

Part Three

A GEORGIAN BOYHOOD

*Yet hark how through the peopled air
The busy murmur glows,
The insect youth are on the wing
Eager to taste the honied spring
And float amid the liquid noon.
Some lightly o'er the current swim
Some shew their gayly gilded trim
Quick-glancing to the sun.*

GRAY

'What sort of a thing is Tydeus?'
'Tydeus rose and set at Eton: he is only
Known here to be a scholar of Kings.'
[*West to Walpole: Walpole to West,*
October, 1735]

*Altro dirti non vo'; ma la tua festa
Ch'anco tardi a venir non ti sia grave.*

LEOPARDI

Credentials

UP to this point the function of this work has been entirely critical and performed with those privileges of the critic which allow him to assume equality with those whom he criticizes and to take their books to pieces as if he were their equal in stature. But this equality is a fiction, just as it is a fiction that a jurymen is superior to the temptations and stupidities of the prisoner he judges or qualified to convict a company director on a point of corporation law. A critic is a product of his time who may affect impartiality but who while claiming authority over the reader projects his doubt and aspiration. Every critic writes as if he were infallible, and pretends that he is the embodiment of impartial intellectual sanity, a reasonable though omniscient pontiff. But without his surplice the preacher of the loftiest sermon is only human or subhuman, and now is the moment to step down from the pulpit, to disrobe in the vestry. The autobiography which follows is intended to be such a disrobing; it is meant to be an analysis of the grounding in life and art which the critic received, of the ideas which formed him in youth; the education, the ideals, the disappointments from which are drawn his experience, the fashions he may unwittingly follow and the flaws he may conceal.

A critic is an instrument which registers certain observations; before the reader can judge of their value he must know sufficient of the accuracy of the instrument to allow for the margin of error. We grow up among theories and illusions common to our class, our race, our time. We absorb them unawares and their effect is incalculable. What are they? In this case, I am trying to find out, hoping that all I discover, however personal, may prove of use. To do so I have to refer

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to something which I find intolerable, the early aura of large houses, fallen fortunes and county families common to so many English autobiographers. If the reader can stomach this, I will try to make it up to him.

The Branching Ogham

I HAVE always disliked myself at any given moment; the total of such moments is my life.

The first occurred on the morning of the 10th of September 1903 when I was born at Coventry where my father had gone to look after a body referred to as 'The Volunteers'. My father was in the regular army. His father, Admiral Connolly, son of a General Connolly and nephew to various other veterans of the wars with France, belonged to a naval family long resident in Bath where he had married late in life the eldest daughter of the then Rector of Bath, Charles Kemble, who had restored the Abbey in the Victorian taste and who inhabited what is now the Spa Hotel. The Kembles of Overtown near Swindon were West Country squires who in the eighteenth century had gravitated to London and Bray and made a fortune in the tea trade. Charles Kemble had inherited the wealth of these nabobs and from his mother, Miss Brooke, the estate of Cowbridge House, Malmesbury, which he had rebuilt in the baroque style with Italian workmen from the Great Exhibition. The vigorous, dominating, millionaire Rector of Bath was said to be too Broad-Church in his views to be made a Bishop, for from Wadham he had joined the Clapham Sect. The Connollies, however, were a frugal, blue-eyed, long-lived, quiet, tidy, obstinate race of soldiers and sailors; the Admiral's uncle, Captain Mathew Connolly, had been a kind of arbiter of Bath elegance in the reign of George IV. There was something eighteenth-century about the Connollies, while the Kembles were eminently Victorian. My grandfather, the Admiral, was born in 1816 and had done much of his sailing in the Mediterranean and the Pacific on wooden ships of which he was a great defender against the 'ironclad'. He

was older than my grandmother, older than the Rector, his father-in-law, and died in 1901 at his house in Marlborough Buildings, Bath, with a great reputation for good looks of the genial, bearded, crusty, open sort, charm, gallantry, temper, and bad language.

Meanwhile the Rector's fortune had vanished among his eleven children, his rectory had become a public school, his country houses all been sold. He left a book called *Memorials of a Closed Ministry* and a Victorian gothic church he had built at Stockwell. The fifty thousand pounds he had contributed to the restoration of the Abbey was a bitter memory to his grandchild, whose frequent complaints about it to my mother afforded me at an early age a grudge against society. I never had a chance! Both my great-grandfather the Rector and my great-great uncle Mathew Connolly have their monuments in the Abbey and windows commemorate my great-uncle Brooke Kemble who was drowned off Tunis as a midshipman, and other members of the family. That quiet corner where are grouped in such incongruous harmony the Roman Bath, the Gothic Abbey and the eighteenth-century Colonnade is not the less sultry for enclosing my roots.

In 1900 when my father's regiment was on a visit to Ireland he met and married my mother, the daughter of Colonel Edward Vernon, D.L., J.P., of Clontarf Castle, outside Dublin. The Vernons of Clontarf were a branch of the Vernons of Haddon Hall and Tonge who had come over to Ireland with the Duke of Ormond in the reign of Charles II by whom John Vernon, Paymaster-General of the Royal Army, had been given Clontarf, then a castle of the Templars. They were a fiery race, proud of their Anglo-Norman descent, their sixty-three quarterings and their position among the sporting Church-of-England 'Ascendancy', the landlords of the Pale.

My earliest memory is of a chemist's shop in Bath with coloured bottles in the window and a circular air-cushion with a hole in the middle. This mysterious rubber object excited me

beyond words. What was it for? I never knew except that it must be for something quite unimaginably disgusting and horrible. I knew it and It knew it, and It knew that I knew it. It was vice made visible. And It was for Me!

Then my father's regiment was sent to South Africa, and all my memories became exotic; arum lilies, loquats, eucalyptus, freesias, are the smells which seem to me divine essences, balms of Eden remembered from another life. The freesias grew wild in the grass and those long thin stems with their wayward creamy blossom, and their fragrance, so strangely fresh and yet sophisticated, were my first clue to the vast riches of the universe. I remember also Cape Point, the walk to the sea through clumps of rushes and over white sand feathered with the tracks of lizard and all around me an indescribable irradiation of sun and wind and space and salt. And at Montagu there was an island in the mountain river on to which I used to be hoisted, clutching a stinking meercat's skin, lord of a rock on which a bird deposited the shells of crayfish, an Ithaca twelve feet long.

We lived at Wynberg; there were chameleons in the garden and squashed apricots; on Sundays the Regiment had church parades and there were smells of pine and eucalyptus paint blisters and hot tar. I had already grown accustomed to being an only child and enjoyed playing by myself. I had a dog called Wups, a cat called One-Eye and a crowd of other animals, some real and many imaginary. I derived enormous pleasure from animals and something approaching ecstasy from the smells of flowers and fruit and from the arid sub-tropical scenery.

Already my life was a chain of ecstatic moments; I invented happy families of tops and fir-cones or made overtures to the sacred personages whom I learnt about from *Line upon Line*: Isaac on his way up the mountain to be sacrificed, the infant Samuel, the other children David and Benjamin. But my deepest concern was the apprehension of visual beauty. To stand among arum lilies, faintly scented, thick in texture and

to break off their leaves, or among the brittle lines of sweet pea, or with my watering-can by the rose-beds smelling of wet earth and to pour out the spraying water – these were experiences, like climbing a willow tree near the stables where the green and edible willow branches hung down like the reed curtains in Spanish doorways by which my existence was transformed! In vain Captain Scott shook hands with me on his last voyage to the South Pole, in vain I was shown the giant tortoises and the fleet at Simonstown or saw the Regiment parade on Minden Day – my relations, sadistic with One-Eye and Wups, aesthetic with pale cones of silver fir and the gummy blue cups of eucalyptus, were all that concerned me.

I twice visited South Africa; at the age of five, and six. In between we went to Ireland and stayed at Clontarf, and then at Mitchelstown Castle in Cork which left a deep impression. This castle was an enormous eighteenth-century Gothic affair, which belonged with some thirty thousand acres to my great-aunt Anna, Countess of Kingston, who had once been besieged there by the Fenians; there was a lake in the grounds, and a wishing well. Now alas, not a stone remains. It was winter and there were icicles along the lake. I wore brown gloves on week-days and white ones on Sundays and held an icicle (the first I had seen) with its mysterious purposeful pointed whiteness, in my white glove. Of the rest of the visit I remember little. Lord Kingston descendant of Milton's Lycidas had long been dead, but my grandfather was there, terrifying. 'Where is Grandpapa?' I asked my nurse one morning. 'He's busy.' 'What's he doing?' 'He's doing his duty.' This answer, which would have covered the activities of all Irish landlords at that date, I took to mean that he was in the lavatory (Have you done your duty today?), and was more frightened of him than ever except when he would come in with his gun and a huge stiff dead grasshopper two feet long in his hand, waving it at me and saying 'snipe, snipe'.

This was my first visit to Ireland since babyhood and, besides the love of the beautiful, it awoke in me a new passion.

I became a snob. The discovery that I was an earl's great-nephew was important to me; I soon made another. My mother's favourite sister had married a rich man. Aunt Mab was very beautiful but she also had special smells, smells of furs and Edwardian luxe. Uncle Walter gave me a steam train and a watch for Christmas. Wherever we went with Aunt Mab there were presents and large houses and the appeal her wealth made to an imaginative child was irresistible. Bishops-court, Loughananna, Rochestown, Marlay, the names of her houses (for she moved every six months) held a poetry for me. They went with security and romance, fires and potato cakes, footmen, horses, and soft aquatinted Irish winter.

Cold grew the foggy morn, the day was brief,
 Loose on the cherry hung the crimson leaf;
 All green was vanished save of pine and yew
 That still display'd their melancholy hue;
 Save the green holly with its berries red
 And the green moss upon the gravel spread.

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In 1910 I was sent home from Africa for good. My parents stayed on while I went with my nurse to join my father's mother and sister in Corsica where they had a villa. By now I was an aesthete. I adored my mother, but lived otherwise in a world of my own. Sunsets were my preoccupation. I saw all words, people, numbers, and proper names in colours or notes of music and there was a different colour for every day of the week which I tried to paint but failed. I remember being often ill with fever, and the taste of the orange-leaf tea I was given to bring my temperature down. I added the flavour of this infusion to my ecstasies, with walks in the 'maquis' and sessions by the garden tank where I sailed my prickly pear leaves in the evening.

Then there was the sea itself, though, like Petronius, I cared only for the sea-shore, for the beach by 'Les Îles Sanguinaires' where transparent 'Venus' slippers' were thrown up by the

sea. One evening I was taken out in a boat to see the French destroyers fire their torpedoes. The lurid Mediterranean sunset, the ships, the noise, the rolling, were not to my liking. I cried louder as each torpedo went off and from that evening I date a horror of battleships, bands playing, noises, displays of arms, and all official functions.

I also discovered friendship in Corsica and fell in love with a child called Zenon, a Pole, three years older than myself. He had dark eyes, a fringe of brown hair and adored fighting. He made cardboard swords and shields for us on which he used to paint our coats of arms and we would hack at each other till our escutcheons were broken. From that moment I have seldom been heart-free and life without love for me has always seemed like an operation without an anaesthetic. I have been inclined to regard that condition as the justification of existence and one that takes priority over all other ideologies.

Love the most generous passion of the mind,
That cordial drop heaven in our cup has thrown
To make the nauseous draught of life go down.

From Corsica we moved on to Tangier, where I was infatuated again, this time with a handsome bearded Moorish guide called Salem. We showered presents on each other and I still have a beautiful drum he gave me. Then we returned to Bath, where aged six I was sent to school as a day boy. It was the hot summer of 1910 and we wore dark blue cockades for the general election, except the dentist's son, who was a liberal. He seemed to me to smell quite different from the other boys. Oily.

I was now nearly seven and from this moment my character began to deteriorate. My grandmother spoilt me. I have since observed that it is a pleasure of grandparents to spoil their grandchildren. They revenge themselves in that way on their children for the insults they have suffered from them. My grandmother, lonely, religious, and unselfish, was only playing

her biological role. The tragedy was that I found it out and recognized my victim.

I remember being spoilt as an actual sensation, waking up early on Christmas morning and seeing the thrilling contours of my presents taking shape, the stocking bulging in the dark, afterwards unpacking the toy soldiers and setting them up in the new fort, going to church in my Eton jacket and suddenly, about three o'clock, being afflicted with a sensation of utter satiety and aggressive boredom. It was like eating – having been delicate and often feverish my appetite was most stimulated by invalid foods – the egg, the grape, the pat of butter, the cutlet, the tangerine, they were my highspots. In the winter afternoon I would play by the fire with mines of matchboxes fired by trains or torn paper in the grate, for I hated to leave the fire for a moment, then tea would be brought in, my grandmother would cut the buttered toast into fingers, ready to dip into the boiled eggs. Which tastes best? The first or the second? The first finger of toast or the last little triangle dug out from the bottom with a spoon? I don't know – but I do know one should never have a third egg, and I remember the unwilling sensation of not wanting to eat it yet hating to let it go and finally forcing myself to dispose of it, and then rounding on my grandmother – a vicious little golden-haired Caligula.

To this period I trace my worst faults. Indecision, for I found that by hesitating for a long time over two toys in a shop I would be given both and so was tempted to make two alternatives seem equally attractive; Ingratitude, for I grew so used to having what I wanted that I assumed it as a right; Laziness, for sloth is the especial vice of tyrants; the Impatience with boredom which is generated by devotion; the Cruelty which comes from a knowledge of power and the Giving way to moods for I learnt that sulking, crying, moping, and malingering were bluffs that paid.

The people I had been in love with before, my mother, my nurse Betty, Wups, One-Eye, Zenon, and Salem or Selim (the

spelling varied) were people who loved me, but we loved as equals, conscious of each others' rights. Sufficiently provoked One-Eye would scratch, my mother rebuke, Betty spank, Zenon, Wups, and Salem slink away. Now for the first time I learnt of unequal love. I was not in love with my grandmother, she was in love with me, or perhaps so ignorant and helpless with children as to seem in love, and I took advantage. *Sic ego perire coepi.*

At school I was popular for I had embarked on the career which was to occupy me for the next ten years of 'trying to be funny'. I was neither good nor bad at games; my favourite exercise was to take a short piece of pointed wood in my hand and meander for hours through the long summer grasses round the playing fields, calling at imaginary ports, tunnelling through the hay, chewing sorrel, and following my faint tracks in the silver grass as a liner follows a trade route. Inside my desk a cardboard shoebox perforated with holes supported a brood of caterpillars. Who can forget that smell of caterpillars, the smell of wet cardboard, drying leaves and insect excrement, the odour of northern childhood? It was on one of these long summer cruises, in a patch of cowparsley, that I realized my own identity; in a flash it came to me that my name and myself were something apart, something that none of the other boys were or could be, Cyril Vernon Connolly, a kind of divine 'I am that I am' which I should carry all through life and at last deposit on my grave, like a retriever with a bit of stick.

I was still in love, as I had been since I first saw in Little Arthur's History of England the picture of the Princes in the Tower - those two royal princes, so sweetly embracing, so soon to be smothered - what only child could look at them without a disturbance or read of Prince Arthur himself, walking trustfully beside the gaoler on his way to have his eyes put out? Indeed, like many children, I had fixations on the early Plantagenets. With their remote grandeur and their drooping black moustaches these sad bad Kings seemed like

my great-uncles, huge brooding stylized figures who awoke a sense of guilt.

My great friend was a boy called Hubert Fitzroy Foley. I remember leaning out of the dormitory window with him to watch the fireworks on a summer night, while the rockets went off and we heard the inevitable Gilbert and Sullivan from the distant military band. That summer I seemed to be initiated into the secrets of preparatory school life. I came to know the smell of the classrooms, of slates, chalk, and escaping gas, and to fear the green baize door which separated the headmaster's part of the house from the boys'. On the one side, silence, authority, the smell of savouries; on the other noise and freedom.

At night we made 'tabernacles' by stretching the sheets up over the tops of the beds and I would lie in the evening sunshine playing flicking matches between the fingers of my right hand and my left or arching my hands into swan-like shapes that swooped up and down above my head. When I was ill there were cracks in the ceiling to map and explore and patterns in the wall-paper. I learnt the rhythm of the seasons: summer, which is the time for overdoing things, the recoil of creative autumn, the vibrant coma of winter and the lowering spring. I began to enjoy my work and to win prizes. I acted in a play and wrote facetious little Leacockian sketches. I declared a rebellion against the masters and returned a prize to one of them saying none of us would ever speak to them again. This was part of insensitive teasing, but he took it seriously and looked hurt. I was so spoilt that I felt bored and disappointed with myself and I tried to take it out on whom I dared. Otherwise I was a typical schoolboy, with a red cap, a belt with a snake (which I slept with under my pillow), a cricket bat, a knowledge of the tracks made by wapiti, skunk, racoon and wolverine, and a happy bitchiness which endeared me, as it was intended to, to my superiors. I went in brakes to watch matches and came home summertipsy in the dusk; I adored sausages and Sunday breakfasts, said my prayers,

bickered with other boys on walks, cried 'quis' and 'ego', and was conceited and bright in the way in which so many small boys are, and which, alas, proves such a false dawn of intelligence.

I can never remember not being able to read and was already deep in 'Natural History'. I could reel off the habits of aardvarks, aye-ayes, and Tasmanian Devils, and I knew (from *The World of Wonders*) about the great Tun of Heidelberg, the deadly Upas Tree, and the Pitch Lake of Trinidad. I collected stamps, pressed flowers in blotters and adored chess. For lighter reading there were fairy stories and nonsense books. I enjoyed Burnand, Mark Twain, and Stephen Leacock, but wept at the humiliations of *Vice Versa* or the sufferings of the Yonghi Bonghi Bo. My thrill of the week was to visit a little shop on Lansdowne Hill in the early dusk of winter afternoon and receive a rolled-up bundle of 'Comic Papers'; *Chips* and *Comic Cuts*, the *Rainbow*, the *Gem* and the *Magnet* - I hold them, as I did with everything, to my nose, the smell is excruciating - damp paper, newsprint; I feel I shall burst. Ahead of me stretches the evening with my grandmother; the gas lit, the fire burning, the papers unrolled and untied, the peace and security of the literary life though even then I am depressed by the knowledge that nothing I shall find inside will come up to the sensation of opening them. As with Leopardi's peasants, the eve of the Festival will always bring me more happiness than the Feast itself.

There was one other lesson I learnt, living with my grandmother. Hitherto I had been in exotic African surroundings or in Ireland. But my grandmother was poor and we lived in 'rooms'; sometimes they were by the seaside in the isle of Purbeck, where balls bounced on the porphyry pavement, and a horse-drawn tumbril dragged the long-robed bathers far out into the string-coloured sea; sometimes they were in London, sometimes in Bath - but they were always middle-class. While listening to tales of the Admiral's splendid dinner parties or of her childhood: the Rector's fine horses galloping

the twenty-four miles from his country house at Malmesbury to his Palladian villa at Bath with its fourteen gardeners, the opulent safe Victorian saga, I yet was coming to know the world of the realist novel, those fuggy rooms with plush sofas and antimacassars, gas mantles, kettles on the hob, and their landladies, overfamiliar women with common voices and ripe bosoms sprayed with jet. I came into contact with the lower classes too, for we used to visit one or two old servants to whom my grandmother had made pensions. One, Old Sally, who lived in an alcoholic bed-ridden fug, distressed me particularly. Here were horrible things: illness, poverty, old age, and I felt I must make every effort to avoid coming into further contact with them.

I now made the comparison, as many a small boy would:

England = Grannie, Lodgings, School, Poverty, Middle Class.

Ireland = Aunt Mab, Castles, Holidays, Riches, Upper Class.

Ireland, therefore, became desirable and England sordid. This division, however unreal it may seem, had importance for me, it conditioned my homeless insecure lonely childhood, and made me a social hybrid. I could not consider myself entirely upper class; yet I was not altogether upper middle. I had fallen between two standards of living. With the upper class I felt awkward, dowdy, introspective and a physical coward. With the middle class I felt critical, impatient, and sparkling. This class distinction, the line between Kensington and Belgravia, is a source of anguish. To consider oneself born into one and yet be slowly conditioned to the other was as uncomfortable as having one shoulder too low.

Meanwhile my mother returned and tried to repair the damages to my character. She disapproved of the school in Bath where I was always ill. I had whooped my way through the coronation summer, I had come out in measles and german measles and chicken pox, and, after a recurrence of malaria, I was removed. My mother came down to see me while I was

ill and brought a trunk of toys, all the composition animals whom I adored in the holidays, with their house of parliament and the cricket elevens. I was ashamed of them and refused to play, for already my solitary only-child world seemed disgraceful to my social school-world, even my mother's presence in it seemed incorrect. She took me away to Ireland and so Bath – that beautiful relaxing town where the Abbey chimes played *The Harp that once through Tara's Halls* with morbid sweetness as we watched the county cricket matches, knew me no more.

Clontarf was a paradise for up in the musicians' gallery of its gothic hall was a pitch for the kind of cricket I played, bowling a marble with my left hand to my right hand which held a toy animal as bat. A book standing up was the wicket. When an animal was out another took its place. Animals that were solid like the elephant or streamlined like the seal made the best bats; animals like the giraffe, whose legs broke when they hit out, were less successful. Books were filled with their batting averages and my celluloid seal, besides being the best cricketer, was also a potent voice in my animals' parliament, and taken every night to bed with me.

My grandfather tried to give me real fielding practice on the lawn but I was frightened. There is a two-handed sword in the castle, reputed to have been used by Brian Boru in his battle there against the Danes, with which my grandfather and my great-uncle Granville Vernon would pretend to chop off my head. Their sombre jesting accentuated my cowardice, but I became interested in Brian Boru, and so was led to cultivate my 'Irish' side. I wanted to learn Gaelic and I read history books from the nationalist stand-point. Shane O'Neill, Owen Roe O'Neill, Wolfe Tone, Lord Edward Fitzgerald were my heroes and I learnt to sing the Shan Van Vocht. The last intellectual to stay at Clontarf had been Handel, whose bedroom was my nursery, and I began to be considered 'Queer'. The introduction – 'This is cousin Cyril [my nephew Cyril]. (p) He's supposed to be very clever. (pp) His grandmother's

spoilt him,' depressed me. I responded as usual by showing off and 'trying to be funny'.

I went on 'trying to be funny' till I was seventeen. This grisly process was my defence mechanism. It was the shell I was secreting as a protection from the outside world: by making people laugh I became popular, and I ultimately became feared as well. 'Go on, be funny!' some boy would command, and I would clown away or recite my poems and parodies, with their echoes of Mark Twain and Stephen Leacock. 'Connolly's being funny,' the word would go round and soon I would have collected a crowd. I revelled in this and would grow funnier and funnier till I passed quite naturally into tears. 'Connolly's not funny now. He's gone too far,' and the group would break up and leave me, except for some true friend who remained to puzzle over the psychology of the manic-depressive. 'But you were being quite funny a moment ago.' 'Oh, Boo-Hoo-Hoo. I wish I was dead.' 'Oh, shut up, Connolly.' 'Oh, go away. I hate you.' Then a master would come by and comfort me. I would be handed, still hysterical, to the matron, and the inevitable case-history would be gone over. '(p) It's his grandmother. (pp) She spoils him.'

But I could not be so funny in Ireland. My wit was the opposite of the native sense of humour, my jokes, a combination of puns and personal remarks interlarded with the wisecracks of the day ('Oh, go and eat soap' was a favourite), were beyond the Anglo-Irish, who saw only the humour of situations, and could not appreciate a *calembour*. They began to tease me about being English, which I gathered meant possessing a combination of snobbery, stupidity, and lack of humour and was a deadly insult. There were many stories of social triumphs at the expense of parvenu England - especially against unpopular viceroys, like Lord Aberdeen. The Anglo-Irish were a superior people. Better born, but less snobbish; cleverer than the English and fonder of horses; they were poorer no doubt but with a poverty that brought into relief their natural aristocracy. And, above all, they were loved (for

'being Irish' meant belonging to the Protestant Landed Gentry) by about four million devoted bog-trotters, who served them as grooms, comic footmen, gardeners, and huntsmen.

And the real Irish – what had happened to them? They were my first lost cause, and I worshipped them with passion, reciting the 'Dead at Clonmacnois' to myself in a riot of grief.

In a quiet watered land, a land of roses,
 Stands Saint Kieran's city fair
 And the warriors of Erin in their famous generations
 Slumber there.

There beneath the dewy hillside sleep the noblest
 Of the Clan of Conn,
 Each below his stone with name in branching Ogham
 And the sacred knot thereon.

Many and many a son of Conn the Hundred Fighter
 In the red earth lies at rest;
 Many a blue eye of Clan Colman the turf covers,
 Many a swan-white breast.

Even today such verses typify Ireland, the soft constipating weather, the unreality of that green cul-de-sac turned away from Europe where the revolutions lead backwards and the Present is invariably the victim of the Past.

In the meanwhile what of Clan Colman? Great-Uncle Granville obligingly made a list of chieftains for me. They were not all extinct; behind the Anglo-Norman families of the Pale, the Fitzgeralds, de Burghs, Tristrams, Talbots, Vernons, and Plunkets, lurked the remnant of an older race – the O'Grady of Killyballyowen, the O'Gorman, the O'Connor Don, the Magillicuddy of the Reeks, the O'Reilly and the Fox! These were the legitimate rulers, downtrodden heirs of Shane and Owen Roe. I begged Uncle Granville to point them out to me. To serve the O'Gorman! To speak Gaelic, wear a saffron Irish kilt, and sing the Shan Van Vocht!

In the curragh of Kildare
And the boys will all be there

with the O'Connor Don! The parliament of animals became supporters of the movement and the great seal himself, a fine cricketer and a generous statesman, added the letters D.A.I. (Dublin and Irish) after his name. I planned a restoration of the monarchy and pestered my Uncle Granville about the claims of various families. Who should be considered the rightful king of Ireland, the successor of Brian Boru? Naturally all Connollys, O'Connors, and O'Connells, through Conn, the King of Connaught. That pointed to Edward Conolly of Castletown. But his family had taken the name Conolly and were really Pakenhams. Besides, his Gaelic . . .? The O'Briens were Uncle Granville's candidates for the vacant throne. They had a Gaelic motto and were descended from Brian Boru himself through the kings of Thomond. Lord Inchiquin had the best right to the crown of Tara. For my own part I had no personal ambition, nothing to hope for from the Restoration.

It was friends to die for
That I would seek and find

and my day-dreams ended in my being sacrificed for the new king, like little Arthur.

This Irish nationalism may seem an extraordinary phase but it must be remembered that there are still several million who believe in it. Gaelic is now compulsory in Ireland, and I believe Lord Cullen of Ashbourne even wore a saffron kilt in Richmond Park. Monarchy has lost ground there since 1912, but at that time the revolutionary movement was unknown to me. My own feelings were romantic and literary, in fact English.* Ireland represented glamour and luxury, and I tried

* The surnames of my eight great-grandparents were Connolly, Hall, Kemble, Catley, Vernon, Bowles, Graves, and Brinkley. The Vernons had no Irish blood, the Connollys, at any rate since the early eighteenth century, had never been there and now despite my early infatuation nothing infuriates me more than to be treated as an Irishman.

to make a religion out of them. Of course, I was a failure with the Irish. I never could learn the Gaelic Alphabet, nor for that matter could I talk with an Irish brogue and the only Irish people I knew were the housekeeper at Clontarf and her husband.

All my cousins were healthy, destructive, normal children. I was lonely, romantic, and affected and already the friction between extrovert and introvert was set up. I was extremely shy, for the effort to accommodate my inner life to my outer one was proving harder and harder. I was sentimental at night and facetious in the morning. Between morning and evening my personality would swing from one mood to the other as I watched my wisecracking morning self with its defiant battle-cry 'Oh, go and eat soap,' turn by degrees into the tearful Celtic dreamer who believed in ghosts and at night would go into a trance over a line of poetry. My appetite for Gaelic and ghosts waxed and waned with my craving for titles. There were evenings when I wanted to kill myself because I was not the O'Grady of Killballyowen. Why had not my father got a title? Why was I not the heir to Castletown? It was heartless, anguishing – why be born, why live at all if I could not have one? Nobody understood me. Nobody cared, and I would scream and scream with real tears and screams that grew more and more artificial as I had to raise my voice to carry to the dining-room. Nobody loved me, nobody understood me, nobody would give me what I wanted, there was an Elemental under the bed. I could die for all they cared. Wur! Wur! Wur! till at last my mother appeared in evening dress and would sit with me and stroke my head smelling of chocolates.

The fever I got from time to time was a recurrence of African malaria, and was just enough to cause anxiety – the anxiety enough to procure me privileges. Nobody could be quite certain that I was shamming. And in the morning, when my night fears had been discussed and I would come down to an atmosphere of sympathy, it was 'Oh, go and eat soap', or 'Stick him with a fork'.

Such were these early excesses that today I cannot listen to any discussion of titles or open a peerage without feeling sick, as from the smell of rubber steps and stale whisky on the stairway of a Channel boat. I shall never be able to breathe till they are abolished. Nor has 'being understood' proved reassuring.

In the end I compromised on the brogue. I pretended that I had got rid of it except in moments of great excitement and I would even affect to lose my temper so as to try out a few phrases, though I was careful to do this when no Irish boys were in the room. My new history books taught me to abominate England for I read *Tales of a Grandfather* at the same time and it never occurred to me that the England I hated, the oppressor of the Celt and the Gael, the executioner of Fitzgerald, Emmet, and Wolfe Tone, was made manifest in my grandfather, who owned a thousand acres of suburban Dublin, and a shoot in Kerry; that the Anglo-Irish were themselves a possessor class whose resentment against England was based on the fear that she might not always allow them to go on possessing.

White Samite

THE new school my parents chose for me was on the coast. At first I was miserable there and cried night after night. My mother cried too at sending me and I have often wondered if that incubator of persecution mania, the English private school, is worth the money that is spent on it or the tears its pupils shed. At an early age small boys are subjected to brutal partings and long separations which undermine their love for their parents before the natural period of conflict and are encouraged to look down on them without knowing why. To owners of private schools they are a business like any other, to masters a refuge for incompetence, in fact a private school has all the faults of a public school without any of its compensations, without tradition, freedom, historical beauty, good teaching, or communication between pupil and teacher. It is one of the few tortures confined to the ruling classes and from which the workers are still free. I have never met anybody yet who could say he had been happy there. It can only be that our parents are determined to get rid of us!

Yet St Wulfric's where I now went was a well run and vigorous example which did me a world of good. We called the head mistress Flip and the headmaster Sambo. Flip, around whom the whole system revolved, was able, ambitious, temperamental and energetic. She wanted her venture to be a success, to have more boys, to attract the sons of peers and to send them all to Eton. She was an able instructress in French and History and we learnt with her as fast as fear could teach us. Sambo seemed a cold, business-like, and dutiful consort. The morale of the school was high and every year it won a shooting trophy and the Harrow History Prize from all the other preparatory schools. Inside the chapel was a chaplain,

inside the gym a drill-sergeant and there were a virid swimming-pool, a cadet corps, carpenter's shop, and riding class.

The school was typical of England before the last war; it was worldly and worshipped success, political and social; though Spartan, the death-rate was low, for it was well run and based on that stoicism which characterized the English governing class and which has since been under-estimated. 'Character, character, character,' was the message which emerged when we rattled the radiators or the fence round the playing fields and it reverberated from the rifles in the armoury, the bullets on the miniature range, the saw in the carpenter's shop, and the hoofs of the ponies on their trot to the Downs.

Not once or twice in our rough island's story
The path of duty was the way to glory

was the lesson we had to learn and there were other sacred messages from the poets of private schools: Kipling or Newbolt.

Muscle-bound with character the alumni of St Wulfric's would pass on to the best public schools, cleaning up all houses with a doubtful tone, reporting their best friends for homosexuality and seeing them expelled, winning athletic distinctions – for the house rather than themselves, for the school rather than the house, and prizes and scholarships and shooting competitions as well – and then find their vocation in India, Burma, Nigeria, and the Sudan, administering with Roman justice those natives for whom the final profligate overflow of Wulfrician character was all the time predestined.

After I had spent one or two terms at St Wulfric's, blue with cold, haunting the radiators and the lavatories and waking up every morning with the accumulated misery of the mornings before, the war broke out. My parents had taken a house in London in Brompton Square and the holidays had become an oasis after St Wulfric's austerity. In the big room at the top of the house with my grandfather's sea chest and the animal books by Ernest Thompson Seton, a fire and the view of the

sea-green limes of the Brompton Oratory, or in the drawing-room with its vine-clad balcony and rose-wood furniture from Cowbridge I could be happy. The square abounded with looper caterpillars, tight in the shallow earth wriggled the pupae of the privet moth (in those that did not wriggle the ichneumon was at work). On Sundays people made jokes about not going to church but went and the churches disgorged their top-hatted congregations into the Park from whence they strolled back, myself in top hat and Eton jacket moving in an Anglo-Irish phalanx and imagining I was Charles Hawtrey, through gates and squares and crescents aromatic with Sunday luncheons, the roast beef, the boredom, the security of 1913. At night my fear of the dark was still acute. I had to have night-lights and I had a terror of anything 'going out' - I could not bear a dying fire or a guttering candle, or even a clock to run down - it seemed a kind of death-agony.

The rest of my time at St Wulfric's was spent on a war-time basis. The school thrived; its *raison d'être* apparent in the lengthening Roll of Honour. Old boys came down in uniform and retired generals lectured to the corps while the boys stuck flags into maps, gave Woodbines to the wounded soldiers, and learned to knit; doing without more and more, as Flip's organizing genius found its expression.

The master who first took me in hand was Mr Ellis. He was gruff and peppery with an egg-shaped bald head. He and Mr Potter, the high-priest of the shooting trophies, were professional teachers, the rest makeshifts thrown up by the war. Ellis was pro-German; the Germans deserved to win the war, he thought, because of their superior efficiency. The boys respected his point of view; to them, a German victory would have seemed natural, a chastisement on England for neglecting duty and discipline, and not listening to 'Lest we forget'. He made me enthusiastic over algebra and as my enthusiasm grew I became good at it.

From that moment Daddy Ellis befriended me. He called

me Tim Connolly and built up a personality for me as the Irish Rebel, treating me as an intelligent and humorous person, an opponent to respect. When the Germans conquered our decadent country through their discipline and the superiority of their general staff I should be one of the first elements to be shot.

My new personality appealed to me. I changed my handwriting and way of doing my hair, jumped first instead of last into the fetid plunge-bath, played football better, and became an exhibit: the gay, generous, rebellious Irishman, with a whiff of Kipling's McTurk. Flip also admired the transformation and began to introduce me to parents as 'our dangerous Irishman', 'our little rebel'. At that time I used to keep a favour chart in which, week by week, I would graph my position at her court. I remember my joy as the upward curve continued, and as I began to make friends, win prizes, enjoy riding, and succeed again at trying to be funny. The favour charts I kept for several terms; one's favour began at the top and then went downwards as term wore on and tempers.

When angry Flip would slap our faces in front of the school or pull the hair behind our ears, till we cried. She would make satirical remarks at meals that pierced like a rapier and then put us through interviews in which we bellowed with repentance - 'It wasn't very straight of you, was it, Tim? Don't you *want* to do me credit - don't you *want* to have character - or do you simply not care what I think of you as long as you can get a few cheap laughs from your friends and shirk all responsibility?' The example of brothers or cousins now in the trenches was then produced to shame us. On all the boys who went through this Elizabeth and Essex relationship she had a remarkable effect, hotting them up like little Alfa-Romeos for the Brooklands of life.

The one thing that would bring our favour back (for, woman-like, Flip treated the very being-out-of-favour as a crime in itself, punishing us for the timid looks and underdog manner by which we showed it) was a visit from our parents

and many a letter was sent off begging for their aid. I was restored, after a low period during which I had been compared before the whole school to the tribe of Reuben because 'unstable as water thou shalt not excel', by an inquiry for me from Lord Meath, the founder of Empire Day. Sometimes we could get back by clinging to friends who were still 'in favour'. It might drag them down or it might bring us up and the unhappiness of these little boys forced to choose between dropping a friend in his disgrace or risking disgrace themselves was most affecting.

I had two friends whose 'favour' was as uncertain as my own, George Orwell and Cecil Beaton. I was a stage rebel, Orwell a true one. Tall, pale, with his flaccid cheeks, large spatulate fingers, and supercilious voice, he was one of those boys who seem born old. He was incapable of courtship and when his favour went it sank for ever. He saw through St Wulfric's, despised Sambo and hated Flip but was invaluable to them as scholarship fodder. We often walked together over the downs in our green jerseys and corduroy breeches discussing literature, and we both won, in consecutive years, the inevitable 'Harrow History Prize'. There was another prize for having the 'best list' of books taken out of the library during the term, the kind which might have been invented only to create intellectual snobs and to satiate boys with the world's culture at a time when they were too young to understand it. The books were given out in the evening by Flip herself and a way by which it was sometimes possible to get back into 'favour' was by taking out or returning one which caught her eye. Old boys who came down promptly inquired, 'What sort of favour are *you* in?' and letters to those who had gone on always ended up, 'I am (touch wood) still in good favour' - 'I shall have to do something, I'm losing favour - or 'I am in the most awful favour'; unjust at the time as this feminine tyranny seemed it was a valuable foretaste of the world outside; even the nickname Flip suggested some primitive goddess of fortune. Thus, although I won the prize

through heading my list with 'Carlyle's *French Revolution*' – and Orwell won it next, we were both caught at last with two volumes of *Sinister Street* and our favour sank to zero.

We both wrote poetry. At sunset or late at night in the dark, I would be visited by the Muse. In an ecstasy of flushing and shivering, the tears welling up as I wrote, I would put down some lines to the Night Wind. The next morning they would be copied out. Although the process of composition always seemed an authentic visitation, the result was an imitation of Stevenson or Longfellow or my favourite, Robert W. Service. I would compare them with Orwell's and be critical of his, while he was polite about mine, then we would separate feeling ashamed of each other.

The remarkable thing about Orwell was that alone among the boys he was an intellectual and not a parrot for he thought for himself, read Shaw and Samuel Butler and rejected not only St Wulfric's, but the war, the Empire, Kipling, Sussex, and Character. I remember a moment under a fig-tree in one of the inland boulevards of the seaside town, Orwell striding beside me and saying in his flat, ageless voice: 'You know, Connolly, there's only one remedy for all diseases.' I felt the usual guilty tremor when sex was mentioned and hazarded, 'You mean going to the lavatory?' 'No – I mean Death!' He was not a romantic, he had neither use for the blandishments of the drill sergeant who made us feel character was identical with boxing nor for the threats of the chaplain with his grizzled cheektufts and his gospel of a Jesus of character who detested immorality and swearing as much as he loved the Allies. 'Of course, you realize, Connolly,' said Orwell, 'that, whoever wins this war, we shall emerge a second-rate nation.'

Orwell proved to me that there existed an alternative to character, Intelligence. Beaton showed me another, Sensibility. He had a charming, dreamy face, enormous blue eyes with long lashes and wore his hair in a fringe. His voice was slow, affected and creamy. He was not good at games or work

but he escaped persecution through good manners, and a baffling independence. We used to mow the lawn together behind an old pony, sit eating the gooseberries in the kitchen garden, or pretend to polish brass in the chapel; from Orwell I learnt about literature, from Cecil I learnt about art. He occupied his spare time drawing and painting and his holidays in going to the theatre.

On Saturday nights, when the school was entertained in the big schoolroom by such talent as the place could offer, when Mr Potter had shown lantern slides of *Scrooge* or Mr Smedley, dressed up like a pirate at a P. & O. gala, had mouthed out what he called 'Poetry' – there would be a hush, and Cecil would step forward and sing, 'If you were the only girl in the World and I was the only boy.' His voice was small but true, and when he sang these sentimental songs, imitating Violet Loraine or Beatrice Lillie, the eighty-odd Wulfricians felt there could be no other boy in the world for them, the beetling chaplain forgot hell-fire and masturbation, the Irish drill-sergeant his bayonet practice, the staff refrained from disapproving, and for a moment the whole structure of character and duty tottered and even the principles of hanging on, muddling through, and building empires were called into question.

On other Saturday nights gramophone records were played; when we came to 'I have a song to sing O, sing me your song O' I would open a book which I had bought in the Charing Cross Road, at the prepared place, and read:

Far out at sea when the evening's dusk is falling you may often observe a dark-coloured bird with white under-plumage flit by just above the waves – another and another make their appearance, and you soon find out that a party of Manx Shearwaters have paid your vessel a passing call. They are nocturnal birds for the most part, spending the hours of daylight in their burrows, and coming out in the gloom to speed across the frowning waters in quest of food. There is something very exciting about the appearance of this singular bird. The noisy gulls which have been playing about all day

drop slowly astern as the sun nears the west; the parties of Razor-bills and Guillemots and Puffins have sped away to their distant breeding colonies; and the wide waste of waters seems unusually desitute and dreary as the night approaches, and the evening breeze fluttering in the sails, and through the rigging, is the only sound that breaks the oppressive stillness. But the hour of the Manx Shearwater's ghostly revelry has come, he holds high carnival over the waste of gray waters, flitting about in most erratic manner in his wild impetuous course, following the curve of every wave, dipping down into the hollows, where he is almost invisible, and then mounting the foamy crests, where you catch a brief glimpse of his hurried movements.

The combination of the music with this passage was intoxicating. The two blended into an experience of isolation and flight which induced the sacred shiver. The classroom disappeared, I was alone on the dark seas, there was a hush, a religious moment of suspense, and then the visitation – the Manx shearwaters appeared, held their high carnival, etc., and vanished. At length the schoolroom where each boy sat by his desk, his few possessions inside, his chartered ink channels on top, returned to focus. This experience, which I repeated every Saturday, like a drug, was typical of the period. For those were the days when literature meant the romantic escape, the purple patch; when none of our teachers would have questioned the absolute beauty of such a line as 'clothed in white Samite, mystic, wonderful!' We were still in the full Tennysonian afterglow and our beliefs, if the muse of St Wulfric's could have voiced them, would have been somewhat as follows.

'There is a natural tradition in English poetry, my dear Tim. Chaucer begat Spenser, Spenser begat Shakespeare, Shakespeare begat Milton, Milton begat Keats, Coleridge, Shelley, Wordsworth, and they begat Tennyson who begat Longfellow, Stevenson, Kipling, Quiller-Couch, and Sir Henry Newbolt. There are a few bad boys we do not speak about – Donne, Dryden, Pope, Blake, Byron, Browning, Fitzgerald, who

wrote *The Rubá'iyát of Omar Khayyám*, and Oscar Wilde who was a criminal degenerate. Chaucer is medieval but coarse, Spenser is the poet's poet, Shakespeare you will remember from your performance as the witch ('aroint thee, witch, the ruffed runion cried her husbands to Aleppo gone the master of the tiger, but in a sieve I'll thither sail and like a rat without a tail I'll do I'll do and I'll do'). Precisely. Milton was a great poet, he wrote *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso*, and *Paradise Lost*; Keats wrote *The Ode to a Nightingale*; and Tennyson wrote *The Lady of Shalott* – and what else? *Morte d'Arthur, Locksley Hall, In Memoriam, Break, Break, Break*, and *Crossing the Bar*. Longfellow wrote *Hiawatha*, Stevenson *Under the Wide and Starry Sky*, Kipling *Sussex* and *If* and *Gunga Din*, Quiller-Couch is a Good Influence and *Drake's Drum* and *Lyra Heroica* are by Sir Henry Newbolt.

'There are other good poems, *Chevy Chase, John Gilpin, The Armada, The Ancient Mariner, Grayselegy*. A poem is good either because it is funny (Ingoldsby Legends, Bab Ballads) or because it makes you want to cry. Some funny poems make you want to cry (the Jumblies, the Dong with a Luminous Nose); that is because you are not a healthy little boy. You need more Character. The best poems have the most beautiful lines in them; these lines can be detached, they are purple patches and are Useful in Examinations. Gray's *Elegy* is almost all Purple Patch and so is the *Ode to a Nightingale*, especially

Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn.

When you come to a purple patch you can tell it by an alarm clock going off, you feel a cold shiver, a lump in the throat, your eyes fill with tears, and your hair stands on end. You can get these sensations for yourself when you write poems like your *Ode on the Death of Lord Kitchener* or *To the Night Wind*.

'Nobody wrote so many purple patches as Tennyson, and he had character too (*Bury the Great Duke, Charge of the Light Brigade, The Revenge*). Kipling is the only great poet alive today.

Poetry is romantic, purple – a help in time of trouble – or else it is clever and funny, like Calverley – or has Character. (Life is real, Life is earnest, And the grave is NOT its goal.) It is also something to be ashamed of, like sex, and (except with the chaplain) religion.'

My experience with the Manx shearwater fulfilled these conditions. It was prose, so could not become poetry and truly purple, till heightened by music. It was romantic; something out of the ordinary, remote, and false, for in real life I should hate tossing about the Hebrides in a small boat – and escapist, since I imagined myself away from my present surroundings, alone on the northern waters, and yet not alone, a Manx shearwater, playing with others of my kind. The twilight was 'my' time of day (the time I felt most the poetical thrill), the waste of grey waters was my weepy Celtic spiritual home. Because poetry was associated with emotional excess, night, and unhappiness, I felt disgusted with it by day as by a friend in whom when drunk one has unwisely confided and I never exhibited the Manx shearwater even to Orwell.

It will be seen that the thread running through this autobiography is an analysis of romanticism, that romanticism in decline under whose shadow we grew up. Romanticism I would call the refusal to face certain truths about the world and ourselves, and the consequences of that refusal. It is a refusal which can be both splendid and necessary, this pretence that truth is beauty and beauty truth, that love is stronger than death, the soul immortal and the body divine – but in the hundred years that have elapsed since the romantic revival we have had too much of it. By the twentieth century the best work has been done and those of us who thought we were angels or devils have had a long struggle to free ourselves from such ideology. We have been the dupe of words and ideas, we have been unable to know when we are well off, we have expected too much from life, too many treats and we have precipitated crises to satisfy the appetite for sensation acquired in childhood; the womb world of the hot bath and

the celluloid duck has been too near us. The romantic's artillery is always bracketing over the target of reality, falling short into cynicism or overreaching it into sentimental optimism so that, whatever the achievements of romanticism in the past, to be a romantic today, knowing what we know about the nature of man and his place in the universe, is the mark of a wilful astigmatism, a confession of cowardice and immaturity.

If but some of us lived in the world of romantic poetry, we all lived in the world of romantic love; there was no sentiment in *Maud* or *In Memoriam* that to us seemed exaggerated, we accepted 'being half in love with easeful death' as a matter of course, like the psychology of the *Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Love was a recurrent ecstasy which drove us to make sacrifices for an object which might or might not be aware of them. Reciprocation killed love faster than anything, then came Ridicule; it was only Ignorance in the Beloved that could permit the emotion to last. The prosaic Sambo seemed to have a flair for detecting our romances and he would try to expel the Cyprian by taps on the head from his heavy silver pencil.

Always I long to creep
 Into some still cavern deep,
 There to weep and weep, and weep
 My whole soul out to Thee.

Such was my ideal, and if it met with any opposition I would reply in the romantic's way with a spiteful poem.

The boy whom I loved for the last three years I was at St Wulfric's was called Tony Watson. He was small, brown, wiry, good at games, untidy and silent, with a low brow, green eyes, and a fringe of rough short hair. I describe him because he is a type that has recurred through my life and which gets me into trouble. It is that faunlike, extrovert creature with a streak of madness and cruelty, not clever, but narcissistic and quick to adapt itself to clever people. In appearance it is between colours with a small mouth, slanting eyes, and lemon-yellow skin.

By the time I was twelve all four types to which I am susceptible had appeared. I do not know whether it is glands, numerology, the stars or mere environment which dispose one to these fierce sympathies, inherited as if from another life, but by now I recognize my kindred forms with some familiarity; the Faun, the Redhead, the Extreme Blonde, and the Dark Friend.

The Fauns well know their fatal power which a series of conquests have made obvious and they derive a pleasure that I mistake for reciprocation, from the spectacle of its workings. Age is often unkind to these charmers and the world is apt to turn against them. With the other types my relations are happier. I supply them with vitality and intensive cultivation, they provide me with affection, balance, loyalty, good taste. The Extreme Blondes are quiet, intelligent, humorous, receptive; they have an impressive reserve against which I roll, like the Atlantic Ocean on the Cornish cliffs, confident that they will be able to withstand me. The Dark Friends are the most sympathetic, they have brown eyes and oval faces; they like my jokes and look after me when I am ill, but it is one of the hardships of romantic love that rarely is it bestowed on people like ourselves and the Dark Friends end by being Consolers. The Redheads have some of the quieting effect of the Extreme Blondes but they may suddenly become as deleterious as the Faun. They are a special type, not the dreamy, brown-eyed, long-faced auburn, nor the aggressive albino, but the gay, thin, dashing green-eyed variety.

Being an only child I romanticized sisterhood, I wanted an Electra and longed for a relationship with sister types of the same age. I liked health and equality in women, an implicit friendship. I desired the same for my imaginary brothers. The Dark Friends and the Extreme Blondes supplied this, the Redheads added an excitement which raised it to perfection. And then the exotic Faun would reappear and all peace of mind would vanish. As with other only children my desire for a brother or a sister was so strong that I came to see

existence in terms of the couple; in whatever group I found myself I would inevitably end by sharing my life with one other, driven by an inner selection through a course of trial and error till after forming one of a group of four or five and then of a trio, I achieved my destiny as one half of a pair.

I christened this search for the '*dimidium animae meae*' the Pair System, and I was fascinated, when later I read the Symposium of Plato, to come across his theory that human beings had once been double and were for ever seeking the counterpart from whom they had been so rudely forced. We were all one half of a Siamese Twin.

The brothered one, the not alone
The brothered and the hated.

But it is a romantic theory and it is part of the romantic's misfortune that in the search for his affinity he is not guided by a community of interests but by those intimations which are the appeal of a mouth or an eye, an appeal which is not even private, so that the spectacle is presented of half a dozen Platonic half-men trying to unite with the same indifferent alter ego. Love at first sight – and the first sight is the supreme consummation for romantics – is an intuition bred by habit of the person who can do us harm.

Yet Tony Watson let me down lightly. He was a wild little boy with plenty of character but not of the right kind. He taught me to smoke (which I hated); to rag in the corridors at night, fighting among the coats hanging from their pegs, and to take part on the downs in gang warfare, which I adored. He moved in a fast set of hard-smoking and hard-swearing cronies from whom he protected me. Our unlikeness made us over-polite. He accepted my devotion, even to a poem beginning, 'Watson, the silent, Watson, the dauntless' and showed me, in return, an extraordinary drawing, a Parthenon Frieze on sheets of paper stuck together that unfolded like a concertina, to reveal a long procession of soldiers – cavalry, infantry,

artillery, wounded and dying, doctors, nurses, ghurkas, staff-officers, and engineers on their way to the war.

For most of us the war was skin-deep. The *Titanic* had gone down, the passengers all singing, 'Nearer my God to Thee' – that was terrible – and now the war: pins stuck in maps, the Kaiser dying of cancer of the throat, Kitchener drowned, ration cards, Business as Usual, a day when we were told of the Battle of Jutland and another when we heard that a terrible thing had happened, a revolution in Russia with a monster called Kerensky now in power. None of us, except perhaps Orwell, believed that England could lose the war or that we would grow up to fight in it nor were we old enough to understand the peril of our elder cousins or the tragedy when – like Uncle Granville's only son, they were killed on the first day of the Gallipoli slaughter. And meanwhile Watson's exact and bloodthirsty pageant grew fuller, a page at a time, till it stretched, by 1917, the whole length of the schoolroom.

Tony shared my love of animals and drew for me pictures of foxes in lonely postures barking to the moon. I had several excruciating moments with him. Once we vowed blood-brotherhood in the Albanian fashion. Tony cut a cross on each left hand and we held the bleeding scratches together. Another time, left in the bathroom alone, he came up to me, wrapped in his bath towel, and pursed his lips for a kiss. My spinster modesty made me flinch. He turned away and never did it again while for weeks I lay awake angry and miserable. He slept in a dormitory called the Red Room; I was in a two-bedded one across the passage with the Dark Friend, his cousin, Frankie Wright. Tony would come over in the morning after a night of pillow fighting, gang reprisals, and smoking on the roof, and get into my bed where my innocence hung round my neck like an albatross. Then the eight o'clock bell would ring and we would troop down to the ghastly plunge-bath. There was a smell of gooseflesh and slimy water. One by one, under the cold eye of Sambo and to the accompaniment of such comments as 'Go on Marsden, you

stink like a polecat', we dived or jumped in until it was the turn of the group of water-funks who shrank down the steps, groaning wer-wer-wer, while the sergeant-major waited to haul them out from the stagnant depths by a rope attached to a pole. When the last had been towed it was time to dress and go on the asphalt for 'gym'.

Year by year, the air, the discipline, the teaching, the association with other boys and the driving will of Flip took effect on me. I grew strong and healthy and appeared to be normal for I became a good mixer, a gay little bit who was quick to spot whom to make up to in a group and how to do it. I knew how far to go in teasing and responding to teasing and became famous for my 'repartee'. I had a theory that there was one repartee effective for every situation and spent weeks in elaborating it. At that time the magic phrase seemed, 'Dear me, how very uninteresting!' If I had to choose one now it would be 'This is a very bad moment for both of us.' I kept a Funny Book which contained satirical poems and character sketches. I became good at history, that is to say I learnt dates easily, knew which battle was fought in the snow and who was 'the little gentleman in black velvet'. I read Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, and Scott and got marks for them, and for pleasure John Buchan. It was time for me to go up for a scholarship. I had crammed Watson energetically for the common entrance which he just managed to pass and when I saw him again in the holidays he was a dapper public schoolboy with his hair brushed back, a felt hat and a cane and we had nothing to say to each other.

My first attempt at a scholarship was at Wellington with Orwell. I hated every moment: the blue-suited prefects bustling about the dismal brick and slate, the Wellingtonias and rhododendrons, infertile flora of the Bagshot sand. It was winter and an old four-wheeler bore me from the examinations to my great-aunts with whom I was staying. The musical groaning of the wheels and springs in the winter stillness had a profound effect and I felt like Childe Roland, mystical

and Celtic. Pines and heather, the whortle-bearing ridges, seemed to have a message for me, to be the background for some great event as I trundled over them after the afternoon paper. Orwell got a scholarship which he did not take. I failed but the experience was considered good practice.

A year later I went up for Eton, which was very different. Sambo took charge of us; he knew many people there and we had tea with old Wulfrician boys and masters. I had a moment on Windsor Bridge; it was summer, and, after the coast, the greenness of the lush Thames Valley was enervating and oppressive; everything seemed splendid and decadent, the huge stale elms, the boys in their many-coloured caps and blazers, the top hats, the strawberries and cream, the smell of wistaria. I looked over the bridge as a boy in an outrigger came gliding past, like a waterboatman. Two Etonians were standing on the bridge and I heard one remark, 'Really that man Wilkinson's not at all a bad oar.' The foppish drawl, the two boys with their hats on the back of their heads, the graceful sculler underneath, seemed the incarnation of elegance and maturity.

There was no doubt that this was the place for me, for all of it was, from the St Wulfric's point of view, utterly and absorbingly evil. I got in twelfth on History and English as Orwell, after Wellington, had done the year before. In case there was no vacancy I went up for one more scholarship, this time at Charterhouse where we did the examination in a cellar during an air raid.

My last year at St Wulfric's was rosy. I was in sixth form which had its own sitting-room, with Ned Northcote, the captain of the school (Extreme Blond), Frankie Wright (Dark Friend), and Nigel Kirkpatrick (Faunlike). We were about as civilized as little boys can grow to be. We were polite and we hardly ever caned anyone. We wrote to each other in the holidays, we got on with each other's parents, we went to theatres together and took tea at Rumpelmayer's. Ned was

captain of the eleven and Nigel of the football team. I was head of the sixth.

My lack of character was now a permanent feature. I was *unreliable*. For that reason I was head of the sixth but not captain of the school; I occupied already the position I was so often to maintain in after life, that of the intellectual who is never given the job because he is 'brilliant but unsound'. I was also a physical coward, though I learnt how to conceal it, a natural captain of second elevens, and a moral coward by compensation, since, in an English community, moral cowardice is an asset.

Already I had accepted the theory that (1) Character is more important than intellect. (2) Intellect is usually found without character (Oscar Wilde). (3) Intellect, when found with character, is called *Nous*. (Intellect plus character = *Nous* plus gumption.) Character is desirable because it makes for success at school (winning colours and reporting best friend for homosexuality), prepares boys for the university, and is the foundation of success in business, politics, the army, the navy, the Indian and Egyptian civil services, and the African Police. But my analysis of success had disclosed another quality which seemed, in school life at any rate, to go as far. It might be called *Prettiness*. In the matriarchy of St Wulfric's, it was not Character, but Character plus *Prettiness* that succeeded; Colin and Nigel Kirkpatrick in their green kilts, even the outlawed Tony Watson or Roy Brown with his fine treble voice; they were the favoured of fortune, petted when others were scolded, permitted to wait on parents and old boys at Sunday night supper in their blue suits, introduced to the guests when they brought the food into the room and in a position to stuff their pockets with potato salad when they took it out.

Prettiness alone (Cecil) was suspect like intellect alone (Orwell) but *prettiness* that was good at games meant 'Character' and was safe. Since I was not pretty I worked hard to be charming and the four of us grew so civilized that

we became inseparable. We were a little clique at the head of the school, a kind of 'Souls' of St Wulfric's, gay, powerful, introspective, and absorbed in each other's impressions. We took to visiting in our cubicles at night. One evening, after lights out, Ned Northcote and Frankie Wright were talking in mine when we heard the matron pass along.

Stalk and sneak, stalk and sneak,
 Maud of the rubbery shoes.
 Sneak sneak every week,
 Maud of the rubbery shoes.
 Over the cubicle wings you go
 Hearing the Red Room whispering low . . .

I had once written to please Tony, and now it was my turn to be caught.

Maud went into Northcote's cubicle. No sign of him. She called out in a terrible voice, 'Where's Northcote?' I answered from my cubicle, 'I think he went to the lavatory.' We heard her go along to open the door and lost our heads, like rabbits chased by a ferret. Ned bolted the latch of my cubicle with a toothbrush, and started to climb over the partition into his own. But Maud came and rattled it. 'Why is this door locked? Open it this instant.' I was afraid to. Silence. At last, with white face, Frankie opened it and she burst in. There was an eternity of waiting while our crime was reported, and then the three of us were taken down and caned by Sambo in our pyjamas. The locked door was evidence which our being a trio instead of the usual compromised pair could not palliate. It was Oscar Wilde over again.

The caning was only the beginning; next day our sergeant's stripes were removed, we were turned out of sixth form and a period of miserable disfavour started from which there seemed no hope of escape. But my scholarship was needed, like Ned's bowling, for propaganda; gradually we were forgiven, and our disgrace forgotten except by ourselves. For we never felt quite the same, we grasped that since we were

all completely innocent there must be a pitch of civilization which, once reached, brought down a Nemesis. Character was safest: we had seen the writing on the wall.

Before I went to Eton I had spent the Christmas of 1917 in Ireland, in my aunt's house at Rathfarnham. The Easter Rebellion had taken place since I was last there and to be pro-Irish, pro-Celt, pro-Gaelic was no longer a harmless eccentricity. I used to go riding with a groom over the Wicklow mountains and for the first time the Sinn Feiner of St Wulfric's met his equal. Frank the groom was supposed to command a company of the Irish republican army whom he drilled in the glens of Kilmashogue and up by the Hell Fire Club. I afterwards pretended that I had been present at these parades but never met anyone with him except an old hermit. We went to the Abbey Theatre and saw Synge acted and heard 'God Save the King' hissed, and to Clontarf for a pink-coated Christmas dinner at which everyone told hunting stories in the brogue. I felt dowdy, awkward, and English again.

Otherwise my holidays had been uneventful. My great moment at home had been the purchase of a bicycle with three speeds which I called the Green Dragon. I rode it over to where we lived at Crondall and a few days later was allowed to go away for a night by myself. My mother and my favourite Great-uncle Granville saw me off. I bicycled that day from Farnham to Winchester, stayed at the George and went over the school and the Cathedral. The hotel people thought I had run away from somewhere and were suspicious, for the sight of a tourist of thirteen booking a room and dining by himself with a guidebook propped up was unusual. It was the first welling up of the passion for travel that was to dominate my spare time for the next twenty years.

I was still ignorant of anything which I had not read in a book but just before I went to Eton a concerted attack was made on my modesty. My father struggled to explain the facts of life and the chaplain at St Wulfric's gave the boys who were leaving a seedy exhortation. Sambo was more precise. We

were going into a world full of temptations, he said, especially the Etonians; we must report any boy at once who tried to get into our bed, never go for a walk with a boy from another house, never make friends with anyone more than a year and a half older (eventually it would be younger), and above all, not 'play with ourselves'. There was an old boy from St Wulfric's who became so self-intoxicated that when he got to Oxford he had put, in a fit of remorse, his head under a train. That miserable youth, I afterwards learnt, had attended all the private schools in England.

Sambo gave a few examples of Wulfricians who had made good and mentioned cases where those who were doing well and were now heads of their houses, had been able to lend a helping hand to those floundering amid the sexual difficulties due to lack of character. The other boys leaving looked at me curiously, for I was warned to be careful, my literary temperament rendering me especially prone to 'all that kind of poisonous nonsense' and I was told that the boy with 'character' in my election at Eton who would, although not an old Wulfrician, keep an eye on me, was called Meynell. The Easter term over, we bade a tearful farewell to each other, Flip turned suddenly into a friend, and Nigel Kirkpatrick, Ned Northcote, Frankie Wright, promised to exchange letters with me from Marlborough, Repton, and Radley. But it was three years before I wrote another letter.

Dark Ages

IF we had written, all our letters would have told the same story. The lively aristocrats of the cubicles and the sixth-form room were reduced to serfdom, cultivated Greeks pitched into the Carthaginian slave market. We began to adapt ourselves to our new indignity; C. V. Connolly, Esq., K.S., New Buildings, Eton College, Windsor.

The seventy Eton scholars lived together in a house, part Victorian, part medieval where they were governed by the Master in College who had under him the Captain of the School and nine other members of Sixth Form, who wore stick-up collars, could cane, and have fags. All boys were divided into elections according to the year in which they won their scholarship; the elections moved slowly up the school *en bloc* and each represented a generation.

Below the top twenty came another thirty boys or so who formed the bulk of college and then the bottom twenty about fifteen of whom were doing their compulsory year of fagging, and who, while all the others had rooms, lived in wooden cubicles in Chamber.

The whole school, ruled in theory by Sixth Form and the Captain of the School, was governed by Pop or the Eton Society, an oligarchy of two dozen boys who, except for two or three *ex officio* members, were self-elected and could wear coloured waistcoats, stick-up collars, etc., and cane boys from any house. The masters could not cane. They punished by lines, detentions, and 'tickets' or chits of misbehaviour which had to be carried to the housemaster for signature. Serious offences or too many tickets meant being complained of to the headmaster and might end in a birching.

This system makes Eton the most democratic of schools,

for it is a school where all the prefects except the Sixth Form (who are only powerful in College) are self-elected. The boys get the government they deserve.

In practice Eton was not a democracy for the system was feudal. The masters represented the church, with the headmaster as Pope; the boys, with their hierarchy of colours and distinctions, were the rest of the population, while the prefects and athletes, the captains of houses and the members of 'Pop' were the feudal overlords who punished offences at the request of the 'church' and in return were tacitly allowed to break the same rules themselves. Thus a boy had two loyalties, to his tutor and to his fagmaster or feudal overlord. Sometimes the 'church' could protect a young clerk, making the lot of a serious little boy more bearable, in other houses the housemaster was powerless, the 'church' weak and unable to control the feudal barons. At other times there were struggles between master and boy which ended in Canossa.

On the whole the feudal system worked well. The boys elected to Pop, those who combined goodness at games with elegance, vitality, and a certain mental alertness, were urbane and tolerant; it was among the house-barons that bullies and stupid types were to be found.

A fag in Chamber I was in the lowest ranks of serfdom. Though fagmasters were usually chivalrous to their own slaves, mine was not, nor had we privacy, for our spare time was at the mercy of our rulers, who could send us far into Windsor to buy them food and beat us if we made a mistake over it. I had not often been beaten at St Wulfric's, at Eton it became a hideous experience, for even the little boy who was 'Captain of Chamber' could beat us, not with a cane but with a piece of rubber tubing. There was a 'Chamber Pop' who also could beat one in a body for a breach of privilege.

I felt quite lost and friendless in this world and sought out Meynell, the boy selected by Sambo to keep an eye on me. An eye was a euphemism for here was the familiar blend of character and prettiness, a tousled wire-terrier of a boy, tough,

humorous, a natural leader and political commissar. We were all unhappy and had such a feeling of persecution that we bullied each other to forget it. I was sixty-ninth in college order and among the most bullied boys in my election where Meynell was ringleader. He invented tortures as a perpetual inquest to see if we had 'guts' and was much liked in the elections above him who considered him a 'good influence'.

Nobody would have believed that he could make me stand on a mantelpiece and dance while he brandished a red-hot poker between my feet and said: 'What is your name?' 'Connolly.' 'No - what is your real name? Go on. Say it.' 'Ugly.' 'All right, Ugly, you can come down.' He was aided by a few boys who hoped that their sycophancy would save their skins and by another bully called Highworth. Highworth was not a torturer like Meynell, but a conceited, rakish, conventional boy who could not bear anyone to be eccentric or untidy. He should never have been in College, he was a natural Oppidan.*

I spent much of my spare time in School Library, sheltering among the poets. I had discovered the Celtic Twilight and in proportion as I was unhappy, I took it out on the *Lake Isle of Innisfree*, the *Little Waves of Breffny*, *Glencullen* and other escapist poems, to which I added the *Golden Journey to Samarcand*. I tried to make friends with one other bullied boy but he reciprocated too violently, showed me his own poems, and sniffed at the back of his nose. Instead I fell for a boy called Wilfrid, the faun type over again with green eyes, nectarine colouring who was quick to divine in the little black-gowned, dirty collegger a potential admirer, even as a beautiful orchid accepts the visits of some repulsive beetle. He was an Oppidan, good at games and older than me. It was only possible to see him leaving his classroom about once a week or sometimes

* Oppidans were the thousand other boys not in College who paid the full fees. Oppidans could be brilliant scholars but they could never experience the advantages and disadvantages of the intensive intellectual forcing-house which College was.

coming out of Chapel or at Absence when the whole of our Feudal society assembled in School Yard. If he was with anyone important he would cut me; if not he would make a joke or two at my expense while I grinned like a waiter. My day-dreams centred round him. I looked up his home address, found out about his family, and copied his initials on to bits of paper. It was something to be in love at last.

The beatings were torture. We were first conscious of impending doom at Prayers when the eyes of Sixth Form would linger pointedly on us. They had supper in a room of their own and a special fag, 'Senior', who was excused ordinary duties, like other police spies, was sent from there to fetch the 'wanted' man. From Upper Tea Room 'Senior' set out on his thrilling errand, past the boys chatting outside their rooms. 'Who's "wanted"?' 'Connolly.' 'What, again?' At last he reached the fags who were shivering with terror – for this was always an agonizing quarter of an hour for them – in their distant stalls in Chamber. Those who were sitting in their tin baths paused with the sponge in the air – they might have to get out again to dress. The talkers ceased their chorus simultaneously, like frogs, even the favoured who were being tickled in their stalls by the Master in College stopped giggling and fear swept over the wooden partitions. 'It's Connolly.' 'Connolly, you're "wanted".' 'Who by?' 'Wrangham.' 'That's all right. He won't beat me, only tick me off. He's my fagmaster.' 'He's going to beat someone. He's got the chair out.'

The chair was only put in the middle of the room when beatings were to take place and sometimes the fag was sent beforehand to get the canes with which he would himself be beaten.

The worst part was the suspense for we might make a mistake the day before and not be beaten for it till the following evening. Or we could get a day's grace by pleading a headache and getting 'early bed leave' or by going out to the shooting range, the musical society or to a mysterious evening

service, held once a week to expedite the war which was much frequented by guilty consciences, called Intercession. The huge chapel was dark and deserted, the gas mantles plopped, the stained-glass windows glittered, the headmaster droned the prayers from the altar. I too was praying. 'Please God may Wrangham not "want" me me, please please God may Wrangham not "want" me or may he forget about it by tomorrow, and I will clean my teeth. And make me see Wilfrid. Amen.'

Often mass executions took place; it was not uncommon for all the fags to be beaten at once. After a storm of accusation to which it was wiser not to reply since no one, once the chair was out, had been known to 'get off', the flogging began. We knelt on the chair bottoms outwards and gripped the bottom bar with our hands, stretching towards it over the back. Looking round under the chair we could see a monster rushing towards us with a cane in his hand, his face upside down and distorted – the frowning mask of the Captain of the School or the hideous little Wrangham. The pain was acute. When it was over some other member of Sixth Form would say 'Good night' – it was wiser to answer.

These memories are associated for me with the smell of Sixth Form supper and with the walk back through the spectators to the bed that pulled down from the wall, with the knowing inquiries of the vice-haunted virginal master in college, a Jesuit at these executions, and the darkness that prisoners long for.

The Captain of the School, Marjoribanks, who afterwards committed suicide, was a passionate beater like his bloody-minded successors, Wrangham and Cliffe. Meynell began to receive anonymous notes which made certain suggestions and showed 'character' by taking them straight to his fagmaster. The Captain of the School was told and the culprit was ordered to confess; nothing happened. Then another note arrived. The sender, clearly very high in the school, was never discovered, but in one satisfactory evening Marjoribanks had

beaten all the lower half of college. Thirty-five of us suffered. Another time we were all flogged because a boy dropped a sponge out of a window which hit a master, or we would be beaten for 'generality' which meant no specific charge except that of being 'generally uppish'.

The result of these persecutions, combined with Chamber beatings and bullyings, was to ruin my nerve. My work went off, and I received several 'tickets' which I had to present to my tutor, in itself a torture. To this day I cannot bear to be sent for or hear of anyone's wanting to see me about something without acute nervous dread.

My own election were broken under the strain of beatings at night and bullying by day; all we could hope for was to achieve peace with seniority and then become disciplinarians in our turn. But there was one ray of hope. The election now in power was a reactionary one which would be succeeded as it passed on by a gentler crowd, and our own senior election, the year above us, whom as yet we hardly knew, contained heroic fighters for liberty and justice. It bristled with Pym and Hampdens and the feudal system was powerless there.

I had another stroke of luck. After a 'chamber pop beating' from Meynell and four other boys, he began a heart-to-heart - 'Ugly, why are you so filthy, what is the matter with you?' After the tears which followed I succeeded in making him laugh, and revealed my capacity as a wit. I was able to expand it and soon I could make not only Meynell laugh, but Highworth: they began to leave me alone, bullying me only when they could not find anyone else, but even then sparing me, if I seemed unsuspecting and confident and did not smell of fear. At last I made them laugh at the expense of their victims and my sarcasm became useful. One evening in my second term, after the Armistice had been signed, Meynell asked me to call him Godfrey. From then I was safe, my prayers at 'intercession' were answered. I had become a bully too.

Highworth's father and Meynell's and my own had all been professional soldiers who had employed the methods of the

parade ground for the disciplining of their sons. We now became the rulers of Chamber, in which Godfrey Meynell was the Hitler, Highworth the Goering, and I the Goebbels, forming a Gestapo who bullied everyone we could and confiscated their private property.

After two terms of being bullied, I had, with occasional relapses, a year of bullying until, owing to some bad tactics, I let both Godfrey and Highworth combine against me. Yet we were fond of each other and our triumvirate was racked with jealousy. Highworth was a big neat handsome boy, good at games, a fast bowler, fond of girls and dirty stories. Godfrey was untidy, lazy, yet energetic, sentimental and self-reproachful, a puritan with a saving grace of humour, a border baron half-converted to Christianity whose turbulent life fitted exactly into the pattern of Eton feudalism for he was an example of character and prettiness in authority; his courage was tremendous, to play football under his captaincy, on a losing side, was a sensation. For an hour and a quarter he blamed, praised, and appealed to our feelings, leading rush after rush against boys bigger than himself, poaching any kicks he could get and limping off the field with his arm round my neck. 'My God, you went badly today, Nolly - haven't you any guts - to think we lost to those bastards by three to one' and tears of rage would roll down his cheeks. 'Next time we've got to win - we've just got to - understand, Flinchface?'

His personality dominated us because it was the strongest and because it was the incarnation of schoolboyiness; the five hundred years of Eton life had gone to make it, the Gothic windows, the huge open fireplace, the table in the middle of Chamber round which our life centred, had been brought into being for him. He was emotional and as Captain of Chamber would 'beat' me for untidiness, half miserable at having to flog his best friend, half pleased at fulfilling a Roman duty, only to suffer remorse at the condition of his own belongings. 'God knows what I'm to do - I can't let you beat *me* - I haven't the authority - if I ask you to hit me as

hard as you can I might lose my temper and knock you down. We'll have to make Wayne and Buckley tidy our stalls for us in future.'

Godfrey's relaxation was reading Homer; he adored the Odyssey, for the Homeric world was one in which he was at home and the proverbs of 'the wily Odysseus', to the disgust of the able but Philistine Highworth, were never off his lips. 'Oh, babababarbaba babababarbaba,' he would storm; 'for God's sake stop spouting Greek - I can't understand a fellow with guts like you Godfrey wanting to quote that filthy Greek all the time - and as for you, Cyril, you're worse - nine bloody beanrows will I have there and a hive for the honey bloody bee - my God it makes me crap.'

Between two such personalities it seemed that I never would have a chance to develop, or find room to reach out to the sun, but I had two pieces of good fortune. Highworth, always sexually precocious, laid hands on a confirmation candidate in the confessional stage and was sent away for two terms and Godfrey got pneumonia. He was in the sick-room for a month and while he was ill his trampled satellites plucked up their courage. I made friends with three of them and when he came back, we presented a united front against further bullying. Godfrey himself was deeply altered by his illness, his mischievous restlessness left him; being ill for so long and perhaps discovering how little he was missed and how well people got on without him, how transitory was power, had changed his character. For the rest of his time at Eton (he left early for Sandhurst), he was hardworking and modest. He never recovered his leadership but became liked by all those who once had gone in fear of him. The border baron, the prince of the dark ages, had undergone a change of heart, a genuine conversion.

Godfrey afterwards joined his father's regiment, went out to India, and had himself transferred to the Indian Army, for he disliked the social side of army life and wanted to be in closer contact with the men he loved. From there he went with his

ghurkas to Waziristan, still reading Homer, and was killed in action on the frontier, winning a posthumous V.C.

Liquenda tellus et domus et placens
Uxor . . .

Encased in the shell secreted by my cowardice, I have thought about his death on that untenable hillside, outnumbered, putting heart into his troops by assuring them that help would reach them, though well aware that help could not, and dying covered with wounds after fighting all day.

Such an end seems remote from the literary life, yet it was the end of one my own age, with whom for four years I had been shaken about like stones in a tin. To a parent passing through College there must have seemed nothing to choose between Godfrey and myself, two small boys in Eton jackets cooking their fagmaster's sausages, both untidy, noisy, and mouse-coloured and yet in each a fate was at work; two characters, reacting differently to the same environment, were shaping their lives. The qualities I admire are intellectual honesty, generosity, courage, and beauty. Godfrey was grave. I was not.

Such was the reward of leadership, the destiny of character – not the position of business responsibility which St Wulfric's had promised us but a premature and lonely death with the barren glory of a military honour.

*

The boys in my election with whom I now made friends were Charles Milligan, Kit Minns, and Jackie O'Dwyer. Charles became of morbid interest through being caught smoking which made him seem romantic and subversive. He was the Extreme Blond with delicate features and an air of neatness and languor. Minns, a peaceable Oriental-looking boy, surprised the Gestapo by refusing to be bullied. He was quiet and good-natured but when threats or force were employed he would not move. The Gestapo were puzzled; we felt like

hunters up against a new animal for Minns was invincible, not through his badgerlike strength, but because he knew he was right. For the first time we felt guilty, aware that our bullying proceeded from a sense of inferiority deepened perhaps by sexual ignorance, and confined ourselves henceforth to the official victims.

O'Dwyer was nearly always in tears but he was affectionate, witty, and genial and I secretly made friends with him. We arranged that if he publicly stood up to the Gestapo in my presence I would try to prevent him being punished. The moment came. Godfrey, as usual, was late in changing for afternoon school. 'My God, I've lost my braces.' He looked round, then marched up. 'O'Dwyer, give me your braces.' 'No.' 'Take off your braces and give them me at once.' 'No.' This was unheard of: Godfrey glowered at O'Dwyer, who stood rooted to the spot with the tears streaming down his face. After a silence, Godfrey turned away and claimed some braces elsewhere. Another serf was on the road to emancipation. Not unnaturally our election had a bad name though no one quite knew what was going on in it.

I was now fifteen, dirty, inky, miserable, untidy, a bad fag, a coward at games, lazy at work, unpopular with my masters and superiors, anxious to curry favour and yet to bully whom I dared. The rule of the election system was that we spoke only to the boys of our own year; we could be beaten for speaking first to a boy in an election above and were expected to enforce the same discipline on those below. All our election were most formal with the year that had arrived beneath us. I got a bad report and was described as 'cynical and irreverent'; '*tu ne cede malis*', wrote Mr Stone, '*sed contra audentior ito*'.

My parents were upset, heads were put together, and the blame was thrown on Orwell, who was supposed to be my 'bad influence' though now I hardly ever saw him. We had been for walks on Sundays but we belonged to two different civilizations. He was immersed in *The Way of All Flesh* and the atheistic arguments of *Androcles and the Lion*, I in the Celtic

Twilight and Lady Gregory's resurrected Gaelic legends. His election found us (Meynell excluded) brutish and savage. They were anxious to talk to their junior election and subvert in that way the reactionary 'election' system but they did not know how to begin for we were hardly the material on which liberal opinions could be tested.

The moral leaders of my senior election, known as 'the caucus', were Denis Dannreuther, Roger Mynors, Robert Longden, Gibson and Cazalet. Orwell was rather extreme and aloof, and Farlow, the most original and vigorous member, too rough and cynical for the lofty inner ring of whiggery. These two precocious boys were bosom friends: Farlow a boisterous sceptic who applied 'cui bono' - 'who benefits by it' as a criterion to the whole school system and Orwell perpetually sneering at 'They' - a Marxist-Shavian concept which included Masters, Old Collegers, the Church, and Senior reactionaries. This did not prevent him knocking Highworth down once when he found him tormenting me. One day at the end of my sixth term I found myself 'staying out' in the sick-room with Roger Mynors. Day by long day we made friends, discovering in each other the inevitable passion for the Isle of Purbeck, for chalk streams and geography, and for the first time I underwent the civilizing influence of my senior election. They were a most remarkable set of boys, and included a batch of five scholar athletes, animated, unlike the rulers of college, by post-war opinions. They hated bullying, beating, fagging, the election system, militarism, and all infringements of liberty and they believed in the ultimate victory of human reason. They were polite to each other and formed an oasis of enlightenment, with one set of baby reactionaries underneath them and another, more dangerous, in the year above.

Mynors did not drop me when we came out of the sick-room and an epidemic of mumps thinned out my own election, enabling Charles Milligan, Jackie O'Dwyer, and myself to push forward together. Jacky was clever, lazy, good at games, and attractive. He represented a type which is found in every

DARK AGES

school, the affable genial kind of boy whose life is a succession of enthusiasms; for dab cricket, for learning all the peers by sight, the variations of the house colours, the results of the Harrow matches or the batting averages of the eleven. He was sunny and tolerant, suspected of 'not going hard' in the more painful sports and, like myself, greedy. We ate quantities of bananas and cream and all day played a game called 'passage fives' under a white fused light in the echoing mump-stricken corridor. Roger Mynors walked about with me and called me the 'little ray of sunshine'. The affectionate and civilized head boy of St Wulfric's tentatively reappeared and that Easter, after my fourth term, I wrote O'Dwyer a letter. The dark ages were over.

Renaissance

It was now the summer of 1920. I was no longer a fag and had a room of my own. Neither ruler nor serf, I now formed part of the central bourgeoisie of College. I first saw Nigel by the letter slab and from that moment I was as much changed as Godfrey by pneumonia. The 'pair system' re-appeared in my life, the faun, the dream brother. That afternoon we played in a knock-up cricket match and each made twenty-five. Nigel had all the familiar features, dark hair, green eyes, yellow skin, and a classic head with the wistfulness of a minor angel in a Botticelli, but, being a collegier, he was not stupid like Wilfrid or Tony; in spite of the year and a half between our ages, companionship was possible.

To say I was in love again will vex the reader beyond endurance, but he must remember that being in love had a peculiar meaning for me. I had never even been kissed and love was an ideal based on the exhibitionism of the only-child. It meant a desire to lay my personality at someone's feet as a puppy deposits a slobbery ball; it meant a non-stop daydream, a planning of surprises, an exchange of confidences, a giving of presents, an agony of expectation, a delirium of impatience, ending with the premonition of boredom more drastic than the loneliness which it set out to cure. I was now entering adolescence and for long was to suffer from that disfiguring ailment. My sense of values was to be affected, my emotions falsified, my mind put out of focus, my idea of reality imposed on reality and where they did not tally, reality would be cut to fit.

Nigel was in my sub-junior election. This meant that although I could be seen about with my junior election, I could not be seen alone with him. One way I could talk to him was

by availing myself of co-ordinated visits to the shooting gallery, glimpses on the way to meals, leaving chapel, at absence or other ceremonies of the community. The other was to frequent my junior election and make use of the etiquette by which they were allowed to go about with him. This meant altering my ideas about the election system, in fact, ceasing to be a reactionary. The change in emotional life led, as is often the case, to a new political alignment.

I first made friends with the two civilized members of my junior election, Peter Loxley and Walter Le Strange, and through them was able to see something of Nigel and his red-haired friend Freddie Langham. At the same time, growing more liberal, I became more acceptable to the election above. Denis Dannreuther and Robert Longden took me up and afterwards King-Farlow and George Wansbrough. At the end of the term I sat next Nigel at a house-match. (I could not give a picture of Eton if I did not emphasize how much time was devoted to planning meetings with people of another year or in another house; the intrigues were worthy of Versailles or Yildiz.) At the house-match I asked Nigel who he liked best in the school. Langham? 'Second best,' Loxley? 'Fourth best,' and so on. He also asked me. We realized that we had both omitted 'first best' and that the only people we had not mentioned had been each other. I experienced the thrill not untinged with apprehension by which the romantic recognizes reciprocated love.

Then came Camp, where my parents, who lived near, gave dinner-parties for Godfrey and my new friends, Mynors, Runciman, Wansbrough, Longden, and Dadie Rylands. Our house was a refuge from Camp and, making up my little dinner parties, I tasted the joys of being a political hostess and laid my plans for the future.

The Christmas term of 1920 I was launched. Looking back at my schooldays I am conscious of a rhythm about them, every year culminated in the summer term; it was the term when things happened, the climax of emotions, successes, and

failures. I never felt well in the summer term. The Thames Valley climate was lowering, I was enervated by the profusion of elms and buttercups and sheep-turds, the heat and the leisure. The summers at Eton were too pagan, one collapsed half-way through. Those hot afternoons punctuated by the 'toc toc' of bat hitting ball when I sat with a book in the shade of Poets' Walk, a green tunnel that has etiolated so many generations of poets, or wandered through the deserted college buildings, where the chalky sunbeam lay aslant the desk, were deleterious. Christmas terms meant consolidation and new beginnings; Easter was a season of promise; the games that I was good at were fives and squash; I liked the Easter terms best. Christmas was a primitive, Easter the quattrocento, and summer the decadence.

To this day I can tell whether a person is school-minded: whether they are cowardly, gregarious, sensitive to pupil-teacher relationships, warm, competitive and adolescent – or whether they are schoolproof. The art of getting on at school depends on a mixture of enthusiasm with moral cowardice and social sense. The enthusiasm is for personalities and gossip about them, for a schoolboy is a novelist too busy to write. Orwell, for example, with his 'non serviam', or Steven Runciman who divided the world into two groups, the stupid and the sillies, lack the ape-like virtues without which no one can enjoy a public school. I possessed them, and from now on was happy and successful. I joined the College Literary Society, for which we wrote poems and criticism.

Two of my new friends in super-senior election belonged, Dadie Rylands and Terence Beddard, whom I called, as one was so much more censorious than the other, the Old and the New Testament. Dadie was a charming, feline boy; he lent me modern poetry to read in the Chap Books which were then coming out. He liked Rupert Brooke and introduced me to the Georgians. My possession of these Chap Books awoke in Highworth envy tinged with incomprehension. 'My God, Cyril – if I'd known you were going to turn into a bloody

aesthete and go bumsucking after people like Rylands! 'There's Godfrey turned pi as hell and all the rest of our election without any guts – and now you start letting your hair grow long and reading those bloody chapbooks. Rupert Brooke! Ow boo-hoo boo-hoo, stands the church clock at ten to bloody three and is there honey still for bloody tea!' After this I lost my temper and for the next year never spoke to him. Handsome and neat as ever, with several cricket colours and many Oppidan friends, he had hopes of getting into Pop, and yet was bewildered, isolated from the rest of us by his lack of adolescence.

One day I wrote a pines-and-heather poem myself for the Literary Society which was favourably criticized. The last couplet was:

And, winging down the evening sky,
The herons come to the heronry.

Dadie said that by accident I had written a couplet as good as anything in Rupert Brooke. Godfrey took me aside and said that he wished he could have written the poem, that it expressed everything he felt and that he did not know anyone else could feel. Even Terence Beddard, a dandy with a romantic side and a gift for satire, was impressed – but Highworth never saw it.

Terence and I did classics up to Mr Headlam in the same division, we satirized Georgian poetry and the literary society in our spare time and invented a Georgian poet called Percy Beauregard Biles. Terence was a Byronic character, the first one I had met; he was a Mercutio, a foppish, melancholy, and ironical dandy. I used to go along to talk in his room and we discovered a common interest in Nigel. By then I liked Freddie Langham almost as much; he was more engaging, intelligent, and whole-hearted than Nigel who could embarrass me by displaying a sentimentality which I shared. He was also inclined to grow weepy, and religious. We sometimes walked across School Yard at night and lay on our backs looking up

at the buttresses of the chapel for it was a discovery of mine that the height of the Gothic could be appreciated in that way.

'I suppose we are the only people in College,' said Nigel, 'who ever look at the stars. The others are all fools. We are the only two who are humble.'

By the next term Terence had left. He had had great influence on me, bringing out a side – Don Juan with a touch of Wilde – whose development made my life more interesting but also more theatrical and egocentric. For years afterwards I wrote to him, about 'Le Rouge et Le Noir' as I called Freddie and Nigel. Nigel sulked that term and grew more religious than ever. My friends were Denis Dannreuther (the head of my senior election), Charles Milligan, and Freddie Langham; the Dark Friend, the Extreme Blond and the Red-head were rallying.

Denis was an exquisite classical scholar, one of those rare people who combine a brilliant and logical mind with genuine moral feeling and who become more than a careerist. We talked ethics and College politics, for the political situation was fascinating. There was party government in the struggle between pre-war and post-war – between right and left. The armistice and the end of the war had released a wave of scepticism and revolutionary feeling over Eton where a book like *Eminent Victorians* made a particular sensation. The Left Wing or Liberals, as we called ourselves, in opposition to the Reactionaries, had a clear view of the situation.

(1) The war and the corresponding increase of militarism had affected the freedom of Eton boys. Emergency measures had been enforced and not repealed, lights went out earlier, discipline was stricter and privileges had been given up in the crisis which had never been restored. The tightening up of discipline involved a cynical view of boy nature, which, especially in College, was to be deplored. Those responsible were the ushers, among whom were certain Vile Old Men who wished to wrest from the boys all liberty and independence and who were aided by our vacillating Master, a sex-obsessed

prude who extorted information about boys' morals from hysterical confirmation candidates and practised other Jesuitical abuses. Behind him was that fine casuist the Headmaster and of course the Old Tugs – old collegers who belonged to the stoic pre-war generations, the pillars of the *ancien régime*.

(2) The corner-stone of this régime was the election system, which did not exist in the houses, was of quite recent origin, and harmful in that it created a false authority, separating people who ought to be mixing with each other, preventing a 'bad' election being improved by a 'good' one and creating a sense of guilt in those who had innocent relationships outside. The theory that the election system prevented bullying was untrue, since bullying, like immorality, was commonest among boys of the same age. The election system therefore must be abolished from the top, and boys be allowed to talk to whom they liked. In this daylight the danger of immorality would be less than in the present atmosphere of privilege and intrigue.

(3) Corporal punishment was a relic of barbarism. It was as bad for those who administered as for those who received it. That torture also must be abolished from the top while mass floggings and generality beatings of the kind we had been subjected to were inexcusable.

(4) The fagging system must be modified. The summoning of boys from Chamber to distant parts of College, the last one to arrive being sent off to Windsor for a walnut cake, made too great inroads on their time and the knight-and-squire relationship between fagmaster and fag was sentimental.

(5) The privileges of College Pop or Debating Society were invidious. There was too much canvassing and blackballing, the elections made too many people unhappy.

(6) Games and colours were over-important. Their influence was exaggerated and must be fought. They should not be competitive or compulsory.

(7) The Corps was a joke; it had no business to be

compulsory and any tendency to increase militarism among a war-weary generation must be exposed and ridiculed.

(8) Boys must be appealed to through reason. They must be given the benefit of the doubt; their fundamental goodness and good sense must be believed in, however contrary to appearances.

To this the reactionaries replied as they always have; that human nature could not be changed, give people an inch and they would take an ell, that 'one must draw the line somewhere', that if games and discipline were relaxed orgies would break out, that corporal punishment was the only check on self-satisfaction and answered a bully in his own coin, that boys were conservative and hated giving up any of their hard-won privileges, that life was a Vale of Tears in which liberalism did not work.

At that time College Pop, unlike School Pop, still had debates and some of my senior election had been elected members of it. There had been two classic debates, on the 'election system' and on corporal punishment, that had almost ended in blows. The liberals at the bottom, Denis, King-Farlow, Roger Mynors, Bobbie Longden, and Gibson had been supported by Miles Clausen and Christopher Hollis, the liberals at the top. The election in between that would shortly be coming into power was reactionary, except for Rylands and for one or two others who were non-political.

As the last liberals left the top of the school and my reactionary super-senior election came into office, the position of the liberals in senior election, and the few others, like myself, Charles Milligan, Le Strange, and Loxley grew unpleasant. Reprisals were due and our few protectors were leaving. Without Beddard and Rylands I had no friends among those coming into power and at the advanced age of seventeen I received a beating for 'uppishness'. Here are two letters of the time.

Easter, 1921

MY DEAR TERENCE,

Home and Morbid. Since I wrote I have become clean gone on Nigel again. It's really too awful. I told you his attitude this half has been sulky with flashes of niceness – well, Monday I lectured him about it, and got out from him – A, the fact that he despised me. B, that his ideal was to be completely indifferent – this he kept up continually till on Thursday afternoon I got him alone in Lower Tea Room and discovered that 'he was aiming at obtaining spiritual perfection, and that he regarded me as a distraction to be avoided, that I brought along other distractions (Loxley and Le Strange) and tried to talk about nothing with him and Langham.'

All of which is true. I spent the last three days trying not to show him (Freddie) that I liked N. more (which I did since last Monday). N. told me that he thought it impossible to like everyone and that he wanted to cut down his acquaintances to a small but select circle and he did not want me to be one but he was afraid my personality was too strong. Well, I then had him on toast. I said that he must have a pretty rotten sort of perfection if it had to be guarded from plausible antichrists like me (that is his unexpressed idea of me), that he treated me like a muck-heap in the corner of his room which he shunned instead of trying to clear up – that he was running away from temptation instead of fighting it, that he was completely selfish, and instead of trying to make others better was only trying to safeguard himself – as for his beastly set, he, I suppose, believed in the parable of the good Shepherd? Yes he did – Well, which did the shepherd admire most, the 99 good sheep or the wandering one? He had to admit he would admire the 99 more. But which did he like most and take most steps over? Moreover who did he suppose liked the shepherd best, the 99 good sheep or the wandering one?

He had to give in and admit he was quite wrong and unchristian . . . I showed him that, temporarily at any rate, I preferred him to Langham. This morning I found him in Lower Tea Room and said goodbye, he asked me to write to him and seemed to have forgiven me. Now I can think of no-one else. Do you know the Greek epigram 'delicate are the fosterlings of Tyre but Myiscus outshines them as the sun the stars'; it seems to me that suits him, there is a husky look about him which the name Myiscus brings out and his good looks are typical sun products, not rosy or effeminate.

Langham is now very nice and attractive but relegated to second place, and now I am not glad at getting home but sorry at not seeing N. I am altogether rather fed with last half – I talked exclusively to a set consisting of Dannreuther, Minns, Milligan, Eastwood, Langham and N., with no one else have I talked anything but trivialities. I got on badly with N. and quarrelled with Highworth. However I got my first ‘stinker’ [Distinction in Trials] the story of which I must tell you when I have more time. I never dreamt I could go clean gone on the *same* person. Wish me luck in my new venture. I hope I can get him gone on me again but I dread lest I should then cool myself. N. despises you I think even more than me. *χαίρε*.

Tuesday

MY DEAR TERRY,

I wrote you two letters lately. Re N. I think it was being treated the right way set me gone on him again. What I like is a winning fight – well at first I got that, then nothing to fight for, then a losing one. Now I am straight again. It is not true to say the unattainable is the spice of life, it is attaining the unattainable. I never enjoy doing a thing until I have made sufficient difficulties – given that I am colossally conceited, I only realized it lately. Tuppa (Headlam) and Crace both saying I was a v. able bucked me up enormously. I used to think I could never do more than obtain a superficial knowledge of a few things. Now I think there is *nothing* I cannot do, though very few things worth taking the trouble to (don’t end sentences with prepositions).

You ask how life is? Chaos. I am in the state of mind of not being able to get at anything, the only thing that is true is that (a) *everything* is true (b) *everything* is false.

Tuppa’s formula of Some People . . . Others . . . seems to be the only generality worthy of acceptance. I am house-hunting for a way of life, it is fun in a way but the agents do not know what I want and the houses that sound most attractive are hideous to look at close, others are beyond my income.

I wrote to N. and sent him my photo, with a lot of explanation of my present state, which seems to worry him. I said I thought I lived for the best form of happiness: learning to appreciate the first rate and know the sham, learning to look for beauty in everything, sampling every outlook and every interest (bar stinks and maths),

trying to stop people being lukewarm and liking the second rate, trying to make other people happy, but not doing so at the cost of my own happiness, or concealing it when I am being generous. Publishing all the good I do. I suppose I am too cautious to risk investing in treasure in heaven. Roughly these are my ideals. I said how much more I liked him than I used to, and that he must treat me as a nice dog, not worship or despise, but sympathize. I said I really had no aim in life (by the way I am trying to analyse after doing anything my motives for doing it and so deduce what my outlook is – unwilling to accept my own introspective failure). I think the fact that one does things and cannot analyse motives or reconcile them to averred principles goes a long way to proving fatalism. I love extremes, either I would be a Catholic fatalist, or an atheist. (I did not say that to N. at the time.) I began 'Dear Nigel' and signed my photo 'Cyril'. I got:

Dear Connolly, I feel very honoured that you (then in pencil) consider me worthy of ink. You see I don't think you are. I did not ask for the picture, but as you have sent it there remains no other course for me than to say 'Thank you' (you notice the improvement in style on the last letter!). By the way I wish you would leave paragraphs in your so-called letters.

I want you to understand that I consider your spiritual welfare a thing that it is my duty to improve. I will allow that I have felt a certain amount of pitying affection for you. I saw last half that you were a waste paper basket for wrong ideas and that something ought to be done for you. I should have tried to do this had I had a chance of seeing you alone and discussing. But you, quite blindly and utterly incapable of putting yourself in my position, always brought company with you and went into Langham's room, where your frivolity, barely keeping within the bounds of decency, was to me so utterly despicable and repulsive to my principles, that I was bound to adopt the attitude which you called a pose. If it hadn't been for Langham I might have quarrelled with you quite nastily – but of course you are not appreciating anything I say. Think of all the millions of times last half you came into MY stall ALONE.

If you come next half alone I shall not generally consider you a distraction, but you must be quite prepared to be sent away, and I want you to understand you are not going to come before either my work or my religion and I want you to realize that anything in the nature of company or popularity is quite repugnant to me. Langham is quite nice and sociable, but as yet I do not

know much about him and am beginning to wonder if there is much beneath the surface. Be it far from me to worship you! You state that you have no aim in life as yet and are trying to find one, well why not take the plain one with which you have been fed from your youth up. (A. Because it is plain. B. Because I have been fed with it from my youth up.) I.E. The Christian One. You can form a pretty average good ideal from this I should have thought. Of course you must know all about it and you can do this by systematic bible reading. Form your principles on what you read, and do everything on principle. Imagine your ideal, which after all is set down in the N.T. You need not call it God, if you dislike the word, but think of it and act on it always. If you like, take it as a matter of interest. Think how frightfully dull your present aimless life is (is house-hunting dull?) compared with what it might be. If you have an aim in everything you do you will find you have an extraordinary pleasure at every success achieved, renewed confidence, and firmer principles. For instance I can assure you I gain real genuine pleasure in turning you out of my stall when I want to talk to you, but have some work to do. In your condition you are perfectly lonely and whenever you are in trouble you have nothing to fall back on, no one to help you, and you act on inspiration. When I am in trouble I always know what to do through my principles. I consult with God and so am acting definitely, and not in an aimless helpless way.

Try this, will you? Call it imagination at first if you like, but if you are sincere you will soon be convinced that it is more than that.

You must see for yourself how thoroughly unsatisfactory your present state is.

Now I am sure you will laugh at me for all this.

N.

A wonderful letter for a boy of fifteen and I think he means it. I wonder why he is so deliberately rude and impersonal. I don't think his ideal is so very good, he says God is his principle while the Christian idea of God is Love. His is more Petrine than Joannine Christianity. I think unless I can make him take an interest in poetry, painting, etc. he will become an awful Puritan. If he cares only about religion he will become narrow-minded too. I know he does despise all popularity, but then he is good-looking enough to be able to. The only respectable Christianity is Broad Church or R.C., and here we have a modern P. father in embryo. Moreover he talks as if he will drop Freddy as soon as he is sure there is nothing in him, though Langham likes him best in the election. I

want to make Langham interesting and wrote to him telling him to go to the National Gallery before he answered. He has not answered but I think he is too young to enjoy writing letters.

I am becoming quite a Socrates in the lower half of college. I do want people to like talking religion and morals, to read good books, like poetry and pictures, and think for themselves. N. merely retires further into his shell as when he wouldn't answer my questionnaire for my religion chart. You see I think my ideals are superior to his. Of course they are founded on the assumption that there is no conscious immortality, that happiness is the mean between good and evil (in their usual sense) that the greatest happiness is to be found in novelty. I think self-sacrifice is the greatest happiness when you are at an age to appreciate it, at present it must be ostentatious and announced to everyone. I think in Art it is at first necessary to accept the decisions of others. I have to go before a picture and say 'that is a great picture, I must learn to like it', till, aided by my own good taste, I do like it. I think my ideals have deteriorated. I used to think Perfection the aim of life, now I think it is Perfection in Happiness. Adversity is like a purge, it is good for you at the time and you are the more able to enjoy life when you have done with it, and it gives me a chance to demonstrate my atheism. I think I must try and be a Stoic in adversity, and Epicurean in prosperity. Baudelaire says somewhere:

From the crude ore of each minute
Draw the pure gold that is in it.

Gangue is the word for 'ore'.

I would love to have tea with you at Rumpelmayer's when you come back on the 24th when I go to stay with Loxley in town. I am so hard up for a sufficiently debauched confidant that you must excuse these long rambling epistles. Biles has written a bawdy ballad in exile. It begins -

O to be back at school again
To gossip and laugh and swear -

I must go to bed now. A Riverderci.

PS.

Is it so small a thing to have enjoyed the sun
To have lived light in the spring

To have loved, to have thought, to have done,
 To have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes?
 That we must feign a bliss
 Of doubtful future date
 And in pursuit of this
 Lose all our present state
 And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

The summer of 1921 my life was once again changed by Nigel. At first we got on well. We agreed that I should introduce him to art while he would convert me to religion. But the relations between adolescents are variable, and Nigel, who had perhaps overreached himself with religion, cared that summer only for cricket, and despised all who were not cricketers. One day we quarrelled. I said our friendship must be All or Nothing; he said, 'Very well, I choose nothing', and I left his room. After a day I tried to make it up. 'Nothing' was not having the effect I hoped for. Nigel was brutal and called me a dirty scug (boy without a colour). I left him in a hysterical mood and went and broke a chair in Upper Tea Room. Then I rushed to Freddie and Denis for sympathy. I was fond of Nigel and fond of myself, and he had injured both these idols.

The rest of the half I kept on making overtures to him which he rudely ignored. Sometimes I was rude too and used to seek him out in order to cut him. He would make loud personal remarks and kick Walter Le Strange if he was walking with me for he had now got a cricket colour and made Oppidan friends. The effect of this quarrel on me was three-fold. I was unhappy and for the first time in my life rebuffed; the guardian angel who looked after my relationships had forsaken me. My one ambition was to get over my feeling for Nigel and avenge myself by making him regret having quarrelled with me. I wanted to become the most useful and desirable person in his world, indispensable to his vulgar ambitions which I would help him to gratify as contemptuously as Lord Steyne assisted Becky Sharp to a new necklace. In

my day-dreams I acquired all the colours under the sun. I put him up for Pop.

The three results were that I became more social, that I worked harder, that I grew sceptical and pessimistic about the world. I was determined that Nigel must see me only with people he would himself like to know. I hugged closer to Denis and to King-Farlow, who was my fellow history specialist. He was robust, tough, cynical, good at games, energetic, and vulgar. We were both absorbed in Renaissance history and translated everything we learnt into our own lives; after reading Machiavelli I practised Machiavellianism, drawing up analyses of whom I should sit next, whom make friends with; of how to separate So-and-so, how to win over somebody else. Every man had a price. It was necessary to discover his ruling passion and play on it. The test of action was whether it led to one's own advantage, i.e. was justified by political necessity. One must learn to keep 'one's thoughts secret in an open face'.

Thus all college must be cultivated for I could never tell who might prove an asset in the humiliation of Nigel – that humiliation which was to consist in giving him the things he valued and which I despised and in being the only person who could give them him. He now went around with my enemy Highworth. They talked invariably of cricket and cast black looks in my direction so I made friends with Highworth again. Machiavelli would have approved. Highworth, outwardly successful, was still bewildered, and oppressed, I discovered, by the thought of the Vale or official leaving poem he would be expected to write at the end of the term and to which his attitude to poetry could scarcely contribute. I offered to compose it for him. I tried to make Nigel jealous by cultivating Freddie Langham whom I liked more and more; I could not make friends with cricketers as College did not possess any but I made up to our rowing men, two of whom were in the Eight. Farlow also had some rowing and football colours, and I felt less of a scug as I swaggered with him past Nigel's room.

It was the fashion to have photographs of our friends signed and installed on the mantelpiece. I had sent Nigel mine. He refused to give me his. I took one and he said that I had stolen it. I collected photos after that like an old hostess collecting celebrities. I cultivated anyone who was a rarity or who had not been taken, persuading them to get done for me and rushing off with the new scalp. Machiavelli functioned. I found I could charm people merely by asking them questions, and seeming interested in them, and at the end of the term I was elected to College Pop.

The election had been stormy and it was through my friendship with the rowing men that I got in for had I been put up by any of the liberals I would certainly have been blackballed. The political situation was now acute. Super-senior election were in power and beatings were frequent. To our indignation they beat Orwell for being late for prayers, then another member of senior election whom they considered uppish, finally, and on the most flimsy pretexts, Whittome and myself. Orwell and Whittome were boys of eighteen; they were just outside Sixth Form, and were beaten by boys of the same age in their own senior election, as if they were fags.

The feeling ran so high against the Captain of the School, the odious Cliffe, and the six other reactionaries in his election that they were cut to a man. Denis's speeches at college Pop debates were reinforced by the contempt of Mynors, the intransigence of Farlow, the indignation of Cazalet and Gibson. At the end of the term it was customary to pass votes of thanks on those who were leaving from College Pop, on the President Treasurer and Secretary, the Keepers of College Wall and Field. For the first time in history these votes of thanks were blackballed. The genial ceremony collapsed; Cliffe the Captain of the School, Lea the Cadet officer of the Corps, Babington-Smith and the boys who beat Farlow and Orwell and Whittome on trumped-up charges for political reasons faced the unprecedented verdict. Name after name was read out, the vote of thanks proposed and seconded, the ballot

box passed, the blackballs counted, and the transaction noted down in the annals. At Farlow's 'leaving tea' a day or two afterwards a lampoon of mine which drew attention to the idiosyncrasies of the seven blackballed reactionaries was sung with rapture. The Master in College protested against the breach of tradition, the Old Tugs got to hear of it, the Vile Old Men took it up, and there were whispers about Bolshevism which almost reached the newspapers.

Meanwhile I had succumbed to the disease of scepticism. My health was excellent but I could not get rid of ideas of mortality, futility, and death. What was the use of existence? Why did one do anything? All was vanity. Stupidity governed the world and human life was a blot on creation. I searched the classics for confirmation of my scepticism and found an overwhelming support. Job and Ecclesiastes and the author of the Wisdom of Solomon agreed with me; the Greek lyric poets and philosophers proclaimed it, Horace confirmed them as did Voltaire and Gibbon and Villon and Verlaine. I wrote a paper on Pessimism for the Essay Society. Only two kinds of thought existed, a pessimism which anticipated better things (Christianity) and my own - which did not. But if one believed this then one should kill oneself, which, of course, I was not prepared to do. Why not? Because of the consolations of friendship and learning, because suicide played into the hands of the Jealous God. One lived on to spite him.

For years I throve on this black doctrine for, although it originated with me owing to a rebuff from Nigel and a Thames Valley summer more virulent than usual, it happened that I had caught the fashionable malady of the period. Futility was the rage. With Farlow I concocted a play which was to expose history. We had been set a 'work of the imagination' to show to housemaster and history tutor, and we collaborated on a revue about the Renaissance, interspersed with songs and satirical sketches which showed knowledge and reading, vast cynicism and an unsuspected talent for horseplay. The Popes, the Emperors, the Medici, the Doges, the Kings of France

and England, the Constable of Bourbon, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli and Savonarola, the King of Spain, the Borgias, Leonardo and Michelangelo were treated to the same knock-about. It was the first creation of my new-born scepticism and the most important. Nobody liked it but ourselves, least of all our tutors, who refused to sign it, Mr Gow making only the ambiguous comment 'pervenit ad umbilicum' and I had instead to write a little purple essay 'On a Crucifixion attributed to Antonello da Messina'. But in the Specialists examination called the 'Grand July' I did well and came out eleventh in the whole school. My gloom was not proof against this although my philosophy withstood it. What did it matter, eleventh or eleven hundredth? Was death deferred a day? Would anyone care in a hundred years? *Cui bono?* 'Can I forget Myiscus, who is in all beautiful things?'

Now years three and 'halves' ten
 Have hastened by and flown
 And soon there will be other men
 But I shall be forgotten then
 My very name unknown.
 And no more careless evening hours
 Of slippered armchair ease
 No glimpse of tea things in the towers,
 No cans, no steam, no shouts from showers,
 No shorts, nor muddied knees.

as I made Highworth protest, echoing Mimnermus, in his commissioned Vale. At Camp that year my depression was entire. Nigel was not there nor Freddie nor Denis; I was glad to be able to get away on a motor-bicycle and drink a glass of port with one of my rowing friends at Ludgershall. I could only bear to talk to Jackie O'Dwyer; like some made monarch with his favourite; even Farlow, in whose tent I was, lost patience with me, for like many Etonians, although cynical, he detested inefficiency. Nothing was worth doing but it was not worth doing badly. We argued till he used to yell, 'Here, Private Connolly, you who appreciate the beauty of our

English hedgerows, you who claim that pleasure and pain are the same thing, go and empty this bucket.' I kept a volume of Gibbon in my uniform and read it when I could. My other bible was La Rochefoucauld whom I remember reading when the victorious Eight came back drunk from Henley. I found his opinions most reasonable for I was one to whom the existence of good seemed already more mysterious than the problem of evil.

In an old French exercise book of mine during this summer Walter Le Strange, my Anglo-Irish aesthetic friend in Junior Election, was keeping a diary, a valuable contemporary document.

9 June. In the afternoon repaired with Satyr and Apollo to the Stoa.* Pride was leading forth his chorus of Athleticism's devotees. 'Ora pro nobis,' he cried. 'No anglo-catholicism' thought Man. Satyr fed him on strawberries while he read *Wuthering Heights*, and, that finished, *The Newcomers*. Discussions on Socialism and Tyrannus followed. Yesterday Man and Calm and Conservation and Calculus discussed Slavery and Fagging. Both are utterly foul. Everybody here seems to think

(a) White men are better than others.

(b) England is everything.

(c) a 'gentleman' is *the* thing. Also all or mostly all worship Athleticism.

Cynicus and Man listened to a revue - 'The Renaissance' - by Apollo and Cato. Apollo good, especially the lyrics, Cato inclined to drag but his horseplay satire superb. The conversation in Hall turned on the peerage. How ignorant they all are, even Pride.

11 June.

Barnaby bright
 Barnaby bright
 The longest day
 And the shortest night.

* The Stoa was the group of lookers-on at College cricket. They read and talked under the elms, which constituted 'taking exercise'. Pride is a boy called John Carter who leads his side out to field. I am Apollo, Man is the author, Tyrannus the Master in College, Satyr Clutton-Brock, Cato Farlow, Rome Gibson, and Cynicus Orwell.

A bright day indeed. The trees along the field and by Jordan looked splendid from the Stoa where I lay throughout the afternoon, near the Ball Alleys. Apollo was on my right. He too knows my loved acacia and has apostrophized it, he says, in verse. I am glad I did not try Shaw before. I am just in the state to understand him. Two years ago the preface to *Androcles* would have shocked me and upset me. A year ago I should have fallen too easy a prey to it. Today I rejoice. Shaw wants just what I want. An equalizing philosophy of life – politically and intellectually, morally and socially a panacea, in fact an elixir. Stevenson's *Velasquez* is very interesting. I looked at the Prado reproductions with Apollo again today. How *ravissant* is *Mercury and Argus*. An English hamlet may be pretty, the country here – take Chamber Field overstrewn with buttercups and clover, or Fellows Eyot with its poplars – is beautiful. But O, for the Wicklow hills, I never realized till now the true glory of the sugar loaf – of Gilt Spear's top, or of the heights between Glencullen and the Scalp.

Evening full of the linnet's wings.

Sunday. Tea with the Alabasters. Then talk turned on the *Beggar's Opera*, which I have not seen. Apollo – with whom I walked in the evening – talked of introspection and confidences. Is introspection a good thing? I think it is. Why, I wonder, does one always feel a superiority to others? Not always, but frequently at least. Apollo, I fear, does it too much. Yet I like him.

13 June. Apollo, Beatrice d'Este, Rome* and I argued most of the afternoon about religion. Very interesting. The result: 'Man must worship something by an inborn instinct.' Surely he can drive this instinct out of him. Later on Satyr, Beatrice d'Este, Scaife and I gossiped with Rome. The conversation turning on *Pride*, Scaife gave demonstrations of his foul ways and words, whereupon Tyrannus entered and in his hypocritical friendly way adjured Rome to cease. Rome with much coldness, though quite politely, dismissed him, and we continued our conversation. This evening, however, Greedy-for-Power [Lea] 'wanted' Rome and Scaife, accused the one of filthy talk and the other of encouraging it. Rome

* Beatrice d'Este = Raymond Coghlan.
Rome = Gibson, who was a Catholic.
Scaife = 'Cully' Cox.

told the story of how it happened. He was dismissed. But – and I burn to think of it – Scaife was whipt – whipt like a mere slave – that is, an oppressed fag, or lower boy, by that unutterable brute, Greedy-for-Power, for a sin of which Rome had proved him guiltless. O may all tryanny perish. May everyone be free! Let not the wretched new boy be oppressed and mishandled just for the convenience of the idle Capitalists, that is to say, the self-made priests of Athleticism, of the Public School Spirit of Imperialism.

27 June. Peter (Loxley) came back tonight. Full of racing and tennis. I wish sometimes I could interest myself in such things. Of course not worship them. I have been reading the *Loom of Youth*. It is all so true in its way. Everything seems melancholy. Is life worth living? Where can one get help? One cannot paint for ever, it only makes you into that aesthete, loose tie, velvet coat sort of thing. Poetry makes you excited, or else sadder. O to do something! But how can a Nobody do anything worth while? Help is from within. Perhaps if one saw everybody as good. It is so hard – but it is beautiful. Therefore it is meet and right to do. ‘Les sanglots longs’ – but they do it always. ‘I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree . . .’ O if only I could quit this place, with its society, its ‘gentlemen’, its absurd church. Where is a true religion? O for peace. Even this journal is hypocritical.

2 July. There is only one God here. Athleticism and his law is ‘Believe – or Be Cast out’. Even now I hear the shouts and cheers, as of barbarism. Baths are banged. Boys shout. Such a display of rowdiness I have seldom heard. The Mob! The Howling of an Angry Mob. Awful. But a joyful mob is worse. The Eight have won the Ladies’ Plate at Henley. Three of them are in College – ‘jolly boating weather – we’ll cheer for the best of schools’. It seems sad to think that a great crowd of boys – of cultured boys – should pour out their spirits thus. O Athleticism! Athleticism! The din is now outside my door. Horror! Horror! Baths are banged and banged – cheers – cheers. So help me!

The noise has been quelled. It is sad that N. [Nigel] should have been so completely corrupted by athleticism. We were quite friendly once. But now he is so devilish superior. And rude, too. What have I done? I despise Athleticism – but not Athletics, yet I have never said *he* should not worship it just because I am interested in the things that really matter. Need be be so really uncivil?

3 July. A boiling Sunday. The heat was most oppressive. I talked chiefly to Cyril, Peter and Farlow. These questions of fagging and of College Politics are very interesting. So is reading the Greek gospel. Belief seems to be based on such slender grounds. It is extraordinary how unchristian are the lives of all those boys who 'profess and call themselves Christians' Carter, Maud, N. But there is an awful danger for us too. One is so inclined to become a Pharisee – an utter prig. The milder forms of this athleticism are not harmful for the young. They do no lasting good. But they tend to present happiness. But everyone seems to imagine that athletics means success. Get a cricket colour and you are made for life. Half a dozen people come up to you. 'I say, isn't it good for College having two Sixpennies.' What could be more ridiculous? No one seems to take any interest in the fact that College has bought a Dürer, or that the Hervey English Verse Prize was won by a Colleger in C.

Carter's ignorance showed itself again yesterday. 'Why Lord John Russell and not Lord Russell?' he asked. But I mustn't be a snob. The Hermit [Martineau] – it appears from a conversation of this evening – is an ultra-reactionary. He disapproves of boys in B playing ping-pong in Sixth Form Passage.

Last Sunday Farlow gave a tea-party in Lower Tea Room, after which the party sang songs, including a topical one by Cyril. All very pleasant, but Carter made himself somewhat objectionable to his host. On the Friday evening there had been the usual College Pop election. Cyril got in. Peter was put up three times and black-balled, I ditto twice, Carter was put up and got seven (five excludes). All this gave us much subject for conceited conversation. Peter seemed rather sad not to have got in. I was also sorry for myself. Our conceit grew vehemently. On Monday, to the general consternation of many, Carter was awarded his College Cricket. This means he will be second keeper next summer, and so in a position to make even more of himself than at present.

*

That summer I went abroad for the first time. My father took me to Paris and the Belgian coast. We stayed off the Rue de Rivoli and ate in restaurants with purple menus, screened from the pavement by tubs of sooty privet. I did not care for

Paris, I was frightened there, it was too hot and I thought people's feet smelt, I liked only the Louvre where I felt at home, Notre Dame, and Versailles which, as I wrote at the time, 'suited my mood'. 'French revues are funnier than English,' I wrote to O'Dwyer, 'but after eight o'clock this town is as full of whores as camp was of wasps' – then I reverted to the interminable College politics. Carter, Nigel's great friend, in my junior election disliked me and my two cronies there, Loxley and Le Strange. There was a chance of him getting into College Pop. It was against my principles to blackball anyone yet somehow five people had to be found who would; Cazalet and Farlow, alas, had left – 'You have to remember, my boy,' I enjoined O'Dwyer, 'that nowadays you are Cazalet, and I am Farlow.'

One event in Paris upset me. On a sultry evening as I was walking back to my hotel after dinner, I was accosted outside the Café de la Paix by a pimp with a straw hat and an umbrella. He offered to take me to a music-hall. I was too nervous to refuse and he then informed me it would be 'rather a rough kind of place, you understand'. I was now too frightened and excited to turn back and he took me to a brothel in the Rue Colbert. I was overcome with guilt and apprehension as I sat with the pimp in the little gilded *salon* while he spoke to the Madame. The mechanical piano played, at last the girls filed in and I was asked to choose two of them. Voiceless I pointed with a trembling finger. They stayed behind and a bottle of champagne appeared. We all had a glass and then another bottle. Drink made no impression, I was paralysed with fear, partly of being hit on the head and waking up in Buenos Aires, partly of saying the wrong thing. Then it was suggested that I should go upstairs with the two ladies. It was then a new panic arose. How much was all this? In a shrunken voice I asked for the bill. '*Quoi. Déjà?*' '*Oui, oui, oui. Toute suite.*' I explained to Madame that I did not know if I would have enough money to pay. She was astounded. 'But I thought Monsieur was a gentleman!' When the bill arrived it was for

almost ten pounds, mostly for champagne and with a bonus of course for the pimp. I explained that I could not pay at once, that the ladies must leave immediately, that I would give her all the money I had (about four pounds), and find the rest within the week. I gave her my card, on which I had written the address of my hotel. My father was waiting up for me and I told him I had lost my way.

The rest of my time in Paris was spent in anguish. At any moment I expected to see Madame and the pimp arrive to ask for me. Meals in the hotel were a torture which I could not bear for I would be sure to see the pimp with his umbrella or Madame with my visiting card directed to our table by the concierge. No time of day was safe. I wrote to my grandmother who, I knew, was giving me five pounds for my birthday and asked her to send it to Paris in advance as the shops were better there than they would be in Belgium and I wanted to buy some presents for my friends. It seemed as if her letter would never arrive; my worst moment was in the Muse de Cluny, beside the iron crown of Receswinth. I went out and sat in a cold sweat on a bench in the garden.

Next day the money arrived and I rushed round to the brothel. It was eleven o'clock in the morning; no one remembered me, another Madame was on duty and listened in bewilderment while I explained, stuffing money into her hand, and wondering if it would seem impertinent to ask for my card back. At last I was safe. I bought Charles Milligan, Denis, and Freddie a few cheap presents and shortly afterwards attained my eighteenth birthday, still without having kissed anyone. The Belgian coast was a relief after this nightmare, and Bruges, with its brackish canals and Flemish primitives, like Versailles, 'suited my mood', for I would try no more conclusions with the Present.

Boys do not grow up gradually. They move forward in spurts like the hands of clocks in railway stations. Most of those in College advanced in this wise though in many the sap of youth ran down after their efforts. In my own case the

autumn of 1921 and spring of 1922 were a high renaissance. They were not the happiest days of my life but I was as happy then as I was able to be.

I started the new term as 'a bit of a chap'. I was in a 'mess', that is to say I took tea in Charles Milligan's room with him and Minns and a fag to look after us, instead of having it in Tea-room. This was an advance in civilization as one had privacy and could have masters to tea and get on better terms with them. I was also in College Pop and got my 'shorts' for football, whereupon Nigel spoke to me again. We were delighted to be friends, my scepticism was now permanent but I had accepted the vanity of life and the worthlessness of human nature so fundamentally that I no longer felt bitter or with a grievance against society. 'Our mess has china tea - down by the streamside' I used to sing, and we gave exclusive tea-parties. Denis was in Sixth Form. All the election above him had now left except the youngest member, who was Captain of the School, a clerical reactionary held in check by Denis, Mynors, Gibson, and Longden.

The Background of the Lilies

So far it would appear that work played a small part in our lives; this was not so, however; for the first two years most boys did not enjoy their work and found it a tedious drudgery. It was not smart at Eton to work; to be a 'sap' was a disgrace and to compete for prizes eccentric. Everybody used cribs though the punishments for being caught were severe. For boys at Eton wanted one thing, popularity, and the flaw in the Eton education was that work was unpopular. Indeed for twenty years I was never to grasp that the love and friendship which I sought were in this world the rewards not of seeking them but of hard work and success.

It is hard to see how such conditions arise. They are prevalent in most schools although boys are more bored and more unhappy than ever when they do not work. Even in College, among the seventy scholars, 'sapping' was discredited and we were infected by the fashion from without, behind which lay the English distrust of the intellect and prejudice in favour of the amateur. A child in Ireland, a boy at St Wulfric's, a scholar at Eton, I had learnt the same lesson. To be 'high-brow' was to be different, to be set apart and so excluded from the ruling class of which one was either a potential enemy or a potential servant. Intelligence was a deformity which must be concealed; a public school taught one to conceal it as a good tailor hides a paunch or a hump. As opposed to ability, it was a handicap in life.

At Eton this was emphasized by the stigma attaching to Collegers which although an economic prejudice found expression as an anti-intellectual one and of which a ridiculous aspect was the contempt in which boys held masters, a relic of the eighteenth century when boys brought their own tutors

to Eton and treated them, as the term 'usher' still indicated, little better than their servants. In this direction the feeling was strong; masters who were old Etonians, who were rich like John Christie or well-born like Georgie Lyttelton, escaped but in general the boys assumed that most of the staff had never held a gun or worn a tailcoat, that they were racked by snobbery, by the desire to be asked to stay with important parents or to be condescended to by popular boys. An Eton division consisted of thirty boys, five of whom wished to learn something, ten of whom wished to do what everybody else wanted, and fifteen of whom spent their time searching for the usher's weak points and then exploiting them with the patience of prisoners of war tunnelling out of a camp. What Proust called the *'lâcheté des gens du monde'* was never so apparent as at Eton, where the life of a teacher like Aldous Huxley was made intolerable because of his defective sight.

The teachers in the middle parts of the school devoted themselves to cramming and keeping order; inspired teaching, owing to the intransigence of the boys, could appear only at the top, where there were five real teachers: the Headmaster, Mr C. M. Wells, Mr G. W. Headlam, Mr G. H. K. Marten, and Mr Hugh Macnaghten. They are worth considering.

At Eton, as at other schools, there existed the ordinary education for the average boy but there grew up as well an inner culture, the eleusinian mysteries of learning, to which favoured boys were admitted and which was maintained by teachers such as these and by a few important outside figures, the Provost, Mr Luxmoore, Mr Broadbent; the pure eighteenth-century Etonian tradition of classical humanism, which could be learnt nowhere else. Most of the boys went through the school without knowing of its existence, without having heard of esoteric figures like William Johnson Cory or Mrs Warre-Cornish, Howard Sturgis or Austen Leigh, but by 1921 (the year for me when 'modern history' begins) I was being initiated; I would dine with the Provost and the Headmaster, or Mr Headlam and Mr Marten would come to tea.

The first of the big five a Colleger came up to, when about sixteen, was Hugh Macnaghten. Although a fine teacher, his learning possessed the faults or rather the literary vices of his time. He was an ogre for the purple patch, the jewel five words long, the allusion, the quotation, the moment of ecstasy. In fact he was embedded in the Milton-Keats-Tennysonian culture, that profuse and blooming romanticism of the 'bowery loneliness',

The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring
And gloom profuse and cedar arches

which had dominated English literature until the death of Flecker and Rupert Brooke.

The Eton variety was diluted with Pre-Raphaelitism. Watts's 'Sir Galahad' hung in College Chapel, Burne-Jones and William Morris had been Eton figures, and Mr Luxmoore painted fastidious water colours of his riverside garden in which the fair Rosamund would not have disdained to take her medicine. He was a disciple of Ruskin, the forgotten man of the nineteenth century.

Another field for the Pre-Raphaelite influence was in translating. Homer and Virgil were the pillars of an Eton education; it would be hard to derive more pleasure then or now than we obtained from reading them. But we read them with the help of two official cribs, Butcher and Lang for Homer, Mackail for Virgil. Lang believed that Homer must be translated into the nearest English equivalent which was an Anglo-Saxon prose reminiscent of the Sagas. He tried to manage on a Bronze-Age vocabulary, and the Mediterranean clarity of the *Odyssey* was blurred by a Wardour Street Nordic fog. Homer, in short, was slightly Wagnerized. Mackail, who had married Burne-Jones's daughter, gave to his Virgil an eighty-ish air, the *lacrimae rerum* spilled over and his Christian attitude to paganism, that it was consciously pathetic and incomplete, like an animal that wishes it could talk, infected everything which he translated with a morbid distress. Dido became a bull-throated *Mater Dolorosa* by Rossetti. His translations

from the *Greek Anthology*, one of the sacred books of the inner culture, the very soil of the Eton lilies, were even more deleterious. They exhaled pessimism and despair, an overripe perfection in which it was always the late afternoon or the last stormy sunset of the ancient world, in which the authentic gloom of Palladas was outdone by that attributed to Simonides, Callimachus, or Plato. Meleager was the typical Pre-Raphaelite lover.

To put it in another way, a sensitive Etonian with a knowledge of Homer and Virgil through these translations and a good ear, would be unable to detect in poems like *Tithonus*, *Ulysses*, or the *Lotus Eaters* any note foreign to the work of Homer and Virgil. If he had been told that 'a spirit haunts the year's last hours' was a word for word translation of Virgil, he would have accepted the fact. The two classics had been 'romanticized' for him, impregnated with the cult of strangeness, of the particular rather than the general and of the conception of beauty characteristic of the Aesthetic Movement as something akin to disease and evil.

Macnaghten accentuated this. He told us that the most beautiful word in the English language was 'little', he liquidated his 'r's' in reciting and intoned poetry in a special way . . .

and hear the bweeze
Sobbing in ver little twees.

Jolly good! He would exclaim, and to hear him chant 'Ah, poor Faun - ah, poor Faun' was a study in pity which made his severe and even harsh discipline appear the more surprising.

The other object of this inner cult was Plato. His humour and sophistry were the delight of those who expounded them to the bewilderment of those who listened. His theory of ideas and essences, his conception of body and spirit, the romantic dualism on which he insisted formed the ruling philosophy. Platonism was everywhere, popping up in sermons and

Sunday questions, in allusions to Neoplatonism, in essays by Dean Inge, at the headmaster's dinner-parties or in my tutor's pupil-room. Socrates roamed through the classes like a Government inspector and even Virgil and Tennyson withdrew before him. But it will be remembered that Plato himself, in the Republic, turned against the poets and advocated censorship and discipline. This contradiction extended through our school-life and emerged in its attitude to sex.

For there was no doubt that homosexuality formed an ingredient in this ancient wisdom. It was the forbidden tree round which our little Eden dizzily revolved. In a teaching conscious and somewhat decadently conscious of visual beauty, its presence in the classics was taken for granted; it was implicit in Plato's humour and aesthetic. Yet Eton, like all public schools, had no solution for sex. If boys had such intercourse between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, no matter with whom or with what, they had better go. The School could do nothing for them. 'Created sick, commanded to be sound', the majority floundered through on surreptitious experiments and dirty jokes but there were always a number who, going further, were found out and expelled.

The extent to which sex-life is necessary and should be permitted to growing boys remains uncertain. The Eton attitude was in line with that of other authorities and with the wishes of most parents, for the dilemma is inherent in all education, lurking in the playing-fields and vinegar-scented cloisters of our seats of learning as, in the preaching of the careful Pater, beckon the practices of Wilde.

The result was that boys learnt to walk a tightrope; the sentimental friendship was permitted in some houses and forbidden in others, allowed to some boys and denied to their fellows or permitted and then suppressed according to the changing views and vigilance of the housemaster. No one could be sure on what ground they trod. There was Macnaghten who, spartan in body as he was soft in mind, would give an annual and long-anticipated lecture attacking those

friendships at a point in Plato's *Euthyphro*; at the same time we were made to put into Latin verses a sentimental poem addressed by Dolben to the then Captain of the Eleven. One thing was certain; the potentially homosexual boy was the one who benefited, whose love of beauty was stimulated, whose appreciation was widened, and whose critical powers were developed; the normal boy, free from adolescent fevers, missed both the perils and the prizes; he was apt to find himself left out.

There is much celibacy in public schools and, where many housemasters are not married, it is possible to say that their teaching will encourage continence officially and homosexuality by implication, sending up to the universities, from whence they will immediately rebound as masters, that repressed and familiar type, the English male virgin.

Another effect of Macnaghten's teaching was to associate English literature with Latin verses. We came to think of poetry in terms of tags and useful epithets, and to consider the best poetry as being in the form of the sonnet or sixteen-line lyric. Macnaghten would not treat Latin verses as a crossword puzzle; he insisted that we put feeling into them, that we exercised our dreams of literary composition through the medium of another language. In his taste he was a true escapist; everything he admired reeked of the death-wish, port after stormy seas, holy quiet and romantic fatigue. No one who did his verses well could write poetry afterwards. There would be one slim Eton-blue volume with a few translations, a *Vale*, and a couple of epigrams, then silence. For the culture of the lilies, rooted in the past, divorced from reality, and dependent on a dead foreign tongue, was by nature sterile.

It may be wondered why I call Macnaghten a good teacher. The reason is that although he concentrated on moments of beauty, he did not neglect the encircling drudgery, and because, although his taste was uncertain, he would permit no blasphemy. To laugh at anything he thought good meant punishment. He chastened the hooligans (even Highworth

could but mumble) and he insisted on the modesty, the abnegation without which great art cannot be appreciated. 'Up' to him boys for the first time had the experience of literature and every now and then, in the dusty classroom, grew aware of the presence of a god.

Wells taught the classical specialists; he was a fine cricketer and a judge of claret, a man of taste with a humour of understatement in the Cambridge style. The Headmaster was theatrical, he liked knotty points and great issues, puns and dramatic gestures. He was a worldly teacher, a Ciceronian, an All Souls Fellow and we felt we were learning Divinity from a Prince of the Church. He was fond of paradoxes and we learnt to turn out a bright essay on such a subject as 'Nothing succeeds like failure' or 'Nothing fails like success'. The exaggeration of his teaching was repugnant to the classical specialists and such was the moral weight of William Egerton, Denis, or Roger Mynors, that he became a naughty boy 'showing off' in their presence although his entry into any other class-room would petrify us with fear.

His was the cult of that light verse which had always been the official poetry for despite Gray, Shelley, Swinburne, and Bridges, the kind of poetry which Eton took to its heart was either the sentimental lyric, the translation (of which Cory's *Heraclitus* is the example) or the facetious. Praed, Clough, Calverley, W. S. Gilbert, and the sacred J. K. Stephen were the official bards and if the Headmaster had had to include a living writer he would have added Father Ronald Knox.

Thus, although the *Eton College Chronicle* made an appeal to premature essayists and the fourth leader of *The Times* was within the grasp of its editors, critical or creative writing there was none. Humorous 'Ephemerals' had a sale; but in spite of tradition, and the encouragement given to them, the Arts at Eton were under a blight. Figures of the post-war world such as Aldous Huxley and Maynard Keynes had been in College, but we would never have known it. They were not recognized, they did not wear like Maurice Baring, Arthur

Benson, Percy Lubbock, or J. K. Stephen, a halo in the pale-blue canon.

Into this world the history teachers introduced a note of realism. Marten was a model of clarity and enthusiasm; he was the sanest of schoolmasters but for that reason had less influence on us than a teacher like Headlam who did not aspire to be impartial.

If the Headmaster epitomized All Souls, Headlam was typical of Balliol, but it was not Balliol that made him impressive, so much as the fact that in his class-room there was at last evidence of a Pre-Ruskinian culture, of the eighteenth century. His favourite writer was Horace, the book he gave to us on leaving was *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. To us he was an enigmatic figure, he seemed to go some of the way towards futility and yet while our conclusions from the axiom All is Vanity were 'nothing is worth while, except art', 'except friendship', 'except pleasure', or 'except wisdom', his seemed to be 'except success - except doing a job efficiently'. He appeared cynical but that may have been only because he was un-Tennysonian. Although irritable in the early morning he was more tolerant than other masters; his tolerance at times seemed apathy, a product of disillusion, yet he hated idleness, dishonesty, and that frivolous complacency to which growing boys are addicted. He brought common sense and reasonable worldly values into his relations with boys with the result that his house was the best at Eton and, as he surveyed the row of Pops in it with affected vagueness, he must have enjoyed the bewilderment of other housemasters.

All the history specialists imitated him, his affectations of saying 'Erse' instead of 'Yes' and 'Toosda' for Tuesday, his apparent lack of interest in games and exercise (although he was a good fives player and his house held the football cup), his attitude of *nil admirari*. He was a Tory in politics, where again he seemed to stand for tolerance, efficiency, and a hatred of fuss. 'You must learn that there is no justice in this world,' he was fond of saying, perhaps setting the wrong boy a

punishment to illustrate it and 'You must always remember that nobody is indispensable,' was another of his maxims.

Was he a Balliol careerist, with the affectation of laziness and indifference that was considered the Balliol manner and by which we were taken in, or a split-man in whom an efficient and ambitious self was being watched by a cynical spectator? Or was he an evocation of the eighteenth-century Tory or of ancient Rome? In appearance he was dark, handsome and rather fat, not unlike the Roman poet whom he interpreted; his expression was blasé and judicial, his voice and smile were charming, his eyes, sombre in repose, when angry, kindled into fire.

All masters lost their tempers; there were some whose rages were comic spectacles, others who became maniacs, fascinating to watch but dangerous if one got in the way; with the Headmaster or Macnaghten there was a sensation of panic owing to the severity of the penalties which they could enforce, but with Marten and Headlam alone did one get a feeling of shame; they were teachers whose rebukes of one boy enlisted against him the sympathy of the class, and 'To do poorly' up to Headlam, or be 'tiresome' with Marten, was distressing for at last we were attaining a level where it was not impermissible to work.

In the aestheticism which was gathering round me, part backwash of the nineties, part consequence of my Celtic romanticism being worked upon by the Pre-Raphaelite background of the Eton lilies, Headlam's sober intellectual energy, his Roman values, offered a gleam of mental health. But, to an aesthete, what appealed in Headlam was his irony, his way of making a reference to authority sound ridiculous (due, one suspected, to an antipathy to the Headmaster which was pronounced among the senior old Etonian housemasters) and to his fondness for what he called gestures - 'That would be a good gesture - the Massacre of St Bartholomew was a bad gesture.' The good gesture, the noisy piece of self-sacrifice, was one of the few lines of conduct sanctioned by my futi-

tarianism. It must be like Sidney Carton's, magnanimous, public, and useless.

By the time I had left Eton I knew by heart something of the literature of five civilizations. It was a lopsided knowledge since we were not taught literature and since the only literature which appealed to me was pessimistic but it is worth analysing, since, although many of the books had been read for hundreds of years and others seemed my own discoveries, taken together, they give a picture of fashionable reading-matter just after the last war.

I was fond of the Old Testament, disliked the New. My favourite books were Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon in which I recognized the melancholy and tired distinction of an old race, the mysterious Ezekiel and that earthy mystic, the first Isaiah. Job was too much thrust upon me and the Lamentations of Jeremiah I found in faulty taste. All these I read with more pleasure in the sonorous Latin of the Vulgate. They were among the books I lived in through the winter evenings.

In Greek literature I had read the *Odyssey* with passion, but not the *Iliad*, I admired Aeschylus, particularly the *Agamemnon*, and Sophocles, particularly *Oedipus Rex*; Euripides and Aristophanes I disliked, and Plato, except his epigrams and the *Symposium*. I enjoyed the lyric poets, Sappho and Archilochus, and adored the Mackail selection of the *Greek Anthology*, Theognis, Plato, Callimachus, Palladas, and Meleager; I knew all the sceptical epigrams by heart and most of those about love and death and 'the fate of youth and beauty'. In all my books I had written after my name 'τίς τίμι ταῦτα λέγεις' (Who are you that say this, and to whom?). Mackail's *Anthology* (in the one-volume edition with the long preface) might have been described as the Sceptic's Bible. I was also fond of the bloomy Theocritus and the *Lament for Bion*.

In Latin literature I read Horace and Virgil but did not enjoy them till later for Horace, except by Headlam, was not inspiringly taught and Virgil associated with too many

punishments and in his moments of beauty with Macnaghten's vatic trances. Although I had learnt Latin all my life I still could not appreciate it without a crib and it was the arrival at the end of my time of the Loeb translations, sanctioned by the authorities, that put its deeper enjoyment within my grasp. Virgil and Horace, without them, had been too difficult, too tearstained. Horace besides was more connected with character than with prettiness. We were slow to appreciate him as a verbal artist.

Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis
Est in juvenicis, est equis patrum
Virtus

'Brave men are bred from the good and brave, there is in cattle, there is in horses,' Headlam would rasp, 'the virtue of their sires,' and the history specialists, conscious that though not poets, they were the stuff about which poetry was written, seemed to preen themselves for a moment in the afternoon drowse.

My favourite was Catullus, whose poetry 'suited my mood', and therefore the mood of the age. It was cynical, romantic, passionate and bawdy and I could substitute my own name for his. '*Otium, Cyrille, tibi molestum est*', '*Sed tu, Cyrille, destinatus obdura*'. I liked the world of Suetonius and Tacitus but the Latin prose-writer for me was Petronius Arbiter. I had four editions of the *Satyricon*. The best I had bound in black crushed levant and kept on my pew in chapel where it looked like some solemn book of devotion and was never disturbed. To sit reading it during the sermon, looking reverently towards the headmaster scintillating from the pulpit and then returning to the racy Latin, 'the smoke and wealth and noise of Rome' was 'rather a gesture'.

I also liked Martial, crisp and Iberian but resented the sanctimonious Juvenal, I was excited by the *Pervigilium*, I struggled through the convolutions of Apuleius and admired the pagan chapters of the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.

In French I cultivated the Troubadours but was dis-

appointed, as I was by those four old bores, Montaigne, Rabelais, Boccaccio, and Burton. The deceptively simple verses of Villon I loved, with the Poussin landscapes of Chénier and the garden sadness of Ronsard and Du Bellay. Then came a few lines of Racine, all *Candide* and *Manon Lescaut*, and an unrepresentative selection of Flaubert, Gautier, Hugo, and Baudelaire, no Rimbaud but a close study of Verlaine, Heredia, and Mallarmé.

I was fortunate to read French with Mr de Satgé; he loved beauty and, while working with him, I apprehended that remoteness of great poetry from life which is inherent in the exaction of the form and creates literature, '*la treille où le pampre à la rose s'allie.*'

In English I began with Spenser sleeping in his coils, I knew little Shakespeare but I worshipped Hamlet, who seemed the Prince of Scepticism and Gestures ('How now, a rat in the arras!'), and of course Marlowe. Shakespeare's sonnets I absorbed. They formed, with Omar Khayyám and the *Shropshire Lad*, limited editions called 'the Medici Books', which, unhealthy though they were in bulk, one could yet obtain as prizes. Webster was my favourite Elizabethan, then came Donne and after him Marvell, Herrick, and Sir Thomas Browne. Milton was the poet in whom my appreciation culminated. Then a gap until Blake, the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and, still later, Tennyson and Matthew Arnold. I knew nothing of Pope, Dryden, and Crabbe, and I had a prejudice against the romantics; Keats turned my stomach, Shelley was ethereal, Byron vulgar, and Wordsworth prosy. What I required from an author was the authentic romantic thrill and the prestige of obscurity. After Tennyson was Housman, who came down to lecture to us on Erasmus Darwin and then Bridges, Yeats, Brooke, de la Mare, Flecker, Masfield, *The Spirit of Man*, and a repository of Georgian cliché called *Poems of To-day*.

In prose, after Sir Thomas Browne, came Boswell, Gibbon, and Sterne, then Pater (so clear in his thought, so evasive in his

conclusions), in whose Sebastian van Storck, with his refusal 'to be or do any limited thing', we recognized a fellow sufferer – lastly the usual modern mixture – Samuel Butler, Shaw, Compton Mackenzie, James Stephens, Belloc, Buchan, Conrad, Lytton Strachey, and Aldous Huxley. Orwell lent me *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But I could not swallow it. It was not necessary.

I was as fond of painting as of poetry and haunted the National Gallery. My taste was conservative. I knew of no French painter except Corot and it was typical of the civilization of the lilies, the limitations of good taste, that I had such knowledge of the masterpieces of the past yet remained timidly at sea among the creations of the present.

Glittering Prizes

THE result of scepticism, of escaping from the world via the pursuit of knowledge, was that I unexpectedly won the Rosebery History Prize. The gain was about twenty pounds' worth of books, but those available, with their horrible bindings, so shocked me that I obtained special permission to get Medici prints. The Man with the Glove, Beatrice d'Este, and The Duke of Cleves now looked down on my bureau. After an intrigue with Denis I was given my 'liberties', the privileges of not wearing a hat, of fagging boys, of having supper by themselves, accorded to the next six in college, after Sixth Form. When a boy not in Division One (Sixth Form and Liberty) won the Newcastle, a classical prize, he was co-opted into it; in getting the same reward for the Rosebery I had advanced the prestige of the History Specialists, a prestige which was rising at the expense of classics, languages, and science. History was easier and more interesting, it was the fashion. Most of the important boys were history specialists, and Mr Headlam's division had ended by becoming a field of the cloth of gold for the feudal chieftains. Of the eleven hundred boys about twenty-five were in Pop and eight of these were 'up' to him. After I got the Rosebery they began to notice me.

In every division there is room for one boy to reconcile popularity with hard work. He is the brilliant idler, a by-product of dandyism. 'Petronius deserves a word in retrospect. He was a man who passed his days in sleep, his nights in the ordinary duties and recreations of life: others had achieved greatness by the sweat of their brows - Petronius idled into fame.' This archetype of scepticism came to my aid; by imitating his example and doing my work illicitly at night

by candle my days were left free for social intercourse. I had an excellent memory, I could learn by heart easily, gut a book in an hour and a half of arguments, allusions, and quotations, like a Danube fisherman removing caviare from the smoking sturgeon, and remember them for just long enough to get down in an examination paper. I was the perfect examinee. The Oppidans began to take me up. I answered difficult questions and discovered smutty passages for them and if I was caught reading a book in class, it would be something as spectacular as the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*. Once a week we had to recite a few lines of poetry that we learnt by heart; most boys depended on poems they had learnt before.

Thereisswee musichere thasofterfalls
 Thanpetalsof blowroseson the grass . . .
 On the grass. . . .

At the end I would stroll up with modest confusion and recite a long Greek chorus chosen for its pessimism, for not to be born was best of all.

My strong point was still being funny. I was working hard enough to be permitted some licence, and I could make jokes about our subject – for the history we studied was the history of personalities – in which even Oppidans could join. I was at my best when being taken up, grateful but not servile, sunny but not familiar and with the schoolboy's knack of living in the moment. I had the advantage of beginning at the top, the only Oppidans I knew were already in Pop, I had no inferiors with whom I had been associated, no ladders to kick down. Antony Knebworth was the first to make friends with me. He had won the other Rosebery prize and was a Byronic figure of overpowering vitality who with his crony, Nico Davies, seemed to make more noise than a whole division. He and Nico were the most successful types of normal schoolboy; they were in all the elevens, ran their houses, were able and rather lazy at their work, conventional, intolerant, and senti-

mental; they were easily moved to laughter, rage, or tears, strict enforcers of privilege and always appealed to by the headmaster when there was a question of Pop 'using its influence'.

A less schoolminded couple were Teddy Jessel and Edward Woodall; they were dandies in the pure sense, with a sober worldly gravity. Jessel had a touch of the 'Arbiter' himself, he was critical of errors of taste, especially on the part of masters whom he treated, with two exceptions, as a set of lower-middle-class lunatics. He disliked Collegers, finding them dowdy and 'pi', and he was fond of remarking how swiftly their cleverness evaporated. 'A brilliant scholar, won the Newcastle three times running,' he would exclaim, imitating a master's complacent tones, 'and now he has passed second into the Office of Works.' With me, however, he was more tolerant, Horace Walpole to Gray, Townley to Pontifex. The other important Pop was Alec Dunglass, who was President and also Keeper of the Field and Captain of the Eleven. He was a votary of the esoteric Eton religion, the kind of graceful, tolerant, sleepy boy who is showered with favours and crowned with all the laurels, who is liked by the masters and admired by the boys without any apparent exertion on his part, without experiencing the ill-effects of success himself or arousing the pangs of envy in others. In the eighteenth century he would have become Prime Minister before he was thirty; as it was he appeared honourably ineligible for the struggle of life.

Relations with Oppidans were more superficial than with Collegers. They were easy-going extroverts lacking in super-ego who regarded friendship as a question of equality and shared interests; only Collegers treated it as a philosophy, an end in itself. Meeting Oppidans was like going to smart luncheons where people seem more intimate than they are; returning to College was going on from lunch to spend all the afternoon with a bourgeois intellectual friend of long standing. Friendship, among Oppidans, was a luxury – a touch of

failure, inequality, absence and it perished. In College it was a necessity of our strange monastic society, a religion invented by sensitive boys under hard conditions and which existed to combat them.

The term which was my happiest now drew to an end. College politics were absorbing and occupied our anxious elders outside to the extent that we christened these busybodies 'The College Investigation Society' and wrote bawdy songs about them. Le Strange summed up the feeling of the minority:

20 Nov. There are two great troubles: political and religious. What is one to believe? The religious services here are just awful. Singing absurd meaningless hymns among ugly windows and pictures, with hopeless tunes, and then the intoned droned prayers – all meaningless.

If there is a God he can't be like the Yahweh of the Old Testament. Yet was Christ God? I think not. If there is no God – only a fiction of man's brain, what are we to do with life? Is there another life? Will it be a punishment or reward for this life? No! Then must we be good? Why not rest – peace is what I need. To get away from all the noise and squalor of the world out on to the hills – if there is any god it is Pan – but we cannot worship him except by letting ourselves be absorbed. He is deaf to prayers. He goes on his way regardless. There cannot be a benevolent God. It is impossible in all this squalor. Should one try to improve the squalor? *Dorian Gray* is an extremely interesting book but of course Lord Henry Wotton must be wrong. I have also just read *Potterism*. It is dreadful the morbid state into which people get whatever they do. Either they become jingoists like Kipling or else they think of a vanished golden age – like those patriot poets in Ireland.

All the questions of freedom – ethnologically, and of Disarmament are so interesting, but the world is so parochial that one can never think of them.

All my time is taken up with talking of: Athleticism, College Pop, and Fagging. They all run into one another.

Peter and I were both elected to Coll. Pop at the beginning of this half, after being blackballed last summer. So was R. Cyril got

in last half. We all arranged to keep Carter out. He was so awful, sarcastic, reactionary, etc. After all, he had his College Cricket, that was sufficient. Now he had got his Wall too. Poor R. has been turned out of that, he is a barbarian and to be foiled of his barbaric triumphs must be hard. Everything here is done on an athletic standard. I am still in Lower College with those small boys, good enough in themselves – But O! the ignominy of it. Thank God Peter is also in L.C. O Peter is splendid! unselfish, generous. It must be wretched for him too. But I can't make myself think of that.

I want to reform College when my time comes – to make the fagging better if I can't abolish it, and corporal punishment too. Why should this heaven be made a hell just for the sake of old traditions and to make the British public school type? Ought I to keep Carter out? He has been good to me – but his influence is bad in College. He stands for Athleticism and Good Form and all the rubbish joined with that. And still at the back of all these questions of reform and improvement and an intellectual rather than an athletic standard and so on, is the moral question.

Is anything worth while?

Should one live for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, avoiding all classes and creeds – or live so as to get the greatest peace for oneself. The second is so easy, and yet conscience goes against it. What is conscience? Is it only some hereditary tradition to be spurned with patriotism, etc.? The English Gentleman. What an opprobrium that is. O pray, if you have a God, for peace of mind. If we live for others we spoil ourselves. If we live for ourselves we harm others. The only course is to give oneself up to art or literature or such. But then that doesn't pay, and I suppose – *Il faut vivre.*

We shared Walter's contempt for the politics of the outside world; politicians were monsters of inefficiency and self-interest, we underwent the general post-war disillusion and would have been surprised and humiliated to be told that through the medium of college politics we had ourselves become politically-minded. I was fond of quoting Halifax: 'The Government of the world is a very great thing, but it is

a very coarse thing compared with the fineness of speculative knowledge.'

My mother took me to Switzerland for the Christmas holidays of 1921. We spent them at Mürren. I was mad about skiing, the hotel was full of pretty girls. I skied, made friends, and fell in love but still managed to work for some part of the day. I had often met girls in the holidays but when I was back at Eton they had failed to retain a hold on my imagination; if I had asked them to come down to see me I would then find excuses to put them off. Their reign would come later. Staying in the same hotel however was Antony Knebworth and we saw something of each other. For the first time I was aware of that layer of blubber which encases an English peer, the sediment of permanent adulation. Antony was high-spirited and even when he rearranged all the shoes outside the hotel's two hundred bedrooms he could do no wrong. The meeting had consequences for me. The alpine heights, unfriendly, like too healthy climates, to all forms of art, were also unpropitious to philosophic doubt. My scepticism retreated; the shutter between myself and the rest of the world was raised and, under Antony's protection, I enjoyed a social success.

It was now decided I must try for a history scholarship; at first Cambridge was indicated. Most Collegers went on to Kings, where there were safe scholarships for them and a reprieve for several more years from expulsion from the womb; Farlow was there and Rylands, Walter Le Strange was going on and eventually Nigel and Freddie. Some of us had been to Cambridge the term before to see the production of the *Oresteia*, and we had found it exhilarating and cosy, for, subject to a little permutation, the sentimental friendships from College continued unabated with undergraduates from other schools forming an audience, who, at a pinch, could contribute new blood to the cast.

On the other hand, Headlam advised Oxford, of which we had caught a glimpse marching down the High on a wintry

field-day, while the old Etonians waved to us from their college porches. Denis and Roger Mynors and Bobbie Longden were all going up for scholarships there and besides Oxford was 'better for history'. In the end out of admiration for Headlam I chose to try for Balliol and as a gesture because it was the more difficult. For the same reason I concentrated on medieval history; we were taught European history from the Renaissance and 'medieval' history meant teaching myself, another 'gesture', which also provided the escape that I wanted my work to be. In history I was on the side of the underdog; I liked the past, the personal element, the Ages of Faith, the policies with no future. Most stimulating were the Dark Ages, there was 'no damned merit' about them, they were obscure, their futility a standing criticism of humanity. I admired the Childerics and Chilperics of the Merovingian dynasty, the chronicles of Liutprand, the crimes of Brunnhild and Fredegonde.

Each night, by my outlawed candle, I read all Gibbon, all Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*. I specialized in the heresies of anarchists and Albigensians but I was interested in them all, in the Manichaeans, in the heresies of Abelard, of my hero Frederic Stupormundi, the Flagellants and in my favourite Neminians who believed in a religion of 'No Man' because 'No Man living hath seen God', and 'To No Man is it given to escape Death'.

Reading late by candle was bad for the nerves for it had to be hidden in one's bed or a chink of light might be seen under the door and, like many lazy people, once I started working I could not stop; perhaps that is why we avoid it.

The result of cramming was that a noise of any kind sent me into a temper and that ordinary schoolboy chatter drove me mad. I could speak only to Denis, Charles Milligan, and Jackie O'Dwyer; in other company I would glower and pull out a book. With the Oppidans however my ill humour vanished, I became engaging and witty.

I now admitted to myself my ambition to get into Pop and

planned my campaign. My handicap was that I had no athletic distinctions, nor was I in Sixth Form from which a certain number of Pops invariably had to be chosen. My only hope was to be elected as wit. Although it was but a small section of Pop who thought me funny, they were influential. My tactics were to seem as important as I could in College, so that my Oppidan friends would not feel that I was too powerless in my own field to deserve recognition abroad. There were two Pops already in College, the lion-hearted Gibson, a fellow history specialist, and Robert Longden, one of those angel-faced Athenians whom the school delighted to honour. I was very fond of both of them and had known them for a long time. I would walk away with Gibson, arm-in-arm, from divisions and seeing me with the only two 'possible' people in College, the Oppidans felt they were safe in going about with me by themselves. I mention this technique in case others who wish to be elected to things may find it helpful. It was not very difficult for if the Oppidans observed me with the right Collegers, the latter also saw me with the right Oppidans and both felt pleased with their discrimination.

Deeper than this lay my friendship with Teddy Jessel which arose out of a certain boredom he felt at Eton through not being adolescent. I amused him because he stimulated me.

If I should get into Pop I told my conscience, my morbid spiritual director, I would make amends, for I should be free to talk to whom I liked, and then no one could stop me. There could be no further social ambition. Meanwhile I watched my step.

The scholarship examinations drew near. With Denis, Robert Longden and Roger Mynors I stayed in Balliol and did two papers a day, of which the most important was the English Essay. The subject was *Compromise* which was a favourite of mine for I had already written one essay on it and had quotations ready by which I could prove that compromises were failures and that, even if they were successes, it

was one's duty to remain uncompromising. The ages of Faith came to life under my pen. But as Denis and I walked about the Quad or lunched with the Balliol contingent of Old Collegers, as we inspected the dingy rooms with no pictures and few books whose furniture was a dark green tablecloth burnt by cigarette ends, a blokey armchair and a small cold bedroom looking out on a Neo-Gothic quad, a doubt assailed us. Here we were, urbanely pouring out the content of our well-stocked minds for six hours every day. *And for what?*

The sheets had not been aired in my bedroom. I got rheumatism in my shoulder and could hardly hold a pen during the later papers. The dons impressed me but the undergraduates I encountered made me long to return to my suspended boyhood, to Charles and Jackie and Nigel and Freddie, my books and Medici prints, the view from my window of wine-dark brick and the chestnut tree in Weston's Yard.

College spirit [I noted down] is antagonistic to Balliol spirit in its suppression of the political, lack of emphasis on conversation, hatred of 'giants at play' and in its attention to reading and the reading of dead rather than living authors. It appears more akin to Cambridge, but with less emphasis on the bawdy Elizabethans.

We were all four school-sick (Oxford reminded me of Wellington) and radiant when the train brought us back down the Thames valley. The term ended in athletics. I went in for school fives with Longden and then the scholarship results came out. Denis and Roger had got classical scholarships at Balliol, Robert at Trinity, and I had won the Brackenbury History Scholarship. There was excitement, the history specialists cheered, and a whole holiday was given. Then came the last Sunday of term and the morning of the Pop election. I sat in my room with Charles. We had planned to go abroad together for Easter, our parents had given permission and in a few days we would realize our dream of a visit to Provence. I longed to see Avignon, the scandalous history of whose

popes was as clear to me as the lines on my hand, for although I had now been abroad twice, to Paris and to Switzerland, I had never travelled alone before.

We knew that Gibson and Longden planned to put me up for Pop. The suspense grew heavy, our voices languished. Pop elections took hours, for the same boy would be put up and blackballed seven or eight times, a caucus of voters keeping out everybody till their favourite got in. Only the necessity of lunch ended these ordeals. Suddenly there was a noise of footsteps thudding up the wooden staircase of the tower. The door burst open and about twenty Pops, many of whom had never spoken to me before, with bright coloured waistcoats, rolled umbrellas, buttonholes, braid, and 'spongebag' trousers, came reeling in, like the college of cardinals arriving to congratulate some pious old freak whom fate had elevated to the throne of St Peter. They made a great noise, shouting and slapping me on the back in the elation of their gesture and Charles drifted away. I had got in on the first round, being put up by Knebworth, but after they had left only the faint smell of Balkan Sobranie and Honey and Flowers mixture remained to prove it was not a dream.

At that time Pop were the rulers of Eton, fawned on by masters and the helpless Sixth Form. Such was their prestige that some boys who failed to get in never recovered; one was rumoured to have procured his sister for the influential members. Besides privilege – for they could beat anyone, fag any lower boy, walk arm-in-arm, wear pretty clothes, sit in their own club and get away with minor breaches of discipline – they also possessed executive power which their members tasted often for the only time in their lives. To elect a boy without a colour, a Colleger too, was a departure for them; it made them feel that they appreciated intellectual worth and could not be accused of athleticism; they felt like the Viceroy after entertaining Gandhi. The rest of the school could not understand that a boy could be elected because he was amusing; if I got in without a colour it must be because I was a

'bitch'; yet by Eton standards I was too unattractive to be a 'bitch' – unless my very ugliness provided, for the jaded appetities of the Eton Society, the final attraction!

When I went to chapel I was conscious of eyes being upon me; some were masters, cold and censorious; they believed the worst; others were friendly and admiring. Those of the older boys were incredulous but the young ones stared hardest for they could be beaten for not knowing all the Pops by sight and mine was a mug they must learn by heart. Everybody congratulated me. The only person not to was Denis. He himself had been co-opted in as future Captain of the School and he could not believe that my election to such an anti-intellectual and reactionary body could give me pleasure. I thought that it was because he was envious, since he had been elected *ex officio*. My intravenous injection of success had begun to take.

Before we went abroad I visited St Wulfric's. I was now Old Wulfrician No. 1 whose triumphs were chronicled in the school magazine but although Flip and Sambo were charming, I was uneasy as I surveyed the eighty little boys in their green jerseys and corduroy knickers. I taught the Sixth Form, I wandered round classrooms and playing fields, the drill ground, the gooseberry bushes, the chapel. It seemed inconceivable that I could have felt so deeply, that I could have been a boy there myself, that Tony Watson had existed or the Manx Shearwater. Flip was confidential; I saw her angry with one or two boys, then when they had gone, she would laugh about them, and say what a lot of nonsense one had to tell them at that age, how difficult it was to keep them in order. Had I dreamt then about my favour-charts? Had I imagined it all, like a savage who believes that a tree or an old bone is ill-disposed to him? I could not be sure for it was clear that these monsters whom I had feared when I was ten had become delightful and reasonable people now I was eighteen – or would my 'favour' change and Flip be revealed again as Avenging Juno? I was bewildered.

All the boys seemed happy; there were several peers and a Siamese prince; once more the School had won the shooting trophy and the Harrow History Prize. It was a mystery. I felt like the English lady at the Paris exhibition whose mother was taken ill in her hotel and who came back with a doctor to find her name absent from the register, the rooms re-let, re-papered, refurnished and the hotel staff adamant that mother and daughter had never been seen. I wired to Charles to fetch me a day early and we crossed to Dieppe. Sambo's farewell was vivid. 'Don't forget, Tim. A Balliol scholar has the ball at his feet.' Already I felt embarrassed to know what to do with it.

We stayed our first night near the Gare St Lazare and visited the Folies Bergères. In the interval we roamed about the Promenoir and sat down at a table with two thin dark prostitutes. It was a great moment and seemed to wipe out my humiliation of the year before. We gave them drinks and were extremely polite, in the *Sinister Street* manner, for who knew, they might have as many different editions of Petronius as I? We wore blue suits, camel's hair waistcoats, and dark blue overcoats with a waist at the back; we smoked cigars and drawled a little, for I was in Pop, and Charles, in Sixth Form, was blonder and neater and vaguer than ever. He might have entertained prostitutes at the Folies Bergères all his life.

Suddenly Egerton and Rylands came up. We were uneasy and left our guests, for 'Pussy' Egerton, now a scholar of Trinity, had been the Captain of the School and in the Eleven; he was 'the hell of a chap' and the Colleger who had best fitted into the background of the lilies, correcting the headmaster, sleeping through difficult construes, to wake up and suggest an emendation with that boom of laziness which was a trait in the 'To him that hath shall be given' Eton type. Rylands, his great friend, was more exaggerated, more literary. He was going to be the Duchess in the *Duchess of*

Malfi next year, he told us, and he talked of 'Lytton' and 'A.C.B.'

Afterwards we went back to the hotel and lay awake in the dark. My face itched, and I could feel lumps under my fingers. I scratched, and heard a noise in the silence. Charles was scratching too.

'Charles.'

'Yes.'

'Are you awake?'

'Yes.'

'So am I.'

'Charles.'

'Yes.'

'Do you know how one catches it?'

'Yes. I think so. From shaking hands – or touching them or drinking out of the same glass.'

'My God – it's come out on my face already.'

'And mine.'

'I shook hands with mine.'

'Mine wore gloves – I felt fairly safe.'

'But don't you think she wore them because she *had it there?*'

'Christ! How awful – and my face itches too.'

'Have you got anything we can put on?'

'Only some *Icilma*.'

'It's better than nothing – in the morning we can go to a doctor.'

'Or should we go now?'

We put on the light and looked at each other. Charles sat up in his white Egyptian cotton pyjamas. They were mosquito bites. We joked about them with nervous vigour, and caught the morning train to Avignon.

There is the first time we go abroad and there is the first time we set eyes on Provence. For me they almost coincided and it would be hard to express what I felt that evening, in the garden above the Papal Palace. The frogs croaked, the

silver Rhône flowed underneath, the Mediterranean spring was advancing. I have been back so many times, as a spring ritual, to that palace, to Hiely's restaurant with its plate-glass windows, to the Greek Theatre at Arles, the hills of Les Baux, the ruins of St Rémy, to the Rhône with its eddies and islands and the cypress hedges where the cicadas charge the batteries of summer that I can no longer remember what they looked like for the first time. I know only that they are sacred places, that the country between the Mont Ventoux and the Canigou, from Avignon and Vaucluse to Figueras and Puigcerdá, is the expression of the complete south, the cradle of my civilization.

We hired bicycles at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon and visited Nîmes and Tarascon and Beaucaire. Then we had to make a decision. Should we go on to the Riviera or down the east coast of France towards Spain? Charles inclined to casinos but we chose Spain because it was cheaper and spent the next night at Narbonne. The town was gloomy, the mistral blew, Charles broke the chandelier in our room and tried to hide the pieces. At the last moment they were found and a large item added to the bill. The mistral made travelling impossible. We sat in the train going past platforms where the acacias and cypresses were plastered back by the wind and where even the names of the stations seemed fretted by the mistral; Agde, Leucate, Fitou, Palau del Vidre. The lagoons fascinated us, for it was the country of *Mariana in the South*. The strip of sand, the reeds, the sea lavender, the wind and sun brought back South Africa; there was the Mediterranean, a dark streak beyond the lagoons like the edge of a pineta and close at hand the stakes in the water, the white beds of flaking salt, the barren rocks of the Corbières. We reached the red soil of Roussillon, the fortress of Salses, the cathedral of Elne where a Byzantine empress lay buried, Collioure with its phallic church tower, dingy Port-Vendres, Banyuls and after many tunnels the frontier at Cerbère. We could go no farther without a visa.

Next morning we scrambled up to the top of the hill from

the beach, blown flat against the ground by the mistral but able to feel we had looked into Spain. Below us was an identical stony hillside dotted with asphodel, Port Bou with its cove, Cullera and Llansa, the mountain peninsula that runs out to Cadaqués and the plain of the Ampurdán. For one moment we surveyed it, then we were blown off our feet. Unable to stay on in Cerbère, we retreated, still battered by the mistral, from the station with its queues of Catalans, in berets and rope-soled shoes, their rugs slung over their shoulders, to the palms and cafés of Perpignan. I was getting school-sick for Eton.

Où sont les gracieux galants
 Whom I saw last month ago?
 And here at Perpignan I want
 To see them all again, although
 'Twas not with such an easy flow
 Of mutual intercourse enjoyed. . . .
 In fact I often was, I know;
 By *ἔρις* not *ἐρῶς* destroyed.
 And how does my dear Denis fare
 Called 'proud' by Dadie, whom we met
 The prey of the Folies Bergères
 And wooed by many an Amoret
 Who said '*Dormirez-vous, you pet?*
 But Egerton, with *visage noir*
 Repulsed the sirenaic set
 Who circle in the Promenoir.

Our journeys back were unpleasant. We both ran out of money and because of our tickets had to return by different ways. I travelled by Toulouse, carried my suitcase across Paris, got to London in the evening and rather than confess that I was penniless, spent my last five shillings on dining alone in Soho and then retired for the night to St Martin's-in-the-Fields. It was cold and uncomfortable; the people coughing all round me and wrapping themselves up in newspapers kept me awake. The next morning I met Charles at Victoria.

A GEORGIAN BOYHOOD

He was coming back by Avignon but had overslept and gone on to Marseille where they had tried to make him pay the difference. He had only a bag of dates on which he had been living and we took them to the Park and finished them before going round to his home in Upper Brook Street.

Vale

WHEN we went back to Eton the news of our travels had preceded us. We were sent for by the Headmaster and rebuked for having visited the Folies Bergères which was not the sort of place where Etonians go. Charles's visit in his sleep to Marseille was misconstrued by his tutor who asked him if he was aware that it was a centre of the white slave trade? I had been staying on my way back with my aunt and her butler had packed the magazines which were by my bed, including a copy of *La Vie Parisienne*. My tutor was horrified; it was bad enough to glance at such drawings he explained, what made it worse was that they were so 'diabolically clever'. He also took away *Tristram Shandy* and an uncut Rabelais.

Denis, Robert Longden, and Roger Mynors now formed the principal mess. Charles and I now messed alone; Denis was Captain of the School but for the first month of my last term I lived among Oppidans. 'Since God has given us the Popacy let us enjoy it,' was my motto after Leo the Tenth's. I was ashamed to hire classical records now from the music shop and on summer mornings I would go down there with Edward Woodall, Robin Gurdon, and Teddy Jessel to play 'Say it with Music' while the fox-trot floated away on the sunlight and we commented on the looks of the passers by.

It was a custom to walk up to a hotel in Windsor and sit in the garden, drinking and smoking. These were serious offences but the Pops took them for granted and never went about without a full cigarette case. At lunch they sat beside their housemasters, breathing port and tobacco over them and making patronizing conversation. I soon discovered that my notion of being careful whom I went about with till I was in Pop and then making friends with whom I liked was quite

impracticable. The Pops like all tyrants clung together as afraid of what the school thought of them as the rest were of the Pops; those who had nothing in common and disliked each other hurried when they met to link arms against an invisible danger.

Thus only boys in Pop were allowed to walk arm-in-arm. When I was not in Pop but was walking with Teddy Jessel or Robert Longden I would await the gesture, the arm first raised and then shot forward to bring the sleeve and cuff down within grip of the fingers and then the whole arm inserted, like a bishop laying on hands, with a sacred stealing motion through my own. It was a solemn moment when this public favour was conferred but when I was in Pop and enjoyed the same privilege I found that my arm seemed unwilling to experiment, and felt at ease only when another braided Pop sleeve reposed in mine.

Soon everybody in College began to seem insipid and dowdy for I saw them through Oppidan eyes and only the fastidious Charles and the genial Jackie were proof against that insolent fashionable stare. 'How petty everything is,' wrote Walter Le Strange. 'Even people one would never suspect of it seem afraid of Cyril, speaking of him only in hushed whispers.'

Some of the Pops had been worried about my not having a colour and the Captain of the Boats was persuaded to give me a rowing one; like any oligarchy the Eton Society went in terror of letting itself down. For a month I was a model member of that corrupt and glittering eighteenth-century clique and I forgot for the first time in my life that I was a 'highbrow', and that highbrows are cut off from the world.

During this month I managed to emancipate myself from the Irish bogey through the Anglo-Irish boys at school who were cousins of mine and whom I met at my aunt's. Being in Pop was a distinction even the Anglo-Irish had to recognize and one day I realized that I was the most important boy there, that they wanted to know me not I them, that I need not rack

my brains to think of something to say about horses, it was for them to try to talk about the all-Colleger performance of *She Stoops to Conquer* in which I was playing an exhibitionist role.* A voice told me that Clontarf, rebuilt with livid stained glass in the Isle of Wight Gothic of the sixties round an old ivied tower, was an ugly and unimportant house in a Dublin suburb, that History, after taking one look at the Vernons, had moved across the Channel and that whoever might now receive her favours, it would not be the lately landed Anglo-Irish Gentry.

Alas, in my excursion into the ruling class I had reckoned without an old enemy – the Thames Valley summer. Buttercups, lilac, elms, and steamy evenings had returned and were preparing their annual coup. They used a roundabout method.

It was the privilege of College Pop not to have to stamp their own letters. One member offered to 'keep the stamps' and to him a fag would bring the letters from the letter-box, stamp them there, and enter the amounts due in a book. When stamps ran out, the stamp-keeper would go round and ask people for what they owed him. At that time I kept the stamps for College Pop but I spurned the dunning of people for money and announced that I would pay for the stamps myself. One or two conscientious boys gave something, the rest accepted this typical 'gesture' as a mixture of idealism, laziness, and the desire to show off. '*Qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête!*' I soon ran out of stamps and having some letters brought to me to post, I remembered that any placed in the letter-box in the rooms of the Eton Society were franked in the same way. I sent the fag down with them. That afternoon, when the letters were

* *Mrs Hardcastle*. The signatures on my programme at this extreme moment of dandyism are revealing. Dunglass, Knebworth, Teddy Jessel, Robin Gurdon, Maurice Bridgman, Edward Woodall, Greville Worthington, Guy Wainwright – all history specialist members of Pop, Brian Howard (aesthete), Bernard Brassey (toast of the day), and three fags, Alsop, Coleridge and Ford to represent College with Nigel and his friend O'Connor. Five of these and three members of the cast would meet violent deaths before they were forty. *Quelle époque!*

collected, somebody in Pop chanced to go through them, and noticed that several were to the parents of Collegers. The old hostility broke out. 'Why the hell should those bloody bastards in College post their letters here - why should we stamp letters addressed to all the bloody villas in Tooting, etc., etc.'

The Pops assumed that they had been posted by Denis, whom they disliked, to oblige his friends and made remarks about him. I heard of the proceedings but at some time in the St Wulfric's or Dark Ages period my nerve had gone. I felt the old panic about 'owning up', 'going straight', 'generality', and 'being wanted' - I could not explain, only wait for it to blow over. Eventually - by elimination - they discovered who it was. Nico Davies and Knebworth rebuked me in a friendly way. I tried to apologize but was seized with a hopeless feeling of guilt. How could I explain? I had betrayed Pop; I had let down the friends who had made the experiment of electing me.

From that moment my vitality failed as I had seen it fail in others, I felt uneasy whenever I was with Pops, and could no longer face the rakes in the Hotel Garden. I made the mistake, common in youth, of not understanding that people who like one for oneself, will overlook occasional lapses. I felt that the Members of the Eton Society liked me only in so far as I conformed while someone more mature would have known that the affair was trivial and that they liked me because they knew I could never conform. Driven underground for a year by success, my persecution mania had found an outlet.

In College my self-confidence still held out but even as I had fallen victim to scepticism a summer before, so now I succumbed to aestheticism. It was in the air; the season, the lime-flowered summer evenings undermined me and I fell. I wore, instead of a blazer, with my grey flannel trousers, a black dinner-jacket, and a panama hat. The fashion was not followed. I read *Marius the Epicurean* and *A Rebours* which sent me on to silver Latin and '*faisande*' prose. I studied the philosophy of Aristippus of Cyrene and smouldered with the 'hard gem-like

flame'. I believed in living for 'golden moments', in 'anything for a sensation' and read Baudelaire, Verlaine, Hérédia, Moréas, and Mallarmé at French Extra Studies with de Satgé, from whom I borrowed *Limbo* and *Crome Yellow* which I got into trouble for reading.

I went to the rose-show at Windsor and had an intense experience looking at the whitest of white roses; after that I always had some Frau Karl Druschki's in my room. Rancid with boredom, I burnt melancholy texts round the wall with a poker. 'Let us crown ourselves with roses before they be withered' (*Coronemus nos rosis antequam marcescant*) from the *Wisdom of Solomon*, 'Finis venit, venit finis, evigilavit adversum te et ecce venit' from Ezekiel, and from Mallarmé 'La chair est triste, hélas, et j'ai lu tous les livres'.

I now admired the twelve Caesars with their enigmatic deathbed sayings charged with power and satiety and the last king of France - 'mettons-nous à la fenêtre et ennuyons-nous,' exclaimed Louis XIII. 'Nous ne sommes pas heureux à notre âge' added Louis XIV. Louis XV left no wisdom, but I learnt that on receiving the news of each defeat in the Seven Years War 'Il ouvre ses grands yeux tristes, et tout est dit.'

A favourite and succulent character was Audubon, in Lowes Dickinson's *Modern Symposium*.

'And just there is the final demonstration of the malignity of the scheme of things. Time itself works against us. The moments that are evil it eternalizes; the moments that might be good it hurries to annihilation. All that is most precious is most precarious. Vainly do we cry to the moment, 'Verweile doch, du bist so schön!' Only the heavy hours are heavy-footed. The winged Psyche, even at the moment of birth, is sick with the pangs of dissolution.'

Walter Le Strange corroborated.

25 June. Seven months since I have seen you, sweet book! Cyril has had you - thank God they were no profane hands that touched you, or unholy eyes that read my heart. When I last confided to you I had sunk to depths of aesthetic affectation deeper than I realized at

the time. Now I am (I flatter myself) more level-headed. Cyril has once more consented to *know* me, after some months of estrangement. His conversation is as butter and honey after bread and dripping. Unfortunately, instead of what was, for me at least, friendship, there is now worship. For then we were outwardly (I flatter myself again) equal, now I am (to the world, not mentally, I hope) unchanged, while he has Success. Niké disdains me. I let Cyril influence me more than I mean to. I know all influence (especially an enervating one like his) is bad. But Cyril is so pleasant I cannot resist him even if I wished to try. (O Hypocrite that I am, this is written for his eyes.)

12 July. Life should be lived, wildly and feverishly within, outwardly with absolute calm and composure. Nor ought one's true opinions to be given to anyone. Everything should bow to expediency and efficiency. How weak I am! In the evening I make huge resolves, in the morning I remember them and disregard them.

15 July. Since last I wrote the whole world seems to have been spread before me. I have seen incense burnt on the altar of Dionysus and heard the Antigone acted in the original tongue of Sophocles. I have dined with the Headmaster and talked of Italian Art. Cyril has shown me the most beautiful flowers in the world. I have knelt on the floor looking at a medieval map beside a Prince Palatine. I have had my 18th birthday. I have four ambitions of which only the third is likely to come true.

(1) To get a scholarship at Kings in December.

(2) To get my College Wall.

(3) To see Florence and Venice.

(4) To be in Pop next summer half.

To myself I appear a Messiah.

To my friends an ineffectual angel with a touch of the idiot.

To my enemies a negligible knave.

Coronemus nos rosis antequam marcescant. But I only do it because it is the thing to do.

Vain attempts to attract Maud.

The Beggar's Opera and *Dear Brutus* both tend to show 'the utter futility of doing anything under any circumstances'.

Le Strange at least kept his diary but all my own attempts to write were doomed to failure. I didn't see how one could well

write in English, and my Greek and Latin were still not good enough. I took to writing jingles in which a Greek verse was brought in to rhyme with the English; it was not till a year or two later that I was able to discard English and express myself in Greek epigrams for to compose in a dead language was the creative activity toward which my education was inexorably tending. Meanwhile there was French.

Roses blanches
 Qui se penchent
 En songes
 Elles m'ont chanté
 Des enchantés
 Mensonges.

Que la vie est brève
 Rêve d'un rêve, etc. etc.

This was the summer's only inspiration.

Meanwhile a strange pink album had appeared called the *Eton Candle*. It contained poems and some precious stories, contributions from Max Beerbohm and those suspect old Etonians, Aldous Huxley, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell. One day Teddy Jessel introduced me to the editor, a boy in his house with a distinguished impertinent face, a sensual mouth and dark eyes with long lashes. He wrote to ask me to tea. I accepted, on Pop writing paper, and went round one summer afternoon to find *foie gras* sandwiches, strawberries and cream, and my postcard of acceptance prominently displayed on the mantelpiece. Seeing it up there for the world to know that Brian Howard had had a Pop to tea with him, I was miserable. I felt that once again I had let the Eton Society down. It was natural for Teddy Jessel to know Brian who was in the same house. The question was, *Who else did?* I swallowed down my tea like a lady who is offered a swig by a madman in a railway tunnel and bolted.

Afterwards when I saw Brian alone I would talk to him; when I was with other Pops I avoided him, as in the Dark

Ages Wilfrid had avoided me. I need not have worried for he soon became the most fashionable boy in the school but, as it was, though I grew to know him better, his politeness overwhelmed me. He belonged to a set of boys who were literary and artistic but too lazy to gargle quotations and become inoculated with the virus of good taste latent in Eton teaching and too disorderly and bad at games to be overburdened with responsibility and who in fact gained most from Eton because of the little they gave. There was Harold Acton, a prince of courtesy, his brother William, Robert Byron who was aggressive, and played jokes on the Corps, the two Messels, Antony Powell, the author of *Afternoon Men* and Henry Green who has since described them in his novel, *Blindness*. They were the most vigorous group at Eton for they lived within their strength, yet my moral cowardice and academic outlook debarred me from making friends with them.

College politics were now less exciting, for we were not in opposition but in office. Denis was Captain of the School; beatings stopped, fagging was light, the election system languished. College Pop had now extended the privilege of using its library to the Upper Half of College, and so to belong no longer brought that increase of privacy which, at Eton, formed the substance of promotion. Being in Liberty and in Pop but not in Sixth Form, I was in an irresponsible position, a school but not a house prefect. I looked on myself as a kind of Charles James Fox or Wilkes, a Whig to the left of the Whig position although I was more of an anarchist than a Liberal for I disbelieved in power and authority and thought them evil and believed that the natural goodness of human reason must triumph without them.

The deadly sin, since I was in Pop, was 'Worldliness' and I preached against it whenever I could. As with many anarchists, there was some vanity in my make-up. I did not want to cooperate or be cooperated with and began to take umbrage with Denis, Roger, Robert Longden, the Periclean Caucus who governed College.

Thus after the reform of College Pop into a debating society, I resigned as a protest against compulsory debates although the motion, 'that death was preferable to life', was one very dear to me. A blasé *grand seigneur*, I called everybody in College by their Christian name and at Liberty Supper I would hold 'wantings', which were parodies of the dread affairs of my youth, and on occasion a mock beating in which the victims kept their gowns on, and the canes, carefully notched beforehand, broke in half at the first stroke. It was a silly way to behave as rumours spread which made more difficult the genuine reforms of the Caucus. Anybody could play about with discipline in that way since however much one might rag 'wantings' and fagging; there was no question of boys not turning up for the wanting or not running to be fagged.

I made friends with many of the fags; in my jaundiced state I enjoyed their simplicity and vitality, besides, I wanted them to be happier than I had been myself. I was sometimes suspected of other motives by my ambivalent housemaster which made me scornful and defiant. He had complained once of my 'infernal pride' and I at last lived up to it. I hated history by now; it stank of success, and I buried myself in the classics. I was bored and unhappy but there was no equal in whom I could confide. I was afraid Denis would fail to understand, the virtuous Caucus might lecture me, my housemaster was antipathetic, Headlam could have helped me but I was too frightened of him. He had pointed out to me the seats which the Sitwells had occupied in his class-room but on the other hand he had condemned as morbid 'Ere blowsy tediousness of summer days', the last line of a sonnet I wrote.

Urquhart came down from Balliol and had tea with me; he seemed with his easy-going good-mannered confidence and aroma of the days of Greville and Palmerston to promise release into an adult world of intellectual excitement and sensible activity – but after he had gone the white roses, the green bananas, the clove carnation soap and the dismal mot-toes resumed their power, and I even engaged a fag to

sing Gregorian chants outside my room, like Saul with David.

I was eighteen and a half; I had never had sexual intercourse, I had never masturbated. 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,' perhaps even St Wulfric's, even the Eton authorities had not required a chastity so strict.

The end of term arrived. There was still Camp, which was one long operatic farewell for me but parting was imminent. I had a spectacular leaving tea, to which my friends were invited in platonic couples and where I played the *Après-midi d'un faune* on my gramophone.

Cyril's leaving tea. A beautiful evening, tea and fair faces and good music [wrote Le Strange]. Then Liberty Supper, the last alas! How banal Liberty suppers will seem next half - *Cyril est épatant, mais comme toujours à la grande manière*. N. got his 22 today. He has gone completely off, as has Maud who used to be so very nice.

There was the last chapel where for the last time I refused to bow my head in the creed and read Petronius through the leaving hymn, walking afterwards under the limes with Teddy Jessel. The cant of leaving infuriated him, the sentimental farewells, the warnings against the prostitutes of Jermyn Street, and the hypocritical anxiety of the stupider Pops worrying about their successors. The gruelling election had lasted all that morning, with partisans of one boy putting in two or three blackballs each against nominees of others until one understood why the College of Cardinals, on such occasions, was locked in and given no food. My principles still kept me from blackballing anyone but I enjoyed the excitement. Charles my old friend and mess-mate was elected, and the second time round I put up Nigel to realize my insolent day-dream of the year before.

In spite of the reconciliation our friendship was in abeyance; it would seem that in the quarrel I had expended all the emotion I was capable of feeling. I remembered how at one time noticing the shape of his ear in chapel had moved me

and now he was only a bouncing fellow who had just missed the Eleven. He was not elected till a year later but his gratitude put me to shame.

In *College Annals* Denis wrote the account of his stewardship.

The past year has been conspicuous more for an alteration in the general tone of College than for any remarkable achievements. It has always been the hope of my own Election to destroy the inter-election enmity, as it existed a few years ago, to abolish the scandals of College Pop, to reduce the number of beatings to a minimum, and generally to substitute a more harmonious system of government for the old methods of repressions and spite.

The actual changes that have occurred may be summed up thus: — When I was a fag it was considered a poor night for the 'senior' if no one was beaten, and 'wantings' occurred every night, whereas this last half it does not happen to have been necessary to use corporal punishment at all, scarcely a dozen to twenty 'wantings' the whole half. As regards College Pop, instead of being a miniature Eton society with exclusive right to Reading Room, it has been reformed with the intention of making it a debating society proper, and I have hopes that the new rules will not allow it again to degenerate into a selfish body of College 'chaps', like School Pop. . . . It is early yet to judge of the success of these experiments, and the universal prediction of the 'old men' *may* be verified, but I can at least honestly record that College has been in every way *happier* this year than at any time in the last six years.

The verdict of subsequent Captains of the School on our shortlived and unpopular experiment in happiness can be found in Mr Eric Parker's *College at Eton* (Macmillan, 1933). *College Annals* also included a short autobiography of every colleger, usually a list of his athletic distinctions, but, under our decadent administration, more general in tone. Thus Farlow added his slogan '*cui bono*' to his list of triumphs, Charles included his gesture in resigning from the Corps and Le Strange ended up 'other minor scholastic achievements there were too, which it would be tedious to enumerate'. I added a list of favourite authors, favourite flower, rose

(white), and my new motto, 'I hate everything public' (*σικαίνω πάντα τὰ δημόσια*), concluding: 'A sentimental cynic, superstitious atheist, and Brackenbury Scholar of Balliol College Oxford.'

Although I affected not to care I dreaded leaving; one part of me was bored and looked forward to moving on, the other clung to the past. Once more I had built up a private civilization of reason and love at a temperature warmer than the world outside; once again it had to be shattered. 'We whose generations are ordained in this setting part of time are providentially taken off from such imaginations' – but I could not repress a dread of the future, of the uglification of life, of Oxford bedrooms and dour undergraduates. Eton is one of the few schools where the standard of comfort is almost in advance of the universities and unlike most boys, Denis and Robert and I were not looking forward to more liberty than we enjoyed already, to more interesting friendships, or to a room of our own for the first time. Also we were attached to the past and used to a world of boys, boys with a certain grace who like the portraits in the Provost's Lodge wore their eighteenth-century clothes with elegance. The world of matey young men with their pipes and grey bags, the blokeries to which we had been allotted, filled us with despair; we mourned with apprehension, 'Not the dead but the ἡβας ἀνδρος ἀπολλυόμενον – the flower of youth perishing.'

I was now entering the third hot room of English education; from St Wulfric's I had got a scholarship to Eton, from Eton to Balliol and from thence there would, I supposed, be other scholarships awaiting me; I could not imagine a moment when I should not be receiving marks for something, when 'poor' or 'very fair' or 'Beta plus' was not being scrawled across my conduct-sheet by the Great Examiner. And yet already I was a defeatist, I remembered Teddy Jessel saying to me by the fives courts, in my hour of triumph: 'Well, you've got a Balliol scholarship and you've got into Pop – you know I shouldn't be at all surprised if you never did anything else

the rest of your life. After all, what happens to old tugs? If they're clever they become dons or civil servants, if not they come back here as ushers; when they're about forty they go to bed with someone, if it's a boy they get sacked, if it's a woman they marry them. The pi ones go into the church and may become bishops. There goes Connolly, K.S., a brilliant fellow, an alpha mind, he got the Rosebery and the Brackenbury, and all the other berries, and passed top into the Office of Rears!'

There was much truth in this, in fact were I to deduce any system from my feelings on leaving Eton, it might be called *The Theory of Permanent Adolescence*. It is the theory that the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly, sentimental, and in the last analysis homosexual. Early laurels weigh like lead and of many of the boys whom I knew at Eton, I can say that their lives are over. Those who knew them then knew them at their best and fullest; now, in their early thirties, they are haunted ruins. When we meet we look at each other, there is a pause of recognition, which gives way to a moment of guilt and fear. 'I won't tell on you', our eyes say, 'if you won't tell on me' – and when we do speak, it is to discover peculiar evidence of this obsession. For a nightmare I have often had has been that of finding myself back; I am still a boy at Eton, still in Pop, still in my old room in Sixth Form Passage but nobody remembers me, nobody tells me where to go. I am worse than a newboy, I am a new oldboy, I go into Hall and search for a place to eat, I wander in schoolrooms trying to find a class where I am expected. When I first used to have this dream I had only just left Eton, I knew most of the boys and the masters and the nightmare then took the form of everyone, after my place had been filled, my gap closed over, having to pretend they were glad I had come back. As time went on nobody remembered me and the dream ended with

my ignominious ejection. I have found other old Etonians who have had the same experience; some dream they are back in their old rooms while their wives and children hang about outside to disgrace them.

Once again romanticism with its deathwish is to blame, for it lays an emphasis on childhood, on a fall from grace which is not compensated for by any doctrine of future redemption; we enter the world, trailing clouds of glory, childhood and boyhood follow and we are damned. Certainly growing up seems a hurdle which most of us are unable to take and the lot of the artist is unpleasant in England because he is one of the few who, bending but not breaking, is able to throw off these early experiences, for maturity is the quality that the English dislike most and the fault of artists is that, like certain foreigners, they are mature.* For my own part I was long dominated by impressions of school. The plopping of gas mantles in the class-rooms, the refrain of psalm tunes, the smell of plaster on the stairs, the walk through the fields to the bathing places or to chapel across the cobbles of School Yard, evoked a vanished Eden of grace and security; the intimate noises of College, the striking of the clock at night from Agar's Plough, the showers running after games of football, the housemaster's squeak, the rattle of tea-things, the poking of fires as I sat talking with Denis or Charles or Freddie on some evening when everybody else was away at a lecture, were recollected with anguish and College, after I left, seemed to me like one of those humming fortified paradises in an Italian primitive outside which the angry Master in College stood with his flaming sword.

Procul abest Fridericus, Fridericus capite rubro

Procul abest Nigel, qui solebat mecum ire

Procul absunt pueri qui clamant in cubiculis eorum

Qui sedent super focus pulchri sine arte

Pulchri sunt sed nesciunt, nec decoris eorum habent scientiam —

O Roma, urbs beata, lumen ultra mare.

* Even the Jews in England are boyish, like Disraeli, and not the creators of adult philosophies like Marx or Freud.

Since I was unable to write in any living language when I left Eton I was already on the way to becoming a critic. My ambition was to be a poet but I could not succeed when poetry was immersed in the Georgian or Neo-Tennysonian tradition. I could but have imitated Housman, Flecker, Brooke, de la Mare, or Ralph Hodgson. By the time Eliot and Valéry came to save my generation from the romantic dragon it had already devoured me. I was however well grounded enough to become a critic and drifted into it through unemployability.

In other respects I had been more deeply scarred. The true religion I had learnt at Eton and St Wulfric's had not been Christianity nor even Imperialism but the primitive gospel of the Jealous God, of *φθονερόν* – a gospel which emerged as much from the old Testament as from Greek tragedy and was confirmed by experience. Human beings, it taught, are perpetually getting above themselves and presuming to rise superior to the limitations of their nature; when they reach this state of insolence or *ὑβρις*, they are visited with some catastrophe, the destruction of Sodom or the Sicilian expedition, the fate of Œdipus or Agamemnon, the Fall of Troy or the Tower of Babel. The happiness, to which we aspire, is not well thought of and is visited with retribution; though some accounts are allowed to run on longer than others, everything in life has to be paid for.

Even when we say 'I am happy' we mean 'I was' for the moment is past, besides, when we are enjoying ourselves most, when we feel secure of our strength and beloved by our friends, we are intolerable and our punishment – beating for generality, a yellow ticket, a blackball, or a summons from the Headmaster, is in preparation. All we can do is to walk delicately, to live modestly and obscurely like the Greek chorus and to pay a careful attention to omens – counting our paces, observing all conventions, taking quotations at random from Homer or the Bible, and acting on them while doing our best to 'keep in favour' – for misfortunes never come alone.

Consider Jacky; playing fives with me one afternoon he said

'Damn and blast' when he missed a ball. The Headmaster, who was passing, heard him and told Sixth Form. That night he was beaten. In the excitement of the game he had forgotten to prepare his construe. Others had prepared theirs but after the silence before boys are put on to construe, when all diversions have been tried in vain, it was he who was called upon. He was ploughed and given a 'ticket' 'Failed in Construe' to get signed by his tutor. He had not the courage to show it him, forged his tutor's initials on the bottom and handed it back. By chance the two masters met, the ticket was mentioned and the fraud discovered. Within three days of the game of fives the Praepostor came with the terrible summons. 'Is O'Dwyer K.S. in this division? He is to go to the Headmaster at a quarter to twelve.' The wide doors are open which means a birching will take place. The block is put out. Two boys in Sixth Form are there to see the Headmaster does not raise his arm above the shoulder, and an old College servant to lower his trousers and hold him down. 'Call no man happy till he's dead. Next time it may be me.'

Morally I was not in advance of this abject religion; I rejected Christian ethics yet was not enough of a stoic to adopt pagan standards in their place. I was a *vierge folle* full of neurotic pride and this gave to my thinking a morbid tinge.

Politically I was a liberal individualist with a passion for freedom and justice and a hatred of power and authority but I disliked politics and wished for nothing better than to talk to my friends, travel abroad, look at Old Masters and Romanesque cathedrals, read old books and devote myself to lost causes and controversies of the past.

The cause of the unhappiness I had come across I put down as Competition. It was Competition that turned friends into enemies, that exhausted the scholars in heart-breaking sprints and rendered the athletes disappointed and bitter. 'Never compete' was my new commandment, never again to go in for things, to be put up and blackballed, to score off anyone;

only in that way could the sin of Worldliness be combated, the Splendid Failure be prepared which was the ultimate 'gesture'. Otherwise when free from guilt and fear I was gay, with evening high spirits hardly distinguishable from intoxication and which rose and rose until the shutter fell, a glass which cut me off from loving friends and imagined enemies and behind which I prepared for that interview with the moment, that sacred breathless confrontation from which so little always results, and so much is vainly expected. I was also an affected lover of sensations which I often faked, a satirist in self-defence, a sceptical believer in the Heraclitan flux, an introspective romantic-sensitive, conceited, affectionate, gregarious and, at the time of leaving Eton, the outstanding moral coward of my generation.

Sometimes I imagine Eton replying to these criticisms, the voice of 'Henry's holy shade' answering me with the serenity of a dowager.

'Yes. Very interesting. It was one of my masters, I think, who said, "Connolly has a vulgar streak" – but we won't discuss that. As I understand, you blame us because our teaching encouraged aestheticism and the vices that are found with it and then punished them when they occurred. Has it ever occurred to you to blame yourself? You say winning a scholarship and getting into Pop turned your head, and set you back ten years. Well, I'm sorry for you. Other boys achieved this and more and were not harmed by it. Look at Robert Longden. The same age as you are and Headmaster of Wellington and Lord Dufferin, almost in the Cabinet. You complain that my teaching is cynical and concentrates on success. Don't forget what Jowett said. "There are few ways in which a young man can be more harmlessly employed than in making money." Not that I altogether approve of Pop myself, but since your time its morals have improved and its powers been restricted. The state of College has improved too; that Bolshy epoch, when some of the post-war unrest reached our little backwater, is a thing of the past.

'I think if you had been less vain, less full of the wrong sort of pride and with a little more stuffing, you would not have been attracted to the "primrose path". You would not have let a little success get the better of you. Don't forget we put you in a strong position. The great world is not unlike the Eton Society. Their values are the same. You could have made lasting friendships with people who will govern the country – not flashy people but those from whose lodges, in a Scotch deer-forest, great decisions are taken. You Bolshies keep on thinking the things we stand for – cricket, shooting, Ascot, Lords, the Guards, the House of Commons, and the Empire – are dead. But you all want to put your sons down for Eton. It's twenty years now since you came here. Even then people talked about this world being dead but what is more alive today? your Bolshevism or the English governing class, the Tory Party?

'But let's leave Pop, let's suppose it is no good in after life to a boy – excuse me – with your income. There was always a Balliol scholarship. Why didn't you follow that up? I see you show a tendency to sneer at the government offices and the diplomatic service. And yet they rule the country more than ever. If "Pop" leads to the Cabinet, "College" leads to the Permanent Under Secretaryships, the plums of the administration. It was the old Colleger type, prelate, judge, or civil servant who turned out the late king (not an old Etonian) with such absence of friction. They decide who's to be given a visa or permitted to land; they open the mail and tap the telephones. I shouldn't sneer at them. You imply our education is of no use to you in after life. But no education is. We are not an employment agency; all we can do is to give you a grounding in the art of mixing with your fellow men, to tell you what to expect from life and give you an outward manner and inward poise, an old prescription from the eighteenth century which we call a classical education, an education which confers the infrequent virtues of good sense and good taste and the benefit of dual nationality, English and Mediterranean,

and which, taking into account the difficulties of modern life, we find the philosophy best able to overcome them.

'You complain that Ruskin's cult of beauty and Tennyson's imagery of water and summer still predominate; but we can't help our buildings being beautiful or our elms stately. If you think boys are happier for a retarded development in unfriendly surroundings, you should have gone to Wellington. You say we are sterile and encourage composition only in dead languages. Shelley and Swinburne and Dr Bridges wouldn't agree with you. And what matter, if the spirit is alive. Take this:

Quam breve tempus abit quod amando degitur! Instar
Momenti fugiens vix superat.*

Exquisite! It is by Mr Broadbent. Something you were too bathed in your masochist Celtic twilight to appreciate. You were never a very good classical scholar. Too lazy. You would not grasp that, as one of my masters writes, "No education is worth having that does not teach the lesson of concentration on a task, however unattractive. These lessons if not learnt early, will be learnt, if at all, with pain and grief in later life." Now I expect you have found that out, as you will one day find out about character, too.

'About the civilization of the lilies, Percy Lubbock and Santayana say very different things from you. However, we bear no ill-will. We shall be here when you have gone. Come down and see us some time. I admit we have been disappointed in you. We hoped that you would conquer your faults but we can't all be Pitt or J. K. Stephen and, in spite of what you say, we have since turned out a writer who has been able to

* Que l'heure est donc brève
Qu'on passe en aimant
C'est moins qu'un moment
Un peu plus qu'un rêve
Le temps nous enlève
Notre enchantement. Anon.

reconcile being a "live wire" with loyalty to the school tradition, even on the Amazon.'

I have concluded at this point, for it marks the end of my unconscious absorption of ideas, besides there was now nothing new which could happen to me. Although to the world I appeared a young man going up to Oxford 'with the ball at his feet', I was, in fact, as promising as the Emperor Tiberius retiring to Capri. I knew all about power and popularity, success and failure, beauty and time, I was familiar with the sadness of the lover and the bleak ultimatums of the beloved. I had formed my ideas and made my friends and it was to be years before I could change them. I lived entirely in the past, exhausted by the emotions of adolescence, of understanding, loving and learning. Denis's fearless intellectual justice, Robert's seventeenth-century face, mysterious in its conventionality, the scorn of Nigel, the gaiety of Freddie, the languor of Charles, were permanent symbols which would confront me fortunately for many years afterwards, unlike the old red-brick box and elmy landscape which contained them. I was to continue on my useless assignment, falling in love, going to Spain and being promising indefinitely.

Somewhere in the facts I have recorded lurk the causes of that sloth by which I have been disabled, somewhere lies the sin whose guilt is at my door, increasing by compound interest faster than promise (for promise is guilt – promise is the capacity for letting people down); and through them run those romantic ideas and fallacies, those errors of judgement against which the validity of my criticism must be measured.

For the critic's role was implicit in this Georgian boyhood.

Beneath the hot incurious sun
 Past stronger beats and fairer,
 He picks his way, a living gun
 With gun and lens and bible
 A militant enquirer;
 The friend, the rash, the enemy,

VALE

The essayist, the able,
Able at times to cry.

It is too early to tell if he has been misled by the instinct for survival. It may be that, having laid the ghost of his past, he will be able to declare himself and come out in the open – or it may be that, having discarded the alibi of promise, it will only be to end up in the trenches or the concentration camp.

Determined on time's honest shield
The lamb must face the Tigress,

and the Tigress may win for in spite of the slow conversion of progressive ideas into the fact of history, the Dark Ages have a way of coming back. Civilization – the world of affection and reason and freedom and justice – is a luxury which must be fought for, as dangerous to possess as an oil-field or an unlucky diamond.

Or so now I think; whom ill-famed Coventry bore, a mother of bicycles whom England enlightened and Ireland deluded, round-faced, irritable, sun-loving, a man as old as his Redeemer, meditating at this time of year when wars break out, when Europe trembles and dictators thunder, inglorious under the plane.

July 1937 – Aug. 1938
'*Post fanum putre Vacunae.*'

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