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Winds of Doctrine

Studies in Contemporary Opinion

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I

THE INTELLECTUAL TEMPER OF THE AGE

THE present age is a critical one and interesting to live in. The civilisation characteristic of Christendom has not disappeared, yet another civilisation has begun to take its place. We still understand the value of religious faith; we still appreciate the pompous arts of our forefathers; we are brought up on academic architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and music. We still love monarchy and aristocracy, together with that picturesque and dutiful order which rested on local institutions, class privileges, and the authority of the family. We may even feel an organic need for all these things, cling to them tenaciously, and dream of rejuvenating them. On the other hand the shell of Christendom is broken. The unconquerable mind of the East, the pagan past, the industrial socialistic future confront it with their equal authority. Our whole life and mind is saturated with the slow upward filtration of a new spirit—that of an emancipated, atheistic, international democracy.

These epithets may make us shudder; but what they describe is something positive and self-justified, something deeply rooted in our animal nature and inspiring to our hearts, something which, like every vital impulse, is pregnant with a morality of its own. In vain do we deprecate it; it has possession of us already through our propensities, fashions, and language. Our very plutocrats and monarchs are at ease only when they are vulgar. Even prelates and missionaries are hardly sincere or conscious of an honest function, save as they devote themselves to social work; for willy-nilly the new spirit has hold of our consciences as well. This spirit is amiable as well as disquieting, liberating as well as barbaric; and a philosopher in our day, conscious both of the old life and of the new, might repeat what Goethe said of his

successive love affairs—that it is sweet to see the moon rise while the sun is still mildly shining.

Meantime our bodies in this generation are generally safe, and often comfortable; and for those who can suspend their irrational labours long enough to look about them, the spectacle of the world, if not particularly beautiful or touching, presents a rapid and crowded drama and (what here concerns me most) one unusually intelligible. The nations, parties, and movements that divide the scene have a known history. We are not condemned, as most generations have been, to fight and believe without an inkling of the cause. The past lies before us; the history of everything is published. Every one records his opinion, and loudly proclaims what he wants. In this Babel of ideals few demands are ever literally satisfied; but many evaporate, merge together, and reach an unintended issue, with which they are content. The whole drift of things presents a huge, good-natured comedy to the observer. It stirs not unpleasantly a certain sturdy animality and hearty self-trust which lie at the base of human nature.

A chief characteristic of the situation is that moral confusion is not limited to the world at large, always the scene of profound conflicts, but that it has penetrated to the mind and heart of the average individual. Never perhaps were men so like one another and so divided within themselves. In other ages, even more than at present, different classes of men have stood at different levels of culture, with a magnificent readiness to persecute and to be martyred for their respective principles. These militant believers have been keenly conscious that they had enemies; but their enemies were strangers to them, whom they could think of merely as such, regarding them as blank negative forces, hateful black devils, whose existence might make life difficult but could not confuse the ideal of life. No one sought to understand these enemies of his, nor even to conciliate them, unless under compulsion or out of insidious policy, to convert them against their will; he merely pelted them with blind refutations and clumsy blows. Every one sincerely felt that the right was entirely on his side, a proof that such intelligence as he had moved freely and exclusively within the lines of his faith. The result of this was that his faith was intelligent, I mean, that he understood it, and had a clear, almost instinctive perception of what was compatible or incompatible with it. He defended his walls and he cultivated his garden. His position and his possessions were unmistakable.

When men and minds were so distinct it was possible to describe and to count them. During the Reformation, when external confusion was at its height, you might have ascertained almost statistically what persons and what regions each side snatched from the other; it was not doubtful which was which. The history of their respective victories and defeats could consequently be written. So in the eighteenth century it was easy to perceive how many people Voltaire and Rousseau might be alienating from Bossuet and Fénelon. But how shall we satisfy ourselves now whether, for instance, Christianity is holding its own? Who can tell what vagary or what compromise may not be calling itself Christianity? A bishop may be a modernist, a chemist may be a mystical theologian, a psychologist may be a believer in ghosts. For science, too, which had promised to supply a new and solid foundation for philosophy, has allowed philosophy rather to undermine its foundation, and is seen eating its own words, through the mouths of some of its accredited spokesmen, and reducing itself to something utterly conventional and insecure. It is characteristic of human nature to be as impatient of ignorance regarding what is not known as lazy in acquiring such knowledge as is at hand; and even those who have not been lazy sometimes take it into their heads to disparage their science and to outdo the professional philosophers in psychological scepticism, in order to plunge with them into the most vapid speculation. Nor is this insecurity about first principles limited to abstract subjects. It reigns in politics as well. Liberalism had been supposed to advocate liberty; but what the advanced parties that still call themselves liberal now advocate is control, control over property, trade, wages, hours of work, meat and drink, amusements, and in a truly advanced country like France control over education and religion; and it is only on the subject of marriage (if we ignore eugenics) that liberalism is growing more and more liberal. Those who speak most of progress measure it by quantity and not by quality; how many people read and write, or how many people there are, or what is the annual value of their trade; whereas true progress would rather lie in reading or writing fewer and better things, and being fewer and better men, and enjoying life more. But the philanthropists are now preparing an absolute subjection of the individual, in soul and body, to the instincts of the majority – the most cruel and unprogressive of masters; and I am not sure that the liberal maxim, “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” has not lost

whatever was just or generous in its intent and come to mean the greatest idleness of the largest possible population.

Nationality offers another occasion for strange moral confusion. It had seemed that an age that was levelling and connecting all nations, an age whose real achievements were of international application, was destined to establish the solidarity of mankind as a sort of axiom. The idea of solidarity is indeed often invoked in speeches, and there is an extreme socialistic party that—when a wave of national passion does not carry it the other way—believes in international brotherhood. But even here, black men and yellow men are generally excluded; and in higher circles, where history, literature, and political ambition dominate men's minds, nationalism has become of late an omnivorous all-permeating passion. Local parliaments must be everywhere established, extinct or provincial dialects must be galvanised into national languages, philosophy must be made racial, religion must be fostered where it emphasises nationality and denounced where it transcends it. Man is certainly an animal that, when he lives at all, lives for ideals. Something must be found to occupy his imagination, to raise pleasure and pain into love and hatred, and change the prosaic alternative between comfort and discomfort into the tragic one between happiness and sorrow. Now that the hue of daily adventure is so dull, when religion for the most part is so vague and accommodating, when even war is a vast impersonal business, nationality seems to have slipped into the place of honour. It has become the one eloquent, public, intrepid illusion. Illusion, I mean, when it is taken for an ultimate good or a mystical essence, for of course nationality is a fact. People speak some particular language and are very uncomfortable where another is spoken or where their own is spoken differently. They have habits, judgments, assumptions to which they are wedded, and a society where all this is unheard of shocks them and puts them at a galling disadvantage. To ignorant people the foreigner as such is ridiculous, unless he is superior to them in numbers or prestige, when he becomes hateful. It is natural for a man to like to live at home, and to live long elsewhere without a sense of exile is not good for his moral integrity. It is right to feel a greater kinship and affection for what lies nearest to oneself. But this necessary fact and even duty of nationality is accidental; like age or sex it is a physical fatality which can be made the basis of specific and comely virtues; but it is not an end to pursue or a flag to flaunt or a privilege not balanced by a thousand incapacities. Yet of

this distinction our contemporaries tend to make an idol, perhaps because it is the only distinction they feel they have left.

Anomalies of this sort will never be properly understood until people accustom themselves to a theory to which they have always turned a deaf ear, because, though simple and true, it is materialistic: namely, that mind is not the cause of our actions but an effect, collateral with our actions, of bodily growth and organisation. It may therefore easily come about that the thoughts of men, tested by the principles that seem to rule their conduct, may be belated, or irrelevant, or premonitory; for the living organism has many strata, on any of which, at a given moment, activities may exist perfect enough to involve consciousness, yet too weak and isolated to control the organs of outer expression; so that (to speak geologically) our practice may be historic, our manners glacial, and our religion palæozoic. The ideals of the nineteenth century may be said to have been all belated; the age still yearned with Rousseau or speculated with Kant, while it moved with Darwin, Bismarck, and Nietzsche: and to-day, in the half-educated classes, among the religious or revolutionary sects, we may observe quite modern methods of work allied with a somewhat antiquated mentality. The whole nineteenth century might well cry with Faust: "Two souls, alas, dwell in my bosom!" The revolutions it witnessed filled it with horror and made it fall in love romantically with the past and dote on ruins, because they were ruins; and the best learning and fiction of the time were historical, inspired by an unprecedented effort to understand remote forms of life and feeling, to appreciate exotic arts and religions, and to rethink the blameless thoughts of savages and criminals. This sympathetic labour and retrospect, however, was far from being merely sentimental; for the other half of this divided soul was looking ahead. Those same revolutions, often so destructive, stupid, and bloody, filled it with pride, and prompted it to invent several incompatible theories concerning a steady and inevitable progress in the world. In the study of the past, side by side with romantic sympathy, there was a sort of realistic, scholarly intelligence and an adventurous love of truth; kindness too was often mingled with dramatic curiosity. The pathologists were usually healers, the philosophers of evolution were inventors or humanitarians or at least idealists: the historians of art (though optimism was impossible here) were also guides to taste, quickeners of moral sensibility, like Ruskin, or enthusiasts for the irresponsibly beautiful, like Pater and Oscar Wilde.

Everywhere in the nineteenth century we find a double preoccupation with the past and with the future, a longing to know what all experience might have been hitherto, and on the other hand to hasten to some wholly different experience, to be contrived immediately with a beating heart and with flying banners. The imagination of the age was intent on history; its conscience was intent on reform.

Reform! This magic word itself covers a great equivocation. To reform means to shatter one form and to create another; but the two sides of the act are not always equally intended nor equally successful. Usually the movement starts from the mere sense of oppression, and people break down some established form, without any qualms about the capacity of their freed instincts to generate the new forms that may be needed. So the Reformation, in destroying the traditional order, intended to secure truth, spontaneity, and profuseness of religious forms; the danger of course being that each form might become meagre and the sum of them chaotic. If the accent, however, could only be laid on the second phase of the transformation, reform might mean the creation of order where it did not sufficiently appear, so that diffuse life should be concentrated into a congenial form that should render it strong and self-conscious. In this sense, if we may trust Mr. Gilbert Murray, it was a great wave of reform that created Greece, or at least all that was characteristic and admirable in it—an effort to organise, train, simplify, purify, and make beautiful the chaos of barbaric customs and passions that had preceded. The danger here, a danger to which Greece actually succumbed, is that so refined an organism may be too fragile, not inclusive enough within, and not buttressed strongly enough without against the flux of the uncivilised world. Christianity also, in the first formative centuries of its existence, was an integrating reform of the same sort, on a different scale and in a different sphere; but here too an enslaved rabble within the soul claiming the suffrage, and better equipped intellectual empires rising round about, seem to prove that the harmony which the Christian system made for a moment out of nature and life was partial and insecure. It is a terrible dilemma in the life of reason whether it will sacrifice natural abundance to moral order, or moral order to natural abundance. Whatever compromise we choose proves unstable, and forces us to a new experiment.

Perhaps in the century that has elapsed since the French Revolution the pendulum has had time to swing as far as it will in the direction of

negative reform, and may now begin to move towards that sort of reform which is integrating and creative. The veering of the advanced political parties from liberalism to socialism would seem to be a clear indication of this new tendency. It is manifest also in the love of nature, in athletics, in the new woman, and in a friendly medical attitude towards all the passions.

In the fine arts, however, and in religion and philosophy, we are still in full career towards disintegration. It might have been thought that a germ of rational order would by this time have penetrated into fine art and speculation from the prosperous constructive arts that touch the one, and the prosperous natural and mathematical sciences that touch the other. But as yet there is little sign of it. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century painting and sculpture have passed through several phases, representatives of each naturally surviving after the next had appeared. Romanticism, half lurid, half effeminate, yielded to a brutal pursuit of material truth, and a pious preference for modern and humble sentiment. This realism had a romantic vein in it, and studied vice and crime, tedium and despair, with a very genuine horrified sympathy. Some went in for a display of archæological lore or for exotic *motifs*; others gave all their attention to rediscovering and emphasising abstract problems of execution, the highway of technical tradition having long been abandoned. Beginners are still supposed to study their art, but they have no masters from whom to learn it. Thus, when there seemed to be some danger that art should be drowned in science and history, the artists deftly eluded it by becoming amateurs. One gave himself to religious archaism, another to Japanese composition, a third to barbaric symphonies of colour; sculptors tried to express dramatic climaxes, or inarticulate lyrical passion, such as music might better convey; and the latest whims are apparently to abandon painful observation altogether, to be merely decorative or frankly mystical, and to be satisfied with the childishness of hieroglyphics or the crudity of caricature. The arts are like truant children who think their life will be glorious if they only run away and play for ever; no need is felt of a dominant ideal passion and theme, nor of any moral interest in the interpretation of nature. Artists have no less talent than ever; their taste, their vision, their sentiment are often interesting; they are mighty in their independence and feeble only in their works.

In philosophy there are always the professors, as in art there are always the portrait painters and the makers of official sculpture; and

both sorts of academicians are often very expert and well-educated. Yet in philosophy, besides the survival of all the official and endowed systems, there has been of late a very interesting fresh movement, largely among the professors themselves, which in its various hues may be called irrationalism, vitalism, pragmatism, or pure empiricism. But this movement, far from being a reawakening of any organising instinct, is simply an extreme expression of romantic anarchy. It is in essence but a franker confession of the principle upon which modern philosophy has been building—or unbuilding—for these three hundred years, I mean the principle of subjectivity. Berkeley and Hume, the first prophets of the school, taught that experience is not a partial discovery of other things but is itself the only possible object of experience. Therefore, said Kant and the second generation of prophets, any world we may seem to live in, even those worlds of theology or of history which Berkeley or Hume had inadvertently left standing, must be an idea which our present experience suggests to us and which we frame as the principles of our mind allow and dictate that we should. But then, say the latest prophets—Avenarius, William James, M. Bergson—these mental principles are no antecedent necessities or duties imposed on our imagination; they are simply parts of flying experience itself, and the ideas—say of God or of matter—which they lead us to frame have nothing compulsory or fixed about them. Their sole authority lies in the fact that they may be more or less congenial or convenient, by enriching the flying moment aesthetically, or helping it to slip prosperously into the next moment. Immediate feeling, pure experience, is the only reality, the only *fact*: if notions which do not reproduce it fully as it flows are still called true (and they evidently ought not to be) it is only in a pragmatic sense of the word, in that while they present a false and heterogeneous image of reality they are not practically misleading; as, for instance, the letters on this page are no true image of the sounds they call up, nor the sounds of the thoughts, yet both may be correct enough if they lead the reader in the end to the things they symbolise. It is M. Bergson, the most circumspect and best equipped thinker of this often scatter-brained school, who has put this view in a frank and tenable form, avoiding the bungling it has sometimes led to about the “meaning of truth.” Truth, according to M. Bergson, is given only in intuitions which prolong experience just as it occurs, in its full immediacy; on the other hand, all representation, thought, theory, calculation, or discourse is so much

mutilation of the truth, excusable only because imposed upon us by practical exigences. The world, being a feeling, must be felt to be known, and then the world and the knowledge of it are identical; but if it is talked about or thought about it is denaturalised, although convention and utility may compel the poor human being to talk and to think, exiled as he is from reality in his Babylon of abstractions. Life, like the porcupine when not ruffled by practical alarms, can let its fretful quills subside. The mystic can live happy in the droning consciousness of his own heart-beats and those of the universe.

With this we seem to have reached the extreme of self-concentration and self-expansion, the perfect identity and involution of everything in oneself. And such indeed is the inevitable goal of the malicious theory of knowledge, to which this school is committed, remote as that goal may be from the boyish naturalism and innocent intent of many of its pupils. If all knowledge is of experience and experience cannot be knowledge of anything else, knowledge proper is evidently impossible. There can be only feeling; and the least self-transcendence, even in memory, must be an illusion. You may have the most complex images you will; but nothing pictured there can exist outside, not even past or alien experience, if you picture it.¹ Solipsism has always been the evident implication of idealism; but the idealists, when confronted with this consequence, which is dialectically inconvenient, have never been troubled at heart by it, for at heart they accept it. To the uninitiated they have merely murmured, with a pitying smile and a wave of the hand: What! are you still troubled by that? Or if compelled to be

¹ Perhaps some unsophisticated reader may wonder if I am not trying to mislead him, or if any mortal ever really maintained anything so absurd. Strictly the idealistic principle does not justify a denial that independent things, by chance resembling my ideas, may actually exist; but it justifies the denial that these things, if they existed, could be those I know. My past would not be my past if I did not appropriate it; my ideas would not refer to their objects unless both were ideas identified in my mind. In practice, therefore, idealists feel free to ignore the gratuitous possibility of existences lying outside the circle of objects knowable to the thinker, which, according to them, is the circle of his ideas. In this way they turn a human method of approach into a charter for existence and non-existence, and their point of view becomes the creative power. When the idealist studies astronomy, does he learn anything about the stars that God made? Far from him so naïve a thought! His astronomy consists of two activities of his own (and he is very fond of activity): star-gazing and calculation. When he has become quite proficient he knows all about star-gazing and calculation; but he knows nothing of any stars that God made; for there are no stars except his visual images of stars, and there is no God but himself. It is true that to soften this hard saying a little he would correct me and say his *higher* self; but as his lower self is only the idea of himself which he may have framed, it is his higher self that is himself simply: although whether he or his idea of himself is really the higher might seem doubtful to an outsider.

so scholastic as to labour the point they have explained, as usual, that oneself cannot be the absolute because the *idea* of oneself, to arise, must be contrasted with other ideas. Therefore, you cannot well have the idea of a world in which nothing appears but the *idea* of yourself. This explanation, in pretending to refute solipsism, of course assumes and confirms it; for all these *cans* and *musts* touch only your idea of yourself, not your actual being, and there is no thinkable world that is not within you, as you exist really. Thus idealists are wedded to solipsism irrevocably; and it is a happy marriage, only the name of the lady has to be changed.

Nevertheless, lest peace should come (and peace nowadays is neither possible nor desired), a counter-current at once overtakes the philosophy of the immediate and carries it violently to the opposite pole of speculation—from mystic intuition to a commercial cult of action and a materialisation of the mind such as no materialist had ever dreamt of. The tenderness which the pragmatists feel for life in general, and especially for an accelerated modern life, has doubtless contributed to this revulsion, but the speculative consideration of the immediate might have led to it independently. For in the immediate there is marked expectancy, craving, prayer; nothing absorbs consciousness so much as what is not quite given. Therefore it is a good reading of the immediate, as well as a congenial thing to say to the contemporary world, that reality is change, growth, action, creation. Similarly the sudden materialisation of mind, the unlooked-for assertion that consciousness does not exist, has its justification in the same quarter. In the immediate what appears is the thing, not the mind to which the thing appears. Even in the passions, when closely scanned introspectively, you will find a new sensitiveness or ebullition of the body, or a rush of images and words; you will hardly find a separate object called anger or love. The passions, therefore, when their moral essence is forgotten, may be said to be literally nothing but a movement of their organs and their objects, just as ideas may be said to be nothing but fragments or cross-threads of the material world. Thus the mind and the object are rolled into one moving mass; motions are identified with passions, things are perceptions extended, perceptions are things cut down. And, by a curious revolution in sentiment, it is things and motions that are reputed to have the fuller and the nobler reality. Under cover of a fusion or neutrality between idealism and realism, moral materialism, the reverence for mere existence and

power, takes possession of the heart, and ethics becomes idolatrous. Idolatry, however, is hardly possible if you have a cold and clear idea of blocks and stones, attributing to them only the motions they are capable of; and accordingly idealism, by way of compensation, has to take possession of physics. The idol begins to wink and drop tears under the wistful gaze of the worshipper. Matter is felt to yearn, and evolution is held to be more divinely inspired than policy or reason could ever be.

Extremes meet, and the tendency to practical materialism was never wholly absent from the idealism of the moderns. Certainly, the tumid respectability of Anglo-German philosophy had somehow to be left behind; and Darwinian England and Bismarckian Germany had another inspiration as well to guide them, if it could only come to consciousness in the professors. The worship of power is an old religion, and Hegel, to go no farther back, is full of it; but like traditional religion his system qualified its veneration for success by attributing success, in the future at least, to what could really inspire veneration; and such a master in equivocation could have no difficulty in convincing himself that the good must conquer in the end if whatever conquers in the end is the good. Among the pragmatists the worship of power is also optimistic, but it is not to logic that power is attributed. Science, they say, is good as a help to industry, and philosophy is good for correcting whatever in science might disturb religious faith, which in turn is helpful in living. What industry or life are good for it would be unsympathetic to inquire: the stream is mighty, and we must swim with the stream. Concern for survival, however, which seems to be the pragmatic principle in morals, does not afford a remedy for moral anarchy. To take firm hold on life, according to Nietzsche, we should be imperious, poetical, atheistic; but according to William James we should be democratic, concrete, and credulous. It is hard to say whether pragmatism is come to emancipate the individual spirit and make it lord over things, or on the contrary to declare the spirit a mere instrument for the survival of the flesh. In Italy, the mind seems to be raised deliriously into an absolute creator, evoking at will, at each moment, a new past, a new future, a new earth, and a new God. In America, however, the mind is recommended rather as an unpatented device for oiling the engine of the body and making it do double work.

Trustful faith in evolution and a longing for intense life are characteristic of contemporary sentiment; but they do not appear to be

consistent with that contempt for the intellect which is no less characteristic of it. Human intelligence is certainly a product, and a late and highly organised product, of evolution; it ought apparently to be as much admired as the eyes of molluscs or the antennæ of ants. And if life is better the more intense and concentrated it is, intelligence would seem to be the best form of life. But the degree of intelligence which this age possesses makes it so very uncomfortable that, in this instance, it asks for something less vital, and sighs for what evolution has left behind. In the presence of such cruelly distinct things as astronomy or such cruelly confused things as theology it feels *la nostalgie de la boue*. It was only, M. Bergson tells us, where dead matter oppressed life that life was forced to become intelligence; for this reason intelligence kills whatever it touches; it is the tribute that life pays to death. Life would find it sweet to throw off that painful subjection to circumstance and bloom in some more congenial direction. M. Bergson's own philosophy is an effort to realise this revulsion, to disintegrate intelligence and stimulate sympathetic experience. Its charm lies in the relief which it brings to a stale imagination, an imagination from which religion has vanished and which is kept stretched on the machinery of business and society, or on small half-borrowed passions which we clothe in a mean rhetoric and dot with vulgar pleasures. Finding their intelligence enslaved, our contemporaries suppose that intelligence is essentially servile; instead of freeing it, they try to elude it. Not free enough themselves morally, but bound to the world partly by piety and partly by industrialism, they cannot think of rising to a detached contemplation of earthly things, and of life itself and evolution; they revert rather to sensibility, and seek some by-path of instinct or dramatic sympathy in which to wander. Having no stomach for the ultimate, they burrow downwards towards the primitive. But the longing to be primitive is a disease of culture; it is archaism in morals. To be so preoccupied with vitality is a symptom of anæmia. When life was really vigorous and young, in Homeric times for instance, no one seemed to fear that it might be squeezed out of existence either by the incubus of matter or by the petrifying blight of intelligence. Life was like the light of day, something to use, or to waste, or to enjoy. It was not a thing to worship; and often the chief luxury of living consisted in dealing death about vigorously. Life indeed was loved, and the beauty and pathos of it were felt exquisitely; but its beauty and pathos lay in the divineness of its model and in its own fragility. No one paid it the equivocal com-

pliment of thinking it a substance or a material force. Nobility was not then impossible in sentiment, because there were ideals in life higher and more indestructible than life itself, which life might illustrate and to which it might fitly be sacrificed. Nothing can be meaner than the anxiety to live on, to live on anyhow and in any shape; a spirit with any honour is not willing to live except in its own way, and a spirit with any wisdom is not over-eager to live at all. In those days men recognised immortal gods and resigned themselves to being mortal. Yet those were the truly vital and instinctive days of the human spirit. Only when vitality is low do people find material things oppressive and ideal things unsubstantial. Now there is more motion than life, and more haste than force; we are driven to distraction by the ticking of the tiresome clocks, material and social, by which we are obliged to regulate our existence. We need ministering angels to fly to us from somewhere, even if it be from the depths of protoplasm. We must bathe in the currents of some non-human vital flood, like consumptives in their last extremity who must bask in the sunshine and breathe the mountain air; and our disease is not without its sophistry to convince us that we were never so well before, or so mightily conscious of being alive.

When chaos has penetrated so far into the moral being of nations they can hardly be expected to produce great men. A great man need not be virtuous, nor his opinions right, but he must have a firm mind, a distinctive, luminous character; if he is to dominate things, something must be dominant in him. We feel him to be great in that he clarifies and brings to expression something which was potential in the rest of us, but which with our burden of flesh and circumstance we were too torpid to utter. The great man is a spontaneous variation in humanity; but not in any direction. A spontaneous variation might be a mere madness or mutilation or monstrosity; in finding the variation admirable we evidently invoke some principle of order to which it conforms. Perhaps it makes explicit what was preformed in us also; as when a poet finds the absolutely right phrase for a feeling, or when nature suddenly astonishes us with a form of absolute beauty. Or perhaps it makes an unprecedented harmony out of things existing before, but jangled and detached. The first man was a great man for this latter reason; having been an ape perplexed and corrupted by his multiplying instincts, he suddenly found a new way of being decent, by harnessing all those instincts together, through memory and imagi-

nation, and giving each in turn a measure of its due; which is what we call being rational. It is a new road to happiness, if you have strength enough to castigate a little the various impulses that sway you in turn. Why then is the martyr, who sacrifices everything to one attraction, distinguished from the criminal or the fool, who do the same thing? Evidently because the spirit that in the martyr destroys the body is the very spirit which the body is stifling in the rest of us; and although his private inspiration may be irrational, the tendency of it is not, but reduces the public conscience to act before any one else has had the courage to do so. Greatness is spontaneous; simplicity, trust in some one clear instinct, are essential to it; but the spontaneous variation must be in the direction of some possible sort of order; it must exclude and leave behind what is incapable of being moralised. How, then, should there be any great heroes, saints, artists, philosophers, or legislators in an age when nobody trusts himself, or feels any confidence in reason, in an age when the word *dogmatic* is a term of reproach? Greatness has character and severity, it is deep and sane, it is distinct and perfect. For this reason there is none of it to-day.

There is indeed another kind of greatness, or rather largeness of mind, which consists in being a synthesis of humanity in its current phases, even if without prophetic emphasis or direction: the breadth of a Goethe, rather than the fineness of a Shelley or a Leopardi. But such largeness of mind, not to be vulgar, must be impartial, comprehensive, Olympian; it would not be greatness if its miscellany were not dominated by a clear genius and if before the confusion of things the poet or philosopher were not himself delighted, exalted, and by no means confused. Nor does this presume omniscience on his part. It is not necessary to fathom the ground or the structure of everything in order to know what to make of it. Stones do not disconcert a builder because he may not happen to know what they are chemically; and so the unsolved problems of life and nature, and the Babel of society, need not disturb the genial observer, though he may be incapable of unravelling them. He may set these dark spots down in their places, like so many caves or wells in a landscape, without feeling bound to scrutinise their depths simply because their depths are obscure. Unexplored they may have a sort of lustre, explored they might merely make him blind, and it may be a sufficient understanding of them to know that they are not worth investigating. In this way the most chaotic age and the most motley horrors might be mirrored lim-

pidly in a great mind, as the Renaissance was mirrored in the works of Raphael and Shakespeare; but the master's eye itself must be single, his style unmistakable, his visionary interest in what he depicts frank and supreme. Hence this comprehensive sort of greatness too is impossible in an age when moral confusion is pervasive, when characters are complex, undecided, troubled by the mere existence of what is not congenial to them, eager to be not themselves; when, in a word, thought is weak and the flux of things overwhelms it.

Without great men and without clear convictions this age is nevertheless very active intellectually; it is studious, empirical, inventive, sympathetic. Its wisdom consists in a certain contrite openness of mind; it flounders, but at least in floundering it has gained a sense of possible depths in all directions. Under these circumstances, some triviality and great confusion in its positive achievements are not unpromising things, nor even unamiable. These are the *Wanderjahre* of faith; it looks smilingly at every new face, which might perhaps be that of a predestined friend; it chases after any engaging stranger; it even turns up again from time to time at home, full of a new tenderness for all it had abandoned there. But to settle down would be impossible now. The intellect, the judgment are in abeyance. Life is running turbid and full; and it is no marvel that reason, after vainly supposing that it ruled the world, should abdicate as gracefully as possible, when the world is so obviously the sport of cruder powers—vested interests, tribal passions, stock sentiments, and chance majorities. Having no responsibility laid upon it, reason has become irresponsible. Many critics and philosophers seem to conceive that thinking aloud is itself literature. Sometimes reason tries to lend some moral authority to its present masters, by proving how superior they are to itself; it worships evolution, instinct, novelty, action, as it does in modernism, pragmatism, and the philosophy of M. Bergson. At other times it retires into the freehold of those temperaments whom this world has ostracised, the region of the non-existent, and comforts itself with its indubitable conquests there. This happened earlier to the romanticists (in a way which I have tried to describe in the subjoined paper on Shelley) although their poetic and political illusions did not suffer them to perceive it. It is happening now, after disillusion, to some radicals and mathematicians like Mr. Bertrand Russell, and to others of us who, perhaps without being mathematicians or even radicals, feel that the sphere of what happens to exist is too alien and accidental to absorb

all the play of a free mind, whose function, after it has come to clearness and made its peace with things, is to touch them with its own moral and intellectual light, and to exist for its own sake.

These are but gusts of doctrine; yet they prove that the spirit is not dead in the lull between its seasons of steady blowing. Who knows which of them may not gather force presently and carry the mind of the coming age steadily before it?



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