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"GREAT IS TRUTH AND IT SHALL PREVAIL"

ALTERNATE SATURDAYS

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A DEFENCE OF HINDUISM

The attack Dr. Ambedkar recently made on the Hindu religion has shocked many people and created extra resistance in the Hindu mind to the Code Bill that is being mooted. For, Dr. Ambedkar is one of the chief architects of the Bill and it would be hard for the Hindus to believe that one so "allergic" to Hinduism could spell any good to their society. If the Code Bill is a necessary and beneficent measure, immense harm has been done to its cause by the vituperations of the Law Member against the Hindu religion. If it is not, he has done immense though unintentional good by rendering it suspect. But in any case he has not added to his own reputation in the eyes of his thinking compatriots. For, his dicta are so patently fantastic that one wonders how a man credited with a keen legalistic and logical intelligence should have indulged in them.

Dr. Ambedkar contrasts Hinduism to Buddhism. He has himself embraced the latter not because of any appreciation of philosophical, much less spiritual and mystical shades, but because he happened to belong to the scheduled classes which held an unenviable position in Hindu society and which seemed to him a pointer to a lack in Hinduism of the sense of human brotherhood. The institution of untouchability was indeed a blot on the social scheme that had got established in India. But with the advent of the modern age the conscience of the best Hindus has always rebelled against it. As far back as the days of Ram Mohan Roy the progressive movement started and reform organisations like the Brahmo-Samaj and the Arya-Samaj fought untouchability for decades on end. The biggest uproar against it came from a Hindu—Gandhiji. And the Indian Constitution which expresses a good deal of the contemporary Hindu mind has abolished untouchability. It is absurd to claim that untouchability is part and parcel of Hinduism. It is certainly no part of those foundational scriptures of the Hindus: the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. In ancient India the castes were guilds for different crafts and professions, with no odious distinctions or taboos. Later they got rigid. In the days of India's decline they became more and more obnoxious, particularly by thrusting several millions outside the pale. But even when we condemn the injustice to so many it is well to remember that injustice of this type in general is not something peculiarly associated with Hindu society. Will Durant, the famous American writer on civilisation and culture, pointedly asks: "Does the attitude of a Brahmin to a Pariah differ, except in words, from that of a British lord to a navvy, or a Park Avenue banker to an East Side huckster, or a white man to a negro, or a European to an Asiatic?" What is clear from Durant's question is that there is a deplorable tendency in human nature towards unjust discrimination. And a social structure with Buddhism as the religious ingredient of it is as likely as Hinduism or Christianity to become gradually stratified and to develop superiorities and inferiorities. If Buddha preached brotherhood, so did Christ and so did the ancient Hindu seers and saints. In fact the essential oneness of all things, the basic equality of all creatures was never so forcefully declared as by the mystics of Hinduism who saw the Divine everywhere.

In viewing historical India, both past and present, it is necessary to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious in the Hindu religion. Opposed to the fear-infested, delusion-darkened hotchpotch that is the masses' spurious Hinduism, there is the splendid many-sided unity of the genuine one, a grand harmony of a thousand truths. Its fundamental tenet is the old Rig-Vedic formula: "The One whom the sages call by many names." Unity and multiplicity, simplicity and complexity, the supra-cosmic and the cosmic, the universal and the individual—all these are blended together in Hinduism and express themselves in the large number of aspects our country's culture and social life possess. A million gods revealing and concretising a million facets of the inexhaustible Divine and of the infinite Eternal, a supreme trinity-in-unity personalising the creative, preservative and destructive qualities of the Supra-cosmic putting forth the

cosmos and incarnating Himself again and again in the world, an ultimate Mother-force or Shakti bringing out for manifestation the secrets of the one Lord and Master of all existence—this is Hinduism. And it is also Hinduism that man can experience and realise the Divine, become unified with the Infinite, act as a channel of the Eternal, for man is in essence the Supreme and man's nature can be through Yoga a form of the Supreme's dynamic. Hinduism recognises three Yogas to suit the three types of men—the intellectual, the emotional, the kinetic—and the Bhagwad Gita combines the three Yogas in a synthesis. What is more, it throws the synthesis open to all without distinction. To realise the One everywhere and see the One in the Many as well as the Many in the One is the goal of the Hindu mystic, the climax of the Hindu religious experience. And Sri Krishna in the Gita declares that even a Chandala, an untouchable outcast, can become a knower of God and stand with the highest.

In the face of such a declaration and doctrine it is difficult to understand how anybody could identify genuine Hinduism with an inflexible as well as tyrannous caste system and the belief in untouchability. Beverley Nichols committed an indeed mountainous "howler" when he said, after talking of reforming Hinduism, that if by reform you knocked the caste system and untouchability out of it you would find that there was nothing left to reform. Dr. Ambedkar seems very nearly of the same opinion. Probably Nichols whose two idols in India were Mr. Jinnah and Dr. Ambedkar owed his misapprehension to them. But regrettably enough some Hindu leaders themselves have made too much of a song about the evil of untouchability. The most famous of them said: "I would rather that Hinduism perished than untouchability survived. This amounts to making Hinduism stand or fall by pariahdom. In other words, one would be satisfied even if there were no such spiritual inspiration in the country as breathed and lived in a Vasishtha or a Yajnavalkya, a Chaitanya or a Mirabai, a Tukaram or a Tulsidas, a Ramakrishna or a Vivekananda—provided there were no scheduled classes! One may inquire what sort of life would there be on earth without the rishis, the saints, the mystics, the Yogis. Man would be just a higher kind of brute or, rather, a worse kind of brute, since he would have nothing of the innocence of the animals but only their ferocity developed and gilded by a soulless reasoning ingenuity. Admittedly, religion which gives birth to the Beatific Vision in some may also degenerate in others to cruel bigotry and hidebound superstitious caste-ridden orthodoxy: we have to be on guard and strive ever for its pure and clear and luminous manifestation, but to be prepared to throw away its higher reaches merely because it has also lower ones that accommodate things like untouchability is to be victimised by a hysteria of humanism. Humanism is a very worthy sentiment and creed, yet it cannot be balanced against spiritual experience, against God-realisation, against concrete communion with the Eternal. Hinduism stands or falls primarily and essentially by its ability to produce embodiments of such experience, realisation and communion. Although a vast brotherhood, a profound parity as between all classes, is indeed one of its tenets, this brotherhood and parity is a tenet not of mere sociology but of a spirituality which is rooted in the universal Self of selves or the single Lord whose undying sparks are all evolving souls. To be ready to forgo this spirituality just because the social structure within which it first flourished and still flourishes has become decadent in many respects and is resistant in many ways to the influence of spirituality—to value more the abolition of untouchability than the existence of the God-knowers and God-lovers who open up for man the possibilities of a further evolution: this is a capital mistake, a loss of right proportion, a blurring of correct perspective, a depreciation of the force that alone can in the long run put a radical rather than a superficial and therefore temporary end to the iniquities that in defferent shapes are the sad lot of millions not only in

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India but also abroad and even in countries where Buddhism is practised. It is another form of the Ambedkarian heresy that if Hinduism bore the caste system for several centuries it has failed "to yield anything substantive."

Here we may remind the learned Doctor that in the very religion he has embraced, in Buddhism itself, it is not Buddha's humanism that is the living core: the heart of his message is Nirvana, the direct experience of an undifferentiated superhuman infinity and permanence beyond all phenomena. "As the taste of water from all the seas is salt," said Buddha, "so too the taste of all my teachings is Nirvana." Remove Nirvana from Buddhism and you rob Buddha's own life of its central significance. Buddha did not come merely to state the equality of human beings: his chief mission was to inculcate and irradiate a spiritual realisation lifting us far beyond humanity and his very emphasis on human equality was born of his mystical perception of the limitless immutable Presence in which earth and life and man can be submerged and the cycles of time transcended. If Buddhism has yielded "anything substantive", the main proof according to Buddha would lie not in whether it has yielded the savour of a society without the caste-system but in whether it has yielded the taste of Nirvana. The main proof, under different appearances, is exactly the same as in the Hinduism Dr. Ambedkar castigates.

However, as we have said, there is a subtle trend among Hindus themselves to exaggerate social values and thus play into the hands of critics of Hinduism. In one sense we may say the trend is towards Buddhism, for Buddhism is more prone than any other religion to be interpreted, in spite of its founder's aim and teaching, as a secular system. It does away with all metaphysical inquiry and discourages every metaphysical statement. It is a spiritual version of what has become known in the present day West as Operationalism. According to the Operationalist canon, we stick only to that which can be demonstrated by a series of experimental operations, an employment of laboratory techniques, a manipulation of scientific apparatus. No assertions are to be made about ultimate reality since scientifically we cannot go beyond the evidence of physical instruments that measure phenomena. Similarly in Buddhism a psychological technique is provided: shedding of desire, rejection of the ego-sense, equanimity in face of all beings and happenings, practice of universal compassion, inner meditative detachment from both mental and bodily processes. This technique is spirituality and what it gives is liberation from sorrow and ignorance. The liberation should be described by no positive labels like Brahman, Atman or Ishwara: it can be labelled only in a negative manner as Nirvana which means cessation or absence of the interminable Becoming which is the world. The primal facts to be reckoned with are, in Buddha's view, world and non-world. The splendours of mystical nomenclature, the sublime entities of spiritual scripture, the metaphysical ultimates of religious hymnody and liturgy are absent and in their place is a super-pragmatism. In reality, of course, Buddha under the Bo Tree or moving amidst his monks or preaching to the populace is enhaloed by a mystical light, one with a spiritual Ineffable, himself an embodiment of a deathless freedom that is beyond the world. But the formula and method of Buddhahood are severely practical and "operational". And just one step more after the refusal to commit oneself to any metaphysics, even while being spiritual, is to ignore the implicit metaphysics altogether and concentrate on a self-discipline in altruism serving an ordered society: the spirituality shades off into social ethicism and we have the secular ideals of truthfulness and non-violence, integrity and fraternity. The nameless peace of Nirvana becomes the happiness-giving principles of kindness and concord. Hinduism is hard to divest of its divine mysteries, difficult of secularisation in the modern meaning of the term: emphasis on humanism. It can be made secular only in the sense of a God-realisation countenancing no narrow religiosity and turning to this-worldly work: it can never be separated from the superhuman Presence. Certain sections of modern India, unable to break away wholly from that Presence yet wanting increasingly, under the influence of the West, to be secular, have found in Buddhist gestures and symbols a means of striking some kind of balance. They have brought about the adoption of the Dharma Chakra for the national flag and the Lion of Sarnath for the State Seal. This choice is due to a particular turn of the *Zeitgeist* and not because Buddhism is a religion superior to Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar is therefore quite off the mark when he uses it to bolster up the religion to which he has been converted and to run down the one he has abandoned. Also the choice is due rather to a defect in the modern Indian temperament than to any special merit in the Buddhist creed, or to any true appreciation of that creed by this temperament. To overlook Nirvana—Nirvana without which Buddha would have regarded his teaching as worthless—is scarcely to appreciate Buddhism. And a religion which allows with some ease its deepest meaning to be overlooked can certainly not be considered grander or more effective. Ancient India could not permanently embrace Buddhism precisely because of this ambiguity, this weakness. The glorious personality of Buddha and the great experience he embodied remained stamped on her mind, so much so that he was included in the list of the Avatars and put beside Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, but after a few glowing centuries the religion he propagated lost its grip and died out.

The inclusion of Buddha among the Avatars and at the same time the rejection of his religion as unfit for wholesale acceptance are facts that can be taken as clues to special qualities in Hinduism which have escaped completely the mind of Dr. Ambedkar. Buddhism could never have taken into its fold Sri Rama or Sri Krishna. It is, like most other religions, a one-track move towards the Eternal. Hinduism is multitudinous and multifarious, catholic and synthetic, a cosmos of creeds and experiences. It is a gigantic diversity driving, by a secret similarity within each variant, towards the same yet manifold Godhead. Its culture too is myriad-aspected: no line of thought anywhere, no scheme of ethics, no system of worship, no style of art, but finds here its place in the wondrous whole. The wide-ness and variety that are held together in a loose yet living and interlinked combination by the Hindu view and way of life are responsible for the almost utter lack of religious intolerance we observe in Indian history. Vivekananda was but voicing the Hinduism of the ages when he said that there should be as many religions as there are individuals; and we may add that every one of these religions could be called Hindu! Not that there is in Hinduism a welter of doctrines: there is only a recognition of the infinite possibilities of the omnipotent divine nature and the extreme multiplicity of frail aspiring human nature. All that Hinduism asks is: can you in any manner realise the Supreme Being? Without the least violation of its own character it can take the religion of Buddha to its bosom, even as it can take Christianity or Mohammedanism. Each of them can be a note in the complex harmony of its heavenward cry. But neither Buddhism nor Christianity nor Mohammedanism can take Hinduism into itself. They are intent on converting all souls to one type and to confine the illimitable and protean Spirit to a single formula and a solitary revelation. None of them, therefore, can truly satisfy, or gain wholesale acceptance from, the Indian consciousness which wants spiritual life abundant. Life abundant, whether spiritual or secular, cannot exist for long in a one-track system.

It is also in the instinctive surge of the genuine Indian consciousness towards a complex harmony that we find the original *raison d'être* of the caste system which Dr. Ambedkar falls foul of. The caste system has been for centuries a sore on the body of this fair country, but the fact that Hinduism evolved the caste system and that Buddhism is devoid of it is not to the credit of the latter. What, after all, is the basis of the system? It is a recognition of the non-uniformity of human nature and an attempt to make the non-uniformity work with the utmost efficiency. Human nature falls into four main functions: the seeking of knowledge, inner and outer, and the giving of form and body to the truths of the universe—the seeking to exercise strength and power and the capacity to attack and defend, to lead and rule—the seeking to produce wealth, promote trade, secure the physical well-being of society—the seeking to serve and obey and exercise the capacity to do manual labour. The four functions are crystallised in the Brahmin the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Sudra. Of course, no human being is entirely one-functioned and room must be left in any social system for passage from one group to another. But a clear division too is, under certain circumstances, required to stabilise society and promote the intensest development of each function by means of a conducive environment, association and training. In ancient India a rare combination of flexibility with fixity was nearly achieved, but as such a combination is very difficult to maintain a decline took place and when the national life was in danger owing to internal decadence and external invasion the strata or classes or castes grew rigid not only as a result of an ebb in the true spirit of Indian civilisation but also in consequence of conditions threatening Indian society with chaos. The caste system as it lingered on up to now was more or less a harmful and superficial institution, but in its origin as a number of guilds it was a creation of much wisdom and also carried a spiritual colour which at the same time infused the highest values into every stratum and rendered different classes equal in essential status by that infusion. Even the sub-Sudras who took up the most servile labour, the work of scavenging, and who in course of time became the outcasts, the untouchables, had their own dignity and spiritual significance and were never debarred from getting into the higher strata, even into the highest, by showing a capacity at variance with their environment, association and training. Modern conditions do not favour clear divisions and today Hinduism is striving to drop them, especially as they have become a mockery of their old selves, but in the ages when they were laid down they were a really fruitful and "substantive achievement" and even now their essential truth has to be brought into play in a new revolutionary fashion rather than denied, denounced and neglected.

Hinduism, however, does not need for its own justification any kind of defence of the caste system. Were this system a total blunder Hinduism would still not stand condemned. Human nature is such a *mélange* that a mighty truth and a huge mistake can exist side by side, and the mightier the truth the more danger there can be of misgrowths occurring on levels where a truth is likely to get perverted in proportion to its being vast and rich and multifoliate. Whatever the results, we have to move in the direction of vastness and richness and multifoliateness, for these alone can provide us with the final key to life's riddle and challenge. These are qualities

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“THOSE WHO ARE NOT WITH ME ARE AGAINST ME”

THE CHOICE BETWEEN CIVILISATION AND THE KREMLIN

By DILIP KUMAR ROY

Historians are legion—those who cull events to register in chronological order. No doubt they merit the approbation of all good citizens, the votaries of chronicles as such. There are, however, tasks which can be more commendable to our aspiration. One of these is to record the heart's deep cry against something which happens to upset spiritual values. By no means an easy task, because for this one must be equipped with an artist mind, a living palette and the heart's hue. But the compensation is that, when achieved, it stands out bolder than history: the moving picture of an age, depressing and yet elevating.

It is just such a picture which has been achieved of late by a gifted Russian, Victor Kravshenko, the author of *I Chose Freedom*. He is an authentic Russian, from crust to core. But he is more: he is an authentic man, a human being who cannot be dominated by a dogma. As a race the Russians are amazing. This I realised first nearly three decades ago, when I read the autobiography of another Russian, an artist of the pen and a humanist at heart, Prince Kropotkin the great revolutionary socialist who wrote *The Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. I read this book in England in the early twenties when Netaji Subhash Bose was in the making and it was one of the books that had taken a hand in making him. For I well remember how he used to discuss the Prince's irrepressible spirit, often with a quaver in his young ardent voice when he read out passages from the book. And how we used to marvel as we discussed together a singular remark of the Prince, that the Russian exhibited a curious blend of soaring nobility and abysmal brutality. For the henchmen of the Tsar, wrote the Prince, betrayed a fierce delight in perpetrating the blackest cruelties: it was almost as if they rejoiced in cruelty for cruelty's sake, while, on the obverse of the medal, he stressed, bloomed some of the whitest flowers of humanity: Turgenev, the artist; Dostoevski, the seer; Chekov, the humanist and, last though not least—the almost incredible phenomenon, Count Leo Tolstoi.

Hope and Misgiving

During my one year's stay in Berlin—between 1921 and 1922—I used to have truck mostly with the Russians who happened to be there. These formed a motley group: there were among them officials (Bolsheviks); anti-revolutionaries (convinced or otherwise); artists (idealists and Utopians); refugees who had lost everything (some of them bolstered-up Capitalist agents); easy-going ruminants (epicureans who “died of a rose in aromatic pain”) and lastly, the Tolstoyans (sentimental anarchists) whose personalities attracted me almost as much as their sentimentality repelled me. From this heterogeneous brood I gathered contradictory reports about the state of affairs in Russia which were bewildering in the extreme. The result was that I oscillated continually between two poles: at one end, a rosy optimism that the Russian Revolution was going to bring overnight the millennium on earth; at the other, a gnawing doubt that the millennium might not come out of the roar and blare of a ruthless intolerant oligarchy. The hope was born out of the fiery idealism of the official agents I had met; the misgiving inspired by the disenchanting idealists whose arguments, boiled down, came to what has been lately summed up powerfully by Arthur Koestler in his moving autobiographical novel, *Darkness at Noon*, in the indictment of Rubashov, the disillusioned recanter:

“Our Press and our schools cultivate Chauvinism, militarism, dogmatism, conformism and ignorance. The arbitrary power of the Government is unlimited and unexampled in history; freedom of the Press, of opinion and of movement are as thoroughly exterminated as though the proclamation of the Rights of Man had never been. We have built up the most gigantic police apparatus, with informers made a national institution. We whip the groaning masses of the country towards a theoretical future happiness which only we can see. For the energies of this generation are exhausted; they were spent in the Revolution; for this generation is bled white and there is nothing left of it but a moaning, numb, apathetic lump of sacrificial flesh. . . . To me it sometimes seems as though the experimenters had torn the skin off the victim and left it standing with bared tissues, muscles and nerves.”

It so happened that at this time I met Sri Manabendra Nath Roy who sent for me and with his marvellous intellectual arguments convinced me that “a new sunrise” was visible in Russia to every genuine seeker of light and he got me an official invitation to visit Moscow. I understand he too is now thoroughly disillusioned about Bolshevism in practice as against in theory, but in 1921 his glowing enthusiasm for “the new era inaugurated by the Bolshevist humanitarians” all but swept me off my feet and I would have accepted his invitation had I not just then come upon two books on Russia which made a great impression on my avid mind: *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* by Bertrand Russell and *Russia in the Shadows* by H. G. Wells. Both men were shocked by what they had seen in Russia. Also my German friends warned me that in Russia the tourist had no freedom of movement and could only see what he was shown and not what was actually happening under “the new era.” Besides, when one did not know

the language of the country, whom could one contact save those the authorities had kept stationed for the all-too-gullible visitor's edification? This I was told banteringly by an Indian whom I had just met who had been to Russia and spoke Russian fluently. He knew Russia well and sighed for “the bleeding heart of the most glorious and the most unhappy country in the world” as he put it emotionally, and he related to me an incident which I shall never be able to forget. He had a Lithuanian friend whose only son of ten was caught playing with a tennis ball of British make. As such foreign articles were taboo at the time, the boy simply “had to be shot to be made an example of.” “It's all very well, Dilip,” said my friend cynically, “to talk of the safety of the State and about its need to be protected from saboteurs and the machinations of the anti-revolutionaries, but an ounce of cold-blooded blood-thirstiness must outweigh tons of eloquent slogans about the much-vaunted ‘new era ushered in by the new Sunrise.’”

I abandoned my project of visiting Russia. My friend, I was persuaded, had not lied deliberately, for the simple reason that he had had no axe of his own or anybody else's to grind. Besides, he was reputed to be a truthful man on top of being esteemed universally as a man of character and culture.

But though deeply shaken, I was yet in two minds about it. Was it not possible, I asked myself, that my friend had been led astray by having seen things from too close quarters? Could one be ever perfectly sure that one had not lost the true perspective when one was swayed a little too much by personal hurts and disappointments? “Things regrettable did happen in every cataclysm,” countered my Bolshevist friends, “but could one seriously maintain for a moment that the bulk of the Bolshevist leaders of the great Revolution, men who had staked their all for the common man, had not been fired and upheld by an indomitable hope, an invincible determination to root out the injustices inherent in the Capitalist order of society?” Such was the refrain of their championship of the new regime caught up ecstatically from the heralds of the “new era”. And these always ended on the heart-warming cadence: was not Lenin a Prince among men whose one dream was to end all tyranny in the name of love of mankind? My friend only smiled at my vacillation. “But what could one Lenin do? Were you not telling me the other day about what your friend Subhash Bose said: that good Viceroy might come and go but the enslavement of India went on for ever? I do not defend the Capitalist tyranny. All I say is that you cannot end one tyranny by replacing it with a worse oppression. I tell you, Dilip, that if the tree is to be judged by its fruit then you cannot acclaim Bolshevism in practice—as against on paper—as a boon-giver, far less as a guarantor of human happiness. For it is a fact that people were far happier under the Tsar—I have seen them so with my own eyes—and in way they cannot even dream of being today ever again. . . .” and so he went on, whenever he spoke of Russia.

Complete Disillusion

I must confess I could not quite know what to make of it all, my faith in his veracity notwithstanding. Sometimes I decided he was overstating his case and so defeating himself even though many of my Russian friends bore him out. With the passage of time, however, the cat mewed too loud even though the bag kept her still out of view, and one moaning evoked that of many another, emboldened as well as desperate, especially after Lenin's death. The world-staggering purges (the procedure of which, with the things that happened at each purge behind the scenes, has been graphically described in *I Chose Freedom*); the weeding out of Lenin's dearest friends and comrades one after another; the muzzling of the Press; the police rule of the terrible N. K. V. D.; the vast army of exiles who worked miserably in Siberia and elsewhere in concentration camps gruesome beyond imagination; the simple but horribly effective punishment of those who had still some manhood left and dared to think differently from the officials by depriving them of their ration cards till they became robots and toed the line; the vast network of espionage spreading its abomination almost ubiquitously till even parents were betrayed by their children turned informers: in a word, the utter reversal of all values of kindness and honour cherished universally heretofore—all leaked out like “murder”. And yet those who came to possess power became so enamoured of it that they had to defend it somehow—anyhow, with the result that a new race of slogan-builders had to be fostered. These, to put it in Koestler's words, were “men of an entirely new species: militant philosophers,” who “dreamed of power with the object of abolishing power; of ruling over the people to wean them from the habit of being ruled”, and so on. The great victor of Kurukshetra, Yudhisthira, declared tranquilly: “*Satyam tu me rakshyatamam na rajyam*: 'Tis Truth I long to save and not the kingdom.” Russia has simply put it the other way, with equal tranquillity.

All this came back to me as I chanced upon the passionate outburst of Kravshenko in his unforgettable autobiography. And one of the reasons why his denunciation of the Bolshevist oligarchy convinces is that he too

"Those Who Are Not With Me Are Against Me" —Continued from page 3

had started, like Koestler (and many others for that matter¹), as an ardent Communist till his faith petered out and hopes ended in an utter shipwreck because he had seen what he had seen which made him confess in his book, *The Yogi and the Commissar* (which may be taken as his credo): "Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion, The Soviet devotee, even if only a fellow-traveller, had trained himself to trust the Soviet Union implicitly. . . . Even when forced to admit that Russia today is not a socialist country he will find comfort in the hope that she may still become one—perhaps 'after the death of Stalin,' or 'when the power of the bureaucracy is broken.'"

Russia Not A Socialist State

There could hardly be a graver indictment of the Russian regime of today than to say that Russia has long ceased to be a socialist State. Russell has, in a penetrating analysis, shown why this had to be because of three "fundamental mistakes, in history, in psychology and in philosophy." For exigencies of space I will quote only a few passages from his article. I wish I could quote more.

"History has known many dogmatic dictatorships and their record is not encouraging. . . . In all these cases the trouble came from dogmatic belief in a panacea—a belief so dogmatic, and a panacea so splendid, that any cruelty was thought permissible in bringing about the desired end.

"In all these cases, as in Soviet Russia, there was an error in psychology. Power is sweet; it is a drug, the desire for which increases with habit. Those who have seized power, even for the noblest of motives, soon persuade themselves that there are good reasons for not relinquishing it. This is particularly likely to happen if they believe themselves to represent some immensely important cause. They will feel that their opponents are ignorant and perverse; before long, they will continue to hate them. What right have these wretches to oppose the coming of the millennium? If they have to be persecuted, no doubt that is regrettable, but, after all, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Meanwhile the pioneers, having established an oligarchy, are succeeded in their privileged position by men of more ordinary clay, who like the privileges but are not much interested in the millennium. For these new men, the important thing is to keep their power, not use it as a means to eventual paradise. And so what were means become ends, and the original ends are forgotten except on Sundays. It is an old story and should be a familiar one, and yet Lenin and his admirers failed to draw the moral. . . .

"From these fundamental mistakes. . . everything that is repellent in Communism has followed by inevitable logic. In 1918, the Constituent Assembly had an anti-Bolshevik majority; therefore the Bolsheviks, being certain that they were in the right, dismissed the Assembly and were compelled to govern by naked force. Having no legal basis for their power, they had to forbid other political parties. When a minority holds power by force, it had to depend upon the police: the situation creates police tyranny through fear of plots, the tyranny produces disaffection and disaffection increases the fear of plots. This vicious spiral continually narrows the circle of those who have power and increases the share of power belonging to those who control the police. Sooner or later the police, to keep their power, invent plots or cause *agents provocateurs* to foment them. In the end every one suspects every one; children denounce their parents, wives their husbands.² No one knows but what his turn may come tomorrow, for the firing squad, the secret prison, or the slow death of forced labour in the Arctic. . . .

"Servile labour in Russia, like the nineteenth-century poor law in England, is an example of humanitarianism gone askew. . . . Gradually, secrecy and despotic power produced their natural result. Labour camps were economically profitable. . . . And so criminals became useful, and the supply had to be kept up by changes in the law, by purges, by deportations, especially of Poles and other conquered aliens. Some authorities estimate that sixteen percent of adult males living in the territory of the U.S.

1 "Six important men have given their reasons for recanting in an important and valuable book, *The God that Failed*. These six men—Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender—all had different reasons for leaving the Communist Party, but in every case they had reasons of which it would be difficult, except for a blind dogmatist, to question the validity. And in each case the experience of disillusion was terrible in proportion as the previous faith had been profound and sustaining."

(The Intellectual Error of Communism by Bertrand Russell, *World Review*, March 1950)

2. How terribly and literally true this is in modern Russia! Victor Kravshenko has given various instances of spies employed by official Russia on even those who have served them with flawless loyalty. Here is a sample episode. Victor Kravshenko while he was once driving in his car in bad weather invited the old mother of a comrade just clapped into prison and gave her a lift. She was trudging wearily to the prison with some food for her unhappy ill-fed son. When he neared the prison-house, she insisted on getting out to avoid involving him in trouble. He must not be seen with the mother of a suspect. How could one be kind to a mother whose son was a suspect?

"Thank you, thank you, Victor Andreyevitch," she said, "may God grant that your own mother may not have to suffer as I'm suffering; that you won't have to endure what my poor boy is enduring." My chauffeur turned round. "Comrade Director," he said, "I may be a son of a bitch who must report everything he sees or hears. But, believe me or not, I swear by my own mother that I will not report this time. My own mother is just a plain woman, not a fine lady like this one. But I love her and, anyhow, thank you Victor Andreyevitch, as one Russian to another." And Victor Kravshenko was a trusted engineer at the time and rose still higher later on.

S.R. are condemned to forced labour; this is probably an over-estimate, but the number certainly amounts to many millions. And there is no doubt whatever that their conditions are wretched beyond imagination."

I quote from Russell's brilliant article at some length not only because he is regarded—and rightly—as one of the top-ranking creative thinkers of today—whose verdicts on history and contemporary happenings are among the most thought-provoking and illuminating, but also and chiefly because his "abhorrence of the aims and methods of the Soviet Government" expressed emphatically in 1920 came subsequently to be under-signed by most of the impartial thinkers of the East and West and borne out more and more by some of the most eminent disillusioned Russian Communists whose brilliant mouthpiece Kravshenko happens to be. And how fully he bears out Russell I will illustrate by a moving excerpt from his book, part of a duologue between the author and his noble father who (after having served long years in Siberia for having plotted against the Tsarist regime) countered his son, then a loyal Bolshevik official, when the latter held the brief for the doings of the Stalinist regime:

"Of course, Victor, of course. But revolutions are not made for factories and railroads. They are made for the people. The essence of the matter is in personal rights and liberties. Without these, without human dignity, men are slaves no matter how industrialised their prison may be. When you, Communists, boast of new factories, the implication is that people live better lives. Well, now, do they, in our country?"

"As compared with their miserable existence under the Tsars, I suppose they do."

"Vitya, why do you fool yourself? . . . Only innocent foreigners and young people without any memory of the past believe the fairy tales. To me the physical facts are not as important as the political and spiritual facts." He then went on to say that under the Tsars "at least we could think what we pleased. There were many political parties, factions, opinions. Harsh as the absolutism was, it now seems liberal by contrast. Sure, the Tsar's police used to beat and sometimes shot strikers and often shot or exiled revolutionaries. But the whole scale was different. We counted our political prisoners by the thousand, not, as now, by the million. And every injustice evoked protests, demonstrations. Today we have only the silence of the cemetery."

This is true as every impartial visitor to Russia will testify. And the reason is that in Russia, unlike anywhere else, "a condition for the survival of the others is secrecy—black impenetrable secrecy, not only about this or that, but about everything. . . . What goes on behind the veil? Not, I think, the creation of an Utopia. In Tsarist days there was a famous book, *Who Can be Happy and Free in Russia?* No such book could be published in Stalin's Russia."³

Problem For All Humankind

But it is precisely because an ominous hush is regnant in Russia that it is so difficult to lay one's finger on the groanings overlaid by this ubiquitous "silence of the cemetery." In Koestler's novel this silence feels almost like a pressure on one's chest, a pressure which just allows you to breathe but not to talk except in whispers. It is stifling. . . . maddening. In Kravshenko's book too, curiously, you feel this horror which continues as it were to be indefinable even after the author's giving a shape to the nightmares which loom in day-time. Nevertheless every lover of freedom, of truth and of humane feelings ought to read these two books even though—or shall we say just because—they are both grim books whose data make one feel like putting them away if only to turn to something more cheerful, more credible and less menacing to one's faith in the basic goodness of human nature. One ought to, because (to quote from the Postscript of Kravshenko's autobiography):

"The Communist dictatorship in the U. S. S. R. is not a problem for the Russian people only, or the democracies only. It is the problem for all humankind. The world dare not continue indefinitely to turn its back on the martyrdom of a great segment of the human race inhabiting one-sixth of the earth's surface. This segment is ruled by a deified group of leaders resting on the Party apparatus of the Politburo and a gigantic police force. The hundreds of millions of people in the U.S.S.R. have no voice in shaping their own destinies and are completely cut off from the peoples and the streams of thought in all other countries."

Precisely. For, in the last analysis, the question whether the Russians themselves favour such a regime or not is irrelevant. The world being one today, no nation, however, vast, should be allowed to perpetuate a mechanism of Government in which the natural kindly feelings of the heart and love of individual liberty are punishable offences, the less when, as it has happened in Russia today, the holders of power in such a Government constitute virtually a handful of men who gag and outrule all criticism of their methods public or private. When such a ruthless set of men have somehow seized power in the name of an ideal which they themselves have no hesitation in repudiating in practice, we cannot stay neutral on the plea that it is none of our business. For say or do what we will, if the highest values dictated by the heart's deepest intuitions and aspirations come to be progressively jettisoned, human life must sink to the level of the subhuman. And one of the highest values that have called to us imperiously down the ages is Love—on the upper levels—and fellow-feeling,

3 Quoted from Russell's article, "The Intellectual Error of Communism."

SRI AUROBINDO, THE LEADER OF THE EVOLUTION

PART II OF "THE WORLD CRISIS AND INDIA"

By "Synergist"

SECTION III: THE NEW WORLD-VIEW

(a) THE SPIRITUAL METAPHYSIC

(ii) KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE REALITY

It was pointed out in the Essay: *Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Future of the Human Race*, that when the mind, habituated to its dealing with the finite, approaches the Infinite and attempts to understand its nature, it must become plastic and not insist on thinking only in terms of its own categories. It must recognise the limitations of its own narrow logic, and realise that it is ill-equipped to comprehend a Reality, the multi-poised and pleromatic nature of which can only be known in a vision higher than the mental,—a vision that can see its luminous totality. The mind is in its essence a consciousness which cuts out forms of things from the whole and regards them as units complete in themselves. It measures, divides and cuts up reality into parts in order to know it, and then by an imperfectly understood causality tries to connect them together without a real understanding of their inter-relatedness or their true significance in the whole. When it tries to reconstruct the whole, which is yet a part of a larger configuration, it generally succeeds in creating only an assemblage of parts or a summation. It is regarding this tendency of the mind to divide and limit in order to know that Sri Aurobindo writes: "It is this essential characteristic of Mind which conditions the workings of all its operative powers, whether conception, perception, sensation or the dealings of creative thought." "Mind is an instrument of analysis and synthesis, but not of essential knowledge."

But this, as we have seen, does not imply that mind is an instrument of Ignorance, one that distorts truths or fabricates falsehoods. It is a product of knowledge-ignorance in terrestrial existence, but in its inner reality it is a subordinate principle of the Supermind. Ignorance is the mind separated in knowledge from its source of knowledge, the Supermind, says Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, if the mind is passive and receptive to the light of the Supermind, it can reflect its truths, or it can seize these truths by a spiritual intuition, or it can, by breaking its boundaries, extend itself through an ascension into the gnostic ranges of the Supermind.

In the following extracts taken from *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo stresses the same point and then explains the nature of the ultimate Reality and the various aspects in which It is apprehended by the human consciousness.

* * * * *

"There is then a supreme Reality eternal, absolute and infinite. Because it is absolute and infinite, it is in its essence indeterminable. It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining Mind; it is ineffable by a mind-created speech; it is describable neither by our negations, *neti neti*,—for we cannot limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that,—nor by our affirmations, for we cannot fix it by saying it is this, it is that, *iti iti*. And yet, though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable; it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable; for that spiritual being is in its essence and its original

and intimate reality not other than this Supreme Existence.

But although thus indeterminable to Mind, because of its absoluteness and infinity, we discover that this Supreme and Eternal Infinite determines itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being which are beyond the universe and in it and are the very foundation of its existence. These truths present themselves to our conceptual cognition as the fundamental aspects in which we see and experience the omnipresent Reality. In themselves they are seized directly, not by intellectual understanding but by a spiritual intuition, a spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness; but they can also be caught at in conception by a large and plastic idea and can be expressed in some sort by a plastic speech which does not insist too much on rigid definition or limit the wideness and subtlety of the idea. . . .

The supreme Truth-aspect which thus manifests itself to us is an eternal and infinite and absolute self-existence, self-awareness, self-delight of being; this founds all things and secretly supports and pervades all things. This Self-existence reveals itself again in three terms of its essential nature,—self, conscious being or spirit, and God or the Divine Being. The Indian terms are more satisfactory,—Brahman the Reality is Atman, Purusha, Ishwara; for these terms grew from a root of Intuition and, while they have a comprehensive preciseness, are capable of a plastic application which avoids both vagueness in the use and the rigid snare of a too limiting intellectual concept. The Supreme Brahman is that which in Western metaphysics is called the Absolute: but Brahman is at the same time the omnipresent Reality in which all that is relative exists as its forms or its movements; this is an Absolute which takes all relativities in its embrace. The Upanishads affirm that all this is the Brahman; Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman. . . . All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman; Brahman is the Absolute, the Transcendent and incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity is an eternal portion of the Ishwara; it is his supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings. The Brahman alone is, and because of It all are, for all are the Brahman; this Reality is the reality of everything that we see in Self and Nature. Brahman, the Ishwara, is all this by his Yoga-Maya, by the power of his Consciousness-Force put out in self-manifestation: he is the Conscious Being, Soul, Spirit, Purusha, and it is by his Nature, the force of his conscious self-existence that he is all things; he is the Ishwara, the omniscient and omnipotent All-ruler, and it is by his Shakti, his conscious Power, that he manifests himself in Time and governs the universe. These and similar statements taken together are all-comprehensive: it is possible for the mind to cut and select, to build a closed system and explain away all that does not fit within it; but it is on the complete and many-sided statement that we must take our stand if we have to acquire an integral knowledge."

To be continued in the next issue

"Those Who Are Not With Me Are Against Me"

Continued from page 4

on the lower. Therefore however modern and progressive a State may happen to be in its industrial undertakings and five-year plans, it cannot possibly be cooperated with when it puts a premium on hatred breeding inhuman cruelty, suspicion fathoming omnipotent espionage and last, though not least, a materialistic ideology pinning down the aspiring soul to a pointless life in an aimless round of pleasure or power-seeking activities. Such a State must gravitate towards an alliance with the forces of darkness and therefore must, sooner or later, find itself in utter opposition to the forces which invoke the Light. That is why the Christ said so emphatically: "All who are not with me are against me." So even that great Messiah of Meekness had, ultimately, to utter an ominous warning to those who stood phalanxed against right vision leading to right partisanship, the reason for which has been elaborated clearly and categorically in a pronouncement of the greatest living Seer of today:

"Do not imagine that truth and falsehood, light and darkness, surrender and selfishness can be allowed to dwell together in the house consecrated to the Divine. . . . If you call for the Truth and yet something in you chooses what is false. . . . then always you will be open to attack and the Grace will recede from you."⁴

⁴ From "The Mother" by Sri Aurobindo.

A DEFENCE OF HINDUISM

Continued from page 2

that not only cope with the tremendous diversity on a basis of unity that is the cosmic play, but also afford *lebensraum* for new developments, adventurous advances, undreamt-of discoveries. Most religions catch hold of certain aspects of the Divine to suit a particular penchant of the human mind. They may show a remarkable intensity engendered by the stress and the limit under which they work, but immensity gets sacrificed. Hinduism aspires to mingle the immense with the intense and, though the fusion is not always complete and there is a preponderance one way or the other, it succeeds in carrying both in some sort of alliance and in keeping the path open for some future fusion. Not dominantly the logic of the dividing intellect under the Spirit's inspiration but a spiritually inspired intuitive logic which welcomes divisions only to unify them and which tends secretly towards some novel integral harmony of the utmost unity with the utmost multiplicity—this is the motive power behind the millennial quest of the Absolute which began with the Vedic rishis. Infinite vistas scratch out to be explored, startling possibilities of evolution remain to be compassed—essential Hinduism has its doors flung wide to ever-new surprises of the inexhaustible will of the single yet manifold Being who is the ultimate reality. It is through these doors that the soul of man will pass into a future of supreme fullness.

THE M On The Earth A

By RISHAI

"The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine. Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed. 'There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!' And with the awakening to love, there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace. Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fulness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine. This world was a world of dead matter till Divine Love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way; it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought. Once the creation is conscious, awakened, open to love for the Divine, the Divine Love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete."

(Words of the Mother Pp. 157-159.)

With the pregnant limpidity of these revelatory words, the Mother outlines the whole evolution of the Earth from her state of being "dead Matter" to her union with the supreme Spirit and transformation into its manifesting channel. The primary state is that of inconscience, inertia and the utter obscurity of absolute ignorance. It is a total involution of the Sat, the infinite, eternal Existence, an apparent negation of the Light and Bliss of the supreme Reality. Out of this state of involution evolution starts. Love comes down from the Divine above,—love, the most victoriously powerful of all divine forces, and releases into self-expressive play, first, Life with its prolific energies, multiform desires and dim, dawning consciousness, and then Mind with its developing consciousness and variegated volitions. But the process of evolution does not—because it cannot—stop short at Mind: Love has to liberate the involved principle and power of the Supermind which is the infinite dynamic Consciousness-Force of the Divine Creator of the universe. The consummation of this evolutionary process is the uncurbed self-revelation of Sachchidananda on earth.

Ancient wisdom saw the potential greatness of the earth. In the Vedas the earth is called the foothold of God and the mother of all creatures whose father is Heaven. In the Atharva Veda we have: "I am a son of Earth, the soil is my mother... May she lavish on me her manifold treasure, her secret riches... May we speak the beauty of thee, O Earth, that is in thy villages and forests and assemblies and wars and battles." (XII. 1. 12. 44, 56.)

The secret riches prayed for are the infinite, involved riches of the Spirit which the Earth yields to the aspiring soul of man under the pressure of the descending Light from above. Again in the same Veda the Rishi prays, "May Earth, sovereign over the past and the future, make for us a wide world... Earth that was the water in the ocean and whose course the thinkers follow by the magic of their knowledge, she who has her heart of immortality covered up by the Truth in the supreme ether, may she establish for us light and power in that most high kingdom." (XII. 1. 1. 8.)

It is held by most of the religions in India that this Earth is the Karma-bhumi, the only place where man can change his consciousness, his nature and his whole life by his thought and action and rise from the animal-human to the divine-human level of existence. The other worlds are the Bhogabhumis where he can only enjoy the fruits, good and evil, of his actions. It is only here that the soul can liberate itself from the meshes of ignorance and recover its infinity and immortality. It is only here that the individual can regain his universality and transcendence and unite with the supreme Divine. It is only here, on this earth and nowhere else, that the highest Truth can be realised and expressed. It is said—and it is a fact—that even the gods, if they desire liberation and union with the Supreme, have to be born here, on this earth, and assume the human form. They may be in possession of high knowledge and power in their own realms, but the highest knowledge and the utmost perfection are possible only to man upon this earth. Chinese spiritual tradition regards Chien (Heaven) as the Father and Khun (Earth) as the Mother of all terrestrial existence. The union of Earth and Heaven has been the ideal not only of esoteric Christianity but also of many of the more ancient forms of spiritual mysticism.

Seen in this perspective, the Earth appears as the only field in the whole universe for the highest divine realisation and revelation. Human life here is a rare privilege and opportunity which, whatever the aim and objective—if it has any—of modern scientific culture, can bear resplendent fruits, only if it turns integrally to its supernal source—Light. Man ascending to the Divine and the Divine descending into man and revealing Himself in Matter: this is the whole play and purpose of earthly life, and, in spite of the lapses and relapses of our frail humanity, this purpose is being progressively but inevitably fulfilled.

This ancient view of the Earth and her destiny invests terrestrial existence with an abiding sacredness and significance and elevates human life from the drab and dusty inanity of material pursuits into the blissful freedom and perfection of the life divine.

Ascetic spirituality which has been invariably characterised by a narrow and intolerant orthodoxy, both in India and elsewhere, has chosen to malign the mother Earth and look down upon her with an undisguised contempt. The bigotry of the exclusive spiritual aim blinds it to the secret and sublime end of human birth and it mistakes the field of dynamic, integral perfection for a delusion and a snare. It glorifies a retreat into a high renunciation and is proud of its purblindness. Happily the spell of ascetic spirituality has almost faded away and mankind is slowly but steadily reverting to the comprehensive aspiration for an integral perfection and harmonious fulfilment in life. Matter, the Annam Brahma of the Upanishads, is receiving again the respectful attention and devout consideration it deserves, not only of the doped worldlings, but of the serious seekers of the Spirit. A glorious future looms before mankind and the Earth has a most magnificent role to play in it. The prophecies of many seers and saints—Ramkrishna, Ramalingam, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, to name only a representative few—about the birth of powerful Yogins in India and a general spiritual renaissance in humanity only confirm and substantiate the persistent anticipations of an approaching millennium upon earth.

But what has been a cryptic or vague prognostic and a dubious expectation is fixed in its proper setting, given a coherent significance and revealed as the definite and inevitable destiny of the Earth by the Mother in her *Prayers and Meditations*. These Prayers are no glistening gossamer of imaginative idealism nor an imposing fabric of theological speculation, but undeniable facts of spiritual realisation—truths seen, words heard, forms touched, at least as concretely as the objects of the outer senses, but all in a world or worlds of light, sealed to the sense-bound consciousness of men. It is in these worlds, as in the green room of the theatre, that the earth-scenes are determined, arranged, rehearsed and released into material expression. If human reason has the humility to listen to the words of wisdom and human life the self-control and flexibility to alter and adapt itself to their dynamic demands, the truth of the Mother's experiences will not take very long to translate itself into a shining reality of our earthly existence.

But what is it that imparts a compelling force and the unmistakable ring of prophecy to the expressions of the Mother's experience? What is it that makes her affirm in clear and definite terms the secret aim of the long, travailing evolution of the earth-consciousness and the glory of its final perfection? It is, on the one hand, her identification with the Earth and intimate knowledge of the aspiration of the Earth-soul and, on the other, the indications and injunctions received by her from the Divine regarding her own role on Earth.

Let us first have a glimpse of the identification—a full view is impossible on the mental plane of consciousness—and then we shall be all the better able to apprehend the dumb but unquenchable yearning of the Earth-soul, its sublime possibilities and their inevitable fruition:

"When the sun had set in the indrawn quietude of the calm twilight, all my being prostrated itself before Thee, O Lord, in a mute adoration and complete surrender. Then I was the whole Earth and the whole Earth prostrated herself before Thee, imploring the benediction of Thy illumination and the beatitude of Thy Love. O that kneeling of the Earth in supplication towards Thee, then collected in itself in the silence of the night, awaiting at once with patience and anxiety the so-longed-for illumination!"

(*Prayers and Meditations*, p. 127)

"... And when I ask this of Thee, the 'I' which speaks to Thee is the whole Earth, aspiring to be this pure diamond, perfect reflector of Thy supreme light. The hearts of all men beat in my heart, all their thoughts vibrate in my thoughts, the least aspiration of the docile animal or of the

OTHER and Her Destiny

HCHAND

modest plant joins in my formidable aspiration, and all this lifts itself towards Thee, to the conquest of Thy love and light, scaling the peaks of the being to attain to Thee, to ravish Thee from Thy immobile beatitude and make Thee penetrate into the shadow of suffering so as to transform it into divine Joy, into sovereign Peace. And this violence is of an infinite love which gives itself and of a confident serenity which smiles in the certitude of Thy perfect Unity." (Pp. 122-123)

The above two passages bear eloquent testimony to the identification of the Mother's being with the Earth, but this identification by itself cannot deliver the Earth from darkness and suffering and make her the field of divine revelation, unless there is an equally complete identification of the Mother's being with the being and consciousness of the Supreme and a sovereign working of His Will through the Mother upon the Earth. Of the latter there is no dearth of evidence in the *Prayers and Meditations*. We cite here only one or two of those that bear directly and definitely upon the Earth and her destiny:—

"Mother Divine, Thou art with us; every day Thou givest me the assurance, and, closely united in an identity that grows more and more total, more and more constant, 'we' turn to the Lord of the universe and to That which is beyond in a great aspiration towards the new Light. All the Earth is in our arms like a sick child who must be cured and for whom one has a special affection because of its very weakness. Cradled on the immensity of the eternal becomings, ourselves those becomings, we contemplate, hushed and glad, the eternity of the immobile Silence where all is realised in the perfect consciousness and immutable Existence, miraculous gate of all the unknown that is beyond.

"Then is the veil torn, the inexpressible Glory uncovered, and, suffused with the ineffable Splendour, 'we' turn back towards the world to bring it the glad tidings." (Pp. 202-3)

"O Thou wonderful Unknown, Thou who hast not yet manifested Thyself, Thou who awaitest the auspicious hour and who hast sent us on earth to prepare Thy ways, all the elements of this being cry to Thee, 'May Thy Will be done', and give themselves to Thee in a supreme and unconquerable *elan*.

"Enfold this sorrowful Earth with Thy puissant arms of mercy, impregnate her with the beneficent outflowings of thy infinite love.

"I am Thy puissant arms of mercy, I am the vast bosom of Thy limitless love.... The arms have enfolded the sorrowful Earth and tenderly press it to the generous heart, and slowly a kiss of supreme benediction settles on this atom in conflict; the kiss of the Mother that consoles and heals." (Pp. 171-72)

But even this double identification, which is the secret of the Mother's mission on earth and her supreme power to act as an intermediary between the Spirit and Matter, does not ensure an easy accomplishment of her work. The stark resistance of Matter, the stubborn refusal of darkness to admit Light, the inertia of the long-established habits of Nature oppose the double movement of liberation and transformation, and in spite of the divine pledge and the prophetic experiences of the Mother, the work seems well-nigh impossible.

"O my sweet Master, why hast Thou asked me to leave my blessed place in Thy heart and return to the earth to attempt a realisation which everything seems to prove impossible?... What does Thou expect from me that Thou hast torn me away from my divine and marvellous contemplation and plunged me again into this dark world in conflict?" (P. 173)

The anarchy and anguish of the present world find a poignant expression in the following words of the Mother:

"Darkness has descended upon Earth, dense, violent, victorious.... All is sorrow, panic and destruction in the physical world, and the splendour of the light of Thy Love seems darkened by a veil of mourning." (P. 185)

"O Lord, Lord, the whole Earth is convulsed; she groans and suffers, she is in anguish.... It must not be that all this suffering has fallen upon her in vain; grant that all this blood which has been poured out may produce a more rapid germination of all the seeds of beauty, light and love which have to flower and cover the Earth with their rich harvest. From the depth of this abyss of darkness, the integral terrestrial being cries to Thee that Thou mayst give it air and light; it stifles; wilt Thou not come to its aid?" (P. 177)

But the work, the tremendous, transfiguring work has to be accomplished: Matter has to be churned and delivered of the Spirit it holds imprisoned in itself, and darkness has to be lashed into Light; for, the aspira-

tion of the Earth for the "benediction of Thy illumination and the beatitude of Thy Love" must be realised. And such too is the decree of the Divine: "Thou has said that the Earth would die, and it will die to its old ignorance. Thou hast said that the Earth would live, and it will live in the renewal of Thy Power." Such, too, again, are the signs betakening the longed-for Advent:

"This sorrowful world kneels before Thee, O Lord, in mute supplication; this tortured Matter nestles at Thy feet, its last, its sole refuge; and so imploring Thee, it adores Thee, Thee whom it neither knows nor understands! Its prayer rises like the cry of one in a last agony; that which is disappearing feels confusedly the possibility of living again in Thee; the Earth awaits Thy decree in a grandiose prostration. Listen, listen; its voice implores and supplicates Thee.... What will be Thy decree, what is Thy sentence? O Lord of Truth, the individual world blesses Thy Truth which it knows not yet, but which it calls, and to which it adheres with all the joyful energy of its living forces.

"Death has passed, vast and solemn, and all fell into a religious silence during its passage. A superhuman beauty has appeared on the earth.

"Something more marvellous than the most marvellous bliss has made felt the impress of its Presence." (P. 240)

According to the Mother the Earth is the epitome of the universe. All the cosmic principles, powers and potentialities are concentrated here, those of light as well as those of darkness and evil, and a long-drawn, eventful battle has been raging between these contrary forces for the conquest and possession of this evolutionary planet which is destined to be the scene of the most perfect manifestation of the Divine. It is, therefore, incumbent on us as children of the mother Earth to help her realise her inmost truth and fulfil her destiny by a complete and definitive victory over the opposing forces. Stricken and sorrowful, enveloped in the darkness of inconscience but fraught with glorious possibilities, the Earth waits in mute and patient aspiration for the birth of a new Force, "unknown to her till now," the Force that will unseal her heart and set flowing the streams of divine glories. The ageless sorrow of the Earth is not a curse, but a blessing in disguise—it is the greatest spur to evolution, to the transcendence of the inert and murky origin. It is, to quote Sri Aurobindo, "the red and bitter seed of the raptures seven."¹ The obscure, dumb, anguished Earth is not a hopeless derelict doomed to perdition; she has a might and a light which, once enkindled, can overcome all obstacles and justify the poet's assertion:

*I, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven
By me the last finite, yearning, strives
To reach the last infinity's unknown.²*

The self-manifestation of the Divine in transformed Matter, the outflowing of His splendours in terrestrial life, the unimpeded fulfilment of His Will and purpose in a New Creation, the evolution of the supramental race of men and the establishment of the Life Divine, the life of inalienable unity and harmony and dynamic peace—this, then, is the destiny of the mother Earth. Neither wars nor cataclysms can baulk her of it, neither disasters nor surging darkness. Whatever the chaos and catastrophic conflicts of the present, if one steps behind the heaving surface, one is sure to discover an urge for Unity, an urge for Peace and an insistent urge for spiritual fulfilment. This triple urge is the fermenting seed of the future efflorescence. The hectic heat and heave will subside, the greed and hate and insatiable power-lust will be transformed into love and harmony, and mankind will live as a single family of the children of Light, doing God's work and serving God's ends on earth.

In many a Prayer the Divine asks the Mother to "turn towards the earth" and warns her that "the time of a small, tranquil, uniform and peaceful life will be over. There will be effort, danger, the unforeseen, insecurity, but also intensity." "Thou wert made for this role. After having agreed for long years to forget it completely, because the time had not come and also because thou wert not ready, awake now to the consciousness that it is very truly thy role and that it was for this that thou wert created." In obedience to the divine Will and in order to accomplish her mission, the Mother had to descend into the very matrix of the Earth, the frozen core of tenebrous Matter and invoke from there a descent of God's delivering Grace. Her Prayer rushed up towards the Divine and, as she describes it, "from the depths of the abyss I beheld Thee in Thy radiant splendour; Thou didst appear and Thou saidst to me: 'Lose not courage, be firm, be confident,—I come.'"

Here is the pledge and prophecy of the divine fulfilment of the destiny of the Earth who "seems to be passing through a decisive crisis."

1 and 2. "The Life Heavens" in Sri Aurobindo's "Collected Poems and Plays."

PEGASUS AND "THE WHITE HORSE" OF G. K. CHESTERTON

K. D. SETHNA

G. K. C. said in characteristic vein: "Bowing down in blind incredulity, as is my custom, before mere authority and the tradition of the elders, superstitiously swallowing a story I could not test at the time by experiment of private judgment, I am firmly of the opinion that I was born on the 29th May, 1874, on Campden Hill, Kensington." In celebration of that fortunate day this year, we offer our readers an appraisal of his most substantial poetic work "The Ballad of the White Horse."

It is often thought that to call G. K. Chesterton a poet is to mistake for the high and authentic light of inspiration mere rhetorical shades masquerading as poetic significances. But the fact is that in G. K. C. there is a genuine poet buried under the clever journalist. His mass of militant controversies has obscured the silver bow of poetic power which he brought in his multifarious armoury; the too frequent thunder of his excursions on a ponderous-bodied though nimble-footed charger of prose style has led us to forget that on occasions he rides out on a more Pegasus-like hoof-stroke. In short, we fail to recognise that he has fought his way, though with many falls, into the kingdom of poetry with his *Ballad of the White Horse*.

As a vehicle for narration, the ballad-form can be stirring and ringing, or else sweet, in a popular way; but to sustain in it a story which keeps a tense edge of magical or splendid suggestion is a proof of rare genius. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is faultless save for its tame moral conclusion inserted on the advice of Wordsworth and regretted by the author ever after. It is a wonder he did not drop the peccant stanzas: they are absolutely detachable and their absence would leave not the slightest scar on the poetic tissue. Chesterton's poem is not so perfect as a whole. It is good for seven-eighths of the way, but the last section is a disappointment, because there nothing striking is said except in a couple of brief moments: picturesque journalese is the utmost we have, a piquancy of phrase without any turn of true poetic surprise. Even the admirable seven-eighths is not as uniformly transfigured as Coleridge's work, yet there is sufficient to show what a fine poet Chesterton might have been if the inspired part of him had found more play in his work and learnt to sustain itself. That promise is a surer claim to immortality than being the most indefatigable coiner of pun and paradox in one's generation.

Though Chesterton's paradoxes make his ideas "kick", they are, in general, not really impressive: we get tired of the game and suspicious whether it is not a device to paint up intellectual platitudes. When, on the other hand, his ideas begin to glow with an inner originality because some eye of his imagination has opened, some permanent chord in us is touched and we perceive whatever truth there is, partial though it be, in what he thinks, at least the heart of vision in the man is conveyed to us and that heart is always a fine mystery, irrespective of its echo or its indifference to our own. Chesterton's humour, audacious and energetic, which accompanies his paradoxes or rather prepares their witty point, has a more genuine freshness than they, but he possesses also a rarer exuberance—an imaginative fantasy as audacious and energetic, with an additional tinge of revealing splendour. The sterling virtues come in a pure and recurrent boldness of deep-sighted speech in the *White Horse*, deep-sighted by either a vivid adequacy or a significant exaggeration.

The former is to be found on almost any page. He says of Mark the man from Italy, one of Alfred's allies against the Danes, that he came from

The glittering towns

Where hot white details show,

catching the exact effect of the Italian atmosphere. Or take the two lines,

The smoke of evening food and ease

Rose like a blue tree in the trees,

as a suggestion of Wessex farms glimpsed at a distance. The note of exaggeration has in poetry a triple face: an object is seen to be a magnified version of something minute, something commonplace and unpretentious, as Homer describes the elders on the walls of Troy as sitting and chattering like grasshoppers, in order to convey acutely the fact of their thin screeching voices and their lean legs; or an object is compared to something physically big and imposing with a view to express an inner magnanimity, importance of status, unusual feat of self-transcendence, as in any of the old epic similes—a hero like a falling poplar, like a tower in a waste land, like a forest on fire; or else an object is conceived under an aspect ordinarily quite incongruous with it and so a pregnant strain is created which may be defined as the miraculous interpretation of one sense in terms proper to another, an instance being Kalidasa's imagining the snowy mountain Kailasa to be the laughter of the god Shiva. Often the three forms of exaggeration grade off into one another and it is difficult to distinguish them: most of Chesterton's splendid effects are such, but he has individual examples of each kind, too. Thus, the raggedness of the army led by Colan the man

with the Celtic strain in him, another ally of Alfred's, is pictured by a synecdoche:

*Grey as cobwebs hung
The banners of the Usk.*

The words about Wessex enjoying an isolated condition of order and safety while confusion and war were all round in the country are a similar stroke of inspired homeliness—verging somewhat on the third type of exaggeration as well:

*And Wessex lay in a patch of peace
Like a dog in a patch of sun.*

A grandiose simile suits Chesterton's genius very well, for he loves to sketch with a sweeping brightness and in huge proportions; his soul lives in a state of elemental wonder in which loud colours and gigantic images are almost a part of everyday experience. But he does not lack in tender touches: the loud and the gigantic are really framed in those wide open windows, the eyes of his childlike heart. And the stanzas about Eldred, "the Franklin by the sea", the third companion found by Alfred for his forlorn hope, reflect this twofold psychology of Chesterton, making a skilful play of contrasting magnificence and simplicity:

*As the tall white devil of the Plague
Moves out of Asian skies,
With his foot on a waste of cities
And his head in a cloud of flies:
Or purple and peacock skies grow dim
With a moving locust-tower;
Or tawny sand-winds tall and dry,
Like hell's red banners beat and fly,
When death comes out of Araby,
Was Eldred in his hour.*

*But while he moved like a massacre
He murmured as in sleep,
And his words were all of low hedges
And little fields and sheep.*

*Even as he strode like a pestilence,
That strides from Rhine to Rome,
He thought how tall his beans might be
If ever he went home.*

Exaggeration in the third variety, the gripping an image incongruous with an occasion and the plucking from it a sudden aptness, is beautifully illustrated by lines about the voice of the Virgin Mary as heard by Alfred when, grief-stricken with his repeated failure against the Danes, he sees at the beginning of the story a vision of her:

*And a voice came human but high up,
Like a cottage climbed among
The clouds.*

Perhaps more truly felicitous a surprise are several examples Chesterton provides of a mixed exaggeration, the three types interblended. Here is one—the closing metaphor about the illumined pages in a mediaeval copy of the Bible:

*It was wrought in the monk's slow manner,
From silver and sanguine shell,
Where the scenes are little and terrible
Keyholes of heaven and hell.*

But surely the most impressive lines Chesterton ever wrote are among those describing in this manner the general state of chaotic indecision after the fall of Rome, the portentous change known to history as the Dark Ages, a wild phantasmagoria of invasion from the savage parts of Europe and from the unknown East—both the Roman power and the Roman peace broken by the iron heel and the brazen cry of hordes from the earth's remote corners. He catches in effects at once majestic and weird the suggestion those times carried as of a universal dissolution:

*For the end of the world was long ago—
And all we dwell to-day
As children of some second birth,
Like a strange people left on earth
After a judgment day.*

*For the end of the world was long ago,
When the ends of the world waxed free,*

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*When Rome was sunk in a waste of slaves,
And the sun drowned in the sea.*

*When Caesar's sun fell out of the sky
And whoso hearkened right
Could only hear the plunging
Of the nations in the night.*

*When the ends of the earth came marching in
To torch and cresset gleam,
And the roads of the world that lead to Rome
Were filled with faces that moved like foam,
Like faces in a dream.*

The stanza about "Caesar's sun" is almost worthy, I think, of Aeschylus, for the imaginative tension reached there in a style that just falls short of the true epic.

Here the falling short is in consequence more of the ballad-form than the poet's inspiration. It is necessary to point out this distinction both in justice to Chesterton's genius and for fear lest his admirers should rank him beyond his deserts. For, his idea and diction may be epic and yet his rhythm be found wanting. There is a certain strongly calm self-mastery in the true epic, which the jog-trot ballad-rhythm tends to disintegrate. As Matthew Arnold with his usual fine ear perceived, only a deep lyric impulse—that is, an impulse which introduces a poignant, wistful or delicate flow—can charm away the ballad-jerk, while the ample sweeping stress of the epic mood striving rather to coincide with than to smooth out that jerk is broken up by it even when not narrowed down by a pause in sense at the end of each short line. This, apart from quality of genius, should deter us from committing the mistake of comparing with Homer's battle-pieces any episode in Chesterton's account of the battle of Ethandune fought between King Alfred and the Danes within sight of that mound of rock called the White Horse which gives the poem its name. But if the ballad is incapable of the large yet contained sweep of strength, the mighty and harmonious self-possession, without which no epic style can exist, it can still display compass and power and imaginative passion. Its movement tends to be narrow because the lines are mostly end-stopped, but there is nothing in the measure itself to keep a poet from stretching out his sense beyond the line, so that the expressive unit would be not eight or six syllables but a longer average, the variations on that average poetically answering change of mood, shift of scene, the necessity to clear-cut or grade off a picture or an idea. And this is precisely what Chapman often does. It may surprise some to hear that Chapman wrote ballad-poetry, but, as he never distributes a word between the fourth foot and the fifth, the fourteen couplets as handled by him divide naturally into lines of eight syllables alternating regularly with those of six—the form Wordsworth took for his *Lucy Gray*; only, in the Elizabethan's work the first lines do not rhyme with the third and so his frequent prolongation of the sense up to the fourteenth syllable is not interrupted by any marked sound-clinch at the eighth. Hence it has compass enough: what Chapman lacks is the epic grand style of narration, because, even when he is without tortured and extravagant conceits, his power is rough rather than harmonious. His muscular vigour, his strong nervous rhythm, have not the serene lift by which Homer's elemental enthusiasm expressed itself, the godlike elegance in which Virgil's dignified pensiveness found voice, the soaring yet mountain-secure intensity to which Dante shaped his compulsive vision, the smiling certainty of vast wing-stroke which upbears Milton through all the revelatory detours of his mind. Chapman at his best rushes, dazzles, distracts: he has compass without full harmonious sweep, brilliance without elevated control, imaginative passion without an assured ease of forceful sight. Take any of his peaks: for instance.

*When the unmeasured firmament bursts to disclose her light.
Idea and language could not be finer or more forceful, but have they a
harmonious strength of rhythm? Or consider a line like*

The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes.

It is most vivid, impressive, puissant, but the last touch of effortless elevation is not there such as Milton could give for pages almost. To quote Chapman at any length is at once to prove the weakness bound up with his vigour:

As in a stormy day

*In thick-set woods a ravenous fire wraps in his fierce repair
The shaken trees and by the roots doth toss them into air;
Even so beneath Atrides' sword flew up Troy's flying heels,
Their horse drew empty chariots, and sought their thundering
wheels
Some fresh directors through the field, where least the pur-
suit drives.*

*Thick fell the Trojans, much more sweet to vultures than
their wives.*

For the tone and rhythm of the true epic style, free from gesticulating loudness, listen to this:

*Millions of Spirits for his fault amerced
Of Heaven, and from eternal splendours flung
For his revolt—yet faithful how they stood,
Their glory withered; as, when heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines,
With singéd top their stately growth, though bare,
Stands on the blasted heath.*

Chapman's general inferiority is due on the one hand to his not being a genius of the supreme kind and on the other to his ballad metre which constantly intrudes its jog-trot even when nobility and the grand style are throwing on him the bright shadow of their pinions.*

G.K.C.'s manner is akin to Chapman's with regard to audacity, an explosive power, either curious or clear, which can give a high and excellent level of poetry though not its *ne plus ultra*. In spite of his using many anapaests the essential manner and movement are unmistakable: write out his couplets as single lines or his quatrains as couplets and you have often the Chapman fourteeners:

*And Wesssex lay in a patch of peace like a dog in a patch of
sun....*

*Where the scenes are little and terrible key-holes of heaven
and hell...*

*As the tall white devil of the Plague moves out of Asian skies,
His foot in a waste of cities and his head in a cloud of flies...
When Caesar's sun fell out of the sky, and whoso hearkened
right*

Could only hear the plunging of the nations in the night.

Even when the stanza, are longer and the fourteeners are divided by intervening eight or less feet, there is as skilful a play of rise and fall, ripple and eddy, within the persistent plunge onward, as the jerkiness of the ballad-measure would allow, and bold imaginative streaks shine out amid fibres of a coarser stuff. The lines already quoted about the moving locust-tower and the tawny sand-winds are a striking example. Elsewhere too Chesterton makes effective music:

*Whirling the one sword in his hand,
A great wheel in the sun,
He sent it splendid through the sky,
Flying before the shaft could fly—
It smote Earl Harold over the eye,
And blood began to run.*

Colan stood weaponless, while Earl Harold with a ghastly smile of defiance stumbled dead.

*Then Alfred, prince of England,
And all the Christian earls,
Unhooked their swords and held them up
Each offered to Colan like a cup
Of chrysolite and pearls.*

*And the King said, "Do you take my sword
Who have done this deed of fire,
For this is the manner of Christian men,
Whether of steel or priestly pen,
That they cast their hearts out of their ken
To get their heart's desire."*

True poetry has a breadth and depth of voice, besides mere length. Through most of these lines the first two are as good as absent. I submit, however, that, at three places in the above, Chesterton executes finely three fourteen-er progressions:

*Whirling the one sword in his hand, a great wheel in the sun...
Each offered to Colan like a cup of chrysolite and pearls...
That they cast their hearts out of their ken to get their heart's
desire...*

The whirled sword is described with an admirable breadth of voice, a quality of magnificence and rhythmic volume. The middle quotation is the weakest, seeming at first mere length of voice filled with a decorative sentiment. Indeed the opening trio of feet is poor, but the concluding phrase saves the line by a depth of voice, for depth means a simple, subtle or else powerful suggestion of some beautiful or profound thought and feeling. And here there is an exquisite subtlety: the half-rusty blades offered by Alfred's tatterdemalion troop were meant to express the feeling that Colan's act was great and heroic enough to deserve a royal reward, a precious and plenary recognition, cups of chrysolite and pearls. Alfred's closing words in that little speech to Colan give a powerful depth, but breadth too accompanies it. All the three lines together give a pretty adequate average of the virtues which carry the *Ballad of the White Horse*, despite many clumsy or flat moments, to a place in poetic literature—forceful figurative sight, beautifully suggested thought or feeling, sense of the inward significance of life's happenings.

Most poetry confines itself to the first and the second virtues; but when all the three combine they render a very satisfying greatness possible. G.K.C. is not by any means a great poet; still, that wondrous possibility he did have, though in a rather uncertain manner, a rather fitful and sporadic brilliance. For his sudden flashes, lyric or quasi-epic, have that rare third virtue—a delicate or a strong grasp of meanings behind the surface, an out-look thrown from a depth of idea and emotion to understand and interpret the spectacle of events, an attempt to feel the pulse of the wider instincts, impulses, destinies, powers at work in the universe. In poetry this virtue has no indispensable affinity to the occult exquisiteness of Yeats or the mystic opulence, that is Sri Aurobindo's. Occult or mystic it may be, yet its fundamental connotation is not thus limited: it can also be moral or philosophical, provided there is no dry philosophy or dull morality. As Arnold could not read Macaulay's

*To all the men upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late*

*In writing this whole paragraph I am indebted to several illuminating suggestions made by Sri Aurobindo.

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without a cry of pain at its ring of false metal, one cannot refrain from laughter at the goody-goody sentimentalism tagged on to the *Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge:

*He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.*

It cannot be arraigned on the score of simplicity or even a childlike naïveté: the mariner has a mentality primitive enough; the point is that the simplicity everywhere else has a delicate strangeness, a touch of ether and fire, while here a commonplace diction narrows down as well as superficialises the large interpretative vision the ballad has behind it, the keen consciousness of profound impulses and powers of being which deepens the general poetic pleasure, adding a new facet to the rich quality of the word-music. Chesterton also brings a large interpretative vision, marred here and there by a too obvious moral and pro-Christian colour, but, often, resplendent with a true Christian idealism and a vivid if partial understanding of alien ardours. In addition, his sparks of "high seriousness" bear a cryptic tinge, so that the supernatural is never far away, although its nearness is unlike the atmosphere created in Coleridge's poem. In Coleridge the inspiration is more weirdly cryptic—the ancient mariner is a creature haunted by supernatural life-forms whose touch is almost directly felt by us; Chesterton's verse is haunted by supernatural idea-forms—that is, a peculiar nuance in the language, a certain imaginative glimpse, suggest presences beyond the mind, without opening a door almost in the senses to feel them. The very first two stanzas set the cryptic tone:

*Before the gods that made the gods
Had seen their sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was cut out of the grass.
Before the gods that made the gods
Had drunk at dawn their fill,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
Was hoary on the hill.*

If the ballad-swing and jaunt had not interfered, the thought and the cast of phrase would have reached a unique perfection. As it is, too, it is worth while marking the poetic device whereby the antiquity of the White Horse is increasingly hinted: the passing of the sunrise is mentioned before the actual dawn. Then, the word "hoary" is an absolutely felicitous pun with its double meaning of "white" and "old": Chesterton must have written it with a whoop of delight. But the surest stroke to express the immemorial is the phrase: "the gods that made the gods"—a cryptic turn in which is summarised the Norse feeling that there was vista on inscrutable vista of the supernatural, there were powers behind mysterious powers, there were strange successions of divine dynasties. In another stanza, Elf the blue-eyed minstrel of the Rhine-land after singing how the gods forgot the mistletoe,

*And soundless as an arrow of snow
The arrow of anguish fell*

killing Balder the beautiful, conjures up an uncanny Fate dogging the world's steps:

*The thing on the blind side of the heart,
The wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring,
There is always a forgotten thing,
And love is not secure,*

Every line here is fine cryptic poetry and high seriousness; and what a verbal gem is that "almighty", with its rare suggestion of the elated joy and flush and godlike power felt by young love. An equally fine passage of interpretative vision, with a couple of exceedingly magical moments—the end of the third and the fourth verses—is about Colan and the Celtic twilight ever in his thought:

*He kept the Roman order,
He made the Christian sign:
But his eyes grew often blind and bright,
And the sea that rose in the rocks at night
Rose to his head like wine.*

*He made the sign of the Cross of God,
He knew the Roman prayer,
But he had unreason in his heart
Because of the gods that were.*

*Even they that walked on the high cliffs,
High as the clouds were then,
Gods of unbearable beauty
That broke the hearts of men.*

*And whether in seat or saddle,
Whether with frown or smile,
Whether at feast or fight was he,
He heard the noise of a nameless sea
On an undiscovered isle.*

Christian idealism finds often a memorable expression in the course of Chesterton's narrative: not so often as it should, though, considering that almost the entire poem strains to be such an expression. Alfred goes gathering comrades after his vision of the Virgin, and to each of them he conveys its compulsive inspiration, for he is fired by a reality greater than his personal self:

*Out of the mouth of the Mother of God,
Like a little word come I.*

She has not spoken to him about the end of his enterprise, she has left him to "go gaily in the dark", but

*Her face was like an open word
Where brave men speak and choose;
The very colours of her coat
Were better than good news.*

So he brings with him a convinced prophecy that what seems impossible shall be done—the Danes' tyranny shall be trod down, their heathen creed destroyed, and the English live to see, with the Virgin's help,

*A tale where a man looks down on the sky
That has long looked down on him.*

Here we have the cryptic at its most audacious, as also when Alfred during his incognito reconnoitre in the Danish camp as a poor harper sings to them the Christian idea of man and the first fall and how, since it was due to the divine freedom with which God had gifted him and not to some ineluctable or blind Fate, even Adam's transgression was a glory—though it brought human nature most dangerously near perdition. That dangerous nearness, that dreadful proclivity, is caught in a figure:

*He brake Him and betrayed Him,
And fast and far he fell,
Till you and I may stretch our necks
And burn our beards in hell.*

It may be that the figure gains a doubly delectable point for those who boast a hirsute chin. Lovers of poetic elegance may demur that its language is almost like a blow in the face. But the refusal altogether to enjoy it argues a defect in the artistic gusto. For this blow is not crude extravagance: it is shot out at the mind's eye, the imaginative vision, and its impact makes one "see stars" somewhat in the sense in which out of two sounds Browning's Abt Vogler made not a third but a star. It is not the grotesque running riot: the grotesque has been illumined and sublimated, even if the "star" Chesterton gives us is an asteroid and not quite a planet. Aeschylus who called Helen a lion's whelp would have relished it; Marlowe who spoke of "Cassandra sprawling in the streets" would have gloried in it. . . . Chesterton, however, has more than one string to his bow: his style can be Elizabethan in effects other than the Gothic—a quieter force and a gentler vividness. Perhaps the lines that sum up best the Christian courage and the Christian mystic tendency that are his main theme are those already quoted:

*That they cast their hearts out of their ken
To get their heart's desire;*

while the most beautiful picture of the mystic truth which is believed to be evoking and guiding that courage through the ages is drawn in that re-appearance of the Virgin on the battlefield just as the last rally of the broken English troops is made and the last charge to victory commanded by Alfred:

*The King looked up and what he saw
Was a great light like death,
For our Lady stood on the standards rent,
As lonely and as innocent
As when between white walls she went
And the lilies of Nazareth.*

. . . I have quoted enough to show Chesterton's merit. His ballad—minus the last section—has eminences which will not let it sink out of memory. *In toto* it is more a promise than a performance, rhetoric and rant or popular sentimentalism thrust themselves again and again between the sheer poetic cries, and we are compelled to accept the entire piece with a certain reserve; but there is no questioning that the root of great poetry was in Chesterton. He remains a might-have-been, yet with moments of inspiration that are noteworthy for a special reason. I hold that distinct lines of poetic consciousness run behind the world's outer life and mind, sending out shoots, so to speak, into the latter; and when these are received in abundance we have an Elizabethan, an Augustan, a Victorian or any other age of poetry with ruling characteristic notes. G. K. C., as I have already hinted, belongs in his defects as well as merits to the Elizabethan, though with a subtle difference from its general temperament since he is one of its stray shoots. He has poetically the mental turn of Chapman and Marlowe, and he has their tendency of life-impetus, too; only, in them the latter royally disported itself in its own authentic vigour, or, otherwise, seized on the mind to attain a more ingenious effectivity, while in Chesterton it is rather the mind using the recrudescing life-impetus for his most telling strokes. All the same, his affinity with the "spacious days", with an inner poetic world of greater power and possibility than at present manifest in purely English letters makes his finer qualities more interesting than those exercised by several living poets. He has a resilient boldness and even his delicacy is dynamic. And he has behind him a splendid enthusiasm: the White Horse stands like a dominating symbol of valorous Faith ready to rush towards death, death which to its eyes is "a great light" leading unto the beatific vision. No doubt he fails to appreciate the old Norse religion in its full relation to life, unlike Morris who gave a puissant reflection of it in his *Sigurd the Volsung*. That was to be expected, so steeped is he in the Christian ideology; and I for one find no reason to complain against his bias, since it is blown towards us in gusts of genuine poetic ecstasy. But that there should be no more than gusts when the ecstasy is so peculiarly brave renders Chesterton's journalistic triumphs an inexcusable self-dissipation.

LIGHTS ON LIFE-PROBLEMS—Continued from page 12

itself even apart from the world, the gods have their own home beyond our sky and air, Nature her own self-absorbed life and super-nature its brilliant curtains and its dim mysterious fences. None of these things are unreal, and if the supernatural as handled by older poets seemed often mere legend, fancy and romance, it was because it was seen from a distance by the imagination, not lived in by the soul and in its spirit, as is done by the true seer and poet of this supernature or other-nature. And all these things, because they have their own reality, have their life and a poetry which makes them its subject can be as vital, as powerful, as true as the song which makes beautiful the physical life and normal passions and emotions of men and the objects of our bodily sense-experience."

Q. 7: But is it not likely that the poetry of the future in its preoccupation with the greater realities of the super-life and the vaster realms of the super-nature may tend to belittle our normal actual life and even give it a hue of unreality, just as modern poetry in its preoccupation with our actual life has belittled and treated as unreal the greater life of the spirit and the higher worlds of the super-nature?

A. "But all life is one and a new human mind moves towards the realisation of its totality and oneness. The poetry which voices the oneness and totality of our being and Nature and the worlds and God, will not make the actuality of our earthly life less but more real and rich and full and wide and living to men. To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its own being, and to know the other countries of the soul is to widen our bounds and make more opulent and beautiful the earth on which we live. To bring the gods into our life is to raise it to its own diviner powers. To live in close and abiding intimacy with Nature and the spirit in her is to free our daily living from its prison of narrow preoccupation with the immediate moment and act and to give the moment the inspiration of all Time and the background of eternity and the daily act the foundation of an eternal peace and the large momentum of the uni-

versal Power. To bring God into life, the sense of the self in us into all our personality and becoming, the powers and vistas of the Infinite into our mental and material existence, the oneness of the self in all into our experience and feelings and relations of heart and mind with all that is around us is to help to divinise our actual being and life, to force down its fences of division and blindness and unveil the human godhead that individual man and his race can become if they will and lead us to our most vital perfection. This is what a future poetry may do for us in the way and measure in which poetry can do these things, by vision, by the power of the word, by the attraction of the beauty and delight of what it shows us. What philosophy or other mental brooding makes precise or full to our thought, poetry can by its creative power, imaging force and appeal to the emotions make living to the soul and heart. This poetry will present to us indeed in forms of power and beauty all the actual life of man, his wonderful and fruitful past, his living and striving present, his yet more living aspiration and hope of the future, but will present it more seeingly as the life of the vast self and spirit within the race and the veiled divinity in the individual, as an act of the power and delight of universal being, in the greatness of an eternal manifestation, in the presence and intimacy of Nature, in harmony with the beauty and wonder of the realms that stretch out beyond earth and its life, in the march to godhead and the significance of immortality, in the ever clear letters and symbols of the self-revealing mystery and not only in its first crude and incomplete actualities; these actualities will themselves be treated with a firmer and finer vision, find their own greater meaning and become to our sight thread of the fine tissue and web of the cosmic work of the Spirit. This poetry will be the voice and rhythmic utterance of our greater, our total, our infinite existence, and will give us the strong and infinite sense, the spiritual and vital joy, the exalting power of a greater breath of life."

K. G.

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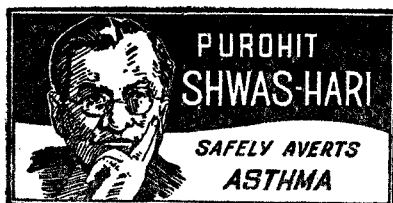
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(30)

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- Q. 1: Art and poetry in recent years, especially amongst people influenced by communistic ideology, have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the real and actual life. Any preoccupation with things that have no direct, real and near contact with actual life is decried as going after unsubstantial and shadowy illusions or remote and airy imaginations and fancies of no value to the individual or the race. How far is this insistence on realism compatible with the true function and aim of art and poetry?
- A. "The demand for activity and realism or for a direct, exact and forceful presentation of life in poetry proceeds upon a false sense of what poetry gives or can give us. All the highest activities of the mind of man deal with things other than the crude actuality or the direct appearance or the first rough appeal of existence. A critical or a scientific thought may attempt to give an account of the actuality as it really is, though even to do that they have to go far behind its frontage and make a mental reconstruction and surprising change in its appearance. But the creative powers cannot stop there, but have to make new things for us as well as to make existing things new to the mind and eye. It is no real portion of the function of art to cut out palpitating pieces from life and present them raw and smoking or well-cooked for the aesthetic digestion. For in the first place all art has to give us beauty, and the crude actuality of life is not often beautiful, and in the second place poetry has to give us a deeper reality of things and the outsides and surface faces of life are only a part of its reality and do not take us either very deep or very far. Moreover, the poet's greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the world's, and he does this even when he is dealing with actual things."
- Q. 2: But is it not a fact that some of the greatest poets like Homer and Shakespeare depict faithfully the actual events and personalities of their time in the themes and characters of their work?
- A. "Homer with all his epic vigour of outward presentation does not show us the heroes and deeds before Troy in their actuality as they really were to the normal vision of men, but much rather as they were or might have been to the vision of the gods. Shakespeare's greatness lies not in his reproduction of actual human events or men as they appear to us buttoned and cloaked in life,—others of his time could have done that as well, if with less radiant force of genius, yet with more of the realistic crude colour or humdrum drab of daily truth,—but in his bringing out in his characters and themes of things essential, intimate, eternal, universal in man and Nature and Fate on which the outward features are borne as fringe and robe and which belong to all times, but are least obvious to the moment's experience: when we do see them, life presents to us another face and becomes something deeper than its actual present mask. That is why the poet oftenest instinctively prefers to go away from the obsession of a petty actuality, from the realism of the prose of life to his inner creative self or an imaginative background of the past or the lucent air of myth or dream or on into a greater outlook on the future."
- Q. 3: Does this mean that art and poetry should turn away from the immediate actualities of life and deal mainly with things of universal and eternal interest?
- A. "Poetry may indeed deal with the present living scene, at some peril, or even with the social or other questions and problems of the day,—a task which is now often laid on the creative mind, as if that were its proper work; but it does that successfully only when it makes as little as possible of what belongs to the moment and time and the surface and brings out their roots of universal or eternal interest or their suggestion of great and deep things. What the poet borrows from the moment, is the most perishable part of his work and lives at all only by being subordinated and put into intimate relation with less transient realities. And this is so because it is the eternal increasing soul of man and the intimate self of things and their more abiding and significant forms which are the real object of his vision."
- Q. 4: Is it likely that the poetry of the future in recovering its complete aim and purpose will outgrow its present preoccupation with the surface actualities of normal life and widen its scope by entering into the vaster realms of the greater life of the Spirit?
- A. "The poetry of the future can least afford to chain itself to the outward actualities which we too often mistake for the whole of life, because it will be the voice of a human mind which is pressing more and more towards the very self of the self of things, the very spirit of which the soul of man is a living power and to a vision of unity and totality which is bound to take note of all that lies behind our apparent material life. What man sees and experiences of God and himself and his race and Nature and the spiritual, mental, psychic and material worlds in which he moves, his backlook upon the past, his sweep of vision over the present, his eye of aspiration and prophecy cast towards the future, his passion of self-finding and self-exceeding, his reach beyond the three times to the eternal and immutable, this is his real life."
- Q. 5: But poetry in the past has already sung of this greater life of the Spirit, of God and the gods and other worlds and the deeper truths of Nature and Man's life. Will the poetry of the future in returning to these subjects only repeat the visions and the voices of the past or give us a new interpretation of them?
- A. "Poetry in the past wrote much of the godheads and powers behind existence, but in the mask of legends and myths, sometimes of God, but not often with a living experience, oftener in the set forms taught by religions and churches and without true beauty and knowledge. But now the mind of man is opening more largely to the deepest truth of the Divine, the Self, the Spirit, the eternal Presence not separate and distant, but near us, around us and in us, the Spirit in the world, the greater Self in man and his kind, the Spirit in all that is and lives, the Godhead, the Existence, the Power, the Beauty, the eternal Delight that broods over all, supports all and manifests itself in every turn of creation. A poetry which lives in this vision must give us quite a new presentation and interpretation of life; for of itself and at the first touch this seeing reconstructs and re-images the world for us and gives us a greater sense and a vaster, subtler and profounder form of our existence. The real faces of the gods are growing more apparent to the eye of the mind, though not yet again intimate with our life, and the forms of legend and symbol and myth must open to other and deeper meanings, as already they have begun to do, and come in changed and vital again into poetry to interpret the realities behind the veil. Nature wears already to our eye a greater and more transparent robe of her divine and her animal and her terrestrial and cosmic life and a deeper poetry of Nature than has yet been written is one of the certain potentialities of the future. The material realm too cannot for very much longer be our sole or separate world of experience, for the partitions which divide it from psychic and other kingdoms behind it are wearing thin and voices and presences are beginning to break through and reveal their impact on our world. This too must widen our conception of life and make a new world and atmosphere for poetry which may justify as perhaps never before the poet's refusal to regard as unreal what to the normal mind was only romance, illusion or dream. A larger field of being made more real to man's experience will be the realm of the future poetry."
- Q. 6: But why has the modern mind considered these greater realms of the life of the Spirit as unreal dreams or illusions? Are they not as real as the world of our normal experience?
- A. "These things are often given an appearance of remoteness, of withdrawal from the actuality of life, because to discover them the mind had at first to draw away from the insistent outward preoccupation and live as if in a separate world. The seeker of the Self and Spirit, the God-lover, tended to become the cloistered monk, the ascetic, the mystic, the eremite and to set the spiritual apart from and against the material life. The lover of Nature went away from the noise of man and daily things to commune with her largeness and peace. The gods were found more in the lights of solitude than in the thoughts and actions of men. The seer of other worlds lived surrounded by the voices and faces of supernature. And this was a legitimate seclusion, for these are provinces and realms and presences and one has often to wander apart in them or live secluded with them to know their nearest intimacies. The spirit is real in