liked Miss Mary. Annie began to take on a maternal, almost 'bossy' attitude to the pair.

Miss Constance herself made a careful note of all the money Annie lent her.

'Directly we get some pupils, we shall pay you back with interest.'

'I don't want any interest.'

'That at least I must insist on, my dear.'

Annie was paid ten shillings a week by the Wells. Five shillings of this was sent to Wales, for Father was on the dole, and there were several children not yet old enough to work. The remaining five shillings were not enough to support the Misses Newton in their present crisis and Annie went through agonies wondering how she could get more money. She thought of borrowing it from her employer, but she knew at once (remembering Mrs. Wells' cold laughter and clear ringing voice) that she would not lend it for such a purpose, not at least without visiting the old ladies and humiliating them. Mr. Wells, however, had an absent-minded habit of leaving the contents of his wallet, or of his trouser pockets, on the bedroom table; and now, whenever he did this, she took one or two half-crowns, or a ten-shilling note.

Quite suddenly Mr. Wells stopped being absent-minded. Annie had noticed, however, in one of the cupboards, several pieces of silver wrapped up and put away as being too large and old-fashioned. From time to time she stole one of these and sold it.

Once Miss Constance asked her: 'Two pounds, Annie! But how on earth can you afford it?' Annie flushed scarlet, and Miss Constance, after a moment's silence, also flushed slightly. Nothing more was said about it.

When Mrs. Wells discovered that Annie had been consistently stealing from them, she consulted her husband as to what she should do. Mr. Wells reluctantly lifted his eyes from the paper (it was at breakfast) and thought.

'We'll have to sack her, I suppose, without a character. It's not worth the trouble of prosecuting her. You can never get anything out of the poor devils. I believe we have the right to search her trunk; or else we haven't, I forget which; but I'll try to remember to ask Glendenning to-day; he's a barrister.'

'But why does she steal?' said Mrs. Wells frowning. 'She doesn't buy clothes, or sweets with the money!'

'Good Lord, I don't know. All Welsh maids steal, I believe. Anyway if you're really sure that she steals, get rid of her at once. We can have old Mrs. Petworth in by the hour, until you get another maid. Try an Irish one this time.'

Mrs. Wells, however, was not content with this easy solution. If Annie's failure were due to a craving for clothes or sweets, it might be curable. Again (as Mrs. Wells knew from her psychology) it might be only a manifestation of the ego, taking a subtle revenge against its superiors. There were many possible reasons, indeed, and not only would Mrs. Wells never dream of resorting to the cruelties of the police court, but there was even a possibility that, by finding the cause, she might be able to cure Annie.

That afternoon she interrogated the girl. Sullen, resentful, Annie at last admitted the theft, but refused to say what she had done with it. Reluctantly, Mrs. Wells gave up persuasion and tried moral pressure.

'Then I shall be forced to prosecute. You know what that means?'

'Yes, m'm.'

'But do you? You know that the police will come, and take you away to the judge, and you'll be put in the dock and have to answer the questions I'm asking now? So it will come to the same in the end, except that you'll go to prison, whereas if you tell me now, I promise you I will not prosecute.'

After a little more of this, Annie told her. Mrs. Wells was amazed when she heard this story.

'Good heavens, where do these women live?' Annie told her the address. 'I shall go round and see them myself at once,' said Mrs. Wells.

'No, m'm, I don't wisn that at all.'

'But it's not a case of what you wish.'

'I shouldn't have told you if I'd known you would go and see them.'

'I can't go into that with you, Annie,' And so Mrs. Wells put on her hat and went to Bayswater.

When the landlady shouted up the stairs:

'Mrs. Wells to see you,' Miss Mary gave a little cry and immediately began to tremble so violently that her cousin was unable to do anything with her. Finally Miss Constance pushed her outside the door.

'Keep out of the room till she's gone!'

'But where shall I go, Connie?'

'Anywhere, May. Go and sit in the lavatory till you hear her go downstairs.'

Still trembling, Miss Mary scampered downstairs; and Miss Constance showed Mrs. Wells up to her room.

Mrs. Wells looked round. The room was almost incredibly squalid, but still more incredible was the smell, a thick soupy mixture due to the fact that, in order to keep the room warm without the expense of a fire, the windows were never opened except on hot summer days.

'Won't you sit down, Mrs. Wells?' said Miss Constance, indicating the broken armchair.

'No, thank you,' answered Mrs. Wells, looking at the armchair with distaste. 'I will tell you why I came. I find that my servant, Annie Jones, has been giving you considerable sums of money.'

'That is hardly correct,' said Miss Constance, whose voice, in spite of herself, was shaking. 'She has tided us over our temporary difficulties with a loan, which naturally we shall repay when we receive some money we are expecting shortly. Meanwhile my cousin and I have been giving Annie lessons without charge.'

'Lessons? In what?' asked Mrs. Wells curiously.

'Sketching.'

Mrs. Wells smiled. 'Sketching! Good Heavens!'
Then she shook her head impatiently. 'Anyway, whether you call it a loan or not, is beside the point. The money Annie lent you was stolen from us.'

Miss Constance's lips began to tremble. 'Stolen? Annie a thief! Impossible!'

'It is possible, unfortunately. Annie has confessed everything to me.'

'Oh, the wicked girl! How could she! Neither my cousin or I ever guessed she was like that. But there, I suppose we ought to, she was so free with her money. But how is one to guess these things, Mrs. Wells? In case you are prosecuting her, I must make it clear that neither my cousin nor I had an idea, not the faintest idea, of the source of the money! We have positive proof of that, you may be sure. No one will be more horrified than my cousin when I tell her . . .'

Mrs. Wells waited, without moving, while Miss Constance's explanations and reproaches died away. The sight of Mrs. Wells – young, smartly-dressed and self-assured, made Miss Constance feel weak and tired. She was unable to think, and she kept on repeating – 'The wicked girl . . .' At last her mind became a complete blank, and she could think of nothing to say.

'I won't go into all that,' said Mrs. Wells coldly. 'I certainly shan't prosecute her. In the circumstances it doesn't seem to have been her fault.'

Miss Constance wanted to deny this indignantly, but suddenly realised that if she spoke at all now, she would burst into tears, a thing she had not done for many years; so she kept silent. 'The only reason I came here,' went on Mrs. Wells, 'was to get your unconditional promise that you will not, in any circumstances, see Annie again.'

'Of course after this we shall have nothing more to do with her.' The tears stood in Miss Constance's eyes, and Mrs. Wells felt morally and physically disgusted. 'We shall repay the loan directly to you –'

'I would rather you did nothing of the sort. The damage is done.' And without saying good-bye, Mrs. Wells went downstairs. Presently Miss Mary scampered into the room like a mouse. Miss Constance, her large face puckered, was sobbing.

'Connie,' whispered her cousin appalled. 'What happened? What *did* she say to you?'

'Don't be such a little fool,' said Miss Constance savagely in the middle of a sob. 'Really, I wonder sometimes how I put up with you. I will tell you all about it later.' The tears stopped. Miss Constance's momentary weakness was over.

'I saw one of the vampires,' said Mrs. Wells to her husband later.

'A perfectly ghastly creature, thinking of nothing but that she might figure in a police court case. Not a thought for Annie! Really she made me quite sick!'

'I don't know why you took so much trouble, darling,' said Mr. Wells vaguely. Gathering up a parcel of proofs and three books sent him for review, he went into his study.

Mrs. Wells called Annie in and, looking calmly at her with her clear blue eyes, gave her a little lecture on the art of making friends. Annie sat humped in a chair, her face sullen, her eyes downcast.

'And they have promised me never to see you again,' concluded her mistress.

'You shouldn't have asked them to promise that, Mrs. Wells,' mumbled Annie.

'They were only too ready to promise that without my asking. Do understand, Annie, once and for all, that they were only taking advantage of you. The woman I saw was not at all grateful, she said you were a wicked girl. She asked if I was going to prosecute you. That was all she was afraid of, and she kept on saying that she had never dreamed what kind of girl you were. No, Annie, I know you did not realise what you were doing. It is very wrong to steal in any case, but you meant well; and I shall keep you on in my service if you promise never to do such a thing again, but always to ask me if you are in real need of money. Will you promise?'

There was much Annie wanted to say, but it was impossible to say it with Mrs. Wells sitting there, so sure of herself, with candid blue eyes, speaking clearly and distinctly, fresh from her triumph over the Misses Newton.

'I promise,' gasped Annie, through her tears.

Later that day, as she sat alone in her little bedroom, resentment at Mrs. Wells' injustice to the Misses Newton, at the injustice of life, surged up within her. She threw her clothes into her trunk, but carefully packed her album of drawings at the top, so that it would not get crushed. And lying awake in bed, she rehearsed the sentence with which she would give notice. 'If I'm to be treated worse than a slave, please take a week's notice!' as one formula. Another was, 'If I'm not to make my own friends, I would like to go.' The Misses Newton had called her a wicked girl (if Mrs. Wells was telling the truth), and had promised not to see her again; and all this seemed Mrs. Wells' fault, or at least

she had rejoiced in it, coldly and logically, pointing out the consequences. And no doubt she had despised the attic, and the eagle, and the boxes. Annie had a sudden vision of the room and the Misses Newton seen through Mrs. Wells' eyes. At last she fell asleep.

Annie did not give notice next day after all, for by the morning the difficulty of getting another situation had occurred to her. It was her first job, and she was as yet too inexperienced to realise how easy it would be to get another in London, now that she was trained. So she said nothing of leaving.

However, five weeks later Mrs. Wells had to dismiss her for impertinence.

THE MOTHER SUPERIOR

I

Mother Xavier walked with the heaviness of age around the narrow patch of garden at the back of St. Teresa's. Asphalt paths multisected the green lawns, and loose stones slid beneath her thick flat soles. As she let the rosary at her girdle trickle gently through her fingers she felt a gentle peace invading her soul, a freedom from all earthly care.

It was forty years since Mother Xavier had walked in the garden so and felt the same freedom from care. Then she had been a novice, and the freedom from care had been the result of a momentary relaxation of the rigid discipline which proves a novice. 'Now into the garden with you and think – of what you will!' the Novice Mistress had said with a smile. And the young novice with the sullen anxious face had obeyed her. It had been for half an hour no longer necesary to curb the wayward thoughts by meditations on this Glorious Mystery or that Sorrowful one. The thoughts flitted like capricious birds about the garden, this same garden, so many years ago.

Between that time, as a novice, and this, as Mother General, what a gulf of activity stretched. 'Twenty new houses founded, six schools, a hundred novices. Surely, my daughter, you have laboured well!' So the Cardinal Secretary of the Propagation had told her in Rome, raising her from her knee.

'Not my labour, but His help,' she had said briskly.

Since that year at Rome, when she was sixty (now she was seventy), she had aged much; and was she not entitled, she asked herself, to rest a little, to look back on her incessant efforts, and take a pride in them? Certainly, as she had said, all would have

been vain without His help; but her labour had called forth His help, and was not this pleasant contemplation of them a reward they had earned?

If not, then the whole conception of an active religious life was rooted in nullity. Yet how many of the great Orders (all, she felt in her heart) had been active! And then her mind turned from these great Orders to the Poor Clares, so strictly enclosed, and those of the Blessed Sacrament, habited in coloured silks, so as to be worthy of the Presence of That they perpetually adored; and she shook her head with a little smile. That was an easy life. If she had belonged to an enclosed Order . . . And it seemed to her, as she walked in the garden, that in such an event, this peace which now filled her heart would have perpetually brimmed it over. 'Instead of which, my life has been full of worries and cares.' And she thought of her useless struggle with a mountain of debt, her daily interviews with solicitors, parents, teachers, architects, publishers, travellers, and education authorities. She thought of her entanglement with the jealousies inside the Community, in whose existence she resolutely refused to believe, but which she had outflanked none the less, and with great astuteness. She thought of how she, with her superficial education, had battled with syllabuses and curriculums. How often her first thought in the morning had been of the dwindling bank balance; but turning over she had commanded herself to resign all provision for the future to the Providence of God, and then, after a few minutes with closed eyes, had chided herself for her Quietism, and returned to her worries.

Even in an active Order, she might have thought less of these labours, and more of her own soul. But if she had done so, then she would not have achieved the works on which the Cardinal-Secretary had congratulated her. She thought of the parable of Martha and Mary; but she had always found it impossible to believe that God could be so unfair as to condemn her for having worked for His greater glory, to the neglect of her own soul, the neglect of all the matters which her Novice Mistress had taught her, which the Novice Mistress, even now, was teaching to new generations. 'I would have preferred,' thought the Mother Superior, 'to have concentrated on attaining peace. It would have been better to have spent my time rooting out all the small sins and prides that make my soul crotchety; but there was the work to my hands; only I could do it; and I have done it. Therefore I

have in a sense sacrificed my soul to the good of others.' Mother Xavier, turning aside to sit on a battered wooden bench, tried to decide whether this was a virtue or a vice, or perhaps a heresy. 'A heresy,' she decided, and smiled, for if there was one thing she had ever, in the slightest way, criticised in the God-given organisation of the Church, it was the tendency priests had to accuse her common-sense convictions of a touch of heresy. She had decided that it was because they were, after all, only human, that is to say men, and with men's pride in formal knowledge. Had not Catherine of Sienna, even Teresa herself, been sometimes suspected of heresy? And then, having laughed at the weakness of her dear priests, Mother Xavier laughed at herself for comparing her earthy thoughts with those of mystics, 'which, to tell the truth, I never understand.'

And if she met a mystic, would she be tolerant? Mother Xavier thought of the supernaturally pious Sister Immelda, and tightened her lips. She pictured with a grin what Sister Immelda's confession must be like in its protracted scrupulosity as opposed to her own brisk and practical use of the Sacrament. Mother Xavier wondered curiously whether her own confessor had sometimes been a little shocked by the complete absence of spiritual improvement in her life, her perseverance, worse, her increase in the sins of jealousy, distraction, anger, hatred, lying, and uncharitableness. 'More love, my daughter. Love your God; Love your neighbour.' How often had her confessor said that, as if he esteemed the lack of love in her nature to be the root of all her sins. Certainly her life was chiefly motivated by what she liked to call conscientiousness, a virtue (if it was a virtue) by which she set much store. Perhaps that was because, as Monsignore d'Orbeliani had once said laughing, 'You are so English, Reverend Mother, we all stand in awe of you.' However, the Monsignore's feeling was not so much awe, as she guessed, but respect tinged with amusement.

How did one love, that is to say love largely, so that it inspired one's life, not as one loved personally say a kitten, or one of the tiny Reds with their huge dangling crosses and staring eyes, or as one loved the sight (returning from a visit to a daughter house) of the huge brick fabric of St. Teresa's, or as one loved the gentle sanctity of blind Father Ignatius, standing in his pulpit, his chin held a little high, like a spaniel looking at his master, while burning eloquence poured from those thin emaciated lips?

And of course Father Ignatius was starving himself to death. 'That nonsense,' as she thought of it privately, nonsense which she revered, and yet which filled her with a quick impatience. And then she remembered her malicious command to Sister Immelda, who had taken to leaving most of her food untouched, to 'finish it up,' ordering her on her Holy Obedience. She saw again the tears in Sister Immelda's doglike eyes as she silently finished the plateful. 'We all have work to do, and so we must keep her strength up,' she had added sharply, less in justification to herself than to the Community, some of whom had been a little aghast at her action, hoping, as she knew they did, that Sister Immelda might be in the interesting condition of turning out a saint. 'We want no saints here,' she had added blasphemously, carried away by her annoyance, and instantly there had come into her mind St. Vincent de Paul, a saint for whose practical genius she had cherished a life-long reverence; the memory had punished her even more than had the confession of this arbitrary act to her confessor.

'No, I have no love!' thought Mother Xavier, getting up and resuming her walk.

It seemed to her probable that Father Ignatius had the secret of that love. She was quite sure her confessor, Father Dominic, had not; his rebuke, true enough no doubt, had come too automatically to his lips. He was right perhaps, but he did not know he was right. He was a stupid man. More and more Mother Xavier had grown into the habit, bad she knew, of classifying her entourage into people who were stupid, and those who were not. How stupid, for instance, Sister Immelda was! But might not a saint be stupid? Mother Xavier knew it was possible, for cleverness was not a virtue, but she continued to cherish her private classification, and mortified herself for it by submitting humbly to Father Dominic's stupid exhortations.

Sister Cecilia had been waiting at the top of the garden to speak to Mother Xavier, for ten minutes now. Mother Xavier had seen her, but had deliberately pretended not to, pretended to be deep-sunk in meditation, or saying her Rosary, when in fact she was day-dreaming. She had noticed in herself of late a wholly new tendency to reverie, to sink back on herself and let work slide. She reminded herself of the pile of correspondence waiting on her desk, and here she was, wandering round the garden like a postulant, with Sister Cecillia waiting timidly to speak to her.

Mother Xavier sighed. Sister Cecilia came up to her, and bobbed.

II

Mother Xavier sat at her desk, and her pen halted for a moment. The twinges in her knees started again. For a moment everything became spangled with bright colours, and groaning, she pressed her hands to her eyes. 'Why, O Lord, why?' she asked, not with resignation, but with resentment; and she rocked gently from side to side in her chair, her heart filled with bitterness.

Presently she started again on the letter she was writing, destined for the Reverend Mother of their newest daughter house. But now the highly important matter of the new chapel's colour scheme no longer seemed important, and she crushed up the letter and threw it into the waste paper basket. The pain had left her, but she sat for a long time staring at her desk, her mind filled with nothing. Everything seemed equally distasteful, and all the mistakes she had made in her long life rose up in front of her.

'Ach!' she exclaimed, a guttural exclamation learned from her three years' sojourn as an English class-mistress in their Munich House, and she began restlessly to perambulate the room. She stopped for a moment before the crucifix, and bowed her head rebelliously; then resumed her shuffling.

During the last few days she had been worried, in a way she had never been worried before, by the endless necessity for decision. Important matters, highly important matters, had been held up by her moods. The Ministry of Education itself had had to send her an augustly-worded reprimand for her non-compliance with its request for some information, and if there was one thing Mother Xavier feared far worse than the Powers of Evil, it was the Ministry of Education.

Yet the letter still remained unanswered on her desk. And she occupied herself, when she did work, only with the frivolous unessentials, with chapel colour schemes, or whether a second gardener should be taken on. And even with such matters, she was uncertain.

'I am becoming stupid,' Mother Xavier told herself. She rang the bell and sent the lay-sister for Mother Ermyntrude, the infirmarian. With her Mother Xavier discussed the new infirmary

and, forgetting that she had intended to limit severely Mother Ermyntrude's expenditure, knowing her incurable lavishness, she had carelessly agreed to everything Mother Ermyntrude asked for.

'Never mind!' she said, just as stupid people do, and for the first time it entered Mother Xavier's head that ten, or perhaps twenty years from now, her mistakes would not matter to her. Someone else would be bearing the responsibility. 'And I, I hope, shall be in Purgatory or Paradise,' but even as she said this, she realised that she did not imagine herself as in either of these places, but as sleeping gently in a quiet place, relieved of all care and trouble. 'Requiescat in pace'. Try as she might, she could not picture herself otherwise; and she remembered the warnings of her confessor, his stories of pious nuns who, sinking into a mechanical observance of pieties, had lost their faith, a tragedy far worse in them than in the laity; but by prayer and fasting they had been able to restore the spring of comfort. 'Stupid nonsense!' she exclaimed, the thought of fasting irresistibly calling up Sister Immelda's doglike eyes. Her mind fastened again on that future time when the Order might flourish, or dwindle, but it would not matter to her.

'But if it doesn't matter then, did it ever really matter?'

Thoughts of this kind had never visited her before, doubtless because she had always been busy; and it could therefore be only her idleness that bred them. She turned from the window, out of which she had been gazing without seeing anything, and went back to her desk. But in the afternoon, Mother Ermyntrude sent for her, to say that Mother Callista was much worse, and that Extreme Unction was being administered. Mother Xavier hurried to the Infirmary.

Mother Callista was the oldest nun in the Order, and for the last six months she had been slowly dying of cancer. Her little face peered out from the woollen helmet that covered her shaven head like the face of a withered monkey, except that it was chalk-white. The black eyes looked straight ahead at the bed foot, and the thin hands curled and uncurled continually like tethered spiders, or were flung suddenly sideways at the ends of their bony arms.

In the chapel most of the Community were praying for her, for her recovery, if the Lord so willed, or if not, for the repose of her soul. But a few nuns knelt by the bed, Mother Xavier among

them, quietly reciting the *de Profundis*. How many old nuns Mother Xavier had seen die, and now she was an old nun herself!

She told herself that Mother Callista was going to Purgatory or Paradise, but almost certainly straight to Paradise at once, for she had been always sweet-tempered and not at all stupid, and during her illness she had shown an angelic patience. But although Mother Xavier knew this, and repeated the confident responses, there was a strange emptiness in her heart. The mere act of dying seemed, for the first time, to be the thing of importance, and while the other nuns' eyes were cast on the ground, those of Mother Xavier were fixed greedily on the staring black eyes of Mother Callista, and she listened to her meaningless babblings, so that Mother Xavier looked as if she were on the verge of discovering a secret that had been artfully hidden from her all her life. But nothing happened except that Mother Callista sank into death; and the Mother Superior went to the chapel, and here prayed for half an hour, or rather tried to pray, because for some reason her sin of distraction had never been more active than at this moment; her mind was filled with scurrying irrelevant thoughts, and she was bored, yes, profoundly bored, that was the truth; she did not mind at all the fact that Mother Callista, whom she had known for so long, had died, and perhaps was even now interceding for the Order at the Mercy Seat. She returned to her study, and sat down at the desk, but the pains in her legs returned, not so violently as before, but badly. 'I ought not to have kneeled,' she told herself irritably.

Suddenly for no particular reason, the memory, long forgotten, returned to her of how she had once dismissed one of the lay mistresses in the High School, without a word of explanation, because she had heard some scandal about her conduct. This scandal later proved to be false. She remembered the timid manner of the mistress; and she had reason to believe that this unjust action had involved the mistress in hardships afterwards. Whether because of her dismissal or from other causes, she had never found another post at a school and eventually became, so the convent Chaplain had told her, a badly paid housekeeper; and Mother Xavier remembered that she had laughed when told this, saying that it was all she was fit for. Mother Xavier pressed her hands against her eyes, and sighed; the pains became worse.

The sin had been confessed and been forgiven. But did that make any difference? Naturally it did in so far as the guilt was

washed from her soul, but the woman who did such a thing, would she not always be the same, and Mother Xavier remembering her treatment of Sister Immelda sighed again.

Yet oddly enough, in a few moments, all thoughts of guilt and remorse had gone. Never to return. Never again did Mother Xavier reproach herself as a sinful woman; neither, on the other hand, did she feel pride in contemplating her labours. Both seemed equally empty, and at night, instead of worrying about the bank balance or the unanswered letter from the Ministry of Education, she slept heavily.

III

A few days later, Mother Xavier went her usual round of inspection of St. Teresa's. Her stout little figure was seen in the kitchen, in the Community Room, in the school, in the laundry, and in the infirmary. And as she went through the huge familiar building, with its mingled smell of central heating and waxed floors, the Mother Superior for the first time saw herself objectively, as an impressive little personage going about her business and receiving homage as she went. Usually her mind was preoccupied on these inspections, she thought of something else as she peered into the huge gleaming copper of the laundry, or said a few words to the class-mistress. But now her mind was concentrated on the task, and she contemplated with mild surprise her achievement, knowing how all of them, even those who disliked her personally, respected it, and could not deny the growth of the Order, or the superiority of St. Teresa's over the small building it had replaced.

There was no pride in her feeling; it was rather a disinterested wonder, as of one who without hope has been climbing a mountain-side and, turning, sees that surprising heights have been reached, out of all proportion to the effort made.

It was the last round of inspection Mother Xavier made. For that afternoon, as she had planned, she called mother Melita to her room, and there warned her that at the next meeting of the Community she would lay down her office, and recommend Mother Melita as her successor.

Mother Melita was an earnest woman, with a relentless grip of inanimate things. Her grasp of details of business, of finance, of

organisation was inflexible; and Mother Xavier had exploited it ever since Mother Melita had become her co-adjutor, with implicit right of succession to the office.

But side by side with Mother Melita's grasp of detail, was her helplessness in dealing with men and women. There was some thinness in her nature that made her inadequate to the task of influencing human beings. Rather than force an unwilling and foolish person to do something for her, she would, however overworked she was, do it for herself. She would not give way to people; it was not a weakness of will, no one could insist more coldly on the letter of the rule than Mother Melita; but she lacked the power of calmly demanding sacrifices from people without offering any rewards, of knowing all that the stupidest people were capable of, if pushed to it. Her weakness came out plainly in dealing with an outsider, for instance a school inspector. Mother Melita was coldly polite and resentful, whereas Mother Xavier showed a childlike frankness.

Mother Xavier knew well this weakness of Mother Melita, though she could not analyse it. If asked, she would have merely said that Mother Melita was 'stupid'. She had known it long before she had worked with Mother Melita, known it from the lack of humanity in the thin, lined face with its large, wet, brown eyes. In past years it had been a depressing thought for her that Mother Melita was so much younger than her, and would therefore succeed her. Mother Xavier saw, in a prophetic vision, Mother Melita falling in with the wishes of most of the Community, and ceasing from that feverish effort to keep the schools up to date, to be always installing swimming baths, having psychology lectures, and teaching languages by the Direct Method. Mother Xavier would turn over in her bed and groan at a vision of the Order losing all its rapidly won reputation for teaching. And it seemed so useless to pray, for she knew that Mother Melita would succeed her if she lived, and it would be wicked to pray that Mother Melita might die, so that Mother Xavier could quickly train up one of the younger nuns to take her place – perhaps Sister Elfrida.

Mother Xavier knew that apart from death, nothing could be done to stop Mother Melita's succession to the office. Mother Melita's very inadequacy in dealing with people made her popular, her retiring personality was naturally preferred to Mother Xavier's exacting vigour. Mother Xavier remembered

how ten, no fifteen, years ago, the Community had almost unanimously wanted Mother Melita to become Mother Superior for a time; and only Mother Melita's tearful humility had prevented it.

'I am getting old,' Mother Xavier now said to Mother Melita. 'I mustn't die in harness. Time you took my place!'

'But you are still so clear-minded and alert, Mother!'

'Not as I used to be. And my pains are a distraction.'

'If only you would see the Doctor, Mother!'

'Nonsense! I am all right. I shall live another twenty years. But you should take my place while I am still able to help you with advice, as Mother Ambrosia helped me during my first five years of office.'

A triumphant look appeared for a moment in the eyes of Mother Melita. Then it vanished. Her face was set again in its lines of grim conscientiousness, as grim as Mother Xavier's own, but so completely without human understanding.

Now, when the moment that Mother Xavier often dreaded had come, she felt no sorrow. The thought of the mistakes that Mother Melita might make no longer perturbed her. Nor was she even visited by those former nightmares; that War would break out again; that religious orders would be expelled from England; that the Government would secularise the schools; that there would be air raids; or a Communist revolution; for who could know what really went on in the world to-day? The wise ones themselves said they did not know. But now none of these things troubled her. Mother Melita had expected to find her predecessor in office always at her elbow, guiding her, even (so far as Holy Obedience permitted) arguing with her; but Mother Xavier seemed to have lost interest in her work; and gazing in front of her, she would answer casually the questions of Mother Melita, her mind plainly far away. There was still something formidable about that round red visage with the huge greying brows, and the full firm lips; yet it had lost its power. Was she tired? Restraining herself in Christian humility? In pain? Mother Melita did not know. Nor indeed did Mother Xavier.

Certainly she was tired now, much more easily than she had been while she was working. The stairs made her pant, and always now, towards the middle of the afternoon, she felt her head and arms become heavy. Her pains became more frequent, rising from the joints of her legs into the small of her back. But

the pain was less acute now, she thought, or else was less noticeable in her present attitude of mind. She had thought, that when she had emptied her mind of business cares, it could be filled with devout thoughts, such thoughts as she had when in Retreat for instance, or as a novice, or when she had walked that day in the garden, and Sister Cecilia had waited to speak to her. But no, her mind seemed filled with nothing at all, she cared about nothing, loved and hated nothing, until quite suddenly, as if from nowhere, the most poignant emotions would overcome her, acuter than anything she remembered experiencing, unless it was when she was still a child.

This had happened for instance at Christmas, at Midnight Mass in the Convent Chapel. She had felt so tired, every bone in her body aching, as she walked into the Chapel; and at first she had felt inclined not to kneel until the Canon of the Mass began, but she had forced herself to kneel, and then she had felt the strange emotion. It mixed with the flickering bright lights of the candles, the blue domed ceiling of the chapel, and the high girlish voices of the choir; and then again it was the masses of glittering greenery about the Child's crib. But no, it was nothing but itself, and Mother Xavier felt this inexpressible sadness, as if everything, chapel and choir, were devoted to endless sorrow, and more and more, so that the tears streamed down her cheeks and she bowed her head to hide them. Again her tears burst forth, after she had returned from the communion rail, so that she left the veil of her hood dropped forward, long after the other nuns, to hide her face and wet cheeks. The emotion left her mind pale and transparent, as she had felt once on recovering from her only serious illness; and she wondered whether it was the beginning of some new life of the soul, as a reward for her labours.

But in a few minutes it had faded, and all next day she felt cross and irritable. The conversation in the Community room disgusted her; the famous Christmas dinner seemed to her quite horrible. Why? She did not know, it seemed horrible that they, all nuns, should eat and laugh and feel cheerful after the long fast of Advent. But why not? She could not say. Suddenly she saw Sister Immelda's face, and from its expression Mother Xavier knew that she was feeling exactly the same as Sister Immelda felt. 'Is it possible?' she thought, and her hands trembled, as they did frequently now from sudden anger or fatigue.

Soon it came to seem to her that this irritation and dislike of

hers for the Community had been noticed, more than that, it was returned. She had always suspected that she was unpopular as a human being, but her qualities of vision and organisation had, she felt sure, gained a certain respect. But even that seemed now to have gone, and almost every day she discovered, in some turn of speech or refusal of it, an instance of a growing dislike, often in the last nuns whom she would have suspected before. They all hated and despised her; and only their fear of her prevented them from showing it more openly.

One day she was sitting in a chair in her room, having felt too ill that morning to go downstairs; when there was a tap at the door and Sister Damian came in. Her eyes were round like a rabbit's as she peered about the room, as if she expected someone to be in hiding there. 'May I have a word with you, Mother?'

'Certainly. Sit down, Sister.'

Sister Damian remained standing on the edge of the carpet, however, and it needed a second reassurance to bring her in.

Mother Xavier had always felt a little doubtful about Sister Damian. She had indeed discussed the matter of her vocation with the Novice Mistress very carefully three years ago. Sister Damian was one of those enthusiastic shrill-voiced girls whom every convent distrusts, pleasant-tempered enough, but with a nervous fickleness of mind that nothing will hold, for they always count desirable whatever they do not have. Yet Sister Damian had seemed to show persistence, which, as is well known, is the most important mark of a vocation; and on this account and perhaps (Mother Xavier admitted to herself) because Sister Damian had a real gift for drawing and painting, they had admitted her. But of late Mother Xavier had noted a certain distraught recklessness and exaggerated humility about Sister Damian that made her thoughtful.

And now it was as she suspected, for Sister Damian, tears gushing down each side of her snub nose, confided in Mother Xavier – of all people – her doubts and fears. Had she really a vocation? Was she doing the best she could here? She was tantalised by visions of happiness to be obtained in the outside world, and she found it difficult to fight the wicked thoughts that came into her head, spites against the other nuns, hatred even, 'and' – Sister Damian wrung her long thin artist's hands – 'and I am terrified that I shall disgrace the Community.'

Mother Xavier reproached herself for feeling no pity, but rather disgust for Sister Damian's longing for the world – she who had once been so tolerant – encouraging even, of streaks of humanity and worldliness among her spiritual children. But she was irritated with Sister Damian and restrained herself with difficulty from some sarcasm. It was impossible to act a false pity, so, folding her gnarled trembling hands in front of her, and looking at the clumsy toes of her broad shoes, Mother Xavier said:

'All of us go through these worrying periods. You must not take them tragically, but regard them as nonsense. Then they will pass. There is no doubt that you have a vocation, child, and therefore you could never be happy outside these walls. But it does not follow that you will always be happy inside them. No human being can achieve that.'

The tears fell faster and faster down Sister Damian's face. 'I'm so miserable at night,' she quavered. And Mother Xavier, who also felt miserable, felt indeed aching and lonely, at night, and often unable to pray, experienced a recurrence of that spasm of irritation she had known at the sight of Sister Immelda's disgusted face at the Christmas dinner. She knew that now, as she had done more than once in the past, she ought to take Sister Damian's hands in hers and, speaking with the tremendous weight of her prestige, remind her of the pride and power of a vocation – not indeed anything about the ineffable privilege of being a Bride of Christ, whose exposition she left to priests and, in its more extravagant developments, secretly thought of as nonsense – but of the joys of entirely selfless work, in which the rewards were all one's own, and one's cares shared by one's fellows, by the broad back of the Church. She ought to tell her of the peace and content she herself had attained, and of the knowledge, sanctifying it seemed every particle of her flesh, that whether she worked or prayed, she was directly helping God and men. But she was not able to say any of these things, though for her they had always been true; but now, almost it seemed with deliberate cruelty (though it was not) she said:

'You must pray for help. Our Lady will help you.'

'Yes, Reverend Mother, I mean, Mother,' answered Sister Damian meekly. Then she wrung her hands again: 'Oh, I feel that the Community suspect me, and don't like me. Sister Immelda . . .'

'That must always happen in a Community,' interrupted Mother Xavier coldly. 'We must do our work to the best of our ability, and obey the Rule, but sometimes we are bound to be misunderstood. I too –' her voice trembled in spite of herself, 'I know I am considered harsh and opinionated . . .' she stopped, biting her lip irritably.

'You, Mother!' exclaimed Sister Damian, 'Why, we all worship you! If only I could ever . . . if you were to go, I . . .' Sister Damian's voice died into silence.

The silence endured.

'I will pray for you,' said Mother Xavier at last. Sister Damian bobbed and departed. Mother Xavier gazed for a time at the fire; then fell asleep. She woke feeling she had forgotten something important, but could not remember what it was. Her mind returned to Sister Damian, and she made a mental note to speak to Mother Melita about her, but later it slipped from her memory.

Soon afterwards her cousin came to call on her. He was a secular priest, ten years younger than herself, and she felt as if he were a brother rather than a cousin, for they had been brought up in the same household. It was twelve years since they had last met; he had been out of England all that time, but he did not seem older. The twelve years were annihilated directly she saw his dark thoughtful face. But either the lapse of time had seemed to him greater, or else he sensed some new quality in her, or had perhaps heard something of her prestige; whatever the reason, he treated her with a tender respect that was new and uncongenial to her. Instead of chaffing her, as he always did in the old days when they met, he sat there stiffly on the edge of the sofa in the second-best parlour, answering 'Yes', or 'No', or putting discreet questions about uninteresting matters.

'Ach!' she exclaimed, 'I am a lazy old woman now, Philip, and do not know what is happening.' His disbelieving sympathetic smile annoyed her.

'I sit and do nothing but eat and sleep,' she asserted. 'It is disgraceful. The Mother Superior will be killed with overwork, while I go on for ever.'

'I hope so.'

'I mean,' he corrected himself, 'that you will live long. In your last letter you said you had not been well.'

'Just pains and aches!' she grumbled. 'Mother Ermyntrude

worries me to see the doctor, but drugs won't make old bones young. Anyway, I've more flesh on them than you have, Philip. What have you been doing, eh? Fasting too much, or any of that nonsense?'

'No,' he smiled at her remark, a smile that reminded her for the first time of the youngster of former days. 'It's the heat. In India you either get very fat or very thin.'

'Well!'

She had got the habit lately of suddenly becoming very sleepy, and she felt drowsy now. She brought the meeting to a close.

'You must say Mass to-morrow, Philip! I will speak to Father Dominic about it!'

Next morning she felt more disinclined to get up than usual. Her body seemed all creaks and groans, and she had begun to hate clothes with a weary hatred; their tedium irked her. However she wished to see Philip before he went, and as she knelt in the chapel, which was filled with the pale empty light of a winter dawn, she remembered that Philip's first mass had been said in this chapel, thanks to the kindness of the Mother Superior – who had it been? Mother Ambrosia she believed, but could not be certain, it was so long, so dreadfully long ago! And when now she received Communion from Philip's hands, and her eyes, as she tilted up her chin, scanned the thin sacerdotal mouth and downcast eyes above the chalice, the face still stamped with the lineaments remembered from so long ago, she felt the same poignant sadness she had felt at Midnight Mass, but now she was able to keep her tears from flowing.

She did not see Philip after the Mass, for that day her Retreat had begun, a three weeks' retreat, which she was taking with five other nuns. Often, during these last few days, she had thought of this Retreat, for she hoped that during it she could purge off this weariness of the soul which seemed to have overtaken her. Father Ignatius was to conduct it, and remembering how often in the past ten years the blind priest's sermons had given a richness, a poetry to her dry heart, she was ready to flog her weary soul into responsiveness.

In the evening they made the Stations of the Cross, and for the first time she felt, in addition to her pains, a dizziness in her head, a thing she had never felt before. She could hardly drag herself from one Station to the other, she had to cling to the pews for support, and presently the murmuring of the responses

blurred into a kind of tantalising buzzing. She could not fix her mind, even for an instant, on what was being said, and the whole chapel, with its blue ceiling and candles shining in the gloom, seemed pressing on her head. The cross held by the lay-brother wavered and swelled in front of her eyes, and with a little groan, she fell sideways, and was helped from the Chapel.

After this she got weaker and weaker, and the doctor, called at last, said there was no hope of recovery. She lay back on the pillow, with blue in her red cheeks, breathing heavily, while the Infirmarian wiped the slime from her lips. Her mind had been full during the preceding few days of lapses from faith, distractions, impatiences, envies and angers; but now when she saw the dull and anxious face of Father Dominic by her bedside, she could find almost nothing to confess, the details had escaped her. Presently her surroundings, such as the distempered walls and the nursing sister, seemed unimportant. Her life of labour, the growth of the Order, the Ministry of Education, Mother Melita's inefficiency, all these continued to surge through her mind in a turmoil, but it seemed to her that they were not part of her, that they were like a black cloud she could watch floating by in the sky, that the Stations of the Cross and God himself were part of the sky, and she was standing beneath the black cloud, feeling a thin wind, and her arms and legs like leaden weights.

'Ach, what stupidity!' she murmured.

Then she became unconscious, gasping steadily for breath. Presently the gasping was drowned by the murmured prayers of the band of older nuns who, like a flight of black crows, knelt round the bed on which was stretched the body of this old woman, with the round reddish-purple face framed in white, and just below it a pudgy hand clasping a cross. Presently the face changed suddenly in colour, the breathing stopped; and Mother Ermyntrude closed her eyes with a thin iodine-stained forefinger.

LODGINGS FOR THE NIGHT

'This doesn't look much of a place,' said Mr. Forrest as he got out of the taxi.

'No, pater,' answered his son Gervase. Several small boys ran up to the taxi and stood staring at them. Gervase, a pale thin youth of seventeen, wondered whether they were impressed by the taxi or irritated, and if irritated, whether they would presently start making remarks in a loud [voice], and if so, whether he would have to pretend not to notice them. Presently he drifted into a reverie. Impudent small boys . . . Lofty disdain . . . he would never –

'Now then, Gervase,' said his father, 'don't stand there dreaming! Pick up the suitcase.'

Mr. Forrest was a portly man with a slow deliberate manner. Starting life as the son of genteel but impoverished parents who had cast him out of home to earn his living at fifteen, he had risen steadily by his own efforts. At thirty-five he had been a well-known journalist with his name in 'Who's Who'. During the War he had had a £2,000 a year post in the Ministry of Information. Since then he had fallen steadily, lower and lower, not through drink, or laziness, or incompetence, but through a mixture of pride and bad luck. Now at sixty he had accepted a £300 a year post in Leeds. But his name was still in 'Who's Who'.

Gervase looked at the house. It was one of a row of yellow stone buildings, jammed so tightly together and with such low roofs, it was impossible to see how there could be any rooms inside them.

'At any rate the doorstep is clean!' said Mr. Forrest. Its yellow ochre shone in the dusk like a buttercup.

They had booked a double bedroom and a sitting room by

post, choosing this address because of the very obliging letter of the woman, so much more cordial in its tone than any of the others they had received in answer to their advertisement in the local paper.

Mr. Forrest knocked. The door opened.

A fat woman stood in the doorway. Her large pasty white face shone dimly with sweat. Dank tails of hair, like a plant's tendrils, seemed to lead an independent life around her face.

'Welcome!' she said. 'You'll be Mr. Forrest. Come in, sir.' Retreating backwards up the narrow hall, as if she were defending an important position, she lured them back into the sitting-room.

This was filled with a hot meaty smell of cooking, but mixed with it was another odour, like sour musk.

Mrs. Gooch saw Mr. Forrest sniff. 'It's only cats,' she explained, 'we breed them. Now sit you down. The meat's done to a turn.'

'Can we see our rooms?' asked Mr. Forrest. 'We should like to wash before dinner.'

'Don't you trouble about that. The food's ready and piping hot, so please sit down to the table and begin.'

Mr. Forrest bowed. After all, they were among the natives, and it was necessary, at first at all events, to follow native customs.

'We must have meals served in our own sitting room in future,' said Mr. Forrest to Gervase. Mrs. Gooch had gone into the kitchen which was like a cupboard off the sitting room.

'Yes, pater,' answered Gervase. Pulling a book out of his pocket, he began to read. The habit annoyed Mr. Forrest, but it was the one thing which he believed it impossible to cure Gervase of, since if he told him to put the book away, he started staring into space, answered like an idiot, and became unsympathetic.

Mr. Forrest sometimes treated Gervase like a Victorian parent, shouting at him, domineering over every minute of his day, and bullying him in public. But Mr. Forrest had an intellectual objection to the methods of Victorian parents, and so he had also treated Gervase as an equal ever since the age of twelve, discussing adult topics with him frankly. He would ask Gervase's opinion about complex or intimate subjects, such as whether or no Mr. Forrest should take a certain job, or marry a certain woman. This terrified Gervase. He much preferred his father as

the Victorian bully than as the Georgian friend, for from the bully he could take refuge in idiocy but Gervase was not old enough to know the trick of defending a mute appeal for sympathy by a genial clumsiness. Gervase wondered whether or no to tell Mr. Forrest that his tie was crooked. Mr. Forrest's clothes had become more and more untidy as his career sloped towards its nadir. Eventually Gervase offered to straighten the tie and Mr. Forrest submitted meekly. Gervase's own tie was crooked, but nothing was said about this, as Mr. Forrest was very tired and sleepy after the long train journey.

The meal was a Yorkshire high tea. Plates of Yorkshire pudding and gravy were put before them, followed by chops. They were given large cups of tea, and the table was covered with plates of thick bread and butter, and cakes with thin strings of coconut writhing in the tops, like nests of white worms.

As soon as they sat down, Mr. Gooch came in. He was a little man, with a shining red face that looked as if it had been flattened from underneath and scorched at the edges. Between the courses Mrs. Gooch flitted in and out of the kitchen, in which several cats in baskets could be seen, Persians with long matted hair and jaded eyes. Mr. Gooch tried to make conversation, but it seemed impossible for him to discuss anything except bricks or weather, so Gervase supposed he was in the building trade. Gervase had put his book by his plate, but out of consideration for his host's feelings he did not open it.

Half-way through the meal Cecil Gooch came in from school. He looked as if originally he had been like his father, but had been blown up to the size of his mother. After a brief introduction he began to eat greedily. His father took no notice of him, but stopped speaking. His mother began to discuss him as if he were not there.

Cecil's advent woke Gervase out of dream into which he had drifted. He looked at the large maggoty boy in his distended knickers with a good deal of repulsion.

'It's funny how large he is,' said his mother. 'It's not that he eats much, but whatever he takes seems to swell him up. I'm just the same. He's so clever too. What is it you did this afternoon, Cecil?'

'Conic sections, ma,' said Cecil, somewhat indistinctly, as his mouth was full.

'There! Isn't he a caution, sir? He won a scholarship you know,

in spite of being away half the term through having an ulcer in his stomach.'

Mr. Gooch had been sucking his teeth loudly, deep in some train of thought. 'You come in the front way!' he said suddenly to Mr. Forrest. This remark was puzzling, and so passed unanswered, until later Mr. Forrest learned that in that part of the world the front door was never used except for weddings, and funerals.

'How's young Hawkins?' asked Mr. Gooch after another pause.

'Now he's all right, father,' said Mrs. Gooch irritably, clattering some plates. 'What do you want to go worrying about him for?'

'Young Hawkins,' explained Mr. Gooch, 'went potty yesterday, and tried to cut the other lodger's throat. I daresay he was only drunk.'

'Hawkins was a good-for-nothing scoundrel. I was totally deceived in him,' said Mrs. Gooch. 'Such a nice quiet young gentleman he seemed.'

'And so he is. Leastway he's one of the best bricklayers Charlton's have got.'

Mr. Forrest made several attempts to see his rooms after tea, but each time Mrs. Gooch fluttered round him like a startled bird, telling him they weren't quite ready yet, that she didn't want him to see them until they were spick and span.

Mr. Gooch sucked his teeth and fell asleep. Cecil groaned in the corner over his homework, muttering the longer words aloud. Gervase read.

At half-past nine Mr. Forrest was shown up to the double bedroom. Mrs. Gooch led the way, holding a candle. They stumbled over the narrow stairs, and 'how they expect us to get a coffin down here, I don't know,' said Mrs. Gooch.

At the top of the stairs they came to a door. Behind the door was another flight of stairs leading into the room itself, which was not so much a room as a space under the roof with the roofboards covered with yellowed and peeling paper. The floorboards were bare. There was a tin jug and basin on a stand in one corner and in the middle of the room stood a large bed and a small bed. Under the small bed was a tin chamber-pot, nearly full.

'This won't do at all,' said Mr. Forrest, 'where is our sitting room?'

'Oh, sir,' said Mrs. Gooch sitting down on the bed – the large bed – and threatening to cry. 'I know we ought never to have brought you here, in this tiny house. This is the only room we've got, bar our own. But the letter we got from you was so nice and kind, and all written on the typewriter, that I thought it would be so nice to have you here. If you don't like it, you can go in the morning, sir; but please stay the night. It would make me so happy!'

The story seemed to be so long, and besides was so embarrassing, that Gervase sat down on the smaller bed and relapsed into meditation. Mrs. Gooch looked at her hands and began to tremble violently. The whole bed creaked.

'Very well,' said Mr. Forrest, who was feeling tired, 'we'll stay the night, but we can't stay after to-morrow.'

Gervase wondered where the Gooches slept. There must be another small room on the ground floor. Perhaps Cecil really slept in the sitting room among the cats.

They went downstairs. An hour later Gervase and his father went up to bed. To their surprise there was already a candle alight in the bedroom, and a man with a dark hatchet face and wandering grey hair was lying in the small bed. He looked at them out of solemn blue eyes. He was wearing his vest and for some reason had a sock tied round his throat.

His eyes were bright and unwinking, and Gervase wondered whether this was the man who had tried to cut the throat of another lodger.

'I thought we were to have this room to ourselves tonight,' said Mr. Forrest with dignity.

'So did I,' said the hatchet-faced man, and turned his face to the wall while they undressed.

'By rights the large bed is mine,' said the man, after ten minutes, 'but seeing how Mrs. Gooch told me there would be two of you, I got into the small bed.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr. Forrest.

'That's all right, mate. Glad to have you here. The last bloke that slept in here tried to cut my throat!'

Gervase and his father got into the large bed. The sheets were clean but torn, and Gervase kept on getting his knees caught in the tear as he turned over.

'Don't keep the candle on for me,' said the man.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr. Forrest, and after three minutes he

wound his watch carefully, placed it under his pillow, and put out the light.

In the dark the hatchet-faced man sighed loudly several times, and occasionaly exclaimed 'Jesus!'. His breathing got deeper and deeper and eventually he fell asleep.

They heard him getting up and dressing before dawn next morning. At nine o'clock they got up themselves, washed with difficulty in cold water and began to dress.

'What a place,' murmured Mr. Forrest, paddling round in his pants. 'Do you really think I was right, Gervase, to take the job on this paper?'

They went down to breakfast. Cecil had gone to school, and Mr. Gooch to work and so they were left alone with Mrs. Gooch. Mrs. Gooch had spent half the night discussing with Mr. Gooch the way she had treated Mr. Forrest, and had decided to explain everything, but somehow she could only repeat exactly what she had said the night before.

Gervase, his book propped against the teapot, was reading.

Mrs. Gooch felt a sudden desire to kiss Gervase. He was so thin and pale, and though he never said anything, he must be very clever.

It was necessary to do something to impress Mr. Forrest at any rate, for he sat at table quietly eating bacon and stirring his coffee in a way she had hardly believed possible, not in her own house.

'I write poetry!' she said suddenly.

Even Gervase looked up from his book. Mrs. Gooch went to the knife cupboard, lifted the bottom sheet of paper, and pulled out the cutting of a poem that had appeared during the war in the 'Yorkshire Observer'.

> 'Mothers of England, gay and brave,
> In spite of your sons in the cruel grave,
> Britannia still doth rule the wave.
> Have trust in God. He will surely save.'

At the bottom was 'AMELIA GOOCH' in capitals with her address in italics.

'We had a house overlooking Roundhay Park, then,' said Mrs. Gooch, 'and were as rich as rich. Mr. Gooch had worked his way up from a bricklayer to his own business, building houses

nineteen to the dozen, but something went wrong, and he broke, and now he's just a bricklayer again. But we were used to better things. My father had a shop of his own in Market Street, and we were brought up to learn the piano, but now it's all come to this,' and Mrs. Gooch began to cry softly, and then giggle, so that with a stern face Gervase propped up his book again, and went on reading.

'Never mind, Mrs. Gooch,' said Mr. Forrest, 'things will be brighter again later on.'

'God bless you, sir,' said Mrs. Gooch, wiping her eyes. 'And I'm sure if you ever come to evil days, which heaven prevent, it's worth knowing there's such a pretty home for old gentlemen at Armley with the loveliest garden. I have an uncle there. They choose one of themselves, you know, to be what they call President, and I can tell you, sir, a gentleman like you would be chosen as President without any doubt.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Gooch,' said Mr. Forrest, 'now will you kindly let me know what we owe you for the night's lodging –'

'I'd like to say to say it was nothing, sir, but we're too poor. Well, call it six shillings, sir, with the meals.'

'We will call it seven shillings, Mrs. Gooch. Gervase, put that book away and fetch our bags from upstairs. We had better go to the office now and get another address from the Chief Reporter.'

They went out of the back door and into the narrow cobble alley. Gervase felt sorry for Mrs. Gooch, even sorrier for Mr. Gooch, but could not feel sorry for the fat boy with the ulcer.

'Pah,' exclaimed Mr. Forrest angrily, 'the woman ought to be shot!'

THE BULLY

I often read of bullies who twist the arms of their helpless victims. I was a bully of another sort. Bullied often enough myself, I only bullied one boy, and he was of the kind that seems born to be bullied. His name was Blaise Rigby, and he was a boy with a thin face, provided with a red nose that had a little hook on the end, which generally needed wiping. His hands were always swollen with chilblains in winter, for he suffered from poor circulation. He had a propitiating manner. From the moment he arrived at our prep school, David and I found it necessary to torment him. We did not do it physically, as he was our own age and rather taller. Besides we were not that kind of boy.

In our dormitory Blaise's bed was between that of David and myself, itself a cause of annoyance, for David and I used to talk when lights were out, and it meant exchanging confidences over the bed of this disgusting slug-like creature. However, this also suggested a method of revenge. We were fond of telling each other ghost stories; and after the first he heard, Blaise implored us not to tell another as he could see things. I told the worst I could think of, which even frightened myself, and Blaise buried himself under the bedclothes trembling with fright. You must remember that he was alone, that it was the first time he had been away from home, and that the dormitory was completely dark, so that David and I were only dim spectral voices.

The next night I told a story in which the ghost crept to the foot of the bed and then slowly felt its way up . . . At the same time I got out of bed, stood at the foot of Blaise's, and started to shake it gently. He squealed with fright so loudly that I was alarmed, and hurried back to bed; but the effect was tremendous,

and he spent half an hour weeping softly and begging us to be quiet. Naturally this only increased our contempt for him. Next day he came to us and begged us, humbly and propitiatingly, not to frighten him at night. He would do anything for us, be our servant and our slave, if only we would not frighten him.

We had established the moral ascendancy which is the essence of bullying; and perhaps just because there was no physical torture involved I did not realise what a bully I was. As the price of refraining from frightening him, I demanded a rather nice new penknife I had seen him with. He gave it to me. His doom was sealed.

Gradually he fell completely into our power. We could make him stand on his hands, keep quiet for an hour, do our impositions for us – anything. He was always rebelling, of course, but this only added to the interest. He might rebel during the day, at night he was in our power, becoming uneasy directly he was undressing and helpless when the lights went out. We had only to rustle and moan for him to become a quivering jelly, and having frightened him sick to teach him a lesson, we imposed next day some arduous task to complete our victory.

By this time he was looking hunted, was sleepless, and slack at his work, but some dreadful fascination kept him hanging round us during the day. But this time our hold on him was complete enough to force him to eat earth. He was sick afterwards, but he had eaten it!

At last, becoming intoxicated with power, I set him, as a final test, the most nauseous meal my not uningenious brain could think of. Even David was a little appalled at the suggestion. Blaise was made to swear by every oath believed sacred to childhood that he would perform this task, which by its nature, was not one which could easily be done in our presence, nor indeed did we wish it to be.

Later, looking rather pale, he swore that he had completed it. We pressed him for a description of the taste, which he gave. 'Bitter and horrible.' This seemed convincing, but we warned him that if he were to die after breaking his vows he would burn in hell. Our description of hell so frightened him that night that, next day, he asked one of the masters whether breaking his word meant going to hell. In other words, true to his petty soul, he had sneaked. The whole story came out and we were both thrashed, while for the rest of his stay at the prep school Blaise suffered

from the biting contempt of the school as a dirty little sneak, whose ears it was a public duty to twist.

Such was my only experience as a bully.

David and I never met again after leaving this school. He with most of my co-evals, went on to B——; I and two others, one of them Blaise Rigby, went on to S——. Blaise was put in a lower form than myself, but even this did not mitigate my disappointment. Blaise was vaguely a symbol of shame. I had hoped to leave him behind.

From being very thin Blaise now started to swell out and become repulsively fat, probably as a result of his ineptitude at all games. I tried to treat him as if I had never known him, but he seized every opportunity of being familiar with me and reminding me publicly of things we had done together, of old prep school jokes. If we had been in the same form it would have been unendurable. I longed to punch his fat body and command him never to speak to me again, but I found myself unable to do it; a kind of disgust, disgust with myself, shame, prevented me. I am sure he knew this for he redoubled his ingratiating attentions, his propitiating air. He tried to give me stamps; he laughed obsequiously at my jokes and repeated them; he was as persistent as an Oriental beggar, and similar in his tactics.

I left school. Ten years later I was a reporter on a provincial daily in the town of D——.

I was lonely at D——. True I had made friends with whom I could play golf, have parties, dance, and go on holidays, friendly with the warming friendliness of provincial youth; you never get its like in London. But I found no one to share my inner life, which was fixed on the hope one day of writing something worth while. Meanwhile I practised my art spasmodically in secret; and was a reasonably efficient reporter. I do not complain; it may be as well for one's inner life to be lived out in solitude; I was never one to squeal for support for my ideals. I mean I am reasonably strong. Weakness in that matter disgusts me. It is common enough in our age.

We used to have coffee, those of us reporters who had returned from our assignments, in a Lyons near the office and there, suddenly feeling tired of myself and the aimless play of pleasant superficiality with which we all coat over such inner lives as we possess, my eyes fell on a young man with a pasty face sitting in a ridiculous black hat, an apparition which for a tired

moment I took to be my conscience. But no, it was Blaise Rigby.

He recognised me. He did not come over and speak to us, and perhaps this was delicacy. It compelled me, from sheer anxiety not to appear to be cutting anyone so obviously eccentric, to go over ostentatiously, slap him on the back, and ask him how he was getting on. I looked at him then more closely. He was thin once more, though his pale face had a queer bloated look. There was a strange hard look in his eyes that I did not remember, and his once loose mouth was tight-lipped, ascetic even. He was badly-shaven, his hair was long, and he had small side-whiskers. He was dressed in black: seedy black suit, an old black coat, the huge black hat which had first attracted my attention, a black bow tie, and black finger nails.

Blaise Rigby had developed. From being a slug he had become something with a sharp outline. An unpleasant, abnormal outline admittedly, but could he not claim it as an achievement that from something so amorphous and glutinously yielding as the Rigby at school he had created this positive being, as gritty as bread-crumbs in the bed? Something of the old Blaise, however, lurked in the sudden propitiating flattery with which he flung himself at me, made me sit by him, decried himself to me.

'What are you doing here, Rigby?' I asked at last.

He stared at me. 'I was going to ask you that! I live here, you know.'

I did not know. But evidently he must have mentioned it to me at some time. He insisted on my having coffee with him, and began, with an affectation of intimacy, to recollect incidents from our school days, remembering details, mostly flattering to myself, that I had long forgotten. I writhed in spirit.

'And what,' he asked me, 'have you been – are you doing?'

I told him. A reporter. Some day perhaps, an author.

His eyes gleamed at this, a pathetic gleam, as of a lonely soul. He too was an author! Only in the novitiate, he qualified, seeing the look of disbelief in my eye; but 'I really have achieved something, Charles, really I have. I see you don't believe me. Look here, I'll send you my latest stories.'

I noticed he had not asked to see anything of mine, but expected me to read his. I submitted. Then, with a nervous little giggle, he began to tell me of his life since leaving school. First of all he had wanted to be a priest, but he had been expelled from the seminary. 'For borrowing money and spending it on

dissipation', he said with another giggle. And was it true? I asked. Had he done so? Yes, with the intention of paying it back of course; and he had spent it on lovely bronzes to adorn his cubicle. Vowed to chastity, he had taken to himself the naked chastity of art. The Rector had been an ignorant brute, it was dreadful that such men were in charge of vocations. Rigby had appealed to the Pope but the Rector had his minions at His Holiness' ear. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster had caballed against him. 'None the less, Charles, I still read my office.'

Afterwards he had become a tutor. But always there had been spites on the part of parents; little faults of his, hardly faults at all, had been magnified into mountains. His own scholarship had been blown upon; and ludicrously enough one oaf had actually cast him out of the house on finding that, although claiming to be a Bachelor of Arts, Rigby had in fact, never been to a University. 'As if I do not know ten times as much as the slobber-lipped graduates our seats of learning turn out by the thousand, my dear Charles.'

His subsequent existence, during which his parents had died leaving him now completely penniless, was only sketched by him airily. There had been persecutions; he had been hounded from place to place by thick-skinned clods who thought a man who wore a broad-brimmed black hat was a knave. He had started a laundry.

'A laundry, Rigby?'

'Yes, a laundry!' And because it failed he had been branded by the investors as a confidence trickster.

Then he had sold a publisher a translation of a Tibetan epic for £50. The publisher had subsequently discovered that the ineffable Blaise was not a Tibetan scholar, in spite of his convincing story of five years' residence in Lhasa culminating in Lamahood, but that he had in fact made the translation from a French translation of a German translation of the epic. Rigby's translation was full of ludicrous errors, partly due to the Frenchman's imperfect acquaintance with German, but mainly owing to Rigby's almost complete ignorance of French, he having translated by guesswork and manful struggling with a dictionary. The result was a curious and choice prose which was put forth – still-born – signed by the 'Yellow Lama Rigby'.

'Business is business,' chuckled Rigby as he told me the story.

'One must pay these knaves in their own coin!' And indeed he genuinely seemed to believe that there was no difference between business and roguery. Now he had returned for a while to his home town to recuperate before the grand assault. The grand assault? Yes, he was soon to go to London to make his rightful place as an author. Rigby's idea of recuperation, I found, was to go round to every friend of his family in D—— and borrow from them what he could, disdaining no sum from 2s.6d. to £25. So he amassed the funds for a sojourn in London. This, however, I only learned later.

As usual, I went to bed at an hour considered late in D——, that is about midnight. I had been drinking and eating too much at a farewell dinner to one of the staff and did not sleep. Outside all was silence. At two o'clock in the morning, however, I heard the sound of steps outside. There was a violent knock at the door. I lay in bed for a little while, waiting for someone to open the door, but as my bedroom was on the ground floor, and as I had myself often turned the landlady out of bed at unearthly hours when I had left my key at home, I decided to do the same for whichever lodger it was. But it was no lodger. Instead, in the letterbox, was a portentous envelope, tied up in green ribbon, with a huge mauve seal, and addressed in elegant mauve handwriting. Addressed to me. Rigby's manuscripts had arrived.

Next day I read them. You may imagine what I expected, and you may imagine, therefore, my surprise when the excellence of these five short stories in their precise mauve ink script took my breath away. There was a certitude about the style that made it almost impudence to appraise them; the writer knew exactly what he was doing. Looking clearly into his unsavoury heart, he had extracted from it, like ambergris from the whale's intestine, the serene beauty of a perfume. The subjects were historical; the characters like no beings of earth or sea; but they were dressed and trammelled in the rippling arabesques of a style whose cold ironic beauties needed no warming flush of humanity. There they were, stories, episodes, what you will; but warm creations, the glowing emanations of a personality. The reading of them made all my own hopeful writing in recollection seem like botching in too-wet modelling clay. For a moment I felt jealous.

But their ultimate effect on me was more subtle: I remembered how, with a certain priggish superiority, I had carried round within me for years this sacred idea of writing something

worth-while, and from time to time perhaps making tentative efforts to do so, yet all the time the most of my efforts had been spent on living a conventional existence of work, sport, and honesty. And while I had been doing so, this eccentric creature, Rigby, utterly condemning the delights of decent existence, prepared if necessary to defraud publishers or investors, had been consecrating every penny of his energy to his art. And he had achieved something, something concrete. There it was. His writhing loneliness and his misery were confronted by these calm pieces of lapidary art.

I recorded my admiration of them next day, and even while there was a pathetic glitter in his eyes at the praise, he affected nonchalance as of one receiving payment of a debt.

'Oh, thank you. Yes, they're not bad. No one in England is doing anything quite like them at the moment!'

We met again, and during the days that followed Rigby seemed to be retiring into himself. His face had grown pale and pinched, and his eyes full of misery. Gradually from hints and explosions I learned to my astonishment that he was regarding his trip to London with enormous dread. Just the prospect of existing, of supporting himself among alien personalities, was bruising his soul. At D—— there were at least friends of his father, there was myself; in London nothing but strangers, jealous rivals, editors, business men! He seemed to crave human companionship desperately in these days, as a support to this resolve and he sought to retain mine by extravagant personal flattery. He shied away from mention of my own writing. And in any case, comparing all I had so far done with his achievement, I did not seek his criticism.

I reminded myself how often I had intended to devote my whole time to serious writing, one day. But, drifting from job to job, I had always lacked the resolution for the final plunge. Yet my case was different from Rigby's. I had no need to run laundries, to swindle, to borrow. I could always earn enough to live on as a free-lance. Sheer lack of inner driving power was my trouble. Seeing Rigby's immense inner purpose, I was ashamed.

I decided at last, desperately, to follow his example; to chuck up my superficial jolly existence. I felt sick and ashamed of my easy philistinism that had, in the past, seemed clever, seemed strength! But in truth it was only vacuousness masquerading as strength; an evasion of my proper soul. Blaise had faced his,

unpleasant object though it was, and made of the confrontation beauty . . .

We decided to take rooms in the same house in London. All this I arranged, while he fretted himself over bags, districts, rents and the like, details which nearly drove him insane, and which I settled without thinking of them.

Thus we came to be installed in two tiny rooms which made up the top floor of a small house in Bloomsbury. I had no qualms about my livelihood. My old paper gave instructions for their London Office to use me for assignments which their staff could not handle, and they also took from me London Letter paragraphs and dramatic criticisms. I had other connections in Fleet Street . . .

So Blaise and I dug ourselves in side by side; he with his mauve inkpot, I with my portable typewriter, although he told me that the sound of somebody writing creatively on a typewriter in the next room made him feel so nauseated that he was unable to go on with his own work.

I may add that the spectacle of Blaise working made me almost equally ill. It was like somebody polishing jewels. I would see him in the morning with a virgin pad and return late in the afternoon to find before him one paragraph. Meanwhile I had written four thousand words.

Rigby at once sold the five stories he had shown me, and they were spotted by several critics, but it was essentially the kind of stuff whose quality could only make its way slowly, so lapidary that it needed the permanent format of a book to bring out its full beauty. Meanwhile my work sold with depressing facility to all but the very best magazines. Never mind. I realised a Rigby was a rare bird; I must humbly be content with that I could achieve, making slow advances as across a swamp.

The mere existence of Rigby made me uneasy. He lived almost entirely on rice and beans which, he had discovered, combined the maximum nourishment with the minimum of expense, and these he cooked himself, stuffing himself with the unpalatable mixture until he was replete. His room was bare of furniture except a chair, a bed and a bookcase. He never wrote at a table but on a board clipped to the arm of his chair, and only when (once or twice a week), he ventured into the outside world, did he wear his black clothes, otherwise he wore a cassock, a biretta and sandals. His only friend was a snake, of some harmless

species, which he fed also on rice and beans, and which wrapped itself round the arm of his chair. In this room he spent day after day, writing, reading, or just sitting in his chair, his eyes empty, gazing straight in front of him – meditating, he called it. The thought of this martyr to art living next door to me always made me uncomfortable.

He rudely scorned any financial help, offered him to improve his diet or his dress:

'Charles, you are *low*!' he said, his lips curling in scorn. 'We *are* a gentleman, even though we are an artist, and in our way, a bit of a saint.'

Occasionally, when I was giving a party next door, he could be persuaded to come in and, after a moment's consternation at the cassock and biretta, created a favourable impression by his conversational coruscations which were as individual as himself. Looking at this strange creature, I tried to think back until he became the Blaise Rigby of our prep school. But no, it was impossible, he was self-created; made, not born.

More often, however, my parties or other mild amusements going on next door annoyed him and he complained. He never spoke to me otherwise than with an extravagant courtesy but I would receive protests of several pages in a blistering style which, had they been from anyone else, would have made me at once rush off to punch the writer's nose. Some of the abuse in them hit off my weaknesses only too well, and he never scrupled to refer jeeringly to confidences I had rashly made him, as one does talking to someone one sees a lot of, with a pipe in one's mouth and a glass of whisky beside one. I only once made the mistake of answering these letters. Later I accepted them as part of Blaise's ways.

There was something so coldly and uncomfortably inhuman about him, that I searched for means of waking him more to life. He had no friends, not even a woman friend, and I thought perhaps he might be approachable this way. I introduced him to Hermione, who had admired his work, a girl who was intelligent, sympathetic, and in her admiration of writers utterly unconscious of superficial peculiarities. I threw them together perhaps a little too obviously, but at least I had the satisfaction of seeing them talking together earnestly in the corner of my room; Rigby with his face slightly flushed.

Afterwards I asked him his opinion of Hermione.

'Horrible!' he said, to my surprise, with a little shudder. 'Charles, I *cannot* meet that woman again! I cannot support learned women, or even a moderately intelligent woman. It is their function to be sensual; animated flesh; playthings; hardly companions. I am Oriental, Charles, I admit it.'

With this amazing pronouncement, Rigby retired to his room, and for some time refused to come to any more of my parties.

Yet two months afterwards he came into my room, dressed in his street clothes, and with a sly furtive look in his eyes.

'We unbend, my dear fellow,' he said. 'To-night we go on an Orgy.'

'An Orgy?'

'Yes. The delights of the flesh. We are not so unfamiliar as you suppose with the injunction: take all that thou hast and give it to the whore.'

Early next morning Rigby returned, pale and battered. His clothes looked as if they had been slept in and his hair was tousled. He winked at me slyly and then, with a little giggle, popped into his room. Four of these 'Orgies' if they were such, relieved his asceticism during the many months he stayed with me in London.

Meanwhile he was now getting short of money. He had sold his five stories but had subsequently quarrelled with all the editors concerned because of what he called their 'logographical baseness' – which apparently meant that they had refused to observe the orthographical peculiarities of his manuscript. One could hardly blame them; the only editor who had obeyed Rigby's extraordinary instructions in this respect, found the next story accompanied by a peremptory demand to reproduce not only its spelling, but its actual calligraphy and moreover in purple ink. 'Intaglios can be excoriated,' he wrote grandly, 'by artificers in that mistery.' On the Editor's refusing and not at once returning the MS., Rigby rang him up, with the result that he found the following message on his desk on returning from lunch.

> Blaise Rigby, Esquire presents his compliments to B—— Editor. Cretinism he can understand and pardon; it is endemic in editorial offices. Roguery, however, will be visited by the most poignant processes of the law. The stolen holographs must be returned.

Such ways did not ease his task of earning a living. Mild eccentricity can be pardoned, but there was something in Rigby's offensiveness that no one could endure. Superficially he was a filmy mass of weaknesses, flattery, and physical cowardice that at first awakened a disgusted pity. He never for instance, dared say anything rude to your face. Yet, below it all, was something hard, as if a slug had a backbone of steel. As Rigby again and again made sudden friendships by his writing, and almost instantly on acquaintance lost them, I felt a partial (only a partial) justification for my bullying at the prep school.

Meanwhile, Rigby had exhausted his store of money, in spite of his meagre diet. His literary composition was in any event slow and painful, and aggravated by his impossible notions of business and his suspicion of all publishers, it made his earning power negligible. I was now doing fairly well in my way, and I helped him – not from liking, I defy St. Francis of Assisi to like Rigby, but as a kind of sop of conscience paid by my smoky eary art, to the clear flame that burnt painfully and steadily above the rubbish of his soul. He no longer thought financial help 'low', and accepted it with the maximum of ill-grace.

One day, as I was writing at my desk, he came in and sat down quietly in front of me. His eyes were wild and two red spots burned on his cheek.

'Advise me, Charles!' he began in a high voice. 'What is the speediest and least painful method of self-murder?'

'The gas-oven,' I said laughing.

His laugh, cracked and whinnying, in response, made me look at him more closely, and suddenly it occurred to me he was in earnest.

'We have only a gas-ring,' he said dryly. 'It has an exorbitant appetite for shillings, and I can imagine nothing more base and unRoman than to fail through the parsimony of a lodging house gas-meter. I should like to get one of those delicious old Florentine stilettos and, after a pleasant bath, and a banquet among all my old friends, press the point gently into my heart and expire on a bed of bloom.'

In any one but Rigby it would have been impossible to take this nonsense seriously, but he always spoke like this when he was most in earnest. It was indeed a perpetual mystery to me that a man whose life and speech were such a bundle of affectations,

yet wrote a virile vivid prose untouched by preciosity. Rigby was exquisitely ambivalent.

It was plain that he was now on the edge of some spiritual crisis. His long, almost transparent hands gripped the chair-arms until the knuckles forced their way through. He seemed in a kind of cataleptic rigidity.

'For God's sake what is the matter, Rigby?' I asked after an ugly silence.

'The matter?' he said with a thin smile. 'Nothing, except that we are not so strong as we thought. The antimony between our life and art, in spite of a fairly tough will, is unbearable, absolutely unbearable.' He swallowed. 'Rome, my dear fellow, Rome! I must get out of this pestilential economic ant's nest or die. Unless I can see the warm light of the sun on old marble every day, Charles – every day, I insist! – my soul will simply wither from an inundation of bile. During the last few weeks I have been steadily rotting inside. In a week or two the process will be completed. It would be nice to go mad. Unfortunately my will is too tough. Instead I shall simply – well – slaughter myself from sheer disgust. My dear fellow, I know exactly what a kipper feels like when it is being salted and cured. It's happening to me. I have lost all interest in London, England, Robotry, life. I refuse, I definitely refuse, to have any more transactions with it.'

Gathering his cassock around him, he returned to his room and from that moment refused to eat any more. No, he said, he refused to have any transactions with the world. He had become a kipper. He could understand now, he told me, those madmen who thought themselves poached eggs. A metaphor had eventually taken possession of their souls until they took it literally. An artist in words, he himself would never make that mistake. But a kipper. Undoubtedly!

In the midst of this ridiculous situation, I was, as might be imagined, thoroughly frightened. Rigby was quite capable of continuing his hunger strike until death. God knows at what stage of his career he had manufactured this tough inner will of his, but there it was. I went round to those of his acquaintances who, in spite of quarrelling with him, still admired his art, and together we raised £300. Rigby was packed off to Rome, and we received on his arrival some brilliant descriptive letters, without a trace of false enthusiasm, which I still treasure.

The only thanks we ever got, by the way, was the remark:

'£300! My dear friends, you must have been eager to get rid of me!'

The £300 was spent in a few months, and a series of begging letters followed, alternately blistering and whining. My remittance in response, I confess, grew smaller and smaller, for Rigby had, during his sojourn, failed to produce even a chapter of the masterpiece he claimed to be working on. At last I got a pitiful letter in which he described the miseries of his poverty in such terms that I could almost smell it in the room with me. And, weighing my knowledge of his genius against my disgust of his personality, I at last made up my mind to go to Rome. I needed a holiday, I could combine it with the duty of seeing what could be done with him.

I went to the address given me in his last letter and found he was out. I was surprised, immensely surprised by the mansion in which he had, it seemed, a complete suite of apartments, a be-pilastered façade, all marble and cracked mosaic. But reflecting that places of this kind were possibly cheaper in Rome than might be imagined, or that some friend was giving him hospitality, I waited for a while in his sitting room – an enormous place hung with dusty scarlet draperies, like a decaying Throne-room. Then, getting tired of this, and by now a little irritable, I went round to the tavern where I was told I might expect to find him. I plodded through the dusty streets, the sun beating down on my head, feeling a confusion, a mental instability, which was, it seemed to me later, a premonition of the sudden disorientation which had overtaken the unstably-poised character of Blaise Rigby.

I reached the street but before I got to the wine-shop, Rigby had passed me. He passed me, standing as I was spellbound on the pavement, but for a moment I thought it was a hallucination caused by the sun and the warm air and the plashing, giggling fountains of Rome. But no, a second stare reassured me. It was Rigby. He was lolling in an opened landau of an antique pattern, drawn by two torpid but impressive greys, and driven by an enormously fat coachman in a scarlet livery. He appeared to be in evening dress – although it was morning, but that is not uncommon in Rome, for evening dress is *de rigueur*, for a Papal audience, whatever the time of day. Unusual even for Rome was the Ruritanian opera cloak lined with red velvet.

Rigby seemed in excellent health, but as the carriage passed

me at arm's length, the unwonted bloom on his face revealed itself as powder and rouge. He had three companions. Opposite sat two opulent and cheerful women, one a muscular blonde, the other a dark, luscious Neapolitan type. Beside him sat a youth with large brown eyes, and plump pink cheeks which he was shielding from the glare of the sun with a white silk parasol.

Rigby passed within a few feet of me, but I was unable to make even a gesture to attract his attention. I stared. The landau rolled on, creaking its way among the Fiats, Alfa-Romeos, and Isotta-Fraschinis, the two women beamed and stared, the youth looked down his nose, the fat driver in scarlet livery flicked the two huge grey rumps; all passed like a dream.

Suddenly recollecting that Hopkins, of the B—— Review, was staying at the Miramella Hotel, I jumped into a taxi. From a startled Hopkins I learned that Rigby, during the very months when I was sending him money in response to tearful letters of poverty, had been living in *opera bouffe* luxury and scandalising the English colony by his eccentricities. He represented himself to be a Count Potocki, the illegitimate son of a Polish Cardinal by an Austrian Archduchess, brought up in England by a certain famous English novelist who, of course, was unaware even of Rigby's existence. Rigby's claim was calculated to be equally offensive to ecclesiastical, literary and diplomatic society.

He kept two mistresses, for effect rather than convenience, together with more dubious favourites, and was constantly driving through Rome in his ludicrous equipage. In it he would arrive at some fashionable church in the middle of a cardinalatial solemn High Mass, and stalk slowly up the aisle in evening dress and opera cloak. The Romans rather enjoyed it, but the scandalised English colony had attempted twice to have him deported. In each case the authorities took the charitable view that he was mad.

'But he's not mad!' groaned Hopkins. 'He does it purposely to annoy us. And what's more he does it on our money. He's managed to borrow money from almost every American and Englishman in Rome. Even so, he is up to his ears in debt.'

It was true. He had run up bills everywhere. Rome was waiting for the crash. I did not wait for the crash. I did not even wait to reproach Rigby. I left Rome for Sicily and spent my holiday there. At all costs I was determined not to involve myself any more with Rigby.

The crash came. Rigby went to prison for a month, and when he came out, I started to get from him the letters I still keep tied together in a drawer; the story of the degradation of a soul. There is no longer any mention of art. There is only a suggestion of his former elegant mauve calligraphy. He scribbles in pencil on scraps of paper. His vivid style has gone too; all is written in the plain and tasteless language of a journalist. He tells me he is a prostitute's tout! – a wreck, a beggar, a guide, a pimp, a sponger, a mere thing.

'Nothing can ever raise me up again. I am a husk. There is only one nexus between me and the outside world. You, my dear Charles! In a few weeks I shall cut even that and sink for ever in the dirty ocean of the world. 'Tis better thus!' In spite of myself I became haunted by the vision of Rigby, a dirty, shameless loafer, sponging on the vice or chance generosity of English visitors to Rome, the mouldy husk of an artist.

Three years later I got a scribbled note:

'For God's sake, Charles, come and collect the manuscript of the novel I have written, before I burn it in disgust. I am not asking you for money. Just to do this for me. I am desperately ill.'

I found it impossible to disregard this last letter. I decided it would be the last payment due under the obligation, if such existed, between Rigby and myself.

I found Rigby unshaven, with burning eyes, looking mentally but not physically ill, lying on a filthy bed in an underground room behind a wineshop. A little light filtered through a window at the top of the room just below ground level. A stray cat mewed interminably outside; it had been mauled by a dog and dragged itself round the yard.

Beetles and spiders ran up the whitewashed wall. In the corner of the room a shrine had been made with the calendar-almanac of a wine merchant depicting in gaudy colours Our Lady of Good Counsel. There was a candle stub in front of it.

Rigby raised himself on his elbow on the disgusting bed and scrabbled under his pillow, and then pulled out a wad of manuscript. I recognised the old familiar mauve script.

'Read it,' he said, his eyes fixed on my face.

I did so, by that dim light, in that stinking room. They were the first eight chapters of a brilliant novel.

'When was this written, Blaise?'

'A few weeks ago!' he said slowly.

'But you must finish it!' I said eagerly. 'The gift has come back to you. This will make your name and your fortune –'

He interrupted me, his lips pressed tightly together.

'My dear Charles. I am a disease. A cancer of the human species! Everyone hates me instinctively. I learned that lesson at school. You and David taught it me, and I have never forgotten it. I was weak then and I answered the world's hate with humility. I cringed. You can never even dream of the miseries of those school days! They twisted my whole soul. But gradually I learned the folly of cringing. I built up a dumb acrid resistance. I was incapable of *active* campaigning; I admit it. But I could dumbly, bitingly resist. I did so. In loneliness. Utter loneliness. But I had my ideals, my inner core. I thought that the world, though hating me, would worship the art produced by me, worship it, as they worship the oyster's pearl. Well, I produced it! You can't deny that; and what happened? Nothing but jealousy and hatred! They hated me for producing anything so beautiful! They tried to lacerate me, to tear me apart. Hark at them snarling still. Pearls before swine!'

Large tears fell slowly from his burning eyes on to his dirty pillows. The speech sounded carefully prepared.

'Every artist goes through these stages, Blaise!' I told him. 'Finish this book and you will be vindicated. Come back to London – or stay with me in lodgings in Rome –'

He didn't answer. He was staring impassively at his bedrail like a lizard.

'Come, Rigby. Promise me you'll let me help you?'

'I'll think it over,' he said slowly. 'Come to-morrow and I'll tell you.' He paused and then smiled enigmatically. 'You quite understood what I said, Charles, just now, about how you treated me at school, and what it was like to a sensitive child like myself? I've never mentioned it before.'

'I understand,' I said, flushing in spite of myself.

'Tell me,' he said thoughtfully, raising himself on one elbow to flick over the pages of his manuscript, and then tossing it on the floor beside his bed. 'The world hates me. I hate the world. Why do I trouble to give it beauty, to create beauty for it?'

'Because it's the artist's job, I suppose!'

'Because it's the artist's job!' he echoed. 'The dumb-all-enduring artist ox has spoken. It is our duty!'

This was more like the old Rigby. When I left him, after he had refused any offer of medical help or money, but had promised to let me know to-morrow if he would make a final effort to pull himself together, I felt reasonably confident of success.

That night he put on the coarse robes of a Franciscan Tertiary, which, apparently, he had always kept by him. He burned the chapters he had shown me – I found the ashes lying in a bowl in front of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Then stretching himself at full length on his bed, he cut his throat. The flies rose buzzing from the bloodstained sheets when I went in next morning.

It was the sort of end I might have expected. I suppose I regret those burned chapters, but I do not believe that he had just written them, or that he had ever had any intention of completing them. His end, like his life, was stage-managed. Oddly enough I feel little sorrow or regret for my part or his in the tragedy – if it was such and not a sort of brutal farce. No, it has affected me differently, though not less profoundly. When, leaning over my desk, I prepare to mould again the wet clay of my work into something of beauty, to gird my loins again for the endless unremitting discipline of art, Blaise's question springs into my mind: 'Why do I trouble?'

The question leaves a bitter taste in my mind. No answer comes. There is none. Reporter, writer, bank manager, grocer, what does it matter? There are friends, amusements, sports, interesting books to read, interesting people to see, love, a family, respect, peaceful old age. Let me live an ordinary, decent life, earning my keep and my leisure, and enjoying it with reasonable people. I am not an artist, I am not a victim. I am a man.

THOMSON

When I was a medical student, I stayed [at] Mrs. Johnson's in Bayswater, a house with a dusty basement, cracked stone steps leading up to an entrance flanked by peeling grey stuccoed pillars, and a blistered door. A small room, just large enough for a bed and a washstand, cost me 25s. a week and all meals. The drawing room was always full of widows and old maids knitting, gathered round the anthracite stove, each in her recognised chair. No men ventured in there but we preferred to go into the smoking room where, at almost any time of the day, Mr. Thomson might have been found, his flushed head on one side, a little dribble of saliva running from the corner of his mouth, and his moustache trembling slightly each time he snored. Occasionally he was unable to sleep. The crude meals provided by Mrs. Johnson had been too much for his digestion and, sitting with resigned eyes, his hands crossed above his bulging waistcoat, he would sigh, his hands would lift suddenly as his stomach shook with an eructation, and he would sigh again. So the time passed.

Sometimes he would talk peaceably about the political situation to old Mr. Salt, the cashier, with his enormous black spade beard, snoozing gently in the opposite arm-chair. Thomson could not apparently afford to buy tobacco, but he was always glad to be offered a cigarette by us. If we were smoking his eyes would follow you round the room until you offered him one. His face was an unhealthy red, and the lips were so thick that his voice seemed to issue out of them with a kind of sticky gurgle, in a manner generally supposed to be peculiar to retired Colonels. It was doubtful, however, if Thomson had ever been in the Army. But no one knew. No one knew what he had done; what he had been. No one, indeed, could be very interested, for

mention of Mr. Thomson conjured up the sight of his figure, and the thought of his figure was repulsive – that unpleasant little paunch always stained with soup, those eructations, that wheeze!

Once a week he was seen painfully waddling with the aid of a stick up the road to the pub at the end. He would return wheezing still more loudly, and this time the wheezes were flavoured with alcohol, while the eructations were unsubduable.

He was a little deaf and was, therefore, unaware that he made loud bathlike noises when he took soup. His deafness, however, was no excuse for his other careless table habits.

Thomson was more friendly with me than with the other boarders, for he was always asking my advice on matters of health. And I was hurriedly fetched when he had a stroke at the top of the stairs, and rolled over and over to the bottom, falling on the cat, which clawed his cheek open.

The cerebral haemorrhage seemed to me serious, and the doctor agreed with my inexperienced prognosis. However, after a month in hospital Thomson managed to hobble back. 'I shan't last long,' he said gloomily. 'If I pop off suddenly, you and Miss Johnson help yourself to anything left in my room you fancy. I've no relatives alive.'

He did pop off, one afternoon, sitting in his arm chair. I gave Miss Johnson his last message and we went through his belongings. There was nothing much, a few curios from India, a good pair of hair-brushes, riding boots. Nothing caught my fancy except some pornographic novels which I took: and I also found a faded yellow letter in a woman's handwriting, addressed to Felix Thomson, Esq., and with a date of forty-five years ago. It read as follows:

'My darling Felix. Each morning I jump up and hail the sun thinking it brings a day nearer the moment when you return from India, and I can kiss your dear face again. The birds sing madly in the orchard with love, until I can bear it no longer, and going into the studio I pick up the drawing I made of you, with that golden hair of yours, so like the head of that Hermes of Praxiteles we used to draw again and again at the art school, until we all fell in love with him – so that I fell in love prospectively with you, Felix – I look at my drawing, and I feel my heart turning to water with the desire for feeling your arms around me once more. It is not many days now, is it, Felix? Everything seems useless to me now, I cannot sit still for long, the sunset I

try to catch in my pseudo-Turner fashion eludes me, for all these are trivial beside our love. Oh, Felix, these letters are silly; I want to hear from your own lips that you love me for ever and ever and ever, that nothing can come between us, not death itself, that it will always be just –'

The remainder of the letter appeared to have been lost.

from

THE ISLAND

THE PLAY

These superb productions are a considerable strain, physical, financial, and mental, on what might be described as a small tribe living in one of the obscurer portions of the globe; but none of us with any sense of responsibility could be persuaded to abandon them.

Nor of course would it be possible at this late date to modify the Play, for we have long forgotten both the meaning of the dialogue (having lost the antique language in which it is written) and of the plot (which appears to turn on points of honour and tribal customs now evolved into new forms showing no trace of their ancestry). How could we therefore change the Play, with no clear understanding of what we changed, and with the conviction all of us have that we are pettier beings than those who first acted in our Play, those persons seven feet high, with a clear milky skin, and golden hair tumbling in cascades on their large firm shoulders? They, as even our babes are aware, were able to navigate in ships across the open ocean; whereas we are confined to estuaries. They, by some means, were able to remove bewitched organs from the interior of the body without discommoding the stricken person; whereas we, in like cases, are restricted to mumbling the medical formulae which are all that remain, except the Play, of their incomprehensible language, and even so with an air of unsureness which undoubtedly reacts on the success of the treatment. They were in possession of an elegant mode of preservation of the body blasted by death, so that the bloodless soul would persist alive in the nether regions for countless thousands of years, wherefrom even now no doubt their starry eyes contemplate their enfeebled descendants who, helpless in the face of the rapid onset of putrefaction, have the

mortification of knowing that their souls are more or less dead and done-for a few weeks after physical death. Finally the great stone structures they reared are daily reminders of our less skill, overlooking, as they do, our miserable village huts of wattle daubed with clay.

But the Play remains.

Not uncorrupted. Undoubtedly with the course of time there have been changes, not only in the Play itself, which would be natural, but in the attitude of the Heavenly Powers towards it. This last may seem strange, for at first they would be thought of as quite unvarying in sentiment. But obviously (consideration shows) if that was the case, the Play would be useless. What, for example, is the use of a constant appeal for mercy (say) to a Power known to be invariant in its decisions? None of course. In the same way, in the course of aeons, the Play must have had some influence on the attitude of the Heavenly Powers – that is to say it has had whatever influence it was originally designed by our ancestors to have, the nature of which, of course, we do not now precisely know. And those who are worried at what they call the increasing corruption of the text of the Play should reflect that our ancestors, in their great wisdom, may easily have foreseen this, and drafted the Play in such a way that its very corruption would modify it so as always to harmonise with the alteration with lapse of years in the sentiments of the Heavenly Powers themselves. Indeed it seems to me that intelligent piety simply demands that we take this view of the matter.

A close study of the structure of the Play, or rather of one of its most important structures – made by a Synod of our enlightened elders, after their fasting for a month, and for the same period abstaining from co-habitation with their wives, shielding their heads from the sun, and daubing their cheeks with white paint – revealed the interesting fact that, in the days of our ancestors, a Son of God was represented in the Play as descending upon earth and, amid awful agonies, sacrificing his life for us to appease a God Who, out of His love for us, had explored every other possible avenue of appeasement but Whose infinite legality made all impossible except – mankind's last hope – this ingenious legal fiction. But as this loving sacrifice of the Son of God became repeated, year after year, in the Play, the original significance was lost, and, as everyone now knows, the Play represents a God who so hates His Son that it is necessary

for us (somewhat basely) to ensnare Him by the appropriate magical formulae (which even Gods cannot resist) and sacrifice Him to His Father's wrath, and so appease at least one immortal Power. Thus the continual re-enaction of the Play has brought about a breach between God and His Son, and induced in us too a certain baseness in permitting the immolation. As is well known, in order to curry favour with the Almighty, we even in the course of the Play, insult and buffet His Son about to be sacrificed for us.

All this, you will say, is only a Play, and there may be no Father, no once-beloved and now-hated Son; but this is to miss the point of the Play, which by its very nature is a microcosm of the greater drama of existence. The Play is a symbol certainly, but it is a symbol precisely geared to the reality, so that although there may not be a Father or a Son, one grey-bearded and the other young with flowing-locks, as depicted in our Play, yet entities there certainly are whose relationship is thus accurately symbolised; and in the same way there passes between them sentiments exactly corresponding to love, and later hate; and undoubtedly in the Universe there takes place, just as represented in our play, a sacrifice at first kindly, but later vengeful; and equally truthfully do we represent our efforts as delivering to Almighty wrath the Divine Animal He once loved, that was once a part of Himself, but which He has now, with forgetfulness and the lapse of aeons, learned to loathe and abhor. Hence too we are justified in calling our Play, in spite of frequent farcical passages, a Tragedy.

Is there any escape? Can the Play ever be restored to the tender and loving form in which it was enacted by our ancestors of the long golden hair? It can only purge off its brutalities, it seems to me, if we likewise lose our bestiality in which, on the contrary, we daily wallow deeper, so that each year sees cruder and more savage implications in the Play, sees our actors with a turn of the wrist or glance of the eye make them visible. For our actors are talented and, as is well-known, are free to use their own judgment in the matter of gestures; only the words are fixed, and the meaning of these has long been lost. There is of course a constant factor of tradition from year to year, but old actors die, new ones take their place, and innovation is always at work among us.

As I see it, something might be done if some genius among us,

struck with pity for the sacrificed and beautiful young God, were to attempt to save Him. Against this is the difficulty that, with the corruption of the Play by time, the Son of God has become an unsympathetic figure. Indeed He is generally represented by an actor cavorting in an unclean beast's skin, with such realism that there is hardly one of us whose spear arm does not itch to plunge a shaft in the Animal; but of course in the theatre we are unarmed. However my hypothetical genius might be able to penetrate beneath the uninviting shape of the beast, and see again the radiant figure we have reason to believe our ancestors saw there, a figure now so long degenerate and brutish. Filled with that knowledge and pity, he might attempt to interrupt the sacrifice, and perhaps even offer himself for immolation in place of the victim, though this argues unusual qualities of soul. This act, in turn, might provoke pity from the Almighty, and thus, in the course of further aeons, the whole Play might be altered, so that there would be a reconciliation between the two divine entities, the Hater and the Hated, the God and the Beast, the Father and the Son, who would then of course both unite in turning their hatred on the sacrificed man. This last, though regrettable, seems inevitable, for the same reason as has resulted in the gradual shift of sentiment in the past, but in this case the change would be more rapid, for the Almighty has less reason to refrain from hating a substitute than his own Son. The point that exercises me, however, is whether the whole human race might not feel the effect of this hatred so that finally the Powers, in an access of disgust, would release a thunderbolt which would abolish humanity. Whether also this would be the end, or the start of a fresh cycle, is equally outside the determination of a barbarous intellect, though all these contingencies may quite well have been clearly foreseen by our brilliant ancestors.

But the Play is like one of those ingenious boxes made by our women-folk, boxes known as the 'All-Sacred', which are not only lucky in themselves but can be used with some success for charming away warts; their power lies in the fact that one box is contained within another and so on down to the final one, no bigger than a white-ant. And what does this contain? Not *nothing*, as might be thought, for it is not hollow. Not *something*, for of course we have no possession small enough to fit in a box so minute. No, the box, the last box, is full of itself. It is solid.

In the same way the Play contains play within play, and if we

strip off one after another of these containing husks, what do we come to, *finally*? Merely the Play. The Play then is full of itself.

At first therefore every interpretation seems tautological, and as altogether unprofitable as it would be if some stranger, picking up one of the All-Sacred boxes, finding it heavy, and hearing it rattle or grate slightly when shaken, were to ask, 'What does it contain?' To which we should answer truthfully, and with perfect seriousness, gently wrinkling our black brows above our broad noses – 'Itself'. Whereupon the stranger would put us down as foolish savages of very low mentality, or hurriedly turn over his dictionary to see if he had mistaken the import of a phrase. But we should be right.

Yet we have not altogether reached an impasse in the discussion of the Box, for, given any receptacle, a honey-pot for instance, full to the brim and with a pandanus leaf neatly tied over the top, the pot contains honey, yes, but in a sense the honey contains the pot; it is at least its justification for existence. I mean it is somewhat foolish to regard a European in uniform as a man-uniform, like a honey-pot. The uniform contains the man, certainly, but we do not say that, we say that the man wears the uniform. We are not interested in containers but contents. And in the same way it is not for us to examine the Play as a set of containers, box within box, but for what it is, and what it does. In other words, as must by now be perfectly clear, the Play wears the Universe or, put in another way, the Universe contains the Play.

And just as the uniform, containing the man, accommodates itself to his various actions, bending when he bows, kneeling when he prays, so the Universe of its infinite subtlety accommodates itself to the varying sinuosities of our Play.

Little proof is needed, for it is obvious to every member of our tribe. Year by year water is poured through a sieve in the flies by the Rainmaker; a switch of vegetation is thrown by the King from the Prompt to the O.P. side of the stage; and a bird, nestling in the bosom of the Queen below her flowery robe, is permitted to escape, blinking and fluttering, flying over the upturned faces of the audience, and so out into the cold spring skies. And inevitably, ever since there has been a tribal record, the Universe, accommodating itself to the action of the Play, has poured down rain from the flies of Heaven on the parched fields, has dressed itself beautifully with the scenery of vegetation, has

teemed with the action of abundant life.

So it has been with all the desired phenomena of the Universe, fertility, happiness, life, produced season after season by the enaction of our Play, blessing not only our poor little tribe but, as visitors report, the race of men all over the world, which they have taught us to regard as a globe, although a flattened saddle-shape seems more likely, as better adapted to rest on the back of the eternal mud-turtle which supports it.

Our logicians have pointed out that the endless cyclic re-enaction of the rains and the vegetation is not alone proof positive that the Play does actually secure the events of the cycle, for it may be that the Universe is like a watermill, on whose periphery are fixed events, which therefore keep on returning willy-nilly like the knot of wood on the rim of the mill-wheel. But they point out that if this were the case, the cycle of events would be fixed and immutable. There would not be, as there is sometimes, a draught, or the sporadic evanishment of the sun or moon in eclipse. There could not be famines and plagues one year, gluts and rejoicings the next. The human race would always be static, or varying constantly between two maxima. There could not be a constant progressive degeneration as witnessed in our tribe. Of this, therefore, there can only be one explanation: the Play; that the Universe fits the Play, not (as the cyclic theory would suppose) that the Play mimics events already mechanically secured by the rotation of the Universe. Famines and droughts are therefore easily explicable by faults in the action of the Play; the branch of vegetation falling unpropitiously for instance, or one of the Rainmakers slipping from his insecure perch. And this theory at least gives us the comfort, that the steady corruption and brutalising of the Play is not due to our degeneracy, but, on the contrary, that our degeneracy is the steady and inevitable result of the corruption, by course of time, of the Play. Nothing can be done about it; we must fold our hands and suffer our fate.

Visitors, anxious as it seems to lose no occasion of humiliating a group of men already sufficiently humiliated by fate, besides being badly diseased and of late suffering from a scarcity of yams, have commented on the unfitness of a tribe of our small importance for being entrusted with the Play, evidently feeling that they themselves should be charged with the celebration of an Event of such importance, though it would seem there is a difference of opinion as to which tribe among them might most

usefully undertake this task. But, as we point out to them, not without a certain sly enjoyment, although with basic truth, these things must be built upwards from the foundations: at the ultimate foundation, the Play. Then, immediately on top of it, in actual union with it, ourselves. Then, as might be expected, a gradual succession of higher types, until we come to the summit, where we find of course our visitors, that is to say whatever tribe the particular visitor we are answering happens to belong to. Needless to say out of mere politeness we have previously ascertained this. Our answer rarely fails of approval, generally tangible, in the form of a screw of tobacco or one of their Sacred Books, the numberless leaves of which serve a variety of purposes.

But there are other arguments than this for our custodianship of the Play, as might be expected from a decision of those sinewy and rational children of the sky, our ancestors. For it is more likely that simple people like ourselves, in our simplicity not much given to doubt and holding fast to what we are given, would be trusted as custodians of something they could never hope to understand and might therefore be expected to preserve intact (subject to the changing hand of time), than that highly intelligent beings such as our visitors always forsaking the position they maintained with such heat yesterday, perpetually arguing among themselves, and spurred on irresistibly to the new, should be acceptable to the foresight of our ancestors as guardians of their sacred Tragedy. And our visitors do ill to despise us, for their whole ambitious civilisation is built on us; though they do not know the importance of certain secrets that assure the continuity of the world. Just because these secrets have always been taken care of elsewhere silently without fuss or bother, our visitors assume that they are unimportant, that they do not exist, that the world can be counted on to go on like some enormous but intelligent machine, that mothers will always love, men wish to improve their position in life, and wheat grow to its full height; though surely a moment's reflection would convince them that all these things are only secured by a constant miracle, by the endless exercise of magic. We ask no credit for this; we understand the miracle even less than they do; but as it happens the formula has been given to us; and while this tribe holds together and our elders are trusted, while the ghosts of our ancestors still stare at us from the centre of the earth with their

cat-like eyes, so long will we to the best of our recollection repeat the formula, perform the miracle, enact the Play.

A BIT IN THE PAPERS

I am perhaps a fool to waste so much time over the matter; but once one gets one's teeth into an investigation of this kind, it is impossible to gain any peace of mind until one reaches the end. And yet I have for a long time suspected that there is not the remotest hope of my reaching the end, however long I live. The investigation can, of course, be handed on to my son, or whoever else takes an interest in it, but it seems to me that it belongs to that sort of enquiries which the mere lapse of time complicates faster than one's efforts can simplify: perhaps, even one's own efforts to straighten it out complicate it, a troubling thought; and yet even if I were to believe this, I do not see how I could bring myself to give up my inquisition which, I admit has made me a nuisance to my neighbours and everyone else, but which has given me a very real interest in life.

I live at G—. Y— is twenty miles away, a larger place than our village, in fact, practically a town. I read the report of the annual flower show at Y— in our paper with great interest but, by the oddest of chances, met almost immediately afterwards T.D., who had just come from Y— and, mentioning the flower show to him, I was at once told that he was quite sure it had not taken place: 'There was a good deal of quarrelling this year about precedence or privilege or something of that kind and so it was not held.' 'You are mistaken, D.,' I said with a laugh, 'the paper could hardly go wrong over a simple matter like that. Here is the report in black-and-white.' 'I am positive,' he answered a little sharply. 'Don't you believe the evidence of someone on the spot? An old friend of yours too and a family man?' 'But here is even an account of the prizes!' 'Very well,' he said irritably, 'I will ring up B., who, as you know, has lived at Y— all his life. Being a

magistrate, he automatically goes on the committees of all these things and so knows about them as soon as anybody.' And there and then he insisted on going into the village Post Office and ringing up B., a precaution which at a later date in the investigation, I should have insisted on myself, but now, so far from expecting anything of the sort, it seemed to me ridiculous to take so much trouble about a small matter; but I could see I had nettled D., and so I fell in with his plans.

'B. confirms my statement,' he said triumphantly, 'and he suggests you speak to him yourself.' I took the receiver from T.D.'s hand, and at once recognised B.'s voice, very emphatically confirming the fact that the flower show had not taken place. 'And you are, I suppose,' I said, 'writing to the paper to correct the mis-statement?' There was a long pause, and I thought we had been cut off by our incompetent local exchange, but no, presently B.'s answer came, 'I am afraid I cannot do that. It would not be public policy.' 'Why not?' 'That would be a long story, and I hardly think I can enter into it all now.' Even then, while phoning and with no knowledge of the important issues involved I was struck by a certain odd quality in B.'s voice, as if it were not really B., but someone mimicking him with considerable skill. Surely, you will say, this circumstance should have made you suspicious even then? but, however it did not, for this reason: At the beginning of the conversation the voice was quite unquestionably B.'s, there was no mistaking that slow fruity voice with its long drawl, even over a telephone: and it was only when I had put the question about denying the report, that the voice seemed to change, to sharpen, to become thin and reedy, and finally almost die away, as if the impostor (but of course, it could not have been an impostor) had lost confidence in his ability to keep up the deception. However, at that time nothing of the sort occurred to me, and saying good-bye, I hung up with some remarks to B. about the poorness of the line, and the unreliability, now for the first time exposed, of the paper.

I did not let the matter rest there, for in spite of B.'s mumbling about public policy (which I shrewdly suspected meant nothing more than private laziness) it seemed to me wrong that anyone should be misled, as I had been misled, by a flat statement that an important event had taken place when, in fact, nothing of the sort had occurred. I therefore carefully pasted down the offending paragraph on a sheet of blue notepaper writing in the

margin the date of the issue and the page and column where it appeared, and attaching a brief transcript of B.'s evidence, and of course T.D.'s. B.'s name would carry more weight, but I could not in view of his attitude, ask him to *sign* his denial, but I could request T.D. to do so, and he assented at once. Then, putting on my hat, I went round to the offices of the local paper.

The general office was deserted, except for a man sitting behind the counter, reading a book. I liked him at once, a fact of importance, as I was to see a good deal of him later without oddly enough, ever learning his name. He was a middle-aged cultured man, wearing a neat grey tweed suit, with a humorous face covered with a network of tiny wrinkles. He smiled at me when I entered, but as soon as his eyes fell on the cutting, the expression changed to a frown. Evidently my liking was not returned, for throughout this interview he behaved to me with great coldness and manifest distaste. 'I have called,' I said, 'to ask you to be so good as to correct a small mis-statement which has crept into a recent issue.' 'Indeed,' he answered, 'our journal is not in the habit of making mistakes.' 'But I fear one has occurred,' I answered, and I handed him the cutting with its mute testimony attached. He frowned still more heavily after reading it, and said: 'Well, Sir, we have only your evidence that this cutting is actually from the issue in question.' 'Are you doubting my honesty?' 'No, Sir. But to err is human, and it well may be that you have clipped it from some other paper, and have inadvertently transposed the titles.' 'Surely,' I said, as calmly as I could, 'you recognise the type-face and paper as that used by your journal?' 'It is the same,' he admitted, 'but after all neither the type nor the paper is exclusive, and any competent printer could imitate it.' 'Why, now you are accusing me of forgery! " I exclaimed hotly. 'No, I should never dream of suggesting such a thing. But you may easily be the victim of a practical joke.' 'That is impossible,' I answered, 'for I picked up the paper out of a pile of them in the newsagent's, quite contrary to my usual practice, which is to get my copy from the little sweetshop at the corner of our road, so no one could possibly have anticipated my action.' 'Well, naturally I take your word for it, Sir. But have you reflected on the changes which may have been brought about by the physical act of cutting out the paragraph and pasting it on a piece of paper? Even an arm or a leg changes if cut out of the body, but if, of your own free will, you tear out a paragraph from

its context, you can hardly hold us responsible –' 'I see you are determined not to take me seriously,' I said, controlling my gathering anger with an effort. 'I demand that I see your Editor or manager! ' Getting up – for before he had been leaning back in his chair indolently – the man said: 'There is not the least need in the world to do that; and, as I am sure you will appreciate, the Editor is a busy man. Over there are files of all our editions and issues. I suggest you examine them and point out to me the obnoxious paragraph, to establish the *bona fides* of your complaint, and I will see the matter is taken up at once.' I went to the files and found the issue in question, but in none of the editions could I find any trace of the paragraph. The man smiled maliciously. 'I fear it is you who are amusing yourself at our expense,' he said: and I was too surprised at the time to do anything but walk out of the office almost in a dream, but fortunately still retaining the cutting in my hand.

You may be sure I did not let the matter rest there. I made it my business to collect a number of local worthies who had seen the paragraph in question. I must confess that of the regular readers of the local paper, a few confessed to having overlooked the paragraph altogether 'although we always read the paper through from cover to cover with the greatest care'; still more were quite positive they had seen a paragraph about the flower show but asserted that it explicitly denied that the flower show had taken place. I attempted to convince these of their mistake; 'You were told this by a friend at Y— and then thought you had seen it in the papers'; but only a few were prepared to admit this. The remainder of the readers had really seen the misleading paragraph and I persuaded most of these to attest to the veritable appearance in the paper of the cutting I had shown them, 'Or of a paragraph closely resembling it in purport and appearance' as the more cautious insisted on qualifying their affidavits. I sent the paper formal copies of the documents, expecting some non-committal reply, but in fact got a pleasantly-worded note thanking me for my trouble and asking me to call and see the Editor at a convenient time. I rang up to fix an appointment, which was given in a civil enough voice, although while ringing off I am almost prepared to swear I heard a low chuckle. I may, however, have been mistaken. I was shown into a small dirty room, but my mind was so full of my grievance that I must confess I never looked until later at the Editor or my

surroundings, I launched out at once on my story which, as you may imagine, by this time I had by heart. 'My dear sir,' he said, 'I will not attempt to deny your accusation, namely that the paragraph appeared, or that it was incorrect, though I must remind you that these,' and he waved a hand at the documents, 'are very partial, they represent a few persons' point of view. We on our side might muster our witnesses, not only to the effect that they did not see the paragraph, but that they saw quite another one.' I felt a trifle uneasy at this direct thrust, knowing its truth, and therefore made no answer. 'But,' he went on, 'we do not want to appear Olympian, and we are prepared, as I say, to accept that the paragraph appeared and that it was incorrect.' I bowed, not without a trace of sarcasm. 'But,' he went on, 'it seems from your letter that you require us to go further, not only to acknowledge that the paragraph was incorrect, but to commit ourselves to a fresh statement, namely that the flower show did not take place.' That surely follows from your admission,' I replied. 'Your statement was that the flower show *did* take place. That you admit is incorrect; therefore, you admit that it did not take place, for, according to the rules of thought, a thing either possesses or does not possess predicate and cannot both possess it and not possess it.' 'I am familiar,' he said coldly, 'with the Laws of Contradiction, and of Excluded Middle; but I am a long way from granting their application to this case.' 'Surely there can be two minds about it!' 'There are very evidently two minds in this room,' he said, with a smile intended to be placatory. 'Let us not quarrel, however, about small points of logic. I suggest (a) that we write you an admission in the fullest terms that the paragraph appeared and was incorrect, and (b) that we make you a payment of ten guineas as compensation for any inconvenience –' 'I consider that an insult,' I interrupted. 'The motive for all my efforts in the matter has been pure public spirit. I have met with endless trouble and obstruction that no compensation could adequately repair. In a word, my friend, you are much mistaken if you think you can buy me off without a published denial of the holding of the flower show at Y—'. It was at this point that I looked at him more closely, and then I realised that – although difficult to recognise owing to the tricky arrangement of the light, which dazzled me and bathed his face in shadow – he was none other than the man who had first met me in the general office. 'This is monstrous!' I exclaimed. 'You are not the editor at all,

but some menial.' 'The copy-clerk, to be precise,' he admitted, 'but at the moment I am *in loco* –' 'No more hair-splitting!' I interrupted, sweeping up my papers. 'I shall get at once in touch with another public print, and expose in their columns the whole preposterous affair.'

I returned to my house full of indignation; but I must admit that as the days passed I cooled a little; for the rival paper to which I wrote returned the correspondence, explaining that it was absolutely impossible for one paper to comment upon another in this direct fashion. Moreover, I reflected, the copy-clerk had only been acting according to instructions, and it was absurd to feel as I had at first, a personal grievance against him. I was in this frame of mind when the copy-clerk called, evidently commissioned to make me an abject apology. I expected him to do so with a certain amount of sullenness but, so far from showing any resentment, he seemed, for the first time, genuinely pleased to see me. There was real cordiality in the way he shook my hand, and from time to time his eyes rested on me with a kind of shy fellowship, as if we were now in possession of a common secret. It was this, more than his words – though these were humble enough – which mollified me. 'The Editor,' he said, 'has asked me to exlain that the whole affair took place quite without his knowledge. The matter, you see, never came into his hands. He is supposed to concern himself with nothing but news-getting and its arrangement into a palatable form; anything else is dealt with by the administration. It was the administration which told me – very wrongly as it now realises – to impose myself on you as the Editor and, moreover, gave me no instructions beyond these: 'That I was to admit the appearance and incorrectness of the paragraph, and offer a sum of ten guineas in compensation, but not more in the slightest beyond these offers. As you may imagine, with these instructions I could do no more than I did do –' 'I understand,' I said good-humouredly, 'and we will say no more about it. But what of the future?' 'As for the future,' answered the copy-clerk, a large smile breaking out on his features, 'the Editor has asked me to request you to honour him by stepping back with me to his office, when the whole matter will be cleared up to your satisfaction.' This was handsome, and without another word I went with him, only delaying long enough to snatch up my precious file of correspondence, which by this time, as you may imagine, had become fairly bulky.

The Editor impressed me favourably. He was a man who at first seemed a little undersized but when he stood up near me, I saw his shoulders were level with mine – and I am above the average height. My first impression had been due to his unusually large head; this dwarfed his body by comparison. He received me as a friend, instead of the nuisance which, I well realised, I must appear in his eyes. He begged me to sit down; but a little later he asked me what I thought of his room, and before I could reply to this I felt it necessary to get up and make a brief tour of it, not only out of politeness, but from curiosity as well. It was plain that I had completely underestimated the importance and prosperity of the paper, for the room was a magnificent one, of enormous size, furnished on the most up-to-date lines, and replete with labour-saving conveniences. Two walls were entirely covered with books, and I saw on the bottom shelf four fat volumes, 'Index to Newspaper Library', which showed that the building contained a complete library, one that must too be of impressive size. The other walls were hung with maps. I was awed by the sight of a row of tape machines ticking away at one end of the room, but I must confess that, on closer examination, I received a very disagreeable impression indeed. The tapes were flowing straight into huge baskets and becoming hopelessly tangled and machines, tapes and baskets were so covered with dust that I felt certain neither the Editor nor anyone else had ever picked up the tape to read it; the battered letters and faint inking also testified to the neglect of the apparatus. I could not help asking, whether he found the machines useful? and he answered, with an abstracted air, 'They have long ceased to tell me anything I cannot imagine for myself.' Smiling at his jest (his own face was grave), I now looked at the maps and was a little disturbed to see, that in spite of their fresh appearance, they were so out-of-date as to be positively misleading, particularly in respect of the Balkan States and Russia. I did not comment on this, of course, or on the fact that the dictaphone and similar machinery was rusted and covered with dirt or fluff; instead, fearful that we might pass the time away in meaningless conversation, I sat down, and asked him without more ado, whether he was now prepared to publish the denial?

He buried his face in his hands and remained thus deep in thought; when he looked up again, after a lapse of about a minute, during which there had been a silence broken only by the

ticking of the tape machines, he said, with a sad smile: 'And what sort of denial would satisfy you? That this year the usual flower show at Y— did not take place?' 'Yes,' I answered, 'that would do admirably.' 'But supposing it is not true?' 'I can vouch for its being true.' 'Indeed?' he said. 'You can perhaps vouch for the fact that the flower show did not take place this year. Can you vouch for the statement, implied by the denial, *that it took place on previous years? that* in fact it has ever taken *place*?' 'What!' I exclaimed, 'but surely you can have no doubt on that point!' 'Why not,' he asked, with another melancholy smile. 'It is true that on previous years my reporters have come back, as they did this year, with an account of the show and the prize winners, very circumstantial, but you tell me, and have proved to me, that this year the show did not in fact take place. It seems to me that the same may be true of previous years, and, therefore, as I am sure you will agree, my copy-clerk was not so foolish as he seemed in hesitating to commit himself to a categorical denial, for the denial is, in turn, a positive statement, and a positive statement which rests on very insecure foundations.' 'It seems to me then,' I answered wearily, 'that I have still further work to do; that is, to get from some inhabitants of Y— positive evidence as to the holding of previous flower shows.' 'That would be best,' he agreed, 'but before you start out on this investigation let me give some advice which I am sure you will not resent, coming from a much older man. It is, to make sure you know what evidence you are seeking.' 'Surely that is plain enough?' 'Answer me, then,' he asked, 'what exactly is a flower show?' 'Why,' I said, 'in its simplest terms, an assemblage of people where blossoms are exhibited and judged – a rough definition but it will pass.' 'Assume then,' said the editor, 'this rough assemblage of people where blossoms are exhibited, and assume further that those people are unaware that what they are taking part in is a flower show. Such people, on being questioned, will deny that a flower show ever took place, and your depositions will be convincing but misleading.' 'I had not thought of that,' I admitted, 'and I see it might well apply to the present case. It seems, therefore, that I must question my informants closely to make sure they know where a flower show is.' 'That will not ensure your correctness!' 'Pray why not?' I asked. 'Suppose that they define, to your satisfaction, a flower show as an assemblage, etc., where blossoms, etc., it is still necessary to find out whether they are

not giving the words 'assemblage' and 'blossoms' a meaning so different from yours; that they would use them to define what we should call a garden, or a cattle market. You will, therefore, ask them to define the meaning they attribute to blossoms and assemblage and these definitions must in turn be further defined, so that you will either have an infinite regress or a circular definition, neither of which will enable you to be sure that a flower show has in fact taken place in previous years.' I remained for a moment with my hands pressed to my forehead, for his argument was incontestable, but I had overlooked it and I said at last: 'Surely there must be some easy means of deciding so simple a point.' He patted me on the shoulder, 'Yes, there is,' he said, 'so do not be downcast; I am surprised the answer has not occurred to you before. How was the definition of 'flower show' ever applied to an 'assemblage', etc? In other words, who originally decided that the event X. was a flower-show? Not, presumably, the persons partaking in it, for they might have been Chinese, and ignorant of the word.' 'Why of course,' I answered, 'the matter is decided by a majority of English-speaking people; it is the genius of the language; the common practice of educated persons.' 'In other words, whether this flower-show (which has caused us so much trouble) ever took place or no, depends on the general view of intelligent persons; one of us is not to set himself up above his fellows and say: "it is for me to decide".' 'That is so,' I agreed. The Editor lay back in his chair and regarded me thoughtfully: 'If that is so – I do not necessarily agree, but if it is so – the matter is already settled; for as the result of the paragraph inserted in our paper, and copied, therefrom, into all the papers in the land, and into official handbooks, histories, and the like and into the despatches of foreign correspondents, and into private letters – according to this almost universal body of opinion – the flower-show at Y— undoubtedly took place this year, and our denial would be incorrect, or rather both the original statement and the denial would be correct, whatever the laws of thought may say.'

I was silent for some time, for the whole position, as I now realised, was full of difficulty. How rashly I had rushed in, confident of the affair's simplicity and the rightness of my views; and how scornfully I had sneered at B.'s pusillanimity, as I had then called it, in talking about consideration of public policy! I

might have reflected, had I not been so hasty, that, as a magistrate, he would have far more knowledge of these affairs than I. Indeed I realised fully now my extraordinary naivety; I had gone my way in my profession (which happens to be that of architect, though I have small independent means) without giving a thought to what I saw every day in the newspapers, until this moment, when direct evidence of a mis-statement had aroused my infernal zeal. 'At that rate,' I asked the Editor impatiently, 'why ever send out reporters, for since there is no means of checking, ultimately, whether their reports are true or no –' 'So far from saying that,' he interrupted, 'I have pointed out to you that their reports *must* be true.' 'Then why do they trouble to go through a process known as verification, and take copious verbatim notes?'

The Editor got up and walked to the window, remaining lost in thought; then he turned to me, and said, 'Frankly, I do not know, Sir.' 'Do not know!' I echoed angrily, 'but surely for you, of all people, it is imperative to know! You should sift the whole matter from top to bottom. How can you take any satisfaction in your work when you may be building on sand.' He shook his head with an indulgent smile and replied. 'I can see you are very young. Our business here is to get out every day a newspaper. This needs the hard work and full brainpower of all of us, and we should fail grossly in our duty if we went probing into the why and wherefore of a mechanism built up with much capital and out of a long tradition. Indeed, if we diverted even one-tenth of our energies into that channel, the paper would cease to appear altogether. At a future date I will show you round the offices and give you an idea of our organisation. Its complexity will, I know, stagger you. It staggers me; I have a fair intelligence, I think, and I have devoted forty years of my life to this one simple task, but even now I know nothing but the *internal* side of the business. Our ramifications, by wire, wireless, telephoto, post, and the system of reporters, photographers, canvassers etc., extends in all directions, and to follow them adequately it would be necessary to traverse the whole world. For forty years I have spent my working hours in this office, never stirring out of it; an investigation such as you suggest would have been impossible for me even if I had nothing at all to do; but in any case I had my task and it seems to me that after all it is what happens in this building that is really important not what may or may not happen

in the world outside; for, however outside happenings are connected with happenings in this office – and a thousand possible connexions suggest themselves at once – the only things we can put in our papers are what happen here – the news ticked out by tape machines or teletypewriters or tapped out by reporters, and I am Editor because by dint of unremitting labour, I have at last secured a thorough grasp of the internal functioning of this organisation.' He looked old and tired as he said this, and paused, but suspecting he was only pausing for breath, I remained silent; and in a few minutes he added, 'To each is given our life-task, and perhaps it is yours to pursue this matter thoroughly. I suggest, therefore, that you devote your time to establishing, with finality, the occurrence or otherwise, of the Y— flower-show this year, and if it did occur, whether this was an isolated case, or the regular practice. You will, I think, no longer have any delusions as to the simplicity of the task, and I will, therefore, give you an introduction to B. who, more than anyone, can help you at Y—. At a later date, when you have cleared the matter up, you can extend your enquiry to other local events, both of your life time, and of past history, though as to the latter, it seems to me wholly impossible to come to any satisfactory conclusion. However, we have many local history books in our library.'

Since that momentous interview I have, as he suggested, been pursuing my investigation into the circumstances attending the occurrence, or non-occurrence, of Y— flower show this year. The end is, I hope, now in sight, that is to say, I see a possibility of its being established one way or another in my life time, but the investigation has stirred up many side issues and these, when the main line of my inquiry is closed, will imperatively demand further investigation, of a most complex kind. They appear to involve my leaving this locality and going to other places, such as Germany and Russia, long known to me from maps and reading; but a point to be considered in this connexion, is whether in leaving my village and definitely setting out for them, I do not concede them in advance the very reality which I desire to test. This would of course constitute a *petitio principii*, something which, more and more, my investigation shows me the necessity of avoiding. However, these difficulties can be dealt with as they arrive; and meanwhile the investigation has undoubtedly made me take an increasingly favourable view

of the importance of my village, and in particular of the library in which I do most of my work.

THE PISTON

The moral burden of being a piston, and particularly a young piston, is almost more than one can bear: it is the last straw when one belongs to a community so important as the particular internal combustion engine of which I am a member. Indeed my position in life seems to me to raise the questions of destiny and Divine purpose in the acutest degree. How far, I ask myself again and again, does my failure or success contribute to the well-being of the world as a whole? How far will the Divine purpose suffer if, as I have seen other pistons do, I cease my endless moral effort and simply collapse? The power of Divine regeneration in our community certainly appears unlimited. No sooner does one member succumb to the strain, or become temperamental and crotchety, than he is replaced by the Divine power. Does that mean, therefore, that no effort is demanded from us, that my nervousness and anxiety as to the successful consummation of my task is wholly unnecessary? Am I to suppose that whether I strive or no, the Divine Power will bring about the end It desires, we being simply so much clay in its hands? Or is it, as I prefer to feel, that the Power is not *completely* omnipotent, that it requires *our* aid to help the struggle to a successful issue? This I prefer to believe; otherwise it seems to me that all our courage and endurance is just so much waste.

I am not ignorant of the possibility of another and tormenting hypothesis, that we are merely machines at the mercy of the law of cause and effect. All, according to that belief, is determined in advance; the future is predestined. We have no freewill. Our community's future acts are the fruits of its past acts. A fortuitous concourse of external circumstances, of which we know so little, may repeatedly cause any diseased members of our community to

be replaced by fresh ones, but it is merely chance, and there is an equal possibility that eventually replacement will cease to take place and we shall, in that event, slowly perish. We think we have freewill; but in fact every movement is the result of past forces. The Universe is a mill grinding according to strict causal laws.

However good a case may be made out for this belief, on scientific grounds, introspection makes us reject it at once. It is *impossible* to believe that I do not prevent myself from disintegrating by a pure act of will. I feel the act, and feel I could refrain from making it. On the other hand, I have watched a neighbouring piston gradually become tired and despondent until, at last, groaning that he was 'sick of it all, that he hadn't the heart for the struggle', he allowed a gaping rent to open in his skirt, which spread rapidly to his crown.

I admit we can be influenced by external circumstances. There are few of us heroic enough to bear the discomfort of a broken valve head banging up and down against our crowns; yet even here free will must come in, for there have been heroes strong enough to survive it, as I myself have seen.

We cannot pretend to understand the external world, I admit; but it does not follow from that ignorance that we must suppose our interactions with it are governed by an iron law of causality. All we know is, that, at intervals, our community is filled with a spirit of unrest, a desire for action, and presently this becomes a hunger. Vast quantities of vapour are ingested and excreted before this hunger is satisfied; and this digestion is followed by a sense of well-being, which gradually disappears until we reach again our normal state of pure perception. But can it really be supposed that this hunger is conditioned entirely externally, and that it does not arise from the volition of the community? If it is a purely mechanical process, how explain that the hunger may come once an hour, or not reappear for months, that the amount of vapour required to satisfy it varies, and that the community never rests, once it is hungry, until a state of well-being is achieved?

There can be little doubt that we pistons have the most arduous task of any members of the community, at these times of general activity. The satisfaction of the hunger of the community depends *entirely* on our remaining *absolutely* still and motionless, while the main units of the community – cylinder block and

crankshaft and crankcase – jump up and down, and other smaller members revolve and reciprocate. In doing so, they push at us violently, and, as can be imagined, it needs a fixed effort of will to sustain these varied forces without moving. The whole welfare of the community in fact depends on our firmness. It is true that the cylinders and crankcase, for instance, have the conviction that they remain still while we move up and down, but this is obviously an optical illusion due to a dizziness produced by motion, since, at the full height of their activity, it is possible for me to look at myself and see that, in spite of the shock, I do not budge a millimetre.

Now I know perfectly well that I remain thus motionless purely of my own free will. I have only to retire into my mind, and I can see all the mental states that led up to my resolution to remain still, and how at any moment I might have made the opposite act of will, namely the anti-social resolution to give way to the violent push from the connecting rod, and let myself be flung helplessly against the cylinder head, so involving the community in a temporary chaos. Not only am I perfectly sure that at any time I could will to do this; but I have seen it done by a piston who, oppressed by the pointlessness of his life, announced his intention of choosing this method of suicide, and was dashed to pieces instantly. Now that fact that the forces throwing him upwards against the head could have been precisely calculated, and would probably be found to agree with his observed motion (as no doubt the forces we resist can be calculated, and will be found to agree with our inertia) – this agreement cannot alter the introspectively-realised knowledge of the freedom of his will. We can postulate, if we like, a metrical space of such a character that, whatever we pistons chose to do, lengths and times adjust themselves to the observer so that effects agree with causes – I am prepared to grant you that – but this objective property of space cannot possibly alter my subjective certainty of willing freely and acting freely. So much for predestination.

But having granted our possession of free will (and we must remember that its possession was never doubted by anyone of common sense for pure determinism is a sophisticated metaphysical concept), having granted its existence, there is, as I have previously admitted, another problem, and that is how far our freewill helps or hinders the Divine Will Which, as it seems to me, is superimposed upon ours. Was it to further that Will that

our community was created? And if we fight against It, will It succeed in spite of us? Or only succeed with great difficulty? Or is It absolutely dependent for full success on our help, and for this reason has called us into being? I prefer the last of those three alternatives.

But although I prefer it as an alternative, the responsibility fills me with awe. Am I equal to this trust? Shall I not fail? Perhaps everything, the whole cosmic scheme, depends on my not failing. And yet I am conscious of my weakness and insignificance. And I know that if the accident I have mentioned were to happen to me, namely a broken valve head banging itself violently against my crown, I *simply could not bear it!* The torture would be too great. God help me, I know it, I am a coward!

When I look back upon my life, it fills me with disgust. I have played no real part in the better life of my community. I have just done my plain mechanical duty, that is all! the very minimum one can do, if one is to live. But I know life means more than that. It *must* mean more than that. All this greed, and laziness and self-complacency is really disgusting to me; and yet when I try to shake it off I am simply despised for trying to be better than my neighbour. God knows I do not value myself more than him. It is merely that I cannot find satisfaction with the ordinary things of life; perhaps because there is a hidden inferiority in my mould, in which case they are right in despising me.

And what is to be the end of it all? When we have served the Divine Will to the best of our ability, are we just to be scrapped, to be as if we have never been? Must all this fixity of will, this nervous strain of living, be its own reward? 'You have had the satisfaction,' I may be told, 'of moments of happiness, of feeling the energy of the community flow through you in its time of activity.' Certainly I have been happy. But the moments of happiness have been so few, and on the whole life is so sad and drab! I dread the thought of death and extinction. The promise that my efforts will not be wasted, that all that is best in my life will return to the stream of power comforts me not at all. It is this personal '*I*' that I wish to survive. If it does not survive, then everything seems useless to me. Instead of being the helpers of God, we are the subjects of a Divine confidence trick. The worst of this is that although I suspect it to be true, it is useless to rebel. Only one rebellion is possible, to thwart His purposes by a premature collapse, but apart from the unworthy betrayal of the

community involved in such an act, it only brings about earlier the very fate – extinction – which was the orginal cause of one's rebellion. All the same, in my more despairing moments, suicide has a desperate attraction. It is only by a strong effort of will that I prevent myself from beating my crown out.

It is no wonder, therefore, that this dreadful mental tension has produced all kinds of symptoms in me. I feel myself prematurely aged, and the top of my crown is becoming covered with a precocious grime. I get unpleasant dreams at night, and sudden periods of acute anxiety, or depression which is purely metallurgical – quite unaccountable for by any mental factors. I sometimes wonder whether as a community we are not played out, and that I am a degenerate – a superfluous piston. Yet my fellow pistons seem satisfied enough; they cannot understand my feelings: 'It is your health, old chap,' they say. 'You'll feel better presently. We all have our moods.' But is this attempt to probe the mystery of the Universe merely a mood? Isn't it our duty, at whatever cost, to attempt to understand why we are here, what purpose we are serving, what is our end?

HOMAGE TO CALDERON

Often my sleep is dreamless, but of late, increasingly, it has been troubled by a confused succession of nightmares, fragmentary and horrifying. It is true that when their painfulness becomes insupportable, the emotion wakes me, but they have shown recently an uncanny aptitude for hovering on the threshold of the insupportable, advancing, retreating, and only after long ages of oscillation dissolving into consciousness, so that I start up broad awake with violently beating heart wherever I happen to have fallen asleep in bed, sitting at table, or listening to some prosing speaker.

It is not necessary to give my name here. Let it suffice that I am a philosopher of international reputation who has gone farther out along the vertiginous ropewalk swung across ultimate reality, than most (I say than most – my contemporaries are inclined to insist, than any). I find a great sense of freedom in these philosophical speculations, for they are attended by none of the strain and fatigue which is presumed by some to be the necessary accompaniment of directed thinking along original lines. The whole chain of reasoning floats into my mind as a constellation of images. It *sweats* out of the very pores of my surroundings, with the naivety of pure perception; and I find no difficulty whatever in communicating these ideas. On the contrary one would almost imagine I had the gift of tongues, so lucid is my explanation on lecture-platform, or among friendly auditors many of them drawn from ranks of life not accustomed to elaborate metaphysical speculation.

I do not mention these facts from any motive of vanity. I merely wish to make clear the contrast I necessarily feel when I relapse into one of my nightmares, where the world of

hallucination takes on a terrifying vividness, but all my reasoning powers have deserted me. The wisdom I attempt to summon to my consolation boils up dimly at the back of my sleep-drugged mind, but I am unable to drag it into the light of the consciousness, much less into prehensible communication, and so the events of the dream world flow by and over me as if I were a mere log. I know of course that this experience is common to all dreamers, but none, I fancy, experiences it so persistently as I do and in so many *humiliating* forms. The adjective I have used is the essence of the repugnant quality of these nightmares.

Let me relate, for instance, one chain of dreams. I was seated in a small bare room, opposite an elderly man, who looked at me as if he both pitied me and despised me. I cannot recall what he said, and I fancy that, as is often the way in dreams, we were speaking to each other without words. To the best of my remembrance he was trying to put forward to me some conception of reality grossly at variance with my intellectual convictions. The fallacy was as plain as the nose on my face, but instead of confuting it in a few well-chosen words, I found myself able to say nothing, nothing at all. The agony was appalling; and at last, when I seemed on the verge of communication, the contents of my mind dissolved in a few sentences. As soon as I had pronounced them I realised they were nonsense; and, rising, the old man walked to the window of the room, remained for a few moments deep in thought, and then went to a desk where he started writing. Perhaps to anyone less immersed in speculation than myself such an incident would seem trivial; but, attended as it was by an overpowering sense of reality, it gave me a distinct pain in my heart. I could see this pain visible in front of me, in the shape of a crab suspended in the air, although in my dream the hidden pun between 'cancer' and 'crab' was veiled, and I regarded the object merely as a natural phenomenon. I put forward my hand and attempted to grasp it. All this time the doctor was writing steadily. Suddenly the animal's claws closed on my hand, but instead of the expected pain, I felt an overpowering exhilaration, as if the blood in my veins had suddenly changed to champagne. I pressed the crustacean to my breast, and at that moment the doctor started up with a look of horrified surprise.

I was felled to the ground by some invisible force; and this dream gave place to another one, in which a woman, of middle-

age but beautifully dressed, was pressing my hands to her lips. She was weeping, and cried between her sobs, 'Oh, John, don't you – ? don't you?' I remember these fragments of speech so distinctly that I know they were all that were pronounced by the woman, and that it is not my waking memory which has left the gaps. Further I remember a complete sentence of hers, full of lacunae. 'I am – your – when – poor little – if only you would –.' The lacunae in this sentence were represented, in my dream, by sharp hissing sounds, made I fancy by the rapid ejection of breath from between her teeth. In my dream nothing of this struck me as strange. On the contrary I seemed to understand the sentence, and to realise that if I acceded to the request it contained, I should be utterly and irretrievably lost, that my soul would be centrifuged off the spinning wheel of the world into a swamp, in which it seemed to me this woman was even then standing, up to her knees in the perilous mud. None the less, I felt a strange desire to humour her, because, although I had never set eyes on her before, I was under some obligation to her. This war of tendencies produced in me a sweet and piercing emotion as a result of which I smiled, but even while I smiled, the tears coursed freely down my face. Presently we were crying together, and the emotion passed into something so much more painful and frightening, that I believe I should have wakened, but instead the image faded, and the next recollection I have is of running down endless corridors.

In some odd way these passages were known to me, for I twisted among them with remarkable skill. My pursuers kept close behind me, however, and presently I was cornered, and engaged in a life-and-death struggle, in the course of which I felt my strength gradually ebb from me. At once, with those abrupt transitions characteristic of dream, I was being forced towards a container full of some repellent, steaming liquid by two burly brutes who twisted my arms until I howled with pain, a fact explicable, I imagine, by the circumstances that at that moment in my sleep I may have happened to roll onto my arms. However whether this was so or not it was impossible to establish, for I went on dreaming; and still remember the suffocating sensations attendant on being gradually lowered, despite my struggles, into the foul brew, which I felt certain was a corrosive acid.

The bath vanished and I found myself strapped to a board, while a man with a huge bald forehead approached me, carrying

something sinister in his hand. What it was I was unable in my nightmare to fathom, although my whole attention, my whole being, was fixed on this object. At one time it seemed to me to be a snake, with venom dripping from its fangs. At another moment it assumed the semblance of a branding iron, and I could almost feel its scorching breath. The branding iron gave place to a transcendental symbol which appeared to have gathered into itself all possibilities of evil, and this vague Sign of All-Power would have seemed a ludicrous contrast if only my conscious reason had been functioning to the demure mien of the man who bore it, attired in black coat, striped trousers, and wearing a grey cravat and monocle. But in my nightmare the whole thing seemed only too real and congruous. The man was now by my side; and, lifting whatever it was he held, he let it touch, or fasten itself, on my arm. A spasm of sheer terror made every muscle in my body twitch, and I shrieked at the top of my voice. Although this was the height of my nightmare, I did not wake up at once. The bite or brand of the loathsome thing slowly spread the torpor of death through my limbs. At the very moment when I seemed to be about to stare death in the face I woke, and found myself seated against a bank of grass on the Sussex Downs just as I had been when I went to sleep. In the distance stretched the peaceful blue waters of the Channel, where a boat, like some giant beetle, sluggishly crossed the bay. A hundred feet below, on the dusty road which wound to and fro past the knoll on which I lay, a squadron of soldiers (I fancy artillery) was trotting, with drums beating and fifes blowing. I was awake; the nightmare world had fled.

I am very exercised to decide from what hidden source of melancholy these foul dreams derive their dreadful power. No one could pass a happier and more peaceful life than I do. My every wish seems to be gratified; I have fame and honour in abundance. Not only is my intellectual eminence recognised, but almost every project to which I set my hand succeeds, and even my most sweeping plans for the amelioration of the human race meet none of the opposition which, more pessimistic philosophers declare, is inherent in the nature of selfish man. I am, I suppose, one of the richest men in the country, thanks to a long line of noble and thrifty ancestors; and though I am in favour of a world where a more equitable distribution of wealth reigns, and though I do everything in my power to bring it about (short of

disobeying the moral or social law), I see no reason, so long as the present social structure subsists, against enjoying my wealth to the best of my power. Consequently my home, set in beautiful parkland with views of the sea and England's loveliest river, is replete with every amenity that money can purchase or a refined sensibility enjoy. There I give myself up to harmless pleasure, well aware that when I venture forth, either to expound a new development of my philosophical or aesthetic systems, or even to engage in more practical work, I am sure of a respect and an attention that, I suppose, no other Englishman of the present day receives in like measure. I enjoy excellent health, since in spite of my sporting successes in my youth I never overdid athletic exertions. Yet my sleeping hours are riddled with agony, bewilderment, and humiliation!

I well know to what forces a certain school attributes the unpleasant affects of dream-phantasy. I may say, therefore, that my emotional life runs with unobstructed vigour. My wife, that famous beauty, is as deeply in love with me as I am with her, and our marital life has been harmonious and joyful.

I could record here indefinitely the images of pain and horror with which my sleeps are crammed. I will report only two more characteristics of the type of phantasy to which I am perennially subject. I am imprisoned in a small dungeon, the walls of which are coated with a kind of loathsome grey fungus, which palpitates with a life of its own, and presents in geometrical diapering, a pattern of button-shaped pseudopodia. There is no ventilation, and consequently I know that sooner or later I shall die from suffocation. From time to time the cell vibrates with a horrible demonic wail. All these material attributes are, however, as nothing compared with the feeling of intense spiritual isolation, under whose pressure my whole personality seems about to dissolve into nescience. And in spite of this isolation (or perhaps as a concurrent symptom of it), I have an uneasy knowledge that I am being watched by incorporeal eyes, whose gaze, focussed on my naked soul, feels like a scorching ray of white light. This watching is not continuous, but spasmodic, and I have the impression that many different entities are availing themselves of the opportunity thus given them to peer at my innermost self.

The other dream took the form of a large lighted hall in which a number of persons, myself among them, were dejectedly waltzing to the strains of music. Almost as soon as my eyes

opened on the scene I knew, with that strange certainty that comes to one in visions, that I was in hell, and these were the damned, of which I was one. My heart within me seemed dust and ashes, and my whole life bled, as if wounded, through this sudden rent opened in my sensibility. The evil passions of the damned were clearly visible on their faces, which showed a variety of degraded instincts and wicked desires.

It is supposed to be one of the privileges of the blessed to observe the sufferings of the damned, and therefore I found nothing odd in the presence of a few visitors, some of them even dancing with us, but all clearly marked out by their smug faces and affable condescension. Occasionally a sudden aimless movement of one of the damned, expressing the agonising dejection of his soul, would bring an uneasy glitter to their eyes, as if they knew that their heavenly state was precarious, and that at any moment a whim of the Almighty might precipitate them from the clouds to reside permanently among us.

Both these dreams were accompanied by affects so unpleasant that they woke me, drenched with sweat.

I cannot remember when these dreams first started, certainly not in childhood, for my childhood and adolescence seem in retrospect, meagre perhaps and colourless, but serenely untroubled by any visitations of this kind. They seemed to work up to full horror by degrees. In the early scenes I was merely surrounded by constantly observing faces, at first solicitous, and only gradually changing to downright enmity and brutality. Moreover in those early dreams I rarely found myself racked by the pain of inarticulation, the utter incapability of making clear to others the vague phantoms that crowded my dream-consciousness.

I remember one dream that took the form of a long and painful journey and a sequence of sad farewells, falling into my heart with the delayed impact of stones dropping into a well. It was after this that I felt the full pressure of the ghastly phantasmagoria that more and more occupy my mind.

More and more. That is the real secret of my uneasiness, rather than the intrinsic terror, bad though it is, of these visions. The diabolical experiences of the night are robbing me of the psychic energy necessary for day time transactions, so that again and again my philosophical speculations, instead of advancing with the inevitability of machinery, deliquesce into a fluent cloud of bright visions. Repeatedly I have found myself in the lecture

hall, or the House of Lords, without remembering the details of the journey to there from my home. I forget large tracts of the previous day's events; and as a result of my disturbed nights I have formed the habit of dropping off to sleep at all sorts of unsuitable places and times. No doubt this slackening of tension is more apparent to me than to others, for nobody has remarked on it in my hearing; but I hardly dare think what may happen when the abominable whirlpool of these dreams sucks up the *major* portion of my mental energy.

The odd thing is, this twilight world of sleep has a strange appeal to some obscure part of my mind. Its bare empty halls fascinate me; and it is as if a voice proclaimed insistently under its breath that I was really destined to a harsh and ugly mode of existence, where cold poverty reigned, and the damp flags struck chillingly to the feet. It is a world vexed by humiliations, a world of sordid vice, and of effort endlessly betrayed by circumstances and personal weaknesses. A network of enmities clogs the footsteps there, and death seems to wait round the corner like a footpad.

It is as if beneath the glittering foliage, the high-piled rose-petals of my philosophy, on which my voracious intellect feeds like a caterpillar, there lurked some evil principle – no, not an evil principle, a *petty* principle –

THE BANK

I had known of the existence of the Bank for many years before I made any careful enquiry of it; indeed it was my mother (I think) who first advised me to apply to it for aid in later life should I get into serious trouble, saying, if I remember rightly, that we had relatives on the Board of Direction (or it may have been among the Executive staff), and she herself had had what was a virtual promise – nothing in writing of course, except indirectly – that help would be instantly given in such circumstances. My father also had occasion to refer a similar way to the institution though, even as a child, from a certain evasive look in his eyes, I used to wonder whether some experience, less pleasant than his words would suggest, was associated in his mind with the Bank; and as I grew older it occurred to me that, unknown to my mother, he had either applied for assistance at some crisis in his financial affairs and been refused, or else he had received aid but under terms more onerous than he had expected, terms that were perhaps still a source of care and worry to him. However, with the usual conceit of youth, I always supposed that in like circumstances I would have managed affairs better.

As I grew up and moved about in the world I had the experience, mortifying enough in all conscience, of finding that the Bank had given a number of people assurances similar to those extended to my mother, sometimes indeed, in still more liberal terms. I shall not go so far as to say that the promise in all cases applied to the same Institution for, as we all know, there is plenty of competition in this sphere, and the varying descriptions I received of the methods of the Bank's operation, its capital, directorate, and so forth, led me to believe in at least a dozen financial institutions of which people have a conviction that, in

time of genuine need, they will not fail them and (more oddly still) that such institutions are not animated merely by a desire for gain and dividend but, mindful of the nation as a whole, strive so far as is possible to release their streams of credit wherever such will prove most generally beneficial. Naturally I came to have a strong suspicion that this belief, and all it entailed, was merely a rumour spread for purposes of publicity, and that my mother, simple soul, had been the victim of some specious piece of advertising propaganda, concerning which my father, who knew better, had been too considerate to enlighten her.

I tried for a long time, out of scientific curiosity and (be it admitted) as an excuse for wasting my time in idle investigation, to collate cases in which the Bank, or Banks, had extended timely help to persons in financial difficulties. I must say at once that these investigations were in the highest degree unsatisfactory. First of all I found large numbers of people to whom, in the utmost straits, help had been refused; in some cases indeed, they had been turned away without any inquiry at all having been made as to their business, and it did not seem to me that they were notoriously lazy or incompetent people, as is proved by the fact that many, ten or twenty years later, had made good; others, of course, went bankrupt, shot themselves, or became mad. But this class of cases was plain sailing, a simple refusal; my real difficulty occurred in the investigation of those cases where the Bank had been of help. It proved almost impossible to disentangle satisfactorily either the terms of the arrangement, which always appeared to be verbal, or even what quantities of credit were placed at the disposal of the aided, for what periods, and whether on current account at the Bank's own offices, or at their own banks, or (though this was unlikely) in the form of cash handed over the counter to the applicant. I do not think that applicants had given any vow of secrecy, though that, of course, is a possibility to be reckoned with; no, it seemed rather as if, in each case, they were vague themselves as to the precise details of the transaction. Indeed I should still be floundering, were it not that the most intelligent of those I interrogated set me on the right track; 'You will never do any good,' he said, 'by questioning us as if the whole thing were merely a direct loan from Bank to client. Before you can understand the affair aright, you must look at matters from the Bank's point of view, and understand that it never regards any such transaction as a simple relation between

the Bank on one hand and the borrower on the other. No, it is trained, or rather its personnel is trained, to look at every transaction in the light of its effect on the economic system of the country as a whole; the borrower is the least important party in the transaction. For this reason, the Bank almost always prefers to work indirectly; and thus the borrower is not confronted with a definite credit balance that he can take out and use, but, to give one example of its working, with a general amelioration of the credit situation in his particular market, or perhaps some debt he has written off as lost will be suddenly repaid. I am giving crude examples of the help extended, it is generally more subtle in its working; and you are, if I may say so, foolish even to hope to understand it, for to do so would require a thorough grasp of the Bank's point of view, its intimate comprehension of the national trade perspective. But, of course, this is only possessed by the Bank.'

I at once realised that my investigation was wrongly conceived, but I did not give up hope. It seemed to me that it would be possible to get at the Bank's point of view, if only I were to be in a position to deal directly with the Bank. And in fact, many years afterwards, when I had almost forgotten my original curiosity in the necesary worries of a business career, I got into a position where it seemed to me essential to apply to the Bank for credit, otherwise I would have no alternative but a complete collapse.

I sent in my application to the Bank addressed c/o of the G.P.O. in the usual manner, having been informed that such a letter would at once go to the right place. Whether this is so or not, I do not know; personally I doubt it; and even at the time, when first one letter, and then another (more desperate in tone) remained unanswered, I began to suspect that the correspondence was not reaching its destination, particularly as enquiry from the postal authorities met with evasive replies, neither directly affirming nor denying, as if they well knew what happened to such letters but, in the public interest, preferred to say nothing about it. I am strongly convinced that it was not through these channels at all that my need eventually reached the ears of the Bank, but through personal recommendation, arising out of a conversation with one of my friends who had been formerly helped by the Bank, and my suspicion is confirmed by the fact that this friend did not deny making such a recommendation when I taxed him with it. I should explain here that I do not in

any way condemn the Bank's secrecy as to its address for it is plain that if it were known, it would be almost impossible to do business at all, as almost everyone in the country would be outside the office clamouring for personal attention. I did, however, expect something in the nature of a summons sent from a local branch, asking me to call on them, but in fact it was I who was called upon in my own home, a fact perhaps explicable by their distrust of their clients, who, once the address of even a branch office was given them, might, whatever vows of secrecy they had made, pass the address on to a needy friend.

You will perhaps object that the Bank's local branches are well known, that you have often seen as many as a dozen in the course of one bus ride, perhaps even that there is one in your own street. If you make this objection, it is necessary to tell you what evidently you do not know, that these local offices are merely devoted to formal business: the stamping of documents, registration of shares, and so forth. They have no connection whatever with the Bank's Credit Department, and the Managers are, in most cases, as out of touch with it as you or I, unless they happen at some time to have been in desperate need themselves. Indeed some of the personnel will be found to assert that the Credit Department is a myth, that they alone constitute the Bank, and that this or that Director has given them a personal assurance to the same effect and told them to pass the disclaimer on to customers. This we know to be untrue; and the Director's assurance is just what we should expect if the Bank desired the operations of its Credit Department, in the national interest, to be kept as quiet as possible.

My visitor was an uninspiring personage, with a red face and whiskers, and watery blue eyes which never met mine. He had on a seedy bowler hat, and resembled nothing so much as a bailiff; a class of persons with whom, unfortunately, I was at that time only too familiar. On reflection, I realised that the use of such dubious emissaries was all part of the Bank's policy of working as unobtrusively as is possible.

This individual took down particulars of my trouble in a large notebook, and told me, with the oily deprecating voice of a commercial traveller, that my wants would be attended to at once. I should add that, for a Bank official, he showed an extraordinary ignorance of financial matters, an ignorance I would have found astounding, had I not believed it to be politicly

assumed. Weeks passed; my affairs, far from showing any improvement, exhibited a steady deterioration; and then this person called again, and asked, if everything was satisfactory? Naturally I answered, 'No,' indignantly, and he affected surprise, but a certain wariness in his eyes told me that he was far from being surprised, and only hoped I would not vent my indignation on his person. Once again he took elaborate notes, but, when he had left, I found he had thrust his notebook so carelessly into his sidepocket that it had dropped into his chair. Acting from motives of curiosity, rather base perhaps, I opened the notebook, and turned to the pages where he had taken such lengthy notes of my troubles – notes which I had hoped would touch the hearts of the Bank personnel and persuade them to speedy aid. You may imagine my chagrin when I found that, instead of writing down anything, this fellow had simulated writing by letting his pencil wander in a series of scrawls and loops which did not even resemble shorthand, much less ordinary writing. At times, no doubt when he thought my eye was more closely on him, he had written legible words, but these were always evidently the first irrelevancy which had come into his mind, such as for instance: 'Lochinvar both ways for the Caesarewitch', or '2 Kippers for tea,' and so on. Hardly had I discovered this when he was announced again, so I hastily dropped the notebook back on the chair and appeared to be writing at my desk. He was relieved to discover his notebook, and I made no mention of having noticed or opened it; but, immediately he had closed the front door behind him, I put on an old dirty macintosh, pulled a cap well down over my eyes, and set out to follow him.

Naturally I expected him to lead me straight back to the local office of the Bank. Not only did he not report anywhere, but he went straight into a public-house. Later on he called at several houses, all evidently houses of the Bank's clients and I followed him, an easy task, for he only made his calls between licensed hours; during them one could safely leave him and go off for a meal, returning to find him reluctantly going about his business obedient to the call, 'Time, Gentlemen, please!' At nightfall he went straight to a common doss-house: that was his lodging! You may imagine my indignation. None the less, forgetting my own troubles, all my early curiosity aroused, I went next morning and waited for him to emerge from the doss house; the same round of private house and taverns took place. 'Very well,' I said to

myself, 'I will follow him round until Friday. If, even on pay day, he does not make a call on his head-quarters, I can be sure that he is no emissary from the bank, but a fraud, though if he is a fraud, I cannot understand why he made no attempt to borrow money from me.'

On Friday afternoon, however, his lounging gait changed to a fast walk. I had also noted that he had been to no taverns that day, though whether this was due to lack of money, or fear that his employer might smell alcohol on his breath, I do not know; but either hypothesis suggested that he might at last be expected to pay a visit to headquarters. His walk ended in a small house in a squalid back street. He opened an iron gate in the railings round an area; nailed to this railing, I saw a board, 'I. Cohen. Money-lender.' He hurried down the stone steps, and the door at the bottom instantly opened; he disappeared. After a minute I too went down the steps and found the door on the latch. I opened it, passed down a corridor, beside a dustbin and a coalbin, and opened another door immediately ahead of me, marked, 'Private.' My seedy friend was just at that moment being paid some money by an old Jew seated at a tall desk. I heard the clink in the fellow's hand, and then his startled face was turned towards me.

I find it difficult to describe the old Jew without making him sound unusual, but he was not so. He had, as might be expected, a hooked nose, and his silver beard was large and untrimmed, falling in an avalanche of snow on his breast. I was instantly struck by his eyes, which were so vivid one did not notice their colour, and their life contrasted with the dried and parchment aspect of his finely-wrinkled skin. He gave an almost imperceptible sign to the bailiff person, who vanished; and made an equally sketchy gesture to me with the tip of a pen, which I at once understood was a signal for me to sit down. I did so.

'So,' he said quietly. 'One of our clients, I fancy. You are not supposed to come here, you know.'

'I can quite believe it,' I said indignantly, 'for to put it bluntly, anyone who does so will at once discover what a fraud this affair is.'

The Jew was silent for a moment, and during that time I looked around the room, which was bigger than I had at first supposed, owing to the lighting being concentrated round Cohen's desk. All round the walls correspondence was piled in

huge heaps, covered with cobwebs and stained with dirt, and it was quite plain to me that the piles near me consisted of unopened letters, fast mouldering into illegibility.

'The truth is,' I went on, 'although you sent that oily old humbug round to me, you had not the faintest intention of doing anything for me.'

Still he was silent, and, determined not to be awed by his venerable appearance, I went on: 'You are unable to do anything, even if you wished to. The place is a joke. Look at those letters; none of them are opened!'

'Well, S.,' he said, smiling (I was surprised that he knew my name; the bailiff person must have whispered it to him when I burst in), 'Well, S., if, as you say, we are unable to do anything, you can hardly condemn us for not dealing with the correspondence since, if you [are] right, whatever the letters had to say, we could not do anything for their senders.'

'Be so good as to answer me directly!' I said irritably. 'Are you in a position to help anyone?'

'In the sense you mean, yes, we are,' he said. 'But actually, so far from that being a direct answer to your question, it is really a misleading one.'

'Now we seem to be getting down to something. Why is my question misleading?'

'For this reason. The Bank ultimately manipulates all the credit of the country. Yes, my young friend, do not be surprised, you must not judge the power of an institution by its architectural pretensions, and I, sitting in this humble office, with my two colleagues of the Directorate, and aided by a loyal executive staff are responsible, in a certain sense, for the whole national credit situation, that is to say, we could have made the situation other than it is. Consequently, we could help any person who has got into difficulties as a result of the present situation. But (as you will easily appreciate) there can never be a simple help of that nature. Even were we to help an individual, we should never help him directly, only by altering the credit situation as a whole.'

'Why cannot you occasionally confine your help to one person?' I interrupted.

'Because,' he answered with a smile, 'paradoxical as it must sound, even if we tried to, we could not. That is to say, even if we helped one person, that help, extended only to one, would still alter the whole credit situation; slightly but perceptibly, this

you, with your business experience, will easily realise. So that it is impossible for us ever to make our dealings merely personal; and that gives us a point of view which you will not at first find it easy to grasp.'

I did not, but, after thinking it over, I said: 'So all this is an elaborate farce then? The people to whom you promise help are not helped at all.'

'On the contrary. They themselves will tell you how often the situation has eased for them after our promise, and they have been able to extricate themselves from disaster.'

'Do not quibble, please! You did not actually help them personally?'

'No, except in so far as all our operations affect every single business man personally.'

'It comes to the same thing,' I answered impatiently. 'Now as to the people who are refused help? Have you any reason for doing so? Do they sometimes recover of themselves? Are they in fact, in a different position from the people you offer to help?'

'Substantially, no,' he answered, but the very fact that they fail (when they do fail; it is not always the case) is itself proof that our operations have not helped them.'

'It seems to me that this promise to help given to some and withheld from others is absolutely meaningless, merely an elaborate farce.'

'After all, some are the more cheerful for it!'

Then why not promise to help all, and cheer all up?'

'We refuse very few. Were we to refuse all, the others would be suspicious, and none would be cheered.'

'But the insincerity of it revolts me,' I exclaimed. 'How is it possible to have any respect for an institution which functions under such pretences, and which gives lying promises –'

'Wait a moment, my young friend,' Cohen interrupted. 'You are rushing into conclusions which are not in accordance with the facts. We make no lying promises. People make applications to us, and we send messengers (as we sent to you) or make private enquiries, or interview them, and in all such cases we make to them, as best we can, a true explanation of the circumstances; so far as it is advisable, naturally we cannot give away all the workings of the Bank. But people jump, as you do, to conclusions, and some go away sure that we have promised to help them; others, in utter dejection, because we have refused

them help; a few not knowing what to think. But they have all been told pretty much the same, and in fact it is their own frame of mind which accounts for their opinions. Those who are optimistic, or who ardently wish something to come about, are generally sure that we have promised to help them; and, as you will have noticed, things usually work out according to their beliefs, not precisely so, but near enough to satisfy them. And the reverse with the pessimists, or those who, in their hearts, are really indifferent as to the attainment of an object, however desirable it ought to seem to them (but we never desire what we ought). So you see, there is no question of our making lying promises. We explain as much of a very complex situation as will be comprehensible to our clients' intelligence, that means we can only explain crudely, for business men never really understand the laws of supply and demand, let alone more subtle economic principles. To explain more than we do would be misleading; nothing we say can be shown to be inaccurate, though it may be incomplete. But the incompleteness is due to our clients' limitations. And in the same way, we make no promises, and refuse no aid, to our clients; they do it themselves, and we can hardly be blamed for that. Unless, of course, you charge us with a responsibility for everything that is? This we must refuse; we are directly interested only in the economic situation.'

I was still unsatisfied, plausible as the man was. Of course his intellect was far nimbler than mine, and I was beaten right along the line. 'Well, I grant you all that,' I said. 'But I still resent this constant coming and going of clients to the Bank, when it is all utterly useless, and so much waste of time. Why should people come to you, cap in hand, and go through all the anxieties of a suitor, when it makes no difference.'

'But it does make a difference!'

'How? When you have just told me your aid is not held or withheld as a result of such interviews.'

'I admit we cannot directly help such people. But they help us by attending on us.'

'Help you?' I exclaimed, surprised.

'Most certainly,' he answered with a smile. 'For do you suppose we function without the support of our clients? Do you not understand the principles of credit? That business men must, before credit is in circulation, first ask for credit? But where does the credit they ask for come from? Do you think we print it? No,

bank notes are only tokens. The credit they want is, of course, merely ability to use for their manufactures or operations, the manufactures or operations of other people; in other words the transactions are reciprocal, and if enough people want help from us, they can help each other, subject to the laws of supply and demand and the elements of the economic situation and, of course, the prevailing character of the requests for help. So you see, so far from these requests for succour being pointless, our whole institution functions on nothing else. We cannot have too much of them; we wish in fact we had more. But the requests for credit must be genuine; our clients must mean to use it when they get it. Well, as we have seen, the optimistic, or those who desire certain ends ardently, do mean to use it; and it is no wonder, therefore, that they go away with the idea that we have promised to help them. The Executive have a proverb, cynical in sound, but founded in truth: 'The Bank helps those who help themselves.'

'Well, the explanation is clear enough, but all the same I must say I do not fully grasp it.'

'I hardly expected you to, sir,' he said, somewhat sarcastically. 'The explanation is suited to your intelligence. It is by no means complete.' His obvious mental superiority made it impossible for me to resent this, apart from his prestige as a Director (if he spoke truth) of the Bank; and this reflection made me ask him: Whether any disagreements arose between himself and his two colleagues of the Directorate, whom he had mentioned?

'Disagreements would hardly be the right word,' he said thoughtfully, 'but undoubtedly we are inclined to different policies. I do not profess to work except by rule of thumb. The old ways are best, and even if I do not always see the reason for them, undoubtedly they function, the thing progresses, and it would be a mistake to abandon tradition, because of an isolated case of injustice here or there, when any large-scale reform might leave things worse than it found them. 'Why do this or that?' my colleagues ask. 'Frankly, I don't know,' I answer, 'except that there is something in me that tells me it is right; and, my friends, you must admit that it is generally a correct policy, even if I cannot say why it is so.' One of my colleagues is kind-hearted, and every now and then he must dash in and interfere with the laws of supply and demand for the benefit of a few poor bankrupts who seem to him the victims of circumstance. Indeed,

he carries this feeling to such an excess, that he has a higher opinion of bankrupt persons than of the rich, which is plainly ridiculous, for though I admit a bankrupt person of high financial ability occasionally fails through force of circumstance, and a complete dolt may sometimes blunder through to affluence, these are the exceptions. He gets small thanks for his interference with the freedom of the market, even from the people he benefits. A certain number of persons worship the ground he treads on, however, and this is some recompense, as is the fact that he (rather than me) is held up as the pattern of a good business man. All the same most business men, in spite of his example, are faithful followers of the ways of their fathers, and so resemble me. I do not say this from any motive of vanity.

Of our third colleague we are both, to tell you the truth, a little afraid. He is an intellectual, with a unique academic record, and he intellectualises everything. He finds it unbearable that we should ever do anything without a reason, or embark on any policy without foreseeing all its effects. He has made many innovations, but it is too early yet to say how far they will be a success. Well, I tell you all this; yet I must say we have never come to a positive disagreement; we pull together as a team and maintain our unity as a directorate; no doubt our faults and our virtues supplement each other. It is impossible to be conservative, human, and rational simultaneously, and all three points of view have their advantages.'

'Thank you, for your frankness,' I said. 'It is kind of you to let me take up so much of your time.'

'Not at all,' he answered. 'I have my reasons, and never stand on courtesy. Had this conversation not proved of some value to me, I should not have had it. And now that its value has ended, I must ask you to be good enough to leave. Please close the door after you, but leave it on the latch.'

I took my hat and got up; but was unable to resist one final question: 'Is it impossible –' I faltered, 'I do not in anyway criticise the Directorate, but is it impossible to pursue a policy which will be more successful in mitigating the present appalling economic misery: the shortage of money, the excess of goods, the widespread deprivations and bankruptcies.'

'But why,' he answered, 'should you assume our policy to be unsuccessful? Why should you take it for granted that our policy is to prevent such things, and not (possibly) to bring them

about as much as possible?'

I stared at him, astonished. 'But is it possible to suppose anything else? How could the economic policy of a bank be directed to anything but the prevention of misery, and inefficiency, and shortage?'

'Of what *you* call misery and inefficiency and shortage,' he said, courteously rising to bid me good-bye. 'Come, that naive question and the surprised expression on your face, tell me well enough, what in truth I already knew, that if I were to explain our policy, even in the most lucid language, it would be utterly incomprehensible to you, and might lead you to make errors in your business life, which your present careless ignorance has spared you.'

THE DEVICE

Mr. Brunton, an old man, lived on the top floor of Mrs. Farthingale's boarding house in Camberwell, where there were two rooms, one being his. It had a gas ring on which Brunton kept a kettle going for tea throughout the day. Young Frank, an engineering student, could hear him grinding in pennies at all hours. Besides drinking tea, Mr. Brunton used to do physical exercises night and morning, and spend his time writing letters to the editors of papers. When one of these were printed he carefully cut it out and stuck it in a book. Apparently Mr. Brunton had a little money of his own; a pension perhaps. Anyway he did not work. Frank, with the intolerance of youth, wondered why such people existed. Mr. Brunton's eyes were bleared and dim, and his white beard was often yellow with soup. One winter he got severe bronchitis and had to stay in bed. Frank's bed was next to his – only six inches separated them, six inches of lath and plaster. Frank heard him coughing and turning and sighing and getting up in the middle of the night to grind pennies into the penny-in-the-slot meter and Frank cursed him on such occasions, a separate curse for each penny. Mr. Brunton did not seem to get any better, and stayed in bed, the doctor coming once every two or three days. One evening, when Frank was studying, there was a knock on his wall. Frank took no notice. The knocking became louder, and Frank went in to Mr. Brunton. He was lying back, propped by pillows, with a shoe in his hands, with which he had been knocking on the wall. His voice was hoarse, a kind of wheeze.

'I am very ill, Frank –'

'I am sorry to hear it, Mr. Brunton, but I am sure that in a few days with careful attention –'

'No, I have always had colds but now this has become chronic. Chronic bronchitis, the doctor says so. It is only a matter of time . . . However the point is, Frank, that you are an engineering student. I was interested in engineering once. In fact I was an inventor. Not that I ever sold my inventions, I never liked the commercial side of it. But there was one device –'

He stopped with a fit of coughing. Frank had sat down. It is impossible to be rude to a man who is really ill.

'What sort of a device?' he prompted.

'A gear, Frank, an automatic infinitely variable gear.'

'Well, there have been several,' pointed out Frank. 'Constantinesco, de Lavaud, Sartous . . .'

'I know that,' said Mr. Brunton angrily. 'I know all about automatic gears. I was the first man to explain their mathematical theory correctly. I wrote an article for an engineering paper on the mathematics of the automatic gear. I proved that there are only two possible laws for their automatic variation. In spring-controlled gears or their equivalent the torque on the driven shaft varies directly as f $(\frac{a}{a_1})$ where *a* is the angular velocity of the driving shaft and a_1 of the driven shaft. This function can be of any shape the designer of the gear chooses, providing he has reasonable ingenuity. You will see from this, that there is, in these gears, only one torque possible for any given gear ratio. In inertia gears the torque on the driven shaft varies in theory as f $(\frac{a}{a_1})^2$ Here, however, it is more difficult to function in practice, save in gears which are similar to spring-controlled ones except that a centrifugal governor takes the place of a spring. You will see that here more than one torque is possible for any given gear ratio.'

Mr. Brunton's authoritative tone and the mathematics reassured Frank, who had at first thought the old gentleman was quite mad.

'The main trouble,' said Frank, 'is not, I believe, the law of these gears – not that I know much about them and doubtless you are right – but the mechanical difficulties. Ratchets or friction drive always appear to be necessary, leading to rapid wear . . .'

'That is so,' said Mr. Brunton, sitting up excitedly in bed, and beating his hands together. 'And I conquered that difficulty. My device makes use of a pulsating inertia system, but needs no ratchets. It –' He attempted to suppress a cough, and turned bright-red. Eventually, in spite of himself the cough exploded.

'Could you describe the device?' asked Frank, when Mr.

Brunton's face had gone grey again.

'Of course,' Mr. Brunton leaned back staring at the ceiling, on which he was evidently trying to visualise the device. Lifting one skinny hand, he pointed it at the ceiling, and traced out, in imagination, a drawing, with his erect forefinger. 'There are four shafts: the engine (or driving) shaft, the road (or driven) shaft, and an auxiliary (or coupling) shaft. The driving and driven shafts have the same axis. The auxiliary shaft has an axis parallel to this and it is carried in a bearing in an arm of the driven shaft. Do you follow me? It is freely mounted in the arm of the driven shaft so that, as this rotates, it is borne round with it, and if itself rotated, would describe an epicycle. Do you follow?' Mr. Brunton closed his eyes for a moment, as if suffering.

Frank sketched the device on the back of an old envelope. 'I see,' he said at last.

'Then there is the fourth or mass shaft bearing a flywheel: its axis is the same as that of the driving and driven shafts. Right! Return to the auxiliary shaft! It bears an arm at right angles which contains a groove. The driving shaft also contains an arm at right angles, which has a pad fitting in this groove. At the other end of the auxiliary shaft is a similar grooved arm at right angles, but emerging in a direction diametrically opposite to the first arm; in other words both arms, which considered separately are radii of a circle traced out by the auxiliary shaft, considered together form a diameter of that circle. Right! This second grooved arm on the auxiliary shaft is engaged by a pad on the flywheel exactly similar to the pad on the arm of the driving shaft. Right! Well, if you imagine the *driven* shaft held stationary, and the driving shaft revolved, then driving shaft, auxiliary shaft, and flywheel will all revolve in the same direction, but (because of the eccentricity) the flywheel will be alternately accelerated and decelerated by the driving shaft, once in each revolution.'

'Plainly,' said Frank.

'Very well! Now if you work it out, or try it in model form, you will see that – contrary to all one's first assumptions – owing to the rotation of all three shafts in the same direction, each acceleration or deceleration will cause a torque or impulse on the driven shaft always in the *same* direction, that being the direction of rotation of driving shaft and flywheel.'

'But surely that is impossible!' exclaimed Frank. 'Ratchets are surely necessary.'

'No!' said Mr. Brunton firmly. 'That is the point of the device. To proceed. Directly the driven shaft starts to move under the impulses, the torque on it decreases, because the auxiliary shaft is carried round with it, and its epicyclic movement, and, therefore, the number and violence of the accelerations and decelerations, becomes less. The law is in fact, $M = (a - a_1)^2$ where M is the torque on the driven shaft and a and a_1 the angular velocities of driving and driven shafts respectively. Of course there is a constant; a multiplier of $(a - a_1)^2$ which depends on the inertia of the flywheel and the degree of eccentricity of the auxiliary shaft. It is in the designer's hands. By the way, for reasons of mechanical convenience, it is best that the flywheel should float freely on the driven shaft, otherwise it is difficult to get your drive to the road wheels off the device. Well, there you are! The law in question, while not perfect, is suitable for i.c. engines, particularly if the inertia of the flywheel is made variable. An auxiliary mass could, for instance, be clutched in for low speeds . . . The device costs almost nothing to produce; it would eliminate the gear box; and wherever internal combustion power is in use, this device would add to efficiency and simplicity. But enough! As an engineer all this will be plain to you. The device is the most remarkable *single* invention in the history of mechanics since the i.c. engine itself . . . Mr. Brunton paused, 'By the way your pad should have a rhomboid shape, so as to get the effect of a Michell bearing . . . Of course the whole device would work in an oil bath . . . You will appreciate that other forms of eccentric coupling between auxiliary, driving and flywheel shafts could be used. Elliptical gear wheels might be used, each mounted at one of their foci. The method I have described, is, however, most convenient . . .'

Frank had covered the back of his envelope with calculations. 'I'm damned if I can get the hang of how it works,' he said at last. 'The truth is, I'm not very handy with the calculus yet.'

'The calculus is unnecessary. Or rather it is useless,' said Mr. Brunton gently, his eyes closed. 'In rest the device is indefinitely deformable, but of course, in motion it has only one epicycle movement according to the torques concerned . . . But I am wandering from the point. You will easily see that, at any moment of the cycle, with the driving shaft speed constant, acceleration of the driven shaft in one sense would increase the acceleration of the mass, in the opposite sense decrease it. The

sense in which it decreases it is the sense in which the torque acts. Oddly enough in my device, contrary to any other inertia gear, acceleration of the driven shaft in the same sense decreases the forces both of acceleration and deceleration. Hence the reaction on the driven shaft, although pulsating, is always constant in sign. Hence the elimination of ratchets.'

'If that were so –' admitted Frank.

'Think it over,' said Mr. Brunton with a sigh. 'Well, there it is. Do what you like with it.' He passed his hands wearily down his wrinkled face. 'The patents have lapsed; I could never get any one to see me in the big motor firms. They didn't believe me. But you're young. There are plenty of obvious subsidiary patents you can take out to make something out of it for yourself, even though the master patents lapsed. The rhomboid shape of the pads, for instance . . .'

'Well, really, I don't know –' began Frank.

'Don't thank me!' said Mr. Brunton. 'I'm an old man with no relatives. I shan't be long for *this* world I suspect. And somehow I feel the thing oughtn't to be allowed to die.' And turning his face to the wall, he closed his eyes, so that Frank, with a few embarassed murmurs, and still carrying an envelope covered with scrawls, was forced to go out of the room.

A month later, Mr. Brunton was taken away to the hospital, and, in spite of oxygen and other helps, died. Frank was very busy at the time, but occasionally he looked at the envelope. There was the device, with a certain superficial appeal, trying to do the impossible, and yet looking a little as if it might possibly do it. Surely it was based on a fallacy? Unfortunately being an eccentric epicyclic mechanism with a freely floating third member, it was almost impossible to analyse, and Frank, with shafts whirling hopelessly in his mind and forces refusing to exhibit their proper signs, always ended his bout with the device by chucking it into a drawer: 'it must be fallacious.' He would not show it to any one else for fear of being laughed at, nor could he make a model because of the cost of it: 'It would have to be a good model, otherwise friction would mask the real effects.' Gradually he became bored with it. The envelope sank to the bottom of the drawer. One day, in one of his moves from one lodging house to another, he would lose it.

But occasionally, perhaps not more than once in a year, when he was ill, or just about to drop off to sleep, the device would

leap into his mind, as if it were a real person who, during the interval, had perhaps changed, and grown older, and had strange experiences. It gave him quite a start, thinking of it like this, as if somewhere, not merely on the back of an old envelope to be lost, but in secret regions of the spirit, it lived a sullen angry life of its own, having been bred from the loins of the defunct Mr. Brunton. For if it were what it purported to be, it was being imprisoned as cruelly as one might imprison a great craftsman, or a great doctor, so that his skill was slowly wasted on generations living their life without the alleviation of his help, and the doctor or craftsman, beating his pregnant head upon the bars in a patch of sunlight, would feel his heart turn old and bitter within him, and begin to wonder if there could be sense in the world at all, if the whole business was not a rather empty farce. And on the other hand, if Mr. Brunton was an old fool and the device was as fallacious as a perpetual motion machine, why should it have any life at all, why should it come, like a nonsense rhyme, lilting into his head to reproach him?

from
'VERSE AND MATHEMATICS'

THE PSYCHE AND PHANTASY

II Phantasy

For the purpose of analysis, we have cut away ideology, the social creation of man's capacity for phantasy, from economic production, of which it forms an integral part. It is a rough cut, for the two blend into each other. Having done so, we have an ideology which is in turn divisible into two. One face of ideology is in immediate touch with inner reality – the instinctive genotype. On this end of the tool of ideology the genotype leans in pushing against external reality to change it. But the other end of the tool, the end where we cut it off, is in immediate touch with external reality, by economic production, whether in the general form of the product, or the specialised form of the experiment.

Or ideology may be compared to the hilt of a sword. Part of it is adapted to the hand (the genotype). The other part is shaped to hold the hard cutting blade of economic production.

It seems to many a hard saying that the end of both society and individual activity in relation to external reality is economic production. That is because, living in a bourgeois age, they confuse economic products with commodities, use-value with exchange value. To bourgeois economics, an economic product exists merely as something with a price, an *exchange* value, and that value in turn is the vehicle of private gain. Thus the commodity enters into modern life already symbolic of private greed, and although it is the basis of social life, we cannot help feeling ashamed of it. This shamefaced attitude towards 'trade' is developed therefore in the very age whose social organisation and efficient working depends, as economists have shown, on just

those 'base' motives. 'Private vice is public benefit', as Adam Smith was able to show.

Thus a class used to luxury and private income comes to condemn the thing by which it lives. It lives on foundations of economic production, firmly built by society in the quaking bog of blind necessity. Or, more justly, economic production may be compared to a dyke which keeps out the flooding waters of nature, a dyke which must be continuously renewed. Our houses, our roads, our drainage, our food, our clothing, our harbours, our transport, our post, our reading, our entertainment, our medicine, our lighting and heating, all these are not only what keep us distinct from brutes, but make us what we are, and make possible the leisure in which we reflect about them. All are economic products – parts of nature given use-value by man's labour.

Moreover to each man external reality is not only nature, but also other men. Other men, as we have seen, are not pieces of nature, or pure genotypes, but educated beings, with psyches full of conscious contents given by society. The psyche is a piece of nature transformed by man's labour; it too is an economic product and, in bourgeois civilisation, a commodity. Hence the strict interdependence, first seen by Marx, between a society's material basis and its ideology.

Ideology then is the tool of economic production. It contains poetry, science, religion; everything which is culture in thought and not action. This ideology is represented in the human mind by all the non-genotypical contents of the psyche which I have called phantasy and is, at any time, in any given culture, the sum of the phantastic contents of constituent psyches. Therefore the study of ideology is the study of private and public phantasy. Its private forms are accessible individually by introspection or interrogation. In its public form – and it is usually of public phantasy that one thinks in connection with ideology – it is everything contained in a nation's language, its recorded or spoken science, religion, speculation and literature. Public phantasy is also expressed in other arts beside literature, but we shall lose little to the purpose of our study by restricting public phantasy for the moment to the contents of a language. Phantasy I define to include everything consciously in the psyche, when its attention is introverted; that is, all conscious contents except current perception. For general convenience we may call private

phantasy, simply phantasy, and public phantasy, simply ideology. Naturally public phantasy is that part of private phantasy capable of projection, but the relation is a dialectic one. Ideology moulds phantasy and vice versa. In phantasy we may distinguish the memory-images from the affects. The memory-images are simply reflections of portions of external reality, gained perceptively, and capable of being shuffled, broken up, re-combined, fused, condensed, and diffused. The affects equally are portions of internal reality, gained intuitively, and they are as it were the emotional colouring of the memory images or, more accurately, the self-valuing of the memory images. The affective colours of the memory images are like tints attached by the genotype to remembered portions of external reality as a sign of judgment. 'I feel like this about this.' These affects, too, are capable of displacement, diffusion, transference, fusion, and fission both among themselves and in relation to the memory-images which are portions of external reality.

But we must not regard phantasy as a mere higgledy-piggledy of memories and feelings. Its characteristic is that it is always directed. Without direction we get – not dreams or madness – but simply unconsciousness. Phantasy is always organised. It is organised by the affects, which stand in relation to the memory-images as energy to matter and, by their specific dynamism, drives them on. As psycho-therapy shows, each instinct of which the affect is the sign takes the form of the simple unconscious wish. The instinct is a blind want, which by means of the affect is gripped and altered. It is the pressure of this simple instinct-want that gives direction to phantasy. Here we have the basic law of phantasy development.

For example in logical phantasy, the instinctive dynamism takes the form of 'I want to conform to external reality.' This is the instinct of attention. It is evidently a primary instinct, for its survival value is primary. The penalty of a variation reducing such an instinct is simply death. The affect of this instinct is that feeling we experience in directed thinking, which mathematicians describe as an intense aesthetic pleasure. This affect is the dynamism which induces men to undertake the strenuous process of logical or scientific thought, but, which has in the past not been recognised, except by Rignano, as affective, for this seemed utilitarian and derogatory, and thinkers believed they were motivated by thought for thought's sake, or 'intellectual curi-

osity.' But curiosity, seen in all animals, is a form of the instinct of attention, mixed with some appetitive instinct, or several in suspense. Is it a mate, food, an enemy? Directly the animal 'knows what it is', other affects – fear, disgust, appetitive interest come into play. With other forms of phantasy, other instinctive affects become dynamic. Thus the lover has 'reveries' in which the phantasy obeys the instinct wish 'I want the loved one.' But because even the one I love is a portion of external reality, and can only be gained by attention to its laws, such phantasy is still mixed with thought, love-affects blend with reality-affects. There is an element of attention. Attention to external reality only vanishes from phantasy in dream, when it becomes completely introverted.

Thus the laws of thought, which are the laws of phantasy, are certainly the laws of association of ideas, but the association is affective. As so many critics have pointed out, Mills' and the atomists' associative ties by contiguity in time and place, will not produce directed thinking. But affective association will, if it be broadened, as we here broaden it, to include the instinct of attention. Ideas together in time or place are likely to share the same affective tone, and therefore to come into the mind linked, but that affective tone may be altered (conditioned) and all the time the instinct wish, in tension with the instinct for conformity with external reality, is the force which selects, links, and drives phantasy forward. If we regard instincts as elaborate reflex arcs, or combinations of them, then the law of the affective association of ideas is the law of the conditional reflex. Instinct grinds the mill of phantasy and, in doing so, alters itself, just as man, in grinding the mill of external reality, is himself altered by it.

Our conception of phantasy may be illustrated by a practical example:

Galileo is considering the law of gravitation. He is puzzled by that statement of Aristotle, accepted by scholastic philosophy and reasonable enough until considered in detail; that the heavier a body is, the faster it will fall. He is sitting in meditation in his study, and yet it is a law of external reality with which he is concerned. Shutting his eyes, he attempts to project himself into the heart of external reality and, as he himself tells us, the phantasy floats through his mind of two bricks, united by a cord. Now if these are dropped, the two bricks together should (according to Aristotle) fall faster than one of them alone. But

Galileo, seeing those bricks actually dropping in the world of external reality, although in his mind's eye, strives to see which brick it is that, by pulling on the other, accelerates it. For if one brick is to accelerate the other, it must go faster than that other, but of two bricks of equal weight, why should one go faster than the other? Yet if both be not accelerated, they will fall at the same rate as one. Thus Galileo, in his mind's eye, saw the united bricks falling at the same rate as one alone, and discovered empirically yet in phantasy a feature of the law of gravity. (Rignano).

Now this thinking was closely geared to external reality. The images were completely symbolical. It was the external reality which they represented towards which his instincts turned themselves, in which 'he was interested'. For interest in external reality, or curiosity, is the affective tone of attention. His instinct was therefore closely pressing his phantasy against the orderings of external reality as he remembered them. His thought was logical. If it freely moulded these memories, combining and shuffling them, it was only because it treated them as true images of external reality. His phantasy worked on the assumption that just as he could combine in experiment on external reality the originals of his symbol-images, so, but more expeditiously, he could shuffle about the symbols themselves, so long as he obeyed in their ordering the orderings of external reality, that is, of logic.

All this time, although his interest was entirely directed on external reality, the windows of his senses were closed to immediate external reality. He was in touch with it only in memory. His eyes were probably closed; in any case his attention was directed inwards. He was introverted. He was 'concentrating'. He was hardly conscious of what was going on around him. Why? Because he was using the superior plasticity of phantasy in its handling of the images of real things, as compared with the handling of real things themselves.

But none the less phantasy is still phantasy, memories are still images, at one remove from external reality. They have this constant danger, that the 'wish may be father to the thought', in other words, that other affects beside those of attention may direct phantasy, a desire to prove a point, *to reach a definite decision*, to avoid the strenuous labour of long thought. The wishes of the genotype must be continuously pressed against external reality. Thus, ultimately, Galileo, actuated by a 'desire

for truth' proceeded to experiment. Ascending the tower of Pisa, he dropped the differing weights which, after observation through the windows of the senses, settled the matter and proved the correctness of the phantasy. But in doing so, he departed from the realm of ideology into that of economic production. Experiment is the link between ideology and production. Moreover it is a dialectic link. Ideology, as in the case of Galileo, may give rise to experiment. Alternately facts observed in the course of man's moulding of nature may give rise to ideology, as doubtless in the evolution of flint implements. Chance discovery precipitates phantasy which, after a while, again resorts to experiment. Here in experiment the hilt of ideology joins the blade of economic production. The idea becomes the product; the product gives birth to the idea. The experiment is a mixture of idea and product. Once again we see the inevitable blending of ideology and material production.

But Galileo's phantasy might have had a different turn. He might, in the privacy of the study, have given way to day-dreaming.

He might perhaps have visualised to himself, in this slack mood, how pleasant it would be to be a magician, instead of a poor physicist battering his head against brutal reality. He might have imagined himself endowed, by the discovery of some mysterious element, with the power of mastery over matter. With this he could overcome gravitation, and make stones soar into the air. Or he could confuse the schoolmen and prove Aristotle wrong by making two bricks, tied together, fall at the same rate as one brick.

Now it will be seen that precisely the same series of images, of bricks being tied together, and dropping at the same rate as one brick, has come into Galileo's mind. But plainly this type of thinking is different? Why? Because the dynamic instinct-wish, the affective tone, is different. Interest is no longer specifically directed towards conformity with external reality, but now the phantasy is interested in gratifying other emotional desires. The affects are proportionately less tense and more pleasant.

Here therefore ideology becomes on the negative side less geared to external reality. What positive form does this take? It takes the positive form of more illusion. While he day-dreams, Galileo can almost believe what he dreams about is actually happening. Not because of the logic but because of the vividness

of the phantasy. Vividness is the expression of affective energy in phantasy. Galileo is really present in the university confounding the schoolmen with his aerobatic bricks. Perhaps a smile at the thought curves his lips, for his face now bears a different expression to its tense energetic look while his thoughts were probing into external reality. His phantasy is less symbolic. He is not concerned with the external reality of which his ideas are symbols. He does not assume that the regrouping he makes in his phantasy is actualisable in external reality. It is in the phantasy itself that he is interested. In so much he is the 'victim' of an illusion.

But not completely so. Although he is introverted, and the avenues of his senses are closed, he is aware all the time that he is in a state of reverie, and in a moment, without difficulty, he can come back to that world. He might even have his senses partly open on the world of unreality, and from his study window, vaguely see people passing in the street while be follows the thread of his day-dream.

Moreover, the structure of his day-dream, like that of all day-dreams, shows that he has not completely lost touch with reality. It has a certain logical connectedness. It represents what might possibly happen; what we should like to happen. It unfolds like a story, with a real time and place. If various people's day-dreams are investigated, it will always be found that this 'tenuous' air of possibility is always present. The day dreams represent a compromise between reality and illusion. They serve the one and do homage to the other. They are half-illusions.

But Galileo might have passed over completely into the world of illusion. He might have fallen asleep, and dreamed. Then the illusion would have been complete. He could not at the same time have watched boys playing in the street and yet dreamed on, as he did while day-dreaming.

He dreams, and the windows of his senses are completely closed. His instincts are now entirely without interest in external reality. Attention therefore is asleep. His phantasy is characterised by a wildness which resembles mania. There is no connectedness of time or place or even identity. The wildest absurdities happen! He is dead and yet thinking; he is himself and yet somebody else; the person to whom he is speaking turns into a lion; he is a child again; he is in the university of Padua and for no reason two bricks, tied together with string, drop

through the air in front of him, but the sight fills him with a sudden pleasure, upon which he wakes. Thus here again the same complex of ideas figures in his phantasy, but here again, because the affective tone is different, the relation to external reality is different, is in fact, nil. The instincts no longer even tentatively press the phantastic riot of images against external reality. Their only associations are non-attentional associations; hence their lack of connectedness. For connectedness is simply that ordering found in external reality. A dream does not even, like a day-dream, tell a story. It does not follow those rails of time, space, and causality which we call rational, and which must be followed by any phantastic locomotive that travels across the terrain of external reality. It is completely irrational. It knows nothing of reasoning, for reasoning is the mould of external reality impressed upon phantasy by sense and experiment. The dreamer never even suspects the existence of a world of external reality, outside the world of phantasy, of which the dream images might be no more than memory-symbols. The symbols are themselves. The dream is the world of reality for the dreamer. The illusion is complete. The dream is completely non-symbolical. And now the expression of Galileo is neither the tense energetic face of the thinker, nor the soft smiling look of the man lost in reverie, but the completely blank expressionless face of the sleeper. It is childlike; the face of the genotype.

These two typical extremes, dream and logical thought, represent the extremes of phantasy, with reverie as a mid-point between them. All three blend into each other by stages. How are they able to live in the same mind, in the same world of phantasy? Because they have one thing in common, memory images. Memory images are the stuff of all phantasy. Thus the whole world of phantasy less its affects, is ultimately derived from the world of reality. Indeed if they were not, we could not be 'taken in' by dreams.

HEREDITY AND DEVELOPMENT

A Study of Bourgeois Biology

The work of Charles Darwin is rightly regarded as the most important event in the history of biology. It is compared to the work of Newton in the realm of physics. The law of evolution is felt to have acted as a unifying and elucidating principle throughout biology, in the same way as Newton's laws of motion and the law of gravity co-ordinated dynamics.

An important difference between the two men is that Newton's formulations were rapidly accepted, and were the basis of a continually expanding and interknit body of thought which endured unchallenged until the twentieth century. It was from the start a tightly-argued and logically coherent structure. By contrast Darwin's theory was loose and contained logical flaws; it was opposed bitterly from the outset; and ever since it has given rise to much confusion in the minds of biologists about its most characteristic feature: the hypothesis of Natural Selection.

Darwin's theory had a double content. First of all it was a theory of evolution: the species were not fixed, but changed into one another with the course of time. The second was a theory of how this was accomplished: by natural selection. The first theory had been advanced in various forms before Darwin by a number of biologists, such as Erasmus Darwin, Buffon and Lamarck. The second theory was Darwin's own, but was invented almost simultaneously by Wallace. Until the discovery of the second part of his theory, Darwin held the first part to be of no value. It was only when as a result of his observation of fauna in the Galapagos Islands, and his acquaintance with the work of Malthus, he hit on this mechanism which could have produced evolution, that he felt that his theory ranked as a scientific hypothesis. He regarded this second part of the theory as a kind of confirmation or

indispensable foundation, of a theory that animals changed by adapting themselves to their environment.

Yet in fact, while the first part of his theory of evolution lives on as the most vital content of biology, the second part has been repeatedly challenged and is now generally recognised to be formally incoherent. No biologist doubts that life changed and changes, as a result of its antagonistic relations with its surroundings. There is a body of evidence for this belief, such as morphological likenesses, the convergence and homology of organs, the linked series of fossils found in successive stratifications, and the re-enacting of tracts of ancestral history by the embryo and the larva. But this evidence is, as it were, a witness to the change, not to the cause of change, and the question ought to be asked whether a mechanism to produce all change in life was ever more than something tacked on to the theory of evolution. But this was far from being the opinion of Darwin and his followers. Natural selection was not something tacked on to evolution, but the pin on which the whole theory turned. Without it Darwin would have seen no meaning in a theory of evolution.

Science in its development has repeatedly thrown up and then thrown away scaffolding of this kind. For a long time accurate empirical data as to the 'flow' of heat and electricity were believed to depend on the theory of calorific and electric 'fluids' which were pictured as actually moving from one body to another. It is now realised that these data do not require such fluids. Heat is the motion of the molecules of matter: and electric current is the motion of the smaller particles of which molecules are composed. The old observations remain just as true, are in fact made subtler and more precise; but it is now seen that special fluids dwelling in matter are unnecessary. The observations depend on properties of matter under certain specific conditions.

In the same way biology in the past attributed numbers of biological phenomena to an indwelling vital force, vital fluid, Archeus, or Spiritus Rector. These phenomena have since been explained as properties of matter, and the indwelling specific forces and mechanisms have been found to be unnecessary and tautologies rather than explanations. Yet such scaffoldings are not superfluous accidents. They are determined by the attitude to reality of the society which produces them.

The mechanism of Natural Selection is similar. The importance of the theory to Darwin's contemporaries, its hold on their

imagination, the violence with which they defended it against the violent attacks of the 'older generation', suggest that the theory had a special attraction to the vanguard of that age.

When in fact we examine the theory of Natural Selection, we find that this machine for producing new species has a strange likeness to the capitalist economy of that era, as the capitalist saw it. Moreover the idea was suggested to Darwin by Malthus and the Galapagos Islands. Now Malthus is a bourgeois economist whose theory is based on the beliefs of his contemporaries about the proletariat; and in making his starting point 'conditions on an island', Darwin is following the example of all contemporary bourgeois economists. The political economy of Darwin's era, which produced Manchester liberalism and Free Trade was based on the following belief: If every man is left to himself to produce and exchange freely the commodities of society, the result will be for the maximum benefit of all, including himself. His private profit will be society's good. All exchange-value will then represent value to society, and just as much, and no more, will be produced than society needs, while every man will get a fair return for his labours. This political economy is justified by a consideration of what would happen if Robinson Crusoe produced for his own needs on a desert island and later a second Crusoe came on the scene.

Such a theory of economy reflects the programme of the bourgeois escaping from the feudal restraints upon trade. Above all, it expressed the 1750-1850 revolutionary upsurge of the new bourgeoisie against old aristocratic monopoly in capital and land. As long as England led the van in capitalist development, this revolutionary theory was the theory of 'free trade', as the result of which the most progressive country will automatically reap the lion's share of social profit. And just as 'free trade' in capitalist economy selected England, thereby proving her to be the country naturally the fittest, so natural selection in the world of nature assured a place in the vanguard for the fittest beasts.

This pleasant pastoral was the purest fairy tale. Unrestricted private property, unrestricted power to buy and sell products, necessarily arises from the capitalist economy of commodity production which goes through a historic development. Ownership of the means of production gives rise to capitalist profit – the exploitation of the labour-power of others. The resulting development of machinery produces the aggregation of capitals,

the larger driving out the lesser. This involves the increase of fixed capital and a falling rate of profit, which produces 'crises' and desperate attempts to mitigate them, including the export of capital and the exploitation of colonies. Evolution proceeds, and gives rise to war. When the world is completely carved up, bourgeois free trade has become economic nationalism, the reign of tariffs, and the appearance of vast monopolies. Thus the peaceful equitable pastoral scene, simply by the development of the potentialities latent in it, has given rise to its lurid opposite. All is misery, monopoly, injustice, war.

Thus natural selection, in the sphere of economy, has not at all produced the kind of development one sees in the world of nature, but something peculiar, violent, and unprecedented. Natural selection is revealed by post-Darwinian history to be, not a natural law but something peculiar to society, and not merely to society as a whole but to capitalist society; and so unstable is it that it never exists except as an abstraction, in practice it is immediately unfolding its destructive negation.

Darwin came on the process half-way. The battle was already bitter, cruel and selfish, but capitalism was still on the upgrade, and this warfare of man against man was still increasing the productive forces of civilisation instead of (as to-day) throttling them. This bloody bourgeois struggle for existence was a progressive force, seen from the viewpoint of contemporary bourgeois man. A struggle for existence produces progress – this appeared to be the lesson of the time.

Darwin's youth was coloured by the incessant demand of the rising industrial bourgeoisie for always greater intensification of the struggle. The Corn Laws, which increased the cost of labour-power, were fetters on industrial production. They favoured a few – away with them therefore! This abrogation of 'protection' was repeated in all spheres. For this revolutionary class to which Darwin belonged, progress depended on the intensification of the individual struggle for existence, of course within the framework of bourgeois property rights. Natural selection then was a *class* theory.

The theory of *evolution* – the continual change of all that is – as opposed to the theory of evolution by natural selection, is not the distortion of ideology by a class struggle. To recognise evolution requires only that one has no vested interest in ignoring it and denying change. Change is so patent a fact of reality that it has

been asserted in all ages, and only denied by the ideologists of a conservative ruling class which has outlived its functional usefulness, and is therefore concerned to assert all present categories as eternal. The industrial bourgeois of Darwin's time had no vested interest in denying change. On the contrary, it was to his interest to assert it, for he was by his actions rapidly changing the face of society. Those concerned with denying change were the vested interests of the Church and the Tory landowners, whose privileges the bourgeoisie were attacking. From them therefore came the bitter opposition to Darwin.

On the other hand this bourgeois class, while it asserted change and asserted it as progressive and vital, asserted also that it could only come about through *free trade* – as a result of absence of social organisation, and by the free struggle of organism against organism under the pressure of natural needs. In other words, the progress of the bourgeoisie depended upon 'natural selection'.

The two parts of the Darwinian theory therefore expressed in the sphere of biology the complete bourgeois position at this time. It at once became more than a biological principle. It became the philosophy of the revolutionary bourgeoisie in all spheres of science. Newton's theories performed exactly the same function for the earlier bourgeois struggle here and on the Continent.

In fact however the theory was untenable from the start. A scientific hypothesis must show logical consistency: this is primary, and congruence with reality in experiment is a means of judging the content of different scientific theories of equal logical consistency. The fact that Darwinism, in spite of its weakness as a theory, made such an impact on the scientists of the day is an indication of the dominating influence of the social relations of a man on his ideology. Only Marx, who was by then familiar as a result of his researches with the essential features of capitalist ideology, was able to perceive, immediately on the publication of Darwin's theories, that Darwin had imposed the 'automatic' mechanism of capitalist economy on his fruitful picture of the changing world of nature.

The weakness of Natural Selection as a theory is not that it explains too little, but that it explains too much. The content of the theory is this: animals are produced in large numbers with slight heritable differences. They are produced in larger numbers

than there are means of subsistence. Many therefore must die young. Variations which increase the fitness of the animal to survive will give the animal possessing them an advantage; hence by the gradual accumulation of such favourable variations, new species will be created. Darwin's [theory] compares Nature to a human stock breeder. Nature sorts over the available material and chooses it just like a human breeder; but whereas he goes for definite 'points', she can seek only fitness to survive.

Now such a comparison is obviously shaky. Nature is not a human being with definite aims, but simply the rest of reality – i.e. the environment or object. There is a subject-object relationship as between animal and environment, and the latter includes other animals. Why should the object play here a sorting rôle?

Only if its antagonism has a definite channel. The channel is alleged by Darwinians to be 'fitness'. But how is fitness to be defined? Only one possible definition can be suggested by the Darwin theory: 'fitness to survive'. Therefore the precise content of the Darwinian theory is: 'the nature of the relation of the environment to subject is such that the animals which survive will be those which are more fitted to survive than those which do not.' It is impossible to wring any more significant content out of the theory of Natural Selection than this; and once so phrased, the theory is seen to contain nothing at all. It does not explain the change of life against an unchanging environmental background. Like Newtonian 'force' and eighteenth century 'caloric', it is tautologous.

Obviously, if there are no variations in life the operations of the environment in a selective way will not occur, for there will be nothing to select. Hence change in life is a *pre*requisite of natural selection. But even when such selection takes place, the changes cannot be directed in their trend by an unchanging environment as an automatic process. For example, given plus and minus variations of a horn length of one millimetre, how can the unchanging environment produce an increase in length of fifty millimetres, unless there is a continual variation in the direction of greater length with each new stock?

But (the Darwinians urge) the environment in any case does not remain unchanged. We have for example the Ice Age, and the denudation of forest areas. Such environmental changes may actually direct species formation.

If this is so, and it is unquestionably true, we then have changes in the environment invoked to explain changes in life itself. But if a mechanism of natural selection is considered necessary to 'explain' the change of living forms, what mechanism secures the change of non-living forms? And if (as is fairly obvious), no such mechanism is necessary, but the changes which produced the galactic, solar and terrestrial transformation unfold themselves from non-living matter as a result of its structure, why should a special mechanism be necessary to produce changes in living matter?

Natural selection is advanced as an explanation of the origin of species, but it is important to notice that the existence of species is not explained by it. The important feature of the living world is that discontinuities exist. There are sharply defined species separated by gaps, and yet fossil remains force us to believe that they flow from common ancestors, and are all part of the one web of life. Natural selection merely says that, if small variations from the type occur in any given animal forms, those which survive longer will be those possessing the variations which give their possessor a superior fitness to survive. Now while not denying the truth of this, it is plain that the theory starts with the assumption that a species exists from which variations can occur. A variation presupposes a standard from which it varies. It gives no explanation of why living individuals continually group themselves in this way into sharply discontinuous families called species. On the contrary, one would expect from the theory that there would be, not an origin but a degradation of species – a continually increasing panmixia of variations. The real content of the theory is:

If changes take place in individuals born, and *if* not all those individuals can survive to a full term of life, and *if* those changes are hereditary, then those changes which survive will be those changes that are better fitted to survive.

But we also find in the environment the existence of non-living species – the chemical compounds. Such chemical compounds came into existence in their present form as part of a process of change, and there are gaps between them. We therefore have here precisely the same type of phenomenon as, in living matter, the machine of natural selection has been built to produce, but here no such machine has been thought necessary. The change of species arises from the structure of matter. It has never been

seriously suggested that the different chemical compounds 'struggle for existence', and, in any case, such a struggle would be just as inadequate to explain change and discontinuity in the non-living as in the living world.

But the most remarkable assumption of the theory of natural selection is that the environment is solely inimical to the subject, and that the relations of members of a species is only that of deadly rivalry. For example the herring is pictured as producing countless eggs, and the members of this progeny, by the competition for the limited food supply, wage a 'cold pogrom' against each other, which only a few can survive.

Such a conception of the relation of life as only inimical, both as among its members and as between life and the environment, is unfounded. For if the environment were only inimical to life, how could it be that life came into being and flourished out of the environment? And if members of a species are only in relations of mutual rivalry, how does a species emerge and solidify: should not this rivalry be a disruptive force in species?

In fact such a conception is simply the transference of capitalist society into nature. An earlier society saw Nature as a system, in which the whole world of life co-operated in mutual assistance. The herb fed the herbivore, the herbivore fed the carnivore, the carnivore was subject to man. Such a system was illusory as a complete explanation of the system of nature, because, although it pictured nature as a system of conscious relations, they were social and not natural relations. They saw the world as a vehicle of class relations, in which Will, as the willer imagines it to be, is the *type* of all relations. There is always a dominator whose will is free, and a dominated whose action is determined by the goal of the dominator. Such a view is a natural one for a feudal or slave-owning society, in which the domination of man over man is naked and unashamed; it becomes veiled in capitalist economy, where the capitalist's domination is veiled. In such a society the fundamental relation is not the naked and unashamed domination of man over man, but a disguised domination. It is secured by the Will's being regarded as free in its relations to property – i.e., to the environment. The struggles of the free wills for the sum of property appearing in the world markets, subject to the 'laws' of supply and demand, seem to secure the progress of society. For 'property', put 'food supply', for 'market', 'environment', for 'individual free will', 'individual struggle for existence',

and for 'laws of supply and demand', 'physical laws', and there is a complete picture of the world of nature as seen by Darwin and his contemporaries. It is a self-consistent closed world, like the world of Newton. But it began to disintegrate almost at once as the result of experiment, whereas three centuries passed before Newton's closed world of physics cracked. Hence the extreme confusion of biology, a confusion which, just because it is now extreme and because biology was never thoroughly homogeneous, is not so startling to biologists as the splitting of the once monolithic closed world of physics is to physicists.

This world of biology, reflecting capitalist economy, not as it is but as the capitalist sees it, is almost as fictitious as the system of Nature of St. Thomas Aquinas or Aristotle. The same criticisms apply to it as to the capitalist's notions of his own economy. They are as follows:-

(a) It is not possible to separate organism from environment as mutually distinct opposites. Life is the relation between opposed poles which have separated themselves out of reality, but remain in relation throughout the web of becoming. This relation is mutually determining. It is a relation of antagonism but, just because it is a relation, the poles remain a unity.

(b) The evolution of life cannot be determined by the wills of living matter alone, or by the obstacles of non-living matter alone. It is the tension between them that generates on the one hand the emergence of ever clearer goals, increasing the consciousness of necessity, and on the other hand, of greater 'problems' to be overcome. The one produces the other. The environment evolves the will, the will changes the environment.

(c) The laws of the environment, in so far as they constrain the operations of life, are not given in the environment, but given in the relation between environment and life. The laws of the human environment are therefore different from those of the amoebic environment. There is no universal 'law of supply and demand' ruling nature. Hence we can never postulate as primary a system of external laws governing the interaction between environment and organism, for any such laws emerge from the relation between the two, and this is a developing relation.

(d) The development of life is determined by the tendencies of life, just as history and capitalist economy is determined by the wills of individuals. But history does not realise the wills of individuals: it is only determined by them, and in turn determines

them. In the same way, the development of life determines and is determined by tendencies but does not concretely and absolutely realise them. This development itself produces an increasing synthesis between environment and life, which we call the consciousness of the necessity of environmental relations. Not only does this development secure the transformation of *tendencies*, the alteration and elaboration of *goals*, but it also secures the congruence of change to goal. Life is increasingly able to carry out its goals.

(e) The relation within a species or between species is not solely inimical, in the sense of individuals fighting for individual possession of a limited food supply. The food supply is itself an outcome of the particular relations between life and nature. As between the members of a species, increase in number may produce an enhancement per capita of the food supply, contrary to Malthusian laws. This for example is the case with the development of the human species, which in modern England is able to support at a higher standard of living more inhabitants than ancient England. This is due to the change in production, which makes the food supply of man in modern England more plentiful than of man in ancient England. It may be urged that the effect of natural selection has been to secure the survival of those qualities making for social co-operation and the production of a more liberal food-supply. But this is untrue, for social co-operation in a capitalist economy is not instinctive to man, but is the result of being born in such an economy and inheriting the social and economic environment of that period in capital, plant and culture. Therefore it is not man which has changed, but his environment; and yet it is he who has changed it.

Similarly the multiplication of one species is not inimical to another, if it is the food of that species. Or the relation between species may be beneficial but indirect, as when birds distribute seeds, bees pollen, and coral polyps form reefs.

Indeed, the conception of the environment as solely inimical in the sense of the 'environment' of capitalist society, is a negation of the facts. The environment, by interaction with the incipient organism, produces in history a multiplication and elaboration of life. Its effect on life is therefore such as to increase its domain and complexity. How can it be conceived as solely inimical? Only by supposing external powers entering life from outside the Universe, *in spite* of matter, and overcoming the enmity of the

environment. But Natural Selection then becomes meaningless – the world of life is determined by unknown entities not by the environment.

The inter-species enmities of capitalism are themselves but one stage in an incessant development which by no means produces always an internecine struggle of organisms for property. This 'law of change' is what change is and change is what reality is. Such change is determined and not lawless and unknowable because it is *material* change. This involves the emergence, as discontinuities, of new material qualities, which are always at least two-termed: There is a relation between the qualitied thing, the *organism* or *subject*, and the rest of the Universe, the *environment* or *object*. Because the quality emerges as a relation, it may be attached to either term, but to attach it *completely* to either term is to generate one of the familiar dilemmas of metaphysical thought.

The tension between environment and life is, therefore, not the incursion of life into a static world, but the development of a contradiction in matter which results in the separation, as a discontinuity, of living and non-living matter, facing each other as opposite poles – life against environment, man against nature. Yet these opposites interpenetrate and, by their interpenetration, develop the increasing complexity of the world of nature, full of new discontinuous qualities. Species is but one particular case of such qualities. The field of consciousness is but one example of the complete interpenetration of subject and object. It is useless to look for mechanisms like natural selection to 'produce' evolution in time, for time is not a container or stream, it is not 'the matrix of all becoming', it is one aspect of the evolution of matter, of which the other aspect is space. A material becoming is what reality is.

If none the less we attempt to seek for such mechanisms, we can only find special cases of evolutionary process. For example, being ourselves living and ourselves changeful, we explain evolution as a property of life, and confront life the absolutely changeful, with environment the absolutely changeless. And yet this is false. The cosmos had a history of change before the emergence of life. By applying the most general case to special cases we attempt to make the part contain the whole.

Or else we explain change in human instead of biological terms. We then get a system of nature which is a reflection of the

society of the time. In the Darwinian upgrade of capitalist economy, evolutionary change is secured by the operation in nature of capitalist social relations as seen by the capitalist. These relations in the world of nature are held to result in progress – that is, in the production of 'higher' forms of life. In feudal times the same tendency produces a theory of nature in which all species and objects have their places and purposes. The interaction of this system does not produce progress, for the social relations of scholastic days are already brakes upon the productive forces of society. The system of nature is therefore pictured as static, or as awaiting the Day of Judgment and meanwhile becoming more deeply involved in sin.

The value of Darwinism therefore was that it persuaded men to see change in life, and see it as determined by the nature of matter. Such change can be seen in all periods where men's minds have not been frozen by the forms of a ruling class. The rapid increase in the productive forces of Darwin's era necessarily broke down the formulae of the conservative classes, and made men see the becoming of nature as never before. And just as the growth of capitalist economy was felt by capitalists as due to the pressure of the expanding market, so change in nature was seen as the pressure of the environment. Thus man for the first time conceived the world of nature as subject to impersonal laws.

The weakness of Darwinism was that it saw change through the ideology of a class society, an ideology necessarily one-sided therefore. The illusion of capitalism has two distorting effects on Darwinism.

(1) It pictures 'progress' or change as the result of an unrestricted struggle for profit (food), because this is how capitalism pictures its own economy. Looking below the surface, we can see that 'progress' and 'unrestricted struggle between organisms for existence' are far from being mutually dependent terms, but merely find themselves connected at a certain stage of social evolution. The unrestricted struggle leads ultimately to the decay of capitalism and to economic regression. It is not merely inadequate as a law of biological progress, but also as a law of capitalist progress.

(2) It sees life as insurgent against the dead environment. The environment or market poses of its unalterable nature certain problems, these life or the producer has to solve: this is the

bourgeois conception of life's place in the scheme of nature. Such a conception is of course the reflex of the bourgeois attitude towards his social role: freedom consists in the unrestricted property right of the bourgeois over inanimate things which he manages for his profit by learning their laws. This is sufficient to give him freedom; and since every man is at liberty to acquire property to an unlimited extent, every man is capable of becoming free. Hence freedom appears to be a matter of knowing the market.

This conception is without justification in fact. A relation to a thing is a mutually determining relation, whether it be a relation of knowing or fabricating. In learning about or acting upon outer reality, man is himself altered, and this forms the basis for a new action. The market changes, not of itself, but by the action of men. A property right is not enough for freedom. The wills and actions of men make history certainly, but past history determines their wills and actions. Not only this, but the outcome of their joint wills, will not be the realisation of their individual wills, unless the co-operation of their willed actions (which produces history) is a *conscious* co-operation. But to accept this would involve the destruction of the whole picture of the bourgeois as a centre of free activity, securing progress by fufilling his will without social restraint, against a background of the fixed, impersonal, environmental market.

Again, owing to the intimate interpenetration of environment and organism, a relation to property which is dominating and unrestricted necessarily becomes a dominating relation over men. All property (as distinct from unalienable natural traits) is social property. It is congealed labour; from its social rôle it derives its value and its being. It contains human life-blood; that of the men whose indispensable efforts produced it, and gave it its value. Bourgeois private property creates the exploited proletariat, and is the instrument of domination of the bourgeois class. History is made by their wills, but because they are unconscious of the determinism of society, including the determinism of their wills, their wills produce society's history blindly. There is a discrepancy between their conscious individual goals and the collective result of their actions. They bring about by their actions the opposite of what they will. The actions of the slave-owners first impoverished and then disrupted the Roman Empire, and the actions of capitalists to-day produce

unemployment, war, and general decay.

The evolution of living objects is not therefore a case of life surmounting a certain set of obstacles posed by the environment, or the environment acting as a sieve to catch the higher elements in life's variations. The environment is not just property to be administered by the bourgeoisie, or a market whose fixed laws of supply and demand evoke the 'best results' from the living producer. The relation between them is mutually determining and developing. If we picture life diagrammatically as a series of steps, then at each step the environment has become different – there are different problems, different laws, different obstacles at each step even though any series of steps beside its differences has certain general problems, laws and obstacles in common. Each new step of evolution is itself a new quality, and this involves a newness which affects both terms – organism and environment.

The environment 'lives' as well as life, because both affect each other through and through. How can my environment – which is subject to Einstein's relativity laws, is full of history known by me, and is analysed for me by all the apparatus of Western culture – be the same environment as that of a protozoan, whose environment consists of nothing but light and dark, edible or excretable? Hence, since both life and environment change at every step, any attempt to 'explain' the detailed change of one in terms of the general laws of the other is bound to fail. We must either explain the general change of both in the most general, logical and coherent way – which is by means of the particular terminology of dialectics – or explain the detailed change of both in terms of the laws appropriate to that sphere of relations, which will be one or other of the particular positive sciences – biology, physics or history.

This error in the Darwinian theory was inevitable because the biologist could only approach the problem in the light of the evolution of the complete superstructure of science at that date. The bourgeois conception of life's rôle as the manipulation of undeveloping 'dead' property, irrespective of social relations, made absolutely essential the thorough examination of the laws of 'dead' property in their least changeful form. Hence, three centuries before Darwin bourgeois physics was born with Descartes and Galileo, and soon flourished. The bourgeois, as compared to the slave-owner, had at least this closer contact with

reality, he realised that freedom in relation to the manipulation of dead property involves a consciousness of its necessities. Bourgeois physics has as its programme the consciousness of the necessity of bourgeois property, which includes the whole universe, for bourgeois property, according to the legal maxim, extends down to hell and *usque ad colum*. Physics is the sphere of the most general and unchanging relations of the universe.

Since subject and object interpenetrate, the manipulation of property necessarily involves the manipulation of man, of the bourgeois himself. The bourgeois would therefore be led ultimately to learn, not merely the necessities of dead nature but also of society, and therefore the laws which determine himself. This is precisely the programme of Marx and Engels. But once one has done this one is no longer bourgeois, for bourgeois society is that economy which involves an unconsciousness of social relations, these appearing not as relations between men and men but metamorphosed into an impersonal market, a plexus of human relations regarded as a non-human, undeveloping 'environment'. Hence it is impossible for bourgeois society to achieve this conclusion, for once arrived there bourgeois society would be no longer bourgeois society but communist. All the social relations and class forms thrown up by bourgeois society resist such a change.

In studying the environment therefore the bourgeois physicist is forced to throw overboard every quality which involves the bourgeois, otherwise he would be drawn into his own infernal machine of necessity in which development is unreal. Owing to the complete interpenetration of subject and object, this involves, as I have shown elsewhere, throwing overboard *all* qualities, and the unreal world thus created – a mere ballet of equations – finally dissolves at the test of reality into the antinomies of relativity and quantum physics.

None the less the bourgeois cannot avoid tackling living qualities. Owing to their complete interpenetration, life always figures in the environment. Not only are animals part of his environment but so are human beings. He is forced to attempt to control the breeding of animals and the use of their flesh and by-products and when the proletariat stirs in the first unrest of revolution, he is driven to consider the control of the *thinking* of human beings – their desires and wants. Or, as it presents itself to him, education is necessary to produce good citizens. The

bourgeois must educate and advertise. He asserted only a right to property, but this now involves clearly the domination of animals and men, and an attempt therefore to understand the necessities of their nature. This gives rise to biology and psychology. These sciences show the maximum distortion because here the ground is most 'dangerous'. At any moment the bourgeois may find his own will determined. Indeed the labours of large numbers of thinkers such as Berkeley, Hume, Schelling, Fichte, Kant and Hegel, are devoted primarily to the task, known as 'philosophy', of saving the bourgeois free-will by separating mind from matter, and it is the last who carries it to the very limit, so that by Marx's inversion mind returns into matter and produces the philosophy of communism.

Of course this distortion is not deliberate. The bourgeois is in his own light. He is using inherited false weights, dating from the bourgeois revolution, and he is bound to give false measure with them. Thus Darwin finds the world of life already a separate sphere placed in an environment which is the world of Newtonian physics, changeless, non-mental and unqualitied, and this in turn is simply the bourgeois market with its impersonal 'laws' of supply and demand, stripped bare of all the human desires and sufferings of which they are the mean. When Darwin is called on to set life in this frame, as something in causal relation with it, he can only give life the rôle of the bourgeois producer, whose efforts are called forth by the impersonal laws of the environment and the competition of all other producers. Even the most subtle theory restricted to these terms is doomed to failure. Any such theory is unable to explain the emergence of life's new qualities as they do emerge, the change of environment, the existence of variations, or the origin of species. The theorist at some later stage must evoke an evolutionary God who gate-crashes into the dead Universe to 'enliven' it; but this then presents the dilemma of a choice between a God who knows what he is doing, in which case the Universe is simply performing to an already written script and is pure waste of time, or who does not know, in which case we have no 'explanation' and must still seek round for causes which will explain the life-god's acting as he does.

The contradictions inherent in the bourgeois view of life have given rise in the field of evolution to contradictions which, like other bourgeois dualisms, seem exclusive opposites but which when more deeply analysed prove to be merely different aspects

of the fundamental bourgeois position. Of these perhaps the most familiar to biologists is the conflict between the neo-Darwinians and the neo-Lamarckians. This becomes a burning question in the form of the 'inheritance of acquired characters'. The neo-Darwinians deny the possibility of this; the neo-Lamarckians insist on its occurrence.

The neo-Darwinians hold that the evolution of species is the automatic result of the selecting process of the environment on the living organism. All adaptations are therefore 'chance' variations selected by chance.

The neo-Lamarckians, on the contrary, hold that the urges of the organism itself, in conflict with the environment, produce adaptations which are inherited. All adaptations are therefore purposive.

But the controversy is entirely without meaning in fact, because both schools separate the organism from the environment as exclusive opposites, of which one is living and changeful and the other inert and changeless. The two positions therefore correspond to the mechanical materialist and idealist positions in bourgeois metaphysics, and are generated by each other. If you separate the two in this absolute way, it is a matter of predisposition which view you adopt. If you are interested in the environment, and start from it as a basis, as the *real* thing, then all qualities (i.e. characters or adaptations) seem to be determined by the environment. If however you start from the organism, all adaptations will seem to be determined by the organism. Moreover, since you have separated the two, neither environment nor organism are real environment or real organism, for they are only *really* real as related parts of one real universe. Otherwise on the one hand there is a mechanical, unchanging environment, which therefore acts blindly and automatically, and on the other a free competitive organism, which therefore acts purposively with a desire undetermined by its environment – with unconscious, bourgeois free-will. These are both travesties of reality and cannot generate a causal explanation of life.

In the Darwinian explanation this weakness is shown by a dependence on 'chance' variations – i.e. on variations of whose exact determinism we are ignorant. In the Lamarckian explanation this weakness is shown by a dependence on spontaneous 'striving' – i.e. movement towards an undetermined goal.

'Spontaneity' is however simply the exclusively subjective aspect of that same ignorance of determinism of which 'chance' is the objective aspect.

In reality organism and environment are *both* contained in the *adaptation*, which is a subject-object relation. Hence the 'problem' of the transmission of acquired characteristics, which has rent biology and even driven a promising young biologist to fraud and suicide, is in the way in which it is usually discussed a problem without meaning.

The variations with which biology deals may be any quality from a colour to a habit. It is a new individual quality, by which this animal is differentiated from others of the species. It is then a new divergence from a type. Given in the recognition of a variation therefore is the existence of a species, a settled type from which there is variation, and the emergence of a new quality not before existent.

The question at issue between neo-Darwinians and neo-Lamarckians is: If the quality is acquired, can it be inherited? If a skin thickening, habit, longer horn or different tint, is the result of something the animal 'does' when confronted with the 'problems' posed by the environment, will this character be shown in succeeding generations?

It is this question I call meaningless, for, in the distinction between acquired and innate characters, lies the same absolute distinction between organism and environment which leads always to a useless dualism and is the characteristic product of bourgeois culture.

A given quality of the animal can only manifest itself in a given environment or life-experience. For example colours are dependent on certain chemicals in the food, mother love in hens demands a magnesium diet, and so on. For every specific quality, the environment must also be specified. Two strains of fowl will both be yellow-shanked fed on one kind of food; fed on another one strain will be yellow and the other green-shanked. Is the green shank an acquired character? It is in fact impossible to distinguish between acquired and germinal characteristics, because all characters are germinal response to an acquired situation.

This arises from the fact that every organism has a life experience and is only known in that life experience. Its life experience is its environment. Its qualities represent a balance or

synthesis between internal and external forces. A change in external forces may produce a change in qualities, but only if the organism has the germinal aptitude for responding to that kind of external force in that kind of way. If pressure on the skin produces a callous it can only do so because the skin is germinally such that it responds to pressure in that kind of way. A callous is an acquired character only in that sense. Mother love in hens is innate and hereditary, but if the diet is robbed of magnesium, the quality of mother love does not appear. Hence mother love is an acquired characteristic in the sense that it is acquired as the hen's reaction to magnesium.

Assume a change in external conditions such that a species suddenly begins, in all its members, to receive pressure on the skin at a certain place. All members of that generation will show callouses – an 'acquired characteristic' and yet due to the germinal properties of the skin.

What of the next generation, who will endure the same conditions? They may show callouses in the same place. It will then be said that the adaptation is still only acquired and not transmitted. The same pressure naturally produces the same callous. Any members of the species which do not receive the pressure will not show the callous.

But suppose after a lapse of time one or two individuals are born with callouses? The acquired inheritance, the Lamarckians will claim, has been transmitted. No (reply the Darwinians) certain of the animals had a tendency towards thickening as the result of a chance germinal variation. These animals were favoured and their progeny survived. The source of change was a chance germinal variation, and it was this that was transmitted.

It is plain that, on this basis, there is no possible way of proving whether a character is acquired and then transmitted, or whether 'only' the ability to acquire it – the result of a germinal change – is transmitted. Since there is no way of detecting any difference in the content of the theories, there is no difference between them. Acquired characteristics are defined in such a way (a) that it is impossible to prove transmission (b) that there is no difference between acquired and germinal characteristics.

The reason that this is not seen is because of the general unclarity with which the issue is presented. The neo-Lamarckians, although they do not realise it, are not claiming the *inheritance of acquired characteristics*, but the *emergence of new*

characteristics. There is no problem as to whether an acquired character is transmitted. Acquired characters are *always* transmitted. Given germinal and environmental homogeneity between two generations, any character due to environmental action will appear in *both* generations as a result of their hereditary similarity. A pressure which produces the callous in father will produce it in son.

But what the two schools are really arguing about, is: Are acquired characters *changed* in transmission – i.e. if a pressure produces a callous in a pure generation P will the same callous appear in a pure generation F, *either without pressure, or with less pressure*. If such a new variation appears, there is no way of separating it from a spontaneous germinal variation between two generations, which is the neo-Darwinian position. It is the same thing. The Lamarckian 'inheritance of acquired characters' presupposes a germinal variation, and *vice versa*.

The unclarity would never have arisen except as a result of the historic bourgeois ignorance of what freedom means, and of what is the relation between free-will and determinism. Is free-will, as the bourgeois supposes, the unconsciousness of necessity? Then the 'chance' variation can be distinguished from the acquired variation, for one is spontaneous and free and the other determined. But in fact the chance variation is simply a variation of whose causes we are ignorant, and so is the spontaneous variation.

There is therefore no difference between the Lamarckian theory of the transmission of acquired characters and the Weismann germ plasm theory. When both are properly defined in terms of organism *and* environment, they are seen to be not opposites but the same thing, just because acquired and innate characters are the same thing. The bitterness of the controversy arises from the fact that each party is concerned with one pole of the contradiction implicit in the one bourgeois position, in which the determinism of the environment is an opposed thing to the free will of the organism.

There cannot therefore be an important distinction between Darwinian and Lamarckian theories. They merely represent the unfolding of contradictions which are to-day bringing about the decomposition of the bourgeois world-view in which all bourgeois culture is contained. The real difference is between the bourgeois separation of organism and environment and of acquired and

germinal characteristics, and the communist synthesis of them.

The bourgeois antinomies can only arise from a partial, class-limited conception of the nature of change. Science is the establishing by theory and practice that the world is homogeneously material. To this the very method of science – the continual unfolding of reality – adds that this material unity is a *becoming*. The establishment of the homogeneous materiality of phenomena is the establishment of their causal linkage, and this is what Science is.

Science cannot 'deny' causality, any more than it can deny its own existence. Where no mutual determinism of qualities has yet been established, there is no science. If it is stated that a certain group of qualities are exempt from causality, it is not science denying this, for science's statements are all causal in form. It is man denying that there is science in that sphere.

Bourgeois science, by splitting itself up into biology, psychology, physics, aesthetics, etc., and then attempting to make each of these spheres self-contained at once raised insurmountable difficulties. By its very programme of closure it stated: 'Each of these spheres of qualities is in itself a material unity, but all together they are not a material unity.' This raised the problem of how these closed worlds, being self-determined, could all be known by man, for the knowability itself constituted a linkage between them, which was denied by the very method of the science. That is why, when physics reached a certain stage of development, epistemology (as expressed in Heisenberg's 'Principle of Indeterminacy') became the vital and basic problem. In biology this splitting raised the 'insoluble' problem of evolution – insoluble because environment and organism are artificially separated.

The theory of bourgeois science is not only split, it is static. It is based on bourgeois physics and therefore, on the eternity of 'property rights', the unchanging laws of the environment. Becoming physics first, and, making all changing qualities subjective, it gives a false picture of the environment as changeless. All it can give finally as reality is a circus of unchanging equations; yet even so, the 'instability' of these equations, indicating an unstable universe, produces a crisis in physics.

Bourgeois science now turns to living matter, in which it has piled up all reality's changing qualities, on the plea that they are

subjective or 'living'. As a result it is faced in these spheres primarily with the task of explaining change by means of categories drawn from a changeless world. Biology (if we include psychology and sociology as departments), is simply the science of the change of qualities. Such qualities are relations between subject and object, but to bourgeois biology, because of the previous programme of physics, they are solely subjective or 'living qualities' – qualities of life. It followed from the very way the bourgeois tackled physics, that when he came to tackle 'biology', biology would simply be the science of changing quality. Evolution was therefore given in his programme from the start.

But since the world as seen by physics, excluding quality, had been rendered changeless, the change which is the feature of all reality (but which the bourgeois saw piled up solely in the sphere of life) came to him as a surprising novelty, a fact requiring explanation.

This change has two aspects. There is the change in the individual, which we call 'a life'. We grow from embryos to old men, and parallel to our external experience, we experience an internal change which takes the form of learning, of a continual Chinese boxing of presents to make a past. Life takes the form of memory and experience, or *time*.

The bourgeois was not surprised by this individual change, because he experienced it immediately, because it was farthest divorced from the environment he had stripped of quality, and because, in his conception of society, the individual was in fact the source of change and progress, as the 'free' will acting on the law-obeying environment of property.

There is also the change in the sum of life, spread over aeons, which takes the form of the change, not of individuals but of species. The bourgeois learned this from the record of the rocks and, because it was not the individuals as in capitalist society but whole species who were sources of change, it came to him as a thing needing explanation. The change that occurs to an individual which he experienced directly, had never seemed to need explanation.

He therefore gave an explanation consonant with his capitalist ideology. The change of species was brought about by the struggle for existence of individuals, as in a capitalist economy. The free will of the individual therefore becomes the source of

change, although the problem at issue is the origin of species.

This explanation, as we have seen, is no explanation. By dichotomising environment and organism, it creates an artificial dualism between acquired and germinal characters. Its mechanism of natural selection still premises changes in the organism (chance variations) which are changes essential to evolution and yet are not explained by the theory.

Of course the bourgeois had made his task impossible. If in a changeless world of absolute time and space, in which unchanging atoms move according to conservation laws, the scientist suddenly finds a heap of changing *living* qualities, it is impossible for him to explain their change in terms of the changeless.

But in fact it is change that is primary, and this must be so, because whereas change includes the changeless, the changeless does not include change. The changeless world of bourgeois physics is correct as an abstraction from the changing world of reality; but it is spurious directly it attempts to pose itself as absolute. That is why all absolutes in bourgeois physics have, one after another, broken up under their own contradictions. If there is change, there must be something that remains recognisably the same, so that we can say there has been change. This is the changeless on which physics operates, and is of course only *relatively* changeless. Bourgeois physics attempts to make it absolutely *changeless*. Change does not take place in changeless Time and Space, but time and space are aspects of it.

Moreover change involves discontinuity. There must be a separation so that we can say *now* 'the quality does not exist', *then* 'it does.' To deny this is to deny the reality of change.

Change also involves the determined unity of the changing phenomena. If the new quality does not arise from the mutual determinism of previous qualities, it is impossible to say meaningfully that it qualifies the previous group of qualities. It is impossible to show that it is connected with the previous group. For example the redness of a red-hot poker qualifies the poker because it is a quality of the material body, the poker black or red, but previously black. Without this material unity, it would be meaningless to say, 'The poker has become red-hot.' The redness must stand in a mutually determining relation with the older group of qualities – the black poker. It qualifies them. If it does not qualify them, they have not changed. This means that the becoming of the world is one, or: 'there is a science of reality.'

But to assert that there is something common to all qualities, and prior to them, is simply to say: 'The world is a material world.'

We accept this as a matter of course in ourselves. We change: time is for us a feeling: space is for us a perception: both time and space as we experience them are aspects of our becoming in relation with the rest of reality. We change, each second is recognisably different for us, and yet we remain the same 'I': we retain our 'personality'. The past, in the form of memory, continually gathers in the present, but the present is always discontinuous and distinct from the past. We do not require an explanation for this; it seems given in the structure of the world. We cannot imagine ourself ceasing to change, Time ceasing to flow, or ourselves becoming 'someone else'. We identify something that is 'I', and something, 'the body', which was there before the 'I', and will be there when the 'I' ceases to exist. The body is part of the material unity which links and determines all the qualities which qualify it.

Yet when bourgeois physics sees precisely the same phenomena in species evolution, it requires an explanation, not of the precise mode of change but of the general 'reason' for it. Since thought is naturally dialectical, this absurd demand, so clearly illusory, can only be based on some outside constraint, some absurdity or contradiction rooted in his environment. This contradiction is the class contradiction of capitalist economy, with its guiding fiction, which therefore provides a fictitious capitalist explanation for the change.

The bourgeois biologist wastes his time in seeking a general explanation for the change of living matter. The dialectical materialist seeks no such general explanation for a change in any part of reality, for change is what reality is. What the dialectical materialist seeks is the determining relations between the new qualities emerging in that change. Given in his task as a scientist is the establishment by theory and practice that all becoming is materially one. Therefore each new quality of change, as it emerges, must be determined by previous qualities, and his task is to uncover the hierarchy of such mutually determining relations.

The bourgeois biologist is so preoccupied with finding a reason for change as change, that he neglects to examine the structure of change. Science's task is not finding an explanation of change, any more than of finding an explanation for the existence of

existents. Such a programme would be foolish. The bourgeois biologist as a Darwinian neglects this. He talks about 'chance variations'. This is like talking about unknowable data; science has no place for such language. It is precisely the determinism of variations with which science is concerned in evolution. Chance is a name for our ignorance of this. Yet the bourgeois biologist overlooks this, the real problem of biology, because he came to the study of life with an ideology that supposed change to be the activity of the free bourgeois, and that therefore the change of evolution was only explicable by a situation like that of capitalist economy. The same ideology had already introduced a dichotomy between organism and environment such that all definitions of 'characters' or 'adaptation', and of heredity or development, were made self-contradictory from the start.

Science however is not philosophy. In so far as it remains science and goes out in practice, it exposes its own contradictions. Thus the development of genetics, embryology and ecology has been the continual exposure of the errors in the bourgeois standpoint, and the continual transformation of leading concepts as a result. But since all such transformations are made within the circle of bourgeois categories, they produce, not the unification of the science but its disintegration into special studies, each of which represents a compromise between bourgeois metaphysics and a specific group of discoveries. Thus genetics and embryology have drifted apart, and genetics itself has split into a number of different studies. There is a limit to this kind of decomposition, and it already seems to be near. The synthesis cannot be brought about by a synthesis within biology, for it is just the posing of biology as a closed world separate from physics and sociology that is the root of the trouble. It can only be healed by the return to science of a common world-view.

Criticism of Darwinism is criticism of the contradictions that Darwinism unfolded within the circle of bourgeois categories. Darwinism as found in Darwin's writings is still fresh from contact with the multitude of new biological facts then being discovered. It does not as yet pose organism aridly against environment, but the web of life is still seen fluidly interpenetrating with the rest of reality. Germinal and acquired characteristics are distinguished as if they were separate things, but Darwin believes in the transmission of both. The extraordinary richness of the pageant of change, history and conflict in life which

Darwin unfolds, gives an insurgent revolutionary power to his writings and those of such immediate followers as Huxley. Biology is still unified; but Darwinism already contained the contradictions which brought about its disintegration, and later biologists only developed them by the exposure of the whole system to the light of reality.

Of great importance in this connection was the work of Mendel which was the negation of Darwin's theory of capitalist biology. Mendel was a priest, an Abbot of the order of Augustinian canons. He was opposed to all that industrial capitalism was doing in his world. His stand against the political innovations of developing capitalist economy in Germany, not only cut short his scientific work but ultimately worried him into an early grave.

He approached the study of variations therefore in a spirit opposed to change, resting on the eternal verities of logic and revelation; but he was also a scientist. He was devoted to the fact, to reality, to things as they are in practice. He was a scientist with a clerical viewpoint, just as Darwin was a scientist with a bourgeois viewpoint. And just as Darwin's bourgeois genius, as a result of his capitalist revolutionary ideology, looked for change and its causes, so Mendel's clerical genius looked for what must necessarily exist in change – the changeless, *that which* changes. Thus he discovered the Mendelian factors of heredity, whose assembly, beneath the changing mask of the phenotype, forms a predetermined genotype.

The fate of Mendel's ideas is proof that the ideology of an era is not the mere sum of the 'discoveries' of individuals, but that these discoveries receive their form and pressure from the social relations of the age. Mendel's discoveries were pressed out of existence until the twentieth century, when de Vries made similar discoveries and Mendel's forgotten work came to light.

Mendel's work was antagonistic to the concept of change for, taken as it stood, it showed that variations were not chance and spontaneous but predetermined. The factors were in themselves unchangeable; the apparent change of the phenotype arose from the masking of a recessive by a dominant character, a masking which only held with that particular individual. Behind the changing pageant of phenotypes an unchanging set of genes performed mathematical combinations.

Mendel's conception could only come into biology when strict Darwinism, in the form of Weismann's germ plasm theory, had

given rise to its opposite, the theory of spontaneous unfolding of large variations or 'mutations'. In the mutation theory it is the 'free will' of the organism that is stressed: just as in the theory of natural selection the necessities of the environment are primary. This change of viewpoint in biology is parallel to the movement from mechanical materialism to idealism in philosophy.

Mendel's theory now, in the hands of de Vries, is used to support the 'freewill' of the organism. The organism makes spontaneous jumps – the mutations – and the environment has no effect on these, they are inherited and sorted according to Mendelian principles. The animal is now the sole source of change, which it produces out of its 'spontaneity'.

The evening primrose (which at that time seemed to develop suddenly a whole series of mutations) became, as a result of de Vries' theories, the symbol of the arrival of mysticism in biology. De Vries is invoked by Evelyn Underhill in defence of mystical raptures and the Dark Night of the Soul in her standard work on 'Mysticism'. His work is followed by a general interest on the part of biologists in meristic variations, Lamarckianism, entelechies, *élan vital* and the like. Biology becomes concerned in preserving the spontaneity of the bourgeois at any price. Though the apparent mutations of the evening primrose have since been shown to be due to the masking of recessive genes and a greater intricacy of genetic inheritance than was allowed for in early Mendelian theory, the movement it initiated has gained in power. It is rooted in the decay of the bourgeois world-view.

Meanwhile genetics, in the researches of Morgan, had been revealing the mechanism of Mendelian heredity more clearly. Above all it revealed the inconsistencies of all formulations which attempt a dichotomy between environment and organism. Certainly Morgan's researches on *Drosophila* at first appeared to render possible the explanation of phenotypical change entirely in terms of the shuffling of a stock of genes; but Morgan is primarily an experimenter and only secondly a theoretician and practice forced Mendelism to include the environment. The trend of genetics is to-day as follows:

(a) The gene is *not* the name for an entity which produces a defined character (like blue eyes). An eye colour or similar specified character is the result of the interaction of numerous genes, and by no means always the same group of genes.

(b) The gene is the name for a germinal entity which produces

a special reaction of the adult organism to its experience, which may be termed a quality. What this quality is depends on (i) other genes; (ii) the environment. In other words, every gene can only be expressed as a subject-object relation, as a particular organic term in relation with a Universal term, whose tension generates the phenotypical quality.

(c) The gene is discontinuous. We can locate and separate genes. But its expression is continuous. The genes can only be expressed as an interpenetrating relation between the whole organism and the whole environment.

(d) As an abstraction the gene is completely discontinuous and completely changeless. In reality it is the quality produced by the gene in the individual which is discontinuous, and this quality is not changeless, because it is a quality as seen in individuals and each individual is necessarily different from others.

(e) As an abstraction new genes can come into being as new germinal mutations. In reality new genes can only be recognised as new qualities shown in the individual for the first time. Such qualities are the product of the environment acting on the organism and are therefore both germinal and acquired.

Thus the whole conception of an abstract environment selecting mechanically, or an abstract organism spontaneously and wilfully mutating, is seen to be incompatible with the practical results of genetics. True genetics began with a programme of isolating the gene and establishing its mode of inheritance. But reality exposed the contradictions in such a programme.

The programme of genetics is in fact not absolute but historical. Its task is to discover the determinism of each quality as it appears and explain it in terms

(a) The prenatal history of the organism (genotype);
and (b) The life experience of this genotype;
(c) As synthesised in the phenotype.

Moreover (a) can be analysed into a long chain of previous phenotypes, or sets of qualities, each of which contains a genotype, an experience, and a synthesis. Each link in the chain is discontinuous because it is an individual, but the chain is continuous because it is an inheritance. And (b) can be analysed into a past history of the environment, and the change in the

nature of its relations with life. The organism becomes a Chinese nest of boxes of qualities, and there is now seen to be no necessity for explaining change as change. That is given in the undeniable fact that the organism has a history. And there is no necessity for explaining heredity, for that also is given in the fact that the organism has a history, for to say a thing has history is to say it has endured, and the thing that endures, the substance, is precisely what heredity is. Heredity is no more in need of an explanation as such than is the likeness of the black to the red-hot poker.

Biology can then proceed to its real task, that of discovering the determined, material sequence of qualities, in each step of which organism and environment are involved as warp and woof. It is none the less the case that contemporary genetics (even where practice has forced it to abandon its original, completely bourgeois programme), still operates in a kind of cloud of bourgeois metaphysics. Always lurking in the background is the assumption that the gene is a changeless character, that the environment is separate from the organism, and that heredity and variation are baffling accidents of reality peculiar to life, which require explanation. These assumptions are continually contradicted by practice, and thus every geneticist, when explaining his discoveries, has to waste his efforts on a preliminary wrestle with the unreal metaphysics he has inherited.

The same wrestling is to be seen in embryology, which is in theory the study of individual development, just as genetics is in theory the study of species development. In practice they overlap, for embryology cannot disregard the ontology of species and genetics can only examine species-change through the mediation of individuals. This overlapping is given in the nature of becoming.

Embryology is rent by a dualism which goes back to the beginnings of biology, and is inevitable directly thought is anti-dialectical. Though the dualism is focussed in embryology, it is in fact the 'problem of growth or development'. The two schools are the *epigenetic* and *preformationist* schools of thought. The dualism has taken a number of different forms, but it remains below all forms the same opposition.

A thing that is a shapeless tiny ovum becomes a man. It grows and develops. How is this 'miracle' performed?

To the preformationist of the eighteenth century, the change

was the swelling of a homunculus in the ovum, so that the growth of the embryo paralleled the growth of the young man. Naturally such a view found difficulty in accounting for larval stages, in which the animal goes through a radically different-looking form. Logically this view implied that in the 'first parents', generation was infolded in generation, like a nest of Chinese boxes, and billions of tiny complete individuals were contained in Eve's loins.

The epigeneticists saw development as the influence of a formative power on shapeless matter. This view derives from Aristotle, in which the matter is the female blood and the form is the male sperm.

These views have become progressively refined with the development of biology, but have not departed from their dualism.

On the one hand growth is regarded as predetermined, in the sense that, given the germ cell, each particle must contain determinants for some part of the body, so that the whole is unfolded automatically by nutrition. This is simply the preformation theory brought up to date.

On the other hand growth is regarded as the emergence of an 'entelechy' or pattern, which dominates the organism, and modifies its growth towards the given end of the 'complete' organism.

Now it is supposed that these views include the whole range of possibilities. The first may be described as mechanical and the second as teleological, and it is held that these are opposites, and that the embryologist must come down on one or the other side. In fact they are merely aspects of the same partial view, which we have met so often elsewhere in bourgeois culture.

The mechanical materialist explains growth by the fact that the cell is a mass of determinants or genes, each of which produces a different character of the organism. But in fact this 'explanation' merely multiplies the problem. How can any particular gene, or combination of genes, determine out of the given material a hand or the shape of a hand or an eye any more than one complete nucleus determines one complete man? Subdivision of the task of formation does not make the task any easier; it makes it more difficult. One is driven finally to the ultimate atom and the ultimate character it produces, and then back again to two more problems:

(a) How do all these atomic characters combine to form a unified organism, for it is well known that modification or transplantation of one part of an organism affects the whole.

(b) How does this atom pass on its characteristic 'power' to new atoms entering the organism. (The transmission of characters).

Thus all schemes like Weismann's, in which biophores or determinants are sorted out and migrate to different parts of the body, only postpone and exacerbate the problem: 'How is dead matter – in the process of nutrition – formed into live matter?' Moreover there is the serious difficulty that the presence of the same number of chromosomes in every cell, however specialised, throughout the whole body, casts doubt on any sorting of determinants; and this is reinforced by the experiments that show there are two stages in embryonic development:-

(1) When one developing embryo, if divided into two or more parts, will develop into two or more complete organisms. This could only be explained on the assumption that the determinants are not at this stage sorted out, but are present in complete batches in each cell.

(2) When an embryo exhibits zones, and division or excision of a whole zone will produce a corresponding missing or imperfect zone in the developed organism. This could only be explained on the assumption that at each stage the determinants are sorted out in zones of increasing specialisation before the final determinant reaches the final spot. This is discredited by the fact that the zoning can be altered by outside forces without apparent material alteration in the organism, whereas if material determinants or separate visible genes were at work, their change of zones should be accompanied by wholesale migration of determinants into alignment with the new zones.

It may seem that there is a difference between the theory that the genes or material determinants of the zygote predetermine parts of the organism and the eighteenth century preformationist theory of a tiny man folded in the ovum, but both theories spring from the same approach to life. Take a novel character of the organism: a malformed digit, a curved spine, size below the average, a thickened skin, or a 'black eye'. Such a deformation is a quality; it represents a specific 'form' given to the material. Is there then a determinant for this deformity or novel character in the zygote?

No, replies the preformationist, these characters are acquired. They are then the result of special forms impressed by the *environment* on the organism.

But we have previously exposed the myth of acquired characters, and we can now easily see through it here. A black eye or a thickened skin is due to an abnormal environment – pressure or impact on the organism. But a normal eye or a normal skin is due to a normal environment, and here temperature, food, air, are much more critical for 'normal' conditions than abnormal. Therefore if an abnormal environment produces abnormal forms or *acquired* characteristics, a normal environment produces normal forms or *innate* characteristics. Since the material determinants are the same in both cases, the form of the organism cannot be the result of the determinants, or else the forms would be the same in both cases. The forms must be the result of the environment, and the difference between abnormal and normal is a matter of different specification of environment.

But it is equally true that the tendency towards (say) thickening of the skin in the abnormal environment, and not-thickening in the normal environment, depends on genes or the material make-up of the cell nucleus. The matter is after all determining in this sense, and we see that both form or entelechy, and genes or matter are abstractions and that in the qualitied organism each quality is the result of a tension between germ plasm and environment in which we cannot separate either. They interpenetrate completely. This is shown by the consideration that the uterus is environment to the foetus, the body and bloodstream are environment to the ovum, and even in the ovum the cytoplasm is environment to the nucleus. Again, the uterus is organism to the woman, the body is organism to society, society is organism to nature.

Pre-determination entirely by genes would be logically consistent as a theory only if in fact each generation precisely resembled its predecessor. We should then have, instead of change, an abstract periodicity like the swing of a pendulum.

But this is not so. The organism changes, not merely from moment to moment but from generation to generation. We say that the organism adapts itself to the environment, to the obstacles around it, but this is merely a way of saying that changes in a body are determined by outside forces. In saying

this, the whole conception of the body's form being determined completely by the genes of the nucleus collapses for, if the difference between amoeba and man is the result of the accumulation of environmental determinants, then the predeterminism of the organism must be small indeed, for nearly every important quality in man is additional to those of the amoeba. In fact in the limit it is nothing, for at the limit organism and environment are one and living and non-living matter are not separated out.

It is not merely that the form is given by the environment, the matter is given also. This follows from the law of the conservation of mass-energy, and the fact that by nutrition the ovum grows to the man. The 'impossibility' of creating living matter from non-living is performed constantly by the organism when it eats. The ovum therefore represents the highest common factor of non-environmental form and substance as between parents and offspring. The instability of that part of the environment in which life manifests itself enables this highest common factor to have such a powerful effect and produce a complete new organism.

All this seems 'miraculous' to us because we reject experience, and attempt to draw development out of an artificial environment, one robbed by bourgeois physics of quality and change. But in fact in our immediate experience we have immediate knowledge of the law of growth. We ourselves grow up. Yet, for some strange reason, this simple knowledge is ruled out of court when we come to study objectively the general laws of animal development.

We know that we draw our ideas, our experience, and our food from the environment. We know that the past is continually gathered in the present, that each second is different and distinguishable, and that this itself is what we mean not merely by time but by living. We mean by living that the same 'I' is never the same but changes according to a definite law, and we call this law Time. We seek no explanation for this law, for we cannot imagine the past happening after the future, or ourselves growing back into childhood, or seconds not following in an inclusive series, for this we understand to be the structure of reality. It is given in our existence. 'I exist, therefore I become.' 'I think' . . . By thinking I mean that time passes in my mind, not as abstract time but as a special inclusive arrangement of

images. 'I think, therefore I am.'

Yet when this fact, which because it is primary suffers no explanation, appears in an objective form in embryology, we find ourselves driven to an explanation, which explanation is necessarily always preposterous and self-contradictory. The organism is never for an instant the same; it is always changing, either coming into being or passing away – not in itself but in complete relation to the rest of becoming. From this universal becoming we abstract an absolute Time and Space, and locate in it the organism, separate from the environment. Its change then becomes peculiar to it, not related to the environment, and not therefore determined. This change then requires explanation. By cutting all the causal threads first, we have naturally presented ourselves with an insoluble problem. This problem arises entirely from our method, from the method of bourgeois science.

The material determinants might account for a succession of generations of organisms all identical – a periodicity like that of the beat of a pendulum. But this ideal periodicity is an abstraction. Each beat of a pendulum is different, and the pendulum first speeds up and then slows, precisely because it is not separate from the environment. The rotation of the planets seem a great natural periodicity, but we know that it is not an ideal periodicity. The solar system has a history and was once a nebulous mass. We find no difficulty in dealing with this change, for we see that it was determined at each stage by the tension between internal and environmental forces. Yet when we are faced with exactly the same historical phenomenon, only richer in quality, in the periodicity of the generations of life, we require first to account for the periodicity by determinants, and then to account for the change (variation) either as acquired by the will and effort of the organism or as the result of a 'free' (chance) variation of the organism selected by the environment. Both accounts are non-scientific because they bring in relations not mutually determining and therefore self-contradictory ('I know B, but B is not known by me'). But this self-contradiction is implicit in bourgeois ideology. 'I mould my environment but it does not mould me.' Even d'Holbach, who in one breath asserts desire as a product of human laws, denies it in the next breath by proposing the change of such laws by man's free desire, so that a part of the bourgeois class – the leader, educator or reformer – must have a will not after all determined by circumstances.

The preformationist or mechanical materialist regards the organism as a machine, but not as a real machine. He regards it as being what the bourgeois falsely imagines a machine to be.

According to the bourgeois, the machine is a piece of matter that fulfils his goal or plan. It does this exactly. It is a kind of congelation of his goal. It is a thing absolutely separate from the natural environment, a changeless slave of his will.

This is not really the case. No machine ever exactly fulfils a human goal or plan. Every machine is a compromise between wish and necessity. Moreover the compromise goal it finally attains influences the mind of the maker, so that his future goals and newer machines will be determined by what he has learned about the working of machinery. The machine is not therefore a mere slave of his mind, it educates him even as he compels it.

Moreover no machine is changeless – it wears, grows old and goes wrong. These 'faults' or changes are not part of the 'plan' or goal of the maker. On the contrary they negate it. They are not predictable exactly from the plan and the known necessities of matter. Yet they are not 'magic'. These faults all have causes, and when the axle fractures or the plug oils up, we look for the causes. They are causes arising from internal strains or environmental causes – in either case from determinants *outside* the plan.

Thus the individual machine does in general resemble the individual organism. It has an initial plan – the human goal, just as the organism had an initial plan – the chromosomes or sum of genes. This plan is impressed on a piece of matter from the environment (including the maker in the environment) just as is the case with the organism. The resulting machine goes through a process of change not laid down in the plan, different in each machine and yet determined by the life experience of the machine – its relation to the environment. If we regard all that is not-individual as environment, then in a broad survey of life in space-time, the parent is part of the environment of the individual. Thus heredity is no longer opposed to environment, it is part of it. The dualism between innate and acquired characteristics is healed. The parent, as part of the environment, then stands to the individual organism in the same relation as the maker, as part of the environment, stands to the machine: the *difference* is a difference of consciousness.

Moreover the machine evolves. From the Neolithic stick used for turning up the earth to the modern tractor plough, is a

tremendous evolution. This evolution has taken place in the same manner as biological evolution. The rudimentary plan has hatched the machine which by its behaviour, not allowed for in the plan, has changed and generated novel experience, and this has produced a new plough more adapted to circumstances, and at the same time has produced a new plan as the result of the greater knowledge of reality produced by the life experience of the plough. This is the history of all machinery and is also the history of life, because it is the history of reality – the nature of becoming.

Against this true background of the evolution of the species, against this true story of the birth and change of the individual machines begetting in the rise of the machines a similar continual change in the human consciousness, the bourgeois has counterpoised a bourgeois Idea of the Machine, quite false, in which the machine blindly obeys the bourgeois will, completely determined by the plan, without itself being changed or changing its maker.

The plan is not in this false interpretation (as it is in reality) determined by the machine to the same extent as the machine is determined by the plan. The machine appears as solidified will, as something predetermined, as a congealed desire of the bourgeois. Such illusions, as we have shown elsewhere, are always found in the ideology of a ruling class, which believes freedom is found in the forcible imposition of one's will on others, regardless of the nature of reality. This particular illusion is due to the specific character of bourgeois class society, in which domination is secured by rights over matter, which involves the creation of the machine.

Having thus invented a false machine, the bourgeois, in the theory of mechanical materialism, applies it as a criterion to life. He is methodologically justified in this for, since reality is a unity, certain laws must hold in the most general way throughout all spheres. But since the bourgeois laws about machines, although highly generalised, are false laws about ideal machines and not about concrete historical machines, they are not likely to be applicable to other spheres. Since they are not true of the sphere of machinery, why should they be true of the sphere of the animals which produce machines? And in practice they are found not to be true of this sphere.

What is the result of the bourgeois discovery that his laws, derived from non-existent machinery, are not applicable to real

life? The result is not as might be thought a return to machinery, and an extraction of its real laws, for to do this is to be compelled to see clearly and concretely, the fundamental mode of motion of society, the primary determining rôle of that labour process. The bourgeois would then realise that he is not merely a scientist in the abstract, but a bourgeois scientist in the concrete, and once having realised this, he would cease to be a bourgeois, his whole ideology would be undermined.

He therefore is driven by reflection upon experience to the opposite pole, which is merely the other aspect of the same illusion – to teleology, vitalism, idealism, creative evolution, or whatever one likes to call it, but what is certainly the fashionable ideology of decaying capitalism.

At this pole, which is colonised by Driesch, Bergson, MacCurdy and others to-day and by the epigeneticists and Platonists in the past, the organism is the product of a plan, form or organisation, conceived as separate from the matter of which the organism is composed, and as a unity imposing an integrated whole upon the organism's parts. The pageant of life then is seen to be the fulfilment of a plan, or the coming into being of a hierarchy of non-material forms or 'patterns'.

The flaw in this conception is that if the plan is regarded as the reason for hereditary likeness, we have the fact that as the result of environmental influences the hereditary plan changes, not merely from day to day, but generation to generation. Such changes are adaptations, and the sum of them produces the difference between amoeba and man. As the most important part of man's organism are the differences between amoeba and man, the plan becomes unimportant.

If the plan is not the hereditary likenesses but the acquired differences in the evolution of life then

(a) The plan is not in the organism but in the environment.

(b) The plan is not a characteristic of living but of non-living matter.

(c) The behaviour of non-living matter is admittedly explicable by physical laws, and therefore the name 'plan' is a misnomer, for it flows merely from the nature of the environment.

Again, either the plan or form already exists, and therefore biological change is an illusion and all nature was already in formal being at the beginning of Time, or else the plan is simply the particular arrangement of matter as we point to it, in which

case 'plan' is a mere name, word, or *flatus vocis*, and the plan is not in the thing but in our head. It is a concept, universal, or Idea.

Since the most essentially living qualities are those that have come to life in the course of evolution and never remain the same, how can we in fact regard it as the result of planning? A building whose appearance has changed so much since its construction that nothing we can point to resembles remotely the original, can hardly be said to be planned. The teleologist calls plans or form just what is not plan or form.

Sometimes 'purpose' is substituted for 'plan', but this is merely making the same mistake from the other end. We see an organism make a change in position or appearance and say it is the result of purpose. We say so because we can recount the causes which led to this. We see a stone make a change in position or appearance and can recount the causes which led to this, but we now say it is the result of necessity. Why do we say 'purpose' in the case of the animal, and 'necessity' in the case of the stone, when the type of explanation is precisely the same in both cases? We make it because a large part of the necessities of our existence are in our consciousness as purpose or free will. The animal is like us in behaviour and therefore we attribute to it a similar consciousness and call its behaviour purposive. 'Purpose' is therefore the consciousness of necessity, and it cannot alone explain the laws of necessity, any more than 'causality' alone is a satisfactory explanation of any non-vital phenomenon.

To say, therefore, that the explanation of life is purposive is to say that it is causal in form. That goes without saying. Explanation must be causal. It is to say further that it is a particular kind of causality, *conscious* causality. That is the only thing which differentiates the movements of a stone from those of a man – the consciousness of the causes that produced them. It is obviously dangerous to assume that living matter is conscious to any degree of its necessities. The protozoon becomes in the course of evolution a man, but the living matter concerned was not conscious of the process and it was not therefore purposive. Feudal society became bourgeois society, but this was never the conscious purpose of society at any time. The lower the animal, the less its consciousness of necessity. The less rich the consciousness of causality, the blinder its movements. No

explanations in terms of purpose will be applicable to life as a whole, and herein lies the danger of categories drawn from human purpose – not that they are not valid, but that they are only valid for human beings in a certain sphere.

Man is conscious of purpose – of a plexus of aims and goals. The farther back we go in his evolution, the less full the conscious plan becomes. The evolution of amoeba to man is the constant change (or expansion) of necessity into conscious necessity. Since it was this process as a whole which brought conscious necessity or purpose into being, the process cannot be attributed to this conscious necessity which is the end product of the process. The coming into being of a building is explained by the plan, which tallies with the finished building. But here we have the coming into being of a plan itself (man's consciousness of necessity) and this cannot be explained by the plan, or we have an infinite regress. It can only be explained on the lines of the coming into being of any architect's plan, by the material adventures of a subject in an objective environment, whose tension generated the plan.

The entelechists hold that life is unique in its integrity. The human organism only exists as a unity. It is a truism that a leg cut off is not the same as a live leg, or a dissected man equal to a living man, but this does not arise from the nature of life, or because of an entelechy – it arises from the nature of reality. A separate pile of spokes and a rim is not the same as a wheel. Oxygen and hydrogen is not the same as water. This arises from the fact that when these components are separate, their relation to the rest of reality is different from what it is when they are together. In certain circumstances the spokes and rim stand to the environment in the relation of a wheel, and roll over it. Separate, they cannot do so. The wheel's quiddity arises from its action as a rolling object on the rest of reality. A thing is always more than the sum of its parts, because our recognition of it as a thing depends on its having a new relation to the rest of reality – a new quality. Such 'nodes' of qualities vary in their newness and complexity. Some are more critical than others in the difference between their standing in 'together' and in 'apart' relations confronting the rest of the universe. Living objects are just such outstanding nodes of newness, and are therefore correspondingly critical in their 'together' relation – or (as we put it) in their *adaptation* to environment. Their unity does not arise from an

indwelling form or entelechy. On the contrary, it arises from the fact that they are in this specific 'together' relation to the rest of the universe. Their unity is that of the Universe. It arises from the fact that the subject-object relation contained in a quality is not only indivisible but is also universal, and is a special dichotomy of the whole of reality. Any attempt to locate the entelechy completely in the organism, merely results in showing the organism itself to contain nothing not given in the environment.

Moreover teleology, the theory which endows life with a plan or a purpose, is simply another name for the theory of mechanism, or likening life to the bourgeois idea of a machine. A machine to the bourgeois is a piece of material designed to fulfil a human purpose. Its action is predetermined; its necessity is known. If life has a plan or a purpose other than the immediate purpose which is its own consciousness, then life is constrained by necessity to run to a plan.

Since the purpose is not that purpose of which life is conscious, it is a purpose of which a god is conscious. Life is a god's machine. Teleology is simply *subjective mechanism*. The reason why the same idea has two aspects is because the idea is self-contradictory and therefore unfolds its contradictions in practice. The Universe as God's machine is a scheme that by no means redounds to God's credit, for determination is a mutual relation. The sea determines the land, the land determines the sea. One depends on the other and is knowable by the other. The process of evolution, if produced by a God, would produce a change in that God, which might certainly be for the better, but this would involve that each step of evolution would not be determined by precedent states of the world but by the precedent state of God. This we know to be untrue. The parent produces the child, the kick makes the football fly. If the opposite were true there would be no need for our present ignorance or controversy about God. Since each state in the universe and in life would be determined by God's state, we should know all the time precisely what was happening to God. In such a case unfortunately there would be no causality in the universe, unless we included God as the universe, and said – 'all that exists is one'. But this is precisely what dialectical materialism does. It asserts all phenomena are one; not as an arbitrary premise, but as a result of the experience of humanity, that phenomena have a material basis. This

situation, of two things in constant determining relation, each stage of which affects the next stage of the other, is after all exactly the mutual relation of bourgeois and universe, of subject and object, and is by no means peculiar to a hypothesis as to the existence of God. It is no wonder therefore that when the bourgeois removes himself from the environment, human values such as 'religion' and 'love' and 'beauty' seem to be created as a being outside the world might create them. Environment and bourgeois, by their absolute separation, have been made to assume a divine status towards each other.

No scientist believes in the determinism of phenomena by a God as a methodological rule, yet he does to-day – in a 'tired' part of biology – admit the possibility of phenomena being determined by a purpose not life's own consciousness of purpose, nor the necessity of matter, but a purpose, or pattern, or plan, or entelechy outside both. Such phenomena he thus relegates to the unknowable. In other words he says, 'Science cannot deal with living matter except in a restricted field'. Such an attitude indicates a tiring or demoralisation of science and is part of the crisis of bourgeois culture. It is not an infection emerging in science, but the crippling of the productive activities of science by the social relations of bourgeois economy. Biology like industry is becoming anarchic. The bourgeois self-contradiction as to the relation of individual and environment – expressed as a myth about the machine – gives us the basic biological metaphysic of Cartesian materialism or mechanism, which eventually reappears in its apparently contradictory but really twin form of vitalistic idealism or teleology.

This movement from mechanism to teleology and back again has in fact taken place several times, and while bourgeois economy was productive and its contradictions not yet plain to analysis, it was a movement which enriched biology and aided investigation. But when its synthesis, dialectical materialism, the communist negation of capitalism, has once been generated by capitalist contradictions, this dualism and tension hamstrings thought and acts as a kind of ball and chain on biological investigators. Biology, in spite of the increase of biological investigation, is becoming confused and disorganised. The contradictions of bourgeois social relations are decelerating scientific advance in biology, and of course it is no accident but arises from the identity of knowing and being that this

fettering is also material. Except in Russia, research students are unemployed and the money available for research decreases.

LETTERS

The Thatched House,
Claygate,
Surrey.
May 9th 1932.

Dear Beard,

Many thanks for your prompt return of my verse. I was interested but not altogether surprised by what you tell me. It is a stage I went through some time ago and I feel I have lost nothing and gained a good deal. You will feel the same. The great mistake is to react. There is much of the Catholic faith which will always remain with you. Meanwhile I prescribe a course of what has helped me – the New Testament – if possible in modern English so that you read it with no educational preconception – Plato, and possibly Spinoza.

The most unexpected discovery you will make is how little morality depends on the sanctions of an inspired religion. This is one of the most philosophically inexplicable traits of human nature. Even the Middle Ages noticed it, and could only explain the 'goodness' of Plato by some pre-Christian inspiration. Do you remember Lavinia, in Shaw's 'Androcles', who is not really a Christian but whose hand draws back when she attempts to sacrifice to the Gods? One's personal morality – I am using the word to express one's conscience, conception of a right rule of life, ideals, and everything else – is very nearly as instinctive and inescapable as that. The fortitude of the martyr and the asceticism of the contemplative (if you are that way inclined) demands no external sanction. Christ said something to the same effect in 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you' and even

Catholic theology recognised that the contrition depending on outside sanctions was inferior to Lavinia's kind of feeling.

I have written somewhat at length because – although my way of living has been extremely empirical hitherto – I have been led into a certain amount of speculation about these things by reading 'The Fountain' by Charles Morgan. Have you read it?

No doubt you will disagree with what I have written. Perhaps we can argue it out at the meeting you suggest. I will ring you after Whitsun.

Yours aye,
Christopher Sprigg

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40 Belgrave Court,
LONDON, W.4.
December 21.34.

Dear Paul,

Thank you – and Elizabeth – for your letters. I am glad to hear you are coming to town, and will be delighted to meet you both, at the Troika, on Jan. 3, all as you suggest, with the exception that you must be my guests.

Since I saw you last I have been through a period of poetic creativeness of which the poems I sent you were the harbingers. My own feeling is that for the first time I am beginning to write out of myself, probably because, for a variety of reasons, I am only just beginning to be myself. Do not be apprehensive; the difference is internal not external!

The poetry I have been writing has been quite unexpected, and I should value your opinions on it very much indeed. As far as your final comment on my other verse goes, you will probably find intensified in the new stuff both 'my stronger stand for beauty', and the ambiguity (which I prefer to call ambivalence and begin to fancy is for me, as it was for Donne, an essential element of poetry). What I have said earlier on will perhaps confirm your wife in her impression that I was 'shedding self-illusions' – to me the most welcome part of her interesting criticism.

I should value more than I can say both your opinions on this new verse of mine. I shall not have time between now and our meeting to make copies of it, so I hope you will not mind the

trouble of taking care of it, and returning it as soon as possible. I warn you that you may for all I know not like this new verse at all; you may find its ambivalence repellent; but I can only say that for the first time I have a strong feeling of having written, in parts, verse which is both personal and worth while.

I have altogether ceased to write verse again. As a result of my experience of (now) ten years of verse writing, I have formed the opinion that it advances in spurts. The beginning of a new spirit is marked by a few scattered poems not particularly good in themselves, but distinctly different to what has gone before. Then follows fairly rapidly the best you are likely to do in that vein. After that one's inspiration is not markedly less, but the poetry – in spite of one's efforts – actually regresses until one realises one is writing in a way one had hoped one had shed.

When this used to happen to me in the past I had a fear my poetic vein was exhausted, and redoubled my efforts, and my verse got still worse as a result.

I now believe that as soon as one sees any falling off in one's verse one should stop. I believe that if I had done this more in the past I should have been considerably further advanced than I am at present. Perhaps the Romantics, with their belief in 'inspiration', were in possession of a sound poetic hygiene even if, like most sound hygienes, it was based on a wrong theoretical system.

This last period of creativeness followed a long period of complete abstention, enforced by pressure of business, during which I feared I had finished with verse. I shall never think so again.

Psycho-analytic theories of the unconscious (particularly Baudouin) have greatly influenced my theory of poetry (though not my technique which is empirical) and I explain bouts of 'inspiration' by the alternate cycle of regression and progression by which according to Jung, a character individuates itself. I have always felt that the progress of my poetry was bound up with the development (individuation) of my character and in that case it would appear that one should write poetry when one's character is just at the height of its progressive movement. (Progress has a strictly technical meaning here; but you probably know Jung's theories better than I do).

Of course I do not claim any universal validity for this theory. It is purely personal. And I may yet recant.

The experiment of giving myself more spare time has been a great success. Before the poetry, I completed my first serious novel. (The fantasy, which I told you of, has been scrapped.) I believe it is just good enough to publish, having certain positive virtues, together with many weaknesses of detail and general plan which I hope to avoid in future novels.

I am now writing short stories, some in a vein inspired by Kafka, which I am finding peculiarly congenial, the remainder with a realistic structure (Tchekhovian realism, not French) about which it is too early to say anything yet, but they may go well.

Also during the last 3 months I have written the following tripe; 1 Detective Novel. 1 Aviation text-book. 30 aviation articles. 6 detective short stories. Heaven knows how many news paragraphs. Done 4 half-days a week office work. At one time I thought that spending so much time on tripe would affect my serious work. But the tripe has now become a sensori-motor habit, quite independent of the cerebrum; and I have also read in Tchekhov's life that in addition to supporting himself and family by writing comic tripe, he completed his university course as a doctor, and wrote his early short stories. So all I need to write like Tchekhov is to enrol at Bart's!

I have written entirely about myself in this letter but parts of it may interest you. I should like to hear about your own work, but do not press you because probably like me, when you are actually writing something you loathe to speak about it. Once written however I like to get an opinion.

Till Jan. 3. My best regards to Elizabeth. This letter is really to you both. And all Christmas wishes, if you have Christmas in your part of the world.

yours ever,
Christopher.

P.S. Causes beyond my control may force me to meet you in a bowler, I apologise to Elizabeth in advance.

40 Belgrave Court,
London. W.4.
May 21.35.

Dear Paul and Elizabeth,

(1 letter in return for 2 is rather a swindle). Thanks for return of M.S.S. and criticisms. I read these with great interest. It is extraordinarily valuable to see one's work externalised in someone else's mind; more so in prose than poetry because it is, I think, easier for the critic of prose to make his criticism concrete and less a matter of pure feeling.

I agree with almost all your criticisms, Paul. That is to say, I agree that they represent marked characteristics of the stories but (as the writer) I don't feel they represent so much faults as necessary concomitants of my method. But of course that only removes the criticism a stage back, to the method.

At the moment I am passionately addicted to elimination. In order to get down to the emotional pattern (I don't mean the plot) I try hard to eliminate all unnecessary scenery, dialogue, psychology and action. Hence the gauntness of which you both complain. In the same way I aim at an elimination of all overtly expressed sympathy with my characters, and hence the 'uncaring attitude'. But if, as you think, it is even 'rather critical' – then this is a definite fault. The truth is I am reacting against the Hemingwayitis of long pseudo-realistic dialogues, and Joycitis of long pseudo-realistic streams of consciousness, in order to get down to the skeleton of the story, of which skeleton I know nothing except that it is neither plot, character, nor even George Moore's melody, but I feel sure it is not fundamentally very different to the skeleton of a poem. But of course you will justifiably reply skeletons aren't the whole animal. I know it; but I still feel that in the evolution of a writer they make a good beginning, particularly in a short story. (By the way this is physiologically untrue, the bones being latest in development). All this accounts for the biographising which, perhaps rightly, you condemn, and yet I feel that in fiction the time has come for drastic bareness and pruning. I remember once being given a pair of scissors by an aunt to groom a pet geranium by snipping off the dead leaves. It became fascinating, for when you looked at it closely, almost every leaf was a *little* dead, and I finished by almost killing the plant.

The particular criticisms of my stories (the above answer refers

to your general criticism) are all interesting to me and in most cases helpful. 'We All Try' might appeal strongly to some people who have been touched by that particular part of the Zeitgeist, but I can understand your thinking it clumsy. By the way, but I myself think the three best are 'Friends', 'The Mother Superior' and 'The Great Man'. I also have a tenderness for the 'Vines', who as a matter of fact really exist. So for that matter, do, or did, 'The Civil Servant', the girl in 'Friends', Angevin, 'The Old Maid', the hero of 'Carry On' and the characters in 'Lodgings for the Night'.

Now Elizabeth, the bit about self-consciousness is really useful. You will see its effects in future stories, Elizabeth! The criticism of 'Thompson' is also good, but I had as a matter of fact contemplated suppressing this story as too artificial. I cannot tinker anything once it has taken a shape and subsisted in it for a few weeks. Indeed even to look at it, in typewriting or print, fills me with a painful disgust. I don't know why; I feel it even when I know rationally that the stuff isn't bad – or that it doesn't matter anyway (e.g. detective stories).

By the way, you were *supposed* to blush for the hero of 'We All Try'. My autobiographical characters are allowed to give themselves away completely but quite fairly. The same applies to the 'Great Man'. Of these two, I am very fond of one and dislike the other, but I flatter myself you can't tell which is which.

As to the merits of the style and the demerits of the structure, they are both part of my present technique I think, which aims at gauntness and tension. Tenseness; or what the horseman calls 'collection' – obtained I may explain by driving the horse on with the legs and keeping it back by a gentle sympathetic restraint with the curb rein! But perhaps I've pulled my characters' mouths about a bit, and if so they're entitled to complain, 'Well, dash it all!'

By the way the atmosphere of the 'The Mother Superior' was purposely unconventual. That being rather the point. But if it seemed wrong of course I failed.

There's no hurry to return the other relativity book.

Glad to hear you are getting on with the hiking book, Paul. The beginning of a book is always the slowest part. I want in due course to show you my Kafka stories (some are not stories, but no other word will describe them). But they are not typed yet, being at the moment down in the cellar fermenting before being

finally decanted. (My knowledge of brewing is rather vague). I like them. More perhaps for their originality than for anything else. Originality, at any rate, in English writing.

I have been working at high pressure on a serious novel. A reaction from having polished off my next detective novel! I determined not to allow myself to write a masterpiece (a masterpiece is anything over 200,000 words; less than that but over 100,000 it is only monumental) and have made the rather shattering discovery that anything under 80,000 words can only be a long short story. So a long short story it is. I have nearly finished it, but have got my nose too close to the grindstone to see its shape. Probably a failure. You will find it too biographical. But it has a certain merit; chiefly that I don't think anyone else would have written it like that – there is practically no scenery at all and it has a strong flavour. It's about murder and sudden death; but not the Macbeth novel which I now see is impossible.

L.A.G. Strong is still reading the stories.

Yours ever (in the bosom of Nelsons),
Chris.

40, Belgrave Court,
LONDON W.4.
July 24.35.

Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for card from Norman, returned herewith. Unless you hear from me to the contrary, I shall get seats for the ballet for Friday evening. Aug. 2nd. for you two, Norman and Joan, and self. We can arrange about meeting later.

I have now definitely decided to come to S Cornwall for a couple of months as soon as I have cleared up work here and, by a process of elimination have decided on Porthleven.

I can never stay with you again! Our evening discussions spurred my poor brain to such feverish activity that after I left you I got a terrific spate of ideas on the nature of poetry.

They started buzzing in my head like infuriated wasps; all my pressing bread and butter works have been delayed and I am half way through a book called 'Verse and Mathematics' A study of the Foundation of Poetry. What's more, it's a damn good book,

The ideas have been pouring out at the rate of 4-5000 words a day! Crumbs, can nothing stop him?

Yours,

Chris.

P.S. This isn't a joke. I know it sounds like one.

The Cornish Riviera, (Sez You!)
Monday. [September? 1935]

Dear Theo,

Thanks for letter. Tingay must be batty if he thinks you can manage two magazines single-handed *and* run a serial publication for them as well.

A cash payment for the idea and preliminary work, plus a royalty payment for running it, would certainly be the soundest basis.

. . .

I should very much like to do work for the serial publication, as it is just the kind of writing I can best tackle now. These factful articles are a change from fiction and need much less mental effort. I suggest we split the proceeds as we did with the Pollock article.

But knowing Tingay, I quite expect to hear next mail that he had postponed it till 1940 again.

Now about myself. The Muse has been working all right, in fact believe me boys she's taken some holding down! The Serious Work has been progressing at a dizzy pace and will shortly astonish the world. It is a super-technical copper bottomed piece of literary criticism, too frightfully fundamental, very revolutionary and disgustingly erudite. (3 cheers for Chiswick and London Libraries). I have had bits of it in my mind for a long time. It incorporates all the biological, psychological, etc. etc., theories I have been forming in the course of my reading during the last few years. (Who shouted Eno's? Please leave the hall, Sir!) I shall publish it (if any feeble-minded publishers, can be found) under a pen-name. The author of such a volume could not, of course, bear the same name as a writer of low-brow detective tales.

All this is highly confidential. Don't mention it to Paula by the way, or the whole convent will want to read it, and some of it might be considered heretical.

Meanwhile I have polished off half the 'Young Airman'.

Altogether I have averaged 4000 words per diem, with M.T. and 'Modern Boy' stuff, which is quite good going.

. . .

As things are at present I intend to stay on down here for another month at least. And then I think, for my own selfish reasons, I should like to live separately. Detective story writing is all very well, but I have got to get down to serious writing. The book I am working on is a start, but it is not fiction, and it is above all serious fiction I want to tackle. My experiments in that line to date have been all right so far as they went, but they have taught me quite clearly that, to do anything worth while, I must get more material – local colour, characters, scenery – at my finger tips. And I can only do that by wandering round a little. Staying at this place has given me quite a lot of material and during the next two or three years, if I keep my eyes open and move about, I can collect more.

That means my immediate plans are very unsettled, and hence the decision. Probably this winter I shall live in the East End for a little, as that is the kind of local colour I want particularly at the moment. Next year, if funds permit, I might manage a month or two in France, but this winter I definitely want to spend in London, as in addition to getting some East End material I want (a) To browse in the London Library. (b) to go to theatres, if possible by getting on a provincial paper's list, so as to acquire a knowledge of dramatic technique (c) to do a certain amount of political work. All this means living in London itself.

. . .

As far as finance goes, my relations with Nelson and Doubleday enable me to count on a minimum, and for the rest I can cut my coat according to my cloth. I am definitely *not* counting in my plans:

(a). On any money from Canada. (b). On any income from my serious work in the first year or two.

Of course this means that in effect I have been making use of your establishment until it suited me. But what else are brothers for? Seriously, I am awfully grateful for all you and Vida have done for me; and if I make this suggestion of parting now, it is only because I feel more and more clearly that I have got to settle

down to making something serious of such aptitude as I have for writing, and that a writer's life must necessarily be different from a journalist's, who encounters his material automatically in the course of business, while the writer must find it. This is all the more pressing because, in our hectic career of the last few years, we have been too busy to put our noses outside our business. But now you are with Newnes and I can scratch a living all right with writing, there is no longer the need for continuous consultation, as there are when we were navigating the rapids with Airways Publications (R.I.P.)

. . .

You know, old boy, how grateful I am to you for putting up with me for so long.

Love to you both,
Chris.

---

c/o Mrs. Mathews,
Atlantic View,
Porthleven.
[September? 1935]

Dear Paul and Elizabeth,

I am so sorry to hear about Elizabeth's operation. I hope she will make a quick recovery. I shall look forward to seeing you both when you return.

I enclose 'Illusion and Reality' but if you think it will be too much for Elizabeth in her present state of health, don't let her see it!

I am gradually becoming an inhabitant of Porthleven, and getting through a certain amount of work. I shall stay on here till mid-October if I don't perish of alcoholic poisoning before then. Wrote a book last fortnight, but have not revised it yet – a pot-boiler. What happened about the hiking book?

Personally, I think 'Illusion and Reality' is good.

There is a very impressive bibliography of the 200 or 300 learned books I have drawn on (intended chiefly to strike terror in the heart of the reviewer!) missing from the carbon copy. I

cannot put in all the dates, etc., till I get back to the London Library.

Please note I have not (to the best of my knowledge and belief) used the word 'Beauty' in I & R.

You may notice a similarity in many parts between my views and those of Ogden and Richards (Meaning of Meaning), even to the terminology: e.g. use of word 'symbolic.' This is I believe a complete coincidence, as I have only just read their book. I think in the book as published I shall have to make some extended reference to 'Meaning of Meaning', otherwise it might be thought I had cribbed their ideas without acknowledgement.

The biological and sociological bits, and also the general analysis of the arts, are, however, so far as I know not to be met with anywhere else.

Yours,
Chris.

(I am quite prepared to hear that Elizabeth finds the book repulsive in its resolutely antiseptic approach to poetry. These scientists! I know the exact passage over which Paul will fall asleep!)

34, Birchfield Street,
Poplar,
LONDON. E. 14.
November 21st. 1935.

Dear Paul and Elizabeth,

Thanks very much for letters. Yes, I suppose this is a proletarian stage in my life: 'From Bowler to Cap'. I am getting a good many new impressions but it is too early to talk about them yet. More at Christmas. I haven't joined the C.P. yet, but probably shall soon. So far I am concentrating on talking Russian, as I want to go to Moscow (like the Three Sisters) next year. The language isn't too bad, but the alphabet is fairly bloody.

About 'I and R'. Please keep it, Paul, until you can give a considered opinion. I should like that. About publication, Allen and Unwin, the only publishers to see it, still have it. If

Shakespeare lived to-day he would include the delay of publishers in his catalogue of life's basenesses and injustice. Which reminds me, I promised to give Nelson's a list of illustrations for my new air book two months ago, and still haven't tackled it.

Please remember that although a working man I am respectable, and am entitled to Esquire after my name!!!

Both of you seem to agree about the badness of my Kafka stories, I mean fundamentally. I think I realised that myself, unconsciously, as the artist does realise that kind of thing, i.e. by my sudden lack of interest in the form, and feeling that I had got out of it all I could. They have, though, I think, a certain stylistic and metaphysical interest, and I propose to publish them sometime. If you know of any just cause or impediment thereto, speak now, or for ever hold your peace.

I was interested in your opinion that my prose in 'I & R'. did not show my usual fault, which you attribute to lack of baking, Elizabeth, because I think it may put me on the track of what that fault is. At any rate, it shows that it is not a mechanical deficiency due to the pace at which I work, for as you know 'I and R' was written at break-neck speed. Evidently then the lack is deeper, and it is not a lack of baking in the prose, so much as something insincere and tentative in the method of approach, i.e. attitude to reality. As follows, perhaps:

> *Report by Herr Doktor Adler re the case of C.S.S., former artist, on notes supplied by Mrs. Beard.*

In psyches with an inordinate ambition combined with a distrustful or wary attitude to the environment, we get the inferiority complex with a characteristic form of the masculine protest. This is the usual pattern of the neurosis, and while from the material supplied we would hesitate to describe the subject as a neurotic, we can certainly trace characteristic attitudes in his art, as lucidly analysed by Mrs. Beard. Note the constant effort, characteristic of the neurotic, to obtain 'distance' (see my monograph on the 'Neurotic Distance') from the object, and the characteristic belittlement of the environment by humour (significant this) and a superior haughty treatment of emotional complications and human beings. This subtle disparagement is of course quite unconscious but is all the more revealing. The

prolific production indicates the same indirect approach at dominating the environment, i.e. substitute for action.

Prognosis. Bad, as in all these cases. Analysis by an individual psychologist might improve matters. On the other hand, it might cure him and prevent his writing at all.

Note by Herr Doktor Jung on the above:

As usual Herr Doktor Adler is influenced by his ego-instinctive approach and sees everything through the spectacles of the inferiority complex. It seems to me that C.S.S. suffers from a predominance of the thinking function which in an introvert necessarily implies a distant and deprecatory attitude towards the object, with an attempt to rob it of (emotional) danger when remoulding it in the sphere of art. Meanwhile the feeling function, repressed into the unconscious, is making compensatory efforts which appear in the fertility of production and sudden irrational ventures into new art forms and ambitious artistic undertakings. The tendency towards greater extraversion, mediated by the unconscious, is on the whole, hopeful, and indicates an approach to psychic integration.

Note by Herr Doktor Freud. The case seems very simple, stripped of mystical verbiage and preconceived formulae. (Remainder censored by the endopsychic Censor.)

I'm afraid I've been writing nonsense. Seriously, I think my weakness has been the lack of an integrated Weltanschauung, I mean one that includes my emotional, scientific, and artistic needs. They have been more than usually disintegrated in me, I think, a characteristic failure of my generation, exacerbated by the fact that, as you know, I have strong rationalising as well as artistic tendencies. As long as there was a disintegration I had necessarily an unsafe provisional attitude to reality, a somewhat academic superficial attitude, which showed in my writing as what Betty has described as the 'lack of baking'. The remedy is nothing so simple as a working-over and polishing-up of prose, but to come to terms both with myself and my environment. This I think during the last year or two I have begun to do. Naturally it is a long process (the getting of wisdom) and I don't fancy I am anywhere near the end. But 'I and R'. represented a milestone

on the way, and that, I think, was why it seemed sincere, free from my other faults, and, with its necessary limitations, successful. It will be interesting to see if the same improvement is shown when I tackle more creative work, as I hope to do shortly. I have in mind a play and a novel; perhaps some poetry. The play you read is still being considered by the Westminster. I shan't be sorry if they refuse it, as it does not succeed. By the way Betty, I don't think I ever told you, you had got the theme *wrong*. My fault, no doubt. It is not to show the necessity of work, but the failure of idealism, as long as it is really only a selfish longing for self-fulfilment, and has no social roots. Working or idling, Brian is equally a failure because he always sees things in personal, not social terms. Perhaps I ought to print this in the programme.

My God! (God here a purely illusory concept) this is going to be a long letter. I can only deal briefly with the points you raise, Elizabeth. My treatment of religion was necessarily summary, as was my treatment of psychology, and other themes only related to my subject. As I see it, religion undoubtedly represents very strong emotional realities, but they only become religion by religious people's making them static, i.e. by demanding that their formulations (angels, salvation, heaven, hell, God, etc.) represent actual existent entities with the same reality of existence as matter. It is just this static formulation which is the core of any formal religion (Buddhism, Christianity, Mohommedanism). Separate that out and what have you left? Primarily two currents. One: art, or 'poetry' – The fluid emotional experimenting with illusory concepts drawn from reality, either felt as illusory, as in our civilised age, or felt as real, but unconsciously acknowledged as illusory by the very fluidity of treatment, as in Greek myth (not Greek religion). The other current is sociological, and is symbolical of the tremendously powerful and emotionally charged currents that hold a society together, and express, in a subtle instinctive way, the fact that though individualities, we yet have a real being in common: buds of the same tree. We are *not* completely divided by 'The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.' The power of this bond is expressed in the attitude of men to a drowning stranger, a ship in distress, in time of war, and so on. You may feel a sociological conception of religion arid and empty of content. So do I, but that is because we are children of a civilisation that necessarily sees society as linked primarily by money exchanges, I mean sees

that intellectually, whatever we may sometimes feel emotionally. The first criticism of Communism is always that men would never do their best work for society, regardless of income, and this expresses perfectly how debased and empty of content our conception of social relations has become. But the Greek citizen, or the merest tribal primitive, would see nothing strange in our conception of the society as the basis of religion. To him the city or tribe is joined with religion's bonds; and even to-day, when religions are so palpably failing, we see, in Italy and Germany, how men are bowled over by the sociological as opposed to the theological element of religion, in however questionable a guise it comes.

But why not leave it at that, you may ask, and, seeing religion's aesthetic and sociological credentials, say 'Pass friend, all's well?'. Just because religion, to be religion, formulates its sociological and aesthetic beliefs in terms of science, of external reality. So that on the one hand art is held back from developing, made to accept the outworn forms of yesterday, and, on the other hand, man, mistaking social relations for divinely ordained permanences, is held back to the social groupings of yesterday. So the Greek, cramped into the City State, was torn by internecine warfare and fell victim to the barbarians he despised. So we, with our national formations, and national churches, are involved in imperialistic wars, in which ministers preach from the pulpit the divine approval of a just war. And it is no answer to say that *genuinely* religious people are pacifists, for we can only take religion as it appears, and to do otherwise is to mean by the adverb '*genuinely*' – 'religious in a way we approve', which, from a historical view-point, taking religion as it has manifested itself, turns out to be not religious at all, but people who put social reality before theological formulations – heretics, prophets, and rebels.

Re poetical rhythm, I can only explain very briefly. Metre, i.e. that rhythm in poetry not encountered in prose, is *not* what gives form to the 'real', i.e. symbolised contents of poetry, as variation in rhythm gives form to music. This should be clear from the extraordinary variety of musical rhythmic movement, not merely in measure, but in movement up and down the scale. What then is metre's purpose? It is temporal, but it corresponds to subjective (bodily) tempo – the regular tempo of breathing and other metabolic processes, which stand in such contrast to the irregular, haphazard aperiodic movement of objective external time. By establishing this subjective affective rhythm it says in

effect; 'external time is abolished, we can concentrate on spatial relations –' 'the world at a glance'. Now logic is spatial. I cannot explain why here, it would take too long, but the method of logic – laws of contradiction, excluding middle, etc., are all spatial laws – my little discovery, by the way. But logic is not a special form of language, but the essence of the method of language, in its approach to reality. Logic shows the way language functions, its weaknesses and its strength. Logic is the quintessence of verbalism. Consequently, when metre denies external time by asserting affective time, we concentrate our attention on verbality, for poetry and logic agree in this that, more than any other functions of language, both are concerned with the words themselves, rather than with the things symbolised. Thus a logical proposition, or series of them, can be shown to be right or wrong by inspection with no reference to reality. But poetry is interested in verbality *affectively*, not formally as is logic. This is shown in poetry by the logical – i.e. spatial distortions of poetry. That is why I say the distortions of poetry are spatial, while those of music and the novel are temporal, and yet metre is plainly temporal. But it is subjectively temporal. Is this clear? I don't pretend it's easy to understand, since it involves a simultaneous metaphysical and aesthetic approach to the problem.

As regards beauty, I can only say briefly that I have not, and do not, pretend to explain beauty by reducing it to affective associations. Affective associations, derived from simple instincts, are the material of the reaction to the beautiful, but the beauty is not in the material, but the organisation. The material of mathematics is classes, but classes are not mathematics, it is the organisation. No explanations for any organisation which involves a new quality, are possible, except in terms of that quality. What is beauty? Beauty is such an arrangement of affective associations that, seeing the light falling on the rain, we experience a sensation of coenaesthesia derived for simple affects, but organised in a new emotional attitude, that towards the beautiful. Its main characteristic is its apparent lack of immediate interest. We like a field of cabbages because we propose to eat the cabbages, see them in the mind's eye beautifully cooked and tastefully served (if it is possible to serve cabbages tastefully). But we have no ulterior designs on the field of daffodils. I equate this with the essential feeling of conscious, or nearly, conscious illusion, about the objects of aesthetic

satisfaction. The painting is real, and yet it is illusory. The daffodils are real, and yet we cannot help on reflection feeling the beauty as something not in the daffodils, but common to the daffodils and other things (light and rain, lambs) and which we therefore hypostatise as an entity. But the thing common to them is not so much in them, as in us. We meet the same attitude in ourselves, projected into the objects of it. Beauty is a factor of time and place. Beauty does not belong to the daffodil like its colour – bedraggled and in a dustbin it is ugly – but to a certain time, place, arrangement, light. In other words, to experience beauty, we want reality arranged in a special affective, illusory pattern. We select a flow of hills, a sweep of river, and a belt of forest, from pure undifferentiated country, with the mind's eye, and call it beautiful, becoming in this much our own artists. Do you see my method of approach? I can't more than indicate it in a letter.

To go back a bit, neither Marx nor I ever denied that great religions contained truths. It was Marx's subtlest achievement to point out how religions expressed the truths of contemporary social relations, and, of course, the instinctive psychological mechanisms common to all societies, thus explaining both the likeness and differences of religions. But because man has always had an unconscious from which sudden affective uprushes emerge, and therefore all religions have had evil spirits, does not mean that djinns, devils, etc., really exist, in the same way as you and I exist.

But now I really must stop. I haven't room for a full criticism of Lawrence, which would be long and would of course concentrate on his weaknesses, not on his strength. His faults, like those of the other Lawrence, all seem to me to spring from a selfishness – not greediness, but egoismus. I think he saw the danger of that egoismus, but he fancied that it was not the ego but the intellectualising reason; certainly they are closely associated. And so he tried to correct it by a flight to warm simple emotional levels, and yet here, for lack of an adequate understanding of himself, he was still on the same selfish individualistic plane. The emotions indeed can be more selfish than the reason. And so, instead of being made happy and strong by the wise ancestral waters of social being, in their instinctive animal simplicity, he was made unhappy and ineffectual, and he made other people unhappy and ineffectual, or at least

encouraged them on the same difficult road. Certainly in this he expressed the spirit of his generation, and his turning away from barren rationalising was, as it were, a turn for the better, but he never found the right road. Have any of us yet?

By the way, did you know Hopkins said, in one letter, that he felt a strong sympathy with Communism, and a deep impatience with the present economic ordering of society, and the position of the proletariat? I find that symptomatic.

Finally, and now I must end, I have quite come to the conclusion that 'beeches' was a slip of the pen for 'birches'.

Yours ever,
Chris.

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34 Birchfield Street,
LONDON, E.14.
November 30.35.

Dear Betty,

Thanks very much for your letter. But I shall have to ask you not to write to me, or discuss these matters with me, because they have a most dangerous effect. As you know, our discussions at Newton on Poetry and the Unconscious resulted in the writing of 'I & R – 120,000 words of it. After my answer to you on the subject of beauty, I felt impelled to put on paper all the things I couldn't find room for in the letter. The result is a 10,000 words study on Beauty and the Beautiful, attacked from the same analytic point of view as was used in 'I. and R.' Reflecting further on the subject of Religion, I was led to that of asceticism, and suddenly saw a most interesting causal connection between the thrift of the Puritan, the asceticism of the Roman Church, of the Roman Republican, of the modern Nazi and Youth movements, of the Communist Party in Russia to-day, and the exoticism of the French and English *fin de siecle* movement. Result, a 15,000 words study. This must now cease! It is interrupting me in my necessary work, such as for example, 'Internal Air Mail Contracts of the British Isles.'

As a matter of fact, a book is taking shape which will consist of synthetic studies in particularly interesting aspects of modern culture. The two I have mentioned will be part of it, also there

will be studies on such contemporary figures as Lawrence, Shaw, Wells, Bergson, and Russell, on religion, morality, law, psychology, quantum and relativity physics, free will, intellectualism and instinct, and a good many other questions which cannot be summed up in a word. My approach will of course be that of historical materialism, but I hope to avoid thrusting the richness of our heritage of knowledge and art into sterile formulae. I want rather to ask; This rich and conflicting often violently contradictory, congeries of wisdom, knowledge, affection and inspiration – what will they turn into? Why are there contradictions? What is the truth behind the half-truths, and how did both their truth and their error arise? If, as I believe, the culture of the future is to be still richer and intenser, in what will that intensity and richness consist? Above all, how can we think of the future without holding it to our own barrenness? I propose to call the book 'Studies in a Dying Culture' and to take as my motto Lenin's remark:

'Communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere facade, and the Communist a mere bluffer, if he has not worked over in his consciousness the whole inheritance of human knowledge.'

To me, in this phrase, the use of the word 'consciousness' is of particular importance, and I think Lenin chose it deliberately.

With regard to your query about the contemplative, I can only answer briefly. First of all I distinguish, as you do, the contemplative who rejects material reality. In this therefore he differs from the artist contemplative (Michael Angelo, Shakespeare or Nietzsche) or the scientist contemplative (Spinoza or Einstein). The mystic is the obvious type. To say I regard him as a social misfit is true, but not quite the whole truth. For in the Communist viewpoint there are no such things as social misfits – people that will not fit the social frame – but social misfittings – social frames that fail in this respect, that they do not fit the individuality without cramping it or driving it to revolt. This point of view is important in the Soviet attitude to crime. Consequently the appearance of contemplatives of the enclosed order type, is not an indictment of the weakness of the contemplatives (a phrase which absolutely is meaningless) but of the social frame, the social relations of the time.

Just as there is no absolute truth, except as a limit, so there is no perfectly fitting social frame, except as a limit. But just as the Newtonian scheme is less true than the Einsteinian, so there can

be improvement (or in times of decline, degeneration) in social relations. Plainly there is such a degeneration at the present. What is important in this connection is that the improvement of a social frame nourishes further individuation, which in turn demands a still greater subtlety in social relations. This tension drives on the development of increasingly rich social relations, not steadily, but in a dialectic swaying to and fro. Thus the undifferentiated savage fits, with few exceptions, his primitive social frame, which would be unendurable for the more highly differentiated bourgeois. And so on.

Consequently, a misfit, as such, is not condemnatory of the misfit, but of the system. It is a sign that social being is cramped by an outworn frame. Now the very misfits are generally the people who, feeling this misfit in their being most keenly, drive on the necessary change, notably with the 'neurotic' artist, the 'eccentric' scientist, the 'ambitious' Caesar. Needless to say they may be failures, and instead of achieving the future, or some part of it, waste themselves in sterile effort. The question then arises, how far is the contemplative one of these?

I honestly don't feel that this question can be answered in any general way. During the Middle Ages the ascetic contemplative of the scholarly type undoubtedly played an unexpected and important part in building up the material of bourgeois civilisation to follow. To explain why this was, would be too long here. Again the contemplative mystic, the maker of a new religion, or a new current in religion, like all prophets, is a social experimenter, experimenting, in symbolic terms, with social being – for all religion is a symbolic expression of man's instincts in relation to society and the environment. But the contemplative who remains shut entirely in the circle of his own being seems to me of no value to humanity, because his experience is not communicated, or made over in other ways. It may have value to himself, but what meaning can I attach to that, I who stand outside him, and who therefore can only make a social judgment of it. If an epileptic, a rake, and a mystic come to me and speak of the self-value of their experiences, I can only accept their words alike. Allow me, however, to make a social judgment, to turn their experience into social words, and at once I have a criterion, and will select the mystic's experience (assuming he is a St. Francis or an Isaiah) as having the greatest value. Thus the pure contemplative, shut up in his self, seems to me a

pathological phenomenon. As such I do not blame him, naturally, for his very revolt is a sign of his greater individuation and greater potentiality. As such it is possibly a hopeful symptom even pathologically. As you know, in most illnesses freedom from pain at the crisis, or placidity, is a bad sign.

I also insist that the hermit's self-knowledge is social self-knowledge. Not because society is selves, but because the thoughts the hermit thinks, the consciousness he turns over inwardly, are social creations. Let that hermit be brought up as a baby away from language and civilisation, like a beast of the jungle, never seeing a man. Do you suppose he would possess a self, let alone a consciousness? I don't, and I suppose further that, like animals, he would not be in the least introverted, but would live solely in his environment, in instinctive reactions. His consciousness, his gift of introversion, his symbolism, his thought, are all social creations. In this respect he is therefore wasting the capital of social consciousness, for, since we have assumed he makes no overt return, consciousness would ultimately disappear if each of us, all our lives, remained shut up in a cell, not even educating each other. Therefore society is entitled to ask: 'This social consciousness I gave you, what use did you make of it?' The mystic, the founder of religion, can answer proudly: 'I showed man the way to higher social consciousness, to richer individuation. With symbols that he could understand – for he still lives in a world of illusion, projecting himself into his new environment – with symbols, therefore, I sketched out for him a new society.' But what can the hermit say?

Time is passing, and the article on 'Internal Air Mail Contracts' remains unwritten, so I can only say briefly, with reference to beauty, that in saying the quality of beauty was not in the flower as is the quality yellow, I mean that yellowness can be expressed and differentiated quantitively (a certain wave length), that is in terms independent of the subject. Ditto position and shape. Beauty however can only be expressed in terms of affective relations between human beings and the world. Perhaps, instead of saying that beauty is not inherent in the flower (really an idealist view, which only haste made me subscribe to) I should have said, yellow is inherent in the object only, beauty in the subject-object relation. I make this clearer, I think, in the study I have written. The point is of more

importance than it sounds.

About myself. I started to tremble when you hinted that you could attack me where I least expected. Every woman I have ever known, even the simplest (and you are quite definitely not that, Elizabeth) has an uncanny gift for letting drop some remark, sometimes unconscious, which at once gives me away to myself. I have never had the same experience with a man. Generally it happens when I think (poor fool) that I am nearest having grasped a woman's point of view. Various possibilities flashed through my mind: Callousness, defective sensibility, arrogance, misplaced humour, self-absorption – but the possibilities are too ghastly to contemplate. If only women would write as they see the world, and not how they think a man would see it, how illuminating it would be! But perhaps the self-consciousness necessary for writing is just what makes this adoption of the schematic utilitarian male point of view necessary. Language, with its generalisation implicit in its structure, its metaphysical logical basis, is I suppose a typically male structure. But then, music and painting . . . Is it that you *won't* tell or *can't* tell? But I suppose, like all women, you won't take this question seriously.

Yours, (This correspondence must now cease. Editor)
Chris.

8, High Street,
Poplar, E.14.
April 23rd. 1936

Dear Betty,

Thanks for letter and criticism of 'This My Hand'. I agree with a good deal of what you say. Paul's criticism that the approach is behaviouristic is true: (except of the last chapter). It was at that time a definite aim of mine in technique which, however, I have now dropped. It was an attempt to gain an impartiality which, in the nature of things, I now see is not possible. People seen only externally still remain people 'seen by someone', and the problem of the observer remains the central problem of the novel. Of course it may be this that makes my

women seem masculine: they are seen externally, and therefore, through male eyes, that is by eyes which automatically interpret actions as arising from a settled 'world-view' instead of from something more nebulous: not of course that men's actions so arise, either; but men feel they ought to, and women don't (I think) see the necessity.

But Betty, aren't you a little inclined to create an abstract woman (rather like yourself) to which all women must correspond? Aren't the clear-minded, squashy-minded, angry-minded, suspicious-minded, nice-minded (you, of course!) all types whose whole way of going-on is distinct – the difference in their minds merely a reflex of a more fundamental difference in temperament? Or do you still insist that there is only One Woman – extra- intra- or ultra- verted? And is there only One Man? Hitler and St. Francis Assisi and C.E.M. Joad and Louis XIV and me?

The point of 'This my Hand'. That Fate is just ourselves as ourselves: that this thing that seems compulsive and external is internal. This paradox, that it is precisely this attempt to come into ourselves, to realise ourselves, to possess and control ourselves, that places us most helplessly at the mercy of what seems an external force, blind and controlling. And when, consciously or unconsciously, we cease to see everything in personal terms, with no values except values-for-us, and cease to set up as the sole criterion of significance and interest the little world of an *isolated* self, then Fate loses its blindness and by acting on others we react on ourselves.

The central characters of 'This My Hand' – as a result of their situation and history – are characters who never escape from this, and it is just this which, as it were, transforms their selves into a hell. True they have relations with each other, but in these relations neither Ian, Celia, Barbara nor Salmon ever project themselves easily or naturally into the other. Every judgment made of the other is in terms of how that other's action squares with their own rigid life-plan. Surely there was no extra subtlety in this: the very choice of the characters – particularly Barbara and Celia – made this evident?

Doesn't this partly account for your criticism of my women. Celia and Barbara have to be women who from entirely different angles – Celia from a kind of unconscious necessity, Barbara starting from a position of conscious altruism – are both unable to achieve those natural relations with others by which we escape

from, or rather, realise, ourselves. But it is precisely women who, in personal relations, are most inclined to project themselves into the other and go too far – sacrifice themselves to the other's selfishness. (That is why women so often play a 'saving' role in regard to men. You don't hear of men 'saving' women.) Consequently, Celia and Barbara are not typical women. Does that mean they are not real women? Only, as I say, if you believe in the One Woman. Are my 'minor' women unreal women? Perhaps so. In that case your criticism is justified.

I understand about the poetry. Even my fluency can't produce poetry on request, so to speak.

You will be seeing the first parts of 'Studies in a Dying Culture' soon. Next week I complete the writing of it and start revision.

All the best to you both
Chris

24, Susannah Street,
Poplar,
LONDON. E.14.
Dec.9.1936.

Dear Paul and Elizabeth,

Your letter arrived just as I had volunteered for service in Spain. There is an urgent need for drivers there now, in view of France's big push with German and Italian troops, and I have a passport, which is an advantage. I leave on Friday.

I cannot answer your letter in full, in the present rush. I will only say that like most idealists, you separate subject from object, and ascribe 'materialism' to the object and 'spirit' to the subject. The result is that the object becomes so abstract it is just hard matter and the subject so bloodless and attenuated that it is just Idea. But neither can live without the other: they exist for us only in their active relationship where they interpenetrate; and that is life in all the vivid living of it, with its bony skeleton of iron abstract laws (the object) and its vivid beauty and tragedy and accident (the subject).

'Studies' is scientific in its aim: it writes of everything even art and passion, objectively. These things can be written of

objectively, because there is nothing so subjective (or 'spiritual') that there is nothing objective in it, just as there is nothing so objective it has no subjective component. Thus, 'Studies' seems to you 'materialistic'.

Art, too, however is materialistic, yet art reveals the subjective side of reality. All religion is to me art mixed with science, seen in its clearest blend in the myth. Tragic beauty cannot be 'explained' in your sense, any more than the 'I' can be explained. But it has a law of generation which is as skeleton to body. But the body is not the skeleton. Yet the body must have a skeleton, and the soul a body. Literary criticism reveals the skeleton, and makes us know the body more intimately; but art is art, beauty beauty, and the body all warm fleshiness and muscularity and enjoyment.

'Studies' is imperfect – hasty sketches. One sketch (Physics) has already been expanded to 80,000 words – a complete little study which is good. The other studies will all have to be rewritten and refined in the same way (cutting out the smaller, trifling ones, or absorbing them). The crude outline of 'Studies' will, however, be the basis of my method, although it needs refining, balancing, getting in it the movement of time, ripening and humanising. After that: poetry and the story – on a new plane!

There is always a possibility that I may not come back from Spain, in which case I shall leave behind me a mass of manuscript some of which may be worth publishing. Roughly I have accumulated this:-

SHORT STORIES:	
The Island.	Parts worth publishing.
Lodgings for the Night.	All belong to my dishonest
Various Poems.	sentimental past.
STUDIES IN A DYING CULTURE:	Only drafts, but with some good ideas.
THE CRISIS IN PHYSICS.	Just half ready for press, second half written but needs revising for grammar and sense.
Plays, Novels, etc.	All completely worthless.

I am telling you this because I am leaving M.S.S. in my brother's charge with the understanding that he is *guided entirely by you*. I hope you will accept this responsibility, which is only a contingency, but I like to feel I have not left any avoidable ragged ends behind.

Au revoir to you both,
Chris

Destination confidential till I am out there! I suggest you hang on to M.S.S. of 'Studies', till further developments.

---

24 Susannah Street,
Poplar,
London. E.14.
December 9.1936.

Dear Theo,

I expect it will be a surprise to you, but I am leaving for Spain on Friday. I did not know there was any chance of this till yesterday afternoon. They are badly in need of drivers, who are in the Party or close to it, and have passports, and I therefore volunteered.

Can I see you before I go? Could Vida and you meet me in town – say at 6.30 at your office, and we could then have dinner together? I am rushing round making various last-minute preparations and purchases which is why I suggest this. I shall ring you tomorrow to find out if you can manage this; if out, leave a message.

More when I see you. I am writing Paula and Laurie, but will say I am going abroad without specifying destination. All this is strictly confidential, till I am out there.

Love to you both,
In haste,
Chris

[Post card to Theo from France]

December 17.1936

Wednesday.
Just arrived at frontier. Convoy had engine trouble all through France. Spain tomorrow.

Salud!
Chris

[From a letter to Nick Cox, a Party colleague in London]

21st December 1936

We are only at Barcelona. We have been here three days waiting for permits and hope to leave tomorrow. Even in Spain to-day one must learn to say "Manana".

We had a good deal of mechanical trouble with our five lorries driving through France and had to drive continuously even to arrive in Barcelona on the 18th.

It is difficult to give to someone in England an impression of Catalonia under the Popular Front Government. All the way from the frontier we saw the uniforms of the militia everywhere, villages barricaded, clenched fist salutes even from the children, and cars rushing round with party banners.

Barcelona is a wonderful sight. The main hotels and offices have been requisitioned by the workers' organisations and are ablaze with banners. Almost every car seems to carry a party banner or placard. The trams, buses and taxis are painted red and black (the anarchist colours). And on almost every building there are party posters: posters against Facism, posters about the defence of Madrid, posters appealing for recruits to the militia, posters advertising "gran mitings" and even posters for the emancipation of women and against prostitution and venereal disease. These posters are artistically of a high quality and are all prepared by the Trade Union of Professional Artists.

Try and imagine what the Strand would look like if there were several hundred of these posters on each main building, if there

were party banners hung across it, loud-speakers at intervals, and if the hotels and chief offices had been requisitioned for trade union and anti-Facist headquarters, and imagine this repeated in *all* the streets, and you will have some idea of the appearance of Barcelona. There are also loud-speakers in the chief plazas, and everywhere booths selling revoutionary literature.

The militia is everywhere, with arms and forage caps. One's first impression of the people of Barcelona is the thousands of uniforms, all different, the easy-going way in which the militia stroll around, and the way in which the militia seems to grow out of the ordinary workers, starting with red scarves, and going on to caps, uniforms and arms, through every kind of transitional stage.

The militia, including foreigners passing through Barcelona for Albacete, are put up at the former luxury hotels, all of which are controlled by a central body. You get a paper called a "vale", and this entitles you to a night's lodging. There is only one snag – you cannot get hot baths or even when you have a room with a bathroom the taps are stopped up. These "vales" are universal for petrol, food etc., hence the body issuing them is known to irreverent Englishmen as the "Board of Guardians". Of course this only applies to militia men and Party functionaries.

Apart from this, Barcelona functions in the old way. Cafes and cinemas and bullfights are crowded. All cinemas and theatres are controlled by the Anarchist Trades Unions (C.N.T.). The peseta exchange makes living cheap in English money. Rationing has just started, but it is hardly noticeable. One is merely restricted as to the number of dishes in restaurants and food is still plentiful. Cigarettes are almost unobtainable, so everyone smokes cigars. The windows are covered everywhere with adhesive tape, in case of air raids, and everyone competes to produce the most artistic designs in the stuff.

Barcelona itself is a wonderful city. The streets are so wide, there are two and even four traffic lanes with a wide tree-lined walk in the centre and the town is beautifully planned, set in the hills. The weather here now is as warm as a fine English Spring day and no coats are needed. Catalan is mainly spoken, but you can generally find someone who speaks French. In the Party headquarters, everyone is chattering away in Italian, German, French, English, until one honestly forgets what language one is speaking.

A word as to the balance of forces. There was a Government change shortly before we came, which resulted in the P.O.U.M. (the Spanish LLP) being no longer represented in the Cabinet. The main forces are now the C.N.T. (with four ministers in the Cabinet) and the U.G.T. (with three.) The two mass organisations are the C.N.T. – the Anarchist T.Us, under the leadership of the F.A.I., the Anarchist political party, and the U.G.T. – the red T.U's, under the leadership of the P.S.U.C, which is the Catalonian section of the Communist International. The P.S.U.C. is more important than I realised. You see these letters everywhere. The U.G.T. is growing rapidly in size.

The Party H.Q. is the Hotel Colon, a huge hotel with 600 bedrooms overlooking the main plaza.

Most important British developments are taking place at Albacete and I am extremely anxious to get there with the lorries as soon as possible. I cannot say much in this letter, but the quality of the British comrades who come out, and above all, their political education and experience of collective work, is absolutely vital and *this cannot be too much stressed at home.*

For obvious reasons, all the most interesting news about developments here will have to be left until I see you. Till then, I can only say it is a wonderfully heartening sight to see the strength and rapid growth of the proletarian organisations here, and the movement towards unity, in spite of all attempts at disruption. And so – "Salud!".

Address:
C.S. Sprigg,
International Column,
16 King Street,
London. W.C.
Dec. 30.1936.

Dear Theo and Vida,

Just a line to let you know that we delivered the lorries safely at [*obliterated by censor*] and have been drafted into the British Unit. At the moment we are at a training centre, but do not expect to stay here long. My letters will be extremely sketchy from now on, and do not be surprised if you do not

hear from me at all for a fairly long time. Letters to the above address will find me. It is also possible to make enquiries from O'Donnell, Diagonal 428, Barcelona, who will know if there is anything to report. If he has no news, it is good news.

One of our group who came over may be back in London soon and if possible will ring you and give you any news you want. Meanwhile all the best and don't worry.

Love,
Chris

I hope you got the album from Valencia and the cards from Toulouse and Barcelona.

C.S. Sprigg,
Soccorro Rojo,
Plaza del Altazona, 161
Albacete.
January 14,1937

Dear Theo and Vida,

Please excuse paper – all I can find at the moment.

I hope you got my previous letters. The post is a little erratic here, due to war conditions. In particular, I hope you got the album of drawings I sent some time ago from Barcelona.

The above address will find me from now on, wherever I am. Of course it may take a little time to get an answer as letters have to be forwarded to wherever I happen to be in Spain at the time.

I cannot of course for military reasons give you any details of our training or where we are. However our training is almost over now. It has been extraordinarily interesting; the International Brigade in its composition and whole organisation is so entirely different to any ordinary army; and I am beginning to understand how it has been able in quite a short time to build up a big reputation and a special tradition. Perhaps these kind of details will interest you: Our uniform is a pair of baggy trousers (khaki), khaki tunic, khaki great coat and khaki beret. Of course

there is no distinction between the uniforms of officers and men and the discipline, although strict, is entirely different to the discipline of the ordinary army. The morale and discipline within the ranks is based on different methods from the accepted army practice, which make it possible, given the type of men you have here, to shorten very considerably the period of training. In addition there is a high proportion of ex-soldiers in our ranks. Our commandant [*obliterated by censor*] who is thoroughly at home in this Spanish fighting, which is about as different as possible from the Great War:– a very extended front, continual flanking movements, and a very mobile type of fighting. At Madrid however there is a certain amount of digging-in. A feature of this War is the tremendous use of machine-guns – far eclipsing the last war. In this connection we are handicapped by shortage of ammunition – due to the Arms Ban. We are also short of artillery and aeroplanes.

English recruits are coming over fairly well now: we are already forming an English Batallion. Of course we are tremendously outnumbered in the Brigade by the Germans and the French and the Italian sections.

I am specialising in the interesting type of machine gun we are [using . . .?]. I cannot give details.

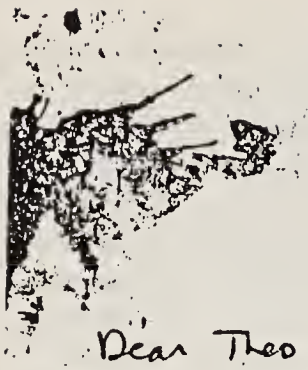
I'll cut short this letter now, as a long English letter is liable to delay in the censors' office, where the English speaking staff is naturally limited.

All the best,
Chris

Siccorro Rojo Internacional,
Plaza del Altazona 161,
Albacete.
January 30.1937

Dear Theo and Vida,

I don't know when you will get this. Posts here have been a bit erratic. I have not had a single letter from you and feel sure you will have written one. It looks as if our training period is drawing to an end. It has been very long for some of us because we could not move off until a complete



SOCCORRO ROJO INTERNACIONA
PLAZA DEL ALTAZONA 161
ALBACETE

January 30. 1937

Dear Theo & Vida,

I don't know when you will get this. Posts here have been a bit erratic. I have not had a single letter from you & feel sure you will have written one. It looks as if our training period is drawing to an end. It has been very long for some of us because we could not move off until a complete English Battalion had been formed & trained. This is now complete, & in fact the flow of volunteers suggests the possibility of an English Brigade. The Brigade we are in is already commanded by an Englishman who

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& showed himself a first-rate commander.
Things look like being more interesting
in two or three days, which means you
may not hear from me for some
little time.

I expect you have seen plenty
of news about Franco's, or rather the
Reichswehr's recent heavy offensive
against Madrid. So far it has
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a wide scale. We still feel keenly
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being short of weapons, & those
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machine-guns & artillery.

Please let me have all the home
news when you write. — How Nemies
is going, & how Vida's guv'nor is.
I'll finish now, as I have to go on
guard.

Love to you both,

Chris

Note: Reproduced slightly less than original size.

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Please let me have all the home news when you write:– How Newnes is going, and how Vida's guv'nor is. I'll finish now, as I have to go on guard.

Love to you both,
Chris

Jan.1937.

Dear Theo and Vida,

Just a hasty scribble which I can get through by a friend by hand, if I hurry. I am still here in [*obliterated by censor*] – a tiny village [*obliterated by censor*] which is the English training centre. We earlier arrivals had to wait until fresh drafts had come in sufficient quantities to make up an English Battalion. It is now complete and we should be moving soon, perhaps to the Oviedo Front. I am a machine gunner and have been here so long I am instructing. Am quite fit bar the colds we all have here, through the scorching days and freezing nights. Plenty of marching and field manoeuvre gets one into condition!

We are all crying out for English cigs. and chocolates. Could you send me some of both (cigs. for my pals) in parcel *without letter* – to save censorship delay.

I'm closing now, as I fancy you'd rather have just the shortest note by this quick method than get this in a fortnight or so, which

is what it will take if I miss my pal, who is a T.U. delegate on a flying visit. Heaps of love Chris.

C.S. Sprigg,
Soccorro Rojo,
Plaza del Altazona 161,
Albacete.
Feb.7.

Dear Theo,

This must be a fairly short note as it is written in haste and I may not find time to write for some time. Verb. sap.

I received your letter of Jan.18 two days ago and of Jan.26 today. I have written several notes you do not seem to have received. Note above address – slightly different for special reasons.

Thanks for looking after my business so thoroughly. Sorry the power of attorney was a washout. But don't worry about money. The pay here was 3 pesetas a day (about 6^{d}) and we could not spend it all! Now it is 6 pesetas! I still have all my English money except some I changed to buy a watch. But we do want English cigs. and chocolates. Butter also welcome!

Your note about the Party mystifies me. You saw my letter and the two blokes in charge of the ambulance who are here with me insist that their instructions were for me to stay. Also a member of my Branch Committee who came out here 6 days ago on a T.U. Delegation said nothing about it. However I am arranging for the Party organisation here to wire home for instructions as a breach of Party discipline on a major point is a serious thing. I am afraid that for the next few days the reply will not reach me. If it is what I think it to be, I can think of only one explanation for your letters, which may occur to you.

Thanks especially for reading the 'I & R' proofs. I know what a hateful job proof reading is – even if you hadn't got to do it all your spare time.

As for the political points you raise – I'll leave them until I see you again! Meanwhile and until then – all the very best to you both.

Love,
Chris.

Please send the NC cuttings

DATE DUE
