

## TOWARDS INNOCENCE REGAINED

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**T**HERE is such a thing as Progress, even with a capital P. The word has been discredited by those whose concept is superficial; who see plumbing as of the essence of progress, or a higher school-leaving age a gain regardless of what is taught in the schools. Over a short span progress is hard to plot. Fifty years ago people died of starvation in British slums: today no one need starve in Britain. Yet the majority are perhaps less happy in their work. Again, fifty years ago Russians who were sent to Siberia were at least treated as men: today in their slave camps their descendants are treated like beasts, and valued as such. British children are now kept longer at school: yet juvenile delinquency has increased and seems at the moment to become more vicious. In many ways do we see both progress and retrogression active in society, until there appears to be no constant direction, only a heaving flux in men's affairs. Seeing it, some of us turn cynical or irresponsible, others turn to a brutal materialism, an idealism that condones diabolism as a means to an end that it poisons.

'We are not islands', we cannot dissociate ourselves completely from our fellow-men. The sons of Adam are one, although individual. That is perhaps why efforts to found ideal communities, cut off from the rest of the world, fail. Men are of their nature missionaries, they must share and pass on what they possess. Only in a very special way, by abnegation and withdrawing from normal social life, can religious communities survive: and they are not isolated, for they serve their fellows only by keeping their distance to serve better, withdrawn from some of the inevitable distractions, serving bodily, or, sometimes, by prayer alone.

While despair and depression are a perverted self-indulgence, if sometimes, and perhaps notably now, difficult to throw off, it is right for us to feel in ourselves the pain of those less happily placed, frustrated, starved, tortured, vitiated. Today when we know so quickly much of what goes on in far parts of the world, it is easy for any sensitive person to feel oppressed, to drift towards despair. Good men have killed themselves overwhelmed by the futility of nations that snarl and bicker with atomic bombs in

their hands. Yet happiness is not so much a reward as a duty, a happy duty, and it may be an imperative duty. That is where man's other and first service lies, in God, the source of happiness. He can only truly serve his fellows through God. Love must have polarity.

All about us we find things perverse and confusing. We find a peasant people, not a community of saints by any means, yet with a scale of values, and more, with an intuitive aptitude for living, something of its nature in communion with God; a people with an old, deep civilization rich in that Christian culture that is the basis of all Western European civilization. These people, happy, even serene in their rural environment, are by the whole force of the contemporary trend, with its ceaseless propaganda, sucked away into the industrial cities. Industrial cities can offer a dubious material progress, otherwise the life they provide appears only retrogressive, stabbed with ugly crimes of a witless, animal violence, self-assertion made against the smoke-dark backcloth by slashing the faces of strangers with a razor—not even, often, in order to steal, but in some protest rooted in God knows what bitterness. Nor, whatever limitations the peasant's scale of values may have, does it ever have that strait-jacket limitation of suburban prestige-values. Nature may at times be red in tooth and claw, but sun, earth, wind and rain intimately known bring a sanity, a renewal that is hard to find beneath the neon lights of shops, offices and factories.

It is startling to discover how quickly and with how little trace a peasant culture sinks beneath the trash of industrialism. Within one generation almost everything can be lost, dwindled like, commonly, the physique of the immigrants. Faults and weaknesses that may do little harm but remain half-dormant in a peasant community are fanned to destructive vigour in the shiftless life of the streets. An army of experts, planners, sociologists, has developed dormitory suburbs, laying the blame for crime and disease on overcrowding. Not infrequently the incidences of both disease and crime have increased in the new outer-urban communities. New theories and cures are being evolved, and new areas desolately developed. It is, however, doubtful whether vast, artificially-created communities can ever be satisfactory, for many reasons. They tend to lack focus and purpose: they have neither the consolations nor the space of the

countryside, nor, properly, the quality of the integrated city that can develop its own culture and unity. Yet the drift from country to urbanization continues everywhere unabated as it has now done for many years.

Impoverished dietary, soil-erosion, wastage of essential minerals, over-population, have all provided subjects for solemn warnings by experts of varying kind and validity. In fact, progress as seen by the materialists is losing caste, and with it withers another passing phase of heresy, not necessarily to be replaced by anything better.

Yet we can see that there has been progress. The development of a Moral Law reveals it. The Christian revelation has established it, not as has been optimistically hoped from time to time, by the establishing of an earthly paradise, but in the tremendous potential offered to each individual.

Despite the burden and scar of original sin, there is a palpable innocence of youth. It is lost by the individual in some manner analogous to the eating of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. The time of the loss varies. Some people seem never quite to lose their natal innocence. With others of us it rapidly diminishes, even from early childhood. But whatever state the soul may reach, regeneration is still proffered, and with it the knowledge that makes sin possible becomes acuter and makes sin increasingly painful. There is a growing desire for a renewal of innocence. Perhaps the bloom of the first innocence is irrecapturable, but the second innocence is a stronger one, it is a deliberate and a conscious innocence. Those who have fought so that they may receive this gift do not lightly lose it again. It is their utmost treasure, redeeming them from past evil, making present effort practicable, token of the soul's progress to the Beatific Vision.

Yet on his way towards a renewal of his innocence the human creature may visit many dark places and worship many strange gods. Even after his quest has become earnest, man blunders grotesquely. Probably the longing for innocence is never totally lost in this life: even we may see it perverted by animal lust and vitiated by possessiveness in the attraction that youth holds for the ageing sensualist.

In considering society, made up of millions of souls, it is harder to trace progress than it is with the individual. Different countries, races and civilizations seem to move quite out of step with one

another. One community lags while another shoots ahead: one facet develops quicker in southern lands, another in northern climates. Different elements seem to experience progress and retrogression concurrently. The picture is never clear. Yet, to confine it for the moment to our own Western European civilization, we do see a major change taking place at the time of the Renaissance: a change not unlike the child's growing into adolescence, the achieving of a knowledge of sin. Before that there had been light and shade, good and evil, but thereafter there was a greater, more general awareness. For long, of course, as by any adolescent, the change was seen only as good, as a liberation, the opening of new horizons: the past was primitive, rather shameful in its ignorance. But just as the adolescent comes later to perceive that growth has not been all gain, that there has been loss as well, so today a more considered judgment can even hanker for some elements of the pre-Renaissance spirit.

We perhaps see a manifestation of this in the still-growing enthusiasm amongst artists and art-lovers for the works of the Primitives. Something of the sheer deliberate virtuosity of Leonardo da Vinci now informs the work of the painter of the vulgarest advertisement. More serious artists seek escape from what has become superficial and obvious by a deliberate simplification, an effort to recapture the spirit of the Primitive. The results may be pleasing, but generally they inevitably suffer from being pastiche, conceived of a limited, a not entirely authentic simplicity. Youthful innocence, with its ability to express truths far beyond its analysis, is not so easily to be recaptured, not, in fact, precisely to be recaptured at all. Both the contemporary painter and his public have passed beyond the age of the innocent eye. Pleasant things may be produced but one might hazard that no great, no major, phase of art can arise again in a world that is reaching the end of its self-confident adolescence and finding the need for a second spring of innocence, until such day as the artist is ready to be a saint, and have, perhaps, a sanctified public for his setting.

Innocence cannot be assumed, it is either an endowment or, in a manner, won. In our private lives we have known even the worst heresies twist their way back to truth. The work of redemption goes on, we sustain it in sharing the suffering of the world, joyful at least in our acceptance. A period that thought itself

enlightened is entering the awful doubt that precedes the enlightenment of simplicity and innocence: innocence conscious, determined and possessed. We know the Nemesis that materialism has brought upon itself, the scientific disintegration of material things: we know the threat that that portends. Hundreds of years may be spent in chaos, and all that time the demand upon every individual who would serve society will become more imperative. A social conscience is not enough. Perhaps the next distinctive phase of progress can only be the achievement of heroic sanctity.

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## MORALS AND LANGUAGE

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**I**N his study of the tradition of thought in the early Middle Ages, a distinguished historian (Mr Richard Southern) remarks that it should be easier for us today than it was a hundred years ago to understand the fascination of logic for scholars of the eleventh century; for them as for us, 'Logic was an instrument of order in a chaotic world'. Mr Southern speaks as a historian and a humanist, for whom thought is more immediately apprehended as an orchestral scoring of the themes of human need and of moral concern than in its own proper cogency. Yet the paradox of moral philosophy lies in just this incommensurability of the humane and the analytic: the task of moral philosophy is somehow to mediate; to explore the complexity of the humane and to map it with a disciplined fidelity.

It might very well seem that the scholastic metaphysical tradition exhibits its inadequacy more patently here than anywhere else, with its manuals of moral theology, its solutions of problems of conscience by the numerical assessment of probable opinions, its approximation of moral philosophy to a demonstrative science, and more radically, with just this very metaphysical character itself. It is this last reproach which will specially concern us here.