

# HOW TO BE AFFLUENT



**GEORGE MIKES**

Drawings by PAPAS

# HOW TO BE AFFLUENT

**George Mikes**

illustrated by **PAPAS**

Students of Mikes already know *How to be an Alien* and *How to be Inimitable*. Mr Mikes realizes, however, that the world in which we live is changing round us, and we need to be able to adapt our skills to keep up with it. Since the biggest change is that our society is now an affluent one (it may not seem like it when the bills come in, but that's what everyone says and everyone can't be wrong)—well, here's how to meet that challenge.


Affluence, as Mr Mikes makes clear, doesn't affect only our relationship with our money or other property. It also affects our relationships with our spouses, our children, our neighbours, our politicians — even with God. No aspect of the question is overlooked in this book.

Mr Mikes has a new ally. The cartoonist Papas, well-known to readers of *The Guardian*, has devised a pointed allegory to illustrate the wit and wisdom of the text.

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GEORGE MIKES

*Drawings by*  
PAPAS

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1972



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# INTRODUCTION

THIS book contains all the wisdom a modern man needs and a little more.

The main thing we want to know is, how to be affluent; and how to live and think in an affluent society. I am fully aware, of course, that by the time this book appears we, as a nation, may not be affluent but may, in fact, be in rags. This, however, does not matter in the least. If we are in rags, we shall certainly want to know how to become affluent once again; if we *are* affluent, we shall be even more eager to learn what to think and how to behave properly in an affluent society.

Henry Ford's notorious remark 'History is bunk', still resounds down the decades. *History is bunk* is a very silly saying. He must have had philosophy in mind.

Philosophers may count the most brilliant minds of humanity in their ranks; they may have said what they had to say in a breathtakingly exciting, profound, original, subtle or witty *manner*; but their conclusions have never amounted to much.

The philosopher is like a good athlete on the double bar: his movements are beautiful; his skill is breathtaking; his

achievement admirable. But when he jumps off, he is where he was before, he stays where he started, he has achieved nothing, he has progressed nowhere. You wonder what all this jumping and bouncing and standing on his head was in aid of. His performance was as useless as it was spectacular.

There are controversies galore in other sciences; but medical men, whatever their differences, all agree that blood circulates in our bodies; physicists may quarrel about the interpretation – nay the validity – of Einstein's Unified Field Theory, but they will agree on the rules of acceleration of falling bodies; mathematicians may be divided on certain aspects of the Quantum Theory but they all accept the formula for solving simple quadratic equations. But there is not a single statement – however simple, innocuous and self-evident – on which philosophers agree. No philosopher has said *anything* in the course of the last twenty-five centuries which all his fellows accept. They regard themselves as rather a special band of people and top experts; but in the last two or three millenia not one single statement by any one of these experts has passed uncontradicted by other, equally qualified and eminent experts.

Nor has a philosopher ever convinced anybody of the truth of anything. Not even himself. No thinker has ever sat down to reason coolly and come to a certain conclusion. The conclusion always came first and arguments were found to support it. The verdict was always brought in first, the evidence was fitted to it afterwards. Similarly: no reader has ever been convinced by any philosopher. The reader simply hit upon the philosophy which suited his preconceived ideas. You don't choose a philosophy; the philosophy chooses you.

Philosophy is not a real science; it is more subjective than lyric poetry. The sage who comes to the conclusion that life is not worth living, always has his own life in mind. If he

'proves' that the human soul is immortal, it only means that he himself does not fancy the idea of dying.

Look at the problems which have preoccupied the greatest and most brilliant minds. If we put a book in a drawer, does it really stay there when the drawer is closed? Oh, yes, we know we find it there when we open the drawer: *but was it there all the time?* Does the world really exist or do the people and things we see exist in our mind, in our imagination only? Philosophers cannot answer these questions. How can you know what's happening inside a drawer when it is closed? Two ways of finding out suggest themselves.

1) Open the drawer and look. But if you open a drawer *it is no longer closed.*

2) Experimentally. A philosopher could get into a large drawer, have it closed and keep an eye on the book for a week or two. This, however, would bring philosophy down to the level of vulgar, experimental science and that would never do. Solving a question by simply finding out the answer is not the way of philosophy. It prefers to argue over such questions for a few thousand years and leave them unsolved.

Perhaps I ought to make it clear that the present work is based on the *Theoria Mikesiana*.

1) The holder of this theory is satisfied to find a book in a drawer when it is needed and does not care a damn where it may have been in the meantime. If it has had a jolly good time on its own, good luck to it.

2) The holder of this theory starts worrying only when he actually *does not find the book in the drawer.* In such a case the thought might occur to the Founder that

- a) he never put the book in the drawer in the first place; or
- b) someone – most probably the Founder's daughter, Judy – removed it.

The *Theoria Mikesiana* asserts that all the people one meets

and talks to and has meals with are real and do, in fact, exist. If they do not, it is their worry.

The Theory further asserts that if a man gives you a cheque, he is a real man. It is, alas, often not a real cheque, but this, strictly speaking, is not a problem of philosophy.

The Theory asserts that if you fall down and hurt your back either a) you feel real pain, or b) you *think* you feel real pain. In such a case go to a doctor and ask him to do something a) to stop the pain or b) to make you *think* that he has stopped it.

I cannot claim much for this little book; but I may claim – proudly and with head erect – that it is not a work of philosophy.

\* \* \*

I must also warn the reader that it is going to be an obscene book. Not sexually obscene – it is not easy to be sexually obscene in post-Chatterley Britain. Fill your book with four-letter words of the type which but a few years ago made the more sensitive kind of drill-sergeant blush, and the teenage maiden of today will yawn in boredom. But talk about someone's *Weltanschauung* in decent company, and you will never be invited again. Put it down in writing – and hint, as I am doing now, that your book is going to reflect it – and your readers will be horrified. (The word does not even exist in English. This most imperialistic and rapacious of languages – which roamed over five Continents from Peru to India and from Spain to China and purloined words, phrases and ideas wherever it found them, shied away from *Weltanschauung*. The English did not need even the *word*; not even for denouncing the notion.)

It has been said – and repeated *ad nauseam* – that the British are *empirical* while foreigners (i.e. the rest of humanity) are *theoretical*. *Empirical* means: being guided by the results of



experiment only. The other fellows are guided by principles and past experience which is not only wrong but downright ridiculous. A typical English boast (never actually put in so many words): in two world wars we started to prepare for war only when we were already three-quarters beaten. The conclusion (which, of course, is never drawn) seems to be: there is some intrinsic value in entering world wars unprepared. Nay: is it not unsafe to prepare? If in a third war Britain is not only three-quarters but totally beaten before she starts her preparations in earnest, that will be due to the fact that the foreigner is *theoretical*. To be theoretical isn't cricket; it is hitting below the belt and quite definitely against the Queensberry Rules. So losing the war would not really count. (As the loss of the Empire does not really count either, for technical reasons.)

\* \* \*

Finally, this book is unorthodox on yet another count: it reflects a great deal of optimism and faith in mankind. I am almost ashamed to admit it but I do not despair of the world. In spite of being dubbed a humorist, I am not a melancholy creature, ready to burst into tears whenever I have a few minutes to spare. I do not hate the guts of humanity; sometimes I even feel part of it myself. I know that the compulsory pose for a modern humorist is to observe the world with a wry and condescending smile, noticing how detestable people are but – wise and tolerant fellow that you are – ready to forgive mankind. I wish I could be a little more sorrowful and dejected. But what am I to do if I rather *like* people? I do not feel superior to them; I do not feel inferior to them. I do not feel contempt for them, however fashionable a feeling contempt may be. I do not pity them and do not regard them as stupid. Some, admittedly, are pretty dim; others are more

intelligent than all the humorists of the world put together. I just *like* people. I do not even hanker after solitude. I am glad other people are alive at the same time as myself and share this century with me. I wish about a dozen or so had chosen another century – there are so many centuries, why pick on this? – but I am prepared to put up even with them.

I respect, even admire, the prophets of gloom but as far as I am concerned humanity is looking forward to a rosy future.

I am the man who says in a drought: 'It's better than a flood.' Who remarks in a heat-wave: 'Well, it's better than freezing,' and in the middle of an arctic spell: 'It's better than a heat-wave.' I am the man who catches a cold and is glad that it is not flu; and when he catches flu rejoices that it is not cholera; who catches cholera and says: 'Well, this is better than dying,'; who breaks a leg and rejoices that he has not broken both. I am the man who falls out of the window from the thirty-seventh floor and on the way down heaves a sigh of relief as he passes the tenth floor: 'It's been all right so far. Not to worry!'



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## Part I

# PRIVATE WORLDS

## The Age of Ringo

THIS age has been called many names – it has been called the Age of Suspicion, the Age of Fear, the Age of Longing, etc, etc, but I used to think no label fitted it better than the Age of Hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the desire to seem more virtuous than one really is. But this age, on second thoughts, is not hypocritical. Hypocrisy has, at least, the virtue of trying to *seem* good. The pretence of virtue – where virtue is lacking – may be repugnant but at least it reflects an appreciation of values. Our age, however, does not care one way or another. The not very attractive phrase ‘I couldn’t care less’ originated in the twenties but it is our own age which raised this contemptuous shrug of the shoulder to the rank of a new faith. Indeed: *Weltanschauung*. Ours is the Age of Couldn’t-Care-Less.

Religious discussion in the past could always spark off violent controversy; tempers rose to boiling point in no time. But declare today that there is no God and people – atheists and believers alike – will give you a bored look. It is only a few years since Mrs Margaret Knight’s radio-talks (suggesting simply that true morality needs no religious basis) threw a considerable part of our population into a frenzy and the air

resounded with indignation, even abuse; today her lectures would pass unnoticed. What is even more remarkable, rationalists and atheists – a vociferous and most excitable race in the past – are not very militant either. No one attacks organised religion or unorganised godlessness with any great fervour and people whose livelihood is not threatened (like that of archbishops, bishops, church-organists, etc) do not seem to care one way or another.

The terrifying truth is that there is not very much difference between believers and atheists. The majority of people call themselves believers, fulminate against the godless, and though they do not go to Church except on special occasions, they maintain that they do believe in God. Atheists may base their rejection of the Deity on diverse grounds but, when pressed, most of them would admit that while they cannot accept the traditional image of God as painted by organised religions, they are prepared to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being or Force who may have started it all and who, in some vague manner, presides over the Universe. What is the difference then? Some people (we may disregard the comparatively few practising Christians and Jews of this country) do not pray and avoid the churches, but believe in a vague Father Figure and call themselves Deists; others do not pray either, also avoid the churches, accept the possibility of a vague Father Figure and call themselves atheists.

The very idea of abolishing capital punishment roused the country to fury not long ago; but recently hanging was abolished without much fuss. Even those conservative ladies in fancy hats do not seem to care much nowadays whether violent criminals are flogged or not. They have their preferences, of course, but they can no longer wax indignant. The idea of permitting homosexual acts between consenting males in private still engenders some heat; but in a year or two such a law will reach the statute book almost unnoticed.

Or take politics. Russian Communism is now miles away from Stalinist Orthodoxy. The Russians and their East European allies are much more interested in earning hard currency from Western tourists than in destroying capitalism and hastening the withering away of their own states. Western Socialists are inclined to forget their Marxist origins and Conservatives are keen on showing their progressive – in other words changing – non-conservative face. They do not even bother to keep up the appearance of remaining true to their original programmes; they couldn't care less.

The great issues of the present are colonialism, starvation and racialism. Racial problems are the only ones that are being taken seriously and are debated – or fought out – with conviction – coupled with a great deal of blindness, stupidity and hysteria. Colonialism has become an empty slogan and a sham issue. New nations are gaining independence at an alarming rate (alarming for them, not for the former colonial powers); and starvation is too great a problem for the individual citizen to worry about. You may grow angry with your coloured neighbour or, if you are a coloured person, you may resent the smugness and intolerance of your white landlady; but what are you to do about 300,000 starving Pakistanis in Pakistan? Send a cheque to Oxfam? Very well, you do send a cheque. What next? You may get worked up if a small stretch of your land is compulsorily purchased for road-building; if the building societies raise their interest rates; if you get caught in a bus strike. But you cannot get emotional about the H-bomb. If you are able to keep your perspective, you find that issues are all either too petty and silly to worry about, or much too big. There is nothing in between.

Whether you take religion, politics, capital punishment, flogging, sex or the Bomb, this is the Age of Couldn't-Care-Less. The Thirties were different. Fascism was a threat and



*Raves*



an ideology; it was of real importance. But what is ideological about the H-bomb? It's like the Great Plague in the Middle Ages. You may have rejoiced when it hit your enemies and left your part of the world intact; but you could not be *for* the Great Plague or *against* it. The Spanish Civil War was a fundamental issue; the Nazis may have been criminal psychopaths bidding for world-domination but, by God, they *mattered*. Today Hitler's prominence has been taken over by the Beatles. Is this a change for the better?

At first sight it seems difficult to choose between Hitler and the Beatles. Their hair-styles are somewhat similar; they provoke the same mass-hysteria; both started out as revolutionaries, appealing to important but neglected social classes. Politically the Beatles are more successful: they have succeeded where Hitler failed: they have achieved world domination. The Beatles on the whole are perhaps less dangerous. Their sheer presence might – on occasion – endanger life and limb but they will not provoke a world war. (Mods and Rockers might; the Beatles never.) The Beatles 'repertoire' is a little more monotonous than Hitler's although he, too, had a tendency to sing the same old tunes over and over again. But Hitler reigned supreme in an Age of Frenzy, while the Beatles reign in this Age of Couldn't-Care-Less. Few would deny that the Beatles are much, much nicer; but Hitler was, undoubtedly, the better entertainer.

## Birth

BIRTH is an important event in most people's lives. Few of us would be the same if we had not been born.

Birth is a very dangerous event. Not for the mother; for

her it is – if this be the right expression – child's play. It is dangerous for the newly born. Few people actually remember their birth; only Sir Compton Mackenzie and a few others, blessed by what is called total recall, can remember all the details. The event is dangerous in the sense that birth exposes us to the perils of death. Only those comparatively few people who are actually born, are threatened with death. Those countless millions who – by hook or by crook – succeed in avoiding this accident are spared all the unpleasantness of life, from tooth-ache and mosquito-bites to paying taxes, and they will never, never die. Indeed, the only safe way of achieving immortality is to remain unborn. Being born is the first mistake one commits in life.

*When to be born? Where to be born?* These and similar problems require a great deal of thought and careful planning. They should be considered *before* birth. To contemplate them after birth is almost useless. I cannot go into all the details here (this would require a full-length *Handbook for the Unborn* or else would require a person's full working time in an *Advice Bureau for Unborn Citizens*). However, here are the two main considerations:

1) WHEN TO BE BORN? I have already mentioned the difficulty of choosing the right century. It is, however, a popular pastime to select in imagination the era you would like to have lived in. The era of Pericles in Athens is very popular; so is the age of Louis XV in France; others again prefer Victorian England. It can always be taken for granted that the speaker in such cases visualises himself a) a free citizen of Athens, a personal crony of Pericles, delivering impressive speeches in the *agora*; and *not* a slave, beaten and kicked around; or b) a courtier, wearing a powdered wig and having a clandestine affair with the Pompadour or Madame Du Barry, and *not* a blind beggar in Montmartre, nor even a butcher at Avignon, plagued by taxes; or c) a prosperous and

stern Victorian father ordering his children about (who do not dare to speak until spoken to, unlike his real children today who tell him where to get off), and *not* a child of six likely to be pushed up chimneys at frequent and regular intervals. In all ages of history it was advisable to be affluent.

I personally have chosen the present century after careful consideration, for the following reasons:

a) I love my mother. In order to have my mother as my mother I had to be born in the second decade of the present century as this was the time when she got married. I should hate the idea of my own mother giving birth to perfect strangers, while I myself had for a mother some woman I do not even know.

b) Had I lived in the Athens of Pericles – even as a well-to-do, free citizen – I should have been dead now for roughly 2,400 years. What is so attractive in *that*?

c) I like comfort and no era can beat ours for bodily comfort. I have toyed with the idea of choosing the 21st century which might be still better. But it is hard to tell. A few H-bombs might fall and put the plumbing of many, many lavatories out of order for weeks and weeks on end.

2) WHERE TO BE BORN, or – as it is more often put – where to live, is the second important consideration. Humanity, on the whole, may be divided into two groups:

a) Those who could not possibly live anywhere else except where they actually live; and

b) those who would prefer to live practically anywhere else.

One often meets people from, say, Sydney or Vancouver, who just ‘would not be able to live anywhere else’. There are others who could not visualise life anywhere else than at Morcomb Springs, Alabama, or Appenzell, Switzerland. It is all right, they say, to *visit* Paris or California, and one can easily spend a few days in Florence or in London, but for *living* – no, only at Morcomb Springs or Appenzell.

How many times have I heard the remark: oh, yes, I quite like New York but I simply could not *live* there. He would probably jump off the roof of the Empire State Building if he were forced to live in New York; or just wither away in melancholy. Eight million people manage to exist in New York; but he could not. It is, once again, the question of being a free citizen or a slave. I have never heard anyone say: 'If I were a multi-millionaire, I might be able to put up with New York. But if I had to live in Harlem, sharing a bed with two others, and working down-town as a Negro dustman, well, then, I prefer my seven-roomed flat in South Kensington.'

This is cheating, the reader may object. It is understood, of course, that one would pursue one's own occupation. Very well. But why is it so much nicer to be an insurance clerk in the City than in Wall Street? Just because the salary is so much lower? To this, the customary reply is: it's not that, but the whole rhythm of life is so different there. But does not the rhythm of rush-hour on the subway vaguely resemble the rhythm of rush-hour on our underground? It may be slightly more ferocious with a Wild-Western touch, but there is really not much to choose between the two. You have to be a real connoisseur of rush hours to be able to declare a preference.

The other type of person would go absolutely anywhere, just to be able to leave home. These people spend their time planning moves, emigrating, immigrating, re-emigrating, exchanging notes and collecting information on the climate and the income-tax rates of faraway places. I am not speaking now of those who have good, sometimes compelling, reasons for moving. I am talking of those who leave their home simply because it is their home. I am talking of *stayers* and *movers*.

I do not know how many unborn infants are going to read this work. But to those who do, my advice is this: never mind where you are born but try to be the type who just

could not possibly live anywhere else but where you are actually living. This would mean that you are a person content with life and with your circumstances; and also that you are a person who loves himself. All human beings are in dire need of love. If you can give yourself nearly all the love you require – if you are self-supporting in this field – you will find that you are as independent as a human being can possibly become.

## On Being Important

SEE to it that you are important.

The world is divided into V.I.P.s (Very Important Persons) and U.U.P.s (Utterly Unimportant Persons).

The small child of a second cousin of the Queen is a V.I.P. The second cousin of a licensed victualler from Nuneaton or the second cousin of a dishwasher from Llangollen is a U.U.P. Some selfish people fail to realise this, just because they are of some importance to themselves.

It is true that if you kick a U.U.P. it will hurt him just as much as a similar kick would hurt a V.I.P. The only difference being that the unimportant person is likely to be kicked more often and much harder. Unimportant tears will be just as bitter as important tears but they are shed more frequently.

There are also important and unimportant nations. Two million Indians starving to death are not terribly exciting because they are the extreme cases of U.U.P.s. Besides, they are used to starving to death. Admittedly, starving to death needs some getting used to, but they do have tremendous practice.

After a disaster in which two people have been killed, we

are supposed to rejoice that the death-roll was not twenty or two hundred. Whereas at reports that the American forces have killed a hundred Vietcong guerillas, we are supposed to be upset because it was not two hundred or five hundred. We often receive 'satisfactory' reports about the recession of an epidemic, saying that only three people died on the day before. But we rarely hear (as that Hungarian sage, Karinty, pointed out) any dead man remark: 'How delightful. Only one man has died today: myself.'

Of course, three deaths are better than 30, 30 are better than 300 and 300 are a trifle compared to 3,000. And three deaths may be a mere 0.0023 per cent of the total population of a community. But for each of the three who died, the death-rate is a hundred per cent. He will be a hundred per cent dead. All people - V.I.P.s and U.U.P.s alike - have only one life each. *One*. Perhaps V.I.P.s should have 1.35 and U.U.P.s only 0.78 of a life. But they all have just one.

## On the Oppression of Children

A SHORT while after your birth, with a little bit of luck, you become a child. And then you belong to a persecuted minority.

I am not talking of babies at the moment. I need not waste too many words on the defence of babies; they do not need any protection, they can look after themselves pretty well. I have never liked babies although I used to be a baby myself. Babies are selfish, inconsiderate, ill-mannered and tyrannical; and they are usually ugly. They also bring out the worst and meanest in human nature: they turn people into inveterate liars. People look at a frog-like creature, wrinkled, yellow and seemingly a hundred and five years old - and faint left and



*V.I.P vs U.U.P*

right with delight, shrieking that they have never seen anything so lovely. Babies keep on howling for hours, waking you in the middle of the night, throwing their socks out of their prams two hundred and fifty times running – in other words they behave in such a way that any normal human being with decent and natural reactions wishes to strangle them. What can you do?

a) Pick them up (the babies, not the socks), smile at them, sing to them, say how sweet they are, talk idiotic baby-language to them – in other words degrade yourself and lie again; or

b) strangle them.

Neither behaviour is morally correct.

\* \* \*

Abolish babies altogether. They are a nuisance. It is utterly different with children. Children are all right and very lovable. They also have my sympathy because they belong to a persecuted minority, like coloured people and women – to mention the two most obvious groups.

People oppress others for a number of complex reasons, perhaps the most important being a strong desire to establish their non-existent superiority. Why being superior should inspire us to oppress our inferiors instead of being helpful and kind to them, instead of guiding and teaching them, is another question. To different groups we react differently. The more they need our help, the less are we ready to grant it to them. Coloured people we simply hold down (as long as it is safe to do so); women we treated with so-called chivalry – seemingly the smug condescension of the strong towards the weak, but in fact the bribery offered by the weak to the strong; our children we profess to love but we oppress them even more cruelly – but more subtly – than these other categories.





*What can you do?*

Another important reason for oppressing others is fear of competition. We prevent Negroes and women from performing certain tasks, declaring that they are not competent to do them, simply because we fear that, in fact, they are more competent than we are. About children we *know* they are better at many things than we are. A great deal has been written of the relationship between man and child. But there is no 'relationship': man is a child, child is a man. We are all extremely childish but *we are jealous of the child, knowing that he is incomparably better at childishness than we can ever hope to be.* We never grow up and there is no reason why we should. The only difference between children and adults is that of size.

A little boy decides that he wants to become a pilot when he grows up. The pilot in his eye is not a superior type of bus-driver (as the little boy would not mind being a bus-driver either, it would not make much difference if he was). The pilot is a man of power and glory, a man who soars in the air over the heads of others, a man envied and admired by all. The little boy wants power, glory and admiration – so he resembles a normal adult who wants, exactly the same things, all the time, throughout his life.

But men are interested in important matters and children are not – you may object. This is not true. Men are interested in selling shirts or making spare-parts for lawnmowers or writing books while children play with marbles and build sandcastles. But playing marbles is just as important to the child as selling a shirt is to his father. The family may live on the father's shirts but this only means that his shirt-selling is more useful to him than his child's marble-playing. All this has nothing to do with real importance. Why should I think that the book I am writing will be more important and will last longer than a sandcastle? Some books do, and some people's work *is* truly important, but they belong to a tiny and negligible minority. Adults, admittedly, produce food

and industrial articles, distribute them, sell them, police our streets, lock up our criminals if they catch them, cure our sick unless they kill them and they make life feasible, often agreeable. Granted. The real point is not what people *do*; it is their attitude to themselves. They are just as vain, just as self-deluding, just as boastful as children. They need love praise and reassurance just as much as toddlers. It is indeed their own shortcomings and failings they try not to notice in their children. They pretend to be different; but they are not.

\* \* \*

Not all children play; but almost all grown-ups do. They play golf and tennis and darts and bridge and whist and Monopoly and football. Some do not even play but just watch others playing and howl at them and throw bottles at them – behaviour no self-respecting child would indulge in. If a child sees others playing he wants to join in. But of course children are rarely allowed to join in. I play a great deal of tennis myself; children are not allowed on the courts because they would spoil our ‘serious’ game. Even little dogs are not permitted to chase the ball although, I fear, it would be more appropriate and natural for a poodle to chase the ball than for an obese Q.C. of fifty-five.

And we play outside the golf-courses, tennis-courts, pubs and card-rooms, too: we play throughout our lives. We try to seem important; we are snobbish; we endeavour to impress one another; we buy big cars and imply: ‘Look how rich and important I am!’; when we drive our cars we race each other as little children race one another on their tricycles; we lie; we constantly try to outshine one another. Our manners may have changed – superficially – since the age of five; our basic behaviour, our attitudes and ambitions have remained the same. A man is a child; a child is a man.

Only that the child – as I have said – does all these things much better. It is, of course, easy for him to beat us at childishness. He starts with a natural advantage. He has more charm and acts with more sincerity. He does not hide his aggressive instincts: if he wants to kick little Paul, he goes and kicks him. When we want to kick Big Paul, we disguise our kick as a helpful, friendly and noble act; we pretend to act from higher motives; or we pretend that the kick is really in Paul's interest or that our action is righteous and justified. When the child puts on fancy dress, he struts up and down and shouts: 'See, how wonderful I look!' We, so-called grown-ups, put on morning coats and tails, and fancy uniforms and academic gowns and wigs and peers' robes and follow the idiotic and arbitrary instructions of fashion-designers of questionable taste, decorate ourselves with precious stones and have our ears pierced, we tivate our moustaches, tint our hair and stick on false eyelashes – yet we lack the sincerity to call out: 'Look, what a fine figure I cut!' We say it without words, with clumsy shyness and hypocritical modesty. The child when he jumps across a narrow ditch or manages to walk along the top of a narrow wall (ten inches high) has the decency to ask for our admiration, wishing to be told how wonderfully brave he is. We perform similar feats all our lives, expecting the same shrieks and shouts of admiration without asking for them in clear honest words.

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I do not see why children should put up with our treatment. Negroes fight back; women organised Feminist Movements; why don't children organise themselves into a Puerile Movement? They are worse off than the rest: not all females are coloured; not all coloured are females; but all coloured people and all females are children some time. (It is true, on

the other hand, that the children grow out of their disability. Others do not.) Why do they tolerate being ordered about? Being told (when they ask *why?*) 'because I told you so'; being bullied, humiliated, laughed at? Why do they tolerate blackmail by love and tears and maternal sorrow – the worst of all blackmails? (If you are the victim of normal blackmail, at least you feel outraged and that helps; but if you make your mother cry, you feel guilty and that makes it worse.) Why do children tolerate off-hand treatment and low wages? (I know a few toddlers whose pocket-money is a penny for each of their years. How can you expect a four-year-old to live on fourpence a week?)

Children should revolt. I know that many do and take action *individually*. They refuse, for example, to drink their milk or eat their lunch. Very good, most impressive. But only *organised* action can combat parental tyranny effectively. The country is full of Parents' Organisations: why not Children's Trade Unions? Imagine the effect if the spokesman of British Pueriles announced to the press that on next Wednesday all British children between the ages of three and eight would refuse to drink their milk? Or that all children between five and fifteen would refuse to eat spinach for a week? Or they would refuse to do their homework or sit for O-Levels unless they got a rise of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent in their pocket-money – whatever the National Income Commission may say to that. Imagine the Transport and General Workers' Union coming out in support of the B.T.P.T.U. (British Toddlers' and Pueriles' Trade Union) and refusing to carry parents on buses and on the underground trains, in sympathy. The B.T.P.T.U. could easily be affiliated with the T.U.C. If trade unionists keep behaving like toddlers and children, I really fail to see why toddlers and children should not behave like trade unionists.

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*Childishness* simply means normal, human behaviour, the behaviour of all of us, between the ages of three and ninety-three. (Under and above these ages we are babies, cf. beginning of this chapter.) Being truly childish simply means being sincere, aggressive, wilful, boastful, generous, cruel, kind, silly, snobbish, impulsive, gay and happy. In other words, being human. Yet, we keep using the word *childish* – this most complimentary of all adjectives in our language – in a pejorative sense.

### On Professional Deformities

ONCE I asked a little boy of six what he would like to be when he grew up. He replied without a moment's hesitation:

‘A suffragan bishop or an ombudsman.’

I was a little surprised: ‘Not a cable-car designer, by any chance?’

He frowned. His frown was worthy of an ombudsman: ‘I’ve just told you: a suffragan bishop or an ombudsman.’

Perhaps he was a precocious little boy. Perhaps he knew his mind better than most little boys of his age; even better than most grown-ups. Some people decide earlier on their careers than others. At the age of twelve, I knew that I wanted to become a writer and never wavered – except in these last five or six years when I should have preferred to be the owner of a vast industrial empire. My sister – two years my junior – also knew her mind: she was determined even as a child to become a doctor. On the other hand we had two second cousins who had no idea what they wanted to do in life. Today, forty years later, they still have not made up their minds.

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You may think: what a nice little boy (the would-be suffragan bishop/ombudsman) is. He wants to be a clergyman because he is religious, humble and virtuous. And if he cannot serve Mother Church, he wants to see justice done among his fellow men and to protect them from the excesses of bureaucracy.

You may be right. Undoubtedly there are some people who choose their professions on such meritorious grounds. They must be few and far between but they do exist. But, I am afraid, you most probably would be nearer the mark if you said this: What a detestable little wretch. He wants to be a clergyman because, like most clergymen, he has an incurable superiority complex. Most of these people keep talking sanctimoniously of humility but they are convinced that they are cut above ordinary humanity; that they have a special relationship with God; that they are God's own representatives on earth: a bit of God themselves. But this little horror does not want to be just a clergyman: he wants to *start* as a bishop. He does not even pretend he wants to *serve*, he wants to rule. And he wants to be a *suffragan* bishop: he wants to shine without accepting any responsibility for his see; he wants the glory but rejects the duties that go with it. Wanting to become an ombudsman is even worse. He wants to order others about. The post will be a new one in all the glare of publicity. Bureaucracy is mighty but he is determined to be even mightier: a source of bureaucracy.'

Pondering over these lines I invented a nasty little game. The disturbing thing about it is that it contains more than a grain of truth. It is a game of Professional Deformities. This does not sound nice but then it *isn't* nice. The idea is simply this: *all* professions deform your character. You start, of course, with some original, inborn deformity which, most probably, will make you choose your career. Nobody becomes a hangman by sheer chance, just because there

happened to be a vacancy. No one becomes a prison-warder or a book-keeper, a railway clerk or a sanitary inspector, a tramp or a lieutenant-general by chance either. Once your job has been chosen by you – or taking your inborn deformities into account: once a job has chosen you – it will go on deforming your character further.

Take a seemingly modest barrister who is raised to the bench. From that moment he is surrounded by nauseating sycophancy. He is dressed like a mediaeval court jester; throughout his working life he looks down upon people from his lofty seat. A great deal depends on his decisions: people may get ruined or become rich as a result of his words; they might be sent to prison or (until recently) to their graves. As soon as he opens his mouth, a chorus of 'Yes, my Lord', 'Certainly, my Lord', 'As your Lordship pleases', begins to bleat. His jokes are always laughed at and his most fatuous *obiter dicta* are solemnly quoted. Is it really remarkable that – unless he is a quite exceptional human being – he becomes a pompous fool inclined to believe that he is getting no more than his due? Can you blame him if he feels like a God walking on this earth – a planet not quite worthy of him?

Well, I am sure you see what I am driving at. So let us examine a few more professions, trades and jobs. You may afterwards continue on your own: all professions are fair game.

Being a doctor – an ordinary G.P. – tends also to bring out the godlike in people. Because the doctor tries to cure people, he is inclined to believe that it is he who distributes health and illness among ordinary mortals. He is a Knower of Secrets – secrets of the human body and secrets of mysterious medicines – secrets which are vitally important to his patients. As he can kill or preserve life – and does both frequently – he feels that he is a Master of Life and Death, like God Almighty Himself. He can afford to be gruff, impatient and tell everyone – well, almost everyone – where to



get off. The poor old-age pensioner, lying on a hospital bed, who timidly asked the consultant as he made his tour of the ward: 'Excuse me, sir, I know it is none of my business, but how am I?' knew and understood doctors. The patient is there to suffer. He is an indispensable piece of the background. His job is to be impressed and – in more ambitious hospitals – to serve as raw material for experiments, but otherwise he is unimportant.

Doctors, like judges, are used to giving peremptory orders or, in the best case, leaving their instructions cryptic. They are men of authority; they expect to be obeyed, not to be questioned. In due course they, themselves, begin to believe in their infallibility.

The case of a teacher is still worse. He is not really just a pleasant, amiable fellow to whom we entrust 'our greatest treasure'. He is very often a person with a tremendous feeling of inferiority who insists on being surrounded by his inferiors. It is only in the company of children that he feels safe; he will always know more than they; they will always look up to him (or her, of course). Among children he is a giant, both in stature and in intellect. He is, for them, a godlike phenomenon.

Actors who stand in the limelight night after night or appear on the screen larger than life, and whose every movement and gesture is critically watched or admired by thousands, cannot be blamed if they become even more egocentric than the rest of us. Their job is to please; so their preoccupation in private life becomes also to please, to enchant and to be applauded. They always speak other people's lines, so they cease to have lines of their own.

Lawyers tend to become narrow-minded. The better they are at their job, the more narrow-minded they tend to become. The law is a science of reality. It is not interested in what the rules *ought to be*, but simply in what they are. If

lawyers discover a valid precedent dating from the 13th century, then that is the law. As a result of this, the worst of all reactionaries are to be found among lawyers: they are determined to oppose any change in the law (and in everything else). *Change* and *law* are contradictions in term. The law is what it is and if you change it – many lawyers feel – it ceases to be the law. It is not hatred of humanity but a love of the law which makes them insist that people should be hanged if they steal property valued at more than five shillings; that people, in general, should be punished, and yesterday's crimes should remain tomorrow's crimes; that ancient and meaningless rules and procedures should be kept in force. Their world is perhaps not the best of all possible worlds but everything that *is*, is real; the very idea of *ought to be* belongs to the realm of dreamers, fools, cranks and – worst of all – academic lawyers. This mentality cuts deep: as a result of it lawyers are, as a rule, exceedingly conventional in *all* their views. In fact, in no other profession can people rise so high while uttering so many platitudes and dull conventionalities as lawyers.

Lawyers are also accustomed to briefs. You give them your cause and they embrace it. They are like the mercenary warriors of the middle ages. Their cause depends on who hires them. The cause comes first, arguments for its justice are to be found later; and had the other party approached them first, the villains of the present case would be its heroes, its heroes the villains. Thus solicitors and barristers may make excellent advocates – in the wider sense of the word; they make outstanding members of borough councils; effective party politicians, provided someone else works out the programmes for them. They perform their task in hand with such zeal and brilliance that few people notice that their personal judgment, their individuality, their originality have completely disappeared – if they ever existed.

Let us go to an utterly different field and take a worker in the motor car industry who keeps turning a screw or moulding the same tiny spare part all his working life – like the hero of Chaplin's *City Lights*. A single screw may be important, indeed indispensable, for the motor car but what is the true relationship between a screw and the entire motor vehicle? Exactly the same as the relationship between that particular worker and society. He is a screw – an essential yet unnoticed part of the whole. That is how he comes to see himself and he will be determined to be noticed. It is no good exhorting these workers 'to think of the nation', to 'put the national economy first', to 'work for the community'. When the great test came during the war, they responded magnificently; but at ordinary times a screw has little in common with the finished Rolls Royce. A wildcat strike of unskilled riveters or luggage-porters or van-drivers is simply loosening a bolt on the wheel: it is the desperate attempt of the screw to seem important; it is the part's spite against the whole; the grim determination of the small component to wreak vengeance on the whole for not being larger than it is. You may not think of those bolts on your wheel too often; but they are remembered and appreciated all right when the wheel comes off and the passengers get hurt. These are the bolt's finest hours.

Policemen, prison warders, sergeant-majors, overseers – petty men wielding power – are minor gods, too. If a man cannot order you about, he can, at least, keep you waiting unnecessarily, as many post office clerks do, to show who is master. Dustmen's lorries blocking the street make the dustmen the rulers of that street. If one cannot even hold up others, one can at least make a bored face to show who is important and who is not. The aim of people – with very few exceptions – is to exercise power, cut a grand figure and boss others. If a man is a brute, he becomes Jack the Ripper; if

he has a fine intellect and real skill to go with his sadistic instincts, he may become a surgeon of repute (although, of course, not all surgeons are sublimated sadists); if he is adventurous, he plans the Great Train Robbery; if he is more cautious by nature but wants to waste *real* money (not a trifling two million pounds) he invents the Groundnuts Scheme and similar enterprises. It is all the same: really we are *all* in the same business.

\* \* \*

And what about writers? What about other artists? In a sense they are the opposite of lawyers, at the other end of the scale to be sure, but not a whit better. *They* never accept a brief, that is true. Indeed, they believe that they are called upon to supply briefs to the rest of mankind. They are free-lance people, have no bosses, exactly like God. In fact, they are slightly better than God: God just happens to have no boss, yet Christ had his Father. But the writer tolerates no boss, not even his father or any other authority. His freedom to speak his mind – perhaps an ingenious, perhaps a silly mind – is regarded by him as the supreme law of the universe. If the need arises, all the lawyers, car-workers, prison-warders, tally-clerks, licensed victuallers, lorry-drivers, tramps, suffragan bishops and ombudsmen: in short the whole of humanity must be called upon to defend the writer's freedom to preach sedition and to use four-letter words. The writer is not even impressed if they do so: humanity, by fighting for him, is doing no more than its duty.



*Professional deformity*

## God-Complex

WE have seen that all professions have one thing in common: their pursuers believe they possess God-like qualities. So, to understand lawyers, policemen, clerks, dustmen, and judges – well, everyone – better, we must examine the idea of God more closely.

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All little children want to be God when they grow up. And by the time they have grown up, they think that they have achieved their ambition. The God-complex is the ardent desire cherished by many people to become God; or their firm belief that they are.

Man created God in his own image. God had to be everything Man is striving to be: immortal, omniscient and all-powerful. God possesses all the minor virtues, too: He is very clever, generous and rich; He is good at languages, a superb cook and astonishingly good at golf. We believe that our religion (or rather religions, because we have several hundreds of them, all claiming infallibility) have developed a great deal since ancient times. This is a mistake: nothing has really progressed in this field, only circumstances have changed. Primitive man – we are told – was polytheist, we are monotheists. But why should this be progress? Why is it progress to worship one God instead of many? Where is the gain? Surely, there is a clear loss here: the loss of a large number of Gods. It is a pity that this should happen now, when we could *afford* more Gods than ever before – with temples and all the paraphernalia that go with them. It is remarkable that

in this modern age, when we are so keen on competition and condemn monopolistic, restrictive practices, we should be satisfied with one supreme God. It is even more remarkable that in this age of Democracy we should not wish to be governed by a Committee of Gods, with a chairman having the casting vote.

I have always thought that the religions of Greece and Rome, with their numerous, roguish Gods, permanently chasing women and busy with intrigue and personal vendettas, were the most human and poetic of all religions. It is fair to object that religion should not be human but divine; and poetry does not need to come into it at all. Be that as it may, the question is still left open: does modern humanity really believe in one single God? The truth is that people believe in many Gods: *everybody has his own personal God* – adjusted, trimmed and cut to size, according to personal requirements. There are as many Gods as there are people – which means about 3,000 million Gods. And they increase by several hundred thousand per day – though many of them die, too. The existence of these 3,000 million Gods is the basis of what we call monotheism.

God's character may remain an eternal mystery; but *your* God, to be sure, will reflect your own character. He will be wrathful or gentle; revengeful or forgiving; mean or generous; stern or humorous; exacting or understanding; He may be a bureaucrat of a God or the type of Deity with whom you can always stretch a point. It all depends on you – on your own character and personal requirements. You may – again, according to your character – admire His power more than His wisdom; you may be on formal or on intimate terms with Him. You may address Him as 'O Lord' or else may be on Christian name terms with Him. If you want to eat meat on Fridays but never – well, hardly ever – fornicate, you will hold that those old-fashioned dietary laws are of no

importance as long as you lead a moral life. (These days the word 'moral' means sexual morality and nothing else.) Should you, however, fornicate quite frequently but never eat meat on Fridays, then you will firmly believe that God forgives you for following your *own, higher type of moral code* – which is always the code that happens to suit you. (The man who hit upon the idea that fish is not meat, must have been a genius. I do not quite know what reasons and explanations he gave. Perhaps no one pressed for an explanation, the Church dignitaries were so eager to accept. The fact is that today there are millions of people who claim to be good Catholics on the sole basis that on Fridays they never eat steaks but confine themselves to smoked or fresh salmon, caviar, oysters, blue trout and sole *bonne femme*.)

God has his faults, too: indeed, He has your faults. He has His virtues: your virtues – real or desired. God is you. You are God.

The prophetess Alice Lenshina of Northern Rhodesia (as that country then was) caused some consternation when she declared that God is a black woman. As earlier theologians were white men, they had never doubted that God was a white man. *They* were God. But Alice Lenshina wanted to be God, too. And so do all other black women. And white men. And yellow children. Wanting to be God is nothing more than a human weakness.

### Do-it-Yourself God

GOD, as we have seen, is what we make Him. In this Do-It-Yourself Age we have created, in fact, a tremendous number of Do-It-Yourself Gods. But the organised religions refuse





*God is you*

to recognise this; they cling to the idea of the ancient God, invented by a primitive and humourless desert tribe. Mary McCarthy wrote of this God: 'Perhaps He exists. But I don't like Him.' That is the trouble, of course, and the sooner organised religion realises that the image of God is badly in need of modernising, the better it will be for organised religion. The Churches nowadays go in for all sorts of undignified public relations jobs, but neglect this most important one. They try to move with the times, however slowly. A time once came when the Churches gave up witch-hunts, stopped the Inquisition and abandoned their belief in a square world. The time has now come when in the interest of their own survival, they must give up the idea of the old-fashioned, wrathful, vain and ill-tempered God of the desert people and replace Him by a truly likeable and attractive Father-figure.

The first question we cannot avoid is: *should* organised religion survive at all? I am not keen on it personally; and should it disappear and go down the drain of history, few people (I mean amateurs and laymen) would notice it and still fewer regret it. I know that even today there are men with first-class brains who are ardent believers. But they are exceptions; besides, people of outstanding intellect can be, and often are, emotionally childish. By today, for most people, religion has become an issue hardly worth fighting for or against. Quite a few people believe that religion is fine for the other fellow – makes him virtuous and keeps him on the straight and narrow. But is religion really so good for the other fellow? It depends, of course, on the other fellow. To quote Mary McCarthy again: 'It [religion] is only good for good people.' Religion makes bad people even worse. It makes them self-satisfied; aggressive; conceited and smug; it convinces them that they have some special relationship with God, that they are inspired by God, consequently they

must be right about everything all the time. Religion makes them thoughtless and irresponsible, too: they never have to think and struggle with their consciences: all decisions are ready-made for them by dogma and by the Bible. In fact: absolutely everything they want to read into the Bible, can be found there. The Bible contains all possible views and also the exact opposite of all these views. As for good people, they remain humble and modest; kind and understanding; sensitive and sympathetic. But as they would be good people in any case, their religion is neither here nor there. Or, rather, it is *there*: as it does not make good people better but as it makes bad people worse it cannot, on the whole, claim to be an influence to the good. I personally should like to see religion relegated to a column in the popular Sunday papers – beside the astrological one.

So much for organised religion. But God is an utterly different proposition. Humanity created God when it was young and immature; they – God and humanity – grew up together. The trouble is that humanity grew up much faster than God. God, through no fault of His own, remained a curious, Oriental and singularly unattractive figure. His wrath is terrifying; He visits the crimes of the fathers on the sons; He expects you to wallow in the mud and pray to Him and to flatter Him outrageously. He has absolutely no sense of humour. We have innumerable jokes about bishops, saints, priests, and nuns, but not one single joke in which God delivers the punch-line. I am not particularly fond of practical jokes but is it not remarkable that God, with all that immense power of His, has never played a practical joke? Perhaps creating the porcupine came nearest to a practical joke – but then, again, along came Darwin, and explained that the porcupine had never really been created and so this joke, too, was spoilt. The idea that God loved humanity so much that He sent His only Son to die for it is a very strange notion. He

may have loved humanity; but He certainly did not care too much for His only Son. One just doesn't send one's only son to such a fate – particularly when one is all-powerful and omniscient.

It is high time that humanity gave God a completely new image. An outstanding, preferably American, firm of public relations consultants could make a first-class job of Him. Here is some guidance for that firm:

First: He is not a fierce, elderly gentleman with a long beard, but a handsome youth, with long hair. Something between James Bond and Ringo.

Second: He is kindly; He is modest; and He makes mistakes. Whenever He makes a mistake, He says *sorry* and compensates the victim. Preferably with cash. (God must have a lot of money.)

When you pray to Him, you forget all about that silly 'Thou' and 'Thee' business. You speak to Him courteously but in simple language. You do not tell Him: 'You are omniscient and perfect.' If He is, He knows all that. You do not tell Him: 'We are as insignificant as vermin in your sight; you are immortal and we are miserable, erring wretches.' You don't flatter anyone so crudely and do not humiliate yourself so abjectly; any decent God objects to such an attitude. Such flattery and self-humiliation is not good for the ego of either of you. You simply say: 'Dear God, may I please have a fiver urgently. I need it for booze (or women or groceries or the doctor's bill) and, after all, it costs you nothing. And even if it does, what is a fiver to God Almighty?' You joke with God; you pull His leg. You do not even think of Him as wrathful and fearful but as genial and jovial. Occasionally you wink at Him and He winks back. And you never – *never!* – refer to the painful fact that He sent His only Son to the earth on a mission that ended so disastrously. That was one of His early mistakes. You just don't rub it in.



*Do-it-yourself God*

And finally, some friendly advice to God Himself:

1) Do not punish sons for their fathers' – or even for their own – sins. Do not punish anybody. Declare a general amnesty.

2) Don't let children die of cancer. Or of hunger. I know that your job is no easier than most of ours and I know that you must keep up discipline. But the two calamities I have mentioned make more people doubt your wisdom and mercy more than anything else.

3) Perform a few miracles. Ever since scientific examination of all phenomena – and particularly of miracles – has become feasible, no miracles have occurred at all. A lot of cynical people maintain that it was easy to lead the Jews across the Red Sea in those days but just watch what the Arabs would do if a similar miracle occurred today. Or to put it even more bluntly: it was easy to perform miracles for those ignorant desert tribes but it would be more difficult to get away with them today. So it is obvious that we need a few good and convincing modern miracles. And for Goodness' sake: make them funny.

### On the Advantages of Being Persecuted

BUT God is not enough. I mean it is not enough for wretched and insecure humanity to strive toward a God-like image; it needs more reassurance than that. People must feel superior to one another, too. It is no use feeling God-like and being convinced that you are, in theory, superior, to everyone, if – coming down to individual cases – you are forced to admit that everybody you meet is, in fact, superior to you. The truth is that *everybody must be superior to everybody else*. This

does not seem to be an easy proposition; but on the whole it works.

No person can be so wretched, so low and so miserable that he cannot feel superior to some others. Beggars feel that they are cleverer than their benefactors because they are able to hoodwink them; prisoners feel – and often are – superior to their warders; slaves to their owners; office boys to the managing director; employees to their employers; privates to their sergeants; sergeants to their officers; parents to their children; children to their parents; pupils to their teachers; lavatory-attendants to lavatory-users. One of the basic rules of mankind is simply this: *everybody is a finer fellow than everybody else.*

Whenever we are faced with true greatness, our job becomes slightly more difficult. But we are equal to it. We can always seize on some weak point in a great man's make-up and compare ourselves with his weakness, not his strength. An eminent writer, for example, may stutter. *We* do not stutter, so – we feel – we can afford to patronise the eminent writer and refer to him as 'that poor chap'. So we win on points. We can always skate better than Jasha Heifetz, play the violin better than General de Gaulle, sing better in a choir than Harold Wilson and know more telephone numbers by heart than Jomo Kenyatta. Personally, I am a keen tennis-player, a professional writer of light literature and an ardent cook; and I shine in comparison with Roy Emerson, Graham Greene and the chef of the *Pyramides* at Vienne because I am a better cook than Roy Emerson, a better writer than the chef and a better tennis-player than Graham Greene.

Should you need further psychological crutches, persecute people. Persecuting people is, indeed, one of the true pleasures of life. You do not persecute people (Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Italians, Irish, etc) because you do not like them. You may or may not like them – that's entirely beside the

point. You do not persecute people in order to harm them but in order to help yourself. The main attractions of persecution are twofold:

1) It makes you belong. Take, for example, the case of the Poor Whites in the Southern United States. They may be ugly brutes, illiterate wretches with the stupidity, fear and ferocity of the lower animals written on their faces, poor devils; but as soon as it comes to Negro-baiting, they all rise on the social ladder: they suddenly become Whites. Whites, like the Southern aristocrats and the millionaires; Whites like the Bishop and the President. It all becomes 'we' and 'they', and the plantation-owner who despises and dislikes the white rabble more than his Negro servants (whom he neither despises nor dislikes) becomes their ally, their partner, their accomplice, their cousin.

2) Persecution is one of the simpler arts. It is not a difficult thing to do. It needs no education, no knowledge. It needs no courage. Anyone can become an efficient and successful persecutor of minorities simply by trying. And once you belong to a superior group (say to the White master-race) it does not matter what you *do*; all that counts is what you *are*. Once you were born white, you may become an idiot, a drunkard and a thief, you still remain white – and consequently remain superior to blacks. Indeed, the duller an idiot, the more hopeless a drunkard, the more often convicted a thief you may be, the more superior you will feel toward honest, sober and educated black people. And that is very, very good for your ego; in any case, it is about the only way you can boost it.

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But if it is good to persecute others, it is ten times better to be persecuted. The advantages of being persecuted are enormous. Of course, it has its drawbacks – indeed, its very





*Everybody is a finer fellow . . .*

nasty sides – but at the moment I am talking of its often forgotten advantages. The persecutor, after all, is a bully, a man of dark prejudices, a bigot and a reactionary while you – the persecuted – are an innocent victim and a noble martyr. But persecution does much more for you than merely ennoble you. It gives you the one gift which all humanity is striving for: it gives you a universal excuse for all your failures. A man I know – a shady, even crooked businessman who happens to be a Jew – was rejected by one of the West End Clubs. He explained afterwards that he had been turned down because the Committee was anti-Semitic (in other words, his rejection was their shame, not his). If a Negro who cannot sing in tune is rejected by the Metropolitan Opera he can always maintain that he was turned down on account of his race. If one of my own radio talks flops miserably, I attribute this failure to prejudice against my foreign accent. This way, you are always a wonderful fellow, better suited to any job than any of your rivals and it is always the circumstances of your birth and the blind prejudice of others which prevent you from reaching the top. If you really believe this, then life holds neither horrors nor disappointments for you.

Prejudice and persecution have written some of the darkest and most ignoble pages in human history; but – by keeping both persecutors and persecuted content – they have also contributed more to human happiness than they are given credit for.

### Sex

‘SEX is over-estimated in our lives.’ This is a fashionable saying nowadays. Considering the fact that without sex there

would be no life, it is not easy to see how sex can be over-estimated. Nevertheless, this age is supposed to be madly interested in sex. A friend of mine – a barrister – returning from a conference abroad decided to buy a light novel at Munich airport. At the huge bookstall, he complained, there was not a single book either in English or in German which was not semi (or entirely) pornographic. Perhaps an unimportant observation in itself; but, surely, a significant symptom. We hear so much about sex-crimes, the spread of four-letter words in literature, teenage sex, etc, etc, that we are inclined to believe that it is this generation – this Age of Affluence – that has discovered sex.

This is not so. Sex was already known in the Middle Ages. The early mediaeval Church Fathers were all obsessed with sex, could hardly think of anything else and condemned sexual practices three times a day, every day. Perhaps they did not like sex; but they certainly liked to talk about it. In any case, they did not succeed in extinguishing the practice entirely, not even among Christians although until Hyde Park was opened in London, sex used to be practised in private.

It is difficult to trace the origins of sex-practices. The Romans and the Greeks were ardent practitioners. Historians believe that it was the Phoenicians who invented sex. They invented it almost immediately after inventing the alphabet. In fact, the alphabet was nearly lost and forgotten because those early Phoenicians got so much more interested in sex than in writing. (It should be added in all fairness that the quality of their sex was much superior to the quality of their writing.)

It was the Babylonians who discovered that sex and literature far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary. Once dirty literature had thus been born, neither sex nor literature ever looked back.

Some people, while admitting that sex was not actually discovered by this age, insist that it is more exciting, more

important, more beautiful today than ever before. This, too, is a mistake. I stopped a number of people near Chelsea Bridge – as I have learnt to do from television interviewers – and asked them what they thought of this matter. I chose mostly elderly people, because it is only the elderly who can compare our age with former ages. Here are some of the replies:

W.B.S., accountant, aged 87: 'It is absolute nonsense. Sex was much better before the First World War. It was more important, too. Definitely more important.'

T.F.A., solicitor, aged 83: 'The truth is exactly the opposite. Sex has lost all its significance and excitement in the last thirty years. Say twenty-five. Well, say fifteen.'

P.M.B., retired haberdasher, aged 92: 'Women were much more beautiful and more desirable at the beginning of the century. Nowadays they are not worth looking at.'

\* \* \*

Our age also pays a great deal of attention to perversions. Sadism is the favourite, with lesbianism and male homosexuality as runners-up. Intercourse with birds and fishes is on the decline.



Flogging ladies – if this be the right expression – beats everything. Ladies of easy virtue who take part in this exercise, must wear black silk stockings and nothing else. I know from a trial I followed that the present market price is £1 per stroke, irrespective of whether you are receiving the lash or handing it out. With creeping inflation plus growing demand, the price is rising. In a few years' time, should the present trend and public interest last, we may have the Closing Prices in the daily press.

It is the treatment allotted to homosexuals which remains one of the great enigmas of this age. Female homosexuals are ignored, male homosexuals are punished – but not for long. As a punishment they are locked up in all-male prisons. Bank robbers are not locked up in banks full of freshly printed five pound notes; alcoholics are not locked up in gin-shops. But male homosexuals are locked up in all-male prisons *as a punishment*. If society, for atavistic reasons, insists on punishing them, surely they should be locked up in female prisons.

There is a layer of society which will never accept the tolerant treatment of homosexuals. The abolishment of capital punishment was a terrible blow to these people and the threatened introduction of some decent laws on homosexuality would be more than they could bear so soon afterwards. The law is slowly moving; but the flag of the Angry Purists is still flying. Their arguments have not changed much in the last two or three hundred years.

First of all they ask: what would happen to mankind if we *all* practised homosexuality? Humanity would die out. But why should we *all* practise homosexuality? Just because it is allowed? Would *they*, for example, practise it if it were allowed? Playing badminton is allowed, yet not all of us play badminton. I don't think legal tolerance would induce people to indulge in these practices any more than legal prosecution deters those who are fascinated and allured by the male body.

But if this objection is valid, homosexuals are true benefactors of humanity. Mankind is not exactly threatened by extinction through lack of birth; one of the most terrible threats of the future is, in fact, overpopulation. Homosexuals should really be cherished and hailed because they do nothing to aggravate this problem; homosexuals should be given medals. They are to be thanked and congratulated. In some Asian countries homosexuality should be made compulsory; and heterosexual practices severely punished.



Homosexuals – we often hear this as a further argument – should be persecuted because they are wicked. If they were decent people they would go to bed with women. Decent men go to bed with other people's wives, not with other people's husbands.

This argument has a great deal of truth in it. I knew a man who used to be a great ladykiller, quite mad on women. Then a series of misfortunates exasperated him and turned him against humanity. He decided to wreak vengeance on society. He was not sure how to do this but at last he hit upon an excellent idea: 'I've got it! I've got it!' he exclaimed. 'I'll

turn homosexual. That will teach 'em.' He gave up women and slept with men for about two years. Then his business picked up again, he won his appeal against the surtax people, so he ceased to have a grudge against society. After listening to a sermon on the wickedness of homosexuality, he began to see the error of his ways and now he sleeps with respectable ladies which makes him, once again, a decent member of society.



Homosexuality is unnatural – we are also told. It can't be, simply because a number of human beings practise it. Poor 'nature' is always called in. Catholics used to say that being a Protestant offended against the laws of nature; Protestants said the same about Catholics. But if someone sees a baby with two heads, he cannot call him unnatural. Rare perhaps, but not unnatural. To have two heads will be natural enough for that baby. What can he do about it?

Besides endocrinology has proved that in both men and women there is a variable balance of male and female sex hormones and subsequently they vary in their degree of masculinity and femininity.

If this is true – and it is – then it is wrong for a feminine male to love women. It is not only unnatural but it amounts to real homosexuality. For a feminine male to love a masculine male, whatever else it may be, is natural, bordering on the heterosexual.

\* \* \*

Looking into the problem of true heterosexual love, I should like to exhort my readers: practise it! Don't start it too early in life; do not be promiscuous; try to avoid becoming a sex-maniac. But practise it! Leading a sexless life will turn you into some sort of neurotic. Your neurosis may be very bad or not so bad; it may be terrible for you or worse for the people around you; in a few cases its effect may be beneficial for humanity as it may manifest itself in selfless and charitable activities. But neurosis it will still remain. So if we want to decrease tension, bitterness, frustration, envy, malice and hysteria in society, we must lead a normal sex-life. Sexual intercourse is not a sin: it is a patriotic and civic duty.



## Part II

# THE WORLD OF AFFLUENCE

### Light and Shade

THE post-war era has been dominated by two major developments – one favourable, the other pretty sinister: the Bomb and Affluence. The Bomb is the favourable development; Affluence the sinister.

If the Bomb explodes and destroys civilisation, that will not be unalleviated joy. But as long as the Bomb's main strength is what the strength of the British Navy used to be during the heyday of Empire – namely that it exists – it is a beneficial influence or, in the phraseology of the immortal authors of *1066 and All That*, a Good Thing.

It is a Good Thing because:

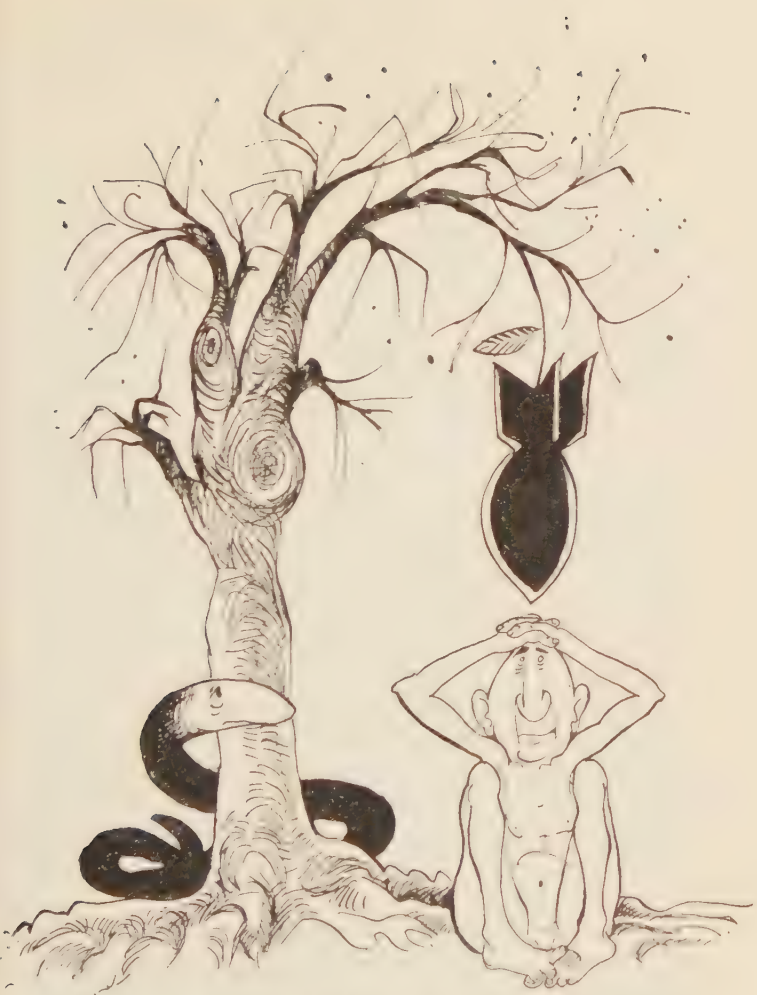
1) The Bomb improves us spiritually and intellectually. Nothing has ever concentrated the mind of humanity better than the thought that it might be hanged in a short while. Why humanity should be so much afraid of death, is not quite clear. Worse things could – and often do – happen to mankind than just perishing. Perishing itself is not really bad. You perish and that's that. It's all over and done with in no time and you have no more worries. There is no intrinsic value or joy in just existing, whether you are an individual, a Navy or mankind. Besides, a great physicist, whose judgment I value,

told me that even a nuclear holocaust will not necessarily destroy mankind. All people have to do after the explosion is to stay down in their shelters for two hundred years.

Nevertheless, the possibility of perishing has made humanity introspective. It is looking at itself and into itself. What it sees is not too edifying, but at least it is looking.

2) The Bomb may ultimately be responsible not for wiping out mankind but for abolishing war. But not for the reason usually given: that war has become too frightful to be contemplated. This is nonsense. War was pretty awful even at the time of Thermopylae or Marathon, yet humanity went on waging it. World War I was not exactly a holiday-camp, yet World War II followed. I know of the nuances between nuclear and non-nuclear wars but the truth remains that humanity *likes* horror. A terrible experience is always good for the other fellow, it makes a real man out of him. Why the Bomb may make war unfashionable is because war used to be a Great Adventure and mankind consists of a fair amount of James Bonds; but there will be nothing adventurous in World War III. No glittering lances; no charge of the Light Brigade; no marching columns singing *Tipperary*; no dashing young fighter pilots saving the country; no breath-taking escape stories. In fact, it may turn out to be a shatteringly brief non-escape story. There is nothing glorious or glamorous in pushing a button in an underground hide-out or in a lurking submarine; nor is there anything uplifting or heroic in being blown up in the company of unadventurous women and utterly unheroic babies. The great virtue of the Bomb is not that it puts the Horror into war but that it takes the last vestige of the boy-scout element out of it.

3) The Bomb is a wonderful excuse for not doing anything. Who wants to bother with minor problems when the Bomb of Damocles is hanging over our heads? Minor injustices do not have to be rectified because we, all of us, are supposed to be



*Who wants to bother with minor problems?*

engaged in solving the major problems of humanity. Who can seriously worry about pension schemes when – thanks to the Bomb – in the near future there may not be any old-age pensioners at all? Not even candidates for old-age pensions? A few years ago Arthur Koestler made an outcry about the injustice of putting dogs into quarantine in Britain. He may have been right or he may have been wrong; but his protest was brushed aside with a superior smile: who could devote his energies to the problems of dogs in quarantine in times like ours? One could mention a dozen similar examples, but this is the gist of it: it is silly to bother about minor problems in the Age of the Bomb. Yes, the Bomb is a blessing: it justifies us in forgetting and neglecting all our problems – not because we are lazy, ignorant, incapable and unimaginative: but because we are much too serious and much too responsible to care about anything except the ultimate fate of humanity. And what the hell can we, as individuals, do about the ultimate fate of humanity?

\* \* \*

The Bomb, then, is a Good Thing. Affluence, on the other hand, is a Bad Thing. There are only two drawbacks to the Bomb, only two blots on its scutcheon. The first is that it helped to create the affluent morality. The Bomb is greatly responsible for the 'let us enjoy ourselves while we are alive because afterwards this might prove difficult' – way of thinking.

I shall dwell at some length in what follows on the various aspects of Affluence (And How to Avoid It); here I want to mention only one evil for which it is *not* responsible: affluence – whatever people say – has not made us competitive. Man has always been competitive and boastful, thousands of years before Affluence reared its ugly head. During the Depression,

people boasted of being *more* unemployed, or unemployed for a longer period, than their neighbours. In the Middle Ages – when riches were condemned by the Church – devout and humble men boasted of their poverty. Some rich men gave up all their worldly possessions in order to get into the Kingdom of Heaven and these *Nouveaux Pauvres* flaunted their misery as ostentatiously as successful real estate speculators do their wealth today. Old lags serving long sentences look down upon short-termers; regular prowlers in doss-houses look down upon casuals. People in hospital wards brag about their illnesses, each asserting that his or her malady is more dangerous or more painful than the others'. Gout has always been contemptuous of mere rheumatism. Bohemians of the last century were proud of their poverty and hated meeting other Bohemians who had starved for longer periods in more miserable garrets. People will vie with one another in claiming that their minor vices or failings are worse than those of their friends; as to who is more forgetful, sillier and less mechanically minded. No, affluence did not create this boastful and competitive spirit, but it did direct it into less pleasing channels. It is nicer to boast of your poverty, misery, illness, criminal past and silliness than to boast of your success, wealth, far-flung travels and possessions. Of course, both kinds of boasting are the same. Both types of person try to impress you with a record achievement. But the disaster-boys, at least, really suffer and deserve some sympathy while the affluent boasters become smug and condescending. I personally prefer a retired burglar or a man who can speak of his gout with a twinkle in his eye to a smug stock-broker who maintains that stockbroking is an Art. Yes: an Art. Because they are not content with their money; they all want to be artists, too.

## How to Avoid Money

AS soon as money started pouring in, people began instinctively to fight against it. Having money was not only unusual but also embarrassing. People's whole lives, their entire past, their entire economy were based on poverty. People knew how to be poor; they had no idea how to be affluent.

As long as people were poor, they knew what they wanted: to become rich. But once they became affluent they did not, of course, want to become poor again. As long as they did not have enough to eat, they knew what they wanted: food. As long as they were shivering in cold rooms, they knew what they wanted: a little warmth. As long as they went around in rags, they were not in doubt that they wanted decent clothes. As long as hungry shivering people walked around in rags, life was simple and happy. It was affluence that brought all the complications in its wake.

People's first – and right – instinct was to fight off affluence and run away from money. It was no easy task: in fact, it proved impossible. Once the bacilli of affluence infected the air, money started spreading like influenza. There was a year or two when it was practically impossible not to speculate on the stock exchange and win a small fortune however ignorant of financial matters you may have been. I, too, laid the foundations of my family fortune in those years on the stock exchange. It was a small fortune but then we are a small family. It's all gone by now, in any case. In those years, when you passed a bank, the manager tried to pull you in and force an unsecured loan on you. It was almost like a hold-up. He forced you at pistol-point to take his money. Trade Unions



*Knowing how to be poor*

asked for rises every other week and before they could make it clear that they were only joking, they got a larger rise than they had bargained for.

So the struggle warmed up and the indomitable people of Britain were put on their mettle once again. They had not been defeated by the shower of Nazi bombs, they would not succumb now to the shower of five pound notes. Poverty was their ancient heritage; they rallied to defend it.

What could they do? As always in the hour of national emergency, the classes united and everyone pulled his weight. Manufacturers began to flood the market with silly, pointless and badly made articles and hoped nobody would want them. You can imagine their disappointment when people besieged the shops and queued up for the goods, provided they were – a) really useless, b) abominably finished, and c) outrageously expensive. Well, said the manufacturers, industrialists and merchants, if people could not be dissuaded from buying badly finished and expensive home-made articles, we obviously had to *import* badly finished and cheap articles from outlandish places, such as Japan; surely nobody would want *those*. Who wants to buy foreign rubbish when he can buy British rubbish? But the cheapness of these goods, they thought, was the real catch. Who wants to buy cheap things nowadays? Everybody did. Cheapness still has its attraction in this age of affluence. People in every age want to be clever and spend their money intelligently. Millions and millions of pounds are squandered in the shops every day, because people are keen on saving money. They rush out to buy unwanted and unnecessary rubbish just because it seems to be cheap.

The boom was exasperating and was getting out of hand. The merchants (I love this word: merchants; I always wanted to become a merchant banker but never knew how to begin), the merchants ground their teeth and decided to revert to the



oldest and most outplayed of trading tricks. They revived the ancient 'eightpence off' game. When they wanted half a crown for their goods, they asked for three shillings and twopence and advertised it as 'eightpence off'. They hoped people would turn away in disgust. This is really too obvious – they thought – and even if it is not dishonest, somehow it *looks* dishonest. But again they were out of luck. People fought for their wares. Having acquired the goods, they did not have the feeling of having spent three and two, but of actually having made eightpence. One could live on such purchases they thought, if only one could find enough goods with eightpence off.

Very well, said the staunch Britons, we shall ruin ourselves on exports. We certainly know how to do that! So they exported shoddy goods; they never kept a delivery date; they sent instruction leaflets to Finland and Turkey printed in English only; they – at least indirectly – pushed German goods whenever possible. But it was hopeless: British exports flourished.

But Britain still refused to give up her hope of returning to the traditional poverty and unemployment of past generations. The Trade Unions stepped in once again. Where Capitalism failed, Socialism would triumph. If the Capitalists betrayed their ancient and time-honoured traditions and failed to exploit the toiling masses properly, the Trades Unions would teach them a lesson. They knew – they felt – how to ruin the economy and stem the rising flood of affluence. They started unofficial strikes left and right; they worked less and less for more and more money; they struck because tea was hot and struck because tea was cold. Goods were never ready for delivery in time. If they were, railwaymen refused to carry them to the boats; if they reached the docks somehow, dockers refused to load them. If dockers loaded them, seamen refused to sail with them. If workmen

could not dream up any further excuses for striking against their employers, they struck against one another, against rival unions. Two dozen electric switchmen (who switched the lights on and off) could – and did – put 30,000 men out of work. Such an achievement gave the switchmen tremendous satisfaction and was a shining testimony to working-class loyalties. So everybody was happy. If even the utmost ingenuity could not organise an unofficial strike, one could always find a football match instead. Mass absenteeism was almost as good as a strike. Even the dullest football match was more entertaining than a day in the factory.

But money was still pouring into British pockets. So Britain rallied to a final, grand effort. It was not enough – the clarion call went out – to be overpaid and make outrageous profits; it was not enough for workmen to waste time and for directors to spend endless hours at so-called business luncheons; *it was essential to do every single job badly*. The country responded magnificently. Goods bought in the shops did not survive the journey home. In newly-built houses, doors would not close, windows could not be opened and lavatories collapsed as soon as the first person sat on them. (Which was good as a practical joke; but very, very bad as a lavatory.) The windscreen-wipers on new cars jammed and exhaust pipes fell off after the first forty-eight hours – from sheer exhaustion, one would guess. Service in shops and restaurants went from indifferent to rude. Everybody played his part in this national campaign. Solicitors knew less and less of the law, concentrated on routine jobs – drawing up contracts for the sales of houses and making wills but doing even this badly, sowing the seeds of future litigation. Chartered accountants gave advice which would – in normal circumstances – have ruined their clients, but in those days it worked out well and lined their pockets. The efficiency of criminals alone improved while that of the police sadly declined. One

regretted that the Great Train Robbery had not been entrusted to the police: they would never have pulled it off.

The Gas and Electricity industries were so wretchedly run that on one occasion they collapsed at the onset of cool weather. Cool, not cold: the thermometer hardly touched freezing point. Britain's electricity and gas supplies packed up before this cool breeze had been blowing for twenty-four hours. Well, no one could do more to ruin the country, so these industries deserve our gratitude. The electricity and gas people – to their eternal glory – did their wrecking not only thoroughly but with exquisite humour. Winter, they said, had come earlier than expected, so it was all the winter's fault. Winter should always arrive when the gas and electricity bosses are expecting it. Earlier onset is utterly un-English; it just isn't cricket. But even better jokes were forthcoming. One spokesman said that *the trouble lay in the high demand*. In other words, if there had been no demand, supplies would have been adequate. Another wag declared that if reckless fools (meaning the general public) go home and switch their lights and heating on, they get what they deserve – that is to say, power cuts. People, particularly on cold winter days, should go home and sit in the darkness and the cold – after all, that's what they bought expensive modern electrical and gas appliances for. But all these efforts misfired. It was at this stage that people sighed deeply and began to give in. If this spirit will not ruin the country, nothing will. But a year later, next winter, the same thing happened all over again: the same cuts, the same power-failures, the same atrocious and pompous excuses. People by now were too tired to complain; or else they were pleased to see ruin at last approaching.

The Government helped, too. The pound sterling collapsed at regular intervals. There were promising balance of payment crises and international complications all the time. Stern warnings were issued about twice a month; financial

Cassandras shouted themselves hoarse. We were informed that we were poor, ruined, bankrupt. At the same time money went on pouring into our pockets. 'If ruin is like that, give me ruin,' people nodded. It was a bit like the phoney war: officially it was war, in fact it was hardly different from peace. Now again, officially it was degraded poverty; Britain, like a backward country, had to be helped out of the mess – but life went on getting better and better, people never had it so good. Besides the official lament salved – at least to some extent – people's bad consciences. If this was really dire poverty, why worry and feel guilty? If we can bask in the virtuous gleam of poverty and at the same time enjoy the blessings of Affluence, that simply meant eating our cake and, at the same time, being proud of our abstinence.

It is true of course, that if you were an Indian, African or Latin American you still had a good chance of spending your life in squalor and misery; indeed, the overwhelming majority of humanity still had a splendid chance of going around hungry. But who wants to be a foreigner? We are true Britons. If Affluence, with all its grave problems, novelty, trickery and complications is to be our lot – very well, we'll face it with courage, determination and a stiff upper lip.

It was only the other day that I, too, came to face up to things and resigned myself to the fact that Affluence had come to stay.

I was visiting a woman friend – a kindly and gregarious soul, always ready for a few friendly words with anyone. We were in the garden when the dustmen came. 'Haven't seen you for a long time,' my friend shouted to one of them. 'Been away?' The dustman paused with her bin on his shoulder, nodded and agreed, yes, they had been on holiday. 'Where did you go?' she inquired. 'Well,' said the dustman, 'I went with four mates of mine,' and he made a gesture with his head, indicating that at least some of the four were members

of his team. 'We visited eleven countries in a fortnight.' 'How nice,' the lady exclaimed and then she added, somewhat patronisingly: 'You have a little car, I take it.' The dustman shook his head: 'No. We have a little plane.'

## The Keynes-Mikes Theory

MONEY is one of the most complicated phenomena in the modern world. Money for most people means something other than it is. It means almost everything, except money.

That's why it is so difficult for the ordinary chap to become a millionaire. It is easier, of course, to make a million or two than ever before but it still requires effort. (It was in Texas that I heard the old phrase used with complete seriousness and without a twinkle in the eye. I asked whether a man I knew was a millionaire. My informant, a multi-millionaire ranch-owner himself, nodded seriously: 'Yes, he *is* a millionaire. But only a poor millionaire.') Even here, in England, it is perhaps more difficult to acquire a proper millionaire's outlook than to acquire the million itself. The millionaire – industrial and commercial, that is, I am not referring to the Beatles and other exceptional beings – must be devoted to money-making and thinking of nothing else. He must be acquisitive, aggressive, nasty, pompous and vain. One of them told me once: 'You have a certain talent for writing. Others have a talent for painting or music. My talent is for money-making. It is as simple as that. You must not think that simply because my talents lie in this field, I am a better man than you.' I hastened to reassure him that this thought had never crossed my mind.

Another gentleman, reputedly the richest man on earth, has had a coin-box telephone installed in his house, for the use

of his guests. The reason for this is that one of them had, allegedly, put through a phone call to New York at his host's expense. Of course, a call to New York means less to this man than a local call by one of my guests would mean to me or to most of my readers. Yet he did not hesitate to offend all his future guests; and these insulted guests do not hesitate to accept his invitations. The point is that a real millionaire with the true millionaire's attitude, hates the idea of *being taken advantage of*. 'I hate being taken advantage of' is a phrase I have heard more often than any other from these people. That's the chief reason why I should make such a poor millionaire. I should love to be taken advantage of. If I had a few hundred million pounds - I know what I'm going to say will sound reckless to



*A millionaire*

all millionaires – I would not mind spending an extra shilling or two on my friends' and guests' pleasure. If any of them wanted an extra piece of cake, an extra glass of champagne or an extra telephone call to New York, I should be delighted to be able to treat him to it. I should be enormously pleased if others, too, enjoyed my vast riches. That is, of course, the wrong attitude. Your guest does ring up New York and then your fortunes dwindle from £397,895,327 to a mere £397,895,322 and that is just below the safety margin.

I knew a millionaire who spent long and anxious hours weighing his luggage because if he had been required to pay an excess luggage fee of £1, his holiday would have been ruined. Another millionaire admitted in a television programme that he had queued up outside a night club and waited till ten o'clock because admission was a few shillings cheaper after ten. It was a small sum, he agreed, but as the time was 'quite near' ten, paying the higher admission fee would have been sheer waste; and 'waste is stupid and wicked'. I knew another extremely rich gentleman who was a splendidly generous host, gave opulent house parties every week, pampered his guests in every possible manner but cheated like hell at rummy. Everybody noticed it but he just *had* to win his three or five bob every Saturday and Sunday night. He did not really need five bob; but he needed the glory.

I know poor people who would never dream of going anywhere by any means other than by taxi; and I know very rich men who would not hesitate to do the bus company out of fourpence and risk being caught. (They could always say, 'Me? Cheating to save fourpence? Ridiculous!') I know poor men who refused to accept commissions from friends; and I know one millionaire who introduces customers to his wife (the introduction is always couched in social terms) and then claims twenty-five per cent commission from her. I repeat:

twenty-five per cent and from his own wife. He says his action is educational: she must learn that one has to pay for everything in life. (Having been married to him for twelve years, she has probably learnt that by now.) The gentleman in question is not ashamed of this grabbing: he is proud of it, regales his friends with the story and expects to be admired for his cleverness.

Millionaires have another stupid anxiety: they want to be loved for their own sake. In old-fashioned films (their vogue will, no doubt, return) twenty-year-old beauty queens are shown about to marry aged and shrunken fools, doubled up by gout. The old man – a multimillionaire, of course – disguises himself somehow in order to find out if the girl really loves him for his own sake. My personal guess is that she does not; I'd risk a wager that she is after his money. Here again I would make a rotten millionaire. My life-long ambition has been for dazzling, young beauty queens to love me for my money. For my countless millions, my castles, my yachts, my Rolls Royces, my country estates. But there's not a hope! They all love me just for my own sake.

For many money means love. Money is not love, of course, but it is a pretty good substitute. To others it means power and glory and kudos. It is the sheer joy of possession which intoxicates yet another kind. For a fifth type the acquisition of money is reassurance: it means they must be clever fellows, superior to others if they could make such a pile. (At the bottom of their hearts they always have a teeny-weeny doubt about themselves.) There is a considerable layer of the population who talk of money day and night, who have no other topic and no other thought; no other values and no other yardstick. They breathe money, worship money, dream of money, smell of money. Some mad compulsion makes them chase more and more money, just to increase their riches on paper. Money is to be worshipped for its own



sake, like a beautiful woman. But it is much better than a beautiful woman. Money always obeys you; it never talks back; it is hardly ever unfaithful to you. And if your fortune grows larger – unlike a beautiful spouse growing larger – it does not matter.

And it is here that the Keynes-Mikes Theory comes in.



*The Keynes-Mikes Theory*

Frankly, it has very little to do with my illustrious predecessor, John Maynard Keynes. It is all Mikes. But it struck me that it would enhance the theory's prestige and lend it more respect if I added Keynes' name to it.

The theory itself, however, is revolutionary. It is worthy of Keynes, he has no reason for complaining. In addition to being a brilliant theory, it also solves the problem of inflation

once and for all – a problem no other economist succeeded in solving before Keynes and myself. The theory simply discovers the real role of money. No economist has ever given this advice: SPEND IT! Don't use money as love, power, glory, proof of your brilliance, sexual potency, and what-not. *Use it as money.* This is the only safe cure for inflation, whatever the orthodox economists may say. If you want to make sure that your money does not lose its value, *enjoy it!* Money is not for piling up; not to show how clever you are; not to show how potent you are – use another tool to prove *that.* *Money is for spending.* The only way you can save money from devaluation is by enjoying it. Once you have enjoyed a good meal, a nice trip to Asia Minor or the fjords of Norway, a pleasant evening in the company of a lovely woman or of your debauched companions, absolutely no subsequent fluctuation of the Zurich money-market will ever diminish your enjoyment. That trip, that dinner, that woman is yours; it remains yours. It was not a waste: it was investment. Investment of the wisest kind: investment in experience; investment in life; investment in yourself. A full life of experience and enjoyment makes you richer; money in the bank makes you poorer.

### The Danger of Savings

SAVINGS were not invented in this age of Affluence but the danger of savings has increased since people have more money. One is surprised by this development: surely it is poverty, or shortage of money, which encourages thriftiness and similar repulsive virtues, while affluence induces people to spend recklessly? And this is indeed so. But because people, on the

whole, agree with my theory and do see that saving is useless – and is consequently the most reckless way of squandering one's money – and *because* in this Age of Affluence people are wont to squander their money recklessly, they squander it on savings and as a result savings have gone up.

Why do people save? (I am not speaking of saving small and reasonable sums for emergencies; I am speaking of passionate, reckless and maniacal saving; saving as a way of life.) Most people say they are saving for security. But in the long run there is no such thing as security. If you believe in security you *ipso facto* believe in false security (*all* security being false) and you are simply deceiving yourself. Some people save for their old age. They look forward to their old age with relish. Now old age can be a very pleasant period of life if approached with understanding and wisdom: but these Savers insist that in their extreme senility, when they can no longer enjoy anything at all, they should have everything they don't need at their disposal. There is one extreme danger in this, which they never contemplate: failure to reach that extreme old age. To deny yourself everything for the first seventy-five years of your life and then die before you reach the age when you are at last really and truly unable to enjoy the fruits of your thrift, is a trifle disappointing. Of course, it is fun having a splendid funeral; it is a great joy to occupy a comfortable mausoleum all to oneself. Some are convinced that these are the finest joys in life. It is true, you can always leave your money to your children and they, in turn, to their children; and they to theirs. And so on. But why should each generation labour for the next one? Give your children a proper education and equip them for life, that's all they need. Would it not be simpler – and better for morale, for everybody's ego – if each generation fended for itself?

For others again, saving is a love of possessions. This love

of possessions is the most dangerous of passions and I shall have more to say about it in the next chapter. Others again save simply because they are psychologically unable to spend. They do not actually care about having the money; yet they are unable to part with it. When people hear about mean millionaires – the one who would rather die than pay fifteen shillings in excess luggage fee – they often remark: ‘That’s how they became millionaires in the first place.’ Utter nonsense! Their devotion to money is an important factor but only one of the factors; even if I – or, I suspect, you, Gentle Reader – had saved up every penny we ever had it is unlikely we should have amassed a fortune of 540 million pounds. I do not need 540 million pounds, not just now, anyway; but that’s another story. Besides, while nearly all millionaires are mean, not all mean people are millionaires. You may be as mean as a multimillionaire and yet remain as poor as that proverbial church mouse. Meanness helps; but it is not enough. (Millionaire’s sons, the second generation, are usually spendthrifts.)

In the story of the *Ant and the Grasshopper*, the grasshopper is the sympathetic character and everyone with any decent feelings hates the prim and smug little ant. Everyone knows this and the Savers always envy and hate the Spenders. The Savers deny themselves many joys the Spenders have. The Saver thinks: ‘Very well, today I’m going without these pleasures, but just wait! In a few years’ time I’ll be sitting pretty and the Spender will come along begging.’ The Saver hopes for this; he looks forward to these visits; he looks forward to saying *no* or – almost worse – to helping the foolish Spender out with a derisory sum, accompanied with a sermon and with that ‘see how noble I am’ attitude. So the Savers become envious, jealous, calculating, mean and full of ill-will towards those who can enjoy themselves. Soon they will hate them almost as much as they hate themselves.



*The most dangerous of passions*

Because self-hatred is one of the real motives behind these crazy saving habits. They do not *want* to treat themselves to life's pleasures. Their attitude is not real self-denial; it is self-punishment. They are not really afraid of not reaching a ripe old age and enjoying the fruits of their savings; *they hope they will not survive*. And they rub their hands with malicious glee at their own misfortune. They laugh with sardonic joy at their own frustration. At the bottom of their hearts they know that that's what they deserve.

I know a lady who is the typical Saver, the Saver Incarnate. It causes her physical pain when she has to spend a penny. I mean this in the primary sense of the word, I have no information on the metaphoric sense. How she can go through life, I fail to understand. Every time she has to buy a quarter of ham or a tube of toothpaste means acute suffering for her. Hearing that someone has bought a cottage in the South of France or got a fur coat from her husband for her birthday, her reaction is not to say: 'How nice!' but: 'It must have cost a fortune.' And she rejoices in her heart as though she had saved the equivalent sum. She is not particularly intelligent but she is fabulously quick at petty arithmetic. Her favourite stories go something like this: 'The other day, I went to the supermarket and I saw a piece of ham marked eight shillings. The price of one pound is twelve shillings so I asked the woman at the counter to weigh it. "Weigh it?" she asked me quite astonished, but I told her coolly: "Yes, my dear. Just weigh it!" She did and it came to ten ounces!' Shrill laughter on her part; the others first remain silent, then smile with polite embarrassment and wonder what the point of this fable may be. I go home, spend half an hour with pencil and paper and then I *think* I've got it: ten ounces should cost only 7s 6d. The point is that the supermarket meant to diddle her to the tune of sixpence but she was too clever for them and, in the nick of time, managed to save herself sixpence. She is

also one of the most envious creatures I have ever met. The very thought that two people can live happily together turns her pale with envy. If she hears that Miss X has married a rich man, she can hardly control her fury. If she is informed that Y and Z had a nice time the night before, her face becomes green. She may not even know Y and Z but people should not have a nice time, they should suffer.

One day someone told us that A had died. We all knew A, he was a charming, successful man in early middle age and – as far as we knew – perfectly healthy. It was a tragic case and I thought the bad news might greatly cheer up the lady in question. But I was wrong: she was as upset as the rest of us. For a time I thought that she was begrudging poor A for being the centre of interest. He had stolen the limelight; everyone was talking about him. But it wasn't that at all. She seemed resentful and envious but for different reasons. At last I understood: she *envied A because it is dirt cheap to be dead*.

I had never thought of death from this angle but, of course, she was dead right. A dead man needs no food, no clothing, no heating, no entertainment, pays no rent and no taxes. He is never diddled out of sixpence at the supermarket. He needs some flowers every now and then but others pay for them. Being dead – she reckoned – was the cheapest way of existing. Or non-existing, if you like, but she was not one to bother about nuances. Her own life – as she refused to spend the smallest sum unless it was an absolute necessity – was near enough to non-existence. She saved and saved, lived a dog's life (in a manner of speaking, because most dogs live lives of luxury nowadays) and looked forward to distant old age; so she might as well be completely dead, spend a few centuries really cheaply in the grave, and look forward to resurrection when she would, at last, enjoy herself thoroughly (provided monetary economy is to be abolished in that happy, paradisaical life to come). Being dead may not be great fun but it is

very, very cheap; and that was more important for her than any other consideration. Being the truest Saver I have ever encountered, she brought her philosophy to its logical conclusion: death held more pleasure and joy for her than life.

### The Dangers of Property

WE had a saying in Hungary: 'I've caught a Turk and now he won't let me go.' In other words, it was not quite clear who caught whom. It is the same with property. You think you own property; but the truth is that your property owns you.

You buy a cottage in the country and believe that you are its proud possessor. You are badly mistaken: the cottage is your possessor, and not even proud of you. Your cottage does not belong to you; you belong to the cottage.

Many a good friend have I watched go down the drain. I may have known them for many years and regarded them as normal persons, with the right instincts and reactions. They loved towns, preferred the noise of traffic to the deadly silence of the countryside and the pleasant smell of petrol to the fume of daffodils. Then, one day, they would inform me – shyly and sheepishly – that they were going to buy a cottage in the country. It is always their wives who insist on this silly idea, they say, they only give in to keep the peace and to show what generous souls and loving husbands they are. Then they would wink at me, make a few jokes about being only too keen on escaping from the new cottage and spending their time with old friends in London. At first they mean it and they do make an effort to remain members of civilised



society. But they are fighting a losing battle. They start digging and growing their own radishes. The appearance of the first self-sown radish has a peculiar effect on human nature. People look at the miserable, shapeless and tasteless little object and they feel they are united with the soil forever. I knew a man who was incomparably prouder of having grown a bunch of spring onions in his own garden than he was of becoming Professor of Economics at one of our great universities at an almost incredibly early age. Then these people, your former friends, will start telling you, first with genuine astonishment: 'You know, I *like* it . . .' They will discover in no time that country bumpkins, inarticulate retired majors, the half-illiterate wives of wholly illiterate farmers are, in fact, brilliant intellectuals whose conversation – to be sure – differs from that of Cyril Connolly and Isaiah Berlin. Or in the best case, country people are so 'kind' and 'nice' and the newcomer much prefers genuine kindness to intellectual eminence. Town people become 'phonies'. The next stage is for them to despise all city-dwellers and believe firmly that only the man who lives at the back of beyond, right on top of a manure heap, is able to enjoy the beauties of nature. Having surrendered their personality, they give away their entire selves, too. They spend more and more time in their cottage. Their friends have only one function now: to go down to their place and admire their gladioli, their magnolia trees and the weird tool-shed they built with their own hands. They become terrible bores; they give up their former hobbies; they give up their sports and pastimes; they cease to read books and go to concerts. Their cottage is their life and their only interest but not because they are really devoted to it; simply because they have to run after the money they have invested.

I asked one lady why she was working herself to death and she replied brightly: 'Oh, I don't mind slaving for my own

comfort.' She never stopped to ask herself: 'Where is the comfort if I'm a slave?' She had no time to stop and think about minor details like that.

Another man I knew bought a house near Malaga. Before he took this fateful step, he had been an extensive and intelligent traveller with wide and lively interests. As soon as he sold himself to that house, he would never go anywhere else; the rest of the world ceased to exist for him. He dashed down to the south of Spain more often than he could afford and suffered in silence and solitude on his property. He belongs to his property now and is growing more and more depressed every year.

People who belong to cottages, houses, bungalows or even castles, keep telling themselves and others – more and more loudly and aggressively as time goes by – that they are happy and content, and that they adore their 'little place' and they would not give it up for anything in the world. Well, they adore it as any slave adores his master; and as for exchanging it, they cannot exchange it any more easily than a dog can decide to exchange its owner.

People do not only belong to houses; some belong to gardens; some – their number is decreasing – belong to motor cars; some ladies belong to their jewellery. I heard of a poor old Hungarian actor who belonged to his pullover and died for it. It happened during the war in distressing circumstances, when his sole possession in the Ukraine, where he was serving with a Jewish labour-battalion, was his warm pullover. A brutish sergeant tried to take it away from him but the old actor allowed himself to be beaten to death rather than part from his pullover. Well, poor man, he was perhaps doomed in any case; but as it happened he died for his pullover, whose faithful possession he was.

I knew a charming French lady, living in Switzerland, who was given two Alsatians by a heartless lover – who, in fact,



*People who belong*

abandoned her soon afterwards. At first she was a little surprised and did not quite know whether she should be delighted or annoyed with the gift. Soon, however, she grew extremely fond of the two dogs – Charlotte and Nicky – and before she knew where she was, the two dogs had taken complete command of her life. She was unmarried and, it is true, the two dogs were excellent company; but she was also rather badly off and Nicky and Charlotte were voracious eaters. She

had to travel a lot and on such occasions Nicky and Charlotte had to go to a kennel and kennels are not too cheap; she had a wonderful offer of a managerial job – the dream of a lifetime – but she had to turn it down because it was a living-in job and she could not possibly move into a luxury hotel with her two huge beasts. A hoped-for marriage fell through too because – she is convinced – her would-be husband could not face life with Charlotte and Nicky. The dogs meant poverty, a bad job and a lonely future to her. She was fully aware of the dogs' role in her life but she would not dream of getting rid of them. Many people belong to a dog; she, at least, belonged to two dogs. Which is, let us admit, some distinction.

Property-owning is also bad for the character. Property turns simple, truthful people into braggarts and liars. They will tell you the price they paid for something – a habit they used to despise and ridicule in others – but never the true price. They may add a bit on, to show how prosperous they are; or they may subtract something to impress you with the smart bargain they struck. Every wretched suburban hole – miles out in the wilderness – seems to be just seventeen minutes away from Piccadilly Circus. 'Not too bad, is it? Seventeen minutes. . . .' I myself live in St John's Wood: and it takes me about twenty minutes to get to Piccadilly. But whenever I travel another hour and a half in the opposite direction, I always reach a point from where it takes exactly seventeen minutes to reach Piccadilly. Seventeen is a magic number. Nobody ever mentions more; nobody ever mentions less, with the exception of one stockbroker who mentioned twenty-three minutes but soon afterwards he went mad and committed suicide.

Property may make you rich; but it also ruins you. It robs you of your personality, your character, your sense of truth. A man who owns too little property cannot be free – poverty

means slavery: but the man who owns too much cannot be free either. History knows of revolutions in the course of which the poor set about seizing the property of the rich. If mankind were more intelligent, the next revolution would be a rising of the property-owning classes trying to get rid of their riches and become free again. After all, the rich have nothing to lose but their chains.

### Non Sequitur

ONCE it became obvious that Affluence had come to stay, the great battle was inevitably joined. To be affluent does not only mean financial status: it is also a state of mind. Here lies its real significance; that's why we have to study this age and ourselves in it. Whatever our original state of mind *vis-à-vis* money may have been, once we become affluent, we get more and more attached to our well-being. A vast conspiracy – in fact several vast conspiracies – are at work, trying to get the money out of our pockets. In this Battle of the Cash many of us fight on both sides of the barricades: one person may be an Enticer – a man after our money – but, necessarily, he is also a consumer, and another horde will be after *his* money. The Enticers are really Money Charmers – emulating the art of Indian snake-charmers: they play a number of alluring tunes on their various instruments and our money rises from our pockets and performs all the peculiar movements of an agitated snake. There is one significant difference between the Snake Charmer and the Cash Charmer. When the snake – or the snake-charmer – have had enough, they stop their performance and the snake curls up once again in his own basket. But our money, whether curled up or not,

after the other type of performance comes to rest in someone else's pocket.

The Age of Affluence has made us all sillier, slower, duller and meaner. Poverty, the fight for scraps, petty advantages, small positions, makes one cunning, suspicious, quick-witted; Affluence makes one self-satisfied, complacent, smug. So the Money Charmers have always succeeded with astonishing ease. They use three principal tricks and we fall for all of them.

### 1) HOW TO IGNORE MOTHER'S DAY.

This is the easiest trick: turning old-fashioned, decent sentiments into repulsive institutions. One day a wily shop-keeper decided that a certain Sunday should henceforth be



*. . . all sillier, duller, meaner*

called Mother's Day. On that day you must be a good, loving son or daughter (hereinafter to be called GLS/D) and shower gifts on your Beloved Mother (hereinafter BM), not so much to please her as to please the Trade. People did as they were told. Now they queue up at florists and elsewhere to buy gifts and hand them over to their BMs with sheepish, self-satisfied smiles on their lips. Why you should be a GLS/D on the first Sunday of May (or whenever Mother's Day is – it varies from one country to another) and not every day, all the year round, has never been explained; but then the question has never been asked either.

The basic idea of the Cash Charmers – on whatever front they operate – is that you cannot afford to contract out. If A,B,C and Z turn up with bunches of flowers and boxes of chocolates to please their BMs, *you* have no option. This pressure and blackmail stands on solid foundations. If you fail to give your BM a gift on the appointed day, you are not regarded as an individual with strong and independent views but as a mean bastard and a Very Bad and Unloving Son/Daughter.

This has nothing to do with the old worn-out idea of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. This 'keeping up with the Joneses' (or keeping up with the Snowdons, as nowadays it is, more ambitiously, called) may have been a strong motive once upon a time but it has changed its colour several times and gone through several phases:

- a) First we had the desire to *keep up with the Joneses*.
- b) Then *to be the Jones* – to become one of the trend-setters.
- c) Then *to do better than the Joneses*.
- d) And now we have reached the era of *keeping away from the Joneses* – of keeping away from the vulgar masses, from the beaten-track. And as everybody is trying to keep away, off-the-beaten-track is becoming more crowded and vulgar today than the beaten-track ever was.

Mothers' Day succeeded beyond all dreams of avarice. So Fathers' Day followed. And Grandmothers' Day and First Cousins' Day and Stepsisters' Day. Commercial Christmas is based on the same solid idea. More and more people buy gifts for more and more people. In America it is not only families who bring or send gifts to one another; but each individual member of each family gives something to each individual member of every other family. The result is that in the American branch of my own family, instead of seven or eight gifts, several *hundred* gifts are annually exchanged each Christmas, to everybody's annoyance and not too well-concealed dismay. But there is no getting away from it. All retreats are cut off. The leering, malicious and greedy figure of the Trader lurks in the background: there is no escape.

Instead of improving, the situation gets worse every year. In America today – and this means Britain tomorrow and the Continent the day after tomorrow – you have to send gifts not only to all members of the family but also to their dogs, cats and budgerigars. And it is not enough simply to take or send those gifts. The paper-merchants and string-manufacturers insist on their share, too, so you have to pack everything in elaborately printed coloured paper, ornamented with Father Christmases and reindeer – and tie the parcels up with gold-coloured string. All this means two or three nights' work (unless you are one of those lucky, lonely people who have no friends). So your money is not enough: Christmas demands your time and energy as well. You start to feel a slight aversion against everybody for whom you have to buy and slave. The shopkeepers have managed to transform Christmas into a jolly family-festivity of universal hate or, at least, irritation; and in the present commercial atmosphere you are not sure any more whose birth Christmas commemorates. Is it Gordon Selfridge? Is it Fortnum? Or is it Mason?

In the resulting nervousness and tension, you eat too much



turkey and nuts and dates and Christmas pudding – things you would not touch during the rest of the year. That means that you throw your health along with your elegant, boyish or girlish, figure after your money. You spend a few miserable sleepless nights – and all this to keep the shopkeepers happy and to give people things they do not want, bought with money you do not have.

What is to be done? Nothing. That is the saddest part of it all: absolutely nothing! Affluence produces affluence. The string-merchant buys coloured packing paper, the paper-merchant buys small gifts for his sister-in-law's budgerigar and the pet-shop owner buys fancy corkscrews. And so on it goes, round and round. Affluence produces more affluence, silliness produces more silliness. Year by year, we increase the number of gifts and the number of Cousins' Days; we pack things more and more elaborately; and if next year we are told that each gift has to be wrapped in five pound notes and tied round with thin golden chains or that on Neighbours' Day we have to buy something for everybody in the street, we shall obey. Our intelligence and judgment are undermined and so is our character.

I like spending my money but not this way. I dream of the day when I can invite my friends for a turkey-dinner at Whitsun; when I can send a box of cigars to my Mother on Father's Day and a bunch of flowers to my Grandfather on Mothers' Day: when I do not send Christmas Cards to all my friends whom I see three times a day or to a group of others whom I hardly remember. I cherish the idea of sending Christmas gifts to no one; or, if I do send something, of not wrapping it up in coloured paper; or, if I wrap it up in coloured paper, of not tying it with gold-coloured string. I dream of sending a spate of gifts to all my friends and relations on April 18 or September 9, when they do not expect anything, just to please them. But I am a coward like the rest of

us: I may gnash my teeth but I do send my Christmas cards and tie up my parcels with silver and gold-coloured string. Perhaps all this is not so black as I have painted it. Perhaps we have come a long way since the thirties. The threat of being inundated by ordinary, old-fashioned bombs has been replaced by the threat of being inundated by Christmas gifts; the horror of Hitler has been replaced by the horror of Mothers' Day. Perhaps this is bearable; it might be regarded as a change for the better. But in the thirties I was a helpless victim; today I am an accomplice and a coward. Myself an appeaser. Hitler's bombs, after all, created our Finest Hour; all that silver and gilded string might yet strangle us one day.

## 2) THE BOYS WITH THE MAGIC FLUTE.

Libraries have been written about modern advertising and it is only one aspect of it I wish to discuss here. Advertising has contributed a great deal to the mental deterioration we are witnessing in this Age of Affluence. Not because the beauty of the advertisers' style is but rarely conspicuous; not because advertising has contributed but few fertile ideas to modern thought. On the contrary, the trouble is that it has contributed too much. It has stamped itself on our minds, it is shaping our way of thinking. Not with its breathtaking superlatives and glib sales-talk: we can allow for those. We know that through those advertisements it is only a poor chap talking to us, trying to sell his wares; another desperate millionaire whose pathetic cry tries to persuade us to give him another million or two.

The trouble lies elsewhere. The trouble is that advertisements are turning our age into the *Age of Non Sequitur*.

You look at the advertisement of a very expensive car. You see the car door being held open by a chauffeur for the new owner to get in. The new owner is obviously a rich man. So far so good. Only a rich man can afford a very expensive car.

But the rich man is not only rich: he is also rather young, well-dressed and extremely good-looking. The inference? Only rich, elegant and good-looking young men drive this car. This is not far from saying – and this is what the advertisement means to convey – buy this car and you will automatically be rich, young, elegant and good-looking.

In the case of this particular motor car, at least one of these claims must be true: the buyer of the car must be pretty well-off or have a lucrative job, which comes to the same thing. However, at the same time, he may be as old as the hills, and as ugly as the devil; and he may circulate in shabby rags. In most other cases the inference suggested by the advertisements is even more ludicrous. Smoke our brand of cigarette and you become a muscular Apollo; buy our beer and a beauty queen will fall in love with you and go out picnicking with you every Saturday afternoon; buy our socks and you will be tall; buy our shampoo and you will have long, golden locks. People are shown eating biscuits in a beautiful modern kitchen. The suggestion is, not that the biscuits are good or at least cheap but – eat our biscuits and you, too, will have a modern wonder-kitchen. Dogs are seen chewing an artificial bone on a precious Persian carpet. The suggestion is not that this particular artificial bone is more succulent than other artificial bones, but: buy our artificial bone for your doggie and, in some mysterious way, you will also acquire the carpet for 7s 6d.

Of course, when these things are pointed out you smile and say: I can't possibly be so silly as to think that way. But you can. We all are quite as silly as that. Advertisements are ubiquitous and we do not stop to argue with them. As soon as we start thinking, we win all the arguments, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we just look at the advertisement unthinkingly and in all these cases *they* win.

Once we accept, however thoughtlessly, that X's cigarettes will keep us young, healthy and beautiful, Y's soap-flakes

will make us wise and well-read, Z's dried fish will help our daughters to marry millionaires, we have become true children of the *Age of Non Sequitur*.

The *Age of Non Sequitur* is a decline of the substance in favour of meaningless form. We want beautiful food and forget that food, not so long ago, used to have some taste, too. An apple today must be round, large and red – it does not matter at all if, having bitten into it blindfolded, you cannot tell it from a tomato, a carrot or a tennis-ball. Any goods you buy must be in nice, colourful boxes and wrapped up in tastefully designed wrapping-paper. Never mind if they fall to bits when taken out of their beautiful habitat. Call hot dogs *chien chaud à la Richelieu* and they become a delicious French dish. Go to certain schools and universities as opposed to other schools and universities and you will be all right, irrespective of whether you have learnt anything at all while there. It is better to have been sent down from Oxford than to get a first at Sussex. It is preferable to have been kicked out of Eton than to have gained five A levels at an obscure grammar school. Come to our institute of education and we will turn you into a successful company director just as our cigars or whisky have turned you into a young, elegant and healthy man-about-town.

Just as food has to be beautiful and to hell with the taste, so politicians have to be beautiful, too, and who cares whether they are capable or honest. People become presidents of the United States and Prime Ministers of Britain because they perform better on television than their opponents. In the old days, a politician needed certain qualities; today the main question is how he can stand up to the testy questioning of a certain television interviewer who enjoys a reputation for arrogance. You may become First Lord of the Admiralty if you have a deep, resonant, booming voice; if you have warm, brown eyes under bushy eyebrows you stand a good chance

of becoming Lord Privy Seal, and infectious, if somewhat affected, laughter may gain you the Treasury. For the Ministry of Pensions it is enough to have a manly chest, covered with a lot of hair.\* This infection, too, has spread. We see in the newspapers Chairmen's statements delivered at the Annual General Meetings of industrial concerns; and the report – inserted at the company's expense – carries the Chairman's portrait. You are shown a shy, self-conscious horse-face; a brash, vain, yet empty expression; or an aggressive, over-ambitious climber. Yet the implication seems to be: buy our shares because we have such a beautiful Chairman. And you go and do it.

People who have achieved eminence in one field, are given jobs in others. It is the story of the beautiful apple or the third great soldier, or a more or less successful politician, is elected president of a powerful state; another will go on talking puerile rubbish on all the political issues of the day and we are supposed to listen to him in awe and reverence; a third great soldier, or a more or less successful politician, is invited to the boards of companies manufacturing plastics or artificial manure. Actors are asked how they would solve the traffic problem and dukes or financiers are begged for their views on the racial troubles in Alabama. Every retired airline executive is regarded as an expert on foot and mouth disease. After all, if a man had sense enough to be born a peer, or make a million on real estate speculation, or play the lead in a musical comedy, he must *know*. Buy our socks, and they will make you tall, happy and prosperous.

It's all due to Affluence. Even our judgment of history has been coloured by the mentality of this *Age of Non Sequitur*. Take the last war; we are prouder of having stood alone for a while than we are of having had powerful allies; we are prouder of our defeats than of our victories; it was grander to

\* No reference to the actual incumbents.

'take it' than to give it. We are prouder of having lost an Empire than of having gained a victory. We are prouder of having been in two wars from the first day to the last (or almost) than of the decisions achieved. In these confusing times, war seems to have been transformed into a gigantic sporting event. It was not important to win; it was only important to have taken part.

### 3) CREDIT CARDS.

A few weeks ago I met a friend of mine – a literary gentleman – in the Club. He was in a most distressed state. He told me in a worried tone that he had just returned from Florence.

'I went to Venice first,' he informed me in deep gloom.

'That's not so terrible,' I suggested.

He shook his head.

'But it is. You don't know the circumstances.'

'Tell me the circumstances.'

'They are frightening,' he said and gazed into space speechlessly for a full minute. 'My wife and my son went on holiday to Venice.' He looked at me and added in the voice of a man who was confessing to a grave and shameful crime: 'And I went to fetch them.'

'Is that all?' I asked him astonished.

He shook his head.

'It isn't. I took them to Florence as well.'

He almost broke down under the strain. He looked at me again with a look that seemed to implore me: 'Don't judge me too harshly.'

'I'm sure you don't understand,' he said again.

'There is not much to understand or misunderstand,' I said patiently, but with slight irritation creeping into my voice. 'You are a reasonably good husband and father and you decided on the spur of the moment. . . .'

'Rubbish!' he interrupted me fiercely. 'I'm telling you, you

haven't got a clue. I am not a good husband. I am a bad husband. I love my son but I am a bad father, too. All this has nothing to do with what happened. I could not afford to go and fetch them. I had not time for such pleasure trips; still less did I have the money. Fly to Milan and back! All those murderously expensive hotels for three of us. All those gifts. The whole thing was ruinous.'

'Then why did you do it?' I asked him, really puzzled by now.

'That's the whole point! I did it because I've got a new credit card. Of course, I knew what had happened to others. I should have been prepared. But I laughed at them. I felt certain it couldn't happen to me. Famous last words. It did happen to me. I could not resist getting my ticket without paying for it. Going to luxury hotels and restaurants and, instead of paying my bill, just tossing my card to them. I bought those extravagant gifts just for the pleasure of not paying for them. Not paying cash, I mean, but to test the magic power of my card.'

He sighed.

'It will ruin me, I know. I'll end up sleeping under bridges.'

He sounded like a doomed man. He *was* a doomed man.

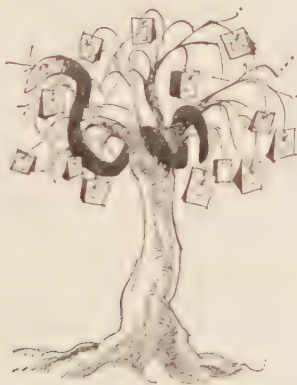
It took the greatest genius among the Money Charmers to invent the Credit Card. They tell you that a Credit Card is just a super-cheque. A simple convenience which enables you to write one single cheque at the end of the month instead of lots of small ones. But Credit Cards have nothing to do with cheques. Cheques do not induce you to spend money. Or to put it more precisely: you may spend your money wisely or foolishly, but the possession of a cheque book will have nothing to do with it. But Credit Cards will turn you into a fiend or a sucker. Credit has always been an irresistible notion to most people. People buying things on credit – on short credit, on very expensive credit – have the feeling

that they are getting something for nothing just because they can take away goods (or receive them in their homes) without paying for them on the spot. Yet even this is just a minor factor of the racket. Credit Cards give you the feeling that you have been invested with magic power. Like my friend, you go to air companies and luxury hotels to test your card. Your life becomes a mad spending spree, just because in the end you will have to write only one cheque instead of many. The card gives you power. You cease to be one of the mob. The Age of Affluence has robbed hundreds of thousands of people of their identity. It has produced the Organisation Man – with money, status, expense accounts – but with no identity; it has also produced the beatniks and their equivalents in other lands: who are only too glad to swop money, expense accounts, a feeling of security for true identity. Many others turn to Credit Cards. Anyone can pay for a meal or a luxury suit with cash – anyone who can afford it. But your little card sets you apart from common clay. You are a member of a fraternity; of a distinguished set. You have the feeling that when you walk into a hotel in Tokio, into the best restaurant in Montevideo, into a jeweller's shop in Sydney or into an air-line office in Lagos, you are known, respected and received as a member of a select clique. As though you were an individual which, at the bottom of your heart, you know perfectly well you ceased to be long, long ago. You feel it is your duty to live up to the distinction the card confers upon you. You cannot let the card down. *Noblesse oblige*. You know you are a fool but you find the card irresistible. You spend much more than you would have spent otherwise. If you can afford it, all is well; but if the card ruins you and drives you to suicide, you will always have the gratifying feeling that a) you belong to the very distinguished dead, and b) that your family can bury you on credit.



## Instant Tea

I RAN into an old friend who is now vaguely connected with a firm manufacturing instant coffee: you pour boiling water over a mysterious brown powder and the result is quite drinkable coffee.



‘We are making instant tea now,’ he informed me.

He is quite a wag and I thought he was joking. But he was serious.

‘What’s the point?’ I asked him puzzled. ‘To make tea in the old-fashioned way you pour boiling water over tea-leaves; according to the new method you pour boiling water over tea-powder? Where does the ingenious discovery come in?’

‘Nowhere,’ he grinned.

‘And does it sell?’

‘Like hot cakes.’

‘What next?’ I asked him.

'Our laboratory is experimenting with instant water. The idea is that we'll manufacture a certain powder and when you add water to our powder, the result is water. Ordinary water. It won't be cheap but it is sure to be a best-seller.'

It sounded to me every inch as good as instant tea. Perhaps I ought to add in fairness, that, as was explained to me, there is a little – just a little – more to instant tea than hits the eye. You choose your own special brand of tea-powder and the boiling water turns it into the sort of tea you want: tea with milk, tea without milk, tea with lemon, tea with rum, Indian tea, China tea, with or without sugar.

The idea is, of course, to simplify matters and to save time. An earlier age tried to induce people to buy certain goods because they were cheap. But cheapness is not a selling point today; it may be attractive; but as soon as you proclaim the cheapness of something, this may act as a deterrent. The old and reputable firm of 'Fifty Shilling Tailors' has changed its name; erstwhile 3d and 6d stores no longer lay emphasis on the fact that, while prices had to go up, they are still cheap places to shop at. Unpretentious little restaurants had to be cheap in former times; today they do not try to attract you by low prices or even by their good food. Their draw is that you can eat there quickly.

On television, which is the characteristic art-form – if it may be called this – of our Age of Affluence, quick replies are more appreciated than good ones. A silly opinion expressed on the quiz type of programme is more highly valued than the result of research and meditation. If someone has prepared a script and has given time and thought to a matter, this has to be disguised and the speaker has to give the impression of talking extempore. Instant answers are preferred to good ones; improvisation is preferred to knowledge; quick wit is more appreciated than slow wisdom.

Everything around us gives the impression that everybody

is madly busy all the time; that everybody is short of time and is desperately keen on saving minutes or even seconds; that time is the most precious commodity of this Age of Affluence. This is the age when people buy fast and expensive sports cars and jog along at 35 m.p.h. on the motorways. People are quite honest about this. Being 'quite honest' means that they do not try to delude others; they try to delude themselves. Our age is, in fact, indolent; it is leisurely, sluggish, often soporific.

Parkinson's Law said the last word on one aspect of this problem. 'Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion'. These are words of wisdom; but Parkinson's point is not my point. My point is that all those busy and important people are not busy at all. Their work does not expand, in spite of their desperate efforts. I do not know many great industrialists but all the ones I know waste three quarters of their time on trivialities. They must know everything that goes on in their empire, they are absolutely incapable of delegating responsibility (in practice; they can waste endless hours explaining how important it is to delegate responsibility). They spend long hours – which they would not know how to spend otherwise – on matters which should never have come up before them. I remember being at an important conference which was interrupted three times because the managing director insisted on deciding himself whether a messenger (fee 7s 6d) should be sent with a letter or whether the ordinary special delivery service (1s 6d) would do. Another time I had to visit a busy and important man in his office. As I knew that he could rarely get away from his office before nine or ten at night, I kept my business short and my words concise, meaning to leave him in a few minutes. He kept me there for over an hour chattering on irrelevant matters and wasting my completely valueless time of which I had plenty. At this rate, I found it surprising that he could get

home for the night at all. I asked another businessman – the chairman of several large companies – to contribute to a charity which, I knew, was near his heart. All he had to do was write out a cheque; or else refuse in a brief note; or, in the worst case, leave my letter unanswered. (A rude but truly time-saving device.) He did none of these things. He rang me up seven or eight times, kept me on the phone for indefinite periods while he babbled on explaining how terrifyingly busy he was, what large sums he contributed to diverse good causes and assuring me that the matter would receive his attention but he would have to discuss it with deputies and vice-presidents. In the end – having kept me altogether at least three hours on the phone and, no doubt, having wasted further hours with his vice-presidents and secretaries – he sent me a cheque for exactly the amount I knew he would send when I first wrote to him. I have heard allegedly busy barristers pompously droning on and on, repeating points too obvious to be made at all. The president of a medium-sized firm, one of the busiest men I have ever met, wasted no time chatting; he was always brisk and to the point. He had to rush around from dawn to dusk; he had no time for executive luncheons, pleasant drinks in bars and clubs, long chats, interminable conferences. He was always on the move, always hurrying, always active, always breathless. After his firm went bankrupt he could not get another job. He is an old-age pensioner now, living on national assistance and has absolutely nothing to do. Yet he is just as busy as before. He can never find five minutes to have a chat with you on a bench in Soho Square (outside his former offices) in the sun. He is always on the move, always hurrying, always active, always breathless. Being busy had nothing to do with the amount of work he had to do: it was a personal characteristic of his, like being tall, slim and blue-eyed. Others – civil servants, members of all large organisations – rely on conferences. Most of these are

pointless and all decisions are taken elsewhere. Yet they are a blessing: they keep you busy in the sense of helping you to spend your time somehow. I do not maintain that businessmen are never truly busy. I do not mean that they never take important decisions. But important decisions are taken in a few minutes and then the details – relevant and mostly irrelevant – are worked out by underlings. I also admit that a few people – but only a few people – who do good work at low wages are harassed, exploited and kept busy all the time.

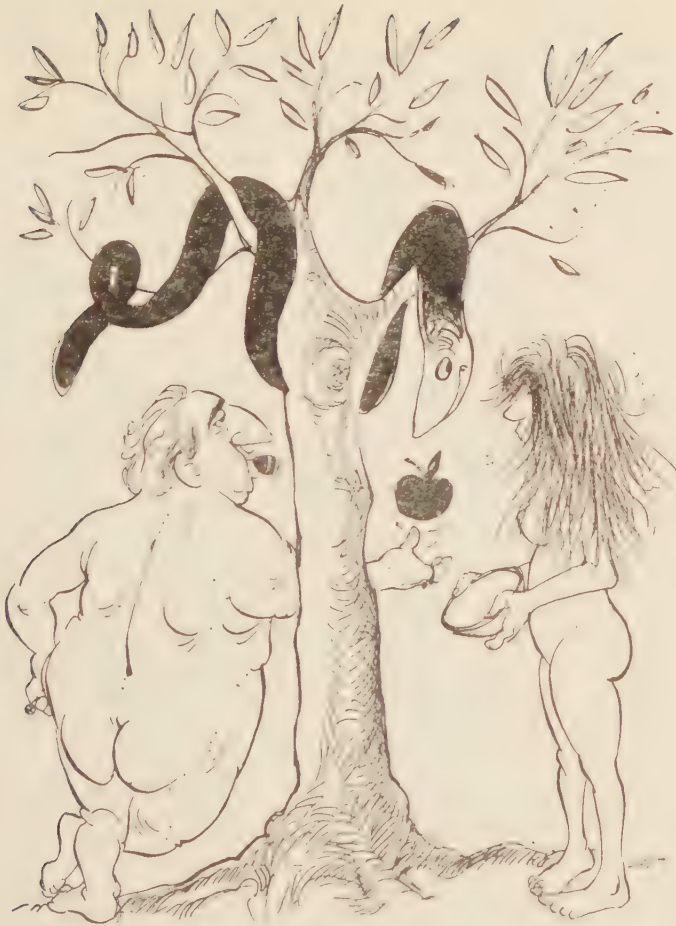
Why this pose then? Why pretend to be so busy when one just isn't? Partly because we like to look important and a busy man is believed to be an important man. But that is only part of the explanation. We want to look busy because we are not busy at all. I write a book and a half per annum plus innumerable articles plus doing some television and radio work but I always have plenty of free time and I love it. The Age of Affluence has given us leisure; the Age of Automation is going to give us much more leisure. According to Professor Gabor (*Inventing the Future*) this will be one of the major problems of the coming decades. It is, of course, a terrifying threat. It is easy to work, however pointless and unnecessary your so-called work may be; it is much more difficult to spend your free time intelligently: indeed to spend it at all. What do people do nowadays, when they start having too much free time on hand? They rob banks and trains. Those robbers do not really need money. They rob banks and trains because of boredom; just to while away their time somehow. It is better to rob banks than to sit and do nothing. The increase of leisure threatens us ruthlessly and that is why our age is whistling in the dark. That is why busy executives and presidents of large firms keep talking utter rot and preventing people like myself from going home quietly to do nothing or read a book (which is the same in their eyes, anyway). We all drink instant tea, standing up, to conceal the fact from

ourselves that we have all the time in the world to make tea on gas-cookers in the old-fashioned way and sit down to enjoy it.

## The Decline of the Rich

IT is not so easy to be a member of the Affluent Society as it used to be to be rich. In olden times a rich man was a rich man and everybody knew it. Rich people were elegantly or at least expensively dressed, while the poor walked about in rags. Rich people had cars, the poor used public transport or walked. Rich people travelled abroad, the poor were happy if they managed to get down to Southend for the day.

Affluence, coupled with modern manufacturing methods, has put an end to that happy era. Members of the Affluent Society are cornered on all fronts. The large, cheap department and chain stores have produced equality in appearance. Look at a man in the street and unless he is carefully and spotlessly dressed in brand new clothes (which gives him away as an upstart) you cannot tell a retired general from a car worker or a Conservative M.P. from a postman. It is still worse in the case of women. Experts in materials, cuts and furs can, of course, tell something expensive when they see it. But experts are few and far between and imitations are becoming better and more convincing every day. To the uninitiated majority, shop-girls look like duchesses except that a) they are often prettier than duchesses and b) duchesses themselves – to increase the confusion – buy their clothes in the chain stores. But even what is spent on clothing becomes a poor guide. Mink is expensive enough; yet it has become so vulgar that it is now not merely unwearable but unmentionable. It



*A rich man was a rich man . . .*

is not much good sending your son to Eton because the place is full of the sons of *nouveaux riches*, traders, industrialists and advertising agents; there is little distinction in belonging to once famous clubs that have become the venues of pretentious expense-account luncheons. There are no 'distinguished' sports any more: tennis – the worst come-down of all – has become a popular pastime since Wimbledon began to be shown on television; golf and even shooting are becoming as common as hop-sotch used to be among slum-children in the twenties. There is no point in having yachts or country-cottages because it is rare to find any small clerk or self-respecting foreman without some seafaring vehicle or a place of his own in the country. Long expensive journeys abroad are, of course, non-starters. Anyone who has any job at all can and does afford a holiday in Sitges or a cruise if he – or she – is still attracted by the waning magic of the word.

These developments have thrown the most affluent members of the Affluent Society into a panic. How to show off in a world where showing off has become an intricate and well-nigh insoluble problem? To make things worse, vulgar ostentation is now hopelessly out-of-date and discouraged by the older moneyed classes. In the late twenties – during the depression – the rich got frightened and learnt their lesson: it is better not to show off, or if you must, then show off in a subtle manner, without provoking envy and anger. So what are the super-affluent to do? The idea they have hit upon is not very imaginative. They have just gone to the other extreme; they have simply reversed the trend and now they behave the way the poor used to behave a short while ago.

1) It was only the day before yesterday that people were vying with one another as to who had the newest, ugliest, flashiest car. Today the distinguished thing is to drive about in an old, very small sports car. The real dream of many people is not to have a car at all. But who can afford *that*? I



know an industrialist who used to drive a huge Bentley in the fifties; in the early sixties he switched to a small sports car and now he has no car at all. 'I am consciously happy when I go out, I enjoy immensely not having a car,' he has told me at least five times. He feels that he has at last arrived.

2) As you cannot go to the fashionable places any more, you have to go to the unfashionable ones. 'Off the beaten track' is the battle cry. Up to the mid-fifties the intellectuals were the path-finders: they kept discovering beautiful unknown spots such as Ischia or Ibiza, to be followed by the industrial and commercial masses who, in turn, were followed by the Common Affluent. The latter turned any and every place into a popular resort, resembling Southend in August. The trouble is that the world is slowly running out of places worth visiting, so the really knowledgeable now go to primitive Greek islands without electricity and running water, to wild villages in Anatolia without sanitation, to Macedonian chalets without central heating, to Moroccan sand dunes where parking your camel is still no problem. By 1984 the truly rich will spend their holidays with the Eskimoes of Greenland\* or in Katanga and shove-ha'penny will be the exclusive sport of today's polo players and foxhunters. The change may, of course, be for the better; but the tendency is nevertheless surprising.

3) This new trend suits the English and their puritanical instincts. Basically they are still fond of bad food, unheated bathrooms, cold living-rooms and, generally speaking, are devoted to discomfort of all kinds. Although they can afford the best restaurants, they will go out picnicking, eating cold food from plastic plates in crouching positions and spreading

\* Since writing these words I have seen an account of the latest thing in holidays: a tour of the Antarctic. Apparently it was greatly enjoyed by those who went on it - and I am sure they will enjoy even more spending the rest of the year being the only people who have yet made such a tour.

ants on their bread with the butter. Although they can afford the best hotels, they cross and recross Europe in uncomfortable and over-crowded caravans – in glorious slum conditions. This is fun; it is also self-punishment. For the English punishment, of course, is fun. This latest twist in affluent living is a great achievement. These latest trends give them a chance of being well-off and miserable at one and the same time; of enjoying not only all the riches but also all the discomfort money can buy.

\* \* \*

I wish to add that being poor is also much more difficult than it used to be. Between the wars unemployment was the major curse and economic crises kept hitting the headlines. A poor man was the victim of the times, he suffered from the short-sightedness, mismanagement or downright wickedness of governments. But there is no glory in being poor today. The poor themselves accept this notion. The anger of the poor has given way to self-conscious resignation. The aggressive and militant poor have become shy, retiring and meek. (Aggressive Trade Unions should not be taken for aggressive poor; Trade Unions no longer represent the poor.)

I was present some time ago when a friend of mine, a sociologist, received an American lady who came to him with a letter of introduction. He asked her politely what he could do for her, what she was interested in.

She answered ebulliently: 'In poverty, professor. You must tell me *all* about poverty. I am terribly fascinated by poverty. I'm just crazy about poverty.'

She was on a poor wicket (if American ladies are on any wicket at all). She chose the wrong subject and the wrong decade. Or at least the wrong Continent.

## Emptio-Mania

EMPTIO-MANIA is the scientific name of a disease created by this Age of Affluence. It is brought about partly by Affluence itself and partly by the reckless advertising, enticement and allurements to which the ordinary shopper is exposed. *Emptio*



is the Latin word for *buying* and the more common name of the disease is shopping-mania. It is a highly infectious disease: should your intimate friends or neighbours catch it, you are, almost certainly, as good as lost.

Emptio-mania is one of the compulsive diseases, closely resembling alcoholism. You buy things not because you need them; not because you want them; not even because you like them. It is buying itself, the act of shopping you find irresistible. Like alcoholics, emptio-maniacs specialise: as some people drink gin only, or brandy or Irish whisky, some emptio-maniacs buy only clothes or shoes or hats. I knew a man in the last, deadly stages of emptio-mania, dissolute,

poor, practically penniless, who was unable to pass a post-office without dashing in and buying a penny stamp or two. He had no money left for anything else. This stage corresponds to methylated spirit drinking. I also knew a man who booked and bought three funerals for himself. When it was pointed out to him that this was two too many; that no one can possibly enjoy more than one funeral – as far as he, himself, is concerned – he only smiled. What could he say? An abstainer just would not understand.

Emptio-maniacs start off as normal shoppers, just as alcoholics, more often than not, start off as normal, social drinkers. This stage is called social shopping. They buy things they or their family need – or almost need. The signs of compulsion will, however, soon creep in, yet they will not always be easily detectable. When a woman fills up her refrigerator with enough meat to put a medium-sized butcher's shop to shame, she still may pass as an over-conscientious housewife. When she buys a shipload of bananas most of which will inevitably rot away, she still may give the impression of having merely miscalculated her needs. Others – to disguise their mania – will not buy things for themselves but gifts for their husbands, wives, children, etc. When a woman buys her first dozen pipe-cleaners for herself (provided she does not smoke and owns no pipe) or a man buys his first major consignment of hat-pins (provided he is not a transvestist or even if he is, never wears a hat), these symptoms deserve close attention. Some emptio-maniacs preserve certain ties with reality: they buy three times as many clothes as they can possibly wear – even on one single occasion – yet after all, one does need clothes; others cannot resist boxes, toys, shining objects, colourful objects, things of peculiar shape, ashtrays, decorative objects, souvenirs and novelties of any kind; others again buy more books every month than they can read in a lifetime – yet there is nothing in itself

peculiar about buying books. So neither the patients nor their families may notice that there is anything wrong; they believe for a long time that the patient is simply a person who spends his money rather lightheartedly. (There is a rare sub-species, members of which buy several pieces of everything. The different pieces may vary in colour and size but they may be exact replicas. 'Reserves'. Some people feel safer if they have a dozen electric barbecues or three dozen nut-grinders in their kitchen.)

If emptio-maniacs are deprived of their chance of buying – if money is withheld or other preventive circumstances are created – strong withdrawal-symptoms will soon become apparent. These are dangerous; they are often worse than the disease itself. Many a marriage has been broken by emptio-mania; but almost as many by the withdrawal symptoms.

What is to be done, then?

1) You cannot stop the emptio-maniac from buying. But you can stop him (and *him* always means *her* too) from throwing or giving away the goods he has bought. Soon every nook and cranny of the house will become a crying reproach to him and it may wear him down. You should praise and treasure every idiotic object, and insist on keeping it. Soon there will be no place for members of the family to live, to move, even to stand.

2) There is one simple solution few people think of – but a few do. *You can spend all your day shopping without actually buying anything.* You go through the motions. You explain in the shop what you want, you go through the acts of choosing, hesitating, discussing your problems, even considering the price and then you walk out. You flee. This habit – particularly if it becomes widespread – may cause nervous disorders among shop assistants and shopkeepers but it may cure you. Besides, there are most efficient drugs to

cure or alleviate ordinary nervous disorders but no drugs exist as yet to cure emptio-mania.

3) And Shoppers Anonymous should be formed without delay. When the irresistible urge comes to buy another dozen pipe-cleaners, an additional electric barbecue and another funny corkscrew, a member of the S.A. should be available to come and talk to the sufferer, right up to closing time, if need be. He should tell him his own sad story, how emptio-mania ruined his finances, his nerves, his marriage. He should warn the sufferer how all this emptio-mania rampant in our world creates more and more prosperity and affluence – which are, of course, the original sources of this plague.

## Red Lights

I HAVE lately encountered two terrifying symptoms, small matters in themselves, yet glowing red warnings to show where the Road to Affluence might lead.

I was invited for a drink to a rich businessmen's five-star hotel in Zurich, a place (I mean the hotel, not the town) I particularly detest. However, as the man who wanted to have a word with me, *was* a rich businessman, and as he also lived in that hotel, I had no choice. He was an American, the president and proprietor of a large New York firm, and he'd been living in Europe for the last fifteen years. Without asking me if I wanted a drink and, if I did, what, he just nodded to the barman – that 'The usual, Jean' type of nod.

The barman brought a bottle of champagne and poured out a glass for each of us. My host then took a slender, elongated leather case out of his pocket. It contained a champagne-stirrer made of pure gold. He stirred his champagne

with it, then put it down on a saucer, for everyone to see. This little scene nauseated me rather but I had to admit his performance contained quite a few impressive ingredients: 1) He carried in his pocket a permanent tool – obviously a necessity of everyday life – to use for champagne drinking. (Champagne – as every beginner knows or at least thinks – is the most expensive of drinks). 2) Champagne manufacturers have accumulated great skill, over generations, at putting those little sparkles *in*; my host's first act was to take them out even before tasting the stuff, thus reducing the best of champagnes into intoxicating yellow water. 3) For this job he used a stirrer made of pure gold, worth a little fortune. Gold is not particularly good for this purpose and it is especially heavy. But that had nothing to do with his main point.

The heroine of the other small event is a small English girl of six. I ran into the family – father, mother and their little daughter – in Paris and they invited me for dinner at the Ritz. I fancy myself as something of a globe-trotter but I had never had a meal at the Ritz in Paris. I just could not afford it; I always thought the Ritz was considerably more expensive than any other ruinously expensive restaurant in that ruinously expensive city. My hosts had ordered the meal in advance. The first course was caviar. The little girl looked at the beautiful black pearls on her plate, turned to her mother and burst out sharply:

'But, Mummy, you know perfectly well I *detest* the caviar at the Ritz.'

\* \* \*

This is not only terrifying; it is also reassuring. It clearly shows that Affluence – luckily – carries in it the seeds of its own destruction. An Affluent Society – these examples are proof, if one had any doubts – becomes feeble, effeminate, decadent.

In Pakistan, I heard, a member of the American Peace Corps – who had gone there with great enthusiasm and readiness to help humanity – was warned not to go outside Karachi. ‘Places are filthy; it’s no fun.’ Again, in Israel, a friend of mine was stopped in the street by two young Americans who inquired: ‘Excuse me, but where can we buy a kibbutz?’

And so on. The Affluent Society is ripe to fall victim to more virile systems. It is never the hardships that blow away a civilisation; it is always its success and love of comfort. That will be the end of Affluence – so why worry?



### *Part III*

## THE WORLD AT LARGE

### My Political Memoirs

AS in the next few chapters I intend to say a few words on politics and on public life, I thought I might as well start off with my political memoirs. I am absolutely determined to give my political memoirs to the world and I feel that the present opportunity might never recur.

The Reader need not be alarmed: my memoirs claim a unique distinction: they are the shortest political memoirs ever written.

I have read many memoirs, including a large number of books by the political second eleven. All these people believe – with a conviction they hardly showed in any other field – that they ought to have become Prime Minister; indeed we learn that, at certain junctures, they had a splendid chance of so doing and it was only a) their modesty, b) their self-sacrifice for the sake of party unity, c) their sheer bad luck, ill-health, etc, or d) the intrigues of smaller men which prevented them from achieving their due, the highest post.

Members of the second eleven invariably inform us in their memoirs that although they failed to become Prime Minister, it was they who played a decisive part at certain crucial

advice that the chap who usurped their position as Premier is able to make his most valid claim to greatness; or, conversely, had the man accepted *their* advice, he would not have made such an ass of himself. In other words, while they failed to achieve actual power, they played a decisive part in the background and they made history. This is true of myself, too. The Reader would be astonished if he knew my historical importance.

Having said so much, however, I have said more than my natural modesty permits. So I will confine myself to one single episode which occurred quite recently and which I regard as the highlight of my political career.



A short while ago I went to a party given by a literary gentleman. It started with a bit of a shock. I heard the hostess telling a lady next to her, 'That is George Mikes.' I turned towards them and saw that she was, in fact, pointing out another man. Now, I am not terribly vain about my appearance, but the other man was about five foot high, almost as wide and completely bald; while I am tall, slim and extremely good-looking. To make matters worse, for the rest of the evening I did not dare show my face to our hostess: I felt that it was not very nice of me not to be Hugo P. whom she had taken for me; I felt that by not being Hugo P. I was letting her down, putting her in the wrong, embarrassing her and certainly not behaving as a guest should towards his hostess.

Then in came Mr Edward Heath, followed a few minutes later by Mr George Brown.\* There was a Swedish journalist – a brand new arrival in this country – standing next to me and I, trying to be helpful, explained to him: ‘Just watch. You will be able to witness an interesting phenomenon of British political life. These two men have been abusing and maligning each other for weeks in the press and on the public platform. But to the glory of British commonsense and fair play, they never carry public hostility into their private lives. Observe how jovially these two will drink together in no time; listen to the jokes and friendly legpull; and watch the back-slapping.’

The Swede nodded and waited. Perhaps he is still waiting. Mr Heath and Mr Brown knew nothing about the niceties of English political life and managed to look through each other – even from a distance of two or three feet – as if both had been made of thin air.

Then my host introduced me to Mr Brown.

‘But we’ve met before,’ he said.

I was embarrassed. ‘Have we?’

‘Oh, yes, we met at Patrick Gordon-Walker’s house. You don’t remember?’

‘I do,’ said I. ‘And I also met your sister at Highgate.’

Now he seemed a little surprised.

‘My sister?’

‘Certainly,’ I said a shade more aggressively than I meant to.

‘When we met at Patrick Gordon-Walker’s we discussed a book called – wait a minute – yes, called *Up on the Mountains*.’

\* Note for those who will read this in the 21st century and after: Mr Edward Heath was the Leader of the Opposition, and also leader of the Tories. The Tories (also called Conservatives) were a political party. Mr George Brown was made Minister of Economic Affairs, a post specially created for him by Mr Harold Wilson. This was Mr Wilson’s just revenge because Mr Brown had opposed him as a rival in the contest for the Party Leadership.

Then he looked at me. 'But you don't remember me. Why should you?'

For a moment I liked this new role of a man who meets the famous politicians of our day and does not even remember them. But I did not wish to seem rude, so I told Mr Brown: 'Indeed I do remember. I remember vividly. It was a very pleasant occasion.'

Mr Brown suddenly shouted at me: 'No, I am wrong! I'm quite wrong!'

This was a bit painful after my emphatic declaration that I did remember. By then I knew that Mr Brown was mixing me up with Arthur Koestler. Now it is only our accents which are similar which is not a compliment for either of us. Be that as it may, I thought that having been mixed up with Hugo P. I might as well be mixed up with Arthur Koestler too, whatever the reasons for Mr Brown's mistake. But now, I thought, he remembered, too. But no, he didn't.

'I'm quite wrong,' he went on, 'the book was not called *Up on the Mountains* but *Down by the River*.'

'Quite so,' I nodded feeling relieved. Using this opportunity I rapidly outlined one of my brilliant economic theories, destined to save the country. I do not remember what it was but it made only a passing impression on Mr Brown.

'This is an inflationary theory,' he said, shaking his head, 'and I'm after deflation.'

My face grew dark.

'So what?' I asked him. 'You don't mean to dismiss perfectly good economic theories because of such trifling nuances?'

'I must,' said he. 'Besides, I get all the economic advice from Hungarians I need.'

This, of course, hurt my pride immensely. I told him coolly and sharply that in this case I felt it my duty to inform him that I had never met him before; I had never been in Mr Patrick Gordon-Walker's house: and I had never read a book

called *Up on the Mountains*, nor *Down by the River*. Very well, Mr Brown replied, if I took such a nasty attitude, he might as well inform me that I had never met his sister in Highgate. The lady I had met could be his sister-in-law – but he doubted even that.

We parted on a tense note.

And that is how I missed becoming Prime Minister.

## Writing Under Water

NOT that it matters much who *is* Prime Minister. His personal qualities are important but it makes very little difference which party he belongs to.

The Conservatives have had to get rid of the image of being a reactionary party, serving the interests of the rich and privileged only. In a democracy no great party can confess to being purely sectional. The Conservatives have become ardent supporters of the Welfare State. (The Leader of the Opposition grew almost hysterical when he was accused of not being devoted to the idea of the Welfare State.) In the forties they opposed the idea of granting independence to India but between 1951 and 1964 they granted independence to more colonies than Labour had done. They also profess to be the true friends of the working men and devoted to their interests.

At the moment of writing we have a Labour government elected in 1966. It is hardly distinguishable – with the naked eye – from its Conservative predecessors. Doctrinaire Socialism is being forgotten quickly; non-doctrinaire socialism is being forgotten more slowly. The Labour government's financial policy is the old Tory game of stop-go. America's Vietnam policies are whole-heartedly endorsed. The White Paper on

Immigration is more of a retrograde step than almost any Tory legislation. And so on, and so on. I cannot attempt a detailed analysis of the political situation of the moment but it must be clear to everybody that the Tories have moved left in the last decade, Labour has moved right and the two parties largely overlap. A party says one thing in opposition and then it shrugs, mellows, 're-adjusts' when it comes to power. There is, of course, still a great deal of animosity between the two parties; but perhaps not more than within the two parties. I do not wish to criticise Mr Wilson. I am a great admirer of his. I think he is the best Tory Prime Minister we have had since Disraeli. (Churchill in his great period was no 'Tory' Prime Minister.)

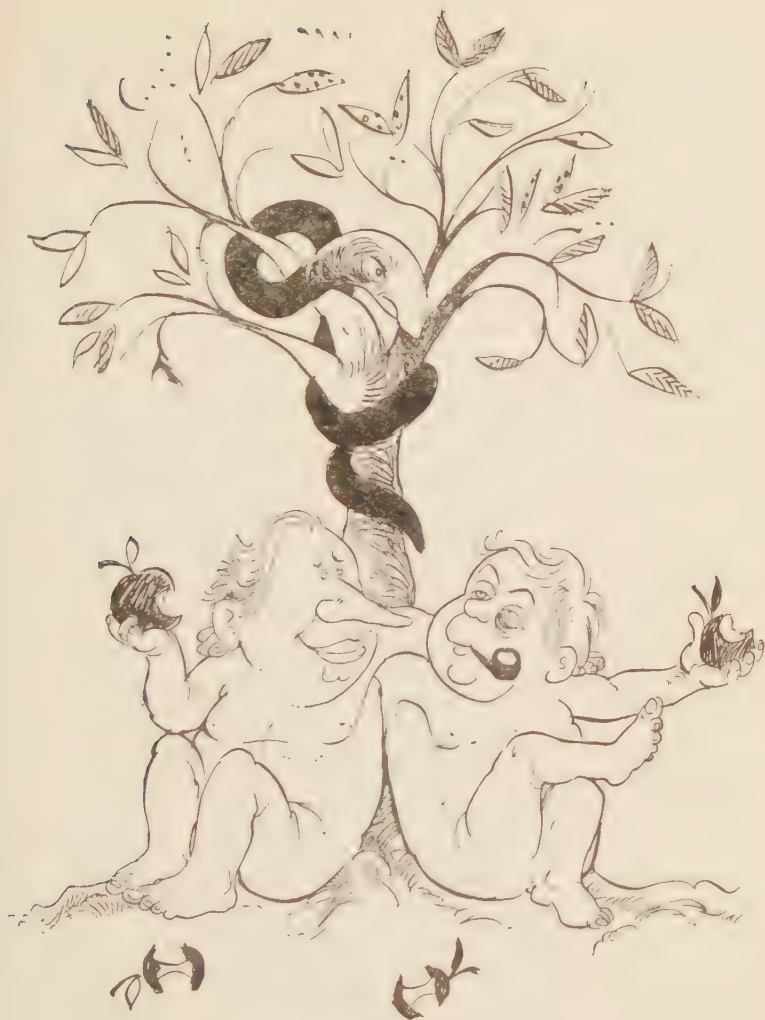
There is a very simple solution for all this. We do not have two sets of really first-class people in the two big parties. That is why second-, third- and fourth-raters manage to occupy important ministerial posts. The two parties should form one single team, which should consist of first- and second-raters only. Thus we would get rid of the third and fourth elevens.

What? - I hear the shouts. Britain as a one-party society? No elections?

But who said this? Of course, we would keep our free democratic elections. But we would not vote for parties; we would vote for programmes. We, the electors, would simply decide whether we wanted a Socialist or a Tory programme for the next five years. It would not make the slightest difference in practice, but in this way we would be able to keep everything as it is today and to keep also our cherished free elections and true democratic system of government.

\* \* \*

Well, why does it seem that there is no real difference between Tories and Socialists? It seems so, because there *is* no real



*There is no real difference*

difference. It is true that this Age of Affluence is more interested in chasing money and enjoying life than in political theory; but it is also true that the dividing line between the parties has faded. It is maintained by personalities; by the vested interest of the ageing workers of both great parties (a man who has devoted his whole life to the Labour Party does not like to be told that he might as well have devoted it to the Tories – it would have made little difference); and it is also maintained by sham arguments, phoney quarrels and hollow debates.

The Trade Unions may pose as representatives of the oppressed masses – they may even take their own postures seriously. In fact, they exploit the capitalists – whenever they get the chance – just as ruthlessly as the capitalists exploited them as long as the going was good. The Trade Union squabbles of the last decade or two have had nothing to do with the valiant struggle of brave men for just causes; they were a series of petty and often ridiculous quarrels for trifling, momentary advantages and, just as often as not, fights between Unions, or even within Unions. Neither the socialist Tories nor the conservative Socialists have had the guts to hit some of the comical, pompous, arrogant and often incredibly stupid Trade Union Caesars on the head. I have been a Socialist all my life. I am still a Socialist. But the Trade Unions of Britain are not. Even less than the Labour Party. (Not that Trade Unions do not care for their members; nor that they are declining; nor that they are in a crisis or in a conflict with themselves. They are – much too often – simply plain silly; they often try to achieve results, one feels, in the one single way they cannot achieve them. They gained too much power, influence and too much of the limelight much too quickly and feel awkward and self-conscious now – like quickly growing adolescents who try to look mature.)

There is no contradiction in this situation: employers and



employees are in the same boat today: they are all exploiters. Exploiters of the really poor in their own country. Exploiters of the seven and a half million people who suffer in silence in our Affluent Society – three millions of whom have full-time jobs. (What do the Trade Unions do for *them*?) Exploiters of cheap immigrant labour. Exploiters of the under-developed countries. Units have become much larger in this modern world and there are no exploiting and exploited classes any more, only exploiting and exploited nations, countries and even continents. As far as the Pakistani street-sweeper in Birmingham or the Jamaican vegetable porter in Bradford is concerned, he sees no difference between the British bank director and the British skilled worker. He is exploited by both. The Ghanaian cocoa-slave in Ghana is in a more privileged position: he has been exploited by the Affluent West – by all classes of it – as well as by his own Ghanaian brethren.

It has been said that no society could live half rich and half poor because, when driven too far, the poor might get exasperated and rob the rich of their wealth. The world is rapidly becoming one large society and it is the whole world today which cannot live half-affluent, half-beggar. This is a sad truth. I like and enjoy my affluence as much as the next man. I have always liked good steaks; but I was always taken aback in restaurants in certain countries where half-starved women – with infants in their arms – watched me eat with terrified, pleading eyes – hopeful, subdued and burning with hatred at one and the same time. The world is becoming such a restaurant. The West is enjoying its steak; hundreds of millions of dirty, starving beggars – with their infants in their arms – look through the window and watch attentively. I find this a little disconcerting.

I know that the under-developed countries are given a lot of cash. More often than not, the gift is not so much to help the people as to prevent them from going Communist. More

often than not, half of this help is spent on administration, the other half is stolen or disappears down the Corridors of Corruption. But doling out money – particularly money that never reaches the people – is not enough. Whether we like it or not, the only solution is this: the people of Asia and Africa – Chinese, Indonesians, Nigerians and all – must be turned into silly and useless members of the Affluent Society. They must be able to buy terylene underwear, bikinis and ballpoint pens (which can write also under water). Some people say that there will be no peace in the world until total nuclear disarmament is achieved. Nonsense! There will be no peace until hundreds of millions of yellow and black people sit in their terylene underwear and bikinis under water and write with their ballpoint pens. Albert Schweitzer reached darkest Africa but did not change much; if Perry Mason reaches darkest Africa, he will change a great deal. Imagine the pride and happiness of those black millions, scribbling away happily under water; imagine the market it would create – first of all for their own useless, new industries but also for the useless industries of the West. And imagine the situation: world revolution might threaten because of a dire shortage of bikinis in Indonesia or Zambia. What a wonderful, god-sent opportunity *that* would be for British lorry drivers and dockers to hold up a consignment and strike for some – as they call it – fringe benefit.

### The Decline of Paris and Chicago

ONE beneficial result of Affluence – at least affluence in Britain – is that this country can claim now to be the Capital of Sex and Crime. *Gay Paree* has been dethroned; it is all



*The capital of sex and crime*

*Gay Londres* now. Chicago, once the home of prosperous killers and successful gangsters, has become – thanks, greatly, to an able police chief – one of the comparatively decent and law-abiding cities of the world. London has, undoubtedly, taken its place as the capital of crime.

You can no longer wink when you speak of going over to Paris for a day or two. If you go to Paris, it will be on business. Your physical pleasures will, most probably, be confined to visiting some good restaurants. Today it is Frenchmen who wink or blush when talking of a planned visit to London. It is true that the streets of London have – as the saying goes – been cleaned up. This cleaning up, however, has done a great deal of good to the sex industry. It gave it status; it raised it to higher spheres. The girls who entertain the foreign visitors are the same; but they are not street-walkers any more – they are courtesans who sit around in bars and clubs, call-girls, even models. Their prestige and professional standing have risen greatly. So while they give exactly the same service as before, they can demand higher fees. (Another sad example of prices going up without a corresponding rise in productivity.)

The re-conquering of our leading role in international crime is even more reassuring. Our gratitude is due, mostly, to the train robbers who, while at home they get much less appreciation than their due, are valued and admired abroad. London in the heyday of Sherlock Holmes was the acknowledged capital of crime; but its prestige gradually faded until, in the twenties, an utterly new type, the foul-mouthed, gum-chewing, cigar-smoking Chicago gunman took the place of the gentlemanly opponents. But Britain hit back; the imperial idea – at least in the field of crime – is not dead. Britain regained her lost prestige. Incessant bank robberies, regular hold-ups, the weekly four or five wage-snatches have gone far towards establishing our past glory. But it was first the £62,000 mailbag robbery in 1962 which convincingly

strengthened our position as leaders in crime. Then the Great Train Robbery clinched it all and we are the Criminal Nation Number One – without peers, even without serious rivals. American crime is dull, monotonous and – though I should not like to sound harsh – unattractive; Continental crime is feeble, petty, often emotional, amateurish and unimaginative.

At the beginning of 1966 German television put out a series on British crime. Their theory – unconfirmed but appealing – was that the mailbag robbery and the Great Train Robbery had been committed by the same gang: the £62,000 haul from the first was simply the petty cash needed for the second operation. The German television series was a tremendous success; it claimed an unprecedented rating of one hundred per cent viewing. The series was shown in some other European countries, too, making a great impact everywhere. It has done a great deal to confirm our claim of being the world's leading criminals. It has also revived the legend of a special British type of felon. The robbers are cool, bowler-hatted and umbrella-carrying English gentlemen, impeccably dressed, never in a hurry. Their manners are exquisite: they might – occasionally – hit an elderly postman on the head with a cosh but they would never fail to stand up when a lady enters the room; they might now and then throw the driver off his engine but they would never raise their voices. We seem to be unaware of the debt we owe to our criminals; they are the envy of the Common Market.

### Politics (*Theory*)

I WANT to deal here with some of the most important and most neglected aspects of political theory. Let us assume you

want to succeed as a political party or movement at home or abroad: how do you set about it?

1) *You need a Book*; a Book which lays down all the principles. A Book like the Bible or the Talmud or the Koran or – coming to *real* politics – Marx's *Das Kapital*. The advantages of an all-comprising tome are numerous, the greatest advantage being that it answers all the questions, it guides you in all problems; it is authoritative and final.

Some incorrigible cynics – having the Bible in mind – may ask: how can a book, almost two thousand years old, compiled by primitive, desert people, give all the answers to questions arising today in our electronic-computer civilisation which has brought the moon nearer to the earth than Jerusalem used to be to Rome? Many would insist that, all the same, it *can* give all the answers because the Bible (or the Talmud or the Koran) is of divine origin; while *Das Kapital* is, at most, of semi-divine origin. This, however, is not the right answer. The real beauty of these Books – all books of this sort, of divine and semi-divine origin – is that they always give you the answer you want. They tell you absolutely everything but also the opposite of everything. The Bible inspired the Inquisition but it also inspired tolerance and understanding; it inspired the burning of witches but it also inspires Christian love; it inspired the Crusades – with all their cruelty, robbery, plunder and rape – but it also preaches kindness, self-restraint and peace. There is nothing you cannot find in the Bible. There are more than 300 Christian sects, all claiming to be the only true religion; all are firmly based on the Bible. Within these religions and sects there are countless factions and within the factions innumerable individuals who all deviate from orthodoxy: there are, in short, several million interpretations, all based on the same texts of the Bible (or the other books). Marxists were hanging and shooting one another gaily in the thirties and later again in the fifties, and thousands



*It guides you in all problems*

were thrown into prison; next day, the jailers went to jail and their former prisoners became their jailers; what was sacred and unassailable dogma in Jugoslavia, was mortal crime in Russia; what today is anathema in Peking is the revered truth in Moscow. All these doctrines, nevertheless, have one thing in common: they all claim to be based on the teachings of Marx and Lenin. All this clearly proves: it does not matter in the least what anyone writes in his book; what matters is only what others read into it. Or, which makes it even worse: no one really reads anything into any book. Tyrants, political manipulators, crooked intellectuals first decide what an author ought to have said and then they proceed to find that he really said it. Words have no meaning, no guts, no honour; words always rush to serve any rising tyrant, crank or rogue. Words are whores. Luckily, they age and become useless as fast as whores.

The British, as usual, know better. They have no political dogmas. They hate the very word. They have no written constitution either. They have *tradition* instead which, by now, boils down mostly to fancy dress. Looking around in Britain, you sometimes have the feeling that you are at a fancy-dress ball. You can observe judges in ceremonial processions, wearing fleecy wigs, golden chains around their necks, red velvet robes with small pieces of ermine hanging down here and there, black stockings and patent leather buckled shoes. Or you can see them in court, being addressed by barristers, garbed just a shade less ostentatiously. People at the universities and even at much humbler educational institutions wear another kind of fancy dress; certain soldiers don bear-skin headgear and shiny breastplates and ride black chargers. There is a special fancy dress for weddings and horse races, there is a fancy dress for grand state occasions, there is a traditional uniform for beatniks and even a closely defined hairstyle for social revolutionaries; there is a bizarre fancy



dress for porters standing in front of luxury hotels and an even more preposterous but magnificent one for valets of gaming clubs. Occasionally we see our great men in a solemn Garter procession and we admire them for being able to keep a straight face. All this has a deeper significance. The fancy dress habit creates almost as many problems as it solves but it does solve some. The thirteenth century fancy dress preserves a thirteenth century mentality. So in Britain there is no real conflict between past and present. There is hardly any present.

2) *You need Unity*. When in difficulty about policy, advocate unity. Unity is a magic word. Everybody is convinced that unity can solve all problems, everywhere, at all times. We keep hearing of bi-partisan foreign policy here and in the United States; we read about Lib-Lab pacts; ecumenical conferences; anti-socialist coalitions; Common Market; EFTA; national unity; international unity. The forming of the United Nations was thought by some (who did not remember the old League of Nations too vividly) to be a universal panacea. The creation of the United Arab Republic surely created many more problems than it healed.

There is no unity even where unity has apparently been achieved. Various branches of the armed forces (in all countries) fight one another more bitterly than they fight any enemy; within a government the various departments are at loggerheads, fighting for money and authority, and there are bitter feuds within each department itself. Within all large organisations rivalry is murderous. Take the BBC as one example: the Light Programme will regard the Home Service as a rival; BBC 1 will regard BBC 2 with more hostility than ITV. Rivalry has reached such a pitch between BBC 1 and BBC 2 that to curry favour with its audience BBC 2 always forecasts better weather.

Yet, unity remains a noble aim. The trouble is that people

always try to unite the unblendable. They try to unite organisations of the same kind, which refuse to give up their identity. How can you possibly unite – even for *ad hoc* co-operation – the Liberal Party and the Labour Party? Or the Catholic Church with the Protestant Churches? Unity should be approached from a new angle:

a) Do not unite Soviet and American space research because they just will not unite. Unite, instead, American space research with 'Estates in the Moon Incorporated' – a business firm, which sells land on the moon, at reasonable but steadily rising prices. These two organisations could co-operate fruitfully and there is no clash of interest between them.

b) You will never be able to unite all the Trade Unions in, say, the motor industry, into one big union speaking for all motor car workers. But you could unite the Trade Unions with the Whitehall Theatre or some other institution producing farces and the two institutions, between them, could entertain the nation superbly.

c) You will never be able to unite the Church of England with the Church of Rome. The Church of England – one of the largest property-owners in the country – should be united with the Abbey National Building Society: together they could do business on an impressive scale.

d) If you want to unite – or at least ally – things of the same kind, see to it that they should be far away from one another. Britain and New Zealand have been able to get on splendidly for centuries; Britain and Ireland never had a chance.

3) *You need Humour*. This, we are told, is the saving grace of politics. A sense of humour is God's most precious gift, we are constantly informed. A politician with a keen sense of humour will always win hearts and elections. When a much-loved and respected Speaker of the House of Commons died, the obituaries all dwelt at great length on the fact that he was a witty man and a first-class joker. He had the saving grace

– one of the most important obituaries remarked – of never taking himself seriously. But one is not entirely convinced; after all, why should the Speaker of the House of Commons not take himself seriously? Why is it so bad if that august referee is in turn taken seriously by the legislative assembly?

An exquisite sense of humour is regarded as an estimable quality in all professions, except in humorous writers. (With *serious* writers it is all right.) If a Minister of Pensions is a funny man, he is sure to be a success: people enjoy the laughs and no one minds the pensions. But if a humorous writer is trying to be funny – he never *is* funny; he is always *trying* to be funny – he is a pathetic figure, a miserable clown. If the Lord Chancellor cracks jokes on the Woolsack, everybody loves him; if a humorist does it much better, he is regarded as a bit of a bore. If the Speaker of the House of Commons refuses to take himself seriously, that is his 'saving grace'; if a humorous writer refuses to take himself seriously, he lacks dignity. If *he* refuses to take the Speaker seriously, he is a subversive influence, undermining respect for our established institutions.

This is quite right and logical: a joke in a serious, dramatic, blood-curdling situation is a joke; a joke, where everyone expects it, is an anti-climax. Instead of relieving tension it meets resistance. Besides, the Lord Chancellor starts off with a great advantage over the professional humorist. He is dressed for the part. It is easy to be funny if you are so quaintly dressed and sitting on a woolsack: how can a sober, dreary, dignified humorous writer even dream of competing with him?

## Politics (*Practice*)

IF you enter politics, you must learn how to react to certain stock situations. I dislike the customary and worn-out jokes about politicians which imply that they are all crooks, self-seekers, fools, and that they all live on the gullibility and *naivité* of the public. No, not *all*. A fair amount; probably as many as corresponds to the general level of intelligence and integrity of the community. In other words: a country gets the politicians it deserves, just as it gets the solicitors, postmen, underwear-manufacturers and district surveyors it deserves. Nevertheless, if you become a politician – whether a self-important crook or a second Winston Churchill – you have to give up certain sensible and decent habits of everyday life and adopt certain silly ones instead. First, a brief list of things you must not do:

1) *You must never say 'sorry'*. History is one long, interminable list of political mistakes; yet no contemporary politician may admit to a mistake. English private – and even business – life is based on this maddening 'sorry' habit. Britons vie with one another in taking the blame for matters they are entirely innocent of. They know that this 'sorry, my fault' gimmick disarms all opposition and criticism and shows what fine ex-public schoolboys they are. But in politics everyone must seem omniscient and infallible. This is a new trend; it was not always so. David Cecil tells in *Lord M* that once Melbourne, when as Home Secretary he was attacked by the opposition, stood up in the House and declared: 'I know I have a perfect reply to all this but, unfortunately, I don't know what it is because I've mislaid my notes.' The House in those days accepted this as a perfectly satisfactory answer. A

man may mislay his notes occasionally; why should he stop doing so because he was appointed Home Secretary? (I quote the above from memory. I am a strong Melbournist and have mislaid my notes.)

2) *You must never change your mind.* In normal life changing your mind is a virtue; in politics it is an unforgivable sin. Everybody keeps on changing his mind all the time, of course, but no one ever admits it. This so-called firmness makes utter nonsense of all parliamentary debates. Members argue for two days about a question, often throughout the night. Some of them deliver excellent arguments; some speeches are irresistibly convincing, true masterpieces of logic. Epoch-making these speeches may be; they may find their way into anthologies of great oratory and they may be read throughout the coming centuries; but they will not move the hopeless ditherer, who never in his life managed to make up his mind about anything. The debate, nowadays, is decided by the whips, in advance. Voting may depend on an influenza epidemic or on traffic congestion which may hold up more Tories than Labour members in Trafalgar Square or vice versa; it may depend on whether it is a minister or an opposition M.P. who is lost in a basement, or it may depend on which division bell may be temporarily out of order. But it certainly will have nothing to do with the speeches delivered and the arguments forged in them. I should bow my head to any M.P. – I should love him; I should erect an equestrian statue to him – who would stand up and say: 'I've voted with my opponents because Mr A's speech convinced me that in this particular question our opponents are right and we are wrong.' Not a hope, of course, of such a man emerging. He would become the joke of the century and would be hunted out of public life.

3) *You must never lose an election.* But do not worry: you cannot. No one has ever lost an election. According to the

results there *is* a winner, but this is misleading. Every party keeps on winning all elections. The Tories declare that although Labour has won, it is, in fact, a defeat for Labour for while the Tory vote went up, the Labour vote – in spite of the actual win – has gone down. So it is really a Tory victory. (Or vice versa, of course; all examples are reversible, there is no difference between the parties.) What happens when Labour votes do increase? It does not make the slightest difference: they increased by a smaller margin than the Labour party had expected. The Liberal candidate may lose his deposit, yet the voting will always clearly indicate a strong electoral swing towards the Liberals. The Independent Candidate may have been routed most ignominiously, yet he is a winner too: he has made his point and that is all he meant to do. (The day before he was talking of the absolute certainty of his victory.) He received only 317 votes but that, in fact, surpassed his wildest dreams. And that, exactly, is one of the main beauties of politics: you keep losing yet you always win. (The only disturbing factor is that sometimes you do win.)

\* \* \*

And now we have reached the second group. The group of stock replies you must use in certain situations.

1) '*This is no surprise to us . . .*' Nobody is ever surprised in politics. The wildest and maddest events are always foreseen and expected. Nobody ever explains why, in that case, they were not forestalled. For some time I thought that Pearl Harbor had been the only surprise in history. But it wasn't a surprise. Having read the memoirs of some American politicians, I now know that scores of them were awaiting the attack, some of them impatiently.

2) '*He does it only for electoral advantage . . .*' The noblest, the

most desirable, courageous and necessary steps immediately become suspect or worse if they bring electoral advantage in their wake. The entire political life of a democracy is based on gaining electoral advantages. Politicians freely admit this on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; but indignantly deny it on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. (On Saturday mornings only. On Saturday afternoons they are not concerned with politics.)

3) '*He has only his party, not his country in mind . . .*' This is also indignantly rejected every other day. In-between politicians maintain that as their party and their political programmes are the right ones, what is good for their party, is good for their country. That is supposed to be the whole idea in trying to gain power for their party.

4) '*The Prime Minister is playing politics . . .*' I had to re-read this charge three times but yes, this was what the Prime Minister was accused of. The Prime Minister is a professional politician. He was put into office and he is paid to play politics. Day and night. I think it would be a more serious charge to say: 'The Prime Minister is playing something else, not politics.'

5) '*We are not downhearted . . .*' No politician worth his salt is ever downhearted. Theirs is a gay life. After the most disastrous defeats – at elections, by-elections, in the House or anywhere else – political leaders must declare, oozing self-confidence: 'We are not downhearted!' In normal life you are a bit browned-off after a disaster; or anyway not especially exuberant. In politics every defeat cheers you up, every rout and catastrophe fills you with joy, rapture and ecstasy.

6) '*This is Communist-inspired . . .*' One of the most ancient and reddest of all herrings. Never mind the gist of the complaint, the reasons for a strike, disturbance or revolt, the justice of any cause. If it is Communist-inspired – or may be called so – there is no reason to take it seriously. (In other parts

of the world read: 'Zionist-inspired', 'Inspired by the lackeys of Imperialism', etc.)

7) *'This is only to distract attention from . . .'* Another ancient and respectable red herring. If you are badly caught with your pants down and truly stung, ignore the actual problem and declare: 'He is only doing this to distract attention from the poverty of his own Arab people . . .' Or from his electoral difficulties. Or from shortages of this and that. Or from dis-



sensions in his own party. The answer to such a statement (as, say, the last one) would be: 'What a lie! There is no dissension in my party.' From there you proceed to discuss whether there is or isn't dissension in his party, instead of discussing the original problem. This is the best way to distract attention from the fact that you have nothing else to say other than that your opponent has tried to distract attention.

8) *'Oh yes, but what about . . .'* This is used in dire emergencies only. A Russian takes an American visitor down to the largest underground station in Moscow which – as the Russian explains – is the most wonderful, most beautiful and most efficient in the world. They stand there quite a time,



when the American suddenly remarks, a little doubtfully: 'But there hasn't been a train for 35 minutes.' The Russian retorts angrily: 'Hasn't there? And what about your treatment of the negroes in the South?'



## *Part IV*

# RETURN TO PRIVACY

## On Marriage

AT the beginning of this book I spoke of birth and choice of job, so I may as well conclude with some reflections on two other private subjects: marriage and death.

Marriage is not a bad institution but a great deal depends on choice of a partner. There are two occasions when people are prepared – indeed eager – to discuss their marriage partners: before marriage when she (or, of course, he) is a perfect angel, a beauty, an epitome of kindness, magnanimity, fidelity and all other virtues; or again when a marriage breaks up and he/she is the most awful bitch/beast who ever trod the earth, repulsively ugly, shapeless, vicious, conceited, inconsiderate, selfish, promiscuous, a nagger and a bully. After twenty-three years of marriage, people describe their spouses in a way that makes you fail to understand how they could bear to live with them for twenty-three minutes.

Once, many years ago, I went to see Sir Alexander Korda. I had not seen him for a long time and his first question was: ‘How is your wife?’ My first wife used to be his secretary for years and I ought to have remembered that; but I had been married to my present wife for a few years then, and when someone spoke of my wife, well, I thought of my wife.

Having talked at cross-purposes for a few minutes, our mistake became obvious and Korda burst out laughing.

'Although I have just now broken my own golden rule,' he said, 'I'll give you one excellent piece of advice for life. Never, but never ask anyone how his wife is.'

He added: 'It's usually another wife, in any case.'

I have always kept to his advice and never asked. He was right, you can never be sure. You may have seen them as a loving couple the night before, but when you ask the husband next day, at lunchtime, 'And how is Adelaide?', his face can nevertheless darken and he can reply: '*That* horrible bitch? I don't know and I don't care.' No one will be hurt if you do not ask him how his wife is.

And another word of wisdom to add to Korda's. If one of your friends bursts out decrying, abusing, and vilifying his wife, just listen to him in silence and say nothing. Do not disagree with him because he may become violent; but still less agree with him. Don't say: 'At last, Harry. Quite frankly, I never understood how you could put up with her. Besides, she slept with half Kensington. The male half, I mean.' Harry may or may not like your remark at that moment. But the odds are that the two of them will make it up, he will repeat it to her, and neither of them will ever speak to you again. Not until the next break, at any rate.

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When people discuss the failings of their spouses, they are, as a rule, civilised enough to introduce their censure with a remark like: 'Well, I know I'm not perfect myself.' What they really mean is this: 'Well, I know I *am* perfect myself; indeed I am so tolerant that I do not expect perfection from anybody else. But that creature is really below the limit.'

This is, in any case, the wrong approach. You do not

want, you do not *need* a good – let alone perfect – wife. (Or husband, I repeat: I am speaking of both.) There is no such thing as a good wife. The lady who is a good wife to you may drive A or B into the madhouse in no time. In marriage there are no absolute values, only compatibility. Few people would regard a sadist as an ideal husband. ‘Imagine poor Lydia, what rotten luck! Giles turned out to be a sadist.’ But if Lydia happens to be a masochist, then Giles *is* the ideal husband for her. Unless, of course, Giles is one of the really nasty sadists. On their wedding night Lydia may hand Giles a whip and cry: ‘Beat me! Hit me hard!’ But Giles may reply with a courteous smile: ‘Me? Hit a lady? Certainly not. Lie here, darling, let me kiss you and stroke your hair.’ That would be real sadism; luckily, such turpitude is rare.

Marriage is not only sex. (How did Mrs Kinsey put it: ‘I don’t see much of Alfred since he got interested in sex.’) A generous wife cannot stand a mean husband. If one spouse acts on the other as a reasonable brake, this may work; but union between a spendthrift and a miser is doomed to failure. Two misers, however, may hit it off splendidly. (So also may two spendthrifts if they have enough left to live on.) Two compulsive talkers will grow to hate each other; but if a compulsive talker meets an attentive listener or a person who can give the impression of listening while she is able to switch off and think of more interesting subjects, they may grow old together. Some people cannot exist without admiration; others are born hero-worshippers. If they meet, all will be well; but let two of a kind marry and disaster is sure to follow. A brute may be ideally suited to one of those born martyrs; a thief will be blessed by a receiver. There is no fault, sin, defect, even depravity which cannot be gratified by the corresponding virtue or corresponding fault and depravity. Never look for the ideal husband. Give the ideal wife a wide berth. Run away fast if the species is even mentioned. All you want is a

big-eyed hero-worshipper if you are a detestable show-off; a compulsive giggler if you are the life and soul of the party type; a born nurse if you are a hypochondriac.

\* \* \*

I remarked above that in talking of marriage I have reverted to private subjects. That was a mistake. Nothing is less private than marriage. Marriage is of public concern; your marriage is everybody's business.

When I was a boy (judging by the level of the stories which I found wonderful then, not – I hope – more than nine), I read a piece in a boys' paper in which the hero, the eternal duffer, was invited to a ball. The invitation clearly stated: 'No entrance fee'. He went; he danced. However, when he was about to leave the premises, he found his way barred by a six-foot-four doorman. 'I was told, there was no entrance fee,' he mumbled. 'That's true,' the doorman replied. 'But there is an exit fee, ha-ha-ha . . . You can't leave before you pay it, ha-ha-ha . . .'

Marriage is like that. Any silly young couple may walk into the trap, no matter if they've known each other for only two hours, no matter how drunk they both are. They may be madly in love – in other words blind and completely incapable of judging each other's suitability. Nevertheless, as soon as they have signed the register, their marriage becomes sacred and the grave concern of society. A matter of public policy. Holy matrimony between a slightly backward teenager and an equally young nymphomaniac makes them pillars of society. A look at our society suggests that perhaps it is supported by such pillars.

Marriage is so important that it cannot be dissolved except by one of Her Majesty's Justices of the High Court. One of Her Majesty's County Court judges will not do for the

purpose. Marriage is much too sacred for a simple county court judge. So the very same county court judge is appointed a Special Divorce Commissioner. He sits in the High Court dissolving about twenty-five or thirty sacred marriages per hour at the cost of £110 instead of £11 (which might be the cost in the county court). At this price the simple county court judge has ceased to be simple. At £110 he has become a wise competent archon and arbitrator. 'There is an exit fee, ha-ha-ha . . . You can't leave before paying that, ha-ha-ha . . .' Society needs pillars. And also cash.

## On Death

It's only in England that people talk of 'a good death'. 'Lucky fellow, W, he had a fine death.' The English – not an envious race otherwise – always envy a really good death.

But not even the best of deaths is truly enjoyable. There is greater fun in life than death.

There is one single exception. Man is perhaps not so mean, petty and cowardly as is generally supposed but on the whole he is surely an unimaginative, unexciting and conformist animal. He can however – when properly moved and roused – rise to great heights. I am not speaking of born martyrs and other neurotics at the moment. I am speaking of the so-called ordinary Man in the Street; I remember well the days when he became the ordinary Hero in the Street. Dying for great causes has always been one of the major pleasures of mankind.

(And one of its major glories. Yet, the thought trails on:

how often has mankind been deceived? How often have the noblest passions been roused in defence of mean and despicable causes? And is a misguided, foolish man less noble when he sacrifices his life – in perfect good faith, burning with noble passion – for a repulsive and evil cause?)

But let us return to private death. In no circumstances can death be a special joy, a real bonanza, for the individual concerned. Nevertheless, I can never understand some people's abject fear of death. Everything that has a beginning must have an end. Every age – youth, middle age, old age – has its beauty, charm, or at least compensations. You can be very happy at eighty (if you accept the fact that you *are* eighty). Even if I had the chance, I should certainly refuse to become a youth of twenty once again. No, thank you. I liked it. I enjoyed every minute – well the overwhelming majority of minutes – of my life. But once was enough. And it was nice partly because it was a unique experience, a unique life, like everybody else's. And in this sense death, too, has its beauty and poetry. Life is not nice because it is everlasting; the moment is delightful *because* it flies away. An everlasting orgasm would be a deadly bore.

Besides, death is not a novel experience for any of us. 'Death is so awful,' we often hear it said, 'because it is so dreadfully unknown.' But there is nothing unknown about death. Death is simply non-existence. I personally was non-existent before my birth and it never bothered me. Centuries rolled by and I was untroubled by my complete and utter non-existence. Hannibal fought Rome; King Charles XII of Sweden invaded the Russia of Peter the Great; Queen Victoria came and went; Austria was defeated at Sadowa and I knew nothing of all this. I had absolutely no information, no awareness of the Fifth Century B.C., or the Second, the Thirteenth or the Eighteenth Century A.D. I was not worried by this at all. Why should I worry more about the fact that



I shall not know anything about the Twenty-First Century? Quite frankly, I am not interested.

A friend of mine, a wise and witty man, reached the age of sixty. I asked him what it felt like? 'Marvellous,' he replied. 'You see, I cannot lose any more.' He had lived enough as it was, he felt; even if he died next day, he had had a good run for his money. I shall feel the same on reaching sixty. It is youth who should be entitled to their run; they should become winners, too. I wish myself all the very best; I am full of goodwill towards myself. There was an old-fashioned



Continental saying – '*bis hundert und zwanzig*'; very well, I too wish myself that I should reach the age of a hundred and twenty. But if not, not. Sixty will be as good as eighty; eighty as good as a hundred; perhaps a hundred and twenty would be too much of a good thing. After all it is not the quantity of life, but its quality that counts. A great deal of suffering is worse than a little suffering.

Nor do I understand why religious people terrify themselves with the horrid idea of everlasting life. They seem to be born pessimists but I feel they see things in too dark a shade when they envisage eternal life – all of us dressed in

white, wearing OMO-white wings, walking around on tip-toe and listening to dreary harps, day and night. This threat of Paradise is worrying. Paradise must be hell.

Hell itself seems to be a more entertaining and lively place but it is not my cup of tea either. When I have finished my work here, I want to die. Nor am I worried in the least: die I shall. Perhaps not cheerfully; not joyfully; I do not say I am looking forward to it; but I shall die without murmur or complaint. I opt out of hell; of Paradise; of resurrection. Other people may have all that; but give me a good, old-fashioned, final death, against which there is no appeal.

Nor do I look with any admiration upon the shelter-builders. Horrid people they must be, those rich who want to survive a nuclear holocaust when everybody else is slaughtered; those who build shelters with running hot water, central heating and all modern conveniences for themselves and their families regardless of the fact that everybody else (in the lower income brackets) will die in their hundreds of thousands around them. I came to live in England as a young man. I was accepted by the English – these exasperating, dull, lovable, decent, silly, tolerant, generous and humorous people. They never really needed me but they accepted me. Now I haven't got the slightest inclination to survive them. I hope the Bomb will never be dropped. But if London blows up, I only ask for one privilege: to be blown up with it.

\* \* \*

Is there any justice in this world? Do people in their life – and in their death – get what they deserve? Sometimes I am inclined to believe that they do.

I went to visit a charming old lady in the West Country, a widow for twenty-seven years. Even after so many years she spoke of Basil, her deceased husband, with a candid lack of

affection. Her son suggested that we should go and see the old man's grave. The lady was noticeably surprised, even taken aback, but after a moment's hesitation, she consented. We walked to the village cemetery and found the old man's grave in a deplorable state. It was overgrown with shrubs, creepers, and weeds. The grave was a sorry mess; it seemed it had not been attended to for twenty-seven years. We were all deeply embarrassed and remained silent. At last the old lady spoke: 'Well, Basil never liked gardening.'

\* \* \*

No, man is not immortal; life is not everlasting. All that man can claim is that he is unique. Whether we are wonderful persons or rather poor specimens, we can claim with certainty that no one quite like us ever lived or will ever live again.

I once heard a story reminding us of the uniqueness of life. Only a very witty – and a very, very cruel – person could have made this point with such deadly clarity. There was a truly great actor in Hungary; an artist of tremendous power; an actor of the Charles Laughton class. He had all the passions in his heart: anger, hatred, contempt, desire – all, except one: love. He knew no tenderness, no gentleness. He loved no human being. All the love in his cold heart was concentrated on his dog whom he adored with the wild passion of a powerful, lonely and frustrated man. One day his dog died. He was heartbroken and perhaps for the first time in his life he wept in the presence of another human being: his mother. She tried to be helpful.

'The first thing you have to do,' she said gently, 'is to buy yourself, as soon as possible, another little dog.'

He looked at his mother with cold, contemptuous eyes.

'Quite,' he nodded. 'And when *you* die, I shall have to buy myself as soon as possible another little old woman.'

## Love Thyself

YEARS and years ago, in Hungary, I had a friend – a great fencing champion – who was also a colleague of mine as a journalist. On occasions when we had nothing to do and he felt in the mood, he would jump on the table and recite his favourite poem, written by himself.

'Ode to Myself' – he would shout the title – and his Ode ran something like this:

*I love myself.  
I love myself because I am beautiful.  
And charming and witty and  
magnanimous  
My face radiates intelligence.  
My eyes shine brightly with wisdom,  
humour and deep human understanding,  
Not to speak of generosity and kindness.  
I do admire myself as I have never admired  
any other human being before or since.  
Yes. I do love myself.*

I was very fond of this poem, too, because it sums up so aptly the essence of most of the lyric poetry I know and love. It puts the views and sentiments of all the great poets with a clarity and force which most of them lack.

Thinking back after all these years, I have a vague feeling that my friend did not love himself with all the fervour he claimed. He did not love himself at all. His poem – declaimed so vociferously, on top of the table – expressed simply a wild and hopeless desire to love himself.

And that is exactly the trouble with most of us, as my

great predecessor Sigmund Freud so aptly pointed out. We are not conceited: we only have a desperate desire to have reasons to be conceited. We do not think ourselves all that clever. We *do* love our Neighbour better than we love ourselves. We try to emulate him; we envy him; we are impressed by him. As to ourselves we are full of doubt; we are uncertain. We are shy and timid. Not only do we love our Neighbour's virtues, but – being basically rather decent fellows – we love even his faults and failings. We understand him and we forgive him. It is ourselves we are at war with. It is ourselves – however much we profess to love and admire ourselves – we are so uneasy about.

I think this earth of ours is not such a bad place, after all. It has its points. More points for us decadent Western capitalists than for others, I'm afraid, but it certainly does have its points. And yes, I believe it could be turned into an even pleasanter, nicer, easier place if humanity heeded this last pearl of wisdom falling from my lips:

LOVE THYSELF AS THOU LOVEST THY NEIGHBOUR



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