

are now the sole province of top management. Raising the plane of ethical conduct requires lowering the wall of separation between these two layers of management. If the wall is not lowered, it may again become the hiding place behind which conspiracy can renew its life.

Desmond Chute, 1895—1962

WALTER SHEWRING

Stanley Spencer has left it on record how in 1916, among the miseries and the friendlessness of a military hospital in Bristol, he was suddenly aware of someone who, 'like a Christ visiting Hell', came walking down a stone passage towards him: 'a young intellectual named Chute'.¹ In April 1940, a few months before his own death, Eric Gill wrote in his *Autobiography*: 'of Father Desmond I shall say little because my love for him is too intimate, too much a matter of daily companionship and discussion and argument, too close a sharing of life and work and ideas and doubts and difficulties - the only man and therefore the only priest with whom I have been able to talk without shame and without reserve.'² Ezra Pound, no blind admirer of the clergy, was present at Father Desmond's funeral. It falls to me to offer some coherent account of this remarkable man, perhaps the most widely gifted of all English priests of his own time, yet one who through accidents of circumstance remained comparatively unknown. It is easy to gather recollections of him; it is hard now to convey to a younger generation the things he stood for.

He was born at Bristol on September 11, 1895, a collateral descendant of William Charles Macready, the Shakespearian actor whose surname was his own second name; his family had kept links with the stage, and still owned the Prince's Theatre at Bristol. In 1906 he went to Down-

¹Maurice Collis, *Stanley Spencer* (1962), pp. 49-51, 67-68. Dates are confused; in 1916 Desmond was twenty.

²p. 209. Cf. Eric Gill, *Letters* (1947), p. 448.

side; brilliant from the first, a classical pupil of Neville Watts and later Head of the School, he might well have become a scholar of Balliol or of King's, and this would have pleased both his parents; but in 1912 he chose instead to enter the Slade.³

In 1915 or 1916 he first met Eric Gill, perhaps in or outside Westminster Cathedral. Whatever the circumstances of the meeting, there could be no doubt of its result. Henceforth, Eric Gill was master and Desmond was disciple – a master by no means infallible, a disciple by no means uncritical; but master and disciple they were and remained. Soon after this – I am again not sure of dates – Desmond joined Eric on Ditchling Common. He became an apprentice in the workshop, learning, re-learning and unlearning. What was meant by apprenticeship in that context he himself described some forty years later in a fragmentary writing which I hope may yet be published. It is hard to assess Desmond's own work of this period (roughly 1916–1921). The best, no doubt, was done in co-operation;⁴ he came early enough to help with the later Stations at Westminster, and his last task as apprentice may well have been some part in the great New College War Memorial – perhaps the most beautiful of all post-mediaeval works in Oxford. I know merely through photographs two fine small stone crucifixes, both in relief. Working for Father John O'Connor – a formative influence in spirituality and liturgical wisdom – he collaborated in some detail with Eric Gill for the Stations in St Cuthbert's Church.⁵ No doubt he had also shown already his particular gift for portraiture, but I can cite no early example.⁶ Some good engravings belong to this time – such things as the *Purgatory* in *The Game* (Vol. III no. 2) and *It is Consummated* in *Songs to Our Lady of Silence*. And in his last few months at

³Whether this was a good thing or bad thing I can't decide – so often, in our perverted age, technique is the enemy of art; the Slade provided technique. Desmond relished afterwards the possible applications of Mother Julian's sentence: 'And anon he falleth into a slade, and taketh full great sore.'

⁴As he wrote himself: 'To anyone who has learnt a craft in a workshop, the elaborate *expertise* whose aim is to spot the master's hand, isolating his work from that of the school, is simply laughable. The touches of the master are as fleeting as they are frequent, whereas the imprint of his mind is everywhere, and not least in what he has least touched.'

⁵Eric Gill, *Letters*, pp. 148, 153, 163, 175. Time and circumstance have not been kind to these Stations.

⁶His best portraits are pure line-drawings and are psychologically convincing. Sometimes he added colour; sometimes he used a landscape background. Eric Gill's *Letters* have at p. 214 a portrait of E.G. by D.C. (distinct from that in the National Portrait Gallery), and at p. 346 one of D.C. by E.G.

Ditchling he taught the rudiments of engraving to a *miglior fabbro*, David Jones.⁷

He had other activities. He taught the Gill children to sing. In 1918, during Eric's conscription, he became a general overseer of the house and workshop. And he contributed poems to *The Game* - some of them personal religious lyrics, fevered, Thompsonian and best forgotten, but two of them roundels that still read well. *The Game* is now very hard to find (not least of the ironies that dogged the fortunes of Ditchling is that this small, unworldly and beautiful magazine, with its one-and-sixpenny sales to friends and neighbours, its practical aims of social reform, its pious intemperate utterances, should now be gloated over by cynical book-collectors or the puzzled librarians of institutions). So I print again this *Roundel on a Theme by R.H.*⁸

Every leopard lark or rose,
Every song or hue or scent,
Of one WORD is eloquent
Who from His Father's bosom flows.

Every tree that straightly grows,
Every bough that's crook'd or bent,
Every leopard lark or rose,
Every song or hue or scent.

The worm that on its belly goes
Doth HIS infinitude present
Who on this earth hath spread His tent;
Doth HIS loveliness disclose
Every leopard, lark or rose.

I quote this poem of Desmond Chute's both for its own sake and as embodying most faithfully his lifelong love of all visible things and his complete Augustinian acceptance of the theological truths involved in creation. One of the scandals he always felt keenly was that many Catholics, including of course many priests, should regard whole families of created things as ugly and contemptible or should arrogate to themselves the right to kill animals for pleasure. His feeling for land-

⁷From their earliest acquaintance Desmond was conscious of the greater gifts of this friend, and he lived long enough to be enthralled by the *Anthemata*. I am glad to see, as I write this memoir, that some of my judgments have been anticipated by Mr Jones (letter to *The Tablet*, 20 October, 1962).

⁸*The Game* Vol. II, no. 3 (1918), p. 55. In Vol. IV no. 4 (1921), p. 50, is the other roundel, from Charles d'Orléans: *The year hath cast his cloak away*.

scape was intense; in this he differed from Eric Gill. Bernard Berenson, I believe, said once that the appreciation of painting was a means to the appreciation of landscape. To Eric this judgment would have appeared perverse; Desmond might have questioned its terms but would have been in sympathy. For Eric, it was above all the tiny exact detail that was movingly beautiful - the daisy in the grass, the skeleton of a leaf, the white functional bones of some small animal; for Desmond, these were of course beautiful, but much more so the whole - the seascape or the landscape of the Riviera di Levante.

He had many friends at this period whom the scope of this memoir forbids me to particularize. I must mention, and only mention, Father John Gray, André Raffalovich, Hilary Pepler, Reginald Lawson, Roger Kynaston. Stanley Spencer remained in correspondence with him, and - pining in Macedonia for his lovelier Cookham - sent him the remarkable autobiographical letter which was printed in *The Game* (Vol. III, no. 1, 1919). Above all these towered Father Vincent McNabb, whose influence throughout Desmond's life was second only to that of Eric Gill. I should like to stress that this influence remained none the less real because of certain doctrinal disagreements that sooner or later showed themselves. Father Vincent had a strong vein of puritanism; he ruthlessly subordinated all other arts to the art of agriculture; at a later crisis, he seemed unconscious of the moral problems of modern war. In anyone else these things would have been a diriment impediment to understanding and to reverence; in Father Vincent they were not; his sheer violent sanctity carried everything before it, and from private and intimate correspondence I am sure that till the end of his life Desmond saw in Father Vincent a permanent standard of truth, a permanent guide in spirituality.

Desmond was already a Dominican Tertiary. Towards the end of 1921 he left Ditchling to study for the priesthood at Fribourg. These studies, like many activities in his later life, were continually interrupted by tubercular symptoms and by neurotic and other troubles. But Fribourg meant a great deal to him - among other things, he heard Père Allo lecturing there on the Apocalypse. He was ordained priest at Downside on September 25, 1927. For a short time afterwards he remained in England, then left for Rapallo, which he already knew, and which doctors recommended to him as the kindest climate for his complaints. Here he remained almost continuously till his death, and it is against that background that all but his earliest friends will remember him.

At Rapallo and thereabouts he had a few English friends who shared his knowledge and love of Italy; with more conventional English residents – the retired colonels and public schoolmasters – he remained on courteous but distant terms. He was happy to know Ezra Pound, who in many ways sympathized with his ideas and who introduced him to Yeats.⁹ He met Max Beerbohm but never became an intimate. In his own villa – first S. Giorgio, then S. Raffaele – he had a constant succession of English guests; many Dominicans, travelling through Rapallo to Rome, will remember his hospitality; at Christmas 1936 Eric and Mary Gill and I were staying with him in his own house while Christopher and Valerie Dawson came in every day from a *pensione* nearby.

But on the whole he had chosen Italy and the Italians, whose language he spoke with sophistication and wrote with more grace than some Italian novelists. Let me try to recollect some scenes from a world now very distant indeed. Rapallo between the wars. Vines, olives, cypresses, oleanders . . . Desmond and I are guests of Marchesa S., whose ancestor painted by Velasquez had the very nose that now dominates our group; we sit in a sub-tropical garden with lapping waves a few feet below; tall, handsome, red-bearded and elegantly cloaked, Desmond converses on local happenings with two old ladies who have momentarily emerged from the pages of Fogazzaro; as we rise to go, the elder one kisses his hand . . . Now we are at a concert which Desmond himself has helped to plan; he has joined forces with Ezra Pound to bring to Rapallo a string quartet which will play a recent work by Bartók and a seventeenth-century English fantasy; tomorrow he will write for *Il Mare* a polished and searching article on this music; just now he is listening; or in the less exacting moments he may stealthily take pencil and paper and begin to draw another listener's face . . . Or we are at his own villa in the evening; perhaps there is music again, with Desmond at the piano accompanying Olga Rudge in a violin sonata of Pergolesi; or perhaps Gino de Negri has come from Genoa to discuss some problems of translation in his version of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*; or there is a guest from Bordeaux to whom in irreproachable French Desmond recounts his talk with Paul Valéry on the matter of verse technique, or his meeting with James Joyce in Paris and the drawing of his portrait.

⁹A recorded talk of his about Yeats and Pound was broadcast on Christmas Eve, 1955 and was printed in *The Listener*, 5 January, 1956, with reproductions of his own portraits of both poets.

All these scenes are characteristic; and my reader now, or a casual acquaintance then, might have the impression of a highly gifted man of the world who happened also to be a priest – an *abbé* of conventional fiction. But no; let me add more details, not to cancel the first but to change their relevance. He did enjoy fashionable society, he did enjoy meeting celebrities, but he was not credulous about either; he was well aware how easily the social patriciate may coincide with the intellectual plebs, and what spiritual void may underlie the brilliance of a famous critic or *avant-garde* painter. He was much admired – I suppose he was rather spoiled – by the great ladies of the Ligurian nobility; but perhaps more devoted to him still were the humble *bagnino* on the beach, or the old sailor who once boasted to him ‘I speak three languages – Italian and Genoese and foreign’, or the widows of shopkeepers and workmen whom he visited in their affliction.¹⁰ He had an aristocratic respect for good servants, and was blessed with some admirable ones himself; two were brothers whose peasant father on his deathbed had rejected doctors and asked for the Blessed Sacrament in the words: ‘Medici non ne voglio; portatemi il Re dell’ universo.’

In his periods of health – which were sometimes long, but would always end in swift collapse – he did active and even strenuous work for various good causes – the Liturgical Apostolate, the Apostleship of the Sea,¹¹ and the *Protezione della Giovane*, which last society, though normally busied with quiet ladylike tasks, had certain encounters with the grim Italian criminal underworld which were of the most terrifying kind. To anyone who was Desmond’s guest it was a surprising and exhausting experience to accompany him on a typical day’s work in Genoa, as he moved from one centre to another, talked, organized, persuaded, illuminated; he seemed tireless throughout the day and crumbled suddenly at its close. These were obviously clerical activities, as were also his visits to the mountain shrine of Montallegro behind Rapallo, where he liked when he could to hear confessions in the summer days when pilgrims crowded there most. But equally edifying in

¹⁰One of these, a Tuscan who had married a Genoese, replied to his condolences: ‘Yes, he was a very good husband, a wonderful husband; but – would you believe it, Father? – till his dying day the poor man could never hear the difference between *tórta* and *tòrta*.’

¹¹He helped to found this Apostleship at Genoa and did much work on an Italian prayer-book for sailors of which he presented a copy to Pius XI. The audience was to have been of five minutes, but the Pope stayed for half an hour, asking questions about the Apostleship and listening intently to the answers; Desmond’s mother kneeled beside in ecstasy.

another way was his constant direct encouragement of all such good work in traditional style as still survived in that part of Italy. In particular there was the little shop which sold pottery from Umbria; Desmond bought from this eagerly for his chapel and house and guests, discussed workmanship with the owner and warned him of this or that kind of pattern where the devil was creeping in. More interesting still was the lawn-and-lace shop over the bridge, because this was a real workshop where things were made before they were sold. Signora D. had, say, ten apprentices, and taught them lace-making in the traditional Genoese style; the hours were long, but the girls who stayed were glad to be there; looking rather like so many Lucias from the stiff early engravings to Manzoni's novel, they did work which would have given prestige to a museum, and a few years later they would have earned their dowries and would make most exemplary wives. As Desmond ordered a handkerchief for a godchild or a new towel or pall for his chapel, as he discussed the style and stitch of these or sympathized over a recent death in the family of one of the girls, he seemed to be very particularly at home. The girls and their mistress were less effusive with him than marchionesses were, but besides reverencing him as a priest they paid him the compliment of taking his understanding for granted. The *reverendo* knew perfectly well what lace was like, what work and workshops were like, what human persons were like; for a friend's wedding or for the daily liturgy in his chapel he would demand the best work that was to be had, would criticize anything that fell short and would praise what reached the mark. Everything was as it should be, and the austere shade of Father Vincent could scarce forbear to smile.

In the summer of 1939 Desmond made one of his few visits to England; he went back with me to Italy in September, and after a few blissful days in the Charterhouse of Pavia we went on to Rapallo and heard there the declaration of war. I returned to England a few days later, and he remained. To him the war was especially bitter; not only because of his conviction that modern warfare was immoral (this at a time when to most Catholics the idea of Catholic conscientious objection was still as strange as the story of St Martin himself) but also because of his position as an Englishman in Italy. He now had Italian friends who were ready by fair means or foul to liberate Europe from the menace of Communism, even if this meant a temporary alliance with Communism itself; he had English friends who were ready by fair means or foul to defend the integrity of Poland, even if this meant the eventual signing away of that integrity into the hands of Stalin; on either

side, pious Christians acquiesced in the bombing of civilians and refugees, of Protestant chancels and of Catholic tabernacles. A Catholic priest in a madhouse cannot act precisely as one in an ordinary hospital. Father Desmond did what he could.¹²

As things turned out, it was a hospital in the literal sense that gave Father Desmond one of the best opportunities of his life. For some months after Italy entered the war he had been left unmolested, but a time came when he and other aliens and suspects were suddenly told to leave Rapallo with what they could carry and make their way to an unknown destination – at first, I believe, by lorry, then simply on foot. At some stage of this adventure occurred the interview I record later, which gave him a relative freedom in captivity. His journey ended at Bobbio, and here for some time he lodged in a hospital which was nominally directed by nuns. Whatever their standards in times of peace, the nuns had abandoned them now; patients had lost the normal rights of patients. To Father Desmond this seemed very shocking indeed; so also it seemed to a communist military prisoner – a Yugoslav sergeant, I think – who was in the same galley and who allied himself with Desmond immediately. Desmond forgot his usual status as an invalid and privileged person and simply joined forces with this samaritan in ministering to the humblest needs of the sick and wounded and poor there present; I should think the nuns ended by being edified. Later these crying necessities were seen to; Desmond himself was given a room in the Bishop's palace, and did useful work of another kind by instructing seminarians in liturgy and the chant; at the same time he began to write a scholarly study of St Columban's life at Bobbio.¹³ But I like to think of him with his communist friend in the hospital. So many of our corporal works of mercy are performed by metaphor or by proxy; these were not.

When the war ended, Desmond returned to Rapallo; for some time he was very poor, and he eked out his small allowance by giving English lessons, in which he insisted that no one can really understand English who cannot read Shakespeare well aloud; a criterion recalling Macready.

¹²After the war, he rebuilt at his own expense in the main church of Rapallo the Chapel of the Redeemer destroyed by his countrymen, adding a memorial to a priest friend who had then been killed in the confessional (*inter remittenda peccata animam pro ovibus posuit*). The donor, says the inscription, was *Desmundus Macready Chute, sacerdos, Anglicus natione*. Two further words may be supplied from Dante's tenth letter.

¹³Two chapters of this were published in the *Downside Review* of 1949 (nos. 208 and 209).

Slowly things eased; English friends began to revisit him, and in 1947 he could welcome Mary Gill and a granddaughter whom I brought out to Italy. Eric Gill had died in 1940, and this I suppose was the greatest grief of Desmond's life. In the succeeding years he began various studies which were meant as an elucidation, an extension, in some respects a correction, of his master's philosophy. These, like much other work he projected, were continually thwarted by real and painful illness and also by hypochondria.¹⁴ He planned an ambitious preface to a volume on Eric Gill's sculptures and drawings; it was work which he might have done better than anyone, and it was a great joy to him to be employed upon it, but it was still unfinished when his health collapsed altogether. His memory became intermittent, his senses failed him gradually. He died peacefully with the rites of the Church on September 14, 1962.

It would be possible to hold that had his health been normally good Father Desmond Chute might have visibly achieved great things, have been a memorable writer, draughtsman, philosopher of art. I do not myself think this; I think that his very sensibility towards so many things was of a kind incompatible with important 'creative art'; a great artist must indeed be sensitive, but he also needs an intellectual hardness, a sharpness of resolution which Desmond never had. And though I am very sorry that some few things such as the Gill preface remain unfinished, I think that his main achievement in any case would not have been any book or other visible work of art, but his own personal integration of life and thought.

I cannot hope to transmit the sense of that integration to those who live in so changed a world. But let me recall one more incident. At some stage in his wartime wanderings, Father Desmond confronted a German officer who one by one was examining the exiles. 'Father Chute? We have a note about you. You have been very kind to our people. You were called to see Private S. who was dying; you gave him the Last Sacraments, you stayed with him till the end, you made sure of his address and saw that a letter went to his mother. We are grateful to you.' Father Desmond, who was in no mood to bandy civilities with the occupying power, replied rather stiffly: 'I have not been particularly kind to your people. I am a Catholic priest, and I did my ordinary duty.'

¹⁴Bibliography. Obituary of E.G. in *Osservatore Romano*, 28 February, 1942. Italian translation of *Social Justice and the Stations of the Cross* printed in battered unauthorised form in *Humanitas*, Brescia, March 1951. *Blackfriars*, December 1950 and January 1951 (*Eric Gill: A Retrospect and Eric Gill and the Money-Changers*). *Catholic Art Quarterly*, U.S.A.: *Thomist Aesthetics* (Pentecost 1949); *Eric Gill* (Christmas 1953); *Sacred, Holy or Religious Art* (Michaelmas 1954)

‘Well,’ said this officer, who also should not go unhonoured, ‘we are grateful to you all the same. In a moment I shall tell you to leave. Take not this door but the one on the right. Go through. No one will ask you who you are or why you are there. You will walk straight on.’

Perhaps the main thing is as simple as that. Desmond Chute was essentially a Catholic priest, living a full life with wide spiritual sympathies extending alike to the dignities of a departing social order, to the intellectual subtleties of the Mozart *Concertante* or the *Anthemata* of David Jones, to the traditional workman and to all trades with their gear and tackle and trim, to the victims of war and the harried cats and dogs of Genoa. Of a piece with this are the instructions concerning his death, written in inimitable Italian but roughly to be translated thus: ‘In reverence and love for the Sacred Liturgy, I desire that my requiem shall be sung with deacon and subdeacon; apart from this, let my funeral be like the funerals of the poor. Let me be buried in the habit of a Dominican Tertiary and in all the vestments of a priest. If I do not die in England, let my tombstone bear only the dates: birth, ordination, death; and the words: DESMOND MACREADY CHUTE: PULVIS ATTAMEN SACERDOS.’

Survey

FIVE YEARS OF SPACE

On October the 4th, 1957, the world was startled by the announcement that the Russians had put a satellite, Sputnik I, successfully into orbit. The launching, coupled with the relatively large size of the satellite, caused widespread alarm in the United States. The Americans had already announced their intention of launching a number of small satellites as part of their contribution to the International Geophysical Year, which began in July 1957. Practically the only hint that the Russians intended anything similar was given by an article in a Soviet magazine for Radio amateurs, which in July 1957 asked enthusiasts to prepare receiving systems in the 20 and 40 Megacycle Bands for satellite reception, laid down the form in which observations should be taken, and gave a telegraphic address, Moskva-Sputnik, to which they should be sent. This article passed unnoticed in the West.