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Mr Robertson wears his erudition lightly, but underlying the application of his courageous philosophy to all aspects of life is a profound scholarship and a warm humanity. This is a " must book " for all who are seriously concerned about the crisis through which the world is passing. It is the Rationalist's *vade mecum.*

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RATIONALISM

IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

By

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

WATTS & CO

JOHNSON'S COURT · FLEET STREET · LONDON EC4

First published 1954

Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay and Company Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk, and published by C. A. Watts and Co Ltd 5 and 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, EC4

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I AM indebted to C. A. Watts and Co Ltd, for permission to reprint parts of Chapters III and XI which have appeared in *The Rationalist Annual*, and the whole of Chapters V, VII, X, and XXI, which have appeared in *The Literary Guide*. I am indebted to South Place Ethical Society for permission to reprint those parts of Chapter XI which have appeared in *The Monthly Record*.

The rest of the book represents the substance of lectures given at Sunday morning meetings of South Place Ethical Society.

PART I

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER I

EVOLUTION AND ETHICS

ETHICS is the study of the behaviour of human beings in society. Evolution is a theory, rendered increasingly probable by all the available evidence, of the origin of the different forms of life, among which human societies are included. There is therefore no reason why evolution and ethics should be antagonistic. The facts of social life, with which ethics deals, are among the data which evolutionary theory has to take into account. Only a very crude reasoner would argue that because biology shows the different forms of life to have evolved by natural selection in the struggle for existence, we ought therefore to revert to the law of the jungle; just as only a very crude reasoner would argue that because we live in a society that recognizes rights and duties, the theory of the origin of species by natural selection is immoral and should be suppressed. The two are perfectly compatible.

T. H. Huxley, in his Romanes lecture on "Evolution and Ethics," makes it clear that he regards morality as having an evolutionary origin. It is true that in the same lecture he opposes the ethical process to the cosmic process. But there is no inconsistency in this, except to those who assume dogmatically that cause and effect must always be alike—an assumption refuted over and over again in everyday experience and in the laboratory. It is precisely because man has to struggle for existence, and because he is poorly equipped with the teeth and claws that aid other species in the struggle, that he has evolved the practice of mutual aid and loyalty to the group, to which practice we give the name of morality.

So much is common ground to all evolutionary thinkers. Sir Arthur Keith adds a rider to this proposition which does not really follow from it. According to him the group or, as he puts it, the tribe or State, to which loyalty is due, is something rigid, static, and final. No tribe ever voluntarily unites with another tribe. If, in

the course of history, tribes have united, it has been by compulsion. This is because nature (which Sir Arthur personifies and spells with a big "N") has entrusted each tribe with a special assortment of genes which must not be contaminated by mixture. To this end nature has implanted in man an instinctive enmity to everyone not of his tribe. It is therefore unscientific and futile to speak of morality between States. Every State is the natural enemy of every other. While morality within the nation is compatible with evolution, morality among nations is a dream doomed by nature herself to eternal frustration.

It seems to me that to formulate the purposes of nature is to cease to be a scientist and become a dogmatist. I know nothing of the purposes of nature, but something of the purposes of men and women. Men and women tend, no doubt, to be parochial in their interests and sympathies and to distrust foreigners, especially if they look odd and speak a strange language. But this has nothing to do with racial purity. In the first place, race and nationality are not the same. The whole history of civilization is a history of racial intermixture. Ever since the days of Helen of Troy the prerogative of barbaric conquerors has been to carry off and breed from the women of the conquered. That does not look as if conquering tribes (to say nothing of nature) cared much about keeping their genes uncontaminated. There is not a nation of any size in the world today which is racially pure; and the average man and woman would care nothing about racial purity unless education and propaganda put the idea into their heads. In the second place, the phenomena of language, especially the evolution of great linguistic families like the Aryan, the Semitic, or the Ural-Altaic, extending over many different tribes and nations, prove that there must have been social intercourse between tribes from early times, and discredit any theory of natural and inevitable enmity between tribe and tribe. Such facts refute the idea that nature's purpose (if we can credit her with any purpose) is to maintain the integrity of the tribal stock.

If we are to estimate aright the bearing of evolution on ethics, we must begin by recognizing the fact that the tribe, or community of common racial descent, is by no means the only kind of human organization, and today by no means the most important. "Tribe," "nation," "State," and "community" are not convertible terms. The primitive tribes of Europe had been melted down in the crucible of the Roman Empire long before nations in the modern sense emerged. Between the disappearance of the primitive tribe and the emergence of the modern nation came a time

when the chief claimant to men's loyalty was neither of these, but the religious community or Church. In the modern world ideology or class interest—" the reformed religion," " civil and religious liberty," " the solidarity of labour "—has often cut across frontiers, and not always ineffectually. In every civilization there have been situations in which men and women have been impelled by motives which they have felt to be more fundamental than the law of the State. In the words of Sophocles' Antigone:

> Not now or yesterday they have their being,
> But everlastingly, and none can tell
> The hour that saw their birth.

We need not go as far as this. There is no reason to think that any law is everlasting. But it is incumbent on evolutionary theory to account not only for the morality that takes the form of tribal loyalty, but also for the morality that on occasion overrides it. With the coming of civilization, tribal organization is broken up, personal or individual purposes in life become possible, and in course of time " universalist " ideologies—Stoicism, Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism—make their appearance. Evolution has to account for this development. It is no use to say: " Nature commands us to love only our countrymen and to hate every other nation; and if you don't, you are not playing the game." The fact remains that men and women have never played the game strictly according to rule, and that the more intelligent of us are increasingly disinclined to do so and are increasingly convinced that playing the game according to the above rule will lead not to survival, but to destruction.

If it is true, as evolution teaches, that every living thing struggles for survival, that variations conducive to survival win through in the struggle for existence, and that man's moral and intellectual qualities, no less than his physical characteristics, have originated in this way, we must see in the emergence of universalist ideologies a variation which, to put it mildly, is more conducive to the survival of mankind than tribal mentality, and put our money on it accordingly. There is no rule of the game dooming us to commit suicide. Evolution, which produced man from an animal stock, has also produced civilization from savagery, science from magic and superstition, and the urge to human solidarity from tribal loyalty, sectarian fanaticism, and national patriotism. It is our business not to lie down tamely before an idol labelled " Nature " and let it crush us, but to use the intelligence which evolution has given us to understand its processes and control them for our good.

CHAPTER II

THE ETHICS OF BELIEF

In 1877 William Kingdon Clifford, Professor of Applied Mathematics at University College, London, and one of the most *brilliant Rationalist* philosophers of his day, contributed to the *Contemporary Review* an article under this title, later included in his collected lectures and essays. In it Clifford puts, with an almost Puritan austerity, his view of the ethics of belief. He starts by putting the case of a shipowner who sends an unseaworthy ship to sea. He may believe the ship to be seaworthy, but if she sinks, he is nevertheless guilty. "He had no right to believe" in the seaworthiness of the ship "on such evidence as was before him." But suppose that the ship is sound and makes her voyage safely. Even then, says Clifford, the shipowner is guilty if he believes in her seaworthiness on insufficient evidence. Even if a belief is true, to hold it on insufficient evidence is morally wrong. For, argues Clifford, belief is not a private matter which concerns ourselves alone. Every belief may lead to action affecting our fellows. Therefore it is our duty to believe only truths "established by long experience" and "free and fearless questioning." To believe on insufficient evidence may in a given case do no great harm, but it does at least this harm, "that I make myself credulous." Consequently, in Clifford's words, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

This is a difficult pill to swallow. Such a doctrine seems, as Wordsworth puts it, "too bright and good for human nature's daily food." Robert Browning is said to have defined a Liberal as one who, if by lifting a finger he could destroy every false belief in the world, would *not* lift his finger. Evidently Clifford did not agree with Browning. And in theory I see no escape from Clifford's conclusion. There is no denying that any belief we hold, however trivial, may in unforeseen circumstances lead to action which may affect our children's children, and that any yielding to credulity to that extent makes us worse citizens.

The difficulty is that life is too short and the need of action usually too urgent to admit of the rigorous scepticism prescribed by Clifford. He himself imagines the case of a busy man who has no time to study certain questions or the relevant arguments. He rather unkindly shuts up this imaginary objector by saying: "Then he should have no time to believe." But later he admits that there are many cases in which we have to act on probabilities. He might

have gone further and said that all of us act on probabilities every day of our lives. This was pointed out long before by David Hume when he said that, although the idea of cause and effect arises only from association of ideas, it would be ridiculous to doubt that the sun will rise tomorrow or that all men are mortal. It is obvious that by far the greater part of our beliefs about the world depend not on our own senses or our own reasoning, but on the authority of others, and that in accepting the authority of others we always take a chance. Those others may lie or be ignorant. Clifford devotes part of his essay to this question of authority. He points out that the moral character of a witness is no guarantee that he is telling the truth; he may be deceived, or he may make statements which neither he nor any man is able to verify. This is particularly the case with founders or propagators of religions. We are right to believe a man of science when he tells us something about the subject-matter of his science which he is in a position to verify and which we, too, should be in a position to verify if we understood the methods of his science. But we are wrong to believe even a man of science when he trespasses beyond the bounds of verifiable fact and professes to tell us how the universe began or will end, or the nature of the being who created it. Even the phrase " the being who created it," begs three questions in five words: a beginning of the universe, a First Cause, and a personal Creator.

Since Clifford's time his maxim that it is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence has been widely challenged. Friedrich Nietzsche was the pioneer and in his day the frankest exponent of the " flight from reason." He roundly denied what Clifford affirmed. For Nietzsche " the falseness of an opinion " is no " objection to it," and the greatest falsehoods (Christianity, for example) are commendable if they keep the " lowest " of mankind satisfied with their hard lot in life. (It is not only Marxists who think religion the opium of the people.) After Nietzsche came Arthur Balfour, who argued that since the beliefs of common sense and science (belief in the external world, for example) are logically indemonstrable, the beliefs of religion may be held in spite of their indemonstrability; and William James with his " will to believe "; and the whole crew of Pragmatists, Barthians, Existentialists, and what-not, all repudiating any " ethics of belief " and claiming the right to take a chance with any belief which suits them. It would be a mistake to argue with people who deny the force of argument.

The fact is that the ethics of belief expounded by Clifford are the ethics of the mathematical lecture-room and the scientific laboratory. They are not and have never been the ethics of everyday life. In

the lecture-room or the laboratory all present are engaged in a co-operative enterprise—that of adding to their knowledge. That being presupposed, Clifford's ethic naturally follows. But in the outside world, I regret to say, we are not engaged in a co-operative enterprise. We are engaged in a struggle for existence among groups; and in the struggle for existence the propagation of falsehood is a weapon like any other.

We begin to find this out quite early in life. It is knocked into us at school that there are things which it is our duty to believe—for example, the articles of the Christian faith, and that our country is better than all other countries, and our school better than all other schools. It is also knocked into us that it is our duty on occasion to lie—for example, to shield a schoolfellow in a scrape—always provided that we are not found out! And this schoolboy ethic is carried on into the world of adult life. Public opinion (I mean the opinion which is moulded and reflected by the newspapers) holds that there are certain things which it is our duty to believe. The articles of the Christian faith are still publicly taken for granted. Newspapers allot a weekly half-column to religious platitudes; the BBC treats them as axiomatic; hardly an MP dare go today as far as Bradlaugh went seventy years ago. "As in heaven, so on earth": the heavenly mythology of the creeds has an exact counterpart in the earthly mythology of a unique monarch, a unique country, and a unique history; even the devil has his counterpart in the enemy of today or tomorrow, who is invariably much more devilish than the quite different enemy of yesterday and the day before. All this it is our duty to believe, even if in the process we make a meal of our beliefs of ten years ago. Did Clifford say it was "wrong to believe anything upon insufficient evidence"? Pity his simplicity! How did he think the world was run?

There comes a breaking-point. As Carlyle put it in his mystical fashion: "Where thou findest a lie that is oppressing thee, extinguish it. Lies exist only to be extinguished; they wait and cry earnestly for extinction." Translated into more realistic language, this means that, while we all lie now and then, none of us likes being lied to, and when we find that we have been lied to, we are angry. Especially are we angry if the liars are those whom we have been taught to honour as better and wiser men than we. I was born and bred in that school of nineteenth-century imperialism whose prophet was Kipling and whose heroes were Joseph Chamberlain and Rhodes. I thought my way out of it early; but it was some time before I could believe that the heroes of my boyhood were not only mistaken, but dishonest into the bargain. Then one day I read a

speech by Chamberlain in which he attacked Labour MPs as men who had not done an honest day's work in their lives. I threw down the paper in anger. Nothing has done so much to discredit party politics as the discovery, made by millions in different ways, that politicians—not only the small fry, but party leaders—have a lower standard of truth than we exact, and ourselves respect, in private life.

This dislike of lying is the root of Rationalism. Like all ethics, it begins in self-interest: we dislike being lied to as we dislike being assaulted, robbed, or swindled. Not being Robinson Crusoes, but members of one another, we can live together only by agreeing that lying, like other anti-social acts, is in general to be avoided. Living as we do in an imperfectly organized world, we find that the rule has many exceptions. Lies are told every day in business, in political speeches, in newspapers, in broadcasts, in propaganda generally. But we are sufficiently social animals not to like it. Unfortunately until the world is changed—until the struggle for existence between class and class, nation and nation, creed and creed gives place to a co-operative struggle against nature—we shall have to lump it. In the meantime we can try not to be taken in by it more than we can help. We are so placed that we derive our daily knowledge of the world from channels coloured by propaganda. But at least we can know that it *is* propaganda. We can take two papers of opposite tendency. We can compare their versions of the same event—their agreements and discrepancies. We can note any admissions which (perhaps unintentionally) go against the main tendency of each. We shall probably not change sides on that account, but we shall fulfil the first duty of a Rationalist, which is not to be fooled, and we shall come as near to Clifford's counsel of perfection as in a world of struggle it is possible to come.

CHAPTER III

GROUNDS FOR DISBELIEF IN GOD

WHAT grounds are there for belief in God? If the grounds for belief in a fact are weak, that very weakness is a ground for disbelief in that fact. Too many disputants assume that an atheist is a man who undertakes to prove the non-existence of God. Of course I cannot prove a negative. I can only show that the reasons

urged for belief are bad. If the grounds for believing that Bacon wrote Shakespeare are weak, that is a good reason for believing that Bacon did not write Shakespeare. Similarly, if the grounds for theism are found to be weak, that is itself a good reason for atheism.

First, let us define our terms. The term " God " needs definition; for it does not mean the same to everybody. The term " God " meant one thing to an ancient Greek consulting the oracle of Delphi. It meant another thing to the Jewish prophet who wrote Isaiah xl ff. It meant yet another thing to Spinoza. The ancient Greek and the ancient Jew both meant by God a person, mightier than man, who revealed himself to man. But to the Greek, " God " was a general term applicable to many individuals: above Apollo was Zeus, and above Zeus was Fate. A Greek god, therefore, was not almighty: his might was limited by another god's might. To the Jew, on the other hand, " God " was a singular term applicable in strictness only to one. " Before me," says the Isaianic prophet in the name of Jahveh, " there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I am the first and the last; and beside me there is no God." When we turn from the ancient Greek and the ancient Jew to Spinoza, we find a third conception. Spinoza defines God as " a being absolutely infinite " or, alternatively, as " a substance consisting of infinite attributes." The God of Spinoza, therefore, is by definition all-inclusive: he is the whole of what is, and there is nothing real apart from him. This means that, though Spinoza verbally uses the language of the prophets—" God is one alone," and " there is none like him "—he is really affirming a very different doctrine, namely pantheism or the doctrine that God is all. By defining God as the totality of being, Spinoza deprives the word " God " of any specific meaning. Long ago Aristotle told us that mere existence is not the essence of anything; or, as Hegel put it, pure being is not-being. Pantheism is atheism grown circumspect.

For the purposes, therefore, of this discussion I propose to put entirely aside the God of Spinoza, Hegel, and other pantheists. For the existence of God to be worth discussing, the term must have a specific meaning—it must denote not all being, but one kind of being as distinguished from others. I mean, therefore, by God a being other than the universe. Further, I propose to rule polytheism out of court. I shall confine my criticism to the doctrine of the Jewish prophets, which has descended from them to the Christian Church—the doctrine that there is one God, the almighty and eternal creator of the universe, who reveals himself to man and takes sides in human affairs. The question is whether there is any

stronger ground for belief in this God than in Zeus or Apollo, whom we have agreed to relegate to the museum of myths.

I. I will begin by asking why most of us in fact either believe or once believed in a God of this kind. I will answer for myself, and I think that in doing so I shall answer for most of us. I believed in God at one time because my parents and teachers, who were older and therefore presumably wiser than I, had told me about him. In reality they had no more first-hand knowledge on the subject than I had. They, like me, believed in God because they had been told about him in their impressionable years by their parents and teachers. In other words, belief in God, except in the case of those philosophers who think out proofs for themselves, and of others who follow and adopt their reasoning, rests on tradition—exactly the ground on which the ancient Greek rested his belief in Zeus or Apollo. That tradition, among Christians, rests on an authority accepted as infallible—either, as among Protestant Fundamentalists, on the Bible accepted as the word of God or, as among Catholics, on the Church conceived as a society founded by God and divinely guaranteed against error in matters of faith.

The trouble with Fundamentalism is that it hangs in the air. The Bible does not argue with us, it tells us; and if we do not believe the story, there is an end of discussion. Since most of us have not the gift of faith, we need a proof of the existence of God. Doubtless it is this which has led the Roman Catholic Church to declare it heresy to say that the existence of God cannot be proved by reason. So we come to the proofs of the philosophers.

II. I shall not spend much time on the famous ontological proof —that is to say, the argument that, because I am imperfect and yet have an idea of perfection, therefore a perfect being exists; nor on its stable-companion, the cosmological proof—that is to say, the argument that, since the world exists, and an effect must have a cause, therefore a first cause exists. These arguments, even if we grant their validity, are insufficient to prove the existence of God in the sense in which I am using the word. They carry us no further than the pantheism of Spinoza. Even if we accept the conclusion of some astronomers that the universe originated a few thousand million years ago in the explosion of a primeval atom, it does not follow that God exploded that atom. To say *that* is to assume that the existence of God is already known by other means. And as a matter of fact this kind of proof was blown sky-high by David Hume when he pointed out that to demand a cause for the universe other than the universe itself was to commit the error of the Indian who supposed the universe to rest on an elephant, and the elephant

on a tortoise; by Immanuel Kant when he pointed out that the *concept of causation held* good only as between one phenomenon and another, and could not be significantly applied to the totality of phenomena; and by William Kingdon Clifford when he pointed out that scientific speculations about the beginning of the universe assumed the exact and absolute truth of the known laws of geometry and mechanics, which is to assume something we know nothing about.

III. The argument from design is worth a longer examination. This argument—described by Kant as " the oldest, the clearest and that most in conformity with the common reason of humanity "—is used by St Paul in Romans i. " The invisible things " of God are " clearly seen through the things that are made." It reached its apogee in the writings of eighteenth century divines, of whom Paley is the best known. According to this argument the world exhibits such a conformity of means to ends, such purposive arrangement in all its parts, that we are obliged to infer an almighty designer. To reject this inference, say the exponents of this argument, would be as absurd as to attribute a house, a ship, or a watch to merely natural causes, or the plays of Shakespeare to a legion of monkeys tapping at random on typewriters.

This argument is dealt with destructively by Hume. True, he says, when we see a house or other artefact, we infer that it had a builder, because constant experience has assured us that houses have builders. But is the universe so like a house that we must infer that it, too, had a designer? Do we know so much about matter that we can say dogmatically that it could not have originated the degrees of order and arrangement which we observe in the universe? These considerations, says Hume, do not exclude the hypothesis of a God, but they destroy its cogency and leave the possibilities fifty-fifty. Yet suppose, urges Hume, that we allow the argument from design, what shall we infer from it as to the character of the designer? Infinite power, doubtless; but if so, then not infinite goodness too. " Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil? " [1] And if it is urged, says Hume, that the conundrum of evil is beyond the wit of man to solve, be it so; but in that case we must equally admit our incapacity to infer the character of the first cause from phenomena. If we have no right to deny that a good God can have permitted evil, we have equally no right

[1] *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part X.

to affirm in the first place that there is a good God. The argument from human limitations cuts both ways. In face of the mutual destruction which reigns in the organic world and the preponderance of pain over pleasure, the correct verdict, according to Hume, is "not proven." The most probable hypothesis is that the power behind phenomena is as devoid of goodness as of malice—"a blind Nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children." [1]

Kant, as we should expect, is more friendly than Hume to the argument from design, but he, too, finds it inadequate. "This proof can at most demonstrate the existence of an *architect of the world*, whose efforts are limited by the capabilities of the material with which he works, but not of a *creator of the world*, to whom all things are subject." [2] This idea of a limited God has appealed to certain later thinkers, including J. S. Mill and, in one phase of his career, H. G. Wells; but orthodox thinkers do well to be shy of it. A limited power struggling with an adverse background falls short of what the plain man understands by God.

Since the time of Hume and Kant the demonstration by Darwin and his successors of the origin of species by natural selection of favourable variations or mutations in the struggle for existence has immensely enhanced the force of Hume's criticism of the argument from design. In the words of Gilbert Murray, "the majestic order which reigns, or seems to reign, among the stars is matched by a brutal conflict and a chaos of jarring purposes in the realms of those sciences which deal with life." That the problem of evil is a logically insuperable barrier to theism has been evident indeed since the time of Epicurus.

During the centuries of Christian ascendancy it was usual to meet this difficulty by the doctrine of the Fall of Man. Because our first parents wilfully disobeyed God, pain and death entered a previously perfect world. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Today it is usual to treat this story as an allegory. But allegory or history, its difficulties either way are enormous. In the first place, a Fall presupposes an original state of innocency. But, revelation apart, there is not a jot of evidence for an original state of innocency. There is cumulative evidence that man was evolved from an animal ancestry. At what point in evolution are we to believe that man acquired a soul and with it the

[1] *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part XI.
[2] *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. J. M. D. Meiklejohn, p. 385.

debatable benefit of "freedom"? In the second place, we are told that an almighty and all-knowing creator endowed one of his creatures with "freedom" to disobey him. But, knowing all, God must have known the use which his creatures would make of their "freedom." Foreseeing the Fall, as I suppose it will be admitted he did, God, we learn, nevertheless resented and punished it by visiting its consequences on man to the thirty thousandth and forty thousandth generation, just as if he had not foreseen it, or as if the act of a creature could in any significant sense wrong or harm an infinite creator! How human, all too human—how palpably made in the image of man, and not man at his most rational—is the God of Genesis, however interpreted, and of any theology which accepts either literally or allegorically the Genesis story!

Finally, the record of the rocks and fossils has shown that living species appeared and disappeared, that they struggled for existence, that nature prodigally spawned life and as prodigally destroyed it for millions upon millions of years before man existed and could disobey God. And all those living species, all that struggle, all that prodigal spawning and destroying, the very teeth and claws with which they struggled, the very nerves and brains with which they suffered for those millions upon millions of years were designed—we are asked to believe—by an almighty and beneficent creator. Well, I do not believe it.

For the purpose of this argument I assume that we mean by a good person one who prevents evil so far as he is able. I further assume that the unpleasant features of the world as we know it *are* evil. The theist may challenge these assumptions. He may ask how we know that pain, disease, famine, earthquakes, and war are evil; how we can be certain that these apparent evils are not necessary ingredients in a good world, or necessary means to a good end. Or he may deny that a good being is by definition bound to prevent evil and, if almighty, to prevent it altogether. This is the line taken by well-known theists like the late A. E. Taylor and Mr C. S. Lewis. Benevolence, argues Taylor, does not mean providing a good time for everybody. Some people, sneers Mr Lewis, seem to want not a Father in heaven, but a grandfather in heaven. And there is the stock Christian argument that God, although almighty and all-good, is not responsible for evil; that man's abuse of his freedom is responsible; and that man had to be endowed with freedom to do evil, because a world of free agents is better than a world of automata.

All these apologetics can be met. To the question how we know that pain and so forth are evil, we may answer that it is a matter of

definition. Most of us mean by evil just such things as that. The Christian himself accepts the definition when it suits him: he claims that the founder of his religion "went about doing good," meaning that he relieved pain and disease, which by implication are evils. To the question how we know that these evils are not means to an overriding good, the answer is that means and ends exist only for finite beings like ourselves, whose action is limited by factors which we did not create. To an almighty being, limited by nothing, the idea of means and ends—of doing *this* as the only way to get *that*—is inapplicable. To use the words "means and ends" of such a being is to use the language of space and time about one who is spaceless and timeless. To the argument that God permits evil in order to leave his creatures free choice, the answer is that a human father who left the fire unguarded, in order that his children might be free to burn themselves or not, would be justly prosecuted for negligence. Moreover, assuming an almighty and all-knowing God, the very word "freedom" is meaningless; for whatever will be is foreknown by God and therefore predestined to happen.

IV. A further ground for rejecting theism lies in the nature of human knowledge. We are finite beings. Our mental faculties are adapted to the conditions in which we live. In the words of John Locke, "the candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our purposes." But those purposes do not include the solution of the riddle of the universe. Probability is the guide of life. In everyday matters repeated experience can raise probability to practical certainty: as Hume says, "one would appear ridiculous, who would say, that 'tis only probable the sun will rise tomorrow, or that all men must die." We cannot live at all without assuming a natural order of events; and therefore all—even the idealist and sceptic who affect to deny or doubt it—in practice show that they believe in a natural order. But we can live without assuming a supernatural order. The avenues of knowledge at our disposal reveal nothing, and in the nature of the case can reveal nothing of the "absolute," the "whole," the "perfect," the "transcendent," and the other pseudo-entities wielded by metaphysicians and theologians for the confusion of the profane. The subject-matter of our knowledge is either empirical (such stuff as we can observe or infer from what we observe, such stuff as we can make verifiable predictions about) or analytical (identities or differences of symbols). With such subject-matter we are equipped to cope. With such conundrums as the beginning (if any) or end (if any) of the cosmic process we are not equipped to cope. When we try to cope with them, the affirmations which we make are in language which,

strictly examined, means nothing. How should it mean anything? Language was evolved to deal with the familiar world in which we walk and talk and live and die. To suppose a spaceless, timeless, immaterial world is to suppose a world of which we can say nothing significant. Its attributes are all negations.

This is proved by the fact that when we try to say anything positive about the supernatural world, we inevitably slip into materialistic and anthropomorphic language. We are told, for example, that God is our Father and that God is good. Now the words "father" and "good" mean something in the familiar world of space and time. A good father is one who does his duty by his children—who adopts appropriate means to make them happy and useful in the world as he finds it. But what can the words "good" and "father" mean when applied to a timeless being? We are told that God is angry with sinners. The word "anger" means something in the world of time, where we are up against things which pain or frustrate us. What can it mean when predicted of a timeless being? Exactly nothing. Of such a being every positive predicate is meaningless.

I would not go so far as to say with the Logical Positivists that all theological propositions are unmeaning. Whether they have meaning or not depends on the social *milieu* in which they are affirmed. As long as the theology of the philosopher remains purely philosophic, I should say that it is meaningless. But of course no theology is purely philosophic. It has to be translated into the language of every day. Then it acquires meaning, but at the same time becomes untrue. As long as God remains the God of the philosophers, spaceless, timeless, without body, parts, or passions, nothing affirmed of him is significant. When he ceases to be the God of the philosophers and becomes, as Pascal puts it, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then he enters space and time. Heaven is his throne and earth his footstool. He is "a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth": he "will by no means clear the guilty." [1] But, as Hume points out, such attributes as resentment, love, approbation, blame and pity—all those attributes, in short, which (if I may be allowed the expression) make the God of the Bible interesting to us—implicitly negate omnipotence. They "have a plain reference to the state and situation of man, and are calculated for preserving the existence, and promoting the activity of such a being in such circumstances." [2] They are, in a word, anthropomorphic. To transfer

[1] Exod. xxxiv, 6–7. [2] Hume, *op. cit.*, Part III.

them to a being who by hypothesis is spaceless, timeless, and passionless is a contradiction in terms—a string of words without significance; and every attempt which I have read to render such a transfer intelligible turns out on inspection to be a mere piling of words on words.

All theoretical proofs, then, of the existence of God break down. Hume and Kant demonstrated it; and Karl Barth, perhaps the most famous living Protestant theologian, admits it. For Barth, God has nothing to do with the "absolute" of philosophers: he is known by revelation or not at all. Even the Gospel story, even the resurrection of Christ is known only so and not otherwise. Considered as history, says Barth in a remarkable passage, the resurrection of Christ is "as doubtful as all earthly facts are: he might, in fact, have been stolen, he might only have appeared to be dead." The resurrection "is only to be grasped in the category of revelation and in none other." [1] And for Barth, the resurrection—itself known by faith—is the thing on which everything else hangs, including faith in God. If we have faith, the question is settled: faith dispenses with any proof. If we have not faith—well, I gather from Barth that all that is wrong with the world is due to just that fact.

V. I now come to the question whether any reason exists, independent of metaphysics and independent of the laws of evidence, for belief in a God whom we cannot know. According to Kant such a reason exists. Despite the limitations of speculative reason, practical reason tells us that we have duties. Now the idea of duty, according to Kant, can have no possible basis in the world of space and time. There we see only brute facts operating according to the laws of nature. But the sense of duty informs us what we ought to do, whether in fact we do it or not. If this sense is not illusory, we are obliged, says Kant, to assume the existence of God, though no theoretical argument can prove it. Kant thus invokes practice to correct the scepticism induced by theory.

But does Kant really achieve what he sets out to achieve? According to him freedom is possible only if we are really spaceless and timeless beings; for only on that condition can our acts be independent of natural law. But in reference to spaceless and timeless beings what meaning can attach to the words "freedom" and "duty"? Take away space and time, and no universe, in any intelligible sense, is left. In fleeing from space and time to find freedom, Kant turns his back on all that gives meaning to the word "freedom." Far from the idea of duty having no basis in the world

[1] *The Resurrection of the Dead.*

of space and time, it has no possible basis anywhere else. It has its basis in the fact that man is by nature not an isolated individual, but a social animal.

This is so plain a fact that it escapes the notice of theologians and metaphysicians who try to solve these questions in the detachment of their studies rather than in the give-and-take of the workaday world. We are constantly told that man is a fallen creature, that by himself he is incapable of doing the right thing, and that he cannot even begin to do the right thing without the grace of God. Never, surely, was a question more brazenly begged. The procedure seems to be this. You attribute all the evil in the world to man. As there is certainly plenty of evil in the world, you have no difficulty in thereby proving man severally and collectively to be an unredeemed monster of iniquity. Such an unredeemed monster, plainly, can be redeemed only by something other than himself. You postulate God in order to redeem man. And when your attention is drawn to the fact that your unredeemed monster in fact quite often behaves decently, co-operates with his fellows, stands up against oppression, cherishes ideals, lays down his life for his friends, and, in Thomas Hardy's words, plods on "through hoodwinkings to light," you reply that this is a transformation wrought by the grace of God. You debit man with the evil, but you refuse to credit him with the good. This, I submit, is intellectual thimble-rigging.

Let us look at the case honestly. Man is an animal engaged, like all living things, in a struggle for existence, but differentiated from others by his erect posture, by his use of tools, by his large and convoluted brain, by his ability to articulate, generalize, and reason, and by his consequent capacity for complex social life. Without these characteristics—these mutations special to himself—man, with his long gestation, longer immaturity, and poor array of nails and teeth, could not have survived in the struggle. What teeth and claws are to the carnivora, tools, brain-power, and mutual aid are to man—mutual aid primarily between man and man, but also between man and dog or man and horse. Man, ever since he was man, has lived in some kind of community—horde, tribe, city, church, nation, as the case may be. It is therefore false to say that the idea of duty is something superposed from a spaceless and timeless world on a creature naturally anti-social. It is part of man's evolutionary heritage, an inseparable condition of any social life, and therefore of man's survival as a species.

VI. The theist and the rationalist agree in affirming the dependence of man, as an individual, on something greater than himself and

able to command him for his good and to punish him if he disobeys. We disagree as to what this something is. For the theist this something-greater-than-ourselves is God. For the rationalist it is some kind of community in which we live and move and have our being. That is the divergence between us; and as it happens, we are able to say how the misunderstanding originated. The researches of scholars like Robertson Smith, Frazer, Durkheim, Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, and others have thrown a flood of light on primitive religion. For detailed exposition I must refer to the works of these authors. Here I can give only a condensation. We know that ancient religion was everywhere an affair of the community; that it had to do with such things as fruitful seasons, increase of livestock, and success in war; that it consisted essentially of magic rites believed to further these benefits; that myth after myth in ancient religion can be shown to radiate from such primitive rites—the communal meal, death and resurrection, and so on. Man at this stage knows very well that he depends on something bigger than himself, but he has not reached the stage of abstract thinking: not all of us are at home in it even yet. The primitive does not use abstract words like society, community, or nature. He personifies this something-bigger-than-himself as a god, *el*, the strong one, *theos*, the magician (so Gilbert Murray interprets it), or the like. The ancient god is a reflection or personification of the community which invokes him. "The tribe to primitive man," says Gilbert Murray, "is not a mere group of human beings. It is his whole world. The savage who is breaking the laws of his tribe has all his world—totems, tabus, earth, sky and all—against him. He cannot be at peace with God." [1]

Now of course it is a long way from this primitive religion to the God of the Jewish prophets, the Pauline Epistles, or the Nicene Creed. But it is a way on which the steps can be traced. Man changes; and his theology changes with him. Primitive society gives place to civilization, to increasing mastery over nature, to the exploitation of man by man, to individualism and abstract thinking. *Pari passu* with this development the gods of different groups coalesce into a hierarchy. But by this time there is no longer a homogeneous community; and the gods, having originated as the projections of homogeneous communities, no longer command unreflecting and whole-hearted belief. From genuine myths or projections of group-life the gods degenerate into idols made with hands, manipulated by priests to exact offerings from the people, or into literary

[1] *Five Stages of Greek Religion.*

figures like the Olympians, about whom sceptical poets spin picturesque, artificial, and unedifying yarns. And in the end thinking men are revolted by these gimcrack gods, and turn and rend them, as the philosophers did in ancient Greece, or as the later Jewish prophets and psalmists did when they mocked the graven images made by goldsmiths and cunning workmen.

But what is to take the place of these gods? For man still depends on something greater than himself: indeed, in the complex civilizations which have now ousted primitive society, the isolated individual is more helpless than ever. Nor does the community in its old form help. For, at the stage I am discussing, myriads of people have no effective community. Civilization has treated them badly. Their community has been wiped out by an enemy. They are slaves, outcasts, exiles by the waters of Babylon, or whatever it may be. They need a new community opposed to the enemy power which has trampled on them, a Church as opposed to the State, and a God who is different from those idols or devils of the priests, who is greater and mightier than they, and who, if his people remember him and stick by one another, will consume and destroy those idols and those idolaters, if not in this generation, at least in some miraculous " day of the Lord " hereafter. That is what the oppressed were promised by the Jewish prophets and the early Christian preaching.

As I say, this is a long way from primitive religion. Yet it is remarkable how features dating from primitive religion persist throughout the later development. The primitive god, we saw, is the personification of the community which invokes him. Just so in the New Testament the Christ of faith is the personification of the Christian community: " I am the vine, ye are the branches "; " ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof." Those primitive rites and myths, the communal meal, the vicarious sacrifice, the resurrection, are all there, but they are grafted into a new organism, a new community—the Church. I am not discussing here the existence or non-existence of a historical Jesus. I think there was one; but that is outside my present subject. My point is that " revealed " religion, whether Jewish or Christian, is explicable sociologically as a development from primitive religion without postulating an objective revelation or an objective God.

Do not mistake me. I am not upholding the view that all religion is the cunning invention of priests. I am not setting up as a superior person and sneering at the delusions of the common herd. Far from it! I think that possibly all religions, and certainly all great religions have at some period of their history marked a step forward.

Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all improvements on the pagan cults which preceded them—I do not say on pagan philosophy, but on the official religions. But I do not think that either Judaism or Christianity—indeed I do not think that any ideology formulable by man—is final truth. In both Judaism and Christianity truth is mixed with error; but whereas in their early centuries the truth was important enough to make their error worth while, in the period of history which we have now reached the error has become an obstruction to new truth.

The fate which overtook paganism has overtaken Christianity in its turn. What happened to paganism, you will remember, was that, as civilization advanced, its gods no longer commanded whole-hearted belief, their cults became a hypocritical racket, and a religious revolution became inevitable. The many gods were overthrown by one God—the one God, like the many, being a projection of community life. I think this was progress. The pagan gods had become a wretched lot: I cannot read Tertullian or Minucius Felix without sympathy with their invective. But the wheel has come full circle. With the victory of Christianity over paganism, Christianity became in turn paganized—not only in the obvious sense that it substituted saints for the old gods, relics for the old idols, and Church festivals for the old feast-days, but in the more fundamental sense that the Catholic clergy stepped into the shoes of the pagan priesthood and became a privileged hierarchy; that the Church ceased to be a community and became to a very large extent a racket; that Christ himself was made by his ministers into a profitable idol. In the end thinking men were revolted by this, as they had been revolted by the old paganism, and turned and rent the Church. Once the rending process had begun, it was to know no halting-place short of modern materialism. As an epigram of the age of the Reformation put it:

Magna ruit Babylon: destruxit tecta Lutherus,
Moenia Calvinus, sed fundamenta Socinus.

"Great Babylon is fallen: Luther has destroyed her roofs, Calvin her walls, Socinus her foundations." And after Socinus, Bruno; after Bruno, Hobbes; after Hobbes, Voltaire; after Voltaire, Diderot; after Diderot, the deluge.

Now it is not the slightest good to pretend that this revolt against authority was or is the work of wicked men out to serve their own lusts and feather their own nests. What these men did was not an easy thing to do. It was not the line of least resistance. It was a difficult and dangerous thing to do. Many of them took

their lives in their hands. Some of them perished. Why should men who reject the authority of the Church—why in particular should men who, like the later ones on my list, reject the dogmas of Christianity and finally the existence of God—fight for a mere negation, take risks for it, even get killed for it?

I will try to tell you. I will not pretend that this idea was clearly present from the first to all who fought in the fight. Obviously it was not. The new gospel, like the old, had its *præparatio evangelica*, its Old as well as its New Testament. If we look at the literature of this revolt, we see taking shape, dimly before the eighteenth century, more clearly from then on, most clearly in the last hundred years, a new idea of the community—a community which no longer needs to be personified or projected in any divine figure; a community created by the fact of man's world-wide economic interdependence; a community, therefore, depending for its very life on realistic and scientific thinking; a community to which all who contribute to the necessary work of the world belong by the mere fact of that contribution, whether they know it or not—though naturally it is better for them and for the community if they know it.

Now the remarkable fact is that this idea of a world community should have taken shape *pari passu* with the decline of belief in the Christian revelation and of belief in God. And yet it is not so very remarkable; for " revealed " religion, as we saw, is the product of a breakdown of the old community life. It is natural that, with new possibilities of satisfactory community life, religion should decline. During the centuries in which the Church held undisputed sway in Europe and in which the voice of Rationalism was not only *silent*, but *silenced*, such evils as war and poverty were accepted as the will of God—as inescapable consequences of the Fall of Man. I do not say that these things were due to Christianity: they were incidental to an unorganized or badly organized world. But I think I may fairly say that Christianity was indifferent to them. They had to be passively endured, it was said, because they were of this world, and " the fashion of this world passeth away." It is significant that only when religious belief began to decline did these evils begin to be called in question. Until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries hardly anyone troubled about humanizing penal codes or levelling social inequalities. Until my own lifetime hardly anyone gave serious attention to the problem of world peace.

Now you may adopt one of two attitudes to this fact. You may say, if you like, what religious apologists used to say in my youth, namely that democratic, humanitarian, and internationalist movements are all due to Christianity, and that people who join these

movements and forsake Christianity are illegitimately living on their Christian capital. To that I shall reply: How strange that Christianity should have taken such an unconscionable time to engender its lawful progeny! How strange that such movements should have had to wait to be born until Rationalism came on the scene!

Or you may adopt another attitude. You may say, if you like, what the Evangelicals and Tractarians said a hundred years ago, and what Papal Encyclicals say today, namely that ideas of creating a world community and making man the master of things are sinful, anti-Christ and anti-God. To that I shall reply: Now you are at least logical. If I believed that God existed, that God had revealed himself to man, and that that revelation had been entrusted to an earthly authority infallible in faith and morals, I should agree with you. But the existence of God, of revelation, and of an infallible authority is not self-evident; and you have not yet proved it. So, as a citizen of a world community in the making, I shall continue, as part of the struggle for its creation, to battle against any authority which claims, fraudulently as I believe, to be the earthly representative of God. We Rationalists can make our own the famous boast of Tertullian: *Hesterni sumus*—"We are but of yesterday, and we have filled everything you have. All we have left to you is your temples."[1] And I am not sure about some cathedrals.

The atheist, therefore, is justified in applying ethical criticism to the God set up by orthodoxy. Because he rejects theology, he does not reject the common human heritage of social life without which neither theist nor atheist would be here to conduct the dispute. He replies to the theist: "You tell me that on my showing there is no moral government of the universe and no absolute standard of ethics. What then? Ethics are relative to human society. Relative to human society is absolute enough for me. There is no moral government of the universe. That is exactly why I refuse to worship the universe or the being who, you say, made it. You profess to think that, without a moral government of the universe, there can be no morals except personal preferences, no moral approval deeper rooted than my liking for good food, no moral disapproval more fundamental than my distaste for bad coffee. But I am not an isolated animal. I did not originate my moral ideas. I derive them from my fellow-men, from co-operation with them in a common life, from the tradition of co-operation without which I should not be; and you derive yours from no other source."

[1] *Apology*, XXXVII.

It is the theist who asserts the existence of an almighty Creator at the same time infinitely good. It is for the theist to prove it. The atheist has disproved it if he shows that it is contradictory; that on any definition of goodness applicable in everyday life, the work of the assumed Creator does not answer to the description "good"; and that the misapplication of adjectives cannot possibly be the beginning of wisdom.

CHAPTER IV

IS THERE A SOUL?

NEARLY all of us are taught in childhood that man consists of two parts, a body and a soul. The body is the material organism we see; the soul (according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*) is the "immaterial part of man" and also his "moral, emotional, and intellectual part," his "vital principle." We are taught that a body is not alive unless something not body, the soul, is in it; consequently that at death the soul, with its moral, emotional, and intellectual qualities, leaves the body and lives on as a "departed spirit," capable of feeling and thought, although the body and brain have decomposed into their chemical elements; capable, therefore, of pleasure and pain, of everlasting joy or everlasting torment. November 2 in the Catholic calendar is All Souls' Day, a day of intercession for the souls in purgatory who are suffering for sins committed in the flesh.

As a matter of fact All Souls' Day is of pagan origin. The peasantry in many Catholic countries believe that on that date the dead return to their former homes and share the food of the living. In the Tyrol people warm a room for their reception and leave cakes on the table. In Brittany they pour holy water or milk over the graves and leave supper on the table for the departed. These ceremonies have an exact parallel in Melanesia, where, according to Malinowski, every year, after the garden crops have been harvested, the spirits of the dead are believed to return to their villages and are given gifts of food. In the same way in ancient Athens at the spring festival of Dionysus (the Anthesteria or flower-festival) the dead were believed to emerge from their graves and eat a supper prepared for them, and in return for that hospitality to bestow a fine harvest for that year.

These primitive festivals of the dead, found in ages and countries as far apart as Melanesia, ancient Greece, and modern Europe, throw

a curious light on the notion of an "immaterial" soul. The souls catered for on these occasions are obviously not immaterial in any sense intelligible to us. They are at least material enough to enjoy a good square meal. The metaphysician or theologian may say that this is because the people concerned are simple savages or peasants without enough education to distinguish between spirit and matter. I venture to say that the savage and the peasant are not so bemused as the metaphysician and the theologian. The savage or the peasant sees that a live body is different from a dead body, and explains the difference by something which he calls a soul. But, quite logically from his point of view, he argues that if a soul is a live thing (and it is only as a live thing that it interests him at all) it must do as other live things do: it must live *somewhere*; it must come and go; it must eat and drink—it must be, in a word, material. The savage and the peasant may be ignorant and backward, but at least they do not credit feeling and thought, moral, emotional, and intellectual qualities to something "immaterial"—that is, to something that is nowhere, which we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, smell, imagine, or detect by any experiment—a mere label tied to nothing!

How did the mistake arise? It arose, I think, when men (by which I mean *some* men) had leisure to sit back and philosophize—that is, to reason about the world—without having as yet any experimental apparatus by which to test their conclusions. That does not mean that they knew nothing. Man learns a good deal about the world by the mere business of living in it. He learns things about the behaviour of visible and tangible bodies, the behaviour of live things and dead things, and the difference between the behaviour of people and animals. In short, he acquires a lot of practical knowledge and even some theoretical knowledge about those things which are easy to observe and manipulate. But this knowledge only lays a pitfall for the theoretical thinker. He sees that visible and tangible bodies exhibit certain uniformities of behaviour: if you push or pull them hard enough, they move; if you push or pull them harder, they move faster; if you drop them, they fall; if you heat them, they melt or burn, and so on. Such uniformities are formulated in the laws of physics and mechanics. But feeling and thought are not visible and tangible; you cannot observe and manipulate them as easily as bodies; you cannot push or pull, break or burn them. So the theoretical philosopher, who has coined the word "matter" to denote things that he can push, pull, break, burn, and manipulate in other easy ways, decides that feelings and thoughts, which he cannot so treat, are "immaterial." This is a question of definition. But the next step he takes is a step

in the dark. Because feelings and thoughts are not material in his sense of the word, he concludes that nothing material can feel or think, and that there must be an "immaterial" soul to do these things.

The fallacy is plain if we consider that there are many other things besides feelings and thoughts which we cannot treat as we treat *ordinary matter. We cannot* treat light, sound, electricity, or *radio waves as we treat* a ton of bricks or a sack of coals. We do not on that account fall into the trap of calling light, sound, electricity, or radio waves "immaterial." Still less do we conclude that nothing material can give rise to them. We do not commit this fallacy, because we know by experience that matter can give rise to these phenomena, and that they exhibit uniformities of behaviour just as bricks or coal do, though they have to be formulated in different laws. But there was a time in the history of thought when men considered light and sound immaterial. In the book of Deuteronomy the Jews are told that they must not make any graven image of God, because, when the law was given in Horeb, "Ye heard the voice of words, but ye saw no form; only ye heard a voice." Evidently to the writer a voice was spiritual, but a form was material. And in the Fourth Gospel light is identified with the divine *logos*—an identification of which Milton makes use in *Paradise Lost*:

> Hail holy light, offspring of heav'n first-born,
> Or of th' eternal co-eternal beam
> May I express thee unblam'd? . . .
> Thee I revisit safe,
> And feel thy sov'reign vital lamp; but thou
> Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
> To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn.

Yet we know that both sound and light are modes of matter in motion, measurable by scientific instruments as accurately as a pound of sugar.

Is it otherwise with feeling, thought, and human behaviour in general—the alleged attributes of the "immaterial" soul? I do not suppose that human behaviour will be susceptible for some time to come of as exact measurement and prediction as sound-waves and light-waves. But it is surely mere dogmatism to say that it never will be. The very existence of the social sciences and of actuarial calculation implies that determinism is as applicable to human affairs as to external nature. Insurance against burglary would be impossible if burglary were irreducible to any statistical

law; and there could be no statistical law of burglary if every burglar were an immortal soul able by the grace of God to give up burgling tonight. Economists could not be sure that inflation of the currency would raise prices, if every business man by the divine gift of free will were able to make the same charges regardless of the amount of money in circulation. The mere existence of economics presupposes that human behaviour exhibits uniformities *like other* natural processes, though formulated in different laws.

Even the metaphysicians and theologians who affirm an immaterial soul do not write of it consistently. Once they have finished tying labels to nothing and try to treat it as something, they contradict themselves. Plato devotes many dialogues to proving that the soul is independent of the body, that the body is more of a hindrance than a help in the acquisition of knowledge, and that the soul can know the truth only when sight, hearing, and all bodily senses are put aside. Yet, when he tries to describe the life of the disembodied soul, he does so in bodily terms: the soul of Er in the *Republic* sees other souls led before *seated* judges who send the just *up* to heaven and the unjust *down* to hell, where for a thousand years they suffer tenfold torment for their sins. Thus, after repudiating the bodily senses as liars, Plato has to describe his spiritual world in terms of what he repudiated. Christian theologians are in the same case: we are all to *stand* before the judgment-*seat* of God and to go *up* to heaven or *down* to hell according to our deserts. Kant, who advanced from orthodoxy to rationalistic deism, with all his ingenuity falls into the flat contradiction of upholding freedom of *action* after proving to his own satisfaction that, apart from appearance, there is no time in which to *act*. Of modern Spiritualists with their ectoplasms and astral bodies, Summerlands and celestial whiskies and sodas, the less said the better. The "immaterial" soul, when we come down to brass tacks, turns out to be as material as the guzzling ghosts of the Melanesian islanders.

CHAPTER V

MATERIALISM

THE religious Press (and in these days, when the recognized duty of a commercial editor is to let nothing appear in his paper which might offend the most stupid class of reader, the religious Press means very nearly the whole Press of this country) continually

repeats, as facts too well known to need any proof, firstly that materialism is a discredited and exploded Victorian superstition, and secondly that materialism is the cause of every evil which afflicts us, and if not checked may end by destroying civilization.

It is difficult to see how a discredited superstition can menace civilization. Actually, of course, the materialism which is said to be discredited and exploded is not the same thing as the materialism which is said to be the plague of modern life. But this is never made clear by those who print these clichés; and there can be no doubt that many are misled and muddled by the dope dealt out.

The materialism which is alleged to have been widely held in the Victorian era, but to have been discredited and exploded in our more enlightened century, is the philosophy which holds that life and mind are functions of organic matter. The common sense of this view is obvious to anyone who has been under an anæsthetic, who has been knocked out by a blow on the head, or who has had the experience of getting drunk. Alcohol, anæsthetics, and a knock-out blow are physical agencies directly affecting the body. Their effect is to derange or temporarily extinguish the operations of the mind. The conclusion is inescapable that mental life depends on bodily life. The bearing of this conclusion on the doctrine of immortality is obvious.

Materialism in this sense has been held to be refuted in one of two ways. Some philosophers (e.g. Berkeley) argue that matter does not exist, that what we call "matter" or "body" is a bunch of sensations or ideas in the mind, and that so far from mind being dependent on matter, the boot is on the other leg. It must be a great consolation to a Berkeleian philosopher to know that if he is run over by a bus he is merely run over by his own sensations. I have never met an idealist philosopher who *acted* as if matter did not exist. A belief on which nobody can act is thereby refuted more effectually than by any theoretical reasoning.

Other philosophers admit the existence of matter, but argue that its qualities are inadequate to account for mental phenomena. No interaction of atoms, it is said, no combination of chemical elements, and in fact nothing in space and time, can account for the simplest mental fact; much less can it account for objective knowledge, æsthetic appreciation, or moral endeavour. If this argument means that the qualities of matter are such as to exclude life and mind, it is dogmatic and antiquated. There was a time when philosophers could define matter as "extended substance," and treat it as if that exhausted its properties and as if nothing could be allowed to belong to it which could not be deduced from that definition. We have

left those days behind. Matter has turned out to have highly unexpected properties; and there is no more reason for denying *a priori* that matter can feel or think than for denying *a priori* that it can attract or repel at a distance, or that it can consist both of particles and of radiation. " Matter " is the name we give to whatever directly or indirectly affects our senses. It is as applicable to the mental processes of an artist or philosopher as to a sunbeam or a shower of rain. So far from the march of science since the Victorian age having exploded materialism, it has made materialism a far more probable conclusion today than it was in the days of Tyndall and T. H. Huxley.

This brings us to the charge that materialism is the cause of the present crisis of civilization. Those who bring this charge use the word " materialism " in a deliberately vague sense. They mean by it primarily a ruthless struggle for wealth and power and a disregard for ethics. But by using the word " materialism " in this sense they insinuate, without daring openly to state it, that disregard for ethics is a consequence of accepting materialist philosophy in the sense before described. The insinuation is as ignorant as malicious. To the materialist philosopher human society, and ethics as a function of society, are natural phenomena just as are the processes of life and of inanimate matter. That does not make them less real. Just as one of the characteristics of matter, under suitable conditions, is to organize itself into living bodies, so one of the characteristics of living beings, under suitable conditions, is to organize themselves into societies. Every society, to maintain itself, evolves a code of behaviour and trains its members to observe it. That there has been up till now a struggle for wealth and power, and therefore a disregard of ethics, as between group and group indicates that human society is still imperfectly organized. It has nothing to do with materialist philosophy. On the contrary, religions and ideologies which reject materialism and talk loudest of Christian civilization and man's spiritual nature also, as a rule, fight tooth and nail against any movement to substitute co-operation for competition in national and international life. The saving of civilization depends not on less materialism, but on more.

CHAPTER VI

THE IDEA OF NEMESIS

THE dictionary meaning of the word "Nemesis" is "goddess of retribution; retributive justice, downfall that satisfies this." But the original meaning seems to have been much wider. The Greek word "Nemesis" comes from a verb meaning to "distribute" or "give what is due," whether good or bad. It is akin to *nomos*, "law," the way a human community distributes things among its members, and so usage or custom in general.

But "law," as we know, is an ambiguous word. We apply it not only to laws which men make, but also to laws of nature—the way things happen. In early societies no sharp line is drawn between the two: the law which makes *people* do what they do, and the law which makes *things* do what they do, are one and the same. That is one reason why men made God in their own image and attributed their laws and customs to God as author. It is quite a mistake to think that man is naturally lawless and has to be made moral by threatening him with the wrath of God. On the contrary, man is a creature of law and custom—he would never have survived in the struggle against wild nature unless he had been so; and it was to explain the laws and customs which he had made himself, but of which he had forgotten the origin, that he first told stories of the gods.

Among the ancients Nemesis was a sort of personification of "fair shares for all." When we first hear of her in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, she is not a dreadful goddess, but a friendly one. She dwelt with men in the golden age, when they were happy and everything went well; but now, says Hesiod, in the iron age, when men have labour and sorrow, and cities are sacked, and evil-doers prosper, things are so bad that soon "Shame and Fair-shares-for-all will depart from the earth and forsake mankind to join the company of the deathless gods: and there will be no help against evil."[1] But man refuses to accept this. He insists that there *shall* be help against evil. So in later poems Nemesis becomes a personification of resentment and retribution. She is now a grim goddess, daughter of Night and sister of Doom and Death and the Fates; and so she continues until Christian times. All the time Nemesis is not so much what we should call a supernatural being as the personification of a natural force—the force which makes men build communities and

[1] *Works and Days*, 197–201.

order them by law; the force which makes man resent disorder and punish its authors. She is represented on coins with a pair of scales, a measuring-rod and a wheel—the wheel of the circling seasons, the whirligig of time that brings his revenges. "The wheel has come full circle," says Edmund in *King Lear*.

Under the influence of Christianity we have learnt to draw a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural. In nature, and in man so far as he is natural, nothing is moral; "in my flesh," says Paul, "dwelleth no good thing"; all wickedness begins in serving "the creature rather than the Creator." No remedy, we are told, can come from man himself; it can come only from God conceived as a wholly supernatural being, acting through a chosen minority of men to whom he gives his Spirit and reveals his will. Hence any attempt by uninspired man to build an ordered society is impious. The idea of Nemesis, whether as the distributor of fair shares to all or as the corrector of unfair privilege, has been swallowed up by that of the superhuman judge. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

The modern movement which some of us call Freethought, some Secularism, some Rationalism, some Atheism, and some Humanism (it is all one to me) abolishes the distinction between the natural and supernatural not, as did the ancients, by slurring it over, but by doing away with the supernatural. Whatever is, is natural. Therefore, since men have unquestionably built communities, and made laws, and approved and rewarded lawful behaviour, and censured and punished lawless behaviour, these are as natural phenomena as thunder and lightning. We no longer personify forces external to the human individual; we no longer tell stories of a Zeus who thunders and lightens, or of a Nemesis who holds the scales of right and wrong, and whose wheel comes full circle and hurls the sinner to his doom. But because we no longer do that, does it follow that there is no force external to the individual which operates in ways which he, if socially minded, will approve or, if unsocially minded, will resist at his peril? Or, to put it more simply, are there really such things as progress and reaction? Or are "progress" and "reaction" merely noises which the individual makes to signify his likes and dislikes?

If there is such a thing as causation (and, however we define it, all science and indeed all common sense assume there is), our approvals and disapprovals are not mere caprices; they have a social and historical background. This is something which the Logical Positivists seem to leave out of account. They quite rightly draw a distinction between facts such as those of science, which can be

verified by experiment open to all, and values such as those of ethics, which cannot; but after all, the valuation, even if it is only a noise signifying a like or a dislike, is itself a fact admitting of scientific verification and investigation. "Peace" and "progress" may be only noises made by people in public places to evoke approving emotion; but that those noises *do* evoke that kind of emotion in great numbers of people is a sociological fact, just as much as lightning striking you dead is a physical fact. We shall not be far wrong if we define "good" as what evokes approval, and the greatest "good" as what evokes approval in the greatest number of people—past, present, and future. In this way ethics can still be meaningful in a world swept completely clean of the supernatural.

And in this way, though we no longer believe in a Nemesis with a pair of scales, nor in a Lord God to whom vengeance belongeth, there is a causation in society and in history of which such figures can be used as symbols provided they are not liable to be misunderstood owing to their mythical associations. If a man betakes himself to a course of anti-social roguery and is exposed and caught, we can say that Nemesis has overtaken him, because no one will suppose that we mean a Greek goddess. We cannot, if we are Rationalists, say that the Lord has punished him; for unfortunately there are a great many people who will think that we mean Jehovah. A dead myth can be used symbolically without misunderstanding; a living myth cannot.

This is a simple case. It is easy to put other cases more complex. Suppose a man leads a life of anti-social roguery and is *not* caught. Can we in such cases speak of Nemesis in any sense whatever? To the insensitive or unimaginative spectator such a man may seem to have "got away with it." Here old Epicurus has something pertinent to say. Anti-social people, he says, can never be confident that they will remain undiscovered; even if they escape, the fear of exposure dogs them to the end of life. But suppose a man does not infringe the law, but nevertheless makes himself a burden to those around by selfish behaviour. Here, too, Epicurus is wise. The most important means to a happy life, he teaches, is making friends. A person who becomes a nuisance to everyone around does not make friends, but unmakes them, and so forfeits that source of happiness. If we know such people in our own experience, we shall, I think, hesitate to pronounce them happy. No doubt it would be far better if they did not exist; but because they exist, let us not jump to the conclusion that here we have the wicked "flourishing like a green bay tree." They, too, have their Nemesis. Man was not evolved to be anti-social, but to be social. They are

kicking against evolution and punishing themselves, even if they punish us in the process.

So far I have dealt with individuals. The case is more complex still when we come to societies. A society can exist for many centuries in a condition which condemns the majority in it to misery and degradation. Such a society may have all the outward appearance of success. It may produce great art, great thinkers, and great literature. There was once a "glory that was Greece" and a "grandeur that was Rome," the glory and the grandeur resting on a basis of slavery. History tells us that Nemesis overtakes such societies in the long run. But it may be a very long run; and Nemesis may be a blind goddess who slaughters the innocent with the guilty. The Jews and the Christians, in spite of their belief in a righteous God, seem to have felt that this was so. The "day of the Lord," though it spells doom to the oppressor, is invariably a time of tribulation to the Lord's people—a "day of wrath."

Generally speaking, we may say that history shows that every civilization up to date has contained the seeds of its own destruction, and that that weakness has been closely connected with the failure of each civilization to provide the masses, who carried it on their backs, with sufficient incentives to defend it in its day of crisis. Egypt fell, Greece fell, Rome fell, because for most of the people the game was not worth the candle. To use the language of the old myth, Nemesis—Fair-shares-for-all—had gone from the earth and "joined the company of the deathless gods." When she came again, it was in company with Doom and Fate and Death "to afflict mortal men." Egypt fell, Greece fell, Rome fell—and Western civilization may profit by their example.

CHAPTER VII

OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE

To call religion opium is to imply that it is false. Opium is a narcotic. To apply the term metaphorically to a doctrine means that the doctrine in question is an intellectual narcotic, that it dulls our perception of the world. A true doctrine, which adds to our knowledge of things and helps us to cope with them, cannot be fittingly described as opium. Only error can be so classed.

But there are errors and errors. It is erroneous, for example, to

hold that a circle can be squared; but no one calls that opinion an *opium of the people.* A crank who wasted his life in computing π to hundreds of places of decimals might perhaps be described as having succumbed to a kind of opium habit. Such cranks, however, are few and far between. The trouble with religion is that it affords illusory satisfaction, not to a few isolated cranks, but to masses of people who are thereby drugged into contentment with evils which otherwise they would find intolerable. That is what is meant when religion is called the opium of the people. An error which drugs masses of people into contentment with preventable evils is obviously more pernicious than one which merely wastes the time of an individual here and there. It is an aggravation of the case against religion that it does precisely that.

This must not be confused with the antiquated idea that religion was invented by priests with a view to their own aggrandizement and enrichment. There is a good deal of conscious priestly imposture; but it would not succeed unless the needs which the priest professes to supply really existed. Ever since man was man, he has been a social animal. Co-operation has been imposed on him by his anatomy and physiology—his poor outfit of teeth and nails, his long gestation and infancy, and so forth. He has had to co-operate in order to survive. In the horde, the tribe, the city, the national or multi-national State, he lives and moves and has his being. As W. K. Clifford puts it, " Century by century the educating process of the social life has been working at human nature; it has built itself into our inmost soul." Those human characteristics which we enjoy and value most belong to us not as isolated individuals but as members of a social group.

But man has never yet evolved a perfectly integrated social group. Along with co-operation he has had to practise competition. There have been constant struggles not only between groups but within groups—national struggles, class struggles, civil wars, open or veiled. The co-operation which we instinctively feel to be good, and which we know by experience to be the condition of our highest enjoyments, is practised against a background of ruthless struggle which often forces itself into the foreground. Like Nehemiah's Jews, we have to build our city weapon in hand; and the building is so slow that we sometimes wonder whether we are getting anything built at all.

In these weak moments we indulge in a pipe-dream of a world without any struggle—a world to be attained not by battling for it, but by renouncing the battle and pretending that it is there already when it is not. " God's in his heaven—all's right with the world ";

or if it does not appear so, that is due to our partial vision; we have only to endure and be patient and we shall see (on the other side of death, if not now) that all was for the best all the time. The main thing is to be resigned and not to resist evil, which in any case is only apparent. " Our citizenship is in heaven." " The fashion of this world passeth away." That is the sort of thing Marx meant when he called religion " the opium of the people."

The Churches, naturally, are ready enough to supply the opium which the weak among us demand; and not only the Churches, but all those whose interest is that we should be patient of evil and not resist it. Hence the age-long alliance between traditional Christianity and social and political reaction. " When was there ever obedience," wrote Charles I, " where religion did not teach it? " " Don't talk to me," said Napoleon, " of men without God. I knew men without God in 1793. You don't govern men like that; you shoot them! " The same kind of politician whose fathers tried to hound Bradlaugh out of the House of Commons insists today on the maintenance of the Blasphemy Laws and on the endowment of religious instruction in publicly maintained schools. He may or may not himself believe in " pie in the sky when you die." He undoubtedly wants the people to believe in it. The work of the Rationalist Movement is to break people of the opium habit, to wake them from their pipe-dream, and to educate them in the scientific view of the world. For this reason, though unwedded to any social theory, it is nevertheless an agent of social progress.

PART II

CHRISTIANITY AND HISTORY

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRUE AND FALSE IN CHRISTIANITY

THE title of this chapter provokes a question. The Christian religion, I shall be told, is a myth. Man has no Father in heaven, no Saviour from on high. There is no purpose in life but the purposes which he puts into it. Why do I speak of truth in an admitted myth?

That is just the point. A myth is a human product; and there is a reason for every human product. Old-fashioned Freethinkers often appear to overlook this. A great deal of Freethinking propaganda defeats its own end by treating Christianity as if it were a wholly evil intrusion into a previously sound and healthy world—thus inevitably raising the question, whence the intrusion can have come. Too much Freethinking propaganda consists of sneering generalizations at the expense of "Christians," as if Christianity were a standardized article made to one pattern. "Christians" do this, that, and the other—invariably something very silly or very wicked. But there are no standard Christians. Quite a lot of people call themselves Christians without believing in the whole of orthodox Christianity, and some without believing in any of it. That sort of propaganda only antagonizes potential friends and achieves nothing worth while, unless feeling oneself superior to the majority is worth while.

Let us begin by facing an ultimate, insurmountable fact. The *final* arbiter on all questions of value is the man in the street. He is very commonly, indeed constantly, mistaken: hence the temptation to feel superior. But the whole point of being superior is to anticipate the future. Unless the superior minority can win the majority to their viewpoint and change the world (if not now, at least in the future), they may as well save their breath to cool their porridge. Talk about "master-morality" is hot air; for if the masters of today are mastered tomorrow, by what criterion are they

superior? Certainly by none that an atheist or a materialist can apply.

Now, as a plain matter of history, Christianity managed to supplant paganism as the religion of Europe. Evidently, then, Christianity had in it some element of strength which paganism had not. Its strength consisted in this, that it provided the exploited classes of antiquity, the slaves and the disinherited, with a social life, a sense of solidarity, and a hope of deliverance which contemporary conditions denied them. Life under the Roman Empire had become hateful to the majority of its inhabitants. Christianity told them that it would not last. The kingdom of God was at hand. The hungry would be filled, the rich would be sent empty away, the exalted would be humbled, and the humble exalted. It was that sort of teaching which made converts to Christianity, which drew down on it the repressive measures of the Roman authorities, and which in the end won for it a sufficiently large following to make it worth the while of Constantine to do a deal with it.

Of course, the promises were not fulfilled. Christianity, like all great movements, had seized some elements of truth—the truth that the world is not static, and that something in man always revolts against what is hateful in it. But it had mixed up these truths with a false picture of the universe, in which God—a "magnified, non-natural man" projected by wishful thinking on the empty heaven—did for man whatever he could not do for himself. This was inevitable in a pre-scientific society. It was a fulfilment in fantasy of what could not be fulfilled in reality. It meant in practice that the Church stepped into the shoes of the pagan priesthoods, disavowed her revolutionary roots, and excommunicated as heretics those who, like the Donatists in Africa, tried to hold her to her bond. There is substantial truth in Hobbes's description of the Catholic Church as the "ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof"—a truth which the Protestant reformers glimpsed in their own way when they transferred to the Papacy the apocalyptic imagery of the harlot sitting on the seven-headed Beast which the early Christians had used of imperial Rome.

It is significant that when the man in the street today talks of Christianity he usually means, not the dogmas of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, which are contained in the historic creeds, but social justice, international peace, and other values which the Church has never embodied in any creed or made any serious attempt to put into practice. The fact is that such hold as Christianity retains on the masses in the modern world (apart from the half-pagan peasantries of Southern Europe and Latin America) is due to

the fragments of old Jewish revolutionary propaganda that have come down to us embedded in the Old and New Testaments and in no way to the dogmatic creeds. The Catholic Church has always disliked the open Bible. It contained too many evidences of the original character of Christianity—evidences which it was to her interest to hide. It was the seed-bed of every heresy; and in modern times its careful study is usually a stepping-stone to Rationalism. No wonder the priests prefer it in a dead language!

But we have got beyond the stage at which it was necessary to use the Bible as a stick to beat the Church. Today, the whole growing body of natural science and human history has become our Bible. The truth that was in Christianity has burst its mythical integument and achieved independent existence. Since the eighteenth, or perhaps even the seventeenth century the established Churches in all countries have been on the defensive against movements which stand in the same relation to them as Christianity once stood to paganism. Christianity had the advantage over paganism of appealing to the needs of the disinherited, to the hate felt for the existing order, and to the hope of change. It embodied their need of comradeship in the more or less mythical figure of Christ, their hate in apocalyptic visions of fire and brimstone, their hope in promises of the millennium and the new Jerusalem. Christianity conquered, was paganized in its turn and "went bad." The movement which came to a head in the French Revolution, and which has continued to sweep the globe in ever-expanding circles down to our day, has exactly the same advantage over fossilized Christianity which Christianity formerly had over fossilized paganism. Jacobinism, Radicalism, Socialism appeal to the same love, the same hate, the same hope. Nietzsche from his hostile standpoint saw correctly enough that these movements were in a sense a continuation of Christianity. But it is a continuity in difference. The modern movement, in so far as it is vital and effective, is atheistic and calls on man to save himself, not to accept salvation from above. What was true in Christianity, its belief that the world could and would be changed, has disentangled itself from myth and become the faith of modern man. What is false in Christianity, its theology, hangs like a millstone round the necks of clergy who themselves only half believe their creed, and whose only real function in the modern world is to be the auxiliary policemen of a sinking social order.

I shall be told that it is the duty of a Rationalist to stand aloof from all violent change, to rely only on the weapon of reason, and to criticize with dry impartiality everybody, whether on the Right or on the Left, who relies on any other. The purists, too, had their

counterpart in antiquity. The Epicurean philosopher turned his back on the struggle and, with Lucretius, left the swimmers to labour unaided in the stormy sea. The Epicurean had his points; and I shall always enjoy Lucretius. But the world passed him by. He could only despise paganism, not destroy it. The modern Rationalist should beware lest he, too, is left high and dry by the tide into which he disdains to plunge. For my part, I want to see "Christian civilization" go the way of pagan civilization. That, to my mind, is why there is a Freethought movement.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTIAN MORALS AND RATIONALISM

THE Christian Churches do not separate Christian morals from Christian faith. For them the one depends on the other. Those of us who learnt the Church Catechism as children undertook to "believe all the articles of the Christian faith" and, as a consequence, to "keep God's holy will and commandments." It is a commonplace of Christian apologetic that if the first goes, the second will go too.

In this, Christianity follows Judaism. In the Jewish Decalogue the commandments concerning religious observance stand first and those concerning social behaviour second. Throughout the Old Testament it is assumed that people who serve other gods than Jahveh or bow down to graven images are likely to do murder, commit adultery, steal, and bear false witness. In the New Testament the worship of false gods is regarded as the direct cause of the general wickedness of the pagan world. The modern Christian apologist, taking his cue from the Bible, confidently attributes immorality, dishonesty, crimes of violence, class war, national war, and world war to the decay of religious belief.

This sort of apologetic is justly resented by Rationalists. We point out with truth that individual standards of conduct are, to put it mildly, not noticeably lower among Rationalists than among Christians; that the number of Roman Catholics convicted of crime is higher in proportion to their total numbers than that of any other denomination; and that both world wars were precipitated by Governments whose members had been educated as orthodox Christians and had never repudiated their religion.

This is true; and we might go further than that. We might point out that in arguing from the situation in the ancient to that in the modern world the apologist is comparing unlike things. It has been pointed out by that very orthodox theologian, Karl Barth, that in the Bible next to nothing is said about atheism, but a great deal about false religion. The ancient Jews and the early Christians had nothing to say against Rationalism, because they were not up against it. Their enemy was idolatry—a body of rites and myths going back to the prehistoric past and kept up in ancient times mainly as an instrument of government and as a vested interest. As against the sort of polytheism which practised temple prostitution and human sacrifice, Judaism and Christianity really were a step forward, and there was something to be said for bracketing idolatry with immorality. But now the situation is quite different. The wheel has come full circle. It is not Rationalism, but Christianity itself which keeps going and teaches to the young, partly as " opium for the people " and partly as a sheer racket, ancient rites and myths at which the civilized conscience revolts. The invective hurled by Hebrew prophets and Christian Fathers against paganism does not lie in the mouths of modern Christians against Rationalism. We can retort it on *them*.

In short, we must take a historical view of Christian morals, as of Christian faith. We must see them as things which were relatively good in their day, but now stand in the way of world progress. Rationalists have not always taken this view. Provoked by the claim of the Churches to be the sole custodians of decent behaviour in a naughty world, it was natural for combative Rationalists to contend that the Churches had never stood for decent behaviour at all, and that the appearance of Judaism and Christianity in the world had been an unmixed evil. The *ne plus ultra* of this reaction was reached by Nietzsche (forty years ago a power among Rationalists, but now much dated), who, because Judaism and Christianity exalted the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers, elevated the contrary qualities into an ideal in his hard, self-assertive warrior-superman.

Simply to say " No " to whatever Christians affirm, and " Yes " to whatever they deny, is neither rational nor scientific. We must look on Christian morals as a human and historical product. Morals in general are part of man's evolutionary equipment. He has always lived in and depended on social groups of one kind or another. A social group must have a code of behaviour in order to exist. Sexual and family life must somehow be regulated, co-operation furthered, and peace kept within the group. This

necessity underlies the Jewish Decalogue and every other code of behaviour. If a man does not keep the code, he is out of the group: "that soul shall be cut off from Israel." Since in early times man knows nothing of his own history, this code of behaviour is attributed to a mythical father-figure or god—a projection or personification of the tribe itself as a corporate body.

But the tribe is not immortal. There comes a time when a predatory tribe or coalition of tribes reduces others to serfdom or slavery, lives on their labour, and perhaps carries them captive from their land. We have now a much more complex grouping than before. Instead of a savage tribe we have a civilized empire—civilized in the sense that it has a greater command over nature than a savage tribe, not in the sense that the average person in it is happier. This grouping, too, needs a code of behaviour. But now there is no community of interest. The code of the ruling group does not suit the exploited. The code of the masters exalts the warlike virtues which have put them where they are. But to the exploited, the warlike qualities exalted by their masters seem mere wickedness, and the gods of the masters seem demons. If there is no real hope of liberation, the oppressed will live on fantasies and dreams. They will exalt those virtues which keep them out of trouble—meekness, mercy, and peace—and, since man never reconciles himself to permanent defeat, they will console themselves with the myth that the meek shall inherit the earth, and that their god—a god made in their own image, crucified but alive—will sooner or later gather them into his kingdom and send their enemies to hell.

That is a fair description of the Christianity of the New Testament. It is, as Nietzsche said, a "slave-morality." That does not mean that it was a bad thing. It kept the oppressed classes of the Roman Empire going in, as far as human eye could see, quite hopeless circumstances. But a code of this sort may serve two purposes. It may serve to keep hopeless people going until circumstances are more hopeful. If may also serve to keep them in their place when they might be making themselves a nuisance to their masters. Christianity has served both purposes. It took the Roman imperial authorities a long time to see that the Church could be made an instrument of government. But when they did see it, what an instrument it became! And what an instrument it still is!

That is why the Rationalist approach to Christianity cannot be as simple as the old Secularists (who did grand work in their day) supposed. The old Secularists had no historical sense. Either you had the measles or you didn't have the measles: either you believed a pack of silly lies backed by a sheaf of impudent forgeries, or you

didn't. It is not as simple as that. The rites and myths of the Christian Church served a purpose in the cruel surroundings of the Roman Empire. Even after that, in the Middle Ages, Christianity did not "go bad" all at once. It always had two faces: the face of Popes and prelates, Crusaders and Inquisitors (and a foul lot they were) on the one hand, and the face of scholars like Abelard and Occam, heretics like the Cathars and Lollards, and rebels like John Ball on the other. When the Reformation came, it was the left-wing Reformers like the Anabaptists and Socinians who by their "private interpretation" of the Bible sowed the first seeds of popular Freethought.

One consequence of Christianity—originally, as we saw, a "slave-morality"—becoming an official religion and an instrument of government has been that there is more downright hypocrisy in Christian civilization than there ever was in pagan civilization. Owing to its origin among the downtrodden classes of antiquity, Christianity made cardinal virtues of meekness, mercy, and peace, enjoined non-resistance and love of enemies, and exalted celibacy above marriage (partly from a general revulsion against sex in the conditions of decadent slave-society; partly, as Paul said, because marriage in that world meant tribulation). But a code of behaviour evolved for downtrodden subjects of the Roman Empire could not possibly suit Popes and prelates, barons and burghers in the Middle Ages, nor merchant adventurers and industrialists in the modern world, nor revolutionists fighting for a better world in the future. Consequently Christian morals have never been practised. Chesterton said they had been "found difficult and not tried." But "difficult" is an understatement. No society run on the lines of the Sermon on the Mount could last a month. The admission of this simple fact, however, would be fatal to those who support the official religion. They therefore pay lip-service to Christian morals as a "counsel of perfection" while in practice behaving (in so far as modern inventions make it possible) worse than their pagan ancestors.

It is the business of Rationalists to discredit myth and to smite hypocrisy, while remembering that "man is the measure of all things," and that we, too, are men.

CHAPTER X

THE DATING OF THE GOSPELS

THE earliest writer known to have mentioned all four canonical Gospels under the names familiar to us is Irenæus, who was Bishop of Lyons in the last quarter of the second century. In his work against Gnostic heresies, written about 180, occurs the following passage:

> For by no others have we known the method of our salvation, than those by whom the gospel came to us, which was both in the first place preached by them, and afterwards by the will of God handed down to us in the scriptures to be the ground and pillar of our faith. . . .
>
> Now these all and each of them alike having the gospel of God, Matthew for his part published also a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and founding the Church. And after their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed down to us in writing the things which were preached by Peter. And Luke also, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel which was preached by him. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who had even leaned on his breast, himself also published his gospel while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.[1]

Irenæus later says that the Ebionites (Judæo-Christians) use only one Gospel—namely, that according to Matthew; that Marcion mutilated Luke; and that other sects use only Mark or John. But, he argues, there must be four Gospels, neither more nor less, since there are four quarters of the world, four principal winds, four cherubim, and four covenants between God and man (Noah's, Abraham's, Moses', and Jesus Christ's).

Obviously a man who could reason like this had no capacity whatever for weighing evidence. We need not, then, attach any value to the statements of Irenæus about the Gospels. What he says of Matthew and Mark is, as we shall see later, copied with a little embroidery from statements of Papias. Where he got his account of Luke and John we can only guess.

But that Irenæus could write in these terms shows, I think, that our four Gospels in his day were not recent concoctions, but works of some standing and widely known. Each had been long enough in existence to be the pet authority of some sect or other. It is noteworthy that Irenæus, in discussing Mark, cites chapter xvi, 19.[2] Now xvi, 9 to end, is absent from our oldest MSS and, by general

[1] *Against Heresies*, III, i, 1. [2] *Ibid.*, III, x, 6.

admission, an addition to the original Gospel. There must therefore have been time, before Irenæus wrote, for Mark not only to be written and circulated but to be interpolated too. Further, since the appendix to Mark manifestly uses Luke and John, those Gospels also must have been in circulation for some time before Irenæus. It is necessary to be clear on this, since too many are in the habit of arguing that *because* Irenæus is the first extant writer who mentions all four Gospels, *therefore* we have no reason to date them much earlier than his time. Such incautious reasoning only damages the cause of Rationalism.

We have further evidence of the existence before this time of a canonical group of four Gospels in the fact that Tatian, a pupil of Justin, published, about 170–80, a *Diatessaron* or harmony of the four, which in the third and fourth centuries was the usual form in use in the Syrian Churches, but was later suppressed as heretical.

Earlier than this we have no evidence that any four Gospels were regarded as more authoritative than the many rival works produced in the second century. This does not mean that our four did not then exist. Justin in his two extant works, the *Dialogue with Trypho* and the *Apology* (about 150), makes numerous citations from writings which he calls, generically, "memoirs of the apostles" or just "memoirs." Some of these citations appear to be from our Synoptic Gospels; others from apocryphal sources. E.g.:

> For when he gave up the ghost upon the cross he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," as I have also learnt from the memoirs.[1] (Luke xxiii, 46—my reference, not Justin's.)

> It is written in the memoirs that he spake thus: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."[2] (Matt. v, 20—my reference again.)

> For the apostles in the memoirs which they made, and which are called gospels, have declared that Jesus commanded them to do as follows: "He took bread and gave thanks and said, 'This do in remembrance of me; this is my body.' And in like manner he took the cup and blessed it and said, 'This is my blood'."[3] (Luke xxii, 19–20, with slight variation and compression.)
>
> For in those memoirs which, I say, were composed by his apostles and their followers it is recorded that his sweat poured down like drops of blood as he prayed and said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."[4] (Luke xxii, 44; but this verse is an interpolation in Luke; so Justin may be citing an apocryphal Gospel.)

[1] *Dialogue*, 105. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Apology*, 66. [4] *Dialogue*, 103.

In view of these and other quotations, it is difficult to believe that Justin did not know the Synoptic Gospels in a form roughly similar, though perhaps not wholly conforming, to that in which we have them. He does not demonstrably quote the Fourth Gospel at all. That does not prove that he did not know it; but he certainly cannot have regarded it as the "memoir" of an apostle. Had he done so, he could hardly have failed to use it.

We come now to Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in the first half of the second century. His work is lost and known to us only from quotations by Irenæus, Eusebius, and some later writers. Papias wrote, about 140–50, an *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, in the preface to which he claimed to have known men who had known the Apostles. In the course of his work he related that one of these "elders" (unnamed in the extract, but perhaps identical with a "John the Elder" mentioned by Eusebius just before) had given the following account of Mark:

> Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not indeed in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded, but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles; so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.[1]

This is clearly the source from which Irenæus took the account of Mark quoted above. I see no reason to doubt that Papias and Irenæus mean in substance the Mark we know. The "single points" not arranged "in order" agree very well with the snippety string of episodes that compose most of Mark. But there is room for doubt whether the "elder," who presumably lived early in the second century, told Papias anything of value about the book. He says, for instance, that Mark omitted nothing of what he heard from Peter. Yet Mark omits whole blocks of discourse given by Matthew and Luke, including the entire Sermon on the Mount. Are we to believe that Peter never told Mark about them? If he did, Mark was not a faithful recorder; if he did not, the consequences are devastating to their authenticity. All we can infer from Papias is that Mark, either in the form we know or in some more primitive shape, was in circulation early in the second century.

Papias further said that "Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could."[2]

[1] Eusebius III, xxxix, 15. [2] *Ibid.*, 16.

Here we have the basis of Irenæus' account of Matthew. It tells us two things. Firstly, there existed in the time of Papias (or perhaps of the " elder " to whom he went for information) a Hebrew or, more likely, Aramaic work[1] attributed to Matthew and containing " oracles of the Lord." Secondly, there existed various Greek works purporting to be translations of this. Papias does not seem to rate them very high. Our Matthew is in Greek and may be one of the professed translations, but if so it is a fraud, for it contains no internal evidence of being a translation at all. It is in fact a compilation from various sources, one of which may have been a Greek version of the *logia*; but we cannot be certain of that.

Papias either did not mention Luke's or John's Gospel, or, if he did, it was not in sufficiently edifying terms to induce Eusebius to quote him. Plainly in the time of Papias these two Gospels were not yet considered authoritative. Eusebius, however, says that Papias used the first Epistle of John. As that writing is closely connected with the Fourth Gospel, we may take it as probable that that Gospel was in circulation at the time.

The external evidence, then, does not entitle us to date any of our existing Gospels before the early part of the second century. But it would be rash to conclude that they contain no earlier elements. Matthew and Luke are compilations from older sources, one of which seems to be an early version of Mark, and another the source known to critics as Q. Now if we isolate those parts of the story which are common to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we get a document closely linked by internal evidence with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. For instance, in Matt. xxiv—Mark xiii—Luke xxi, Jesus is made to prophesy the destruction of the temple and the horrors which are to precede it. In Matthew and Mark this " tribulation " is to be shortly (Matthew even says " immediately ") followed by the advent of the Son of Man and the gathering of the elect into his kingdom. Luke, writing later, allows for a longer interval. But in all three the assurance follows that all will be accomplished in " this generation." Such a prophecy cannot have been first circulated much after AD 70. I conclude that the first Gospel documents, of which this is a sample, were written soon after that date, and that by compilation and interpolation the Gospels assumed their present form about the middle of the second century. Even by AD 70 there had been time for a rank growth of legend.

Christian apologists for intelligible reasons date every New Testament book in the first century if they possibly can. Some

[1] Few Greeks knew the difference between one Semitic language and another.

Freethinkers, more polemical than scholarly, refuse to date any Gospel source whatever in the first century. My conclusion will please neither. But in criticism, as in conduct, there is a golden mean.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

IF there is one thing on which orthodox Christianity insists, it is the essential novelty of its message. To sum up what we were taught in our youth: when Jesus Christ was born, the pagan world was sunk in idolatry and immorality past human redemption; and the Jews, though they had given up idolatry and had been taught by their prophets to expect a Messiah who would redeem the world, had so utterly misunderstood their teachers that, when the Messiah came, they crucified him. The Jews expected a conquering hero who would smash the Roman Empire. Instead, there came "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." They had no use for a man of sorrows; and that was that.

The publication of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Preliminary Survey* by Professor A. Dupont-Sommer, of the Sorbonne, makes available to English readers in the short compass of a hundred pages the fascinating story of the discovery which has knocked the bottom out of this traditional picture. Orthodoxy, of course, will not admit this. Even Professor Dupont-Sommer at the end of his little book disclaims in a footnote any wish "to deny the originality of the Christian religion." The Professor may not deny it; but his facts do.

In 1947 a Bedouin shepherd, looking for a lost sheep, found in a cave near the Dead Sea something more valuable than many sheep. In the cave were jars, some broken, some undamaged: and in the jars were rolls of leather containing Hebrew writings. Four of these were sold to a Syrian monastery at Jerusalem; several more found their way to the Hebrew University. Then the Arab-Jewish war made further transactions impossible. The Syrian share in the find was finally made over to the American School of Archæology and taken to the United States, where the contents were published in facsimile in 1950. The Hebrew University published independently summaries and extracts from the rolls in their possession.

Since publication controversy has raged among Hebrew scholars over the date of the scrolls. The Hebrew script, Professor Dupont-Sommer contends, is of an older kind than that used in previously extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, and is consistent with a date a little before the Christian era. The fact that the scrolls were found in jars in a cave suggests that they were hidden in some time of trouble (say the Jewish war of 66–70) for safe preservation.

These conclusions are confirmed by the contents of the scrolls. Two are copies of the canonical book of Isaiah—one complete and legible, the other in bad condition and not yet wholly deciphered. The main interest of the Isaiah scrolls is that they are several centuries older than the " Massoretic " text fixed by learned Jews about the eighth century AD, and so afford invaluable means of checking the received text. The most important finds are not these, but scrolls relating to the history of a Jewish sect (almost certainly to be identified with the Essenes) during the period at which they were written.

One of these is a commentary on the minor prophet Habakkuk. The author of the scroll takes us verse by verse through the canonical book of that name and interprets it in the light of events of his own time. It is noteworthy that, while Habakkuk in our Bibles contains three chapters, the commentary deals only with two. This suggests that the third chapter was added to Habakkuk after the date of the commentary, or at least that the commentator did not consider it authentic. The way in which he interprets the prophecy may be seen from examples given by Professor Dupont-Sommer. Habakkuk's description of the Chaldeans, whose " horsemen come from far " and " fly as an eagle," is applied by the commentator to " the Kittim," who come " from the isles of the sea, to devour all the nations like the eagle." Habakkuk's conqueror takes men like a fisherman and " gathers them in his drag. Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his drag; because by them his portion is fat." In the same way, says the commentator, the " Kittim . . . sacrifice to their standards " and make a religion of the " arms of war " with which they subdue and exact tribute from the peoples. Here the commentator refers to the Romans. " Kittim," originally the Hebrew name of the city of Kition in Cyprus, is extended in the Old Testament to any conqueror from the West. In Daniel " ships of Kittim " means the power of Rome. The references to the eagle and to the cult of legionary standards prove that our commentator, too, means Rome. The commentary, then, dates from the period of Roman conquest. Any later date would make these allusions unintelligible.

But there is more. Commenting on Habakkuk's description of "a haughty man" whose "appetite is as wide as hell and insatiable as death," the writer applies it to a certain "wicked priest" who, after misgoverning Israel in every possible way, tortured and put to death a certain "master of justice," whose name is not given. For this crime the wicked priest has been "delivered into the hands of his enemies." The judgment occurred on "the day of atonement . . . the day of the fast, which for them is a sabbath rest." There is no mistaking the reference. Pompey stormed Jerusalem in 63 BC, taking advantage of the annual fast-day on which the Jews abstained from work. Aristobulus II, high priest from 67 to 63, was taken by Pompey to Rome and led in triumph. Evidently Aristobulus is the wicked priest, and the "master of justice" is an otherwise unknown sect-leader whom he executed at some date between 67 and 63. That dates the scroll after 63 BC.

It can be dated even more exactly. The commentator refers to another wicked priest who at the date of the commentary is still at large and sinning. Quoting Habakkuk's "Woe to him that builds a town with blood, and stablishes a city by iniquity!" our commentator says that this "prophet of untruth" has rebuilt the city, but that his work will come to nothing, since in a little while he and his like will "come to the judgment of fire for having insulted and outraged the Elect of God." In that day the "Elect," martyred by the wicked priests, will "execute judgment on all the nations," and good Jews who believe in the "master of justice" will be saved. The second high priest is evidently Hyrcanus II (the brother of Aristobulus), who reigned from 63 to 40, and in 47 was allowed by Julius Cæsar to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem destroyed by Pompey. Hyrcanus was made captive by the Parthians in 40; but the commentary does not allude to this. It was therefore written between 47 and 40, while he was still in power.

The chief critic of Professor Dupont-Sommer is Professor G. R. Driver of Oxford, who contends for a later date—at the very earliest posterior to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. But such a date does not fit the allusions in the commentary. The city fell in August of 70, not on the Day of Atonement; and there was no high priest to be carried into captivity, as the Zealots had massacred the priestly aristocracy some years before. Dr S. Birnbaum of London University and Professor Paul Kahle agree with Professor Dupont-Sommer that the Habakkuk commentary is pre-Christian; so on a count of heads BC seems to have it.

This scroll adds materially to our knowledge of Jewish history in the last century BC. It tells us that at the time of Pompey's con-

quest of Palestine a Jewish opposition sect regarded the event as a judgment for the execution of their leader, and as late as 47–40 prophesied his return to take vengeance on the oppressors. Do we know anything more of this sect? Yes, for another scroll found in the Dead Sea cave contains its rules. Its members bind themselves to follow the law and the prophets, to make recruits for the party, to "love all the sons of light," to "hate all the sons of darkness," and "not to depart from the precepts of truth to go either to the right or to the left." This is very like what Josephus tells us of the Essenes, who swore on admission "first to revere the divinity, then to observe justice towards men . . .; always to hate the unjust and to come to the help of the just," and so forth. Like the Essenes, the sect described in the scrolls practised community of goods.

A document discovered in 1896 in a Karaite synagogue at Cairo seems to refer to the same sect. Here they are called the "New Covenant" or the "Sons of Zadok," evidently after the Jewish priestly line in the Old Testament, and in implied contrast to the corrupt and oppressive priesthood denounced in the scrolls. The Cairo document seems by internal evidence to be contemporary with the Habakkuk commentary. Like it, it contains deprecatory allusions to the rebuilding of walls by a "prophet of untruth." It refers to the leader of the sect as a "Unique Master" who was "taken away," and also as the "Anointed One" (Messiah) who is to come and execute judgment on the wicked and deliver the faithful.

Lastly, a scroll found in the Dead Sea cave contains what can only be described as army regulations for the "sons of light" in their war with the "sons of darkness." This seems to be older than the other documents of the sect and to date from the Maccabean period. It contains directions on military organization and on the conduct of war which might make us smile, but for the fact that they seem to have worked. After all, the Maccabees won their war.

The Dead Sea scrolls prove that before the Christian era, at a date which can be fixed within a few years of the Roman conquest of Palestine, there was a sect of Jews to whom the idea of a Messiah triumphant over suffering and death was quite familiar. The evidence points to the identity of this sect with the Essenes mentioned by Josephus. Here, therefore, we have an Essene writer of the first century BC speaking of a dead leader of his sect in terms indistinguishable from those in which many early Christians spoke of Jesus. Two possibilities arise, each equally uncomfortable for the traditionalist. One is that the Gospel story has somehow or other been post-dated by about a century. The other is that the thing happened twice.

Let us take the post-dating possibility first. It is not new to Rationalists. It is well known that some of the Jewish traditions in the Talmud and the *Toldoth Jeshu* make Jesus contemporary with Alexander Jannæus, the father of Aristobulus II. These traditions, though of little weight by themselves, link up curiously with the evidence of a martyred Essene leader provided by the scrolls from the Dead Sea cave.

Another hypothesis which may have to be reconsidered in the light of this evidence is De Quincey's identification of the Essenes with the primitive Christians. Hitherto De Quincey's theory has broken down on the question of date. The Essenes certainly existed before the Christian era; and it has been assumed that there were no Christians until the first century AD. But if it is proved that in the first century BC the Essenes had a Messiah who was killed and whom they expected to return, may not this expectation have contributed one element to the Christian legend? It was pointed out long ago by De Quincey that the Essenes and the primitive Christians had striking similarities. The Essenes, says Josephus, preferred celibacy to marriage. Some of them rejected marriage altogether. They despised riches and had property in common. They took nothing with them when they travelled, but relied on the hospitality of their own members. They refused to take oaths, except the oath which admitted novices to membership. They endured torture heroically when they fell into the hands of the Romans. It all sounds very Christian. And now it turns out that their name for their own sect was the "New Covenant." "This is my blood of the covenant," says Jesus at the Last Supper. Luke and I Corinthians have: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The pieces seem to fit. And why are the Essenes, unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, not so much as mentioned in the Gospels? Is it because the sect which originated the Gospel story *was* Essene, but did not call itself by that name?

One difficulty in De Quincey's theory is that Josephus, though he describes minutely the tenets and practices of the Essenes, nowhere says that they believed in a Messiah. But this can be explained. On the subject of the Essenes Josephus contradicts himself, for after telling us that they are loyal to the government, he goes on to commend their heroism when tortured by the Romans, and names one "John the Essene" as a commander in the Jewish revolt of AD 66–70. The fact is that Josephus wrote to sustain a thesis, namely, that the Jewish revolt was the work of bandits and that the people were never behind it. Hence his equivocation about the Essenes. Hence, too, maybe, his notorious silence on Christianity. The

whole subject of Messianism was one which Josephus tried as far as possible to avoid. Consider his position. The popular hope that a heaven-sent leader would shortly destroy the Roman Empire and establish the kingdom of God on earth had just ended in dreadful disaster to the Jews. Josephus was writing for Greeks and Romans, trying to persuade them that the Jewish War had been the work of a gang of extremists and that good Jews had had nothing to do with it. Naturally he " played down " Messianism all he could. In one place he refers to an " ambiguous oracle " which foretold that someone from Judæa would become ruler of the world, and applies it to Vespasian. And that is all he has to say of Messianism. Nowhere does he let it appear that so dangerous a belief was held by any body of good Jews. Yet we know that it was widely held.

The Dead Sea scrolls, if we accept the majority verdict as to their date, point to the execution of an Essene Messiah by Aristobulus as one source of the Christian legend. The resemblance between the earliest Christians and the Essenes is too close to be accidental. Their resemblance leaps to the eye more than ever now that we know that the Essenes, besides despising riches and pooling their possessions, also venerated a martyred leader whom they expected to come again with glory to judge the nations. As Professor Dupont-Sommer says, if there was borrowing, it was on the part ot Christianity. It does not follow that the Christian legend had no other historical basis. The episode may very well have repeated itself. We have the matter-of-fact statement of Tacitus (accepted as genuine by the vast majority of Latin scholars) that a Christ (Messiah) was executed by Pilate. There is nothing unlikely in the statement; and Tacitus had many sources of information. Nor do I see why the Christians should have dated the crucifixion under Pilate if nothing of the sort had happened then. It would not help them. It would brand their movement, and *did* brand it, as treasonable to Rome.

The Dead Sea evidence, then, does not prove that Jesus did not suffer under Pilate. But it destroys the uniqueness of the event. It puts the " myth or history " issue in a new setting. Hitherto it has usually been assumed that we have to choose between two alternatives: either there was one Jesus whose life and death underlie the Gospel story, or there was no Jesus at all except a mystery-god. The Dead Sea discovery forces us to consider a third possibility—already conceded to exist by J. M. Robertson. It is that more than one historical figure went to make the legend; that mythical material, floating around, was attached first to one such figure and

then, when he was forgotten, to another; that the Gospel Jesus is a conglomerate of two or even of many such.

One difference there was between Essenes and Christians: the Essenes never had a Paul. They lived and died a Jewish sect, while Paul's successors converted the Roman Empire.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

THE saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," dates back to Tertullian. At the end of his *Apology* for Christianity, written in AD 197–8, he says to the pagan authorities in effect: "Do your worst; we multiply by persecution. The blood of Christians is a seed." Little over a century after this was written, Constantine made Christianity the State religion. Ecclesiastical writers liked to see here a case of cause and effect. They repeated the saying about the blood of the martyrs until it became a proverb, though they also used the argument—not altogether consistent with it—that only divine protection could have enabled the Church to survive the persecutions which she had endured. Many of us today take it for granted that the surest way to popularize a movement is to persecute it.

Lecky in his *History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe* subjects this historical axiom to searching criticism. He points out that the opinions of the overwhelming majority are formed by education, and that most of those who react against their education do so as a result of reading and discussion. Hence, by controlling education, censoring books, and penalizing the expression of particular opinions, a government can effectively mould the opinions of its subjects. He gives instances of successful persecution —the extirpation of Christianity from Japan, of the Albigenses in the Middle Ages, of Protestantism from Spain, of all but a small remnant of the Huguenots in France, and of all but a small remnant of Catholics in England during the period when the penal laws were enforced. Two apparent exceptions are the persistence of Catholicism in Ireland and of Nonconformity in England in the teeth of persecution. But these are not real exceptions. Catholicism survived in Ireland owing to its association with the national cause; and Nonconformity survived in England owing to its association with the cause of civil liberty. Lecky concludes, not that persecu-

tion is invariably successful, but that it very often is, and that the religious beliefs of millions at the present day are the result of coercive enactments of former rulers of their respective countries.

It is a matter of common observation that the repression of a minority by no means necessarily engenders popular sympathy with it. The small sect of the Peculiar People have not gained in numbers by going to jail rather than call in a doctor for their children. The imprisonment of militant suffragettes did not win women the vote; the war work of women in 1914–18 did that. The stand of conscientious objectors in the two world wars did not convert any appreciable part of the nation to pacifism; nor is there any reason to think that, if it had, it would have converted the Germans. There is no ground for thinking that the mass of people regard any movement more favourably merely because it is repressed. Courage under persecution may serve to keep a movement together; but other factors are needed to win it converts and give it victory.

In the classic instance of early Christianity persecution was not continuous and very seldom systematic. The rescript of Trajan, preserved in the correspondence of the younger Pliny, did not inaugurate persecution, but restricted it by forbidding inquisitorial procedure and throwing the onus on the common informer. There was never enough persecution to stamp Christianity out; there was just enough to harden the Christians against their enemies, to give a vogue to fanatical writings like the Apocalypse, and to incline the Church to persecute in her turn when she won power. What gave Christianity power was not the blood of the martyrs, but the organization and propaganda which made the Church a State within the State and made it consequently worth the while of Constantine to do a deal with it.

Courage in persecution does not of itself win victory; but it may be symptomatic of other factors which do. Men who are ready to die for a cause are likely to be ready to live for it, work for it, and submit to discipline for it. Provided that the movement has enough in it to appeal to ordinary men and women, these factors may be decisive. Christianity conquered because the masses in the Roman Empire lived under bad and deteriorating conditions and found in the Church a hope and succour which they did not find elsewhere, and also because the discipline of the Church made it a formidable organization. Paganism, when its turn came to face persecution, had no such advantages. It was in the literal sense of the word a *superstition*, a system that had survived its usefulness, and it disappeared into holes and corners as witchcraft, or baptized its rites and myths and turned itself into respectable Catholicism. The

one rose, the other sank, not because of martyrdoms or the absence of martyrdoms, but because Christianity was adapted to the social and political conditions of the decadent Roman Empire, and paganism was not.

So in the Middle Ages the Albigenses, in spite of their heroic resistance and their constancy under persecution, were crushed because the time was not ripe for a successful revolt against the Catholic Church. There was no social force in the thirteenth century that could stand against it. The Cathars showed by their wholly negative attitude to the world that they knew as much. In the sixteenth century the case was different. By then the rising middle class and a large part of the ruling class in Northern Europe were ready for revolt and able to win the princes to their side. The Reformation succeeded where the Albigenses had failed, not because its adherents were readier for martyrdom, but because they had a programme and physical force to carry it through—not, in short, because of their readiness to die, but because of their ability to kill.

In the movements of liberation which have agitated the world since the Reformation, the blood of martyrs has not been the seed of victory; rather it has been the assurance of victory that has nerved men and women to be martyrs. "It is with more fear," said Giordano Bruno to his judges, "that you pass sentence on me than I receive it." He knew that his was the winning side. But Bruno was a man of exceptional vision; and there is no record that his martyrdom made any converts to his doctrines. The scientific view of the world, both in the matter of Copernican astronomy and in the general abandonment of the supernatural, won its way because those who were extending man's power over nature could not afford to cumber their thinking with outmoded theories. If a movement is in line with the march of social evolution, as that was, no persecution (save locally and for a time) can put it down. If it is not, no martyrs can give it victory.

Nothing is more striking in our time than the contrast, in this respect, between the Fascist and Nazi régimes and the resistance movements which they provoked in every country which they dominated. The men and women of the resistance knew that the thing they fought could not last—that history and humanity had sentenced it to death. So they fought with an assurance of victory, and faced torture and death with resolution. The Fascists and Nazis fought resolutely only as long as they were winning. When they lost, they crumpled. There were no willing martyrs. The former *Herrenvolk* crawled to curry favour with their conquerors. Too many of them have found it.

PART III

ETHICS AND POLITICS

CHAPTER XIII

THE END AND THE MEANS

IN the time-honoured controversy about the end justifying the means, our terms need careful definition. Many who reproach opponents of one kind or another with holding that " the end justifies the means " talk as if this meant that *any* end justified *any* means. To say this would be to disavow any moral principle. But no one in fact says this. Obviously a bad end, being itself unjustified, cannot justify anything else. The whole controversy presupposes that the end is good. The question then arises how far the end, being good, justifies means which in themselves, apart from the end aimed at, would be bad.

This leads in turn to the question what we mean by " good " and " bad." Once supernatural authority is set aside, I do not see how any but a utilitarian definition of good and bad is possible. The meaning of a word can be gathered only from the uses to which people put it. Now people invariably call " good " something they want to happen, or something they are glad about, or someone who does things they want done; and they invariably call " bad " something they want to avoid, or something they are sorry about, or someone who does things they do not want done. That is, the words " good " and " bad " presuppose human interest and are meaningless apart from it. And as words are meant for communication between social beings, the likes and dislikes presupposed are *social* likes and dislikes; i.e., when Tom tells Dick and Harry that this or that is a good or a bad thing, he means not merely that he, Tom, likes or dislikes it, but that he expects them, Dick and Harry, to like or dislike it too, because it is something they all want or all don't want, as the case may be. " Good " and " bad," then, presuppose not merely human activity, but *social* activity—the activity of a group of human beings, more or less extensive, with ends in common. The more nearly the group approaches universality, the more nearly absolute is its " good " or " bad."

We are now in a position to reword more precisely the question whether the end justifies the means. Given an end which we as social beings have in common, how far are we limited as social beings in our choice of means to that end? Are we limited to means which our social conscience would approve independently of that end? Or can we, without hurt to our society, use means to that end which, but for that end, we should as social beings dislike and detest? And if so, within what limits, if any?

As a matter of fact, over a large field of social behaviour the question answers itself. The answer begins in the home. Parents want their children to grow up well-behaved, considerate, honest, and truthful. Children who misbehave have to be corrected. Now scolding a child is not a good thing in itself; we dislike people who scold children for no reason, and still more people who beat children for no reason. But to correct misbehaviour we endorse scolding. We talk of " a good scolding." That is to say, the end in this case justifies the means. Whether we should also talk of " a good beating " I hesitate to say. Children were certainly beaten too much in the past; there was a lot of cant about " sparing the rod and spoiling the child." Possibly we should not beat them at all. In any case no one justifies the correction of childish misbehaviour by the infliction of permanent injury. In other words, the end does not justify *every* means. It does not justify means which defeat or sabotage the end itself.

Coming now to the adult community, we find again that over a large field of behaviour the question answers itself. No one supposes fines or imprisonments, let alone capital punishment, to be good things in themselves. But for the protection of life and property we fine and imprison offenders without any qualm of conscience, and a majority, though not all of us, approve in specified cases the use of corporal or capital punishment. That is, in such cases the end in our opinion justifies the means. The end is the preservation of society and of the lives and belongings of its members; the means is the infliction of pain, loss of freedom, and in extreme cases death on those who offend against it. Things which, apart from the end aimed at, are undilutedly evil are justified as means to a good end. Most of us accept this without any question. Tolstoyans and anarchists who believe in running society without any coercion are an insignificant minority. Christians, who theoretically should not resist evil nor judge, in practice do the same as the rest of us.

There is comparatively little dispute in such cases as this, because the end is one to which all, or virtually all, subscribe. Where there

is unanimity, or all but unanimity, about the end, we find in practice that nearly everybody is ready to accept a certain amount of evil in the means. Of course the evil must be in reason; it must be necessary to the end in view and not more than necessary; and here is room for rational dispute. The real trouble about the end justifying the means begins when the end itself is not unanimously accepted. It is not clear whether the Jesuits ever taught in so many words that the end justified the means; but they certainly acted on the principle. Their end was the " greater glory of God," which meant to them the conversion of peoples and States to Roman Catholicism. Their means included at various times incitement to assassination and the fomenting of war. The result was that by the seventeenth century their name stank, and that in the eighteenth they were suppressed by the Pope himself under pressure from professedly Catholic States. The cause of their suppression was not the immorality of their teaching. Average opinion in the eighteenth century did not consider making war to be criminal. Political assassination, provided the right people are assassinated, has always had its defenders: witness the idealization of Brutus by Shakespeare and by historians and politicians until the nineteenth century. The trouble with the Jesuits was that they were on the wrong side. From the Reformation onward Europe was not unanimous in identifying the " greater glory of God " with the increase of papal power. Even Catholic sovereigns were not prepared to subordinate their secular interests to that object. So the Jesuits were suppressed as a nuisance. After the French Revolution, when the sovereigns of old Europe needed them to buttress the *status quo*, the Jesuits were restored; and it is very bad manners now to question their sanctity or moral integrity.

So with the political and economic struggles which divide the modern world. The trouble is the conflict of ends. This is obvious in the case of war. Every belligerent government considers itself to be fighting in self-defence and tells its people so. Since self-preservation is the law of life, every means is held justifiable in war; the only question is whether its use is expedient. But enemies are aiming at incompatible ends. Consequently, while *our* end, being good, justifies every means, *their* end, being bad, justifies no means at all. What *we* do is justified by military necessity and even by humanity, since we aim at shortening the war and saving life. What *they* do is a dastardly atrocity worthy only of sub-human fiends. And so on and so forth until the war is over and the propaganda machine is switched on to some other target.

But it is not only in war that there is a conflict of ends. Even in

peace under existing conditions there is no agreement as to the end which political and economic activity is to serve. That is why there are political parties. If I own property and have an income independent of any work I do, it is natural that I and others like me should regard the defence of such property as among the first objects of the State, and any threat to such property as seditious and criminal. If I own no property or next to none and depend on my work, it is natural that I and others like me should regard the matter in a different light. It is all very well to say: "We are all equally free citizens; let us settle it by peaceable discussion and majority voting." The fact is that, when it comes to the point, there are things which people do not allow to be settled by majority vote. The landlords, business men, and skilled workers of Ulster took up arms in 1914 rather than be put by a majority vote under the rule of Catholic peasants. The miners of Britain stayed idle for months in 1926, and were backed by other workers in a general strike, rather than accept reductions of wages which the Government of the country, elected by a majority vote, told them they must accept. Did the end in Ulster, or the end in the coalfields, justify the means? Obviously there is no agreed answer to either question. And there is no agreed answer because in neither case was there at the time (nor is there now) an end agreed on by all. If there were, the question of means could be settled. Usually, when men want a thing in common, they accept any means necessary.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GROUNDS OF TOLERATION

To Rationalists the duty of toleration is apt to appear self-evident. The history of the Rationalist movement is to so great an extent the history of a fight for the right to hold and propagate unpopular opinions, that we often tend to identify Rationalism with the assertion of that right. For a Rationalist to examine the grounds of toleration may seem as superfluous as to examine the reasons for reasoning.

Yet the duty of toleration is not self-evident. Most of us were brought up on the Bible. Now in the Bible, toleration is far from being a duty. On the contrary, it is the duty of good rulers to put down idolatry. Elijah's slaughter of the prophets of Baal is related

as a good act. True, when idolaters persecute the prophets, or when, in the New Testament, Jews persecute Christians, that is very wicked; but it is not wicked because it is intolerant; it is wicked because the persecutors are wrong and their victims are right. So far is the duty of toleration from being self-evident that most of us in our youth, if we took our Bible studies seriously, accepted it as sound that truth should put down falsehood. We carried that principle over into secular history. Bloody Mary was a bad queen because she burnt Protestants; but Elizabeth I was a good queen when she turned the tables on the Catholics.

All this was very young and very simple, but it was not wholly irrational. The criterion of right and wrong is the common interest of human beings living in a society. Society can be under no obligation to tolerate what is obviously contrary to that common interest. We do not tolerate murder or theft. Now, if it is accepted that man has a destiny not only on earth, but beyond the grave, and that his behaviour now will make a difference to his eternal welfare hereafter (assumptions which most of us were brought up to accept), the conclusion is inescapable that society has the same right to punish behaviour which endangers the eternal welfare of its members as it has to punish behaviour which endangers their temporal interests. That is the argument by which Catholic divines, such as Aquinas, have defended religious persecution. As long as we grant their premises, namely that man has an eternal destiny and that an infallible revelation exists on matters affecting that destiny, we cannot cavil at their conclusions.

The growth of religious toleration has in fact gone hand in hand with the decay of religious belief. Lecky in his *History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe* points out that the first apostles of toleration in Europe were Socinus, the founder of Unitarianism, and Castellio, one of the pioneers of biblical criticism. They favoured toleration because they no longer believed that an infallible authority had laid down the conditions of man's eternal welfare. Rather over a century ago Macaulay in a famous review attacked the contention of Gladstone (then still " the rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories ") that dissenters from the established religion should be excluded from civil office. Macaulay's review is still a delight to read. The way in which he convicts Gladstone of inconsistency (if you exclude them from office, why not imprison them? if imprison, why not pillory? if pillory, why not burn?) is a logical treat. But it is to be noted that Macaulay's own reason for neither burning nor pillorying nor imprisoning nor excluding dissenters from office is simply this—that Governments are incompetent to pronounce on

religious truth or error. That is true, but only on one condition, namely that no earthly authority is competent to do so either. For if any earthly authority possesses an infallible revelation, no Government may plead incompetence: it has only to follow that infallible authority; and Macaulay's argument falls to the ground. It is only because Macaulay by implication, if not explicitly, repudiates all infallible authority in religion, and in the last resort treats a State Church as no more than a political convenience, that he is able to refute Gladstone. "The world is full of institutions which, though they never ought to have been set up, ought not to be rudely pulled down." Cold comfort for the Church of England!

It is easy to establish a case for toleration in other-worldly matters, of which nobody knows anything and in which, therefore, no belief is more rational than any other. The problem is more knotty when we come to this world, in which real knowledge exists and practical issues are at stake. In such cases it must happen every day that one line of action furthers the common interests of human beings and another does not, that one line of thought is wholesome truth and another pernicious error. What are the grounds of toleration here, and what are its limits?

Mill in his essay *On Liberty* tried to answer the question in a simple formula. "The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection" or "to prevent harm to others." It is to be noted that after stating his formula Mill at once has to qualify it by excepting children and backward races. These apart, he uses his formula to vindicate "absolute freedom of opinion" (including the expression and publication of opinion) "on all subjects practical or speculative," liberty of tastes and pursuits, and liberty of combination "for any purpose not involving harm to others."

But Mill's formula is as full of holes as a sieve. Does "absolute freedom of opinion on all subjects practical or speculative" include freedom to advocate cannibalism? Obviously not. Here, I suppose, the prevention of harm to others could be pleaded. Does it include freedom to advocate lynch law, anti-Semitism, preventive or atomic warfare, or other comparable measures in the interests of "white supremacy" or "Christian civilization"? In such cases "freedom of expression and publication" is in one scale of the balance, and "harm to others" (possibly many millions of them) in the other. Again, does "absolute freedom of opinion on all subjects" include freedom to teach children that the earth is flat? A teacher who tried it would find himself out of a job. But if he may

not teach children that the earth is flat, may he teach them that 1900 years ago the Virgin Mary went up bodily to heaven, and that they must believe that or go to hell? It is difficult to see any difference of principle between the two cases, except that the dogma of the Assumption has been proclaimed by the head of a powerful Church, and the dogma of the flat earth has not. Yet a teacher who was sacked for teaching that the earth was flat would get little sympathy, while a teacher who was, I do not say sacked, but retarded in his professional promotion because he held the dogma of the Assumption would be crowned with the halo of a martyr for religious liberty by the whole Press, Tory, Liberal, Labour, Catholic, Protestant, and Rationalist.

The fact is that no simple formula fits. Mill, great man though he was, is in this discussion somewhat of an armchair philosopher. Reading *Liberty*, we seem to see the world as a big debating society with John Stuart Mill as a benevolent chairman reproving rude majorities who would silence a minority of one, and championing the right of even the silliest to a full hearing on the outside chance that his silliness may turn out true. But the world is not a debating society; it is the scene of a grim struggle for life in which mankind may either join forces in a common battle with nature, or waste their energy in mutual destruction until nature finishes off the survivors by pestilence and famine.

If we look at it in this way, the grounds of toleration must be restated. If you are to tolerate me and I am to tolerate you, it is because we are units in a human army engaged in a military operation against brute nature, on the success of which our survival and the survival of our children depend. An army cannot allow its soldiers to fight one another over the colour of their hair, their taste in drinks, or their notions about another world. Its existence depends on living and letting live in such matters. Further, the success of the operation against brute nature, in which we are engaged, depends on the efficiency of the weapons with which we conduct it, and therefore on freedom of research. Finally, the efficiency of the human army depends on its education and morale—that is on a cultured use of leisure and on freedom of artistic and literary creation. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Jack will not work well if he is dull. Therefore he must have freedom to play, and the artist, poet, playwright, and novelist must have freedom to provide playthings. It may seem blasphemous to some people to rest scientific, artistic, and literary freedom on utilitarian grounds; but are there any rational grounds other than utilitarian?

It is otherwise when we are asked to tolerate behaviour which, instead of helping, hinders mankind in the battle with nature. Here I do not think any principle can be laid down except expediency. I see no reason why a murderer should be hanged, while a general or a head of a State who orders an atom bomb to be dropped on a populous city is an honoured international figure, except that the general or the head of a State has at his back a phalanx of newspapers to call him a great man, and a mob of fools to believe them, while the ordinary murderer has not. I see no reason why a teacher who tells his class that the earth is flat should be professionally ruined, while a teacher who tells his class that the sun danced in the sky at Fatima in 1917 is protected, except that politically powerful people think the Fatima miracle useful opium for the people and do not think a flat earth so useful. There is no question of right in such cases. There is a question of might. At present the fakers of Fatima miracles and the stockpilers of atom bombs have might on their side: that is all.

The Catholic claim that error has no rights against truth would be irrefutable if we always knew what was truth. But we do not, and are able to arrive at truth only by trial and error. Hence it is to our interest to tolerate error, provided it claims only to be an approximation to truth and is held subject to correction. Error which sets up as absolute truth is to be tolerated only because the evil done in the course of its suppression would exceed that involved in its toleration.

CHAPTER XV

THE SURVIVAL OF CIVILIZATION

WHEN we use the word "civilization" in an objective and ethically neutral sense (as when we speak of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or Chinese civilization), we mean a society with enough command over nature to raise it above savagery or barbarism. Civilization primarily means *civitas*, city life, division of labour, and a consequent surplus production over and above mere animal needs. It is the fashion among moralists and religionists to pour scorn on civilization in this sense and to make out that man's command over nature has done him more harm than good. The fashion began with Rousseau in the eighteenth century. So far as this is meant (as Rousseau meant it) as a protest against the iniquities of present civilization and

as a spur to action against them, we can let it pass as a pardonable exaggeration. But when it turns into defeatism and into an excuse for inaction, it is time to protest in our turn. How many of those Jeremiahs who denounce the results of science would like to do without science? How many of them could endure to live in a world without antiseptics, anæsthetics, or sanitation, without artificial lighting or mechanical traction, without power production or international communication, without any of the discoveries that distinguish us from the men of the Stone Age? Whatever other criteria of civilization we may add, that of a command over nature sufficient to ensure a minimum standard of what we can call comfort is indispensable. The primary object of civilization is to raise that standard, and to raise it for all, not only for some. If a society raises its standard of comfort for some, but not for all, I know of no reason why the excluded class should respect the property of the beneficiaries, except the reason of *force majeure*.

Some will attack this criterion of civilization as materialistic. They will urge that art, literature, philosophy, civil and religious liberty, and the like are as vital as, or more vital than, material well-being. My reply is that these are indeed valuable things and enhance civilization, but that their value is secondary. For the appreciation of art, literature, and philosophy a certain minimum of material well-being is necessary. A hungry man cannot enjoy a poem or reason dispassionately. Again, political and intellectual liberty are valuable not as ends in themselves, but as means to the multiplication and wider diffusion of material goods among the mass of people. This is not a palatable conclusion to politicians or intellectuals; but each of these categories is, after all, a small minority in society and must learn that it exists for the sake of the others. The activities of politicians and intellectuals are valuable in so far as they promote the multiplication or the better distribution of the goods desired by simple people. Usually no conflict between the two arises; but should it arise, let us be clear that the common needs of mankind come first.

Civilization, then, is, firstly, a progressively increasing command of man over nature; secondly, that intellectual activity and freedom of inquiry without which progress in the command over nature will not be ensured; thirdly, those political rights without which the fruits of progress will benefit only a class and not the whole community; fourthly, those graces of life which can be enjoyed only after a certain standard of material well-being is achieved.

The danger now is that all these values may be swept away by a war in which man's command over nature will be horribly abused

to destroy all that he has accomplished in these directions. In approaching this problem let us cultivate long memories. It is not just a question of one bad man or one bad nation. Not once, but twice in a single lifetime civilization has been shaken by world war—the second time far more menacingly than the first; and now we are threatened with an even more devastating war than the last. It is vital to us all to understand why this is so; for only by understanding can we save ourselves alive.

Let us begin by discarding certain false diagnoses. It is not true that war (at least as we know it today) is due to some sadism or lust for killing endemic in human nature. Neither of the two world wars of this century was begun in response to a popular demand. Each was begun by a small ruling class of uniformed or frock-coated ministers, diplomats, and staff officers. Once the war had begun, the people obeyed orders and marched, because they were used to obeying orders and it would have been more dangerous to disobey; but that is not the same thing as saying that the people began the war themselves out of some congenital blood-lust. Indeed, in all belligerent countries in both wars they had to be conscribed to fight.

Nor is it true that war is made necessary by the pressure of population on the means of subsistence. War and the preparation necessary to make war do not ease the pressure of population on the means of subsistence. On the contrary, they divert millions of men and women from productive to unproductive work and so aggravate the problem. Lord Boyd-Orr, who draws attention to the urgency of the population problem today, points out that the nations are making it far worse by their military preparations. War may have been an outlet for surplus populations in antiquity or in the Middle Ages. It is nothing of the kind today. Modern war is different not only in degree, but also in kind.

The sort of pressure that impels statesmen to make war is not simple population pressure, though easily mistaken for it by those who leave out of account the mechanism of modern industry. The salient characteristic of modern industry is that the greater part of its products cannot be consumed by the producers, but must be sold to enable industry to go on; and that the effective demand of industrial countries is unequal to their productive capacity. Beginning in the nineteenth century, this led all industrial countries to seek spheres of influence in which they could sell their products, and so assure profit to their investors and employment to their workers. This international competition led to the war of 1914, which of course solved nothing. The pressure of Germany (now deprived of colonies) for *Lebensraum* led to the rise of Hitler to power and to the war of 1930

which nearly destroyed Europe, and left the United States (undevastated owing to distance from the theatre of war) the paramount industrial power and world creditor.

Meanwhile the class struggle between capital and labour (endemic in industrial countries) has been bitterly intensified by the inability of those countries to keep clear of periodical war. The First World War led to the Russian Revolution and the conquest of one-sixth of the world by revolutionary Socialism, alias Communism; the Second World War led to its extension over Eastern Europe and China, and has severely shaken the capitalist system in other countries. The United States, the one great capitalist power yet unscathed, sees this as a menace; hence the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the rearmament of Western Germany, and the mess we are in.

If it were true (and many of us talk as if it *were* true) that nations were personalities, each seeking its own interest as an indivisible unit and subject to the rules of individual psychology, there would be no hope for civilization. We should be ridden to the devil by irresponsible monsters labelled " National Governments " and perish helplessly. The one ray of hope lies in the fact that this is not so. Man is, after all, an animal with an instinct of self-preservation. He is a social animal, and only as such has been able to survive till now in the struggle for existence. The societies in which we live—our cities, our countries, our empires—are not super-personalities, but human groups whose function is to make our labour fruitful and our life gracious, not to set us massacring one another with atomic bombs and bacteria. We owe our country loyalty as an instrument of the good life, not as a juggernaut that sacrifices us without reason. And the reasons for which we are told to be ready to sacrifice ourselves in a third world war are so disproportionate to the sacrifice demanded that I do not believe our people or the peoples of Europe will make it without a protest.

CHAPTER XVI

PROPAGANDA

As a boy I had given to me a little book called *Near Home : or Europe Described.* It was published by some evangelical firm or society, and purported to tell children something about foreign countries and peoples. In the part dealing with France I read that

there was once a wicked man called Voltaire, who tried to persuade people that the Bible was not true. On his death-bed he screamed in terror at going to hell and cursed his doctor for letting him die. Having hardly heard of Voltaire till then, I swallowed the story.

That little book was propaganda of an extreme sort. It is not generally realized that all religious education is propaganda. It may not be all as mendacious as *Near Home*. But it invariably puts forward as proved, and admitting of only one opinion, statements which are unproved and admit of more than one opinion. A good definition of propaganda, in fact, is the making of one-sided statements on two-sided or many-sided questions. Propaganda need not be false. The ablest propaganda is factually true, but it is never the whole truth.

Here it may be pointed out that the whole truth on most questions is unattainable, and even if it were attainable, would be too complex for us to hold in our minds, let alone to do anything about it. As most of the speeches we utter are meant to induce somebody to do something, they are never the whole truth. It may be said that we can tell the whole truth relevant to the situation. Precisely; but what is relevant depends on the purpose in view. To tell a partial truth for an ulterior purpose is propaganda. We simply cannot live without it.

We are very apt to assume that what the other side says is propaganda, but that what our side says is the honest truth. But partisanship and propaganda are inseparable. We are all partisans if we are in any way active in the world of affairs. It is safe to assume that half of what we read in any newspaper of any party is propaganda. That does not mean that it is false. It *may* be false, but whether true or false, it is selected for a purpose.

We cannot successfully lie to people on matters of which they have first-hand knowledge. No propaganda can persuade you that you are hungry if you are not, or that you are not hungry if you are. Hence the scope of propaganda in home affairs is strictly limited. But in foreign affairs it runs riot. The vast majority of people in any country as big as Britain have never been abroad, except perhaps on military service in war. For their knowledge of other countries they depend entirely on the Press, the cinema, and the radio. On the whole, therefore, propaganda can do what it likes in foreign affairs.

Most of us start by being completely taken in. If we have long memories, our suspicions are awakened when we find that the propagandists contradict themselves. The extent to which public

opinion on foreign affairs is manufactured by propaganda becomes evident if we consider the changes of opinion in our lifetime on the subject, for example, of the Germans. I can just remember a time when the Germans were popularly supposed to be a nation of spectacled, beer-drinking, music-loving, and rather dreamy professors. This ceased when Germany became a keen trade competitor and began building a navy. The Germans were rapidly transformed into a nation of rude, tactless, and ruthlessly efficient go-getters. Then war broke out in 1914, and the atrocity tap was turned on. All wars produce atrocity propaganda (I remember it even in the Boer War) and some of it is sure to be true. Ignorance of this fact of history led many of us in 1914 to believe that atrocities were peculiar to the Germans. Thenceforth there was no good German but a dead German. This propaganda, turned on for the practical purpose of winning the war, ended by bedevilling the peace. After Versailles the tap was turned off, and the Germans gradually became human again. The pendulum in fact swung too far, and the new " friendship " propaganda blinded the majority to the real nature of the Nazi movement. By the time of Munich it was " warmongering " to speak evil of Hitler. However, Hitler himself rectified our error in 1939. In the Second World War there was no need for any manufactured atrocities: the Nazis themselves boasted of them and made our propaganda for us. Since the war ended the pendulum has swung again, and we are now bidden to admire the brave Germans—once more for propagandist reasons.

Or take again the changes of opinion about Russia. I can just remember the time when the Tsarist régime was a byword for black reaction. Then, faced by the German menace, our Government concluded an *entente* with Russia, and it became necessary to whitewash Tsarism. In 1914 the Tsar was a " gallant ally." Then came the Revolution. For propaganda purposes Lenin was a " German agent," and he and the other Bolshevik leaders were " Jews " to a man, imposing an alien Marxist tyranny on the helpless Russian people. From 1917 till about 1930 we were told that it could not possibly last: Bolshevism was too inefficient and too contrary to human nature not to collapse soon. In the 1930s it turned out to be unaccountably lasting. In 1941 the whirligig of time brought its revenges. I had the pleasure of hearing a brass hat from the War Office, in a lecture to civil defence workers, say: " The fact is, we've been told a lot of lies about Russia." Indeed we had, and by whom? But the war ended; and the Press, as if at a word of command, switched back again to the story of an inefficient and inhuman Communist tyranny. But they have learnt not to

call it "Jewish." It is now "Asiatic" instead. "Europe" ends at the "iron curtain."

What is the ordinary citizen to do when practically every source of information is tainted by propaganda which betrays its unreliability by its inconsistency? Make a point, for one thing, of taking two newspapers of opposite tendencies. Both will be propagandist; that goes without saying. But where they agree on a matter of fact, they are probably right. Where they differ, ask yourself what motive each has for publishing a lie, and whether your general experience leads you to credit one or the other. If you cannot decide, suspend judgment and wait. Meanwhile, enlarge your background by reading history. There is a lot of propaganda even in histories; but not many present-day propagandists have time to waste in lying about the past.

CHAPTER XVII

HUMAN INEQUALITY

HUMAN inequality is an obvious fact—so obvious that it may be questioned whether anyone has ever seriously denied it. The authors of the American Declaration of Independence, when they wrote that all men had been created equal, did not mean that they had been created equal in height, strength, or intelligence. They meant that they were endowed with equal rights—a political conception which has nothing to do with measurable qualities. In qualities which admit of measurement nobody doubts that people are unequal.

We must not confuse inequality with dissimilarity. We call things equal or unequal only when we can apply a common yardstick. One man may be taller or stronger or more clever than another, and in that sense they may be unequal. But one man may be clever at music, another at mathematics, and another at drawing. To say that these men are equal or unequal is meaningless. There is no common yardstick. They are simply dissimilar.

This is important; for in political discussion dissimilarity and inequality are often confused. Those who aim at reducing economic inequality are accused of wanting to reduce everybody to a dead level; and we are told what a dull world that would be. A world without dissimilarity would, of course, be dull. But

economic inequality could be reduced to a minimum without abolishing dissimilarity. In fact, it would be impossible to abolish it. The dull world is a bogy!

The fact that people are unequal in their measurable capacities is constantly used to justify the existing economic and social order. The argument runs: men are born with unequal abilities; there is no better proof of ability than making money; therefore the richest are the ablest, and the right man is in the right place. The logical outcome of this argument would be the political disfranchisement of the poorer class and the conferment of additional votes in proportion to income. In fact, when the franchise was restricted, its restriction was justified in this way. The argument, however, never carried conviction except to those who stood to benefit by its acceptance. Everyday life tells us that income under our present social order is in no necessary relation to ability. As long as land and capital are privately owned, incomes will be payable irrespective of service, past, present, or to come, and a considerable volume of service will be diverted to satisfy the demands of the owning class rather than of society as a whole. Plainly under such conditions money is no yardstick of ability, still less of useful service.

Every scientist knows that in order to obtain experimental proof of anything his apparatus and materials must be isolated from disturbing factors. To get experimental evidence, therefore, on inherited inequalities, environmental inequalities would have first to be levelled out. Yet we hear of intelligence tests applied, for example, to army recruits, the results of which are cited without the slightest attempt to isolate hereditary from environmental factors. Many years ago I was told by someone that the average "mental age" of the British working class was fourteen. It did not seem to occur to my informant that the fact that the statutory school-leaving age at that time was also fourteen might possibly have something to do with it. A society in which all had an equal start and equal educational opportunities would probably have something useful to contribute to our knowledge of inherited ability. Failing such a society, knowledge of the subject is bound to be scrappy and conjectural.

The same applies to the question of sex equality. When I was young, the exclusion of women from the franchise and from certain careers was commonly justified on the ground that women were inferior to men intellectually. Women, we were told, were incapable of impersonal approach to any question, they had no sense of justice, they went by instinct rather than by reason, and so on. Now it is vital that we should not be dogmatic on such matters.

We cannot exclude *a priori* the possibility that owing to physiological factors a real inequality may exist between the mental powers of men and women. But obviously a society which limits the educational and professional opportunities open to women is in no position to say. It has not isolated its apparatus and is in no position to conduct an experiment. Only a society which gives boys and girls equal opportunities, a fair field, and no favour can provide the world with useful information as to the real relative abilities of men and women.

The same with the question of racial inequality. The defenders of racial discrimination in the United States and in the British Empire tell us that coloured people are mentally and morally inferior to whites. It is, of course, possible. But a society which imposes artificial restrictions on coloured people on the strength of their assumed inferiority cannot be said to have proved it scientifically. Only a society in which whites and blacks have equal opportunities is in a position to know the real state of the case. In such a society coloured people, if they are really inferior, will fail to make good, and it will not be necessary to keep them down. Meanwhile, all attempts at a biological justification of the Jim Crow car and lynch law can be dismissed as special pleading.

Since in most actual societies the conditions of scientific inference on the subject of hereditary capacity do not exist, it would be better to drop pseudo-scientific generalizations and stick to common-sense observation of the inequalities, partly, no doubt, hereditary and partly environmental, which meet the eye. We usually know a born fool when we see one, and we need not waste time asking whether he was wholly born or partly made. He undoubtedly exists, and he is not confined to any class. There is no natural selection relegating fools to the bottom of the social scale. A fool and his money need never be parted if he has a good bank manager and a good solicitor! Nor is there any truth in the adage that you cannot keep a good man down. We all know dozens of good men who have been kept down. Their good qualities may not be of the money-making kind; they may even be a hindrance to money-making. The temperament which in one class produces a Byron or a Shelley will in another produce a tramp or a crook. Far from the fact of inequality providing any justification for class society as we see it, a dispassionate analysis of its operation should eradicate the last rag of reverence for a social order which distributes its rewards haphazard and, having made a few rich for no avowable reason, credits them with qualities they do not possess in order to flatter its judgment in putting them there.

CHAPTER XVIII

THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

THE democratic movement in the modern world began with the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. That Revolution was not democratic in its inception or in its outcome: it was a struggle between, on the one hand, the King, aristocracy, and old landed families, who represented what was left of the feudal system in England, and, on the other hand, the bulk of the middle classes, who resented the trading monopolies conferred by royal authority and the coercive régime in Church and State which silenced criticism. The object of the Roundheads was to deprive the Crown of effective power and to transfer political control to a Parliament representing property in general—an object eventually realized by the Revolution of 1688 and later adjustments. But to win their battle with the Crown, the Roundheads had to arm and drill a class of yeomen and petty tradesmen whose ideas went very much farther than their own. The grievances of these men gave rise to the Leveller movement. In the demands of the Levellers, formulated in 1647 in the *Agreement of the People*, we have the first democratic programme put forward in the modern world—manhood suffrage, abolition of King and Lords, religious liberty, equality before the law, freedom of trade, restoration of the common lands; and in the famous Putney debate, in which they pressed their views on Cromwell, we have the first modern attempt to formulate a democratic theory. The army had fought to recover their "birthright as Englishmen," not to transfer power to men of property. "The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as well as the greatest he. Every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government." So argued Rainborough, Sexby, and their friends.

Democracy thus emerged as a revolutionary theory—a rationalization of the claim of the men who furnished the rank and file of the Parliamentary army to political and religious equality with the landed and moneyed men whose battle they had fought. To justify that claim they put forward the doctrine of government by consent, later given greater precision in the theory of the social contract. The theory that government depended on a contract between king and people had been formulated by a few medieval thinkers (including even Thomas Aquinas) and had been used by Jesuits and Scottish Presbyterians as a weapon against monarchs of whom they disapproved; but to those men, as later to Locke, the "people" in

practice meant a propertied and privileged class. The Levellers were the first to push the theory to its logical conclusion.

Rousseau in the next century formed the theory into a deadly engine of attack on the rotten edifice of French feudalism. His *Contrat Social* is superb as destructive criticism: as an argument against the right of conquest or the divine right of kings it is unanswerable. It fails, as all theories of a social contract are bound to fail, on the constructive side for the simple reason that it tries to base government on a fiction. Historically there is no such thing as a social contract. Every State is based on force; and the attempt to deduce political obligation from an imagined pact to which all are parties is just as mythical as the attempt to deduce it from divine right. The conclusion towards which Rousseau seems to be fumbling his way through a mass of metaphysical verbiage is that men, in fact, will not obey a government if it is so oppressive as to be intolerable, and that for a government to be tolerable it must offer its people inducements to support it. To induce men to relinquish their "natural liberty" to take what they can get, they must be guaranteed something which on the whole more than makes up for it, namely civil liberty and equality before the law. Restated in this form, Rousseau's theory nearly approaches the Utilitarian position. Some important consequences appear in the *Contrat Social* as mere *obiter dicta*; e.g. equality before the law is illusory if it only serves to keep the poor poor and the rich rich (cf. Anatole France on the "majestic equality" which forbids "rich and poor alike to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread"). "No citizen should be rich enough to be able to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself"—a maxim which, under the conditions of modern industrialism, leads straight to the Socialist conclusion. In view of the frequent confusion between democracy and party government, it is interesting to note that Rousseau, far from favouring the party system, regards parties as engines of public deception and destructive of the common weal, since they prevent every citizen from thinking for himself!

The next great democratic theory, that of the Utilitarians, derives from the French materialists of the eighteenth century, particularly Diderot, Helvétius, and Holbach. Though these men were only indirectly concerned with politics, they laid down principles which were bound to have momentous political repercussions. Their *Encyclopædia* asserted that the main concern of government should be the condition of the people. Helvétius, seeing in sensation the sole source of knowledge and in the love of pleasure and fear of pain the sole springs of action, drew the conclusion that to make a

happy society the interest of each must be harmonized with the interest of all. Holbach declared a happy society to be one in which " the greater number of its members are fed, clothed, housed, can, in a word, satisfy for themselves without excessive labour all the needs which nature has made necessary for them." These views, particularly as stated by Helvétius, had a great influence on Bentham, who applied the acid test of " the greatest happiness of the greatest number " to the dead lumber of medieval law which cumbered the statute-book of this country one hundred and fifty years ago. Like the Encyclopædists, Bentham was not, to begin with, a political Radical, and regarded Rousseauism as " nonsense upon stilts." But he found his projects of reform blocked by the placemen and borough-mongers who filled the unreformed Parliament, and in old age came round to the view that only democracy could force through the measures he wanted. Bentham's friends and disciples included a notable galaxy of reformers—Romilly, Ricardo, Brougham, Austin, Grote, and the two Mills. Not all these men were democrats. But as the nineteenth century proceeded and Parliamentary reform, repeal of the Corn Laws, and elimination of jobbery from the public services became in turn burning issues, the logic of events equated Utilitarianism with democracy. In John Stuart Mill we see it passing by stages into Socialism.

The defect of Utilitarianism in its classic form was its mechanical and static view of man. It regarded man as a machine driven by two motives only, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain; it assumed pains and pleasures to be commensurable; and when it turned to politics, it assumed that by giving votes to everybody Parliament could be made automatically to grind out happiness for the greatest number. But man is not a machine. He is a social animal nurtured and conditioned by many interacting influences—family, school, work, play, religion, patriotism, propaganda, hate, fear, love. The pleasures and pains associated with these have no common or constant yardstick. Different people value them differently; so does even the same person at different times. Further, Utilitarianism ignored the class structure of society. Most actual societies are stratified into income levels (based partly on service, but fundamentally on property) which do not appreciably intermix, whose education is not the same, and the higher of which instinctively feel themselves superior to the lower. It is not to be expected that mere political enfranchisement should automatically ensure the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Mill recognized the effect of class structure in colouring moral sentiment. Marx and Engels went a step farther, and saw in class

relations the factor determining the political, moral, and religious ideas of a society. Hence to the Marxist democracy is not strictly possible in a class society. The higher income levels, by virtue of their educational opportunities and social pull, man the administrative posts, officer the armed forces, and control the Press. The lower enjoy at most the privilege of voting every few years for a representative nominated by a party caucus; and the Parliament so elected has at most an imperfect control over policy. The Marxist does not ignore the achievements of Parliamentary government; on the contrary he regards factory legislation, free education, and the social services as important gains. But they are tactical gains in a " concealed civil war," wrung from the capitalists by unremitting pressure. Only by the overthrow of capitalism can democracy become a reality and the greatest happiness of the greatest number become in fact, not in name, the purpose of government.

Much current misunderstanding springs from the ambiguity of the term " democracy." If, taking the class structure of society for granted, we use the term " democracy " to denote Parliamentary government, the party system, and so forth, regardless of the economic realities beneath the legal forms, we shall be using the word in a sense which has little relation to the needs of the common man or woman. If we use it to denote the claim of the common man and woman to equal opportunity, whether that claim is made good under the legal forms familiar to us or not, we shall be using the word in its old Greek sense and in the spirit of the English Levellers, the French Revolutionaries, the Utilitarians, and the new world now struggling to be born out of the ashes of the old.

CHAPTER XIX

IDEALS, REALS, AND SHAMS

Ideals, Reals, and Shams was the sub-title of an essay by that notable pioneer and thinker, Belfort Bax, which appeared in his book, *The Religion of Socialism*, in 1886. In that essay he criticized what he called the " bourgeois idols " of liberty, justice, etc., as conceived in the last century, and showed them to be shams. The book played its part in my conversion to Socialism in 1905. As a long time has elapsed since then, I propose to subject to similar criticism some idols of the present day—not necessarily on Bax's lines, for I do not everywhere agree with him; but on lines as realistic as I can make them.

I shall begin, as he did, by taking the word "liberty" or (as I prefer Saxon) "freedom." What *is* freedom? In other words, what reality do we try to denote by that label? The only way to find the meaning of a word is to find how people habitually use it. My dictionary tells me that "freedom" means "non-slavery"; "independence"; "right to do" this or that; "exemption" from this or that defect, disadvantage or duty; plus other aliases over which we need not trouble. It is significant that three out of the four definitions quoted are negative. The other one, "right to do" this or that, adds nothing to the rest except the notion of a right, that is an agreed ruling in favour of the freedom in question. Freedom, therefore, as habitually used, is a negative term. It means not being a slave, not being dependent on someone or something, not having some disadvantage or obligation—being able to do as you like without restraint by some person or circumstance. This is the sort of reality we denote by the label "free."

Now it is clear that absolute freedom does not exist. We are all dependent in a great many things and restrained from doing much that we might like. No one is absolutely free; but we may be relatively free to do this, that, or the other. These relative freedoms are the only real freedoms. But in the course of history certain of these relative freedoms have been singled out from the rest and acquired an emotive value all their own. Bax in his essay singles out for examination freedom of contract and freedom of conscience. These certainly have had in their time an emotive value greater than that of common or garden freedoms. When Sir Winston Churchill talks of "setting the people free," he means abolishing various restrictions on contract. We all know how good we feel when we say we fight for freedom of conscience. Now the holding of beliefs and the making of contracts are modes of human behaviour just like eating, drinking, sleeping, and the like. There is no reason in the nature of things why freedom of conscience or of contract should "start a spirit" sooner than freedom to eat, drink, or sleep. But they do; and the reason why they do is that the class of people who write and read leading articles and books of philosophy have in past time fought for those particular freedoms, and have not had to fight for freedom to eat, drink, or sleep. These historically privileged freedoms thus blossom into ideals. They are liable to be spelt with a big F and to be treated as if they alone were worthy of the name Freedom. I do not say they are not good things. But good is relative. We must not be surprised if people to whom something to eat is more important than something to believe (and a majority of the human race are in that condition) fail to appreciate

the peculiar devotion of leader-writers and their public to freedom of conscience and freedom of contract. An ideal, to those who have shaped it from their own struggles and their own experience, may be worshipful and divine, but to those whose struggles and whose experience are of another kind it may be a sham, and will assuredly be so if used against them.

In another essay Bax points out that man's material needs (food, shelter, health, and so on) demand satisfaction before he can begin to appreciate such higher values as truth, beauty, and goodness as such. Material needs are like the six tricks in a game of cards which we must win before we can take the odd trick that wins the game. The analogy is just as good in 1954 as in 1886. Even if we hold that we in Britain with our "Welfare State" have taken the first six tricks (and that is very doubtfully true, and will be more doubtful still as guns increasingly take precedence of butter), the fact remains that a majority of the human race have not yet won those six tricks and, until they have, cannot take the odd trick of the higher values. The idealists who preach the priority of "eternal values" are usually people whose own material needs are satisfied before they begin to preach.

Obviously the majority who have still to satisfy their need of decent food, decent homes, and decent health may, in struggling for these things, have to override some of the values preached by those who already have those advantages. This is obviously so in the case of freedom of contract. The whole history of the Labour and Socialist movement is the history of the workers' struggle to satisfy their material needs at the expense, if need be, of the freedom of contract preached by economists, politicians, and leader-writers of the owning class. The clash with freedom of conscience is not so usual; in fact, as long as people are content to treat their religion as a private matter there need be no such clash. But we may imagine a hypothetical case. The Pope has recently laid it down that, where a doctor or midwife has to choose between the life of a mother and the life of an unborn child, the mother is always to be sacrificed. Suppose there were to be a new government in Italy or some other Catholic country, and the new government enacted that the Pope's ruling was inhuman and immoral, and that any doctor or midwife enforcing it should be struck off the register. What a howl would go up from the whole Catholic hierarchy and Press, and from many non-Catholics (I am afraid even from some Humanists), over this "persecution of religion," this "violation of freedom of conscience"! Yet I venture to say that such a governmental enactment would be justified in the interests of the mothers and of com-

mon humanity, and that the cry of liberty of conscience would be a sham.

In general, I would say that material needs are prior to so-called spiritual needs, and that the importance which moral, intellectual, and artistic values undoubtedly have springs from the fact that they minister to man's material needs. Moral values are necessary to hold a community together, and therefore necessary for the satisfaction even of the material needs of its members. The search for truth is necessary if material resources are to keep up with material needs. Artistic production is necessary to the happiness of present and future generations. But to treat these spiritual values as "things in themselves" apart from the material world in which we live and move and have our being is idealism in the bad sense: it is idolatry and superstition.

Lastly, take a word much bandied about in current controversy, the word "democracy." My dictionary tells me that democracy means "government by the people, direct or representative." Bax in several essays subjects this conception to obvious criticism. He points out that government by the people does not in fact exist, that it cannot exist with disparities of leisure and education, that even with universal suffrage the majority are too ill informed to understand the issues on which they vote, and that even when they understand them, there is no guarantee that their wishes will be reflected in legislation and executive action. All this is true. It can be answered, as Bax answers it, by the argument that, imperfect makeshift as democracy is, it is better than no check at all on the executive. But it remains a makeshift. Since Bax wrote, much has happened to ram home his lesson. The electorate, indeed, have won more leisure and more education; but side by side with this the hold of the millionaires on the Press has tightened, and with it the hold of the party caucus on the private member and the hold of the permanent officials on administration. How far can the people be said to govern when their representatives fear the whips more than their constituents, and when the front benches carry out "bipartisan" policies which have nothing whatever to do with the people's will? The thing is not new. Even under Gladstone's last Government (1892–4) some Liberal members used to "thank God for the House of Lords," which could be relied on to throw out the reforms for which they voted in the Commons. By 1911 collusion between the front benches had become so patent that Hilaire Belloc and Cecil Chesterton exposed it in *The Party System*—a little book which a *Pall Mall* reviewer said would be "poison in the hands of the working classes." Belloc and Chesterton were not Reds. Belloc was a

Catholic; and Chesterton soon became one. But they were prophets.

Democracy in the sense of government by the people does not exist: it has to try to exist by fighting through a network of party caucuses, Press scares, and front-bench collusion which might almost be designed to make it of no effect. Unfortunately the word "democracy," like the word "freedom," has been distorted so as to denote, not what it was originally coined to denote, but the very network which entangles and thwarts it. It has come to mean, not government by the people, but the game of ins and outs which was a joke even in the days of W. S. Gilbert. Stranger still, direct action by the working class, as in 1926, to resist reductions in wages for which they had certainly never voted is called "undemocratic." Never was there a better example of a word, originally coined to denote something real, being torn from its meaning and turned into a mask, a sham, a piece of "double talk" covering with emotive value its own negation.

CHAPTER XX

AGE, YOUTH, AND PROGRESS

In youth the human animal is adventurous and questioning. The earliest ways in which the child makes himself a nuisance to his elders are by playing with fire (if he can) to his own danger and theirs, and by asking questions which they cannot answer. Later, playing with matches is superseded by climbing trees and making centuries at cricket; and these in turn lead on to mountaineering and wearing odd-coloured shirts; while the omnivorous curiosity of childhood prepares the way for scientific experiment and would-be solutions to the riddle of the universe.

In age the taste for adventure and for questioning is lost. We lack the energy for adventure; and our questions have been either answered or found unanswerable. We prefer the fireside and retrospection. As the song says, we grow "shorter in wind, as in memory long." Yet, if we have lived not altogether foolishly, we have gained something from the adventures and questionings of youth. We *know* more—if we can only put our knowledge to use, or communicate it to others who can! As the proverb has it—*Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.*

This tension between the physical and mental energy of youth

and the settled inertia of age is one of the standing contradictions of human society. The majority of societies have overcome it without undue difficulty. The conditions of their existence have been static: their natural environment and their means of coping with it alter very slowly—too slowly, as a rule, to make a difference in a single lifetime. Hence in the majority of societies—the savage tribe, the ancient city-State, the nation-State of the early modern period—the elders have taken the lead and the young have accepted it as right and proper. This rule has worked, because the experience gained by one generation has remained valid for the next. Immense prestige has always attached to the " grand old man "—Nestor in Homer; Burghley, Franklin, Palmerston, Gladstone in history.

But in our modern world the basic assumption which underlay this deference paid to age as such has ceased to be true. I mean the assumption that the world " stayed put "—that the lessons learnt by our elders in their prime can be transmitted without much revision to their successors. The world no longer " stays put " even while one generation ripens and passes on. Consequently in the modern world deference is no longer paid to age. Its counsels are heard with impatience or not at all. And age for the most part, not understanding the reason, frets over the " apathy " or " irresponsibility " of the young and the " collapse of moral standards," and wonders what the world is coming to.

The roots of the problem lie in the accelerating technical revolution which began in the eighteenth century and is still gathering pace. The political, religious, and cultural fruits of that revolution were not immediately apparent; for the connection between material conditions and their ideal superstructure is not obvious to the naked eye. But in the course of the nineteenth century it became evident that the leisurely, picturesque political institutions of the pre-industrial age were not adapted to a society dependent on mass production for the world market; that religious dogmas evolved in the ancient East could not be squared with the findings of modern physical and social science; and that traditional teaching as to the " whole duty of man " was inadequate and irrelevant to the stresses and strains which rocked the modern world.

With these discoveries went an increasing misunderstanding and tension between successive generations. Until 1914 the elders could still to a great extent live on their prestige. Youth still on the whole believed in them. Even if they were rather out of date on Biblical criticism and economics, they were given credit for an honesty and open-mindedness equal to their critics'. To a keen young Fabian Socialist in the early years of this century the question,

"Don't you think that if there were anything in Socialism, Mr Balfour would have seen and adopted it before now?" might not be a convincing reply, but it was at least a reply which made him think. For the elder statesmen of that day *were* his elders and presumably his betters.

And then came 1914. Our so honest, able, and open-minded elders and betters had been engaged not, as we had supposed, in the good work of broadening freedom slowly down from precedent to precedent, but in committing us behind our backs to military engagements which led straight to world war. Our generation had to foot the bill. I do not think the prestige of age has ever recovered from that shock. But we were slow in absorbing the lesson. We could not believe all at once that the great and good men whom we had been brought up to honour were really the crooked set of cynics which war had revealed them to be. So we did nothing about it. The old men who had made the war made the peace. They made such a peace that twenty years later another generation—the generation after ours—had to be thrown into the furnace.

As a result the incomprehension between age and youth is today greater perhaps than ever before in the history of the world. We who grew up before 1914 have to deal with a generation which does not respect us, which *ought* not to respect us, and to which our very controversies are a dead language. This applies with special force to us in the Ethical, Rationalist, and Freethought movements. Fifty years ago we thought ourselves a very fine lot. We thanked evolution (we were too enlightened to mention God) that we were not as our fathers had been when they excluded Bradlaugh from the House of Commons, gaoled Foote for blasphemy, and hounded Parnell from public life. We had read our Huxley and our Renan, many of us even our Shaw and our Webb, and we stood on their shoulders. But that did not save us. Today we talk to youngsters to whom Huxley means, not Thomas Henry, but Julian and Aldous; who have never heard of Renan; and to whom Shaw and Webb are as much warriors of the past as Herbert Spencer and Matthew Arnold were to us.

What are we to do about it? I suggest that we learn a little humility. Shaw says: "Every man over forty is a scoundrel." He meant that the average man's sense of social responsibility diminishes with his expectation of life. If we have fifty years of life before us, our interest in the future, other things being equal, is greater than it becomes when we have not ten. That is a drawback given in the nature of the human animal. If, then, we Rationalists do not interest the young, be sure that it is our own stupid fault.

Let us not flatter ourselves by pretending that the young are too mentally immature to join us—that no one is a worth-while Rationalist till he or she is past forty. We are ourselves a refutation of such rubbish. Did *we* wait till we were forty? I was a Rationalist at sixteen, and writing for Rationalism at twenty-eight.

If we are not winning the sixteens and twenty-eights of today, it is because we do not speak a living language to them, as the prophets of our youth did to us. The world has not "stayed put" in the interval. Fifty years ago it was enormously important to break the social ostracism of avowed Freethought, the political alliance of "beer and Bible," and the bogy of hell fire by which the established religion was defended. Today the Churches themselves confess that they are a minority; no one "cuts" us for Freethought, unless he is such a fool that he is not worth knowing; and hell, except among hard-shelled Catholics, has been degraded from an eschatological dogma to a common or garden swear-word. The old Bible-smashing Secularism is played out; and the "reverent agnosticisms" and other half-way houses, about which we were so earnest in our youth, are now unsaleable. The new generation is much more interested in finding jobs and homes and stopping a third world war; and rightly so.

Probably there is nothing which the Ethical and Rationalist movements can corporately do about it. We cannot corporately take sides in politics. But there is much that we can do as individuals. We can be on our guard, every one of us, against that loss of interest in the future which normally comes with age. If we are parents, we can be on terms of equal friendship with our children. If we are not, we can keep on such terms with any young people who are willing to tolerate our society. We can remember that we have as much to learn from them as they from us. We can learn from them the sort of problems which interest them, and we can show that we are more, not less alive to those problems through having had to face and fight our own. In that way we may justify the Rationalism that is in us to those who may think it a dead issue.

CHAPTER XXI

RATIONALISM AND THE ARTIST

ONE of the arguments now used by apologists of religion to discredit Rationalism with the younger generation is the supposed incompatibility of Rationalism with æsthetic values. In attacking religion, it is argued, the Rationalist assumes that the method of science (the collection of facts, framing of hypotheses, testing of those hypotheses by experiment, and correction of theory by practice) is our only avenue of information about the world around us. By this method we get rid of religious dogma. The existence of God, the incarnation of Christ, the atonement, and the world to come are hypotheses neither necessitated by the facts nor verifiable by any experiment open to man. But, the argument runs, the scientific method equally invalidates artistic appreciation. The universe as envisaged by the scientific materialist has no room for beauty or significant form. The Elgin marbles are just calcium carbonate, the paintings of Michelangelo just chemicals which reflect certain wave-lengths in a certain pattern, a Bach concerto aerial vibrations set up by the scraping of catgut and other mechanical devices, a play of Shakespeare the representation of transactions and conversations for the occurrence of which we have no historical evidence. The critic's appreciation of these is his private emotion. In catering for such emotion the artist is a minister of pleasure; but by the criterion of pleasure there is no difference between Bach and a crooner or between Shakespeare and a Punch and Judy show. If we wish, the argument concludes, to escape these conclusions, we must admit that there is a world of absolute values distinct from the world of verifiable fact dealt with by science. On that admission art yields us a knowledge of reality beyond the reach of scientific tests. And if art does, so may religion.

It seems to me that this argument, which has been put to me more than once by critics of Rationalism, confuses several issues. First, there is the question whether art is any good at all; secondly, whether the good at which art aims—namely, beauty—is identical or not with the good at which science aims—namely, truth; thirdly, if the two are not the same, whether beauty admits of a criterion comparable to the criterion of truth—in other words, whether there is any sense in which we can say that Shakespeare really is better than a Punch and Judy show.

No Rationalist, so far as I know, denies the value of art. The opponents of Rationalism often seem to me to be knocking down

an Aunt Sally of their own creation—an imaginary dry-as-dust fanatic who wishes to eliminate from the human make-up every faculty except that of reason. I have never met such a Rationalist. Man has many faculties in exercising which he can find self-fulfilment; and of these reason is only one. The artist who creates beauty and the scientist who enlarges knowledge are each doing something very worth while. There have been religionists who denied the value of art, but no Rationalists.

The second question, whether beauty is identical with truth, is answered affirmatively in a well-known line of Keats. I do not see how the identification can be sustained. The seeker after truth is not concerned with the beauty or ugliness of what he discovers. A doctor may have to diagnose cancer or tuberculosis; a court of law, applying scientific rules of evidence, may have to establish murder most foul. In such cases truth is not beauty. Similarly the artist is not concerned with the truth of what he portrays, in the sense of its photographic correspondence with nature. In certain media, as in portrait painting or in a historical play or novel, a certain correspondence between the work of art and its subject is expected; but that is not the final standard by which the artist is judged. In music the divorce from objective reality is almost complete. At most the musician suggests a mood or an emotion; the attempt to do more (e.g. to represent a motor-car or a railway-engine in music) is not generally considered great art.

The claim that beauty is truth is really a claim that art can do the work of science, and is just as absurd as would be the converse claim that science could do the office of art. Those who assure us that a Bach concerto reveals absolute values never seem able to explain what values it reveals. In short, the absolute-value-monger is a word spinner. Those of us who enjoy Bach (among whom I number myself) are or should be content with the feast which he indisputably provides, and have no more use for speculation on the eternal values allegedly revealed by his music than has the modern mathematician for Plato's view that we learnt geometry in heaven before we were born.

There remains the final question—namely, whether there is a criterion of beauty analogous to the criterion of truth. Now the criterion of truth is in the last resort social: the Copernican astronomy displaced the Ptolemaic, and modern chemistry displaced belief in phlogiston, because in each case the new theory appealed to tests which anyone with the necessary leisure and equipment could apply for himself. I believe the criterion of beauty in the last resort to be social also. Bach is a great musician, and a crooner is not,

because Bach has thrilled multitudes of men and women for two hundred years, and nobody believes that the crooner's caterwaul will outlive half a dozen. A great artist is one who moves not one country or one age only, but many countries and many ages. I confess I can think of no other criterion of great art.

The great artist, by the fact that his work lives, proves that he has touched springs which lie deep in human nature. Is not that achievement enough without crediting him with supernatural vision? Is it not enough to interpret in a few strokes of the brush, a few lines of poetry, or a few bars of music the dreams of millions past, present, and to come? to be an engineer of the human soul? That is what the artist is. If the religionist were content to be no more, the Rationalist would have less quarrel with religion.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT SHAW HAS TAUGHT US

BETWEEN Shaw's first impact on the British public and his death there elapsed about sixty years. As a preliminary to an estimate of Shaw's influence on his age, I propose to compare the mental climate of sixty years ago, the climate of my earliest recollection, with that of today. Sixty years ago most of us were taught that it was our duty to believe in the Christian religion and to obey the will of God as revealed in it. Such obedience consisted in submission to Church and State, in personal honesty and chastity, and in contentment with the state of life into which it had pleased God to call us. Today, whatever meaning we attach to the word "duty," it is not that. The very Churches which hold to that formula have to restate it in more acceptable language. Submission is no longer a categorical imperative; belief has to be justified by reason; personal ethics have to be set in a social and political context. Church and State, which once had only to command, are now driven to persuade, and need an enormous apparatus of Press and radio propaganda to do that.

This change is not the work of Shaw or of any one man. It is part of a world revolution that has been going on all our lives. But Shaw played a notable part in it; and his work must be judged against that background.

When I first began reading Shaw and seeing his plays, most people of my acquaintance regarded him as, at best, a joker and, at

worst, a corrupter of morals. Nobody outside the little circle of Socialists and progressives (who at the beginning of this century cut very little ice) gave him credit for meaning anything he said or for being actuated by any motive but self-advertisement. That was middle-class public opinion forty to fifty years ago. One effect of reading Shaw was to make me react violently against that public opinion. The public who held it seemed to me to be, and still seem to me to have been, not only ignorant and mistaken, but fools, and not only fools, but, in the most solemn sense of the word, damned fools. A careful reading of Shaw's plays and prefaces, to say nothing of his other works, is enough to establish that he meant very nearly everything he said, that in saying it he was trying his hardest to change people and to change the world, and that the jokes and paradoxes which were all that some people could see in him were mere gilding to make the public who paid for seats in West End theatres swallow the pill of a consistently held and inculcated doctrine.

The first article of Shaw's faith is man's collective responsibility for the world. The conception of duty inculcated on us in our youth, namely that the powers that be are ordained of God, and that while we owe honesty and kindness to individuals, our duty to society begins and ends with obedience, is anathema to Shaw. He shows it up in play after play. Trench in *Widowers' Houses* is a model young man according to the Church catechism, virtuously outraged by Sartorius' exploitation of his slum tenants. He is made to see that his own income, to which he has never given a thought, comes from a mortgage on the very slum property he denounces. Vivie Warren in *Mrs Warren's Profession* is a hard-working and ambitious young woman icily contemptuous of her questionable mother and her questionable set. In one of Shaw's best bits of dialogue the mother forces her daughter to see that she owes her college education, her refinement, and her independence to the money her mother has made and is making as a professional procuress. The conventionally virtuous people are fraudulently dependent on the conventionally vicious. And Shaw does not let us escape by the hoary lie that the remedy is the reform of the individual. Sartorius is not a slum landlord because, having a free choice between good and evil, he chose evil. Nor is Mrs Warren a procuress by any such choice. Both, we learn in the course of the plays, began in squalid poverty and struggled out of that squalid poverty by fighting with what weapons they had—Sartorius with his ruthless greed and Mrs Warren with her "turn for pleasing men." The choice was not between good and evil, but between

two evils; and the remedy is not to " reform " Sartorius and Mrs Warren into choosing squalid poverty sooner than greed or vice, but to abolish squalid poverty and the need to escape from it in those ways. Shaw returns to the theme in *Major Barbara*, in which poverty, not money, is declared to be the root of all evil—of ignorance, disease, ugliness, dirt, cowardice; and the very agencies which alleviate poverty, such as the Salvation Army (whose work among the poor Shaw in no way belittles, but stresses), are shown to depend for their money on big business firms which exploit poverty and war. Barbara, who is reduced to despair by this discovery, learns the lesson that the remedy is not to preach to individuals, but to fight the system. It is noteworthy that in this play, written as long ago as 1905, Shaw makes it clear that the system must be fought, if necessary, by revolutionary means. " Turn your oughts into shalls, man. Come and make explosives with me."

But Shaw does not stop at asserting man's collective responsibility for the world as against the conventional doctrine of individual responsibility. He challenges the conventional conception of good conduct itself. In *Candida* he stages an evenly matched conflict between an old and a new conception of sex relations. Morell, the clergyman, is a sympathetic figure, entirely on Shaw's side in the political battle against the exploitation of man by man, but taking for granted the patriarchal basis of the family. He simply cannot imagine that his wife does not " belong " to him. Against him is pitted, with immense dramatic effect, the young poet Marchbanks, a perfect fool about politics and economics, but able to see what Morell does not see, that a woman no less than a man belongs to herself, and that a marriage bond based on anything but love is no bond at all. Morell learns his lesson; and Eugene, when Candida freely chooses to stay with her husband, goes out into the night. The same theme of sex equality is stressed in *You Never Can Tell*, where the conventional pretence of horror at premarital " affairs " is shown to be equally humbug in the case of a man or a woman.

But to what end does Shaw wage war against exploitation, whether of man by man, of woman by man, or of man by woman? He tries to tell us in *Man and Superman*, especially in the interlude *Don Juan in Hell*, where he proclaims that there is no joy for him but the work of helping life—now so wasteful, so self-frustrating and self-destructive—to achieve a common purpose, understanding, and plan. In this scene he says: " It is not killing and dying that degrades us, but base living, and accepting the wages and profits of degradation. Better ten dead men than one live slave or his master." In the preface: " The only real tragedy in life is the being

used by personally minded men for purposes which you recognize to be base." That is why Shaw, from *Fabian Essays* down to his last letter to the Press, fought capitalism as Voltaire fought *l'infâme*. That is why so many people of my generation, nurtured in orthodox homes and taught to respect ideals of truth and justice, when we came out into the world and found those ideals mere masks hiding the reality of cut-throat competition, prostituted pens, and lying propaganda, made Shaw our prophet.

To those who do not share his revolutionary zest Shaw naturally seems heartless—an intellectual remote from common human nature. But Shaw declares in play after play that the urge to understand and change the world is itself a passion, differing from other passions in its greater constancy and sense of direction, and organizing " a mob of appetites " into " an army of purposes and principles." All moralities which conflict with this master-passion Shaw dismisses as false coin, mere sentimentality and dread of doing the unusual. In Jack Tanner's words, such morality " can go to its father the devil." There lay Shaw's strength—the strength which forced those who had despised him as a posturing paradoxist to acknowledge him in the end as a world figure.

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By Archibald Robertson

HOW TO READ HISTORY

Here is a provocative study of how history is made, a keen analysis of the forces that go to make up our judgment of historical events. History, the author reminds us, is not a tale of the triumph of virtue over vice. To gain a deeper insight into the past and a clearer unders[illegible] of our own problems, still in the course of solution, we [illegible] new into the background of events whil[illegible] conceptions that encumb[illegible]