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BACK TO REALITY

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WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER

BACK TO REALITY

BY

Gustave Thibon

LONDON

HOLLIS & CARTER

36090

*This translation from the original French,
Retour au Réel (Lardanchet: Paris), was made by
A. GORDON SMITH*

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LTD., AYLESBURY AND LONDON,
FOR HOLLIS AND CARTER LIMITED, 25 ASHLEY PLACE, LONDON, E.W.1

First published 1955

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FOREWORD

REALITY and realism are such abstract terms and tend to give rise to so many confusions that it would be well to begin by clarifying my vocabulary and also my general attitude to the subject.

The idea of realism, for me, suggests first of all organic relationship and vital equilibrium. Man does not stand alone: he is immersed in a totality of real entities by which he is at once transcended and fed. His degree of realism, in every field, is measured by the degree of his communion and intimacy with one or other of the elements of this totality. Realism of work, intellectual, social and religious realism, all imply a fruitful contact between man and his function, between man and truth, his fellows and his God. Inversely, the unrealism of the irresponsible official, of the pharisee or the armchair reformer, is recognised by the absence of such vital links.

In the following pages, however widely different the subjects treated, I have been careful to stress reasons for the loosening of these vital bonds and to indicate conditions for recovering health.

Such health, as I conceive it, must be total. True realism embraces life and spirit simultaneously. Nothing is more real than the ideal; exclusive care for the material and carnal is the worst of mutilations, and therefore the worst unrealism.

If I have been more insistent on certain elemental values, which some people will doubtless think common and "earthy" (the health of the instincts, the birth-rate, the coincidence of duty and interest), it is simply because it is these that seem to me most threatened. And here, let me assure the reader, I know what I am talking about. In the abstract, and without the awkward testimony of facts, it is possible to go on arguing indefinitely; but after witnessing from within the disintegration of a people, of their biological, moral and religious substance, it is impossible not to be painfully aware of the causes. I agree with Péguy (who

sets the beginning of the *general* moral decadence as far back as the eighteen-eighties) that here is a vital crisis unprecedented in history. We shall never reascend the slippery slope by having recourse to some magic formula, but only by cleaving close to the earth and using all our strength to grapple with necessity. I have followed the evolution of a particular village from the eighteen-sixties to the present day—and the name of this village I am talking of is Legion! I have seen its population drop from 2,500 to 1,000, its annual births from 80 to 15; I have watched the fallow land nibbling away the arable, the official steadily ousting the farmer, the vanishing away of the language, of all the customs and traditions of our ancestors; and I can calculate, from the figures available, that if the rate is kept up for another sixty years, there will be nothing left at all of the material and moral foundation provided by the land. In view of this I have every reason for not being very gentle with the forces that have brought us to this ante-chamber of death. Admittedly it is important to know what we shall be to-morrow; but it is still more important to know if we shall even exist. *Primum vivere*. . . . There is no being cured when you are dead.

There is another reason for respecting the earthly and carnal values: it is the readiness with which purely spiritual values expose a vulnerable flank to falsehood. There has never been such a debauch of imagination and verbiage, such a display of noble sentiments and heroic dreams, alongside such an utter impotence for action. This spiritual onanism, these ideals that engage and link up with nothing, which lead to no definite action, inspire an almost involuntary disgust. As far as I am concerned, the value of an ideal is measured not by its abstract beauty or purity, but simply by its capacity for being made incarnate. *My realism is not the realism of the flesh; it is an incarnate realism*. There is a world of difference here: the saint is the least carnal of men for the simple reason that he is the most incarnate. Ultimately it is martyrdom, the absolute testimony of the flesh to the spirit, that furnishes the proof of total realism.

As the Gospel tells us, the spirit is willing enough but the flesh is weak. And yet, as one day St Peter learnt to his cost, without the corroboration of this weak lumpish flesh, the fairest and most nimble spirit counts for nothing. This is why the least degree of effective action and the very humblest practical realisation are more to me than the noblest soarings of the isolated and discarnate spirit. Yes: I know very well that this attempt at incarnation involves, nearly always, many cramping limitations and a mass of dross. Every giving birth is accompanied by impurity. But I know very well that this attempt at incarnation involves nearly always many cramping limitations and a mass of impurities of giving birth is the surest means of avoiding its pains. . . .

* * *

The word "organism" also implies balance, rhythm, polarity: the integration of the most diverse elements. Therefore organic thought cannot possibly be other than relative and measured. There are only two truths I recognise as absolute. One of them is metaphysical: God is. The other is supernatural: God is love. Below these two immovable certitudes, that alone can be pushed to their limits without distortion (their measure is to be without measure, as St Augustine would say), all else is a mingling of yes and no. Biological, moral and social health is simply a ridge, and often a very narrow one, between a couple of equally perilous slopes. So nothing would be more in conflict with my mode of thinking than to regard as absolute and unconditional principles the attacks or parries that will be seen delivered in these pages. When I attack some excess, it will be to restore harmony, not to show love of the opposite excess. A doctor fighting insomnia or fever is not aiming to produce lethargy or sub-normal temperature.

The same concern for organic unity, for adapting to the concrete, may sometimes appear to be self-contradictory. But is it self-contradiction to fight a double danger? Every teacher worthy of the name is strict with a spoilt child, but gentle when dealing with one who has been ill-used. It is

the same love for childhood that dictates these seemingly opposite treatments. In just the same way a good wagoner puts his shoulder to the wheel going uphill, but applies the brakes when he is going down; both actions aim equally at furthering the vehicle's progress. It is a little humiliating to be forced to labour such obvious truths.

* * *

The chapter on "Christianity and the Democratic Mystique" calls for a few special comments. First of all, to reassure those who (in good faith no doubt) pretend that my quarrel with democracy dates from June 1940, let me make it clear that it was written in 1937.¹ It is reproduced here because I am convinced that fundamentally it is as topical as ever.

I have been accused of misunderstanding, and even of slighting, the soul of the people and popular virtues in general. Living in daily contact with the people as I do, I think I understand their virtues and their weaknesses at least as well as any of the intelligentsia, whose love of the humble can never be more than a literary theme. What I have learnt from daily experience is that nothing so quickly corrupts a people's soul and dissipates its reserves of strength and kindness as a particular kind of democratic climate. My instinctive aversion in the matter of democracy was explained to me in a flash by a remark of Péguy's (I quote from memory): "There is only one way not to be a democrat to-day: it is to be the people."

I am anti-democratic, but not because I hold a brief for the moneyed interest or the "respectable" middle class. Nothing, to me, is more hideously, more inorganically plebeian than the pundits and profiteers of capitalism.

Nor is it because I am a believer in state-tyranny, whatever the name or the mask it assumes.

I am anti-democratic because of my belief in what I call the natural communities and hierarchies. What I should most like to see would be a new aristocracy, founded on

¹ It was first published in the *Revue catholique des idées et des faits*.

something other than the vagaries of fortune or officialdom and with its lot closely linked with that of the people. Such an *élite*, in my view, has so little in common with the master-clans of capitalism and state-absolutism that it would have to be wholly recreated. This is the only thing that can restore to the people, perishing for the want of someone to follow and to love, its veritable soul and a sense of its destiny.

I am relentlessly opposed to the law of numbers and the power of the masses. So much so—and here I am more revolutionary than many of the Left—that I am all for abolishing the masses as such. This word, borrowed from terms of matter and quantity, is simply horrifying when applied to human beings. For an atomised bourgeois, or would-be bourgeois society (Péguy stressed long ago these death-pangs of the true people), I would substitute an organised society, one in which every man, according to his capacities and in communion with his fellows—for frontiers, if they are respected, are also marks of union—could have scope to do something really worth-while and something that only he could do. I stand for the kind of unity that brings men together, as against mere number that makes for dispersal. In everything I would subordinate having to being. For me it is not enough that each should *have* a place; I also want everyone to *be* in his place.

I have been blamed for criticising the democratic ideal of universal peace, brotherhood and happiness. Is not this, I have sometimes been asked, also the programme laid down by the Gospel? No doubt it is; but to me the contents of the bottle mean more than the label. How comes it that the same call to universal communion uttered by a St Francis of Assisi is irresistible, yet in the mouth of a demagogue, utterly repellent? It is solely a question of the purity of the source. The ideal of the left-wing politician is oftener adulterated than that of your conservative, for the simple reason that it is infinitely more lofty; it is harder to incarnate what ought to be than it is to organise what is; the virtues a statesman needs are far less high than an apostle's. Besides, what I attack in the democratic mystique is not the

generous ideal it sets before us, but the prostitution of this splendid ideal. The idealist kiss of a Lamourette¹ is worth not much more than the materialist kiss of Judas himself: the consequences of both are mud and blood. My call is not to destroy but to purify: I should never rage against the mask were it not that I believe in the face underneath.

* * *

The same concern for unity governs my attitude to the other problems of the hour.

Some people have been alarmed by my attacks on certain kinds of material progress: they have inquired ingenuously if it can really be that I am opposed to machinery. As if the question, asked in such absolute terms, could convey any meaning at all! The plough itself, the distaff and the wheel are all achievements of technology; indeed, the consistent enemy of machinery would logically be bound to be the consistent enemy of the human mind. Yet the tragic element in the present situation is no less obvious for that. The material possibilities made available to mankind in rather more than a century have increased to an utterly bewildering extent, whereas man's biological and spiritual faculties have remained unchanged and are incapable of changing. Technical achievements endow him with almost indefinite possibilities of reach, but for all his efforts he can add not an inch to his inward stature. He piles up his "marvels" on the level of *having* without anything to counterbalance them on the side of *being*.

Hence lack of balance. The organism, in Hippocrates' words of universal application, nourishes itself only on what it subdues. It is all too clear that many technical acquisitions (wireless, cinema, ease of communication and the rest) have not yet been "subdued" by the mass of

¹ Adrien Lamourette, sometime French prelate and member of the Legislative Assembly, distinguished himself, in July 1792, by an emotional appeal which led to a brief reconciliation between the right and the left. There was much embracing, but it was all forgotten before the day was out; hence *baisers Lamourette* have become proverbial. Lamourette himself was executed in 1794. (Tr.)

human beings. I look at technical achievement not only in its aspect of *conquest*, which is marvellous enough; I look at it also from the point of view of *assimilation*. And this is disquieting. Every conqueror knows that there is nothing so dangerous as a conquest unassimilated. Material civilisation, as I see it, is an enormous banquet, at which thousands of courses are served to the guests and at an ever increasing rate. Where I am divided from the wholehearted supporters of technology is that, while they have no thought but to rejoice at the number and quality of the dishes, I take into consideration the capacity of the guests' stomachs and the time they require for digestion.

Similarly I defend property, in its organised form: I attack it in its parasitical form. I also believe in the diffusion of knowledge, but to the extent to which knowledge can be absorbed and properly controlled. I prefer an old unlettered countryman, who draws his rude wisdom from his direct contact with God-given reality, to the uprooted individual stuffed with useless reading, who in the words of Mistral "no longer tells the time by the sun, to whom the old ways mean nothing". I prefer, everywhere, the humblest *realities* in which soul is perceptible to the loftiest *appearances* bereft of soul.

* * *

I have done my best not to be unjust, but I make no pretence to universalism. My book—and here lie both its purpose and its limitations—aims to be nothing more than a humble attempt to return to health. But health means joining up: a diseased limb is an isolated limb. Whether I am concerned with war or economics, with the salvation of the body politic, with technology or education or religion, what I am after is restoring the living bonds between man and the various elements of his destiny. I am for everything that serves to strengthen these bonds, even if to contemporary taste they are merely narrowing and restricting; I am against all that loosens them, even if the forces of division embellish themselves with the most sacred names. In this age, when men are separated as never before from

each other and from everything else, and so suffer and die for the phantoms that people their own inward emptiness, I have tried to bear witness to the plenitude and satisfaction, to the maternal security of these fundamental bonds of life.

Above all, I have insisted, as I did not in *Jacob's Ladder*,¹ on those *natural* bonds: the land, work, the community. A minimum of earthly health, I believe, is necessary for the renewal of contact with God. But I also believe that all earthly harmony must be frail and imperilled unless it finds its support in the divine heart which creates the world and preserves it in existence. My standpoint throughout is a Christian standpoint: God may not be always mentioned, but he is never far away.

* * *

There is a certain anxiety which the metaphysician, being concerned with the unchanging, partly escapes, but which the moralist, busied with the fugitive aspects of life, must experience very fully. It is that to which Plato refers when, speaking of the written word that remains permanently fixed, he says: "Its father is no longer there to defend it."

The theories developed in this book, displaced however little from their concrete perspective, may well give rise to so many misconceptions that all I can do in publishing them is to rely on the reader's intelligence and good sense. It is for him so to assimilate the author's thought that he can adapt it to the thousand facets of reality. Every line is the fruit of reflection on facts and bears witness to a truth I hold dearer than life. This truth I present with all the willingness in the world, but I force it on no one. I have put all my good faith and good will into these pages, and it is to those of good faith and good will that they are dedicated. I hardly expect them to carry conviction to others. I have neither the skill nor the desire to besiege minds that are hostile. Huckster's tricks are completely foreign to me. Your salesman has forceful methods of his own when he wants to overcome a buyer's resistance: a giver can wait till someone comes along. . . .

¹ *L'Echelle de Jacob*, Lyon, H. Lardanchet, 1942.

PART ONE

THE REALISM OF THE LAND

IN what was perhaps the darkest hour of our history, we heard a leader proclaim: "I hate the lies that have done you such harm." And the same voice recalled us to the truth we had been so long engaged in forgetting: "There is one thing that never lies, and that is the land."

I have no desire to make the least contribution to the chorus of hollow praise that has been showered on the countryman. We have seen the birth and proliferation, ever since June 1940, of a whole philosophy and literature of the land, as ephemeral, to my mind, and quite as meaningless, as the pseudo-mysticisms of love and youth and something-for-nothing, of which we had previously more than our fill. When the tempest breaks, men humbly solicit the patronage of the saints; they soon forget them once the peril has passed.

Your true countryman is no more moved by to-day's wafting of incense than he was by yesterday's slights and indifference. In any case, it is not primarily the countryman I am proposing to praise, it is the land itself; not the virtues of the man on the land so much as the climate that produces him. I shall merely attempt to show, by analysing some of the evils that have brought us to disaster, how the one remedy for all is contact with the land and work upon the land. At the root of all these evils there is falsehood. But the land is a school of truth: while it bridles the instincts that make for dissolution, it nourishes health of body and soul. It helps a man to be himself and defends him against himself.

* * *

"If anyone tries to persuade you", said Benjamin Franklin, "that riches are to be had without working and saving,

hang him: he is a poisoner!" This poisoning process has been going on a long time. The sowing of false promises has destroyed the taste and feeling for all that is really good for us. Gorged on illusions, the people who were the best off on earth started to pine for the impossible. We lived in an oasis and went in search of a mirage. But what a revelation of what they were when these false ideals and the promises of financial and political charlatans were confronted with a blade of corn or a mere clod of earth! No vain promises are made by the land. The humble goods it produces are genuine and necessary, they go to make the flesh and blood of men. They are also the fruits of human exertion, for God wedded the soil to the sweat of the children of Adam. The dullest of labourers is instinctively mistrustful of all the dreams of wealth and happiness unfounded in hard continuous labour.

Not only does the land not lie itself, but it forbids men to lie: it cures their lying. In other fields—especially in the liberal and administrative professions—it is always possible to feed on illusions, to surround oneself with a false prestige, to impose it on others and on oneself as well: the sanction of facts is uncertain and remote.¹ In life on the land there can be no such illusions. The land is not to be tricked, it declines to be paid in words; prestige and flattery have no effect on it; the intrinsic worth of the labourer can be read in the result of his labour; very directly, too, and in a way that is capable of being tested exactly. It is possible, elsewhere, to live and prosper by falsehood; here there can be no intrigues, no sleight-of-hand, only the quality of human effort that all can see for themselves. If you have planted cabbages, the crop of cabbages, good or bad, is the reality you will be judged by, and against that verdict there can

¹ "A professor may be in error and so remain all his life, he can be the ruin of thousands upon thousands of minds, but he keeps a good job and retires on a comfortable pension. A farmer, on the other hand, if he neglects to sow for a couple of seasons, promptly faces disaster. Hence what is called the farmer's good sense: he knows there is a nature of things and that it can never be changed.—"Henri Charlier: *Culture, Ecole, Métier*.

be no appeal. The pharisee or the utopian are characters impossible to conceive in agriculture. I knew in my early youth a professor of agriculture whose theories were long the subject of local discussion: his technical competence, admired by some and denied by others, continued to float in a kind of haze that made for every possible illusion. Among other ideas, he had some that were original and daring on the growing of sorgho-grass. One day he turned to practice, and there by the roadside could be seen the professorial sorgho, burnt up by badly compounded manure, and sprouting its meagre ears beside the rich sturdy crops of the "routine-ridden" peasants. There was the proof: from that day on the fellow was never discussed.

The realism of agricultural work is due to its being applied to the things of nature. There is no difficulty about checking and interpreting these: they are no fit subjects for disguise or evasion; unlike the world of thinking and writing, they never provide a man with those infinite possibilities of falling on his feet. Moreover, your true countryman has a certain disdain for the pure idea. In Provençal we talk of an *ideious* (an untranslatable word rendered very colourlessly as "a utopian") when we wish to describe a chimerical mind, a man whose ideas come to nothing, never take flesh, never bite on nature. It is an advantage on the land that a freak of this sort is instantly recognised by everyone. A politician, whose folly and ineptitude are never recognised till he has brought about fearful collective havoc, if he had been a farmer would have been judged and eliminated within a year.

As M. Jacques Chevalier has wisely remarked: "The very ease with which we manipulate words makes us liable to be intoxicated and carried away by them; we have no idea how to be rid of the mirage and set ourselves firmly in the presence of the facts. . . . We are too much inclined to think that words exempt us from action, that it is enough to have described eloquently what it is necessary to do, and the thing is done: this is the vice of parliamentarianism, as

practised by us for the last half-century. And the worst of it is that words dig ditches between the facts and us, between us and ourselves, ditches that it is impossible to cross or fill in."¹ It is the tragedy, in fact, of human language to glide imperceptibly from testimony to alibi, and end by becoming a substitute for the very actions which it should rightly enlighten and initiate. The realism of the land, that perpetual checking of the idea by the fact, the eliminating of every chance to succeed dishonestly, is thus the most powerful counter-weight to the gifts of language and imagination so typical of us as a nation: it keeps the mind to the sure path of moderation and harmony. It is in contact with the earth that thought becomes wisdom, for wisdom is nothing else but the incarnation of the idea.

* * *

It is generally agreed that before the war we suffered an unprecedented crisis in the matter of responsibility. There were few—and fewest of all among those in high places—who preserved any sense of their social mission, who knew any longer how to give what was in them, how to pledge their faith or assume a burden. How are we to account for this lack?

Here, in the heart of the countryside, is a smallholder working the farm he has inherited from his ancestors. The task of this man is at once stable in space and continuous in time. He knows no other trade but his own. He would have difficulty even in transplanting himself to another district, where he would cultivate less well a soil that was unfamiliar to him. His livelihood and that of his family, his future and his reputation, all depend on the quality of his work. Morally and materially he has nothing to hope for apart from this piece of land with which the whole of his future is bound up. If he fails in his duty, he is *immediately* punished in his dearest interests. For him, the accomplishment of his mission in society is a necessity quite as personal and quite as vital as is that of breathing or sleeping. He is bound

¹ *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15 October 1940.

almost as closely to the soil he cultivates as his soul is bound to his body.

Now take a man with a high post under the government. The hazards of his career keep him perpetually on the move—to the capital, to the provinces, to the colonies, to foreign lands. He has to account, of course, to his superiors and to his country; if he is a man of any depth and integrity he may have a taste for his work and perform it conscientiously. But could we say of him what we have said just now of the countryman? Can functions so dispersed in space and time ever bind him so deeply and so completely as work in the fields binds the farmer? That is a glaring example, chosen deliberately; but it is just the same, at a lower level, with a host of workers and employees and petty officials, tossed about from place to place, from job to job, by the enforced removals of their uprooted existence. With them, the thing that binds them to their work is the abstract necessity to live by doing *something* (and this ultimately means *anything*); it is no longer the precise and unescapable necessity to live by doing *that*—which is the necessity that welds the countryman to the land. Function is no longer what the body is to the soul; it tends to become what the clothing is to the body. It is no longer *lived*, like the organic continuation of the self; it is simply regarded as something useful (and replaceable); it passes insensibly from the domain of *being* to that of *having*.

The decline in the sense of responsibility is the necessary consequence of the increasing separation of the individual from his social function. Man feels responsible only in so far as he is bound, and the only true bonds are organic bonds. It sounds well enough *to be devoted to one's work*, but devotion belongs essentially to *being*, not to *having*. A man devotes himself only to what makes part of him, to the things and people he can't live without. It is absurd to expect anyone to take as much care of his hat as of his head, and from all these people who are wholly without roots it is idle to expect much in the way of fruit. No material or moral encouragement, no rigour of the law,

will ever induce the vast majority of men to **take** interest in tasks that have no root in their souls.

It is a just reproach against our modern town-dwellers that they no longer know how to rely on themselves, that as far as they can they leave it to others (in this case the community) to see that their work is done and their future provided for. A number of laws concerned with social welfare are tacitly based on this refusal by the individual to rely on his own exertions. And this is bound up with the lack of vital bonds between man and his social function. In life on the land, man needs the earth; but it is no less true that the earth needs man. The exigence is mutual. And your countryman has an obscure awareness of this dependence of the land upon himself. Every day, as the season requires, he feels that the ripening of the harvest, of what is living and precious, calls for his own co-operation or it will not take place. Hence something beyond all material calculation: a kind of symbiosis between the land and man. It is this, even in the most primitive conditions, that makes work as spontaneous as a natural function. Only last winter one of my neighbours, who had been called up for military service, was home on ten days' leave. I met him one evening as he was coming back from pruning his vine—not very warming work at a temperature twelve below zero and with a strong mistral blowing. When I pointed out the risks he was taking he replied as naturally as possible: "What else can I do? The job has got to be done!" Now here was a man neither poor nor miserly, but his vine was something living, with no one in the world to appeal to but him. . . .

True, the healthiest countryman has an eye for what he can make; but it is not money for itself he loves; it is the fact of its being the recompense and consecration of his toil. I remember an old peasant-woman whose only son had quitted the land to go in for business. One day I heard her reproaching him bitterly for giving up working his father's fields. When he could stand it no longer he brandished a wad of bank-notes before her eyes: "What are you com-

plaining of?" he demanded. "Is it money you are after? I've made a lot more than by working the land!" "You can keep your money", the old woman retorted; "I don't want it, I want the land to be worked." I have known personally a number of old farmers, with none to leave their property to, rich enough to live on the money they had invested, yet continuing to work for no other reason than that they hated to see their land lie fallow. The motive behind it was not profit: it was a mixture of love of the land and self-respect. In any case, a taste for money is far less desiccating in rural life than in other professions, for the excellent reason that the peasant's profit is always bound up with his professional conscience, a convergence which creates a moral atmosphere in which selfishness, by force of necessity, is shrouded in an "aura" of sacrifice and devotion.

After a certain stage of economic and political centralisation, these close and cordial relations between man and his work are no longer thinkable. Mere anonymous workers, employees in some great factory or business, can never be made so intimately aware of the necessity of their own work; weak interchangeable cogs, they rather get the impression that the vast machine they belong to would go on running just as well without them. Such an impression is enough to weaken considerably any feeling for personal effort and sacrifice. A man relies on himself to the extent to which he feels himself necessary, and that means *bound*; in so far as he feels detached, he tends to cast on others his own duties and responsibilities, so that it is no paradox to say that the man who lives for himself alone is he who relies the most on others. If my vine-tending neighbour, with the same share of selfishness, had been a member of a team or gang of workers, he would have remained at home and said to himself: "It'll get on all right without me"; thinking more or less consciously: "And even if it doesn't, I couldn't care less." But a field ill-cultivated or a harvest spoilt has a different effect on the individual concerned from that produced by a badly repaired ditch beside the common highway; it is not merely a blow to self-interest:

the feelings suffer, there is a loss of self-respect and personal reputation.

This physical and moral necessity of relying on oneself and labouring without remission also explains the almost religious veneration with which peasants surround the idea of work. "This man has such-and-such faults", they say, "but he is a *worker*"; and the final word is uttered in a tone that implies absolution for all the rest. Similarly there is no worse insult than to call a man an *idler*. In other environments, a man who works as little as possible wins ready respect for being smart and wide-awake; but here this reaction of rural public opinion acts as a marvellous curb on the instincts to relax. It is always an excellent thing, this coincidence of the sense of social duty with the ever-present fear of "what people will say". Some fifty years ago a farmer in my village had an acute attack of laziness in the middle of the summer and neglected to thresh his corn after it had been cut. It was a unique event in the annals of the place, and the yokels still talk of it in tones of mingled stupor and indignation such as might well be used for some tale of sacrilege. I hardly imagine that any bursar of a college or army quartermaster, after allowing the provisions in his charge to be spoiled, has ever raised a scandal so violent and so lasting.

The shortcomings of so many in regard to their social duty are commonly attributed to selfishness and lack of moral sense: to diminish the evil, the optimists are always preaching a return to morality, pessimists the imposition of severe legal sanctions. Such views are legitimate but somewhat restricted. There are few able to respond to an abstract moral ideal, and it is always possible to by-pass even the most stringent legal enactments. The best remedy for this failing, which everyone complains of, is for the function to be bound up with the subject's profoundest and most personal interests, the coincidence, in short, of selfishness and duty. Good purpose, no doubt, will always be served by moralising and raging, but what is most important of all is to replace the *atomised* society we suffer

from at present with an *organised* society, and of this the life of the countryman provides the purest model. The atom simply exists for itself, but the organ, by definition, cannot realise its own good except by serving the good of the whole. A socially insured person takes it easy when he is ill (even if he doesn't go out of his way to exploit his malady), whereas a worker of the land, at the same moral level, when driven to it by his beloved crops, which live only thanks to him and will die without his attention, works to the limits of his endurance (I have seen some all but kill themselves); pensioners, for the most part, sink into a lazy torpor, but the majority of old farmers go on producing.

If the land gives man the sense of personal effort, it teaches him also the complementary virtue, one forgotten, perhaps, even more at the present day: a yielding to destiny, a healthy patience and resignation.

Those who live on fixed and guaranteed incomes, and even industrialists, merchants and professional men, whose activities are certainly more hazardous but who never encounter obstacles other than the humanly surmountable—all, in short, whose means of existence do not bring them into direct contact with the cosmic forces in all their inevitability—are inclined to suppose that human success depends entirely on a man's position or the effort he makes. "I have been successful", such a man will say, "in this or that competition; I have got this job, sold so many bicycles or so many cheeses: therefore these advantages or benefits are my due." It is understandable enough that people who are accustomed to count on a virtually automatic reward find it hard to adapt themselves to the blows of fortune and in the event of serious reverses are always prone to turn bitter and revolt. "It was due to me", they will complain, "and I haven't got it; it's not fair!" Note, incidentally, that the great fevers of revenge we have witnessed in our day spring largely from this narrow and materialised sense of justice, inherent in a society that has lost communion with the elemental springs of life.

It is not the same in the country. An activism of the

American type, faith of any sort in the omnipotence and unlimited potentialities of human exertions, are not even to be dreamed of here,¹ where nothing is due and everything is a gift. The best endeavours come to nothing without the benevolence of heavenly and earthly forces, the influence of which can be neither foreseen nor directed. There are harvests that are *blessed*, and this word that countrymen use shows clearly enough how they feel the fruits of their labour to be outside their control; there are also harvests that seem cursed. There is no such thing as automatic success, there is nothing at all that can be calculated in advance. But beset with uncertainty, fashioned as he is by so many unforeseeable failures and successes, the countryman necessarily acquires a certain resilience and power to withstand trials, such as the inhabitants of cities, fortified with every sort of insurance, are no longer capable even of imagining. I can illustrate this with two examples I have actually witnessed. At the beginning of the winter of 1939-40 I was talking to a man in receipt of a regular pension who owing to the postal delays brought about by the war had been unable to get hold of his last remittance, now ten days overdue. "It's an outrage!" he shouted: "not being able to get *on time* the money you *have a right to*!" Great indeed was his annoyance and indignation. A few days later, after the worst of the cold weather, I saw one of my neighbours surveying his field of cauliflowers ruined by the frost. They had been planted several months; he had succeeded in keeping them alive through a particularly dry summer; what it meant for him was that the fruit of weeks of hard toil was lost. "Bah!" he commented, without a trace of bitterness: "I can sow something else. . . ."

It is just this combination of *activity* and *passivity*, of persevering effort and yielding to fate, that explains the unique plenitude of the farmer's life. The countryman achieves

¹ This resistance of agriculture to the laws and ambitions of a crude industrialism has been admirably expounded by Marcel Malcor in his *Au delà du machinisme*, the profoundest study I know of the evils of modern economy and of the remedies they call for.

spontaneously that difficult balance between the two opposite poles of human duty: the use of freedom (with all it implies of initiative and toil) and the acceptance of necessity. He simultaneously wills and consents. Without him the land can do nothing, and he can do nothing without the land. "Peasants," cried Mistral, "working with God you do but half the work!" Working, as they do, directly under Providence, their resignation is essentially religious. Nothing in this world so closely resembles the shedding of divine graces as the genesis of the fruits of the earth. They need, apart from human effort, the benediction of God; however much they may be deserved, they are none the less gifts. This kinship between the things of earth and the things of heaven makes it easier to understand why the land is a reservoir of religious life, and why the latter declines in proportion as a people abandons the countryside.

The patience of the farmer is also due largely to the fact that he is very little dependent on society, that he is neither ruled nor rewarded by men. "It's the work that gives the orders," remarked an old man, a fellow-villager of mine, to a town-dweller envious of his rural freedom. The countryman obeys only the work of his hands and the extra-human forces (changes of weather and the rhythm of the seasons) that help or hinder him in his work; ultimately this is the only necessity that he obeys. But it is a necessity which commands with a force and persuasiveness that no human being could ever exert. A factory-worker may feel humiliated by having to obey, and desire through sheer resentment to become an employer himself; but a countryman never repines at being unable to command the weather and the seasons. . . . And the man who is set his task by men, who is paid and ordered about by men, has only men to blame for the ills he suffers. It is this that incites him to bitterness and revolt; for an evil caused by men is *ipso facto* reparable, and no evil is more intolerable than one felt to be reparable yet in fact can't be repaired. But what would be the sense of a countryman's ever rebelling against necessity? The worst ravages of flood or hailstorm find him always

more resigned than a worker in the town who (rightly or wrongly) thinks he is exploited by his employer. This feeling of an extra-human necessity in the evils and reverses suffered by man, counterbalancing the instincts of revolt and anarchy, is the basis of that huge force of social conservatism represented in every nation by the agricultural element.

The modern proletarian, in contact with nothing but men, believes in man's omnipotence for good as well as for evil. His situation is therefore all the more unbearable in that he conceives it to be arbitrary (which it often is): if men so willed it, he thinks, it might be otherwise! The revolutionary impulse is due precisely to this: since everything *can* change, it *must* change! The countryman for his part, knows exactly what can be achieved by human desires and human efforts when they find themselves confronted with the powers of fate. And more than this, his habit of accepting without argument the commands of the earth and the seasons disposes him to see the social edifice as a continuation of the cosmic order: he considers with just the same feelings of resignation the rigours of nature and the inequalities of society. "Your five fingers are not all equal", was the answer of Mistral's old basket-maker to his son when the latter complained of his poverty. There is no better curb on the mischievous dreams of an earthly paradise, and on the impulse for revenge that springs from the religion of humanitarianism, than this awareness of the fatality of nature in the imperfections and injustices of human government.¹

* * *

We had lost, yesterday, the sense of risk. But paradoxically as it may seem, we had acquired at the same time a

¹ This is no justification for the exploiting of man by man as a natural necessity. All I am maintaining is that resignation and patience are socially more healthy than the blind and subversive fever for absolute justice which generally leads, as history shows, to an enormous aggravation of injustice. It is the unpardonable crime of the pseudo-*élite*, which governed during the last century, that by its selfishness and indifference it spurred the masses to revolt instead of leading them by peaceful measures to the enjoyment of a better lot.

taste for adventure. I call "adventure" any dangerous activity in which the good pursued, through either its hazardous or insignificant character, appears to be disproportionate to the risk entailed. There were those—we all knew them—who felt they were never sufficiently protected against the perils inherent in life (illness, poverty, family or social responsibilities) yet never hesitated to risk their lives, without adequate preparation, in yachting (shall we say?) or climbing mountains. The spirit of adventure is a perversion of the sense of risk.

But it is, as I said, only apparently a paradox. The man of the present day has no foundations or roots: he no longer feels he is bound to any nurturing necessity. Hence this creature, so flimsily attached to the ground, is in terror of the wind. He envelops himself in insurances and guarantees against risks just as an anaemic body needs a heap of bed-clothes to compensate for the internal heat it lacks. A man nourished by no roots is loose and unattached. He has no fixed place, no definite aim; and all he has left of the instinct of risk, for want of being canalised, tends to sweep him into adventure. Thus the paradox is resolved. . . .

It is the land that provides the antidote for this double evil. A countryman's life, compared to that of a wage-earner in the town or a man of private means, seems at first sight singularly precarious and uncertain. One so placed, in circumstances where the fruit of his exertions is always at the mercy of forces independent of his control, has necessarily the sense of risk: the hardness and insecurity of his life keep him constantly on the alert. But if the land is harsh and capricious, preventing his ever being lulled into a false security, it is also too maternal and too sure to inspire him with any taste or liking for adventure. What a deep security there is in fact beneath this seeming insecurity! The countryman is never sure of having this or that, but he is always sure of having something. The wage-earner or the stockholder, whose life has an outward show of security, finds he is despoiled of everything if he happens (as he easily may) to lose his job or his money; but the country-

man survives the worst social cataclysms, which hardly affect his existence at all. A calling so strongly magnetised leaves but very little room for the morbid attraction of the hazardous and unforeseen. Placed by his state of life at the convergence of human freedom and cosmic necessity, the countryman escapes the false security that brings lethargy and the false taste for risk that leads man astray: he yields nothing to chance, but he entrusts everything to fate.

The countryman has roots. Because he has roots he is not afraid of the wind and has no need to insure against it. There lies his sense of risk. And because he has roots he is never the sport of the wind. There lies his refusal of adventure.



"You have become a nation of old men," a foreigner told me one day. The remark is ambiguous. It might mean that owing to the fall in the birth-rate the proportion of old people is too high; it might also mean—and this is more serious—that the young among us have the souls of old men. Here again we must be on our guard against sweeping condemnations. But it is all too true that the *virtue* of youth is departing from us. Just like a tree, a man uprooted can hardly help withering.

Other things (notably quality of soul) being equal, a countryman stays young much longer than the town-dweller. The first reason is because he is in direct contact with life, because he is constantly busied with things that are living: there is bound to pass into him a little of that eternal youth which is all about him. The second reason is that his future is always bounded by the unforeseen: this atmosphere of hope and fear which he breathes, this constant need for effort, for adapting himself to new circumstances, fosters in him the faculty for expectation and striving, and this is the very essence of youth. The countryman's road is sure: following the rhythm of the same seasons, he devotes himself to the same tasks till the time comes to die. But it is not a road with the mileage marked up ahead and furnished with automatic filling-stations: no

one year is the same as another and every harvest is precarious. Now no one will ever realise sufficiently how rejuvenating it is for a man to have always *something to rescue*. The thing that is threatened and saved assumes a kind of sacredness; it is endowed with a mysterious virtue which thrills the depths of the soul and reawakens the eternal child in us. An old man is one who has nothing more to save. It is with an almost religious emotion that a countryman will announce: "I have rescued my harvest." It would be harder to imagine a merchant saying: "I have rescued my profit," and impossible to conceive an employee declaring: "I have rescued my wage-pocket."¹ These distinctions can be read everywhere in the facts: it is necessary only to compare the physical and moral vitality of an old countryman, whose soul is constantly warmed by communion with the land, with that of an old man in pensioned retirement, with his arteries hardened by the secure monotony of his existence. Every village in the country provides abundant opportunity for establishing the parallel.

I know too much about peasants to attempt to depict them in idyllic colours. From the purely moral point of view they are no better than their uprooted brethren: they, too, are visited with selfishness, with envy and hardness, and often in a form more permanent and more violent than with others. Where they excel is in the biological and social order. What I mean is that from the very fact that their state of life reminds them constantly of the order of nature,

¹ Note that there are plenty of other callings that belong to what Gabriel Marcel calls the "*catégorie du menacé*". The doctor, the statesman, the soldier, the teacher also work at what is "menaced", they have always something to save. And nothing is more effective for preserving the energy and ardour of youth than this sort of creative duel with evil, matter and chance. The superiority (so to speak) of the peasant lies in the fact that his security and his personal gain are directly bound up with what it is his mission to save. And this, considering the moral mediocrity of the mass of human beings, is no small advantage. To fulfil his social duty, the peasant needs only a minimum of moral elevation. To devote himself to his task with as much energy and application as the humblest labourer in the fields, an anonymous and irresponsible wage-earner would need to be almost a saint.

their faults are less opposed to the primitive demands of individual and collective balance.

A countryman may be as greedy as anyone else, he may be as ambitious or as envious. But whereas elsewhere these faults are terrible solvents of social life, here, by the very force of circumstances, they tend to make for collective prosperity. A politician or a doctor, a lawyer or a merchant, may be tempted to make his fortune or to gain prestige by recourse to lying and intrigue: they have a thousand means of tricking their clients. But it is impossible for the countryman to play tricks on the land: his selfishness has no shortcut to success; if he would succeed it can be only by working and producing. That is why agriculture, unlike so many other kinds of social activity, suffers little from the moral shortcomings of those who practise it. (I make exception here of certain attempts at industrial farming; but nature soon checks and punishes these.) I shall always remember an employee of a certain firm—an honest man and a hard worker, but bitten by ambition—complaining to me once about the way his colleagues, less industrious than himself, contrived to get on: "The only way to do it", he explained, "is to crawl!" Now all a farmer would have said was: "The only way is to work harder!" On the land envy, in its outward results, is not to be distinguished from emulation.

In other words, if countrymen have as many faults, they have fewer perversions. It is not so much their virtue that I praise as their health.

But it is precisely health that we stand in need of. We have more invalids to cure than sinners to convert. The best remedy for our ills is to return to the initial virtues created by hard and bracing necessity. I have pointed out a few of these virtues: a sense of truth, of effort and risk, patience, continuity and youth; and it is the land, I am convinced, that contains the reserves from which they are to be drawn.

"Where the State ends", wrote Nietzsche, "it is there that the song of necessity begins." A society in which all expect everything of the State is one in which the State can give

nothing to anyone. A countryman, relying more than others on necessity, is also he who relies least on the State. And that is why the State is most in need of him. The State organises and distributes; it can create nothing at all. And there is no surer means of destroying it than to treat it as an almighty Providence and make it responsible for compensating for the laziness and other shortcomings of its various members. There has been too much of a tendency to expect from the State more than God himself gives. True Providence requires that we should first help ourselves.

A material return to the land is neither possible nor desirable for all. The thing that is necessary for all is the creation of a social order in which each feels *vitally* bound to his task, just as the countryman is to his. For this we can never learn too much of the land, and of those who work it. What we specially have need of to-day is roots: but the soul also takes root in the land.

From every point of view the surest pledge of our people's rebirth and continuance lies in the persistence of a solid rural foundation, and for the other classes of society in a deep understanding of the land, and of the manners, virtues and traditions there incarnate. When Hercules fought the giant who regained new strength every time he touched the earth, it was only by keeping him lifted off the ground that he contrived to make an end of him. To-day this myth has a meaning once more. What is important above all is *not to lose touch with the earth*. A people that has lost true contacts with its soil is ripe for slavery—internal and external. But as long as we keep our roots, Hercules—by whatever name he is known—will never rob us of our life: fidelity to the land will be the guardian of our national freedom and genius.

CIVIC REALISM

IT is not my intention to indulge in vain and bitter regrets: mere moaning can't help. But, as every doctor knows, there can be no effective treatment without careful diagnosis; nor can there be any rebuilding without discovering first of all the precise degree and extent of the ruin. It is only by ascertaining what it was we lacked yesterday that we can know what it behoves us to do to-day.

Our country is stricken, and those who watch by its sick-bed fall into one of two errors: they regard the malady either as a blessing or as incurable: this is gratuitous optimism as an alternative to despair. No serious remedy is prescribed, for in either case there is nothing to do. For myself I believe the country to have been seriously ill, and to be so still; I also believe that it can and must be cured. But in this connection there is plenty to say. . . .

A man in good health, organically sound, can safely stand draughts; there is never any danger of his contracting pleurisy. So it is too easy altogether to reduce to purely extrinsic factors (e.g. the political and military blunders of our governments) the whole collection of causes that have brought us to disaster. It's a comfortable attitude to adopt: we have suffered defeat by external forces; so all we have to do is to wait for external forces to relieve us. . . . This frees us from any remorse and any need for effort, but also (alas) from any chance of being cured. What is forgotten is the correspondence of the microbe to the patient's constitution, and that those political and military leaders—whose personal responsibility is certainly not negligible—did not descend upon us out of the blue like so many meteorites; they were to some extent the emanation of our own feeble state, of our national abdication. With but few

exceptions we are all to some extent responsible for the present situation. Whatever the part played by external circumstances, it is important above all that we should never lose sight of the *inward* evils.

* * *

Inward evils? Were we as bad as all that? Not just bad. We were impoverished, we had grown slack; we were losing contact with the deep realities that sustain and nourish every individual (the land and the family; work, country, religion). We were straying about the outer surface of ourselves in quest of easy pleasure and immediate repose; we were becoming incapable of engagement, either in good or bad causes; separated from the tutelary foundations of existence, we were building ourselves funk-holes out of words and dreams.

Take the facts; they are more enlightening than all the rhetoric in the world, and what they teach is not to be refuted. Here is a Provençal village I know well. In 1860 the population provided some sixty conscripts a year; in 1940 it provided six. Of those sixty, more than fifty remained on the land where they were born; of the six, at least four sought jobs in offices, not through any vocation to the work but simply out of a taste for false security, with the final prospect of swelling the ranks of the petty pensioners, already over-crowded. The same lack of vital energy is to be observed in other and less respectable aspects. Admittedly all in the village was not perfect before: there were plenty of squabbles and bickerings, obstinate and somewhat spectacular quarrels. To-day all that has gone: all that remains now is envy disguised by smiles, venomous scandal and more than all else the anonymous letter—almost the only expression of resentment left. I remember, when I was a boy, how an old man, the victim of one of those viper's tongues that are the curse of every village, lay in wait one Sunday for the woman concerned as she came out from Mass, and to the great public joy administered a very resounding chastisement. From the moral-purity point

of view opinions may vary about a gesture like this, but there is no denying that it suggests a forceful sense of public duty. What is there in common, as an exhibition of vital energy, between resentment that explodes like this in full daylight and that which crawls under cover of an anonymous letter? Instances like this are sufficient to prove that all the causes of our calamities are not external.

* * *

This refusal of the deep realities, a selfish recoil of the heart, was accompanied, as might be expected with a people as intelligent as ours, with plenty of cleverness and flexibility. It was what we used to describe as "dodging the column". Without indulging in sweeping condemnations, I can't help associating this particular word "dodging" with so many others, all beginning with a "d", that signify anything but what is positive or constructive: words, in fact, that are peculiarly applicable to our present situation—decadence, destruction, defeat, etc. . . . May it not be that "dodging" is perhaps the key to all these—disasters? The latter have at any rate served to show us, not by any mathematical demonstration but by means of our own ruin, by our blood and tears, all the mischief that lies in this pitiful ideal.

All the uprooted, who have had their country's ruin brought home to them to-day by way of their hungry bellies, may learn to what extent it is all bound up with a reality that yesterday they laughed to scorn. The absurdity of mere selfishness is now blatant. The man who declines to accept responsibility will be crushed. In place of a burden proportionate to his strength, he will have to take on his lazy shoulders the whole weight of a falling world.

This lesson has now been learnt. All are now in agreement in desiring the salvation of the body politic which they can no longer separate from their own. But not all see the one and only way that leads to this salvation. I want to stress here a few of the illusions which weigh so heavily against our future.

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The most deep-seated evil we suffer from is our *unrealism* in thought and conduct. This unrealism arises out of the loosening or rupture of vital bonds. A man who lives in contact with reality, who actually works on reality, has very necessarily a sense of reality: he knows instinctively what is possible and what is profitable. The thing we call good sense is nothing else but this balance which in thought and action makes for communion with reality. The man of good sense is always a man with *ties*. But he who is isolated and uprooted, however intelligent he may be, is lacking in good sense: absurdity is displayed in all his aims and actions. There is nothing, in fact, apart from personal experience and vital participation, that makes it possible in the end to escape unrealism. It is not enough, as Kant would have it, that thought should be self-consistent. Even the thought of a madman fulfils this condition. "The madman", wrote Chesterton, "is the man who has lost everything except his reason": his thought is consistent with itself; it is inconsistent only with the world. The bout of unrealism, which lasted so long with us, left its traces behind it, and we can still see all about us plentiful examples of absurd behaviour: of behaviour, that is, insufficiently related to the possible or the necessary—in short, to reality.

There are some who are intoxicated with unmeaning words and unfounded hopes. Their plans for saving the country are wonderful, sometimes heroic. What they have to say may do well for the electoral platform, but there is nothing *tested* in it all, nothing *incarnate*. Those who would straighten up everything remain twisted themselves. The sellers of panaceas are themselves sick men. It is grotesque, and also pathetic, to see a negligent petty official, or a woman who has made a mess of bringing up her children (or has none at all), for ever laying down the law about affairs of state. Why not first apply their sovereign cure to the humble realities that fate has entrusted to them? I know that the really important things are bound to be talked about more than they are experienced. It is only

natural that heroes and true statesmen should be a scanty minority compared with those who discuss heroism and high affairs of state. It is a weakness as old as humanity; but the present moment, I suggest, is singularly inappropriate for such an orgy of hollow verbosity. There is another name for illusions and pretensions: it is *lying*. And we have suffered enough from that; we have been stuffed with it so much that it is impossible henceforth not to vomit it up. If we have not the inner integrity to avoid such verbiage, at least our sense of the ridiculous should be enough; but a sense of the ridiculous calls for a sense of reality.

Others—and this failing is connected with the last—rely on perpetual criticism. The best of these are impatient idealists who have no understanding of the slow, tentative gropings that are bound to accompany any process of ascent. They would arrive as soon as they start. Ill-informed and unreflecting, they sift with their harsh zeal every act of civil authority; they excel at exposing all the impurities and imperfections that are inherent in every work undertaken by man. They themselves do nothing, which relieves them of having to face any criticism in return. As Péguy remarked: "Their hands are clean, or they would be if they had any." The one thing they forget is that clean hands are not empty hands. There was a navy I knew (the instance is typical and worth putting on record) who used to leave his shovel and hammer by the roadside and pour out to every passer-by his lamentations upon the evils of the day. Amid his spate of recriminations there were two phrases that kept on recurring like a refrain: "Nothing has been done," and "What's the government waiting for?" The answer, of course, is that if nothing has been done it is because too many others are doing the same as he. And as for the government, the thing they are waiting for primarily is for everyone to do his job. "From you", one could have told him, "they are waiting for you to start breaking stones. It's your sweat they want, not your spittle."

There is the same negative zeal in busily watching the other fellow, then abusing or denouncing him: the epidemic

of anonymous letters, so often condemned by the courts, is a striking example of this spirit. Those who draw up these acts of accusation would generally be better employed in making acts of contrition. Here again the evil was always with us; but it is far graver now, when on pain of death we should be going all out for a positive end; it has become a luxury we can certainly no longer afford. We have to live, body and soul; for this, the good done counts for very much more than the evil denounced. There is no good done by pointing out the cockle in the other man's field: that is not the way to produce more wheat.

But those who do nothing themselves rely on others—and it is here we touch the bedrock of unrealism. I am thinking of that political sentimentalism in regard to other nations that misleads so many of us and divides us into frantic “-phils” and “-phobes”. How many there are who show an unbounded sympathy for one particular nation and a no less unbounded antipathy for another—sentiments, like all others with no grounds in reason, essentially shifting and reversible—and who link the future of their own nation with that of some other! What basis have such feelings in knowledge and experience? The majority of people are historically uneducated, they have had no direct contact with the peoples they cherish or execrate; the little they have learnt from vague memories of the classroom, from the commonplaces of private conversation and the press, float about them in a kind of fog which makes for every possible misconception. They love and detest what they know nothing about; their heart speaks, though their eyes are blind. And this is what is called having personal convictions!

Such emotionalism, baseless and uncontrolled, is a perpetual threat to the accomplishment of any rational and objective diplomacy. It makes one see what was in the mind of the statesman who remarked: “The verb *to love* is one I never conjugate in politics.”¹ The fact is, international

¹ It is not a matter of rigidly separating the emotional from the rational. Obviously there are certain political decisions dictated by a

affairs are a matter of reason, not sentiment. Political wisdom teaches us that other nations exist; its task is to find the means of co-existing with them in the way most conformable to our national interests and ideals. According to circumstances, this may involve closer or more distant relations, but neither hatred nor love. Joan of Arc, let me remark parenthetically, had never any hatred for the English: all she wanted was to put them (in the most material sense) "in their place", and that was out of France. Feelings of love or hatred, adulterated even when individuals indulge in them (they are never found pure except in heaven or hell), internationally always arise out of an absurd over-simplifying.

But there is often a secret motive, hardly one to be acknowledged, behind these absolute sympathies and aversions: it is the amorous comedy, the false enthusiasm, the emotional viscosity of the impotent. Unable to do anything for themselves, they wait for some miraculous salvation from without, murmuring to the stranger they cling to: "I love none but you, I hate all whom you hate." Here is the climax of the absurd. You, who are nothing, would be loved for yourself alone? Would you be saved by having others assume the efforts and sacrifices you yourselves are incapable of making, though *you* are the people principally involved and though yours is the destiny at stake? Only

completely objective view of affairs (such as a war or an alliance) which are bound to release feelings of love or hatred. There are also sympathies and aversions that are born of real contact between peoples (adjoining frontiers, invasion, emigration, etc.). But such feelings, the result of a people's instinct for self-preservation and of *service to the national interest*, have nothing in common with that political sentimentalism which ultimately destroys the sense of nationality. It is also significant that these mystical involvements, for or against a particular nation without any regard for the fate of one's own, were very conspicuous during the crisis of unrealism which began with the Revolution of 1789 and ended (it is to be hoped) with the defeat of 1940. Such collective impulses are still dangerous in themselves; all the more so because of their unforeseen changes and returns, which have led to a discontinuity in our foreign policy which has caused us to lose both on swings and roundabouts.

God knows how to give without return: if you have no exchange value, if your adhering to a cause brings no support to it and your refusal to co-operate involves no menace, why should you expect that other people will take care of you? It is only as a prey that you could be welcome, and your feelings, whether you like it or not, are already those of a prey that surrenders. Political agreements dictated by the common interest of two or more nations are both healthy and necessary, but there is a servile way of making eyes at a foreigner and submitting to him unreservedly that is out of keeping with our national honour. Our country is not a strumpet in search of a "protector".

* * *

The work of national recovery calls first of all for a change of institutions. Institutions are a kind of atmosphere that pervades the spirit: according as they are good or bad, they cause either the good or the evil in us to develop. This is all the more so in a more highly evolved society, where the individual tends to be more dependent upon the State. "What are good laws", asked Cicero, "without good morals?" Quoting the remark in 1815, Bonald went on to inquire: "What will become of good morals without good laws?" A process of decentralisation must be encouraged, the dignity of the family and profession must be restored, an organic system must be established which by sanctions and rewards makes the future of the individual depend strictly on his doing his duty in the community; these are tasks that the State alone can perform, and it is only thus that it can rebuild the normal framework of our existence. Who would venture to deny that such a treatment as this is necessary to our healing?

Yet ultimately Cicero's observation is sound. There is a balance to be preserved between two points of view that are equally idle: that of the unpolitical "moralists" who believe the State can do nothing without the moral revival of individuals, and that of the amoral "politicians" who expect the State to do everything.

"He who created us", said St Augustine, "without our help will not save us without our co-operation." And the State, most certainly, will do no better than God. Whoever the doctor at our country's sick-bed, the best doctor in the world can never suffice alone: the patient himself must have the will and the power to recover. Even when restored to the most healthy and natural atmosphere, an organism too badly infected will continue to die.

There is every likelihood that a strictly authoritarian phase will be necessary for national recovery. For this wounded and exhausted country, such an authority would be like a prop to a tree or the dressing to a wound. There is all the more need of a prop the more the tree is damaged and the stronger the storm that rages: so, too, the deeper the wound, the tighter and more durable must be the bandage—and also the more cramping. It is only to be expected that at times of extreme social peril men should first be constrained to return to normal conditions. *Compel them to come in. . .* A life-saver is not very scrupulously tender in the way he handles a drowning man; he does not consult him as to the best means of reaching the shore, and nothing stops him in his saving work—not even the "eminent dignity" of the person he happens to be snatching from destruction.

Yet the legal function remains always relative. Neither the prop nor the bandage is any substitute for the will to live. The tree without root or sap will wither beside its prop; the wound, without the organism's regenerative effort, turns septic beneath its dressing.

And there is something worse than a wound, it is a tendency to haemophilia. Our blood, for a long time, was ebbing away drop by drop, and in our sense of well-being—that deceptive feeling which always precedes disaster—we paid no attention to it. Our blood still flows every time we neglect a duty, every time we allow ourselves to be lulled by a lie. An external force may destroy an individual, but never a nation: for that it would have to exterminate every one of its members; on the other hand, a nation will surely

die if it is unable to retain the blood in its veins. To a victim of haemophilia, the least wound is fatal. But however deep the wound inflicted by recent catastrophes, we cannot be killed by it—except in so far as we consent to die. If we can be rid of all the causes of our internal haemorrhage, we shall survive.

* * *

The prodigious shrinkage of the world due to technical progress and, above all else, democratic exhibitionism have led the mass of men to hold opinions, and experience feelings, about matters far beyond their very moderate intellectual and affective capacity. That, I think, is one of the principal causes of modern unrealism. And what is more serious still, the sham ideas and feelings thus produced establish themselves like parasites on genuine ideas and affections. Every mirage deprives us of a fragment of oasis.

Artificially aroused and maintained, these states of mind are true to their origin: they continue to be necessarily factitious and unreal. Nothing comes from them in the way of active virtue; they take no hold on the individual, they bind him to nothing; not being made to measure, all they clothe in him is emptiness. For instance, we all know people who are loud in their enthusiasm for some politician or political programme; yet, so far from offering their lives in such a cause, they show themselves daily incapable of the slightest sacrifice for it, even of a fraction of their personal goods or peace of mind.

True ideas and true desires—even, for that matter, true *words*—are to be recognised as such by their motive power; they naturally tend to become incarnate in action. The problem we have to solve to-day—and it is a matter of life and death to us—is primarily a problem of *incarnation*. Leave alone whatever you don't understand, what you can do nothing about: it is not for you to rule and organise the country—or the world. But, whoever you are, you have within you, you carry in your hands, a portion of the country's life and the world's. You have a family, a calling,

social surroundings: there lies the particular field entrusted to you; there none can take your place and it is there if anywhere that your ideal must flower. No abstract conversion can count for anything: there must be a change, not only of ideas but of life; not to-morrow but to-day; not by way of others but by way of yourself. Has it ever happened to you, at the end of the day, to strike a balance between what you have thought and dreamed and what you have actually *done*? The humiliation produced by such an exercise is the best possible reviver of a feeling and respect for reality. What I propose is that we should have recourse to a general examination of conscience; it is not enough alone, but it has this advantage: it is incompatible with any excessive internal anarchy and contradiction. There are certain enormities of speech and feeling that it is impossible to explain on any other grounds than a complete refusal to indulge in introspection. Monstrosities have a horror of mirrors—which make them even more monstrous than they are.

Such an incarnation of duty in the immediate affairs of everyday life is the only way to the country's salvation. There must be a strengthening of the vital bonds between the individual and all that directly touches him, and a general social regrouping from the bottom upwards. Life is impossible for any organism unless the cells that compose it preserve their own life and their mutual relationship. For every person his country should mean first: this particular child to bring up, this neighbour to help, this field to cultivate, this task to accomplish; otherwise the country, however eloquently extolled, remains no more than a corpse.

And realism exacts not only action but discipline. When you talk of the conduct of a war, of international relations or the future status of Europe, you know very well that what is involved is your own personal destiny and that of everything dear to you. But you are also aware that you lack the information, you lack the necessary competence to deal with such questions and that in any case they are not your *direct* concern. So there is only one thing to do: to

acknowledge the nation's true leaders and trust them unreservedly. Your discipline strengthens their hands: your dreams and criticisms—and especially your differences—are a source of weakness to them. Doubtless your leaders are far from perfect; like all men, they have their frailties and errors; but humility and good sense must assure you that you are far more likely to be saved by remaining loyal to your imperfect leaders than by creating anarchy through seeking perfection. The following line of Victor Hugo's is one that can never be repeated too often to the impatient and revolutionary, to all intransigents: "*Le mal qu'on fait est lourd plus que le bien qu'on rêve. . .*"¹

The same realism also counsels silence. When you take it on you to judge, to decide and criticise political events, and when you are shown how useless it is to talk, you are the first to say: "There is nothing I can *do* about it!" In that case, say nothing. When it is impossible to do anything there is no need to talk. The present is full of darkness and difficulties; of the future we know nothing. There is one duty that is immediately obvious: we must reascend the slope and *live* once again. Our one task is to recreate, to regroup our forces, and even now, in the grip of winter, to prepare for new birth. This is the time for germination and incubation: a time, that is, for waiting in silence. It is in secret only that living things evolve. "They never ripen", wrote a saint, "by being talked about." Verbal anticipations kill the future in the womb: words are the greatest of all abortionists. When the grain is germinating it makes no sound; a brooding bird never sings.

* * *

The world of yesterday—that world of "facilities" and sly subterfuges in which man tried to trick the forces of nature—is buried for good and all. Some may be cowardly enough to regret it; none can restore it to life. All who cleave to that corpse are destined to rot with it. The artificial funnels, built to protect us from the exigencies of life, may

¹ "Ill done weighs more than good but dreamed."

have had, while they lasted, a perverse kind of charm. Now that they have fallen in, the only thing we can do is to rebuild.

But to rebuild we must be strong. Action, obedience, silence—these are all signs of strength, so many constructive virtues. Verbiage, a spirit of negation, hoping in others, all such false coinage, issued by weakness, ceases to be legal tender when once the hour of realities strikes. The present catastrophe is simply the revenge of that human and social necessity which all too long we thought we could dodge. So cruel a spectacle should suffice, once and for all, to teach this generation a sense of reality. Life is no gaming-table, nor is it a box of conjuring-tricks. Peace, security, happiness—these are commodities that can be bought only with work and patience and total self-sacrifice. There are no recipes for manoeuvring the laws of life from outside, for “turning” them, as a crafty attorney may turn an awkward clause in a statute; for these particular laws are part of ourselves, and none can tackle them from outside unless he abandons his own nature, nor twist them without betraying his personal destiny. Human things can be controlled only from within. The true conduct of life implies participating in life. Nature can be commanded only in so far as man first knows how to obey her, and he who dominates necessity is also he who is most penetrated and fed by necessity.¹

If we are strong, we shall survive. As I remarked before, an individual, even the strongest, may always be killed by some external force, but a nation can die only as a result of its own weakness. Where nations are concerned, the one that lives deserves to live, the one that dies deserves to die. Hence our life or our death lies wholly in our own hands.

¹ Whereas the impotent, to compensate for their disability, pour a transcendent scorn on elemental necessities, it is significant that the greatest geniuses among men of action are submissively docile to natural laws and the elements of destiny. “The greater a man is, the less he must rely on his own will: he must depend on events and circumstances. . . . I protest I am the most slavish of men. But the master I obey has no human feelings: my master is the nature of things.” (Napoleon to Josephine, 3 December 1806.)

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INDIVIDUALISM AND THE BIRTH-RATE

HERE is a hamlet in the South of France, its population no poorer or more immoral than any other. At the beginning of 1942 it had exactly 100 inhabitants, statistically a very convenient figure. Of these 100 inhabitants, 22 were children (that is, under the age of 20) and 24 were old people (over the 60 mark). Of the 17 married couples who were still young, four had no children, seven had one, four had two, one had three and one had four. The unmarried of both sexes numbered 16 in all.

These figures are frightening. The same hamlet, fifty years before, had a population of 200, more than half of them children or young men and girls, and the children in each household averaged three to four.

What happened in so short a time? Why this headlong fall in the rate of births? We are dealing, remember, with quite a small village, so it is no good trying to explain it by any of the material obstacles to motherhood that are so conspicuous in large towns (destitution, lack of accommodation, women going out to work and the rest). The only causes left are psychological and moral. What are they?

What is commonly held to blame is a decline in the religious sentiment, together with the loss of any sense of moral duty. These explanations seem to be rather too simple.

Religion? Certainly fifty years ago people practised it more than now. But was it really owing to religious scruples that people had children? Before the encyclicals of Pius XI and the publicity they were given, most of our old peasants were in ignorance of the fact that birth-control was strictly

forbidden by the Church. Besides, there were two or three "free-thinking" couples, and these had children like all the rest.¹

Sense of duty? The village used to contain a few families of riff-raff. But these had children just the same. Indifferent morals were no bar to maternity; far from it! I knew several regular prostitutes who, married or otherwise, brought up quite large families. Everyone knows that in practice it is no abstract cult of duty or categorical imperative that makes people have children.

The root of the evil is more remote. An old countryman, full of wisdom and experience, to whom I had lent Hesiod's *Works and Days*, told me something that threw more light on it than all the moralists ever did. "It's odd," he remarked, when he returned me the book, "fifty years ago the manners and customs of our people in the country, and their ways of thinking, were just the same, or very nearly, as those of Greek peasants three thousand years back. It's just in these last fifty years that all has changed."

There lies the source of the evil. The balance maintained for thousands of years, which from its very duration would obviously seem to have conformed to the eternal exigencies of human nature, has been suddenly lost. The liberal, materialist and democratic myths, powerfully aided in their work of separation and death by technical facilities, have detached the individual from the great cosmic and social continuities (the soil, the family, the country) which formed

¹ Not that I would minimise the part of irreligion in the fall of the birth-rate. I know very well—and I have insisted upon it elsewhere—that the refusal of God is the cause of all disorder. It is also true that the religious sentiment, for the vast majority, goes with a certain healthiness of social climate. Our country-folk no longer have children because they no longer have religion; such is the general complaint. But why have they lost their religion so rapidly? Surely there are strictly moral and *personal* causes for this decline of faith. Why does a particular peasant from the mountains, who goes to Mass and has children, cease to practise his religion and procreate children as soon as he comes down to the plain? His soul is unchanged, but he has changed his surroundings. It is too often forgotten, in this age of "personalism", that most of men's vices and virtues are shaped by the atmosphere they live in.

the normal framework of his inner life and activity. In short, they have reduced man to himself. It is just this individualism, to my mind, which is the principal cause of the evil we are considering. For life everywhere transcends the individual; it provides him with ties and continuity. Individualism, which isolates him, is the negation of life. The fall in the birth-rate is the most striking manifestation of this refusal of life.

Moreover, this vital balance, this interior tonic, this instinctive acceptance of the laws of nature, which used to be typical of previous generations, is also the biological foundation of religion and morals. Irreligion, immorality and the fall in the birth-rate are merely particular symptoms of the general corruption which affects humanity when it finds itself ejected from its natural climate.

* * *

If we would know why the people of this hamlet have so few children, it would be well to inquire first why their ancestors had them. The parallel will be illuminating.

Married couples (especially the woman) *wanted* to have children. The reason is simple enough. The desires and hopes of these women, rooted in nature and with no horizon beyond their own homes, had no issue but in the joys of motherhood: the child was almost their one reason for living, the only ray of sunshine that brightened their future. Their granddaughters are different: they regard the life of their ancestors as intolerably monotonous and narrow; for them, the things of nature and elemental realities have lost all their savour and attraction. It is because they no longer completely belong to their work and their environment: they have acquired at school a veneer of pseudo-education, they have read *Marie-Claire* and the novels of Delly (or worse), they have watched the simpering of stars on the screen, they have travelled a little, they have their silk stockings and permanent waves—and all these things conjure up other images at the back of their dreams than the smile of a little child. Individualism, with its egalitarian

and anarchical "why not me?", has developed in them tastes and sentiments which, at their psychological and social level, remain in the most negative sense artificial. The village minx longs to copy the artificial existence of the woman of the world; but she lacks the material means, and still more the moral poise, which makes it possible for your true woman of the world to reconcile the artificial with the natural, and her spurious desires necessarily result in suppressing what is most brutally and frankly natural in reality, that with which no kind of artifice can subsist: a child. A baby has no place at all in an artificial world. It is possible to go on playing tricks with other necessities of life; one can find food and clothing and get about from place to place by more or less artificial means, but pregnancy cannot be other than utterly natural. There is only one possible artifice: to avoid it. And that's what they do.

The possibilities open to the people are necessarily very limited. A peasant girl, in her own rank and environment, may have excellent qualities. But the day she conceives a passion for the cinema, for the outings and little luxuries of the provincial middle-class, she has no servants to mind the children or shake the cushions while she is away. She may very well find she has not the inner freedom necessary to master and integrate the cinema, the outings and the little luxuries. And it is the child who will be sacrificed. The apostles of the easy life, of the levelling down of classes and environments, never think to what extent, among the popular masses, the ideal of ease and comfort and making a display is incompatible with having children. And this quite apart from the fact that a soft and artificial life is bound to deprive women, to a certain extent, of the physical tone and balance required for the successful working of the reproductive functions. The present increase of painful pregnancies and difficult labour is proof enough of this.



But our ancestors had more than the *desire* for children. When their desire was blunted by the anxieties and expense

of having a child, they had another quality which we lack no less: resignation to the laws of life, a simple and sturdy acceptance of the decrees of fate. How often have I heard people say something like this: "Children are a nuisance, one wouldn't go out of one's way to have them; but when they come you have got to take them, and that's that!" Agreeable or otherwise, there were certain things that were not disputable: a child was one. You accepted it as you did the rhythm of the seasons or the exigencies of work, as the earth accepts the plough that tills it, or as the grass the wind that blows it about. "I know well enough", one of the local women told me, "that you don't have any more good times once you are married; you have children and all kinds of worries. But one has got to settle down. That's life, it's the way of the world. . . ."

It is indeed. This scrap of a sentence is a perfect expression of a deep cleaving to necessity, the very soul of the whole religious mentality. As Paul Claudel says somewhere: "We have worked side by side, the sun and I. I am one with necessity. . . ." When a human being of this sort makes himself children, he still works side by side with the sun.

These people had resignation, they knew how to wait; it is impossible to conceive anything like it to-day. Was their moral sense more highly developed? Were they dominated any less by their momentary tastes and needs? Did they see further into the future? Not at all. They were simply steeped in a living continuity from which their personalities scarcely emerged: it was life, through them, that was willing itself. Like us, they lived in the sensible and immediate; but their feelings, their tastes and even their instincts were penetrated and governed by a higher finality, just as the reactions of the obscurest cell are ruled by the exigencies of the whole body. As Chesterton remarked, people don't marry to ensure the continuance of the human race, they marry because they are in love. But, though he never suspects it, a healthy human being falls in love because in him the race is craving to endure.

There is no stronger "tie" than a child; it is the incarna-

tion, one might say, of the loss and survival of ourselves. And for this reason there is no act more *religious* (in the etymological sense of the word) than that of procreation. On the other hand, for the person "without a tie", separated and turned into a god for himself, the child, as providing ties and continuity, has no justification at all. A god doesn't create gods!

The uprooted have lost that obscure trust in life, the feeling of deep security inseparable from the accomplishment of the great natural duties. Nor have they the necessary patience to strive for long-term results. Whence should they derive it? Those deserted by life have very good reason to be mistrustful of life and to cower shivering into themselves.

Impatience and revolt are the normal fruits of individualism. Having nothing but themselves, feeling life is short and happiness perpetually slipping through their fingers, the uprooted can't wait: they have a craving for pleasure and immediate repose, and they instinctively shrink from every effort and undertaking that menaces this very impoverished ideal. I shall not forget in a hurry the reply of an old labourer, suffering terribly from toothache, whom I had urged to go to a dentist: "Bah, they'll drop out at last!" It was an exaggerated form of resignation, I dare say, but what we are suffering from to-day is the opposite excess. People forearm themselves against every kind of suffering and inconvenience, and since the child *begins* as inconvenience and suffering, they forearm themselves against the child. In short, foresight no longer transcends the individual. And it is the same running after every pleasure and shrinking from every pain, the marks of a being cut off from his sources, that everywhere explain the absence of long-term enterprises by means of which the individual transcends and perpetuates himself. An age that recoils from having children is equally incapable of inspiring a *Divine Comedy*, or great achievements of statecraft, or of causing cathedrals to spring from the ground.

The chief benefit conferred by healthy customs and institutions is not the suppressing of selfishness in individuals (for there is such a thing as healthy selfishness, and no one, even under colour of love, can possibly desire for himself what is bad), it is to make this selfishness coincide with the interests of the race and the community.

In our old peasant societies there was another motive that combined with the vital instinct and surrender to fate to encourage procreation: it was personal interest.

It was an advantage to our ancestors to have children. After the first difficult years of marriage, a peasant family enjoyed a period of well-being. Children, on leaving school, began to help their parents, who experienced now some measure of relief. At least one of the children would marry within the home without ever leaving his parents. Children, for them, were their only refuge, their one form of insurance. Households without children were doomed to a lonely old age, forlorn and impoverished.

The present-day loosening of family ties and parental authority has changed all this. Most children, instead of helping their parents, make for jobs in an office; the bigger they get, the more they cost, and when they have at last found a post, they are lost to their parents for good and all. As for those who stay on the land, they usually leave their parents as soon as they marry, so that after long years of sacrifice the parents' old age is just as lonely as that of people who have had no children. Here is an example. A farmer of sixty has two sons both in administrative jobs. Their studies cost him plenty of toil in the past, and now when he has every right to enjoy some relaxation he has to work harder than ever, not only to live himself but also to feed his other hungry children. I say quite frankly that a social atmosphere such as this is bound to lead to a huge drop in the birth-rate. Once interest and duty entirely cease to coincide, the mass of the people will naturally sacrifice duty.

Moreover—and the same individualism is at work in both cases—if it is impossible any longer to rely on children,

people will take good care not to find themselves in need of them. The young married couples in the village will be-think themselves first how to guard against the risks of life and the necessities of old age, either by making economies instead of having children, or else by migrating to that social sphere which of its very nature offers least encouragement for the begetting of children: petty officialdom.

The spread of petty officialdom is in fact the worst possible factor that makes for the atomising of society.¹ The man in a government office is guaranteed all his life against every sort of risk. I shall have a good time when my children grow up, says the countryman. But what the petty official thinks is: "I shall have a good time when I have got this or that promotion, or when I have retired." This feeling of mathematical security is obviously no encouragement to have children.

Apart from this artificial insurance against risks of every kind, administrative work has another drawback that equally conflicts with the continuance of the family: the fact that the jobs are not inheritable. However brilliant the post, the moral and material advantages it procures disappear with the holder. The latter, who has nothing to expect of his children in his lifetime, has nothing to leave them after his death. This harsh severance of the interests of one generation from the next is bound to make for the diminishing of the number of births: if one has nothing to ask of children and nothing to give them, one is sorely tempted to leave them non-existent.

Take two extreme cases. I knew an old artisan, very poor, the father of six girls. As soon as each of them turned fourteen he hastened to place her in service in the neighbouring town, and until she came of age never failed to pocket her wages every month. In this way he assured

¹ I am not, of course, attacking petty officials personally: many have preserved those family qualities of which I am deploring the decline. I merely assert that officialdom creates a psychological and moral climate in which it becomes more difficult to perform the elementary human duties.

himself of a life of comparative comfort. Far be it from me to justify his behaviour! But the girls contrived to exist, and after a few years of this rather shocking exploitation they found themselves free and established homes of their own. I mentioned this once to a smart and distinguished-looking member of the civil service. He couldn't find words harsh enough to condemn such a mentality, and he made me a splendid speech on the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial which should inspire the conduct of parents towards their offspring. Perhaps he was so sensitive on the children's behalf that he would hardly dare bring them into the world at all. . . . It is rather like that cry from the heart one associates with the romanticism of the assizes: "I loved her too much, I killed her!" *Primum vivere. . .*



I have denounced individualism as the chief moral factor making for the decline of the population. But in a being so dependent, so social as man, such individualism is never unalloyed; it is bound to lead to a compromise between the self and the non-self. It is the compromise called idolatry. Idolatry is merely a projection of individualism: it wears the mask of love, but in fact knows nothing of it. For it is not enough to love (everyone in this life loves someone or something), it is a matter of knowing whether the people and things we love serve us as *doors* that open on the world and on God, or merely as *mirrors* sending us back to ourselves. False love, I mean the love which separates the being loved from the rest of the world and makes it an absolute centre, conflicts as much as selfishness with the duty of having children.

First there is the false love of the partner in marriage. Without leaving that microcosm, my own hamlet, I note how the so-called love-matches have perceptibly increased in the last fifty years. In the old days people married without waiting for "the call of the heart"; they married under the pressure of an obscure social imperative, and the choice of a partner was primarily governed by similarities of rank

and fortune, of political and religious traditions, and so on. All that was left to individual inclination—and it was quite enough—was that the future bride or bridegroom should not be completely repulsive. Love would come later. There were cases, from time to time, when the social veto was defied and passionate love-affairs occurred between young people of different social backgrounds; but even so, such passions generally led to premature pregnancy which procured, as by magic, the consent of the two families! All this has greatly changed to-day. Before marrying, people wait till they are in love, or think they are, and each is more or less free to wed the person of his choice. Truth, unhappily, compels me to state that these love-matches provide not only most of the divorces and unhappy homes ("meet in love, part in hate", runs the old popular saying), but also the majority of homes without children. The paradox is only apparent. The same social imperative which in the old days led our ancestors to embark on marriage without being too particular in their choice of a partner ("one has got to settle down . . . it's the way of the world", etc.), induced them also to have children. And to-day it is the same individualism, the same impoverishment of an ego unable to transcend itself, which leads us to choose our mate—and reject the children we do not choose. What is called love (sentimental intoxication and carnal appetite based on a vast deal of selfishness, with the petty well-being and petty security *à deux* that result) is too recent and shallow, too deprived of roots to culminate in the flower which is a child. When you have found a shoe for your foot and can at last walk in comfort (your foot is so tender), the arrival of a child is more like a nail in the sole than a gift from heaven. This is the state of things that justifies the moralist's bitterness when he says: The child's worst enemy is still—love!

I am not attacking the true love that is due to choice. There is nothing greater in this world. The love I am discussing is simply a transposed egoism. Unhappily it is more common than the other. It is only in a few exceptional

beings that personal passion can rise superior to social background and take its place. When Tristan and Yseult, instead of wandering in the inhospitable forest with nothing to sustain them but their love, repose comfortably side by side in a bedroom without a cradle, they are no longer really of interest to anyone.

Apart from the exclusiveness of the married couple themselves, there is another idolatry that makes against child-bearing, and that is the idolatry of the child himself. One has but to think of the only child in a modern household. He is the absolute centre of the whole family. His least gestures and wishes, even his faults, excite a semi-religious regard and admiration. He is the cause of a host of anxieties (a touch of cold, the slightest hiccough will plunge the mother into an agony of alarm), and, similarly, he is the object of every hope: to-day, nothing is fine enough for him, nothing sufficiently good; to-morrow, they will "push" him, get him a better position than his parents had. . . . How, in these circumstances, could one have other children? One is quite enough to drain the material and moral resources of the whole family. In this world one has to be content with a single master. . . .

This mentality peeps out in a number of expressions we have all heard, for example: "If you are not good, we shall buy you a little brother." Conceive the wicked enormity of such a threat, which appeals to the worst kind of childish selfishness and by implication consecrates the idol's monopoly of affection!

This leads to a state of mind in which the child is simultaneously worshipped and rejected and can be treated only as a god—or as an enemy. Our ancestors were less attentive to their children and less ambitious for them, and so they were enabled to have more. I would even say that, steeped as they were in the continuity and fecundity of life, they may perhaps have felt the loss of a child less than we do. There is no doubt that the excessive care taken of modern children has helped to lower the rate of infant mortality. But, apart from the fact that the lessening of infant mor-

tality may thwart, in some cases, the process of natural selection, the advantage is tragically set off by the increase of birth-control and abortion. All things considered, we have fewer citizens of twenty years of age than we had a century ago. And this apart from the fact that the spoiled child, by the very fact of being treated as a god, stands a very good chance of falling physically or morally below the average human standard. The possible child, if he does emerge from non-existence, becomes an idol. And the result is similar in both cases: idolatry sets out to cultivate within the child a kind of non-existence, crueller, perhaps, than the absolute non-existence in which the infant remains whose birth was not desired: in the place of one who will never live, it sets one who does not deserve to.



Now where are the remedies? All I can do here is to skim the problem. It is clear, at all events, that the purely legal remedies (concessions to large families) and the purely spiritual remedies (appeal to moral or religious duty) can be only very limited indeed in their effects.

No material advantage granted by the State can really compensate, with married couples who have no desire for children, for the cares and expenses involved in having them.

As for the appeal to duty, it can affect no more than a chosen few. It is too easily forgotten that human freedom never wholly creates anything and that duty is first a capacity, a disposition, a *taste*. Where the taste does not exist, the warmest exhortations have no more effect than meaningless words. In dealing with some couples who decline to have children, you are up against a moral sterility almost as incurable as one that is physiological. You might as well talk to an assembly of cripples about the necessity and duty of walking! And incidentally I regard it as an alarming symptom that there is so often occasion to appeal to a sense of duty in matters where instinct, the very urge of life, should be the first to speak and speak most powerfully.

Those women of old time, who regarded sterility as the supreme trial of all and the worst of humiliations, were not wont to have children from motives of duty! I am also reminded of St John of the Cross, who warned his contemporaries against the immoderate desire for children. . . .

The true remedy—the remedy for the masses—can be found in nothing else but a profound change of social climate, a slow recasting of custom under the influence of day-to-day necessity. We may hope that the present disaster, wisely exploited by us all (for there is nothing more beneficial than the misfortune from which there are fruits to be gathered), will make human conditions such that individualism will find no more scope, and that men will be forced, in order to live, to take a grip once more on those elemental realities the use of which they have too long lost: personal effort, the soil, their immediate neighbours. Only in this way will there flourish again those bracing virtues, rooted in instinct and strong as instinct, that an age of artifice and facile expedients has now atrophied in men's souls. One of these virtues is fecundity. Here, as in all the other fields in which we must be born again, the primary question is one of *health*. Fecundity is nothing else but a plenitude of life which overflows and communicates itself to others. God is fecundity *par excellence*. As long as we live apart from life we can never be fruitful: there is no transmitting of what we have not got. But when, by cleaving with our whole being to the great laws, moral and biological, inscribed in our nature, we have rediscovered our human harmony and human resources, we shall be fruitful again and spread abroad once more the life that is within us. To be filled and to overflow it is necessary to stay close to the welling springs.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE
DEMOCRATIC MYSTIQUE

I HAVE no intention of embarking on a profound exegesis concerning the meaning and import of the word "democracy". Besides, few people to-day are very much concerned about exact definitions: most big words that impress the crowd remain shrouded, even for its chosen leaders and spokesmen, in a kind of sacred obscurity; their load of intelligibility is meagre in the extreme and the magnetism they exert is chiefly due to the power of what in practice always accompanies them, a formless and often chaotic emotionalism. All the aims of humanity have become so many "mystiques"; people make a *Deus absconditus* of the clearest realities. So it is that the term "democracy", slipping insidiously out of its etymological framework, evokes in the mind of an adherent of the Left confused and grandiose notions of universality, of equity, noble generosity and the rest. A new reform or undertaking is commonly described as "democratic", in the sense that it makes for the peace and happiness of mankind. On the other hand, to those of the Right, "democracy" has come to be synonymous with social unrealism and corruption in public life.

I have nothing to say about democracy in itself: to discuss this would mean entering upon speculative philosophy. Nor do I propose, strictly speaking, to discuss democracy as a *purely political institution*. So-called democratic institutions vary with time and place out of all recognition, and nothing could possibly be more superficial than to try to judge them all as a whole: the democracies of antiquity, for instance, and those of some modern states have only the remotest resemblances to each other. So, as my title indicates, the subject of this study is primarily democracy as a

mystical ideal, as an ersatz religion. I shall study this mystique as it is actually experienced in men's minds, with all the instincts, with all the passions and dreams that follow in its train. To set bounds to the subject, I shall limit myself to that vast democratic movement which was born in France in the eighteenth century, which prepared and inspired the Revolution of 1789 and has endured to our own days under its successive forms, beginning with Liberalism and ending with Marxism. I propose to study this movement as a moralist. The things that will interest me chiefly are not the principles and ideals proclaimed by the champions of democracy, but the psychology, the complex of interior and often unconscious tendencies, of which these principles and ideals are the expression—or possibly the mask. Purely speculative democracy, as discussed by thinkers like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, is something very different from the democratic mystique which possessed people like Rousseau or Saint-Just, Victor Hugo or Jean Jaurès: the democracy, that is, which develops concrete form and achieves revolutions. I am well aware that it is difficult to discern the motives that lie hidden beneath the visible doctrine, the man under the ideal. But in this connection Christ has bequeathed to us a saying that is embedded very deep in reality: "It is by their fruit that you will know them." Sooner or later the work itself betrays the secret of the workman. Democracy is no exception to this rule: it is not by its programme, it is by its fruit that we know it.

* * *

At first glance there is a striking similarity between the Christian and the democratic ideals. In the social and political order, democracy appears as the incarnation of the Gospel revelation. Bemused by this resemblance, plenty of Christians are frankly astonished that the democratic faith should ally itself so often with atheism. They imagine that this atheism is merely an irrelevant accident, a regrettable misunderstanding due to the hostile reception given for so long by the ecclesiastical world to the doctrines of

social emancipation. They endeavour whole-heartedly to explain away the misunderstanding: their dearest wish is to "baptise" a movement so "naturally Christian". On the other hand, there is an aristocratic atheism, hostile alike to Christianity and democracy, which merges its two aversions by trying to show that both the religious ideal and the ideology of the Left have really one and the same root.

Superficially there is much to confirm this idea. The democratic movement seems to continue and crown with success the reversal of human values effected by Jesus Christ. "You have but one master, and you are all brethren alike. . . . The last shall be first. . . ." Is not the democratic ideal, like the Gospel, founded on the abolition of an old order of society, both oppressive and isolating; is not the basis of both a universal appeal and universal love? And surely it is in a democratic society that the divine words, *I am moved with pity for the multitude*, find their truest and most faithful application? It is certainly a fact that many great minds have seen in the ideal which the French Revolution introduced into the world the sequel, or even the actual completion, of the Gospel message of deliverance and brotherhood. Democracy, at its birth, appeared not so much a vulgar change of political régime as the creation of a new humanity.

But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.

So sang Wordsworth. The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount announce blessings for men. Saint-Just echoed the Beatitudes when he proclaimed: "Happiness is a new idea in Europe!" Christ regenerated the individual, democracy regenerates society; a new world, in both cases, emerges out of the ruin and decay of the old.



It has now become a commonplace that the democratic impulse has produced results diametrically opposed to the

"spirit" of democracy. The September Massacres and the days of the Terror are not so very remote from the night of August 4th.¹ The purity and incorruptibility of those "great ancestors" gave place to something different: the nineteenth-century's thirst for material riches and the twentieth's appetite for immediate pleasure. Fraternity has turned to a separation of class from class and an atomising of individuals such as had never been encountered before in history. Liberty has produced a particularly inhuman form of tyranny, and it must not be forgotten that the most draconian of political régimes, from Napoleon to the present day, have in fact, whether they laid claim to democracy or repudiated it, all sprung from a democratic soil. Finally the development of the great revolutionary principles, saluted by some as the echo and complement of the preaching of Jesus, has led multitudes to practical and theoretical atheism.

It will be answered that the history of individuals and peoples is all shot through with contradictions like this; it is the very rhythm of life that causes contraries to attract and succeed one another. I confess I am unconvinced by these Hegelian fantasies. In nature, it is not contraries but opposite poles that tend to attract and succeed one another. These two things should never be confused. Poles are *complementary*, they are mutually sustaining; contraries are *antagonistic*, they devour one another. Night is not in opposition to day, nor autumn to spring, in the sense that being is opposed to non-existence, yes to no, evil to good. When contraries attract one another, it is because they have some fundamental similarity; in other words, because they are not true contraries. There are certainly some authentic conversions, but they are rare. Human conduct, generally speaking, however full of apparent contradictions, is much more homogeneous, deep down, than might be thought. The kind of chastity that breaks out into sudden debauchery is already fed by debauchery below the surface;

¹ The session of the National Assembly (1789) when feudal privileges were relinquished. (Tr.)

a love that turns to hate is already impregnated with a latent hatred. It is just the same with the case we are considering here: if the democratic idea, which apparently conforms to certain Christian principles, has in fact contributed to destroy throughout the world all the true evangelical values, it is because it had no more than a Christian mask, and because from the very beginning, under an outer coating of Christianity, it concealed an essence that was really anti-Christian. What we have to do here is to define the precise nature of this parody of Christianity.

* * *

If we take an extreme example (and this is always necessary if one is to define the essential), we find that the crux of the debate between the Christian and the democratic mystiques lies in the notion each conceives of an earthly paradise. All men have a dim remembrance of it, a vague nostalgia for this garden of delight. But Christian realism, ripened by the preaching of the supernatural and the Cross, sees above the gate of Eden the flaming notice: *Permanently closed*. On the other hand, the words that democratic idealism reads there are: *Closed for reconstruction*.

The paradise dreamed of by messianic democracy is naturally not the paradise that existed before the fall—namely an earthly but also a heavenly paradise, a harmonious synthesis of nature and grace, of man and God—but a paradise altogether earthly, made to the measurement of carnal and fallen man; there he will enjoy divine fulfilment with no help from without and no purifying within, without spurning underfoot his own base desires or imploring the aid of a God to save him. None of the great apostles of democracy, from Condorcet to Jaurès, have ever experienced or considered the divine truths sown in the world by Christianity except in terms of a craving for this paradise and of a belief that it can be realised in Time. There lies the kernel of the democratic parody of Christianity.

* * *

"A new man is born within man. . . . To-morrow will bear no resemblance to to-day. . . ." Phrases like this are very typical indeed of democratic optimism; thousands like them can be met with in the literature of the extreme Left. Encountering them, a truly Christian mind experiences a certain feeling of disgust: they appear to prostitute divine truths, like a new kind of pharisaism.

Now there are two sorts of pharisaism, two ways of prostituting heaven to earth.

The pharisee, in the classical sense of the word, is a Christian whose soul is closed to the supernatural nature of his religion. He belongs to the world and knows how to succeed in it. He tends instinctively to materialise, to add sweetening, to minimise the divine requirements. Love and the Cross are both things foreign to him. All he sees in religion is a force that makes for social conservation; he makes God subordinate to a particular form of human order, narrow and wholly exterior. A pompous prelate of the seventeenth century, a respectable bourgeois of the last, are excellent representatives of this type of humanity.

But side by side with this classic pharisaism there is another, more subtle, more interior and more profound: it is the pharisaism of the publican, or (if I may call it so) romantic pharisaism. Here a man seems to open his whole soul to the supernatural precepts of the Gospel: he thirsts after universal love, universal justice and renewal. But it is merely an outward appearance: the mask is no less a lie for taking flesh. These new pharisees betray and *naturalise* the Gospel quite as much as the others do. The thing that distinguishes them is the fact that they have descended even further into decadence; they have become no more like gods, but they have become considerably less human. This messianic element in politics I take to be a significant mark of collective decrepitude. Here are people evidently suffering from exhaustion; feverish, perverse, they are already too feeble and distracted to achieve in themselves the wretched human equilibrium of the ordinary pharisee. They have no native land but the earth itself, yet they are naturally

ill-equipped to master this earth and live by it. Discontented with themselves, they want everything changed. Incapable of true happiness, they suffer from an unbounded thirst for happiness. This mingled *exasperation* and *impotence* of the human faculties is one of the major weaknesses of the modern world. Because of the very poverty that is theirs in reality, they flaunt, in compensation, the loftiest of ideals; too feeble to attain the average stature of manhood, they voluntarily aim at a superhuman stature. Hence it is that the loftiest principles of the Gospel—of which every civilised man, even if he no longer believes in Christ, bears within his mind some lingering echo—exert a powerful attraction: the Christian reversal of human values is so well adapted, outwardly, to the resentments and ambitions they nurse in their souls! These new pharisees place divine truths at the disposal of human disorder: their weak, covetous nature apes the supernatural.

The first pharisaism is that of the powerful and satisfied, the second is that of the impotent and envious. The classical pharisee rejects the supernatural, the romantic pharisee eagerly welcomes it, to justify the unreal aims of his sick nature; he receives Christ's message at the level of human impurity, at the level of his desire for earthly repose and happiness. The one relegates to heaven the Gospel appeal, the other mingles it with human degradation.

But fundamentally there is a resemblance between the two. The way they succeed one another is sufficient proof of their kinship. Both proceed from the same refusal of grace, and hence from the same decadence of nature. For nature closed to God is already diseased: the order and wisdom of the classical pharisee is a false order and a false wisdom. Conservative pharisaism makes ready the way for revolutionary pharisaism: the classical idolatry which accepts God and rejects love is answered by the romantic idolatry which pretends to preserve love while rejecting God. Nature that has grown hard through being closed to grace is followed by a putrifying nature that counterfeits grace.

Here is an essential point: if we examine at all deeply the democratic mystique, we note that its resemblance to the evangelical ideal does not extend to these two particular characteristics—faith in a transcendent God and in the Cross that leads to God. The aim is certainly the salvation of man, but it is a salvation to be sought *only* in the recasting of statutory laws.

Here we come upon the second great attempt in history to redeem and transform man without divine assistance.

The man of the Renaissance sought salvation and freedom and the fulfilment of his individual nature. Liberation for the senses, liberation for the reason: and an earthly paradise was the goal of it all. It was the religion of man.

The man of 1789 no longer relied on the individual. He sought his earthly paradise in the shattering and rebuilding of the social edifice. It was a civic religion.¹

Formerly what belonged to religion encroached on

¹ This corruption of the religious sense is the only explanation of institutions so absurd as universal suffrage, in its *present abstract and inorganic form*. We have grown so used to the thing that we find it hard to measure its extravagance. It is obvious that political wisdom—quite as much as medicine, for instance, or philosophy—calls for personal qualities, long study and even longer experience; it is therefore accessible only to a tiny minority. Yet, unlike anything dreamed of for other branches of human knowledge, people act as though every man possessed it in perfection. My neighbour, a man of excellent sense, would be seriously offended if he were asked his opinion on the advantages of collapsing the lung in the treatment of advanced tuberculosis, but he takes it as a matter of course when electoral appeals consult him on the control of currencies or on whether alliance with the Soviet is opportune. How does this come about? How is it that the institution did not collapse at the outset under the weight of general ridicule? There is only one answer. Universal suffrage, however absurd it appears in principle and results, came to birth and remains in being because it corresponds to one of those secret necessities in the face of which logic is utterly powerless: it is the inevitable result of the religious sentiment degenerating into politics. It is in fact of the essence of religion that it can be taught by all and lived by all; every man is *a priori* "capable of God", none is excluded from the divine banquet. But now that the State has absorbed God, none is excluded from the political banquet! This caricature of a reply to the *universal* appeal of God is the basic cause of the appearance and survival of *universal* suffrage.

things political (we have only to recall the ages of theocracy, the Bull of the Two Swords, etc.), but for a long time now we have had the opposite state of affairs: the fever of politics attracts to itself most of the religious energies of humanity. The quest of the highest good has become a "social question". There is an implicit belief that reforms in the purely political (or even administrative) order are capable of curing all the deep-seated ills of humanity. There is almost a hope that individual souls can be tempered and perfected by statutory enactments, that the working of "laws and regulations" can be substituted with advantage for the working of moral and biological factors.

For Rousseau, all human evils arise from the vices of the social organism. The great and only culprit is society. But this sweeping malediction has its counterpart and complement. What is capable of the worst is capable of the best. If society is the prime cause of evil, it is also the prime cause of good. Once the great conversion of the body politic takes place, every possible happiness will flow to mankind (the myths of the "great evening", the "city of the future", etc.); society, only yesterday the mother of hell itself, tomorrow may be expected to bring forth heaven. Men will be happy, and because happy they will be good.

In these circumstances every moral problem may be conceived as included in the great political question. This is the explanation of that revolting revolutionary hypocrisy so powerfully denounced by Augustin Cochin. If there is a certain machiavellism of the Right, which would banish morality from politics, your whole-hearted leftist adopts for his slogan: *Morality, plenty of morality, but only in politics!* The Forum being God, virtue is not called upon to go beyond the Forum!

The ancient idolatry of the State was something infinitely less stupid; the laws were to be obeyed unto death, but they were never expected to produce either the absolute or paradise.

How comes it about, this prostitution of religion and morals to politics? It is the natural reaction of impotence,

as we have already noted: it is a reaction common to all who are incapable, to all the failures who put the blame on destiny (destiny, namely, in its most accessible form: society) for all their personal shortcomings. There is no way of emerging from the self, as Nietzsche observed, or of becoming someone else. But if only there were some means of salvation from without! And there is such a means: it is the reforming of society. *The impossible recasting of men is made unnecessary by the easy recasting of the laws.* Salvation is dearly desired, and nothing else but that, but painless salvation, without any interior wrench or self-sacrifice; all that is needed is a "grace". Now, with God, some personal effort is necessary, some suffering, self-purification, etc.; for God helps those who help themselves. . . . As St Augustine said: He who created us without our help will not save us without our co-operation. All this disappears if original sin is simply a badly constituted society and grace the organising of the State of the future. The remedy becomes purely extrinsic; it doesn't hurt and it calls for no effort; it is simply a matter of a change of climate, of rediscovering primitive innocence, artificially corrupted by social tyranny.

The revolutionary, poorer by far than the man of the Renaissance, no longer seeks heaven in the "freeing" of his own personality. But he is quite as much the enemy of transcendence and the Cross; the salvation to be found only in Christ, who is all men, he expects to receive from society, the *homo collectivus*, who is no one at all. What he needs is an easy redemption, one that involves no ascending; he wants to be saved without leaving ground-level. And he preaches social revolution because he is incapable of personal revolution; he is a revolutionary outwardly because he can't be one inwardly. Thus the revolutionary fever rises in a degraded soul like a bogus substitute for an impossible conversion.



Such an attitude to life leads necessarily to a monstrous parody of Christianity. Accepted at a natural level—at the

level of a nature which is a burden upon itself and eager to escape rather than transcend itself—the truths of the Gospel become a lie and a poison. Here are some of the features of this caricature:

The last shall be first . . . Every human inferiority becomes sacred for its own sake. The Christian love for the poor and weak is transferred to the natural order. Thus the people are necessarily good because they are unfortunate. The weakest reason is always morally the best.

Blessed are they who mourn . . . It matters little what the quality of the tears! Ultimately it is the devil who deserves most pity. Sorrow is enough to efface all evil. "There is none wicked, there are only those who suffer" (Victor Hugo).

Woe to you who are rich . . . But God detests the rich because their hearts are weighed down and closed to *heavenly* goods; the revolutionary detests them because he burns to rob them of their *earthly* goods!

Behold, I will make all things new . . . "The past we will sweep clean" is the faithful response of the revolutionary hymn. The revolutionary also believes in the total renovation of man; he even goes so far as to think that the demons which inhabit mankind are merely waiting for the opportunity to turn into angels. In other words, a demon is only a restrained and inhibited angel: all that is necessary, in order to free the demon and allow it to grow and develop, is to make an end of a few kinds of social servitude. Unhappily it is far easier to *travesty* than to *transform*. And what sort of a creature do they take man to be? How vastly they demean the idea of redemption! None ever suspects how much God has to crush and trample down our demons before ever he can draw forth the frail and bleeding semblance of an angel.

Christian love for the sinner is parodied in the same way. A kind of universal pardon springs up, at a very earthy and sinful level, and inspires the "generous" eloquence of the pontiffs of the new religion. But only God has the right to pardon, when and how he wills, because only he has the

power to create a new soul in the sinner: his pardon is *creative*. But there is a certain form of human indulgence that can be nothing else but an encouragement of evil. Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more." He helps the weak to become strong. Romanticism would say instead: "You have never sinned, go and continue as you are. . . ." It justifies, even canonises weakness.

Equality of *souls* before God—"you have but one master and you are all brethren alike"—is turned into the equality of *members of society* among themselves. Christian egalitarianism, founded on the love which elevates, implies the *transcending* of natural inequalities; democratic egalitarianism, founded on the envy which degrades, is simply the *denial* of such inequalities.



This whole caricature of Christianity seeks to be realised, not at the affective level, of man to man and soul to soul, but at the level of mere collective organisation. The qualities which Christ demands of persons—love, gentleness, mercy—the democratic mystique looks to find in institutions alone. National insurance is to do the work of aiding the poor and the sick. Of the criminal law, of the magistracy in the exercise of its functions, there is expected some ineffable divine indulgence. . . .

This transposition is due to the drying-up of that living love which is the sap of Christianity. Institutions grow soft in proportion as the atrophied hearts of individuals grow hard; they are expected to supply the deficiencies of persons. The evangelical counsels resolve themselves into purely administrative problems.

All this is essentially unhealthy; it is an entire misreading of human necessities. Man fallen and redeemed, capable alike of good and evil, of heaven and hell, stands equally in need of rigour and clemency, of chastisement and pardon. But in a vitally Christian society repression and severity should primarily devolve on institutions; kindli-

ness and clemency, on individuals. For charity is something elective and organic; it "touches" and fructifies him who receives it, it reaches to the man himself beneath his wretchedness. But soft laws merely cultivate and develop that wretchedness as such; a man who has fallen, when succoured by a generous friend, will derive from this support the strength to recover; another, at the same moral level, aided by an anonymous fund, will abandon himself further to his own improvidence. There is nothing that atrophies virtue and develops vice so much as an order of society in which a man may wallow indefinitely in soft laws and be brutally shattered by hardened hearts. Rigour, by rights, belongs to the law; it should be something impersonal. It is less shocking then; less wounding. But kindness should come from persons; then its effect is more touching, it has more significance. A man should feel himself specially chosen for pardon, but struck down quite anonymously by punishment. Even in personal relationships, it is the objective and "institutional" side of us (for we are all to some extent the supporters of one institution or another) which should exercise severity; the purely personal and elective side of us should be merciful. Thus I punish my child because for him I stand for parental authority in general; I pardon him inasmuch as I am *this particular* father and he is *this particular* child. Only charity has the right to address anyone *intimately*.

These considerations immediately recall the old Christian commandment which would have us hate the sin and love the sinner. The social mystique takes the opposite line: it is indifferent to souls, but has a benediction to bestow on all kinds of frailty, every disorder. It wrenches charity from its proper place, in the heart of God and in the hearts of men, to tie it up, corrupted and estranged, with administrative red-tape. How many idealists I have known in my time whose hearts have never been touched by any real misery and whose "love" consists solely in advocating more and more liberal reforms! But tenderness is a quality to be looked for in persons; there is no such thing as tenderness in

laws, only softness. The health of society depends on the severity of its institutions (not that this excludes pliancy, a quality not to be confused with softness), tempered always by the charity of persons. On the other hand, there is no society more sick than one in which the softness of institutions adds its corrupting influence to the ravages due to the decline of individual love.

* * *

The question of the Christian origins of the democratic mystique is one that can only be glanced at here. It was raised very early on and in a most subtle fashion. The words addressed to the new Adam, to man made god-like—"You have but one Master, and you are all brethren alike"—were hearkened to by man at a level somewhat below that of grace and prayer. The best, the noblest part of the old Adam, carnal and sinful, applied them to itself and tried to realise them at its own level. Then weight began to tell and the avalanche swept down: the divine truth which has the power to make divine, Christian faith, hope and love were lived more and more (or rather aped more and more) in the lower strata of fallen nature. In the end (and history shows how soon the end was reached), this appetite for heaven banished God from the heart of man, for the deifying of nature must necessarily imply atheism. The confusing of man with God always ends in the flat denial of God. The first utopians seemed to be genuinely acting in God's name; they appeared to be still Christians. But you can know them by their fruit: what they believed they were doing in God's name was soon done *against* God. From the cry: God alone is our master! it was but a short step to: Neither God nor master! I can trace a perfect continuity from the slightly deviationist Christianity of Fénelon to the theism of Rousseau, to the pantheism of the romantics and to the atheism of the socialists of the twentieth century. . . .

Atheism, in fact, is no "regrettable" accident in the evolution of the democratic mystique, it is the inevitable consequence of it. Even when decked with religious pretexts,

the revolt against human nature, and its constellation of humble duties and hard necessities, becomes sooner or later a revolt against the Author of that human nature. The man who feels himself a god, capable of discovering by himself a heaven upon earth, has obviously no room for a heavenly Father. The revolutionary fever lives on the refusal to accept the status of a creature. But faith in God must constantly bring us back to this status: so God must disappear from the human scene, since he is the Being who is at once the most useless and most embarrassing. It is hardly possible to imagine a true revolutionary who is for ever on his knees. With every willingness to be beguiled, it is impossible to worship indefinitely one's own condemnation: the lie must end—and it is greatly to its credit!—by spitting out truth. Those disciples who interpreted the Gospel materially walked no more in the company of Christ.

Deploring the progress of materialism among the enthusiasts for democracy, Victor Hugo wrote with an illuminating simplicity: "If life is not unbounded, distinct and adhering, knit into a kind of endless chain which traverses unbroken the phenomenon of death, binding one being to another and creating unity in multiplicity, if there is no persistence of the self throughout the unknown regions of existence, then there is no such thing as solidarity and the first principle of democracy vanishes forthwith. The fleetingness of the self is the end of all human ties. . . . Materialism is fatally and logically egoism." It is. The only thing is that messianic democracy ends in materialism because it is actually founded on egoism. "You will be like gods. . . ."

Prostituted by egoism, the sacred truths once uttered by love turn to the seeds of death.

The Christian faith teaches that all men are created by God and made for God. But there is neither the strength nor the desire to go back to this origin or forward to this end: for that it would be necessary to love, to emerge from the self. . . . And this identity of origin is interpreted as an

identity of nature. Hence everyone suffers through not being the equal of everyone else. And well he may! These people who have absorbed the first cause into themselves feel they have all *absolute* rights, or as they express it themselves, all *equal* rights. Hence the insoluble nature of their political and social conflicts; when men contend as gods there is only one way to be reconciled: in annihilation.

The Gospel has also revealed to us that marvel of which the ancient world knew nothing: the descent of love. God stoops to all men: none is too base for his love.

Though God be denied, there is still remembrance of this mercy that exalts the lowly as such. Thus even God's pity is turned against God; his very gifts are used to crush down love. I am your equal because you have had pity on me!

* * *

There are two slogans used by Christians of the Left. The first is one of three words: through our fault. If there are so many evils and errors in the world, so many Christian virtues deformed and polluted, it is the Church, it is we Christians, who are rightly to blame. Statements like this are all the more dangerous for being partly true. Admittedly a fish, as they say in the East, starts rotting at the head. Behind Luther there was a Borgia, behind Fénelon a Jansen, behind the French Revolution a considerable loss of savour in the salt of the earth. It is no less true that every rebellion against order and against God proceeds *also* from the malice of the rebel himself, and beneath all that generous humility of the Christian, who beats the Church's breast for his own sins, there lies hidden a myth which is itself a Christian truth deformed, the caricature of God's pity for the crowd and for the unfortunate: the myth of the absolute and necessary innocence of all that naturally happens to be inferior.

The second consists in repeating that the revolutionary ideas are Christian truths that have gone astray and that it is simply a matter of leading them back to the fold.

People speak, for instance, of the "latent Christianity" in communism, and in the eyes of many the democratic mystique is simply a vast forehead only waiting to be baptised. This, too, includes a partial truth. In this world of ours there is no absolute evil: every error is a truth deformed. And sometimes, among certain revolutionaries (especially the young) one comes across plenty of blind good will. But if a *mystique* like that of marxism is considered as a whole, anyone can see that in this mixture of good and evil it is the evil that is the yeast. It is in its quintessence that the ideal reveals itself poisonous: in this deformed truth, the accent is on the word *deformed*, not *truth*. Consider, for a moment, what this distinction implies. . . .¹

I hear the cry: "Baptise that novelty, revolutionary *progress*, save the truth that lurks beneath error!" But the revolutionary movement is not in fact a progress, it has brought nothing new into the world; all it has done is to usurp and caricature the old values, the eternal values of Christianity. What is uppermost in the revolutionary mentality is not a truth desired and pursued despite accidental errors (if it were so, it would be right to try to save and baptise it); on the contrary, it is error as such, or rather

¹ Naturally I am not so ingenuous as to intend by this an absolute judgement. All I assert is that in this mixture of good and bad, which is the revolutionary ideal, the evil preponderates amply over the good. Comparing the democratic mystique with the Christian ideal, some stress the aspect of promise and adumbration; in terms of the same comparison we should rather stress the aspect of caricature and betrayal. Where they see a Christianity in embryo, we see primarily one in decomposition. And what is proof of the fundamentally anti-Christian orientation of the revolutionary impulse is the fact that certain movements which themselves do contain much latent or germinal Christianity (such as the French socialism of Leroux or Proudhon) have been swept away by the marxist ideology. Anything that could possibly be baptised has been instinctively eliminated.

There is one final confusion to be avoided. I should be far from denying the necessity and justice of *certain* reforms accomplished by the French Revolution and the democratic governments that succeeded it; all I maintain is that they were conceived and realised in a rebellious and utopian spirit which was bound to make them remedies worse than the disease they professed to cure.

truth *as adulterated*. Your true revolutionary does not start with the obscurely presented *form* of a truth which his blindness proceeds to transform into a caricature; he starts with the caricature itself. His parody of justice, liberty and so on is the result, not of a too simple or short-sighted love, but of an instinctive hatred and loathing, for the true justice and the true liberty. It is not an unconscious and larval Christianity that inspires bad shepherds and false prophets; behind the mask of fine words that have been stolen from Christianity, it is an implacable hatred, an utter rejection of the Christian order and Christian love.

What, in these circumstances, remains to be saved? One does not save a caricature, one rubs it out and recaptures the true form. The revolutionary ideal is not a promise, an *embryo* of Christianity; it is a *cancer*—there is an outward resemblance between the two things, as every biologist knows—which develops in the Christian organism when it is impoverished and corrupt. So it is not a question of saving “what there is healthy” in this tumour (there is nothing healthy in it); it is a question of destroying it, and by so doing saving the afflicted organ. It is also a question of strengthening and purifying the organ itself, the weakness and infection of which made it possible for the tumour to develop originally. There is nothing to *save*, for instance, in the communist revolution (one does not save a disease, one saves the sick organ by destroying the disease). But there is plenty to *correct* in the social organism, the weaknesses of which made possible the irruption of so pestilent an evil.

That revolutionary fever, to be sure, arises from no Christianity gone astray, wandering from its true path, but from a hatred of Christ who knows his way too well. It is tragic that some Christians see in these initial achievements of Antichrist the work of an imperfect Christ in search of his way. The wolf is not a member of the flock; but this is no sufficient reason for confusing him with a lost sheep.

What then have we to draw from this vast flood of false-

hood if not a return to the everlasting truths it has profaned? What of *essential* importance have we to add to the political wisdom taught by a St Thomas or practised by a St Louis? Instead of trying to baptise the unbaptisable, it would perhaps be better for us Christians to try to realise fully the logical consequences of our baptism and our Christianity. It is not our task to attract impurities but to make ourselves pure. The thing that is important is not to dally with caricatures but to show to the world the true image of Christ; not to compromise with false ideals but always more and more to *distinguish* our own from them. "Let your light so shine before men. . . ." Only then will falsehoods fade in this light and all that is pure in the outside world will come to meet us of its own accord and find, with us, its one true home.

* * *

It is impossible not to feel a certain misgiving when very Catholic writers use expressions like the "fourth estate", the "emancipated people" who have now arrived at "historical existence", the "social majority of the masses" and so forth; and all the more so in that they talk of such things as though they were unheard-of marvels, totally new and fresh, prodigies (as it were) of the coming dawn. If only we could have some exact definitions. . . . If all these sonorous phrases simply mean that the so-called lower strata of society are composed of human persons whose freedom and dignity should be recognised and respected, we are wholly in agreement. But what is there new in this? The humblest Christian was well aware of it a thousand years before the declaration of the Rights of Man. On the other hand, if these formulas are meant to insinuate that the education of the "masses" is complete, that they have no more need of tutelage and are capable by themselves of governing their destiny, then this is something truly new; only it is one of those novelties impossible to take seriously. . . .

It is not a question of writing an apology for the ideas of the "right". These labels are stupid. But when the social

apple-cart is in process of overturning into the left-hand ditch, anyone who draws attention to the middle of the road can hardly do other than veer to the right. Authority, as I understand it, has no other mission but to save freedom from itself. My reactionary spirit merely demands for the people the form of tutelage that assures to the freedom, to the idiosyncrasies (if you will), of persons and groups the utmost possible harmony and scope. We too perceive the imperfections of the old social systems; we are touched as much as anyone by the material and moral misery of humanity; it may even happen that our programme of "reforms" coincides, at certain points, with that of the revolutionaries. But the essential difference between them and us lies in the fact that we, before setting out to promote a "just and liberal" reform, insist that the three following conditions be fulfilled:

1. The reform must be *possible*. There are certain transformations (complete communism, for instance) which are not compatible with the natural exigencies—and therefore the eternal exigencies—of human society. We know where St Thomas More located the nation in which perfect socialism flourished. . . .

2. It must be opportune: adapted, that is, to the spirit of time and place; and there must be moral preparation for it, especially when the reforms are of the emancipating type. It was thus that, in the course of ages, the Church was able to make an end of slavery, to temper the rigours of war, of serfdom and so on; and these results, slow and moderate though they appear, were at any rate *achieved*. Whereas the seeds of liberty and material well-being, broadcast over lands inadequately prepared, have produced by way of harvest corruption and slavery in new refined forms.

3. Lastly, there must be a pure intention in the mode of demanding it. There is an envious and vindictive manner of claiming justice which itself amounts to injustice and if it succeeds must necessarily aggravate injustice. "An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. . . ."

For instance, let us consider for a moment the democratic

myth of the "sovereign people". For a long time now, everyone of any intelligence has detected here an outrageous piece of trickery: with one hand the people are given a power for which they are not fitted, and which therefore always remains something spectral and Platonic; with the other they are deprived of the rights which do belong to their proper rôle in the body politic. The polling-booth flourishes over the tomb of communal and corporative liberties. And what does the abstract right to vote amount to, against the slavery of a people given over to the horrors of economic liberalism, as in nineteenth-century Europe, or to the horrors of state-tyranny, as in so many countries of the twentieth century? In law and in theory the people drive the chariot of state with a sovereign hand; in practice they can no longer control or organise even the things that touch them most nearly, the things they should rightly control and organise: all that concerns their daily bread, the dignity and independence of their various callings.

It is healthy and necessary that the "masses" should exercise a certain power in the body politic. But in the first place there should be no "masses", in the sense in which the word is understood to-day. My idea of a healthy people is a collection of local and professional organisms, highly differentiated and mutually adjusted, but each functioning at its own level. This amorphous *mass*, brandishing, bear-like, the *massive* club of its *massive* claims, is characteristic of a society in the last stages of decadence.

But to return to my point. In a normal society, no class, no individual, is completely excluded from power. An element of "democracy" is indispensable to the life of the State: the central government, however independent in its own order, needs to rest on the solid foundations of freedom—individual, regional and corporative freedom. But this government by the people should remain something relative and subordinate. What I complain of, in the modern democratic ideal, is not the power of all,¹ it is the absence

¹ To clear up an ambiguity here. The power of all is healthy in so far as "all" means all the organic members of the social, labouring body,

of any hierarchy of powers, it is the *confusion of powers*; it is not "the power of the people" but the granting to the people of a sovereign yet fictitious and sterile power, *to the detriment* of that limited but authentic and profitable power which belongs to them naturally. In fact it is simply an application of one of the great laws ("Hell itself has its laws", said Goethe) which seem to govern our modern folly: the sacrifice of the relative, not to the true absolute which is God (who saves and crowns what is relative), but *to the shadow of the absolute*.



The democratic mystique is a hatcher of utopias, but Christianity possesses an ideal. And how, you may ask, is a healthy ideal to be distinguished from a utopia? By this: it is always possible to move towards an ideal; and, though without fully realising it, at any rate to approach it. Thus certain reforms inspired by the Church, reforms *which have endured*, are genuine advances along the ways of justice and love. The mirage, on the other hand, can be recognised by the way it evades approach. The more you go towards it the further it withdraws and becomes lost in the desert. It collaborates with the desert: it is the infernal allurements of the barren sands. The revolutionary ideal of liberty and fraternity is a utopia; the more ardently humanity pursues it, the further it is away. But every ideal which *allows itself to be approached*—even at a far distance and by a single step—is not a utopia.

There are "conservatives" who treat as a utopia every ideal not to be had by stretching out the hand and in a single day. Consequently they stay where they are: such is their hatred of the mirage that they decline to seek the oasis; they remain in the desert. What we have to do is to establish a balance at a higher level between the "realism"

each in his place and for the good of all. It is unhealthy if "all" is understood as the anonymous and disorganised multitude. Then Demos can cry, with Victor Hugo: "I am *all men*, the mysterious enemy of *the whole*."

of those for whom every promise is a mirage and the "idealism" of those others for whom every mirage is a promise. It is easy to maintain a state of inertia, it is easy to go in pursuit of anything at all; but it is harder to combine the incessant pursuit of the oasis with the incessant refusal of the mirage. Only the *integral* realism of Christianity can do this.

On the right there are far too many asleep; on the left there are far too many who are dreaming. Our own task is to remain awake.

* * *

The fact is, the Christian idea is menaced to-day by its contrary and its parody simultaneously: by those who deny it and by those who prostitute it. The two jaws of the pincers are equally repulsive.

Our own attitude is simple: confronted with a dilemma, we refuse to accept it as such.

On the right, there is a tendency to separate earth from heaven and to see only the earth. This is a narrow and carnal realism. On the left, they appear to want to bring all heaven to earth, but in reality they are mistaking the clouds for heaven. And clouds, when they break, turn to dirt and corruption.¹ This is an empty and corrupt idealism. But what Christianity effects is a true union between earth and heaven: it knows that heaven is not only purer than earth, but more substantial: *firmanentum*. . . . This is total realism: no longer a realism of the flesh but of incarnation.

On the right there is a too facile resignation to baseness, evil and war; there is no belief in the possibilities of human

¹ "Uplift" and impurity, wherever they are encountered, have secret affinities. Unhealthy flesh loves to assume the fairest masks of spirit. "Between ourselves", wrote Montaigne, "there are two things that always seem to me to go remarkably together: supercelestial opinions and subterranean morals." It is this impurity, this inward hypocrisy of so many prophets of democracy—whose ambitions, in order to manifest themselves and succeed, *need* to be mingled with generous ideas—which caused Beaudelaire to declare: "We are republicans as we are syphilitics."

perfection. On the left this perfection is presupposed; it is assumed that man is perfect. But Christianity is in pursuit of human perfection. It sees into the depths of human wretchedness: not, like the pessimism of the right, to accept it; nor, like the optimism of the left, to forget it. Its aim is to transcend it.

On the right there is a tendency to preserve nothing of Christianity but a strictly human system of morals, founded simply on the exigencies of nature. On the left, there is a desire to crush this system of morals under the weight of the supernatural exigencies of the Gospel—exigencies which, out of hatred for what is truly natural, are dragged down to the level of nature. Genuine Christianity teaches that the mystical element presupposes and crowns the moral.

On the right there is a temptation to look askance at Christianity when it ceases to be purely individual and subjective: its social implications, especially if they are somewhat disturbing to the "established order", are regarded with suspicion. On the left—and we have commented on this at length—the pursuit of social reforms tends to render superfluous any effort by the individual. True Christianity is social, but it is first individual: for Christianity, an inward revolution must always precede, must guide and safeguard social reforms.

We ourselves are neither to the right nor to the left; we are not even up above; we are everywhere. We are tired of mutilating man; whether it be to overburden him, as on the right, or to worship him, as on the left, we are tired of separating him from God. We have no intention of surrendering one iota of the total truth which is ours. In whose name are we attacked? Are our adversaries for the people? So are we. For liberty? So are we. For authority? For family, state or justice? We are for all these things, but for each in its own place. None can attack us without stealing what is part of ourselves. We are for every party, seeing that we are for the whole. We have no wish to deify what is really human and social, because we have a God already.

We are not against anything. Or rather, since *nothingness* is so active nowadays, we are against *nothing*. When confronted with any idol, we defend the reality which the idol replaces. We say no to every death's head, however it is painted and disguised.

In the hopeless struggle which engages the deniers and corrupters of the Gospel, we have taken up a consistent position all along: we are on the side of Christ. Bad shepherds are no more reassuring than the wolves themselves. And we know they resemble them. They have the same contempt for the flock and the same hatred for the Good Shepherd. Bad shepherds are wolves in disguise.

SUPERNATURALISM AND THE SUPERNATURAL

SHORTLY before the last war, a controversy on supernaturalism divided Catholics like Henri Massis and Marcel De Corte from others such as François Mauriac and Jacques Maritain. The events that have occurred since, and the new positions they have led the disputants to take up, have merely added to the importance and topicality of the question. This is no attempt to settle the issue theologically: all I propose to do is to formulate certain personal conclusions which are the result of earnest and painful reflection. Moreover, I enter the debate with the utmost circumspection and regard for persons, which is only appropriate in a family quarrel.

* * *

Let us start with some clear definitions. What is the supernatural? Everyone knows that human nature is incapable of attaining, by its own resources, to the intimate knowledge and love of God, for there is no common measure between the finite and the infinite. Grace, which is a free gift from God and participation in his own life, uplifts this nature and makes it fit to enter into divine relations with God; namely, to love God as he loves himself, and correlatively to love all men, in God, as God himself loves them. The different virtues that combine to this end are called *supernatural*, for they transcend the capacity of all nature, created or creatable. They are all centred in charity and nourished by charity. So much for the supernatural.

And now what is *supernaturalism*? I should so describe every doctrine or rule of conduct (explicit or otherwise) which tends to deny or diminish the rôle of nature, not only

in the work of eternal salvation but even in the exercise of worldly wisdom. Complete supernaturalism may be said to be summed up in the two propositions: (1) grace suffices for all good; (2) there is no authentic good apart from grace. Jansenism is a good example of supernaturalism, for it teaches that human nature is polluted in its essence and the virtues of the heathen are to be considered as vices.

We should point out at once that this exclusive cult of grace has a logical consequence. If charity is the unique source of good, how can there be any real evil where this charity exists? And there the door is immediately opened to quietist supernaturalism and the justification of evil by love! If all good (and that means all being: *ens et bonum convertuntur*) is supernatural, where are we to find room for any natural evil? No substance is intrinsically bad: evil is to be regarded as something merely grafted on a capacity for good, which it inhibits or destroys, and if this poor human nature is capable of no true good, it is equally capable of no real evil. Sin, in these circumstances, can be nothing but an illusion, something non-existent: one may yield to it without fear, provided that one retains charity, the one thing that matters. This is a projection, and a caricature, of the great saying of St Augustine: *Ama et fac quod vis*. The quintessence of supernaturalism is expressed in the formula: Christian love is the sufficient cause of all good and the total excuse for all evil.

It is obvious enough that it is only very rarely that supernaturalism is encountered in this extreme form. People don't go as far as that, but they tend in that direction. In many doctrines supernaturalism is present as a pervading atmosphere, a secret hankering, a vital urge; it lurks as a miasma; it may escape the *perception* of pure intelligence, but not the *intuition* of a healthy soul. Probe to the depths the psychological state that produced the works of writers like Rousseau or Wilde, Nietzsche or Gide—men no longer Christian, but bearing in them still the bleeding stumps, the already rotting remains of the Christian conscience—and what do you find? That manichean mixture of contempt

for natural health and surrender to all the maladies of nature: that nature which fundamentally has no existence, the vices and virtues of which are simply an appearance and a prejudice!

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND NATURE

Far be it from me to belittle the rôle of grace or contest its primacy. It is an elementary Christian truth that the smallest degree of grace surpasses in worth and dignity the highest degree of nature: as Pascal said, it is of a totally different order. All I would do is to draw attention to two points which appear to be essential.

Firstly, grace has no existence without nature. The supernatural virtues have their roots and continuation in the natural virtues. This does not mean that there is an absolute correlation (as theology teaches us there is in the case of the angels) between the natural and supernatural gifts of man; it simply means that man is *one* and that the life of grace cannot possibly exist in a state of independence and complete isolation from the natural life. God, it is true, is master of his gifts; there are men of very feeble natural virtues who can possess a very high degree of grace; but it still remains true that, even with what St Paul calls "the world's refuse", the birth and growth of the supernatural life are accompanied by at least *some* degree of natural purifying and uplifting. Grace assists man to transcend his nature only to the extent to which it acts in contact and collaboration with his nature, and to the extent to which it can rely on the support of that nature.¹ It is all the more capable of perfecting nature the less it aims at taking its place. Even though conferred by heaven, the crown that exalts the brow of a king must at least have a brow upon which it can rest; without a

¹ This does not mean that we repudiate the *agere contra*, the inner conflict essential to the Christian life; merely that this conflict implies first a certain natural disposition and afterwards has its issue in the purifying and perfecting of nature. Grace fights against nature, not to destroy it as an implacable enemy, but to make it bear fruit, as a master does who, even when their relations are most strained, remains the friend and ally of his pupil.

brow a crown is useless. Imagine a bird taking wing just to repudiate the earth, which provides the fruit it lives on and the tree in which it nests. A bird like that would never have flown. The supernatural that thinks to do without nature has no existence as such: it is simply an illusion or a mask for nature itself.

Not only has grace no existence apart from nature, but—and this is the second point—it is very difficult to disentangle it from nature. True enough, the very least spark of divine love is worth more than all things created. But this spark has still to exist! Now the degree of existence and purity of divine life in a soul is something by no means easy to assess. None can tell if it merits love or hatred. . . . But the natural passions, tinged with a certain generosity—I am thinking here of that juridical indignation, that human anger which, according to St James, “does not bear the fruit that is acceptable to God”—can display themselves cheaply enough under the colour of charity, supernatural love. There is something disquieting in the facility used by literary men in juggling with divine ideas: each speaks in God’s name as if he were himself possessed of the highest sanctity. But if you listen closely, these supernatural voices give forth a single sound; and it is human—all too human. The spirit is willing enough and the words come readily. Who can tell the purification required before the Christian life can develop? In what depths of detachment and solitude lies the secret of holiness? And all these people who cry and exhort, who judge and condemn in the name of God—how much have they paid to God for all this? There is nothing more frothy than a virtue ill-decanted—and nothing muddier!

Men who live according to reason are rare enough now; those who live according to grace are rarer still. It is only saints, in this world, who incarnate the pure supernatural truth: other Christians bear it in them like a frail seed, beset with powerful passions and habits which more often stifle it than show themselves under its name. Isaias, in his own day, denounced these human degradations of the

supernatural. . . . Certain modern apostles, imbued with the loftiest social ideals, particularly the adherents of what was called before the war a "vitally Christian" policy, would do well, even in the interests of that policy, to give serious attention to the lack of moral vitality shown by Christians in the world. To say so much is not to have recourse to naturalism, nor is it to be pessimistic about the religious possibilities of mankind; it is merely to protest with St Francis that "love is not loved". Léon Bloy, whom none would surely accuse of naturalism, also spoke of the "apparent failure of the Redemption".

In short, there is always a danger of supernaturalism when, either in the individual conduct of men or in the pattern aimed at for the organising of the body politic, there is a tendency to confuse the supernatural as a design, and sometimes even as a mere word or mask, with the supernatural in its fullest purity. This means ignoring the alloy of impurities and illusions of every kind always mingled with the divine in souls that have not attained "that maturity which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ". True fidelity to the true supernatural consists in tending and cultivating the humble grain of mustard-seed sown by God in the ungrateful ground of the soul; supernaturalism consists in *leaning* upon this, as if it were already the great tree in which the birds of the air come and settle.

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND FALSEHOOD

All this leads to a final point which is one of capital importance. It is the *apparent* connivance between the authentic appeal of grace and the unreal hankerings of a sick nature full of self-disgust. It is an evil, of course, that has existed from all time: heresies of the gnostic or albigensian type are very characteristic of these morbid somersaults of human nature which under the cloak of mysticism tries to escape from its own essence. But in the past these terrible aberrations occurred only as passing fevers; the whole framework of human life, biological, social and

domestic, was not yet shattered, and nature was not slow to return to itself. To-day the evil is more chronic and universal: instead of fever, we have a temperature below normal. And in this world in which men are so tired of being men, there is a danger of mistaking for a divine invitation any recipe for a purely external salvation for attaining the divine without first being human. . . .

Times have changed. All a normal man needs, for the accomplishment of his duty, is good will; a sick man first requires to be cured. It used to be possible to rely on nature. One might abuse her, but afterwards one could be pretty sure of finding her in her place, like those constantly faithful servants that still survived in the last century. But nature to-day is cracking all about us. It is no use trying to build on nature without working at the same time to consolidate the foundations.

Such a moral overthrow calls for new practical directives for the Christian apostolate. There is no lie more disastrous than a truth no longer opportune. In the Christian writings of past ages one is struck by a certain disregard for natural realities. The omission was natural enough: in those days nature, like a body in good health, needed no one to coddle it. Worse than that: this indifference often turned to contempt or aversion. This too was natural: the healthiest natural realities (the feeling for family, for honour and native land) were then so self-contained, so apt to become idols and a veil concealing God, that they deserved to be humiliated, so that grace could be grafted upon their wounded strength. Remember St Chrysostom's attacks upon private property, St Teresa's or Bossuet's upon the religion of honour, those of St John of the Cross upon the immoderate desire for begetting children. As natural necessities all these things remained still unquestioned: Chrysostom was no more a "communist" than Teresa was opposed to the sentiment of honour, and their appeals to the supernatural were not misunderstood. But to-day these same earthly realities are menaced on what is their own rightful ground. Is it for religious motives that the sense of

honour is being belittled, that a false ideal of society threatens the family and private property, that so many husbands and wives are "resigned" to not having children? What these things suffered from formerly was rankness, now the complaint is haemorrhage, and there is no contradiction if the Church to-day dresses nature's wounds, after being yesterday at pains to let her blood.

In this moral chaos, in which human nature loses more and more relish for itself, for its true destiny and its true good, the Gospel's invitation to transcend nature makes fatal contact with the craven manichean desire to deny it. The exhortation to transcend becomes a pretext to evade: the appeal of pure negation triumphantly usurps the appeal of heaven. Every moral and social romanticism is marked by this frantic parody of divine ethics: man aspires to become God without actualising or building up the element in him that is human. The result is a caricature of the Christianity that is celestial, in its essence spiritual. Side by side with the classical pharisee, the corrupter of Christian *morals*, we have the romantic pharisee who corrupts Christian *mysticism*.

THE RESTORATION OF NATURE

It is important for every true lover of the supernatural to be aware of this danger of the *interior* corruption of Christianity. The Church of Christ has to contend simultaneously with its contrary and its parody. The first danger is less serious because it is self-defined and no one can possibly be mistaken about it. At this crisis in the world's history, when our very reasons for living and acting are called in question, a Nietzsche who attempts the murder of Christian love seems a lesser peril to me than a Rousseau who prostitutes it. . . .

In such a world, the first thing to do is to restore nature and remake man. The highest love can be recognised by this, that it is capable of saving the humblest reality. Until I have positive proof to the contrary, I would suspect the supernatural character of the vocation of any girl who feels

called to infused contemplation or of an intellectual who burns to serve God's cause with speech or pen (I don't say such vocations never exist in a pure state, only that plenty of them are "mixed"); but if I see the love of God make a good farmer or a good father of a family, I shall not be tempted to doubt the genuineness of that love. If grace does not place itself at the service of nature, nature to-morrow, polluted and laid waste, will have nothing in which to receive the divine seed but a desert—or it may be a sewer. For too long now man has been frittering away his nature by playing at the divine; it is time to teach him that the divine must pass through the human stage; there is only just time—for the margin between madness and death narrows daily—to re-educate this poor nature, deprived by some inhuman dance—not before the ark of the Lord, but before the mirror of Narcissus—of the use of its ontological joints. And this in the interest of the supernatural itself, for if grace *edifies* (what an ominous sign of death that this splendid word has become funny!), it is always nature that provides the foundations.

What must be shed among men is the supreme love, the absolute, heaven—but a heaven that begins on earth, at the poorest roots of humanity. And not a heaven self-sufficing, behind clouds and dreams! If we would save the heaven that is real, we must first restore man to health, to his bodily and earthly health. For the sake of the sleeping angel we must rescue the animal and the man! When received in an inward atmosphere that is unhealthy (I am not including certain miraculous realisations which are so exceptional as to prove the rule), the heavenly image becomes just another phantom or poison the more. We have accepted too many words uncritically, too many anaemic dreams, too many superstructures with no foundations to support them. We love the things of this world for themselves, I grant; but we love them principally as the supports and bases for the things of heaven: they are heaven's beginning! On these poor and slender realities rests the God whose trembling outline each human being bears

within his soul. These poor things are not all, but they *support* all and they are the beginning of all. Take, for instance, this mass-produced man who has lost the taste of all human realities, spoilt and exhausted by his mode of living in this world, from his manner of feeding to his political institutions—what glimpse of the supreme reality can such a man ever have? The slogan of our realism, of our materialism if you will, is: *for heaven's sake, save the earth!*

Christianity, in the past, had to contend against nature; it was an obdurate nature, so hermetically sealed that grace could hardly penetrate it. To-day we have to fight on the side of nature, to save the minimum of earthly health that is necessary for the grafting of the supernatural. It is illuminating to read now the violent attacks which St Teresa made on the idolatrous sentiment of honour. That honour, keen and tough as a sword-blade, usurped the place of God in Castile as it was then, at the peak of its pride. It is different to-day: we have to revive that natural sense of honour as a kind of adumbration, an analogy as it were, and a starting-point for loyalty to the eternal and supernatural. Nature is like a tower, from the summit of which man takes off for heaven: he never flies off from ground-level and mere nothingness. . . . This massive close-shut tower once held man fast, imprisoned within its walls: the top had to be dismantled so as to give the prisoner access to heaven. Now it is the foundations of the tower that threaten to give way: man is sinking fast amid make-believe and illusion, and his chances of heaven fade steadily as he sinks. What we have to save, above all, is this minimum of *human altitude* to serve as a taking-off point for the supernatural!

To neglect the earth for the sake of heaven is to make a phantom of heaven itself. No need to seek elsewhere the basic reason for the hollow and artificial impression given by so many sermons on the religious ideal: this heaven is not fed by the sap and health of earth, it has nothing in common with the pacing of rude humanity along the path of human nature; it is no longer a *climb*, it is merely a *dream*.

Health comes first, concluded Marcel De Corte, some time ago, in winding up a debate on naturalism. This implies not the least slighting of souls that are sick. They are invalids who need a doctor. More than ever, those who would be men's guides must know something of the science of evil. But the good doctor uses this science to heal his patients; the bad doctor confines himself to *charming* their ills. The moral and religious order has also its artificial paradises! Moreover, after a brief deluding of suffering nature, such paradises make nature's awakening the more terrible. Human nature is not a prison from which it is necessary to escape before entering into God—a game that would involve battering one's head for ever, like a maddened fly, against an impassable window—it is a dwelling to be purified so that God may return to it. All the difference between supernaturalism and the supernatural spirit is clearly revealed in this comparison. Supernaturalism is incapable of purifying nature because it declines to accept nature. The curing of every human ill implies the acceptance of every human necessity. Precisely here lies the secret of the saints. Christianity is not intended to lull, to exalt or deify corrupt and suffering nature; it is meant to *repair* it: *mirabilis reformasti*. . . .

Christian salvation, as we have said, requires before all the salvaging of nature. And nature in its turn is so enfeebled, so poisoned and bemused by its idols that it is capable of being saved only by the Christian God. Here is a convergence perhaps unique in history. A wonderful rebirth is in course of preparation—or else an irreparable abortion. So much the more reason why Christianity, which alone holds the remedy for all our evils, should care more than ever for all kinds of realities. Every human road will presently be blocked except in one direction, and that towards God; the supreme hope has become the only hope. What would befall if through fault of ours the name of Christ came to be added to the list of great words which have betrayed their meaning, and if the crown intended for brows made pure should end as a mask to disguise a face

now permanently disfigured? It is neither permissible nor possible to lie any longer in the name of God.

PURITY OF THE SOURCES

The Christian thinker or man of action, who would escape all danger of supernaturalism, must conform to these two rules:

1. To bear in mind the possibility, in oneself and in others who speak or act in God's name, of a mingling of natural and unpurified desires, or even the possibility of a mask.

2. Never to present natural problems in supernatural terms; nor, on the pretext that a question has a supernatural side, to neglect the side which is natural.

One example is enough. We all know Christians who never hesitate to link *essentially* and *definitively* the cause of God and the salvation of religion with the victory of a particular political party or a particular nation at war. It is the true supernatural spirit, unhappily, which pays the cost of this kind of universal "supernaturalism". Apostles such as these spend all their religious fervour painting nature in heavenly colours. The unavoidable cost of supernaturalising what is natural is the naturalising of the supernatural: supernaturalism is the worst form of naturalism. There are Christians who in the best possible faith think they have discharged the duty they owe to Christ when they have placed themselves at the service of some abstract ideal of justice and fraternity that has no human roots and no divine nutriment. What can they know of that which is unutterably transcendent, of the lone purity of supernatural love? If their ideal can still be distinguished from the fleshly and profane ideals which they attack or defend, it is more often by the *name* than by the *spirit* of Christ. Apart from confusing, in this way, things temporal with things eternal, in the event of temporal failure or disaster (which always happens sooner or later), it means opening the door to all the demons of doubt and despair. I shall never forget the indignant reply of an ardent and sincere Catholic to whom I had confided my anxieties, in the

darkest days of May 1940, about the ultimate issue of the war. "What!" he cried, "have you lost your faith in Christ?" Truths have dwindled among the children of men. The romantic pharisee is just as closed to the divine order, just as embedded in the temporal as the classical pharisee: the only difference is that in him nature is rather more impotent and feverish.

Is it a question, then, of relapsing into a dead realism, a purely carnal and rational prudence? We know all too well that every realism that rules out God and the religious energies of humanity is merely an idealism in reverse. And we have pointed out already that what we chiefly respect in nature is its serving as a substratum and instrument for grace.

Or is it a question, again, of isolating God in his heaven and in the interior of souls and "leaving to the devil" what belongs to social and political life? Not at all. As Christians, and in the actual interests of Christianity, we have certain social and political preferences. We are well aware—and we have demonstrated the fact at length elsewhere—that there are two extreme forms in which the State can be organised; and these are equally anti-Christian, because they are equally anti-human. What we are afraid of is that any mere social and political Christianity may easily mistake its source.

That the sap of Christianity both can and should penetrate, by way of individuals, the whole of society and partly transform the visible face of the world—that is a fact which is not open to question. But the sap must *descend*! The divine spirit descends everywhere, but its home is above. That Christianity may descend too far is not what we are afraid of, but that it may make its centre at too low a level. There should be a divine ear in us open to the divine word. And thence—from that height, from such a purity of supernatural communion—love can filter down to the forum, down to the activities of the shopkeeper or the speeches of the politician. But if nature alone (or too much of nature) gives heed to the divine word, can it, if it is healthy, see in it anything but a scandal, or else, if it is sick, an invitation

to escape by way of emptiness and mirage? All these earthly virtues, all these forces that make for coherence and stability (self-esteem, prudent foresight, a feeling for property and the family, for tradition and honour), these are things which the Gospel invites us to merge into love; but another voice in us—that of decadence and death—urges us to dissipate them for ever in nothingness. And this is the instinct for death, of which the supernatural word may become the innocent accomplice. To take just one example: is there anything, in the order of soulless apparitions, that bears a closer resemblance to Christian detachment and Christian love than the humanitarianism of the uprooted, who being unable to love effectively the human beings they can see and touch, have a verbal love for the whole of humanity? If the words of God miss their supernatural aim, it is anti-nature that catches them as they fall.

The central flaw in modern messianism is its trying to discover an alibi, in a comparatively easy reorganising of society, for the far harder business of individual conversion. It would be disastrous indeed if the present vogue of social Christianity were to serve Christians, in however small a degree, as any such cheap and paltry expedient. Whatever its importance, social Christianity must ever be a derived and secondary value: without betraying its origins it can never precede, in any degree or in any sense, an individual Christianity.¹

¹ This does not mean that a social atmosphere which is Christian may not further the development and evolution of Christianity in the individual. All we assert is that the quality of this social atmosphere is ultimately determined by the quality of individuals. I don't know whether there are any social phenomena that can be regarded as primary, but Christianity is certainly not one of them. Individual Christianity is not a result (unless in its *material* causes and foundations) of social Christianity; it is the result of personal contact between God and the soul. And in proportion as this contact is lacking, institutions and social groupings inspired by Christianity become naturalised, retaining nothing Christian but a pharisaical crust, liable to crack under the stress of the first storm that rises. The fate of the German "Centre Party" is highly significant in this respect.

Christian thought, equally aware of the men that we are and of the God we ought to be, can never sacrifice grace to nature or nature to grace. It must keep steadfastly in view, united but not confused, our human lowliness and our eternal hope. To denounce supernaturalism is to clarify the name of God in men's hearts. False realism is denying the existence or effectiveness of Christian love. True realism is the cleansing that love of all alloy of impurity and the stripping it of every mask of falsehood.

DEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM

THE false mysticisms that batten on the modern soul have an instinctive reluctance to define their object: they have a presentiment that their idol, once it has been defined (reduced, that is, to its own humble measure and relative proportions), will no longer exert the power to attract worshippers.

So it is with freedom. For a century and a half men have been dying for "liberty", without ever asking themselves the meaning of the word. At the very most the idea of liberty floated in their midst like a vague mirage of complete independence and godlike plenitude.

Let us turn on our lamp and see what we find. To define freedom as independence involves a dangerous ambiguity. There is no such thing, for man, as complete independence (a finite being that depended on nothing would be separated from everything, and so eliminated from existence). But there is a dead, oppressive dependence and a living, expansive dependence. The first of these is slavery; the second, freedom.

A prisoner is dependent upon his chains, a farmer upon the earth and the seasons; there is a vast difference between these two realities. To return once more to biological comparisons—they are always the most illuminating—what is the meaning of the expression "to breathe freely"? Does it imply that the lungs are completely "independent"? Quite the contrary: the lungs breathe most freely when they are most soundly and integrally combined with the other organs. If this bond is loosened, breathing becomes less and less free until it stops altogether. Freedom depends on vital solidarity.

But in the world of human relations this vital solidarity

is known by another name: it is called love. According to our emotional attitude towards them, the same bonds can be accepted as living attachments or rejected as chains; the same walls can have the oppressive harshness of a prison or the endearing intimacy of a retreat. The studious child runs eagerly to school, your true soldier has a liking for discipline and adapts himself to it accordingly; a husband and wife who love one another enjoy fulfilment in the "bonds" of marriage. But the school, the barracks or the home are dreadful gaols for the scholar, soldier or married couple who are without any true vocation. A man is not free to the extent to which he is dependent on nothing and no one: he is free to the precise extent to which he is dependent on what he loves, and he is a prisoner to the extent to which he depends on what he is unable to love.

So the problem of freedom is one to be presented not in terms of independence but in terms of love. Our capacity for attachment determines our capacity for freedom. However terrible his lot, the man who can love everything is always perfectly free, and this is what is meant by the freedom of the saints. At the opposite extreme, those who love nothing break their chains in vain, make revolutions to no purpose: they remain prisoners for ever. The utmost they can do is to change their servitude, as an incurable invalid turns on his bed.

Does this mean that we should accept indifferently every constraint, force ourselves to love every yoke? It is the way of the saints, but it is not to be recommended as a social ideal. As long as there is evil and oppression in this world, so long will there be yokes and chains to be broken. But this work of revolutions cannot be an end in itself: the breaking of a dead cord should lead to consolidating a living bond. It is not a matter of investing every individual with an illusory independence: it is a matter of creating an atmosphere in which each individual can love the things on which he depends. If our will to be independent is not governed and directed by this desire for unity, we are ripe for the worst of all possible servitudes. Man, I repeat, can-

not choose between dependence and independence; his only choice is between a slavery that stifles and a communion that liberates. Individualism, as we have seen already, is only a provisional refuge. We are not alone, we cannot sever ourselves from others. Long before the final equality of death, we have all the same destiny. It depends on us alone to make this common destiny favourable or disastrous. Unless we live together as organs of the same body, we shall wither together and rot like leaves without sap, independent one of another, all individualists, but doomed to be torn away, and tossed about at its pleasure, by the *same* autumn wind. Or rather—since no one country can stand apart from the rest of the world—a force from without will impose on us the unity which we have so long refused to create from within. The alternative is clear: either we must be united to-day in the same love, or to-morrow we must all of us bow under the same yoke.

VII

DUTY AND INTEREST

MEN have lost the sense of duty: it is the common complaint we hear of the utter heedlessness and negligence of so many members of modern society.

This state of things raises a crucial question: people neglect to do their duty, but have they really any interest in doing it? Are they bound to their work in any direct and living manner? How comes it that countrymen—whose morals, as we have seen above, are no more exalted than those of other men—how comes it that they, as a general rule, abandon themselves to their mission in life wholeheartedly? How comes it that the law of the least effort, in other circles the rule, remains with them the exception?

The reason, we repeat, is that the countryman cannot separate his interest from his duty. If he neglects to spray his vine at the first sign of mildew, if he fails to cut his corn when it is ripe, it is he, and he alone, who will suffer for it. Nor has he any need of external exhortation to discipline and effort. A feeling for effort and discipline is borne in upon him from the very force of circumstances, from day-to-day necessity. Is it the same in other walks of life?

Let us be frank about it: until we have constructed a society in which the individual is completely welded to his work by a system of sanctions and rewards that are *immediate and personal*, we must not be astonished that the moral sense is so often eclipsed. An appeal to the civic virtues may very well lead to sporadic results, but it will never serve as a substitute, so far as the majority is concerned, for the irresistible pressure of necessity.

It may perhaps be objected that it is a cheapening of the sense of duty thus to ally it so closely with interest. The objection would have weight if, among the common run

of mortals, a sense of duty could ever exist neat: if men, in short, were other than they are. Taking the opposite line to this utopian one, we venture to assert that, since humanity is concerned above all with its temporal interest, it is to ennoble selfishness, and purify it not a little, to ally it so closely with the requirements of duty. I call to mind the most completely self-interested, the most grasping of our local farmers and old village craftsmen: what a love they have for their land or their trade, what a "mystique" of effort and work well done wholly penetrates their sordid lust for gain and somehow transcends it!

What is most demoralising and corrupting of all is precisely the cleavage of interest from duty; and if proof is needed you only have to look at a particular section of contemporary society. Cut off from personal interest, virtue loses that solid weight which serves to make it incarnate: there is nothing left to anchor it to earth. On the other hand, personal interest, separated from virtue, loses the wings that should make for its deliverance: there is nothing left to raise it towards heaven. It is the divorce of the ideal from the real: on the one side a purely verbal and inoperative morality, on the other an anarchical teeming of egoisms devouring one another, with nothing to counter-balance them, and followed inevitably by the cheapening of individuals and the dissolution of societies.

Does this amount to saying that we would banish from the world all disinterested virtues and heroic vocations? Far from it: no society, in my view, can do without an *élite*, devoting itself to its task on a plane above every personal consideration. Everything plunges into the depths once there is a decline, up above, of the spirit of priesthood and the spirit of chivalry. Just as the paste needs leaven, so nations need their heroes and saints.

But the leaven is not the paste, and in the making of bread its proportion is very small. What we want is a social climate in which disinterested vocations, instead of being vainly imposed upon all, can be effectively chosen by some. In other words, the social duty which the *élite* accomplishes

under pressure of love and the ideal, the mass, at its own level, should accomplish out of necessity, under the pressure of interest. The harmonious co-existence of such an *élite* and such a mass makes at once for the soundness and the glory of nations, for these two modes of serving, far from excluding one another or conflicting, are mutually supporting. It is just in a period of history like the Middle Ages, when the interests of men, from the prince to the humblest of craftsmen, were bound up as intimately as possible with their duties, that we discern in every walk of life the presence of so many heroes and saints.

VIII

THE SOWING AND THE SOIL

WHEN denouncing the evils that have resulted from a particular form of civilisation (the moral and biological enfeebling of individuals, loss of the sense of effort and social discipline, the decline in the birth-rate, and the rest), I have often been met with the retort: None of these evils is intrinsically connected with the present structure of the State, they are due simply to the decline of Christian charity; put God back in his place, restore love for the brethren, and whatever the form in which society is organised, humanity will again start climbing the hill.

This supernaturalism makes much too free with the Gospel parable of the sowing and the soil. Only God, we are told, will save us. That is true enough, but people forget that God is everywhere and that the gift of God which is grace cannot possibly develop without that work of God which is nature.

In a period like the Middle Ages, the task of the Christian apostle was simpler than it is to-day. Certain questions never presented themselves. Men were still healthy in body and soul; necessity formed them into little living groups in which the security of each depended on the efforts of all, the bonds of family and society were still strong, existence was harder but also more human; in short, carnal man and "carnal communities", although they endured terrible external shocks, contrived to preserve a sure equilibrium. All that had to be done was to guide nature in the direction of God.

The problem is presented to-day in very different terms. The flesh, nature and society are all sick. It is no longer enough to guide them, they first have to be healed.

In the Middle Ages, the Christian apostle knew only one enemy: individual sin. Once that was got rid of, the rest would take care of itself. The evil we must contend with to-day is more universal and more tenacious, a disorder that has infiltrated into our very bodies, into our customs and institutions; it is part of the very air we breathe. When the atmosphere is poisoned it is no longer enough to take care of the lungs.

It is a world of absolute liberalism and absolute state-ism, of anonymous and wholly irresponsible work, of the isolation and promiscuity of individuals, of frenzied flights of technology without any regard for the physical and moral needs of the human being; and it is a world that is irrevocably damned. Even God will not save it, for grace was not meant to shore up anti-nature; nor does the super-human serve the anti-human as a prop serves the plant. No doubt there are privileged individuals, heroic souls that have maintained their health amid the general ruin of moral principles, who can work out their salvation and find fulfilment even in this vitiated atmosphere. But if the world is to continue, and Christianity with it, this atmosphere must sooner or later disappear. It was thus that Christianity struck root and grew in the decadent world of ancient Rome (so similar, with its overgrown cities, its capitalism, its state-ism and its declining birth-rate, to the present world in process of dissolution); but Christianity itself, in spite of its political victory in the fourth century, was unable to prevent the Latin Empire from foundering. It remained for humanity to rediscover in the Middle Ages—when life was grim, but for all that healthy and with a firm grip on elemental necessities—the virtues indispensable to its own salvation, and consequently indispensable to a new flowering of Christendom.

For—to repeat it once again—grace is grafted on nature. If it is a healthy stock on which the grafting is made, then there is no need to worry; otherwise it is the stock that calls for attention first.

This is the state of things that explains and justifies, even

where the Christian apostolate is concerned, consideration of factors in the biological, social and political order. And if I am accused of materialism, my reply to that is that the modern man is in need of remedies at least as much as he is in need of sermons.

Take, for example, your typical modern city-dwellers. Here they are, without definite background, with no fixed work or place of abode. Inadequate and unwholesome food, impersonal labour, the countless excitations of every kind that assail them, have played havoc with their nerves, with their very souls; they have no sense of being linked to anything or anybody. Go and ask such people, in the name of Christian duty, to devote themselves to their neighbours or to beget children! In what secret recess of their artificial and almost unreal nature are your words (do you suppose) likely to find an echo? If there is nothing at all, in the individual soul and in the material conditions in which it leads its existence, to help make virtue accessible and attractive, moral and religious instruction is all a vain appeal for the heroic or the miraculous.

It is precisely this that we want to avoid. No social climate is more corrupting than that in which the masses of humanity cannot be induced to perform their ordinary daily duties without an appeal for the heroic and miraculous. The man who finds himself on a slope too steep for walking and is invited to escape by taking to the air, reacts as a rule by lying flat on the ground; in this way he drops *below* his own level; instead of flying, he crawls. . . . As for those of the elect, who feel the sacred wings of heroism all a-flutter, I can reassure them at once. There will always be an opportunity for those wings to spread: indeed, it will require plenty of heroism to create the climate—the social and biological climate—in which men, to live like men, will not be called on to be heroes.

Our task, admittedly, is to teach men how to love. But it is also to help so to dispose the world that love can strike root in it. Men must be given back their normal conditions of life, they must be given back a human soul, so that a

divine soul can be effectively grafted on them. If that is materialism, I accept the epithet as a compliment. For I know well enough that as much love can go into preparing the ground as into scattering the seed, and that without the ploughman's humbler, more back-breaking work, the airy gestures of the sower, walking with his head in the air, could never achieve any purpose at all.

AFFECTIVE LIFE AND SOCIAL LIFE

A PSYCHOLOGICAL phenomenon, strangely little noticed yet of paramount importance, is the way the personal attitude of any individual to the good or evil that befalls him is so largely governed by what are essentially *social* reactions. Thus a misfortune known to be collective seems far more supportable. Great public calamities (wars, famines, epidemics and so on) weigh less on the individual than much lighter trials that affect him alone. I have seen a farmer much more annoyed by the ravages of a fox that was killing his hens without touching those of his neighbours, than by a hailstorm that inflicted far greater damage but destroyed the crops of the whole village as well. I remember also the remarkable comment of a man who had had his property flooded by the Rhône; when he learnt that during the night the river had reached the dwellings of his neighbours: "Come now," he said, brightening, "it's not so bad after all. . . ." And everyone knows that in times of scarcity it is the sight of the well fed that is far more demoralising than actual hunger.

It is too simple and too easy to interpret such feelings as vulgar manifestations of selfishness and envy. What I see in them is an obscure longing for some sort of justice in punishment, a mysterious communion in misfortune, a desire to rest the head on the understanding breast of another victim of the same scourge, and even more, perhaps, to escape the awful feeling of having been *especially chosen* by misfortune, of being the object of the negative election of destiny. Inversely, good fortune turns insipid and loses its attraction as soon as it is felt to be shared by many. Good fortune is not so much something to enjoy as something for which one has been specially picked; it is not so

much suffering that is dreaded as the being *selected* to suffer. Surely the "communist" thrust, shaking the world to-day, has its roots in just this profound need for brotherhood, for a universal sharing, in distress and want; it is something inherent in an impotent humanity that has all but lost its taste for happiness. I shall never forget the answer I once received from a farm-labourer with revolutionary sympathies, when I pointed out that under any political régime he would have to go on working just the same and that if this was an evil it would be no less an evil then. "Of course," he retorted, his eyes bright with excitement, "but at least everyone will be unhappy!"

The modern advocates of a standard happiness for all are childishly ignorant of how fundamentally human situations are affected by this element of comparison. The same pleasures for all would almost amount to no pleasure for anyone! Every joy which ceases to be a privilege practically ceases to be a joy. It is a law that might well be remembered by the hasty popularisers of the "benefits" to be derived from education and technology. It will be objected that the sharing of privileges is also a need and an object of desire. It is; but within a chosen circle and one that is always more or less closed. And this, in fact, is how every aristocracy comes into being: they are all born—and it is this that explains their exclusiveness—of the profound human need to combine the pleasure of social intercourse with the pride of privilege.

These remarks, I agree, have a sound that is rather more human than Christian. I am quite well aware that above individual selfishness and any narrow aristocratic communion there is such a thing as charity, and that this is universal. Saints burn with the desire to share unreservedly the supreme good which they themselves possess. But here we are at another level altogether. What in the order of nature is mere malady or illusion becomes in the order of grace what is purest and most fruitful. The tragedy of all the social messianicisms is to seek the universal without the absolute. To want to share *everything* with *everyone* it is necessary to be God—or else to have only nothingness to share.

COMPLEXITY

MAN is truly the "luxurious animal". He feeds on superfluities to the detriment of his real needs. He barely skims the rich field of his true human destiny: the most he gathers is what is absolutely necessary to keep him alive (a minimum of truth, simplicity and love), but he is never tired of rummaging about among phantoms and clouds. It has become a commonplace in economics that the superfluous is now the *unum necessarium*: people have forgotten how to feed, how to work and how to rest; but they have always the time, they have always the strength and the money, for vanities. In America a woman may spend three times more on cosmetics than she spends on food. The same aberration corrupts the world of the emotions. Almost the only sentiments cultivated now are what might be called the luxurious sort: a headlong rush for the superfluous devours all spiritual energy. You have only to think of sexual love as described by a writer like Proust, of all the refinements of selfishness, irritable sensitiveness, ambition and show, of all that world of vain affections that absorb us, and you will shudder, maybe, at this bloated monstrosity of luxury run riot.

Yet it is a kind of inverted asceticism. The man of "progress", the man of ambition or pleasure, deprives himself on principle of what is necessary, cuts out everything that is life (from wholesome food to God himself) and makes up for it with every kind of gross artificiality. The so-called "complexity" of the modern soul is due very largely to this perversion: the pursuit of the Nothing turns every path it contaminates into a labyrinth!

It will need some great providential shock before man, dispersed as he is amid a world of vanities, discovers once

again, if he is still capable of doing so, the simplicity of those sentiments that are needful for his existence; the vital affections, the pure love of God, a love of himself and mankind. We are complex because we harbour in us a host of parasites. But there is nothing so simplifying as cataclysm!

* * *

It is far from being profound, this human complexity. What is complicated in us is all on the surface: our artifices, our masks. The deeply personal roots of our feelings are incredibly simple—as simple as yes and no. Good or bad, every action is simple at its centre, at its source. Surrender or refusal: the duel between black and white—that is all man is. There is nothing complicated in the great game of destiny: its rules are tragically simple. Heaven and hell are simple, the heart of things is a transparency unplumbed. Complexity begins with the world (in the evangelical sense of the word); with *falsehoods*. There, before himself and his fellows, man has to qualify and rig, to justify and *adapt* his yes and his no. The worldly spirit resides, fundamentally, in the instinct to jumble up heaven and hell. But in the depths of the soul, how distinct they remain, beneath this artificial imbroglio! Beneath the ruffled surface, how clear to the divine scrutiny is the simple gesture of a hand that opens, of one that remains closed!

Man's complexity is made up of his cowardice and his concessions, of his vanity, of his daily inability to adopt and recognise the yes and the no that are alive deep within him. At the peak moments of his life—in his great loves and his great refusals—man is aware of his own simplicity: when death has finally sealed his fate with an utterly permanent yes or no, then he will be simple for ever. He is complicated because he would serve two masters. But in the depths of his heart it is only one of them he loves; the other he despises. The subtlety and ambiguity of his sentiments are but outward phenomena: it is *appearance* they affect, not *being*.

Psychology is a simple science, and the deeper the simpler. What I mean is this. There is a psychological *simplicism*, which is the science of those who would ignore the complexity of the human *mask*, simplify man on the surface, and substitute a few fixed tints for the infinite variety of superficial shades. Typical of this mentality are philosophers like Spencer, novelists like Zola. As against simplifiers of this sort, Proust will inevitably hold his own! But side by side with this "simplicism" there is a true psychological simplicity: it is that of the thinker who goes right back to the simple *sources* of human feelings. For complexity is not the basic truth about man. Complexity must never be confused with depth. . . .

There are therefore three degrees in our knowledge of man. The first is a plastering of the surface with a few abstract tickets (*flat* simplicity, or what I call "simplicism"); next comes the perception that the human reality is infinitely wider than these tickets and infinitely different (this is the discovery of complexity); finally, beyond this complexity, recognised and transcended, comes knowledge of the *concrete* simplicity, the living simplicity of man's inner life. The simplicism, for instance, of an Eugène Sue or a Georges Ohnet stops short of complexity; it has no understanding even of the human mask and develops in a world of infantile ideas. But the simplicity of the Gospel finds its natural place, beyond all complexity, in the human heart. . . .

PHARISAISM

THERE are four possible attitudes a man may adopt towards his "star"—his ideal.

First, he may make his feelings and conduct conform to it. This is the way saints and heroes are made. Their ideal is "sincere".

Or it may be—and this is what generally happens—the individual's conduct may conflict with his ideal. Then the result is one or other of the two following consequences.

The man may simply deny his ideal, justifying his failure by declaring his ideal impossible or mistaken, and so blaming his own betrayal on the object betrayed. This is the way to preserve one's digestion and enjoy the satisfaction of peaceful nights: the ideal unattained is turned into a falsehood, its collapse has become a truth! These realists, these slayers of "illusions", profess to be sincere. They are false, just the same. Why? Because they make their individual failure a general law, a mass condemnation of their particular ideal.

Or there is another reaction, and the choice between this and the last depends on the individual temperament and also on the spirit of the age: there are periods when cynicism is the vogue, others when hypocrisy is more in favour; and both may be combined in practice, as in Rousseau. The more a man betrays his ideal by his acts, the more he may extol it in words. Here the ideal is simply a compensation and an alibi. And it is so exaggerated and so pure, so rigorous in its demands, that it becomes quite unreal and hopelessly impracticable. Thus Rousseau, who evaded his own duties as a father, preached an educational ideal that was utterly superhuman; or George Sand, perverse and fickle herself in love, gives us in Mauprat an ideal of con-

jugal fidelity that amounts to perfectly fantastic unrealism.

But of those who say "I go and go not", there is yet another type. There are noble but frail and divided souls who for all the betrayals of their inner experience persist in loving and defending their ideal. Such as these never stoop, like the cynics and "realists" mentioned above, to universalising their failures and personal sins; they remain faithful to truth in their thoughts and desires: they will not deny and besmirch the thing they have betrayed. It is a humiliating course, and by no means comfortable, this heroic loyalty to the light: not for them to blow out the lamp that shows up their frailty and also condemns it. Better, indeed, to be wholly faithful to the truth and shape one's acts and principles accordingly; but, failing this, it is preferable to persevere, to go on respecting the betrayed ideal, than with false sincerity or false pride to drag it down with one's personal failure.

Nor do men such as this wear their ideal like a *mask*, as do the romantic "compensators": they feel it in their hearts—like a wound.

FORESEEING AND HOPING

NOTHING can be more devastating than the impression one sometimes gets of a purely mechanical development and unfolding in the things that have to do with thought and spirit. A priest goes into the pulpit, and at the first words he utters I can foresee with quite infallible certainty all the points he is going to make and how his sermon is going to end. A woman throws herself into my arms: I know in advance the words that will be uttered, the gestures that will be made, all to the very last. In these cases, and thousands similar, there is no margin for surprise. We might say, to use Bergsonian terms, that mathematical time with its relentless succession has absorbed the "lived" time, the begetter of all newness. Foreseeing arises out of the ashes of extinct life.

It will at once be objected that there are innumerable things, in the life of the emotions and of the mind, which we do in fact foresee, yet so far from giving that deadly impression of the mechanical they actually nourish the soul and even stir it to rapture. Reading a book I admire, I feel emerging in my own mind the conclusion to which the author is gradually leading me; in the first glance of the woman I love, I divine the potential gifts she has in store for me; such things as these, foreseen though they are, can be no less entrancing. But if we would view the matter clearly, it is important to distinguish between the mechanical connection of things that are dead and the organic connection of things that are alive. It will not matter that I foresee what the woman I love is going to say: her words will still be fresh if she speaks them with her soul, for they will find their place in that living experience which makes all things new; it is only in so far as they are spoken with-

out soul that I receive the impression of something empty and barren.

But where it is a matter of a living development, can I strictly say that I *foresee*? It would be more accurate, I think, to say: I have a presentiment, I divine, I look forward to, I hope. There is a vast difference between the realising of what is foreseen and the achievement of what is looked forward to. One might go further and say that ultimately there is a contradiction between foreseeing and looking forward to.

To return to our examples. When I read this book I like, I feel that there is something within me *ripening*: I have a presentiment of the author's conclusion, I divine it to the extent to which it is already preformed in the green fruit that is in process of ripening; but however much this conclusion is expected, it is not strictly foreseeable, I shall be astonished when I actually read it; there will be a tone to it, a certain resonance not given in advance by what I have read before, any more than the final flavour of the ripened fruit is contained in that fruit before it is mature. Moreover, if I could foresee this conclusion *more geometrico*, I should not be looking forward to it, I should have it already. Strictly speaking, *it is only the unforeseeable that one looks forward to*. On the other hand, when I see a clock that tells me it is twelve o'clock and I hear at the same time the first of the twelve strokes, I strictly foresee the eleven that will follow, but I don't *look forward to* any of them: I know they are contained already in the working of the clock's mechanism; they are given simultaneously in my mind *already*. And here we come to a second, equally vital point: *to foresee is to look forward to nothing*. Since hope and expectation are the meaning of human life, and since hope, in this world, is inconceivable without a rebirth, without a constant refreshing of events and human beings, we may well understand our feeling of despair at every mechanical degradation of living reality. The soul, which cannot live without the breath of mystery, stifles in this stale and arid world: it is like being in a desert, of which all the bounds

can be measured at a glance; the track to be followed can be observed all the way till it reaches the horizon: never a single detour unforeseen, where human hope might possibly lurk!

In true expectation the soul is like a fruit that feels in itself a gradual maturing, anticipated yet mysterious; but in pure foreseeing the fruit which is the soul has rather the feeling of being violently forced, all its promise is dried up, it has nothing to expect but desiccation and death. And the spectacle of a world in which what is foreseen encroaches more and more on what is looked forward to is not the least anguish that racks us at the present day.

We might examine even further the opposition that exists between foreseeing and looking forward to. In current language (to which the philosopher should constantly refer if he would keep a grip on reality) there is a close connection to be observed between looking forward to and hoping.¹ What, in general, does man look forward to? He looks forward to his happiness, his fulfilment, his *good* (I call "good" all that warms and nourishes the soul); he never looks forward to any evil for himself. Even when we say of someone that "he is looking forward to death", the expression seems to imply a certain confidence in death, and this element of hope emerges still more clearly if we compare "look forward to" with "count upon"; the latter has a meaning more akin to foreseeing. To say, for example: "From that day Peter looked forward to death" is not the same as saying: "From that day Peter counted on dying."

Man looks forward to what he hopes for. But everything that is a source of hope in us (youth, love, poetry, prayer) is penetrated with mystery; every good (except a certain mechanical morality, and ultimately this is something bad) is also astonishment, fascination, deliverance; there is always something religious about looking forward to anything. Man's good is not therefore something foreseen, it is something looked forward to.

¹ So much so that in some languages, Provençal is one, "to hope" and "to look forward to" are expressed by the same word.

Evil, on the other hand, is something foreseen but not looked forward to. How comes it that when people use expressions like: "What did I tell you? I warned you it would happen", or "I saw that coming", etc., it is nearly always something bad they are referring to? I don't mean by this that every evil is strictly foreseeable: evil, in this world, is never wholly free from mystery because it is never wholly free from life; all I maintain is that evil which is a corruption of nature and an eclipse of being, necessarily *tends*, for want of the freshness of life and the creative urge, to be mechanical and monotonous, and therefore it always tends to be foreseeable. Baudelaire is referring to this when he speaks of "the wearisome spectacle of immortal sin". And when in despair, ultimately perhaps on the verge of suicide, we say: "I look forward to nothing more in life", what does this mean, if not: "I know in advance what destiny has in store for me: I feel that no grace can ever flower in my path, that there is no possibility of any deliverance"? "I look forward to nothing more" implies "I have foreseen everything, and nothing but evil". But how could I foresee *only* evil, if evil itself, through its very affinity with the immediate stressing of death, did not naturally lend itself to being foreseen?

The deep cause of this "tendency" of evil to be monotonous and automatic lies in the tragic power of human freedom. We are free, not only to choose between good and bad, but to annihilate this very freedom itself, the possibility of choosing. The abuse of a faculty weakens the faculty itself: lungs condemned to breathe badly gradually lose their power of breathing at all; the power to think diminishes in a brain habituated to thinking badly. Freedom is no exception to this rule: essentially a faculty of renewal, of creativeness and unexpectedness, it tends, by virtue of creating sin (and what human ill has not sin at its roots?), to destroy itself as a faculty for creation, and transform itself into a machine for sinning: evil deliberately chosen is like an acid, slowly corroding the capacity to choose. . . .

Finally it may be objected that there are live sins just as there are dead virtues. "Sin alone is alive", declared Hafiz, in contradiction to Baudelaire. But there Hafiz was contrasting two extreme cases: a "sin" full of emotional and biological spontaneity, a mere lacking of the abstract law, and a "virtue" reduced to the dry bones of formalism. His dictum does not mean that evil in itself is any more alive than good is, but that there is more life in a full sin than there is in an empty virtue.

XIII

DISTANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

SOME complete stranger spends an hour in your company and goes away entranced. But your next-door neighbour will tell him: "I know the fellow better than you do, I see him every day: his life is entirely petty and commonplace; the brilliance that so impressed you is all on the surface. You are too far off from him to know him properly." To this your "simple" admirer may rejoin: If a thing is great, do you see it close-to? The man who lives on the mountainside sees the stones crumbling away and the mud trickling down; also, perhaps, a few useful springs and some pleasant shade. But what does he know of the lonely majesty of the great mountain, all clothed in light? Yet who would say that the virgin peak you contemplate afar is any less *real* than the mud you see when you are close at hand?

Mere physical proximity, without moral intimacy, is the surest way to miss the secret beauty of a soul, to brush by without seeing it; all it makes accessible is the material envelope, life's mechanical waste-product. It is not close at hand that greatness is to be seen, but from within; vicinity without intimacy sets up the densest and most impassable of barriers. The majority of families and human groupings provide examples of just this near impossibility of passing from proximity to communion. Hence such proverbial expressions as: no man is a prophet in his own country; a hero to his valet. The person we know is not the one we *rub shoulders with* (what a perfect description of extreme proximity allied to complete exteriority!), but he whose soul we *penetrate*; there is, in fact, a mysterious association between distance and intimacy. Without knowledge from within, greatness is better perceived from afar than close at hand;

it is from a distance you behold the shining of stars, the halo about heads. Proximity contracts the field of vision to superficial and empty detail; moreover, everything looks much the same close-to, all tends to equality in one and the same nothingness. But distance is the very criterion of greatness: it obliterates what is not worth seeing and transforms the rest into a star.

Yes; there is a close association between distance and intimacy. The man who lives near you is never *astonished* at your presence, which is simply part of his dull familiar scene; there is nothing about you that penetrates him. How could there ever occur, between him and you, that revealing shock which is the source and origin of all true knowledge? But one who comes from afar does experience this feeling of novelty and shock, this sense of openness to the other which is the first condition of penetrating the other. Such a man does really know you: he sees deeply, because instead of stopping short at the sediment deposited by matter and time, which catches the eye of those in your own circle, his gaze goes straight to the divine kernel within you, which is in fact *you*. Hence such apparent paradoxes as the fact that the unique worth of certain people never appears till we see it across the impassable abyss opened out by their death; or that so many great men are never admired or understood except outside their country or apart from their own age; or that great intimacy between two human beings is almost always accompanied by a feeling of inaccessible beauty and purity. There is a close connection between the star shining in our heaven and the love we carry in our heart; what is closest becomes identified with the most remote, and if the star goes out in our heaven, love perishes in our heart. When I no longer feel you are unsullied, from that moment I am incapable of possessing you.

Every great love (and therefore every deep knowledge) is thus a combination of spring and recoil (without the great transfiguring recoil of vision, the spring of the soul can never attain its final goal); it implies a kind of polar tension

between the worship that casts itself down before the intangible and the desire that moves steadily forward to possession. Here is a new and profound application of that marvellous line of Hugo's:

*Sentir l'être sacré fremir dans l'être cher . . .*¹

¹ 'Feel sacred Being throb within the being loved.'

MAN AND HEROISM

THERE is never any withdrawal of God's gifts. Here is an end to every scandal. If a man chooses the evil, God takes back none of the riches he has conferred on him. Every man is free to consume his inheritance in what sacrilegious banquets he may please. God never withdraws. He displays a staggering *nobility* in his gifts.

Nothing holds any longer to-day: mankind is aware of being on the brink of the abyss. "It can't last any longer", rage wise men and fools. Is man, then, any more wicked than he was? No: the world has contrived to endure because so far man has found enough to feed on in his very *nature* as man. The reason why everything is collapsing to-day is that these natural reserves have been squandered. We have come to the end of the Father's unconditional gifts. I don't believe for a moment that my contemporaries are any more perverse than their forebears. But in times gone by nature was still healthy, it could both nourish and correct the perversities of the will: the worst of follies were possible, individually and collectively, without the incurring of any grave harm. All that belonged to the unconscious element (physiological and instinctive life, social institutions and the rest)—all this was still pure, it was rich and sound, it could resist evil, or if it were made to serve evil, it allowed it to bear fruit. How many human beings, morally corrupt, have been brilliantly successful, thanks to their own animal health or to that of their age! In those days a guilty freedom could batten on innocent necessity. But to-day it is the other way about. Man has to confront his accursed hunger by himself. Thanks to his misuse of nature, sin has sterilised him. Polluted by the evil that springs from the spirit, necessity, in revenge, contaminates

the spirit and so calls for heroism in the exercise of even the humblest virtues. The prodigal son is not *blameworthy* today, as he was long ago when he left his Father's house: he has merely devoured his share of the inheritance. And he is denied the possibility of even living like a pig!

But it is not to no purpose that we have descended so low. All recoil into non-existence makes possible a still greater leap towards God. The collapse of every natural *cadre* (whether vital, moral or social) calls for a still more plentiful outpouring of grace. Hell is invading the earth, the habitable area of nature is becoming more and more restricted: we have no longer any choice between God and death. Very soon all natural harmony and health will have to find its only support in charity—or the world will perish. To take one example: formerly a man disinherited by fate could draw from a kind of vital well-being and instinctive social sense the faculty for accepting his situation spontaneously. "Fate has made you a grey lizard", says Mistral's old peasant: "drink your rays of the sun and thank heaven." Nowadays, for the vast majority of men, the overdevelopment of the ego, the desiccating atomisation of individuals, make this acceptance possible only in the purely supernatural order. To tip the scales on the side of good, all *God* has to be set in the balance! And this applies everywhere: revolt, anarchy, mechanisation, sclerosis—all these agonising factors which go to make what Spengler calls the winter of humanity are merely the divine means of reducing to the minimum the deviation of the earthly order from crucified Love, of bringing nature to its point of supernatural saturation. There is no more salvation from below: the prodigal son begs in vain for the rude health, for the animal fulfilment of the swine gorged on husks! A return to the Father—an utter routing of the old pride and the old ingratitude—has assumed the violence and urgency of a carnal necessity. To-morrow it will be impossible to take a single step forward, to achieve anything at all on this earth of ours, except with the whole of heaven in one's heart.

A new heroism is rising from the ruins. Everywhere the decadence of instincts, morals and institutions—of the whole *environment* that should naturally assist the individual to act healthily—makes ever more arduous the accomplishment of the humblest of human duties. What used to be done spontaneously, almost inevitably, under the beneficent influence of the biological and social climate (respect, for instance, for the social hierarchy, for fecundity in marriage) represents to-day a victory over climate. The heroic, formerly associated with exceptional circumstances, now finds a place in the everyday world: it descends to the human from the superhuman; once a luxury, it is now almost a necessity. The time is approaching—for some it has come—when a normal life, the life of the ordinary man, will call for the exertions of a hero. Such is the supreme gift of life, by way of death—this obligation to be a hero in order merely to exist, in order to remain faithful to the common way of life which our ancestors found as easy as breathing! The relations between heroism and nature are reversed: yesterday the great of soul were “naturally” heroic: nature supported sanctity. To-morrow men will be *heroically natural*: it will be for sanctity to support nature. This new heroism has already its saint: Thérèse of Lisieux. It has no worldly glamour: it goes deeper down into man than greatness, than the glorious and the exceptional: like God, it sustains all and is seen by none. But there is perhaps nothing in all history—save God’s descent into human flesh—that is more moving to contemplate than this secret salvaging of nature by grace, than this new order in which our humblest and most everyday things, emptied of their sufficiency and their acquired momentum, can no longer subsist except in the atmosphere of prayer.

What you lose to-day as man, you will recover to-morrow as God. . . . *Advesperascit*. The politics, economics and morals of to-day are steadily deepening the twilight in human nature. How can man continue in this inhuman environment if not by becoming God? Everything is vanishing here below that could serve as a refuge or nest,

as a maternal bosom. A hurricane is sweeping away those gentle bonds that once upon a time linked man to nature, to family and native land. The rot has set in at the very heart of the world. Every natural retreat has gone: the "Mothers" are no more. No choice will be left soon between the artificial and the divine. When that time comes every hope of ours will have to concentrate on Calvary: all life must crouch at the foot of the Cross. *God is God only when he is alone.* A humanity without country, without human love, will approach him in a way that the love of those over-rich ages gone by could never have hoped to approach him. What we see being born is the time of great poverty, but it is also a time of pure riches: profounder than ever before, and more generous, there falls from the divine lips: *I am moved with pity for the multitude.* At the end of the journey, at the end of the day, no Cybele, no Rhea will lull our weariness to sleep. We have slain the Mothers in our hearts, our lips are too defiled for the kiss of nature. The Mothers are no more—all are dead save God!

PART TWO

THE ESSENCE OF NOBILITY

IF I were pressed on the subject of my moral opinions, I would readily admit that to me the difference between noble and base is more essential than the difference between good and bad. But what, in its deepest sense, is nobility? First, the refusal of what is easy (petty gains, cunning calculation, using questionable means to gain success and power): the man who is noble is he who is particular about the means he uses. Secondly, it is the scorning of a certain kind of prudence: to be noble is to know how to risk. . . . But none of this touches the heart of the question. There is a love of difficulty and danger in any harum-scarum who is willing to risk his neck; it takes more than that to have nobility of soul.

The word nobility, to me, suggests first of all *distance*. What I mean is that outward and visible nobility means being distant towards others; inner and real nobility is being distant towards oneself. A man of nobility sets the purpose of his existence and the source of his actions in some faith or ideal, in a code of honour that far outweighs his own paltry ego. His way of feeling, judging and acting is wholly penetrated by this element of distance: so, too, his virtues are free from that viscidty, that adherence of the self, which soils and debases even the best of actions. Because the principle of his virtue is outside himself, his left hand is ignorant of what his right is doing: forgetfulness of services rendered is one of the essential marks of nobility. The same distance that separates him from what is basest in himself makes for forgetfulness of what he gives and mindfulness of what he receives. He is detached but not inconstant, loyal but not "clinging" (the loyalty of one who clings is of interest only to the flesh and the ego, it is a loyalty without

distance). He also loves himself, but from afar. In all things he regards *himself* from above.

So we can measure the degree of nobility in an individual by the remoteness of his reasons for living and acting from the exigencies of the vain and carnal ego. Where there is no such remoteness, there is absolute baseness; where it is present in an infinite degree, nobility is unlimited, as is the case with the saints who have their dwelling-place in God. . . .

Contempt for death, essential to every type of nobility, is a good indication of this distance. Whereas the mean soul, wholly riveted to his lower appetites, is willing to sacrifice all to preserve his earthly life, the soul that is noble has an instinctive preference for death rather than dishonour. The self must be loved from a very great height and a great way off, before it is possible so to choose death, the flesh and the ego being so close and so clamant! Moreover, the sacrifice of life is what makes martyrdom, the testimony of man to a reality that transcends him. Here again, and always, distance!

Detachment, we said, in regard to the vain and carnal ego. Yet there are souls essentially noble (a Louis XIV or a Lamartine) who are victims alike of the flesh and of vanity. True enough; but they are so preoccupied only with part of themselves, they are not wholly immersed in their passion; they have something in them winged and incorruptible, and this has hardly any part in their frailties. In other words, noble souls can know what it is to *fall* but not to commit base actions: they can fall, but it is not down there that they belong.

If nobility is defined as being loyal to an appeal that transcends us, it follows that there are as many varieties of nobility as there are varieties of true vocations. I remember reading, in *Revolution über Deutschland*, the criticism passed on their officers, in 1918, by the men who refused to take part in the suicidal attack on England, then contemplated by high-ranking officers of the German Navy. "We know", they said, "that the officers have sworn to die rather than

surrender their ships to England. But the honour of officers is not ours. Our honour is to live and work to bring up our children. . . ." Clearly the honour of the man who handles the plough is different from the honour of the man who wields the sword: the first is concerned to maintain the vital values (*primum vivere*—life comes first), the second to maintain the spiritual values (better death than dishonour). It is also clear that aristocratic honour requires the existence of a social class that is largely exempt from servitude to the material. The man who earns his daily bread by the sweat of his brow, whose whole soul is occupied with the care of winning this uncertain and always threatened livelihood, can hardly be expected to have a nice appreciation of the subtleties of an altogether higher code of ethics. The cult of spiritual values implies a minimum of material leisure and security: it is easier to despise death when life is assured!

These two kinds of honour are in fact supplementary: man must eat bread, but not live by bread alone. The aristocratic virtues are both higher and purer than the popular virtues; they are also more fragile and far more precarious, for, instead of being fostered from without by the constant pressure of necessity, they have to be created from within by the effort of personal freedom. But the decadence of aristocracies is the worst decadence of all: nothing is more repulsive than the type of man who neither earns his living nor despises death.

II

SOCIAL REALISM

TRUE AND FALSE ARISTOCRACY.—The first consists in *distinction*, the second in *separation*. The latter invades society as the former disappears from it. Whatever a man is, he experiences the need to set himself apart: when he is lacking in any inward distinction,¹ his natural desire to rise and excel has no other outlet but in the creation of artificial (and therefore anti-social) barriers and distances; in other words, the very movement of life has a fatal tendency to *separate* a person who is distinguished by no superiority. A very adequate proof of this theory can be seen in the social differences of modern society, the swarming of vulgar parvenus in quest of fortune and honours.

The conclusion seems paradoxical: the greater the resemblance between men, the greater their separation. Atomic levelling makes them utterly similar and at the same time utter strangers one to another. Distinction, on the other hand, draws them together. The harmonious societies are those in which personalities, classes and professions have all of them strongly marked characteristics. The unity of a body depends on the diversity of its organs: just as an organ develops by contributing to the life of the whole, so the man possessed of inward distinction finds in the accomplishment of his own function so much *personal* satisfaction that he can collaborate without envy (envy belongs to the atom, not to the organism) with the other members of the social body: the body's organic difference is a sufficient safeguard against anarchical separation.

¹ The "inward" distinction I mean is not merely the fact of personal originality; it can also be due to belonging to any caste or environment or profession, provided that these are truly organic.

Finally it is as well to note that this organic aristocracy is not the achievement of any particular class or vocation; its character is in certain respects universal. To attain distinction it is unnecessary to have a place at the top of the social ladder; it is enough to be genuinely what one is: a true peasant, or a true soldier, is each in the deepest sense *distinguished*.

* * *

THE PROBLEM OF CLASSES.—The spirit of liberalism and democracy has left the forming of social classes to the unhealthy workings of politics and finance: thus a hierarchy has been created which corresponds to no real vital necessity, and merely feeds, and goes on feeding, the spirit of division and revolt. The great problem at the present day is to remake a social organism, to remake a whole world, in which social differences rest on real foundations and so contribute to the cause of unity.

To achieve this end, I should be glad to be told of a system any better than the hereditary organisation of society. I am keenly aware of its shortcomings; but I know of no other. A general return to the laws of family and environment I believe to be absolutely necessary. No society can be healthily and soundly organised on the sole basis of individual contingencies (what a chaos of unruly "vocations" would the world be then!); what is needed is that weight of necessity which goes with hereditary differentiation and continuity. A promiscuous opening of all the doors to everyone at large is an invitation, at every grade of the hierarchy, to that frenzied ambition which is the worst social evil. There again we have an unhealthy projection of the Gospel truth into the field of politics. None is excluded from the divine banquet: all men are called to the celestial heights, to sanctity. It is a parody of this divine universal appeal to desire that all members of society should be called to the *terrestrial* heights (fortune, power and the rest); instead of the harmonious progress of every soul towards a divine privilege that by its very essence is *indefin-*

itely extensible, we have an anarchical stampede after temporal privileges which of their very nature are reserved for the few.

It is only too obvious that there is no room for everyone on the topmost rung of the social ladder. The eliminating factor of birth is attacked as unjust. But in the first place it is not absolute: in the kind of society we are thinking of, the function of birth would be to prove and select vocations to rise, not kill them in the egg. And what of democracy as an eliminating factor, the result of fortune's caprice, or the clash of unleashed ambitions? Is this any less hazardous and less unjust? For answer you have only to look at the hideous upside-down selection effected here with us by the outcome of financial or electoral battles!

If there were any automatic means of assigning the highest functions to the worthiest representatives of all social classes, I should be much less inclined to urge the benefits of heredity. But meanwhile, until such a means has been discovered, I shall continue to believe that the division of society into distinct organisms, preserving stability as the generations go by, still offers the fewest drawbacks of any; it serves to restrict that anarchy and conflict which the total abolition of hereditary cadres merely helps to envenom and make universal. Human ambitions, all jumbled together, are like a basket of crabs: it is better for the basket to be divided into compartments. . . .



PERSONALISM IN POLITICS.—A people is hardened by purely collective treatment; it grows soft and flabby when deferred to without consideration for authority, without consideration for the keeping of distance. The two errors cancel out if there is a ruling *élite* that knows how to *love* the people *with severity*. For this to be possible there must be social grades that are both *living* and *rigid*. What I believe to be necessary is the restoring of a patriarchal type of society. For where, more than in a father, will there be found combined the two things that a people so essentially

needs: love and authority? A state-organisation can result, if it is slack, only in a watery caricature of love; if it is rigid, in a deadening caricature of authority. To my mind the ideal type of personalist institution would be a monarchical form of government, superimposed on a variety of social formations, far more private than to-day, more local and more human: a type of society in which the immediate contact of superior with inferior would be purified of every taint of promiscuity by a deep hierarchical reserve.

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SOCIAL GRADES AND INDIVIDUAL FULFILMENT.—I still know a few old countrymen who have never emerged from their environment, from their family, social and professional milieu. They have never left their native village, never opened a newspaper; the idea of "escaping", or "living their own life", has never crossed their minds. Now nearly all these old people have vigorous and original personalities; but their more emancipated children—who travel about, go to the cinema, listen to the wireless, abandon the land and break with all their ancestral traditions—have, generally speaking, no ideas of their own, no emotions that can be said to be really personal: their dim souls are all much alike.

It is far too often forgotten that the social cadres are a kind of bark that protects the sap. The depth of the river is due not only to what it derives from its source; it is also deep because its bed is narrow.

These social cadres are often attacked in the name of the rights of the individual. But in practice they were the best supports for healthy individualism. They prevented from emerging only those unworthy of doing so. They were the tests and the purifiers of true personalities and true vocations. They helped the strong—those capable of escaping upwards—to be all the more themselves. The weak, all those who aimed at escaping downwards, they defended against themselves. They contributed, in both cases, to raise up the level of *individual* dignity and *individual* worth.

* * *

THE DUTY OF THE ÉLITE.—It will never be sufficiently realised how easily and how directly the masses are corruptible. The people can stand up to centuries of tyranny without losing their basic equilibrium; a few years of demagoguery and they become rotten through and through. They are hard to crush but easy to corrupt; they are like those insects, protected by their armour from external shocks, but very easily poisoned: a drop is enough to kill them. To escape from our present chaos, what is needed is not a rectified democracy, it is a new aristocracy; one that can impose on itself and impose on others the pure rigorous climate that makes an end of corruption.

Let there be no mistake: the more a people is lulled with illusions and steeped in an easy life, the more the *élite*, whose mission it is to save it, must lead a life of austerity and self-sacrifice: only in this way can it disarm envy and win confidence; only thus can it serve as a priming to any new discipline, any raising of the moral tone. It is by the head that societies grow diseased, and it is by the head that they are cured.

A life of austerity is necessary for all men, in every walk of life. The only difference is this: austerity must be imposed on the masses by necessity (by natural forces or the working of institutions) and on a responsible *élite* by choice and freedom.

* * *

ONTOLOGY AND POLITICS.—“I believe in democracy because I have faith in man, in his value and in his immortal soul.” These words of Masaryk’s shed a flood of light on the confusion at the bottom of Christian democracy. God preserve us from making our politics an *exact* replica of the data of ontology and the Christian faith. Personality, spirit, immortal soul, child of God—all these things represent for man an *end* rather than a *fact*: man is on his way to realising his essence, to attaining his goal; and how heavy-going that journey is, how beset with obstacles, how threatened at every step by the sinister snares of materiality and evil!

Paradox as it may seem, the essence and goal of man are present with us not as a good already acquired, but as a promise and a hope—a forlorn hope. . . .

The politician who sets too much store by this hope runs the danger of smothering it. To treat a child as a grown-up person is to weaken and possibly destroy his power of ever becoming a normal adult. In the same way, to treat the mass of men as a collection of developed personalities is to run a grave risk of slaying, before ever it grows to maturity, the fragile germ of the spirit.

Out of respect for the human person itself we should beware of excessive personalism in politics. Political wisdom has to deal with man in process of formation, not with man already achieved; it must take account of the sub-human necessities which weigh on this embryo of man. Its mission is to aid the embryo to grow. This is impossible without respecting the stages of the slow and difficult process of maturing. The crime of one sort of democracy is precisely that of having forced man's growth. It has invested human beings, still unripe, with the powers and liberties of a matured personality: thus it has inevitably barred the way to maturity. Less harm may well have been done by the men and the theories that aimed quite frankly at keeping the people in ignorance and servitude: of all the ways of killing the *man* in a man, the most fatal of all is to force the human fruit to ripen before its time.

* * *

TWO KINDS OF INHUMAN RÉGIME.—A régime is inhuman when it refuses to man the respect and rights that are due to him as a person, as a spiritual being; when it envisages man as something below what he essentially is. Thus draconian laws, or systems of education more like the training of an animal, are rightly described as inhuman. But there is another way of being inhuman: it consists, not in the lack of humanity, but in an excess of it; it sacrifices the human stock to the qualities that are specifically human, and seeing man purely as a spirit and a person it deduces the rights

and duties of man from these rudiments of the angel. This ignoring of the sub-human in man leads to the worst of social and moral disasters; individuals are torn adrift from their moorings, the moorings of tutelary laws and traditions; whole nations are dissolved in the democratic melting-pot. . . . *Plures homines sequuntur sensus*. It is the folly of trying to cultivate the human person without regulating the machine and training the animal. Nothing is more inhuman than seeing in man *only* what is human.

* * *

TYRANTS AND DEMAGOGUES.—In former times tyrants ground down, bled and broke the people; they robbed them of happiness, but never uprooted from their soul the feeling and taste for happiness.

Demagogues, by dint of flattery, false ideals and impossible promises, make the people desire their own unhappiness; they rob them of the sense of their true destiny; they pervert what God created for them, the hunger for natural and supernatural food.

Tyrants in old days starved the people, deprived them of bread; modern tyrants, more cunning, overload their stomachs and ruin their appetites. And the second misdeed is a thousand times worse, a thousand times harder to correct, than the first. When a man is hungry he can be cured with a piece of bread. But the curing of a ruined digestion is a highly complicated process, fairly bristling with hazards! To revive his people, Henry of Navarre has a simple remedy: a chicken in the pot. To-day he would have a very different programme to carry out: a vigorous yet subtle cure for poisoning.

* * *

HOW AN EVIL BECOMES GENERAL.—The regular procedure on the part of modern society, when confronted by any evil, is not to get rid of it but to make it legal and reputable, and thereby infinitely more prevalent. For instance, satisfaction is expressed that there are far fewer

beggars in the streets and on the highroads. There are; but there are unemployed, all manner of "insured persons", useless officials and the rest. The first kind of parasitism was at any rate limited by the hard life it involved and by the discredit attaching to it; the second has no limitation at all and it is actually becoming an object of competition. Every healthy countryman has a horror of the fate of a rural mendicant, but I have heard many express envy of the treatment received by a superfluous official or even by the receiver of the "dole".

Here is an extreme case: an incident that happened a few years ago in a little village not far from Alès. One afternoon a little girl told her schoolmistress that her parents had sold the few fields they owned and that the whole family was shortly moving to Alès. "And what will your parents do there?" asked the mistress. "Oh, at Alès", replied the child, her eyes shining with enthusiasm, "daddy will be on the dole!"



HUMAN LEVEL AND SOCIAL FUNCTION.—I have in mind a certain lazy farmer I once used to know. Here is a man who if left to himself would idle all day, but in a communistic type of society would accomplish a more or less normal day's work. The general set-up, the compulsion and discipline, the permanent contact with others, would make up for what he lacked himself in will-power; relieved of the necessity of making decisions, of guiding his own conduct, absorbed and sustained by the collective machine, he would achieve at any rate something in the life of the community. (As a matter of fact, since these lines were written, this particular man was driven by want to abandon his farm and has got himself a job with some big firm. There, as I should have expected, he works like everyone else. . . .)

Complete collectivism has no positive virtue except for the sub-products of humanity. The few mental weaklings I have known as smallholders have ended, after a series of failures, by earning their living in a factory. But this way of

life is disastrous for the superior and even the average man, for all, in fact, who are capable of initiative, who have any creative power and who can act without absolute constraint. *Collectivism raises the lowest human specimens and lowers all the rest.* Better, surely, a free and personal activity than one that is purely mechanical. But it is also better to force a man to some servile or purely automatic labour than to respect a freedom that will always choose what is negative.

* * *

SOLITUDE AND MULTITUDE.—Man is not made for solitude: *Woe to him that is alone.* . . . But neither is he made for multitude: *I am moved with pity.* . . . He is meant to live in small and living groups (the family, the local or professional community): it is only these that can bring him full self-realisation, link him effectively to wider organisms. The self becomes hardened in solitude, but in multitude it dissolves. In solitude the self is only the self, which is little enough; in multitude it is not even that, it is nothing. Hence the necessity to live in society, but in a *ventilated* society (the problem of decentralisation is precisely that of reconstructing such a society as this). For the average man, the big factory or the big city is a spiritual and moral tomb. As St Dominic observed: grain massed into a heap goes bad. . . .

* * *

THE REVOLUTIONARY LIE.—The pontiffs of revolution make boast of their materialism, they teach the people to have a horror of patience and sacrifice, they see religion as an opium: the happiness they announce is truly of *this world*. But it is not of *this time*. What religion promises for eternity (that means now, if the soul is pure), they promise for to-morrow, and to realise this future but ever receding happiness, they require of the people more privations and sacrifices than were ever required of them by any religion.

The revolutionary spirit, essentially irreligious, must therefore subsist by constantly cheating the religious in-

instincts of humanity. First comes a denial of every ideal; an exalting, in the individual, of his thirst for immediate and material happiness; then a demand to sacrifice this happiness in order to build a "city of the future"; something just as empty—for the man whose thoughts are only for the flesh and who to-morrow will die—as the heavenly city of religion. . . .

"To-morrow's joy we cast to the winds": the whole gist of revolutionary materialism is contained in this single line. Away, then, with the promises of religion! It is to-day we wish to live and enjoy. Very well. But what we have to-day is war and cold and hunger. . . .



POLITICAL ATHEISM.—Robespierre's famous saying, "Atheism is aristocratic", is no longer true. Nietzsche was the last aristocratic atheist, the last to be an atheist in the grand manner. Where do we find men, to-day, who reject God as God? How could one compare the godless of modern Russia with a "libertine" of the *grand siècle*? Modern atheism is based on a misunderstanding: it attacks God, not as master of the universe, but as an ally of the governing classes; it confuses God with the bourgeois. All said and done, its foundation is essentially political; it is a mere accessory in the mechanism of democracy.

Aristocratic atheism proceeds from personal revolt; it implies "Nothing above myself"; it is the revolt of human masters against the divine Master. Your revolutionary's atheism is a gregarious atheism; its own motto is "Nothing above the herd"; it is the revolt of slaves against their human masters.

Aristocratic atheism, naturally enough, precedes and prepares the way for democratic atheism. Once the great repudiate God, the mob is not slow to repudiate the great, and God along with them: masters without God produce peoples without masters.

Psychologically, this atheism of the mob is less profound, less pure (in the sense of *echt*) than the atheism of the great;

morally, it is undoubtedly worse; socially, it is infinitely more destructive. Getting rid of God is in the first place merely the sin of pleasure-seekers without offensive intent: it is a sin that is punished only by its slow repercussions in the deep substrata of reality, of carnal or social reality. It is rare for God to take any direct vengeance: so it is not the atheism of the great, but the atheism of the second degree, the atheism by proxy (so to speak) of the masses, that shatters whole nations. The fine-spun offence against being at its highest is avenged by the coarse revolt of being at its lowest: there is nothing so brutally carnal as the punishment of the sins of the spirit. It was that refined pastime, eighteenth-century atheism, which gave birth to the horrors of the French Revolution.

* * *

ADVANTAGES OF A STABLE RÉGIME.—Violent changes of political régime bring the lowest dregs of humanity to the surface. So it was in 1814-15 and in 1940. . . . What would have been the behaviour, at such periods, of the loyalest subjects of Louis XIV? It is not the least of the benefits conferred by stable régimes that they never tempt a man beyond his resources or give too many opportunities to win himself dishonour.

* * *

COMMON DESTINY.—There is no getting out of it. The selfish "everyone for himself" conceals a flat contradiction. We are members of the same body; and the members will die together, if they decline to live together. Whatever we do, we shall always be bound one to another, either by the inner bond of a common life, or by the external bond of a common corruption. Leaves not nourished by the same sap are carried off by the same wind.

III

MORAL REALISM

THE PAST AND THE ETERNAL.—It's the cry we hear on all sides: "Give us something new!" But we, who believe in the unchanging laws of human nature, have nothing new to offer—except the eternal. Life is not novelty but renewal. To innovate, if it is not to continue, is to kill: evil and death are the only absolute beginnings permitted to man. Every healthy revolution is like a storm, of which the thunder-clap heralds the fertilising rain: it rediscovers the true tradition, makes it fruitful once again, brings all the enthusiasm and agony of the passing hour into harmony with the unchanging groundwork of history. Thus the fleeting storm is a source of fertility to the enduring earth. . . .

The revolutionary who kills tradition is no better than the pharisee perpetuating a dead fashion: the pharisee embalms, the revolutionary cremates, but both operations are carried out upon a corpse. The only wisdom consists in saving the youth of traditions, whenever these conform to the central exigencies of human nature. Those who desire novelty, something new for its own sake, have no belief in this nature; for them life can be nothing but a succession of beginnings, one destroying the other, a series of abortions. There is a morbid thirst for novelty which it is impossible to distinguish from a taste for death. Baudelaire had the frankness to recognise as much.

But the problem, in any case, is not one to be presented in terms of history: it is an ontological question. Ours is not a cult of the past. We do not worship the past as such or value things in proportion to their antiquity; if we did, we should never prefer the medieval civilisation to the fourth-century Roman worship of the State. What we like

about certain forms of the past is a deeper incarnation of truth—human and social truth. We would revive these forms, now obscured by the chimeras of a world in frenzy; and we know it is possible to do so, for if the course of history is irreversible and never repeats itself, it is always reproducing something extremely similar. But our only reason for wishing to revive these forms is that they seem better adapted to the essential needs of humanity. The face of the past has no attraction at all except in so far as it reflects the eternal.

The eternal forms of social life (the family, local and professional groups, aristocracy, church and native land) are tottering to-day, or altogether overthrown, so much so indeed that many would look elsewhere for salvation. All these things, they moan, are now bankrupt; we want something new. To which we can only reply: However sickly they are, these necessary things, there is no way of escaping them. Renew the family, rebuild an aristocracy, revive the sense of country and religion, otherwise you die. Man haunted and maddened by the craving for novelty is like one in the final stages of consumption, who would breathe by other means, if he could, than with his lungs. But either his lungs must be healed or he must be reconciled to death—unless he prolongs his agony with the help of an iron lung. But, at the present juncture, this new mode of breathing has given all too manifest proofs of what it can do. . . .

Nothing new under the sun! Recognition of the fact need not necessarily lead to pessimism, for everything that deserves to live and endure still remains indefinitely renewable.



TRADITION AND THE FUTURE.—These people who ignore or despise the past, who have lost every kind of attachment to tradition—are they the more inclined to look to the future? Not at all: they are simply clinging with all their might to their petty ephemeral happiness and ease, to all

that is emptiest and most futile in the present. To take one example: where I live, in the country, I observe that all the young couples who are most free from parental influence are precisely those that have the fewest children. No paradox there. The very same breaking of vital bonds which causes them to turn their backs on the past quite naturally leads them to mistrust the future. Everything is transmitted in this world; nothing is created. The torch they have never received, they can never pass on. The human being most bound to the past (I am speaking here of a living bond and a living past, not a dead attachment to a past that is dead) is also the best possible shaper of the future. There is no foreseeing without remembering. The root and stem of a plant follow opposite directions, yet the depth of the root measures the shooting of the stem, the beauty of the flower and the flavour of the fruit.

He who prolongs nothing has nothing to provide. The present, unless it is fertilised by the past, has no future in its womb. "Respect for the old and love for children"—to quote Victor Hugo—"both die together."

* * *

TWO WAYS OF BEING "CONSERVATIVE".—One is to protect a declining tradition from all the threats of the future (and all promises of life) by the sterilising processes known to the food-canner; the other is to restore to it a constantly renewed youth in touch with the eternal. Seen from without, Charles de Foucauld is attached to the same object as the most hidebound pietist. But the one, with his soul wide open, takes his stand by the source of the unfailing stream; the other watches jealously over a flask of stale water.

* * *

A HARD LIFE AND INNER UNITY.—It is a truth of common experience that a man preserves his life, keeps strong and develops, as the life he is accustomed to lead is hard and as stern necessity holds him in its grip. Once he yields to his good pleasure, becomes the arbiter of his own destiny

and has a free choice between effort and ease, he invariably tends to be diminished and corrupted. In every village you will find old farmers, still full of the taste for work and life, and the old retired folk, living a premature death. The comparison is illuminating.

One may deduce from this that a certain constraint, a certain *pressure* from the outer environment, is necessary to assure man's *inner* cohesion and equilibrium. When this pressure ceases to operate, the individual degenerates and goes to pieces inside, rather like the deep-sea fish which is apt to burst when relieved of the weight of the ocean. And man, in many respects, is an animal of the depths. . . . As long as he is borne along and gripped by necessity, he is comparatively happy (such inward tension, such a mustering of the inner forces which is brought about by struggle and desire, is the very first condition of happiness); but as soon as his lot becomes safe and easy he is no longer happy, he becomes a prey to inward inertia and depression. Hence the constant paradox of a humanity sighing for outward peace in times of trial, yet once this peace is obtained yearning for the inward ardour and satisfaction which those very trials had nourished and sustained. It is just in this way that lovers burn for mutual possession, and then, once they have found fulfilment in one another, pine for the ardour of their first and unassuaged love.

It is therefore this resistance of the outside world that largely creates our inner harmony and simplicity. Once this resistance is at an end, the demons of boredom and surfeit rise from below and gnaw us like white ants. We create within ourselves the warfare we no longer have to wage outside. We are like the sheaf of corn that would complain of the strands that bind it. But once these are cut the ears are scattered and all the wealth of them perishes. . . . The strands constrain the sheaf, *but they make it*.

This is no indiscriminate approval of oppression. I can distinguish between natural constraints, that arise out of cosmic and social necessity, and the artificial constraints that result from the folly and malice of human beings. It

is good for the countryman to bear the yoke of the seasons; it is not good for the worker to bear the yoke of capitalism. . . . None the less, if a man's soul breaks against obstacles that are too great for it, it breaks more irreparably, and very much sooner, against the total absence of any obstacles at all.

* * *

STRENGTH AND VIRTUE.—I once spoke with admiration of the man of the world who unhesitatingly boxes the ears of insolence and settles a drawing-room quarrel with the sword; of the "public sinner" who to sate his passion will spurn the esteem of men all his life, of the greedy and possessive old farmer, who is wholly undaunted by his neighbours' hatred and the scowls he has to meet on his daily way to work. I have even said I preferred this crude energy, this display of firm resolution in what is evil, to the little prudences and timidities of present-day virtue.

And of course I have been reproached with praising evil! But what I praise in men is not their evil, it is the strength and constancy they use in evil, qualities that re-directed might well serve the good. *Ex nihilo nihil*: active evil is richer in promise than impotent virtue. I prefer a rider who has gone astray to a cripple on the right road. The first can reach his goal if only he changes direction (conversion has no other meaning than this), but all the other can do is point to the right road. There are, unhappily, too many good people who do only this: they are mere signposts on the way to virtue. Their sense of direction is excellent, but they never move!

* * *

SPIRITUAL RICHES AND POVERTY.—A good criterion of value is the attitude a man adopts to material goods. The spiritually rich have a deep enjoyment in their use, but suffer hardly at all when deprived of them; the spiritually poor take scarcely any pleasure at all in possessing them, but suffer a very great deal at their loss. In these days of restrictions, I observe how it is precisely those who yester-

day took the truest and healthiest pleasure in material goods (a good table, a car and so on) who endure most easily the disappearance of these things. And those who used them dully and mechanically, without any real pleasure, resent most bitterly being deprived of them.

The reason is that the soul is both the faculty for enjoyment and the faculty for renewal. Those who yesterday had not the spiritual resources to enjoy these goods, now lack the spiritual resources for rising above their loss, or for creating other joys in their place. They are like machines: they take no delight in the possession of all their gears, but make a lamentable screeching once they are deprived of a few of them. . . .

* * *

CRITERION OF ARISTOCRACY.—A soul's degree of nobility is measured by its faculty for supporting freedom and power, leisure and luxury, without being degraded by any of these things; or better still, by its capacity to flourish in an atmosphere in which the mass of men are corrupted. What is poison to the vulgar, a noble soul can use for food.

* * *

THE INWARD BLANK.—I shudder to think of all the hosts of withered souls that can perceive nothing but the negative in any human situation. Are they attached to a home, to an environment, to any particular work in life? It is not the warmth and intimacy they feel, but the restriction of a prison. Are they free and masters of their destiny? It is not liberty they are aware of, but risk. When bound, they carry chains; when released, they shiver in the chill of isolation. Their emotional fate reflects the material existence of those poor wretches who divide their lives between vagrancy and prison. . . .

* * *

AIR AND WIND.—Effort, risk, pain—these things are to life what the wind is to air. The folly of a certain ideal of ease and foresight lies in not understanding that the air

which gives us life, and the wind which shakes and freezes us, are really one and the same thing. The only perfect shelter from squalls is asphyxiation.

* * *

THE DUE AND THE GIVEN.—On her fourth birthday, a little girl confided in me hopefully: "Daddy has promised that if I am very good I shall be five next year!" A child's soul clothes every event with an element of the unforeseen: it sees a grace even in the mechanical unrolling of time. The soul that is withered and old does the opposite: it mechanises the unforeseen, and when grace bursts forth, when hazard breaks into flower all about it, all it can see is something commonplace and hollow, the falling-due of a debt! It banks God's gifts as if they were dividends. . . .

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THE RIGHT OF THE STRONGEST.—Strength is the same as being: the whole romantic cult of weakness is of no avail against this law. To contest the "right of the strongest" is to deny reality. But here are a few qualifications:

1. Strength has not *every* right indiscriminately.
2. There is a qualitative scale of strengths. Every superiority, as such, is a strength. The only thing is that with finite beings strength in one domain is nearly always compensated by weakness in another. An animal is both stronger and weaker than a plant; a man both stronger and weaker than an animal. And the strength of a Beethoven is not that of a Caesar. The mistake of sentimentalism is to idealise weakness as such, and not as the compensation for strength. Therefore the right of the strongest applies to every kind of strength, not merely to brute material force. Every superiority has rights in its own domain.
3. The rights of the strongest are radically inseparable from the duties of the strongest. In this world, where none can live for himself, every right proceeds from a duty, and the extent of our duties marks the limit of our rights. Neither of these two things can survive without the other:

as soon as the strong repudiate their duties and merely exercise their rights, they quickly cease to be strong and disappear! Such is the end of all governing classes that abandon their mission in society and are thereby dislodged from their privileges. . . . For strength can be preserved only in the bracing climate of duty and sacrifice.

* * *

WORSHIP OF STRENGTH AND HATRED OF STRENGTH.—It is a mark of baseness to worship strength as such. The clouds of incense and concerts of praise that rise at the feet of the masters of the hour bear witness throughout history to the unrelieved flatness of human inferiority. But the hatred of strength as such, the cult of weakness as weakness, is something no better. Those whom the mere figure of the ruler and the conqueror fills with rancour and revolt belong to a fairly low type of humanity. In both cases there is a complete absence of any sense of the just and the unjust, of any objectivity or transcending of the ego; merely the same blind and almost animal reaction which springs from what monopolises the centre of their world, a mixture of weakness and fear. It matters little whether the reaction is one of submission or resistance: it is essentially the same in both cases. The worship of strength proceeds from a weakness that grovels, the hatred of strength from a weakness that rebels. The mouth may either lick or bite; but it is not reason or justice that prompts it to do either, and it is certainly not love. . . .

* * *

THE EVOLUTION OF WAR.—There is still contention between nations. This will not last: very soon there will be no more nations. War will then assume a more deadly form as a war between social classes. But class differences will also perish. When that happens, men will no longer need differences in order to hate each other: *they will hate each other as men*, and precisely as men they will be strangers one to another: each will hate in his neighbour the very essence

of humanity: his brother, the image of God! This will be the worst of all wars, the most inward and most venomous. For there can be no lessening of *woe* except by a lessening of *malice*: trying to fight against misfortune alone only drives it deeper in, makes it something interior. There lies the whole history of the modern world. . . .

* * *

A HOLY WAR.—Its immediate advantages are considerable. But its weakness lies in this: sooner or later the nation that wages it communicates its fiery inspiration to its opponent; generally, too, it is just when its own fire is dying down and giving place to weariness and yearning for repose. When the oppressor relaxes, the oppressed grows taut. The moment the conqueror succumbs to weariness, the conquered flares up out of sheer exasperation: enthusiasm, fanaticism, contempt for death change sides. This is the explanation of the ultimate failure of holy wars. The spirit of Valmy, lost to the Frenchmen of 1813, inspired the Germans of Fichte and the Tugendsbünde. . . .

* * *

EVIL AND ABSURDITY.—“All evil”, according to Montaigne, “comes from folly.” In other words, all evil is also falsehood: *ens et bonum et verum convertuntur*. Therefore, whatever the precautions taken, whatever the mask assumed, every unhealthy tendency, either in institutions or in the hearts of individuals, must necessarily end in logical incoherence, in an internal contradiction. This victory of the absurd is an infallible sign of the wrongness of a sentiment, idea or régime. *The logic of falsehood is illogicality*: it is a law that became blindingly evident in the course of the last war. From beginning to end, those at the head of affairs did nothing but contradict themselves: courses of action were embarked on without any foresight of their most immediate and inevitable consequences; when these consequences occurred, everyone was vastly surprised and even shocked; with doltish astonishment they contemplated the

water as it poured from the tap they had just turned on. They had never counted on that! Here was a people who for twenty years had been encouraged in a soft and easy way of life, who had acquired a horror of exertion and been drugged by incessant reliance on the community; now suddenly, without any transition, what was expected of them was heroism and the highest of all sacrifices. In just the same way, war was declared without ever a thought that one day it would have to be waged; consequently, when the flail hurtled down, those responsible were no less surprised and unprotected than a peaceful traveller attacked by bandits. One could go on giving examples. Such an ignorance of the most elementary rules of the human game, such a perfection of absurdity leaves the mind with a feeling that here is the very consummation of ineptitude: here we reach an absolute, touch the deep bedrock of human folly. This perfection in unrealism is the last symptom of a sick soul, of diseased morals and a disordered State; it always appears in the final stages of decadence. The initial absurdity, long concealed, at last bears the fruit that all men can see, and it is true enough to its roots: folly yields a hundredfold! After doing its worst and exhausting all its ruses, evil must spit out all its absurdity before it dies.

* * *

A DEFENCE OF PREJUDICE.—There are many "prejudices", from the purely logical and moral point of view quite ridiculous, which are really barriers erected by the profoundest instincts of mankind against an overwhelming torrent of evil. For instance, a superficial and perfectly abstract good-sense tells us that it is absurd to brand and condemn as a murderer the poor wretch who kills his neighbour, while offering up incense to the conqueror who sacrifices thousands of human lives to his own ambition. Of course it is; but what happens if we push the argument to its logical conclusion? There is no stopping the conqueror from making war (that would be far too difficult!), so there is nothing one could do but forgive and commend the first

murderer like the second. It is the same with other sins (sexual misconduct, or clumsily executed and petty thefts), which the world visits with excessive reprobation, while it has nothing to say against misdeeds that are morally far more serious. So what? Must we wipe the slate clean . . . ?

"If I had succeeded, I should have been worshipped", proclaimed General Malet¹ after his abortive conspiracy. So logic demands (since unhappily there is no way of punishing the successful) that we forgive and worship every unlucky conspirator as though he had succeeded—thus opening the door to utter anarchy and making life in society impossible. The equality of men before pure reason and pure conscience would have the effect of justifying every crime.

The idealist demands justice and punishment for all. This being impossible, the only alternative is justice and punishment for none. In the police reports, as well as in the evolution of public opinion, we have seen in practice the social results of such indulgence. . . . Better the poor dyke of "prejudice", however imperfect, however pitifully breeched, which stops the total inundation of evil!

We know it is the unavowed weakness of a certain type of idealism to prefer complete negation to imperfection. Justice, in this world, will always use a variety of weights and measures. But we prefer such a justice as this to the idealist's pseudo-justice, which has no use at all for either weights or measures. Justice will always go lame. But is that any reason for striking her with paralysis?



FREEDOM.—In the modern mind, freedom is confused with opposition and indetermination. To be free, for many, is to have the right to oppose and the right of not making a choice. Opposition is simply being *against* this or that; indetermination, being *for* nothing at all. The one thing

¹ Claude-François de Malet, who plotted a conspiracy against Napoleon and was shot in 1812.

involves the other, and both of them merge. Freedom resolves itself into negation.

* * *

PARALYSIS AGITANS.—What a symbolism there is in this strange complaint—as a physical image, how faithful to our present spiritual condition! A movement engendered by inertia and impotence! The sufferer is no longer capable of any living human gesture, yet all the while he goes on shaking. What a caricature of life in the midst of death: monstrous imitation of life by death!

* * *

THE MACHINE-MAN.—I met him once. A strange sadness seemed to emanate from his soul, a pale desert weariness. There was a reflection of death in his face, but a death without mystery. I begged him to tell me his secret, this creature who seemed like the irreparable incarnate. A hellish death-rattle answered: "The secret that preys on me is that I have no secret!"

IV

LAW AND LIFE

FOR our lack of heroism and sanctity it is no excuse to plead weakness. Heroes and saints are no stronger than the ordinary run of human beings: it is just that they make a different use of their strength. It is not the law of least effort that regulates our conduct, it is the law of least value. We should all be heroes if we devoted to the service of the true and the good all the strength we spend daily in the pursuit of evil and falsehood, if we did for *being* what we do so easily, so readily, for *appearance*. A saint makes no more effort, no more sacrifice for his God, than the miser does in pursuit of riches, the coquette in order to attract admiration.¹



LAW AND LIFE.—In the saint, morality comes alive. The practice of spiritual virtues is spontaneous, natural, fed

¹ The theory is well illustrated by contemporary events. Yesterday religion, morality and simple prudence all combined in enjoining certain sacrifices. It was too much to ask of us: these sacrifices did seem beyond our strength! So what happened? The force of circumstances, to-day, imposes acts of detachment a hundred times more exacting. What latent "virtues" have been revealed by the shock of events! We know the kind of husband who used to proclaim life unbearable if a too docile wife was late with his dinner, or served his coffee not hot enough for his liking. People of this sort appeared totally incapable of patience and resignation. They can't do anything about it, the indulgent would explain. Well, what was the result when tobacco ran short? How patiently, with what docility, whole herds of such people could be seen tacking on to the end of a long queue of suppliants, at the other end of which gleamed a packet of cigarettes! How yielding they had become, how resigned in the presence of this malign fatality! The virtue that neither duty nor love could evoke was everywhere now called into being—by what? By the magic wand of fairy Necessity!

with blood and sap, a sensible influence; the law is a fragrance inhaled, an elating drink. The tone of the hymn to the Law, which runs through the whole of the 118th Psalm, is completely voluptuous: "My delight is in thy bidding. . . . Never was honey so sweet to my taste. . . . Unchanging truth is thy word's fountain-head, eternal the force of thy just decrees."

In our own world we can see the opposite process. Instead of a living morality, we have a revolt against morality in the name of life, or rather (since man is an essentially moral animal) an attempt to extract a law from life, from deified life and deified sensibility, and what we get as a result are pleasures that are sensual and artificial, bloodless, forced, colourless and *abstract*—like morality in fact! The dilemma is clear enough: unless you get the law to flourish in nature, all you call nature will dry up in law; if you sacrifice duty to pleasure, because duty to you seems empty and artificial, your pleasure will soon be something still emptier, even more artificial, more "dragged in by the hair" than the very duty you ridicule. The formalism of virtue is repugnant? Take care: what lies in store for you is the formalism of vice.

The decadent seeks the absolute solely in sentiment, which endeavours to annex and usurp the spirit. Sentiment plays at being spirit, and the experiment costs dear. Over-driven, over-inflated, diverted from its normal function, it becomes something like what St Paul calls a "reprobate sense". Thanks to this aping of the spirit, it acquires all kinds of imperfections of its own. Just as in the saint (and, after a different order, in a great thinker or artist) the things of the spirit become concrete, so in the modern man it is the sensibility that *suffers from abstraction*.

* * *

By their fruit. . . . And in some cases, too, where the fruit is not visible, *by their roots*. There is always a correspondence between the fruit and the roots; but between the roots and the fruit there is always some room for error and imposture,

and it is from the roots you must judge the quality of the fruit to come.

Here is one example. Among atheists to-day you may meet with men who are perfectly healthy in body and mind; it may even happen sometimes, where human values are concerned, that the advantage lies with the atheists over the believers. Is this a cause of scandal? Then go down to the roots. Who are the ancestors of these "honourable" atheists? In the seventeenth century the atheist was *also* a kind of moral monster. Regarded simply on the human level, what were the tribe of *libertins* as compared with men like Bossuet or Pascal? On which side *then* do you find health and strength and dignity? In the human heart, clean and sound morals are bound up *naturally* with the religious sentiment; the earliest atheists were all of a degraded human type. Atheism of the thoughtful and philosophical sort, the atheism draped in wisdom and virtue, was something invented afterwards to justify immoral atheism that came from the instinct for anarchy and dissolution. I am willing to grant that, once the lie was launched, there were healthy and upright men who allowed themselves to be taken in by it, and there came into being an atheism of virtue and even of heroism. But that was not how it began! That slogan of modern thought, the cleavage between morality and religion, is merely a screen, an alibi meant to disguise, in the original atheists, the *simultaneous* rejection of religion and morals. . . .

* * *

The cross we Christians have to bear is to know where the infallible remedy lies for all the evils that prey upon the world, and at the same time see clearly that men will have none of it, but bend all their energies to an absurd and artificial aggravation of their ills. It is bad enough watching a man die of thirst in the heart of a desert, but to see him dying of thirst beside a spring of water is more than one can bear. The evil is so hopeless, the folly so unadulterated! And mankind at the moment is really in the act of dying

of thirst beside a spring: it is not *undergoing* evil, it is *creating* it. Never did potential harmony and deliverance coincide quite like this with a spontaneous cult of death and chaos. Men seem less concerned to pursue their own interests than to flee their own salvation.

* * *

THE ENEMY WITHIN.—The worst blows a man receives are those he delivers himself. All who aspire to guide and protect their fellows labour under a basic misconception if they blind themselves to the fact that what man needs first is to be defended against himself.

* * *

LIMITATIONS AND LIFE.—What we need most is a sense of our limitations and a healthy respect for them. Our limitations are inseparable from all that is deepest in us, from our resources, from our life: it is by means of them that we breathe, that we exist at all. When we overstep them, we think to enrich ourselves, but all we do is to lose our way. It is our limitations that guard our strength and our unity. We live within them as blood in the arteries; the wall of the artery is no prison to the blood and we don't open an artery to "liberate" the blood. But there is a way of emancipating humanity, politically and scientifically, that is uncommonly like the opening of an artery. . . .

* * *

Everyone for himself and God for all.—This is true to a certain extent. But an absolute "everyone for himself", a complete riddance, in this world, of love—the one reality that makes the fatherhood of God—is bound to result in the monstrous statement: God for none. The proof of this error is now becoming apparent.

* * *

Laws and sanctions. . . . "All begins with refusal and ends with giving"—so said Victor Hugo. It is the mystery of the

strait path: man sees a conflict between law and love, constraint and freedom; but he is so made that for him all true love depends upon law and all true freedom on hard constraint: the *yes* begins with a *no*. . . .

* * *

Ubi salus?—The thing that amazes me to-day in every project for reform—individual, social or international—is the ever sharper convergence of *the necessary and the impossible*.

INTELLECTUAL REALISM

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING.— There are those who profess to be teachers yet make no attempt to divine the thoughts and emotions their words may possibly evoke in their pupils; they just listen to themselves, understand what they mean and admire their own learning; they are talking for their own benefit entirely. This kind of "teaching" is just an educator's soliloquy, accompanied at best, on the part of the pupil, by a purely automatic recording.

But true teaching should be a dialogue, and the first condition for a dialogue is that it should be a speaking *to another and for the benefit of another*. Far from being a *tabula rasa*, a kind of phonographic disc, the pupil's mind already possesses an enormous capital of ideas and sentiments; therefore the new wealth the educator brings him will be completely worthless unless it has something to add to this capital already existing. To teach is to continue: the master has no useful gift to bestow unless he takes account of what the learner knows already; the sole result of his work will be to set his pupil's mind straying along all manner of paths that lead nowhere at all, because instead of leading from one thing to another, they all start from zero.

So the problem of teaching resolves itself into one of *adapting* new knowledge to knowledge already acquired; hence, along with the careful laying of stone upon stone, there is the constant necessity of testing the foundations and keeping a careful watch on the *cementing* material. In educational building it is always the mortar that is chiefly lacking! You may have plenty of fine stone, but the building may still lack unity, it may be pitifully fragile. It is instruction without education; and by education I mean

the imponderable breath of living wisdom which organically joins together the various items of instruction in just such a way as the soul informs the body. It was Edouard Herriot, I think, who defined education as "what remains when everything else has been forgotten"; but it might just as well be called: "What is lacking when everything has been learnt."

* * *

KNOWLEDGE AND RECEPTIVITY.—Ignorance, in natures of the superior sort, goes with a kind of receptivity, an intellectual virginity. This explains the extraordinary faculty, shown by some who are quite ignorant, for gathering knowledge and understanding facts: their new intelligence receives things in all their freshness and originality. Education, on the other hand, may involve mental encumbrances, or else a kind of mechanisation which makes it difficult to grasp the deep connections in new knowledge acquired. It is hard for a man of learning to accept things as they are in their individual purity: he is always apt to ticket them, to classify them with reference to what he knows already. A poor man who has few friends, and is always surprised to have any at all, receives you with special sincerity and cordiality; a rich man, who in the world of ideas is always fairly representative of his type and must always (so to speak) keep open house, receives you according to your rank and with the superficial graciousness of a man of the world who entertains freely. . . .

I would hasten to add that it is not always so. There is one kind of education which enlarges the mind, just as there is a habit of hospitality which refines and deepens the faculty for entertaining. And all education is harmful and vain which furnishes the mind *materially* by merely filling up gaps, by restricting the area of ignorance and therefore of receptivity. A day comes when there is no more room, and there sets in the worst kind of ignorance: that of the man who has nothing more to learn. True education should aim at the *deepening of ignorance*: at the creation, that is, of

a higher receptivity, sensitive to a profounder illumination of things. An education that kills this faculty for astonishment and receptivity, inherent in ignorance, is like a food that makes an end of hunger for ever. But there is only one "food" that achieves this perfectly, namely poison!

* * *

They are exceedingly rare, true intellectual vocations. Hence "education" for the masses should have as its principle and aim the spiritualising of material needs. Instead of that there is a general stampede after what might be called "intellectual" jobs. But matter is well avenged: the mind that refuses to raise matter to its own level is dragged down by matter to matter's own level. In an old countryman, rich in his ancestral traditions and in his own personal experience, putting so much of his mind into his material labours, there is infinitely more intelligence and wisdom than there is in an intellectual, stuffed with acquired knowledge, who accomplishes his mental work *materially*. . . .

* * *

CLASSICISM.—A classical work is one in which the whole is present in every part, in which the soul of the whole work makes the beauty of the detail. A masterpiece can be nothing but that. Minor works have beauty only in their details; they lack soul, the bond that exalts and makes organic, that gives to each part a note of total fulfilment.

* * *

THE CRITERION OF MEDIOCRITY.—A superior man, when honestly refuted, will accept your refutation, but integrate it into the body of his personal thought: he will not feel he is *refuted* so much as *completed* by your criticism. Criticise a mediocrity, one of your mass-produced type, and he will either remain closed against all your best arguments, or else he will admit them, but without assimilating them, without attempting to reconcile them with his previous

opinion; he will never be perturbed by the "hole" you have made in him. The worst of this kind of man is that he will house in his mind an opinion that is really a "foreign body"; he is unconscious of any need for inner coherence, for an inner synthesis. Whereas your superior man tries to make the contradictory, as far as he can, complementary, the mediocre person is willing to accept contradictories as such; not only so but he is wholly unaware of the absurdity of what he is doing. . . .

* * *

THE BENEFITS OF VULGARISATION.—In a train the other day I heard a working-man remark to his companion: "Mind you, the reason I smoke is because there is vitamin (*sic*) in tobacco." The rest of the conversation was full of similar assertions. I must own I regret the days when people believed in goblins and ghosts. These were no more real, but at least they had something of poetry and mystery. It is a poor age when pseudo-scientific mythology has replaced belief in the marvellous, when what is not true has not even the excuse of being poetic!

* * *

IDEAS.—I loathe such expressions as living, fighting or dying for an idea. No idea, as such, was ever worth this honour. A philosopher, for instance, who is worthy of the name, does not defend ideas; he defends, *in the field of his ideas*, some formula for living, an inward and total urge towards what he knows to be humanity's true goal. And just as the frontiers of a country are vastly wider than the confines of the battlefield where its fate is decided, so the spiritual reality which the philosopher defends is infinitely vaster, richer and more profound than the narrow intellectual lists where he fights.

IDEAL AND FALSEHOOD

SPRING AND UTOPIA.—New things are always tender, frail and defenceless. Everything, when it comes to birth, is extraordinarily vulnerable: the April shoots, the birds of heaven in their nests. . . . So it is with the springtimes of human history. The greater and purer the things born among the nations, the more they lack protection. All that is necessary to crush them is the very least shock from tradition or habit. And because they are so tender and easy to destroy, all that is hard and successful, fully incarnate, all that has bark and feathers, has an instinctive contempt for the new arrivals as “unreal”. What is ripe and fully grown tends naturally to be hard upon new-born life; so it is only to be expected that there should be minds that always confuse promise with mirage. Under the impression that they themselves are “realists”, they are in fact nothing else but the stiflers of spring. . . .

The problem is the more thorny because life in society is fairly littered with empty promises and false springs. Utopia dawns on the soul in the soft colouring of the dawn, in the tender gestures of April. But it is no authentic renewal we have here. Utopias are only the fevers of decadence, and they *hasten* decadence. God help us to distinguish, amid the rout of ideas, what is spring and what is falsehood, and to combat every utopia without smothering a new-birth. . . .

* * *

TRUE AND FALSE ASCENTS.—There are plenty who think they are rising higher. All they are doing is evaporating in the void. They are going up, not like mountaineers, but more like reckless glistening bubbles. The mountaineer

climbs, taking his human weight with him, all his terrestrial density. The heedless bubble loses touch with the ground, but the conqueror of mountains feels the earth under his feet, has the fragrance of it in his lungs. In human eyes the hero can often be mistaken for the coward. But this is how to distinguish them: in the soul of the true climber there is an ever-growing respect, understanding and love for what is down below.

* * *

THE THIRST FOR NOVELTY.—It is a disease and a mockery unless it is combined with a thirst to climb higher. The cage of the senses is narrow: you can turn about in it faster and faster, but you are only going round in circles. *Altitude alone creates new horizons.* He who sees furthest is he who has known how to climb the highest. The extent of the landscape open to our view depends on the height our feet have scaled.

* * *

ACTION AND CLEARSIGHTEDNESS.—The narrow-minded (as blind to the bad in their own cause as they are to the good anywhere else) are too often alone in being steadfast in action. Lucidity of view makes for a wavering of the will, clearsightedness for indecision. This is not as it should be. A knowledge of the gaps in our ideal need involve no relaxing in the service of that ideal. To devote oneself to a political cause, it is not in the least necessary to make an idol of it, to confer on it a kind of divine perfection and see nothing elsewhere but what is bad and entirely negative. It is possible to die for a cause without supposing it to be perfect: it is enough to believe it the best—or the least bad. Unlike the religious impulse, political wisdom is not in pursuit of the absolute good, but quite a relative good—not to say a lesser evil.

* * *

THE IDENTITY OF CONTRARIES.—Is anarchy preferable to tyranny, false asceticism to false mysticism, oppression to

revolt . . . ? In practice there is no choosing: they are all aspects of the same refusal of health and unity, *and each leads to the other*. It is possible, for instance, to regard tyranny as a lesser evil than anarchy, but this slender advantage disappears at once when it is realised that tyranny automatically begets anarchy. As well choose between the two extreme points of a pendulum's oscillation: hardly is the choice made when the whole weight of the pendulum carries it over to the opposite point.



PURITY AND INDIGNATION.—What is so nauseating, in a book (for instance) like Michelet's *Le Prêtre*, is not the denunciation of things that are wrong (we know such things must be), it is the feeling that they are being denounced from the same level as themselves. This can be seen from the whole tone of the book; its "generous" indignation is redolent itself of perversity and lust. There are certain evils that can be discussed with justice only when they are judged from a superior standpoint; when, in the soul of him who condemns, the evil has been not only vanquished but transcended. What revolts me in a certain kind of spiteful indignation is seeing that the judge differs from the culprit only in outward behaviour: the inner level, the quality of soul, is very similar. To judge with integrity it is not enough to have one's hands bound in the presence of evil, the heart itself must be delivered from it. That, ultimately, is why we are bidden to leave judgement to God. . . .



REALISM.—The worst realities I find less hateful than false ideals. For me, the opposite to the real is not the ideal but the false.



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