

INSIDE OUT 2037

MONSIGNOR BOSCO CHANG felt cold and stiff and tired. He could not but compare this lumbering progress from the English coast, shaken and jolted in the clumsy coach along the rutty roads, with the ease and speed of travel in China, either by air or through the new compressor tubes, where you stepped into a private padded carriage, dialled your destination, and were shot there at 700 kilometres an hour. Why, one morning he had consulted the voice records at the great central phony of Nanking, lunched with his friend from seminary days the Vicar-General of Honan-Fu, seen his publishers at Canton in the afternoon, and started his retreat that very evening at the great Manresa in the Snowy Mountains on the borders of Tibet. So little friction, he reflected, so little distraction; the mind could concentrate and the will fix its desire on the Simple Sheer, unworried by the multitude of little things. But here one was so close to time and space, to all the trivial quantitative modalities of being; to soft and hard and sore and wet, the fleas, the cold, the grit, the shaking; congested veins and broken finger nails, the smell of a drink that lingered in the breath of the natives, sour and yet touched with the sweetness of chrysanthemums decaying in the late autumnal gardens round Ko-Hoa. And their minds and speech, so definite and slow, with the edges of a chunk of Cartesian matter and the labourings of an ox before the plough; their nerves, too, like so much muscle and bone.

The Monsignor was publishing a series of image-discs on the psychology of religion; his standard of scholarship was exacting, and he had decided that he must sense for himself the atmosphere of Oxford and Birmingham breathed by Newman. Incidentally he would also try to decide the question whether there were three Newmans, or two, or one; the cardinal, the musical critic, and the billiards' champion. In China opinions were divided, for a great darkness had settled on the West fifty years ago after the great civil wars; even the culture of North America had been destroyed by the wind

and dust, and the great towns lay dead and dry as the bones of camels along the old caravan routes of the Gobi Desert. He had landed a week before at the treaty-airport of Gravesend, and thence had slowly travelled through a land of scrubby trees and nettles and thistles, with frequent clearings where stood little villages, wooden shacks and cottages of brick and stone grouped round a church. He would always remember the stalks of brussels sprouts rising leggy and clammy from the mud; he wondered if they ever grew flowers in their gardens just for the fun of the thing, but he fancied not. Yet many of the natives were Catholics, to judge from the massy rosaries they wore over their smocks of rough frieze.

He judged he was now approaching the remains of a large city; the thickets grew more scarce, and instead of earth there were mounds of rubble half-covered by the growth of weeds. Birmingham, he said to himself, this must be Birmingham, famous for Priestly who had discovered nitrogen, for Chamberlain and his orchids, and for the Aston Villa Club. He was not Latin, yet he warmed as he mused on Rome his mistress; how Catholic she was, even her culture, how she touched everything; Priestly and Pontifex, Chamberlain and Camerlengo, the purple proudly worn by the heroes of the Aston Villa Order. Villa! he exclaimed aloud, what a roman ring! The piles of rubble grew closer and closer; in the less ruinous remains he was able to distinguish styles of architecture, Insurance Company Gothic, Edwardian Pompeian, Georgian Necropolis. The coach laboured painfully up a hill, and stopped in a large open space, thronged with coaches and wagons and hand-drawn sleds, surrounded by little booths selling flesh and cloth and spades and vegetables.

A young priest, distinguished by his tonsure, clean-shaven face and long dark gown, stepped forward and introduced himself: the Bishop's Secretary. He explained that the rural deans of the diocese were now holding their seasonal meeting and that the bishop's grange was full of hearty loud-voiced clerics; he regretted that consequently the Bishop could not offer hospitality to the distinguished visitor, but that arrange-

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ments had been made for him to stay with a prominent Catholic family of the town. Calling to some men to carry the Monsignor's gear, the priest led the way. On the left he pointed to a mass of rusty girders lying twisted and sprawling like a hundred giant spiders in death.

"The railway station," he said, "once. Most people regard it as a relic, but," he added wistfully, "to some of us it is more. We are called poets and dreamers and reactionaries; people ask us, do we really want to change our present lot, work and fresh milk and meat and women knowing their place and numerous families, all the advantages of the present distributist system, for the dark days of superstition, when machines did the work and the smoke of a thousand great chimneys threw a pall over the sky. Yet they were also the days when men could read the words of the sages and listen to music over the air, when more than half the babies lived to grow up and people did not die in anguish from gout in the stomach, and teeth"—he winced—"were attended to without pain. And every week the news from all over the Catholic world was presented in a paper the price of an egg." His tone heightened. "Some of us think we could restore the proper scale of values, release the mind from its present closeness to earth, and, as a practical proposition, run human life on such a theory. I know a man—actually the champion turnip-hoer in Warwickshire, so no one could call him a fool—who says that with good-will, some solder and oily rags, he could make an engine work and pull a hundred people to London in a day."

The Monsignor, touched by the simplicity of his companion, was about to embark on a description of the efficiency of Chinese technohumanism, but remembering the modesty proper to a visitor and the interest proper to a cleric, he asked instead whether the Church was well established and regarded in the country.

"About a third of the country is Catholic," replied the young priest, "perhaps another third is Christian, sharing in many of our practices. The rest is not really attached to any form of religion, though it lives in the same culture and according to the same liturgical rhythm of the seasons and

observes the great feast days. The Church, you see, offers the only relaxation in a routine of work, work, work; digging, shepherding, washing, spinning. The great bulk of the nation consists of peasants, artisans and shopkeepers, everybody must struggle for the security which he possesses as the owner of permanent property. . . ." He broke off to indicate a ruined temple in the Grecian style. "The old Town Hall. In it there is a curious machine made up of many pipes. The women, some of them, think it was the communal laundry. But I will not weary you with these speculations. By the side you will observe the famous statue of Queen Victoria, whose bounty still preserves the old cathedrals in repair; legend says she fought the Germans with chariots armed with knives on the wheels. Most people think she was terribly machine-minded because of that, and praise her chiefly for being the Virgin Queen; but a small group have adopted her as their patroness. You will meet them, I trust, young, zealous Catholics who, without much encouragement from official quarters would disengage human nature from the grind of toil, who would give women intellectual interests and make marriage more than a state of perpetual pregnancy, who even say that economically productive work is not a noble value in itself, not an end, only a means, imposed on man because of his fall from grace. Some of the clergy support them, and one of their leaders is the well-known Dominican, Father Bernard McGuiness. But here we are."

They had arrived at a long, low house, built of brick with wooden lean-tos, thatched with straw. The ground around was cleared of rubble, a large sow was asleep across the doorway, some nondescript hens were scratching in the front, behind were goats, clothes-lines, a patch of brussels sprouts. In the large living-room a dozen or so people were seated at a long table, at each end of which stood a great earthenware bowl steaming with stew. From another room came the whimper of a child. Introductions having been made, the Monsignor sat down and took stock of his company. The dapper, neat figure in the cassock of nankeen set off the shagginess of the others. They were like friendly bob-

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tails round a dainty black cat. They were very curious about life in China, life in the world beyond the Avon and Trent. Had he ever visited Rome?

He described the old city, uninhabited except for the caretakers, all endowed with the first of the minor orders. He described the vast glass dome that covered it over to preserve it from the elements, and the ring of great hostels on the flat roofs of which the great air-liners landed with their cargoes of pilgrims, quiet Chinese most of them, and lean, energetic Italopians. He told them of his visit to the present Holy Father in the papal control chamber at the Magnetic North, the converging electrovolors dropping from the stratosphere like vultures, and then returning to their own countries with their precious parcels of image discs, made of harmonic wax and impressed by the Pope with the appropriate psychological reaction to any current problem.

The little Monsignor grew quietly elegant, and with modulated gestures spoke of the two great blocs of highly complicated Catholic civilization in Eastern Asia and Equatorial Africa. It was difficult to say which represented the greatest triumph of technohumanism. To the former, perhaps, machinery was more a means to contemplation, while to the latter it was more an effect. "We perfect the machine so that we may be released from the distraction of work, while in Africa they invent just for the sake of inventing. I think it is their Latin blood." He talked of the courteous old-world charm of Latin America, the drab workshops and prairie farming of Russia, and ended with a complimentary allusion to the interest an outsider must feel in the simple and unsophisticated life in the almost unknown lands of Cisalpine Europe. He felt uncomfortably conscious that perhaps he had been patronizing.

They had listened with eager and polite attention, but with little trace of envy, he thought. "Fancy having a fire that lights itself," observed a woman. "Don't your muscles decay," asked a man, "going everywhere on wheels and in balls and things." Another with a serious face, a long upper lip and straggly grey whiskers, wondered how the Church managed to keep its hold when there was so little need to

struggle with poverty and toil and original sin. "The elementary things," remarked the Chinese, "birth and love and death. As your proverb says, we are too big for our boots and cannot be at ease. St. Augustine says the same." The serious-faced man still did not see how it was possible and, with an expression of great respect, began to talk about the holiness and necessity of work.

The Monsignor was given a tankard of yellow liquid with foam on the top, and by fixing his mind on Pecci Yin's theorem on the conciliation of freewill and divine premotion in the fifth dimension was able to drink of it without incommoding his hosts with a wry countenance. He noticed a young man, different from the others in that his face was clean shaven, or nearly so, who caught his glance and came across the room to where the Monsignor was standing. "Would you care," he said, "to come with me, monsignor, and I will show you something different, more like China? People are quite nice about it, though they think we're mad and young. They don't take us seriously, though already the association of peasant farmers have tried to stop us, and some of the priests have preached on how wrong it is to try to change the foundations of society." He led the way outside to a shed, opened the door. There was something inside; the Monsignor recognized it for what once had been an automobile. Not like the fresh and glossy 1937 Rolls preserved in the museum at home; but a skeleton of a car, without tyres, and with two rush-bottomed chairs lashed to the chassis with thongs of hide. His companion pushed it out into the street, pointed it to the left, invited the Monsignor to take a seat, bent over the engine and did something with a flint and steel. There was an explosion, the young man jumped aboard, explosions, and with a start they were off.

Chang noticed with some anxiety that his companion did not steer, but sat holding the sides of his chair. As the vehicle was travelling quite slowly in a series of spasmodic jerks he resigned himself, and anyhow it stopped before the road took a turning. "How do you turn corners?" he enquired. "Timing," was the answer, "timing. You measure the amount of applejack to the distance you want to go; if

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it's brandy you don't use so much. Then you stop before you come to a corner, lift her nose round, and begin all over again. If it's not much of a corner you can sometimes get round by throwing your weight to one side or another."

Thus they progressed, to the smiles of the people and the cries of the children, stifled by the sight of the solemn little ecclesiastic sitting upright in his chair, until finally they came to a large leprous-grey building, rather less ruinous than the others around. "St. Lewis's," said the guide proudly, "the headquarters of the Victorian League and the scene of a great social experiment, the Catholic Back to the Town Movement. The Bishop has not committed himself beyond a blessing, and the chief peasant of the diocese who offered to give us a churn, some chickens and grain was snubbed by our secretary, who doesn't mince his words, quoted St. Paul *cujus deus venter est*, and said we were out to restore the rational values of life, and were pre-occupied with liberating man from material elements, not absorbing them. In any case we had discovered a considerable cache of food in tins."

They entered the building and went across to where a large windlass was worked. "The lift," explained the young man. "You go in and I'll wind you upstairs." Chang felt some anxiety, but with much creaking and swaying he was hauled up. The secretary came forward, a bright little robin of a man, wearing a bowler, a high celluloid collar, and a tuxedo over his smock. "Pleased to meet you, monsignor," he said. "Here are some leaflets explaining the movement, but let me show you round. Afterwards, if you can stay, you'll hear Father McGuinness, who is cycling over from Hawkfriars and is going to give us a talk.

"This," he said, "is the library. We are continually adding to our collection, discovering books and scraps of newspaper. What an age that must have been! When one could think alone with a clear printed page in front of one and not have to puzzle out handwriting on skins, when minds were stocked with a supply of facts and were gentle with sympathy, when words were plentiful and covered a multitude of meanings, when one could discourse with others

with subtle allusiveness, and argument was not closed with brutal images: call a spade a spade and have done with it, or, the Church says so and what is good enough for the Church is good enough for me. No speculation now, no disinterested curiosity; everything must work, and work in terms of soil and wood and plants and beasts. Spirit is immersed in matter despite the lip-service we pay to spirit in our religious ceremonies; the noblest human values are degraded, marriage is a property contract, and children are produced as so many more workers, everything is tied down to the physical necessities of life. But we have the key which will release us from this bondage. Machinery will liberate the soul for higher things. Less work, more contemplation. We appeal to primitive Christianity, to the spirit of the precept forbidding servile work on Sundays, to the economic unconcern of the religious founders, to the mysticism of St. John of the Cross.

"This is the cinema. Would you like to see a movie?" The oil lights round the room were extinguished by a bellows from which blow-pipes radiated to the lamps, a pallid circle of light was thrown on the wall and presently the Monsignor observed a muddy picture of a ship. The slide was jerked up and down to give the impression of movement. The lights were rekindled. "There," said the secretary, "we'll do better than that soon, we're going to draw a lot of pictures on a strip of some transparent stuff and pull it through rapidly.

"The gift of freedom," he went on, "universal truth, universal good; man was not made to be determined by one little spot, by the circumstances of his immediate environment. His mind and imagination should reflect the manifold beauties of creation. The more pictures the better. But Father McGuinness will have arrived by now."

They returned to the library where, surrounded by a crowd of young men and women, stood a priest in a long frock coat, a pleated stock with jet buttons, patent leather shoes, cycle clips round his trousers at the ankles. "Cycled from Hawkfriars in little over four hours," he said proudly.

"What a man!" murmured one of the bystanders admir-

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ingly, "he never walks anywhere if he can help it, and very rarely wears his robes. Detachment, and poverty of spirit, not wanting to be cluttered up with the visible things of this world, seeking to be as unconscious of his body as possible."

The Dominican began: "This afternoon I wish first to talk to you about the young but growing liturgical movement. I have just finished supplying for three weeks at a hamlet called Leicester. I was in charge, and I got the congregation into the way of listening to and liking Low Mass. At first they missed their High Masses, the walking about and long drawn-out plainsong, but I explained how worship was best performed in recollection and quietness of spirit. Then what would they do for the rest of Sunday morning? I had provided for that. One of your members lent me his gramophone and his four discs, and we listened to the Benedictine monks at Compline and the Boswell sisters singing their haunting religious songs in a strange dead language. It never seems to strike people that in the good old days, when men could call some of their time their own, the monks and nuns of the strictest and straightest persuasion were not averse from having their religious music reproduced by mechanical means.

"I have here," continued Father McGuiness, "a copy of a Catholic newspaper of a hundred years ago. It is called the *Catholic Herald*, though it contains little about tabards and sennets. True, there is a column about a tournament that was being fought out on a bridge. For the rest, it is instinct with the marvellous technohumanism of the time. On the front page there is an announcement of a mortgage society: 7 per cent per annum paid quarterly, redeemable debentures. We don't yet know what it was all about, I have set some of our young men at Hawkfriars working at the problem, but it seems that here was some scheme whereby people could meditate and love without the chronic anxiety of grinding toil. Also on the front page there is an article by an archbishop on Africa's Backward Races. Mark the word, comrades, backward. And why? Because they were living without the benefits of machinery.

"In those days it was realized that heartache was not a

noble state, but a morbid condition to be mastered—one of the first lessons of the spiritual life. Listen to this advertisement. Heartburn, it begins in big letters, and continues: many people suffer from this distressing condition without realizing that it is a form of indigestion produced by the decomposition of indigestible food retained in the stomach. And so easily cured, just a bottle of the original stomach powder. 1/3, 2/-, 5/-, never sold loose. Now it is a lengthy process, penances and ascetical exercises. We must strive to learn to profit more from divinely-instituted secondary causes; mortification is no substitute for magnesia.

“We are out to restore those days, to recover the true status of human nature through an intelligent adaptation of physical forces. We are faced with two main obstacles, the exaggerated localization of man by private property and the cult of work for work’s sake. But I will not go on. I am told we have among us”—he made a little bow in the direction of the Monsignor, “a distinguished representative of a Catholic culture which has surmounted these obstacles. But before asking him to talk to us, I wish to draw your attention to two recent publications by members of the League, a biography of the Venerable Volta and a learned study of the Cistercians in Yorkshire called *The First Big Business*. And now, if you please, Monsignor Bosco Chang . . .”

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