

## 4. TOTALITARIAN

At 3.20 this afternoon I opened an history of philosophy and "my head swam", I was submerged in a mass of nomenclatures completely unstuck from reality.

The New Learning if it comes into being at all will get hold of ideas, in the sense that it will know where they "weigh in". It will take the man of ideas when he "pulls his weight".

I am not asserting that Plato and Aristotle didn't. I am very definitely asserting that we ought to see if, how, when they (or their teaching) managed to do so.

If Plato's ideas were the paradigms of reality in Plato's personal thought, their transmutation into phenomena takes us into the unknown. What we can assert is that Plato periodically caused enthusiasm among his disciples. And the Platonists after him have caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of mind, apart from any man's individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it wore molten glass that envelops us, full of light.

The history of a culture is the history of ideas going into action. Whatever the platonists or other mystics have felt, they have been possessed sporadically and spasmodically of energies measurable in speech and in

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action, long before modern physicians were measuring the electric waves of the brains of pathological subjects.

They also evolved terminologies and communicated one with another. And there is no field where the careful historian is more likely to make an ass of himself than in trying to deal with such phenomena either to magnify or to deny them.

There is also no doubt that Platonists, all platonists every Platonist disturb or disturbs people of cautious and orderly mind,.

Gemisto brought a brand of Platonism into Italy and is supposed to have set off a renaissance.

Aristotle was banned by the Church, I think because he was so discouraging. Some sort of vital instinct, down under the superficial intolerance and stupidity, felt the menace of logic-chopping, of all this cutting up, rationalizing and dissecting of reality. Not but what a man can dig a lot of acute sense out of Aristotle if he pick out what suits him in a given case or a given moment.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing is, without efficient cause. Rationalizing or rather trying to rationalize the prerational is poor fishing.

St Ambrose midway between Athens and the Sorbonne pulls up with a root of reality "CAPTANS ANNONAM". Hoggers of harvest, cursed among the people.

<sup>1</sup> These sentences of introduction had gone completely out of my mind when I wrote the later notes on pages 340-1 and I leave these repetitions so that the strict reader can measure the difference, if any, between this "residuum" left in my memory or whatever, and the justification or un-justification given in detail later.

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Anybody can get their teeth into that phrase. It lasts on as a "root" right up to Dr Soddy, in Butchart's collection *Tomorrow's Money*, under a shifting sea of various techniques of various conditions.

*"Exactly as taxation is a forced levy on the community's money, so the issue of new money is a forced levy in kind on the wealth-on-sale in the community's marts. Just as it is unthinkable that private people shd. have power to levy taxes so it is preposterous that the banks, in the teeth of all constitutional safeguards against it, shd. by a mere trick usurp the function of Parliament and, without any authority whatever, make forced levies on the community's wealth. . . . But no one can pay taxes, or, in a monetary civilization, discharge any obligation or debt at all until there is money. The provision of the correct quantity of money shd. be the first and most important duty of the State."*

The last sentence implies I take it that public order shall have been already assured; that Prof Soddy is contemplating England, and has not spread his cognizance over corporate techniques, organizations where perhaps the guilds etc. can or cd. perform functions now relegated to parliaments. These are minor varia and in no way affect Dr Soddy's main thesis.

Soddy here represents the summit of modern ethics as applicable in ordered society.

The reader who resents my introducing this question must also resent the illustrative paragraphs which terminate the second book *OECONOMICORUM*, say where philosophy ends and decide that it probably has nowt to do with culture and civilization.

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Is the total man to be denied his right to discuss subjects already discussed by philosophers and theologians when such were respectable, but since abandoned by dilettantes for cosmologies about which they knew nothing, or metaphysics about which no man knows anything save what he finds out for himself. Soddy's admirable essay starts with dissociation of the "rise of man" from the myth of man's "fall", I suppose that is a philosophic issue?

The fight against unjust monopoly has never let up from the hour of St Ambrose's philipic. Jean Barral will trace it back to the Egyptian captivity. Matsumiyo with Japanese angle of incidence writes his history by dividing the year, spring, summer, autumn, winter.

No conception of culture will hold good if you omit the enduring constants in human composition.

Charlemagne fights the monopolists; he decrees a commodity denar, or a grain denar, and the significance escapes six hundred and more economists in a sequence of centuries.

A . D . 794, oats, per moggio (modio, peck)		1 denar
barley	„	2 denars
rye	„	3 „
wheat	„	4 „
A . D . 808, oats	„	2 „
barley	„	3 „
rye	„	4 „
wheat	„	6 „

the latter reading "frumento parato" and might mean superior wheat, but the rye and barley have moved in

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like proportion so that it wd. seem to indicate wheat as per 794 or a precaution against inferior grain.

Herein is a technical lesson in justice, there being no reasonable doubt that justice was aimed at.

Here was a lesson that David Hume had learned, presumably from some other series of observations, when he said prosperity depends not on the amount of money in a country, but on its continually increasing.

Gesell and Douglas in our time have both learned the lesson of Charlemagne's list for just prices, without any collusion.

The Catholic Church, aiming at justice, was more intelligent than professors who, in our day, fall for the stability racket, meaning a fixed set of prices, i.e. an unchanging relationship between wanted and/or needed goods and a unit of money.

The hurried reader may say I write this in cypher and that my statement merely skips from one point to another without connection or sequence.

The statement is nevertheless complete. All the elements are there, and the nastiest addict of crossword puzzles shd. be able to solve this or see this.

Having said this, perhaps the reader will believe me when I say one must begin study by method. One must be in condition to understand an author's simplest words if one wishes to understand him. A narrative is all right so long as the narrator sticks to words as simple as dog, horse, and sunset.

His communication ceases almost entirely when he writes down "good", "evil" and "proper".

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Manifestly ideas are NOT understood, even when men write down what they themselves consider simple and unambiguous statements. C. H. Douglas remained misunderstood for years because he relapsed into algebra. I myself once printed an analytical formula in a discussion of sculpture, during 25 years I have had no evidence that that statement has ever fallen under the eye of any man who had both a college sophomore's knowledge of geometry, and an interest in sculpture,

. . . .

Prof S. used to sneer at philosophy and at least contributed the statement that philosophers had worked for 2000 years and failed to define the few pieces of terminology sufficient to cover their ignorance.

My generation found criticism of the arts cluttered with work of men who persistently defined the works of one art in terms of another.

For a decade or so we tried to get the arts sorted out. (I am not leaving my narrative by this jump to the present.)

For a few years paint and sculpture tried to limit themselves to colour and form. And this did I believe clarify the minds of a small group or series of people.

We traced the "just word" back to Flaubert. We heard a good deal about using it. For the purpose of novel writing and telling of stories, the composition of poems, the evocative word, the word that throws a vivid image on the mind of the reader suffices.

We litterati struggled for twenty years on this front.

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In the economic battle we were, after a time, confronted with the need of DEFINITION.

Definition went out in the fifteen hundreds. "Philosophy" went out in the fifteen hundreds, in the sense that after Leibniz the thought of people who labelled themselves philosophers no longer led or enlightened the rest of the thinkers. "Abstract thought" or "general thought" or philosophic thought after that time was ancillary to work of material scientists.

Some Huxley or Haldane has remarked that Galileo in inventing the telescope had to commit a definite technical victory over materials.

Before the experimental method, when men had hardly more than words as a means for transmission of thought, they took a great deal more care in defining them.

All this may be flat platitude, but one has to climb over it. The late Victorians and the Wellses were boggit in loose expression.

Every man who wants to set his ideas in order ought to be soused for a week at least in one part of mediaeval scholasticism.

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I reiterate our debt to Frobenius for his sense of the reality in what is held in the general mind. Dr Rouse found his Aegean sailors still telling yarns from the Odyssey though time had worn out Odysseus' name, down through O'ysseus, already latin Ulysses, to current Elias, identified with the prophet.

Of the seven sages we in like manner conserve a few maxims: Heraclitus' "Everything Flows", somebody's "nothing in excess" and with effort of memory from the school list "Know thyself".

The Christian examination of conscience is not much better. Saving one's soul may be of interest *in a system*, but in ignorance of that system, in default of a motto that Yeats once printed in an early volume of poems, and had, when I cited it to him, forgotten: God hath need of every individual soul. . . . , your Xtian examination degenerates into mere cerebral onanism. As hell-dodging it is a personal matter, and as pie in **the** sky it is merely a greed system with imbursement delayed.

The greek injunction is glib whereas the Confucian Great Learning, the examination of motivation, is an examination with a clear purpose.

It is a root, the centre of steadily out-circling causa-



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tions from immediate order to a whole series of harmonies and good conducts.

CIVILIZATION, to define same:

### 1

To define it ideogramically we may start with the "Listening to Incense". This displays a high state of civilization. In the Imperial Court of Nippon the companions burnt incense, they burnt now one perfume, and now another, or a mixture of perfumes, and the accomplishment was both to recognize what had gone materially into the perfume and to cite apposite poems.

The interest is in the blend of perception and of association.

It is a pastime neither for clods nor for illiterates.

### 2

They say when Younghusband finally got to Lhasa he found a man from Connecticut selling stove pipes. Commerce precedes. But after Fenollosa, among my honoured compatriots in the higher exploration I shd. propose for distinction Katharine Carl. It appears that the St Louis exposition of sometime or other desired the Dowager Empress's portrait, and sent out a lady who appears to have passed the rest of her time doing squashy water-colours in the St Louis style of that period. Under the insistence of the Empress she turned out what appears in reproduction to be an excellent work of

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art, in the course of producing which she observed the Dowager charming birds, definitely luring at least one down from a tree when the court ladies couldn't. Mrs Carl also describes the old lady painting or writing the ideograms, writing them large and with great and delicate perfection so that they were prized by recipients.

This book<sup>1</sup> records a high degree of civilization. Fenollosa is said to have been the second European to be able to take part in Noh performance. The whole civilization reflected in Noh is a high civilization.

The ghost of Kumasaka returns not from a grudge and not to gain anything; but to state clearly that the very young man who had killed him had not done so by a fluke or slip, but that he had outfenced him.

The play Kagekiyo has Homeric robustness. The Noh is not merely painting on silk or nuances *a la* Chas. Condor.

### 3

Let me set it down as a matter of record, in case this book lasts fifty years, that men of my generation in the Occident have witnessed the belly-flop or collapse of a number of kingdoms and empires, all of them rotten, none of them deserving any pity or two words of regret. Among putridities it is difficult to make a just estimate. The Grand Dukes stank no worse than Basel, the Banque de France, or other political producers. They sold their country. They had no moral splendour.

<sup>1</sup> *With the Empress Dowager of China*, by K. A. Carl, Century Co., N. York, 1906.

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Their flop did however for a few years enrich bohemia or la vie humaine des litterateurs by a dispersal of fragments.

During the downshoot of XIX t h century forms there remained a species of surface. A sort of immense cardboard raft intact on, as it were, a cataract of stale sewage. A room of Madame Tussaud's as it might have been.

*I am not merely taking a pot shot at something I, personally, loathe, I am contrasting the fine flower of a civilization with a species of rot and corruption.*

The denizens somewhat hushed, but not conscious, as it were perhaps semi-asphixiated but still smiling, shall we say with a touch of stiffness.

Men of my time have witnessed "parties" in London gardens where, as I recall it, everyone else (male) wore grey "toppers". As I remember it even Henry James wore one, and unless memory blends two occasions he wore also an enormous checked weskit. Men have witnessed the dinner ceremony on flagships, where the steward still called it "claret" and a bath oliver appeared with the cheese. (Stilton? I suppose it must have been stilton.)

Such activities may be called natural phenomena, to be distinguished from more numerous "efforts", by which I mean social events whereunder one sensed a heave, an unhabitual outlay.

I isolate social habit, custom indicating high culture, from exceptional individuals, let us say those who made history or have at least appeared in the story.

Apart from things seen, and more pertinent to my

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ideogram at this moment: von X. had never been out of uniform from the time he was six until the end of the "war" (1919).

*I am not in these slight memories, merely "pickiri' daisies". A man does not know his own ADDRESS (in time) until he knows where his time and milieu stand in relation to other times and conditions.*

Countess M. (an italian title) counted her high water mark a wedding at the court in St Petersburg. My most prolific Urquell, source of these notes, has been an ex-diplomat, ex-imperial staff officer, reduced along with dukes k.t.l. to flats, restaurants and intercourse with untitled humanity.

Comfortably at the Regence he remarked that if you are covered with brass chains, a sword, etc.; if your sartorial sheath is rigid and every time you move something jangles you naturally do not loll, you sit still and upright. Considering simply the phrase "good society" it appeared that he had seen some, for example the Duchess of D. never spoke. She nodded. She had the dignity of a temple image, and various nods and bobs eliminated all need of verbal expression.

It being then 1925 I asked if any remained. He meditated and finally thought there was some left in Spain.

"Is it a society in which you wd. care tq spend much of yr. time?"

"Good GOD, no!!" said the general.

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## 4

Against this a few evenings in Brancusi's old studio, wherein quiet was established.

"The quality of the sage is like water."<sup>9,1</sup>

I don't know the source of Allan Upward's quotation.

A few evenings in the Palazzo Capoquadri listening to Mozart's music.

I am setting down "social" as distinct from personal events. I am not counting "spectacles", people brought somewhere to see or to hear a show.

*In attempting to discover "where in a manner of speaking etc. we have got to" (ref. H. James plus Madox Ford's exegeses) one can use allegory or data, trifling or grave things seen. The Goncourt insisted that the top belongs to reality no less than the bottom. H. J.'s excuse for some of his characters was that "if they didn't exist and if no counterparts existed we, still, ought for the honour of the race to pretend that they existed". Landor finding no good conversation had to pretend it had sometimes existed.*

If one is to measure merely by brilliance, the maximum I have known was at Picabia's of a Sunday about 1921 or '22.

<sup>1</sup> This text is interpreted in various manners.

## Section III

### 10. GUIDE

**T**he present opusculus is listed even in the early business arrangements between my agent and publishers as "A guide to Kulchur" (verbatim), "to be known provisionally as a Guide to Culture", sic. the contract. To avoid mysterious carriage of body designed to conceal defects of the intelligence.

A definite philosophical act or series of acts was performed along in 1916 to '21 by, as I see it, Francis Picabia. If he had any help or stimulus it may have come from Marcel Duchamp. Picabia may have been touched up by Eric Satie. I know of no other intelligences implied in the process. There were participants in a "movement" but they were, so far as I know, not sources of movement.

Bayle and Voltaire used a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* for the destruction of hoakum. Picabia got hold of an instrument which cleared out whole racks full of rubbish.

"Europe exhausted by the conquest of Alsace Lorraine." The transposition of terms in idæes regues. The accepted cliché turned inside out, a, b, c, d; being placed

b, d, c, a,

c, b, d, a, etc., in each case

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expressing as much truth, half truth or quarter, as the original national or political bugwash.

That anyone shd. have tried to use Picabia's acid for building stone, shows only the ineradicable desire of second-rate minds to exploit things they have not comprehended.

After Dada there came a totally different constructive movement. Based on the inner need of a couple of painters to paint; in certain permanent facts of human mental existence and sprouting in a field utterly unconscious (as far as one cd. see) of ancestry and tradition.

The young frenchmen of 1920 had NO elders whom they cd. in any way respect. Gourmont was dead. The war had thrown up a few stuffed monkeys, third rate gallic ^ffigies, cranks who hadn't even the excuse of being British to account for their holding the tosh of Manchester they emitted, the bunk of a Romain Rolland, the vacuity of a Gide.

Apart from the unclean daily press of Barres etc. etc.

The stream of thought that had made the *Mercur* in the beginning, trickled out into the sand. A concept of literary integrity remained among weaker brethren who have finally been gathered into their graves. France rose after 1870 and almost disappeared after 1918. I mean to say that anything that cd. have caused Henry James' outburst of devotion to France, anything that cd. have made Paris the focus of human respect and intelligence and of "respect for intelligence" entered a phase of non-being.

A few more than middle aged gents had reminiscences.

## GUrDE

Hennique remembered Flaubert and Maupassant. Men distinctly of the second line conserved this, that or the other.

A new boiling of french talents was as grossly avid and as vulgar as Lorimer, without even the natural American gusto and genuine unconsciousness of all civil values. Lorimer honestly didn't know that there ever had been a civilization.

The post-war frogs *a grand tirage* were a set of perruquiers. They differed from the yankee and cockney shekel chasers only in being more cheaply for sale.

"I thought I was among men of letters," said Z. "and suddenly saw they were garage assistants." You can get the meaning of this from Willy's pharmacien. Willy's figures of fun were inheriting the seats of the serious. Willy and the earlier Abel Hermant are the recorders of an epoch and of part of an epoch preceding. A civilization definitely runs down when for its best you go *away* from serious books to the comics, from comics to the theatre, from the theatre to the cult of the music-hall.

Which is not to sneer at the music-hall or at Mr Eliot's obit for Marie Lloyd. At a given point the word ceases. The observer inexperienced in music-hall technique finds more *literary* sense in George Mozart than in the British novelists of 1919.

Ellen Terry said to me that she wasn't clever enough to have made a success in the halls. There is a distinct decadence when interest passes from significance—meaning the total significance of a work—into DETAILS of technique.



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That sentence must not be taken to contradict my sentence of 30 years ago that technique is the test of a writer's sincerity. The writer or artist who is not intolerant of his own defects of technique is a smear.

But the aim of technique is that it establish the totality of the whole. The total significance of the whole. As in Simone Memmi's painting. The total subject IS the painting.

When the userer climbs into the saddle you have attention absorbed by the detail, colour, lighting etc. to DETRIMENT of the total reason for the work's coming to be.

*Hugh Selwyn  
Mauberley*

BY

*E. P.*



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## ODE POUR L'ÉLECTION DE SON SÉPULCHRE



OR three years, out of key with his time,  
 He strove to resuscitate the dead art  
 Of poetry ; to maintain " the sublime "   
 In the old sense. Wrong from the start—

No hardly, but, seeing he had been born  
 In a half savage country, out of date ;  
 Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn ;  
 Capaneus ; trout for factitious bait ;

" Ἰδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ' , ὅσ' ἐνι Τροίῃ  
 Caught in the unstopped ear ;  
 Giving the rocks small lee-way  
 The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.

His true Penelope was Flaubert,  
 He fished by obstinate isles ;  
 Observed the elegance of Circe's hair  
 Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.

Unaffected by " the march of events,"  
 He passed from men's memory in *l'an trentiesme*  
*De son eage* ; the case presents  
 No adjunct to the Muses' diadem.



HE age demanded an image  
Of its accelerated grimace,  
Something for the modern stage,  
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries  
Of the inward gaze ;  
Better mendacities  
Than the classics in paraphrase !

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,  
Made with no loss of time,  
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster  
Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

**IN A STATION OF THE METRO**

THE apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough.

**THE END**