THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

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IN WRITING AND PAINTING

BY

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PREFACE

THIS is not a book for the expert. It was planned as a simple introduction to problems which have been more profoundly dealt with by others. I have written it in the belief that some explanation of the great aesthetic problems would be a help to the general reader, the picture-lover, the student at university or art-school, and members of senior forms at school who are beginning seriously to consider writing and painting. Indeed it was in a discussion group of scholarship candidates and others that the whole book found its origin.

I well remember how, at an early university lecture, I wrote down from dictation the name of an important book on aesthetics by Bowes and Kett. The first half of the name at least seemed familiar ! It was, I think, unimaginative of the lecturer to dictate the name to beginners. When, some years later, I encountered the work of Bosanquet, I felt that it was equally unimaginative to suppose that a raw undergraduate could understand it. I have tried in this book to assume on the part of the reader no large fund of critical lore, no wide experience of the arts. There is nothing new here, except perhaps the observation of a close resemblance between a drawing by Blake and a passage from

Hyperion. Consequently I feel that the book needs this short preface to explain its aim and scope. It is intended to provide a start. It is, I hope, a book that can be built on.

H. C.

Oundle
Nov. 7th, 1950

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THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

> I find that I cannot exist without poetry — without eternal poetry — half the day will not do — the whole of it — I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan — I had become all in a Tremble from not having written anything of late — the Sonnet over leaf did me some good.
>
> KEATS, *Letters*

THERE have always existed human beings who not only felt the impulse to create works of art but possessed the ability to do so, men and women for whom artistic creation and the communication of their experiences has been the only means of finding satisfaction.

This creative impulse is a mysterious element in human personality. In whatever state of civilisation or barbarism he has lived, in whatever age or country, man has almost always created, in word or line, colour or sound, works which admit of no purely utilitarian explanation. His architectural achievements, it is true, have arisen in the first place from the need to create dwellings and public buildings. But the same cannot be said of song, poetry, painting, sculpture and dance. Although it is believed that some of these had their origin in magic or religion, that in itself is an inadequate explanation of the urge to create works of art, for this urge continues where magical and religious motives have

been long forgotten, and where they have not existed. Even when it is granted that magic or religion provided the original inspiration for certain artistic manifestations, such as drama, the paintings of cave-dwellers and primitive sculpture, that admission does not in any way diminish the mysteriousness of the impulse and of the ability to create.

To understand the nature of the creative urge more fully it is necessary to discover how it is satisfied. It appears, if one considers the lives and utterances of painters and writers, that their happiness lies in the partial fulfilment, the most complete fulfilment possible to them which is none the less never absolutely complete, of certain deep-lying desires, and that this partial fulfilment can be achieved only through the creation of works of art. The first step then towards an understanding of the creative mind is an analysis of those deep-lying desires which the creative artist attempts to satisfy by his activity.

The artist[1] is a man with something very urgent to say. His nature leads him constantly to explore, constantly to seek new aspects of truth. Having attained to some understanding of what he believes to be true, he longs to give complete expression to the excitement of feeling or thought that the discovery arouses in him. His desire for expression therefore contains two elements: first, the wish to express what is true, and secondly, the wish to give this truth full and perfect expression; truth is a quality of what every artist is trying to say, and the expression

[1] This book is concerned with writing and painting. To avoid the repetition of such expressions as "the writer and the painter" the word "artist" has been used throughout to denote both writer and painter.

of it constitutes his craft, his technique.

In his craft, his means of expression, the artist is, consciously or unconsciously, trying to achieve perfection. He is an idealist in the sense that he can conceive of a perfection or completeness of expression towards which he is always striving. Each time he approaches a canvas, or undertakes a lyric, or a short story, or a novel, he has the feeling that this time he will do better, this time he will come nearer to what he is aiming at. Every work of art is started with great hopes. Innumerable endeavours which the public is never allowed to see or to read are destroyed or left unfinished. The unfinished canvas that is never taken up again, the uncompleted commission, the half-written poem, are all left (except where the artist dies at work) because the writer or painter is already dissatisfied. The work that started so well has gone wrong and the disappointment and distaste that he feels prevent him from ever completing it. He may pick it up from time to time and put it back on his easel or his desk and look at it half affectionately, but rarely will he go on with it. Once it has become clear that a work of art cannot be satisfactorily completed by the standards of the artist himself — and those are the most exacting standards of all — he loses interest and prefers to abandon the work or start again. The general public often do not understand this attitude. After all, if any other job can be finished why cannot a work of art? But the artist is the best judge, and what looks so promising, what has already so many fine qualities, is best left incomplete if the artist realises that he can never fulfil his intention.

The artist is his own keenest critic, his own judge. Being his own judge, he must wrestle with his own doubts and fears and inadequacies. He alone can tell how far short his work falls of its aim, for he alone knows the aim taken. Katherine Mansfield in her *Journal* puts into words something of his aspiration:

> But the late evening is the time — of times. Then with that unearthly beauty before one it is not hard to realise how far one has to go. To write something that will be worthy of that rising moon, that pale light.

This desire for worthiness in the artist's mind depends on the conception of ideal forms which, if not attainable, are at least conceivable. The belief in a conceivable perfection of expression is at the very root of all artistic effort. Walter Sickert argued that if this perfection could be attained art would be at an end, and defined art as " the individual quality of failure, or the individual coefficient of error of each highly skilled and cultivated craftsman . . .". Fortunately perfection in his craft remains beyond the reach of every artist, for though there are works that to the reader or spectator seem flawless it is certain that their creators felt that they fell short in some particular of what they had set themselves to achieve. No true artist is ever long satisfied with his own attainments.

If a creative artist has in his mind some conception of perfect and complete expression, he must also have the conception of certain rules or standards of order, balance and harmony in accordance with which it may be achieved. Life and nature never obey such rules, for life and nature, with all their vitality and exuberance

and power, are formless. However lovely a landscape may be, however interesting a man's life or the events of an afternoon, these things are yet bound to contain elements that are inharmonious from the artist's point of view. The landscape, for example, has no bounds. The eye can scan it further and further to this side and to that. But a painting of a landscape must be of a certain size and must be contained within the rigid limits of the frame. Inside that frame every element of the painted landscape must fit into an ordered pattern with no line or mass or colour or plane that does not fall into its place. In other words the painter must take the elements, the raw materials, from nature and organise them in accordance with some preconceived notions of arrangement. The same is true of the writer: he takes from life the events, the impressions, the words that he can make significant within the framework of his book. All else he leaves out. So the artist in his endeavours towards perfect expression, with certain ideal conceptions in his mind, reorganises life and nature, which are his raw materials.

The second element in the creative artist's desire for expression is the desire to express what is true. Truth is the quality that he wishes to impart to the substance of his work. A perfect poem or a perfect painting would contain truth perfectly expressed. The expression constitutes the technique, the craft, and the truth is a quality of what the artist is trying to say. Truth, to him, is the true content of life and nature, and that is very hard to understand. There are passages in great paintings, lines in great poems, words in great plays and novels which

do not seem to ring true, where the artist seems for a moment to have misunderstood life, or human nature, or the form of some object, to have failed to say what he ought to have said and wanted to say. It is easy to find examples of this sort of untruth in inferior works. There is a poem of Masefield's *On Growing Old*, in which these lines occur:

> Only, as in the jostling in the Strand,
> Where the mob thrusts or loiters or is loud,
> The beggar with the saucer in his hand
> Asks only a penny from the passing crowd,
> So, from this glittering world with all its fashion,
> Its fire, and play of men, its stir, its march,
> Let me have wisdom. . . .

That is not true writing. Wisdom is won by effort, it is not a penny in a beggar's bowl. There is no depth of thought or feeling there about growing old, but only a false comparison.

> Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.

That is true writing about age. Truth is impossible to a writer who does not feel profoundly the innermost significance of his subject, as it is impossible to a painter who has not felt and seen the real significance of the forms he is painting. Many flashy paintings which give a superficial appearance of being intensely true are not true at all because the deft technique covers negligence or ignorance of form.

This truth to life and truth to nature is the constant quest of the artist who is all the time looking more and

more closely at life and nature, trying to penetrate more deeply into the way men's minds work, to understand man's place in nature and to see what are the permanent and deep principles that underlie all creation. " O you who come after me ", wrote Katherine Mansfield, " will you believe it? At the end *truth* is the only thing *worth having*: it's more thrilling than love, more joyful and more passionate. It simply can*not* fail."

Truth cannot fail. Throughout the centuries the value that the artist has attached to truth has been one of the constant values in incessantly changing societies. Other objectives have varied with civilisations, religions, governments, parties and fashions. But the artist has always sought truth. He may have been misguided, blind; he may have written bad poetry and painted bad pictures; his art may be utterly forgotten or may never have been known; but if he was sincere and honest with himself then it is certain that he was trying to express what he believed to be true about life and about nature. If you pick up a dusty portfolio of miscellaneous drawings and paintings in a junk-shop perhaps, as you run idly through the contents, you will come upon a faded water-colour, a smeared pastel or a scrap of pencil drawing which immediately holds your attention. It has some quality of sincerity, of vision, that appeals to you. The man who put that down on paper, at some unknown time and place, had looked at life honestly and left on that scrap of paper a true statement (Plate I). It is not so easy to find portfolios of unfinished or forgotten writings, but one can sometimes gain the same sudden unexpected pleasure by reading the memorial verses on tombs and

No. I

Young Magpie

This is one of a large series of drawings of animals, birds and plants in the Chatsworth Collection. Various suggestions have been made about their authorship but without the possibility of any certain attribution. One of the drawings was made on the back of a page from an old rent-book, where details are given of a payment made in 1540. The drawing of the young magpie was made in body-colour on a sheet of manuscript covered with some grey preparation through which the script is clearly visible. It has been suggested that this drawing " may be as late as the seventeenth century and may possibly have been painted north of the Alps ".

Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Estates Company. The details above are taken from the catalogue prepared by the Arts Council for their exhibition of Old Master Drawings from Chatsworth, 1949.

monuments. Here are some lines from a tiny brass in the church at Benefield in Northamptonshire:

> My child-bed was my death-bed: thankes I gave
> To God that gave a child, and so I died:
> My body is enterred in this grave:
> My soule (for which it long'd) to Heaven her hied.
> My good-report they can record that knewe mee
> A maide, a wife, a mother: then death slewe mee.

That verse was composed while Shakespeare was alive and the unknown voice still speaks with the accent of true pathos. The lines express the simple truth that the birth of a child is a joyful thing but that it is sad to die young. Many pretentious inscriptions say less.

Another desire of the artist is the desire to free himself from all encumbrances that hinder him in his work, all doctrines that are false, all conventions of art or of society that are cramping, all duties other than his duty to his art. Thus he can think and look and understand. And because he values this freedom of the spirit for himself, he values it for other men. So artists have constantly taken their stand on the side of revolt against tyranny. One thinks of the noble legacy of poems in the English language celebrating freedom:

> Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
> Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,
> For there thy habitation is the heart —
> The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
> And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd —
> To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
> Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
> And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
> (Byron, *Sonnet on Chillon*)

A few days before this page was written the Soviet government issued a May Day manifesto calling upon creative artists for " works of high ideological content " ! Is it possible that intelligent men can be so blinded by a doctrine that they hope to enslave art and keep it alive?

Then, again, the artist tries to find and to impart happiness. Happiness can be achieved only by the satisfaction of the human spirit. The human spirit is not satisfied by doctrines or politics or profits. Only if the life a man leads fulfils the innermost cravings of his heart will he be happy. The true cravings of the human spirit, say the artists, are not for possessions, machines, power or rank. Those things do not satisfy, however much they may please and flatter. If a man wishes for satisfaction, he must find out as much as he can about truth and bring his life more and more into harmony with his discoveries. Then he will find that the things that satisfy are simple things — delight in human nature, love and friendship, pride in his work and a life in contact with earth so that he can see the processes of nature and love them. These are things that artists have always desired and understood.

This introduces naturally the next desire of the artist, the desire to communicate with his fellow-men. The mystic, the contemplative may penetrate as far as the writer and the painter into truth, but, if he is no artist, and there have been men who were both, he will feel no urge to express his experiences to others. The artist on the other hand, though with no conscious moral purpose, must share his discoveries and, in sharing, longs for appreciation. The mystic could meditate upon a desert island, but it is very doubtful whether the artist,

unless he had some hopes of ultimate rescue, would continue to create there. There is a most moving sonnet of Wordsworth's which seems to express the fundamental desire of almost every creative mind:

> Surprised by joy — impatient as the Wind
> I turned to share the transport . . .

There is no impulse by which man is shown in a kindlier light than his instinctive desire to share happiness, to speak of it to others, and in this the creative artist is the most human of men. For what is his art but the expression of his desire to share his experiences, and, at the same time, of an equally human craving for sympathy, understanding and approbation. A poet, said Wordsworth, is " a man speaking to men ".

It is true that some men have appeared to be satisfied by the mere act of creation. Thus Lord Houghton in his *Life and Letters of John Keats* says:

> Shorter poems were scrawled, as they happened to suggest themselves, on the first scrap of paper at hand, which was afterwards used as a mark for a book, or thrown anywhere aside. It seemed as if, when his imagination was once relieved, by writing down its effusions, he cared so little about them that it required a friend at hand to prevent them from being utterly lost.

Keats' *Letters* and the first Preface to *Endymion* make it clear that Keats regarded the general public with distaste. In a letter to Benjamin Haydon in December 1818 he said:

> I never expect to get anything by my Books: and moreover I wish to avoid publishing — I admire Human Nature but I do not like *Men* — I should like to compose things honourable to Man — but not fingerable over by *Men*.

Yet on the very page of Lord Houghton's book from which the passage above is quoted the author writes :

> The odes *To the Nightingale* and *To a Grecian Urn* were first published in a periodical entitled the *Annals of Fine Arts*. Soon after he had composed them, he repeated, or rather chanted, them to Mr. Haydon, in the sort of recitative that so well suited his deep grave voice . . .

In spite of his distaste for the general public a poem was not complete for him until he had found a sympathetic sharer for it. Despite the seeming indifference of the artist, which arises partly from the immediate relief of creation completed, partly from his feeling of the inadequacy of his work, no work of art is ever complete, the very act of creation is incomplete, until the work has been seen or heard by others and won the approbation of another spirit. If it were not so, why should we so often hear of the despair of artists whose work is rejected or ignored ? They are not usually in any doubt of the value of their own work, for a true creator knows his own genius. But being creators they are frustrated until the act of creation is consummated by the approval of their fellow-men. Turner provides a curious example of the working of this law of the completion of a work of art. When he had won universal recognition and could command good prices for his work he would sometimes refuse to sell pictures because he had already destined them in his mind for the nation. During his lifetime quantities of his works lay in the dust-laden house in Queen Anne Street, but Turner, certain of his own powers, had no intention of leaving them in obscurity, and by his will the nation ultimately became possessed of over three hundred

oil paintings, one hundred and thirty-five finished water-colours and something like twenty thousand studies, sketches and fragmentary notes. Despite his fame, Turner felt bitterly the ridicule which his later work sometimes earned. According to Ruskin, he accused his critics of being "not merely contemptible in their ignorance, but amazing in their ingratitude". Nothing could better express the attitude of the artist to the public. He tries to communicate to them an unfamiliar vision and hopes not only for understanding but for gratitude.

This communication with other men, this completion of the work of art by its acceptance, necessitates the use by the artist of a comprehensible language either in words or paint. This does not mean that the artist must never break new ground and use *unfamiliar* language. Unfamiliarity is a very different thing from incomprehensibility. But it is surely the condemnation of a work of art if its nature is such that it defies comprehension. Deliberate obscurity by the use of a private language, depending for its significance upon personal symbols, associations and interpretations of words, and requiring explanatory notes for its deciphering, is an artistic perversion. Art is a personal but not a private thing. It is by its very nature communication between men. Its true significance in life, a significance far greater than is admitted for it in our educational and moral systems, is that it provides a satisfaction for the spiritual cravings of men, that it reveals eternal truths, that it adheres to permanent and comprehensible (though perhaps unfamiliar) values. If it is completely private and confined to the

mind of the artist alone, its usefulness is limited or unfulfilled and man has no blessing from it. It is as profitable as an unposted letter.

Last of all, the artist is actuated by a desire so deep-lying as to be felt only half-consciously, and this is the desire for permanence, stimulated by an acute consciousness of the mortality of man and of the transience of his experience. Just as for any sensitive person the splendour of the earth has, at times, an almost unbearable poignancy, so this consciousness of an inevitable separation gives an almost desperate intensity to the efforts of many artists to find and express truth. There is only one way in which some measure of permanence can be achieved :

> We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
> The elements, must vanish ; — be it so !
> Enough, if something from our hands have power
> To live, and act, and serve the future hour ;
> (Wordsworth, *After-Thought*)

Perfection of form, truth, freedom, happiness, communication, permanence : it will be seen at once that these aims have one quality in common — they are quite uninspired by material considerations. Every mind dictates the actions of the body it inhabits in accordance with a scale of values, a scale which ranges, for each individual, between what he considers most desirable, most to be sought after, and what he considers most to be dreaded and despised. If there could exist a man who was entirely materialist he would be one whose only good was material well-being, a man who was directed in all his actions by his desire for this, allowing no thought or

desire for anything else to intervene between him and the comfort of the flesh. At the other extreme stands the mystic or the visionary whose utmost good is the liberation of his spirit from the trammels of the body and whose constant aim is to escape from the realm of material things into realms of religious ecstasy or imaginative activity. For such a man the supreme evil is the stifling of his spirit beneath the dead weight of physical comfort. The materialist seeks the body's ease as the mystic seeks the spirit's release.

The creative artist stands with the mystic and the visionary at the opposite extreme from the materialist. The fact that painters and writers have been self-indulgent, and have found pleasure in wealth and possessions and ease, must not be taken to mean that they are materialist in their outlook. The artist counts those moments in his life as most significant and desirable in which his creative spirit is active. He would disclaim, perhaps, the desires that have been attributed to him above, preferring to say simply that he wrote or painted because he wanted to write or paint. But whether he recognise the separate elements in his desire to create or not, he would admit that everything else is secondary to it. Money is necessary for life and materials. Comfort, luxury and self-indulgence even may be exciting and may provide some of the raw materials of experience from which his art is wrought. But no great artist ever *became* an artist primarily from the desire for gain. Indeed, there have been many men who found the money motive quite irreconcilable with the creative motive. Rainer Maria Rilke, the German poet, was one :

I realise more and more that there is nothing more difficult and dangerous for my art than wanting to earn money by writing. Like this I cannot bring myself to write at all; and the consciousness alone that a connection exists between my writing and the day's nourishment and necessaries, is enough to make my work impossible for me.

(*Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, translated by R. F. C. Hull)

Blake, as might be expected, was another :

I wish to do nothing for profit ; I want nothing ; I am quite happy.

And Leonardo said :

Despise me not, for I am not poor : poor is he only who has material desires.

The legend of the artist in the garret then has this much foundation, that in many cases the artist has been prepared to undergo want and discomfort rather than abandon his art. There has rarely been security, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, in the early life of the painter or writer, unless he has had means of his own, and his later years have frequently been made dreary by poverty or neglect. On the other hand, it has sometimes happened that the successful artist who has come to attach an importance to material things out of proportion to their proper place in his life, has ceased to be creative. He may have continued to be popular, fashionable and wealthy, but his work has lost its significance. Other successful painters and writers, with more wisdom, while enjoying comfort, have understood that their only true happiness came from the most complete fulfilment possible to them of their urge to create.

II

IMAGINATION

> He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light, than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all.
>
> BLAKE

IMAGINATION is the supremely creative faculty, a faculty which all men possess in some degree and use at every moment. Without it man would be incapable of creating or enjoying art, unable to conjure up the past or anticipate the future; no speculation about the absent, no day-dreaming or ambition would be possible for him.

The first and most familiar function of the imagination is the pictorial power, the power of creating images of things not actually visible or even existent. Under the sway of imagination we find ourselves in strange situations, commit unfamiliar actions, and meet unknown people; we change our personalities, reshape the past and probe the future. These imaginative experiences may bring us either delight or dismay, for, although we may deliberately invite them, we may also, for example under the influence of fear, be unwillingly subjected to them in their most harrowing forms. Such are the simplest imaginative processes in ordinary men. There is

no evidence here of creativeness, but simply of deep-lying desires to change life, to modify personality, to penetrate the unknown. These desires provide the stimulus necessary to the imagination, which in all men is more active under the influence of deep feeling. We are all moved by the contemplation of vast spaces, by loneliness, time, death and the unbridled forces of nature. All these shake man from his self-sufficiency, his unimaginative acceptance of his life and his environment, and allow him to see himself as an infinitesimal part of an immeasurable creation. This is an imaginative experience in which a man sees himself from without, in his true proportions. As Thomas Hardy said of Gabriel Oak in the great storm at Weatherbury: "Love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe".

Man is not frequently brought face to face with the vast and fearful aspects of creation. But his imagination is constantly stirred by more everyday emotions.

> Fear [said Hazlitt] is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair or madness, are all poetry.

Hazlitt was speaking of the stirring of the imagination of poets. But all men under the stimulus of the feelings that he enumerates become poets in some very small degree because it is by these feelings that they are moved to express themselves most imaginatively. This can be seen by the language they use: in a state of excitement they will have recourse to metaphors, similes, personifications and exaggeration. Under the stress of some unfamiliar experience a child will take refuge in complete

fantasy in an endeavour to express the intensity of its sensations. An adult in similar circumstances will tend quite unconsciously to use figurative language. The excitement sets the imagination to work and the pictorial power of the imagination in its turn provides the mind with images as a means to express sensations for which the language of every day is inadequate. Our ordinary language is full of familiar, sometimes outworn, figures of speech drawn originally from the everyday life of town or country, office, farm, or factory. "To weed out", "to rake up", "to plough back" and "to mow down", "to gut" and "a shark", "to weld together" and "to short-circuit", all indicate different social backgrounds but illustrate the same process. They must all once have been spoken for the first time, and when first spoken were vivid and imaginative. "Whispering corn", "biting wind", "flashing eyes" and "thundering hooves" have sunk by use from the level of poetry to that of popular fiction or speech. But so inevitable is the use of hyperbole and figurative speech to men who feel strongly, that new images and metaphors are constantly being coined and passing into the language. Slang or familiar speech is particularly rich in these inventions which must have originated from the spontaneous expression of lively minds.

If the effect of excitement is so striking on the ordinary man, what will its effect be on the artist? How will his imagination respond to sensations and spectacles that move him? The causes that stir the emotions of ordinary men and women have always spurred the poet to write poetry and the painter to paint. And as the effect of these

emotions on the ordinary man is to make him see pictures and speak in images, so it is, with greater intensity, on the artist. This is the simplest effect of excitement on the writer and concerns only the style of his utterance — the speech not the substance. It is not hard to find examples of these modes of speech, imagery, personification and exaggeration, for these have always been poetic forms of speech, and most imaginative writing abounds in them.

> The sea of faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.

The image of the world's dark edge which Arnold uses here in *Dover Beach* and which Tennyson uses in *In Memoriam*,

> Be near me when I fade away,
> To point the term of human strife,
> And on the low dark verge of life
> The twilight of eternal day,

serves both of them to express fear and spiritual loneliness. Stephen Spender, in his poem *In Railway Halls*, uses the drifting flotsam of the shore to symbolise hopelessness and futility:

> Time merely drives these lives which do not live
> As tides push rotten stuff along the shore.

Two striking examples may be quoted from Auden and Isherwood, *The Ascent of F.6:*

The frantic washing of the grimy fact.

And:

The girl imprisoned in the tower of a stammer—

This pictorial power of the imagination is not confined to poets. It is constantly used by prose writers also. Here is a magnificent example from Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, when Sordo is facing certain death on a hill-top:

Dying was nothing and he had no picture of it nor fear of it in his mind. But living was a field of grain blowing in the wind on the side of a hill. Living was a hawk in the sky. Living was an earthen jar of water in the dust of the threshing with the grain flailed out and the chaff blowing. Living was a horse between your legs and a carbine under one leg and a hill and a valley and a stream with trees along it and the far side of the valley and the hills beyond.

And a philosopher, Bertrand Russell, in his *Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, describing the World Commune, wrote:

Rockets climbed the skies and peppered them with a thousand stars.

It is a power, however, which is possessed in very varying degrees even by poets. Matthew Arnold, for example, was poorly equipped with it. It is most revealing to examine carefully the epithets and rare figures of speech in his poetry. There can be no doubt that his emotion was deep and genuine. He loved Oxford, mourned Thyrsis and feared the ebb of faith. But where a great imaginative writer would have used, to express these feelings, unfamiliar epithets, fresh and vivid figures of speech, Arnold was often almost entirely common-place.

A fine passage from *Dover Beach* is quoted above, and there is the familiar "Tyrian trader", but what more pedestrian epithets could be imagined than these from *The Scholar-Gipsy*: white sheep, thick corn, scarlet poppies, green roots, cool bank, cool stream, pensive dream, white anemone, dark bluebells, purple orchises, black-wing'd swallows and mossy barns? His colours are the colours of a man who thinks that all grass is green and never looks to see. How astonishingly different is Coleridge's use of colour!

> Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
> Like April hoar-frost spread;
> But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
> The charmed water burnt alway
> A still and awful red.
>
> Beyond the shadow of the ship,
> I watched the water-snakes:
> They moved in tracks of shining white,
> And when they reared, the elfish light
> Fell off in hoary flakes.
>
> Within the shadow of the ship
> I watched their rich attire:
> Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
> They coiled and swam; and every track
> Was a flash of golden fire.

A hoar sea with red shadows is a vision possible only to a mind both daring and highly endowed with pictorial imagination.

The use of figurative language by imaginative writers to express excitement is accompanied also, as in the case of the ordinary person, by a desire to personify and to exaggerate. Joseph Conrad uses personification in *The*

Mirror of the Sea to express his own deep feeling of the enmity of the sea.

> The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation. He cannot brook the slightest appearance of defiance, and has remained the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men ever since ships and men had the unheard-of audacity to go afloat together in the face of his frown. From that day he has gone on swallowing up fleets and men without his resentment being glutted by the number of victims. . . . If not always in the hot mood to smash, he is always stealthily ready for a drowning.

Burns makes splendid use of exaggeration in his poem *A Red, Red Rose* :

> Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
> And the rocks melt wi' the sun ;
> I will luve thee still, my dear,
> While the sands o' life shall run.

This then is one effect of excitement upon the creative artist : it causes his imagination, as it causes that of ordinary men and women, to create pictures. But excitement affects the artist more fundamentally than that : it makes him want to paint and want to speak. In other words it stirs that truly creative activity of the imagination which ordinary men and women do not possess. The artist may be like other men in his use of figurative speech, but he is most unlike them in his ability to create something out of nothing. Under the influence of excitement his mind will feel an unrest, amounting possibly to a turmoil, in certain cases almost to a frenzy. Then he can regain tranquillity only by self-expression. The cause of his emotion, perhaps, or some circumstance arising out of it, some picture called

up by it, will give direction to the creative impulse within him and gradually, after minutes or perhaps only after months, he will become fully conscious of what is burdening his mind. Not until this is expressed will he have peace again. The imagination must be delivered of its offspring. The period necessary for this act of expression will vary. There are great works as there are small ones ; some men work rapidly, others slowly and laboriously. But all have the same need to work out of their system the thing which they have imagined and to give it shape that it may exist outside their own minds and be shared by other men.

In this act of creation there is another remarkable activity of the imagination : it produces to the writer or painter all the raw materials stored in the chambers of the memory. Thus it is that childhood's feelings and symbols and all the experiences of adolescence, youth and manhood, will be at the artist's disposal for the expression of his feeling and thought. That is why wide experience is so important to an artist, so that the recesses of his memory shall be well stored. If a man feels the need to create and if his experience is narrow, then either he must create something limited, within the bounds of his experience, or he must venture into realms unknown to him where he may well lose his way.

It is not only the actual experiences of his own life that will be presented to him as raw material, but, because he is highly sensitive and has felt deeply the work of other men, that too will be drawn up out of his memory.

Thus it sometimes happens that without deliberate theft (" Blake is damn good to steal from ", said Fuseli),

the pictures and the very language that spring to the mind of the writer in moments of emotion are remembered from other authors. I. A. Richards in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* has pointed out an echo of Milton in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, which is particularly interesting because Coleridge wrote the lines of that poem from his memory of a dream. Shelley in *Epipsychidion* clearly had in mind, perhaps unconsciously, that other island in *The Tempest*.

> Be not afeard ; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> (*Tempest*, III, 2)

> And all the place is peopled with sweet airs.
> (*Epipsychidion*)

A little later Shelley makes for himself and Emilia Viviani on their island just such provision as Gonzalo made for Prospero.

> I have sent books and music there, and all
> Those instruments with which high Spirits call
> The future from its cradle, and the past
> Out of its grave . . .

As Shelley loved Shakespeare, so Francis Thompson loved Shelley, and *Epipsychidion*, besides echoing *The Tempest*, provided in several places the material, images and words of *The Hound of Heaven* :

> O thou of hearts the weakest,
> The phantom is beside thee whom thou seekest.
> (*Epipsychidion*)

> Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
> I am He Whom thou seekest !
> (*The Hound of Heaven*)

I questioned every tongueless wind that flew
(*Epipsychidion*)

To all swift things for swiftness did I sue ;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
(*The Hound of Heaven*)

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought.
(*Epipsychidion*)

I sought no more that after which I strayed
In face of man or maid ;
(*The Hound of Heaven*)

The same process of unconscious or half-conscious memory may take place with a painter. He may see and paint in the manner of another painter. Only if this echoing of another man's work is so frequent as to indicate a poverty of personal vision, is the artist to be condemned as derivative. At the present time many of the younger English painters and draughtsmen show the influence of Blake and Samuel Palmer. But as they discover their own true individuality they gradually discard borrowed mannerisms in favour of a style of their own.

The shaping of an imaginative work of art may be a matter of the continued effort of years. The writing of a novel or an epic poem or the completion of a large canvas is laborious toil and would seem far removed from the sudden flash of excitement that produces a short lyric poem. The writer's state of mind in the case of a long work is rather to be compared to a smouldering fire that is occasionally whipped into a flame. This smouldering fire is the excitement of creating and living in an imaginary

world so real as to possess the mind of the author and to provide him with a constantly renewed stimulus. By this excitement he is spurred to the long creative toil during the course of which there will be periods of more intense emotion when the situation of his characters is particularly moving, or the passage that he has reached in his painting is particularly exciting. It is probably true to say that a novelist during the period of creation lives simultaneously in two worlds, material and imaginary, and that there are times when the imaginary world is the more real. Balzac's procedure is well known. The days and nights of concentrated effort, the incessant coffee-drinking, the darkened room and the monk's cowl make him the most picturesque example of the novelist living in a world of his own. In his case the superb crescendo of *Le Père Goriot* is justification enough for such a frantic method. But less eccentric authors have been no less absorbed in their imaginary world. Henry James said that the only thing was " to live *in* the world of creation — to get into it and stay in it — to frequent it and haunt it ", and Anthony Trollope lays it down in his autobiography that the novelist's characters " must be with him as he lies down to sleep, and as he wakes from his dreams. He must learn to hate them and to love them. He must argue with them, quarrel with them, forgive them, and even submit to them." In his Preface to the 1850 edition of *David Copperfield* Dickens expresses the sense of personal loss that he feels on the completion of a novel :

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of a two years'

imaginative task ; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. Yet, I have nothing else to tell ; unless, indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still) that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing.

The production of a long imaginative work, epic, novel or play, demands at least three distinct imaginative processes : first, there must be the invention of the whole and the maintaining through months or years of the unity of the conception ; secondly, there is the creation and consistent development of the characters ; thirdly, there is the use of imagery. It is not by any means true that all works, even great works, reach an equally high standard in all three. It has already been shown that Matthew Arnold was only rarely a master of imagery, and it is equally true that Dickens was weak in the invention of plots. Only in a handful of the very greatest works are plot, characters and style equally imaginative.

Imaginative writing does not only make great demands upon the writer, it makes corresponding demands upon the imagination of the reader. He must be capable of entering into the writer's experience. If it is an extremely intricate and intimate experience, as in the case of Proust, only a sustained effort on the part of the reader will win for him his full reward of living in the writer's world. But the writer has the right to demand a response from the reader, who must be able to distinguish imaginative truth from imaginative falsehood. When Coleridge wrote, in *The Ancient Mariner* :

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head ;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

or :

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist :

he was expressing imaginative but not literal truth. If we have had the sensation of the pursuing fiend, as most of us have at some period of our life, and if, from some memory perhaps of a stained-glass window or a painting, we can envisage God's own head, then we can respond to the demand that he makes upon us. There is no means by which the reader can be so directly or so poignantly affected as by this truth of the imagination. When the author expresses exactly the innermost experience of the reader he has made the closest contact that the artist can make with the mind of another. If a man tormented by jealousy hears or reads the speech in *The Winter's Tale* which contains that amazing phrase, " I have drunk, and seen the spider ", or if, feeling himself entangled in evil, he reads Hamlet's uncle's words, " O limed soul ", or if, being weary of life, he reads in Spenser the line on death, " the common Inne of rest ", he will experience a stab of feeling almost as intense as his original suffering. But when a writer tries to convince us of something that has no foundation in any man's experience, something that is not *true*, as for example in the wild novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto* and *Frankenstein*,

then he is guilty of imaginative falsehood. It is not the strangeness of a story that proves power of imagination, but the ability to make any story, strange or familiar, convincing. Any man can invent a strange tale, but few can give it life. The novelist, M. G. Lewis, published in 1795 a work called *Ambrosio, or The Monk*. This Ambrosio sold his soul to the devil, committed evil deeds, kidnapped nuns and did away with them in gloomy gothic vaults to the fullest orchestration of horrors. But because Lewis was a man of limited talent his work was greeted with universal derision and earned him the nickname of "Monk" Lewis, by which he is still known in literary history. True imagination, however strange the regions into which it lifts its head, has its roots in human experience.

Imaginative art then can be appreciated only by the imaginative. Ruskin defined the unpoetic man as "the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel". All feeling causes some distortion, or emphasis of vision. Consequently the unimaginative person is deaf to the language of poets and painters; he finds little pleasure and much to disturb him in an exhibition of pictures or a volume of lyrics. It is he who writes to the press to proclaim his conviction that modern artists are not only wicked but mad.

As there are people with too little imagination, so there are those with too much. The dividing line between genius and madness is sometimes a very fine one. The same imagination which can create the world of a Prometheus or a Perdita, if once the domination of reason be lost, may hold its owner captive in some fantastic region

from which he cannot return. The creative artist is the man with a high degree of imagination under the control of reason.

In writing fiction it is particularly necessary that the author should rely on the imaginative response of the reader. It is not by meticulous description or detailed analysis that a person or place is best brought to life in the reader's mind, but by those sudden revealing strokes which are possible only to a writer whose imagination has enabled him really to enter into his characters and scenes and to possess them fully, as it has enabled him to enter into and understand men and women around him. This power of entering into another personality is another gift of the imagination without which drama and fiction would be impossible. It is the writer who remains too much on the outside of his characters who burdens us with long descriptions which neither stimulate the imagination nor leave it room to move. André Gide said that " the novelist does not as a rule rely sufficiently on the reader's imagination ", and Delacroix in his *Journal* criticised Scott for this very fault.

> What is making his works seem old-fashioned today (Oct. 28th, 1853) . . . is precisely his abuse of truth to detail.

When an author wearies us with descriptions he fails to realise that art is in a sense a partnership, that a work of art makes a demand on the reader or spectator, and that if the reader or spectator is unable to make the necessary response the work of art must in any case be a failure as far as he is concerned. Just as it is the quality of a good conversationalist to make other people talk well, so it is

the quality of an imaginative artist to set other people imagining. When one reads in Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* that " Aunt Harriet was an exhaustless fountain of authority upon every detail concerning interments ", or in Eric Linklater's *Private Angelo* that the hero lacked the " *dono di coraggio* ", or in John P. Marquand's *Wickford Point* that " Aunt Sarah was always getting baskets of acorns from the great oak near the river and carrying them up the hill and poking them into the soil on either side of the road ", or in I. Compton-Burnett's *More Women than Men* that Mrs. Chattaway had " the alert, enquiring, engaging aspect of some little woodland beast ", a train of pleasant speculation is started in the mind and a picture is formed or developed. This picture may not entirely correspond with the writer's conception, but if it is built up consistently from all the evidence gradually supplied it will live in the reader's imagination. Nothing is then more exasperating than to be given a description which destroys this living image ; on the other hand, to provide a long description of appearance before the character is built up is usually wasted effort, for the reader cannot or will not accept a description of a person who, as yet, has no active existence for him. The same is true of descriptions of scenes. From a few harmonious details the mind will build a setting that contains the essential elements better than from a detailed pen-picture. It is only confusing to be provided with every particular.

There are two directions in which the imaginative power of the artist may be exerted on the reader or spectator. Either the artist can make him feel that what seems

commonplace is full of poetry, or he can convince him that what seems highly poetic and fantastic is, if not commonplace, at least credible. The method of Arthur Morrison [1] or of Graham Greene, by which a squalid story of violence and vice is given an imaginative quality, is the antithesis of the method by which Butler, in *Erewhon*, gives to fantasy a matter-of-fact reality. When Wordsworth co-operated with Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*, his self-appointed task was to be the very reverse of Coleridge's, for, whereas Coleridge set out to give reality to a fantastic tale, Wordsworth proposed "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and . . . to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect". His poem *Resolution and Independence*, although not actually one of the *Lyrical Ballads*, provides an admirable example of this process. The basis of "incidents and situations from common life" appears to be compounded of two encounters described in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*:

Friday, 3rd October (1800).—When William and I returned from accompanying Jones, we met an old man almost double. . . . His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce, and he had not the strength for it.

and in 1802:

Wednesday, 30th June.—We met an old man between the Raise and Lewthwaites. . . . William said to him, after we had asked him what his business was, "You are a very old man?" "Aye, I am eighty-three." I joined in, "Have you any children?" "Children? Yes, plenty. I have children

[1] *E.g.* in *The Child of the Jago.*

and grand-children, and great grand-children. I have a great grand-daughter, a fine lass, thirteen years old." I then said, " Won't they take care of you ? " He replied, much offended, " Thank God, I can take care of myself."

Four days after this entry we read : " William finished *The Leech Gatherer* today ". In this poem, later called *Resolution and Independence*, Wordsworth transmutes these not uncommon old men into a dream-like, almost frightening figure, a timeless symbol :

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence ;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence ;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense :
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself :

Such seemed this Man . . .

And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood
That heareth not the loud winds when they call ;
And moveth all together, if it move at all . . .

The old Man still stood talking by my side ;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream ;
Or like a man from some far region sent . . .

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech — all troubled me :
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently . . .

The same alchemy is applied to many other subjects which Wordsworth took from his everyday encounters. It is this which gives to many of his poems their peculiarly Wordsworthian flavour. The poet himself called it "casting a certain colouring of the imagination" over his subject, but the process seems to be something less superficial than that. The figure of the old man becomes for him something permanent, something symbolical. It has the eternal and spiritual qualities of a vision. This poem shows a far rarer and more original imaginative power than the pictorial power. It is the power of the prophet who sees "a new Heaven and a new Earth", of the mystic who can "turn but a stone and start a wing", and of the visionary, like Blake: the power

> To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour.

Many of the imaginative processes described above are familiar to the painter. As he is a maker of pictures and, in varying degrees, a poet, it is natural that the picture-making power of the imagination should be strong in him. This power is stimulated by some excitement of the mind and the emotions, which will probably arise in the case of the painter not from any abstract idea but from the sight of some moving scene presented either to the outward eye by reality or to the inward eye by the imagination itself. This second statement may seem contradictory. What is meant is that the imagination in this case provides its own stimulus. A painter will suddenly see before his mind's eye, conjured up with or

without conscious effort, a suggestion for a picture, or for the central subject of a picture. Shapes and colours and arrangements will be clearly indicated — a figure or group of figures in a certain position before a landscape of a certain sort with a colour scheme for the main parts of the painting. This sudden vision, which may come into his mind quite unsolicited, as a poem or a line of poetry may come into the mind of a poet, will immediately arouse his interest. He may become completely abstracted, withdrawing from life around him to examine further the idea that has come to him ; he may snatch a piece of paper, anything that can be drawn upon, to experiment and explore. If the idea grows and possesses him, then his imagination will be stimulated further by the excited state of his mind to elaborate and complete the vision. The excitement will endure and be renewed as long as the conception continues to satisfy him. He may work at a major canvas or a mural decoration for months or years, during which time the imagination will continue to present before him the goal that he is aiming at.

The subject springing up thus before the mind's eye may arise from everyday experience or it may be concerned with some mythological, legendary or fantastic subject. The actual subject is unimportant except in so far as it provides the painter with exciting pictorial possibilities, or stirs his emotions. The great religious paintings of the early renaissance clearly owe a great deal to the intensity of the feeling with which they were conceived and undertaken. But, however fanciful the subject, the painter is concerned with reality, as the writer is. His material is drawn from visual experience ; his gods

and madonnas have human bodies no less than his contemporary figures, and are set in architectural or natural surroundings that are real in this, that the buildings must stand up and the trees must grow. What his imagination does is to suggest to him a new arrangement of forms, and this arrangement must preserve imaginative truth, just as *The Ancient Mariner* preserves it. It must be emphasised even more in the case of painting than in the case of writing, that imaginative creation demands imagination in the spectator. The visions of Blake are moving and acceptable only to the imaginative person. That means that no unimaginative or insensitive person can pronounce a reasonable judgement upon an imaginative work. If he attempts to do so, he will reveal his own inadequacy, possibly by dismissing the artist as mad, as Blake was indeed dismissed by some of his contemporaries.

The excitement which stimulates the painter, however, may come to him through actual visual experience. He may see something in life that suddenly fills him with the feeling " What a picture that would make ! " Again he may pass through the period of abstraction, experiment, exploration. As he contemplates a scene that to others would appear trivial or tawdry or dull, he is enabled by his imagination to see the essential quality that runs through the scene. He will discard innumerable details, reorganise the elements, modify or intensify the colours, all in accordance with the dictates of his imagination which has seen a picture in a scene. This is a function of the imagination which consists not in adding anything to a subject but in discovering and extracting something

essential from it. If the painter were not endowed with this power all paintings of landscape would vary only in accordance with the competence of the painter in vying with a colour-photographer. But the more imaginative the painter the more personal and the more revealing his paintings will be, until they differ utterly from the work of other imaginative painters. A landscape by John Piper could not be confused with one by Paul Nash, but the paintings of men less imaginatively distinguished are less distinguishable.

There is one function of the imagination possessed by the painter and not by the writer, and that is the ability to visualise himself painting a picture in a certain way in a certain medium. When his imagination is creating his picture for him he is actually in his imagination very rapidly painting it. He feels the strokes and touches, the texture of the paint and the correct medium for the subject. This is in itself an exciting experience for him and fills him with a desperate impatience to carry out the actions envisaged. Throughout his actual painting he will know how he ought to be painting, even if he is not always able to paint in that manner. This visualisation of the process of creation is an imaginative power possessed by all men whose creative work is done through the hands. They have the feel of their medium in their imagination.

It may be felt that a portrait is a particularly unimaginative form of work. Many portraits carried out as commissions are indeed unimaginative, but one of the qualities that distinguishes a great portrait is just this, that the painter has been able to discover qualities and

possibilities in the character and form of his sitter which have roused his imagination and enabled him to extract the essential quality of his subject rather than merely to depict recognisably a certain person.

Whether he be contemplating an object, a person or a scene, present or imagined, the painter must have the power to enter into his subject and possess it wholly with his imagination. The imagination of the painter while he is at work is transferred into the object he is painting. By his imagination he is exploring it — he *is* it. Thus he learns to go beyond the temporary and superficial qualities of things and to discover their permanent nature. It is by this power of entering into things and discovering their true nature that the painter reveals to men aspects of reality that would otherwise remain hidden from them.

The water-colour drawing by William Blake which is reproduced as Plate II is a magnificent example of creative imagination. Although the subject is taken from the imaginative realm, it has its own truth and consistency in light and form and structure, and its separate elements are drawn from our familiar experience. Such a conception, to be appreciated, demands of the beholder the power of entering an imaginative world.

But the most interesting thing about this drawing is that it gives so fine an example of the stimulus that one artist can provide for another. Blake drew his subject from the first book of *Paradise Lost*. His drawing appears to have been used consciously or unconsciously by Keats. The drawing was made in 1808. Some ten years later Keats started to write *Hyperion* and in the

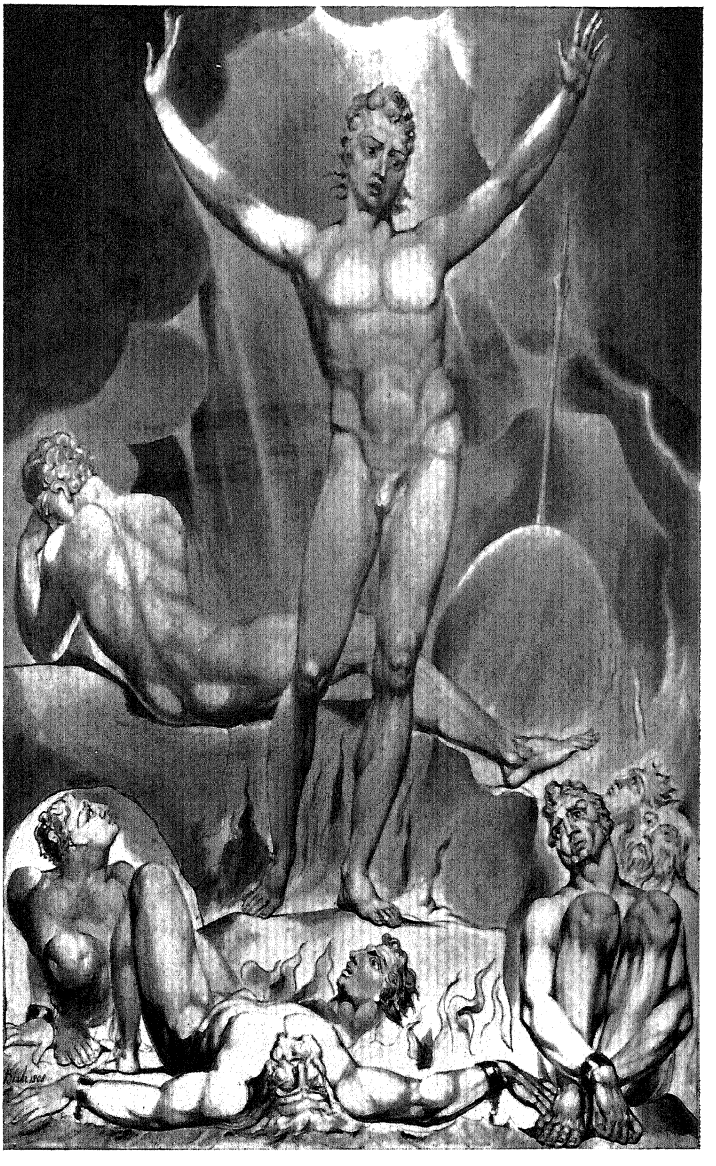
No. II

Satan arousing the Rebel Angels

WILLIAM BLAKE
(1757–1827)

This water-colour drawing was made in 1808. It was a preliminary design for a tempera painting exhibited by Blake at his brother's house in Broad Street in 1809. This tempera was described by Blake as " a composition for a more perfect Picture, afterwards executed for a Lady of high rank ". The lady was the Countess of Egremont, and the " more perfect Picture " is now in the Leconfield Collection at Petworth. There are other versions of the subject by Blake in the H. E. Huntington Library, California, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.

The probability that Keats was influenced by this drawing when composing the second book of *Hyperion* is discussed on pages 39-42.



second book of this poem he describes Saturn's arrival in the midst of the fallen Titans. The general description of the " den " where " the bruised Titans mourned " is fully in harmony with the spirit of Blake's drawing, though not with the detail. The background was

> Of thunderous waterfalls and torrents hoarse,
> Pouring a constant bulk, uncertain where.

As for the Titans themselves :

> Instead of thrones, hard flint they sat upon,
> Couches of rugged stone, and slaty ridge,
> Stubborn'd with iron.

Keats then describes those Titans who were not assembled but who

> Were pent in regions of laborious breath ;
> Dungeon'd in opaque element, to keep
> Their clench'd teeth still clench'd, and all their limbs
> Lock'd up like veins of metal, cramp'd and screw'd ;

Then come the Titans in the " den " itself

> like a dismal cirque
> Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor.

So far any resemblance between the poem and the drawing is quite general. But in the description of the individual Titans are two figures whose attitudes are singularly close to Blake :

> Next Cottus : prone he lay, chin uppermost,
> As though in pain ; for still upon the flint
> He ground severe his skull, with open mouth
> And eyes at horrid working . . .

> Above her, on a crag's uneasy shelve,
> Upon his elbow raised, all prostrate else,
> Shadow'd Enceladus . . .

> He meditated, plotted . . .

An examination of Milton's description makes it clear that Blake's drawing bears in some respects a closer resemblance to Keats' conception than to Milton's. As it preceded *Hyperion* this resemblance suggests that Keats, at some point between 1808 and 1818, may have seen this drawing in one of its several forms and that, when he came to write *Hyperion*, he was influenced by his memory of it. It must be remembered that Keats had made a close study of Milton and that he broke off *Hyperion* because he felt himself to be too much in the power of the older poet. The means by which the drawing could have come to his notice is a matter for conjecture. At the time of Blake's ill-fated exhibition in Broad Street, Keats was a boy of fourteen living at Edmonton. Leigh Hunt, who is thought to have been one of the few visitors to the exhibition and to have described it in *The Examiner* as "wretched" and the artist as "an unfortunate lunatic", was later closely acquainted with Keats. On one occasion certainly they talked of Milton when Leigh Hunt showed to Keats what he alleged to be a lock of Milton's hair. Again, Fuseli knew both Blake and Haydon, and Haydon was a friend of Keats. However the contact was made (if it is reasonable to suppose that such a contact existed) between the imagination of Blake and that of Keats, it provides an interesting example of material absorbed and stored in the mind to be reproduced under the influence of creative excitement.

III

SENSITIVENESS

> The tree which moves some to tears of joy, is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way.
>
> BLAKE

ARTISTS have no monopoly of feeling. When it is said that they are more sensitive than their fellow-men this is a generalisation to which many exceptions might be found. All that can safely be claimed for the poet or the painter is that he is sensitive in more ways than the ordinary man, and that he feels certain things more quickly and more deeply. The nature of the art that he pursues intensifies this characteristic; he trains himself constantly to see and to feel, and were he to lose his sensitiveness his art would languish into the commonplace. This training of his awareness is part of the work of preparation that the poet or painter can carry on when apparently idle. Somerset Maugham claims that a novelist "cannot give an undivided attention to any other calling" than that of being an author. "But", he says, "the author does not only write when he is at his desk; he writes all day long, when he is thinking, when he is reading, when he is experiencing; everything he sees and feels is significant to his purpose and, consciously or unconsciously, he is for ever storing and making over his

impressions." Ingres defined the painter's activity in strikingly similar words : " One must always be drawing, drawing with the eye when one cannot draw with the pencil ". And Sickert emphasised the need for " cumulative and silent observation . . . a manner of breathless listening, as it were, with the eyes, a listening extending over a long series of years ".

All men are sensitive to the great events in life, to birth and death and love, to suffering and joy. But the writer or the painter tends to see a significance also and to find an intense experience in things seemingly more trivial than these. It is not the majestic moments only, or indeed principally, that have moved poets to write, but chance encounters and brief moods : a bird's song or a fall of snow. So too with the painter. It is not principally in pageantry and splendour that he finds what he is seeking, but in a drab woman with an empty glass, a loaf on a table or the light falling across a wall. When Renoir heard that Gauguin had gone to paint in Tahiti he exclaimed : " Pourquoi ? On peint si bien à Batignolles ". But men and women who are not looking at life with the painter's or the poet's eyes remain unmoved by the constant impact on their senses and minds of those very experiences which are the raw material of the artist. For the raw material of the artist is usually everyday life among everyday people in everyday surroundings. Great works of art have had their origin in experiences that are known to all men, but from these starting-points the artist travels farther, more swiftly and by more exciting paths. This is the first way in which the artist is more sensitive than other men.

Secondly, his imaginative powers are both more vigorous and more easily set in motion.

Thirdly, he is more conscious of his own inner life and more analytical of it. It is part of his work to analyse his own response to events. He is more subject than other men to extremes of feeling, transports of happiness or depths of misery. This intensity of feeling is constantly evident in letters and conversations. John Varley even said of himself: "All these troubles are necessary to me; if it were not for my troubles I should burst with joy".

Fourthly, he is quicker to attach permanent significance to transient circumstances, and to see around him evidence of those unchanging laws which govern man's existence. He endeavours to understand life, frequently expressing his conception of the meaning of it by images. Thus the fall of the leaf is the symbol of death; the singing bird is more than a singing bird, it is a reminder of mortality:

> Thou'll break my heart, thou warbling bird
> That wantons thro' the flowering thorn:
> Thou minds me o' departed joys,
> Departed never to return.
> (Burns, *The Banks o' Doon*)

There are symbols for him in primroses filled with dew, the drooping celandine, the cloud, ash, smoke, stars, countless objects and experiences. He interprets life in terms of eternity; like Marvell, he can hear "Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near", and, like Wordsworth, he is aware of "the primary laws of our nature".

In speaking of the sensitive nature of the artist a distinction must be made between the sensitiveness of the

writer and the painter, for, though there are experiences to which both respond, they are sometimes, by reason of the nature of their art, stimulated and moved in quite different ways. The writer's view of life is primarily literary and descriptive while the painter's is primarily visual. Both the writer and the painter may *see*, but what the writer sees appeals by ideas, associations and a sequence of events and what the painter sees appeals by form or colour.

If it is an outdoor landscape that he is studying, the ray of sunlight that pierces the clerestory of the forest is on that bough, his bough, at that point in time only. Those beech leaves are a cold shower of new silver pieces, perhaps for the last time this summer. He is as anxious as the harvester. The weather may change tomorrow. A fortnight hence the inclination of the sun at this same hour will be different. That bough on which all depends, that bough, the protagonist in his ineffable little drama, will never be quite the same again. Miracles of concentration, made possible by an inherited aptitude, sedulously cultivated for years, must be done in twenty-five minutes.

(W. R. Sickert, *A Stone Ginger*)

De ce hêtre au feuillage sombre
J'entends frissonner les rameaux :
On dirait autour des tombeaux
Qu'on entend voltiger une ombre.

Tout à coup, détaché des cieux,
Un rayon de l'astre nocturne,
Glissant sur mon front taciturne,
Vient mollement toucher mes yeux.

Doux reflet d'un globe de flamme,
Charmant rayon, que me veux-tu ?
Viens-tu dans mon sein abattu
Porter la lumière à mon âme ?

Descends-tu pour me révéler
Des mondes le divin mystère,
Ces secrets cachés dans la sphère
Où le jour va te rappeler ?

Une secrète intelligence
T'adresse-t-elle aux malheureux ?
Viens-tu, la nuit, briller sur eux
Comme un rayon de l'espérance ?

Viens-tu dévoiler l'avenir
Au cœur fatigué qui t'implore ?
Rayon divin, es-tu l'aurore
Du jour qui ne doit pas finir ?
(Lamartine, *Le Soir*)

Here, side by side, are the literary and painterly reactions to a ray of light in a beech-wood. Sickert feels the feverish necessity to record a visual experience before it evades him, to perpetuate the shape and colour and tone of it. In Lamartine it starts a train of ideas and comparisons: the ray becomes a symbol, a messenger. Consequently it is very important, when looking at a scene, to distinguish between its literary and its pictorial qualities. The amateur painter frequently falls into the error of choosing for his subject some ruin, or mountain gorge, or street of ancient houses, which appeals to him not by those qualities which should impel him to paint it, not, that is, by forms and colours and rhythmic properties, but by qualities which do not belong to the realm of painting at all, such as antiquity, or historic and romantic associations. The untrained spectator is by his education far more susceptible to such qualities than to those that appeal to the painter. Castles and ruins bring to his mind pleasant memories of historical novels

and romantic poems. Because of our cultural background we tend, naturally and rightly, to attach a value to such picturesque scenes. But this value is not the painter's value. However sensitive the painter is to picturesque qualities he is not impelled to paint by them but by quite other properties of form and line and colour, which excite him in a different way. The more he responds to these qualities the more sensitive he becomes to them, until he is able to find them in objects and arrangements of objects that appear to the untrained eye quite uninteresting. This sensitive perception is a great gift, and by it the painter is enabled to find subjects for painting within a stone's throw of his house, wherever he may live. It is stimulating and exciting for him to travel and find new material, but the subjects that he finds in foreign countries will not necessarily appeal by picturesque or romantic unfamiliarity, but by some freshness of arrangement, a new harmony of colours, a new problem in tone values. A painter may travel a thousand miles and paint a hay-stack or a bank of nettles, both of which he had over his garden wall at home. This distinction between the picturesque and the pictorial was widely misunderstood in England at the time of the "Grand Tour", when the young Englishman of fashion travelled through France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany in search of the picturesque, describing in words and reproducing more or less competently in paint those scenes to which he felt he owed an emotional response. Indeed English painting has frequently laid itself open to the criticism that it is too literary in its inspiration. A true painter will respond with delight

No. III

The Edge of a Wood

CLAUDE LORRAIN
(1600–1682)

This is the drawing of a very sensitive man. The painter has found in a commonplace scene poetic qualities that have pleased and excited him. He has delighted in the carefully organised lines of trunks and branches, in the contrast of light and shadow, and in the different textures of bark and leaves and ground. The imagination is stirred not principally by the figure but by the inviting recession into the scene from the plant in the foreground to the dimly indicated trees in the distance, and particularly by the tunnel on the right leading through darkness to light, an effect which is always exciting.

and emotion to a bend in the road or a plate of stale fish. He will respond because he is sensitive to qualities that he has loved and looked for all his life, and because the plate of fish or the bend in the road present him with problems to solve as absorbing as the most spacious landscape. When the reader looks at the drawing by Claude Lorrain (Plate III) he may well wonder why it is so satisfying, or he may find it uninteresting. If he finds it satisfying it is because he is sensitive to the qualities of poetry, order and craftsmanship which it possesses. If he finds it merely dull he must unconsciously be looking for "something happening"; in other words, he is looking for a literary content. He wishes to see people in interesting situations or clothes, or perhaps some animals moving through the wood, or a town in the distance. A picture may well contain these elements and be a good picture; they might indeed be of great importance in the structure of a painting, but in so far as they interest only by literary ideas they are out of place. The spectator who finds himself wondering what town is represented, what the persons shown are doing and to what date and class they belong, is considering questions which have no place in the assessment of a drawing or painting. The Claude poses no such questions. It interests purely as a drawing expressing Claude's highly poetic response to a simple scene in nature.

This sensitiveness of the painter to properties of matter to which most men are more or less indifferent enables him to enlarge our experience and teach us new pleasures. Our education, naturally, is predominantly

literary, and by it we are trained to find the meaning of a book rather than that of a painting. From our earliest childhood we read. But only very few men and women visit public galleries or collections as often as once a year. By constant reading a person of average intelligence gains an increasing understanding of the writer's art. A corresponding sensitiveness to the art of the painter can only be acquired in the same way by constant contact with pictures and a resolute effort to appreciate painterly and not literary qualities in pictures studied. If this effort is made, a great new realm of exciting experience will be opened up, and this is the gift of the painter to humanity, a gift far too little understood and enjoyed. It is a failing of our educational system that it sets so little store by happiness. There is no happiness more acute than that which can be brought by a great painting. It is a happiness which is accessible to those who live in towns within reach of municipal galleries. But it is a happiness utterly inaccessible to the man who has at his disposal the finest galleries in the world or a splendid collection of his own, if he has not by training and practice been made sensitive to those qualities which can make that happiness his.

There is one experience to which all creators of plastic art are sensitive, for them sometimes a supremely important experience, and that is the sheer joy of handling materials. No spectator, no professional critic even, who does not himself work constantly in these materials can ever fully appreciate the intensity of this delight. A fresh surface to be covered with paint is a source of tingling physical excitement ; the first brushfuls of paint on it are

pure happiness. There may succeed moments, hours, weeks of disappointment, toil and despair. But, whatever the result, the actual handling of paint, the feel of it, the smell of it, are sensuous pleasures. These are experiences which Mr. Joyce Cary has admirably expressed in *The Horse's Mouth* in the words of Gulley Jimson :

> That is to say, I was shouting as loud as I could. And I will admit that I wanted to shout, for standing on the top of a scaffold in front of a good new wall always goes to my head. It is a sensation something between that of an angel let out of his cage into a new sky and a drunkard turned loose in a royal cellar.

The same sensation was described, with less gusto, by a Chinaman in the fifth century :

> To gaze upon the clouds of autumn, a soaring exaltation in the soul ; to feel the spring breeze stirring wild exultant thoughts ; — what is there in the possession of gold and jewels to compare with delights like these ? And then, to unroll the portfolio and spread the silk . . .
>
> (Wang Wei, quoted by Mrs. Laurence Binyon in *The Mind of the Artist*)

This does not mean to say that at any moment of any day a canvas is an invitation to a painter, any more than a clean page is always inviting to a writer. There are long, humdrum periods of work, sometimes tedious, always exacting. There are black days of complete unproductiveness when paper or canvas are repellent. But when the desire to paint is there and the circumstances are propitious and the materials to hand, then there are few joys so intense as the painter's.

In considering the sensitiveness of the artist to his

materials for their own sake it is necessary to make once more a distinction between writing and the plastic arts. The actual sensuous appeal of materials that can be manipulated and whose texture gives a physical feeling through the hands is something almost unknown to the writer. Moreover, visual appearances in colour, line and mass have a direct appeal to the senses without that necessity for interpretation by the mind that is always present before words can convey their message. For although there is a sensuous pleasure to be derived from the sound and rhythm of words, it is almost impossible to dissociate it from their actual meaning. The writer misses the joy of the painter in handling his medium for its own sake, for he cannot enjoy words apart from their meaning to the same extent that a painter can enjoy paint. To the writer the excitement of handling material begins only when the words start to assume intelligible patterns in his head.

All men and women are accustomed to the use of words, and because the medium is not strange to them they can appreciate fine handling of language, rich vocabulary and resonant sentences. That is why rhetoric has so ready an appeal : the medium it uses is universally familiar. Most men and women are far less sensitive to the language of painting : the actual quality of the paint and of the drawing, the colour and the organisation of the picture. These are things which appeal to the senses, but only when the senses are trained to respond as the brain is trained to respond to words and the sound of words. Yet if we were all as familiar with the language of the plastic arts as we are with the language of the literary arts,

the plastic arts would be found to be a more direct means of communicating feelings from one person to another, for, whereas in the interpretation of words the mind intervenes, painting and sculpture can speak directly through the senses.

IV

INTELLECT

> The work of art . . . cannot be produced by a mind relaxed.
>
> BENEDETTO CROCE

EVERY artist must be a thinker. The romantic conception of the poet or painter as an instrument through which the wind of inspiration fitfully blows has done great wrong to these exceptionally hard-working professions. It is most misleading to suggest that inspiration is a power which relieves the man of genius of intellectual effort. It is only by prolonged intellectual efforts that he can train himself to express faithfully and intelligibly the exact interpretation of life that he may wish to express. For all art is an interpretation of experience, a criticism of life, the reaction of man to his environment.

Man may arrive at one of a variety of conclusions about his surroundings and his destiny, but whatever conclusion he reaches must be attained by thought. If he fails to think and so arrives at no personal standpoint, his lack of conviction and decision will be reflected in his life, and, if he is an artist, in his art. If he does think, he may become persuaded that human existence has meaning, or that it has none ; he may adopt an attitude of confidence towards death and fate, or one of stoicism or defiance. His convictions will not, in all probability, remain the same throughout his life. But if he feels

strongly and thinks honestly he must at any given time have a point of view that he will express deliberately, or betray unconsciously, in his speech, his behaviour or his art.

> We had better live in others as much as we can if only because we thus live more in the race, which God really does seem to care about a good deal, and less in the individual, to whom, so far as I can see, he is indifferent.
>
> (Samuel Butler, *Notebooks*)

A man who believed that could not write a novel or a play without this conviction of the loneliness of the individual revealing itself in an emphasis on the aimlessness or unhappiness of some character. A denial of justice or plan in life is a denial of poetic justice in art, and art lacking in poetic justice is marked by a sadness and bitterness, a sense of frustration, that reveal the hopelessness of the writer, just as the optimism or the calm of a Browning or a Jane Austen reveal a sense of being what Buchan calls " a happy part of a friendly universe ".

In Hardy's poem *Freed the Fret of Thinking* are these lines :

> Loosed from wrings of reason,
> We might blow like flowers,
> Sense of Time-wrought treason
> Would not then be ours
> In and out of season ;

What more revealing phrases could be found for the background of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or *Jude the Obscure* than " Time-wrought treason " or, from another poem in the same volume, man's " long groan " ? Nor is one surprised to read in a letter of A. E. Housman an ironic reference to " this charming world ".

Here, in poetry, notebook and letter, these men express their personal beliefs. The novelists might have put these convictions into the mouths of their characters, but, had they done so, we should never have been quite certain whether they were the utterances of the characters or of the authors. When Gloucester says,

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods ;
> They kill us for their sport.

and Lear,

> When we are born, we cry that we are come
> To this great stage of fools,

these words do not necessarily reflect the attitude of Shakespeare. In drama and novel the writer's attitude can be traced rather in the wider aspects of the work of art. When man is made to be a noble and a dignified creature, despite all suffering and crime and treachery, when goodness outrides the storm of evil, and love still burns in the darkness of hatred, it is fair to deduce that the writer is not hopeless of man and his lot. But when the shadows gather impenetrably, when innocence suffers senseless torment and is destroyed, when evil triumphs for no motive of retribution or punishment, but like " a Fury slinging flame ", when futility prevails and men are made to resemble

> the flies of latter spring,
> That lay their eggs, and sting and sing,
> And weave their petty cells and die,[1]

it is reasonable to read despair and fear into the writer's heart. It is a quality of the greatest works of art that they present a conception of the dignity of man even in the

[1] *In Memoriam*, L.

direst suffering : great art does not whimper. No truer example of this could be found than Dostoievski's *The House of the Dead.* The magnanimity and compassion of Dostoievski shine through the terrible pages of his Siberian prison days ; nowhere is there a word of pettiness, self-pity or complaint.

Clearly the attitude to life, which is discernible in novel, play or poem, is less easily traced in works of plastic art. Though it is possible on looking at a painting to say with some certainty, " This man is romantic ", or even " He loves his fellow-men ", it is not usually possible to hazard a guess whether the painter believes in the immortality of the soul. Such philosophic conceptions are far more likely to be conveyed in words than in paint, and if an attempt is made to convey abstract ideas in paint, as, for example, in the paintings of G. F. Watts, there is always the danger that the idea will destroy the work of art. But there are other and more immediate personal problems which confront both the writer and the painter with an insistent demand for thought. All artists, for example, must ask themselves the question, " What form of art am I most suited and most inclined to undertake ? " This question brings a man face to face with his own nature, and he must understand its complexities sufficiently clearly to know whether he is choosing a form of art for which he is fitted.

And though the non-logical, instinctive, subconscious part of the mind must play its part in his work, he also has a conscious mind which is not inactive. The artist works with a concentration of his whole personality, and the conscious part of it resolves conflicts, organises memories, and

prevents him from trying to walk in two directions at the same time.

(Henry Moore, *Notes on Sculpture*) [1]

If an artist does not carefully consider both subject and method, and the relationship between the two, he may easily fall into this danger of walking in two directions at the same time. Many an art-student who has learned to draw in the manner of Leonardo has never paused to think that it is far more natural for him to *see* in the manner of the Impressionists. Sometimes a writer who is at heart a romantic may try to assume a cynicism which is quite foreign to his nature, not realising that though a man may, by taking thought, change and improve his literary style, he cannot change his heart in the same way. Again, it is only by thought that consistency can be maintained within the work of art. The mind must grasp the whole aim from the beginning. The strangest example of inconsistency and change of direction within a work of art is perhaps *The Winter's Tale*, which, from the gnawing jealousy of *Othello*, suddenly changes to the carefree pastoral comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In order to produce a great and a consistent work the artist, then, must understand two things: the nature of his own genius; and the nature of the work he is about to produce. This understanding can only be achieved by intellectual effort.

Then, again, the artist must consider the problem of the true function of the artist in society. It is not difficult to express in a few words the place of the lawyer, the preacher, the merchant or the miner in society. Even

[1] In *The Painter's Object*, edited by Myfanwy Evans.

the purpose of the teacher is fairly generally agreed upon though diversely expressed. But there has been constant and sometimes embittered argument about the precise place of the artist, and it is difficult adequately to define his function. His activity is in part that of teacher, philosopher and entertainer. His position in society is vital but neglected. His contribution to the happiness of mankind has been greater and more lasting than that of any other class of man except, perhaps, the great religious teachers, and even they can be accused of having given rise to persecution and bitterness that cannot be laid at the door of the artist. His aim is unselfish : it is, fundamentally, to give delight to other men. All this he must realise and consider, guarding himself by logic against the dangers of becoming a charlatan, a preacher, a tradesman or a buffoon. He must be prepared to defend his activity against misunderstanding, misinterpretation and malice.

There are other problems which confront the artist : what is the true nature and scope of his art ? What are the limitations and peculiar properties of his medium ? What subjects are suitable for him, and for what reasons can a subject be judged unsuitable ? In other words, he must understand not only himself and his powers, but the meaning of art and of his own art, the technical problems it raises, and the sort of excellence that may be achieved in it. He must have taste. None of these questions can be answered ; nor can taste be acquired without thought. It is implied sometimes that taste is a natural gift. A person is said to " have taste " or " not to have taste " rather as he might be said to have blue

eyes. But a natural interest in the arts undeveloped by serious thought does not constitute reliable taste. One has only to consider the lack of taste revealed in the work of men so remarkably gifted as Tennyson, Holman Hunt and Landseer to realise that they allowed themselves to be betrayed by their talent into a complacency undisturbed by any questioning of the foundations of their success. They were not incapable of thought, indeed they had great powers of mind, but they neglected to consider the fundamental aesthetic laws. Had they considered them they would have avoided the artistic vulgarities to which they fell victims. The simperings of the deplorable company of Lauras and Doras, the maudlin religiosity of *The Light of the World*, the humanised sentimentality of dogs and horses, would have been impossible to men who grasped the true nature of art. Intellect will protect a man from sentimentality, and an understanding of first principles acts as a discipline and prevents flabbiness of mind. It has been said of Landseer [1] that "the more sentimental he became, the more flabby and inert became his forms". Winston Churchill has well expressed the necessity for sheer intellectual power for the creation of a great picture:

> And we think — though I cannot tell — that painting a great picture must require an intellect on the grand scale. There must be that all-embracing view which presents the beginning and the end, the whole and each part, as one instantaneous impression retentively and untiringly held in the mind.
>
> (*Painting as a Pastime*)

Another direction in which the writer or the painter

[1] Jonathan Mayne, *The Listener*, October 14, 1948.

must exercise his intellect is in keeping abreast of contemporary knowledge. The thought that is expressed in lyric poetry must be contemporary thought. The novelist must be familiar with the advances in knowledge in his time: he must understand something of social and political movements and of psychology and science. The same is true of the painter. Moreover, the painter has, in the past, been presented with a succession of problems concerned with the best method of producing an illusion of reality. Such were the problems of perspective, which gave such delight to Uccello, and of anatomy. Colour itself has presented many difficulties. It seems a commonplace that distant objects are most easily represented by less intense colour than objects near the eye. But this, like every other familiar piece of knowledge, had once to be discovered, reasoned over and accepted. Leonardo deals most carefully with this and kindred problems in his *Treatise on Painting*. Again, with the increased understanding of light, painters were enabled in the nineteenth century to make further experiments in painting. The French Impressionists, by working with the colours of the spectrum, achieved an amazing illusion of atmosphere surrounding the objects in their pictures. The advance of photography presented painters with an entirely new set of problems. Here was a mechanical method of producing an illusion of reality superficially far more accurate than any representational painting. The endeavour to discover how best to represent nature by line, colour, perspective, tone and atmosphere was found to be an enquiry which it was fruitless to pursue further. Men began pondering all over again what was

the true scope of painting. Such recent movements in painting as abstract painting and cubism were solutions offered to this new and vital problem, vital because, if it were not solved successfully, art would seem to have reached a dead end and to have had its main function usurped by a mechanical process. Yet one more example may be given of the way in which the artist must grapple with the intellectual and scientific movements of his day. Psychoanalysis and the study of the subconscious mind could not be ignored by him any more than the advances in anatomy and optics. From the impact of psychoanalysis on the thought of recent writers and painters surrealism was born, a form of art predominantly occupied with the images and associations that present themselves to the mind in dreams.

This is not the place for any technical analysis of the methods and materials of the painter, though these too offer innumerable problems. The points here mentioned about painting have been raised purely as examples of the intellectual effort demanded of the painter. It must never be considered that the painter just paints. He thinks. Problems possess his mind relentlessly by day and by night. Even in moments of relaxation, when he is far from his studio, his mind will be turning over the problems of his latest work which will be present before his mind's eye. A quotation from Leonardo may serve to sum up this whole matter :

> The painter who paints only by rote and by ocular judgement, without bringing his mind into play, is like a mirror which imitates all things put in front of it, knowing nothing of them.

V

CONCENTRATION

> I consider the case is this: the disease is simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men.
>
> A doctor's diagnosis quoted by J. W. MACKAIL in his *Life of William Morris*

THE romantic conception of the artist, besides suggesting that he does not need to think, in laying too much emphasis on inspiration, has tended to overlook the necessity for sheer hard work and to create the impression that the artist has only to listen to his genius. It is, of course, indisputable that artists have periods of inspired creation, when the power by which they are possessed drives them to write or paint as though it were some outside force beyond their control. These are the rare and precious moments of exaltation for which the artist waits, it is true, but not, if he is wise, in idleness. In order that he shall be able to give expression to the inspiration that visits him he must work constantly, keeping himself in readiness, preparing his faculties, sharpening his vision and his understanding. He must, if he is a writer, be continually using words, and, if not actually writing, constructing works in his mind. If he is a painter, not only must he be always thinking in terms of paint, but also increasing the dexterity of his hand and the penetration of his eye by

incessant practice. The more he works, the more strenuous his self-preparation, the more frequently will he be visited by the impulse to create and by the flow of ideas so necessary to him. The converse is certainly true, that the painter or writer who neglects to handle paint or words for long periods will lose the desire for self-expression and the power to achieve it. Idleness is incompatible with the creation of great art, and inspiration cannot work upon an empty mind.

In considering the length of the period of preparation and experiment, it is necessary to make a distinction between the lyric poet and the creator of what may be called the major imaginative works — epics, novels, plays or important canvases or murals. The finest lyric poetry has usually been written by young poets. Three reasons can be assigned for this. First, lyric poetry is the product not only of imagination and intellect but also, and perhaps chiefly, of intense feeling, and, in most cases, it appears to be true that the intensity of a man's lyric feeling diminishes as he approaches middle age, when he becomes more analytical and when moments of spontaneous emotional expression become rarer for him. Secondly, as lyric poetry is the nearest approximation in literature to the direct voicing of feeling, its technique takes less time to learn than that of more complicated works. There are examples of fine lyric poems written at an amazingly early age, such as certain of Blake's *Poetical Sketches*, written from fourteen onwards, and many of the great poets have published volumes in their early twenties. Thirdly, lyric poetry is within the reach of the young writer because it demands no very wide

experience. At its best it has often been the expression of pure joy or pain, which are experienced with no less poignancy, perhaps with more poignancy, in youth than in later years.

But if the best lyric poetry is usually produced in youth, this is certainly not true of the greater imaginative works. Feeling here is not dominant and the artist will not be fully equipped until his imaginative and intellectual powers have been developed by prolonged hard work. Imagination grows with use and the intellectual grasp needed for major works of art comes only with intellectual maturity. Thus it comes about that the great plays and novels and paintings have more frequently been created by men in their middle or later years. To all such generalisations there are numerous exceptions. There have been poets who, like Victor Hugo, wrote fine lyric poetry when youth was far behind them, and in the case of the novel one is faced with the remarkable fact that *Pride and Prejudice* was written at the age of twenty-one. But on the whole it remains true that youth cannot produce the greatest imaginative works. The great tragedies of Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *David Copperfield*, *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Madame Bovary*, *Le Père Goriot*, were all written after the age of thirty-five. The activity of painters in their later years is remarkable. Many have continued to paint, and to paint well, until physical weakness made it impossible for them. Titian was painting when nearly ninety, Turner at seventy; Renoir, in his seventies, when crippled by arthritis, continued to paint in a wheel-chair with the brush strapped

to his fingers ; Matisse is still active at eighty, and Picasso, the most powerful influence in modern painting, is nearing seventy. The young artist can produce an inspired sketch or an inspired poem with success, but early novels and plays, and the more ambitious early canvases generally show some lack of power to control the material and lack of the grasp necessary to give unity to a major work.

The achievement of perfect unity within the work, unity of character, atmosphere, style, point of view, is the artist's greatest technical problem. How many books and paintings do we not leave with the feeling that they have " good bits ", or that a certain passage is out of harmony or less well executed than the rest ? A man can never achieve complete unity until he has made himself capable of the supreme act of imagination which consists in seeing the whole work from the beginning. This, in turn, will be impossible for him until he has reached a clear conception of what constitutes a great book or a great painting. Without this he will find himself in parts of his work feeling his way, groping, improvising or changing his plan in mid-course. Keats said in the rejected Preface to *Endymion* : " Before I began I had no inward feel of being able to finish ". All other technical difficulties are secondary to the achievement of this power to see a whole work at once, which can be gained only by repeated endeavours to create a work which has both unity and sound structure.

Again, the major creative works make a demand which lyric poetry does not make, and that is the demand for breadth of knowledge. It is impossible to examine

great works of art without feeling amazement at the sheer volume of information which the painter or writer has at his command. This, in the case of the painter, comprises not only the special knowledge which he possesses, the command of the technical processes of painting, but general knowledge of great variety gathered through the eye and carried in the memory. Every aspect of nature, the form of things animate and inanimate, the anatomy and characteristic attitudes of men and animals, architectural details and geological formations, all this and great stores of other information have been at the command of great painters. Leonardo provides the most striking example of inquisitiveness about the nature of visible things. His *Notebooks* contain drawings of plants, roots, muscles, veins, limbs, hair, the folds of materials, rocks, floods, clouds, storms, machines and inventions. Such drawings by painters are objects of great interest in themselves, but they were never intended to be more than studies towards some greater work, pieces of observation noted down, things seen and loved and learnt (Plates IV and V). In the same way the writer adds to his experience of life and to his knowledge of men and women. Just as a painter cannot invent a rock or a tree without a knowledge of their structure, so a writer cannot make up men and women without an understanding of human nature. There is an essential humanity as there is an essential " treeishness " or " rockiness ", and without insight into these fundamental qualities the artist can never achieve greatness.

From all this it will be seen that a great part of an artist's work is intense *living*. He may appear to be

No. IV

Studies of Arms and Hands and of a Rock

ALBRECHT DÜRER
(1471–1528)

These studies for the left and right arms of Adam, and for the details of a rock with plants growing on it, clearly illustrate several points in the text (pages 67-70). It is evident that the artist has made the most intense effort of eye, hand and brain in his search for truth of form. A page of such studies makes clear that the completion of a picture may demand not only the initial imaginative effort but prolonged intellectual and manual labour. Not only must the painter be sensitive and imaginative, he must have knowledge and the power of concentration.

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inactive when he is acutely observant of life around him. When a man's work consists largely in seeing, feeling, understanding and memorising, when he can sit in the sun quietly and at the same time be strenuously exerting his powers, it is natural that others should suspect him of being lazy. Leonardo explained once to Lodovico Sforza, the ruler of Milan, that he was really producing most when he appeared least active, and Rilke said in a letter from Sweden :

> I have often asked myself whether those days on which we are forced to be indolent are not just the ones we pass in profoundest activity.

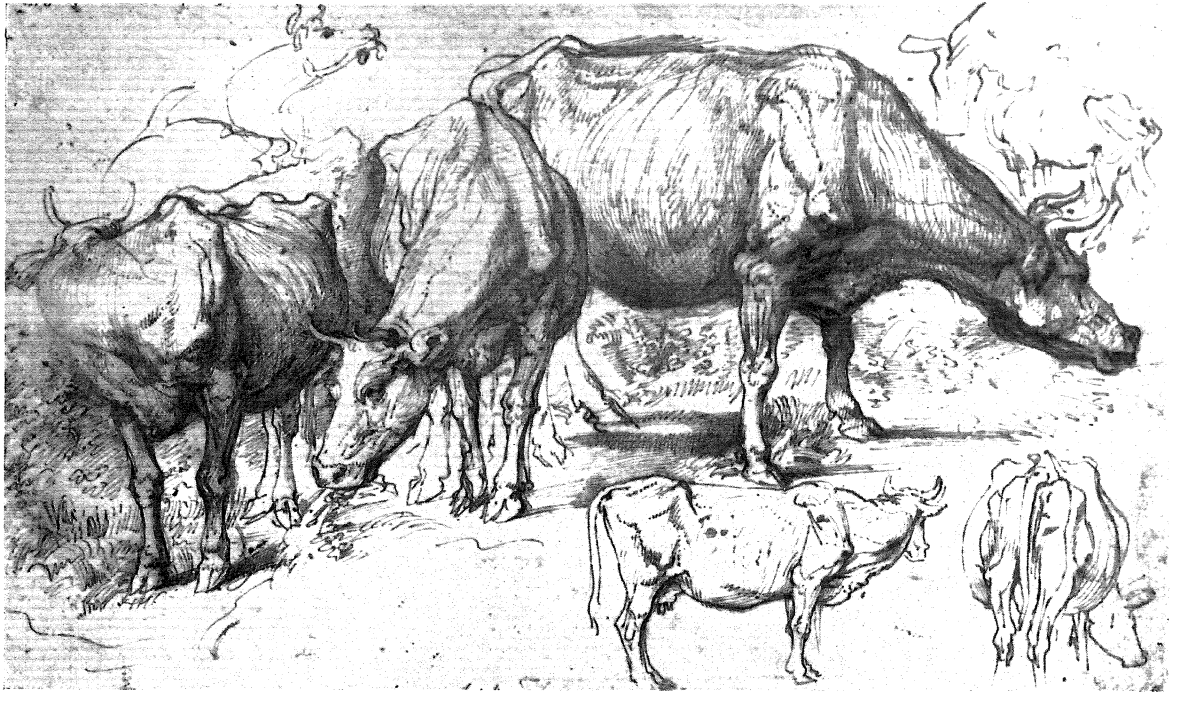
It is difficult for those who do not experience deeply through their eyes or through their imaginations to realise that it can be exhausting work merely to exercise the inward or the outward eye. But a great effort is needed to make the eye convey to the brain the true significance of forms or events, and, the eye having given its message, further great exertion of the mind is necessary before a complete work of art can be organised in the imagination. The physical inactivity of the artist will often coincide with his most arduous work.

Artists have constantly shown remarkable devotion to their art. Lady Troubridge, in her *Memories and Reflections*, says of G. F. Watts :

> He got up at three o'clock in summer and when the light began in winter, and painted all day until the light failed.

and Derrick Leon, in his *Introduction to Proust*, gives this picture of the novelist's heroic struggle :

> For the next six years he devoted himself almost exclusively to his book. Day after day, week after week, month after



No. V

Study of Cows

PETER PAUL RUBENS
(1577–1640)

In the spring of 1949 there were on exhibition simultaneously, in London, this study from the Chatsworth Collection and also the oil painting from the Alte Pinakothek at Munich for which the study was used.

A Rubens landscape is a revelation of the enormous breadth of observation and understanding which a great artist has at his command. In the finished painting the cattle are set in an exuberant landscape rich in knowledge of human beings, trees, foliage, plants, earth, water, sky and light. Professor Joseph Muls, of the University of Louvain, has said of Rubens :

> He possessed the world in the most perfect, the most absolute meaning of the term. No longer had he to discover it like the masters of the Renaissance who, in their quest, had tried to identify every plant, every flower, every muscle in the human body to learn all of their intricacies and thus perfect their universal education. Rubens now knew everything. . . .

month and year after year, he wrote in bed, propped up by his pillows, scene after scene of his tremendous novel. . . . When he was too ill even to sit up, he would work lying flat on his back, his paper held over him with his left hand.

One might quote many examples of this passion for work, this craving to produce something that shall express the fire within. It is in one sense true to say that the artist is a man possessed; he is so possessed by the desire to create that he dreads the encroachments of other pursuits or of possessive people. He dare not allow interests or personalities to deprive him of his time or strength. The writer's attitude to his work and the "joys or sorrows peculiar to his calling" are well described in a passage of Sir Osbert Sitwell's *Laughter in the Next Room*:

How is it possible to picture for him (the reader) the quotidian miseries and splendours of a life attached to the inkpot, the many months spent at a table, the hours when every disturbance is furiously resented, the other, more occasional moments when every interruption is welcome, the evenings when an author looks on his work and finds it good, or those frequent nights when it seems to him to have fallen unbelievably short of what he had intended, the inflations of self-conceit and the agonies of self-reproach, the days when everything grows to giant proportions because it has meaning, the afternoons when all dwindles to pygmy and shows none? What of the racked and sleepless hours before the dawn?

Many lives of painters and writers reveal this struggle between the demands of art and the demands of society, friends or even family. This shrinking from interruption and diversion make the artist sometimes adopt a hedgehog attitude to life, an attitude of defensive mistrust and retreat into himself, combined in some cases with an excessive irritability. This defensive and sometimes

actively offensive attitude, which springs from the natural sensitiveness of his nature and the fanatical concentration of his powers, is one of the causes for the widespread misunderstanding of the artist's character and life. From it has arisen the judgement of selfishness and neglect of others which is based on a misconception. The quality of unselfish devotion and the sense of responsibility, which are rightly counted virtues in the ordinary man, are, in the artist, directed inwards. The responsible and devoted man is the man who will carry out his duty to a higher power and sacrifice to that his personal comfort, safety or life. No man will be found more responsible or devoted than the artist once it is realised that the authority to which he bears allegiance is not any society or group or person outside himself but his own creative genius. In his service of this power none can judge him but himself; he is his own taskmaster. Many writers and painters have driven themselves to exhaustion. No account of the sheer physical labour imposed by an artist on himself could be more revealing than that which Benjamin Haydon gives in his *Autobiography*, and his testimony is in no way invalidated by his overestimation of his own talent:

April 3rd (1812).—My canvas came home for Solomon, 12 feet 10 inches, by 10 feet 10 inches — a grand size. God in heaven grant me strength of body and vigour of mind to cover it with excellence. Amen — on my knees.

4th.—Began my picture — perspectived the greater part of the day — felt a sort of check in imagination at the difficulties I saw coming, but, thank God! instantly a blaze of enthusiastic perseverance burst into my brain, gave me a thorough contempt for my timidity and set me at rest.

6th.—Drew in my figures. Ascertained the perspective

proportions of all the heads; squared in my pavement; oiled in my ground. Thus I have advanced my picture, by God's blessing, more methodically than any I have yet done. . . .

11th.—Worked vigorously; advanced my picture. Got in the two mothers. At the Opera in the evening. The most delightful ballet I ever saw.

12th.—At church; an idle day.

13th.—Idle.

14th.—Got in some heads; advanced my picture.

Later in 1812 he wrote:

I sprang like a giant refreshed to my canvas the next day, mounted a chair on an old table, singing as independently as a lark, and was soon lost in all the elevated sensations of an ambitious and glorious soul.

Through the autumn the work continues:

December 14th.—Made a last application to my father for money. He frankly tells me it is impossible: that what I have had is rather beyond his means. I am in the middle of a great picture without a penny for the necessaries of life or for models. However, I never felt more enthusiasm, more vigour, more resolution. . . .

Jan. 12th (1813).—Hard at work — seized in every part of my body with pain. I take it I caught cold at Lord Elgin's last night, after painting in a warm room all day. I was literally frozen when I got home. Succeeded in my back.

13th.—The greater and more numerous the difficulties a man is surrounded with, the more he should be determined to conquer, and exert his talents to the utmost, because, after all, if his picture be so fine that no one can contradict it, it must have its effect. No man does his utmost.

14th.—Very ill, and consequently very miserable — tried to work, but so weak, uneasy and uncomfortable, could not go on. How much serenity and energy of mind depend on health and vigour of body.

17th.—The week is ended. Three days did I apply myself most indefatigably, night and day — two days indifferently — and one day, being ill, weakly and listlessly.

This perhaps is an epitome of life. How miserable that a darling object cannot be pursued without intermission, without sleep, food or relaxation! But did we make use of the time that is left us, even with all these barriers and weights how much more might be accomplished.

Dark day — hard at work: the light could hardly make its way through the blanket of a sky.

In December 1813 he records progress thus:

I worked away day after day, till at length from severe application and irregularity in hours of eating my stomach gave in and then my eyes. After a fortnight I rallied, but still painting so large a work in so small a room, where I was unable to lift it up or down, and could move it only sideways, and then being obliged to live in the foul air eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, naturally brought on complaints. I had no draperies, no comforts, nothing but a wooden lay-figure on which my breakfast cloth, my blankets, my sheets, all took their turn; yet nothing could equal my happiness in painting. Oh, I have suffered much, there can be no doubt, but I have enjoyed more, and if I had suffered twice as much as I have enjoyed, my enjoyments are so intense that they amply compensate me. Notwithstanding all difficulties and drawbacks, as the year drew to a close the picture of Solomon was nearly completed.

On the 24th of December I recorded in my Journal:

I have succeeded in my conception of the head of Solomon. I thank God humbly for it; I painted till 3 in the morning from 10 the morning before. I was determined not to go to bed till it was done and happily did I retire to rest. My model left me after six hours, exhausted.

25th.—It struck me this morning in the same way. Once more I thank God from my heart and soul. Were I to die now I should leave this world more contentedly.

This was the longest time I ever painted at once . . .

Early in 1814 is the following entry:

After the most dreadful application, influenced by an enthusiasm stimulated by despair almost to delirium, living

for a fortnight upon potatoes because I would not cloud my mind with the fumes of indigestion, I broke down, nor have I to this day (1843, 25th May) ever entirely recovered.

I had finished my picture except toning, but my eyes were so affected that I could see no longer. Adams the oculist visited me, and came just as I was laying my head down, by the advice of a little apothecary, to have my temporal artery opened. Adams in his blunt way said, "If that's done he will be blind. He wants stimulants, not depletion;" and he saved my eyes.

Such is the responsibility of the artist. He is possessed by a spirit that drives him relentlessly. If in the pursuit of his one aim, to fulfil his calling, he neglects his family, or becomes entangled in financial disasters, or cuts himself off from human society, these things are rather the measure of his single-mindedness than of his selfishness or irresponsibility. An artist is by nature an individualist and must heed before all else the dictation that comes from within.

In order that this single-mindedness shall be effective it must be accompanied by two other qualities — conviction and courage. It is hard to imagine the agony of mind, the bitterness and despair of a man who knows his own genius and who yet passes a whole lifetime of work without commendation or encouragement. When critics and public are deriding or, worse still perhaps, ignoring a man's work, only he who has the unshakeable conviction of his own vocation can continue to create. Some have lost heart, like Chatterton. But the greatest have resisted and overcome (even though posthumously) opposition and neglect. They were unswayed by criticism, undeterred by suffering because they knew themselves.

In admiring the single-minded service that the writer or painter renders to his art, one need not condone his faults. Artists, like other men, have been unnecessarily neglectful of duties. But the artist is not more than usually selfish. The biographies of painters and writers prove rather that no class of men has been more generous, more magnanimous, less self-seeking. Their very poverty has sometimes arisen from open-handedness. It is not money that has mattered in their lives, but words and paint and harmonies. These are their riches.

VI

EARLY ENVIRONMENT

> Home! It begins when a child counts the nails and knots on the floor. A home, look you, is something that begins as a little seed and ends as a great tree. It begins with the children's room, then grows until it becomes many rooms and a whole house, a whole district, a whole country; and outside that land the very air and water lose their refreshing taste.
>
> WERNER VON HEIDENSTAM, *Karolinerna.*

WE look back upon certain memories of our childhood with feelings of peculiar warmth and pleasure, for over these past scenes and times there hangs a radiance that is rather the product of happiness than of the sun. The intensity, the poignancy, of our own memories helps us to realise the supreme importance to the poet, painter or novelist of his early experience. The child, even the child who is not destined to become an artist, is, at times, wholly creative, weaving what it will from nothing, believing in its own creations, unaware of any limitations. The slightest details of room or house or garden, the pattern on the wall, the stones on the path, are endowed for the child with a particular magic. The tiniest things will stimulate his imagination to populate a dream-world with fictitious persons. Childhood knows powerful emotions and profound loves. Its love is

directed not only towards people, but towards places, sounds and scents. Whatever the environment of the child he will find some part of it to which he will attach himself with special affection. This is natural enough when that environment includes a garden, a gracious house, a fine extent of country. But these are not indispensable to the child. He will feel the same attachment for hideous and squalid surroundings because his affection demands a focus and an outlet. It is one of the brutalities of an industrial community that children brought up in mean urban surroundings are compelled by circumstances to attach themselves to unworthy objects. Home, which may mean a Derbyshire farm or a Northamptonshire village, may also mean a Sheffield slum or a dingy suburban street. The child whose environment lacks dignity and spaciousness will feel no less intense an attachment for what is mean and hideous. Unless he be the victim of unmitigated cruelty or misery he will love the slum or the street, which will leave upon his imagination marks as ineradicable as the impressions of mountains or seashore. Thus it should be one of the first duties of our civilisation to provide every child with objects worthy of its love, that its imagination may be stimulated and its spirit enriched. Later experience will never wholly obliterate the earliest impressions. In his later years a man's mind may become a store-house of memorable scenes and experiences, yet none will have quite the same quality as those of childhood, the quality of having stirred the imagination of a child.

Once we have left childhood behind us it is difficult to renew its experiences. We can never feel again quite

what we felt then. Set face to face once more with the same room, the same garden, the same countryside, we feel something of the old magic about us, but it is our memory that brings us this experience and not our imagination. We cannot re-enter our dream-world because we can no longer believe in it but only feel an intense nostalgia for it, a sadness and a wonder that the mind which once peopled these places with strange denizens should so forget its creativeness. An old house that hid such splendid or such dreadful places assumes a normal aspect on reacquaintance. Caves that were romantic become poky; rocks that seemed majestic dwindle. It is true that in its wider aspects nature does not change for us. Mountains and clouds and sea are as inspiring to a man as to a child. But it is not the grander aspects of nature that appeal to the child so much as the little things, the hollow tree, the shiny pebble, the chestnut in its husk, and these lose something of their power over us as we grow older. We remember but we do not re-experience our feelings. It is here that the creative artist is nearer to the child than we are: his imagination is fresher and nimbler: he has not lost the faculty of faith in his own creations, his own dream-world. And so it is that the best renewal of the deep feelings of childhood is often to be gained through creative art. It is, for example, the intense sympathy of Dickens the writer for Charles Dickens the boy, the actual memory of harsh indignities and strange acquaintances, that give to the early chapters of *David Copperfield* their tenderness and intensity. They can be read and re-read without weariness because they are the very texture of deeply felt

experience. Wordsworth, too, with his astonishing gift for translating the profoundest experiences into the simplest words, expresses in *The Cuckoo* this memory of an emotion.

O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?

. . . .

Though babbling only to the Vale,
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

. . . .

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

O blessèd Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee!

This same consciousness of a glory passed away, a "radiance which was once so bright", is the starting-point of the *Immortality* ode:

But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

If only we knew more of the very earliest impressions upon the minds of writers and painters, how much better we might understand their work. In reading the biographies of such men, one is struck by the paucity of information available on their most formative years. The family history for several generations, the talents of father, mother or grandparents, the books read in youth, knowledge of the Bible, school life and other such "influences" are discoverable by research. But how seldom can a biographer understand or suggest the experiences and emotions, stamped on the brain and buried in the heart in the very early years, influencing the judgements and tastes of a whole lifetime. These are more likely to be revealed in autobiography as, for example, in Sir Osbert Sitwell's admirable descriptions of his childhood at Renishaw and Scarborough. When some such record has been attempted by another it is almost certainly incomplete but may nevertheless be suggestive, as when Ruskin gives his opinion of the influence of Turner's early environment upon his painting :

Consequently he attaches himself with the faithfullest child-love to everything that bears an image of the place he was born in. No matter how ugly [1] it is, — has it anything about it like Maiden Lane, or like Thames' shore ? If so, it shall be painted for their sake. Hence, to the very close of his life, Turner could endure ugliness which no one else, of the

[1] It is curious that a man sometimes so penetrating as Ruskin, himself a painter of considerable ability, should have fallen into the error of calling such things ugly. There is no ugliness here except in the social sense of the word. Brick walls and blank windows, old clothes, simple people and humble rivercraft will provide all the excitement that a painter could desire, and to these Ruskin adds effects of light and atmosphere. Yet in the preceding paragraph he attributes to Turner "Giorgione's sensibility to colour and form". See Chapter IX, where the question of beauty is discussed.

same sensibility, would have borne with for an instant. Dead brick walls, blank square windows, old clothes, market-womanly types of humanity — anything fishy and muddy, like Billingsgate or Hungerford Market, had great attraction for him; black barges, patched sails, and every possible condition of fog.

You will find these tolerations and affections guiding or sustaining him to the last hour of his life; the notablest of all such endurances being that of dirt. No Venetian ever draws anything foul; but Turner devoted picture after picture to the illustration of effects of dinginess, smoke, soot, dust, and dusty texture; old sides of boats, weedy roadside vegetation, dung-hills, straw-yards, and all the soilings and stains of every common labour.

And more than this, he not only could endure, but enjoyed and looked for *litter*, like Covent Garden wreck after the market.

(*Modern Painters*: V. The Two Boyhoods)

Mud flats and narrow alleys were to Turner in his childhood what the fells and dales of the Lake District were to Wordsworth. Of all records of the formation of a creative mind none, surely, can surpass the early books of *The Prelude*. It contains passage after passage that penetrates into secret achings of the heart, exultations and delights that are almost untouched by other poets. All our deepest and most inexpressible feelings before nature, all the "dumb loving" of the soil, find there their most exact expression.

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst thou,
O Derwent! winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,

Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.
When he had left the mountains and received
On his smooth breast the shadow of those towers
That yet survive, a shattered monument
Of feudal sway, the bright blue river passed
Along the margin of our terrace walk;
A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved.
Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child,
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
Of yellow ragwort; or, when rock and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.

So "the earth and common face of Nature" spake to him "rememberable things"; he "held unconscious intercourse with beauty old as creation" until at last his childhood had

the charm
Of visionary things, those lovely forms
And sweet sensations that throw back our life,
And almost make remotest infancy
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining.

In the fourth book, *Summer Vacation*, there is a most moving description of the renewing of the old loves:

When first I made
Once more the circuit of our little lake,

If ever happiness hath lodged with man,
That day consummate happiness was mine,
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
The sun was set, or setting, when I left
Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on
A sober hour, not winning or serene,
For cold and raw the air was, and untuned ;
But as a face we love is sweetest then
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look
It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart
Have fulness in herself ; even so with me
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God.
While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate :
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt ; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness.

Other English poets have left no such tribute to the formative influences that came to bear upon their infant spirit, and it is hard to assess the importance to them of their early environment. The subject, perhaps, was too personal for some, and had little interest for others. The affectionate mention of this or that place-name is, in many cases, all we have to go on. But there have been minor poets, minor partly for that very reason, whose poetry has expressed their limited but profound attachment to home. Such have been William Barnes, and, in our own time, Housman. Such, above all, was John Clare.

There is a pleasure in recalling one's past years to recollection ; in this I believe every bosom agrees, and returns a ready echo of approbation, and I think a double gratification

is witness'd, as we turn to a repetition of our early days, by writing them down on paper.

So he opens his *Sketches in the Life of John Clare*, the brief autobiographical record that tells so little and so much. Here were no stirring vicissitudes, little indeed in the early pages but the story of a few months of village schooling snatched year by year from the drudgery of a labourer's child.

In cases of extreme poverty, my father took me to labour with him, and made me a light flail for threshing, learning me betimes the hardship which Adam and Eve inflicted on their children by their inexperienced misdeeds, incurring the perpetual curse from God of labouring for a livelihood, which the teeming earth is said to have produced of itself before. But use is second nature, at least it learns us patience; I resigned myself willingly to the hardest toils, and tho' one of the weakest, was stubborn and stomachful, and never flinched from the roughest labour; by that means, I always secured the favour of my masters, and escaped the ignominy that brands the name of idleness; my character was always "weak but willing". I believe I was not older than 10 when my father took me to seek the scanty rewards of industry. Winter was generally my season of imprisonment in the dusty barn, Spring and Summer my assistance was wanted elsewhere, in tending sheep or horses in the fields, or scaring birds from the grain, or weeding it.

A little later, when not yet more than a boy of sixteen, he turned his hand to gardening, but disliked his banishment from the scenes that had by now bitten their way into his mind.

The continued sameness of a garden cloyed me, and I resumed my old employments with pleasure, where I could look on the wild heath, the wide spreading variety of cultured and fallow fields, green meadows and crooking brooks, and the dark woods waving to the murmuring winds.

There is the material of his poetry. Constantly, even in the asylum, he tried to give coherent utterance to this attachment to the fields, to the simple loveliness of Hilly Wood or Swordy Well. It is easy in the case of so limited a poet to see the imprint of his early years. Within a stone's throw of his native village are still to be found the objects of his love, the birds and flowers (save the kite and the spider-orchid), the very insects. But when a man's childhood is overlaid with all the multitudinous experiences of education and travel, it is difficult to trace more than a hint of those impressions and memories that lie deepest buried in his mind. Much of the imagery and symbolism used by writers and painters must spring unconsciously from hidden wells, but it is possible to do no more than guess which images these may be. Mr. Grigson, in his book on Samuel Palmer, provides another authentic instance :

> He owed much in his Walworth days to his nurse " who with little education else, was ripe in that without which so much is often useless or mischievous : deeply read in her Bible and *Paradise Lost*. A Tonson's *Milton*, which I cherish to this day, was her present. When less than four years old, as I was standing with her, watching the shadows on the wall from the branches of an elm behind which the moon had risen, she transferred and fixed the fleeting image in my memory by repeating the couplet :
>
> Vain man, the vision of a moment made,
> Dream of a dream and shadow of a shade.[1]
>
> I never forgot these shadows, and am often trying to paint them." It was a moment of a kind common enough in the lives of painters and writers and musicians and saints, when a sight or a sound, a glitter on wet leaves or what you will,

[1] Edward Young, *Paraphrase of Job*, xxxviii, 187.

possessed them and seemed later to symbolise their whole creative existence. A similar tale was told of Palmer's friend Calvert. Coleridge, too, built much upon an early experience of the Evening Star.

With the imprint of the Bible, *Paradise Lost* and moonlight on the mind of a sensitive child, we are not far from the sources of those rich and passionately felt drawings of the Shoreham period (Plate VI).

Shelley said that in his childhood there was an aged snake in the garden of Field Place which was regarded by himself and his sisters with peculiar attachment.

> This venerable serpent was accidentally killed by the gardener's scythe ; but he lived long in the poet's memory, and it may reasonably be conjectured that Shelley's peculiar sympathy for snakes was due to the dim recollection of his childhood's favourite.
>
> (J. A. Symonds, *Shelley*)

Was there perhaps some other experience which prompted Shelley's constant use of the imagery of waters and caverns, or Wordsworth's poetic use of clouds ? Haydon speaks of the profound effect upon him in infancy of an illustrated book, and who knows how many of the great painters have had an attachment for certain shapes or symbols because of some long-forgotten experience in their earliest years ?

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance to a creative artist of the environment and encounters of his childhood. Nurses and schoolmasters, pictures and books, animals and birds, stars and clouds, visitors and strangers, fears, joys and secret delights, all add to that stock of raw material of the imagination that comes most readily to hand in moments of excitement.

Samuel Palmer 1823

No. VI

A Rustic Scene

SAMUEL PALMER
(1805–1881)

This drawing illustrates admirably the use of symbols and shapes to convey emotions. Palmer had a deep feeling for the exuberant richness of a landscape, a religious appreciation of the fatness of the earth. He conveys these feelings partly by the scale of some of the objects, such as the enormous ears of corn, partly by the rich and rounded forms which give a feeling of opulence, and partly by the very wealth of detail. It is very easy for a detailed drawing to get out of control, but the drawings of Palmer's Shoreham period (about 1825–1833) combine great imaginative power with admirable organisation. Many of the forms here are not taken literally from nature but are personal symbols.

VII

THE ACT OF CREATION

> The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place; from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web. . . . A painter paints to unload himself of feelings and visions.
>
> PABLO PICASSO, *Conversation*, translated by Myfanwy Evans and published in *The Painter's Object*

IT is generally agreed that the arts have their immediate starting-point in a state of excitement. This excitement may, at first, be mainly emotional or mainly mental — a feeling or a state of mind. But even if it begins as an emotional experience, it must give rise to certain thoughts and ideas before it can be expressed in any form of conscious art. The actual nature of the artist's first response to a stimulus can be well illustrated from the experience of the ordinary man. Faced suddenly with a scene of unusual grandeur or horror his first reaction is one of feeling. He does in fact experience something of the excitement that the artist feels: he draws in his breath with awe, wonder or fear. This is the immediate sensation and it is followed by what may be called the "exploratory" process. The feelings are first affected and the mind then comes into play to analyse and assess the emotional experience. For example, let us suppose

that three men, a photographer, a botanist and a rock-climber, walking together in the Cairngorms, reach the bothy by Loch Einich early enough one morning to see the mist rise off the mountains that enclose the head of the valley. The first sensations of all three will be of delight and awe. Then as they lie on the turf and run their eye over the contours of the hills their minds will become active. The photographer will be considering questions of light, scale and foreground; the botanist wondering if the bright speck at the foot of the scree is a patch of flowers and whether any plants of interest are to be found along the water's edge; the rock-climber may be speculating upon the chance of finding an easy route out of the end of the valley for his inexpert companions. In each case the man's mind is stored with the lore and curiosity of his particular interest.

The artist is moved in precisely the same way, though more readily, more profoundly and by less obvious stimulants. And just as the climber and the botanist examine quite different aspects of the scene that confronts them, so the painter and the writer differ completely in what is called above the "exploratory" process. The painter is preoccupied with visual experience, with forms, colours and textures. Graham Sutherland has described these very preoccupations in his essay, *An English Stone Landmark*.

> The setting sun, as it were precipitating new colours, turns the stone, rising from its undulating bed of bright green moss and blackened heather, yellow, pink and vermilion. The coloured patches which streak the surfaces give emphasis to the form and variety to the eye. These patches are warm, even in a cold light.

That is part of a painter's exploration of a landscape of hills and rocks. It is interesting to set beside it the descriptions of some writers. It will be seen that their different interests lead them to discover quite other qualities than those of form, colour or texture.

> This red rock wilderness
> Shall be my dwelling place.
>
> Where the wind saws at the bluffs
> And the pebble falls like thunder
> I shall watch the clawed sun
> Tear the rocks asunder.

In these lines from Sidney Keyes' poem, *The Wilderness*, the elements of the landscape are not considered for their visible attributes but are endowed with symbolic qualities — the endurance of rock, the sawing of the wind, the probing of the sun. Wordsworth's lines on *The Simplon Pass* turn from visual to spiritual experience. Winds, torrents and crags "were all like workings of one mind". So too, in *Glen-Almain*, he speaks of the narrow glen

> Where rocks were rudely heaped, and rent
> As by a spirit turbulent;

To him a mountain scene suggested religion or mythology. Leigh Hunt described in his *Autobiography* his first view of the Alps.

> It was the first time I had seen mountains. They had a fine sulky look, up aloft in the sky, — cold, lofty, and distant. . . . I seemed to meet for the first time a grand poetical thought in a material shape.

Finally, Siegfried Sassoon, speaking of "a landscape that was all grey-green and sad and lonely", adds: "I thought what a haunted ancient sort of land it was".

First came the feelings of sadness and loneliness, then the immediate literary analysis, the question why, and in what way it seemed sad and lonely.

It is not, of course, always a scene of wild nature that moves either a painter or a writer ; it might equally well be a trivial incident in a street, a man's attitude (Plate VII) or his expression as he speaks to a woman. Here the writer will seek motives and imagine a background, a plot, to explain this particular psychological relationship, while the painter will be occupied primarily with the formal relationship of the two figures, their grouping, colour and linked rhythm or movement. It is true that the painter may be interested also in the dramatic possibilities of the scene. He too may wonder about the bearing of these two persons to one another and what it means. But if he paints solely for the same reason as that for which the writer writes, then he will be an illustrator rather than a creative painter. Painters, sometimes too hastily, have been condemned as literary. If they are purely illustrators, recording anecdotes on canvas for the sake of the anecdotes and the drama they contain, then these painters may justly be condemned. This is a verdict that falls heavily on many Victorian and post-Victorian pictures. Such works, for example, as Burne-Jones' *King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid* or Leighton's *Winding the Skein*, countless paintings by Marcus Stone and the once-popular " problem-pictures " of the Royal Academy, are uninteresting as paintings. But when an anecdote or incident provides a painter with the excitement that he needs, and leads him to build a picture round it, he is clearly as entitled to paint such a scene as he is

No. VII

Le Vieux Guitariste

PABLO PICASSO
(1881–)

This painting is an excellent example of the distinction between an illustration and a picture. It has a literary content : it tells a story : it expresses emotion and it is representational. Quite evidently its origin was an experience, a thing seen. But the subject is treated in a painterly way. The emotion is conveyed by the remarkable use of shapes and forms. The harsh repetition of sharply defined angles is a more potent way of moving our pity than the representation of emaciation or despair. This figure, with the same expression, the same physique and the same clothing, painted in another attitude by a lesser painter might have been completely unmoving.

It is interesting to note the relationship between the shape of the body of the man and the belly of the guitar, and the inverted repetition of lowest curve of the instrument by the arrangement of the feet. The placing of every part of the figure and background is worked out with an architectural attention to the balance of forces and structural stability.

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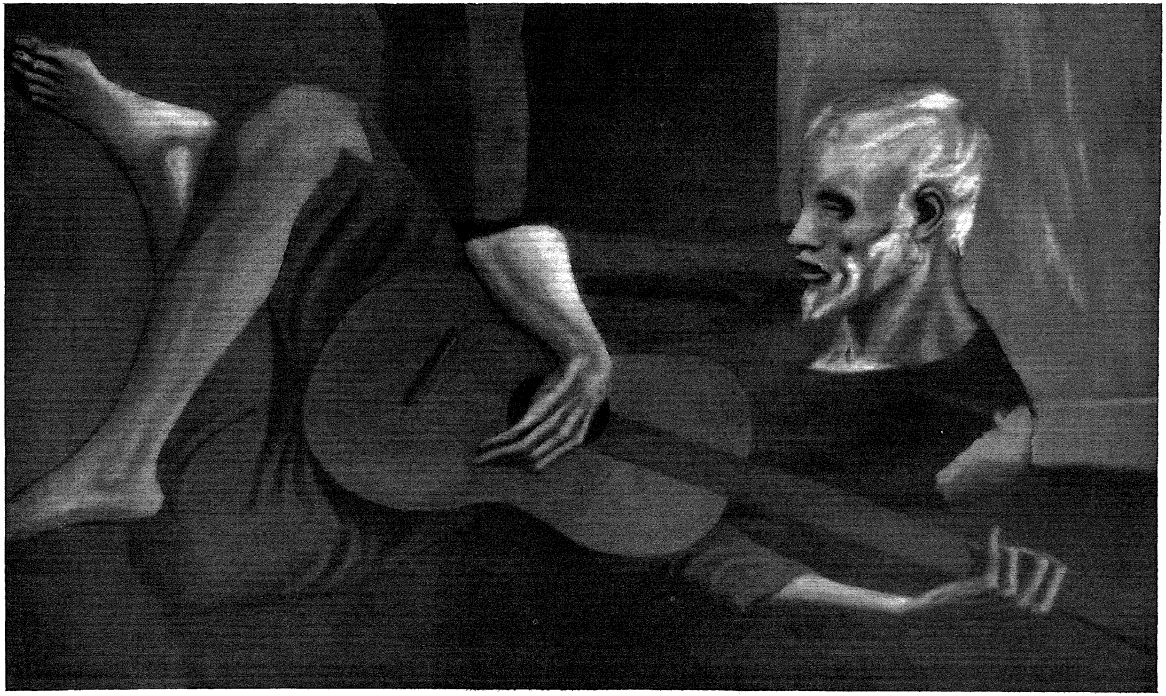

to paint anything else. The distinction to be drawn is simply this : if a painting appeals merely by its story, its literary interest, then it is no picture but an illustration. If its truly pictorial content is such that it will appeal by that whether the literary content be understood or not, then the painter has used his material as legitimately as in the most austere arrangement of pure forms.

There are other sources and types of excitement besides that stirred by an actual scene. If we consider, for example, a poem which would usually be classed as unemotional, such as *The Rape of the Lock*, we find this difference that what stirred the poet to creation was a quickening not of the feelings but of the mind. The idea of the poem and all its possibilities provided the initial stimulus, and the excitement was sustained by the elaboration and perfection of this original conception. The same is true of intellectual painting. An arrangement of abstract forms is not undertaken or completed without excitement. It is this stimulus of an idea or of an opportunity that explains the creation of great works of art to order, as in the case of commissioned portraits or mural decorations. There is no doubt that, to a painter, the opportunity to paint the blank surface of canvas or paper or wall is an adventure and a challenge.

A work of art, then, is produced by an impulse of feeling quickly followed by an exploratory process of thought, and in its completed form it will convey a combination of these two elements, with one or the other dominant perhaps, but never unmixed. For pure feeling could be expressed only in unorganised sounds, colours or lines ; it would create a shriek, a daub or a scribble ;

No. VIII

The Martello Tower, 1927

EDWARD BAWDEN

(1903–)

This drawing illustrates the intellectual approach to the subject. Although all works are the products of both intellect and emotion, yet the painter confronted with a scene that excites him, if he analyses his experience, will be able to trace the source of his excitement primarily in the dramatic and emotional qualities of the scene, or primarily in the more subtle and less immediately perceptible qualities of design. If he is excited by qualities of design and pattern, in all probability a landscape will provide him only with the suggestion for a picture: he himself will organise the elements of it into a satisfactory whole. Emotional qualities are, in a painting or drawing, most readily expressed by strong colour, sharp contrast of darks and lights, and excited, nervous rhythmic lines. These means are not used here, where the emphasis is laid rather upon the conscious arrangements of shapes and patterns. Indeed the degree to which a work of art may be said to be intellectual rather than emotional is the degree to which it is *consciously* organised.

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while pure thought could lead only to some form of expression approximating to mathematics. All art lies between the two extremes of feeling and thought and consists of a blend of the two. There are painters who work, like Vlaminck or Van Gogh, with violence and directness under the influence of an excited vision. In such work the intellect plays a comparatively small part in controlling the actual application of the pigment to the canvas. On the other hand, the work of men like Cézanne and Paul Nash reflects a process which is predominantly intellectual. The source of excitement may have been a visual experience, a form or a combination of forms that gave delight, but the intervention of the mind was prompt and dominant and the completed work the result of long analysis and synthesis (Plate VIII). Cézanne was not satisfied until his mind was satisfied, and the mind is harder to satisfy than the emotions. On the whole, it is probably true to say that the greatest landscapes in the world have been painted under the control of the intellect and not in immediate and emotional contact with nature. This latter method may catch inimitably an aspect of reality, a moment of vision, an atmosphere, but it will lack the architectural organisation that causes a great work of art to be a permanent and not a temporary thing.

Turning once more to poetry, there is in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* a clear argument for the control of the mind over the fervour of the emotions, and it must be remembered that *Tintern Abbey*, written in 1798, belongs to the early and magnificent period of Wordsworth's production. The poet explains how his earlier contact with nature had been one of physical rapture :

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

But as he advanced from boyhood to manhood Wordsworth learned to analyse experience with the mind, and, being a writer, he explored the moral and spiritual aspects of nature, the relationships between man and creation and that

something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

In this later period he was conscious of a mood in which,

with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

In direct contact with nature the artist's eye is at first too restless, too wildly leaping from point to point, too superficial in its appraisal to appreciate the true nature of what he sees. It is this " eye made quiet " which is one of the secrets of great creative art, this mood when rapture and excitement are brought under the control of the mind and there results vision, a vision which can penetrate the permanent and significant qualities of experience.

In literary art the control of the mind must clearly be more continuous and complete than in painting, for words are the vehicle of thought and can appeal to the ear only

when spoken, and then only partially to the ear, and never to the eye. In saying, therefore, that creative works of poetry or prose may be emotional or intellectual, one means either that after the initial excitement the mind makes varying degrees of analysis, or that the initial excitement itself was of the feelings or of the mind. But in any case it is the mind which creates ; emotion cannot do so. It has very frequently been debated whether reason or emotion is the better channel for the creative impulse. But it is quite false to speak of them as though they were mutually exclusive. Benedetto Croce in *The Essence of Aesthetic* speaks of the customary distinction of art into two sorts, that which is " above all, the spontaneous and violent effusion of the affections, of love and hate, of anguish and joy, of despair and elation ", and that which " loves the peaceful soul, the wise design . . . equilibrium, clarity ". But he concludes that in speaking of great art this antithesis is false. When we fix our attention " upon the works, not of the disciples, but of the masters, not of the mediocre, but of the supreme, we see the struggle cease . . .". The greatest art is an inseparable blend of reason and emotion, springing from excitement in the mind and in the feelings. This highest sphere of all is the sphere of vision, where the mind of genius is in contact with the eternal pattern of things. No one can say how much part mind or feeling had in lines like these from *Samson Agonistes* :

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast ; no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame ; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

or these from the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*:

> The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Await alike th' inevitable hour:
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

or these from *Prometheus Unbound*:

> Death is the veil which those who live call life:
> They sleep, and it is lifted.

or these from *Don Juan*:

> Thus lived — thus died she; never more on her
> Shall sorrow light, or shame. She was not made
> Through years or moons the inner weight to bear,
> Which colder hearts endure till they are laid
> By age in earth.

Indeed, what does it matter? This is the supreme art that fills one with reverence for the creative spirit of man.

Keats' *Odes* have usually been classed as among the most spontaneous and directly emotional poems in the language. But the ode *On Melancholy*, though its subject is a feeling, is concerned with the expression of thoughts, the thought that the customary symbols for melancholy are false and superficial and that it is not in poison or drug or death-moth or owl that the spirit of melancholy dwells, but "in the very temple of Delight", and the kindred thoughts that beauty inspires melancholy because we recognise and mourn its transience or our own, and that pleasure is akin to pain because, perhaps, it is so hardly won, so intense and so swiftly past. And behind these thoughts lie doubtless others of despised

love and frustrated hopes. So that it may well be concluded that Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" might, for certain poets, be inverted and expressed as " thought recollected in emotion ".

Now this excitement which sets off a train of thoughts is like a touch on the trigger of a loaded gun. Just as the photographer and the rock-climber and the botanist have in their minds certain curiosities, desires, memories, and stores of expert knowledge, so too the mind of the artist is loaded. And just as the rock-climber and his fellows look for what they want to see and almost for that only, so the painter or writer sees what he is looking for in life — drama, humour, pathos, squalor, colour, pattern, texture or form. His immediate aim, the sort of work that at the moment he desires to undertake, will regulate his vision and direct his attention to the material he wants.

We have already discussed the importance of early environment to a creative artist, and the certainty that his mind will be enriched with associations, symbols, loves and hates from his very earliest years. To this wealth of impressions he is constantly adding new material by new experience. Great art cannot be evolved from nothing ; it demands the introduction into the consciousness of an uninterrupted flow of raw materials. The literary artist must have some coherent conception of the nature of man, of his place in the universe, and of the nature of that universe. He must form an opinion of the relative goodness and importance of the things that men do and possess and suffer. In other words, all writing

that is important reflects an attitude, and that attitude must be founded on convictions. But one man's life is limited. It may be possible for him to pass through a wide range of mental and physical experiences, but he can never know them all, and for those which he cannot himself undergo he must rely on two sources: the knowledge of life that other men express in their art, and his own imagination. It is inconceivable that Shakespeare could actually observe in his own life or the lives of those around him all the passions that he analyses in the tragedies. Love, jealousy, hate, fury, the bitterness of ingratitude — of these he may have known something. But he can hardly have known the feelings of a son to his incestuous mother, or the horror of a man driven by ambition to murder. Here his imagination and his reading must have helped him, and because he had already such wide knowledge and such insight, imagination was able to provide what he had not learnt from life. The work of writers whose experience has been closely limited tends to be personal and autobiographical, because no other material is at hand for their imagination to work on. Thus there is a close resemblance between Charlotte Brontë's novels and the events of her own life. This fact is perhaps less cramping for poets than for novelists, for a large part of the lyric poetry written is the expression of personal feeling, or, if it is not so, leaves the realm of fact altogether and moves in regions of pure fantasy. But even in the poems farthest removed from life as we know it, in *Hyperion*, *The Ancient Mariner* or *Paradise Lost*, there is a logic which gives conviction and which is founded on knowledge. The emotions of

the Titans, the Mariner or Satan are neither arbitrary nor incredible, however fantastic their situations.

The experience which a painter expresses in his work is of a different sort. When he is young and immature his art, instead of being autobiographical like the writer's, tends to be reminiscent of other men's styles, showing that what the writer derives from knowledge of life the painter derives from knowledge of art. When he has accumulated enough of this knowledge, if he is truly creative, his style will reject the influences of other men and become individual. In so far as he is a painter his contact with life itself is mainly visual. He is stimulated both to feeling and thought through his eyes; he remembers visually and he thinks in images.

When some sudden excitement or mood, spontaneous or created, touches off a mind so loaded with the right material a work of art will be undertaken and perhaps completed. The nature of the work will depend not only on the nature of the raw material and of the excitement, but on the direction of the artist's interests at the moment. Reverting once more to the photographer, the botanist and the rock-climber, it must be remembered that one man could have all these interests, but that he could not exercise them all simultaneously. So too the writer or painter may have many interests. The poet may write lyric, narrative or poetic drama; he may have periods of intense concentration on one special metrical form. Painters too pass through periods which art historians differentiate as the blue or the pink or the abstract periods, or which may be associated with the name of the district where the work was done. Painters

are like miners. They suddenly discover a rich vein of inspiration which they work for weeks, months or even years before it is exhausted. The Italian etcher Piranesi suddenly, in 1750, launched out into a strange series of sixteen imaginary prison scenes, *Carceri d' Invenzione* (Plate IX), in which he rang the most exciting changes on figures, chains, pulleys and wheels, set against a fantastic background of huge arches and nightmare staircases receding towards loftier and loftier galleries and roofs. In April 1888 Van Gogh painted a series of fifteen canvases of orchards in blossom and projected a yet more extensive series for the following year. There is no limit to the examples that could be quoted of change of aim or change of interest on the part of painter or writer.

Finally, a word must be said of the actual putting down of the work on paper or canvas. In what mood or state of mind is this done ? Here no generalisation of any sort is possible. Leonardo, who of all men had the right to be confident, approached his work with misgiving. Lomazzo said of him : " Whenever Leonardo came to work on a picture he seemed to be filled with fear ", and Leonardo himself said : " That painter who has no doubts will achieve little ". Many others have felt this humility, some have felt exultation, some confidence, some arrogance. Some have sought absolute isolation, dreading interruption, others have been stimulated by criticism. Some work rapidly, some laboriously. Some create with joy, others with groaning.

So far in this chapter no mention has been made of inspiration, which has been explained rather as a normal

No. IX

Carceri d' Invenzione (V)

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI
(1720–1778)

Piranesi's prison scenes are remarkable products of pictorial imagination. They have dream-like qualities of immensity, and it is interesting that they made a deep impression on the mind of Coleridge. The following passage is from De Quincey's *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* :

> Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Coleridge, then standing by, described to me a set of plates from that artist, called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of these (I describe only from memory of Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls ; on the floor of which stood mighty engines and machinery, wheels, cables, catapults, etc., expressive of enormous power put forth, or resistance overcome.

De Quincey then describes the stairs and arches, that appear to rise ever higher and higher in these strange buildings, and concludes :

> With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams.

In support of the statement (page 95) that a work of art grows from a state of excitement followed by a process of intellectual exploration it is interesting to note that in their first state these etchings were looser and less carefully constructed. As he worked at the plates Piranesi made them intellectually more satisfying without losing their tremendous emotional power.

process of excitement and thought. But it cannot be denied that there are recorded cases where, from the innermost recesses of the sub-conscious mind, complete works and entire visions appear to have risen unbidden. Siegfried Sassoon describes how a whole lyric came to him uninvited and apparently unconsidered. W. H. Hudson tells how he came to write *Far Away and Long Ago* because in a period of illness a clear and complete vision of his childhood surrounded him

> To return to the simile and metaphor used at the beginning, it was as if the cloud shadows and haze had passed away and the entire wide prospect beneath me made clearly visible. Over it all my eyes could range at will, choosing this or that point to dwell upon, to examine it in all its details; or in the case of some person known to me as a child, to follow his life till it ended or passed from sight; then to return to the same point again to repeat the process with other lives and resume my rambles in the old familiar haunts.

But in spite of all this diversity of method and mood one thing is certain, and it is frequently unknown or unconsidered: to create is arduous. It may mean a preliminary struggle to face the day's work, a struggle to bring hand and brain and eye to the same pitch of acute activity, a struggle to create the mood, to stimulate the excitement. Once the work is started it will demand the highest possible concentration of the faculties. The imagination and the eye rarely work at their utmost pitch undriven by the will. To all this must be added the fact that over and over again the end of the day brings the realisation of a falling short, of inadequacy, of failure. Then the intense work of hours is lifted from the canvas or flung in the waste-paper basket, and the next day, and

the next, may bring the same struggle and the same result. And all the time, and in the intervening periods, even in sleep, the mind is probing and exploring and pondering. At the end of a period of creative work there comes a reaction when the body is as weary as the spirit.

VIII

THE TREATMENT OF THE SUBJECT

> Novelty is in the mind that creates, and not in nature, the thing painted.
>
> EUGÈNE DELACROIX, *Journal*

ART is not a reproduction of life. Life provides the artist's raw material, but it is as crude as iron-stone or newly-shorn wool. A stainless steel knife or a gaily-coloured skein is not farther from its original untreated condition than a work of art from its source in life. But because art deals so constantly with the recognisable material of life, and because so many phrases have been coined to the effect that art imitates nature, or holds the mirror up to nature, there is a danger of overlooking the elaborate processes of selection, adjustment and reorganisation that go on before a work of art is produced.

Every artist has an individual approach to life and an individual method of dealing with it. It is unlikely that a finished work by a genuinely creative artist should be attributed to another, though there have been cases of mistake or doubt. The greater a man's individuality the more clearly he shows it in a style of his own. Apart from deliberate imitators no other personality will ever wish to express itself quite in the same way, no other eyes will see quite what his see. This individual style depends on an individual selection of material, an individual

attitude to life, an individual way of seeing and an individual technique.

Selection is forced upon any man who wishes to construct a work of art by the overwhelming wealth of material at his disposal. It is not only that there are so many things to talk about and to look at, but that each separate object, or person or idea has innumerable aspects and qualities and relationships with other objects and persons and ideas. No absolutely complete record of the slightest incident is ever possible. The artist must select, and in selecting he will discriminate according to his taste and intention. One of the hardest lessons that an artist has to learn is how to reject material. He is just as much concerned with leaving out as with putting in.

No man can ever be a mere camera. All that he experiences, before it is expressed, must pass through his mind, and the human mind is not a lens. It cannot register every detail; some it will stress, some it will neglect, some it will distort. The baldest reports of the same scene by men aiming solely at accuracy will differ widely. What strikes one as vital and relevant will be entirely ignored by another. We have seen that creative work, which does not aim at accuracy, has its origin in excitement followed up by thought. Here are two processes in which no men are identical: they are excited by different causes and they think differently about them. The expression of their excitement will depend upon the sort of work they wish to create. A man who wants to paint still life will ignore landscape; if he wants to paint a still life within a certain range of colours which he

has in his mind's eye it is useless to offer him a bowl of mixed flowers ; if he wants to paint the texture of a potato on a sack he will reject an apple on a white cloth ; if he wants to reduce his still life to a pattern of abstract shapes in two dimensions he will be uninterested in perspective. The same is clearly true of a novelist or poet. The novelist may select one of innumerable aspects of life round which to build his book. He may select a passion, a biography, a society, a relationship, an event or a place. The poet may be stirred by lyric feeling or reflective feeling. Whatever he selects the artist will be unmistakably himself.

Every man has an individual attitude to life. His optimism or pessimism, his personal convictions about man's place in the universe and the artist's place in society will stamp his subject and his style. In the case of the novelist or dramatist they will affect also his atmosphere, characters and plot. If several men look into a church through different sections of a stained-glass window, their impressions will be almost irreconcilable. To one it will seem unbearably depressing ; to a second radiant ; to a third cold and unmoving. A man who is convinced that life is controlled by a power of goodness will make a selection of events from the life of a community that bears out this view, and put upon them an interpretation that accords with his belief. The man who holds that life is meaningless will select other events which appear to be without logic or meaning. Neither view is necessarily true or complete. By an arbitrary distinction we have come to call the dingier view of life " realism ", though its deliberate stressing of the shadows

is no less pronounced than the emphasis on the lights by more optimistic writers. Realism in the sense in which that word is commonly employed and understood is an impossibility. By what standards can it be decided that one view of life is more real than another? The critic's view in turn depends entirely upon his own convictions, experience and temperament. There can be no absolute judgement because man cannot absolutely detach himself from life and view it dispassionately; he must view it through his own mind.

When Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary* he devoted infinite pains to the close representation of a certain society and certain characters. He suppressed rigidly the exuberant artist that was in him and concentrated all the capacities of that other artist whom he contained on the achievement of an objective detachment. But even this detachment was the reflection of a personal point of view with its contempt for the vulgarity of the provincial middle class and its deliberate choice of insignificant characters. When Flaubert described the death of Emma Bovary he wished to make the scene as devoid of dignity as it is possible to make death appear. To do this he included repellent details to heighten the disgust of the reader. The dying woman's symptoms, the sweat, the blotched skin, the spasms of agony, the protruding tongue are all drawn against a background of the ineptitude, stupidity and vanity of doctors, husband and apothecary. She dies to the sound of a coarse ditty rising from the street. One detail from her last hours may be quoted for the contrast it presents with two other writers.

And she was seized by a retching so sudden that she scarcely had time to snatch her handkerchief from under the pillow.

"Take it away," she said sharply; "throw it out."

The very handkerchief is made an object of disgust and humiliation.

Twenty years earlier, before literary taste had swung away from easy optimism, another woman met a violent death with a handkerchief in her hands.

The house-breaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon upon the upturned face that almost touched his own.

She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief — Rose Maylie's own — and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

There is nothing intrinsically falser or truer in the action of the one woman or the other. To hold up clenched hands is no more unnatural than to retch. But where Flaubert uses the handkerchief as a symbol of the husband's blindness and of the squalor of the whole scene, Dickens uses it to symbolise innocence, repentance and hope. Rose Maylie's cambric is treasured in the fallen woman's bosom like "a good deed in a naughty world". Nancy's dying action is sentimentally described, but is

her death in any fundamental respect less true than that of Emma Bovary ?

Des. I never did
Offend you in my life ; never lov'd Cassio,
But with such general warranty of heaven
As I might love ; I never gave him token.
Oth. By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.
O perjur'd woman ! thou dost stone my heart,
And mak'st me call, what I intend to do,
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:
I saw the handkerchief.
Des. He found it, then;
I never gave it him: — send for him hither;
Let him confess a truth.
Oth. He hath confess'd.

How noble is this scene in *Othello* when placed beside the sick-room reek of Flaubert and the mission-hall piety of Dickens. Each artist had his view of human nature, each was dealing with a woman violently done to death, each selected the details that suited his end. Flaubert chose the vomit, the utensils, Dickens the melodrama of the harlot's prayer. Shakespeare saw the tragedy of a noble nature distorted by passion ; he saw and did not mitigate the horror of an innocent victim ; he faced human depravity and human suffering without denying human dignity. He was nearer to " realism " than Flaubert.

Individuals differ from each other not only in the events and details that they see, but, more profoundly, in the shapes that they see. The significance of the human figure was utterly different to Blake and Renoir and Modigliani. It is not only a question of how the figures were painted, though that is a very important

difference, but of the shape that they occupied in the painter's eye. This difference of shape comes from an emphasis or distortion that depends on the artist's conception of what is really characteristic and interesting. It is part of a painter's work, as it is of a writer's, to look at things constantly and intently in order to penetrate beyond the immediate superficial appearance to the underlying significance and character. The Japanese artist Hokusai said that only at the age of seventy-three (after sixty-six years of drawing) had he gained a partial insight into the real structure of nature. Every object has so many aspects, so many qualities that only by rigorous selection and simplification can an artist express what seems to him vital. This selection is not a question of leaving out what he cannot understand — he dare not do that — but of leaving out what he fully understands and does not want. Consequently a man cannot select with certainty until he has fully understood. Turner carried out thousands of landscape studies, drawings of rocks and trees, mountains and buildings, familiarising himself more and more deeply with the form of things, not so that he could introduce every detail into his paintings but so that he should know what he could leave out. For just as absolute realism is impossible in words so it is impossible in paint. The painter could not if he wished convey everything about a scene nor reveal every detail of it. It is only necessary to look at a tree for a moment to realise that no attempt to paint every detail of it could succeed.

The writer does not have to deal with form. As we have seen he interprets form in terms of thought. For

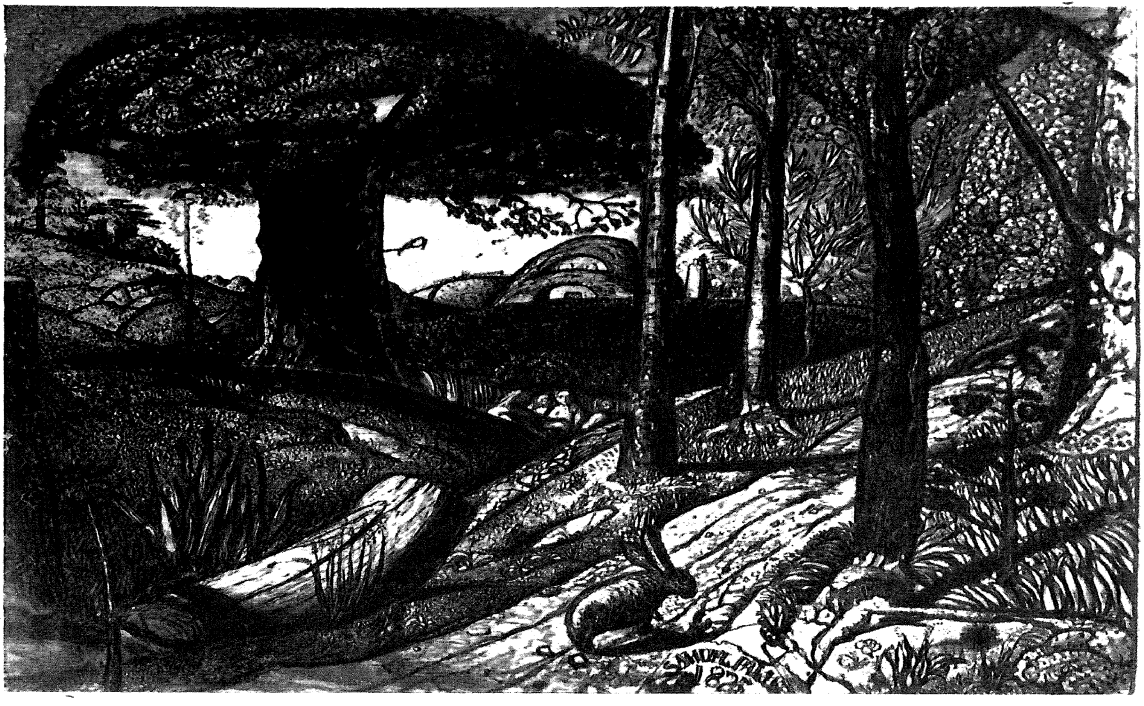
him the leaves are not innumerable baffling shapes but " pestilence-stricken multitudes ". The entangled pattern of the trunks becomes the death-grip of battling enemies:

> Sycamore shoulders oak,
> Bines the slim sapling yoke,
> Ivy-spun halters choke
> Elms stout and tall.
> (Thomas Hardy, *In a Wood*)

Victor Hugo makes a scurry of dead leaves the symbol of lame thoughts that rise up to subside; Barbellion, in his sickness, envied the sturdiness of the beech and longed " to possess its splendid erectness in my bones "; Blake saw a tree full of angels on Peckham Rye. That is the ultimate expression of the writer's attitude to form. He transforms it into an idea. But the painter is compelled to grapple with form itself and in some way to express it. Even if it were a desirable achievement so to imitate every detail as to give an illusion of reality there comes a point when hand and eye can go no farther. And even supposing an absolutely exact painting of a tree could be made from a given standpoint, that would still present only one aspect of a tree. Seen more and more near at hand the tree would continually reveal further facts about itself until finally the eye, only a few inches from the trunk, would be contemplating the marvels of the bark. All this is, perhaps, too evident to need such elaboration were it not for the fact that the first and sometimes the hardest step towards an understanding of painting is the realisation that the painter does not wish or attempt to represent photographically what he sees. He is compelled to substitute personal symbols for visible objects.

It is true that some Dutch paintings and pre-Raphaelite paintings, and certain contemporary works, by Mr. Stanley Spencer for example, do convey an impression of immensely meticulous representation. But such works tend to assume rather the nature of a conjuring trick than of a work of art and, if they succeed as paintings, do so not because of any illusion they create but because principles of arrangement, balance, colour and rhythm have been obeyed which have endowed them with qualities other than mere reproduction of appearance.

Reverting once more to the tree, a careful examination of a number of paintings and drawings reveals that each painter has his own symbols for the various qualities of a tree, whether it be height and dignity, strength and stability, or growth and intricacy. Upon some such characteristic he will concentrate his attention, ignoring other qualities that would confuse the impression he wishes to convey. In the drawing by Samuel Palmer reproduced (Plate X), it will be seen how quite unrepresentational his drawing is. The plants on the ground, particularly those like knife-blades on the right of the picture, are not imitated from nature but serve to indicate a thick growth of grass or other vegetation ; the foliage on the trees to the right is that of no English trees, nor is the habit of growth natural. Palmer's personal delight in certain shapes and textures is to be seen in every part of the picture, particularly in the repetition of the squat hummocky form in the ground formations, the crown of the large tree, the cottage roofs, the rabbit (or hare ?) in the foreground and the very arrangement of his signature. The trees and plants in the Rembrandt



No. X

Early Morning

SAMUEL PALMER
(1805–1881)

This drawing is discussed in the text on page 116. The remarks on illustration No. VI apply here also.

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No. XI

A Cottage with a large Tree

REMBRANDT HARMENSZ VAN RIJN
(1606–1669)

This drawing is from the splendid collection of Rembrandt drawings at Chatsworth. It illustrates many qualities of a great artist and a great work of art. The painter is sensitive to scenes and shapes that the ordinary man passes unnoticed. But the ordinary man will often appreciate the qualities which the painter in his treatment of a scene extracts from nature and puts on paper. This extraction is an imaginative process. The painter, being sensitive, responds with excitement to a certain scene. Being also imaginative, he sees in his mind's eye a complete work in the right medium. In his imagination he selects and organises the isolated details, realising what part each must play in the whole. Thus Rembrandt has instinctively selected those details — ditch, fence, plant and shadow — which serve to enclose the foreground and to carry the eye round, in either direction, to the centre of interest.

drawing (Plate XI) are an excellent example of a personal method of expression. No attempt is made to suggest the actual size of the leaves or their shape, but the result is completely satisfying. The drawings and paintings of Gainsborough, Constable, Derain, Cézanne, or indeed of any really original painter, are made up of personal symbols not only for trees but for everything that they introduce into their pictures. These symbols have highly characteristic shapes, and it is that fact partly which makes it improbable that a work by any genuinely creative painter should be attributed to any other person except a too devoted disciple or a skilful imitator.

It may be objected that a tree, being of so intricate a structure, is an unusually difficult object to paint, and that a study of still-life paintings would reveal a series of sedulously imitated apples. But is the object of the painter simply to imitate the apples as closely as he can? If so, why does he not make a wax model of them in three dimensions? The answer is that he does not make a wax model in three dimensions because he wants to paint. There is therefore a clear distinction between exact imitation and painting. Exact imitation may provide a certain satisfaction, but the pleasure of painting consists in the expression in paint, in two dimensions on a flat surface, of a personal interpretation of experience.

The great majority of people who look at a picture have one criterion and one only: "Does it look like what it is meant to be?" This deplorable attitude is exceedingly hard to combat. In the first place, it must be understood that a picture is not necessarily a picture *of* something in the sense in which most photographs are

photographs of something, in other words visual records, reminders of its superficial appearance. A picture is to be enjoyed for its own sake ; it is a surface of canvas, or paper or wall, animated with exciting shapes and colours. It probably will present recognisable objects but its purpose is not to give an imitation of their immediately perceptible qualities. A painter is just as much in search of the underlying significance of things as the writer. He has vision as the writer has and his painting must be, to some extent, an abstraction or idealisation even when it appears to be a representation. Indeed, it will prove to be a far more convincing and satisfying representation by that method than by any laborious imitation. Thomas Hardy wrote in 1887 ·

> The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art — it is a student's style — the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life.

Finally, and least important, we come to individual technique. It is not how a man speaks that matters but what he says, and the artist who depends for distinction upon a distinguished technique alone will never be among the truly great. Some men are endowed with such astonishing dexterity that it betrays them into complacency. They become satisfied with that alone. There is an inviting sparkle about their work as there is about shallow water, but you cannot swim in it. Swinburne was one of these, though by no means always, and Sargent. Many who exhibit annually at the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours have the same failing. They say nothing, with skill and taste.

There can be only one criterion for technique : does it honestly subserve the artist's aim ? If it helps him, then it is good technique for him. It may be intensely individual, like the verbal technique of Gerard Manley Hopkins or the *pointillisme* of Seurat, or it may be much less easily distinguishable. But it must help the artist to express what is in him. If what he wishes to say is banal, if his eye and his mind are uninteresting, then no brilliance of technique will save him from mediocrity. It is important always to consider with care the content of a work that appears particularly brilliant.

IX

THE ARTIST AND NATURE

> Without art nature can never be perfect; and without nature art can claim no being.
>
> BEN JONSON, quoting Simylus

IT has been agreed by critics of all countries and periods that the artist must follow, or obey, or imitate nature. But without some definition of the word "nature" the exact meaning of this maxim is not clear. In his writing or painting the artist is endeavouring to express more and more completely the significance of his experience. In this experience there are three elements which together constitute that "nature" which he is to follow and obey. First, there is the character of man himself, human nature; secondly, there is man's environment, natural creation; thirdly, there is the relationship between the two and the laws by which man in his natural environment appears to be governed.

At different periods and in different countries artists have attached more or less importance to one or other of these elements. Thus to the critic and the artist of late seventeenth-century France or eighteenth-century England nature did not mean what it meant to the men of both countries in the early nineteenth century. The earlier age concentrated rather on the nature of man and on the laws by which he appeared to be governed; the

later age, flinging aside laws and restraints, revelled somewhat unhappily in a lawlessness which they conceived to be natural, and found great inspiration in natural creation. But in spite of changes of emphasis and interpretation all great creative artists have been concerned with these three aspects of nature, the writers being primarily interested in behaviour and the moral significance of experience, the painters in its formal significance and in appearance.

It is evident that the writer must understand as fully as he can the nature of man, for all literature consists either of the direct expression of the writer's personal experience, in lyric or reflective poetry, in autobiography, essays, letters or diaries, or else of its indirect expression through the words, actions and thoughts of fictitious characters. In creating fictitious characters the writer comes face to face with the law that the logic of art is more closely knit than the logic of life. He will find that, if his characters are to be convincing, they must act not as men and women might conceivably act, but in the way in which the reader or spectator has been led to feel they *must*. To achieve this the writer must endow his characters with that inner consistency which human beings do actually possess. In life, men and women may surprise us by actions or words that appear to be out of harmony with their characters. But the surprise arises actually not from their inconsistency but from our incomplete knowledge. The psychological cause for their behaviour has always been there, had we but known it. In art we must know it, lest we should be shocked by a development which appears contradictory to what has gone

before. Here, again, is shown the necessity for the artist of seeing the end of his work from the beginning. Art must have an inevitability in its development to which every detail must contribute. Even the mystery preserved throughout a long novel must remain a mystery only because of some factual evidence that is suppressed, some misinterpretation of events or motives, and not because a character is suddenly to be revealed in an entirely different light. A person in fiction or drama may play a false part, but we must be given some hint of his duplicity. To depict him as a good man in every detail, only later to reveal some villainy, as Victor Hugo did with the character of Clubin in *Travailleurs de la mer*, is an artistic blunder which offends the reader. In other words, the reader must be admitted by the writer into a degree of knowledge which may be withheld from the characters of the book. There must almost always, in fiction, be a degree of dramatic irony.

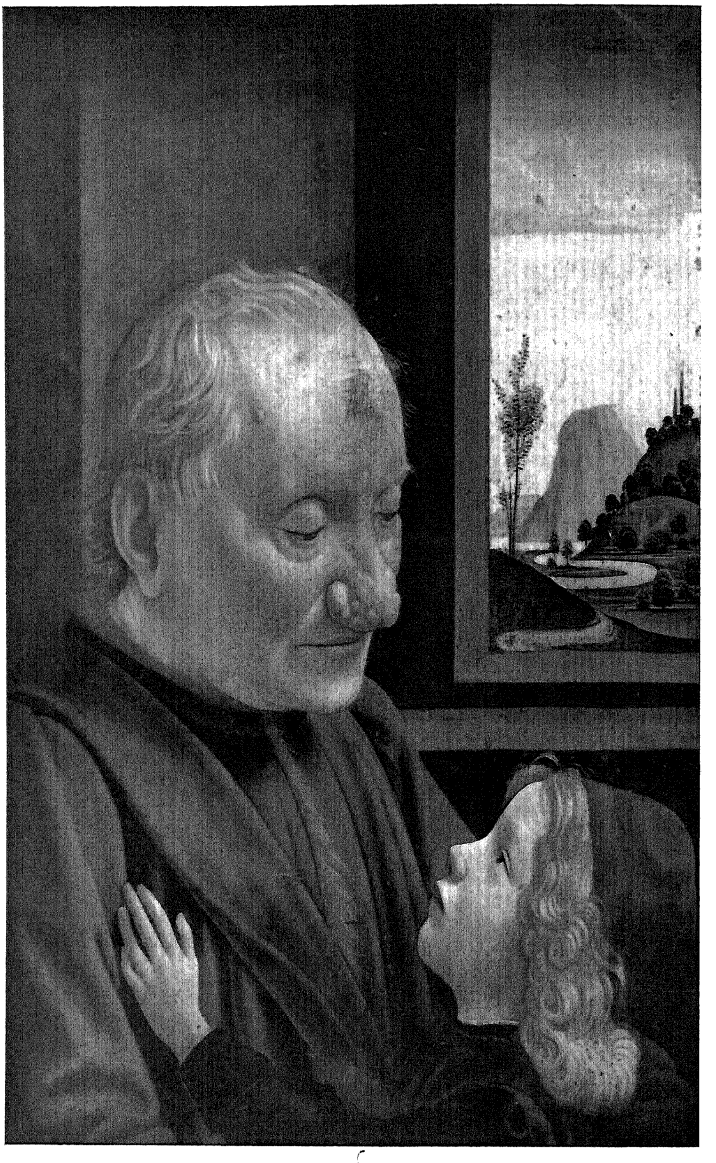
In order that the words and actions of his characters shall have this quality of inevitability, it is necessary for the writer to be highly endowed either with the imaginative power of picturing very vividly their outward appearance, habits and peculiarities, or with the imaginative power of entering into other personalities and wholly comprehending them, or with both these powers together. The former and more superficial method is of itself sufficient for comic writing. A puppet may be amusing and consistent in its actions in that it will always respond in a certain way to a certain stimulus. Mr. Micawber, M. Jourdain and Mrs. Malaprop are to this extent puppets that we hardly enter at all into their minds

but delight in their antics and tricks of speech. One of the great resources of a comic writer is to make his reader await and anticipate a certain sort of behaviour. But persons of this sort can have no true pathos ; they are inadequate for serious novels and plays. In these we must have revealed to us a personality which is carefully built up and whose humanity is more fully and more gradually developed. In *Vanity Fair* Thackeray contrives to change our feelings for Rawdon Crawley without shocking us by the transition. From being contemptible he becomes pathetic. We are prepared for the change (though we do not expect it) because we know that with all his vices he is both stupid and affectionate. He is one of the most brilliant examples in English fiction of true characterisation. But in reading even such a masterpiece as *Pride and Prejudice* it is legitimate to wonder whether the Darcy who ultimately marries Elizabeth Bennet is really the man who insulted her at the ball at Netherfield.

In order to achieve an impression of reality, a writer, particularly a dramatist, may use a process of extreme simplification. Phèdre, in Racine's great tragedy of that name, is not a fully modelled human being. There are many things about her that we do not know. But she stands as a profoundly moving symbol of one thing — a deadly struggle between virtue and unnatural passion. The conflict between good and evil in the human heart is so elemental and so familiar to every man and woman that the simplification of Phèdre's psychology, to emphasise this struggle only, greatly intensifies her pathos.

The power of penetrating deep into human nature, of finding the constants beneath the variables, is as necessary to the painter of men and women as to the writer, if ever he is to rise above mediocrity. There is a painting by Ghirlandajo (Plate XII) of an old man, with a hideously deformed nose, and his little grandson which is most moving because the painter has succeeded in subordinating the deformity to the simple human relationship—the man's love of the child and the child's trust of the man. Just as in intercourse with our fellows we are blinded by love to their physical shortcomings, so, as we look at that picture we lose our feeling of repulsion in a much deeper emotion. Ghirlandajo could not have painted that portrait if he had not studied and loved his fellow-men.

The second element in that " nature " which the artist must study to obey, is the realm of natural creation, man's environment. So far in this book the word " beauty " has not been used except in quotation. It has been avoided deliberately because the whole conception of beauty is vague and misleading. The word is not used in any of the more familiar definitions of poetry, nor would a painter use it in seeking to define his activity. There is no absolute and accepted scale of beauty. To introduce the term in criticism therefore is exceedingly dangerous ; one is apt to draw conclusions as though beauty were an attribute like hardness, about which there can be no two opinions and which bears a meaning in no way relative to other conceptions. A stone is hard and a sponge is soft. A stone is harder than a piece of wood, and a piece of wood harder than a cork. Hardness there-



No. XII

Portrait d'un vieillard et de son petit-fils

DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO

(1449–1494)

This painting is discussed in the text on page 126.

Louvre, Paris. Photo. Giraudon

fore is a word which means the same thing for all ordinary people, and from the use of which no confusion can arise. But beauty is an entirely relative term. The artist is not trying to express beauty, he is trying to express what seems to him satisfying and exciting. He has his vision of such abstract qualities as order, form, harmony, balance, and these, where he can find them and express them, give him the aesthetic pleasure which is loosely associated with the word "beauty". But where one man can see order and find pleasure in it, another will see only chaos and experience only dismay and disgust. Thus the explorer in the artistic realm, the pioneer, is almost always hailed with derision, contempt and anger until he has forced his point of view upon other people. Gradually a new vision will be accepted when its unfamiliarity is forgotten. The popular artist, popular, that is, in his lifetime, is frequently popular because he is giving the public what it has already accepted and not revealing a new vision, a new aspect of human experience. We do not now deny beauty to *Endymion*, *The Ancient Mariner*, or the paintings of the French Impressionists, but at their first appearance they were treated with a contempt which today seems inexplicable. Van Gogh's richest canvases were greeted with derision or ignored; it was only towards the end of his life that his brother was able to announce with triumph that he had at last sold a picture for him. Yet in the early weeks of 1948 a hundred and fifty thousand people visited the Tate Gallery to see his paintings and drawings, and from morning to evening the queue stretched from the entrance out into the street. These facts should be a

warning to all who feel inclined to sneer at what is unfamiliar to them. We all know the visitor to exhibitions of contemporary art who mutters with indignation and clamours for what he understands. For him there is no pleasure to be found in new modes of expression. He hankers for old forms and fashions. And, indeed, it is hard to keep abreast of developments in the arts. There is a hardening of the arteries of appreciation that sets in, accompanied by a nostalgia for the realms of poetry and painting once enjoyed and now effortlessly re-visited. No blame can attach to the man who says humbly, " I cannot understand this ", but great blame to the man who condemns immediately what is unfamiliar.

" Beauty " then, in speaking of art, is a highly dangerous and controversial term. Its meaning shifts and changes even for the individual. What once gave pleasure will cease to do so ; what once seemed unpleasant will give delight. And this is true not only of the critic and the public but of the artist himself. For both the creation and the appreciation of the arts demand constant effort and constant growth.

It is, however, impossible to write what is to be said in this chapter without introducing the word beauty, not with reference to works of art but to the world in which the artist lives. There is no danger here of confusion because, although all men do not find pleasure and excitement in the same scenes, there is a general agreement that the world is beautiful. It would be impossible to find a creative artist who did not believe this, and it would be difficult to find a man of any sort who would deny beauty to sea, sky and earth.

Man is a part of natural creation. In it he finds his normal environment and this is as necessary to him as to any other animal. But unfortunately he has increasingly used his powers to divorce himself from his natural surroundings. By his gradual concentration in cities, and by the recent industrialisation of his life and the vulgar commercialisation of scientific inventions, he has surrounded himself with so much that is unnatural and hideous that an increasing number of human beings are born and bred in each generation who do not understand their need for natural beauty or their own loss in being deprived of it. A man in a room with closed windows does not realise the foulness of the air until he becomes conscious of drowsiness or malaise. He knows then that it is fresh air that he needs. So a man who is physically hungry will seek food. But there is a spiritual hunger, a restless, aimless misery, a loss of values and of balance which comes from the lack of contact with earth. This evil is the more insidious as it is unrealised ; it grows the more malignant as men seek to remedy it with the toils and pleasures of the town. Instinctively, like sick animals eating grass, weary men and women turn to the country or the sea. The tired, the sleepless, the unnerved find relief there. The man who has learned to love the country can visit it with his mind when his body cannot go. Intentionally, in idle moments, he can dream of it; unintentionally, through some unconscious association of ideas, he will find it springing up in his mind. As he walks down a glaring pavement a sudden whiff of peppermint from a sweet-stall will carry his mind to a lime-stone dale filled with the warm scent of mint and

thyme, or the reek of garlic from a Soho kitchen will recreate around him the dank wood where he first learnt that smell. A railway time-table will bring magic names into his mind and he will repeat the syllables with delight.

But the man who has never known the countryside, and there are many now, cannot turn to it in this way. A hundred and fifty years ago there can have been but a negligible proportion of Englishmen who were unfamiliar with country things. All the dwellers in hamlet, village and market-town knew nature as their background and their home. They were not all conscious of any pleasure in it, or of its effect upon their lives, any more than a man is conscious of his breathing or the beating of his heart. But they shared in the great processes of nature, the spring sowing and the autumn gathering, and knew by hard experience the dependence of man upon natural forces. But now the great migration to the centres of industry has turned vast numbers of us into hereditary town-dwellers and made us increasingly ignorant of nature. The cities with their mechanical labours and amusements substitute shrewdness for simplicity and inherited sophistication for inherited lore. So the cleansing, strengthening sanity of the earth is being withdrawn from modern life. Week by week suburbs and factories creep farther afield. The loud cry of economic necessity excuses open-cast coal-mining and surface excavations for iron-stone, dumps and quarries, exploitation and "development". The spiritual impoverishment of a country so developed is never considered at its true cost. Men are exiled from their birthplaces; villages and

communities fall derelict; the surface of the earth is befouled and deserted. If we were not so enslaved to material values we might realise that no economic impoverishment could be more grave than this spiritual impoverishment. As we scar the face of England by our vulgarity and greed, what heritage do we leave for future generations? We would not willingly deprive them of food or air, but we hardly hesitate to deprive them more and more of their incomparable patrimony of beauty and the power to understand it.

Against all this the artist has always set his face. He has reiterated ceaselessly the importance of natural creation to the spirit of man, and in a long succession of novels, satires, films and plays, expressed his anger or despair at man's surrender to materialism. He knows that man's feet are on a dangerous slope. Constable said of the landscape painter that he "must walk through the fields with an humble mind", and this humility before the creation of which he is a part is essential to any man who would preserve a balanced view of life. When a civilisation becomes materialist, when it conceives itself to be self-sufficient, when it forgets man's place in nature, its art becomes increasingly sterile. This is because the soil of a complacent materialist society is too shallow to promote long life and robust growth in any art, whose roots must go deeper than fashion and convention into the permanent laws and conditions of our life.

Such a conclusion leads us to the third element in "nature" which the artist must endeavour to understand. One of the sources of art has always been man's curiosity about the laws that govern his life.

"Those who read me," said Joseph Conrad, "know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity."[1]

The artist is endeavouring to explain experience, and he is always to this extent a teacher that he opens man's eyes not only to man's own nature and environment but to those unchanging laws beneath which he exists and which he cannot with impunity ignore. The artist does not regard these laws as abstract problems. That is the realm of the philosopher, and the expression of philosophic conclusions, reached by pure reason and divorced from behaviour, has no place in art. Only a conclusion reached by the observation of men and women living their lives can have artistic significance. One of these unchanging laws deducible from man's behaviour, is the conclusion which we have just reached, that he cannot cut himself off from his natural surroundings without spiritual impoverishment. There are other permanent conditions which bind him: the impossibility of ever finally enslaving man's spirit which will always in the end insist on freedom; the absolute necessity for man of something beyond material possessions; the positive nature of love and tolerance and the deadliness to man of hate, anger and greed; the destructive quality of fear and jealousy. All these can be found repeatedly expressed in novel, poem and play, and in the satirical drawings of such men as Goya, Daumier or Cruikshank. It is by no means only the romantic idealists, like Rousseau or William Morris, who have proclaimed them. They are a part of our Western tradition.

[1] *Personal Record.*

The tradition which we inherit is a religious tradition. It has ascribed absolute and ultimate value to the individual soul; its view of life is that of a pilgrimage of the soul towards freedom. This is not merely the attitude of a small company of mystics. The finest expression in English of life as a pilgrimage was written by a tinker. The values of our western heritage, justice, mercy, kindness, tolerance, self-sacrifice, are incompatible with materialism, or rather the contradiction between them and a materialist view of life must in the end be realised. If I may borrow a well-worn phrase about the state, these values will wither away in a materialist culture. It is meaningless to talk about human 'rights' in a materialist society; one might as well make a moral appeal to the Atlantic Ocean. Materialism knows only power and expediency; the lamb has no rights against the lion, and the lion has no duties towards the lamb. There is no justice, only a ruthless, functional expediency in the bee-hive and the anthill.

(Professor E. L. Woodward, in *International Affairs*, April 1949)

Those are the words of a very distinguished historian. Every article of this Western faith which we hold finds support in the words and lives of artists. Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Molière, Cervantes, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley and innumerable other men and women of creative minds have ascribed value to the individual soul, hated materialism or defied tyranny. The formation of ruthless societies with the efficiency of anthill or beehive, the totalitarian states or police states, belongs particularly to our own day, but already it has aroused the passionate opposition of writers and painters. In *Trial of a Judge* Stephen Spender describes the working of such a society:

For by your law, the jungle
Is established; and the tiger's safety is guaranteed
When he hunts his innocent victim,
By all the iron of the police.

I condemned to death gunmen
And gangsters, but they are
The highest functions of this society;
Except perhaps for machine guns and those inhuman
Instruments of killing
Which are more powerful even than your fangs
Devoid of pity and the human spirit. . . .

A similar disgust stimulated Picasso:

In 1936 Picasso was deeply indignant at General Franco's proceedings in Spain. This indignation was given form in January 1937 when he produced a series of terrific symbolical etchings called *Songe et Mensonge de Franco* accompanied by a burning text; some of these etchings are in the tradition of Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra*; others show the bull as the Spirit of Spain snorting fiery defiance at the invader typified by obscene beasts, half-slugs and half-wasps, arrayed in armour and crowned with mitres, making ramshackle gestures of warfare and hollow pretensions to piety. In this mood too Picasso painted *Guernica*, a passionate protest against Franco's savage bombing of Spanish towns and villages.

(R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters*)

These, then, are the three elements contained in the word "nature", when it is used in critical writing: human nature, natural creation and the conditions of man's life. If the artist ignores these, then his art will suffer. For example, the construction of a novel or a play, depending for its development upon coincidence or accident or casual actions, offends against nature in the critical sense of the word. It is true that the lives of men and women may be changed by any of these things, but it is not in their nature to be so changed, but rather to depend upon the normal laws of cause and effect. So too the creation of characters of pure goodness or unmitigated baseness would show a failure to recognise the fact that, though it might be possible for such persons to

exist, they would be exceptions to the normal law of human nature. It is very difficult in art to use successfully improbable characters or improbable events ; they offend us by contradicting our experience.

The writer or painter who tries to express his experience without constant fresh contact with some aspect of nature will fall into one of two errors : either he will be dull from lack of new observation, or he will be absurd from his attempt to be interesting by invention. The landscape painter who confines himself to his studio, or the figure painter who paints without a model, cannot for long preserve the quality of living truth in his work. He cannot hope to remember or invent the subtleties of true form and colour and light. He is likely very soon to invent a personal formula to which he will have recourse rather than to actual visual observation, and his work will become increasingly false. Nature is inexhaustible. No man can study any part of her without discovering what is new to him. She may inspire in him as many feelings as the heart can know — love, fear, hatred, contempt ; natural creation may seem to him a mother, a consoler, a spectator or a stage. But, whatever his feelings, he must study her humbly with the desire to understand and to express faithfully his experience of her. The humility is vital. The arrogant or self-satisfied artist, flushed perhaps with his success, assumes sometimes that he has seen all that nature has to show him, that he understands her and need hardly look at her again. When a man assumes that he signs his death-warrant as an artist. Great painters and writers have always been content to go on learning.

There is in the greatest art a quality of timelessness and indestructibility. Vast upheavals of European societies, constant changes of taste and advances in knowledge have taken nothing from Homer's *Odyssey* or Botticelli's *Primavera*. Except in his response to his instincts of self-preservation and sex no part of man's life has remained so untouched by time as his art. Great art is indestructible because it reflects indestructible things. In Ghirlandajo's painting we are not looking simply at certain satisfying forms and colours, nor merely at a man and a child, but at something permanent in human nature. A Rubens landscape is not merely an arrangement of certain trees and cattle and buildings, or of certain masses and rhythms : it is the expression of an attitude to the universe. Thus great works of art have a depth and dignity that no minor artist, with all his technical proficiency, can ever attain, for great painters and great writers penetrate and interpret the permanent spiritual qualities of creation.

X

THE ARTIST AND THE STATE

Civilisation, a desire for the things of the spirit . . .
VIRGINIA WOOLF

AFTER a careful consideration of the activities and influence of creative artists Plato banished them from his ideal Republic.

We have, then, a fair case against the poet and we may set him down as the counterpart of the painter, whom he resembles in two ways: his creations are poor things by the standard of truth and reality, and his appeal is not to the highest part of the soul, but to one which is equally inferior. So we shall be justified in not admitting him into a well-ordered commonwealth, because he stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine the reason. As a country may be given over into the power of its worst citizens while the better sort are ruined, so, we shall say, the dramatic poet sets up a vicious form of government in the individual soul: he gratifies that senseless part which cannot distinguish great and small, but regards the same things as now one, now the other; and he is an image-maker whose images are phantoms far removed from reality.

There are his two reasons for disqualifying the artist as a useful citizen: he is too far removed from reality, and he sets up a vicious form of government — that is to say, the government of the emotions — in the individual soul. The artists themselves, in all ages, have attributed a very different value to their activities, and have always felt

that they were making a valuable contribution to the commonwealth. Coleridge indeed said that " no man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher ". All civilised countries honour poets and painters, though not always the best ones, with laurels and decorations.

One reason for this remarkable divergence of views is to be found in the difference of opinions held on the relative importance of emotion and intellect. On the one hand are those who found their ideal state upon reason. For them nothing that is not reasoned and reasonable is permissible. Reason is man's sure guide, and if he will but use this power of deciding between what is good and what is evil, he cannot go wrong if he reasons correctly. Over against this view, and the consequent conclusion that the feelings set up " a vicious form of government ", we must set the view of those who believe, like Wordsworth, in the guidance of feeling.

> It is the hour of feeling.
>
> One moment now may give us more
> Than years of toiling reason. . . .

There is here a seemingly irreconcilable difference. But Plato and Wordsworth had this in common, that they believed profoundly in the importance of goodness and in the existence of some absolute standard of truth transcending material and temporary values. If, believing in the importance of goodness, we trust either to reason or to feeling as a safe guide to conduct, we must consider that it is possible by the use of reason or feeling to arrive at virtue and at a sound judgement

of it. A man who believes in goodness desires goodness. He asks himself how it is to be achieved in society or in his own life. He may answer that he can reason his way towards it or that he can feel his way towards it. But in either case he has his own resulting happiness or unhappiness to help him to judge whether his reason or his feeling is indeed leading him towards that goodness which alone will satisfy him. If he is unhappy and frustrated, he can endeavour to reconsider his conception of the goodness he is seeking, or to judge whether his reason, or his feeling, is indeed leading him towards goodness or in some other direction altogether. In other words, if we are idealists, we may accept either reason or feeling, or a combination of the two, as guides of conduct. But, if we reject idealism and accept only material reality and material values as our ultimate reality and our ultimate values, neither reason nor emotion will lead us towards anything but material good, and in guiding us towards this they may teach us ruthlessness and expediency. For example, the virtue of unselfishness is utterly unreasonable to a man who believes in comfort, just as the feeling of pity is disagreeable to a man who does not wish his convenience and complacency to be disturbed. We may find this conclusion hard to accept, for we have, most of us, as a result of our education, a deep-lying belief that goodness, as understood in a Christian community, is important, and that cruelty and the lust for power are to be deplored. But it must not be forgotten that it is possible to inculcate into a child, or into a generation of children, quite another conception from our own of what constitutes goodness. If the

conception that a man is given in his impressionable years is one of nationalism, racial supremacy or physical perfection, then his reason and his emotion will lead him to act in a way which we, with a different conception of goodness, can only regard with horror. By his different standards he may quite reasonably and passionately condone racial discrimination or persecution, and, in his personal conduct, unbridled indulgence in all forms of physical enjoyment.

Thus, without going into a discussion of the origin of the idea of goodness, we may immediately grant this (if we ourselves have Christian ideals of virtue and truth), that any activity which combats materialism and tends to develop such ideal conceptions is of vital importance to society. It would be difficult to deny that in the world today there is a loss of belief in ideal conceptions. It is therefore most important for us today to hold at his true value any man who can help to implant in us any such belief. Now the only persons who can convince us of the importance of these ideal conceptions are the artist, the teacher who is himself an idealist, and the virtuous man. The virtuous man dissociates himself from the values of a purely materialist society, and the idealist teacher, because he believes in a God or in a scale of ideal values outside our physical experience, seeks to make men accept a conception of goodness founded on these beliefs. The artist is the ally of the teacher because by his art he exercises and ennobles those faculties which appreciate virtue and truth. Art cannot be materialist. The very nature of the artist's activity depends on his belief in some ideal order, some ideal system of values.

For example, the whole conception of poetic justice, without which we find no play or story satisfying, bespeaks a belief in a principle of justice prevailing in the universe. Similarly, great art depends on a belief in the value and dignity of the individual man. When, in a work of art, man is made to be essentially base or petty, art suffers. Individual characters, perhaps all the individual characters in the book, may be made to be vicious, but *man* must not be made despicable. Painting and musical composition depend equally on a sense of order and form which man instinctively finds satisfying. If we were ever to become so utterly materialist as to lose our sense of meaning in life, and dignity in man, art would die, for it cannot exist without idealism. Conversely, a living art is an enemy to materialism and directs men's minds to other than material values. This is the first reason for allotting to the artist a position of the first importance in society.

A second argument for valuing the services of the creative artist may be founded on his political importance. This does not mean that the artist is politically active but that his attitude to man is of political significance. The artist values the individual. Many governments today are substituting a non-existent " state " for the total of individuals which constitutes the population. The demands of this state are allowed to over-ride the sacred rights of the individual. Freedom, belief, personality, conscience, happiness and life itself are sacrificed in the great machine. The attempt is even made, quite senselessly, to harness the arts to this machine, and to make the artist the mouthpiece of a society in which he

is denied those conditions which are the very essentials of his art—freedom and the right to be a rebel against what he holds to be evil. There is one political circumstance that is indispensable to the creation of great art, and that is freedom of the spirit. If this is denied, the artist joins the resistance or seeks another country. When we hear that in a totalitarian state another artist has been rebuked or imprisoned or destroyed we may pay tribute to one more victim who has maintained the right of the individual to possess his own soul. No more courageous ally, no stauncher champion than the artist has been forthcoming for freedom and the rights of man. Churches have been found on the side of reaction and persecution ; education has been obscurantist and class-bound ; politics have been oppressive and corrupt. But art has always demanded liberty and progress for the same reason that man has always demanded that his water should be clean and his air fresh : he cannot live otherwise.

Totalitarian forms of government are not the only danger today. Politics, sociology, industry, education and science are increasingly tending to ignore the essential individuality of the separate human being, to deal in men as a mass, and to organise them in accordance with doctrinaire conceptions well-meant but inhuman. Art is the expression of one individual's hopes, beliefs, visions, observations, addressed to other individuals for their particular pleasure. The state can never be substituted for the citizen in art. There is a great threat to art in all forces, however benevolent, that tend to level and unify and regiment the human spirit. Some of the most advanced movements towards social betterment are

likely also to prove movements towards social impoverishment, if personality and initiative are lost in security and equality. In art all men are not equal. Moreover, art flourishes in an exciting society where hazard and even hardship act as stimulants. If every member of society is organised from cradle to grave by a benevolent government so that life contains little element of risk or struggle, it will not be to the benefit of art. Probably the artist will solve the problem, as far as he personally is concerned, by rebelling against regimentation and refusing, if he can, to be organised. It is even worth considering whether in a utopian state of absolute protection (and absolute dullness) art would ever achieve its highest flights at all. Suffering and emotion would still be there in personal relationships and losses, but the artist needs more than this — he needs day and night, good and evil, joy and suffering, all the contrast and conflict of the brightest light and the obscurest gloom, and security has too often been his enemy. It was suggested above that in a purely materialist society art would die. It is equally true that in an ideal society it would die, for art thrives on the conflict between the ideal and the material. It is certainly doubtful whether in a Christian heaven, where all men are made perfect and there are no more tears, art could exist for a moment. G. F. Watts said that the first thing he would ask for in heaven would be his brushes. It is interesting to speculate what he could possibly wish to do with them once he discovered his own perfection. Thus we arrive at the same conclusion as Plato, that in a utopian society art would have no place, but we base this conclusion not on Plato's argument that art is far removed

from reality but rather on the contrary belief that art is always seeking reality and, in face of perfect reality, would have no function left to it.

A third reason for valuing the artist highly in society is that his aim has always been to provide men with delight and the satisfaction that only art can give. Here, for a moment, we may extend the meaning of the word artist, which has so far been limited to include only the creators of great works of art. The word may also be taken to include a host of minor artists and designers. In our daily life, in our homes, our fabrics, furniture, china, cutlery, glass, carpets, motor-cars, aeroplanes, telephones, trams, indeed in almost everything that we use, the designer plays a vital part, and the designer is, in his turn, if not a great creative artist, under the influence of the great creative artists. The everyday objects of our domestic life show clearly the influence of cubist and abstract art. Even Picasso's most embittered critics may unwittingly derive satisfaction from his influence on the design of their block of flats or the railway carriage in which they daily travel. It is true that this influence takes the form sometimes of nothing more than a debased imitation of some feature of modern painting. But the true designer, being himself an artist, is bound to reflect the influence of the greatest art of his day. Thus the great creative artist deserves our gratitude for his influence through the lesser artist and the designer upon our own surroundings and our own tastes.

Returning now to the great creative artists, we must immediately acknowledge our debt to them because their fundamental aim has always been to give delight. No

class of men has provided human society with more happiness than artists. The religious teacher has raised and inspired men ; the social reformer and the legislator have improved the standard of man's life and made it possible for him to enjoy the arts in his increased leisure. The scientist has given man knowledge, improved health and ever-increasing power. The educator has helped him, by the training of intellect and feeling, to derive pleasure from the works of art that are put within his reach. All these have worked together for the spiritual enrichment of man. But none has actually provided him with as much happiness as the artist, and the happiness that he gives is no selfish thing, nor is it trivial or transient ; it is a noble and enduring happiness. The suspicion that because the aim of the arts is to give pleasure they constitute a negligible or even slightly contemptible activity is a puritanical way of thinking that has done enormous harm to the arts in England. The extreme puritanical view amounted to the conviction that it was wrong to find pleasure in the arts. This view ignored utterly the uplifting and inspiring quality of great art. We enjoy a tragedy because it leads us to pity for suffering and evil, an understanding of human weakness, and fear of what is base in ourselves. We enjoy a lyric because it releases within us a flood of pent-up feeling, perhaps unrealised, needing expression. We cannot read great writing without the delight of finding feelings, dimly realised deep within us, amplified and given form and permanence. A great picture can do this too, whether it be a painting of the life of Christ by Giotto or a still life by Braque. We are the nobler for

these experiences, for no great work of art can leave us in any doubt that design and purpose and dignity matter in life.

The great importance of the arts in education is discussed in the next chapter, where it is maintained that the arts develop the imagination and the feeling, and turn men's minds towards virtue, truth and perfection.

The arts are also a source of peace and strength. In the turmoil of this uncertain civilisation, wherein harried and unhappy individuals live their lives in a fever of worry or anxiety, the great permanent values that are the foundation of all art are as unchanging and as reassuring as a landmark in a swirling mist or a firm footing to a tired swimmer. The tranquillising property of art has been well expressed by Mr. Robert Conquest in a poem called *Reading Poetry after a Quarrel.*

> Now the brain's tightnesses unclench
> Into the timeless forms
> Where the golden leaf and the snow-bud
> Hang from the always-springtime branch:
>
> And that translucence of the best,
> Even among its storms,
> Rebuilds the great impervious dream
> On which the world's foundations rest.
>
> (Published in *The Listener*, March 10, 1949)

But, though it is true that great art brings peace and restoration, it does not bring escape. It is most important to distinguish between the function of art in feeding and strengthening the character, and the action of false and sentimental works in weakening man's resistance to life. Art may be used as a resting-place; it cannot be used as

a hiding-place. It can be a tonic but not a drug. You cannot escape from life in art, because the constant aim of art is to bring you face to face with life. Escapist writing or painting, which cannot be called art at all, depend for their success upon the cowardice or unhappiness of those who take refuge in them. Escapist work offers an easy retreat into a world of fantasy which the reader or witness knows, or should know, to be false. When we read a great novel we may be so completely transplanted from our immediate surroundings that, when we lay down the book, we blink to find that we are not on Egdon Heath. That is the legitimate power of imaginative creation — to lift us out of our surroundings. But we do not turn our back upon life, and from the experience we return stronger and fitter for our everyday existence. But if we flee from a humdrum, disappointing, emotionally arid existence into those seductive realms of the film where all women are beautiful and easily won by debonair or desperate heroes ; if we ourselves take refuge, as Charlotte Brontë did in her day-dream writings, in imagining the illicit pleasure we know we cannot and should not enjoy ; if we find delight in saccharine paintings of romantic nonsense, or worse, such as the works of Poynter, Alma-Tadema or Alfred Moore (to mention only some), then we are substituting cheap sentiment for true feeling, a drug for a tonic. We know, if we are honest enough to consider the question, that these works are false because they bear no relation to life, just as we know that the girl whose hand we are holding in the cinema is not a glorious creature with a blonde halo. The danger of this escapism is that we try to turn

life as we live it into life as we dream it. That is what happened to Branwell Brontë when he made love to his employer's wife. Such a course leads only to frustration, disillusion and disgust with our actual circumstances. The girl in the next seat is a person of flesh and blood with a character of her own. If we try to convert her into a film star and imagine her in a sarong and a tropical setting we court bitter disappointment when we meet her in workaday clothes at a tea-shop. Long before films offered so easy an escape the demand was supplied by frenzied novels, such as those which Jane Austen satirised in *Northanger Abbey*, and by the exaggerated romanticism of Byron or George Sand. Joseph Shearing has well summed up the danger that attended the romantic cravings of French women of the early nineteenth century:

> From reading novelettes to writing novelettes, and then to living novelettes, the steps were easy. The romantic deliberately created out of herself a character that approached that of her favourite heroine, and sometimes, like Frankenstein, found that she had created a monster who ran away, not into realms of fantasy, but into the sordid tragedies of everyday.
>
> (*The Lady and the Arsenic*)

This escapism becomes the more insidious the more it is forced upon us by the dreariness of our surroundings and the inadequacy of our education. It is particularly dangerous for those who do not understand what they are doing but feel only the ache and fret of the return to the humdrum.

Great art is an antidote to escapism. If we are sufficiently educated to love it we shall not want for long to seek refuge in trash. We may do so deliberately in a

spell of romances, detective stories and tales of horror; these will satisfy the tired man's craving for an easy stimulus. But all the time we shall know that the world is not in truth peopled by vampires and jungle maidens and sleuths. We shall soon wish for flesh and blood again. Life is the realm of true art, and because art teaches us to understand and value our actual surroundings and our actual neighbours it does us an inestimable service.

XI

ART AND EDUCATION

> Art . . . trains us never to be completely satisfied with imperfection in what we ourselves do and are: to idealise, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all our characters and lives.
>
> J. S. MILL, *Rectorial Address to the Students of St. Andrews*, 1867

IT is a great weakness in our society that we have come to look upon the activity of the artist as something very remote from ourselves and our lives. To some people it appears even eccentric or ridiculous. If, in our education, more care were devoted to the explanation of the aims and ideals of the artist, if his values were held up, as they should be, for admiration, as comparable with the noblest values of religion and scholarship, his position in our society would be more naturally accepted and his art would be stimulated and strengthened by public approval. The separation between the public and the artist has been made wider by the desire to be different, of which the artist has become increasingly conscious in an increasingly material age. The artist's contempt for the "bourgeois" originated in the creation of a particularly materialist middle class as a result of the industrial age. If the ideal values of the artist were better taught and better understood they might in some degree

permeate our society and bring artist and public into closer association. In this chapter, because the importance of the ideals of the artist is felt to be so underestimated and so vital, the attempt is made, even at the risk of repeating material from earlier chapters, to analyse and establish that importance. Why are the values of the artist so necessary for our society today?

In the first place, art has a moral significance. A careful distinction must be made here between what is moral and what is didactic. It is the purpose of writing to convey ideas. In dealing with questions of philosophy and religion those ideas may be moral ideas and didactic writing is to be expected. But it is not the function of the artist to teach or to reform. If he attempts to do so in writing he is likely to vitiate his art. If he attempts to do so in paint he is almost certain to vitiate it, for the realm of paint is not the realm of moral ideas. But this does not mean that art has no moral influence. After any great artistic experience our dominant feelings are those of exultation and exaltation. Even a work of almost unbearable sadness, like Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, where we see the death of an innocent and beautiful character, and the revelation of self-deception, blind fanaticism, self-indulgence and cynicism, leaves us with these feelings. The exultation is aroused by the appreciation of a great achievement by the playwright and the actor. Something has been created that was worth creating and that is always exhilarating. The feeling of exaltation comes from the indisputable conclusion that, in spite of pettiness, vice, selfishness and folly, goodness matters. These two feelings satisfy us and, though perhaps only temporarily,

ennoble us. It is harder to act meanly after contact with great art. Wordsworth in a letter to Lady Beaumont foretold that the destiny of his poems would be "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous". Amédée Ozenfant, the French painter, said: "Are not the greatest works of art those in which every man who is sane of mind and body finds manna for the soul regardless of his cultural level?" [1]

A fuller realisation of the moral power of great art would bring with it a realisation of the demoralising influence of bad art. Censors and critics have sometimes condemned as immoral works that did not deserve such a verdict. The sincere consideration of what is vicious or disgusting is not immoral. The resulting work of art may be unsuited for wide distribution, particularly among the young or the uneducated who are not equipped by training and experience to understand it as it is meant to be understood. Society has then to seek the means of confining a particular work to a particular audience and has sometimes found the easy solution in a complete ban. But the really immoral works are those which are deliberately vicious or consciously insincere and whose aim is commercial. These, by their insincerity and commercialism, are unsuited to be classed as works of art at all. Many films, magazines, books, plays and paintings exert a baneful influence upon society by their vulgarity

[1] In the article "Serial Art", translated by P. Morton Shand, in *The Painter's Object*.

of outlook. They cannot be banned. By the standards of the censor they are completely innocuous. The only defence against them is education, and the only sort of education that will help men and women to detect and reject insincerity and vulgarity is an education in the aims and values of true art.

Then again the great artist, besides aiming at perfection of form, searches for truth. He never, in any of his works, allows what he knows to be false to remain. If he believes a work to be false in any part he will change, destroy or abandon it. The longer he works the more exacting he becomes in the demand for what is true. This insistence upon truth is of great importance today. The invention of atomic weapons is a far less sinister threat to human happiness than the discovery of the power of untruth. The realisation that it is possible to influence millions by the deliberately told lie is one of the most dreadful threats that civilisation has ever been compelled to face. The atomic bomb in itself is harmless. But the untruth, or the deliberately fostered ignorance, that inflame a nation may, at any moment, cause it to be dropped. Only truth can combat falsehood, and the artist is a champion of truth.

Without truth there can be no freedom. Art honours the spirit of man, his intellect and his feelings, and would have them free. This does not mean that art demands licence. Licence may be defined as free indulgence in desires uncontrolled by considerations of goodness. Artists have been licentious, as have priests or lawyers or tradesmen, but licence is not freedom. The man whose feelings, thoughts and beliefs are free is the man who is not hindered by prejudice, training or fear from discover-

ing and holding what he believes to be good. Society, by its system of education, first gives men a standard of goodness. If they cannot accept it they must, if they are to be free, be allowed to stand in opposition to the beliefs of society without fear of persecution. It has frequently been the position of the artist that he has incurred suspicion by his insistence on his right to oppose society.

Oppression and persecution are degrading to man and are possible only among those who do not respect human nature. Unhappily the ideas of the rights of men and of the value of the individual, established by Christianity, have gained ground very slowly and, of late, suffered serious defeats. Artists are among those who have believed most consistently in the dignity of man and who have loved and studied human nature.

Art introduces us to aspects of experience of which we could otherwise have no knowledge. The man or woman who has passed a normally sheltered youth has probably never experienced or even witnessed the effects of unbridled passion or avarice. Yet some understanding of these can be gained from *Wuthering Heights* or *Eugénie Grandet*. Nor is this true of the extremes of good or evil only. Our personal contact with other human beings is so limited, and our knowledge of them so superficial, that we are fortunate if we can count among our friends one really rich character. But in our reading we can make the intimate acquaintance of Sancho Panza, Parson Adams, Mrs. Proudie or Dick Swiveller, and we are infinitely wiser for it.

By its imaginative content art awakens and cultivates the imagination. From its earliest years, pictures and

tales are, after food, the child's most insistent demand. It longs for imaginative material to feed its own imaginative life. We cannot all, unaided, people dream worlds of our own creating. We need raw materials, and the artists provide them for us. The child will not realise the artistic qualities of what it enjoys. It cannot discuss technique. But it can enter and inhabit the world of Doré or Rossetti as it can enter the world of *Robinson Crusoe* or *La Boutique fantasque.*

It is certain that the imagination of a child who is trained exclusively on facts and reasoning becomes atrophied. He can neither imagine, nor enjoy the imaginings of others. If a small child is asked to draw some exciting scene his imagination is usually unhesitating in its response, where an older child, after some years of the education that we provide, may be quite unable to think of anything to draw. This inability can, to some extent, be overcome by exercise. The imagination can be made to work again. It is a dreadful thing that so splendid a faculty, needed in every walk of life for grappling with personal, social and international problems, should be deadened by an education designed to impart knowledge and to train the reason. The education should surely be planned also to train and strengthen the imagination and the feeling. Professor MacMurray, in his book *Freedom in the Modern World*, deplored the fact that for hundreds of years we have believed education to be a matter of training the mind and have left the feelings almost unconsidered.

We are inclined to think of feeling as something a little ignominious, something that ought to be subordinated to

reason and treated as blind and chaotic, in need of the bridle and the whip. I am convinced that this is a mistake. It is in the hands of feeling, not of thought, that the government of life should rest. . . . No doubt primitive, uncultivated feeling is chaotic and unruly, but so is primitive, uncultivated thought. And if our thought is orderly and sane in comparison with our feelings, that is only because we have cultivated and trained our minds and neglected the training of our emotional life.

Religion, particularly the Christian religion, has in certain directions helped to train our feelings. But in training men and women how to feel, and how to distinguish between feelings which are true and false, shallow and profound, good and evil, we have at our command, if we cared to use it, another great power — the power of the artist. Yet in our education but a small, sometimes a minute, proportion of our time is allotted to the appreciation of the arts and the exercise of the imagination, while hours a day are spent upon the accumulation of knowledge and upon the training of reason. It is of little use for us to be able to reason rightly if we cannot also feel rightly, for feeling is more fundamental than reason. If, in our education, we devoted more time to the understanding of the arts and the values of the artist, we should be training men and women to be more sensitive, more capable of happiness, more imaginative and more idealistic, loving order, perfection, truth, sincerity and harmony. What higher aims could education have ?

One of the greatest failures of contemporary societies is the failure to make life really worth living, to put true happiness within the grasp of the individual. Not only has much manual work become less satisfying because of

its repetitive and mechanical nature and its lack of craftsmanship, but leisure is empty because men and women are untrained to find happiness in it. It is true that human relationships, family life and friendships, provide happiness ; it is also true that religion and belief provide satisfaction. But there are many who possess none of these things and who possess no imaginative outlet either. That is a grave shortcoming in their education, which might have taught them to enjoy pictures, to love good music or at least to read.

" The cultivation of poetry ", said Shelley (and he was applying to the word ' poetry ' a very wide interpretation), " is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceeds the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature." We are living now in an age which certainly suffers from " an excess of the selfish and calculating principle ". How blindly do we insist more and more upon reason and fact and technical proficiency when within our easy reach lies an almost untried remedy — the educative and ennobling power of the arts.

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THE END

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