

PART III

CHAPTER XXXIV

[Note: Chapter XXXIII heading not used by Barfield.]

Early in the spring of that year Humphrey, acting on a hint from Dawson, had begun to psycho-analyse the English translation of a book by a certain Karl Brockmann. He went at it in his usual quick way, so that he sometimes appeared to Gerald to be only just restraining himself from actually eating the entire volume, covers and all! As he read, he made automatically the usual transfer from the objective descriptions and statements of the author to the subjective states of mind of which they must be the outcome. Brockmann's complaint was not a new one, but it seemed to have gone deeper in his case than in any which Humphrey had yet come across, while the sweep and profundity of his intellect were so astounding that the imaginative reverberations of any neurosis could hardly fail here to be extraordinary.

Extraordinary they were! Egocentricity was the complaint — egocentricity raised, so to speak, to the nth power. Humphrey diagnosed a sort of combination of all the usual causes — introvert disposition, sense of physical deformity, unattractiveness to women, repressed childhood, balked social aspirations and so on and proposed to himself to verify this diagnosis later on from a biography, or whatever source might be convenient. Meanwhile he was quite fascinated by the symptoms themselves, and content to go on reading, and watching the man's intellect broadening itself out, like a spider's web, from the centre and hooking itself on to every object that came into its radius, twisting and winding and doubling in such a manner as to turn necessary deviations into symmetrical form and obstacles into supports.

Brockmann was not content with interpreting all known history in such a way as to make it lead up to and culminate in this epoch, this year, this personality, this particular book that he was writing. That was fairly common, particularly with Germans (though Brockmann was an Austrian) and people of an instinctively religious turn of mind, such as his seemed to be. He spoke with dry confidence of an entire universe unknown to science, of previous civilisations of which no trace remained, of older ones still before the ice-age, including of course the overworked 'Atlantis', and further back still of previous incarnations of the whole earth-planet and of 'spiritual hierarchies' who had brought them into manifestation. The ingenuity of it was almost incredible; for here was this colossal structure of unsupported theory, this vast time-ocean of alleged history, hovering as it were in the background, behind all the rest of knowledge and professing, not to supplant, but actually to supplement the results of authentically experimental science, and the proper reading of historical documents. It contacted the normal Twentieth Century cosmos at innumerable points and at each point claimed arrogantly, not merely to correspond with, but to illuminate that particular spot of terra firma, by tracing its origin back into geological periods beyond the ken of its discoverers, and describing its formation from within instead of without.

Humphrey was used to reading stuff he violently disagreed with without getting angry or contemptuous, for that was the only way one could get at a man's

psychology. He read on, therefore, and began to come somewhat under the spell of the symmetry and completeness of Brockmann's system — if system it could be called — for his method was, not so much to outline a scheme in abstract as to discuss some particular fact or problem, sub specie aeternitatis, in such a way that the system slowly revealed itself. It revealed itself slowly, part at a time, and one was always being surprised and gratified at the way in which one revelation (which seemed so ingenious that it must have been invented especially for that particular context) would fit in later on with another on quite a different subject. Brockmann's system seemed thus to build itself haphazard in your imagination, now a few bricks on the ground floor, now a corner of the roof, now a panel in the front door, and now a fireplace in the attic. It was something like the method of construction depicted by the comic artist, Heath Robinson, in which the first day's work is to get the grand piano in to an upper-storey room through a window that isn't there. Not knowing the architect's plan, or even whether he had one, you were constantly expecting the measurements to be hopelessly out — and yet they never were.

This method of exposition brought into especial relief Brockmann's way of meeting the more obvious objects. Humphrey would read on, keeping these objections (as was his habit) quietly at the back of his mind, and then he would suddenly come on some casual utterance which revealed — not at all argumentatively — that one at any rate of these objections (whether an interior inconsistency or an apparent contradiction of proved experience) was actually a necessary support, an integral part of the scheme itself. And then, later on, another one would find itself enclosed in the same way. The force of persuasion which lay behind this apparently casual method seemed to Humphrey at the time to be almost diabolical. And the 'enclosure' in this way of one of his own objections was the first thing that really roused him from his more or less comfortable sense of being easily able to 'see round' Brockmann and made him ask himself uneasily whether perhaps all the time Brockmann were not seeing round him!

Humphrey's standing and unanswerable objection to all mysticism (such mysticism as, for instance, he had come across in Blake) was the existence in such large numbers of the genus, non-mystic. If mysticism was indeed a form of perception — of the perception of an objective reality — why was it debarred to the majority of the human race? Quite early, however, in his reading of Brockmann he had come to realise that the truth of everything the latter said really depended on just this phenomenon. For Brockmann considered the whole evolution of the earth as being dedicated to the end of achieving human spiritual freedom, and spiritual freedom was impossible without that detachment from spiritual guidance, which nothing but an incapacity for mystical experience could bring. The problem was to recover, in freedom, by one's own efforts and without dimming the self-consciousness, that old mystical experience in a new form — to achieve an 'exact clairvoyance'.

This Brockmann claimed himself in large measure to have done. He denied that his cosmogony was a theoretical structure and asserted that it was merely a description of what he could see. He had written various books in which he professed to describe the methods by which others too could train themselves to see the past and the unmanifest — and even to some extent the future. Humphrey got

hold of one of these books and almost the first 'exercise' which he found prescribed there was one which of his own accord he had already begun to undertake, out of a kind of instinct of self-preservation. The idea had occurred to him on the night when he came home from Adela Cranage and heard Gerald read out the passage from Herder. The thing was perfectly simple. One merely took one particular thought or visual image and endeavoured for a certain brief period to hold this image fast in the mind entirely alone, without wavering and without allowing other thoughts or images to encroach. In fact one did consciously, in the control of thought, what Herder had implied that primitive man did in the production of language. Turning aside from the manifold importunate appeal of the senses and the intellect, the crash of traffic, the shrieking advertisements, the everlasting hoarse dribble from the loud-speaker, aside from the ubiquitous newspaper paragraph and the more inward endless shower of conflicting shadowy ideas about the self and the world, one said firmly: "This is this image and no other!" And one held on to it.

The re-discovery of this exercise in an almost identical form in Brockmann's book, where it figured merely as the first and most elementary of a long series, was the second serious jerk which Humphrey received from him. It gave him pause and made him reflect back on the rest of Brockmann's work, as far as he was acquainted with it. He began by looking up some notes he had made on the phenomenon of 'Paranoia'.

Hallucinations and dreams . . . occur when the patient's will direction is to be regarded as final and yet he is not to be held responsible . . . Both hallucinations and dreams thus prove to be contrivances for objectifying those subjective impulses to whose apparent objectivity the patient unconditionally surrenders himself.

The last sentence, which was copied verbatim from a text-book, began to make his head spin in the old way. He had that uneasy feeling that he was thinking without knowing what he was thinking about: subjective — objective: objective-subjective, like the ticking of a clock. And then it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps after all it really did not matter very much — perhaps the distinction was of no more significance than Gerald's poser of the man going round the monkey or the monkey round the man. Was it simply that one was trying to think from two points of view at once?

The upshot of it all was that he still went on reading Brockmann, reading, reading, reading — there seemed to be no end to the stuff the man had written, as well as nothing that he himself had not read and apparently understood. Humphrey now usually accepted, as he read, the convention of its objectivity, not bothering to psycho-analyse, as he went along. And then at the end he would turn it all inside out again like a glove and simply marvel. The egocentricity was absolutely amazing; one would have called it a colossal naivety, if Brockmann had not known so much. The whole Universe existed for the sake of the development of Man; the present incarnation of the Earth was the central one of seven incarnations; the present moment in time the centre point of that incarnation; Europe held the centre position in the stage of the world, and Central Europe was the centre of Europe, and in a

village in about the centre of Central Europe Brockmann had been born! To do him justice, however, it was only his followers who actually drew attention to this last link in the chain.

And then Humphrey received his third jerk. In one of the innumerable lectures, which his followers had taken care to make accessible to posterity, Brockmann had let fall quite casually and incidentally the statement that every period of time, and to some extent each individual, must inevitably see itself as the mathematical centre in this way, just as each individual has his own horizon. He even refined on this a little, pointing out that in fact each period sees itself as just past the centre — much as a man travelling in an express train would be past the centre of any given horizon before he had time to reflect on it. And indeed, on reflection, Humphrey recollected that his previous conception had been inexact, and that the present, in Brockmann's scheme, was actually some way 'past the centre'.

From this point on Humphrey gave up altogether trying to psycho-analyse Brockmann's writings or to convert them to a subjective interpretation. He simply went on reading them. At the same time a rather subtle change began to enter into his own attitude to life. That lurking horror of the Boundless — whether of inexhaustible appetite or infinite series of dreams and ideas, began to give way to a certain confident pleasure in the very thing he had previously abhorred. Whether it were the exercises he had begun to undertake, or the influence of all he had read in Brockmann, summed up and as it were driven home in this last powerful concept of an infinity of intersecting circles, of which the circumference of each is infinity — or some reason he now began to have moments in which he confronted the fluent dream of sensuous and intellectual experience with a kind of calm exultant joy. He rejoiced in his freedom. He was like a man with a snapshot camera, or a mathematician sitting tight with his coordinates up his sleeve, secure in the knowledge that however continuous the series, however incessant and ruinous the motion, he can at any point he chooses arrest that motion and, for the purpose of his thinking, grasp it in a state of instantaneous repose.

At the same time he became somewhat uneasy about his own attitude to Brockmann. Humphrey actually did not know at this time how far he took what Brockmann said seriously, how far he regarded it as objectively valid. It is possible to test the candle-power of an electric lamp by means of an apparatus which makes it alternate rapidly on the retina with a second lamp of known candle-power. If correct, there is no twinkle and one seems to be looking at a single lamp. This was now Humphrey's experience with his 'subjective' and 'objective' interpretations of Brockmann. They seemed to have run together into one, so that one read them as descriptions of fact, rather than as symptoms of the state of the author's imagination, and yet the question of their being true or untrue never arose.

This was all very well, but one could not simply shelve the whole question of objective validity in this way! At last he came to the conclusion that in considering the question of Brockmann's claim to know in this way, from within, the crucial issue was the true nature of thought. 'Whether thinking is something that goes on inside my head, or whether it has a kind of existence of its own' he said to himself. He broached the matter to Gerald — unskilfully. Technical terms like objective and subjective rolled uneasily off his tongue.

“Om-m-mjective and sum-m-mjective!” exclaimed Gerald, snuffling the ‘M’s in an exaggerated manner.

“What do you mean?”

“Ah, you ought to read Hazlitt’s description of Coleridge in his old age!”

“Humour can be beastly destructive!” muttered Humphrey impatiently.

“Yes, and also an excellent safety-valve! Not to speak of ‘emergency exit’, which is what you’ll be wanting shortly!” Humphrey pressed him to a serious answer.

“My dear chap,” he brought out at last, a little superciliously, and yet half unwillingly, too, as it seemed — “Kant settled all that years ago! Don’t waste time trying to work out a Subjective Idealism at this hour of the day!” They had spoken of Brockmann before, and Gerald had a strong distaste for the whole subject. Indeed, during the last few weeks, he seemed to have developed a distaste for serious conversation of any sort. Humphrey felt as if he had been snubbed — a thing which he had never used to feel with Gerald. He looked at him, screwing up his eyes, but said nothing.

Subsequently he reflected that he had had Kant flung at him before now — by John among others. It became evident that, if he was really to make up his mind on the nature of thought, he would have to make his peace with that extremely unattractive-sounding philosopher. So next day, not without considerable misgivings, he went to his library and brought back with him a copy of the Critique of Pure Reason.

CHAPTER XXXV

Margaret’s temperature went up a little the evening after Janet left, not high, but high enough to keep her for some time from getting to sleep. Her limbs ached slightly and she could not stop the workings of her brain, which continually insisted on taking some one thought or memory from the past and repeating it over and over again senselessly ad nauseam. Finally matters came to a sort of crisis. She had before her, in extraordinarily vivid colours, a certain evening on which she and her mother had sat together in the afterglow on the slope above a green meadow near a village, watching the summer night draw on. The sudden report of a gun had caused a flock of birds to rise from the meadow and wheel uneasily in the air, until gradually, as the noise was not repeated, they settled again to their old place, and the tranquillity of the scene seemed to be re-doubled by the consciousness, which this incident had brought about, of that quiet absorbed business of feeding going on in the meadow below.

Her mental repetition of this scene carried her each time as far as the gun-report and the subsequent rise and agitated motions of the birds, but not to their settling again. And she became convinced in the curious feverish way that, as soon as she could get those birds to settle again in her mind and go quietly on with their feeding, she would be able to fall asleep — but not till then. She never succeeded however; for when at last she had worked enough of the fever out of her to allow of sleep, the birds and the whole scene vanished from her mind.

The next morning she was much better — nearly well, in fact. Only, whereas in such cases the feverish fantasies of the night before usually seem on waking incredibly remote, so that it is hardly possible even to recall them, Margaret had not lost her vivid memory, of this evening with her mother and the birds. Moreover, in the weeks that followed she lived a great deal in memories of the past; scenes from her childhood and from her holidays of travel came up and hung vividly before her — too vividly — and those curious half-formed, or merely suggested, pictures which had used to flit disconcertingly across her imagination — especially during her engagement — also began to appear again.

John, to judge from anything he deliberately said or did, seemed to have no other care in the world now but to make her easy in mind and body, and she soon began to feel more completely at one with him than she had done for a long time. Only occasionally some remark that escaped him unawares, or something needlessly emphatic in his manner would reveal to her that he was still inwardly perplexed and burdened. One evening, for instance, he mentioned to her that the Broadcasting authorities had decided in future to provide two programmes simultaneously, one 'highbrow' and the other 'lowbrow'. They spoke of this a little and he seemed to find it symptomatic of some big split in society. But far less from anything he said than from his face and a certain suppressed energy behind his silences she divined that this piece of news had for the time at any rate seriously affected his happiness. When he went away, she leaned back passively in her chair and closed her eyes. Conscious of the steadily growing weight of new life within her, she strove hard, and completely failed, to realise in sympathy how much a fact could alter anybody's spirits or seem important.

There was something, however, which seemed to draw increased strength from this very absence of emotional sympathy, and that was a sort of instinctive, magical 'sympathy' in the older sense of the word. Just because he was at such times in a state of suppressed agitation and anxiety, she too became in such a state, and, knowing that it was bad for her, would then grow more agitated still. Then her imagination would begin to work too vividly; if she were alone, she would live in a dream of the past, and once, when he was present, she had that old bewildering double vision of him as the baby and then again as the large ruthlessly blundering engine. Determined not to worry, she would at such times take herself in hand by calling up some one particular, tranquillising memory; and generally it would be this vision of the evening with her mother and the birds quietly feeding.

Living, as she did at this time, a great deal in her own thoughts, Margaret gradually came to accept, in a half whimsical way, that her business was to get all those birds settled again, undisturbed, to their feeding on the ground, by the time the great event took place. And, as the months passed, she felt that this was actually happening. She began to feel deeply — wholly at peace in a way that she had never done in her life before. John himself seemed to come nearer to her, while at the same time the significance of his abstract ideas and problems floated further away. If he did reveal some of them, she only experienced a sort of tolerant benevolence, as if he were showing her his toys, and was no longer concerned, to understand them, but only with their effect on him.

Oddly enough this attitude of hers gave him a more intimate sense of being understood than her previous efforts to feel with him in the proper sense. It removed his anxiety about upsetting her at a difficult time and so loosened his tongue, with the result that the strain under which he had been living was considerably relaxed. He was surprised, and half ashamed, to find that it did not seem to matter so much whether she really understood and felt the importance of what he said, as long as she looked sympathetic and perhaps stroked his head. The truth was that John spent a large proportion of his waking time in meeting and fighting opposing ideas — whether his own or other people's; and, when he was with her, he secretly wanted like a medieval knight, to have his armour taken off and to be softly bathed and anointed, while he recited the glorious exploits of the day. If they had an argument, it was as though he arrived back at the castle, bloody and exhausted, only to find the damozel armed, vizored, and caracoling impatiently round the courtyard with an ugly-looking spear. Poor Margaret, like other modern wives, in order to give satisfaction, had to think for herself and at the same time not think for herself!

Fortunately the problem appeared to be solving itself. Joy is a singularly powerful flux, and joy was the prevailing sentiment of both, as the winter drew on and the time approached. There were many delightful evenings when they sat together for an hour after tea with no light but that of the clear faintly-crackling fire, saying little, but vividly conscious of each other and of the third, that was approaching them. John would watch the dark masses of the furniture shoot up into colour and form with each flicker of the flames, whose miniature images danced back to him again from the obscure depths of a polished mahogany table-leg, and then died away, leaving nothing in the room but her oval face illumined by the warm glow from the grate. And then, if she said anything, he would watch — more fascinated than he had ever been before — those mysterious curves and lines of force which crowded invisibly into the shadows round about her speaking mouth.

He thought one evening, as he watched her saying something, of the opening lines of St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," and seemed to divine a depth of mystery in them which he had hitherto hardly suspected. "The Word!" His own lips pouted shapefully forward to the 'w', as he had seen hers do, and he realised at the same time how much more lazily he, and most other people, commonly enunciated their words than she did. "The birth of the Word," he said to himself soundlessly, but forming in secret each syllable consciously and distinctly with his lips and tongue. And then he thought of that other especial birth of the Word, when it had become flesh, and at the same time he realised a Christmas tang in the air, and felt for the first time in the year that breathless, waiting beauty of the winter night, that almost palpable sigh of celestial love-longing, which the carols have held fast in their unearthly melodies.

"We must put the light on, Johnny!" she said at last, and as he again watched her speaking, it even occurred to him to think that those crowding, dancing invisible curves were like little cherubs playing round the Manger in the dim lantern-lit stable. He took her hand and looked for a long time into her eyes; then he got up with a sigh of happiness and, switching the light on, went away to his work. Everything was coming right! And Margaret too, closing her eyes and leaning back in

her chair with still joy upon her face, felt that everything must come right after all. The flock of birds had settled, everyone peacefully to its busy feeding on the grass; the sheltering shadows of night were closing gently round them; and the air above their heads was empty and calm.

CHAPTER XXXVI

John's experiences at home at this time had a certain mellowing effect on his attitude towards his parishioners, and especially those with whom he had hitherto felt most ill at ease. He began to lay more stress on the purely human side of the relation and, if anything, rather to discourage religious topics. He would crack jokes with Miss Butler, when he met her, and rarely now made any serious attempt to demur to heretical or materialistic interpretations of the Scriptures. She thought he was growing more affable and liked him better, but in point of fact he only achieved this compromise by actually sacrificing much of the overflowing affability which he had originally brought in his heart, alike to her and to the other parishioners on whom he called. Henceforth, however freely he seemed to look or speak, there was always a part of himself which he kept back in cold and critical reserve. And, beneath the surface an uneasiness began to accumulate in him, partly owing to the bare fact of this restraint — which seemed somehow to be essentially unchristian, but much more owing to the judgments and opinions which this detached critic began to pass.

At that time a series of religious articles was appearing in a section of the daily press under the general title 'Jesus in Piccadilly'. Holroyd, John's vicar, took a great interest in these, which he regarded as one of many similar signs of a great revival in the religious consciousness of the people. To John, on the contrary, they gave nothing but pain, appearing to him to put the possibility of such a revival far further off than it had been before, or, if that were taking them too seriously, at any rate to reveal how much remoter such a possibility was than he had supposed. Nearly everybody who wrote spoke of Christ as a kind of ethical socialist or enlightened Poor-law Guardian. One felt that it had really been extraordinarily intelligent of Him, brought up in a little place like Nazareth, to anticipate by nearly two thousand years the enlightened ideas of Lord Shaftesbury, or Jeremy Bentham, or Auguste Comte, or Lenin. In fact, it was agreed on almost all hands that He was not merely a good man, but on the whole quite a wise one. The only serious mistake He had made was in getting Himself born in an ignorant age before the discovery of the inductive method and the circulation of the blood. This explained and amply excused his mixing up the profound and simple message he had to deliver with all sorts of apocalyptic stuff that had nothing to do with it. And so on, and so on.

Holroyd did not of course like the total lack of interest on the part of the general public in the ceremonial and doctrinal side of Christianity, but he hoped that the rest would follow in God's own time. John said nothing to Holroyd of his own pessimistic view of these alleged hopeful symptoms, for no purpose seemed to be served by attempting to wet-blanket an enthusiasm which was temperamental and far stronger than the intellect that failed to govern and direct it. His reserve on this

matter reinforced that dualism, that deep crack, which, fine and sinuous as it was, had begun to divide his inner life from top to bottom.

More and more that cold critic, who sat somewhere aloft in his brain, remained apart and passed judgments out of harmony with the impulses which had originally guided him to his work. Only John did not pay such close attention to it as he might have done, being too much absorbed in his domestic affairs and affections. It soon began to concentrate its hostility on that remarkable, inexpressible feeling of 'being a part of things' which had become, since his wedding, such a powerful factor in John's experience. Just as he had used this feeling as a key to unlock the meaning of ancient ecclesiastical disputes, so the cold critic in his brain began, with great strategic subtlety, to apply it as a criterion for testing the significance of contemporary religious discussion. And over and over again, whether it were the vicar he had spoken to or a parishioner, or an article he had read in a paper, the criticism came: all this talk about 'it' is from mouths, which only know it by its effects. Of it — itself — they knew nothing; otherwise they would speak quite differently — as you know from your own experience. They would speak, as those have spoke, who experience it itself — as some few of the poets and painters spoke, as Plato, Plotinus, Paul, Synesius, Traherne, George Macdonald spoke (it was through Gerald that John had discovered Traherne and George Macdonald).

Then perhaps he would fall again into musings as to what he really meant by this childishly vague and allusive 'it' of his. All that could be said was that it was the most important thing in his life and also — if they only knew it, in everyone else's life. But this gave rise to the uneasy thought that, if those who spoke of it with authority in the past were as often pagan as they were Christian and, if the avowed Christians of the present day never spoke of it in that way — then what justification was there for connecting it with Christianity at all? Was the whole attempt — an attempt which had determined his own career — to connect this 'it', this powerful all-solving sense of 'being a part of things', with Christianity nothing after all but a tour de force?

And here the strategic subtlety of the cold critic would appear; for very often, at this point, his warmer self would suddenly react violently against this whole train of thought, this whole idea, that nobody knew anything of God except a few supercilious artists and mystics, into whose company he himself was struggling to intrude. A violent distaste for his own egotistical 'meditations', his sensation-hunting from Italian pictures and the poetry of Spenser and invisible glories of light took possession of him. He felt he was cutting himself off from humanity by this sort of thing more than anything else. And because it was just this part of him which had led him to the ritualistic side of the Church, he would feel at such times an extreme distaste for all ritual — a distaste which his experience at the blessing of the Font had perhaps brought to a head rather than originally caused.

All this internal dissension, while it troubled his feelings and prayed slightly on his health, retained nevertheless a certain speculative character. He did not seriously think of doing anything about it, and thus kept it well below the surface, except towards the end of the year, when he sometimes spoke to Margaret in such a way as to reveal a little of what was troubling him.

Immediately after that unfortunate service he had indeed entertained serious thoughts of trying to get into a different kind of parish, where the church was 'lower' so that he would no longer be obnoxious to such disturbing experiences. But Margaret's revelation had put all such ideas, at least for the present, out of his head. That he had not entirely dismissed them, however, was shown by his mentioning such a possibility to Startop, who spent a night with them on his way through London, in October.

It was late in the evening, and Margaret had already gone to bed. Startop made no secret of his surprise, and, as he was not the kind of man who is easily put off with vague explanations, he eventually elicited from John a fairly close account of the whole affair. He was silent for a time, when the latter had finished speaking, and then:

"Of course", he said, "you are probably better acquainted with modern ideas on this sort of thing than I am. But I should have thought . . . for that very reason . . . that you would have been less upset. I mean, I can think of all sorts of Welldon men whom I should have quite expected to be shocked by such an idea, if anyone had put it into their heads; but I always had a notion, when you were with us, that this sort of explanation was already familiar to you." John opened his mouth to reply, but Startop went on: "You know my views on the sacramental nature of all appearance: I thought you were with me so far at least as to feel that nothing is too mean to form a part of Christ's body. And if 'everything that lives is holy', everything that is concerned with the renewal and reproduction of life, properly seen, is to say the least of it not less holy than the rest. Why not look through the other end of the telescope? Is it God's fault, my dear Trinder, if his Holiest mysteries have been turned into abominations of which we are ashamed to be reminded?"

"I know!" cried John almost bouncing up and down on his chair with impatience (how often had he been through this train of reasoning in his own mind); "but that's not the point!" He stopped and smiled sheepishly for a moment, feeling that he had begun speaking to Startop as though the latter were a young man of twenty-five. Startop smiled too.

"All right!" he said briskly: "what is?"

"The point is" began John, and paused again; for now that he was just about to put it into words, the point really did seem like a mathematical one, to have 'no magnitude'; while his having paused made it sound feebler still: "— that the congregation don't know anything about it!" he finished at last.

"How do you know?"

"Oh, it's obvious — if you meet many of them in private life!"

"But surely, my dear boy, there must be all levels of understanding — how many of your congregation really understand the Athanasian creed — or the Nicene creed, for that matter?"

"I know! — But it's dangerous!" Startop did not seem to be very much impressed; and John saw from his face that his mind had moved off in some other direction and was revolving something.

"We have been talking," he began at length; "as though your interpretation of the meaning (or of one of the meanings) of this ceremony, were unquestionably correct. But as a matter of fact I should say that is more than doubtful. It is really

very easy — and especially perhaps in our time — to become obsessed with a simple explanation of this sort. Over and over again, during my life, I have noticed how some young man, who is not perhaps blessed with too much mother-wisdom in the first place, gets hold of a key that unlocks a particular door, and nothing on earth will convince him that it does not unlock every door in the house. The first thing to do therefore is to get up on the roof and wave the key excitedly, shouting “Eureka!” at the top of your voice. It is only after that has been done that these young people think it worth while to go down again and actually try their new key in some of those other doors. Don’t think I am suggesting that you are one of these young people, Trinder: I only say that I fancy you may have been unduly impressed, when you passed by and heard one of them shouting. Now no key is prima facie more like a master-key than this one of the so-called ‘phallic emblem’, especially when one considers the inevitably startling effect of a first introduction to the idea. People lose their heads altogether. I have just recollected a book by a fiery young Austrian student, who has since committed suicide, which somebody once lent me for a day. Only I can’t remember the name. What a pity! I should have liked you to read it! I remember, he traced the same symbol as underlying practically all the forms of modern civilisation (especially of course Anglo-Saxon civilisation, which he wanted to prove was rotten) not excepting, if I remember right, my favorite sweetmeat, Edinburgh Rock!”

John burst out laughing. He was beginning to enjoy this conversation.

“Yes, I know, Sir!” he said: “I have really laid more stress on this particular idea than I meant to. It did, as a matter of fact, rather knock me off my feet, the first time I felt it vividly as a possibility — and — caused a lot of trouble. But it’s the general principle that really disturbs me. The other only drew my attention to it rather forcibly. Nobody will deny that, whatever their meaning, the Church (of course the Roman church par excellence, but ours too, especially since the Oxford Movement) is full of elaborately symbolic ceremonies, of whose real inner meaning not only the congregation, but generally even the priest himself, is entirely ignorant. At least I do not myself feel that the simple allegorical interpretations which are sometimes put forward from the pulpit, could possibly satisfy any but the weaker sort of intellect — or one that is completely out of touch with the history of religion as a whole. That is the real trouble for me!”

A curiously weary look had crept into Startop’s face; and John observed the superfluity of lines and creases more sharply than he had ever yet done before. Evidently his last words had recalled experiences, perhaps struggles, of the Warden’s own in the remote past.

“Ah, I see!” he said: “Your saying it was ‘dangerous’ naturally misled me.” And then, after a pause: “If you are going to insist on everyone understanding everything that you say and do, you are going to cut yourself from the simple people, who are after all as Our Lord insisted over and over again, and as my own experiences, Trinder, is constantly bringing home to me — the salt of the earth. Cleverness is not everything.”

To listen to this speech of Startop’s was torture to John. It was torture inflicted in something of the calm, dignified manner, of a horse which stands

contentedly and unconsciously on a man's foot while he is grooming it. At last, however, he was able to collect his thoughts, and say with a wry smile:

"Ah, now you have made the precise nature of my own trouble clearer to me — if you don't mind my talking so much about myself?" Startop smiled and proffered a tobacco-pouch. "It is because I do feel what you say so strongly, that cleverness is not everything — that no mind has a right to look down on another mind — it is because I feel that so horribly deeply, Sir, and yet at the same time all my instinct tells me that it is wrong to fill people's imaginations with forms and symbols which they don't understand . . . especially if there are a few somewhere, not always too scrupulous, who do understand . . . that is why I can't get away from this hopeless sense of bewilderment. I seem to be at a kind of deadlock, unable to move one way or another without stultifying my own convictions. I feel more and more impotent and sit-on-the-fency every day."

Startop nodded and smoked on in silence. At last, however, he took his silver-mounted pipe out of his mouth:

"I am afraid," he said, "one simply has to make one's choice. It sometimes illuminates a problem of this kind to look at it historically; for there is nothing so very new under the sun; though the same problem is in a sense new for each of us, each time it arises. Now, as you know, it is often objected to the Church that she is an essentially pagan institution; that she incorporated the pagan rites with too great facility, and that, although elaborate Christian interpretations of these rites are to be found in the works of the Fathers, yet to the simple souls whom they 'converted' at the time Christianity was in fact no more than a change of name. They continued to adore Venus, under the name of Mary, and so on, and so on. Personally I think there is much truth in this accusation, and even if one supposes (as one can hardly do otherwise) that the pagan cults were indeed foreshadowings of the eternal truth in Christ, even then the complaint lies, that, for the masses of newly converted Christians, the conversion was only a conversion in name. I mean that under the name of 'Christians' they maintained what one might call a pre-Christian consciousness."

"But now put yourself in the position of one of these early Fathers. Suppose yourself to have thought and felt deeply concerning the colossal, infinite meaning of the figure of Christ! Suppose yourself to be convinced (and a very good case can be made out for this) that the people who really possessed the deepest understanding of this meaning were the Gnostics. And now suppose that you were suddenly confronted with a horde of these simple, pagan souls and that the first and strongest of all the feelings in your own soul was, as it might well be, love — love for these souls and out of that love an intense longing to call them your brothers in Christ — what are you going to do? Are you going to withdraw from the profanum vulgus with the Gnostics and cultivate your own spiritual life? If so, your human love will torture you for ever and the denying of it will in the end make that spiritual life itself a vacuum. Or are you going to preach to these souls the lofty doctrines of the Gnostics — of the Virgin Sophia, is it not? and the divine spark falling through thirty aeons, though I haven't the faintest idea what an 'aeon' is — doctrines, which might indeed, if understood, effect the true synthesis between the old religion and the new, but doctrines which stand not the faintest chance of being understood, which would

indeed make their heads ache at the end of the first sentence? Are you going to break yourself on one of these two impossible rocks — or are you going to listen humbly to the voice of love in your heart, and consent to some kind of compromise? That is the choice which the early Fathers had to make at the time when the New Testament canon was slowly hardening, Trinder, and later — and that is the choice, or something like it, which it seems to me you have to make to-day, and from which you are shrinking — no wonder! — and perhaps making yourself ill in the process.”

There was a pause, until John murmured sadly: “If it were only myself!” The Warden looked up at him with a perceptible start, and a transient expression of pain crossed his face, for which John silently blessed him.

After a pause John said: “I suppose you are right. I suppose one must make one’s choice, yet it seems hard to have to admit that nothing changes, that the same hopeless gulf between ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ exists now as existed then, and (I suppose you would say) must always exist! Still, it is childish, I know, to expect everything to be just as one would like it oneself. One must choose the lesser of two evils. Only it seems rather hard that the thing to which one wanted to give oneself heart and soul, without any reserve, should have to be secretly acknowledged in that cold fashion as ‘the lesser of two evils’. “I don’t know,” he went on after a pause, “I doubt if I shall ever be able to ignore that instinctive, and possibly quite unreasonable feeling I have of a something evil in this conception of the understanding few providing imaginative food for the ignorant many.”

“If you wish to see what happens, when the many provide their own imaginative food,” replied Startop with a smile, “go to the local Methodist Chapel next Sunday! You won’t find any imaginative food at all. Only rather self-satisfied talk.”

“But think of the power it gives them!”

“Who?”

“The few — the few who know.”

“Possibly!” said Startop: “but surely the point is that that power should be well used!”

John remained silent. He could not avoid a slight feeling of disappointment. He perceived that, after all, Startop did not really comprehend this obscure, oppressive fear and dislike, which he was trying to express, and that this was because he himself had never seriously felt it. At the same time the significance of Startop’s reference to the Methodists opened up a new vista. John suddenly saw the meaning of two old familiar terms in a fresh and deeper light. Startop is a Catholic by nature, he thought — and I suppose I am a Protestant! And soon after this they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The uneasy sense, which John had, of being completely cut off from a large number of his fellow men was not confined to the Church. Wherever he turned his eyes, they brought him back the same disheartening experience — a sinking conviction that the ways and manner of thought of most of his contemporaries were rapidly becoming, not so much antipathetic, as absolutely unintelligible to him. He tried to

fancy that it was his own fault for getting needlessly 'superior' and recollected how Middleton, who frequented Cup-ties and Cinemas, had twitted him:

Painful pre-eminence, yourself to view
Above life's weakness — and its comforts too!

But whatever the truth of the matter — whether it were his own fault or the other fellow's — there seemed no longer to be any way across. And things were growing worse every week instead of better. Over and over again he had the experience of picking up a newspaper and reading some of it and then, when he had put it down again, feeling as if he had intercepted some horrible process of decomposition. There appeared to be a universally diffused senile decay of intellect. It was not so much from any particular article that he derived this awful feeling, for, taken by themselves, they generally read intelligibly enough. But if you continued to remember the substance of one article after you had gone on to the next (an achievement of which the bulk of newspaper-readers were apparently no longer capable), then you began to have that curious sense of unreality; for you discovered that everything in the paper was incompatible with something else.

For instance, a leading-article would extol apropos of something or other certain domestic virtues, affirming that they remained the backbone of the nation and so forth, and two pages further on the gossip-contributor would mention with bated breath how he had met Mr. So and So, the noble and distinguished writer, the grand old man, whose whole attitude to life was determined by his contempt and ridicule of precisely these alleged virtues. Or there would be an article exhorting everyone to thrift, as the only means of saving the nation in its terrible economic difficulties, and very likely on the same page one of the reasons given for the present trade-depression would be 'inefficient salesmanship' i.e. a lack of artfulness in overcoming thrift.

Eventually he decided that the rift which he himself felt so keenly could hardly he identified with the rift between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' in the popular sense; for it was almost as often among the former as with the latter that he felt that uncomfortable sensation of being among imbeciles. He often recalled at this time the meeting of which Humphrey had taken him and felt he was at last beginning to understand something of the inspiration which had brought those curious people together. In particular there came back to his mind the earnest-looking man who had got up and spoken on economics, for ever since his own vague attempt to grapple with the precise definition of a 'Conversion Loan' John's mind had tended at intervals to gravitate back to this subject — with the usual uneasy suspicion that something was horribly amiss.

Here he was constantly being brought up against the same apparent inability of his contemporaries to hold two ideas in their minds at the same time, and contrast them. An argument with the vicar, who had spoken of the country's repayment of its debt to America as if that were an act of moral value, had led to his (John's) reading a long speech on this subject by a highly-placed American dignitary, who had begun (1) by speaking in the same way, of a moral obligation on Europe to repay her debts, and then (2) gone on to say that America could probably 'better

afford to forgo these debts than the Allies could afford not to pay them' (owing to the prosperity which an increase of exports brings) after which (3) he had spoken of the increasing difficulty which all nations found to-day in discovering areas in which to invest their capital, concluding his speech (4) by a reference to America's 'openhanded generosity' in being willing to lend so much money to (i.e. invest so much capital among) the Allies at the beginning of the War. This speech was broadcast to the whole of America and printed next day in every considerable newspaper in Europe.

It was a peculiarity of John's that this sort of smearing over of all meaning made him feel personally unhappy. It oppressed him almost physically. What conceivable relation, he would ask himself with a strangely heavy heart, is there or can there ever be between a mind such as this — a debauched mind, for there really does seem to be such a thing as intellectual debauchery — and the Gospels? Am I only trying to make myself believe that Christ can have any further significance for this civilisation?

Terrible as this thought was, there was something he first began to notice at about this time which oppressed him still more. Reflecting, as he was prone to, on the steady decay of ideas, or rather of the very power of ideation itself, he gradually came to realise that the imagination of that elusive quarry of his, the 'average Englishman', was being fed less every day on ideas and more and more on something else: on pictures. The circulation of the illustrated papers went up and up; other papers — even the most staid and sober ones — began to introduce one or two pages of photographs; every wall was plastered with pictorial advertisements; every town, almost every village, had its cinema. When John first became fully alive to the meaning of all this, he had the sensation of waking up from a sort of dream. He suddenly perceived in a terribly clear new light the enormous difference between a picture and an idea; for, whereas an idea which is not comprehended is rendered by that very fact, to some extent harmless, a picture, of which the meaning is not grasped, may still be received, and received in such an intimate way as positively to alter character. It does not matter so very much that the Creed and the Articles mean one thing to one mind and another to another; he said to himself; but it may matter terribly that a complex of form and colour and motion which somebody has deliberately put together, should mean nothing to other souls that are nevertheless affected by it.

That, of two people who enjoy a picture, one may be conscious of a meaning in it and the other totally unconscious — this at least had been brought home to John's deepest feelings, by the differences of opinion with Margaret and again by the incident of the service. And it was perhaps these bitter personal experiences more than anything else, which made him look with suspicion and hostility upon such an apparently harmless affair as the topical cartoons of the artist who signed himself 'Smiler' in the Daily Sensation.

These cartoons represented the various doings and emotions of a certain 'Mr. Plain Man', who was represented as a rabbit with large frightened eyes, wearing coat and trousers and bowler hat and carrying an umbrella, a newspaper, and an attaché case. He was always represented as being helpless and afraid, hurrying anxiously away from something or other — the income-tax, increased national

expenditure, the authorities, a designing woman, or the forces of nature as recently expounded by scientists, and so on. But the title of the cartoon, or the explanatory note beneath it, would invariably be couched in such a way as to imply that whatever 'Mr. Plain Man' was doing, that was the right, common-sense thing to do, and that the other fellow, though he might look more fearless and impressive, was really rather an ass.

As he sat in the Underground one morning, John caught a glimpse of one of these cartoons over the shoulder of the man next to him. Then, as he looked up at the rest of the carriage — which consisted simply of two long rows of noses buried in newspapers and about half of them in this particular newspaper, he suddenly had a sharp return of that oppressive sense of dark, wise, secret forces operating in the background — forces which knew all about the dangerous inner meanings of these pictures, which knew all about the senile decay of intellect, which knew all about that vertical split between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' that was the cause of so much wit, and about that other deeper split with which it only half corresponded; which not only knew all about these things, but consciously willed them.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

When he reached home that evening, John made an attempt to write a letter to the Press about the confusion of thought in the American Speech. But after playing about with a few sentences for over an hour, he looked at his watch and, seeing that he had already taken more time than he could properly afford from his own work, gave it up in despair. Whether from his own inability, or because the language itself had become too 'debauched' by all the loose thinking that was daily done in it, the absurdities, now that he came to point them out, did not sound nearly so absurd as they actually were. He laid down his pen and, instead of hurrying back to the work from which he had stolen the time, went through a desperate half hour, during which he felt hideously impotent in the face of those dark, impalpable forces, before which he himself and the whole of civilisation must apparently go down without the power to lift a finger. The sensible truth-loving part of humanity seemed to be suffering the fate of one of those wicked characters in Macdonald's Princess and Curdie, who was crossed and recrossed in his sleep by an animal like a very large spider, and awoke terrified and paralysed under a million-threaded formless web. Their very ideas were imprisoned, as it were, in their own souls by this universal cheapening, this continual imperceptible smearing, of language. It was too late now to get anything done before supper. He picked up a newspaper for five minutes and in the 'cross-word puzzle', which was printed on one page, seemed to find an absolute incarnation of this formless web of idiotically disconnected ideas, which was slowly descending on the civilised world and paralysing it.

During supper, however, he succeeded in throwing off the sense of oppression and, in the reaction which followed, cursed himself, as he had once or twice done before, for meddling with matters so far beyond his radius and grasp, to the neglect of his own true circle. This confused dream of forces and ideas seemed after all so remote, so unreal, beside the quiet reality of his life with Margaret, their love for each other, and the various practical problems of the day which had to be

discussed and solved; yet already, more than once, he had allowed this unreal to break in and mar the real, and now he seemed in a fair way to repeat the mistake. 'In any case', he said to himself — seeing more clearly still how far he had wandered from his proper track, 'my whole business is with human souls, individual souls — and anything else can never be more than a side-issue and must not absorb energy or emotion!' He made a secret resolve to give up reading the papers altogether, until the baby was born — beyond a cursory glance each day at the summary of news.

John was so constituted that, if any particular situation endured for a few days, he began to think of it as a permanent dispensation. Thus, if he were kept in bed two or three days with a cold, he would forget what it was like to be up altogether and would begin instinctively trying to solve the problems of a bedridden life. And so it was with a certain atmosphere of intentness, which hung about the house during the period of Margaret's pregnancy. Everything pointed tranquilly to the future, as in a well-ordered hive of bees, and John slowly began to forget that there were any other problems in life beside that of adapting himself to this absorbed dedication of the present to the immediate domestic future. In such leisure moments as he had, his thoughts began to flow along very different channels; he had pleasant visions of this same future, with two or three children larking about the house, and, later on, satchels and perhaps a small cricket-bat getting in your way in the hall, when you came in. He fancied they might eventually get a country living — large, dignified old vicarage — where he would have plenty of time to give to himself and his family — summer morning — walk round the large garden with Margaret and the children, and then back to the study, to find out, by reading and meditation, more and more about 'it' and its proper connection with Christianity — to read all Plato, and Synesius, and perhaps some of the Gnostics, only occasionally looking out through the large (everything was large in these visions) window over the wide smooth-shaven lawn to the ancient — and of course large — trees on the other side, under the shadow of which the dew still glistened in like wet silver on the grass.

When they talked or whispered together, it was usually, now, of the future; and so much did all their plans seem to centre round the new arrival that at last it became a sort of pose with them to say that they would relegate him (her) sternly to the background. There was to be no nonsense! As soon as possible after he arrived — well, perhaps not till after her first birthday — they would take another holiday in Italy, just to 'show their independence'. Once they got out maps and Baedekers and discussed the course of the holiday in detail.

The first reminder, which John received, that this state of tranquil expectancy was not after all a permanency, was the arrival of Sir Otto and Lady Hudson with a large trunk on the back of the car. It was a Saturday morning, and he was in the middle of writing a sermon, when their arrival was announced. In spite of the fact that they arrived almost exactly at the hour previously arranged, John felt a sort of uneasy surprise, when he came into the room and saw them standing there all wrapped up against the cold. Lady Hudson went up almost immediately to Margaret, who was still in bed, and John was left alone with Sir Otto.

"Well, John!" he said kindly: "beginning to get anxious, eh?"

"Just a little, Sir."

“Well, I shouldn’t if I were you. There’s very little danger nowadays and, I believe, need be no pain at all.” Sir Otto concluded with a technical reference. John explained with some hesitation that Margaret objected to taking the easy course.

“Poof! Nonsense!” exclaimed Sir Otto, with a slight wave of his hand: “Margaret won’t be so childish.”

“She doesn’t like the idea of being unconscious!” said John.

“Why not? Tell her she’s unconscious every time she goes to sleep. Or rather I’ll tell her myself. Besides, she’ll be unconscious under the anaesthetic in any case!” With even greater hesitation John explained that Margaret not only saw differently from her father on this point, but actually objected to the use of an ordinary anaesthetic — under any circumstances whatever — having in fact elicited a solemn promise from her medical woman that she would not employ one.

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Sir Otto. “There’s the medical profession; its whole job is to prevent pain. It ought to have managed this sort of thing ages ago instead of only a few years. The whole concern’s barbarous! There’s not the slightest question of her having one, if necessary!”

John saw that Sir Otto had not the faintest doubt of overcoming Margaret’s resolution, and as he himself felt equally confident that he would fail, he thought it a good moment to change the subject.

“Was Margaret’s arrival a very painful affair?” he enquired tentatively.

“Margaret’s?” exclaimed Sir Otto, and John saw that this was the first time he had felt any connection between the approaching event and that other one, in the past. “Yes, of course, terribly painful!” He began to reflect: “Margaret’s mother used to say she longed for music, and we were so poor we couldn’t afford a piano; so I used to sit up on a sort of office stool and play the flute to her!” He chuckled. “She must have wanted music very badly, if she could put up with that! I remember I used to play all the tunes I knew from Mozart, who was her favorite composer, and then finish up with ‘Knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road.’ We always finished up with that as a matter of course.” After a pause Sir Otto began humming ‘Knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road’ to himself, and John had a momentary fancy that he would rather have liked to dance round the room, as he did so.

“Have you heard from your sister?” he enquired at last. John said he had had two or three short letters. Janet was not a good letter-writer. Dodge had settled in a large villa near Luci in the South of Italy, which (partly for reasons of health) was henceforth to be his headquarters, whence, however, he intended to make protracted journeys into other countries, taking his retinue with him. Sir Otto knew all this already, so, after he had satisfied himself that Janet liked her work, the subject dropped. He picked up a book that was lying on the table, and, opening it in the middle, read the last stanza of a poem printed on the left hand page:

—Yea, but a worm! Not mine the power,
The will that bursts Orion’s bands:
Yet were this worm a God for one sweet hour,
If thou but take them,
His body and his soul in thy soft hands
And bless, and break them!

He glanced at the title-page: "Gerald Marston! Who's that? I seem to know the name! Ah yes, the man I wrote an introduction for to Bilbury. Is he a poet then?"

"He doesn't call himself one!" said John. "He wrote these four or five years ago, and says he hates them. But I'm not sure if he altogether means it. I oughtn't to have left the book lying about really; he says he wants all the copies burnt, and only gave me that one on condition I wouldn't show it to anybody. I happened to be looking at it last night!"

"Oh!" said Sir Otto, nodding without interest, and at the same moment Lady Hudson came down and joined them. Sir Otto went up to see Margaret and, coming down a quarter of an hour later without saying anything of what had passed between them, said good-bye to his wife and drove away. John guessed that Margaret had stuck obstinately to her point in spite of her father's cocksure way of talking, and felt proud of her, though he was also afraid.

He was right. Margaret herself even was surprised at the imperturbability with which she had ignored everything Sir Otto said on this point, and the way in which her peace of mind remained entirely unaffected by his obvious annoyance. During the fortnight that followed she was indeed most of the time at peace in a way she had scarcely known before. She read nothing and did practically nothing except a little sewing. John noticed how, although she smiled often, the slightly restless, though charming, tendency for actual laughter to break through whatever she was saying had disappeared. It was as if the energy were needed elsewhere. She herself felt precisely the opposite of what she had felt immediately before the wedding, when it had been so difficult to believe in the reality of what was going forward, and love's reflection in art had seemed more real than love itself. Poems or pictures concerning childbirth, if they came to her notice, seemed to her of no importance or interest whatever. If she were conscious of anything outside herself during these long periods when she closed her eyes and almost seemed to be listening to the mystery within her, it was that she had at last become an actual living part of the world and its business, and that, therefore, she and John after some stormy passages were at last drawing into the haven of real communion with one another.

It meant much, too, to have her stepmother with her. The friendship which they had always felt for one another ripened into a genuine affection at this time, and Margaret was taken back by her presence into the calmer, and in many respects ampler and more leisured atmosphere to which she had been accustomed before her marriage. One had talked about things in those days without necessarily worrying about them so much. She couldn't think how she had lost that balanced attitude to life, which she had formerly prized so much, and resolved, now that she had regained it, not to let it slip again.

John also came to know Lady Hudson better during these days; for they were frequently alone together and were moreover bound by a real community of interests. The moment Sir Otto went out of the front door she had begun, as it were, to fill out, taking on a certain spiritual plumpness and roundedness, like an air-cushion, from which someone has just risen. She enjoyed the simple dignities of her position, and felt drawn to John by the unwonted deference to her wishes and opinions, which she found in his manner. As for John, just as he had begun, with a

certain phlegm, to accept this arrangement, too, as a permanent dispensation in his life, he received another jolt in the arrival of a professional nurse. The nurse had a long nose and wore high stiff collars, which two attributes, taken together, somehow prevented him from thinking of her as a woman at all. He felt more as if some military man, a peppery colonel or major, were billeted on him, and became half-frightened of meeting her on the stairs and about the house, not knowing whether to smile or not, or whether to say anything. It would have eased his feelings a good deal, could he have shared this mildly humourous fantasy with Lady Hudson, but that lady was unfortunately not the kind who would have understood.

When the medical woman began to pay her calls, John's misery was made perfect. He would creep up at night to his little camp bed in the attic, murmuring "Yea, but a worm!" to himself and envying his forefathers, who had at least been certain of one fellow male, in the person of the doctor. And this state of affairs — with the nurse in the house and the doctor calling — lasted much longer than anyone had expected — nearly a fortnight in fact. The sense of anti-climax not only doubled the weariness of waiting (it was the longest fortnight John could remember in his life) but also caused him great apprehension. His anxiety grew greater every day, and he became convinced that the military man and the doctor and Lady Hudson were all conspiring to conceal from him the gravity of the situation. He fastened greedily therefore on any signs that appeared to him to reveal what they were truly thinking, and was almost grateful for a certain thinly-veiled contempt of himself, which he divined behind the military man's answers to his questions. For this, he felt, she could hardly maintain, if the situation were hopeless.

When at last he was told that the labour had begun, he could only go on prowling miserably about the house, doing nothing. The most sensible thing I can do, he thought, is to keep out of the way; but when he had kept out of the way for five minutes, it seemed to him appalling that he should be sitting there at ease, while Margaret was going through such horrible pain, and he wandered upstairs and, seeing the military man, who had come out to fetch something from the bathroom, asked her helplessly: "Is it very bad?" The military man looked down her nose, and John thought at first that she would not condescend to answer him, but at last she replied: "There's no need to worry, Mr. Trinder!" and he went downstairs again, feeling slightly reassured. He walked round the damp, cold garden, staring at the bare fence and the few spindly bedraggled stalks decaying in front of it, and felt that he had really been thoroughly selfish all his life, and that that was why he was so useless now. Of course he was willing, only too willing, to do anything they asked him; but that wasn't what was wanted. A really unselfish man, out of his very nature, out of his very love for the suffering party, would have been originating all sorts of little ideas to make things slightly easier, doing something all the time, with not a moment to be idle in.

He heard a sound from the house, and then the same sound again. It was a scream. John rushed back and up the stairs and once again met the military man whom he asked again in exactly the same words, only with the sweat now showing in beads on his forehead: "Is it very bad?" And again the military man looked down her nose and seemed as if she did not mean to answer, until she suddenly broke out

impatiently. "Do you mean is the pain very bad? Of course it is! Women don't make that noise for fun!" She might just as well have added "— you fool!"

John wandered into the bathroom and pressed his forehead hard against the cold glass of the window-pane, listening to the moaning and the occasional screams of pain that came from the sick room, listening intently also for another cry, which he knew might mingle in at any time and announce in its own peculiar language that the worst was over. He was torn between fear and admiration for the stubborn sense of loyalty — a mistaken sense, possibly — which had made her choose this instead of unconsciousness, though she must have known perfectly well what it would mean. Suddenly he became aware that the moaning had ceased, and at the same time he heard a low voice — Lady Hudson's — calling "John!" over the bannisters, under the impression that he was downstairs. He ran along the landing, and she pointed to the door of the sick-room — herself passing on to her own bedroom. She was crying. John opened the door and went in. He was amazed to see that the military man was crying, too. From the bed Margaret murmured something in a kind of delirium about birds that refused to settle and start feeding; then she feebly stirred her arms, as if she wanted to stretch them out.

"Where is he?" she murmured. The doctor bent down to her:

"In a minute! in a minute! You must keep quiet a moment!"

"Where is he? Why can't I have him? Where's John then?"

"Here's your husband just come in!" "Mr. Trinder!" The doctor went over to John, who was kneeling down beside a little white cot, which had been prepared near the bed, gazing at the minute human being, whose absurd likeness to himself he could perceive quite clearly even through a positively Startopian superfluity of wrinkles. What seemed most ridiculous was that this miniature edition of himself should be so complete! Eyes, nose, mouth, hands, fingers, and even little pink fingernails, of which there were precisely ten — neither more nor less. Only one thing was wanting to render this tiny creature, who had so miraculously appeared from nowhere, a full and perfect human being in every respect. But unfortunately that thing was breath.

"I think," whispered the medical woman earnestly: "we had better leave it to you to break it to her. I know you are close to each other. There's absolutely no danger, and I'm afraid it's impossible to conceal it any longer! I'll come back in a few minutes!" She beckoned to the Nurse, and John stared after them, as they tiptoed cautiously out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX

After floundering for a fortnight through the mazy paragraphs of the Critique of Pure Reason, Humphrey came out again with two vague ideas in his head — that the possibility of thought is entirely dependent on the perceptions of the senses and (as a kind of corollary to this) that it is a passive sort of affair, over which the human being himself has very little control. Such ideas came as a painful check to the conviction which had been steadily gaining strength within him up to now, that thinking itself is a kind of act of will — or may become one. Moreover they seemed to put Brockmann's 'exact clairvoyance' out of court. If Kant were right, all he

claimed to have arrived at in this way could really only be a phantasmagoria of pale reflections of sense-experience.

He then discovered that Brockmann had himself written a book concerning the nature of thinking and, on getting it, found numberless references to Kant, who was represented in many respects as the arch-seducer of Western thought. At the end of this book Humphrey was nearly as confused as before. He now felt, however, not indeed convinced of Brockmann's view as against Kant's, but at any rate satisfied that there was nothing palpably irrational in it. At least he was not able to "understand Brockmann's ignorance", and, that being so, there were innumerable reasons for presuming himself to be "ignorant of his understanding!" There was good reason, therefore, to go on reading Brockmann — and this was what he wanted to do. From final intellectual convictions of any sort Humphrey shrank with distrust, and above all from definitely uniting himself with anyone else's metaphysical scheme. It was because he had refrained from doing this in the past, he felt, that he was now able to appreciate the full depth of Brockmann himself, instead of immediately short-circuiting his wisdom with the clockwork explanations of *Lusst* and *Vogel* — as Dawson had apparently done.

He was determined, therefore, to preserve intact that freedom which had brought him — as he believed — so far, and rejoiced especially when he found abundant evidence that Brockmann himself did not expect or even desire belief from his followers. It was especially when he came across such things as this in Brockmann's work that Humphrey could feel again that half ecstatic sense of power and freedom, the curious joy of Arion, sporting on a dolphin's back through the bottomless ocean, where in he had once feared to drown.

Under the influence of such moods he frequently felt an overwhelming desire to make Gerald see eye to eye with him, and accordingly approached him in many different ways, to see if he could make some impression. Absolutely useless. Marston, who was generally open-minded, would hardly let him even open his mouth on the subject. He seemed to have a kind of intellectual portcullis, which he slammed down firmly as soon as he saw Brockmann's name and theories as much as looming on the horizon of a conversation. It was extraordinary.

At last it occurred to Humphrey that he had been going on quite the wrong tack. The more he read of Brockmann, the more he found him pointing again and again back to Goethe's work as the historical germ from which all his own conceptions had been, or could be, developed. One day accordingly he had a kind of inspiration. He thought to himself: Goethe — literary man: Marston — literary man: of course! And a little later he made a tremendous effort to interest Gerald from this new point of view, urging him to read Goethe, whom he would probably understand and appreciate so much better than he (Humphrey) himself could.

"But I don't like Goethe!" objected Marston.

"How do you mean, you don't like him? I'm suggesting he was a great thinker."

"Oh, there's no question of his having been a great artist — damnably great. It's the man I can't stand!"

"But, look here," said Humphrey: "we've talked of this before; and you've always taken the other side. Now, just because it's something to do with Brockmann, you coolly change right round!"

"I don't understand! The other side of what?"

"Why, you always say that a man's life doesn't affect his work one way or another — you know — the business about art and morals." Gerald relapsed into silence for a few moments.

"Yes, that's all right!" he said at last: "but the point is you can't have it both ways. You come to me and say X is a great poet or novelist or whatever you like. I reply: all right, in order to see if I agree with you, I must read some of his works. As to his private life, that is only of accidental interest — of no interest at all, unless it throws some light on those works. Now, where X = Goethe, I have already reached that stage. I haven't read much of him, but I have read enough to agree with you heartily that he was a very great man — comparable with Shakespeare. But now you come along and say: Look here, old man, X wasn't only a great artist, as I told you just now, but a kind of holy prophet with a blessed message of healing for humanity and Steerforth and Steerforth (Gerald's version of so forth and so forth). Well, in that case, I am perfectly entitled to reply: On the contrary, my dear Sir, X was a self-satisfied old petticoat-walloper!"

Humphrey was nonplussed. He wrinkled his brow.

"Well, at any rate" he said, without attempting to reply, "I wish you would have a look at his scientific works — the theory of colour and so on."

"His scientific works," said Gerald "can safely be handed over to the scientists for investigation; if that hasn't happened already. What on earth would be the use of my expressing an opinion on them, even supposing I could understand them!" Humphrey gave it up. On other occasions he had often heard Gerald himself speak ironically of this same magnificent conception of 'the scientists', as a kind of infallible touchstone.

"All right!" he brought out at last: "I only thought, perhaps, as you yourself said a lot about Goethe's thought in that article on Carlyle you showed me . . ." he finished off with a gesture and a significant lift of the eyebrows. Gerald remained silent. He had, as a matter of fact, forgotten all about that article, and indeed about the whole exciting and stimulating mood of thought, in which he had lived while he was writing it. But he did not now feel that he had anything to say on the subject. It was distressing to Humphrey; for he felt absolutely certain in his own mind that Brockmann's truth had something in it which Gerald desperately needed — needed more than most people, and needed now more than at any time since he had known him. Yet each time he tried to introduce it to him and break down his elementary misconceptions, he would find himself suddenly running on to the spear-point of some sharp dilemma, (such as that about Goethe) which Gerald would fiercely raise to oppose him. It was like trying to stroke a porcupine.

His reason for supposing that Gerald 'needed' some fresh spiritual sustenance was a certain cynical tendency which he had begun to detect of late in the turn of the latter's phrases. Marston seemed to be entirely disappointed of a literary career and, without feeling really convinced of his own inability, had recently decided to give up writing altogether and try for a commercial post instead.

Humphrey tried hard to dissuade him, but he replied that he was sick of being poor and wanted to make enough money to travel and enjoy himself. "However hopeless the world is," he said: "there are thousands of beautiful things in it, which I have never seen and never shall see, if I don't look sharp! Fancy opening a bottle of wine in a restaurant-car, with Athens at the end of the journey!" So he stuck to his point and, shortly after their conversation on Goethe, left for his home in the North, where he thought some friends of his family might get him a useful introduction. One of his reasons for going was the sheer impossibility of continuing indefinitely to draw his allowance from home — and yet without that allowance he could not possibly subsist. Humphrey touched his heart by telling him not to bother about the rent; but as a permanent arrangement, that was clearly impossible.

Gerald found it hard to keep his voice quite steady, as he shook hands with Humphrey through the carriage window, and after the train had steamed out of the terminus, he continued to see the keen smiling face glimmering on through the darkness of his own mind. Of the two, most people would have counted him as the 'steady' character and Humphrey as the unbalanced one. He knew this perfectly well and yet, as he sat back in his corner, Gerald felt as if a strut had suddenly been torn from beneath him. He began to wonder whither he was going. In one sense, home — in more than one sense, for it was not only his body which was hurrying north, but his affections and memories too. Yet another part of him, he knew, was slowly, forcibly, being detached from home and security. Deep, deep within him old ideas and standards of behaviour — old prejudices, if one liked — were beginning to crack and bend before the unending torrent of experience and reflection, which was life. He wondered vaguely and half curiously if they would eventually give way — and, if so, to what dubious ocean the torrent might finally whirl him.

CHAPTER XL

At about this time Humphrey definitely gave up all idea of becoming a practising psycho-analyst and resumed, instead, his studies in orthodox medicine. His decision to take this step was almost entirely due to the influence of Brockmann, whose writings had succeeded in building a satisfactory bridge from Humphrey's human interest in psychology to his academic knowledge of what he called 'guts'. Medicine was a very different proposition, when one began to see behind the physical organ, instead of a crude Darwinian obstacle-race, an immense process of cosmic and spiritual evolution; when one began to realise that no part of the human body could be properly understood without grasping its special relation to the stars and planets — and to the human soul. There was moreover abundant evidence that Brockmann's followers were obtaining practical therapeutic results, with their wealth of untried knowledge. Considering his own peculiar bent and qualifications, therefore, Humphrey had at last taken the final decision to dedicate his life to the medical section of the movement.

With the object of passing the necessary medical examinations, he began applying himself steadily to work. At the same time he naturally came in touch with other 'Brockmannites' of various descriptions and thus began to form a new circle of friends. His method was to study all the morning, and again after tea, and in the

evening to read or visit his friends or attend one of the meetings at which Brockmann's lectures were read and studied and discussed.

On one of these occasions, when a lecture on some subject concerning medieval history was being read, Humphrey persuaded John to accompany him. They arrived late and sat at the back without removing their overcoats and mufflers. At the end of it, John came away unimpressed. The lecture itself had been difficult to follow, containing, as it did, several technical terms with which he was unfamiliar, and this had given him leisure to notice how, both during the reading of the lecture and during the discussion that followed, whenever the Roman Church was mentioned or alluded to, a kind of superior titter seemed to run round the circle of listeners. He was at the time terribly depressed by his own domestic circumstances and as he looked round at the ring of complacent, self-satisfied faces, he thought bitterly of Tertullian, of Cyprian, of Augustine — those three rugged old Africans, bowed patiently beneath the weight of the nascent European civilisation, and carrying it as securely on their broad shoulders, as continent carries continent on the map. He wondered, with a sharp gust of contempt, how many of these comfortable-looking people, who talked glibly of 'the Christ' and of 'the spread of the Christ impulse' had even the faintest conception of the terrible problems which had faced those early Fathers, and of the courage and intellectual force with which they had solved them.

Altogether the result of his experience at this meeting was to set John definitely against Brockmann. He indicated something of his feeling to Humphrey, who immediately enquired why he had not expressed it at the meeting itself, where, he said, the new point of view would have been welcomed. He denied that the people were, on the whole, self-satisfied. John said nothing, but took leave to doubt him on both points. He felt tired and exasperated, and perhaps his vanity was touched. Privately he conceived that Brockmann himself must indeed have had some powerful experience of 'it', but that the elaborate forms in which he had chosen to couch that experience, and in which his followers — like all followers — continued interminably chatting 'about it', were probably of very little importance.

Humphrey was disappointed. He had thought he perceived a decided affinity between John's attitude to life and to religious experience and that of Brockmann and his followers; a far more pronounced one indeed than in Gerald's case. But, in spite of the sense of loneliness which this second disappointment gave him, he did not press an argument; chiefly because of his brother's white face and of the dark rings under his eyes.

All this happened about three weeks after Gerald's departure. A few days later, while Humphrey was sitting alone in his room in the evening, a letter came from Gerald. He tore it open.

Dear Clinker,

You may possibly like to hear something of how I am getting on. Well, I am reposing once more in the yearning bosom of my family, and if some of the petals are a bit crumpled and one or two thorns have been left behind, still I must say that on the whole I find it a bed of roses. They are surprisingly respectful and leave my opinions

alone. I have not yet found a commercial job, but enquiries are being made for me by kind friends. Meanwhile I go into Coalham every day — that great hub of the world's industry, that fiery heart of metropolitan life — to work at Northern Syndicated Periodicals. You probably know them? They produce practically all the factory-girls' magazines and novelettes in this part of the world. If I can get up to a thousand words an hour, I shall be able to keep the job as long as I like — which will be till something better turns up. To give you some notion of the work: about ten of us sit round the wall of a large office with our backs to the centre; each has a printed card with the essential features of the different lengths of story on it: thus: "40,000 words: Alliance of factory-hand with nobleman; Attempted seduction; Machine accident; Interrupted Wedding" — and so on; and as soon as we arrive at 9.30 A.M., we get down to it. My last one ended like this: "Milly!" he cried suddenly, with the love-light breaking through his hazel eyes. They flew together, Milly, the humble factory-hand, and Lord Jim Mountsteven, winner of the great cross-Pacific aeroplane competition and proud owner of a stud of a thousand horses. And as their lips met, her eyes filled with tears and she vowed never again to have ought to do with Marmaduke Oylar and his dastardly tribe." What ho, she bumps! Entre nous it is pretty nauseating, but my point of view is that, if I've got to write what I'm told to, I'd just as soon there was absolutely no nonsense about it — no half-pretence of having written what I wanted to.

Well, in such trifling hours as I can spare from these lofty pursuits, I have been reading some more Goethe; and I may as well tell you straight out that I am thoroughly confirmed in my former opinion. It's not so much anything particular, as the whole atmosphere of the man's life — especially, of course, his relations with women. Absolutely awful — it reminds me of a children's party I was once pushed into by mistake, where they were playing kissing-games. No more o' that! For the love of Mike, no more!

My metaphysical position — in which of course you will be profoundly interested — is at present very much that of Ivan in the Brothers Karamazoff (it would be unoriginal): i.e. I believe in God, but I don't accept his world! Did you read in the paper about those two delightful fellows in America who kidnapped a little girl of 12 and, after several times discussing quite openly in her presence whether they should murder her, did murder her by cutting her throat? Now just close your eyes for a moment and remember the things you were afraid of at twelve, quite tiny things, and what it felt like — and then try to imagine what that little girl went through!

You tell me — in effect — that, if I am a very good boy, I shall be able out of my own life to give birth to other worlds. What possible motive can I have for wanting to give birth to worlds in which blameless little girls will be subjected to agonies of torture and terror?

For if there is one thing in which I do agree with you, it is that good is impossible without evil, and so, if the Almighty has to arrange evils of this sort in His world, in order to bring out his good, it is, to say the least of it, unlikely that I shall manage much better in that other world whose creator or part-creator I am to be!

At this point (your theory) some old beaver in a nightgown pops out of the Mysteries, and says: Ah, my son, my son, you think you know so much, and really all the time you know so infernally little (repeat this sentence five times with variations, and then da capo). There lived in that little girl, my son, quite a different being, a being who will only come to the light, nay, properly speaking, will only be born, when her soul is at last initiated after umpteen incarnations and gathered to eternal bliss. I reply: exactly, old raspberry pip, that is just my point! If the eternal part is there at all, it is quite a different being. The person I am interested in at the moment is the actual little girl, in so far as she is conscious of herself, Topsy, the creature her mother expected to come back from school the day she was kidnapped. What's the use of pretending to me that any amount of hundredfold and seven hundredfold future compensation to some unborn germ sleeping in Topsy, can ever atone to Topsy for those last few days of her little life? Oh, this is absurd. Why on earth should I want to carry on my private arguments in your hearing? Sorry!

I really don't quite know where I shall end up. As far as I can make out at present, I am really a sort of compound of all the most mean and sneaking vices that human nature has ever invented. The only reason that nobody knows it is that I haven't the courage to act any of them out. Does it interest you, for instance, to know that I am lecher — I don't mean in my outward behaviour, of course. Outwardly I am a most respectable individual walking about with a suitcase, but inwardly I seem to live nearly all the time — and quite willy-nilly — in a sort of bath of sex — lick up with great relish every piece of pornography I see in the shop windows and am ten paces past before I even know I have done it. I used to rail at those everlastingly sex-obsessed novelists, but I'm hanged if I'm not coming round to sympathise with them — though I've no more desire to read their stuff than I have to eat dung. You may tell me I am ruining myself by kow-towing to inhibitions, but what in thunder am I to do? I should quite like to be one of those harlot-on Mondays, cum pure-white-dream-on-Tuesdays intellectuals I met at Oxbridge, but I can't do the broad and beery embrace and should only be miserable in their pubs. Not that that would matter very much, as I am so damned miserable already. I do feel I am simply withering without any experience of that kind. But if I went in for it, I should have to go in for it seriously — perhaps for ever, and all in a damned delicate voluptuous way.

Oh yes, and cowardice! That is really the key to the whole position. Do you know I often lie in bed at night, literally quaking with

fear — though, God knows what of! What's the meaning of that, Mr. Witch doctor?

Of course I oughtn't to have written all this, and perhaps I shan't post it. I certainly could never breathe a word of it to anyone else but you. But, Clinker, you will understand and not make too much of it; for you have sometimes unloaded a little on me, too, and know that the mere unloading itself can be some slight relief.

I hope you are getting on well with your own work and are still as interested in it, as when I left. For God's sake burn this letter.

Ever thine,
G. M.

Humphrey held the letter between his fingers and began to think. He felt uneasy — less because of what Gerald had said than because of the way in which he had said it. There was in particular something about the humour — a touch here and there — which rang faintly false; and this was all the more unpleasant, because in a sense precisely the humorous tone of the letter was so thoroughly and delightfully typical of Gerald. If the letter as a whole had been solemnly phrased, with an occasional clear drop into vulgar flippancy, it would not have mattered so much. Actually the vulgar flippancy when it occurred, seemed to peep through like a kind of grinning parody of the man's deepest and best self — as if something hateful had been standing behind his chair as he wrote, and had leaned over and given his pen an imperceptible little twist each time he had tried to speak most from his heart.

Humphrey began considering how he should reply. His principal desire was to impress on Gerald, in some way that would not touch his vanity nor yet make him feel the he was being preached at, the tremendous importance of not being in too great a hurry to 'overcome inhibitions' in the obvious business-like way, which he (Humphrey) had taken. He thought of various approaches to the subject, each of which was clearly impossible, owing to the obviously paternal attitude which it implied, and then his cogitations were interrupted by a knock at the door of the flat. He went out and opened it; and his eyebrows rose nearly through his hair, when he perceived that the visitor was none other than Marston himself.

"Good lord! I've only just finished reading your letter! Splendid! Come along in!"

"Ah! I hoped I might get here first."

"You don't mean to say, you came up simply to stop me reading that letter!"

Gerald laughed: "Ass! No! As soon as I got back from the post, my father told me he wanted me to come up to town on some business of his. The short and the long is, our play's preferred — I mean, can you put me up for a couple of nights?"

"Rather! My dear man, what an amazing piece of luck. Take your coat off!"

Gerald hesitated. He looked at Humphrey, with a sort of coyness.

"I'm feeling particularly spry to-night, Clinker!" he said: "We couldn't go out somewhere, I suppose?" Humphrey looked at the smiling mouth and sparkling eyes. Anything more unlike the presumptive author of the letter he had just read it would have been hard to imagine.

“Why not?” he said: “but how splendid to find you in such good form!” They got a newspaper and looked down the entertainment list; but there seemed to be nothing whatever that they both wanted to see. Suddenly Humphrey recollected that Wednesday was the night on which Rollo used to hold his meetings.

“I haven’t been for nearly twelve months,” he said: “what about nipping along Tottenham Court Road to see if there’s anything doing?” Gerald agreed. He felt the sentimental fitness of revisiting on this night of reunion the environment in which he and Humphrey had first met.

Half an hour later they mounted the same rickety stairs to the same room with the same orange table-cloths and black-and-white crockery. An even-toned voice was speaking, as they opened the door, and crept quietly into two chairs. Gerald observed four or five faces he remembered, among them Dawson’s and Rollo’s. The latter had abandoned his turban, but he was in his usual place, though Dawson was not sitting next to him. Gerald and Humphrey had arrived late and therefore only just in time to hear the speaker’s peroration.

“People speak of the economic man,” he was saying, as two chairs creaked beneath their carefully lowered bodies, “of competition and the survival of the fittest, and so forth; but these things are mere abstractions. What we have to recognise is that it is now definitely established as a scientific fact — quite apart from any preaching or sermonizing — that the egopetitive libido, if allowed free play, interferes with the activity of the altripetitive libido. Not only so, but this interference produces serious psychological and even physiological disabilities, in the form of neuroses. These things are no longer in the realm of theory. Since Vogel’s magnificent work, they are observed facts. The egopetitive libido isolates the individual from society, producing an emotional sterility, which he seeks to overcome in the most manifold and perverted ways; the altripetitive libido, on the other hand, by making him feel himself a member of society, provides the only natural and healthy outlet for the passions and aspirations, to which the egopetitive libido gave rise in the first place. This is Vogel’s grand message to humanity! And once men are convinced by the indubitable proofs offered in his works that such is indeed the case, they must, by the very logic of events, adopt his remedy, and cultivating the altripetitive at the expense of the egopetitive, give birth to a society, in which each shall indeed live for all, instead of living for himself alone.”

The speaker sat down amid discreet applause. After a long pause a woman got up and explained how the new psychology involved a re-orientation of one’s attitude towards at any rate one important social institution — marriage. For it enabled one to preserve a sort of balance between the old-fashioned view that every marriage is a special divinely appointed event, and the modern revolt against the whole institution of marriage. After another short speech and another pause Rollo got up and made his contribution in a speech, which Gerald found distinctly disappointing. He contented himself with repeating the original speaker’s conclusions and adding his conviction that there was such a thing as an intellectual, as well as an emotional, megalomania, as had been demonstrated by the transcendental philosophers, of whom he took Hegel as the type. In the business of shaking off the one kind of megalomania, there was, he said, considerable damage of succumbing to the other. But this was only to fall out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Soon after Rollo, whose foreign accent, Gerald remarked, was much less pronounced than formerly, sat down, the meeting broke up. Neither Gerald nor Humphrey had spoken. The former was always shy of making himself heard in public, and Humphrey was in a sort of maze of awakening this evening —unable to comprehend why he had not seen all along the obvious flaw in these people. They condemned ‘abstractions’ and yet had nothing but further abstractions to offer in their place! Seeing Dawson and Rollo shaking hands with one another, he took Gerald by the arm and went across to join them. It appeared that Dawson, too, by a strange coincidence had made that evening his first visit for many months. Rollo asked them both how the tone of the meeting had struck them after their prolonged absence, and Humphrey at once brought out the objection that had been in his mind.

“What’s the use of cursing abstractionism and then talking more abstractly than ever — that’s what they’re all doing — and, I dare say it’s what I did, too, when I used to come!” Rollo was silent, and Humphrey went on: “They seem to want to link up mind with body, and that’s all to the good! But when it actually comes to the point, they can’t fill up the crack any better than anyone else. All they do is to hop to and fro a little quicker.”

“Can you geeve an example of ‘filling up the crack’?” asked Rollo. Humphrey immediately referred to Brockmann, the bulk of whose work was concerned with regions lying between body and mind, conceived, however, not in abstractions but as concrete parts of the whole human organism. He looked at Dawson once or twice, as he spoke, but made no overt reference to the fact that the latter had introduced him to Brockmann, though with a different purpose in view. Rollo seemed to be quite fairly interested in what he was saying, and Humphrey himself grew quickly animated and excited, suggesting at last that Rollo and Dawson should come back to the flat for coffee and talk it all out. To this they consented, and the four set out together.

CHAPTER XLI

Margaret sat alone in the dining-room, vaguely recalling various unimportant incidents in her past life. She often did this nowadays. The past sometimes seemed to be so much more real than the present. Whenever she thought of her mother, of her step-mother, of Klosters with Nestor barking and jumping up at you and Merlin purring, arching, rubbing, and rambling amiably about the house from lap to lap — all these seemed to be parts of her, seemed to make up her very self. Whereas from the present moment, whatever it might be, this same self was somehow detached. It was almost as if she did not believe in the present. If ever she had managed to incarnate fully, so to speak, in the passing instant, as like as not one of these vivid brightly-lit pictures would suddenly arise out of the past and carry her backward, unresisting but bewildered, so that her eyes, if she were talking, began to shift to and fro and rove restlessly round the room.

Margaret was the readier to surrender to these reveries, because it really seemed important to regain that calmness, that easy balance of life, which she remembered enjoying before her wedding. By sinking herself in memories of the period when that balance had come so naturally to her, she felt she would make

herself better able to preserve the balance now, when an effort was required. If only John could be kept from saying something impatient, something (she did not know what) horribly rash, it might all come right, or at least not grow worse. But, alas, he seemed to be so horribly strained and unhappy and often looked at her in such a peculiar questioning way, that she was continually apprehensive. This morning she remembered noticing that he had taken the trouble to put his trousers in the press. That, at least, was a good sign! She looked at the clock and rang for supper.

Supper came, and a few minutes after it, John, who sat down in silence. She filled his plate and handed it to him without saying anything. After a little while he looked at her and asked:

“How do you feel?”

“Really, very well!”

“You didn’t sleep well.”

“Oh, yes. I only dreamed a lot. One always begins to feel it the next evening, don’t you know, a sort of ‘Why are we weighed upon with heaviness?’ feeling.”

He remarked with despair the polite distance of her ‘one’.

“I don’t understand,” he said unemphatically (he had said the same thing so often during the last three months) “your doing all this dreaming. What do you dream about?”

“Oh, the usual sort of silly nonsense, you know! Climbing up cliffs one moment and cooking the dinner the next!” She laughed and in the middle of her laugh touched him for a shy fraction of an instance with her glance: “You’d find my dreams very disappointing. They don’t —” she had intended to say “mean anything”, but hesitated. While she spoke, John had been bracing himself, and now her hesitation seemed to give him an opening, which he promptly took. Feeling exactly as if he were taking his first plunge into water, whose iciness he had had no means of gauging, he looked steadily at her and said, slowly, with a thumping heart:

“Margaret, things can’t go on like this!” For a second her heart, too, stopped beating, then her eyes began to seek the four corners of the room, as if searching for some means of preventing him from going on. She did not speak, however, and John, feeling as if he were suspended between the diving-board and the water, forced himself to proceed:

“We must have it out. I decided that we must, while I was dressing this morning.”

Once again she said nothing. John, failing at first to understand the meaning of her silence, went on, just as if she had asked him a question:

“I mean your behaving to me like this all the time, as if I were a — sort of — dancing-partner.” Margaret was looking out of window: she continued to do so, as her mobile mouth carefully shaped the words:

“There are a good many things that can quite justifiably be felt — don’t you think — and yet nothing but a mess comes of trying to say them!”

“Yes, but not when people are intimate with one another!”

“No! I mean, however intimate they are!” John realised that his courage and great effort had not brought him a single step further forward. He said doggedly:

“Look here, Margaret, I won’t be put off like this!” She turned her head slowly towards him:

"I don't think I really quite understand what you are meaning."

"But I've just told you!"

"You haven't said very much!"

"No! because there's so devilish little to take hold of."

"Then are you sure it's wise to try and take hold of it?"

"You seem to be making it as difficult as you can! Margaret! You must know perfectly well what I mean really! It's simply that I can't stand being treated as if I were a dinner-party!" Once more she met him with silence, and this time John suddenly realised the real mood of that silence. It was a sort of mute request to him not to go on and make a fool of himself. She was trying to 'save' him. He suddenly grew bitter.

"Yes," he said: "it's easy for you to put me off with silence, as if you couldn't understand — just because there is so little to get hold of. You're so perfectly self-controlled. You're not theatrical about it. That's just the trouble. And yet all the time you keep on thrusting me off — oh, awfully kindly — as if I were — as if I were a rather dubious guest at Klosters just going to drop a brick!" She did not reply, but he could somehow feel from her manner that his words had broken through the outer defences. Immediately he took advantage of the breach to press his point:

"Are you going to refuse to understand?"

"I understand you mean to complain of something."

"Margaret, when I say a thing nowadays, it's not you that answers!" He looked at her, trying to put all the meaning he could into his eyes, and repeated: "You!"

"We seem to be plunging about in the dark!" she said with a nervous little laugh. John was getting more and more desperate. He foresaw them abandoning the subject and going on living together with everything just as it had been before he began to speak — only worse — with still more restraint. All this fearful effort for nothing!

"Margaret," he said, the appeal in his voice giving it a peculiarly soft note: "Won't you answer, yourself? You do love me still. I know that all the time. Where are you?" He went over to her and gripped her shoulders. "I can't live with all these wrappings. I want the true you. Where are You?" Full of emotion, himself on the verge of tears, he waited, steeling himself against the storm of sobbing from her, which he knew was the only possible gate now, through which they could pass back to intimacy.

Margaret had turned quite white. She breathed with difficulty, as she said, in an otherwise calm voice:

"It's a good thing one of us is not theatrical!" Inside John, something jumped as though it had been cut with a whip.

"That was horribly cruel!" he said at last. But Margaret seemed to have come to a decision. Breathing more evenly, she looked straight at him and said, with what sounded to him like a touch of contempt in her voice:

"There are several ways of being cruel, my dear boy. Of course this determination to pierce through to the truth at all costs and lay absolutely everything bare is never cruel or selfish. Not at all! It's a lofty and noble virtue — one that seems to come particularly easy to young men." This was about the second

time in John's life that he heard Margaret seriously sarcastic. It was so unusual that, for a moment, it seemed to his excited fancy as if she were talking in her sleep. He felt absolutely without hope and longed to give up the whole thing and go away, but then, thinking of the still greater hopelessness that would follow, he grimly thrust downward his fear of a 'scene' and, with no feeling in his heart, forced himself to stride over to his wife and violently shake her. The action itself, however, carried him away. He did really become furiously angry.

"Will you answer me!" he said, continuing to shake her and almost hissing the words through his teeth: "You, I mean — YOU!" he shouted. Her head wobbled helplessly on her jerked shoulders and her eyes stared up at him like a doll's, as she let out breathlessly, one word to each push:

"Please — stop! I — don't — see — how — it's — going — to — help — to — kill — me . . . as well!" He stopped, realising that he had failed, and wondering suddenly if he had imagined his whole complaint. But what did her last remark mean?

"What do you mean — 'as well?'" he asked her. She turned her eyes to his with an effort, but kept them steady while she replied:

"Will you never see that there's a right time and a wrong time for saying things — asking things! Of course tact — the trivial habit of considering other people's feelings — is a very inferior virtue. Still, it happens to be a virtue I prize as highly as any." John was absolutely at sea.

"I don't —" he began, and then checked himself, lest the annoyance in his voice should make her think he was only pretending not to understand.

"But I don't understand," he said at last more quietly: "You are not saving my feelings by not saying what you think — just the opposite — that's just what I want you to do."

"It was my feelings I was talking of — oh, John," (she suddenly surrendered from exhaustion) "can't you understand that saying things sometimes makes them true?"

"What did you mean — as well?" he insisted. And now she looked at him steadily and a little defiantly, as she answered: "You force me to say things I know ought never to be said. You must know I meant: as well as Gerald."

"Gerald!" He stared, wondering for one wild moment if she were actually insane. Then the light broke, as he recollected that 'Gerald', besides being Marston's Christian name, and because of that, was to have been given to the baby, whose two-or-three minutes' existence he himself had now almost forgotten.

Somehow he was unable at first to take this extraordinary accusation seriously. It did not even worry him much.

"Do you mean that I killed your — our — baby?" he asked curiously.

"That you — that we both did it — on the night the font was blessed. It's almost exactly a year ago to-day!" And now he began not merely to understand what she had said, but to feel it. He filled with pity at the thought of her silently brooding over this appalling idea. He put his arms round her.

"Margaret, you didn't quite mean what you said?"

"Does one ever mean exactly what one says?" she replied listlessly, and without looking up at him. "Never — according to you. You made me say

something!" She stopped, and for the second time John dropped his arms abruptly to his sides.

He turned away and paced up and down the room: "What medical grounds have you for believing such a thing is possible? Have you asked Dr. Amery?"

"Oh, what's the use of talk-talk-talking? I'm so frightfully tired. It's not only a body that has to be made; it's a soul. There was no difficulty about the body."

"But why shouldn't the soul have been made as well?"

"Because I lost all interest in the whole thing, just when I should have been most intent. You — what you said — made me feel as if I and you and the vicar and the little girls in front were all just savages — animals pretending to be human beings."

"But Margaret, surely this is rather morbid. That can't have been the first time you were ever confronted with the idea that civilised man has something of the savage left in him — is probably descended from the animals." The contempt in her voice was now quite plain.

"My dear John, you go on thinking, thinking, thinking, and you don't seem to have the faintest idea that there's a difference between thinking and feeling; that it's one thing to have a bright idea one day that all one's religion and art and civilisation may be a kind of beastly savagery in disguise and another thing to feel that suddenly with your whole self and soul just at the moment when every feeling you have — even the beautiful ones — are so violent that they hurt you!" He felt a crippling desolation at the picture she revealed, and yet could think of nothing at all to say. To murmur "I'm sorry" would have been so trivial as to sound like an insult. He brought back his mind to the circumstances.

"But you got back your intentness at the end!" he said hurriedly. "We both did . . . I thought."

"The very font he would have been christened in!" exclaimed Margaret, more to herself than to John.

"But Margaret — it was all right at the end!"

"Oh yes, it was all right at the end — when it was too late!" Both of them were now physically exhausted. John had seated himself on a little chair on the other side of the room and was resting his head on his hands. It had begun to ache, and he felt he wanted nothing but sleep. Margaret began to move towards the door; but when he made no sign that he was even aware of her going, she turned and said hesitatingly:

"I hope you haven't taken me as if I were blaming you!" Now John could not help feeling he had been magnanimous. In fact, now he came to look back on the discussion, he was astonished to see how magnanimous he had been. Beneath all the astounding things she had said he had managed to restrain, not merely all anger but all appearance of surprise. And she had spoken to him sarcastically! Well, if sarcasm was the order of the day, it was a game for two!

"Oh no!" he said: "That was the very last thing I thought. You only accused me of a little mild infanticide; a mere nothing; as for blame, such an idea never even crossed my mind!" With the last sentence he looked up at her. and even now could not help noticing the supple motions of her white, ill-looking, fearfully tired face, as she said:

“This is the sort of absolutely hopeless misunderstanding that always comes about, when people try to be too candid,” and went out of the room.

John did not move. That morning he had told himself that, if he could only find courage to speak, to break through the perpetual puttings-off and speak, things must mend. And the renewed atmosphere of hope in which he had accordingly lived all day doubled the blackness of his present depression. He saw his whole life as a series of mawkish illusions and grotesque failures. The whole idea of setting out with knightly courage to ‘bridge the gulf between art and religion’, and then that other gulf between highbrow and lowbrow, had been nothing from the first but a bubble of childish priggery, which Janet and Humphrey had presumably been too soft-hearted to prick. He thought with disgust and shame of all that nonsense with Italian pictures and meditating on them, and saying Spenser over to himself, and the light, and fancying he had got hold of some Philosopher’s Stone. What did it all amount to? With what devious tricks and sleights of thought had he not gone on hiding from himself, the patent fact that Christianity was only of even indirect importance to something like a third of the inhabitants of the globe. While as to the Church, God only knew what minute fraction of the world it was, which had not forgotten all about it ages ago — and for good. Self-deceiver! As if he had really needed Startop’s gentle initiation, in order to understand that the only possible attitude for a churchman — or indeed for anyone who felt kindly towards humanity — was that same tired, disillusioned, Catholic compromise!

Meanwhile, he thought bitterly, his own ostrich-headed refusal to admit this, his everlastingly unmanly fussing and sniffing and worrying round after some high falutin’ tertium quid, had wrecked his private life. He heard Margaret’s contemptuous voice: ‘Thinking, Thinking, Thinking!’ He might at least have made one woman happy, like other decent men, and brought up a jolly family. But no, he must needs go walking about with his nose in everyone’s business, as if he were Jehovah’s pet retriever — until at last he had succeeded in wrecking two lives and perhaps extinguishing a third!

He saw perfectly clearly now that all the time, at the back of his weak, muddled head, he had been nursing vague projects that were not merely beyond his own strength, but preposterous in themselves — as if it had been the secret inspiration of his life to fish the moon out of a pond. The ‘average Englishman’ — the lowbrow — the goyim — the many-headed multitude — as if anyone but a few smug curates had ever fancied for an instant that anything could ever be done with them! Certainly many of them had virtues — heroic virtues — virtues, which he (John Trinder) did not possess. But — so had the animals! As if every intelligent person did not know that all attempts to educate, all echoes of art and religion that could ever possibly reach their fuddled wits, were not really, in disguise, so many more or less hopeless compromises — cunning artifices, necessary to keep them from actually slipping right back (oh, tiny little distance!) to the animal. Suddenly, he saw the justification of Margaret’s instinctive horror. At the same moment his eye fell on the wireless-set, which had not been long installed. He recollected the new system of giving two programmes simultaneously on different wavelengths, one ‘serious’ and the other ‘light’ (i.e. one ‘highbrow’ and the other ‘lowbrow’). The

instrument seemed therefore to be a pat confirmation of all he had been thinking! He took up the earphones.

John was surprised to find that some sort of divine service had apparently been going on. This was curious on a weekday. A voice was still speaking, whose owner was apparently nearing the end of his address. As the voice proceeded, he began to listen more intently. — ‘and that is why I am so glad that, in spite of the opposition in some quarters, we were able to arrange this service. I do not think we should let ourselves be unduly cast down because we were not allowed a Sunday. Rather the very smallness of this beginning should remind us of the fact that it is only beginning. My friends, that is really a very solemn thought. That this is the beginning. That we are holding the very first of these special services. That you and I to-day may be making history! You and I are making history. I want, if you will allow me, to leave you among my listeners who understand me more fully — or rather who have the means of showing me that you understand more fully — with just that thought — a courageous thought, but also a very humble one. You and I, to-day, may be making the history of the World!

And now I turn more especially to you, my little friends — for you are my little friends, every single one of you — you, who are perhaps after all the truest Christians of all my congregation, who have never told an untruth, or betrayed a friend, or spoken an unkind word in your honest, trusty, devoted lives. It is indeed strange, is it not, that when I call you the truest Christians among my listeners, I know that these listeners are the last people — just the very last people in the world — who will be offended?

“Is not that strange?”

John lost the thread of the next few sentences. He had begun to feel extraordinarily uneasy. The same curious frightened feeling, which had come over him in the Underground, while looking over his neighbour’s shoulder at Smiler’s cartoon, began to trouble him again, and he put his hands up to the earphones, as if to take them off before he heard any more. Instead, however, he began to listen again:

“— and when I ask you to pray with me in a few moments, I shall not have the slightest doubt in my own mind that your prayer is as hearty and devout and aspiring in its own way as any prayer that was ever offered up to Him, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls. What a joy it is to me to see you all in my mind’s eye, sitting up so still and attentive, some of you, I expect, with fine blue ribbons on, all of you so beautifully washed — a little restless, perhaps, occasionally because of those difficult earphones, or that rattle from the loud speaker, but subduing your own desires, as always, to the love of the mistress or master, who sits yearning beside you. And how richly paid I shall count myself, if any of those mistresses should write to me afterward and tell me how pussy purred, as I spoke just these words or how little Fido barked and wagged his tail. Not that I depend on such signs as these to convince me of how much you understand of what I say — much more than most of us would be inclined —”

John suddenly wrenched the receivers from his head and flung them with a crash against the wall, so that jagged pieces of black vulcanite dropped on to the carpet, and a lengthening helix of thin green wire crawled reluctantly out of one end.

For a few moments his disgust gave way to a kind of fiendish pleasure. Some bishop or other must have sanctioned this farce — at best, some nonconformist dignitary. He took delight in hurling every kind of insult he could think of at the Church, whose minister he was. It was an institution for encouraging self-deception; for keeping down the poor, for deceiving the weak-minded into docility, a backwater from civilisation, a comfortable refuge for cowards who were frightened to think for themselves, an annexe for a few mental invertebrates and whining women, who had already sunk so low as to be scarcely distinguishable from the pets they slobbered over, and who now, apparently, required helping down even that last rung! And then the vindictive mood left him as suddenly as it came; the hopeless situation with Margaret crept back and added itself quietly on to his other hopelessness, and he sat on motionless in the armchair beside the instrument, staring misery in the face. For now he could see absolutely no reason anywhere why he should go on doing any of the things he had been trying to do so energetically ever since he grew up. No reason for doing anything at all. The thought formulated itself more clearly, and he even felt for a moment a kind of panic. Suppose he simply went on sitting and staring in that chair for ever — simply because there was no reason to be found anywhere for doing anything else! But at this point something — surely not himself, for he had no inclinations! — wrenched him up out of the chair and practically frogmarched him into the hall. He began to put on his coat, and then, with a sudden thought, threw it down again and ran upstairs. Two minutes later he came back, with an ordinary collar and tie on, instead of the clerical ones he had been wearing. Putting on first his trenchcoat and then an old beaver hat, he thrust his head into the kitchen, said: “Tell Mrs. Trinder not to wait for me,” and immediately afterwards went out the front door.

CHAPTER XLII

John hurried along the road, without an idea in his head as to where he was going, until he found himself in front of the Underground station. Here he turned in, and at the same moment made up his mind to go over and see Humphrey — why, he could not have said. Sitting in the rattling half-empty train, he watched the people hurrying in and out at the stations and wondered vaguely what they all did for a living. They all looked so mature, so confident — especially the dark man in the morning-coat, who sat in the corner reading the business part of an evening paper. John envied this man bitterly. How easy it would be to remain a sensible self-respecting person, if only you had an ordinary job, that allowed you to mind your own business! It was this everlasting sense of responsibility for other people’s morals that turned you into a fool and a prig and made you get on your wife’s nerves. If only he could get out of the Church!

The front door of Humphrey’s flat was unfastened, so John walked in and hung up his hat and coat. As he did so, he heard the sound of Humphrey’s voice through the room door. There was somebody there, then! He paused for a moment with his fingers on the handle, until, realising the absurdity of apprehending anything in his present state of mind, he knocked and went in.

Humphrey came towards him, with both arms outstretched, smiling all welcome and surprise. He made no sign that he had noticed the collar.

"Well, I'm jiggered! Come right in, Squire! You're just the man we want! You know Dawson and Mr. Rollo?" John acknowledged having met them. Remembering Dawson's behavior at the meeting two years back, and how he had cut him in Italy, he fully expected the latter to disclaim acquaintance. He felt, however, quite indifferent, and eyed the man somewhat aggressively, as he held out his hand. Contrary to his expectations Dawson smiled and referred politely to the occasion of their first meeting. Rollo took John's hand into his own cold and large one and held it motionless for a moment with closed eyes. Gerald, as they greeted one another, gave him the faintest of winks.

"Go on talking!" said John to his brother, as he took a chair. "I know you were, because I heard you. And I'd much rather sit in a corner and listen than do anything else." He added: "I've only come to pay a call!" smiling feebly and looking at his watch, which said to 10.15 p.m.

"All right!" said Humphrey: "we'll call on you for a speech later!"

"You'll have to call very hard! Go on with whatever you were saying!"

"What was I saying! I don't remember!"

"About the traffic," said Rollo, leaning back in his chair and half closing his eyes.

"Safety first!" said Gerald.

Humphrey nodded: "Oh yes . . . it's like this . . . you're in the middle of the road with about thirty whacking-great motor buses and cars and lorries tearing along both ways and running round in little circles. And all of a sudden you hear a great honk about an inch behind you! What do you do?"

"Ring up Selfridges!"

"No. No fooling, Gerald. You know very well your only chance is to stand dead still just where you are! It doesn't matter where you are — it's the standing still that matters. Everything's running about like hell all over the shop, and the only hope is, if something takes it into its head to stop . . . Well, I say, that's pretty much the state we're all in to-day. The only hope is, when here and there a fellow takes it into his head to say "Wup! All cars stop here!" and absolutely refuses to budge till he wants to."

Gerald had begun to hold his head in both hands. "You mean, the only hope for the fellows who say 'Wup?'"

"No, I mean the only hope or the whole caboodle." Humphrey's gestures began to show that he was getting animated. "Look here! It's like a retreat. There's a great mob of fellows all showing a leg, helter-skelter, for all they're worth. Nothing'll stop 'em. Suddenly one of 'em stops of his own accord with a bang and turns round. Then somebody else sees this, and he stops — then another, and another, and another, till the whole company's made a stand — and perhaps put the wind up the enemy by doing it."

At this point Rollo nodded impressively without opening his eyes.

"Well, that's what's happening to our minds to-day" went on Humphrey: "Cinemas, advertisements, morning and evening papers, slogans, rival philosophies, rival religions — none of which we believe in — every kind of dope pouring and

pouring on us in an endless stream. It's up to us to put a sock in it — or else go under! That's my point!"

"I don't quite see why you should include 'rival philosophies' in your denunciations", objected Gerald. "Surely it's only by the clash of different ideas that we can get at the truth at all. In the mere act of thinking, we have already made a stand against the endless stream of sense-perceptions. Isn't that the whole difference between thinking and perceiving? As far as I remember, it was you yourself who convinced me of that."

"Yes, I know, but I was wrong — or only half-right. Everything depends on the way you think. There are some kinds of thinking that are not much better than scratching. The question is: Is your thinking an act of will? You can pretty soon tell. It isn't only the chaos outside that you've got to deal with; there's a worse chaos inside. Isn't there? Well, only the real kind of 'will-thinking' will have any effect on this internal chaos — you know, I mean that ghastly feeling of slipping away into an ocean of nothingness. That's the test! The other kind of thinking is simply carried away with the stream — because it's weaker. Mere intellect's the weakest thing on earth. Get me?"

"I get a bit of you" said Gerald humbly; "but there's so much to get that the rest of it will probably take me some time." After a pause he added thoughtfully: "I suppose you would say, then, that I had begged the question by talking about the act of thinking?" As he said this, he looked hard at Humphrey, and his mind kept repeating over to itself: "— there's a worse chaos inside, isn't there?" and "you know, I mean that ghastly feeling of slipping away into an ocean of nothingness."

"Exactly!" Humphrey replied. Gerald hardly opened his mouth again for a quarter of an hour.

"What's your idea?" asked Humphrey, suddenly turning to Dawson. The latter was leaning well back in the most comfortable chair in the room, with his left ankle cocked up on his right knee. He hesitated for a moment before replying. At last he said:

"We seem to start from rather different points of view . . . "

"Carry on!" Humphrey cut across his laziness like a little flash of lightning.

"I mean, there seems to be a kind of assumption behind all you say that this 'internal chaos', as you call it, is a bad thing, and something else, not specified, (apparently a kind of policeman that keeps it in order) is a good thing. I don't understand these moral judgments. They don't interest me. I don't want to offend you, but the rule I always go by is: scratch a moral judgment and you'll find fear! I don't really see much in what you're saying except a familiar psychological symptom — suppressed fear, of anything that isn't being kept in order. Don't think I'm insulting you. On the contrary, your emotion is the foundation of all the civic virtues!"

"And the foundation of all religion!" said John suddenly. There was silence. Dawson smiled, and John immediately began to hate him violently.

"Well, but do you mean we ought to just surrender to the chaos?" said Humphrey at last.

“There you go again with your high falutin’ words like ‘ought’ and ‘surrender’, begging every conceivable question. I really don’t think it’s much use our going on.” Humphrey looked at him sharply.

“You’ve changed, since we last met!” he exclaimed.

“So have you — in the other direction,” replied Dawson calmly. Humphrey knit his brows for a moment.

“Do you mean to say that thinking isn’t bringing a kind of light into darkness?” he asked Dawson.

“Oh, very likely. All I object to is your calm assumption that therefore it is a good thing. I don’t say it isn’t. But you haven’t yet shown me any reason why it is. Supposing you are right, all I know so far is, that you and your friends are afraid of the dark.”

“Afraid of the dark!” exclaimed Gerald.

“I should say,” went on Dawson to Humphrey, “you are now going the way of all the philosophers and all the religious reformers. You peeped into the dark, didn’t like it, and so you’re starting to sing hymns to yourself for going and fetching a light.”

“Then you are against all thought!” rapped out Humphrey quickly.

“I’m not ‘against’ anything. You will keep on bringing in these battle-cries. I only like to recognise things for what they are. If you like to put it that all thought is based on fear — well and good. But don’t let’s get excited about it.”

“Can you explain more fully” asked Rollo slowly, “what you mean — “all thought is based on fear?”

“Certainly! The fear of the unknown. By finding a name for a thing, people think they have overcome it — especially if they can fit it into a nice neat system of causes and effects. Even now all thinking is a kind of naming. If you go far enough back, it was absolutely nothing else. Now in all primitive tribes the giving of names is associated with magic. Magic is an attempt to control or propitiate something that you hate and fear. The great unknown forces of Nature, and, of course the unknown powers of the soul, were hated and feared — so they had to be named — i.e. tabooed.”

“So that all knowledge,” said John, “is nothing but a kind of fear and hatred?” Dawson looked at him curiously for a moment but did not answer.

“You’ve left out the most important thing!” suggested Gerald. Dawson turned to him enquiringly. “The ritual murder! The named or tabooed thing is actually killed in the process of naming. That’s the point!”

“Possibly. But I prefer to keep metaphors out of it, if you don’t mind.”

“It’s a good deal more than a metaphor,” said Gerald with some annoyance — “I mean that the thing named is never really the same as the unknown that was hated and feared and had to be propitiated. It’s nothing but an abstraction in the mind of the namer. Can’t you see that? That’s why the namer thinks he’s controlling it! The reality has simply been driven down somewhere where he can’t see it.”

At this point Rollo opened his eyes. “I can see you are going to drift into a general discussion on Uneeversals” he said. “Now I think it will be more interesting if we keep ourselves to one particular kind of uneiversal — I shall say, the law, and in especial the ‘law of Nature’. Do you say, Meester Marston, then, that the laws of

Nature discovered by Science are only abstractions in the mind of the discoverer — and that the scientist only thinks he is controlling Nature by knowing her laws? And do you say, Meester Dawson, that discovering the laws of Nature is ‘tabooing’ Nature?”

“The laws of Nature are not discovered,” replied Dawson: “They are invented. You don’t seriously believe the laws of Nature tell us anything about Nature? As a matter of fact you couldn’t have chosen a better example! Why, the very idea of ‘law’ suggests a sort of spellbinding — it is an attempt to foist off the uncontrollable — to keep it at arm’s length. Take ordinary social ‘law’, which was the first kind invented (the other is really simply a metaphor). What is it but a kind of hocus-pocus invented by old men to fascinate the young and strong into forgetting their own power? Hence the wonderful professional jargon. Don’t you remember Pocock’s definition of law — “Bluff that’s never been called?” Only this particular bluff — as Trinder Junior has just reminded us — happens to be the foundation of all religion — and a fortiori of all civilisation!” John said nothing. But he noticed once more how different one’s own ideas can sound when they come forth out of somebody else’s mouth. He was now beginning to be definitely afraid of Dawson — always a little afraid of what he would say next — for it seemed as if he half knew beforehand.

Meanwhile Rollo was smiling gently to himself, like a baby smiling in its sleep. “Those familiar Old Men!” he exclaimed softly: “Dear Old Men! How do you do! How do you do! So we are meeting again!” Dawson stared at him.

“Eh — what’s the game?” said Humphrey

“I only mean I would like somebody to pinch Meester Dawson — or to tread on his toe!” He paused. Humphrey shot a quick glance at Dawson, but the latter was still staring at Rollo.

“You see —” went on Rex Rollo “Our Meester Dawson is unfortunately suffering from nightmare. So he ought to be woken up!” He opened his own eyes and, meeting Dawson’s deliberate stare, added solemnly! “I don’t want you to think I am insulting you! On the contrary! Your nightmare is the foundation of all the revolutionary virtues!”

“I want to hear all about this!” said Humphrey.

“So do I!” said Gerald, leaning forward in his chair.

“But surely” said Rollo to them, affecting innocent surprise, “you must all meet these Old Men quite as often as I do? Or usually it is one Old Man — an Angry Old Man — a nasty, angry old man — very angry — very nasty! He has many professions and occupations, but he is always the same Angry Old Man, waiting round the corner. Look: I go to Germany and I find a very popular play, in which there is one character, a sort of clever chancellor, who controls everything and everyone by a system of spies and suspicion and tight, oppressive laws. If it were not for him, everybody would be happy and loving each other. I come back to England and I find another play — and, look, there is this same old man, sending out his spies, ruling by fear and hatred, and skilfully sabotaging the revolution, when it comes. If it were not for him, everybody would be happy and loving each other. I read the work of your popular historian — the History of the World — and there I meet my friend, the Old Man again. But now he is very scientific — he is the Old Man of the Tribe. He frightens the young ones so much, they dream about him after he is

dead. The Old Bogey Man! And that is the beginning of religion and the belief in immortality. If it were not for this Old Bogey Man, there would have been no religion, no tortures, and everyone would have been just like your popular historian, very scientific and happy and loving each other! But that's not all; for now I am conscious of that old Bogey Man all through the rest of the book — only behind the scenes now — waiting round the corner! Every leetle piece of emotion in the book is really evoked by this invisible Old Man, because always the author is secretly defying him, treading on his coat, capering impudently in front of his tent in the hope that he will come out and have his beard pulled. But the Old Man never comes out. He still remains a nightmare.

And then perhaps I go on and read the book of a learned philosopher — very staid, very dignified, very impartial — till he must say something about authority or releegion, and then all at once he changes and becomes oh, very ironical, very sarcastic, very clever (always about something to do with authority) and there I see the Old Bogey Man sitting in his tent, and look, the big philosopher has turned into a little vulgar boy dancing about in front of the door and shrieking angrily, "Come out, Old Man, come out and have your beard pulled!" But the Old Man never comes out, and the big philosopher, the distinguished literary man, the dignified old scholar with the fine white head — all his life long he goes on being the little vulgar boy making the long nose at the Old Bogey Man. Many of you very wise people in the West — some day you will know yourselves, and then you will also know what tiny little babies you are!"

There was silence after he finished. Gerald looked at him curiously. He had never heard Rollo quite so eloquent. But at last he said tentatively: "I do think some of us in the West are beginning to understand about the Old Man, you know. There's — well there's Blake's poem, Old Nobodaddy, for one thing, though that isn't what I'm really thinking of."

Rollo only answered with an impassive look, as to which Gerald could not tell whether it meant that he had never heard of this poem or that he knew all about it and thought it had nothing whatever to do with the point. Meanwhile Humphrey had begun murmuring something — half to himself. He seemed to be trying to recollect a quotation.

"— must obey . . . his superiors . . . , as if he were a corpse . . . in the hand of an old man" . . .

"What do you say?" asked Rollo.

"From the summary of the constitution of the Jesuits" said Humphrey.

"Ah yes! I've got it. 'Every Jesuit must be guided by his superior, as if he were a corpse or a staff in the hand of an old man to serve him.'" But at this point Gerald, who had not been listening, interrupted: "I remember now!" he cried, and, turning to Rollo, "What about Dostoevsky's 'Grand Inquisitor'?"

"Dostoevsky" said Rollo: "can hardly be called a Westerner. Yes; he had begun to find the Old Man out. He was becoming conscious of him. But as for me — (he waved his hand) now I have found him out, I do not wish to go on talking about him. That is just what I say! Most people, when once they have seen him, are so proud of themselves that they must spend the rest of their lives making the long nose at him, just to show others that they can see. Now I do not wish to do this. I

think none of us here does. We want to go on to the next thing — to find out what is behind him: what he is trying to hide. For I feel sure he is hiding something, this Old Man, and hiding it on purpose. That is why we do not like him. What is he hiding?"

"Freedom?" suggested Gerald, in a voice of which the extreme gravity covered as a matter of fact an idiotic impulse to begin softly singing:

This Old Man
He played One,
He played knick knock on my drum

"It is not so simple as that."

"Tell us what is behind the Old Man, Mr. Rollo."

"But I wanted you to tell me that!"

"I know what," said Humphrey: "let's all tell each other what's behind him. But you'll have to begin, Rollo; so that we can see better what you mean. Besides, you've thought about it already. We need time."

"Well," said Rollo: "To me it seems a fairly simple matter. If we know how to look behind the Old Man, I think, we shall find — ourselves. Only by 'ourselves' I mean something much simpler than is usually meant to-day. So much is talked, do you understand, about the 'personality' and so on, and how everyone has a different one from everybody else. Well, if we could see behind this Old Man, I believe we should find that our proper selves are really very much the same after all — like a number of little dots. And it would save so much trouble. For these little dots, although they are selves, are not selfish. You see — I put it childishly — to get it over quick! Now you must speak."

"Why a number of little dots?" asked Gerald. "Surely if you get back there — supposing there is any such 'back there' — you cease to exist as an individual. Surely that is really the meaning of your Old Man. He is all the passion and egotism which make us individuals at all. And when we have got rid of him, when all these little personal desires and hopes are burnt away out of us, then the core that remains is perhaps fit to be immortal, but why you should speak of it as our 'selves' I cannot see. Our "Self" if you like."

Humphrey nodded at Gerald. "Go on!" he said: "I have just seen for the first time in my life the difference between men and Man."

"I don't think I need to go on. It's quite simple. I merely mean that, if you piece through all the chemical impurities that turn the One into the Many, what you have left will be — the One."

"I don't know that I like that!" said Humphrey. "It sounds too abstract." Gerald looked at Rollo, as if he expected some comment, but when the latter did not open his mouth, he went on:—

"I know your idea is at the back of all Vogel's work. But I must confess it seems to me to be as unattractive as it is erroneous. When all's said and done — with all his scientific terminology and experimental methods and so forth — everything he says about the 'egopetitive libido' seems to me to amount to something like this: Just keep on keeping on! And I'll show you how to keep in step!"

“Personally” said John, breaking his long silence with the somewhat testy note that occasionally crept into his voice: “I can’t see very much difference between the two points of view — yours and Mr. Rollo’s. They seem to me to be slight variations of the same outlook. It is of course the fashionable outlook to-day, and corresponds very closely to Stoicism — which also arose amid the ruins of a decaying civilisation.” He changed his voice and began to speak more modestly: “Perhaps that sounds condescending. I certainly didn’t mean it that way. I have nothing against Stoicism. On the contrary, it was an extraordinarily noble doctrine — but what puts it out of court for me is that it could never have done anything to deal with the decay. It wasn’t Stoicism that founded the new civilisation.”

“No” said Dawson. “What ever it did, it didn’t make that mistake.”

But John refused to be put out of his stride.

“The Stoics taught the passive virtue of ‘fortitude,’” he went on: “But before anything new, anything positive, could be done, you had to have the active Christian virtue, of ‘courage’. You had to have the beginning of chivalry.”

“Well done, John!” said Gerald with genuine admiration. “Thereby showing the actual derivation of the word — ‘Cor-age’ — a lusty feeling in the heart.”

‘So priketh hem Natur in hir corages.’

“The heart?” said Humphrey, pricking up his ears after losing interest during the excursion into etymology. “I absolutely agree with you, young Squire, New life is only born in the heart, and speaks from there — or else it is not born at all.”

Everyone looked enquiringly at Rollo, but he had already closed his eyes again.

“Very well,” said Dawson to Humphrey: “Now let’s have the Trinder version of this intriguing old gentleman’s background.”

“I’ll tell you what it is, though,” replied Humphrey, speaking to the company in general with intense seriousness: “behind the Old Man — it’s the whole spiritual world! — The Old Man keeps the threshold. That’s why he looks so dark — because the light is behind him.”

“Would it be too much to ask you to explain what you mean by ‘spiritual’ and what you mean by ‘world’?”

“I mean what you call the Unconscious.”

“I wish you’d occasionally say something sensible!”

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“Your mind seems to have gone woolly altogether, since I last saw you, so that all you can do is to keep on mixing everything up together in a kind of sentimental mush. What conceivable reason is there, man, for saying that what you mean by ‘Spiritual World’ is what I mean by ‘Unconscious’. When I say ‘Unconscious’ I don’t mean any sort of mystic ‘world’ at all, I mean the unconscious part of a definite person, such as Mr. Humphrey Trinder.”

“Yes. You think you mean that. Because you still believe in the subjective-objective distinction. You can’t see that in the Unconscious that no longer exists. It all comes back to what I was saying before my brother came in. “What do I mean, when I say ‘I think’?”

“Well, what do you mean?”

“I mean — I suppose — ‘the Universe thinks’.”

“How nice for it! In fact, how nice for both of you!”

At this point Rollo opened his eyes and intervened with an explanatory air: “We shall understand our friend Trinder better,” he said, “if we remember that he has been reading too many German writers lately. Now the German mind stands in relation to the rest of the intellectual world, very much as a baby does to a grown up man. The baby, as it wakes up, thinks at first that everything belongs to it, everything is there for its own special benefit, and subject to its control. It reaches out its arms for the moon and smacks the naughty table on which it bumps its head. It knows nothing of any distinction between subjective and objective, but simply feels its ‘self’ as the central point from which the whole Universe radiates. Thus it animates all nature with its own desires and fears. For it has done nothing to tame down the egopetitive libido; it does not even know yet, poor little creature, that there is such a thing to tame. On the contrary, if it sees the egopetitive libido at all, it sees it as God. Every philosophical German thinks he is God. And that, therefore, if he digs deep enough into himself, he will find the whole Universe — without bothering to open his eyes! It is the intellectual shadow of the racial Teutonic megalomania. Most serious minds come under its influence when (you will excuse me?) they first begin to think for themselves.”

“You are obviously right!” said Gerald, mentally addressing his words to Humphrey but looking straight in front of him: “look at Goethe! Was there ever such a subtle egoist? I believe that man was sincerely and unshakeably convinced that every single person or thing that came into his circle, every one of his friends (especially his lady friends) was divinely ordained by Providence for the development of his own wonderful Ego. The pangs he caused the ladies by deserting them were also very important. They were important because they gave Goethe the experience of remorse! He never actually says as much, but you can see it peeping out through every sentence he writes! It’s absolutely amazing!”

“Damn Goethe!” he added after a pause — “but why don’t all races go through the same stage?”

“Why don’t they?” replied Dawson: “They do. Only they generally get it while they are still in their religious phase. Hence the myths, which are so many ways of pretending to be God, or to be on special terms with him, in every kind of way except the only possible one, which is by renunciation and the exercise of your own will-power. The myths are compensation-dreams, which do very well for a comfortable life ending in oblivion. And a comfortable life ending in oblivion has in fact been the destiny of 99.9 per cent of the human race up to date. Germany woke up a little later, when Europe was getting over its religious measles and beginning to think — that’s all!”

“I begin to see!” said Gerald slowly. “German transcendental philosophy, then, is the product (not that I know anything about it except what I have heard) of a strong but infant mind awakening in a senile civilisation. The two things, the baby mind and the aging, withering civilisation around it would both be necessary to explain the phenomenon. That’s an important point. For the mere tendency to concentrate on the subjective life, the tendency of certain individuals to withdraw inwards — mystically — from a materialistic, uninspired environment seems to me

to be generally characteristic of decadent civilisations — or rather perhaps of civilisations just past their prime.”

“Why just past?”

“Naturally it would be just at this stage of a culture, as it begins to fall into overripeness and decay, that sensitive souls would feel that painful split in themselves, that they would feel torn asunder between two possible ways of life — the way of the senses and the way of inwardness. And the whole trouble is that both ways appear as good. In a mature civilisation the satisfactions of the senses are so refined, so beautiful and subtle. They must be good! And yet there is a kind of rottenness peeping through everything. Everything is so mellow, and (if you can see an inch further than the end of your own nose) so far gone! It has often struck me how the heroes of Walter Pater’s novels, Marius and Gaston de Latour, both lived in the decay of the culture amid whose traditions they had been educated, and how Pater himself must obviously have chosen these particular periods in the past, as vehicles of expression for a similar experience of his own in the present. Yes, and it’s extraordinary that Merejkowski did just the same thing with Julian and Leonardo. You remember the man — what’s his name? — who was in love with the convert in Julian the Apostate? They can’t make the final choice, these souls, between Paganism and Christianity . . . or whatever it may be . . . That is the tragedy.” Gerald relapsed into silence, apparently overwhelmed with the significance of his own ideas.

“It seems to me there’s a good deal of sentimental twaddle talked about Paganism!” put in John impatiently: “They ought to be able to make the choice, if they’re such sensitive souls as all that. Presumably a sensitive soul can think clearly?” Gerald did not answer, but turned his head slowly in John’s direction and, after gazing at him reflectively for a few moments:— “I see your trouble now, for the first time,” he remarked.

“What trouble?”

“Whether you are going to join the highbrows or the lowbrows! No, I know it isn’t as simple as that, but that’s near enough to explain what I mean!”

“Then according to the argument,” said John, “the impulse to the former course is the product of Egotism and Megolomania.” Dawson interrupted:

“We are dropping back into that loose habit of talking about egotism as though it were a bad thing. Personally I never meant to admit that. I only meant that disguising it as religion or transcendentalism is bad — and then only for the same reason that all self-deception is bad — because it is weak. Sentimentalised egotism, and Goethe’s egotism, in so far as it was sentimentalised, is bad, because it is weakened. But as to egotism per se — on the contrary: if you get frightened, and try to sentimentalise away your own egotism — the most powerful thing in you — then you are rivetting the Old Man’s chains on yourself more firmly than ever. Not that I mind — if you want to! When the ship’s breaking up, — saue qui peut!”

During this speech, the feeling that he knew what Dawson was going to say next had been growing in John continually stronger. This curious sensation, together with his own wretchedness, gave an air of unreality to the whole scene, of which he sometimes seemed — even when speaking himself — to be a spectator. Now he heard himself objecting to Dawson in a cold, hostile voice:

"I thought the fallacy of dismissing all altruism as 'sentiment' had already been explored in Victoria's day! Aren't you a little out of date?"

Dawson smiled.

"You may call Christianity a 'myth', if you like," went on John, speaking rather more through his nose than usual: "but you ought at least to be able to distinguish where it differs from every other myth. Nobody can say it is a myth of egotism."

"On the contrary" replied Dawson with enthusiasm. "Properly understood, it is the most egotistical of all; and that is its whole strength!"

"That is simply talking for effect" said John rudely. "If you are going to call Christian love egotism, you merely deprive the word 'egotism' of all meaning."

"I am not speaking of Christian love" said Dawson. "I am speaking of the Father-Son myth itself, not of its sentimentalised variations." And once more John seemed to have known what he was going to say before he added: "The Son frees himself from the Father — from the Old Man, if we are to go on using Rollo's picturesque terminology — by the simple process of bashing his head in. That is the real meaning of the Christian myth, though of course it was much too alarming not to be covered up with a lot of slush about love and self-sacrifice. The Old Man himself took care of that. He does not want anyone to find out how weak he really is."

"All this is very deep" said John: "Only unfortunately the thing you are talking about bears no resemblance whatever to historical Christianity, as it actually exists — as a fact."

Dawson had walked over to the fireplace, and stood there warming his back, with the red glow raying out behind him. "As a fact!" repeated John provocatively.

"Of course it doesn't," Dawson replied cheerfully. "Because Historical Christianity has nothing whatever to do with it. On the contrary, Historical Christianity is the Old Man's special preserve. He has worked more wonders with it than with anything else. What was that extract of yours from the Jesuit Rule, Trinder senior?"

Humphrey quoted again. "Every Jesuit must be guided by his superior, as if he were a corpse or a staff in the hand of an Old Man to serve him."

"Christianity would never have spread and altered the whole face of civilisation, if it had not appealed to something in people's hearts" insisted John angrily.

"About one third of the inhabitants of the globe call themselves Christian" replied Dawson. "And if you go among a lot of hopeless women and slaves and explain to them that they are really as good as their betters, of course you appeal to 'something in their hearts,' especially if you hold out to them a belief in immortality, to save them the labour of actually setting to work to win it. That's what the myths in their popular form really are — labour-saving devices. Hence the rapidity with which they spread! And so, when your popularised Christian doctrine has spread wide enough, you will have a beautiful Christian democracy — i.e. a women-and-slaves government instead of a master government — which is precisely what you have got!" There was silence in the room, while John sought in his mind for something final with which to settle the argument.

“It is cheap to sneer at Christian love” he said. And he added, sententiously and without really believing what he uttered: “You set it opposite to freedom. But some day you will find out that it is itself the only freedom.” He paused and then went on eagerly: “Incidentally, this can be scientifically proved. Tolstoy —”

“It was one particular crude kind of egotism which Tolstoy proved to be impossible. Tolstoy never understood the body. I’m not even sure he succeeded, as far as he went. He based his whole system on an attempt to prove that I cannot be really happy at the expense of others. Do you find that impossible, as a matter of practical experience? Did you find it impossible to enjoy going to — wherever you went for your honeymoon — on the backs of a lot of engine drivers and porters who will never be able to go themselves?”

With the maddening knowledge that he was blushing like a schoolboy, John replied hesitatingly:

“We — cannot change everything at once. It is true, all the same, that — in the long run — I must interest myself in — the weaker.” And the moment he ceased, he felt an absolute conviction — a far more vivid one than he had ever known in his life — that all this scene had been enacted somewhere before, a long, long time ago. He had sat just so, looking up at Dawson, who had stood, with the same fiery glow behind him, waiting to pounce on his words and destroy all his hard-won convictions and self-confidence. And the other two, they also had been there, looking on in silence and critically listening. So strong now was this sense of knowing all that Dawson was going to say that he was actually uncertain whether the latter had already spoken or not — whether it was in the past or the future that he leaned back insolently against the mantelpiece and turned out his toes, said:

“Why? — Why must I interest myself in the weaker?”

John could only look at him with hatred in his heart and feel acutely all the contrast between that easy lounging confidence and his own pitiful innocence. He felt horribly young, impotent, shamefaced. His throat went dry and, as he realised that he had absolutely no answer to this, he only gave Dawson a sickly smile and looked hurriedly away.

There was silence in the room.

John looked at Dawson again. And now he was amazed. All his own cold hostility seemed suddenly to have vanished from his heart and, instead of it, he felt a warm stream of pity, affection, and, yes, even gratitude going out from himself towards the enemy. In a bewildered way he sought about for the causes of this change in his own feelings, and gradually became aware of two conclusions, which he had already reached without knowing it: the first, that there was indeed no answer to Dawson’s question; and the second, that his whole life and strife, that every conviction and emotion which lay really deep in his soul and determined his ideal character, depending on precisely this truth, this truth which he had feared and fought against so miserably, so angrily, so blindly from the moment when he had first seen it looming afar off at the beginning of this conversation; and which Dawson had now nevertheless been the means of revealing to him in all the pitiless splendour of its nakedness.

Dawson had a perfect right to speak and feel as he did, and everything he had said or could say against Christianity was perfectly logical and consistent. That must

be clearly understood — and it was glorious. Moreover he, John, was perfectly entitled to use all Dawson's own destructive arguments with even more force than Dawson himself; to do this, and then (if he chose) to draw the same emotional conclusion as Dawson. But — he did not choose! In a word, he was Christian because he chose to be — and for no other reason whatever. This seemed to John at this moment to be the most precious jewel of wisdom which had ever been dropped in his path. He could not but feel kindly therefore towards the man who had accidentally let it fall.

He looked at Dawson with a curious, almost sly, smile:

"Well," he admitted, almost chuckling to himself, "perhaps 'must' was not quite the right word!"

But at this point Gerald, who had been pondering for some time over a previous remark of Dawson's, interrupted them.

"How did you mean, Tolstoy never understood the body?" he asked.

"I mean, he could only see it from one obvious point of view. He could not see anything but intellect on one side and appetite on the other. Pure intellect, operating on pure appetite, would always choose to die in the moment of coition. Tolstoy knew this and was terrified. He never grasped that appetite is potential will."

Gerald looked at the speaker with a start. For one absurd moment he fancied that he must know all that he (Gerald) had been thinking and feeling throughout the last few months and had deliberately chosen these words in order to reveal the fact. Meeting no sign of recognition, however, in Dawson's eye, he abandoned this grotesque idea and allowed his thoughts to play on the content of the words themselves. His mind flew back to Humphrey's remark about 'internal chaos' and in a confused way he seemed to see Dawson as a kind of monster who was trying to drag him down into this very abyss. He felt he had never understood Dawson better than he did at this moment. The whole of the scaffolding on which the latter's life was erected seemed to stand bare before him, and with this glimpse there came to Gerald an impulse to bring forward an argument which he had recently evolved in the course of one of these long wordless discussions he sometimes held with himself — alone.

"To reject pure intellect" he said slowly, and not realising the difficulty which the other must find in tracing the connection of ideas, to make light of thinking, as it is fashionable to do in certain quarters — to be afraid of all the subtleties of modern self-consciousness, and therefore to try and get back into the darkness — everyone is perfectly entitled to do this if he chooses. But don't let us make any mistake about it. There is nothing noble or strong in such a choice. On the contrary, it seems to me to correspond exactly with a certain very common weakness, which the exponents of this idea are themselves the first to jeer at in others, where it comes out over different matters, such as religion. I mean the weakness of believing something because you want to believe it. Consciousness exists!"

"Of course it does!" said John with a bluff, sturdy, stuff-and-nonsense air which surprised himself and suddenly made Gerald laugh.

"We do say some wonderful things!" the latter remarked.

Dawson looked at his watch.

“Do you know it’s after midnight?” he said to Rollo. “Are you coming my way?”

For a fraction of a second Rollo hesitated. Then he nodded impressively and rose.

John already had his coat on. “I must simply fly!” he said to Humphrey: “last train in five minutes.”

“All right, Squire: ta ta! You look fitter than you did when you came in!”

“Are you coming out to see me?” John asked Gerald, as they shook hands. Gerald feared there would be no time, and John, after shaking both Dawson and Rollo warmly by the hand, thanking them, rather to their surprise, for an extremely interesting conversation, hurried off in better spirits than he had known for days. Dawson and Rollo left immediately afterwards and Humphrey, returning to the room, found Gerald in the act of getting out two cups and saucers and a teapot.