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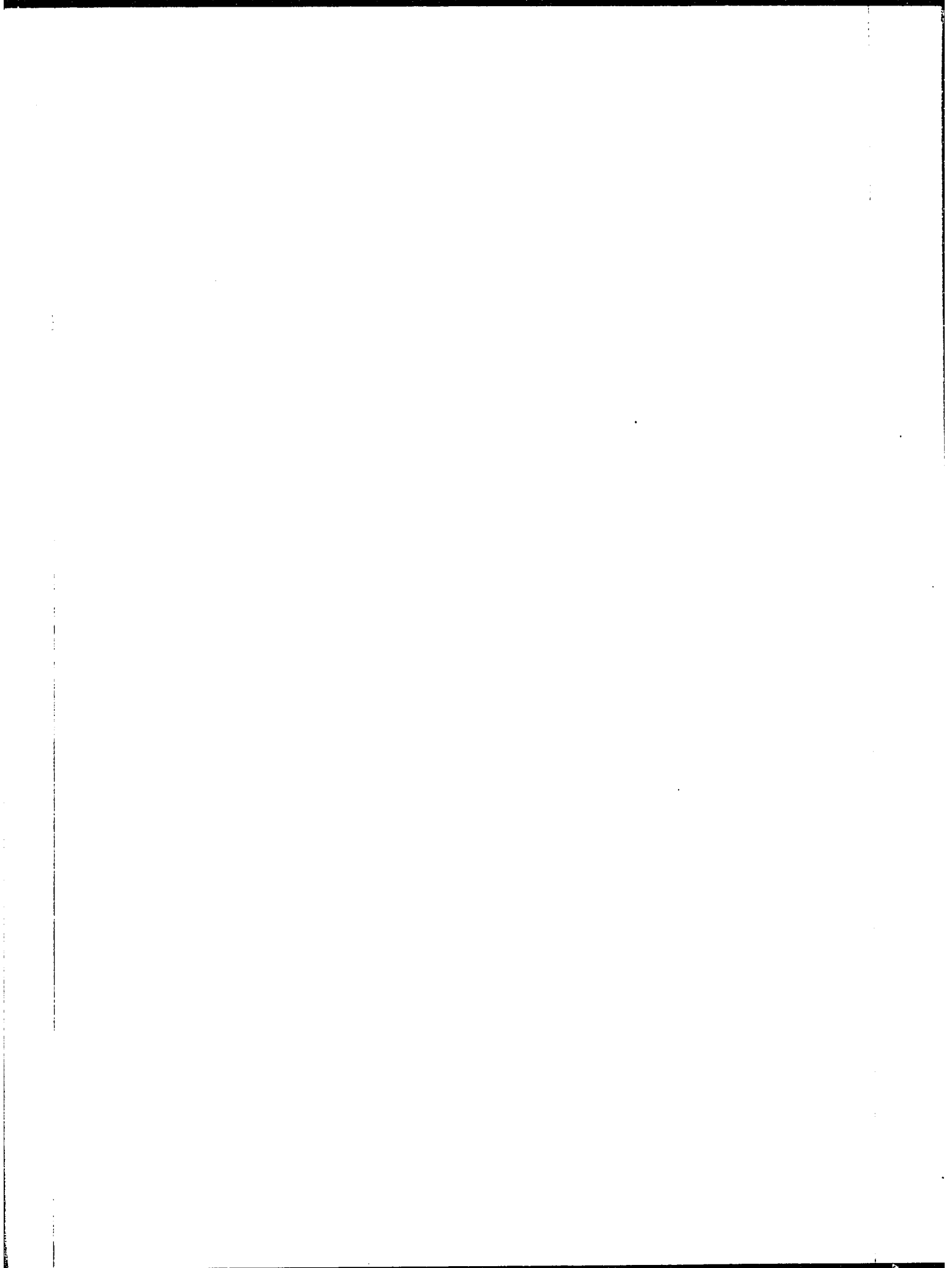
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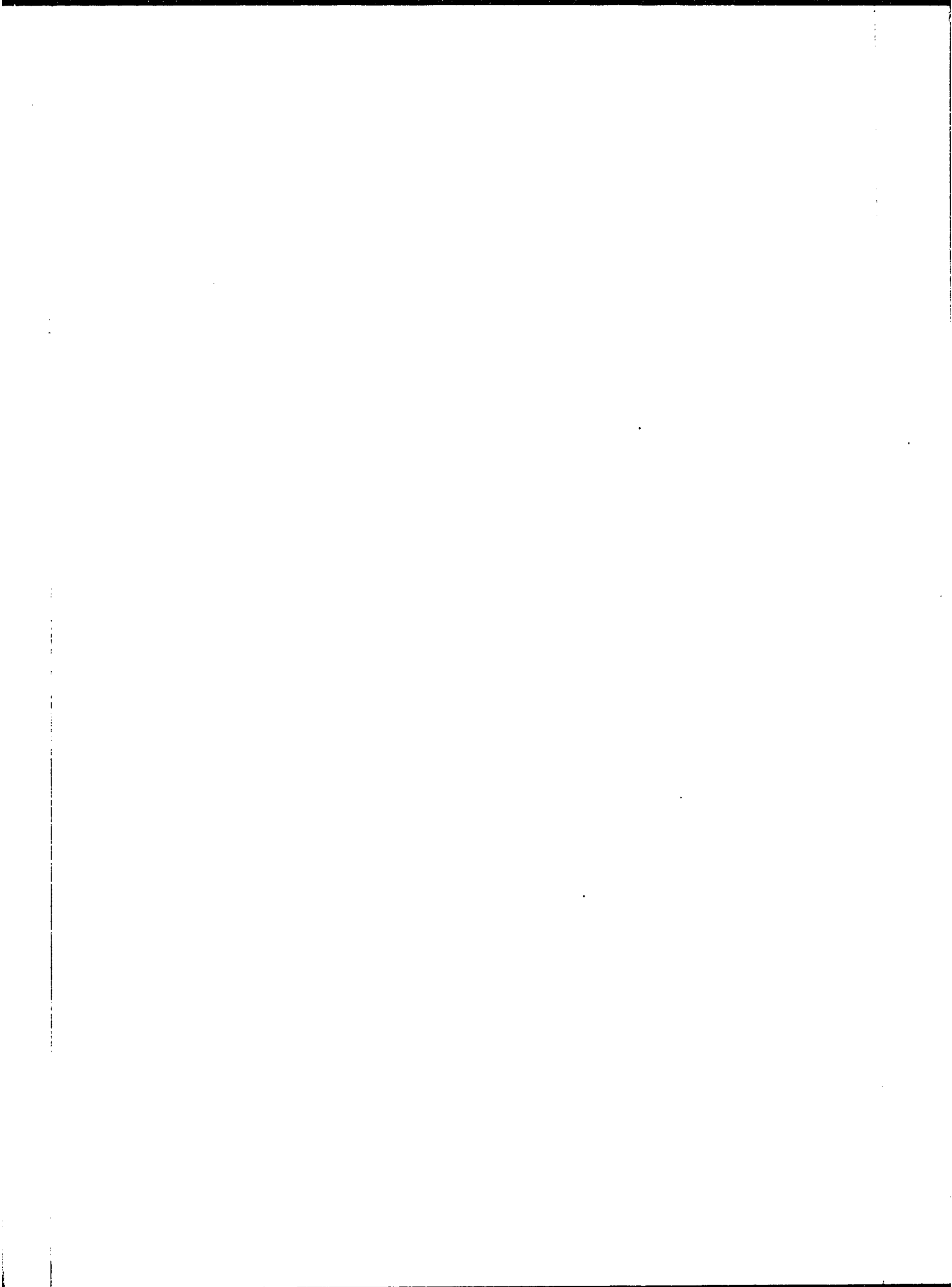
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WHITHER THE DAWN

A Catholic Critique of Contemporary English Literature

A Thesis presented by

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As partial requirement for the  
degree of

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TO  
SAINT ANN  
WHO SAW IN THE DAWN  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN ERA  
THE PROMISE OF A GLORIOUS SUNSET,  
THIS BOOK  
IS RESPECTFULLY AND LOVINGLY DEDICATED

## F O R E W O R D

It is not the purpose of this thesis to survey contemporary English literature. In fact, we are so entirely enveloped in our epoch that we can hardly discern its outstanding authors or choose their masterpieces. However, art and morality are timeless, therefore, the aim of this treatise is to apply to twentieth-century literature a critique derived from the study of the relation between art and morality.

The first postulate for such a critique is the acceptance of an established authority. Unless there is a final certitude based on some reliable source of truth, there is no possible agreement on principles. In this treatise the accepted authority is the Catholic Church. Her teaching, so far as the interpretation of man's life is concerned, is the infallible truth. What is consonant with that teaching is accepted; what is opposed is rejected, for, on the assumption that there is a body of truth, definite norms for the critical evaluation of a philosophy of life exist.

However, at this point, a distinction must be made between art and the artist. The two must be separated

for a right understanding of a moral judgment on works of art. The general source for such a distinction is to be found in the teaching of the Schoolmen, and the specific reference for this treatise is from the synthesis of this teaching prepared by Jacques Maritain (1). Only a summary of the essential notes is recorded here.

Man has a tendency to use knowledge, and the exercise of knowledge is the exercise of the practical intellect. This practical intellect has two spheres, the one entitled Action, the other, Making. Action is the free use of the will unrelated to the production of things. Its sphere is the sphere of morality, the human good. Making is productive action considered only in relation to the thing produced. The latter is good, if it conforms to the rules and the end peculiar to the work to be produced. With this mode of reasoning it follows that the artist can be distinguished from his art.

The pertinent question now is: "How is literature related to morality?" In attempting to define the relationship between literature and morality, two truths are to be remembered: Catholic philosophy looks frankly and steadily upon everything that is, and Catholic philosophy studies things objectively. The first truth immediately disposes of the problem regarding the possibility

(1) Maritain, J., Art and Scholasticism, pp. 5-7.

of art being concerned with evil. The presentation of evil in art is permissible so long as evil is shown in its true light (1). The second truth determines the manner in which things are considered, an unprejudiced outlook, a view of things as they are. This objectivity of philosophy contradicts the modern tendencies to an individualized outlook, a subjective consideration of things whereby each one becomes a creator unto himself (2).

Catholic criticism, then, is founded on the Catholic interpretation of life. Catholicism teaches that man is ordained to a supernatural end. The works of man are subordinate to this end, while they have their own proper perfection. Art, being the work of man, can be conceived, however, distinct from man, and valuable according to its own perfection. But art considered as a means, as an instrument, is related to man and the end of the work (*finis operis*) cannot interfere with the end of the worker (*finis operantis*) (3). So, to apply moral norms (these are derived from Catholic principles) to artistic productions, means that such works of art are measured according to their influence on man relative to his end.

(1) Donnelly, F. P., Art Principles in Literature, pp. 45-47.

(2) *Ibid.* pp. 1-15.

(3) Maritain, J., Art and Scholasticism, p. 77.

Now, the nineteenth century was one of science. Its atmosphere was surcharged with scientific discoveries and scientific theories. In fact, it radiated scientific influence in every direction. To a certain degree literature reflected the philosophy underlying scientific research. But, the popular mind was loathe to ponder long over the hypotheses of scientists, so even before the turn of the century, man looked at life at a closer range for an answer to perplexing questions relative to the source of success and happiness. In fact, as the world stepped into the twentieth century, it was not so much a thinking world as one full to the brim with emotions. And today, not war only, nor political rallies, nor the excited throngs at sports are vibrant with feeling, but not a single act of life escapes some emotion, quiet or intense, which is its source, its companion, its effect. Of course man ought to be ruled by cold reason, but experience shows that he is responsive to feelings and succumbs to feelings.

Twentieth-century literature in all its phases mirrors life and, as we advance through its fourth decade, we look back to deplore much of the ravage wrought by unbridled emotion, but also to laud some of the stabilizing influences that have established a Christian morale, for morale is nothing but organized emotion, the

counterforce to fickleness. Indeed, as the achievements of mankind are measured by the degree in which they have enriched human life, one is apt to question the permanent value of twentieth-century literature in the field of human endeavor. For, is it not disheartening to realize that many of our present generation of littérateurs write under the spell of Freud and Proust and André Gide? What a trio to inspire lofty idealism! And yet... amid the winds of false doctrine and the gusts of sentiment the Catholic Church which knows no "has been" voices her world-old philosophy which offers a reality to replace the present sordid realism. It shows saint and sinner fettered with the same passions, but the saint as conqueror and the sinner as conquered. In these days when songs of victory spur the brave on to valiant deeds, who could choose to be the conquered?

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WINTER THE DAWN



# PART ONE

IN THE GREY TUMULT OF A MISTY  
DAWN, MANY VOICES SANG DISCORD-  
ANT NOTES

## CHAPTER ONE

*English Thought Succumbs to  
Foreign Influence*



## CHAPTER ONE

In considering the various idiosyncrasies of the English people, the student cannot fail to be impressed by the conservatism which appears to be their chief characteristic. In fact, the slow, deliberate, calculating temperament of the English has placed them in diametric opposition to their ardent, gay, flexible French rivals. Courage and tenacity are the dominant qualities of the English, it would seem, while deep, insular prejudice and narrowness of national separatism, their outstanding defects. These traits, one fancies, should have kept them immune from foreign influence, and yet, in the field of literature, at least, they have been as gullible as their more avid neighbors. Indeed, from the dawn of the Renaissance to the present time, the number of writers that have bowed to foreign masters, has steadily increased. Besides, several circumstances extraneous to literature have cooperated in modern times to extend to an unprecedented point the influence of foreign thought on native letters. There is, for instance, an augmented sense of a community of interests and problems among the peoples of western culture induced largely by the first World War and the

various international efforts at reconstruction that followed it. Again the increasing facility with which translations are made, printed and distributed throughout the world, is a potent factor for international propagation of ideas. For example, books like Papini's Life of Christ or Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front have aroused enthusiastic comment in countries where very little Italian or German is spoken. In fact, no country today exists entirely on native literature and, in the English-speaking world, this literary internationalism has had both a detrimental and a beneficial effect.

The philosophy which forms the basis of current literature had its source in the pessimism of a German, Arthur Schopenhauer, who diffused his dismal ideas throughout Europe early in the nineteenth century. He stumbled upon a solution of the riddle of woe in the world but could not see that he had hit on a great truth. This prince of pessimists, after a superficial study of Christianity, condemns it as a pessimistic philosophy because it is a deterrent from the useless quest of earthly happiness. He fails to fathom the meaning of St. Paul's words: "Conversatio nostra in coelis est, " and refuses to heed St. Augustine who, having drained the cup of worldly pleasures cries: "Why will ye still tread these steep and slimy paths? Ye are seeking for rest

where no rest is to be found. Seek what ye seek, but it is not where ye seek it. Ye are seeking for a happy life in the land of death: it is not there." Schopenhauer calls this a philosophy of pessimism. But paradoxically, (and is not Christianity full of paradoxes?) if man seeks happiness not here but beyond, he finds it here, whereas if he seeks it here, he will find it neither here nor beyond. Schopenhauer blamed and ridiculed the Catholic Church for telling her children to expect happiness only beyond the grave. Yet he certainly did not hope to find it here, for he advocated a rigorous asceticism which tended to discourage the will to live. Furthermore, he believed that intellectual endowments merely increased the capacity for suffering and recommended a narcotic calculated to deaden the consciousness of the intolerable pain of living.

The self-consciousness of egotism against which Schopenhauer inveighed, became on the other hand, the principle of Nietzsche's dark gospel, the gospel of the superman, of which, with unparalleled effrontery, he offered himself as the archetype. Repellent as the doctrine is, it could be powerfully attractive to a soul driven back upon itself by the futility of life. It voices the cry of Satan to Eve: "Ye shall be as gods." And yet, Nietzsche's idea of the superman was not so origi-

nal as he himself imagined it to be, for, as Jacques Maritain points out in Théonas, the first author of the superman was Aristotle, while St. Gregory really coined the word. However, both of them had in mind the quite un-Nietzschean idea of man remaining man and yet surpassing the level of humanity. St. Gregory knew that man, by the grace of God, could aspire to become an "alter Christus." Nietzsche wanted to destroy Christianity, especially morality.

He was seconded and surpassed in his efforts by Karl Marx whose means of attack were vastly opposed to those employed by Friedrich Nietzsche but whose prospective end was the same: the annihilation of Christianity. The chief characteristic of Marxian philosophy was the radical secularization of life. Liberalism had wished to push religion into the background; Marxianism advocated eliminating it altogether thus preparing the way for the complete re-absorption of the individual in the social organism and, at the same time, transforming the social organism into an economic mechanism. This philosophy, built up on a foundation of naturalism, is the antithesis of the Christian ideal. Today we see Marxian philosophy at work in Russia; we can also learn how George Bernard Shaw propagates it in England through his plays and especially through the prefaces to these plays.

Nevertheless, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, the doctrine of the superman disseminated by Nietzsche, and the cure-all socialism of Karl Marx had less influence on the masses than the "complexes" of Sigmund Freud. He has been called the most influential thinker of our time, next to Einstein. No discriminating admirer of Freud would call him a clear thinker or a profound thinker. Influential is, indeed, the only correct term. Philosophers, of a sort, have appropriated Freudian ideas, but Freud himself is no philosopher. Nevertheless, he was and still is the vogue, and hence he has influence. Novelists and dramatists with even greater impetuosity than philosophers and moralists, have seized upon Freudianism and have made it popular. In fact, the poetic and dramatic quality of the Freudian ideas has much to do with their popularity. The idea of "complexes" and of the "subliminal self" caught the popular imagination. His phrase "release the inhibitions" promptly entered into the speech of the man in the street. Legitimately or illegitimately the ordinary reader of Freud has taken that phrase as a kind of philosophical justification for the indulgence of passion. In consequence, men and women in appalling numbers have repudiated conscience. Indeed, Freud gave the "coup de grâce" to old morality, or more properly speaking, to all morality, by demonstrating that we are merely beasts--

and uncommonly nasty beasts at that. In his book, Civilization and its Discontents, he explains that happiness has been lost because civilization increases the sense of guilt. According to him, the sexual impulse is the driving force that spurs on to happiness. No sin, no conscience, no responsibility, no punishment, no fear should be connected with anything man does. Then everyone would be happy, as never before in human history. These ideas have dominated the sphere of literature since the dawn of the century. Men have lived them but yet, how far have they wandered from the path that leads to happiness!

On the evening of October 9, 1845, Newman was received into the Church of Littlemore. Three days previous, so Lionel Johnson tells us, Ernest Renan left the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris to begin his career of poisoned apostasy. As a skeptic he had no peer. Faith, tradition, the Bible--all were myths to Renan. He was a scientist and in the name of science pronounced the Church dead, her doctrines discredited by scientific discoveries, her phase in the evolutionary cycle eclipsed by the new secularism which had explained away the supernatural and freed men from the tyranny of mystery. No book perhaps expressed more accurately the new dominant spirit than Renan's L'Avenir de la Science. Science was the new religion which was to replace Christianity and Renan its

high priest who summed up in himself all the forces arrayed against the Church--an intellectual, an artist, a scientist, an apostle with a childlike belief in all the dogmas of the evolutionary hypothesis. In the history of Ernest Renan's career we find a paradox, for an ironic Providence turned his attacks into a reaction in favor of the Church. The "scientisme" of Renan was short-lived. It died first and most conclusively in France, not under the blows of Catholic apologists, but from the dissatisfaction and remorse of those who had accepted the new faith and had found it wanting. To a poet belongs the distinction of having sounded the first and most famous notes of revolt. Charles Baudelaire was not a Catholic, but in his veins coursed the blood of Christian France. He had tasted the fruit of human iniquity and he knew that it was bitter beyond the power of all the sugared platitudes of science to make it sweet. He knew that sin was a reality, the great reality, and, disgusted with his own degradation and the stupidity of his generation, he sang in his Les Fleurs du Mal, of things that men had superficially forgotten, of God and of His fatherly love for His children, of His willingness to forgive their misdeeds; of the transiency of earthly joy, of the hope of heaven and its many mansions waiting and prepared. Baudelaire's reaction to Renan's philosophy gave birth to

a generation of "nostalgiques" who wandered aimlessly, but not without a certain grace, in search of relief from the intolerable boredom of their "milieux." They had lost faith in science and their wavering admiration for the Church was a thing almost entirely aesthetic. But, with the new generation, the generation of Coppée, of Verlaine, of Huysmans, of Brunetière, of Retté, of Bourget, of Léon Bloy, the tide set in motion by Ernest Renan definitely turned, and turned to the Church. However, more thoroughly than anyone else, Ernest Psichari symbolized the changes that have taken place in France. He was the grandson of Renan. He attended the "lycée" with Jacques Maritain and later on went to the Sorbonne, mastering the ideas made popular by his grandfather. Psichari should have been a perfect realization of the Renanian ideal. But, fearful of the moral degradation toward which he was tending, he left the university before taking his degree and fled to the army in search of a hard discipline which alone might save his manhood and self-respect. In the silent night watches in the deserts of Africa, he came close to the God whom his famous grandfather had lost. The year before the first World War he became a Catholic. His soul was filled with a desire to repair the blasphemy of his grandfather and to do homage to the God who had renewed his youth. He

had, as he tells us of a character in his Appel des Armes, taken "the part of his fathers against his father." So, Ernest Renan, whose life was devoted to the destruction of the Catholic Church, was instrumental, quite as much as Newman, in producing a Catholic Revival. Newman's conversion was the first in a long line of English literateurs who have turned to the Faith. Renan's influence, as is evident from the above account, was even more fruitful in literary conversions. The historian of literature finds difficulty in explaining how such a cause is related to such an effect. He can only say that after many years of wanderings it seemed the desire of God that artists, such as Huysmans, Verlaine, Maritain and Léon Bloy, should return home.

Much of the philosophy of Ernest Renan has its counterpart in the writings of Hippolyte Taine, one of the most famous French critics and historians of the nineteenth century. His logic, at once relentless and inadequate, repels the sincerity of the student who goes to him with an open mind. Henri Amiel, a Swiss philosopher, tells us that reading Taine dried, corroded and saddened him. He also assures us that Taine's arguments have the smell of the laboratory, and can never inspire and seldom inform. Both in method and in manner Taine may be compared to Macaulay, to whom he obviously owes much. His

History of English Literature, quite the vogue in England, carried his ideas to the minds and hearts of the English people.

The arguments of these philosophers would have been, for the most part, the sole heritage of scholars who frequented European universities, if current literature had not taken upon itself the mission of propagating their baneful principles among the masses. The French writers of the nineteenth century, imbued with the innate curiosity, gaiety and love of adventure which characterize their race, were ardent disciples of the new creed. First among them was Gustave Flaubert. Though a master of realism, he was temperamentally a romantic for he loved color and light and was fascinated by the mysterious. Madame Bovary, the novel by which Flaubert is best known, reaches the acme of French realistic fiction. However, the brilliancy of its diction, the fascination of its thrilling scenes, and the vivid portrayal of its characters, prove that Flaubert is a master of style and technique. The flagrant indecency of the novel, on the other hand, classifies the author as the most dangerous of the Naturalists.

After reading Madame Bovary one is apt to believe that Flaubert could not have a peer in the realm of naturalistic literature. Yet Emile Zola surpasses Flaubert

in vaunting lust and obscenity. His objective can be summed up as follows: given a strong man and an unsatisfied woman to seek in them the beast, to see nothing but the beast, to throw them into a violent drama and note scrupulously the sensations and acts of both. Zola is a fatalist of the most advanced school and his fatalism stems from the belief that man cannot overcome heredity, environment and lust. He employed ugliness to convey the realities of the commonplace. He aimed at giving a complete picture of the time he lived but he failed. As M. Jean Carrère has said, he depicted only the vices and weakness of his time.

Although Alexandre Dumas (fils) began his career as a novelist, he is important in the literary history of this period because he carried into the field of drama the naturalistic philosophy of his contemporaries. He defended divorce, advocated free love and depicted in a most vivid manner scenes that even today find an answering echo in the heart of depraved society.

As Flaubert and Zola excelled as novelists, and Dumas became famous as a dramatist, so Guy de Maupassant mastered the art of short story telling. He was without doubt the greatest short story writer in France in the period just preceding the "gay nineties." His career lasted only ten years but this period was prolific. It

has been said that Maupassant destroyed Naturalism because he carried it to its ultimate point. He is almost as great a stylist as Flaubert, whose disciple he was. He always sought the most colorful word and strengthened his style by eliminating unnecessary words. The gloom of his own philosophy overshadowed his life. A morbid depression took possession of him in his fortieth year and insanity followed. He died in 1895.

Anatole France, poet, novelist and literary critic is the most dangerous writer of modern times. The Roman Index, in a decree dated May 31, 1922, condemns all his works (opera omnia). His blasphemy is terrifying and the immorality of his works, beastly. His poetry is clever but impious and licentious, especially Les Noces corinthiennes, which is a "cri de rage" against Christianity. The novels of Anatole France are simply vehicles for his philosophy of life and they reek with scepticism, irony and obscenity. He was a journalist and critic of considerable vogue and can be best judged in this field from Histoire contemporaine, a biting satire, and L'Orme du Mail, in which he thunders his rage against the clergy. Anatole France, of all the writers of France since 1850, is the most influential propagator of Renan's philosophy. Furthermore, he admires Lenin and lavishes praise on the socialism and internationalism of Bolshevistic Russia.

This fact alone demonstrates his penchant for Karl Marx. Because of his charming style and his cleverness in writing captivating fallacies, Anatole France has perverted more readers than most of the *littérateurs* of his day.

Realism, as we have seen, was, indeed, the dominant note in French literature during the greater part of the last century. Its ideal was ostensibly "to see life steadily and to see it whole;" but, in the hands of the writers we have just reviewed, it not infrequently became a myopic, truncated realism which saw life steadily but failed to see it whole. Man's baseness,--sin and pollution, and disease--was there but the angel in man was absent. Logically it had to be so, for the iron dogmas of materialism excluded the spiritual and made man a beast. But, thank God, there was a "Renouveau Catholique" and in it we are happy to meet a Bourget, a Bazin, a Bordeaux, a Mauriac, a Claudel and many others. However, since the influence of these authors was felt but little in "fin du siècle" literature, a consideration of their works is beyond the confines of this treatise.

We have seen that the French Naturalists, whose influence was strongly felt at home and abroad in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were great technicians; we have noticed, too, that their realism had a brain. However, realism in the Russian masters to whom we now turn, had a heart. Before

the end of the century, Russian literature had not influenced the intellectual life of the rest of Europe either widely or profoundly. True, Ivan Turgenev was renowned in France before he was even slightly appreciated in his own country, but this was because he lived in France where he was a friend of Zola, Flaubert and Daudet. In fact, he gained much more from France than he rendered back to France of Russia. The influence he exerted on English literature was entirely a matter of technique, for the English intellectuals admired his novels as works of art and not as revelations of a different way of thinking. His masterpiece Fathers and Sons sounds the first note of that socialism which, in Russia, developed into the communism which is a world-wide scourge. It describes the conflict between the rising generation and the old, between the young, who have scientific and intellectual aspirations and the old-fashioned, home-loving aristocracy.

Turgenev's novels are finished and restrained. The novels of Feodor Dostoievsky, a man of more intense or less controlled passions, are poured out of him into no mold but the lawless irregular confines of fact. In his youth he was arrested for attending socialist gatherings and as a punishment endured four years' penal servitude in Siberia. With this experience, bitterness entered his soul and all his life he remained a man of sorrows. His

best known work, Crime and Punishment, is terrible and shocking. A poor student, Raskolnikov, commits an atrocious murder, the motives of which are not ordinary ones,-- jealousy, revenge, robbery,--but a complexity of morbid egotism and resentment against life. He confesses to his sweetheart, Sonia, a poor girl of the streets, and she persuades him to expiate his crime. He surrenders to the police and is sent to Siberia, where Sonia joins him. Her devotedness is his redemption. In the suffering of these two children, Dostoievsky, without being a symbolist, saw all Russia and dreamed of a future when love should redeem not only his own country, but all the world. Dostoievsky is a specialist in morbid psychology. M. Berdyaev, in his magnificent analysis of that writer's genius, says that in him the unrest which is latent in all Russian literature reaches its state of highest tension; the wound dealt by the sorrowful destiny of man and his world is quick in him; the good that can be derived from evil is attained only by the way of suffering and repudiation of evil; freedom has opened the path of evil to man, it is a proof of freedom and man must pay the price. The price is suffering.

Turgenev, Dostoievsky and Tolstol form the triumvirate that rules Russian fiction. Tolstol is a potent satirist, a master of characterization. His works are filled

with the stark photography of life. The Power of Darkness is perhaps the most powerful peasant tragedy of the world. However, though a disciple of Zola, a more humane spirit distinguishes Tolstoi's work from the mere muckraking that appears in much of Zola's. His greatest novels are War and Peace and Anna Karénina. In both these the author expounds his view of ethics, religion, government and art. They are admirably written but overloaded with pessimistic views on life. Tolstoi was, without doubt, the greatest of the Russian triumvirate, but despite the terrific vitality that makes his least important pages alive, he has no message for the Christian soul for, after the vicissitudes of life, he can promise no future abode of happiness.

Before closing this comment on the Russian writers of the period, it would be amiss not to mention Chekhov, a dramatist whose art drew nourishment from the great stream of nineteenth-century realism. He is the only Russian writer who shows a sense of humor. Of his dramas the finest is The Cherry Orchard, a curious play in which a gentle, sadly humorous sense is combined with a painful situation. Tragic humor, a mood seldom attained in literature, Chekhov possessed. However, he had his limitations. His plays are distinguished by the same kind of psychological penetration and sensitivity. All show the

same type of unhappy life seething beneath a quiet surface. Chekhov is important because of his influence on English playwrights, particularly George Bernard Shaw. His dramas are uncanny in the clairvoyant precision with which the fall of society, as it existed in the late nineteenth century, is depicted.

Although the English so-called intelligentsia browsed among the Russian novels, short stories and dramas, they were more deeply influenced by a Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, whose disturbing ideas were first pointed out to English readers by Edmund Gosse. Though Ibsen was a poet of no small merit, he excelled in the field of drama and it was in the study of dramatic technique that George Bernard Shaw stumbled upon Ibsen and in The Quintessence of Ibsenism aired his extravagant views on the art of the prominent Norwegian playwright. For the sake of controversy, one would imagine, Shaw took it upon himself to condemn Shakespeare and praise Ibsen. Already he has lived long enough to see that while the fame of Shakespeare endures, Ibsen is today little more than a memory and perhaps Shaw enjoys the reflection that he himself has enhanced Shakespeare's reputation by denying its validity and that he has killed Ibsen by praising him to the skies. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Ibsen's plays revolutionized dramatic art by reason of their realism and

their consummate mastery of stage technique. The Doll's House is vital, though it destroyed the old, nineteenth-century ideal of genuine womanliness. Peer Gynt, a fantastic satire, will possibly live because of its marvelous songs. Yet, the reader cannot help seeing that a sense of weariness and failure is never absent from Ibsen's works. His characters look back on an abortive or wasted life. When they win their way to the heights, it is almost too late or the defeat looms at least as large as the victory. Defeat was also Ibsen's portion in his own creative work and, despite all that Shaw has said in his praise, he is not considered a sure and dynamic craftsman. Literature according to Aristotle, must be built on the normal, the universal, on what is common to mankind. That requires a certain abstraction from the individuating notes of men as we find them in nature. Ibsen changed all this, insisting on portraying the purely personal sufferings of the individual. His message might have lived had he emphasized the reason for this suffering.

We have watched the trend of thought prevalent in new European philosophies born in the nineteenth century and we have followed the continental literatures based on the pessimism springing from these philosophies. Just how both the philosophy and the literature of the period were reflected in the works of English authors at the end of the century will be the theme of another chapter.



## CHAPTER TWO

*"Fin-de-Siècle" English Literature  
Reflects Naturalistic Philosophy*

## CHAPTER TWO

The nineteenth century was a repository of the beliefs of the immediate as well as of the remote past. It took over almost without question, the ills of the eighteenth century and acquired many more of its own. Protest against authority, civil and religious, had marked English thought since the Reformation and the Renaissance, while Pantheism and Liberalism had treacherously supplanted the century-old belief in a benign Providence. The nineteenth century, especially in England was one of withered hopes and dwarfed ideals. The renouncing of tradition, the limiting of literature to experience, and of inquiry to mundane interests, pragmatism, naturalism--such conditions of mind seem to have created a sense of want, conscious or unconscious, in the tragic generation from which the twentieth century emerged. Sensing the general unrest that impended, the "fin du siècle" writers sought refuge in various centers,--in aestheticism, in jest, in antiquity, in despair, in the Church. Some of them, not unnaturally, resorted to a new stoicism, and steeled themselves to face the mystery of life with the dignity of a resolute will. Such is the spirit which Samuel Butler embodied in his novels.

He broke away from the conventions of the Victorian Age and would have nothing to do with romance in its happier forms. He wanted to get men interested in a satirical tale, a realistic story, a social study. He first drew attention to himself by engaging in endless controversies over Darwinism and by arguing seriously that the creator of the Homeric epics was a woman. Once Butler had gained notice in the world of literature and science he set about to write satirical novels, the best known being: Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh.

Erewhon (an anagram for "nowhere") was written in 1872. This novel was a Swiftian attack on contemporary England. It assailed not any one body of manners and morals but what Butler believed to be the universal stagnation of thought that had settled like a blight on Victorian England. The author was an ardent disciple of Nietzsche and continued his master's attack on Christianity by adopting many of his methods that had been used somewhat successfully in Germany.

Nietzsche's ruse as used by Butler can be formulated thus: "I am the enfant terrible of literature and science. If I cannot... get literary and scientific bigwigs to give me a shilling, I can... at least throw bricks into the middle of them." Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh showed the utter bitterness of soul which pervaded

every line Butler wrote. They were two powerful "bricks" and best showed the author's revolt against mechanism as well as against all that Christianity holds sacred.

The Way of All Flesh was finished in 1884 after twelve years' labor, but was not published until a year after the author died. The novel dealt with a "risen" middle-class family, the clash between son and parents, the decay of faith and of old respectabilities, and limited its view and test of life to actual experience and pleasure. Trenchant, even shocking at times, it forecast the unabashed hardihood of much that is recent. This book is the best example of Butler's complete revolt against mechanism. The style is compelling but far too bitter for the decades in which it is written. Furthermore, since it is a study of the idiosyncrasies and mishaps of several generations of the Pontifex family, it belongs more definitely in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth. In this novel Butler is undeniably ahead of his time. No doubt he was influenced by Emile Zola who was head of the naturalistic school in France and whose rawness of life made him notorious. Butler's own influence was stupendous. He started a new school which broke away from the sacredness of old traditions in style, in content, and in philosophy.

But even sharper than the bitterness of soul which pervades Butler's works is that which both inspires and

mar's Gissing's novels. Butler was, at least to a slight degree, animated by disillusionment, but Gissing's spleen was almost entirely a matter of personal resentment of hardship. No doubt his outbursts against poverty would have been less violent had he not suffered poverty in Grub Street. The affliction of spirit which finds voice in Demos, Our Friend the Charlatan, is born of the suffering of a man without humility who has had to endure humiliation. Gissing was essentially an egoist to whom every misfortune was a personal affront. He tried, as he grew older, to forget his early adversities, but even the serenity of the Ryecroft Papers is disturbed from time to time by memories, like the twinges of a nerve that remembers its pain. However, these memories never stirred him to action on behalf of the poor. In this he differs widely from Dickens whom he justly admired.

Despite the increasing cosmopolitanism of the English writers in the nineteenth century, insular superiority was still an outstanding characteristic of the nation itself. It had long been the Englishman's habit to despise continental judgments of his literature, and when France hailed Oscar Wilde as a genius, this praise only confirmed the Englishman's inclination to regard as an inferior being, the denizen of "gay Paris." Indeed, Oscar Wilde's imagination had been stimulated by French writers, especially

by Gautier, Baudelaire and Huysmans. At home Walter Pater in his Meditations had voiced the first cry of the aesthetics. "What is real? Momentary pleasures received through the senses are immediate and genuine and, while they last, are real, not absolutely, but relatively to ourselves." Wilde took up this cry and was the most prominent figure of the so-called aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century. The spirit which he fostered, leered from the pages of his sparkling but unsubstantial comedies, especially Lady Windermere's Fan and The Importance of Being Earnest. Both his essays and dramas glitter with cynical and often amusing epigrams. As a poet, Wilde is remembered for several artfully constructed lyrics characterized by a richness and refinement of diction and by a sensuous beauty. However, both his life and his works bore witness to the fact that beauty pursued for her own sake always turned upon her worshippers, as she had in ancient Greece and unveiled to them the face of the Destroyer. This reality was so terrifying that some years before his death Huysmans returned to the Catholic Church spending the interval in prayer and penance. Oscar Wilde, after writing A Ballad of Reading Gaol, into which he put more sincerity and less artifice than into anything else he wrote, and De Profundis, his prison biography, died, too, a penitent Catholic. Unfortunately, he realized far

too late that art wedded to morality alone can live on through eternity.

The finest artist of this period was Thomas Hardy. He was not, however, the most inspiring because he had nothing permanent to offer the yearning heart of man. The word "circumstance" sums up much of the structure of Hardy's philosophy, which is decidedly pessimistic. He seemed obsessed by the idea that man is a misfit in the universe, that nature is neither able nor willing to grant him all his desires, that have developed from a source which no one knows anything about. Hardy's lyric genius gave birth to many skillfully constructed poems, but he is far more appreciated as a novelist than as a poet. He wrote some of the most beautiful and direful novels in English fiction. They are beautiful because, for the most part, they are well planned and almost faultlessly written, because their characters become real men and women to the reader, because often their descriptions of nature rise to true artistic levels. His novels are direful because almost uniformly they deal with the grim and depressing side of life, because they are animated by the spirit of brooding, hopeless tragedy, because in the dull stretches of that "Wessex" sky there shines no star of energizing faith. Some pagan writers have professed to find paganism a thing of joy; Hardy is too profound

and too logical to accept that view. Once any person takes God and His Providence out of the world, if he thinks at all, he must agree with Hardy that cruelty of fate becomes apparent and that life is empty and meaningless.

For weal, and for woe Thomas Hardy is a thoroughly consistent pagan. Like a good many other men of the modern world, he had no belief in religion or in Christ; but unlike most followers of unfaith he carried his philosophy to its practical conclusion. He voiced this philosophy in lyric poetry, novels and in one long drama written in verse: The Dynasts. Everywhere the man Hardy portrays himself, and what Frederic Harrison has written of Hardy's verse may well apply to everything he wrote:

"Nature is a graveyard; man is a hopeless mystery; love works out tragedies; death ends all--but it leaves ghastly wraiths on earth... There is no affectation in Hardy's lyrics. They are his own inmost thoughts--his philosophy of life. This monotony of gloom, with all its poetry, is not human, is not social, is not true... It is not so much 'Mors janua Vitae,' as it is 'Vita janua Mortis.' And the portal opens to the Netherworld, not to any world above (1)."

No doubt in due course most of the human beings of Hardy's novels will moulder into dust, but time cannot destroy the countryside with which that dust will be mingled, for

(1) Quoted in Brother Leo, English Literature, p. 456.

that green world of his must exist in time, as imperishably as the blue world of Homer.

Arnold Bennett's secret or, at least, a peculiarity as a writer that makes him unique among realists, is his wonderful curiosity about life and living, an insatiable interest, an ability to savor the things that in other mouths are either tasteless or even bad-tasting. He is a man who abandoned religion, rejected his lawful wife and went about telling the world that he was neither a teacher nor a missionary, nor a philosopher, but an artist recording the pageant of life as it passes before him. The world of his perceptions is the only world that engages Mr. Bennett's mind. In this respect he is wholly unlike his contemporaries, H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, whose main interests are not in people but in ideas.

The function of literature, Arnold Bennett believes, is to interpret life as it is, not as it ought to be, and its highest achievement is the enlargement of a person's vision of reality. In true epicurean fashion, he is always wanting to make people see that the world is a jolly fine place. He is frankly, almost arrogantly, of the earthy earth. He must see, touch, taste and smell, before his mind is engaged, and the atmosphere of dreams and speculation has no attraction for him. He does not believe in worrying about the inscrutable, when there is

this tumultuous, many-colored world to be seen, enjoyed, and painted. The question of a future life is one of those questions which do not interest him and his defiant realism will take no refuge in what is above proof and reason. When referring to the experiences of his childhood and youth, passed in that severe Nonconformist setting of which he has given such vivid pictures, Bennett boasts of being an absolutely irreligious person.

With this dogmatic realism goes a calculated rejection of sentimentalism and even sentiment. Arnold Bennett is not a philosopher, but this does not mean that he has no personal philosophy of life. From the biographies, Life and Letters of Arnold Bennett, written by Dorothy Cheston Bennett, his second wife, one would judge that he had a very precise code of conduct. It was a mixture of Epicurism and Stoicism. He has an inordinate delight in life, but steels himself against its agonies. He takes its joys, but refuses its terrors. If there are tears in things, he lets others shed them. His work is coldly, remorsefully objective, and his own personal carriage is indifferent to the blows of fate. He outwardly bears his misfortunes with a stiff lip and untroubled front.

Arnold Bennett is by all means a realist and yet one cannot but regret that he escaped at least a touch of idealism. Because his vision ended with this world, he

has forfeited the right to permanency in the annals of great writers. He saw beauty of a kind, perhaps, but often that beauty is beyond the ken of his readers. He seems to realize this for he writes:

"Obviously, whatever kind of life the novelist writes about, he has been charmed and seduced by it, he is under its spell--that is, he has seen beauty in it. He could have no other reason for writing about it. He may see a strange sort of beauty; he may--indeed he does--see a sort of beauty that nobody has quite seen before; he may see a sort of beauty that none save a few old spirits ever will or can be made to see. But he does see beauty (1)."

The realism that permeates the personality of Arnold Bennett is evident in his work. Old Wives' Tale, Clayhanger and Mr. Prohack are his best novels, though Riceman Steps scores high among critics. Arnold Bennett is a novelist whose plots are gripping, though, as in Mr. Prohack, slightly fantastic and a trifle frivolous. He is a writer whose art a Catholic critic recognizes, but whose moral influence he deplures.

Although George Bernard Shaw belongs more properly to the twentieth century, he began his career as a writer in the late seventies and is perhaps the spokesman, par excellence, of the foreign philosophy prevalent in the

(1) Cunliffe, J. W., The Author's Crafts from English Literature in the Twentieth Century, p. 171.

nineteenth century. He takes pride in being considered the world's greatest exponent of socialism. He is an ardent disciple of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Ibsen, and in English literature, the successor to Samuel Butler and Thomas Hardy. His socialism is not that of the ordinary emotional labor leader; it is a result of his conviction that efficient government could remove much of the waste and misery of the world, if society were to become really an organization. His theory is that the majority of men are stupid and unintelligent and that, therefore, it is the right and privilege of the superior few to govern. His views are contradictory to the principles of English democracy. In fact, as all socialists, Shaw is not so much concerned with setting forth a social reform, as with showing the absurdity of things as they are now. He is an agitator, a would-be leader who has no solution to present-day problems and no hopes to offer his followers.

Like Ibsen, Shaw is actuated by emotion, by compassion for the human race groaning under the intolerable burden of law, Divine law, which exacts reverence, sacrifice, service; human law, which exacts order, civil obedience, loyalty. Like Ibsen, he wishes to be considered a reformer, but he is first and foremost a sentimentalist, motivated solely by feeling and directing his appeal not

to the intellect, to sound judgment, but to the passions. His argument is always "ad hominem" and, therefore, a confession of the weakness of his case. His real prototype in the field of reform is Martin Luther. That he seems to be proud of this fact is evident, because he is insistent in pointing out, in John Bull's Other Island, that as an Irishman he is much more Protestant than an Englishman could be, that he, in fine, stands with Voltaire as the lineal successor of Martin Luther and John Knox. And in nothing is he so thoroughly of Luther's lineage as in his demoralization of society in the name of morality. Hence, for the Catholic saint he substitutes Luther's and Nietzsche's superman, representative of the revolution which is to effect the emancipation of the human race from the bondage of morality, and this in the high-flown language of the pulpiteer. Marriage has, therefore, to be attacked as "the most licentious of institutions;" its indissolubility represented as "a wicked contract." The right to motherhood apart from marriage, in other words, sexual promiscuity is defended as a sacred right and divorce as "a sacramental duty."

These are a few of the fallacies evident in the early works of George Bernard Shaw. An entire thesis would be necessary to expound his theories and pick out his fallacies, it can only be added here that he loves to stand

forth heroically, for the purpose of defending a position that has never been attacked, as when he grew righteously indignant over the Christian doctrine that sex is in itself obscene, which is not and never was a Christian doctrine. He piles up fallacy after fallacy in his works. He is definitely on the side of that philosophy which refuses to recognize any supernatural element in human life. He is a pagan because he cannot become as a little child. His novels, dramatic criticisms, and plays will be treated elsewhere in this book. It suffices here to mention only the principles he set about to inculcate in the late nineteenth century by his attitude towards life here and hereafter.

The extreme realism of the European writers did not find its counterpart in the "fin du siècle" literature of America, and although, in the twentieth century, realism or naturalism is the keynote of American writing, the late nineteenth century produced few writers who were outstanding in the field of realism. To be sure, William Dean Howells said he was influenced by Heine and Tolstoy, but although he is considered the first successful American realist, one must use the word "realist" in his case with certain qualifications. He was personally too much adverse to breaches of literary decorum to search out the sordid, the unlovely, the neurotic phases of life and

flaunt them before the public, as most European writers did. Nevertheless, there seems little doubt that his novels, especially The Rise of Silas Lapham and A Modern Instance will remain as types of the first echo of realism in America.

The most popular author in America before the dawn of the present century was, without doubt, Mark Twain. He was considered the world's greatest humorist. Yet, in False Prophets by James M. Gillis, the Catholic critic can find clear, honest and outspoken estimates of the man and his works. Probably no other author wrote so contemptuously of the human race. He was not an atheist, but a deist and he possibly borrowed his deism from Voltaire. His reputation abroad and his actual personality were paradoxical, for there never was a greater pessimist. In youth he trained himself to deride religion and all things men held as sacred. As the years crept upon him he plunged into the depths of despondency, violently disdainful of himself, the human race and God. Mark Twain carried on the pernicious ideas of European philosophers but he turned these ideas into new and dangerous channels for he wrote for boys and girls, instead of for adults, and used humor as a vehicle of transmitting his soul-destroying pessimism. Although Howells called him the Lincoln of American literature, Mark Twain never inspired

noble deeds as Lincoln did and, despite his marvellous command of language and captivating style, his works seem foredoomed to oblivion because of their hopeless philosophy of life.

Last of the trilogy of American writers that came to maturity after the Civil War, is Henry James, who is hardly an American at all except by birth. Indeed, he seems to have lived and died a victim of the nostalgia of culture. There is perhaps a suggestion of irony in the fact that one of America's earliest realists, who was independent enough to break with the romantic tradition, should have fled from the reality that could produce material for the best psychological novels. "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to," he makes one of his characters say in The Ambassadors. In those words he summed up his personal philosophy. Furthermore, it was in the pursuit of this goal of a full, vivid, intellectual life that Henry James abandoned America for Europe. In consequence, he suffered the common fate of the "déracinés;" wandering between worlds, he found a home nowhere. It is not well for the artist to turn cosmopolitan, for the flavor of the fruit comes from the soil and sunshine of its native fields.

The spirit of Henry James marks the last refinement of the genteel tradition, the most complete embodiment of

its vague cultural aspirations. All his life he dwelt wistfully on the outside of the realm of which he wished to be a citizen. Did any other professed realist ever remain so persistently aloof from the homely realities of life? From the external world of action he withdrew to the inner world of questioning and probing; yet even in his subtle psychological inquiries he remained shut up in his own dream-world. His characters are only projections of his brooding fancy. He was concerned only with "nuances;" he lived in a world of fine gradations and imperceptible shades; he was absorbed in a stream of psychical experiences. He never created a living, breathing, palpitating reality.

Before the twentieth century, Walt Whitman was the sole advocate of naturalism and realism in the realm of poetry. In fact, Whitman is a crass naturalist and frequently his effusions indicate the lack of fine moral sense that distinguished most of his contemporary poets. A certain individualistic note is also evident in everything he wrote. Satirists said that Whitman was a poet of a country where everyone is a little better than everyone else. Paradoxical as this may seem, it is not only justifiable as a theory, but true in fact. Man, that is, each individual possesses a unique quality, so that in the universal symphony, his own personal note is as neces-

sary as any other, and for its own particular purpose is even a little better. This is the essence of everything that Walt Whitman had to say and the secret of his artistic appeal as a poet. Judging Whitman by O Captain! My Captain, When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, and half a dozen Civil War poems one finds a combination of emotional satisfaction and intellectual stimulus which only great poetry possesses. However, when he writes his opinions about the perplexing experiences of life one wishes he could rise to more than earthly heights. Long says of him:

"Of democracy as related to law, government, society, Whitman had no conception; his verse is largely a glorification of men's bodies rather than their minds or institutions (1)."

A careful study of British and American literature at the close of the last century seems to point out that most of the writers, both in prose and in poetry, failed to admit the relationship existing between art and morality. Art, to be true art, must be founded on principles, otherwise beauty is apt to be confounded with glamor; ardor, with concupiscence. And if art need not moralize, on the other hand, it may not, ignoring all responsibility, become demoralizing. This fact, the writers of this period did not accept. Under the spell of an educa-

(1) Long, William Joseph, American Literature, p. 371

tion which was rapidly becoming too scientific, heavily crushing out emotions under a mass of facts, literature, the chief source of emotions was taught as a science, not as an art. The mysteries of the material world which ought to have prepared man for the greater mysteries of the spiritual world, were looked upon simply as the effects of blind causes, and mankind, who can never escape from the law and order of the physical world, was taught through the philosophy and literature of this period, to go through life perceiving hardly more than the brute that sees what it sees, hears what it hears, but has no suspicion of the existence of another world. Thus we see that art was severed from morality and ideals which are inborn, tended downward, minimizing the dignity of the human personality which had been lifted centuries ago to a participation of Divine life through the infinite merits of a God, made man.



## CHAPTER THREE

*The Catholic Literary Revival  
Counteracts Pernicious Ideologies*

### CHAPTER THREE

In the twilight hours of the nineteenth century, the world was sorely beset by many ills which ravaged the heart of man and left him perplexed, despondent and fearful. Spurred on by an insatiable craving for a delirious joy that would drown his miseries in its lethal waters, he sought in the heart of sinner, of scholar and of saint, for a respite from the philosophy that recognized the tears in things, but was powerless to quench the bitterness of their source. We have seen how some of the prominent writers of the period lived, wrote and died. Their message appealed to man's animal appetites but was incapable of lifting his soul from the slough of despond. However, as the century waned, a protest arose against the course being followed by European society which had received its inspiration from the literature of the day. The trinity of life, art and faith that had animated the Middle Ages seemed, at last, to be the only answer to the heart's yearnings. Besides, the number of converts that flocked into the Catholic Church made men wonder if, indeed, the reality of things is not essentially bound up with man's spiritual nature and his eternal destiny. All

these musings led to discussion, then to research, and finally to a definite Catholic Revival. This movement embraced several activities, the most outstanding of which were the literary and the philosophical or Thomistic revivals. St. Thomas and the scholastics once more came to their own, and literature turned into more sanely intellectual and artistic channels. Moreover, the literary movement, though stimulated by Romanticism, was not by any means identified with it.

John Henry Cardinal Newman is considered the founder of the Catholic Revival, though it really began before his entrance into the Church. However, he was without doubt, the greatest force behind the movement, for as a profound thinker and superb artist, he had no peer. His own intense religious spirit was the basis of the substance of his varied and various works. To him, God and his own soul were unfailing entities. His deep scholarship, his almost uncanny knowledge of the human heart, the breadth and depth of his intellect, his profound influence over the minds and hearts of others, his artistic skill as a writer, were all made possible by his constant and ever increasing sense of spiritual values. How marked, therefore, was the contrast between this lofty idealist and the sordid realists that posed as lords and prophets in the literary world of his day! Religion was the domi-

nant note of his life, the mainspring of his labors, the inspiration that beckoned him on to greatness. Religion disciplined his heart, purified his spirit, animated his literary style.

Newman was a master of lyric poetry, a distinguished essayist and a literary dictator of no small renown. His unique contribution to English poetry is The Dream of Gerontius. It is a marvel of metrical variety and taste. Considered in its psychological content, it is a convincing record of human reaction to thoughts that, in the soul of the ordinary Christian, lie too deep for words. Finally, taken as an interpretation of life here and hereafter, The Dream of Gerontius is a glowing and forceful commentary of what is and what might be. Facing death, Tennyson paused with wavering hope but Newman plunged forward with a daring which well-nigh parallels Dante's.

In the field of essays, The Present Position is Newman's most representative work. It originated as a series of lectures designated to explain the genesis of anti-Catholic prejudice and it contains some of his finest arguments. His Idea of a University is a book indispensable to a person seeking to learn the real objective of Catholic education. His Apologia pro Vita Sua, despite the adverse criticism of Kingsley and Dean Inge, is a masterpiece of autobiography.

As a literary dictator, Newman set about and accomplished many things. He defended style as an expression of the personality of the writer; he established both in theory and in practice, the literary worth of religion; he stressed the fact that both religion and literature have an intellectual as well as an emotional value; most of all, he inculcated sincerity and thoroughness as indispensable requisites for the permanency of the writer's influence and art.

It is simply impossible to overestimate the prestige of this quintessence of Newman. Possibly much that he wrote is far beyond the grasp of numerous Catholics. It is utterly unintelligible to many sturdy old agnostics. Some, however, still continue to talk rapturously of his style, while remaining totally oblivious of his message. The truth and beauty he unveiled were beyond their ken because he had turned definitely from the historical romanticism that began with Rousseau's cry: "Retournez à la nature." On the contrary, the watchword of the literature of Newman was: back to the supernatural; back to the Middle Ages, to St. Thomas and to the scholastics. This cry was a sign of contradiction and a symbol of derision in its Victorian day. Only the passage of years will be able to make it stand forth clearly as the one path of deliverance from the desert which surrounds the

artist who has placed too great a trust in the natural man.

The impetus given to the Catholic Revival by Cardinal Newman was seconded by three writers who made poetry the business of their lives. Aubrey de Vere, constant and calm, found his reflective song in well-trimmed gardens. Gerard Hopkins, strangely solitary, was driven by fear to shut out the world from his eyes, but when he opened them he beheld earth shimmering with lucent rainbows; Coventry Patmore, greatest of the three, went from love that is a sacrament to Love that is beyond vision. In their separate ways, however, these three were brothers.

Aubrey de Vere, in a very real and intimate sense was a disciple of Wordsworth, but the disciple was a lesser poet than his master. He never attained the grandeur of those "purple patches" which show Wordsworth at his best. Aubrey de Vere's finest poetry is contained in May Carols, written at the request of Pope Pius IX, who had asked the convert poet to write hymns to Our Lady, whose Immaculate Conception he was shortly to define. In the preface to May Carols the student discovers de Vere's technique for renewing the artistic imagination. It is his important gift to the Revival, and since some may find it more pious than aesthetic it is necessary to remember that Mary was also an inspiration to men like Dante,

Guido Cavalcanti and Chaucer. Moreover, Giotto Cimabue and Raphael made themselves immortal by painting her with the Child Jesus. Mary, Queen and Mother, loomed large in that springtime of art and letters, the Renaissance; why should she have a lesser influence on the artists in the "second spring?"

Three dominant loves permeate the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins: a love of art, which should have made him a disciple of Pater, a love of scholarship, which drew him mightily to the humanism of Jowet and a love of religion. He tried to fuse all three into a synthesis. In doing so, he turned from the material world to consecrate his life to the principle from which European art and scholarship had originally sprung--namely, sanctity,--the sanctity of Augustine, of Jerome, of Bonaventure, of Aquinas, who laid the deep foundation of Christian culture. Gerard Manley Hopkins was a saint. He was undeniably a poet, too, one deeply appreciated by a chosen few, but never destined to enjoy wide popularity. His gifts were akin to those of Browning, and he is open to the same charge of excessive obscurity due to compact thinking and to the omission of necessary words. The twentieth century is beginning to be sensitive to the aesthetic value of such poems as God's Grandeur. Perhaps the age in which he wrote was too weak to grasp the strength of his verse.

Shall we become strong enough to carry out in our lives the message he still inspires as he looks down "over the bent world?"

In his youth, Coventry Patmore was torn between quack mysticism on the one hand, and bland materialism on the other. The tendency of the artists of his own age was toward the latter, but he failed to understand why littérateurs continued to find inspiration in a creed that was so joyless and so entirely of the "earthy earth." He sought for truth and beauty at various shrines and at length found them both in all their strength and permanency in the Catholic Church. The theme that Patmore chose to develop in his poetry differs vastly from those of many other poets of his day. Sir Edmund Gosse, his friend and biographer, has called Patmore "the laureate of wedded love," and so he was. No other poet can vie with him in singing the glories of matrimony. His poetic rendering of the philosophy of love is found in two series of poems: The Angel in the House and The Unknown Eros. He attempted a third: Sponsa Dei but, possibly intimidated by his own temerity in handling such a theme, he abandoned the project. The Angel in the House, written when he was an Anglican, is Tennysonian in manner. In The Unknown Eros, the theme introduced in The Angel in the House is developed from a Catholic viewpoint and probably he meant to

complete it in Sponsa Dei. Here nuptial love is considered a symbol of Divine love. As a man and woman are united in marriage, so God and the soul are united in religion. His poetry is too exalted and too pure to secure a popular audience. However, his work is still potential, and after all, the fame of great writers shines slowly, pre-saged alone by the morning stars of judgment. Dante waited for the Renaissance to set him in his place. The first to express a classic appreciation of Shakespeare was Dryden. We are only beginning to arrive at the idea that Wordsworth may be as great as Milton. So too, Patmore's place in the history of nineteenth-century literature may soon be fully established.

Foremost among the disciples of Pater who at Oxford were privileged to hear him discourse on Platonism as an inspiration of life, rather than a system of philosophy, was Lionel Johnson. That he was deeply impressed is evident from Johnson's four essays on Pater and his work. But it is especially in his poetry that Johnson shows himself Pater's disciple. It vibrates with verbal felicities, delights in beauty, and pleases by its scholarly grace and gentle melancholy. However, the salt of Catholicism saves his melancholy from deteriorating into the languor of the aesthetes and preserves his sensitiveness to beauty, from effeminacy. His was a less robust talent than that of

Patmore but his gift was a distinguished one none the less, ... and high and learned and spiritual, once he had the courage to reject the entire Pateresque philosophy and live up to the highest ideals of the Catholic faith. To see him at his best, the student should read his stirring defiance of evil, The Dark Angel. Like Hopkins he fought out the lost battles of Shelley, Byron, Rossetti, and with a stronger spiritual armor, won. "I fight thee with the Holy Name" he says, because he realized that it was not good for a poet in gaining the world, to lose his soul. Do not the following lines spur one on to delve more deeply into Lionel Johnson's poetry?

"Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,  
Dark Angel! triumph over me:  
Lonely, unto the Lone I go:  
Divine, to the Divinity."

Alice Meynell was the earliest literary woman to take an active part in the revival of the Catholic spirit in literature. However, if a student looks back to the ancient days of Greece, he finds Sappho who left her mark on the sands of time. Down the years other immortal women, like Mme de Sévigné, St. Teresa, Jane Austin, have penned thoughts on the hearts of men that no season can obliterate. These thoughts have been born of true womanly characteristics--intimacy, restraint, delicacy of emotion. Indeed, in poetry at least, the defense of the shrine of

womanhood lies in a certain poise of reserve, in an attitude which stands, half way between repulsion and embrace. Mrs. Meynell, understanding this principle well, wrote with a magnificent tranquillity. Certain critics have felt that coldness is a distinguishing mark of all her work, both poetry and prose. Her prose is, however, but a splendid example of artistic restraint. It is not lush or extravagant, but neither is it colorless. On the contrary, it is all radiant with light and aglow with fire. That this is a tended altar-fire rather than the wild-fire of an uncultivated heath is surely not to her discredit. Nevertheless, it was in her poetry that she displayed not only these aptitudes but others, inasmuch as she employed verse for the eminently fitting purpose of saying things that transcend the power of prose. They are not obvious things but spiritual profundities. By reason of its combination of depth of thought and intensity of emotion her poetry might be called metaphysical. In a sense, it is mystical poetry, even when it does not deal with religious subjects, since to the pure and unbiased mind nothing is common or unholy. Generally, Mrs. Meynell adopted a religious theme and such poetry lifts a corner of the veil that hides the Divine effulgence from the eyes of men. Her outstanding essays are to be found in The Rhythm of Life and The Colour of Life. But Mrs. Meynell is at her

highest and best in her poetry, especially in The Shepherdess.

Psychology tells us that there are states of creative activity which mystic and artist seem to share, though not precisely for the same purpose. The mystic has riveted his gaze upon the Divine bases of reality; the artist is concerned with the inner side of reality itself. When the two are blended in one man, as they are in Francis Thompson, humanity achieves all that contemplativeness can give, and this is a rare occurrence, but one which posits a kind of goal in Catholic art. Now in the hands of Thompson, the art that Crashaw bequeathed to Patmore developed into a masterpiece of exquisite beauty. Although he calls Patmore his master, Thompson is his own man, asserting with characteristic gesture the Shakespearean lineage from which they both sprung. He handles the Patmorean theme in a different and a more sublime way. For Thompson, love does not pass through various channels but leaps straight from his heart to the Divine. Joy is at once the topic and the temper of his song. He sings of love as the troubadours sang, aware of the discipline it imposes, so that no matter what its ardors are it remains always a chaste and intelligent love. He sings of children and childhood in Sister Songs; he sings the beauty of nature, but always with the reminder that this Lady is God's daughter. Through

all his singing, gleams and flashes the mystery that is the secret of the saint, the secret that makes earth, now a place of resplendent loveliness, now a waterless exile. The spirit that animated every line he wrote was, however, the Gothic spirit, in all its vigor and fullness. His doctrine was mediaeval doctrine: the Cross, and upon it the Corporal Presence. His art was mediaeval art: the Gothic cathedral with radiant charming façades, miracles of spring--with here and there a touch of autumn--driving up graceful pinnacles into the sky. Listen to the plaintive whispering of the poet himself:

"I faint, I sicken, darkens all my sight,  
As, poised upon this unprevisioned height,  
I lift into its place  
The upmost aery traceried pinnacle.  
So; it is builded, the high tenement,  
--God grant!--to mine intent:  
Most like a palace of the Occident,  
Up-thrusting, toppling maze on maze,  
Its mounded blaze,  
And washèd by the sunset's rosy waves,  
Whose sea drinks rarer hue from those rare  
walls it laves (1)."

Thompson is a mediaeval artist also by reason of his use of imagery. He has the gift of transfiguring the commonplace as: To a Daisy.

Leaving the realm of poetry, Thompson is equally at home with prose. His greatest achievement is Shelley.

(1) "Sister Songs," Complete Poems of Francis Thompson, Boni and Liveright, Inc., Publishers, p. 51.

This is not an apology for that wayward poet, but a defense of song. Thompson, pausing for a moment at the white heat of his own creative energy, goes to the rescue of his brother, Shelley, the audacious, the absurd, the spoiled poet, but after all, Shelley the boy. In this prose work Thompson has made a tomb in which paradoxically as it may seem, the singer will live forever.

But Thompson is more than an artist. He is a mystic, with a spirit sublimated from the natural to the supernatural, soaring aloft to see in created beauty the aura of God's reflection. That he is a great mystic is proved by his unparalleled ode: The Hound of Heaven. Is not there ultimate mystic daring in those final lines?

"Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me (1)."

Here Francis Thompson reaches the acme of profound religious inspiration. To say that he is the greatest writer of the Catholic Revival in England is to give him his rightful place. All the other writers mentioned in this chapter were converts to the Faith. Thompson was a child of God from earliest infancy and the divine love of the

(1) "The Hound of Heaven," Complete Poems of Francis Thompson, Boni and Liveright, Inc., Publishers, p. 93.

Hound of Heaven pursued him, indeed, "down the nights and down the days." No wonder, then, he was eager to set the world afire with the caloric flame blazing forth from the heart of Jesus!

The Catholic Revival does not by any means end with Francis Thompson. The forceful union of morality and art which was first evident in Newman's writings found its counterpart, as we have seen, in the works of other no less distinguished artists. Indeed, as the century closed, the Revival had just begun. It had an echo, faint though it may have been, in America where the works of Louise Imogen Guiney, Maurice Francis Egan and Agnes Repplier, seconded the efforts of that soul-stirring poet, Father Tabb. As the Catholic Revival in America is more definitely connected with the twentieth century, it will be considered more completely elsewhere in this book.

# PART TWO

OVER EASTERN HILLS A GOLDEN  
SHEEN DISPERSED THE MIST, BUT  
VOICES STILL SANG ON DISCORDANTLY

## CHAPTER ONE

*Rose Fiction in England and Ireland*



## CHAPTER ONE

Out of the desolate hours of a dying century, the tumult of many voices greeted the sun as it rose reluctantly over a doubting world. Some of these voices were petulant and discordant, a rare few were blended in a rhapsody of heavenly song, but most of them simply droned in a doleful monotone that bespoke the cheerlessness of the century that was awakening. The literature of the new era reflected its various moods. Pagan and materialistic notes continued to dominate the prose fiction penned not only by English and American writers, but also by Irishmen who having discovered an enchanting cycle of folklore, flung their eerie tales world-wide. Many spirited authors graced the movement known as the Irish Literary Revival. With a background that was Gaelic, national, partisan, and sometimes Catholic, these Irish spokesmen voiced not only the poetry of the Celtic gods, ancient hero-lore and a weird mysticism, but also the Christian creed handed down through the ages by the great apostle, St. Patrick. However, it is our purpose here to mention novelists who departed from the Irish spirit that is essentially Catholic. Foremost among these are George Moore and James Joyce.

Moore began his career as a canvas painter in Paris. There he became intimate with the great impressionists Monet, Manet and Degas, but, convinced that he was more gifted with the pen than with the brush, he succumbed to the literary influence of Zola and turned to writing as his life work. He was undoubtedly a talented artist, but one destined to ephemeral glory. Choosing to despise the Catholic faith that was his heritage and to follow the aesthetic dilettantism of the French decadents, George Moore turned out to be neither a decadent nor an Irishman. In fact, his novels from Evelyn Innes (1898) to Aphrodite in Aulis (1930) prove that he was a naturalist of an advanced school. However, the author finally turned against the Irish Renaissance and vented the poison of his wrath in the elaborate Hail and Farewell. This is a unique literary achievement for the combination of impish skill and total disregard for the feelings of Moore's most intimate literary associates and friends.

His indubitable genius has influenced many of his younger countrymen. The Confessions of a Young Man were rewritten by James Joyce in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Here Joyce went to a lower depth than Moore ever reached, one of the most wretched depths that English literature has ever revealed. No doubt there have been similar confessions from people like Baudelaire, for

instance. Yet, most artists, grown older and wiser in the saddle, counseled their friends to write in other strains. James Joyce was definitely a stream-of-consciousness romancer. Given to choose between the "agere contra" of the saint and the "laissez faire" of the drifting romanticist, he chose the easy road. Indeed, this would-be psychologist refused to heed the first dictum of the philosopher: "Know thyself." He was no doubt a staunch advocate of introspection, but not the sane introspection which spurs the saint on to fruitful activity, but an introspection which stops at the mere revealing of hideous instincts and unfulfilled desires. Ulysses, his best known work, makes it imperative to acknowledge James Joyce as an artist. In this book the author shows his knowledge of psychology, yet the Catholic reader cannot help regretting that Joyce had so little concern for logic, which is, after all, a heavier branch on the tree of knowledge than psychology.

The indecency vaunted in Ulysses met its counterpart in the novels of an English writer, D. H. Lawrence. He was a kind of high priest of the Freudian cult, not only because of the novels which he wrote from the standpoint of the new psychology, but because of his exposition and interpretation of its doctrines in Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious. Although he came eventually to hold that Freudianism was based on

poisoned hatred of sex, he was exceedingly skillful in expounding its doctrines. He gave them, moreover, his own complete allegiance, pointing out that the issue is a moral issue, inasmuch as the life and death of morality are involved. In Lawrence's vocabulary, however, the word "morality" carried the exact opposite of its own historic meaning. Furthermore, the novelist had not the slightest hesitancy in extending this meaning to apply to every conceivable exigency, so that he saw no alternative but to accept incest as part of the normal sex manifestation. In pursuance of this line of reasoning, he gave his approval to the Russian and French writers who proclaim madness as a great goal. That it should become not only a goal but a blessed mercy, is readily comprehensible to a reader after a prolonged sojourn in any sex-sodden atmosphere of Laurentian origin. This is not the opinion of many critics of our time who boast of tolerance and who term condemnation of vice, bigotry and prejudice. However, even apart from sex-if sex can be considered apart, in these novels--it is hard to account for the popularity in which such books as The White Peacock, Sons and Lovers, A Modern Lover, Lady Chatterley's Lover are still held. Anything written with less distinction of style than this last, his acknowledged masterpiece, it would be difficult to conceive.

There is no better diagnosis of contemporary ills than that of Aldous Huxley, grandson of the agnostic materialist whose philosophy was the cause of so many of them. Aldous Huxley is one of the most versatile writers of the day, indeed it is dismal to watch him devoting his signal gifts to the mere bottling of the waters of bitterness for future consumption. His novels have no permanent significance as art, since they are for the most part the infuriated thrusts, of a man blinded by pain, in the general direction of the cause of his hurt. That he has a rather definite suspicion of the identity of the cause is evident from Antic Hay, Point Counter Point and Crome Yellow in which he anticipates some of the ironies of Brave New World, novels which at one and the same time reflect the bestialities of the day and protest against them. Compared to the satire of Brave New World, Swift's Gulliver is filled with sweetness and radiant with light. What Huxley's book satirizes is the whole fabric of scientific, materialistic civilization erected on a foundation of religious anarchy.

Much more could be said about Aldous Huxley. Perhaps he may have a redeeming virtue somewhere, it seems all men have, but his is not yet conspicuous. Yet, isn't there an element of drama in the fact that the novels of Thomas Huxley's grandson should be at once the most perfect

expression of the conditions which the great agnostic did so much to bring about and the most scathing indictment of them? Here are all the new things,--new psychology, new morality, new freedom, new kind of love, even the delightful insouciance of animals,--and at the same time all the old, old bitterness of the world intensified to a degree undreamed of by the ancient despair, for it is the bitterness that wears the semblance of laughter.

Perhaps the most prominent writer of the twentieth century is Virginia Woolf who stands out not merely as the most vitally creative force among women writers but as a leader even among men. She is a foremost exponent of the Bloomsbury School of artists,--a group of London intellectuals that rather glory in being described as

"in a hypocritical society, indecent; in a conservative society, curious; in a gentlemanly society, ruthless; in a fighting society, pacifist. (1)"

She considers Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy materialistic and superficial, and is impressed with the power of Russian writers of fiction,--particularly Dostoevsky and Chekhov--to penetrate below the surface of life and lay bare the innermost souls of their characters. Furthermore, no novelist has more clearly reflected the influence of Freud nor displayed more skill in handling the tech-

(1) Kelley, Blanche M., Well of English, p. 328.

nique that has grown out of the new psychology. She is an expert in handling the stream-of-consciousness novel, one in which the reader is invited to follow the thoughts of one character throughout a short period, often only a day, gathering his impression of the character's whole life from what passes through his mind as he goes about the business of the day. Mrs. Dalloway (1925) is a good example of this new experiment, though the book does introduce a secondary theme. The Waves (1933) is even a more explicit exemplification of the stream-of-consciousness theme, with its stressing of the time element... (The sun had not risen... the sun rose higher... the sun had risen to its full height... the sun was sinking... now the sun was set). At the same time this book is the clearest demonstration of the difference between introspection and thought. It is totally lacking in depth because the consciousness of its six characters is chiefly concerned with the surface of things. Viewing Virginia Woolf's achievements at so early a date, her permanency in the field of literature is a topic open to debate. Perhaps the increasing subtlety and consequent obscurity of her narrative method may be a handicap to her continued popularity as a novelist. It is difficult, indeed, to discuss the achievements of Virginia Woolf in simple terms, for her work is new and strange and elusive in its significance. It may

be that she is trying to force into the novel an intellectual content it is not capable of conveying. Nevertheless, she is much more comprehensible in her essays and it can hardly be doubted that her contributions to literary criticism are of permanent value and interest both for their brilliant style and for their sympathetic insight into the lasting qualities of the authors she admires.

Herbert G. Wells has had a more profound and a more extensive influence upon English life and upon English literature than any other writer of the twentieth century. He has been writing a book every six months for nearly thirty years and in every book--novel, history, controversy,--he has given a partial revelation of himself. Volumes could be written about his flawless language, clear thinking, crackling wit, rich imagination and, indeed, imagination is the choicest gift the fairies left in the Well's cradle. However, if the reader is interested in unveiling the real Herbert G. Wells, he has only to peruse the 797 pages that lay bare the heart and soul of Clissold-Wells. The World of William Clissold was written in 1926. Wells tell us in the opening chapter that he does not know why he wrote the book. He surmises it may be the "Rousseau streak" in him (1). He has chosen

(1) Wells, H. G., The World of William Clissold, p. 26.

the phrase accurately. Certainly it was not the Augustine streak, for despite the stark truthfulness of St. Augustine, there is much humility in his Confessions, and what is a confession without humility? With Wells it is different. His William Clissold is but a boast and an evidence of vainglory. The hero is a man obsessed with sex. He admits it, saying that he had studied affairs of sex, not always theoretically, through nearly forty of his fifty-nine years of life. And with such a preface, he commences a treatise upon the psychology of lust, which is not concluded until the book is ended. In December 1923, The Catholic World carried an article on H. G. Wells as a poet "manqué." Three years later, after reading The World of William Clissold perhaps a thoughtful student could conclude that Wells is not only a poet "manqué," but a Christian "manqué," a Catholic "manqué," even a saint, and perhaps a mystic "manqué." Wells has had deep intuitions and momentary fleeting visions of truth, but, like Pontius Pilate, he has turned away instead of pursuing his opportunity to know the full truth. It is evident that the ideas of God, the soul, the infinite value of life and immortality haunt him.

"Now I am sitting motionless, suddenly aware of the tremendous quiet of the day. It is as if the whole world paused. It is as if God was present, God whom they talk about so much in church (1)."

(1) Wells, H. G., The World of William Clissold, p. 32.

and, still more, had the meditative moment been deliberately and regularly sought, H. G. Wells might have come to such revelations as would have illumined his mind and given him a vision of something else besides a sex-obsessed universe. Again, he writes with apparent reverence:

"Though this is all that I can make of life, my mind is not entirely content to rest at this... The world is in the nature of rational and explicable... If there were a God above me, and it is just as possible as not there are intelligent beings above me capable of watching my mental proceedings... I might be expanded to-- anyhow a larger sphere of comprehension (1)."

The tragedy in the soul of Clissold--or Wells--is that he did not follow up these ideas. Had he been less agitated he might have realized the nearness of God. From some of his books we know that at times he had believed in God, some kind of God, but with flippancy and sensuality and blasphemy he drove away the vision. Indeed, he confesses this and even boasts of it. So with sensuality, and intellectual pride, and blasphemy, Wells lost first his sense of beauty and then his vision of truth. God grant that he may not lose his soul! Somewhere he says that he is prepared to believe the universe can be deeply tragic and evil, or wonderful and beautiful, but not that it can be fundamentally silly. The universe is not deeply tragic but the life of man without a religion or a

(1) Wells, H. G., The World of William Clissold, p. 48-49.

philosophy of life is indeed deeply tragic and therefore, what hidden tragedies must lurk in the soul of such a man as Herbert G. Wells?

After delving into the murky depths of the writers we have considered so far in this chapter, it is with a sigh of relief that we open the novels of a group of authors that can be conveniently classified as the prophets of "the gods of the things as they are."

Foremost among them is Joseph Conrad. His novels captivate because of their romantic treatment of life on the sea or under picturesque conditions. The author portrays human existence as a constant and thrilling adventure carried on in the spirit of warfare against the forces of the natural universe. It would seem that Conrad was interested in accomplishing two things in his novels: 1) transmitting his profound and minute scrutiny of the souls of men and 2) vividly presenting the forces of nature and human life taken as a whole. He has an uncanny understanding of the individual masculine heart and a clear view of the world as a unified thing. Although he is considered pessimistic, Conrad's "brooding" melancholy is positively cheerful beside the despair lurking behind the pages of George Bernard Shaw, for instance. Indeed, this melancholy, which so often resembles pessimism, the reflection of a temperamental inclination which pervades

Conrad's work like an atmosphere, is offset by the artistic touch which he calls in the preface to Within the Tides, "a romantic feeling of reality." Then he adds that such romanticism is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers another aspect of beauty. His masterpiece is Lord Jim (1900). For those who love romance The Arrow of Gold will repay careful perusal.

John Galsworthy, finer artist than many of his contemporaries, more discerning, sensitive and mature than Wells, Bennett, and Shaw, is considered the most versatile author of our generation. He was, like Shaw and Wells, a severe critic of English society, but there the resemblance stops, chiefly because of his truer and deeper feeling, his finer humanity, and his more comprehensive outlook. His general theme is the disintegration of English society and the powerlessness of the individual to stay a process which is really a failure of energy, of grasp, of constructive imagination, of will, of moral passion. His most impressive work is The Forsyte Saga.

The student may conveniently classify the Catholic writers of prose fiction in distinct groups. Here we shall consider three. First, there are those who find it impossible from some limitation in their art or personality,

or from some extraneous circumstance beyond their control, to make literary material out of their religious experiences. In this group one discovers such novelists as Canon Sheehan, Robert Hugh Benson and John Ayscough. The second group comprises those who, blasé on the subject of modern civilization, react with vehemence in caustic satire. Bruce Marshall and Evelyn Waugh are outstanding in this group. Finally, there are others who are boisterously, uproariously Catholic before any audience and here one finds the great triumvirate: Baring, Belloc and Chesterton.

Most certainly the writers of the first group do not occupy the place in the history of the English novel that some of their contemporaries do, like Hardy, Meredith and Conrad. The reason is not because they lacked ability, but because they attempted something higher, more exalted and the disparity between their ideals and their achievements must necessarily appear the more obvious. Canon Sheehan's novels, mostly Irish in content, are not stormy, and the public craved for turbulence of some sort. Some way or other, the striking contrasts and stirring drama of genuine Irish life have never been adequately set forth, possibly because to the Irish themselves these things seem too commonplace, and their hearts yearn for idyllic fiction. However, the secret of the success of

My New Curate lay in the author's gift for making realistic sketches of village life. When Canon Sheehan took to depicting queer characters in cultivated society, he was less successful. Robert Hugh Benson was, without doubt, the cleverest writer of this group. If the books written by his Catholic contemporary novelists lacked the sparkle of modernity, the defect was abundantly compensated for by the novels of this fascinating priest. As an historical novelist, Benson analyzed certain characters of great importance from the Catholic point of view, and succeeded by reason of imaginative artistry and the grasp of a harrowed and solitary soul to the faith. His novels, like Paul Bourget's, are demonstrations, but they are individual instead of social. Philosophically, Benson was an egoist who failed to consider adequately the nature and value of environment. His interest lay largely with spiritual cases and, therefore, he never wrote without a religious purpose. He succeeded in saying things which others had neglected, in winning attention by his own interest in the subject and by his brilliant skill. He was a man of intense convictions, but not quite enough of an artist to master the finesse of craftsmanship. Nevertheless, he did honest work of which Catholic letters may well be proud. John Ayscough's most impressive achievement was San Celestino. He was not, however, a great artist and

his stories are improbable and incoherent, yet he merits attention as the representative of an attitude towards life that is both humorous and deeply religious. These three writers may not be as widely read today as others are, but they are important because they began a tradition. Later Catholic writers have inherited their experimental work and have profited by their errors as well as by their achievements. The fact that today there are novelists who can boast of distinguished work in Catholic fiction, must be attributed in no small way to the impetus given at the dawning of the century by such writers as Canon Sheehan, Monsignor Benson and John Ayscough.

Two satirists can be considered in the second group of Catholic writers: Bruce Marshall, a convert at eighteen, and Evelyn Waugh, a fellow-convert who was two years younger than Marshall and who came into the Church in 1930. Bruce Marshall's only work is Father Malachy's Miracle, but even if he should produce no other, this alone would entitle him to an enviable place in the field of modern satire. It is caustic and comprehensive, from beginning to end. The motive which urged the author to sneer at those outside the Church whom the passions of bigotry, greed and lust have blinded to her beauty and sanctity, made him also relentless towards those within the fold who squander God's precious graces. Evelyn Waugh

has written a series of novels that are bitingly satiric. It will suffice here to mention but two of his most representative works: Black Mischief (1932) and A Handful of Dust (1934). The first gives two pictures, one of modern civilization in London, the other of contemporary barbarism in a fictitious region of Africa. In an uproarious climax, the primitive common sense of the Blacks asserts itself in rejecting the newer and rawer barbarism of western pseudo-culture. A Handful of Dust is even a more powerful book. Here the author's satire is trenchant, symbolical and philosophic. However, the tale unrolls with such ease, grace and humor that it is a favorite among all classes of readers. It would seem that Evelyn Waugh's place in literature is secure. Alexander Woolcott testifies that Waugh is the nearest thing to genius among the young writers who have arisen in post-war England.

One of the most celebrated of literary friendships was that of Baring, Belloc and Chesterton, the triumvirate through which the Catholic Revival ran strong and deep from its conception until today. Belloc and Chesterton fought to make men realize the great Catholic truth and heritage. Baring preferred to remain in his tent and increase that heritage with novels, drama and poetry. We are richer for his preference. He is, indeed, an incurable

romanticist,--quite a rare specimen in the realistic days we are traversing. However, he does not spin charming but unreal tales out of a glamorous fancy. He first attracted attention by his autobiography, The Puppet Show of Memory (1922). His most finished novel is Cat's Cradle (1926). The Coat Without Seam (1929) gives glimpses of his war experiences. It is rather unsatisfactory as a novel, though the skeletonized recital of parts of the war is glamorous. Most of all, Baring's faith illuminates and inspires all his novels. In the troubled days we are now living, readers do not always appreciate novels that are generally regarded as approximating closely the ideal in Catholic romantic fiction. They clamor for propaganda and Baring does not touch any of our pressing modern problems. The agony of the world crisis would, indeed, seem out of place in his stories. His Catholicism, and that of his characters is uncombative, calm, serene, secure in the possession of culture brought down through centuries. He is undismayed by the present and unafraid of the future. To recover his balance in this jittery world, perhaps it would be a good thing if the student of literature would lose himself for a few hours in one of Baring's novels.

Belloc and Chesterton were too busy with controversy to delve deeply into prose fiction, yet they, rather than

Baring, have determined the course Catholic literature has taken in the twentieth century. Their objective has been to defend the good things of our culture rather than to enjoy them. They determined that novels should be problem novels, though they themselves wrote few, that history, satire and controversy should assume a greater importance than poetry and the artistic essay. One may be inclined to deplore their attitude as detrimental to the finest "nuances" in literature. Yet, when all has been considered, letters can do no better service to art than to rush to the defense of culture. These are belligerent times, hence we need heroic, belligerent leaders such as Belloc and Chesterton. Belloc, like St. Paul of old, teaches that salvation will come when the world returns to the Faith. Chesterton, the gallant knight that came riding into the camp of the true Church in the summer of 1922 was master of the pen that was a sword. He was the greatest of the immortal triumvirate and the first to join the legion of immortals in heaven.



# CHAPTER TWO

*Rose Fiction in America*

CHAPTER TWO

With the laying of the Union Pacific rails in the late sixties, the destiny of America as a self-sufficient economic unity seemed fixed. Henceforth the drift was from outlying frontiers to industrial centers. On the other hand, because of the greater facility in traveling, the luxuries of the Machine Age no less than its corresponding miseries, reached even the remotest villages, disrupting the traditional domestic economy. Consequently, a new urban psychology displaced the older agrarian, and with the new psychology came other philosophies in response to vacillating realities. Furthermore, the change in American life and letters was also due to the evolutionary philosophy originating abroad and propagated in the works of such writers as Marx, Freud, Taine and Nietzsche. Besides, the giant strides of science which ushered industrialism into the streamline progress of the fabulous Machine Age, automatically prepared for a gloomy realism that took its departure from two postulates: 1) that men are physical beings who can do no other than obey the laws of a physical universe; 2) that in the vast indifferentism of nature, they are inconsequential pawns in

a game that to human reason, has no meaning or rules.

In literature the first influence came from France. Flaubert and Zola were exponents of two diverse tendencies; the one was interested in a sociological study of background, with a multitude of characters dwarfed by the "milieu;" the other was interested in the psychological study of the individual character. Flaubert propagated his theory of economic determinism in Mme Bovary as we have already seen; Zola made biological determinism the theme of Nana and Le débâcle. They had their disciples in America: Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris who were forerunners of the new realism. These were followed by more pronounced social realists: Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Ernest Poole, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton and Zona Gale. Then came the extreme realists among whom may be mentioned: Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser.

In the twentieth century, therefore, both in life and in letters, men became interested in the economic basis of society. The idealism, optimism and other uplifting influences of the past were considered as relics of a religion, men were eager to discard. The mechanization of life, the exploitation of the poor, the devaluation of the individual, all seemed the order of the day. The novelist looked at the world from a new angle and

tried to make his readers believe it was the true angle. He opened his eyes to the significance of economic problems. The novel adjusted its perspective to the facts of the great American game of money-chasing; it shifted its habitat from Fifth Avenue to Wall Street, from the club to the factory. So, with the twentieth century, the business man entered the portals of fiction, no longer the stock figure in broadcloth and top-hat who discarded business with his working clothes in order to shift to respectability, but bringing with him his talk of deals, playing the great game of exploitation at his mahogany desk--the central dominating figure in a capitalistic world.

When Hamlin Garland took up his pen, romance was fading even from the western prairies. The golden West of Mark Twain and the bucolic West of J. W. Riley had both slipped into the past, and the day that was rising was to bring its discouragements that seared man's hopes as the hot winds seared the fields of rustling corn. The burdens of the western farmer were heavy on his shoulders and he could foresee no time when they would be lighter. Depression had settled on the Middle Border and Hamlin Garland, returning to the familiar fields from his Boston studies, felt the depression in every fiber of his being. This was his land and his people. The blight laid upon men

and women and children by the drab pioneer life was a familiar fact to him. His father had experienced it; he had experienced it. In the completeness of his disillusion the glamor of romance was swept away and he proposed to set down in plain, honest words the manner of life lived by these Middle Border folks. He would speak frankly for the way to truth was the way to realism. Thus he mused, and thence was born such a novel as The Son of the Middle Border. And yet, in the light of his total work one hesitates to call Hamlin Garland a realist. Perhaps more justly he might be called a thwarted romantic and his rebellious realism can possibly be traced to its source in a passionate refusal to be denied the beauty that should be a portion of any rational way of living. Later when he found himself in a land of nobler horizons, unsoiled as yet by crude frontier exploitation, when he looked out upon the vast mountain ranges and felt the warm sun on the gray plains, he discovered there the romance of his dreams and fell to describing the strange splendors with the gusto of a naïve romantic. Here he found beauty, too, and he incorporated it in his novels as it goes hand in hand with service. For Hamlin Garland, art was not beautiful just for art's sake, but beautiful in the way it could be subdued for the higher good of humanity.

The art of Stephen Crane was also a reflection of

the sombre period of American disillusion which marked the early years of the century. He was the acknowledged disciple of Zola and Tolstoj, though his preference seemed to have been for Tolstoj. Crane followed the Russian novelist in assuming that victories are accidents, the outcome of a blind clash of unintelligent forces, rather than due to strategy and generalship. The Red Badge of Courage, his masterpiece, is essentially a psychological study. Overpowered by fear, and feeling that he is marked as a target for the enemy, the hero is caught between the external war-machine and the inner instinct-machine. There is a conflict of impulses: fear, pride, the instinct of self-preservation, chiefly the fear of fear. The impression of helplessness predominates this and all Crane's prose works. Too much of a realist to fall in with contemporary romancers, too much of a poet to be a systematic naturalist, his work did not come to the honor due it until another age. That is why, though all he wrote was given to the world in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Stephen Crane belongs definitely to the twentieth century.

With Stephen Crane it is customary to associate Frank Norris, the most stimulating and militant of American early naturalists and the only one who wrote consciously with a definite creed. In his novels we notice the in-

spiration of Zola. There is evident either the study of the individual in his reaction to environment or the study of social forces and their impact upon a group of related individuals. These methods had been effectually used by Zola in Nana and Le débâcle. One may conveniently classify the works of Norris into three groups: 1) Romance--Blix, Morgan of the Lady Letty, 2) Naturalism--McTeague, The Pit. Between the two groups stands his best known work, The Octopus. Though Norris called himself a naturalist in fiction, his zeal for reality had a touch of the romantic. Besides, unlike old-world Naturalists, he never arrived at the amoral attitude. Ethical values persisted in intruding themselves, sometimes quite incidentally as in McTeague, often more increasingly as in The Octopus. He would have been a greater artist if his emotions had not outrun his better judgment.

Among the social realists who succeeded Garland, Crane and Norris, the most prominent is Jack London. He is a Marxian socialist with a pronounced penchant for the superman of Nietzsche. He carries to the extreme what was elemental in Norris and furthermore, his amoral attitude and sombre pessimism bring him beyond the bounds of decency. His most representative work is The Call of the Wild (1903).

In the same school as London we find Upton Sinclair who writes with the special creed of the socialist at the

base of all his novels. With him art is submerged by propaganda, and argument is his prime occupation. He has created few characters and fewer memorable incidents. Possibly his most skillful story is King Coal (1917). Among the other social realists, Ernest Poole, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton and Zona Gale, only Willa Cather and Edith Wharton deserve more than passing notice. The former considered the Middle Border of Hamlin Garland as the cradle of heroic lives. Against the picturesque background of prairie spaces she sets her immigrant women with their vigor and wealth of life and then considers how the West has dealt with them. She drew no caricatures. If she must choose between form and reality, she always chose reality, but unfortunately, the realities which interested her were not all equally interesting to others. Among her books some are powerful, as Death Comes to the Archbishop, others are merely graceful, as Shadows on the Rock. Edith Wharton is perhaps a more finished artist. She is an aristocrat of genteel tradition but an observer with a certain irony that springs from noting the clash between men and society. Her finest work, written with a naturalistic touch is Ethan Frome.

As the century advanced into its second decade and World War No. I thundered its message of stark realism to the ends of the universe, American literature echoed that

realism in novels that assumed more vital nationalistic, naturalistic and satirical trends. Indeed, the novels written after 1914, and especially the post-war novels, were nationalistic in as much as they created characters and placed them in an environment economically and politically all-American; naturalistic in as much as they accepted the main criteria of naturalism: determinism, distortion, pessimism; and finally, satirical in as much as they held up human vice and folly, and in trenchant caustic language pointed out the futility of life. Three writers that voiced these trends were Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser.

The literary career of Sinclair Lewis began in 1914 when he turned from sentimental verse to realistic satirical prose. However, Our Mr. Wrenn which appeared that year, as well as four other novels that came out during the War, did not establish him as a distinguished novelist. His first great achievements were Main Street (1920) and Babbitt (1922). These two books and all the others written in the same decade, make the average American ashamed of the "genus Americanus" that Lewis presents to the world. In the Addenda to the late Vernon P. Parrington's The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, the student will find the keenest, clearest, most accurate estimate of Sinclair Lewis as an author. In fact, he is

a man who lives on the same Main Street as most of us. He meets the same people, goes through the same daily routine but in some inexplicable way he sees only mean, low things, hears only smutty stories and picks up nothing but scandal. Hence his view of life is totally different from ours. And the pity of it is that, for his Babbitt, Gantry, Arrowsmith and countless other caricatures, the Scandinavians awarded him the Nobel Prize in 1930. The regret that fair and clean-minded Americans have over this Nobel award to Sinclair Lewis, is not that he received nearly \$50,000 and fame he did not deserve, but that his idea of America may possibly be accepted abroad as authentic. The country he depicted and the individuals he analyzed never existed in America or elsewhere. Their sole habitat was in his mean and nasty mind.

A note of determinism that rivals that of Flaubert is evident in all the novels of Sherwood Anderson and this determinism he expressed through the futile attempt of his characters to run away from the instincts that seem to wall them in. However, in trying to escape to find a new self, the characters inevitably find that they have unknowingly carried the old self with them. Anderson's works parallel those of D. H. Lawrence. Winesburg, Ohio (1918) shows him at his best and worst.

Theodore Dreiser, in spite of a most uncouth literary style, has become the outstanding spokesman of contemporary thought. His novels are decidedly harrowing and the reader is harrowed to no purpose. For instance, in his full-length portraits of two women, *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, one is disgusted by the passive and pliable attitude of these would-be heroines in the face of moral issues. They are nothing but helpless victims of circumstance. The same holds true for his outstanding heroes. Eugene Witla in *The Genius* is decidedly weak as he is impelled by organic energies dubbed "the will to wealth, the will to love, the will to art." On the other hand, Frank Cowperwood in *The Financier* is a supreme example in American literature of "the will to power." The best criterion of Dreiser can be gathered from what Stuart Sherman says of him:

"By eliminating distinctively human motives and making animal instincts the supreme factors in human life, Mr. Dreiser reduces the problem of the novelist to the lowest possible terms... His philosophy quite excludes him from the field in which the great realist must work. He has deliberately rejected the novelist's supreme task--understanding and presenting the development of character; he has chosen only to illustrate the unrestricted flow of temperament. He has evaded the enterprise of representing human conduct; he has confined himself to representation of animal behavior (1)."

(1) Sherman, Stuart P., *On Contemporary Literature*, p. 94

Among the multitude of interbellum writers of America there are several representatives of a definitely new trend in realism. From them six will be considered in this chapter, not because they are the best, but because they are the most widely read. They are: John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Erskine Caldwell, John P. Marquand and John Steinbeck. Most certainly under close examination one can find more contrasts than comparisons in these writers. Yet with all their diversity, they have in common, essential features that make them typical of the years 1920 to 1940. Not everything in American life and nature is well represented in them, but they claim to stand for attitudes prevailing among the so-called intelligentsia during the interval between the two World Wars. They do not, however, give a proper view of people living in settled peace and contentment in homes secure against financial disaster, moral ruin, and breach of faith. By one consent they have taken for their subject that unsettlement and instability which unfortunately seems to be a characteristic feature of American life both material and moral. They are all realists in the sense of making no concession to the demand for fiction as a vehicle for wishful thinking. There is not a single success story in the output of these six men, unless we include the purely romantic tales that Marquand wrote

before he turned to George Apley and the Brills. Their idealism has largely taken the negative form of irony, tragedy, comedy, satire and pathos, in which the positive ideal is implied in the author's reaction against what he deprecates and abhors.

John Dos Passos, for example, subjects the whole of human behavior to the corrosive action of his keen analysis, bidding his readers observe in rich and poor, in failure and success, among the crude and the refined, the withering effects of materialism in action. This theme is carried out carefully in Three Soldiers, Streets of Night and Manhattan Transfer,--all three leaving their readers overwhelmed by the sickening dénouements.

Hemingway warns his readers that words weave illusions. He distrusts fine words, so often the cloak for rationalization and sentimental self-deception. He is reluctant to admit the abstractions of philosophy or the moral systems handed down by past generations. He is an out-and-out "behaviorist" wishing to study the primary situations where feelings are evident. Therefore, he confines his exhibit for the most part to types and situations below the threshold of bourgeois culture. For cheapness in subject matter and loose handling of morals, Hemingway is unsurpassed. One has but to skim through The Sun Also Rises to realize that he is a crass naturalist.

Caldwell presents a decadent society in the South, a society haunted by the ghosts of slavery and caste and living on a soil that is exhausted. Here the poverty-stricken share-croppers seek in an emotional religion, sex and nigger-lynching, fantastic ways of satisfying the hunger of flesh and spirit. Tobacco Road is most representative of the naturalistic and satirical tendencies of Caldwell. It is abhorrent to any reader that values morals or has any feeling. If the circulation of such a novel would solve the problem of bettering the lot of the people of Georgia, there might be a reason for writing such a painful and disgusting story. The appeal, however, is only emotional.

In Wolfe, as in Dos Passos, the whole of American life is surveyed, and more especially the bourgeois levels from newsboys and boarding-house keepers to wealthy merchants and financiers. His vein is more romantic than most of the naturalists, for he takes a poet's view of the aspirations of the heart, even when they are expressed in the struggle for money and power; whatever the heart desires is invested by him with a mystic rainbow luster. Reviewers say that Wolfe's novels are very largely autobiographical. The Web and the Rock, a late novel, is a complicated affair, showing the author to be, not the writer of "tone poems" transformed into novels, but a

disciple of James Joyce and an ardent seeker of beauty in places pregnant with poverty, violence, superstition, pride and ignorance. Would that he had adored at other shrines!

In turning to John P. Marquand the student finds a writer of a different mold. He introduces him into a world much unlike the world of Hemingway's Bohemians, Caldwell's poor Whites of Georgia. His people are New England blue-hoods. There is nothing brutal or shocking in his subject matter. After reading other naturalists, one is inclined to consider Marquand a skillful and versatile artist. He writes like a man of the world, with an irony mild in seeming, however blasting it may be in final effect. The Late George Apley won the Pulitzer award in 1937 and those who read the novel were tempted to read Wickford Point (1939). The simplicity of the style in which it is written reflects an important phase of twentieth-century art, while the delicate and telling satire on certain aspects of New England society emphasizes the moral lesson the writer wishes to bring home to his readers. Marquand is now so well established in the estimation of critics and discerning readers, that, if he has anything else to say, he will be sure to get a hearing. Possibly he has nothing more to say; but what he has said already is arresting enough to give him a very respectable rank in American letters.

The last of the exponents of new realism to be discussed in this chapter is one who has recently been most widely read--a man whose reputation has sprung up during the last five years and has been crowned with the international fame of The Grapes of Wrath. The tremendous vogue of this book is founded partly on what we call an accident--the fact that it concerns itself with one of the major economic problems of our day, the problem of seasonal labor in California, and with the largest scale agricultural catastrophe of American history, the catastrophe of the Dustbowl. It is, one might say, an accident that so great a talent as John Steinbeck's should have come upon so great and so topical a theme. But that so great a talent should have come to flower in our time is not in the same sense an accident. It is the ripening of American literature in our day. Nevertheless, much as the reader may wish to bow to the genius of John Steinbeck, he deplores the Marxian philosophy behind such a book as The Grapes of Wrath. It is an example of the proletarian novel. This is a somewhat loose term to designate the type of novel that deals primarily with the life of the working classes or with any social or industrial problem from the point of view of labor. It is also a propaganda novel. It is probable that Steinbeck really desired to better the condition of the Okies. Unfortu-

nately, he used his genius the wrong way and instead of making his readers want to do something about righting wrongs, they close the book with their head full of communistic ideas of violence and class hatred and their hearts distressed with the vices which seem inevitable in the society depicted by Steinbeck. And yet, Steinbeck is perhaps the greatest of American realists. He has recently written: The Moon Is Down (March 6, 1942) which for six months was "best seller." It is a simple, moving portrayal of starkly dramatic conditions which prevail in many occupied countries as an aftermath of the ruthless total war waged by the Axis throughout the world today. In the light of Catholic philosophy there are many thorny problems. However, though the book itself is of value, one would hesitate to place a degree upon that value. It could be read with advantage by adults who are emotionally well-balanced and with sufficient knowledge to decide the morality of questions involved, because it presents a series of incidents which, in the dark days we are traversing, are of deep concern to all of us.

Before closing this chapter it seems but fitting that, for one brief moment, we should turn from unsavory realism to consider a new romance springing from the same root as the new realism--hatred of the meanness and ugliness of modern life. The present type of romance seeks to evade

and forget what realism examines closely, and foremost among those who chose to develop this romantic theme in their novels are James Cabell, Winston Churchill and Booth Tarkington.

James Cabell is by far the most successful exponent of the new romance in as much as he seeks ideal beauty as a defense against reality. He is both novelist and critic. His theory is explained in a series of essays: Beyond Life. Here he maintains that art should be based on the dream of life as it should be, not as it is. Romance may not be left out of literature, he tells his readers, because it is essential to life. Most critics consider his best works: The Cream of Jest (1917) and Jurgen (1919). In them the reader will find all the author's leading characteristics: clarity, beauty, symmetry, tenderness, truth, urbanity and a supreme comic spirit. These qualities will at least preserve his works as landmarks of pure and exhilarating romance. Winston Churchill stands with Cabell in this field. Nevertheless, he is less of an artist and is considered as a conscientious middle-class romantic, representative of the spirit of progressivism. His novels are neither very profound nor subtle, but they are always sincere and oftentimes inspiring. The Crisis (1901) shows Churchill at his best. Booth Tarkington, more elastic and adaptable than Winston Churchill, went

over the "main traveled roads" of Sinclair Lewis but discovered on them many sterling characters and many happy incidents. His "happy ending plots" are not appreciated in our day, yet even severe critics admit that he had the knack of romance and a certain enviable touch of satire that will keep Alice Adams and Seventeen in the hands of students who appreciate laughter and pathos.

As the student reviews the history of the novel in the United States since the dawn of the twentieth century, he is apt to wonder why American literature is not great art. Perhaps the answer is that great art is the expression of an Age which is in itself great, and that greatness is founded on spiritual values which build up the moral stature of an individual and a nation. Our Age is not great. It has had little or nothing to express. Men have been selfish, greedy, materialistic. What wonder then, that Hemingway, Steinbeck and their fellow novelists mirror the "milieu" from which they are not valiant enough to escape. When society throws off its semblance of culture and the hypocrisy that cloaks its vices, when it begins to practice the austere virtues that build up character, when writers, too, sense the innate cravings for permanent values that lie smoldering in the heart of man, then we may begin to look for great art in literature.



# CHAPTER THREE

*Non-fictional Prose in England*

### CHAPTER THREE

Non-fictional prose, as it has been written within the last fifty years, has furnished the English-speaking world with the best and the worst types of art. Of its various subdivisions--orations, memoirs, history, biography, and essay--only the last two will be considered to any extent in this treatise, first, because they serve as a fair example of the craftsmanship of the leading artists and, second, because, not only their philosophy of life--their answer to the question: "What is it all about?" but their ethics--their answer to the question: "Why be good?" can be gathered from the contents of the biographies and essays of the twentieth century.

Biography has shown more revolutionary activity in recent years than any other kind of literature, and as a result, changes both detrimental and advantageous have accrued. In the first place, the conventional biography of the nineteenth century in which the subject was draped as a funeral monument, has been gradually disappearing. But, on the other hand, the new biography as practiced not by experts in this art but by their baser imitators, has flooded the market with cheap and flashy books that are unworthy of any serious attention.

Lytton Strachey was one of the earliest and best exponents of the new school. In the preface to his Eminent Victorians he enunciated the principles of this new development by declaring that it is the biographer's duty

"to observe a becoming brevity... to maintain his own freedom of spirit. It is not his business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case as he understands them (1)."

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that great biographies had been written in English before the advent of Strachey. Indeed, neither Boswell nor Lockhart was intent on compliment though they were both inspired by love of their subjects. What Strachey had in mind in his strictures was the monumental biography mentioned above, familiar as the cortège of the undertaker. By the time he undertook to reform, or rather as he claimed, to inaugurate the biographical tradition, the vogue of the new psychology was so powerful that he ventured farther into the inner consciousness of his subjects than most of his contemporary biographers. Yet, his knowledge of psychology did not guarantee that Strachey invariably interpreted facts aright. This probing was, nevertheless, Strachey's contribution to the new art and enhanced the interest of his studies of Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold and General Gordon.

(1) Strachey, Lytton, Eminent Victorians, Preface p. ix

His Life of Queen Victoria created a sensation because of what seemed an application of an irreverent method to a personage who had hitherto been crowned by a divine halo.

However, despite a personal tang of scepticism and cynicism which, by the way, were peculiarly characteristic of his time, despite, too, the acid test to which he dared submit his victims, Strachey did have a scholarly insight into the recesses of human nature, while his incisive style, as forceful as it is inimitable, made his biographies as entertaining as novels and, in places, as inspiring as good sermons. His genius was pre-eminently classical, for order, lucidity, balance and precision dominate in his works. His was a revolt against Victorianism but this absolute breaking away from the smugness of a declining age had the beneficial result of raising literary appreciation to the status of an art that re-creates, under a clearer form, the human characteristics of its subjects. Strachey's impressionism, too, was of a unique type and, far from suffering in the light of truth, his characters became more human by being stripped of the tinsel of hero worship. Finally, he was an artist who could ably link morality to his art, not by depicting virtues only, but by showing the inevitable consequences of evil in the lives of men.

Nevertheless, great as Lytton Strachey is in the field of biography, the credit of setting the Gregorian example of ruthless pursuit of truth belongs to Hilaire Belloc, who has brought to the task all the resources of a sagacious mind, a broadly human scholarship, a specialized knowledge of military strategy and a captivating literary style. As the successor of Lingard and the corrector of Gibbon, he is especially intent on setting forth the true history of the Reformation, not only in the volume entitled, How the Reformation Happened, but also a series of related biographies: Richelieu, Wolsey, Cromwell, Cranmer, Milton and James II.

Artistically, Belloc's two biographies, Wolsey and Cranmer are perhaps his greatest achievements. Both are pictorial re-creations of the days of disaster brought about through the personalities of two men who stood for the two main forces that caused the downfall of morality in England during the reign of Henry VIII. Cardinal Wolsey stood not only for what he literally was--chancellor of the King,--but he was the symbol of worldly ecclesiastics so prevalent in England during the sixteenth century. His biography as written by Belloc is the tragedy of a man who came into power at a critical and dangerous moment in the history of Europe. It is no simple recital of facts, but has in it all the elements postulated by Aristotle

for the high seriousness of tragedy. We find here the rising and falling action, the climax, pivoted on a significant mistake on the part of Wolsey, that is, his utter failure to understand, until too late, the cunning, craft and ruse of Anne Boleyn. Wolsey, with his almost uncanny insight into the mind and heart of man, Wolsey, the diplomat, the peer among statesmen, failed miserably in his estimate of a mere woman, and that woman one who held absolute power over the heart of Henry VIII. Some of Belloc's most skillful work is found in the chapter entitled: "The Cast." Here in a style that is nervous, sententious and virile, the chief personages are drawn with consummate art. Here, also, Belloc, the philosopher, foreshadows the fate of those who seem to have forgotten that "the wages of sin is death." Who could have more adroitly united art to morality?

However, Cranmer, is Belloc's culminating point in biography. Here he views his subject from a double aspect: first, Cranmer, the stylist; second, Cranmer, the man, traitor to the cause of truth. Of his fellow craftsman Belloc says:

"He was a jeweler in prose, a man who sat down deliberately to write in a particular way when there was need or opportunity for it (1)."

(1) Belloc, H., Cranmer, p. 29.

For this art, Belloc bestows his deepest admiration, expressed in a style to match. But for Cranmer, the man who deliberately and cold-bloodedly cast away his Faith, Belloc shows the utmost scorn and in pages that are fairly streaked with the lightning of his flashing irony, he vents his bitter contempt for that pride, which leads men to the deepest and most permanent state of sinfulness. Who can read Cranmer and not realize the intrinsic evil of a lie? Who can read Cranmer and not laud the skill of the artist who, paradoxically, exhibits virtue in all its captivating splendor simply by portraying vice in all its inherent ugliness?

The significance of Hilaire Belloc's contribution to biography cannot be overestimated. Not only his own masterpieces of portraiture, in which perspective is never sacrificed to foreground, but also the extent to which he has influenced biographical writing generally, have made him outstanding among the leaders in this field. D. B. Wyndham Lewis, for example, quite frankly acknowledges himself Belloc's disciple. Lewis began his career in London as a satirist, writing for The Daily Mail and The Daily Express. Now, the proper function of satire is wrecking, leveling formalized opinions, clearing the ground by ridicule. It is obvious, then, that such a writer is weak in building, and hence constructive work in general is

beyond his sphere. Therefore, when in 1921, D. B. Wyndham Lewis turned to biography, critics looked with many misgivings to the publication of François Villon. This quasi-medieval study is set in fifteenth-century Paris, amid the throes of transition. From the first pages the reader is prepared for a romantic biography, so bizarre and colorful is the scene portrayed: "a little before nine o'clock of a bitter night in Paris, on the threshold of Christmas 1456 (1)." The Angelus bell booms out from the tower of the Sorbonne and Villon, writing alone in a garret of an ominous, tumbled-down house "Porte Rouge," puts down his pen, signs himself with fingers stiff with cold and breathes his "Aves." From that moment on, however, the biography is distinctly non-romantic and almost overwhelmingly realistic. The reader follows the cutthroat poet through the various epochs of his checkered life, while by an art akin to that of Belloc, Lewis drives home a moral lesson that chastens and purifies. He is equally successful with King Spider, which is a valiant attempt to reclaim Louis XI from the "stale stench of the theatre" which legend has caused to cling to his name. Finally, in 1931 with Charles of Europe, the prestige of D. B. Wyndham Lewis became established. Critics then admitted that they had had the novel experience of discovering a genuine satirist who had a strong constructive bend.

(1) Lewis, D. B. Wyndham, François Villon, p. 3.

Another expert in the field of satire who also turned advantageously to biography is Christopher Hollis, who came into the Church a few years after D. B. Wyndham Lewis. In Monstrous Regiment (1926) he debunked England's gross worship of Queen Elizabeth and struck the note of his subsequent deflations of history that is bloated with falsehood and bigotry. Hollis was only twenty-seven when he wrote this book and since then he has produced several other even more stimulating biographies. Among the most forceful in purpose and brilliant in style are: Erasmus (1933), Dryden (1933) and Thomas More (1934).

One of the important movements in twentieth-century literature has been an effort on the part of biographers to interpret the lives of saints in a manner that inspires imitation as well as admiration. In centuries gone by, it was believed that priests and religious, by their very vocations, were the best judges of sanctity and, therefore, they alone could adequately interpret the lives of the saints. Of recent years, however, the lay writer has discovered the saint for himself and, in a style that is as realistic as it is appealing, he has written not only "best sellers" but veritable classics. One of the leading characteristics of this new literary "genre," if it may be so styled, is the point of view from which the hagiographer examines his subject. With him, the saint

is first and finally a human being and he is holy just because, and just in as much as he is a human being. This century-old truth at last becomes obvious, namely, that sanctity is nothing else but humanity raised to the utmost possibility of one's being. On the other hand, this does not mean that the new biographies water down sanctity by making the saints merely natural heroes, but they show how the manifestations of the supernatural have grown out of human nature and are nothing else than nature perfected by grace. Now, deep and accurate knowledge of the psychology of character is required to write such biographies. Skill in portraying the light and shade of varying personalities is also essential. Most of all, the writer must possess faith, reverence and piety. All these elements combined, demand an ingenuity that sets the hagiographer on a higher plane than the mere biographer. He not only links art to morality but also to devotion. This is possible today because of the widening realization of Cardinal Newman's ideal that the devout ecclesiastic be intellectual and the intellectual layman be devout.

Some of the most colorful, beautifully written, vastly interesting and absolutely trustworthy hagiographies have come from the pen of Margaret Yeo. These Three Hearts, not only shows the artist's skill in hinging a stirring story around simple words uttered by Christ to St. Margaret

Mary: "My pure love unites forever these three hearts" but also gives an insight into the rôle of the "third heart," Blessed Claude de la Colombière, in spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart. His life touched the world of romance and beauty at many points and stark drama at others. Margaret Yeo lifts the curtain to let us see the splendor of the court of Louis XIV and then bids us view the horror of imprisonment in a London jail during the Titus Oates plot. The Greatest of the Borgias again proves that the author's vivid style fits the fervor of her subject. Reformer: St. Charles Borromeo is also a credit to the artistry of a writer who ingeniously uses literature as a medium to lift men to sanctity. On May 13, 1941, Margaret Yeo wrote the last sentence of a volume every man must write and be judged by. She laid down her life, a splendid masterpiece done with the sincerity of an artist who aspires to perfection and comes as near to it as is humanly possible. As she stood before the Divine Critic to receive, not a perishable Pulitzer Prize, but an eternal reward, who doubts that the confessors and martyrs whom she brought to life with deft words, were not congratulating her on two rare achievements: writing superbly and living holily?

English literature has been enriched by many other biographies that have come like the revelations of the

energy of life. Among others may be mentioned Hilaire Belloc's Joan of Arc, Canon William Barry's Cardinal Newman, Everard Meynell's Francis Thompson, Alfred O'Rahilly's Father William Doyle, S.J. These authors realized that the writing of an authentic life of a saint is the supreme test of the genuine spirit of the Catholic Revival. This test demands, as was mentioned above, not only the highest art, but another quality much more rare and precious in our day,--devotion. Indeed, the greatest contribution of the Revival is not so much that it has produced competent artists but that it has given to English letters artists intent on emphasizing faith and devotion which are built up on eternal and immutable moral principles.

Besides biography, the twentieth century has produced a large quantity of non-fiction which can be conveniently classified under that flexible term: essay. But whether or not many of these essays can be classified as real literature, that is, writing of permanent interest and value, or merely journalism destined for prompt consumption and the immediate oblivion of newspaper or magazine files, is quite another question. There are, nevertheless, some leading essayists whose writings have an essential quality that appeals to all readers at all times.

Max Beerbohm was the leading member of that extremely clever and sophisticated group which also numbered Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. His essays point out the oddities of life. More, Yet Again and Even Now contain whimsical allusions that quite match the whimsical titles they bear. Yet, despite the wit, finish and brilliant satire of Beerbohm's essays, they are too fastidious to have any message for a world that merely amuses their author and in which he has no serious interest.

About the same time that Beerbohm was becoming known in London, George Bernard Shaw was stepping to the footlights on the literary stage. Because his art and influence have been mentioned elsewhere in this book, it will suffice here to draw attention simply to the prefaces to his plays which are, in fact, his cleverest essays. These make up a body of prose which is pungent and clever but utterly perverse and misleading. Shaw is a dangerous writer because he cloaks his fallacies with the most subtle and fascinating terms.

H. G. Wells has chosen for his essays, subjects of the same general trend as Shaw. He loves to speculate on the condition of society, but the temper of his writing is different from that of his brother-in-arms. He is tentative, smooth, sceptical, where Shaw is impatient, terse and dogmatic. Neither has any solution to offer humanity

faced with vexing problems because he knows no Cause that rules all things.

Of different calibre is John Middleton Murry who turns from society and its perplexities to literary criticism. His essays are sound, capable and promising. Murry himself steers a middle course between nineteenth-century conservatism and twentieth-century impressionism. That he realized the intimate relationship existing between morality and art is evident from the following extract which may be considered his critical credo:

"What, I think, we may reasonably ask, is that criticism should be less timid; that it should openly accept the fact that its deepest judgments are moral. A critic should be conscious of his moral assumptions and take pains to put into them the highest morality of which he is capable. That is only another way of saying that the critic should be conscious of himself as an artist. He should be aware of the responsibilities imposed by his art; he should respect the technique of his craft. He should not be cheap, he should not be shallow, he should not be insincere, either in praise or in blame, but above all in these modern times, he should not be insincere in praise (1)."

Standing head and shoulders above the other essayists of the twentieth century are Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Not the least extraordinary thing about them is the extent to which their kinship of talent and opinion has made their joint achievements seem like

(1) Murry, John Middleton, Countries of the Mind, p. 246.

the exploits of a single career, while, at the same time, they themselves have remained so arrestingly individual. However, that unique relationship was broken in 1936 by the death of Chesterton, and Belloc has been left to continue alone what he was first to undertake, the assertion of Catholic principles in English literature. An amazing versatility makes it difficult to say of either that he is more excellent in one department of letters than another, but the statement will scarcely be disputed that Belloc is pre-eminently the historian whose presentation of an era or an event through the medium of a great personality constitutes him, as we have mentioned above, rather than Lytton Strachey, the progenitor of the so-called new biography. On the other hand, though the bulk of his verse is not large, Chesterton was essentially a poet and many readers even assert that in his prose he was consistently poetic. Nevertheless, both Belloc and Chesterton wrote essays that cannot fail to be literature.

Chesterton's most influential work was done in the form of essays. Two volumes, Heretics and Orthodoxy, are especially representative of his convictions. The first is a clever analysis of contemporary writers whose philosophies of life Chesterton could not accept. It is a masterpiece of shrewd common sense written in a Johnsonian vein but in a distinctly Chestertonian style. Orthodoxy

is a vivid defense of traditional Christianity. The argument is, however, neither profound nor very learned, nevertheless, its effectiveness has not diminished with the increasing years. A number of miscellaneous essays, written in a sparkling rousing style, show Chesterton as a master of paradox. The best of these are: What's Wrong with the World?, Tremendous Trifles, All Things Considered. Notwithstanding his versatility, Chesterton was a man of few ideas, but these were made expansive by a gorgeous imagination and a complete and accurate set of moral sympathies. A scrutiny of his essays reveals that he said the same things over and over again but in so many different ways, and loved the same things over and over again, but with so many varying intensities, that he did not need new material to command his readers' attention. Chesterton's style is sometimes glaringly imperfect, too, and many of his essays are in places, enveloped in an oppressive dusk. In fact, construction never preoccupied Chesterton. He chose rather to make his works scrapbooks in which he would jot down ideas as they came to him, and ideas did come. Two things he did give to the world, however,--common sense and honest laughter.

Belloc's essays are more calmly scintillant than Chesterton's and they are seldom contagiously emotional or even mirthful. He has written so many that he has run out

of titles. They vary from: On Everything, On Anything, On Nothing, to simply On ----. To his essays, as to his historical work, Belloc brings accurate scholarship, abounding energy and a take-it-or-leave-it finality which is immensely heartening to readers who agree with his views, but confusing and repellent to his opponents.

The background of the twentieth-century essay is, as we have seen, acutely controversial. On the other hand, its adventurous spirit is also a dominant feature. No subject is too trivial to be expounded by the essayist and no domain too remote to be beyond his far-reaching ken. However, either because of his ambition to control popular opinion or because of his zeal to correct it, the essayist of this period uses style that is at once pugnacious, brilliant and thought-provoking. His art is, indeed, modern, incisive and forceful, though far removed from the stateliness of Bacon, the classical correctness of Pope and the friendliness of Addison and Steele.

Finally, the temper of twentieth-century essays has naturally grouped the writers into two distinct schools. The first, anti-democratic, anti-traditional and anti-Christian is headed by Shaw and Wells; the second, championing the truth salvaged from the Middle Ages, and defending the moral issues that safeguard human dignity, is led by Chesterton and Belloc. The world, which today

stands on the brink of a new civilization, muses as it examines the philosophy of these schools. Tomorrow the torch of both will pass into younger hands. How, then, will fare morality that is ageless, and art that vacillates with the moods, fancies and whims of each revolving century? Only the future can tell.



# CHAPTER FOUR

*Non-fictional Prose in America*

## CHAPTER FOUR

In America, the new biography became so fascinating and so popular that after the first World War many universities, following the lead of Carlton College, Northfield, Minnesota, established chairs of biography. Unfortunately, however, all biographies did not reach the standards of genuine art in literature. Furthermore, in an attempt to be personal and informal, many writers lost their sense of proportion. They overemphasized weaknesses and failings, exposed family secrets that were too sacred for public scrutiny, and dragged notable names in the mud. It would seem that the ultimate aim of the biographer was to carry to the mind of the unsuspecting reader, the idea that outward semblance of virtue always cloaks a private life that shows man the victim of sin, which according to his philosophy, is inevitable. Thus it happened that truth was sacrificed for sensation, and ultra-realism became the order of the day. However, public opinion soon revolted against this extreme type of biography and just as in an earlier period readers had rebelled against an exaggeration of virtues, so in later years, they denounced the overstated weaknesses flaunted by sensational biographers.

The biographies most worthy of a permanent place in the annals of twentieth-century American literature are those written by artists who are eager to promulgate the charm of sanctity or the joy of souls who, along paths of doubt and fear and perplexity, found peace and security within the shelter of the Catholic Church. Foremost among these biographers are three Jesuits: Francis X. Talbot, President of the America Press, literary editor of America from 1922 to 1936, and stylist, writing in the old school tradition; Leonard Feeney, actual literary editor of America, master of an art that is at once versatile and charming; John Louis Bonn, who shows promise of becoming America's leading stylist.

Father Talbot wrote a romanticized story of the giant Jesuit missionary, St. Isaac Jogues. In this thrilling biography the author does what every good biographer should do, make his readers understand the past as did men of the past. He chisels the character of Father Jogues with the consummate skill of a gifted, painstaking sculptor and in so doing he re-creates the man in all his humanness as well as the saint in all his holiness.

Father Feeney's venture into the land of biography brought back from a not-too-distant past the story of An American Woman wherein we find the amazing secret of grace in the life of Mother Elizabeth Seton, convert from Epis-

copalianism and founder of the Sisters of Charity in the United States. This book is a masterpiece not only because of the author's splendid command of the nature and language of grace but also because of the rare art of his literary style and his deep psychology, all of which are evident in the story of the life of a woman who grew strong through Christlike sufferings and sacrifices.

Very recently, another Jesuit, Father John L. Bonn, has come to the front ranks of literature by writing two unusually fine biographies. So Falls the Elm Tree is an excellent analysis of Mother Valencia, while And Down the Days is a story twice amazing: first, it shows the triumph of divine grace in establishing the daughter of the notorious Maria Monk in the Church her mother's Awful Disclosures did so much to impair; second, it tells the thrilling episode of this ugly girl's rise from the hovels of a New York slum to the queenship of Parisian society. "And Down the Days" is a phrase which Father Bonn borrows from Francis Thompson's The Hound of Heaven, but he uses it in a novel way to strike off a lucid, psychological biography about a certain Lizzie who also is a person well versed in things psychological. There is possibly not a single error in feeling, in style and in construction throughout this unique biography. Furthermore, its literary art is poetically edged at times and carries a high finish. One

outstanding characteristic of this brilliant biography is its absence of sentimentality. Passion is there and terror and sorrow and, at last, peace and joy, but all are woven together so adroitly that the reader closes the book convinced that only fidelity to the immutable laws of morality can build up great characters.

Three laymen: Theodore Maynard, John Moody and John Farrow have also written biographies that promise to be of permanent value. The World I Saw is the story of Theodore Maynard's wanderings through the Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist and Unitarian creeds to permanent belief in the true Church. Although at times the author remains remote from his subject, he does succeed in telling an honest story and, above all, he solicits a sympathetic attitude in dealing with those who do not share the Catholic belief. Trailing clouds of the glorious friendships of Alice Meynell and Chesterton, Theodore Maynard brings down to our times the high zest and shining zeal of that earlier literary resurrection of which the Catholic Church is justly proud.

John Moody is another convert who is thrilled with the peace and sense of security which Faith transmitted, and out of gratitude, he gives vigorous expression to his happiness. The Long Road Home has been followed by an even more interesting, factual, and entertaining narrative,

Fast by the Road, written to commemorate the author's tenth anniversary in the Church. The book is of value to cradle Catholics for its emphasis on their position and responsibilities towards non-Catholics; it is informative to pagans and heretics by pointing out their cynicism and unbelief, in arguments for the Faith that are strong and convincing; finally, it appeals to fellow-converts for it voices their common tribute to the Faith that dispels doubts, banishes fears and establishes tranquillity. Although Mr. Moody's belligerency for the Church is almost too apparent, yet he does touch heights of fine writing in his warm appreciation of religion and, therefore, his works show genuine literary artistry.

Perhaps the most captivating biographies written by a layman have come from the pen of a prominent movie director, John Farrow. Damien, the Leper demonstrates the author's command of a literary style that reflects Hollywood's modern art. Here, background and setting are used with the skill of an expert in movie-land, while the dramatic staging of the life of the priest who sacrificed his all for the lepers at Molokai, is realistic, gripping, and inspiring. His latest book, Pageant of the Popes (1942), is another proof that the author's previous training has taught him the power of action. This story is swift, vital, eventful, exciting, and its moral rests on

two arguments--the apostolicity of the Church, and its supernaturality--both of which thread through the glory and the crime that play prominent parts in the colorful history of the Papacy.

Agnes Repplier and Katherine Burton have written biographies that are works of literary art as well as tributes to the lofty ideals which make men saints. Père Marquette is Miss Repplier's first sally into the open field of biography. With words that are agile, vivid, pungent and clever, the author brings the reader across the wilderness with Père Marquette, right into the dingy wigwam where lurk treachery and sinister hypocrisy. Less thrilling and yet, perhaps, more charming is the life of Junipero Serra, Pioneer Colonist of California which demonstrates the missionary's simplicity, childlike confidence in God, disinterested labor for even the material welfare of the Indians, as well as his thirst for souls. These characteristics are evident in the chapter entitled: "The Land of Promise" in which the reader perceives how the Franciscan monk's magnetic force won the easy-going Indians of Monterey to the Faith; how he cut out bright colored cotton clothes for the children and taught the delighted mothers to make them. Significant of the prime objective of his own life is that fact that he taught the Indians, as their first lesson in Spanish: "Amar à Dios" (Love

God), so that it became the universal greeting in that land. Miss Repplier's easy, flowing style is at its best in the chapter entitled: "The Challenge to Saint Francis," wherein she recounts the discovery of the Bay of California.

Katherine Burton, who stepped across the threshold of the Church about a decade ago, has written biographies that perform the near-miracle of unwrapping the winding sheets from the dead past and bidding the characters come forth, and they do come right into our own lives with their very simple, human, yet Godlike message of hope, courage and love. Mrs. Burton, like Father Feeney, has chosen Elizabeth Seton as the heroine of one of her books. His Dear Persuasion is, however, more of a fictionalized biography, outstanding especially for the sympathetic handling of the bitter repercussions to Mother Seton's conversion. Sorrow Built a Bridge is a very arresting story of the life of Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, Rose, for whom Sorrow built span after span of the bridge that led her straight to Paradise. The exquisite style in which it is written, the deep moral lesson it enfolds,--both, make Sorrow Built a Bridge a book that should be recommended to all classes of readers who wish to understand how "God writes straight with crooked lines." Mrs. Burton's latest biography In No Strange Land (1942) is a

delightful volume of fifteen biographical essays. These depict heroic lives in a graciousness of style that is akin to reverence. Wrangling, bitter misunderstanding and even persecution run between the lines of Katherine Burton's book, but she herself is concerned only with the beauty, simplicity and Christlikeness of the characters she holds up for imitation.

Many other biographers have stamped their indelible mark on the pages of twentieth-century literature. Among them may be mentioned Daniel Sargent, whose fertile scholarship has added Christopher Columbus to the list of American biographies. Elizabeth Jordan, who knows all the great in the United States--and elsewhere,--relates her story of literary America in a style that is brimming with zest. Three Rousing Cheers is a masterpiece from the pen of America's greatest dramatic critic. Then, there is that captivating narrative of a magnificent cyclone, John Hanning, who travels the straight and narrow path to a Trappist monastery and eternal life. M. Raymond, O.C.S.O. has won the heart of many readers by his simple yet charming book: The Man That Got Even with God.

Some months ago, if anyone had dared to tell avid readers of fiction that the life of a saint would soon be a "best seller" outdoing the popularity of such thrillers as Rebecca and The Sun is My Undoing, a smile of scorn

would possibly have been the mild retort. And yet, a Jew, with artistry that vies with his deep sincerity, wrote The Song of Bernadette and thereby succeeded in undoing some of the harm that Zola accomplished in his spiteful travesty on Lourdes. In this book, Franz Werfel's ironic pen attacks the scepticism of the intellectuals and the impotency of those who fight the Mother of God and men. The sincerity of the author and his deep concern for the building up of morals is evident not only from the story itself, but also from a recent letter to Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans in which he says:

"I wish to profess here before you and before the world that, as is evident from the major part of my work, I have been decisively influenced and molded by the spiritual forces of Christianity and the Catholic Church. I see in the holy Catholic Church the purest power and emanation sent by God to this earth to fight the evil of materialism and atheism, and to bring revelation to the poor soul of mankind. That is why, although standing 'extra muros,' I have made it my purpose to support, with my modest and humble abilities, the struggle which the Catholic Church fights against those evils and for the divine truth:.... I shall not cease to write books like The Song of Bernadette which will strive to praise the glory of the supernatural (1)."

We need more writers of Werfel's type, but perhaps, too, it would be saner to say we need more Bernadettes, for literature is only LIFE, copied or dreamed, and in these

(1) The Queen's Work, January 1943, p. 3.

days of feverish activity there is little time for dreaming, but ample opportunity for living life to a fullness beyond the most fantastic dreams of incorrigible idealists.

As the student passes from biography into the adjacent field of essay, he is astounded at the bewildering range of writers and types. As he reads, he notices, too, that the essay is to prose what the lyric is to poetry. It is, in effect, the writer's opportunity to give free expression to his ideas about life, whereas the lyric is his opportunity to express his reactions to life. Furthermore, since the essay is the most informal of literary types, the primary characteristic of the essayist is his interest in reflecting life, no matter where his reflections may lead him. The story of the development of the American essay is briefly told. There was no long, slow progress as was the case in Europe. Once the new nation's government was established, then came leisure and with leisure, the essay. Washington Irving was the leader, and the literary aristocracy of New England was not slow to step in line. Various moods controlled the temper of the nineteenth-century essay, from the sly humor of Holmes to the somber, Puritan undertone and deep self-sufficiency of Emerson. However, there is far less constraint in the modern American essay for the writer gives vent to his deepest feelings and his finest literature voices his real

pleasure in people, or in places, or in beauty of nature and art. Indeed, the twentieth-century American essay has a many-sided appeal, for the essayist possesses a seeing eye and an understanding heart. Yet, since this generation of Americans tends to listen more understandingly to its publicists than to its artists, the current value ascribed to many a writer in this field does not bear trustworthily upon his chances for survival. Because, too, of the rapid development of opinion in the United States on almost every topic, a large number of essayists have been called into action to resist, mirror, or encourage the changes going on.

Most of the modern essays have reached the public through magazines which have been popular vehicles for carrying public opinion. In the earlier years of this century, Edward Bok, as editor of the Ladies Home Journal, addressed the largest number of readers ever before reached by an American essayist. His articles were written in a clear, simple, persuasive style and their theme was invariably the betterment of society. He wrote eight books and a most fascinating autobiography: The Americanization of Edward Bok. The personality of the author is evident in his every line and his message is heartening to "the man in the street" struggling to improve his social position. This message is voiced in many tones, but the

underlying theme is invariably the same: There is no greater stimulant than poverty,--not as a condition in which to stay, but as a condition to work out of.

Diametrically opposed to Edward Bok in style as well as in content is Henry Louis Mencken, for many years editor of the American Mercury. He poses as an advocate of freedom, truth, honor, courage, faith and beauty, but he proposes to build up all these without a definite, dogmatic religion. In a language that reeks with vituperation and in paragraphs more noisy than notorious, he fails utterly as an artist and, despite the fact that he pleads his enormous interest in civilization, democracy and reason, Mr. Mencken has fallen short of being a moralist. This is evident from his own assertions that he has no faith in the soul of America. In fact, he does not seem to think America has a soul. In his Notes on Democracy, for instance, he raves about the "city moron," the "righteous clodhopper," the "hinds of Dayton," the "anthropoid proletariat," and leaves the reader bewildered and uncertain whether he himself is intellectually or spiritually able to cope with the problems Life presents him. And yet the Encyclopaedia Britannica calls H. L. Mencken "the greatest critical force in America." Is one great who strives not only to tear down the pillars of a tottering edifice, but to destroy sound material which could build

new ones? Irving Babbitt, in an article "The Critic and American Life," that appeared in the Forum for February 1928, gives a clear, calm and sound critique of Mr. Mencken's philosophy and art, while Michael Williams in a chapter of rollicking satire "A Prayer for Mr. Mencken (1)" laughs to scorn the "self-expression" which this essayist believes will save America. In brief, Mencken is too rough and violent a satirist to be an artist; too racy, daring and irreverent, as is most consistently proved in Treatise on the Gods (1930), to be a moralist. His essays have already found their tomb in the dusty files of the periodicals read only by students intent on probing the worst as well as the best in literature.

The most popular essayist in the United States is Christopher Morley. Books and people--these two interests lie at the heart of his life and works. His readers are impressed by his knowledge of writers, old and new, and by his reverence for the volumes which preserve their works. His brief essays on people and places, on letters and life, have both wit and charm. The secret of his popularity lies in his power to entertain. Christopher Morley has enriched American non-fictional prose with a new kind of essay in which he reflects a contagiously humorous mood. No one doubts Morley's artistry and, as far as his essays

(1) Williams, Michael, Catholicism and the Modern Mind, p. 223.

are concerned, he certainly does not offend the underlying principles of morality. Nevertheless, the thoughtful reader wonders what he may do in the future. His late venture into the field of fiction produced the popular novel, Kitty Foyle, which does not speak highly of its author's respect for decency. One who praises Christopher Morley's essays cannot help deploring his ultra-modern sally into the dangerous field of a self-expression based on a releasing of moral inhibitions.

The virtue of a personal essay comes not only from its subject but especially from its writer. Therefore, is it surprising that the best in style and substance comes from the pen of Catholic essayists? Many authors, outstanding in other branches of literature have written splendid essays. For instance, Father Feeney's irresistible good humor is at height in such books as Fish on Friday, You'd Better Come Quietly and that charming bit of biography entitled: Survival Till Seventeen. Father Talbot, staid dignified and impressive, has provoked serious thinking by his scholarly articles in America. Finally, Agnes Repplier, now counting years up into the eighties, still remains one of the ablest of American essayists. A. Edward Newton, in a delightful chapter: "Agnes Repplier--Cur Best Bluestocking (1)," absolutely confirms our convic-

(1) Newton, A. Edward, End Papers, pp. 131-138.

tions concerning Miss Repplier's permanent place among the leading stylists of America. To be sure she may be called the Essayist Laureate of Cats, but she is infinitely more, for she possesses a certain authority and maturity which one associates with Montaigne, the father of her art. Even in Eight Decades, which is largely autobiographical, one still admires her knowledge, humor, irony (sometimes mild sarcasm, too!), wide-reading and matchless memory.

Many of the best essays are, however, found not in books but on the pages of current periodicals, for controversy, in America as in England, is the dominant feature of Catholic journalism. Indeed, the cap is always off the battle-scarred pens of such eminent writers as 1) Wilfrid Parson, S.J. who wrote brilliantly in America from 1925 to 1936, and since has been a free-lance jousting wherever the Church's need has been most urgent; 2) James M. Gillis, C.S.P. who has travelled ether waves and printed ways on his knightly mission to search out and expose injustice, dishonesty, prejudice and pretense. The Catholic World has made its catholic rounds because of the stirring words of its able editor; 3) that famous Jesuit Apostle of Youth, Father Daniel Lord, who, for nearly eighteen years, has edited The Queen's Work, besides writing at least a dozen books, numerous plays and pageants, and hundreds of pamphlets.

It would be amiss to close this chapter without a tribute to Michael Williams, editor of The Commonweal, who, after wandering for twenty years from the Church he had never really known, stepped into a divine ambush laid by the sweet little Saint of Lisieux and found the Faith he had quite unconsciously longed for since his youth. That was in 1912. Since then, journalism has engaged his energies. In 1918, however, he wrote a spiritual autobiography in The Book of High Romance, and ten years later retired to a Trappist monastery where, during Holy Week, he wrote Catholicism and the Modern Mind, a series of thirty essays as diversified and charming as they are inspirational. Michael Williams is a writer whose dauntless faith matches his enthusiastic, forceful, convincing style. Because he has a worthwhile message to convey and because he is endowed with a gift of writing in a clever, convincing manner, he has combined art to morality with greater facility than most laymen who have ventured into the field of Catholic journalism.



# CHAPTER FIVE

*Masters of Drama*

## CHAPTER FIVE

One important consequence of the new freedom won by literary men of the nineteenth century, was the revival of the drama. The deplorable condition into which the English theatre had fallen, resulted in an almost complete severance between the stage and literature. However, emerging from the period approximating the 1890's, came two playwrights, Jones and Pinero, who were remarkably adept in unfolding plots, handling dialogue and writing problem plays which were characterized by a naturalism, that was both new and shocking to playgoers who had not yet heard Shaw, and a sophistication that seemed witty to audiences who had not yet watched the sparkle of Wilde's epigrams. Nevertheless, though Jones and Pinero wrote entertaining plays, neither of them created good literature, for their dramas lacked both the wisdom based on morality and the beauty based on art, that are necessary to give them validity for readers in any place and at any time. Moreover, the characters were definitely wanting in personality, hence they did not have a lasting fascination for audiences of a later day.

Oscar Wilde's conception of the drama was, however, somewhat different. To him, situation and plot, which seemed so important to Jones and Pinero, were of inferior interest and even character, in the ordinary sense of that term, was of no importance. With him the epigram was everything and in his hand it was, indeed, a valuable contribution and triumph in the field of drama. Earlier masters of the drama had created scores of characters destined to strut across Life's stage until the end of time. Wilde simply created some dozen glittering and cynical epigrams that made him famous in his own day. The dramas that contain them are, however, unsubstantial and insipid and, if Oscar Wilde lives at all in the annals of literature, it will be as a poseur and aesthete, not as a dramatist.

There are, however, three artists, Shaw, Barrie and Galsworthy, whose literary abilities make them masters of the twentieth-century drama. Of the three, George Bernard Shaw is the most gifted. He is clever and industrious, has exceptional ability in expressing his ideas, an active gift of keen observation, an imaginative power not to be despised, and he CAN write. His dialogue is vital, strong, brilliant. His wit is unquestionable. In the use of paradox he bows only to Chesterton and his epigrams are far more sparkling than Oscar Wilde's. All these devices he

uses in dramatic form, sometimes to charm, often to thrill and always to shock amusement seekers. Nevertheless, this playboy-philosopher has written a great many dramas that read far better than they act, for example, his adroit satire on militarism: The Chocolate Soldier, and those other satires: Major Barbara, on scientific charity, and The Doctor's Dilemma, on the medical profession. Yet, most of his plays stage successfully while Arms and the Man, one of his earliest, and St. Joan (1924) are his best productions.

So much for Shaw, the artist, but what of Shaw, the profound philosopher who, his publishers tell us, does the thinking for half of Europe? Indeed, the jacket of one of his books goes a step farther and announces, "When Shaw speaks, all the world listens." It would not be amiss then, to examine what he says to fascinate a universal audience. However, before attempting to understand Shaw and his influence, the reader must face the fact that, until the third decade of the twentieth century, at least, there existed two essential philosophies of life, the one Catholic, the other pagan. The former had many adherents among people literally outside the pale of the Catholic Church, but who, nevertheless, were loyal in varying degrees to Christ's teaching and His ideals. Shaw was not among these adherents, in fact, he was and continues to be

a very consistent pagan. He believes neither in dogma nor morality as a guide to right living. The "biological imperative" is his substitute for both. According to him, all men and women are automata and the reasons that keep them from adultery are the same as those that keep them from eating peas with a knife. In a word, he is decidedly on the side of a philosophy that does not admit any supernatural element. What makes him and keeps him aloof from the Christian concept of life is his utter lack of humility. He venerates nothing. He has no reverence for other thinkers, for the past, for ideas and ideals which in all ages have been held sacred by noble men. Like H. G. Wells, he is a consciously clever man laughing at a world that he considers solemnly stupid. George B. Shaw is a misanthrope, a heartless satirist, a pessimist, an immoralist, an atheist and the list could be continued almost "ad infinitum." When one considers the catastrophe of civilization in Europe today, he demurs.... Perhaps, after all, Shaw's publishers were a bit modest. He has been doing the thinking, not for half of Europe, but for all of it and, witness the results! He is now over eighty-six years old and possibly he has not yet said his last word. "When Shaw speaks, all the world listens." Perhaps. But, God grant that the saner part of that world not only listens but also condemns.

In spirit and technique, James M. Barrie is the opposite of Shaw. Where the latter writes to lash society with his sardonic criticism, the former tells charming, superbly impossible tales to men and women eager to escape into his realm of dreams. Indeed, as Barrie stepped into the twentieth century, he left Thrums, Scottish dialect and Scottish customs in the novels he created and changed from a whimsical modern realist to an even more whimsical idealist. His novels will undoubtedly live because of their own innate virtue, but Barrie, the genius, Barrie, the classic, who penned such incomparable dramas as Peter Pan, Dear Brutus, and Mary Rose, is the great Sir James,-- Barrie, the idealist. He has an intensely personal style. There is, for instance, that whimsical humor that could change at almost any moment from a demure smile to a hearty laugh, or back again to tears. Warmth, hope, laughter, love, pathos--all seem to tiptoe in and out the hearts of readers who browse among Barrie's plays, while their presentation is even more fascinating. Between curtain-rise and curtain-fall the audience moves off into a dim, rose-tinted dreamland which, despite all its fantasy, remains deeply human. The hopelessly sophisticated reader and the theatre-goer object to these plays because they are not true to life. But those of us who still remain avowed idealists in this realistic world, are glad to retort:

"Of course they are not true to life, they are truer than life." Does not Barrie in Peter Pan let his audience see that the more nearly real things are the things that one can think into reality, no matter how impossible they may seem? Who does not love that Boy-Who-Never-Grew-Up as he rushes down to the footlights and compels even the skeptics in the audience to admit that they are loathe to leave his enchanting dream-world?

The last of this famous trio of dramatists, John Galsworthy, was a highly competent technician who wrote plays that are more nearly perfect than Shaw's though they are not so great, for they lack the unique touch that comes only from the Shavian personality. The influence of Ibsen is obvious in Galsworthy's technique. Like his Norwegian master's, his dramas are cold, judicious and controlled. These characteristics may also be the reflection of his own many-sided personality. His attitude towards life was a blending of irony and sympathy, while the art that reveals this attitude was a fusion of realism and romanticism. Like Conrad, he was awed with the mystery of the universe; like Shaw, he was grieved at the stupidity of man; like Browning, he deplored the disastrous sweep of disordered passions. Life to him was both a pageant and a problem. He enjoyed the pageant but attempted to find no solution to the problem. Deeply

interested in the phenomenon of the individual crushed by the majority, and in the conflict between groups or classes of people, his plays are simply the utterances of his perturbed but not despairing spirit. His theory was that out of every truly human relationship, when scrutinized by a refined imagination, a moral arises. Galsworthy did not aim at pointing out the moral, he implied it. The implication, in the hands of a less competent artist, might have degenerated into melodrama; with him it comes so near authentic tragedy that it leaves the audience chastened and thoughtful.

The twentieth century has witnessed a particularly fruitful period in the field of Irish drama. An impulse of national awakening bound romanticists and realists together so that such diverse characters as Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge, Martyn, "AE," grouped themselves naturally around the Irish National Theatre. However, Yeats, more of a poet than dramatist, is the acknowledged leader of this movement. His best plays are lacking in structure but they do leave their audiences stirred to a profound and poetic response. There is little characterization in The Countess Cathleen (1899), or in The Shadowy Waters (1900), or in Deirdre (1907). That his plays are essentially patterns, pageants, extensions of lyric mood, spoken fragments of epic, has led him, perhaps unconsciously,

but inevitably, to minimize character. In his Autobiographies (1927) he talks of the anti-self or counter-self or objective self that enables him to escape from his subjective self. It was these two selves, however, that constituted almost all that passionately interested him. These selves and their expression were the quintessence of his poetry as well as his plays. He could not be interested in any other man than himself, so no wonder he could not create characters. Artist he was, however, and a consciously pagan artist for he deliberated over the Christian option only to reject it. For him it connoted an asceticism that would be equivalent to a pall of darkness cast over the glowing colors of the imagination. Since he was a more successful poet than dramatist the analysis of his art and message belongs to a later chapter.

John Millington Synge owed his development as a dramatist to Yeats who found him writing essays in Paris and sent him to the Aran Islands to study the people and express their life in drama. His sojourn there was fruitful in material. Moreover, he was successful in realizing in his plays the theory of Aristotle that the tragic poet purges the minds of his audience through pity and fear. Of his one-act plays The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea are outstanding. In the first, there exists an uncanny atmosphere, often misty or murky, which rolls

close about the reader so that he all but actually participates in the tragedy that is being lived. The characters are natural, even though they possess extraordinary passions. Riders to the Sea, which reveals the author at his best, stresses one point, the nobility that mankind shows in suffering and defeat. Its descriptions and realism are poignant, but it lives most fully as music and might well be defined as a "tone-poem." There is stark pathos in Maurya, but the imagination is even more stirred by the unseen sea and by the lightly suggested yet intensely present epic of a people doomed to meet suffering in every walk of life. It would seem that Synge wrote The Well of Saints in bitter mockery of reality and man's efforts to circumvent and deny it. A stylist, par excellence, he laved his work in glorious speech. In fact, the distillation of poetry out of common speech was his unique accomplishment among the masters of modern drama. The Playboy of the Western World, the one play in which Synge's mordant irony passed the bounds of truth and common sense, has, nevertheless, passages of rich and glowing beauty and deft characterizations which make it interesting as prose poetry.

Of late years, an Irishman who teaches school in Scotland has written a play that has met with great success in America. Shadow and Substance by Paul Vincent

Carroll is a drama built up on the conflict of idealism with simple faith. The Canon, leading character in the play, represents the classical concept of a cultured religious man; O'Flingsley, the schoolmaster, represents the cultured progressive. Both of these are idealists. In contrast to them is Brigid, who loves them both for what they really are. She is the personification of simplicity, a simplicity springing from humble, inspiring faith. Prescinding from a consideration of this play as one written because of conditions in Ireland, the import of it is universal. The theme implies that true idealism is based on a childlike faith in religion, an idealism akin to humility. This is the answer to those who emphasize the need of refined culture for world happiness, to seek which as an ideal is not enough. The response to the play is deeply significant for it shows that people are glad to turn away from stark realism when they are given something that has a more lasting reality because its appeal goes into the realm of the supernatural.

Until late years, the history of the American theatre was most insignificant for there were no American dramatists that deserved serious consideration. In the second decade of the present century, however, there appeared a veritable renaissance in American drama and by 1915, the Little Theatre Movement had become a very important

reactionary influence counteracting the commercial theatre of Broadway. Nevertheless, it was not until the advent of Eugene O'Neill that the American drama unearthed its first indubitable genius of great scope, for genius he certainly is. After attending a Catholic boarding school in New York, he spent a year at Princeton, sought adventure as a gold prospector in Honduras, took up the study of dramatic technique at Harvard in 1914 and then stepped into his double rôle of playwright and actor in the Little Theatre at Provincetown. Engulfed in a world that was more and more losing sight of God and, consequently, too, losing not its aspiration for an ideal, for that is inborn in man, but its longing for a high ideal, Eugene O'Neill enthusiastically sponsored a certain movement of which the world is now witnessing the development. This movement was the effect of the theory of evolution which attempted to reduce man from the heroic stature to which nineteenth-century romanticists had tried to exalt him, to the semblance of a helpless animal, a being so very insignificant in the universe that he is utterly at the mercy of the forces about him. According to this theory, too, humanity is the accidental product of heredity and environment and is capable of being explained only in terms of these. No wonder then that Eugene O'Neill, the literary artist influenced by Rousseau and the evolutionists, no longer

looks to supernatural greatness,--the saints, Our Lady, Christ,--for his models, but to the "Hairy Ape" or a type even lower and more degraded. He is still swayed by ideals, but their tendency is rather downward than upward, to earth instead of heaven, to a sordid, brutal nature instead of a supernature which lifts man to the Divine. In vain, O'Neill denies that his theory of art is ultra-realistic, for his dramas prove him to be one of the worst realists. He says that the dramatist is not bound to be true to life but to be true to himself and to his vision which may be of life treated as a fairy tale, or as a dream. Possibly then, O'Neill is just being true to his vision when he paints mankind in its lowest levels. True, Christ, also, made His strongest appeals to a similar type: the poor, the downfallen, the sinner. But, He saw the good in the worst of men and, following His example, the Christian artist has drawn inspiration from like sources: the returned Prodigal, the penitent Magdelene, the Good Thief on the cross. On the contrary, O'Neill, because his eyes are riveted on earth, insists in depicting the Thief in his thieveries, Magdelene, in her sins, the Prodigal, reveling with harlots. Furthermore, because he cannot gaze heavenward, he makes no appeal to the higher aspirations of his audience. His characters are repellent, his setting, gruesome and the atmosphere totally unhealthy.

Now, as we mentioned in a previous chapter, Aristotle believed that literature must be built on what is common to mankind and down the ages all the greatest writers have agreed with Aristotle, making abstraction from the individuating notes of men and emphasizing a personality that accepts moral principles or pays the penalty for rejecting them. Ibsen revolutionized all this, insisting on portraying the purely personal sufferings of the individual and O'Neill is an Ibsenite. The most compelling of O'Neill's plays are perhaps The Hairy Ape and The Emperor Jones. They are repulsive and disgusting yet they do hold the audience spellbound. Not since Shakespeare, has a playwright been able to indulge in long speeches and still command rapt attention, like O'Neill. A recent critic speaking of the future of the American stage said: "While there's O'Neill there's hope." He may be right; there is yet hope that O'Neill may shuffle off his pessimistic coil and break into sane, hearty laughter. If he discards his gloomy, scoffing, one-sided ideas, if he will be willing to learn from the sound masters of the past, if he tries to recover his lost ideals, briefly, if he builds on a moral basis, one will be justified in pinning his faith on O'Neill's art, and the greatness of the twentieth-century American drama may not be doomed to disappointment.

The Catholic Theatre in the United States has grown out of a featureless infancy and now begins to evince character lines that may develop into comely maturity in the years that are dawning. Indeed, Church and drama are walking hand in hand again, not quite as they did in those dim and distant days of the medieval morality and miracle plays, but in a manner that is apt to perplex realists and make them fear that perhaps, after all, idealists may have something to say in the shaping of man's destiny. The chief playwright and director of the Catholic drama in America is Emmet Lavery, who has produced his plays right on Broadway. He is capable, experienced and zealous in continuing the thousand-year-old tradition of the Catholic Theatre. His reputation was made by The First Legion, a play that weds realism to idealism. The setting in a Jesuit house, the atmosphere of the supernatural enveloping the all too human characters, the cynicism of the atheistic Doctor, the faith of the boy-invalid, all tend to make the drama fascinating, compelling, unique, and the audience disperses after the play convinced that the one thing that matters in life is absolute confidence in God. The Second Spring, Lavery's next important production, is also gripping, idealistic too, but essentially human. Indeed, Emmet Lavery is the hope of the Catholic Theatre and it seems possible that under his inspiration

and guidance the Catholic Literary Revival in America, which for years has been sinking its roots into the fertile past, may prove momentous in the salvation of a crumbled world in need of learning again the divine alphabet of truth and beauty.



# CHAPTER SIX

*Poetry from British and  
American Pens*

## CHAPTER SIX

Our generation is notoriously unsympathetic to poetry. The wonder is that we have poets at all and those we have perhaps do best to speak, like Paul Claudel, in parables. The reason for this apathy can be traced to the philosophy which is at the base of twentieth-century literature. Naturalism and the theory of evolution have drawn man earthward and have influenced him to value material greatness and to underrate the spiritual forces in life. Now, poetry of its very nature tends to express the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature, as well as movements of the outward world. To formulate an accurate definition of poetry is, nevertheless, almost an impossibility, since, as some writer has said, all poetry begins and ends in feeling and to define it satisfactorily, one must define the feeling out of which poetry springs and to which it gives rise. However, according to the principles of Aristotle the poet is required to reproduce not nature itself, but the idea of nature existing in the mind. He must have some authority for his attitude towards life, and it is only when we get at the ideas which the poet applies to life, only when

we know the standard by which he criticizes and interprets life, that we are able to judge his power.

However, since poetry is the highest type of literature, it is only fitting that the highest type of living should be portrayed through it. This has not always been the objective of twentieth-century poetry, hence much of it fails to ring true. One must hymn lasting beauties to aspire to lasting fame and, furthermore, to be a true poet one must live as a true Christian, not partially and spasmodically, but continually and completely, in full union with the soul of the Church by participation in her sacramental life. That is why beyond the portals of genuine Catholicity there has never been a true mystic. For instance, a poet who lives in close union with God is the only one who understands the reason for pain. Tauler says:

"A man once thought that God drew some men even by pleasant paths, while others were drawn by the path of pain. Our Lord answered him thus, 'What think ye can be pleasanter or nobler than to be made mostlike Me, that is, by suffering. Mark, to whom was ever offered such a troubled life as to Me? And in whom can I better work in accordance with My true nobility than in those who are most like Me? They are the men who suffer' (1)."

Pain, therefore, the mystics often courted, sometimes in crudely physical form, more frequently in those refine-

(1) Tauler, Johannes, Sermons and Conferences. Translated by Rev. Walter Elliott, Catholic University, 1910.

ments of torture which a sensitive spirit extracts from loneliness, injustice, misunderstanding, above all, from deliberate contact with the repulsive accidents of life. Pain inspired a Newman and a Francis Thompson at the dawn of this century, to write such unique poems as The Dream of Gerontius and The Hound of Heaven which will always awaken lofty aspirations in the soul of suffering humanity.

But this belligerent twentieth century needs not only mystics, but warrior poets and as leader among them stands Gilbert K. Chesterton. Controversy, satire and argumentative tracts became powerful under his masterful touch, but critics tell us, and rightly too, that Chesterton was primarily a poet. One regret is that he did not enrich English literature by more poems like Lepanto and The Ballad of the White Horse. He wrote of wars with the zest of a soldier in the thick of the combat. His poems deal with crises and are replete with rousing battle cries. Yet in reality Chesterton wrote of only one battle and of one crisis, and that the crisis of European civilization and the battle to save it. His poetry, therefore, is something more than charming, musical verse. It is a manifesto, a challenge, a call to arms before impending conflict. Would that men had been awakened and inspired to follow him into the thick of the fight! He was a Christian knight, greater than his hero, Don John, who was "only a

crowless prince on a nameless throne." As he wielded his pen with greater might than the soldier wields his sword, perhaps wise and thoughtful men shook their heads and sadly repeated his own words:

"The last knight of Europe takes his weapon from  
the wall.  
The last and lingering troubadour to whom the  
bird has sung  
That once went singing southward when all the  
world was young (1)."

He was, indeed, the crusader-resurgent, the knight-gallant springing in gilded armor out of a world grown drowsy on the brink of an abyss. But was he truly the "last knight of Europe," "the last and lingering troubadour?" We idealists say that he may have been the last knight of the old régime, but he is surely the first knight in the sunrise of a century that, God grant, will be bathed, in its expiring hours, with the crimson glow of a glorious sunset. Poet and prophet, did not Chesterton himself, in The Ballad of the White Horse put into King Alfred's mouth a prophecy which sums up the modern situation in our own day?

"And though they scatter now and go,  
In some far century, sad and slow  
I have a vision and I know  
The heathen shall return (2)."

(1) Quoted in Sister Mary Louise, Over the Bent World, p. 5.

(2) Ibid., p. 10.

Chesterton wrote with unique strength, vigor and precision. In effect, the student goes to him as he goes to Dante, to Vergil, or to Homer, primarily to find a living soul, a soul that creates a great epic to spur men on to deeds of heroism. He was truly the inaugurator of a literature engaged in a battle, the magnitude and seemingly hopeless character of which was ever present to him as well as to his followers. He realized that the contest was between two orders: one, the material organization of the world based on economic exploitation, absolutism and atheism; the other, the Christian ideal of a spiritual order based on Faith, upheld by Hope, animated by Charity. The triumph of such an ideal in a universe so completely at the mercy of greed and hatred would have seemed a fantastic dream to a less intrepid leader, but he was convinced that it was not a more hopeless enterprise than that of a handful of men from Palestine who, centuries ago, set out to conquer the world. They succeeded. Their cause and his are identical. Why, then, need he or his followers falter?

Chesterton's poetry definitely stamps him as a lover of the past. He loved old customs, old ways of thought, old beliefs, and yet he was keenly alive to the problems of his time, sensitive to its dangers and concerned for its good. He did not want to escape from the modern world

to go back to the Middle Ages, but he did want to salvage from the Middle Ages that enduring truth which was the moral basis of common belief, a universally recognized norm of conduct and an ultimate of hope. In fact, tradition and experiment are dominating elements found in modern Catholic poetry. Chesterton represented the tradition and so did Alfred Noyes who became popular in the English-speaking literary world about 1910.

The valueless technical innovations evident in much modern poetry have made Alfred Noyes an intransigent defender of ancient meters. Not that he condemns "new poetry" in itself, but he does deplore its anemic condition and seems to have a clearer concept than most of his contemporaries concerning the remedies needed to revive the vigor of the art. He insists on a fresh grasp on reality. Given this, the sordid realism, that has soiled all types of literature, will lose its fascination. With a sane and healthy message as an underlying force, proper technique for its expression will follow spontaneously. We are not far enough advanced in the century to judge whether his postulates will meet with success but they are at least plausible, for his advocacy of ancient artistic experience springs from his conviction that the work of ages can not be basically wrong. However, he believes with Jacques Maritain that a new world is emerging from the

obscure chrysalis of history. He welcomes it, too, but insists that the new art has real values and will be capable of growth. Too long has literature been holding up the mirror to confusion. It is time now that the poet rebuild the world anew, using the experience of the world's sages down all centuries as a guide to genuine truth and beauty. He wants writers of today to meditate Newton's estimation of his own scientific adventures. He saw farther, he said, because he stood on great shoulders. Continuity is the point that Noyes wishes to stress.

Of his poems, none are greater than The Barrel Organ, Forty Singing Seamen and The Highwayman. The epic-trilogy The Torch-Bearers records not only the progress of scientific discovery, but his own progress along the path of scientific investigation from unbelief to faith. Just how the future will value this work, it is hard to say. At the present time it would seem that Alfred Noyes, in this vast blank-verse poem, attempted something beyond his capacity. He was happier in his choice of verse for Tales of the Mermaid Tavern and he would have done better, perhaps, not to have ventured into fields that were strange and unfamiliar.

We have seen that Noyes clings to tradition but his contemporary, Padraic Colum, steps forward as an advocate of experiment. Dreamer and doer in quest of the "aliquid

novi," he is, nevertheless, a type quite removed from the symbolism of the Anglo-Irish poetry penned by most of the authors of the Celtic Revival. There is no feminine charm to his verses, but rather something manly and robust that combines the best in both classic and romantic attitudes. In his earlier years he lived close to the wild earth of his native land and, like Robert Burns, transmitted in his verse a freshness of perception, a delicate feeling for landscape and a melancholy strain mixed with strength and vigor that have made his art rugged, vivid and unique.

The student notices a variety of influences at work in Colum's poetry, but his inspiration comes from only one source: the Catholic Church. Unlike Chesterton and Noyes, Padraic Colum was born of Catholic parents and was privileged to bear the names of Ireland's two greatest saints. He does not parade his religion unnecessarily nor does he attempt to write pious poems, but his innate Catholicity explains why he is able to balance Romanticism and Classicism, why he shares neither the doubts nor the perplexities of an upset world, why he dares to be a modern and an experimentalist. Because of his religious convictions, he is not allured by the fads and fancies of the tinselled "new" in poetry. He is a simple soul, so he is not carried away by prevalent exaggerations and

eccentricities. However, the new movement excites his curiosity, arrests his attention and sometimes provokes his irresistible smile, but, on the other hand, tradition commands his reverence, his admiration and his allegiance. He belongs to neither movement yet to both, and as an artist, he is a credit to both. Despite the fact that Padraic Colum is more frequently abroad than at home, his heart is staunchly Irish and his incandescent patriotism is one of his outstanding characteristics. His verse, Collected Poems (1930), contains some of his best poetry. The Plougher, The Wayfarer, The Cradle Song, The Old College of the Irish, Paris, are especially representative of his virile art, his deep patriotism and his sincere Catholicity.

By the end of the first World War three other British poets, De la Mare, Masefield and Yeats, had won extensive popularity among the English-speaking admirers of modern verse. Of these three, Walter De la Mare is a real master of glamour which he evokes from the simplicity and innocence of childhood, with its clear recognition of mystery, its acceptance of miracle, its candid faith in all that is strong, protective and loving. His playfulness of fancy and lightness of tone are apt, at first, to make the reader unmindful of the fact that he is a deeply serious poet always aware of the wistfulness that

accompanies childhood. To him the world seems unspeakably beautiful but resounding with voices that call him away from earth. It also seems to be filled with flitting, ghostly visitants, with listeners admonishing to silence, with magic inspiring awe and breathless wonder. Indeed, if De la Mare is important in the literary world it is because of the characteristics that point out his insistence on the quest of beauty, despite the inevitableness of its decline. J. Middleton Murry describes De la Mare's poetry as a trembling poise between the longing for an eternality of beauty, and an acquiescence, an almost ecstatic acquiescence, in its transitoriness. This perhaps explains why De la Mare's preoccupation with mortality is never morbid. His volume, Poems 1919-1934, confirms this impression of his work. Among them In the Dock and The Hour Glass prove that he is deeply aware of the poignancy of the common lot and more acutely sensitive to the imminence of death than many other poets of his day.

John Masefield, actual poet laureate of England, is a man whose varied experiences have done much to shape the style in which he writes. He earned notoriety by his realism. He crosses Yeats with Kipling and thus manages to reconcile the sordid facts of life with the rosy mists of a poet's experiences. He continually tries to carry out

in his own work, his personal conviction that all the world can ask of a poet is that he will show that he is fully alive and keenly attune to the Age in which he lives. All his poems repay careful reading, nevertheless. The Dauber is an unusual study of an artistic temperament; The Widow in the Bye Street appeals by its tender pathos as well as its startling realism, while The Everlasting Mercy, written rapidly under great excitement in 1911, strikes a new note in the gamut of modern poetry. Its melodramatic quality does not detract from the unsuspected depths in the psychological portraiture of the phases of a religious conversion. The depth and seriousness of his view of life and his conscientious efforts to perfect himself and his art have saved Masefield from ephemeral popularity. At times it would seem that Masefield's greatest problem is his soul. He wavers midway between honest doubt and firm conviction. Professions of unbelief stand side by side with passages which show that the poet is haunted by visions of beauty which practically refute his assertion that "there is no God." He discovers beauty not only in the external world, but in the potentialities of man, his dreams, his deeds, even in the externals of the life that surrounds him. "The skeleton of a religion lost," which he mentions in his description of an anchorite's cell, seems to be the underlying theme of all that Masefield

has written. Even in his dramas, which are more poetic than forceful, he emphasizes the link which joins frail humanity to omnipotent Deity. It explains how Masefield, who in the Tragedy of Nan thought he had been successful in his quest for new forms of beauty, went back in the end to the old inexhaustible themes that are the inspiration of the poetic drama Tristan and Isolt, and the poignant End and Beginning in which the admirable Mary Stuart receives new lustre from the laureate's portrayal of her profession of faith, her spiritual constancy and her intellectual fortitude. John Masefield gave a memorable address at the Queen's Hall on October 15, 1931, in which he outlined the spirituality he believes to be the basis of all great poetry. The following extract from that address is ample proof that he considers not only art but especially morality as essential to all poetry destined to lasting fame:

"Invisibly, very near us, touching us all, is a real world of divine order and beauty, whose mission it is to bring order and beauty where they can, to mortal souls who are struggling for such things... The greater poetry is a flowing-in of light from the source of all light, from that King from whom comes our knowledge of the kingly, in whose wisdom we advance, under whose majesty we move, and in whose beauty, if we have cared for beauty, we may come to dwell. His ways are the ways of light, so that in this world we may know a little of the wisdom, beauty and power which are the daily bread of Paradise (1)."

(1) Masefield, John, Poetry, pp. 59-60.

William Butler Yeats, the third writer of this group, is commonly considered the chief poetic spokesman of modern Ireland. He was a pagan mystic wandering through Ireland's dreamy fairyland and communing in limpid, languorous ease with the imaginary elves and spirits of Ireland's legendary past. In effect, Yeats always lived strangely apart from the great streams of humanity. His points of contact with life, especially in his native country, were its fancies and extravagances rather than its realities. The colorful history of Ireland in the second decade of this century found him unsympathetic. In this high tide of his country's heroic mood he failed to understand its soul, so no wonder he responded with frozen apathy to the Christian muse. He worshipped beauty in the abstract and believed that a poet should be concerned with the making of beautiful poems, regardless of moral, religious or patriotic import. He thought he saw beauty in a far-off paganism, whose harshness came to him softened by the mists of centuries, so he dedicated his talent to the service of paganism with a devotion that grew more fervent with the years. Nevertheless, Yeats had a genuine lyrical gift and his inspiration was supplemented by conscientious and skillful craftsmanship. His best work is found among his short poems, the most famous of which is The Lake Isle of Innisfree. Much that

he wrote has no permanent value and more is incomprehensible to most students of literature, but Yeats is important because by his writings and lectures and his personal influence, he had a pronounced effect on the development of Irish literature during more than thirty years of this century.

In America, poetry seemed to be at a standstill for the first decade of the twentieth century, then suddenly the name of Edwin Markham "flashed across the continent." His The Man with the Hoe, which reflected the economic conditions with which the country was faced, has been called "the battle cry of the next thousand years." America had become an industrial nation,--producing, manufacturing. For the most part the workers were poorly paid and had little or no happiness in their lives. Social unrest with strikes and panics was the result. The social and economic conditions were further complicated by the immense numbers of immigrants who came to the country during the first years of the century. It was natural that poetic expression should reflect the times, therefore, much of the literature of this period deals with industrial and social topics.

During the first World War, propaganda poems were the vogue and some of them have endured beyond the war years. Nature has always been and still is a favorite subject,

and many of the new poets have produced nature lyrics of great beauty. Even commonplace characters and scenes furnish themes for another group, but, whatever the theme, new poetry inevitably goes straight to life itself for both inspiration and material. In form and diction, too, new poetry differs from that of Longfellow's day, besides, there is a tendency on the part of many modern poets to revolt from definite patterns. To them, strict metrical laws and definite rhyme schemes seemed irksome, so they changed the old order and adapted the rhythm and rhyme scheme of their verses to their feelings, disregarding definite stanza forms. The metrical structure which they chose to replace the conventional forms, they called "free verse." Some of this new school have gone to bizarre extremes and there has also been a great deal of experimentation that has produced verses of little merit, nevertheless, the general effect of the whole movement has been to produce a rebirth of genuine poetry. Among the fifty odd poets whose influence on art may be lasting, there are approximately a dozen who deserve a special mention either because of the type of new poetry they advocate or because of the message which their verses leave in the hearts of men.

Edwin Markham became famous because of the message he gave the world through his poetry. He valued the soul

of man and saw little justice in a social order which did not look upon men as any different from beasts of burden. He wanted to see a social order in which man should be given an opportunity to grow to the heroism and loftiness of which Walt Whitman dreamed. Inspired by Millet's painting, Markham wrote his poem, The Man with the Hoe. In Millet's bowed and broken French peasant he saw a symbol of the poverty-stricken toilers in all lands and he launched his protest, not against toil, but against the exploitation of labor,--which exploitation has stripped man of the dignity that is his rightful heritage. The same passion that fired Markham to champion the cause of the common workman, animated him likewise with admiration for the great Commoner. His poem, Lincoln, the Man of the People is a noble and lofty tribute to "the Captain with the mighty heart," as well as one of the rare examples of the height to which Markham could bring his art when inspired with sublime ideals. Most of his other poems are inferior in art, technique and inspiration but Markham will live because of the two great poems which carry his earnest plea to a world grown unmindful of the dignity innate in the soul of every human being.

Amy Lowell is the chief exponent of the Imagist school, inaugurated by Ezra Pound in 1913. She first attracted attention by her experiments in form and technique.

She was, moreover, a poet of the external world and her verses are a portrayal of color and sounds of physical perceptions rather than the reactions of inner experience. Miss Lowell lacked warmth of spirit but, as if to compensate, she feverishly agitated all she touched; nothing remained quiescent. With her, too, motion often replaced the emotion she seemed incapable of feeling herself or of inspiring in others. Perhaps, the best study of her many-sided and brilliant personality is found in The Sisters, a shrewd commentary on the "queer lot of women who write poetry," particularly Sappho, Mrs. Browning and Emily Dickinson. The poet ends by confessing that, despite her admiration for the Greek poet, the Englishwoman and the American literary recluse, none of these has any message for her. A plausible reason for this is that they were deeply emotional poets and Miss Lowell was a stranger to emotion. She triumphed in the visual world, in the reflection of reflections, in portraying minute disturbances of light and movement. She failed to reach the heart of man, so her verses, though they display fine art, are merely surface poems. Passion was beyond her domain or even her concern. She was, nevertheless, an adroit craftsman of color and "finesse." Were it not for such exquisite poems as Patterns, Madonna of the Evening Flower and the ecstatic In Excelsis, the name of Amy Lowell might be destined to oblivion when "vers libre" ceases to be the vogue.

There are few contrasts more striking than that between the blatant rag-time verse for which Vachel Lindsay is best known and the aesthetic trend of his education. From early infancy the boy was trained to be an artist. With that end in view he was given a good schooling, special emphasis being put on drawing, and, furthermore, he was encouraged to read only classic authors. Yet, despite his deep and unfailing interest in art, he chose as vocation to be the people's poet. Dreaming of a great communal Art, he insisted that all villages should be centers of beauty, all citizens, artists. One day, however, Floyd Dell read to him Chesterton's Lepanto and from its "dim drums throbbing in the hills half-heard" there was born the tom-tom rhythm of The Congo. Colorful suggestions, fantastic superstitions, revivalistic gusto, half-savage Christianity and, above all, the syncopated music which once characterized the Black Man in America were tremendous influences on the poetry of Vachel Lindsay. He employed a verse form that was wholly original. The rhythm of his poetry is a kind of syncopated movement, chosen deliberately to attract the attention of the public, but developed by him quite beyond anyone else's power to imitate. To be fully appreciated, his poetry must be read aloud. He himself chanted it in a way to heighten the effect. Lindsay was at his best when writing poetry

expressive of religious experience, particularly where the religious experience is highly emotional, as it is among the Negroes. It is to be regretted that Lindsay, motivated by a desire to raise the mind of the common people to the level of poetry, fell into the opposite extreme and brought his poetry down to the level of the common mind. However, though much that he wrote will die, the vitality which impels the best of his galloping meters will persist and, at least, The Congo, John Brown and Simon Legree are certain of a place in the history of American poetry.

Each of the three American poets mentioned above inaugurated a separate school and most of the other poets of the present century can be classified as imitators of Edwin Markham, Amy Lowell or Vachel Lindsay. However, it would be amiss not to mention some of the distinctive characteristics of a few others. For instance, there is the artlessness that is something more than art in the exquisite lyrics of Sara Teasdale, and Edna St. Vincent Millay's artistry has so conquered that stiff and artificial form, the sonnet, that she vies with John Masefield for the honor of being the greatest sonneteer of this period. Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg are true to the common things that, after all, make life worthwhile. But Frost is content with inexhaustible fact and its spiritual

implications. His Collected Poems (1930) reveals him as a great pastoral poet, akin to Theocritus and Vergil. Sandburg also feeds on fact, but it does not satisfy him. The great mid-West, that vast region of steel mills and slaughter-houses, of cornfields and prairies, of crowded cities and empty skies, speaks through Sandburg. He is an avowed realist, but realism does not mean so much to him as he would make others believe; it acts merely as a springboard from which he dives into a new phase of romanticism. One who does not believe this and thinks that Sandburg can write only a big-fisted, rough-neck sort of poetry, should read Cool Tombs, a poignant lyric of our times and listen to Grass whispering as quietly as an earlier poem Fog, that stole in on stealthy, cat feet. Frost and Sandburg look to the same source for their inspiration but the personality of both poets stamps their verses with a different seal. Frost is an intellectual aristocrat vivifying a stone wall, an empty cottage, a grindstone, a mountain, a forgotten wood pile left to warm the frozen swamp as best it could with the slow, smokeless burning of decay. Sandburg is an emotional democrat using slang as freely as his predecessors used the now archaic tongue of their times. Chicago, full of ferment, seething with loose energy may seem harsh and brutal, but between the lines, perhaps there is the spirit of a sympathetic poet who is brutal only to condemn brutality.

We have noticed that, for the most part, poets of the present century have taken their material directly from life itself. We have seen, too, that the life which is nearest the mind of the poet, is life translated into some prevailing theory of philosophy. He is himself the product of influence and his philosophical opinions rule his actions long before he admits he is holding them. Yet, in the twentieth century, as in all preceding periods, the great conceptions of literature do not originate primarily in the individual mind, but in the soil of common, human hopes, loves, fears, aspirations and sufferings. Poetry, then, to be genuine, must be founded on a true philosophy of life and a noble religion that will bear the intellect, emotions, imagination and spirit beyond this world, and by so doing, arouse in men a keen activity for the betterment of their individual lives and the improvement of society in general. We have traced this desire for both personal and social amelioration in the works of the British poets hitherto considered, regretting that these traits are not only less prominent in the writings of American poets, but even frequently replaced by outbursts in cynical and nihilistic free verse, as is often the case in Vachel Lindsay's and Sandburg's poetry. However, in a restricted group of Catholic poets, it is gratifying to note that their predominating trait is a sense

of appreciation of unseen, but none the less real forces within and behind the material world which serves as a canvas for their verses.

Louise Imogene Guiney was fitted by nature and grace to be the forerunner of the Catholic Literary Revival in the United States. In the early twentieth century, Catholic America needed her leadership, Catholic poetry needed her craftsmanship, young Catholic writers needed her encouragement. But, her heart shrank from combat and yearned for solitude, so, unmindful of a mission that awaited her acceptance, she sailed for England whence she never returned except for occasional visits. Buried in the Bodleian Library amid the gold of seventeenth-century poets, she seemingly forgot the pitiable state of American letters and, instead of unearthing the treasures that Vaughan, Herbert, Donne and Crashaw bequeathed to the living present, she mused among them when she was not basking in the sunshine of such friendships as Katherine Tynan and Lionel Johnson offered her. She was favored, too, with the society of the Alice Meynell group. Daily in the company of the best of the past and the present, she should have left a splendid heritage. Verses of genuine merit she did write, however, but the native American is disappointed in the British flavor that clings to all her works. Miss Guiney's poetry is little more than a progressive perversion

of a poet that promised to do superior work if she had remained on native soil. Her most ambitious and scholarly contribution to literature is Recusant Poets, an anthology of Catholic poets from Sir Thomas More to Alexander Pope. Only one volume has been released to publishers and that, twenty years after Miss Guiney's death. Her best poetry was published in a small volume entitled Happy Ending.

Younger than Louise Imogene Guiney and more attune to this swift moving century that applauds an efficiency that snaps and sparkles, is Joyce Kilmer, genuine leader of the Catholic Revival in America. The Month for May 1917 contains a glowing but judicious appreciation of the poetry of Joyce Kilmer. The essay, written by Hugh Anthony Allen ends with a note of prophecy: "Over the shoulders of this green old world is rising the dawn of better things in literature and life, and Kilmer is the blithe herald of their coming." True, there had been great Catholic poets before the advent of Joyce Kilmer but none had greater influence in giving an impetus to Catholic literature, in general, and Catholic poetry, in particular. He was desperately sincere in his desire to promote a permanent Revival in the United States. He studied the history of the English and the Irish Revivals; he even knew the French and Belgian manifestations. Most of all he realized the importance of making its positive achievements

better known among American Catholics so that they might be inspired to seek in their Catholic heritage the richness which is the essence of true art. Like Louise Imogene Guiney, he, too, went to England and met most of the English revivalists, but unlike her, he came back again, fired with a zeal to begin in earnest a true Catholic Revival in America. That was in 1914. The United States entered the World War just as Kilmer's work was well under way. He enlisted, but even amid the noise of machine guns he dreamed of the battle awaiting him in the field of Catholic letters and home came many a stirring lyric. That his hope ran high is evident from a letter written in France one month before he died. In it he expressed the belief that American literature would learn the same lesson from the war that France was learning--

"courage and self-abnegation, and love, and faith--this last, not faith in some abstract goodness but faith in God and His Son and the Holy Ghost and in the Church which God Himself founded and still rules (1)."

Elsewhere he said that he believed America was learning a lesson from the war and cleansing herself of cynicism, pessimism, materialism and the lust for novelty which so hampered her national development. He hoped too, that poets might see this tendency and rejoice in it. Unfor-

(1) The Month, May and June 1942, p. 219.

Unfortunately they did not and, as a result, the literary history of the 1920's shows nothing but decadence. One is tempted to conjecture: "Had Kilmer lived....." He did not, and his premature death had an effect on the Catholic Revival in America that was not unlike that of Ernest Psichari on the French Revival and those of Pearse, McDonagh and Plunkett on the Irish Revival. Joyce Kilmer was a man of great, noble and tender heart, and an ardent admirer of Coventry Patmore's classical simplicity, restraint and sincerity. His verses are lyrics of rare beauty. He had little use for free verse and A Blue Valentine, written as a literary lark, was the only example in all his poetry. There is rare art in such poems as Rouge Bouquet and Trees, while only the soul of a militant Catholic pondering over St. Paul's words in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "I wish to fill up those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ," could pen a Prayer of a Soldier in France.

The names of many poets grace the list of Catholic writers since the dim dawn of the twentieth-century Revival. Who could forget the Reverend Charles O'Donnell, President of the University of Notre Dame? Despite his varied and engrossing occupations he produced three volumes of exquisite poetry which showed his mastery of free verse. Furthermore, in that Gallery of Living Catholic

Authors, built up in the early 1930's through the ingenuity of Sister Mary Joseph, S.L., there are several American poets. In first rank is Leonard Feeney, S.J., President of the Catholic Poetry Society and magic piper who can make even sober words tap-dance in his clear, charming and versatile poetry. Then, there is Sister Madeleva, C.S.C., leader and laureate of poet-nuns today. Her poems are not pale hymns and pious clichés but the exquisite and fearless expression of the noble things that lie hidden in the heart of a Bride of Christ. Catholic nuns have, indeed, shown that they are not shirkers in the great movement of the Catholic Revival. With Sister Madeleva we find many other poets. There are Sister Mary St. Virginia, B.V.M., Sister Mary Angeline, S.S.N.D., Sister Mary Jeremy, O.P., Sister Maris Stella, C.S.J.-- to mention but a few. These religious have taken up the pen wielded with grace and dignity by a St. Hilda, a St. Hroswitha, a St. Teresa, so today, as in days of yore, we have valiant women whose verses continue to throb with the passionate utterance of love to the God-Man who said: "The Lord thy God thou shalt love with thy whole heart."

Mindful that there is only one reality--the soul; only one labor--love; only one attribute--selflessness; only one Way--immolation, the Catholic poet looks above and beyond to Divine Truth, which is his inspiration,

and to Divine Art whose symbolism is reflected in his work. Fired with zeal for a Cause that cannot die, what hopes may he not build for the future of Catholic poetry in America?

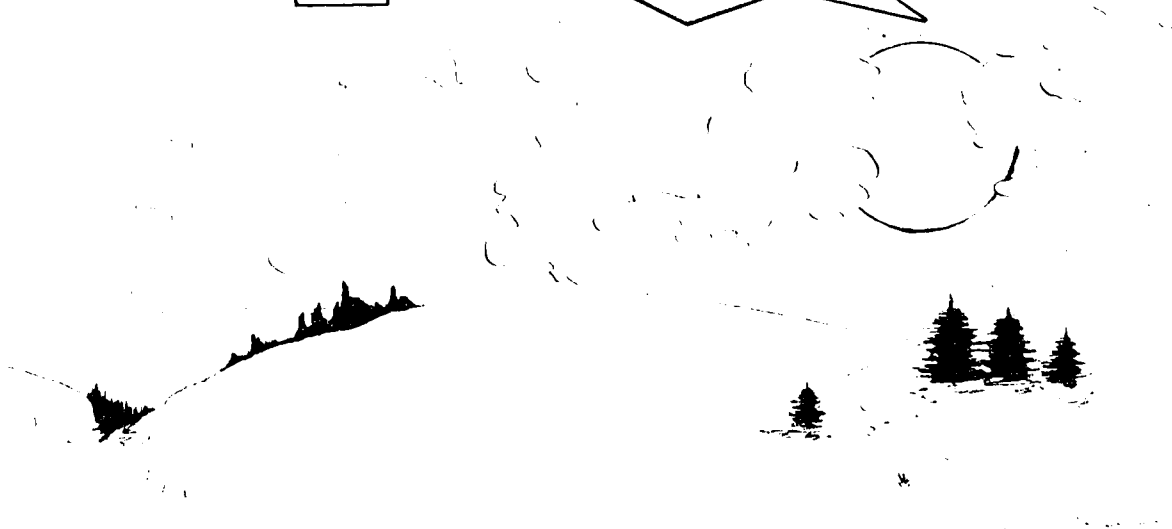


# PART THREE

POISED HIGH IN THE HEAVENS  
THE SUN RIDES ON THROUGH STORM  
CLOUDS AND ETHEREAL BLUE, WHILE  
WE ASK TIMIDLY "WHITHER THE DAWN?"

## CHAPTER ONE

*Conflict and Controversy*



## CHAPTER ONE

As the century emerged from the turbulency of the twenties into the depression of the thirties, life became more and more complicated. Furthermore, the world's conflicting ideas could no longer be separated into two opposing camps: the one, Christian, the other, pagan. Three great ideologies developed and still struggle for world mastery: anti-Christian totalitarianism, the non-Christian secularist culture of Western civilization, and the Christian order. Moreover, these three philosophies have their subdivisions, each of which has widespread influence. For instance, anti-Christian, anti-human, anti-democratic totalitarian ideology exists throughout the world in four forms: Fascism, which is nothing more than the revival of the imperial traditions of the ancient Roman Empire; Nazism, the glorification of the Nordic race; Japanese Imperialism, which is the identification of Divinity with a dynastic house; and lastly, Marxian Socialism, the proclamation of class struggle on the anti-religious basis of dictatorship.

The second philosophy of world-wide influence is the secularist ideology. It attempts to preserve human and

democratic values on a non-moral and non-religious foundation. This secularism tends to separate education, politics, economics, and the family from their center which is God. In other words, each department of life is considered as having absolute autonomy and is totally independent of any ethical principles or the sovereign law of God. Totalitarianism tends to regulate man's exterior life, control his actions, dictate the service he owes to the State. Secularism is not quite as open as totalitarianism, but it is just as insidious. Its purpose is to enslave man's intellect and to paralyze his will. Both totalitarianism and secularism have brought the world to the brink of chaos: the former caused the present World War, which involves nations, alliances, armies, defense plants, airplanes, guns and tanks; the latter, fomented a revolution which involves ideas.

Now, the Christian order, which is opposed to these two philosophies and is bent on destroying both, must contend with the war, which moves on a horizontal plane of land and territory, as well as with the revolution, which moves on the vertical plane of ideology, doctrine, dogmas, creeds, and philosophies of life. As this treatise is not concerned with the outcome of conflicts on a horizontal plane, the war, with all its horrors and the philosophy which inspires these horrors, will not be considered

here. It is deeply interested, however, in the revolution and assumes that the revolution began long before the war and will long outlast it. Therefore, the more pertinent question is: "Who will win the revolution?" rather than: "Who will win the war?" Briefly, the ideologies that will dominate the world after the war demand careful consideration now. Just where the most pernicious of these had their source, it is impossible to say, nevertheless, the philosophies which swept over Europe in the nineteenth century and which were mentioned in the first chapter of this book can be held responsible for the momentum of the revolution which accelerated greatly at the beginning of the twentieth century.

About 1910, Bertrand Russell, an English earl and philosopher of colossal contradictions, began to attract attention. He astounded the world by first denying the existence of ideas, and then capitulated to neutral monism and behaviorism. He is a typical non-scholastic thinker, a neo-realist, a blind leader of the blind, as is proved by the following answer to those who seek to fathom the depths of his theory of facts:

"My own views on the subject of relations in the past were less clear than I thought them, but were by no means the views which my critics supposed them to be. Owing to lack of clearness in my own thoughts, I was unable to convey my meaning. The subject of relations is difficult

and I am far from claiming to be clear about it..... With regard to external relations, my view is the one I have stated, not the one commonly imputed by those who disagree. But with regard to unities, the question is more difficult. The topic is one with which language, by its very nature, is peculiarly unfitted to deal. I must beg the reader, therefore, to be indulgent if what I say is not exactly what I mean, and try to see what I mean in spite of unavoidable linguistic obstacles to clear expression (1)."

After reading the above, one is not surprised to find out that to Bertrand Russell truth and error are the unknown and the unknowable. Nevertheless, he ventures to expound his theory of truth in Philosophical Essays, which appeared in 1910. In 1912, he repeated the same views in The Problems of Philosophy. The Analysis of Mind, published in 1921, is openly behavioristic and his later works are often flagrantly illogical and immoral.

For several years the crude Dr. Russell has been successfully propagating his unsavory ideas on morals, in the United States. That his philosophy of life became very popular is evident from the fact that the Board of Higher Education in New York offered him the chair of philosophy at the City College, New York. However, this appointment shocked all decent, law-abiding people and the cause of honor, morality and culture found many staunch supporters.

(1) Quoted in The New Scholasticism, Catholic University Press, Vol. V, No. 4, p. 345.

Controversy waged vehemently. Finally, Dr. Russell met his nemesis in the decision of Justice McGeehan of the Supreme Court, New York County. After a detailed exposure of the case (Kay v. Board of High Education (18 N. Y. S. 2d 821), Supreme Court, New York County, Justice McGeehan), the memorable decision ends as follows:

"The appointment of Dr. Russell is an insult to the people of the City of New York and to the thousands of teachers who were obligated upon their appointment to establish good moral character and to maintain it in order to keep their positions. Considering the instances in which immorality alone has been held to be sufficient basis for removal of a teacher and mindful of the aphorism 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is,' the court holds that the Board of High Education of the City of New York in appointing Dr. Russell to the Department of Philosophy in the City College of the City of New York, to be paid by public funds, is in effect establishing a chair of indecency and in doing so has acted arbitrarily, capriciously and in direct violation of the public health, safety and morals of the people, and of the petitioner's rights herein, and the petitioner is entitled to an order revoking the appointment of the said Bertrand Russell and discharging him from said position, and denying him the rights and privileges and powers appertaining to his appointment (1)."

Bertrand Russell is the spokesman of the dogmas arising from that sensate culture which the press, education and public opinion often accept as a norm of human conduct. In the name of Progress, Scientism and Materialism,

(1) Quoted in Catholic Educational Review, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 10, p. 610.

he serves palatable morsels to gullible gluttons anxious to have done with inhibitions. To Dr. Russell, progress seems to be cosmically conditioned, totally independent of ethics. He speaks in the name of Science too, forgetting that her domain extends only to the things which are subject to experimentation and to the method of a laboratory. The great values of life, such as justice, truth and charity, are beyond experimentation. A mother's love is none the less real though no one has ever been able to put it in a test tube. Moreover, it seems convenient to him to assume that man is not a creature made to the image and likeness of God but rather a kind of psycho-analytical bag with a physiological libido. Indeed, following Dr. Russell and his fellow intelligentsia, one would conclude that, at best, man is nothing more than a stimulus response mechanism, the end of whose life is the acquisition of money, the ceaseless enjoyment of pleasure and the avoidance of sacrifice. Whither the dawn, if, after stumbling through the fallacies of a Schopenhauer, a Nietzsche, a Karl Marx, the world now accepts Bertrand Russell as one of its leaders?

Happily, the great and noble task of restoring sanity to the Western World has rallied many eminent and enthusiastic leaders of thought. They are champions of that Christian order mentioned at the opening of this chapter,--

champions who have set to work for the moral, intellectual, social and political reformation of the age in which we live. Among them may be mentioned Dawson, Gilson, Guardini, and Wust, to name but a few, but, the great protagonist is Jacques Maritain. Protagonist? Certainly, even though the term may be frowned upon by Dom Albert Jamet, O.S.B. (1) Like his Divine Master, Jacques Maritain is either loved or hated, admired or feared, followed or attacked. Like his human master, St. Thomas, he has an insatiable thirst for truth and a Christlike love for men to the redemption of whose intelligence, wounded by sin and healed by grace, he has pledged his talents, his energy, nay, his very life. The work of developing and spreading scholastic philosophy and of bringing it to grips with modern problems has been Jacques Maritain's vocation for more than thirty years. "Vae mihi," he exclaimed, "si non thomistizavero (2)!" The same idea he repeated recently:

"Depuis que j'écris c'est toujours pour la philosophie chrétienne et pour la politique chrétienne que j'ai combattu.... (3)"

- (1) Le Devoir, Montréal, le 15 mai 1943, Vol. XXXIV, No 111, "M. Maritain. Un penseur? Oui. Mais un chef?" p. 1.
- (2) Antimoderne, Edition de la Revue des Jeunes, Paris, 1922, p. 24.
- (3) Le Devoir, Montréal, le 26 mai 1943, Vol. XXXIV, No 119, p. 2.  
Since I began to write, I have always fought for Christian philosophy and Christian politics.

As we retrace his life to the memorable day in 1906 when he was received into the Church, the sincerity and righteousness of his aim command our deepest admiration.

Jacques Maritain's philosophy is rooted in the tradition of Christian culture; his thought is guided by the light of the greatest philosophic mind of all times, St. Thomas Aquinas; his efforts are oriented towards progressive development, with an energy that is cautious but enterprising, controlled but daring. He has heard the wail of disappointed men complaining that the times are evil, that society is bankrupt, that civilization is crumbling, but he answers all melancholy cries with an optimism that gives courage even to the most faint-hearted. He has unbounded confidence in God's highest earthly creature, man, not confidence in man's innate greatness which may produce a superman, but confidence born of a deep reverence for the dignity of the human person and a vivid awareness of the destiny to which man has been restored through Divine redemption.

He believes that the great twentieth-century malady has its source in the intellect. In effect, the intellect, that guide of conduct, light of life, fountain and source from which should issue the very criteria of judgment, is infected with a lethal disease. The malady is deep-seated so the remedy must be radical, it must pene-

trate the depths and reach the roots or else remain utterly ineffectual. To effect a permanent cure, therefore, Jacques Maritain sets about to defend thought against false progress. However, since it is not our purpose to write an exposé of his philosophy, it will suffice to say that he believes the mind of modern man should be exercised, rescued from its vaulting ambition to rank among the angels and brought to a humble recognition and acceptance of its proper place in the hierarchy of intellects which is, in reality, the lowest place among beings endowed with reason,--"the last among the spirits, the most remote from the perfection of the Divine Intelligence (1)."

Young in years and fired with an enthusiasm born of inexperience, the convert, Jacques Maritain dreamed of leading intellects to the appreciation of Truth as he found it in the incomparable St. Thomas. That suffering, disillusionment, failure did not quell the fire of his zeal but tempered it, is evident from the following quotation:

"Mon erreur en ces années de jeunesse a été de croire que la puissance de saint Thomas pourrait convertir une substance intellectuelle à vrai dire empoisonnée, établie dès l'origine dans l'aversion de l'Évangile et le culte de l'esclavage. J'ai payé cette erreur et elle m'a instruit aussi. C'est parce qu'elle m'a éclairé à fond sur la vraie signification du

(1) Maritain, Jacques, The Angelic Doctor (translated), p. 55.

zèle amer de l'anti-démocratie qui crois-  
sait alors en Europe et sur l'atroce duperie  
qu'il représente que j'ai décidé de me tour-  
ner vers les études de philosophie sociale  
et politique..... (1)"

Jacques Maritain's life and works prove that he is not an immobilist. In fact, he is an enthusiastic advocate of progress, emphasizing, however, that the development, to be a vital growth, must come from within. Nevertheless, with St. Thomas he is also unswervingly faithful to tradition and here is where he comes into conflict with those modern thinkers who contend that true philosophy can suffer no restraint, and that true philosophers can accept no dogma, no doctrine, no authority. He is an out-and-out idealist and optimist while his adversaries are gloomy realists. They have been running the world for more years than we like to count. Yes, they have been the doers while the idealists could only be the dreamers. But, perhaps in the age that is dawning, the dreamers may be permitted to rebuild what the doers have ruined. God grant that they may be given a chance!

(1) Le Devoir, Montréal, le 26 mai 1943, Vol. XXXIV, No 119, p. 2.

The mistake of my early years was in believing that the power of St. Thomas could convert an intellectual substance, that was truly poisoned and established, from its beginning, in an aversion to the Gospel and in the worship of slavery. I paid dearly for this mistake but it taught me a lesson. Because it profoundly enlightened me on the true meaning of the bitter zeal of the anti-democratism that was growing in Europe and on the insidious fraud that it represents, I decided to turn to the study of social and political philosophy.

The works of Bertrand Russell and Jacques Maritain contain the quintessence of the philosophies universally prevalent as the century entered the tragic phase of a second World War. In the various fields of literature these philosophers have been supported by writers who can be represented by the suave Wells and the cynical Shaw, on the one hand, and by that belligerent sharpshooter, Belloc, and the witty Ronald Knox, on the other. Enough has been said of the works and influence of Herbert Wells and George Bernard Shaw. If time and space would permit, much more could be said in praise of Hilaire Belloc, that militant Catholic who has written books and magazine articles that have aroused storms of protests. Indeed, Belloc welcomes protest, so that is one reason why his books are built for stability. He is an active literary figure and, as the most prominent Catholic writer in the English-speaking world, his pen remains uncapped to serve the cause of truth and justice.

Catholic philosophy has also found a staunch exponent in the person of Monsignor Ronald Knox. Converted to Catholicism in 1917, he has since vigorously wielded his pungent-pointed pen for the cause he espoused. Although his best book may not be A Spiritual Aeneid, it unconsciously gives the reader an insight into the sterling personality of the author. Monsignor Knox has written in

various literary forms, but it is as a satirist that he has rendered incalculable service to the modern world by pointing out the absurdities and inconsistencies in life. His trilogy on the pseudo-theology of our times deserves special comment: Sanctions aims at unveiling the religiosity of the parlor and drawing room irreligious; Caliban in Grub Street emphasizes the inanities of the newspaper symposiasts; and lastly, Broadcast Minds exposes the nescience of the omniscientists. These three works just about cover the whole field of modern stupidity on the most important feature of a man's life, his God, and his eternal destiny. There are few of our modern English and American omniscients that escape his merciless castigation from H. G. Wells and the Huxleys to H. L. Mencken. In 1939 Monsignor Knox left Oxford, where he had been chaplain since 1926, to take over a work that is the proper duty of some Oxford scholar, the retranslation of the Vulgate. In this he continues the work of his predecessors at Oxford. Furthermore, is it not fitting that a satirist and controversialist of the magnitude of Ronald Knox should be the continuator of the most pugnacious of Scripture scholars, St. Jerome?

In Roman Converts, Arnold Lunn gives a fair and rather detailed appreciation of Knox as a writer, and he even predicts that Knox's wit may prove more valuable to

the Church than Newman's eloquence (1). Whether this prophesy will come to pass, the future generations alone can tell, but it is gratifying to know that this peerless Knox, by wit and clear reasoning, had the good fortune of taking both the mote and the splinter from his opponent's eye, on the memorable occasion when Arnold Lunn challenged him to debate the validity of Christianity. That Monsignor Knox will do much more for the cause of the Church he entered on a September day more than twenty-five years ago, is the conviction of those who have followed him through his books down this quarter of a century. Perhaps, too, the "Gentleman with a duster" has learned since 1922 that fear of an offended God was not the motive that led Ronald Knox to the gates of Rome (2).

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(1) P. 203.

(2) Begbie, H., Painted Windows, p. 64.



# CHAPTER TWO

*Apostles of Social Justice*

## CHAPTER TWO

The streamline age in which we are living is an extremely precarious one. Violence seems to be the order of the day. Nevertheless, in their zeal to overthrow an old order and to establish a new one, individuals, as well as nations, instinctively look to leaders under whose guidance they may arm themselves physically and psychologically for a conflict from which there can be no possible escape. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Vichy are a few of the leaders that have been making the headlines in newspapers the world over. Their names personify the power, the treachery, the irreligion, and the duplicity which have caused misery such as the world has never before known. Their influence represents the pernicious phase of a revolution that is demolishing an already toppling civilization, on the ruins of which they expect to erect a man-made social régime that will function independently of any supernatural guidance.

However, as on the horizontal plane of war there is a countercurrent, so on the vertical plane of ideas, there is a strong, steady, persistent opposing force leading men of good will toward a permanent Christian world order.

Among the protagonists in this sphere we single out names less glamorous than those of a Winston Churchill or a Franklin D. Roosevelt, but names that, although they may be given scant mention in history, will live beyond the annals of time in the souls of the generations they have influenced. Foremost among Christian leaders are His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, His Eminence, the late Arthur Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, His Eminence, Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve, Archbishop of Quebec, and the Right Reverend Fulton J. Sheen of the Catholic University of America.

In the humble but learned and saintly person of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII is crystallized the Papacy and all it has meant to civilization and culture down twenty centuries. Through him we visualize the Papacy of Gregory VII, of Hildebrand, of Innocent III, the Papacy that founded and nurtured our civilization, that built Christian art on a moral foundation, that turned Attila from Rome and taught the barbarians who swarmed over the Rhine and the Danube that power must bow to law, the Papacy that for two thousand years has stood for justice and right and the sanctity of the human individual.

We moderns have forgotten the rôle of the Holy See in the history of our culture; but if we could travel in spirit to Rome, the seat of our Catholic heritage, to

Rome, which has seen empires crumble and nations disappear, perhaps it would be easier to remember. Only yesterday, Pius V rallied Europe against the Moslem peril and sent Don Juan of Austria crashing to victory at Lepanto. Only yesterday, another Pius died a captive of Napoleon, resisting the Corsican upstart to the very end. Only yesterday, Benedict XV in a "Letter to the Leaders of the Belligerent Peoples" (August 1, 1917) made definite proposals for the termination of World War No. I, insisting on moral and religious bases for peace. In due time the leaders of the belligerent peoples answered in diplomatic terms that snuffed out the hopes of Benedict, but before many years had elapsed the world had reason to deplore its all-too-human policy. Now, our civilization is again in deadly jeopardy, and once more as so often in history, the Papacy speaks.

But, what actual influence can the Pope exert in world settlements? In all his messages he appeals to justice and charity. He speaks in the name of reason and his expectations are that reason may gain a hearing when the clash of arms is over. The words he used in August 1939, hoping against hope that he might thereby avert war, will apply with still greater force when addressed to the infuriated vanquished and the exhausted victors. And yet, what chance has the voice of reason to be heard in

competition with the voice of material power? The plan which the Pope has repeatedly set up for the restoration of order in the post-war settlement, is based upon the recognition of a universal norm of morality. Will his prestige be great enough to command a hearing?

The answer to these questions may be found in a phenomenon which is common to all great leaders in the political and military, as in the religious and moral world. Great leaders acquire power chiefly through the power of their love. In other words, great lovers are invariably great leaders. Yes, in spite of all the cynicism the world holds, love remains the most powerful immaterial force in the affairs of men. Once aroused, organized, and made articulate, it possesses a high and intelligible scope.

Patriots win followers by their promises, but, if we study their lives we find that they win more followers, secure more service, stir to greater sacrifice by means of their love than by their promises, or by merely intellectual ability. What determines the masses of people to follow a great leader is, without doubt, the conviction that a great love burns in that person's soul: a love of the nation, or the class, or the oppressed minority. The handful of soldiers that with Dollard, endured hardship and death at Long Sault were inspired with love for their

wives, their children, their fellow-Frenchmen, their God; a half-starved army endured Valley Forge and Morristown because of their conviction of Washington's unconquerable love for the cause of the American Revolution. Patriotic leaders from Joan of Arc to Bolivar, nay, even a Lenin and a Hitler boast of an insatiable love for the people.

If this can be asserted of false or purely human claims, how effective must be the appeal of love when it is wholly genuine, indeed, when it is divinely inspired and carried to a divinely guided conclusion? Of this nature is the Pope's love--not for a nation or a group of people alone, but for the entire human race and for each and every individual within that race. Indeed, the secret of the influence that Pope Pius XII exerts and is destined to exert, is found in his universal love for the "gens humana," the nation of all mankind.

The enemies of our religion do not recognize this type of love. In fact, they propagate the idea that the Catholic Church is indifferent to the affairs of this world, that She is passive, unprogressive and an incorrigible advocate of tranquillity. The Pope's neutrality in international disputes they assume, springs from these faults which have become more and more deep-rooted in the Church as the centuries advance. However, Pope Pius XII does not clamor for tranquillity for himself, for the

Catholic Church or for the world, because he knows tranquillity is not necessarily peace. Somewhere Tacitus has said: "Solitudinem faciunt; pacem appellant"--"they make a wilderness and call it peace." The Pope knows his Tacitus and much more that Tacitus did not know. He does not mistake the quiet of a desert or of shambles or of a graveyard for peace. He has at heart the welfare of all men so he maintains a resolute neutrality even though impatient and short-sighted people call him remiss or cowardly. Nevertheless, if sanity ever returns to the realm of politics and economics, the Pope who thunders no anathemas against one nation or the other, flings around no excommunications, lays no interdict upon any country, will be recognized, when the tumult and the shouting die, when brainstorms have passed and hysteria has yielded place to reason, as having been a great statesman and a great moralist. Today he is tremendously active in the purely spiritual sphere of love. The slender, kneeling figure with his head bowed in prayer has an influence, a power for justice and righteousness in the modern world. "Per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso," we, too, his followers, can exert an influence in building up a moral structure on which may be grafted an art more beautiful and more inspiring than the World of Yesterday ever knew.

It seems but fitting to place His Eminence the late Arthur Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, England, as a leader second only to Our Holy Father. His varied and colorful career, especially since the eventful day in 1917 when His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV named him Rector of the English College in Rome, brought him into contact with the peoples of many countries and with many European authorities in civil, military and ecclesiastical spheres. He had an extensive and accurate knowledge of world affairs and expounded the social teachings of Leo XIII and Pius XI with precision and clarity. Eminent ecclesiastic, able administrator, sound educationist, outstanding churchman, Cardinal Hinsley was above all a man of God who labored first and foremost for his own personal sanctification and who strove in all things to promote the interests of Christian morals and culture.

His Eminence is perhaps best known through his efforts to hold at bay the inherited prejudice against Catholicism in Protestant England. His generous blessing on cooperation between different Christian communions on social questions, created an amity and understanding unknown in the earlier years of this century. The broadcasts, inaugurated in 1939 under the title: The Sword of the Spirit, voiced Cardinal Hinsley's conviction that conflict on the spiritual plane must be met with forces of prayer and

charity. That his love for mankind knew no bounds, is proved by the numerous tributes received, at his death, from the Fighting French Forces, from the Netherlands, Poland, the Czechoslovak Republic and other distressed nations he had befriended. In the Church beyond the grave, where he still has a mission as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, Cardinal Hinsley will continue his work of moulding the hearts of men and leading them from the baseness of evil to the greatness of an everlasting good.

From the Old World, seething with discord, we turn to America, a continent which unfortunately, is not immune from the ills that have ravaged Europe. There is much to deplore in the political, economic and social life of the countries lying between Hudson Bay and Cape Horn. Yet, there are also certain sparks of moral strength which may develop new vigor when fanned to flame by the ardor of enthusiastic apostles. Prominent among these is His Eminence Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve, Archbishop of Quebec. It is not our purpose to outline the events of his fruitful career, but to emphasize how this Prince of the Church upholds moral standards, supports the claims of social justice and furthers the cause of culture from which springs art, the flower of culture.

With his finger on the pulse of the world, Cardinal Villeneuve directs affairs at home with a benevolence that is matched only by his firmness, tact, and well-tempered tolerance. In the personality of His Excellency, we cannot fail to discern the poise, dignity and prestige of Latin culture, springing, no doubt, from long and deep study of St. Thomas. He personifies, too, the grace, "finesse" and delicate courtesy which is the glory of the French race and, perhaps it would not be amiss to add that he has assimilated much of the alertness and efficiency that are America's most conspicuous characteristics.

To combat Communism, to promote Catholic Action, especially through such channels as the J.O.C., the L.O.C., J.E.C. and other organizations of youth, to make his flock conscious of the tremendous value of prayer, meditation, and spiritual retreats, seem to be some of the specific aims of Cardinal Villeneuve. As an orator and author he is noted for precision, clearness and uncompromising fidelity to his honest convictions. Through his Lenten sermons delivered annually at the Basilica in Quebec, His Eminence has done much to enlighten his people concerning points of both social and ethical importance. These sermons printed in book and pamphlet form, have carried abroad the author's message and laid the foundation for the moral and cultural development of the Canadian people.

All his numerous works are profoundly informative and inspirational. However, La Messe, published in 1938, has accomplished more by its simple "exposé" of the subject than many other books of more pretentious dimensions. After reading this modest volume of some one hundred fifty pages, the layman cannot fail to realize his rôle as an active participant in the great drama which has been the life and center of our religion ever since the Last Supper. Furthermore, the five short sermons so strongly emphasize the far-reaching efficacy of the Mass, that even an indifferent, casual reader is impressed by the fact that beyond the ultra-realistic pessimism of a distressed world lies the lasting optimism of an ideal spiritual kingdom where the immolation of a God, made man, will purchase permanent peace. America needs more writers like Cardinal Villeneuve; America needs more leaders of his exceptional ability. Long may he live to diffuse the effulgence of his learning, culture and sanctity among the people he loves!

South of the forty-fifth parallel, the Catholic Church can boast of no stronger exponent of its philosophy and century-old culture than the Right Reverend Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, of the Catholic University of America. Indeed, Monsignor Sheen is quite generally acknowledged to be the greatest Catholic preacher and one

of the most influential Catholic writers in the United States. The latter accomplishment is, in fact, closely related to the former for, in his books the reader feels the power of oratory even in the printed word. The secret of much of Monsignor Sheen's influence lies in the trinity of interests that have dominated his life: 1) interest in scholastic philosophy; 2) interest in pure English phraseology as a medium for transmitting ideas; 3) interest in oratory as a means of contacting souls.

His search for truth in the pages of Catholic philosophy was not without its reward. The dissertation, God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy won for him at Louvain the Cardinal Mercier Prize for International Philosophy. His next two books, Religion without God and The Life of All Living, were likewise essentially philosophical, the one critical, the other interpretative, and they stamped Doctor Sheen as one of the world's leading philosophers. Furthermore, within the interval between the publication of God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy and The Life of All Living he had fallen under the spell of Chesterton and consequently he developed the second great interest of his life, a passion for a fresh, crisp style and for a certain brittle brilliance beneath which could run an undercurrent of immense profundity. Opportunity for preaching came to Doctor Sheen while he

was in England on the Faculty of St. Edmund's College, Ware--the Westminster Diocesan Seminary. His success in this field merited for him the reputation of being the most popular American orator in England. As a result, when he returned to the Catholic University in 1926, he was welcomed as a preacher who possessed all the essential qualifications of oratory: sound thought, keen criticism, understandable language, striking imagery, poetic fancy, compelling appearance and one of the finest natural voices heard in this century.

Philosophy, Chesterton, and the art of public speaking have moulded both the content and the style of Monsignor Sheen's works, but these three influences have only been added to gifts springing from his own sterling personality. Indeed, his great tolerance, humble acceptance of criticism and sympathetic understanding of the man outside the Church have made Monsignor Sheen a leader whose influence cannot die. Moreover, the underlying theme of his broadcasts and books is social justice, a subject that is dear to every man's heart. His favorite text in Quadragesimo anno is: "... this longed-for social reconstruction must be preceded by a profound renewal of the Christian Spirit." The power of prayer and sacrifice and the unlimited efficacy of the Mass he repeatedly emphasizes as the first means of bringing order out of

chaos. Monsignor Sheen vehemently denies the principle "ars pro artis." His art is, first and foremost, based on morality; he is interested only in saving souls and not in writing best sellers.

It has seemed opportune to mention these four apostles because, on the foundation of social justice which they are laying, may be erected a better life which literature will interpret in the years ahead. Art, too, springing from a more refined type of civilization and culture can give a new and more permanent charm to the various branches of literature it adorns.



# CHAPTER THREE

*A Glory and a Dream*

### CHAPTER THREE

We are at the end of an era in history, between one that is dying and another that is about to be born. The moral wreckage of some fifty years lies cluttered at our feet, sinister rumors above and about us stifle the hope that stirs in our hearts. The past has left scant traces of joy in life or of art in literature. Timid, bewildered, fearful, we cry out: "Whither the dawn?" In the silence of our own souls is whispered a reassuring answer: "Fear not.... Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." Truly we may take heart again for though Fate may have torn up all the photographs and blue-prints of a society based on the moral law, the Church has kept the negatives and Christ, the Artist, can develop the pictures again on a more permanent and picturesque background.

We are living in a period of history not entirely unlike that of the Roman Empire under Julian, the Apostate. When he sat on the throne of the Caesars, he inaugurated a persecution against the Christians which was vastly different from those of earlier years. Julian could not be satisfied with torturing bodies, so he chose to pervert

minds and then gloated over the perversion and loss of faith in Christ that resulted.

There is a legend that tells us Julian made a tour of the Roman Empire to investigate the success of his persecutions. When he came to the ancient city of Antioch, he disguised himself and entered inns, taverns and public markets to learn the fruit of his hate. On one occasion, as he was watching thousands of people thronging into a temple dedicated to Mithra, he saw an old Christian friend whose name was Agathon. The recognition was mutual. Pointing to the crowd and to the apparent success of the pagan cult, Julian inquired sneeringly: "What has happened to that carpenter of Galilee, Agathon? Has he any jobs these days?" The answer was gravely significant: "He is making a coffin now for the Roman Empire and for you." A few months later, Julian thrust a dagger into his heart and, throwing his own blood heavenward, he uttered his last and most famous line: "Thou has conquered, O Galilean!" Yes..... AND HE ALWAYS DOES!

As the sun of the twentieth century slowly climbs to the zenith, we idealists ponder the old Roman legend. Now, as then, the chariots of Mars go thundering by, crowds worship at the shrines of Venus, Bacchus, Mammon, and a hundred other pagan gods, while the World tarries a moment to ask: "Has the carpenter of Galilee any jobs these days?"

In the pause that follows, can we not hear the dull thud of the hammer as the last nails are driven into the coffin that will bury the era that is dying?

Tomorrow a new world will be born. Men will have learned the meaning of the moral law in the mud of Africa, on and over the rolling seas of the Atlantic and the Pacific, in the jungles of New Guinea, and the swamps of the Solomons. When they come back to their fatherlands to build new homes, a better generation will people the earth.

And what of the literature of the aftermath? Then as now, no literature can merit permanent recognition that is not the revelation of the human soul. Furthermore, in the years ahead man will not be confirmed in grace; human nature will still be fettered by passions. Moreover, since art is changeless, the aim of the artist will still be to show man as he is, not as he ought to be, though any adequate picture of him as he is, will not lack implications of what he could be. In other words, as mentioned in a previous chapter, though art need not moralize, it may not, ignoring responsibility, become demoralizing.

Mindful of the fact that in the past popular writers often failed to differentiate realism and reality, concupiscence and beauty, it is to be hoped that the poet, dramatist, novelist and essayist of the declining century will look at life in its entirety, considering its

spiritual as well as its material aspect. His works cannot fail to be masterpieces if they show an appreciation for--or better still--a saturation in the true philosophy of life. His art, too, to be genuine, must blend style and substance so skillfully that the mind of the reader will be captivated, his enthusiasm aroused, and his interest sustained. Finally, in the personality of the artist there must be found that union of genius and sanctity which will enable him to fulfill the twofold mission of stressing the wages of sin and of inspiring, not only a transitory desire to live a holier life, but an undying enthusiasm to spread the Kingdom of Christ.

Many of our modern Catholic writers represent sin in all its ugliness, but they stop here and leave the reader the task of applying the lesson to his own life. This would be a splendid method if men's lives were controlled more by sound reason than by misguided passions. However, considering the fact that education in the twentieth century has laid emphasis on man's feelings to the detriment of his thinking, perhaps it would not be amiss if the writers of the future tried to build a bridge from fragile sensate culture to strong rational civilization.

Indeed, as we travelled down the four decades of this century, it has been a disappointment not to find in literature a more definite emphasis on the positive values

of life. For instance, Sigrid Undset, who is generally considered our most outstanding Catholic novelist has been successful in writing books that are marked by that lively, sensuous awareness which is characteristic of much contemporary fiction. In romance after romance, she has faced truth about life and conveyed it with the masterly skill of a consummate artist. Then, she has left the readers to weave the threads into a perfect fabric, hoping, no doubt, that from the coarser fibers they could produce a useful tapestry. Nevertheless, we cannot but deplore the fact that in most of her novels--and this is especially the case in Madame Dorothea (1940)--emphasis is laid on material needs, appetites and experiences. These supersede spiritual values and end by producing a final portrait of man controlled by his animal nature. We are puzzled by the inconsistency of this great literary artist, who is so Catholic in her philosophy of life, yet apparently unable to grasp the mind of the Church in the manner of depicting sins against the sixth commandment. With deeper interest and greater satisfaction, then, we turn to Madame Undset's essays--and in particular Return to the Future (1942)--to find the true artist emphasizing positive values on which the World of Tomorrow will be built. Here she, who believes that the real conquests which men have achieved were not "dreamed" into existence,

points to goals which can be reached only through tireless, patient, courageous exertion.

With these thoughts in mind, we close this book hoping that the sordid realism of the past may be permanently buried under the somber realities that are chastening our generation. Then, in the years that lie ahead, the emotions which are after all, the energy and charm of life, can be directed into new and more wholesome channels, and art, based on morality, can reach heights unheard of in the World of Yesterday.

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