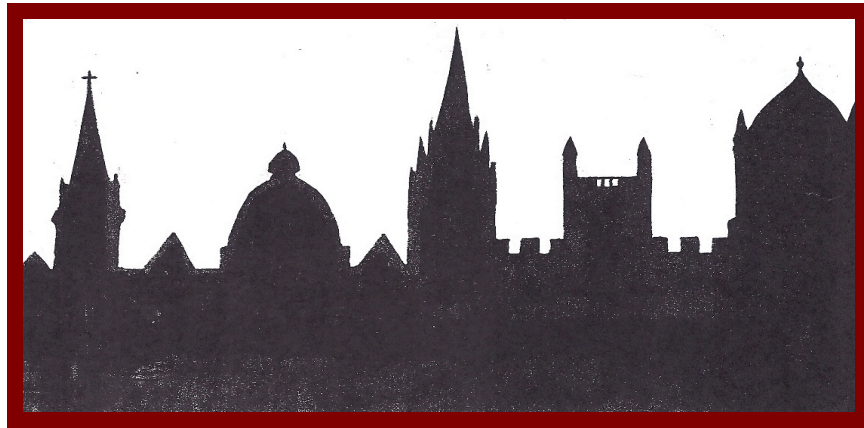


The Oxford Inklings

Tolkien, Lewis, Williams

Literary and Theological Essays



Selected and Edited by

James S. Cutsinger

University of South Carolina

The IMAGINATION I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Contents

Philip and Carol Zaleski, "Prologue"	i
Humphrey Carpenter, "Thursday Evenings"	1
J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories"	33
J. R. R. Tolkien, "Letter to Milton Waldman"	86
C. S. Lewis, "De Descriptione Temporum"	108
C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Literature"	122
C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact"	132
C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"	137
Charles Williams, "The Myth of the Alteration in Knowledge"	149
Charles Williams, "The Precursor and the Incarnation of the Kingdom"	160
Charles Williams, "The Practice of Substituted Love"	175
Charles Williams, "The Compensations of Success"	186

Prologue

During the hectic middle decades of the twentieth century, from the end of the Great Depression through World War II and into the 1950s, a small circle of intellectuals gathered on a weekly basis in and around Oxford University to drink, smoke, quip, cavil, read aloud their works in progress, and endure or enjoy with as much grace as they could muster the sometimes blistering critiques that followed. This erudite club included writers and painters, philologists and physicians, historians and theologians, soldiers and actors. They called themselves, with typical self-effacing humor, the Inklings.

The novelist John Wain, a member of the group who achieved notoriety in midcentury as one of England's "angry young men," remembers the Inklings as "a circle of instigators, almost of incendiaries, meeting to urge one another on in the task of redirecting the whole current of contemporary art and life." Yet the name Inklings, as J. R. R. Tolkien recalled it, was little more than "a pleasantly ingenious pun . . . suggesting people with vague or half-formed intimations and ideas plus those who dabble in ink." The donnish dreaminess thus hinted at tells us something important about this curious band: its members saw themselves as no more than a loose association of rumpled intellectuals, and this modest self-image is a large part of their charm. But history would record, however modest their pretensions, that their ideas did not remain half-formed nor their inkblots mere dabbings. Their polyvalent talents—amounting to genius in some cases—won out. By the time the last Inkling passed away on the eve of the twenty-first century, the group had altered, in large or small measure, the course of imaginative literature (fantasy, allegory, mythopoeic tales), Christian theology and philosophy, comparative mythology, and the scholarly study of the *Beowulf* author, of Dante, Spenser, Milton, courtly love, fairy tale, and epic; and drawing as much from their scholarship as from their experience of a catastrophic century, they had fashioned a new narrative of hope amid the ruins of war, industrialization, cultural disintegration, skepticism, and anomie. They listened to the last enchantments of the Middle Ages, heard the horns of Elfland, and made designs on the culture that our own age is only beginning fully to appreciate. They were philologists and philomyths: lovers of *logos* (the ordering power of words) and *mythos* (the regenerative power of story), with a nostalgia for things

medieval and archaic and a distrust of technological innovation that never decayed into the merely antiquarian. Out of the texts they studied and the tales they read, they forged new ways to convey old themes—sin and salvation, despair and hope, friendship and loss, fate and freewill—in a time of war, environmental degradation, and social change.

Some among the Inklings and their circle attained a worldwide fame that continues to grow, notably the literary historian, novelist, poet, critic, satirist, and popular Christian philosopher C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), the mythographer and Old English scholar J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973), the historian of language, Anthroposophist, and solicitor (Arthur) Owen Barfield (1898-1997), and the publisher and author of “supernatural shockers,” Charles Walter Stansby Williams (1886-1945). Others, like the Chaucer scholar and theatrical producer Nevill Henry Kendal Aylmer Coghill (1899-1980), the biographer and man of letters Lord David Cecil (1902-86), the poet and Magdalen divine Adam Fox (1883-1977), the classicist Colin Hardie (1906-98), the medievalist J. A. W. Bennett (1911-81), Lewis’s older brother Warren (“Warnie,” 1895-1973), and the sharp-tongued don Henry Victor Dyson Dyson (“Hugo,” 1896-1975), achieved lesser but still considerable eminence. Tolkien’s youngest son, Christopher (1924-), who would become the chief editor and interpreter of his father’s mythological project, began attending Inklings meetings after he returned from RAF duty in World War II. Additional members, guests, and relatives drifted in and out of the fellowship, while friends who were not strictly Inklings, such as the mystery novelist, playwright, and Dante translator Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957), nonetheless found ways to draw from and enrich the stream.

The Inklings met typically in Lewis’s rooms at Magdalen College on Thursday evenings, when most of the reading and criticism unfolded; they also could be seen regularly on Tuesday mornings, gathered for food and conversation in a side nook of a smoky pub at 49 St. Giles’, known to passersby as the Eagle and Child but to habitués as the Bird and Baby. A wit might say that the Inklings’ aim was to turn the bird into a dragon and the baby into a king, for their sympathies were mythological, medieval, and monarchical, and their great hope was to restore Western culture to its religious roots, to unleash the powers of the imagination, to re-enchant the world through Christian faith and pagan beauty.

Oxford

The story of the Inklings unfolds mostly in Oxford, a city in the English Midlands, originally a medieval market town set down higgledy-piggledy in the wetlands where Saxons once forded the Rivers Cherwell and Thames with horses, thanes, and oxen (hence Oxenford) to dig themselves in against the invading Danes; where the Normans built bridges and circled the settlement in stone; where mendicant friars and secular masters built their schools of theology and liberal arts under the watchful eyes of God, pope, and king; where town-gown rivalry erupted into periodic brawls. Thanks to its natural watercourses, its stagecoach inns, its eighteenth-century canals and nineteenth-century rails, this city of monks and dons has also been a congenial setting for factories, from Frank Cooper's Oxford Marmalade to Morris Motors, humming and spewing alongside the printing presses for the city's intellectual industries: the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and Oxford University Press (OUP).

Oxford in the Inklings' day was not so different in look and smell from Oxford of today. Then, as now, one felt the irony that from this tangle of traffic-clogged streets, the cloisters of learning lift up to heaven their dreaming (if not always worshipping) spires; that the black-gowned, bicycle-pedaling undergraduates maintain their scholarly idyll at the price of damaging their lungs and risking their lives. Then, as now, one was tempted to fantasize one's surroundings as a Camelot of intellectual knight-errantry or an Eden of serene contemplation. Then, as now, there was bound to be disappointment.

Matthew Arnold idealized Oxford as "whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages," as summoning her votaries "to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection—to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side." Yet for all its whispering, Oxford could not possibly deliver the full draught of the Middle Ages—of holiness, wisdom, and beauty—for which its inhabitants longed. When Max Beerbohm came to Oxford as a freshman in the fall of 1890, his boyish hopes were dashed:

Did I ride, one sunset, through fens on a palfrey, watching the gold reflections on Magdalen Tower? Did I ride over Magdalen Bridge and hear the consonance of evening-bells and cries from the river below? Did I

rein in to wonder at the raised gates of Queen's, the twisted pillars of St. Mary's, the little shops, lighted with tapers? Did bull-pups snarl at me, or dons, with bent backs, acknowledge my salute? Any one who knows the place as it is must see that such questions are purely rhetorical. To him I need not explain the disappointment that beset me when, after being whirled in a cab from the station to a big hotel, I wandered out into the streets. *On aurait dit* a bit of Manchester through which Apollo had once passed; for here, among the hideous trams and the brand-new bricks—here, glared at by the electric-lights that hung from poles, screamed at by boys with the Echo and the Star—here, in a riot of vulgarity, were remnants of beauty, as I discerned. There were only remnants.

The Inklings knew intimately what Beerbohm meant. To live and work in such a rarefied intellectual ambience, with chapel, scriptorium, and Faerie woodland close at hand, among gifted companions who could share a pint and spin off a limerick or clerihew at will, was a rapture that never quite realized itself. For one had also to contend with troublesome families, threadbare pockets, cantankerous colleagues, dim students, urban congestion, and—twice in the Inklings' lifespan—war. The unavoidable harshness of life surprised none of them, for they were Christians one and all, believing that they inhabited a fallen world, albeit one filled with God's grace. Yet it would be a mistake to label them, as did one early biographer, "the Oxford Christians," and to presume that this sufficed. This would be tantamount, as Warnie Lewis complained the moment the term arose, to saying that the Inklings were no more than "an organized group for the propagation of Christianity." Nonetheless, the Inklings were unmistakably Christians in Oxford, and this plays no small part in their cultural significance.

Christianity on the Banks of the Isis

Oxford is, as Jan Morris puts it, "as organically Christian as Bangkok is Buddhist." Before a university appeared in Oxford, the town was a jumble of hermitages, holy wells, monasteries, and churches. The colleges of medieval Catholic Oxford began as quasi monasteries designed to provide the Church with learned clergy and to offer Masses for deceased patrons to speed their souls through purgatory. The colleges of post-Reformation Anglican Oxford renounced purgatory and all other "popish" devices,

insisting that its members subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, thus excluding every Jew and Catholic in England as well as dissenters and atheists. The gowns of an Oxford don were patterned after religious habits, and until the 1880s the man beneath the gown was required, with few exceptions, to be celibate. Bachelorhood remained the ideal and family life a concession to prosaic mediocrity well into the early twentieth century.

As the doctrinal center of English Christianity, Oxford historically has cherished orthodoxy; as the intellectual center of English Christianity, Oxford has often put orthodoxy to the test. Here followers of Duns Scotus and William Ockham debated the semantics of divine being and the modalities of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, Wyclif produced the first English Bible, and Bishops Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer, denying transubstantiation, were martyred in 1555 for the Protestant cause. When Protestantism won out, it was here that Edmund Campion, brilliant orator and favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, shocked his admirers by changing course for the Catholic Church, thus taking the first steps that would lead him to martyrdom at London's Tyburn Gallows.

Whether high or low church, Evangelical, Broad Church, or Catholic, Oxford was in love with the idea of Christian perfection. It was here in 1729 that Charles and John Wesley founded their "Holy Club" and from here that George Whitefield went forth to evangelize America. It was from Oxford in the 1830s that the Tractarian movement set out to re-Catholicize the national church, and it was in Oxford that the saintly John Henry Newman made his submission to Rome. Here John Ruskin, who had a love-hate relationship with the city and with his own Evangelical roots, sought to awaken the nation's sleeping conscience to his vision of Christian socialism, medieval artisanship, and educational reform; and it was here, in the cathedral-like University Museum that Ruskin helped to design, that the ornithologist and bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, took on T. H. Huxley in the celebrated 1860 debate on the validity of Darwinian evolution. The Victorian crisis of faith took place here, but so did what the historian Timothy Larsen has called "the Victorian crisis of doubt." From Ruskin's time until the days of the Inklings, a pattern of religious rebellion and rediscovery would repeat itself; one could be a militant skeptic like Huxley relishing the escape from Victorian restraints, or a militant believer like Ronald Knox relishing the escape from

modern liberalism, or an initiate in any of the manifold schools of occultism, theosophy, and spiritualism that flourished in Oxford as well. All the spiritual alternatives were on offer, all could be sampled, but there was little room for indifference—certainly not for a generation that lived through the Great War.

Oxford at War and After

We must picture Oxford, during World War I, not as the neo-medieval paradise it would like to be, but as the military compound it was obliged to become. The colleges of Oxford turned nearly overnight into hospitals and officer training camps, strangely quiet and emptied of students, “like monasteries where all the monks have died,” as Victor Gollancz remembered it. The Oxford University Roll of Service records that of 14,561 students who served in the war, 2,708—nearly 20 percent—perished. In a society known for its masculine “clubbability,” yet haunted by the memory of so many friendships severed, so many men cut down in their prime, it scarcely surprises that the surviving remnant would seek out every opportunity for male companionship. The Inklings were, to a man—and they were all men—comrades who had been touched by war, who viewed life through the lens of war, yet who looked for hope, and found it, in fellowship, where so many other modern writers and intellectuals saw only broken narratives, disfigurement, and despair.

If Virginia Woolf was right that “on or about December 1910 human character changed” in the direction of modernism and daring social experiments, the Great War intensified that change; according to standard histories of this period, the rising generation of British writers reacted to the catastrophe by severing ties to tradition and embracing an aesthetic of dissonance, fragmentation, and estrangement. Yet the Great War also instilled in many a longing to reclaim the goodness, beauty, and cultural continuity that had been so violently disrupted. The Inklings came together because they shared that longing; and it was the Inklings, rather than the heirs of the Bloomsbury Group—the other great, if ill-defined, English literary circle of the twentieth century—who gave that longing its most enduring artistic form and substance. Far from breaking with tradition, they understood the Great War and its aftermath in the light of tradition,

believing, as did their literary and spiritual ancestors, that ours is a fallen world yet not a forsaken one. It was a belief that set them at odds with many of their contemporaries, but kept them in the broad currents of the English literary heritage. They shared much with Bloomsbury, including love of beauty, companionship, and conversation, but they differed from their older London counterpart in their religious ardor, their social conservatism, and their embrace of fantasy, myth, and (mostly) conventional literary techniques instead of those dazzling experiments with time, character, narrative, and language that mark the modernist aesthetic.

No doubt Bloomsbury has exerted more influence over what Anthony Burgess once called “higher literary aspirations,” those giddy and often glorious assaults upon convention that have found a secure place in the twentieth century’s literary canon. And yet the Inklings have made serious inroads into that canon. The literary status of both Tolkien and Lewis and, to a lesser extent, Williams, Barfield, and other Inklings, is undergoing rapid ascent as academic courses and mature literary criticism focused upon their work blossom around the world, and—unlike Bloomsbury, which now seems part of history, a brilliant stream of art and thought that one admires over one’s shoulder—the Inklings continue to shape significant aspects of modern religion and worldwide culture.

Tolkien and Lewis wield most of this posthumous influence. That *The Lord of the Rings* was voted “Book of the Century” in a massive 1997 poll conducted by Waterstones, a British bookseller, may be dismissed as a transient phenomenon; but if we consider its sales figures (estimates of worldwide sales run from one hundred and fifty to two hundred million), it’s clear that Tolkien has a secure place in the pantheon of popular culture. Far more important, though, *The Lord of the Rings* and the vast mythology that surrounds and pervades it possess an intrinsic grandeur, breadth, and profound originality—it is simply the case that nothing like this has ever been done before—that make them, we believe, landmarks in the history of English literature. To be sure, the fan fiction, derivative fantasy novels, and sword-and-sorcery illustrations inspired by Tolkien can be artless at best; but no unprejudiced critic can deny the bracing effect of Tolkien’s rich mythopoeic imagination upon generations of readers and writers disillusioned with modernist themes and techniques, and longing for re-enchantment.

Lewis has made a comparable mark. Arguably the bestselling Christian writer

since John Bunyan, he is also credited with the conversion or reversion to the faith of a considerable number of twenty-first-century intellectuals and the consolation and instruction of millions more. Yet none of this would have been possible had Lewis not shared with Tolkien the sense of mission and the narrative skill to reclaim traditional story-telling values, not only through fantasy fiction but also through scholarly recovery of the literary past. These achievements have earned Lewis—to the catcalls of some, overwhelmed by the applause of many—a permanent memorial stone in Westminster Abbey’s Poets’ Corner, close by the remains of Chaucer, Spenser, Addison, and Dryden.

An Oxford Fantasia

Everyone knows this about the Inklings: that they expressed their longing for tradition and re-enchantment through the literature of fantasy. The Inklings’ penchant for the fantastic is quintessentially English; folk-tale, fairy-tale, and fantasy motifs permeate English literature from *Beowulf* through *The Faerie Queene* and *The Tempest*, to the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Coleridge. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this national love for the fantastic gave rise to the modern fantasy novel. Immediately Oxford moved into the foreground, as John Ruskin, in his neo-Grimm fable *The King of the Golden River* (1841, written at Leamington Spa while he was an Oxford undergraduate), and Lewis Carroll, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1864, the quintessential Oxford classic), laid the groundwork for a genre brought to early perfection by the Scotsman George MacDonald, their mutual friend, in his three children’s classics (*At the Back of the North Wind* [1871], *The Princess and the Goblin* [1872], and *The Princess and Curdie* [1883]) and his two fantasies (*Phantastes* [1858] and *Lilith* [1895]). MacDonald suffused almost all his works—which also include sermons, poems, literary criticism, translations, and more than two dozen verbose and sentimental novels—with a gentle Christian sensibility that would lead Lewis to call him “my master.” A few years later, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones (both Oxford alumni), and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood produced novels, poetry, and paintings with fantastic themes, bathed with a lovely, romantic, neo-medieval light that would deeply influence the artistic maturation of both Lewis and Tolkien.

Fantasy, then, was in Oxford's blood, and it is no wonder that the major Inklings experimented in so many fantastic subgenres (myth, science fiction, fable, epic fantasy, children's fantasy, supernatural thriller, and more). They chose to be fantasists for a variety of reasons—or, rather, fantasy seemed to choose them, each one falling in love with the genre in youth (Lewis in Ireland, Tolkien in Birmingham, Williams and Barfield in London) many years before coming to Oxford. Their passion arose, in part, from the sheer excitement of the genre, the intoxication of entering the unknown and fleeing the everyday. For all of the leading Inklings, however, the rapture of the unknown pointed also to something more profound; it was a numinous event, an intimation of a different, higher, purer world or state of being. Fantasy literature was, for the Inklings, a pathway to this higher world and a way of describing, through myth and symbol, its felt presence. Fantasy became the voice of faith. And it made for a cracking good story.

From Philip and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*

Thursday Evenings

Humphrey Carpenter

The Inklings kept no minute-book, so there is no full record of the proceedings during Thursday nights in Lewis's rooms in Magdalen. It might easily have been otherwise, for Warnie Lewis was a good diarist and could have provided a detailed account. 'I would have played Boswell on those Thursday evenings,' he said regretfully many years later, 'but as it is, I am afraid that my diary contains only the scantiest material for reconstructing Inklings.'

On the other hand Jack Lewis's letters to his brother during the first months of the war, when Warnie was serving abroad, do record quite a lot of what went on; while later in the war Tolkien wrote detailed diary-letters to his third son, Christopher, who was with the R.A.F., and these letters too record something of what happened at the Inklings. So from these, from the diaries that Warnie Lewis kept (they were not, in fact, so very scanty about the Inklings) and from the reminiscences of the people who attended on Thursday nights, it is possible to get some idea of the kind of thing that happened.

One way to convey the atmosphere of an Inklings evening is to describe an imaginary meeting. What follows is an artificial reconstruction, and entirely imaginary in that it is not based on any one particular evening. On the other hand the subjects of conversation are the kind of things that the Inklings discussed, while the remarks of the various people present are taken from their writings, both published and unpublished, which have been freely adapted to suit the context. So while this must not be taken as an accurate record, it may perhaps catch rather more of the flavour of those Thursday evenings than any purely factual account could do. More, but not all; for no reconstruction can do more than hint at what the real thing was like.

* * *

Considering how fine a building they are in, Lewis's rooms are rather bleak. The effect is as if a school or some other institution had taken over a fine country house, for his plain (and

in some cases downright shabby) furniture simply does not come up to the standard of the eighteenth-century panelling, the broad sash windows, and the high ceilings.

The main sitting-room is large, and though certainly not dirty it is not particularly clean. Lewis's 'scout', the college servant responsible for the rooms on this staircase, only has time to give it a quick flip of the duster early in the morning; and as for Lewis himself, he never bothers with ashtrays but flicks his cigarette ash (he smokes cigarettes as much as a pipe) on to the carpet wherever he happens to be standing or sitting. He even absurdly maintains that ash is good for carpets. As for chairs—there are several shabbily comfortable armchairs and a big Chesterfield sofa in the middle of the room—their loose covers are never cleaned, nor has it ever occurred to Lewis that they ought to be. Consequently their present shade of grey may or may not bear some relation to their original colour.

Apart from the chairs, there is not much furniture in the room. A plain table stands behind the Chesterfield. It was never a very good table; long ago when Lewis first moved into these rooms, his brother Warnie noticed that Jack had chosen the furniture just as he chose his clothes—by walking into a shop and taking the first thing that he was offered. The table now bears the scars of twenty years' ruthless use: ink stains, cigarette burns, and ring-shaped marks, the larger of which come from the beer jug that often stands here, and the smaller from ink bottles. Across the room are bookshelves, and (like the table) they are very plain and rather shabby; nor are the books themselves much to look at. Long before, in his adolescent days, Lewis and his friend Arthur Greeves were avid collectors of smart editions with fine bindings. But Lewis gave up this taste when he was a young man, partly because he could no longer afford it, and partly because when he began to move towards Christianity he ceased to think that such things were more than vanity. In consequence the books on the shelves are nothing very special, nor are there very many of them, for Lewis uses the Bodleian (the University library) for all but essential volumes. The few that are on his shelves are mainly cheap or second-hand copies of major works, both theological and literary. The *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas stands near *Beowulf* and the *Roman de la Rose*, while notably absent are *The Allegory of Love* and *Out of the Silent Planet*, for Lewis takes no trouble to keep copies of his own books, and gives (or even throws) them away at the slightest opportunity. On the other hand *The Hobbit* is there, next to Barfield's children's story *The Silver Trumpet*, while there are several of Charles Williams's books here

too. There are also books in the two smaller rooms that open off the main sitting-room. In one of these rooms Warnie Lewis works on weekday mornings, and several rarities can be found on the shelves here, for Warnie collects works relating to the Bourbon court and is always glad to lay his hands on a fine edition. In this room there is also a typewriter, which Warnie uses both for his own work (he is beginning to arrange material for a book of his own on the court of Louis XIV) and for typing his brother's letters, for he now acts as secretary to Jack. Lying by the typewriter is a packet of cheap typing paper and a large pair of scissors. Warnie dislikes wasting paper (especially under wartime economy conditions) and he refuses to use anything smarter than this stuff for Jack's correspondence. Moreover if the letter is a short one, Warnie will not use up a complete sheet of paper for it, but will cut off a strip just deep enough to hold the text and his brother's signature, and will send off this two- or three-inch slip complete with a reference number ('40/216') to make it clear to the recipient that Jack Lewis has already written two hundred and sixteen letters this year. Jack is faintly embarrassed by all this.

The other small room is Jack's bedroom. He sleeps here during term time, rising early on most mornings to go to college prayers before breakfast, or to Communion. The bedroom is bare and looks a little like a monastic cell, for there is nothing in it besides a washstand with a jug and basin, and a pile of books beside the bed. Yet those books include not just the Prayer Book and the Bible but one of the Waverley novels, Trollope's *The Warden*, and *The Wind in the Willows*.

It is dark, being about nine o'clock on a winter evening; and it is also cold, particularly in the big sitting-room, which looks north on to Magdalen Grove. The only source of heat is the coal fire, which at the moment is burning very low in the grate, for it is a couple of hours since anyone has been in the room. A faded screen has been set up near the door, which leads out on to the staircase, in the hope of muffling the draught; but it makes little difference.

Magdalen clock strikes nine, other college clocks preceding and following it in the distance. Now and then, feet run up and down the stairs outside the door; but it is not until after Great Tom at Christ Church half a mile away has sounded his hundred and one strokes at ten past nine that a more measured tread is heard on the stairs, and the door opens to reveal two men. The first takes off his hat and coat and throws them down on the nearest

chair. Then he pulls down the blinds and draws the blackout curtains, after which his companion switches on the light.

The first man is broadly built, with a plump rather red face, a small moustache, and receding hair. He wears a tweed jacket and baggy flannel trousers. He is Warnie Lewis. In the first months of the war he was on active service, stationed at le Havre with the R.A.S.C., but it was soon decided that officers of his age were not needed, and he was allowed to go back on the retired list and return home. Now that he is back in Oxford he is spending a good deal of his time living on his motor boat *Bosphorus* and cruising up and down the river as part of the Upper Thames Patrol. He has painted his boat battleship-grey and has bought a naval style peaked cap, much to the amusement of Jack.

His companion is R. E. Havard, the Oxford doctor who looks after the Lewis and Tolkien households and who regularly comes to Magdalen on Thursday evenings. He is a few years younger than Warnie and is expecting to be called up for military service fairly soon, albeit as a medical officer. For some reason Havard has always attracted nicknames from the Inklings. Though his Christian names are Robert Emlyn he was once referred to by Hugo Dyson as ‘Humphrey’, either in pure error or because it alliterated with his surname. Some time later, Warnie Lewis was irritated one evening by Havard’s failure to turn up with a car and give him a promised lift home, and dubbed the doctor ‘a useless quack’; and ‘The Useless Quack’ or ‘U.Q.’ Havard has remained. How far this is from being an accurate description of the man may be gauged by Tolkien’s remark to one of his sons: ‘Most doctors are either fools or mere “doctors”, tinkers with machinery. Havard at any rate is a Catholic who thinks of people as people, not as collections of “works”.’

When the light has been switched on, Warnie Lewis puts some coal on the fire, and grumbles to Havard about the shortage of beer in Oxford—beer is in low supply because of the war, and the Bird and Baby frequently has a ‘No Beer’ sign on its door. ‘My idea of the happy life,’ says Warnie, ‘would be to buy a pub, put up one of those *No Beer* notices, lock the customers out, and drink the stuff myself.’

The two men talk about beer for a few minutes more, Warnie referring contemptuously to an inferior brew that he and Havard have just been drinking at a

hotel down the road—he describes it as ‘varnish’, the term that he and Jack always use for bad beer.

There is no fixed hour at which the Inklings meet on Thursdays, but by general agreement people turn up at any time between nine and half past ten. Nor is there any formal system of membership or election, and in theory it is only necessary for one Inkling to obtain the approval of the others (particularly of Lewis) before introducing somebody new. But in practice this does not happen very often, and on most Thursdays the company consists solely of the Lewis brothers, Tolkien, Havard, and Williams, sometimes with the addition of Hugo Dyson, who teaches at Reading University but is often in Oxford. Nevill Coghill used to be quite a regular member of the group, but he is in great demand as a producer of plays for the University dramatic society and other local groups, and he is now rarely seen in Lewis’s rooms on Thursday nights. He is not the only Inkling to have dropped out: Adam Fox, the Magdalen chaplain who (thanks to the campaign conducted by Tolkien and Lewis) was elected Professor of Poetry in 1938, rarely comes now. Owen Barfield very occasionally turns up on his visits from London, where he still works as a solicitor; and sometimes Charles Wrenn looks in. But for the most part the Thursday party is a small group. A direct result is that usually the only people to read their work aloud are Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams. Coghill has once or twice read light verses or lampoons, and Fox (when he comes) generally reads his poetry. Up to the present time Warnie Lewis has had nothing of his own to read to the Inklings, and as for Havard, he always emphasises that he is not a literary man, though he does occasionally contribute some small thing to the group. Readings therefore are in comparatively short supply. Hugo Dyson (when he attends) does not mind this at all, claiming that the conversation is far more enjoyable anyway. But Lewis insists that the readings—the original *raison d’être* of the club—must be kept up. Sometimes, as chance will have it, a logical sequence appears, and one reading seems to lead naturally into the next. But this is by no means always the case.

Warnie begins to make tea—a regular ritual at the start of an Inklings—and in a few minutes Jack Lewis and Tolkien arrive; Lewis has been giving Tolkien dinner on High Table in Magdalen.

Both men are fairly certain of being able to remain in Oxford for the duration

of the war. Tolkien is nearly fifty and will definitely not be required for active service; his contribution to the war effort is to take turns of duty as an air raid warden, spending one night every two weeks or so waiting by the telephone in a cheerless concrete hut in the grounds of St Hugh's College. Lewis is several years younger than Tolkien, but he does not expect to be called up. He declares that his personal war aims are exactly summed up by an entry in the *Peterborough Chronicle*: 'During all this evil time, Abbot Martin retained his abbacy.' However, he does duty with the Home Guard—and at this moment Havard is asking him how he takes to it.

'Merrily enough I suppose,' Lewis answers. 'I spend one night in nine mooching about the most depressing and malodorous parts of Oxford with a rifle. I think that Dyson has the right idea about the Home Guard. He says it should be conducted on the same principle as Dogberry's Watch in *Much Ado*—"Let us go sit on the church bench till two, and then all to bed."'

Warnie asks his brother if there is any beer to be had. Jack usually brings a big enamel jug of it up from the college buttery, but apparently tonight the college is as short of it as is the Bird and Baby. 'I think there's some rum in the cupboard if anybody would like some,' says Jack, and Warnie goes to look for it, while his brother declares:

'I think positively the *nastiest* kind of war service is the thing that Barfield is doing. He's just taken a part-time job in—would you believe it—the Inland Revenue, of all disgusting things! As I was saying to Tollers just now, he's very depressed because he's one of those people who really feels the miseries of the world, and the war is making him terribly gloomy.'

'One can hardly blame him for that,' says Tolkien. 'None of us here has exactly displayed a totally unruffled cheerfulness throughout the year.' He is thinking of the fall of France in June, when even Oxford's calm was shaken by what seemed the certain prospect of invasion, and of the Battle of Britain, in which his own son Michael was involved as an anti-aircraft gunner.

'No,' says Lewis, 'one can't, but that's not quite what I meant. What I'm trying to say is this: that there's Barfield, with more than enough in his own and his neighbours' personal lives to worry about, actually spending a good deal of time being

miserable about the terrible sufferings which are being endured by people hundreds or thousands of miles away. Now, terrible as those sufferings are, I'm not quite sure whether it's really one's duty as a man and a Christian to be so vividly and continuously *aware* of them. Should we try, for instance, to be aware of what it's like, say, to be a fighter pilot being shot down in flames at this moment?'

'I should imagine Williams would think one ought to be very much aware of it indeed,' says Harvard. 'Isn't that part of his "Co-inherence"?'

'Yes, of course,' answers Lewis. (He talks emphatically—'in italics' as a pupil puts it—but does not raise his voice even in the heat of argument. There is just a trace of Ulster still in the vowel-sounds.) 'Yes. I entirely accept the general principle. We must realise, as Williams would say, that we live in each other. But in purely practical terms, were we meant to know so much about the sufferings of the rest of the world? It seems to me that modern communications are *so fast*—with the wireless and the newspapers and so on—that there's a *burden* imposed on our sympathy for which that sympathy just wasn't designed.'

'Give an example,' says Tolkien.

'That's easy. Now, supposing the poor Jones family in your own street are having terrible troubles—sickness and so on—well then, obviously it's your duty to sympathise with them. But what about the morning paper and the evening news broadcasts on the wireless, in which you hear all about the Chinese and the Russians and the Finns and the Poles and the Turks? Are you expected to sympathise with *them* in the same way? I really don't think it's possible, and I don't think it's your duty to try.'

'You certainly can't do them any good by being miserable about them,' says Warnie.

'Ah, but while that's perfectly true it's not the point. In the case of the Jones family next door, you'd think pretty poorly of the man who felt nothing in the way of sympathy for them because that feeling "wouldn't do them any good".'

'Are you saying', asks Harvard, 'that when we read the newspapers we shouldn't try to sympathise with the sufferings of people we don't know?'

'Jack is probably saying', remarks Warnie, 'that we shouldn't read the

newspapers at all. You know he never bothers to look at anything other than the crossword.'

'Perfectly true,' answers his brother. 'And I have two very good reasons for it. First of all I deplore journalism—I can't abide the journalist's air of being a specialist in everything, and of taking in all points of view and always being on the side of the angels. And I hate the *triviality* of journalism, you know, the sort of fluttering mentality that fills up the page with one little bit about how an actress has been divorced in California, and another little bit about how a train was derailed in France, and another about the birth of quadruplets in New Zealand.'

'Well, I think it's irresponsible of you not to read the war news, at least,' says Warnie, and Havard grunts in agreement.

'It might be, if the news was in any way *accurate*, or if I was qualified to interpret it. But instead here I am, without any military knowledge, being asked to read an account of the fighting that was distorted before it reached the Divisional general, and was further distorted before it left him, and then was "written up" out of all recognition by a journalist, and which will all be contradicted next day anyway—well, I ask you!'

'Do you know,' chimes in Tolkien, 'I was coming back in a train from Liverpool the other week, and there was a Canadian and his wife in the opposite seat, and they drank neat gin out of aluminium cups all the way to Crewe, by which time their eyes had certainly become rather dewy.'

'What on earth has that got to do with journalism?' asks Lewis, who hates the conversation to degenerate into anecdote or mere chat.

'Only that the man was labelled "War Correspondent", so I shan't wonder in future why these people's despatches are so fatuous!'

Lewis roars with laughter.

'What's your other reason for not reading the papers?' asks Havard. 'I thought you said you had another?'

'It's this,' answers Lewis, 'though I'm almost ashamed to admit it. You see, I simply don't understand most of what I find in them. I reckon that the world as it's now becoming is simply too much for people of the old square-rigged type like me. I don't understand its economics, or its politics, or any damn thing about it.'

‘Well, I imagine you understand its theology,’ says Warnie, handing round cups of tea.

‘Not a bit of it. In fact it’s very distressing. I always thought that when I got among Christians I’d have reached somewhere that was safe from that horrid thing modern thought. But did I? Oh no, not at all. I blundered straight into it. I thought I was an upholder of the old stern doctrines against modern quasi-Christian slush, but it’s beginning to look as if what I call sternness is slush to most of them. Or at least that’s what it was like when I was talking to a group of Christian undergraduates the other day. They’d all been reading a dreadful man called Karl Barth, who seemed to be a kind of opposite number to Karl Marx. They all talked like Covenanters or Old Testament prophets. They didn’t think human reason or human conscience is of any value at all, and they maintain just as stoutly as Calvin that there’s no reason why God’s dealings should appear just to us, let alone merciful. They hold on to the doctrine that all our righteousness is just filthy rags so fiercely and sincerely that I can tell you it’s like a blow in the face.’

‘If there’s really a religious revival, that’s probably what it’ll be like,’ says Warnie. ‘Does everyone want rum?’

‘Oh, do we really need any?’ answers his brother. ‘I thought you needed blackcurrant or something to go with it.’ The question of drink at an Inklings is a slightly delicate matter between the Lewis brothers. Warnie likes it to flow freely, but Jack maintains that regular drinking on Thursday nights alters the character of the club. (There is another factor, in that Jack is concerned about Warnie’s occasional bouts of heavy drinking, which have been going on sporadically for some years.) But tonight as the bottle is already open and Tolkien suggests adding hot water to the rum, Warnie wins and the glasses are handed round.

‘As Warnie says,’ remarked Havard, ‘if we do get a religious revival, it’ll probably be just like that—very Calvinist.’

‘I know,’ answers Lewis. ‘And will we like it? I mean, we’ve been delighted to see the churches almost full since the war began, and we talk enthusiastically of a Christian revival among the undergraduates, and there’s certainly some sign of it happening. But I rather think that if it really comes, people like us won’t find it

nearly as agreeable as we'd expected. Of course, we ought to have remembered that if the real thing came it would make us sit up. Do you remember Chesterton? "Never invoke gods unless you really want them to appear. It annoys them very much."

'But you don't think these people enthusing about Barth are necessarily wrong?' Havard asks.

'No, I don't. I think the young gentlemen are probably largely right. But between ourselves I have a hankering for the old and happier days, the days when politics meant Tariff Reform, and war was war against the Zulus, and Religion meant that lovely word Piety—you know, "The decent church that crowns the neighbouring hill", and "Mr. Arabin sent the farmers home to their baked mutton very well satisfied".'

There was a pause while Lewis lit his pipe. 'Williams is coming later,' he says through the stem, 'but I don't think anyone else will be turning up. Has anyone got anything to read?'

Tolkien says that he has brought 'another hobbit chapter'—for some reason he rarely refers to his new book by its formal title, and the Inklings generally know it as the New Hobbit.

'It's a pity Coghill doesn't come along on Thursdays much these days,' remarks Warnie. 'He liked Toller's first hobbit book so much that I'm sure he'd enjoy this.'

'Of course,' says Tolkien, 'his "Producing" takes up a good deal of his time,'

'Do you remember Coghill's Hamlet about five years ago?' Lewis asks, as Tolkien gets his manuscript ready.

'It was pretty good stuff as such things so, as far as I remember,' says Warnie.

Jack grunts. 'I suppose it was, of its kind, but really I get next to no enjoyment out of these undergraduate productions. They act them in a way that fills one at first with embarrassment and pity, and finally with an unreasoning personal hatred of the actors—you know, "Why should that damned man keep on bellowing at me?"'

'Hamlet is a fine enough play,' says Tolkien, 'providing you take it just so, and don't start thinking about it. In fact I'm of the opinion that Old Bill's plays in

general are all the same—they just haven't got any coherent ideas behind them.'

'It's Hamlet himself that I can't abide,' remarks Warnie. 'Whenever I see the play I find myself conceiving the most frightful antipathy to him. I mean, there's such an intolerable deal of him. Every few minutes all the other characters sneak off in a hard-hearted way and leave us at the mercy of this awful arch-bore for hundreds of lines. I remember when I saw Coghill's version I thought the only dramatic merit had been supplied by him and not by Shakespeare.'

'You sound as if you want to rewrite the play,' says Havard.

'And why not?' answers Tolkien. 'You could show what a stinking old bore his father really was, before he became a ghost (to the relief of the Danish court), and how nice poor Claudius was by comparison.'

'And how the old man really died of some nasty disease and wasn't murdered at all,' adds Warnie.

'And then even in the grave couldn't keep from mischief,' continues Tolkien.

'... but had to come back with a filthy cock-and-bull story about a murder, which at first was too much even for his own son to swallow,' adds Jack Lewis, who admires *Hamlet* profoundly but cannot resist joining in this nonsense.

'... the son being a chip off the old blockhead, and quite as conceited as papa,' Tolkien concludes. 'But I suppose it won't ever get written.'

'It might make an opera,' muses Lewis.

'Wagner?'

'No, I think something more in the style of Mozart. We must have a go at it. But let's hear the new chapter.'

Tolkien begins to read from his manuscript.

It is the chapter which describes the arrival of the hobbits and their companions at the doors of the Mines of Moria, and which recounts the beginning of their journey through the darkness. Tolkien reads fluently. Occasionally he hesitates or stumbles, for the chapter is only in a rough draft, and he has some difficulty in making out a word here and there. The pages are closely covered—he has written it on the back of old examination scripts. One or two details are still uncertain: he explains that he has not yet worked out an Elvish version of the inscription over Moria Gate, and he reads it in

English; he is uncertain whether the word of power with which Gandalf opens the doors should be *Mellyn* or *Meldir*, and here and there he points out that he has got the details of distance or time of day wrong, and will have to correct them. But such small details do not interfere with the concentration of his listeners, for though he reads fast and does not enunciate very clearly, the story quickly takes charge. It is more than an hour before he has finished. Meanwhile the fire burns low, and nobody bothers to throw coal on it. At last he comes to the end.

“The Company passed under the northern arch and came through a doorway on their right. It was high and flat-topped, and the stone door was still upon its hinges, standing half open. Beyond it was a large square chamber, lit by a wide shaft in the far wall—it slanted upwards and far above a small square patch of sky could be seen. The light fell directly on a table in the midst of the chamber, a square block three feet high upon which was laid a great slab of whitened stone.” He pauses and puts his manuscript aside. ‘That’s as far as it runs. The end is in rather a muddle, and there should have been a song earlier, in which Gimli recollects the ancient days when Moria was peopled by Durin’s folk.’

‘I don’t think that’s needed,’ says Lewis. (Of Tolkien’s poetry, he generally admires only the alliterative verse.) Tolkien does not reply. Instead he says:

‘Did you realise that the faint patter of feet is Gollum following them? He is to reappear now, you see.’

‘Oh yes, I think that’s clear,’ says Lewis. ‘And the underground stuff is marvellous, the best of its kind I’ve ever heard. Neither Haggard nor MacDonald equals it. Perhaps you could just spread yourself a little more in the scene where that Thing comes out of the water and grabs at Frodo. It’s a little unprepared at the moment—shouldn’t there be ripples on the water when it starts to move?’ Tolkien agrees and makes a note of this.

‘I was struck,’ says Warnie (offering more rum to the company), ‘by that bit about the cats of Queen—what was her name?’

“He is surer of finding the way home in a blind night than the cats of Queen Beruthiel,” quotes Tolkien. ‘Yes. Do you know, I find that rather puzzling. Trotter just made the allusion to her without any forethought by me—she just popped up, in fact.

Odd, isn't it?' ('Trotter' is the character who will later be renamed 'Strider'.)

'So you've no idea who she was?' asks Jack Lewis, putting more coal on the fire.

There is a gleam in Tolkien's eye. 'No, I didn't say that. I said she just popped up. Since she did, I do have a notion that she was the wife of one of the ship-kings of Pelargir.'

'Pelargir?' asks Warnie. 'I don't remember that.'

'No, you wouldn't: the story hasn't reached it yet. It was a great port, you see, and poor Beruthiel loathed the smell of the sea, and fish and gulls, like the giantess Skadi—do you remember her?' (He turns to Lewis). 'She came to the gods in Valhalla and demanded a husband in payment for her father's death. They lined everybody up behind a curtain and she selected the pair of feet that appealed to her most. She thought she'd got Balder, but it turned out to be Njord; and after she'd married him she got fed up with the seaside life, and the gulls kept her awake, and at last she went back to live in Jotunheim. Well, Beruthiel went to live in an inland city too, and she went to the bad—or returned to it: she was a black Numenorean in origin, I suspect—and she was one of those people who hate cats, but cats will jump on them and follow them about (you know how they can pursue people who loathe them). I'm afraid she took to torturing them for amusement, but she trained some to go on evil errands by night, to spy on people or terrify them.' Tolkien stops and relights his pipe, and there is a respectful pause from his audience (though in fact a certain amount of what he said was not entirely audible to them, thanks to his speed and the pipe in his mouth).

'I don't know how you think of these things,' says Havard, who does not actually find it easy to appreciate *The Lord of the Rings*, but who certainly admires the fertility of Tolkien's imagination.

'How does any author think of anything?' answers Jack Lewis, quick as usual to turn the particular into the general. 'I don't think that conscious invention plays a very great part in it. For example, I find that in many respects I can't *direct* my imagination: I can only follow the lead it gives me.'

'Absolutely true,' says Warnie. 'I mean, when I picture the country house I'd like to have if I were a rich man, I can *say* that my study window opens on a level park full of old timbers, but I can only *see* undulating ground with a fir-topped

knoll. I can fix my mind, of course, on the level park, but when I turn to the window again after arranging my books, there's that damn knoll once more.'

'That's exactly what I find when I'm writing a story,' declares his brother. 'I *must* use the knoll and can't force myself to use the level park.'

Havard asks: 'What do you suppose is the explanation, or the significance? I imagine Jung would ascribe it to the collective unconscious, whose dictates you are being obliged to follow.'

'Maybe,' Lewis says. 'Jung's archetypes do seem to explain it, though I'd have thought Plato's would do just as well. And isn't Toller saying the same thing in another way when he tells us that Man is merely the *sub*-creator and that all stories originate with God?' Tolkien grunts in agreement. 'But the real point is not *how* it happens (because surely we can never be certain about that) but that it *does* happen. You see, I come more and more to the conclusion that all stories are *waiting*, somewhere, and are slowly being recovered in fragments by different human minds according to their abilities—and of course being partially spoiled in each writer by the admixture of his own mere individual "invention". Do you agree?' He turns to Tolkien.

'Of course, of course. Although you may feel that your story is profoundly "true", all the details may not have that "truth" about them. It's seldom that the inspiration (if we are choosing to call it that) is so strong and lasting that it leavens all the lump, and doesn't leave much that is mere uninspired "invention".'

'What about the new Hobbit book?' asks Havard. 'How much of that would you say was "true"?''

Tolkien sighs. 'I don't know. One hopes . . . But you mean, I take it, how much of it "came" ready-made, and how much was conscious invention. It's very difficult to say. One doesn't, perhaps, identify the two elements in one's mind as it's happening. As I recall, I knew from the beginning that it had to be some kind of quest, involving hobbits—I'd got hobbits on my hands, hadn't I? And then I looked for the only point in *The Hobbit*, in the first book, that showed signs of development. I thought I'd choose the Ring as the key to the next story—though that was the mere germ, of course. But I want to make a big story out of it, so it had

got to be *the* Ring, not just any magic ring. (I invented that little rhyme about *One Ring to rule them all*, I remember, in my bath one day.)’

‘But all that part of it was, by the sound of it, mere invention,’ says Lewis. ‘Didn’t you find when you actually began to write that things appeared largely of their own accord?’

‘Of course. I met a lot of things on the way that astonished me. The Black Riders were completely unpremeditated—I remember the first one, the one that Frodo and the hobbits hide from on the road, just turned up without any forethought. I knew all about Tom Bombadil already, but I’d never been to Bree. And then in the inn at Bree, Trotter sitting in the corner of the bar parlour was a real shock—totally unexpected—and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo. And I remember I was as mystified as Frodo at Gandalf’s failure to appear at Bag End on September the twenty-second. What’s more, I can tell you that there are quite a few unexplained things still lurking. *Seven stars and seven stones and one white tree*: now, what do you make of that? I know it will play some important part in the story, but I can’t say what.’

‘In the same sort of way,’ says Lewis, ‘I have a picture in my mind—it’s been there for some time—of floating islands, islands that float. At present (if it interests you even remotely to know it) I’m trying to build up a world in which floating islands could exist.’

There is a moment’s silence, broken by Warnie.

‘Well, Tollers, whether it’s inspiration or invention, I still don’t know how you keep up your story so magnificently. It hasn’t flagged for a moment. I can tell you without exaggeration that simply nothing has come my way for a long time which has given me such enjoyment and excitement.’

‘Oh yes,’ adds his brother. ‘It’s more than good: the only word I can use is *great*.’

Warnie continues: ‘But how the public will take it, I can’t imagine. I should think, Tollers, you’d better prepare yourself for a lot of misunderstanding. I’m afraid some people will interpret it as a political allegory—you know, the Shire standing for England, Sauron for Stalin, and that kind of thing.’

‘Whereas of course the truth’, says Jack, ‘is that no sooner had he begun to write it than the real events began to conform to the pattern he’d invented.’

‘I know that Tolkien always reminds us that it isn’t allegory,’ Havard says, ‘but I don’t quite see why it’s so silly at least to attempt to interpret it allegorically. I’m sure that some perfectly sensible people are bound to.’

‘Of course they are,’ answers Tolkien. ‘And while, as you know, I dislike conscious and intentional allegory, it’s quite true that any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. And indeed the more “life” a story has, the more readily it will be susceptible of allegorical interpretations; while conversely, the better a *deliberate* allegory is, the more nearly it will be acceptable just as a story.’

Havard asks Tolkien: ‘If you’re prepared to admit the susceptibility of your Hobbit story to allegorical interpretation, what particular interpretations do you predict people will make?’

‘Well,’ Tolkien says, ‘I suppose all my stuff—both this new story and the earlier mythology from which it derives—is mainly concerned with the Fall, with mortality, and with the Machine. The Fall is an inevitable subject in any story about *people*; mortality in that the consciousness of it affects anyone who has creative desires that are left unsatisfied by plain biological life—any artist must desire great longevity; and by the Machine I mean the use of all external plans or devices, instead of the development of *inner* powers and talents—or even the use of those talents with the corrupted motive of dominating, of bullying the world and coercing other wills. The Machine is merely our more obvious modern form. (By the way, did you know that a maker of motorbikes has named his product Ixion Cycles? *Ixion*, who was bound for ever in Hell on a perpetually revolving wheel!)

‘But can’t you admire any machines?’ Havard asks. ‘The advance of medicine depends greatly on the benefits that they can confer.’

‘Maybe,’ Tolkien replies. ‘But it seems to me that the ultimate idea behind all machinery, however apparently beneficial its immediate function, is to create Power in *this* world. And that can’t be done with any real final satisfaction—unlike art, which is content to create a new world, a secondary world in the mind.’

‘Don’t you approve of any labour-saving devices ?’ asks Warnie.

‘Labour-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labour. The Fall only makes these devices not just fail of their desire, but turn to new and horrible evil. Look how we’ve “progressed”: from Daedalus and Icarus to the Giant Bomber. It isn’t really man who is ultimately daunting and insupportable: it’s the *man-made*. If a Ragnarok would burn all the slums and gasworks and shabby garages, it could (for me) burn all the works of art—and I’d go back to trees.’

‘Certainly we seem to be progressing towards universal suburbia,’ Lewis says. ‘And while, as Havard suggests, the first stages of “Progress” may most certainly be beneficial, we have to know where to stop. And at the moment there doesn’t seem much hope that we *will* stop.’ He searches among his papers and takes out a sheet. ‘I’ve called this “Evolutionary Hymn”,’ he says, and begins to read.

‘Lead us, Evolution, lead us
Up the future’s endless stair. Chop us, change us, prod us, weed us,
For stagnation is despair: Groping, guessing, yet progressing,
Lead us nobody knows where.

‘To whatever variation
Our posterity may turn, Hairy, squashy, or crustacean,
Bulbous-eyed or square of stern,
Tusked or toothless, mild or ruthless,
Towards that unknown god we yearn.

‘Ask not if it’s god or devil,
Brethren, lest your words imply
Static norms of good and evil
(As in Plato) throned on high;
Such scholastic, inelastic,
Abstract yardsticks we deny.

‘Far too long have sages vainly
Glossed great Nature’s simple text;

He who runs can read it plainly:
"Goodness equals *what comes next*."
By evolving, Life is solving
All the questions we perplexed.'

'Good,' says Havard. 'But I'm not clear whether it's scientific progress you're attacking, or Darwin. The objectives seem to have got a little muddled.'

'That's the whole point of the poem,' Lewis answers. 'What I'm saying isn't that Darwin was wrong—though incidentally I believe biologists are already contemplating a withdrawal from the Darwinian position—but that Evolution as popularly imagined, the modern concept of Progress, is simply a fiction supported by no evidence whatever. It's an older fiction than Darwin, in fact: you can find it in Keats's *Hyperion* and in Wagner's *Ring*, and it turns up in all sorts of forms, such as Shaw's Life-Force; and for most people it has now taken the place of religion.'

'But I still don't see precisely what you're attacking,' Havard says.

'Quite simply the belief that the very formula of universal process is from imperfect to perfect, from small beginnings to great endings. It's probably the deepest-ingrained habit of mind in the contemporary world. It's behind the idea that our morality springs from savage taboos, adult sentiment from infantile sexual maladjustment, thought from instinct, mind from matter, organic from inorganic, cosmos from chaos. It always seems to me immensely implausible, because it makes the general course of nature so very unlike those parts of it we can observe. You remember the old puzzle as to whether the first owl came from the first egg or the first egg from the first owl? Well, the modern belief in universal evolution is produced by attending exclusively to the owl's emergence from the egg. From childhood we're taught to notice how the perfect oak grows from the acorn; we aren't so often reminded that the acorn itself was dropped by a perfect oak. We're always remarking that the express engine of today is the descendant of the *Rocket*, but we don't equally remember that the *Rocket* didn't come from some even more rudimentary engine, but from something much more perfect and complicated than itself—a man of genius.'

'All right,' answers Havard. 'I understand your objection to the fact that progress

is based on a misunderstanding of the process of development in nature. But does that mean that all progress is of necessity bad? I notice that you have no hesitation (nor does Tolkien for that matter) in using trains and cars when they're offered. (Though I note you usually prefer a slow local train to a main line express.) But surely you must allow *some* good in mechanical science, such as the invention of printing? Didn't that greatly expand culture and scholarship?'

'Possibly,' Lewis replies. 'But have I too fanciful an imagination when I say that I suspect that the flood of so-called "learned" books which was beginning to overwhelm us before the war (and which will undoubtedly return with peace) must inevitably mean recent inferior work pushing good old books out of the way? That is what we shall see, I'm sure.'

'And what about literature?' Warnie asks. 'You must allow of some improvement in *that* over the centuries.'

'Not at all, not as a general statement. Barfield proved years ago that what we have actually experienced is a *decay*, a breaking-up of the ancient unity in which myth could not have any "meaning" separated from it, into allegory, where the meaning can be distinguished and detached; and the ultimate result of this process is of course a literature that has no meaning at all! The other day I read a symposium on T. S. Eliot's "Cooking Egg" poem. There were seven contributors, all of them men whose lives have been devoted to the study of poetry for thirty years or so, and do you know there wasn't the slightest agreement between any of them as to what the poem meant!'

'I can well believe it,' says Tolkien.

'Yet to be fair, can you tell us what Tolkien's story means?' asks Havard.

'But that's the whole point!' Lewis answers. 'It doesn't *mean* anything, in the sense of abstracting a meaning from it. Tolkiers may regard it fundamentally as "about" the Fall and Mortality and the Machine, but that may not be how I read it. Indeed it seems to me (with due respect) a great mistake to try and attach any kind of abstract meaning to a story like his. Story—or at least a great Story of the mythical type—gives us an experience of something not as an abstraction but *as a concrete reality*. We don't "understand the meaning" when we read a myth, we actually encounter the thing itself. Once we try to grasp it with the discursive reason, it fades. Let me give you an

example. Here I am trying to explain the fading, the vanishing of tasted reality when the reasoning part of the mind is applied to it. Probably I'm making heavy weather of it.'

'You are,' says Warnie.

'All right. Let me remind you instead of Orpheus and Eurydice, how he was supposed to lead her by the hand but, when he turned round to look at her, she disappeared. Now what was merely a principle should become imaginable to you.'

'I never thought of applying that meaning to the Orpheus story,' Warnie says.

'Of course not. You weren't looking for an abstract "meaning" in it at all. You weren't knowing, but *tasting*. But what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. Of course the moment we state the principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstractions. It's only while receiving the myth *as a story* that you experience a principle concretely. Let's take an example from quite a different sort of story. Consider Mr Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*—that extraordinary amalgam of high rank, coarse manners, gruffness, shyness and goodness. The child who has once met Mr Badger has got ever afterwards, in its bones, a knowledge of humanity and English social history which it certainly couldn't get from any abstraction. Now do you see what I mean?'

'This talk of "tasted reality",' says Tolkien, 'reminds me of an experience I had the other day, in which I think I encountered the same thing in a different fashion. It sounds rather ridiculous, but I was riding along on my bicycle past the Radcliffe Infirmary when I had one of those sudden clarities, the kind that sometimes come in dreams. I remember saying aloud with absolute conviction, "But of course! Of course that's how things really do work." But I couldn't reproduce the argument that had led to this, although the sensation was the same as having been convinced by reason (though without any reasoning). And I've since thought that one of the explanations as to why one can't recapture the wonderful argument or secret when one wakes up is simply that there wasn't one, but there was some kind of direct appreciation by the mind without any chain of argument as we know it in our time-serial life.'

'I think that's fascinating,' Warnie says, 'and I'm sure I've experienced something of the same kind myself. But I'm a little worried still whether the people who read Tolkien's new Hobbit story are going to appreciate all this. I'm sure that some critics will talk about it as simply "escapist" and "wish-fulfilment" and that sort of thing. You

know the way these people go on.'

'Very probably they will,' answers Tolkien. 'Though anyone who in real life actually found himself, say, journeying through the Mines of Moria would, I imagine, wish to escape *from* that, to exchange it for almost any other place in the world! You see, I think that if there is any "escapism" involved, it's in being able to survey danger and evil (when we read a story) without any disturbance of our spiritual equilibrium. We're escaping from the limitations of our own personality, which wouldn't allow us to have any adventures because we'd be too frightened! And really, you know, these critics who are so sensitive to the least hint of "escapism"—well, what class of men would you expect to be so worked up about people escaping?' The company waits for an answer. 'Jailers!' says Tolkien.

'Yes,' adds Lewis, laughing. 'They're afraid that any glimpse of a remote prospect would make their own stuff seem less exclusively important.'

'But you must be aware', Havard remarks, 'that some people will find a story like Tolkien's to be deficient in the kind of detailed studies of complex human personalities that you find in Tolstoy or Jane Austen.'

'Of course,' Lewis answers. 'But that isn't a criticism. It's merely saying that the Hobbit story is different. A critic who likes Tolstoy and Jane Austen and doesn't like Tolkien should stick to novels of manners and not attack the Hobbit book. His own taste doesn't qualify him to condemn a story which is primarily *not* about human behaviour. We mustn't listen to Pope's maxim about the proper study of mankind: the proper study of man is *everything*, everything that gives a foothold to the imagination and the passions.'

'Including elves and goblins ?' asks Havard.

'Of course. They do the same thing that Mr. Badger does: they're an admirable hieroglyphic which conveys psychology and types of character much more briefly and effectively than any novelistic presentation could do. Now, I know that Tolkien's story does lie on (or beyond) one of the frontiers of taste; what I mean is, if you ask someone, "Do you like stories about other worlds—or hunting stories—or stories of the supernatural—or historical novels?", you will always get an unalterable "yes" or "no" from the very depth of the heart. I don't know why; it's a very interesting literary fact,

which I've never seen discussed by any critic of merit, certainly not by Aristotle or Johnson or Coleridge. Anyway there it is, and Tollers's book will undoubtedly provoke that "yes" or "no" response. But the point is that the people who say "no" shouldn't try to stop other people from saying "yes". For a start, they may be proved entirely wrong by history: the book that they scorn today may be a classic for the intelligentsia of the twenty-third century. Very odd things may happen: our age may be known not as the age of Eliot and Pound and Lawrence but as the age of Buchan and Wodehouse, and perhaps Tolkien. You see, the trouble is that our map of literature is always drawn up to look like a list of examination results, with the honour candidates above that line and the pass people below. But surely we ought to have a whole series of vertical columns, each representing different *kinds* of work, and an almost infinite series of horizontal lines crossing these to represent the different degrees of goodness in each. For instance in the "Adventure Story" column you'd have the *Odyssey* at the top and Edgar Wallace at the bottom, and Rider Haggard and Stevenson and Scott and William Morris—and of course Tollers—placed on horizontal lines crossing "Adventure Story" at whatever heights we decide. But look, Tollers never answered Warnie's criticism about "wish-fulfilment".

'It wasn't a criticism,' Warnie answers. 'I was merely suggesting that some people might say it.'

'Most certainly they will,' Tolkien says. 'But one can only ask, is the wish itself such a bad one? And in what sense is it fulfilled? Of course there are certain books which do arouse and imaginatively satisfy certain wishes which ought to be left alone—pornography is the obvious example. But I'm quite certain that the longing for fairy-land is fundamentally different in character. As I've already suggested, we don't actually want to *experience* all the dangers and discomforts of the Mines of Moria, in the way that somebody susceptible to pornography wants to experience the things it describes. We don't want to be in Moria: but the story (I hope) does have an effect on us. It stirs us and troubles us.'

'That's right,' says Lewis. Far from *dulling* or *emptying* the actual, of reducing it to something very *low* as pornography does, it gives it a new dimension. Look, a child doesn't despise real woods just because he's been reading about enchanted woods. What he's read makes all real woods a little enchanted. And a boy who has any

imagination enjoys eating cold meat, which he'd otherwise find dull, by pretending that it's buffalo-meat, which he's just killed with his own bow and arrow. As a result, the real meat tastes more savoury. In fact you might say that only then *is* it the real meat. This isn't a retreat from reality. It's a rediscovery of it.'

The Magdalen clock chimes the quarter. Warnie looks at his watch. 'Eleven-fifteen. We shan't be seeing Charles tonight, I'm afraid.' He turns to Tolkien. 'There's one thing I meant to ask. What actually happens at the end of that chapter? It seemed to stop a bit abruptly.'

'The Company discovers a great book,' Tolkien answers, 'in which is written the history of the reoccupation of Moria by the dwarves, under the leadership of Balin (you may remember him from my first hobbit story). I've delayed writing that bit because there are a number of linguistic problems relating to the text which they find. And they also discover a tomb, in which lies the body of Balin, slain by—well, we shall be coming to that.'

'Tomb?' asks Lewis doubtfully. 'Surely a pyre would be more likely?'

'No,' answers Tolkien. 'They buried their dead. Or rather, they laid them in tombs of stone, never in earth (as might be expected, considering their origins). Only in the most dire necessity did they resort to burning their dead—it happened once, after the great battle at Azanul-bizar, when more were slain than they could possibly have entombed, and then they made pyres, but only reluctantly.'

'It does seem a little odd,' muses Lewis, 'or at least a little out of character with what you must admit is the Teutonic nature of your dwarves. Are we to take it from this that they believed in the resurrection of the body?'

'A difficult question,' Tolkien answers. 'But really, you know, it must be a tomb.'

'Why, Tollers?' Warnie asks. 'You don't object to cremation, do you?'

'Generally speaking, the Catholic Church forbids it,' says Havard, who has been a Catholic for about ten years. 'There are exceptions, I believe, when there is any special reason—a plague, for instance. But in general it is not allowed, because (of course) it rather goes against belief in bodily resurrection.'

'Oh, come now,' says Lewis. 'Your Church is perfectly entitled to practise what it chooses, but you can't say that cremation denies the resurrection of the body. Why

should the resurrection of a *cremated* body be any less plausible than that of a *decayed* body?’

‘That may be true,’ says Tolkien, ‘but you would find in fact that cremation is far more widely accepted by atheists than by adherents to any form of Christianity. It may not logically contradict the resurrection of the body, but it clearly *goes with* disbelief in it.’

‘But why on earth should it?’ asks Warnie. ‘I just don’t see that you’re putting up any case against cremation whatever.’

‘A corpse is a temple of the Holy Ghost,’ Tolkien says.

‘But you must admit, a *vacated* temple,’ Lewis answers.

‘Yes,’ Havard says. ‘But does that mean that it is right to destroy it? If a church has to be vacated for some reason, you don’t immediately blow it up or burn it to the ground.’

‘You would do,’ Warnie answers, ‘to prevent it being used, shall we say, by Communists. You’d surely rather see it destroyed then?’

‘No,’ Tolkien answers, ‘I would not.’

Warnie persists: ‘Why not?’

‘It’s very difficult to explain.’ Tolkien shifts uncomfortably in his chair. (‘I have no skill in verbal dialectic,’ he has remarked to one of his sons, adding, ‘I tend to lose my temper in arguments touching fundamentals, which is fatal.’) He says: ‘Take a slightly different example: if you knew that a chalice was going to be used by black magicians—as in that story of Williams’s—you wouldn’t regard it as therefore being your duty to destroy it, would you?’

‘I think I would,’ Warnie answers.

‘Then you would be mentally guilty if you did so. It would be your business simply to reverence it, and what the magicians did to it afterwards would be theirs.’

‘With due respect to your beliefs, Tollers,’ declares Lewis, ‘I think you are entirely missing the point.’ He is uncomfortably aware that the two Anglicans and the two Catholics have ranged themselves rather belligerently against each other, but he cannot by his nature drop an argument half-way through. ‘Surely the Incarnation is a key to what we should believe about the body? You remember the words of the

Athanasian Creed: *One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh . . .*

Another voice, with a London accent, takes up his words from the doorway: *‘. . . but by taking of the Manhood into God.’* Charles Williams has arrived after all. *‘One altogether’*, he continues to chant, *‘not by confusion of Substance; but by unity of Person.’* He crosses the room with brisk movements and throws himself down in the middle of the Chesterfield. *‘For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ.’*

‘We have been discussing,’ says Lewis a little lamely, ‘the subject of cremation.’

“Those are pearls that were his eyes . . .” Williams replies. ‘O, don’t you think that would be the best sort of burial? “Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change Into something rich and strange.”’ He closes his eyes and tilts his head back, crossing his legs, so that his grey suit becomes a little creased. (Eliot’s description of Williams at Lady Ottoline Morrell’s seems fitted to Williams among the Inklings: ‘One retained the impression that he was pleased and grateful for the opportunity of meeting the company, and yet that it was he who had conferred a favour—more than a favour, a kind of benediction—by coming.’)

‘You’re frightfully late, Charles,’ says Warnie. ‘I expect you’d like some tea. Where have you been?’

Williams sighs. ‘I was asked by some undergraduates to address them on Malory. I assented. I did not quite like *not* to. But it was—to be frank . . .’ He leaves the sentence unfinished.

‘Well, I’m sure they were enthralled,’ says Warnie. ‘I know your lectures are being greatly valued.’

‘That’s an understatement,’ adds his brother. ‘It’s a long time since anyone dropped on Oxford with such a cometary blaze.’

‘O, but yes,’ answers Williams. ‘Yet—one does not live by reputations. I’m always a trifle worried by Our Lord’s dictum, “Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.”’ He turns to Lewis. ‘By the way, your Mr. Sampson has been talking to me on the telephone. He has in mind a book for his “Christian Challenge” series; and would I be open to a proposal? I would, of course. There is a novel

that I feel I ought to be doing, but I do not know what it is to be about, and for the moment . . .’ (Ashley Sampson is the publisher who commissioned Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain*.)

‘I gather’, Lewis says, ‘he wants you to write something about the forgiveness of sins.’

‘He does,’ Williams answers. ‘It is, of course, something that we have often considered, and yet a good deal of thought is still required.’ (He often uses the ceremonial ‘we’ instead of ‘I’, declaring it not to be conceit but showing an awareness of function’.) ‘One thing particularly nags: he wishes an entire chapter to be devoted to How We Should Forgive the Germans.’ He sighs. ‘It will not be easy.’

‘Do you know,’ Tolkien says, ‘there was a solemn article in the local paper the other day seriously advocating the systematic extermination of the entire German nation as the only proper course after military victory because, if you please, they are all rattlesnakes, and don’t know the difference between good and evil! Can you beat it?’

‘Yes,’ says Lewis. ‘How do you begin to talk about forgiveness to the kind of person who writes that stuff?’

‘On the other hand,’ remarks Havard, ‘I wonder how you’d feel about forgiving the Germans if you were a Pole or a Jew?’

‘So do I,’ Lewis says. ‘I wonder very much. And I suppose that compared to them we have nothing to forgive, and shouldn’t even begin to try.’

‘Exactly,’ says Williams. ‘By the side of their sufferings it would be ridiculous for us to—O so laboriously—*forgive* the Germans for the small things they have inflicted on most of us: a slight financial loss, a personal separation or two. Without real personal injury, there can be little question of real forgiveness.’

‘It seems to me,’ says Tolkien, ‘that in doing what that newspaper article did, we are in spirit doing exactly what the Germans have done. *They* have declared the Poles and Jews to be exterminable vermin, utterly subhuman. *We* now declare that all the Germans are snakes, and should be systematically put to death. We have as much right to say that as they have to exterminate the Jews: in other words, no

right at all, whatever they may have done.’

‘Otherwise,’ Lewis says, ‘we will be no better than the Nazis.’

‘Exactly. As Gandalf often says, you can’t fight the Enemy with his own Ring without turning into an Enemy yourself.’ Tolkien sighs.

Warnie shifts uncomfortably. ‘This is getting a bit rarefied. I mean, in purely practical terms the best way to ensure that the Germans don’t do it again, when the war is over, is to put their leaders to death. That’s only practical common sense.’

‘It does sound very much like it,’ says Williams.

‘And it seems to me’, Warnie continues, ‘that taking what Jack and Tollers were saying only just a little bit further, you land up in a kind of pacifist state of mind in which you’re not going to fight anybody, however wicked and dangerous they are, because you know that potentially you’re just as wicked and dangerous yourself. Now, don’t get me wrong: I’m not attacking *real* pacifism, a real hatred of war. The only true pacifists I’ve met have been professional soldiers—they know too much about the game to be fire-eaters. What I’m attacking is the kind of woolly intellectual pacifism which we’ve all seen a good deal of.’

‘Oh, of course,’ says his brother. ‘I don’t think any of us is really remotely pacifist in the sense that we’re uneasy at taking part in a war. Don’t we all believe that it’s lawful for a Christian to bear arms when commanded by constituted authority, unless he has a very good reason—which a private person scarcely can have—for believing the war to be unjust?’

‘The notion that the use of physical force against another is always sinful’, says Williams, ‘is based on the belief that the worst possible sin is the taking of physical life. Which I’m sure none of us believes.’

‘I know it’s off the point,’ Havard interjects, ‘but I’d like to ask Williams what he *would* regard as the worst possible sin?’

Williams answers without a moment’s hesitation: ‘The exclusion of love.’

Havard nods.

‘Certainly war is a dreadful thing,’ Lewis continues, ‘and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he’s entirely mistaken. What I *can’t* understand is the sort

of *semi*-pacifism you get nowadays, which gives people the idea that though you have to fight, you ought to do it with a long face, as if you were ashamed of it.'

'Oh yes,' Tolkien agrees. 'And it's a perfectly ridiculous attitude. I find it refreshing to discover at least some young men who have the opposite approach. I've met several, all of them airmen as it happens, to whom the war has offered the perfect round hole for a round peg—and they only found square holes before the war. What I mean is, the job of fighting demands a quality of daring and individual prowess in arms that I'd have thought was a real problem for a war-less world fully to satisfy.'

'All right,' says Warnie. 'You're not, any of you, supporting pacifism. You say it's all right to fight Hitler. But you're not in favour of exacting cold-blooded revenge after the war has been won. Is that it?'

'Yes,' says his brother. 'And I'd have thought that the prohibitions in the Sermon on the Mount supported that view—they don't prohibit war, but revenge.'

'You're certain, in fact, that it's our duty to forgive the Germans, both now and after the war?'

'Oh yes. We must love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. Our Lord made that perfectly clear.'

'And yet you say that in practical terms it's silly to try and forgive them for what they've done to us, because what we've suffered is nothing compared to the sufferings of the Jews and the Poles. So it would seem to me,' Warnie concludes, 'that our duty is to try and forgive them *on behalf of the Jews and the Poles*.'

'O but is it?' Williams asks. 'When we ask the Omnipotence to forgive Herr Hitler for what he has done to the Jews, are we not in fact reminding Him of how terrible Herr Hitler is? Are we really asking for forgiveness, or indulging our anger?'

'Isn't there such a thing as holy anger?' Havard asks.

'There is: O yes there is,' Williams answers. "'The golden blazonries of love irate"—mingled with compassion. But, you know, holy anger is a very dangerous thing indeed for anyone who isn't a saint to play with. Supernatural indignation may be possible, but it springs from a supernatural root. Our business is surely to look for that root rather than to cultivate the anger?'

'All right then,' says Warnie. 'Why don't we just say *we pardon* them and have

done with it?’

‘A little facile,’ Jack grunts.

‘And anything other than a facile pardon would probably, in the circumstances, prove to be impossible,’ Tolkien adds. ‘Say you were a man who’d been deliberately crippled by the Gestapo, or you’d seen your wife tortured—well, you’d almost certainly be unable to reach a state of real forgiveness, even if you thought it was your duty to try to.’

‘Vicarious pardon, may be?’ Williams asks.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Someone who has endured what Tolkien describes might, well, entreat anyone who loved him to make an effort towards pardon on his behalf.’

‘Exchange and Substitution again, Charles?’ Lewis asks.

‘An operation of it. But you know, we seem to forget that many Germans (including Hitler? possibly indeed) may feel that *they* have much to forgive *us*. And what sort of reconciliation can be achieved if we are prepared to forgive but not to be forgiven?’

Lewis sighs. ‘Of course, Charles. You’re quite right. But it’s getting late, and as usual you’re turning the whole issue topsy-turvy and discovering all sorts of complications that really needn’t concern us now.’ (Williams smiles.) ‘As I see it, you want a straight answer (for the purposes of your book) to the question: what are we going to do about the Germans after the war is over? Now, I’d have thought that you can quite simply resign the whole issue to the civil authorities, whose task it is to decide such things. You can say that it is *our* duty to be in as best a state of forgiveness as we can manage, and that it is *their* job—the League of Nations, I mean—to do whatever they think fit.’

‘Ah yes,’ says Williams. ‘The League of Nations: but it owes its existence to treaties, does it not? And the problem with the Germans is that they are breakers of treaties; they deny the League of Nations.’

‘Well of course the League can respond by passing laws which declare the Germans guilty of various crimes,’ Warnie says, ‘and it can then punish them. They would of course be retrospective laws, but really it wouldn’t be any more unjust than

the Germans' own behaviour.'

'No more and no less unjust,' says Jack. 'We're back with an eye for an eye. It would only be legalised vengeance. And we're agreed that vengeance is out of the question.'

'I wonder,' Williams muses. 'We can surely take vengeance if we choose; but we must be honest; we must call it vengeance.'

'What are you suggesting?' Havard asks. 'Executions?'

'Execution? Yes; maybe sacrifice. It is dangerous, but it could be done. It is a responsibility we could accept if we chose.'

'I can't see how,' says Lewis.

'Shall we say, the new League of Nations—whatever form it may take—might rise not merely out of the blood that has been shed in the war. It might be definitely dedicated to the future with blood formally shed.'

'But we've already said that there'd be no justification for that,' says Tolkien.

'No justification, no. It would be a new thing. We should say in effect: "We have no right to punish you. But we are determined to purge our own hearts by sacrificing you." And indeed to execute our enemy after that manner would be an admission of our solidarity with him. We should execute him not because he was different from us, but because we were the same as he.'

'But this is quite impossible for Christians,' Lewis expostulates. 'It's forbidden to the Church. And after all, if bloody vengeance is a sin, bloody sacrifice is an outrage.'

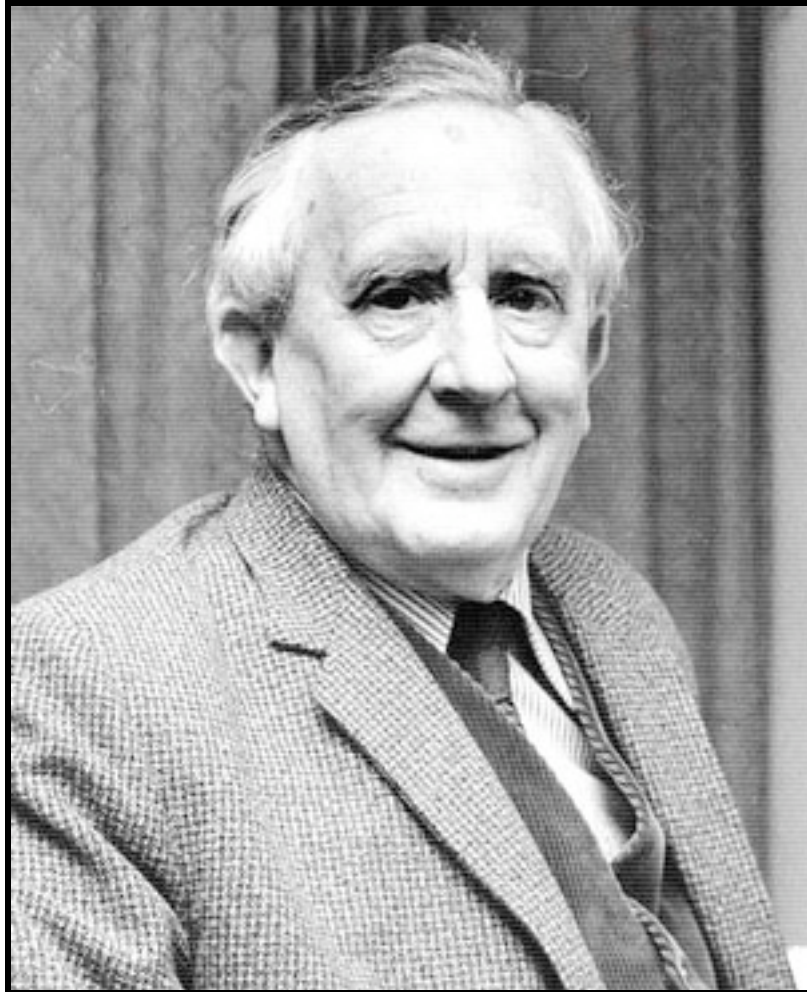
'But if it were conceded outside the Church?' Williams asks. 'The Church, though refusing it in one sense, might allow it in another—as she does with divorce.'

'You amaze me, Charles,' Warnie bursts out. 'Sheer bloodthirstiness!'

Williams laughs, and lights a cigarette with hands that shake (as they always do). 'At the time of Munich,' he says, 'I was regarded as a cowardly wretch because I wanted peace and appeasement. Now I'm called a bloody wretch. A lonely furrower—that's what I am!' He gets up, says brief goodnights to the company, thanks Warnie for the tea ('Why does no one else—except my wife—provide tea at all hours? You spoil me') and is gone. Warnie and Havard follow a few minutes later, making for Havard's

car, which is parked in the yard at the back of the college. Magdalen clock strikes midnight as they leave, and as the last strokes die away another sound reaches their ears from some distance away. Jack Lewis has accompanied Tolkien downstairs, and as they leave the cloisters of New Buildings and make their way across the grass, they have started to improvise their opera about Hamlet's father. It is a very strange noise.

From The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends



J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973)

On Fairy-Stories

J. R. R. Tolkien

This essay was originally intended to be one of the Andrew Lang lectures at St. Andrews, and it was, in abbreviated form, delivered there in 1938. To be invited to lecture in St. Andrews is a high compliment to any man; to be allowed to speak about fairy-stories is (for an Englishman in Scotland) a perilous honour. I felt like a conjuror who finds himself, by some mistake, called upon to give a display of magic before the court of an elf-king. After producing his rabbit, such a clumsy performer may consider himself lucky if he is allowed to go home in his proper shape, or indeed to go home at all. There are dungeons in fairyland for the overbold.

And overbold I fear I may be accounted, because I am a reader and lover of fairy-stories, but not a student of them, as Andrew Lang was. I have not the learning, nor the still more necessary wisdom, which the subject demands. The land of fairy-story is wide and deep and high, and is filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both sorrow and joy as sharp as swords. In that land a man may (perhaps) count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness make dumb the traveller who would report it. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates shut and the keys be lost. The fairy gold too often turns to withered leaves when it is brought away. All that I can ask is that you, knowing these things, will receive my withered leaves, as a token that my hand at least once held a little of the gold.

But there are some questions that one who is to speak about fairy-stories cannot help asking, whatever the folk of Faërie think of him or do to him. For instance: What are fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them? I will try to give answers to these questions, or rather the broken hints of answers to them that I have gleaned—primarily from the stories themselves: such few of their multitude as I know.

What is a fairy-story? It is in this case no good hastening to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, because it will not tell you. It contains no reference to the combination *fairy-story*, and is unhelpful on the subject of *fairies* generally: volume F was not edited

by a Scotsman. In the Supplement, *fairy-tale* is recorded since the year 1750, and its leading sense is said to be (a) a tale about fairies, or generally a fairy legend; with developed senses, (b) an unreal or incredible story, and (c) a falsehood.

The last two senses would obviously make my topic hopelessly vast. But the first sense is too narrow. Not too narrow for a lecture (it is large enough for fifty), but too narrow to cover actual usage. Especially so, if we accept the lexicographer's definition of *fairies*: 'supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man'.

Supernatural is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter. But to fairies it can hardly be applied, unless *super* is taken merely as a superlative prefix. For it is man who is, in contrast to fairies, supernatural (and often of diminutive stature); whereas they are natural, far more natural than he. Such is their doom. The road to fairyland is not the road to Heaven; nor even to Hell, I believe, though some have held that it may lead thither indirectly by the Devil's tithe.

O see ye not yon narrow road
So thick beset wi' thorns and briers?
That is the path of Righteousness,
Though after it but few inquires.

And see ye not yon braid, braid road
That lies across the lily leven?
That is the path of Wickedness,
Though some call it the Road to Heaven.

And see ye not yon bonny road
That winds about yon fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

As for *diminutive size*: I do not deny that that notion is a leading one in modern use. I have often thought that it would be interesting to try to find out how that has come to be so; but my knowledge is not sufficient for a certain answer. Of old there were indeed some inhabitants of Faerie that were small (though hardly diminutive), but smallness was not characteristic of that people as a whole. The diminutive being, elf or fairy, is (I guess) in England largely a sophisticated product of literary fancy.¹ It

¹ I am speaking of developments before the growth of interest in the folk-lore of other countries. The English words, such as *elf*, have long been influenced by French (from which *fay* and *faërie*, *fairy* are

is perhaps not unnatural that in England, the land where the love of the delicate and fine has often reappeared in art, fancy should in this matter turn towards the dainty and diminutive, as in France it went to court and put on powder and diamonds. Yet I suspect that this flower-and-butterfly minuteness was also a product of ‘rationalization’, which transformed the glamour of Elfland into mere finesse, and invisibility into a fragility that could hide in a cowslip or shrink behind a blade of grass. It seems to become fashionable soon after the great voyages had begun to make the world seem too narrow to hold both men and elves; when the magic land of Hy Breasail in the West had become the mere Brazils, the land of red-dye-wood. In any case it was largely a literary business in which William Shakespeare and Michael Drayton played a part.² Drayton’s *Nymphidia* is one ancestor of that long line of flower-fairies and fluttering sprites with antennae that I so disliked as a child, and which my children in their turn detested. Andrew Lang had similar feelings. In the preface to the *Lilac Fairy Book* he refers to the tales of tiresome contemporary authors: ‘they always begin with a little boy or girl who goes out and meets the fairies of polyanthuses and gardenias and apple-blossom.... These fairies try to be funny and fail; or they try to preach and succeed.’

But the business began, as I have said, long before the nineteenth century, and long ago achieved tiresomeness, certainly the tiresomeness of trying to be funny and failing. Drayton’s *Nymphidia* is, considered as a fairy-story (a story about fairies), one of the worst ever written. The palace of Oberon has walls of spider’s legs,

And windows of the eyes of cats,
And for the roof, instead of slats,
Is covered with the wings of bats.

The knight Pigwiggen rides on a frisky earwig, and sends his love, Queen Mab, a bracelet of emmets’ eyes, making an assignation in a cowslip-flower. But the tale that is told amid all this prettiness is a dull story of intrigue and sly go-betweens; the gallant

derived); but in later times, through their use in translation, both *fairy* and *elf* have acquired much of the atmosphere of German, Scandinavian, and Celtic tales, and many characteristics of the *huldufolk*, the *daoine-sithe*, and the *tylwyth teg*.

² Their influence was not confined to England. German *Elf*, *Elfe* appears to be derived from a *Midsummer-night’s Dream*, in Wieland’s translation (1764).

knight and angry husband fall into the mire, and their wrath is stilled by a draught of the waters of Lethe. It would have been better if Lethe had swallowed the whole affair. Oberon, Mab, and Pigwiggen may be diminutive elves or fairies, as Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot are not; but the good and evil story of Arthur's court is a 'fairy-story' rather than this tale of Oberon.

Fairy, as a noun more or less equivalent to *elf*, is a relatively modern word, hardly used until the Tudor period. The first quotation in the *Oxford Dictionary* (the only one before A.D. 1400) is significant. It is taken from the poet Gower: *as he were a faierie*. But this Gower did not say. He wrote *as he were of faierie*, 'as if he were come from Faërie'. Gower was describing a young gallant who seeks to bewitch the hearts of the maidens in church.

His croket kembd and thereon set
A Nouche with a chapelet,
Or elles one of grene leves
Which late com out of the greves,
Al for he sholde seme freissh;
And thus he loketh on the fleissh,
Riht as an hauk which hath a sihte
Upon the foul ther he schal lihte,
And as he were of faierie
He scheweth him tofore here yhe.³

This is a young man of mortal blood and bone; but he gives a much better picture of the inhabitants of Elfland than the definition of a 'fairy' under which he is, by a double error, placed. For the trouble with the real folk of Faërie is that they do not always look like what they are; and they put on the pride and beauty that we would fain wear ourselves. At least part of the magic that they wield for the good or evil of man is power to play on the desires of his body and his heart. The Queen of Elfland, who carried off Thomas the Rhymer upon her milk-white steed swifter than the wind, came riding by the Eildon Tree as a lady, if one of enchanting beauty. So that Spenser was in the true tradition when he called the knights of his Faërie by the name of Elfe. It belonged to such knights as Sir Guyon rather than to Pigwiggen armed with a hornet's sting.

³ *Confessio Amantis*, V. 7065ff.

Now, though I have only touched (wholly inadequately) on *elves and fairies*, I must turn back: for I have digressed from my proper theme: fairy-stories. I said the sense ‘stories about fairies’ was too narrow.⁴ It is too narrow, even if we reject the diminutive size, for fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. *Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.

Stories that are actually concerned primarily with ‘fairies’, that is with creatures that might also in modern English be called ‘elves’, are relatively rare, and as a rule not very interesting. Most good ‘fairy-stories’ are about the *aventures* of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches. Naturally so; for if elves are true, and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are sundered, and our paths seldom meet. Even upon the borders of Faerie we encounter them only at some chance crossing of the ways.⁵

The definition of a fairy-story—what it is, or what it should be—does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of *Faërie*: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole. Yet I hope that what I have later to say about the other questions will give some glimpses of my own imperfect vision of it. For the moment I will say only this: a ‘fairy-story’ is one which touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faërie itself may perhaps most

⁴ Except in special cases such as collections of Welsh or Gaelic tales. In these the stories about the ‘Fair Family’ or the Shee-folk are sometimes distinguished as ‘fairy-tales’ from ‘folk-tales’ concerning other marvels. In this use ‘fairy-tales’ or ‘fairy-lore’ are usually short accounts of the appearances of ‘fairies’ or their intrusions upon the affairs of men. But this distinction is a product of translation.

⁵ This is true also even if they are only creations of Man’s mind, ‘true’ only as reflecting in a particular way one of Man’s visions of Truth.

nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away.

But even if we apply only these vague and ill-defined limits, it becomes plain that many, even the learned in such matters, have used the term ‘fairy-tale’ very carelessly. A glance at those books of recent times that claim to be collections of ‘fairy-stories’ is enough to show that tales about fairies, about the fair family in any of its houses, or even about dwarfs and goblins, are only a small part of their content. That, as we have seen, was to be expected. But these books also contain many tales that do not use, do not even touch upon, Faërie at all; that have in fact no business to be included.

I will give one or two examples of the expurgations I would perform. This will assist the negative side of definition. It will also be found to lead on to the second question: what are the origins of fairy-stories?

The number of collections of fairy-stories is now very great. In English none probably rival either the popularity, or the inclusiveness, or the general merits of the twelve books of twelve colours which we owe to Andrew Lang and to his wife. The first of these appeared more than fifty years ago (1889), and is still in print. Most of its contents pass the test, more or less clearly. I will not analyse them, though an analysis might be interesting, but I note in passing that of the stories in this *Blue Fairy Book* none are primarily about ‘fairies’, few refer to them. Most of the tales are taken from French sources: a just choice in some ways at that time, as perhaps it would be still (though not to my taste, now or in childhood). At any rate, so powerful has been the influence of Charles Perrault, since his *Contes de ma Mère l’Oye* were first Englished in the eighteenth century, and of such other excerpts from the vast storehouse of the *Cabinet des Fees* as have become well known, that still, I suppose, if you asked a man to name at random a typical ‘fairy story’, he would be most likely to name one of these French things: such as *Puss-in-Boots*, *Cinderella*, or *Little Red Riding Hood*. With some people *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* might come first to mind.

But what is to be said of the appearance in the *Blue Fairy Book* of *A Voyage to Lilliput*? I will say this: it is *not* a fairy-story, neither as its author made it, nor as it here appears ‘condensed’ by Miss May Kendall. It has no business in this place. I fear that it was included merely because Lilliputians are small, even diminutive—the only way in which they are at all remarkable. But smallness is in Faërie, as in our world, only an accident. Pygmies are no nearer to fairies than are Patagonians. I do not rule this story out because of its satirical intent: there is satire, sustained or intermittent, in undoubted fairy-stories, and satire may often have been intended in traditional tales where we do not now perceive it. I rule it out, because the vehicle of the satire, brilliant invention though it be, belongs to the class of travellers’ tales. Such tales report many marvels, but they are marvels to be seen in this mortal world in some region of our own time and space; distance alone conceals them. The tales of Gulliver have no more right of entry than the yarns of Baron Munchausen; or than, say, *The First Men in the Moon* or *The Time-Machine*. Indeed, for the Eloi and the Morlocks there would be a better claim than for the Lilliputians. Lilliputians are merely men peered down at, sardonically, from just above the house-tops. Eloi and Morlocks live far away in an abyss of time so deep as to work an enchantment upon them; and if they are descended from ourselves, it may be remembered that an ancient English thinker once derived the *ylfe*, the very elves, through Cain from Adam.⁶ This enchantment of distance, especially of distant time, is weakened only by the preposterous and incredible Time Machine itself. But we see in this example one of the main reasons why the borders of fairy-story are inevitably dubious. The magic of Faerie is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires. One of these desires is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is (as will be seen) to hold communion with other living things. A story may thus deal with the satisfaction of these desires, with or without the operation of either machine or magic, and in proportion as it succeeds it will approach the quality and have the flavour of fairy-story.

Next, after travellers’ tales, I would also exclude, or rule out of order, any

⁶ *Beowulf*, 111-12.

story that uses the machinery of Dream, the dreaming of actual human sleep, to explain the apparent occurrence of its marvels. At the least, even if the reported dream was in other respects in itself a fairy-story, I would condemn the whole as gravely defective: like a good picture in a disfiguring frame. It is true that Dream is not unconnected with Faërie. In dreams strange powers of the mind may be unlocked. In some of them a man may for a space wield the power of Faërie, that power which, even as it conceives the story, causes it to take living form and colour before the eyes. A real dream may indeed sometimes be a fairy-story of almost elvish ease and skill—while it is being dreamed. But if a waking writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder. It is often reported of fairies (truly or lyingly, I do not know) that they are workers of illusion, that they are cheaters of men by ‘fantasy’; but that is quite another matter. That is their affair. Such trickeries happen, at any rate, inside tales in which the fairies are not themselves illusions: behind the fantasy real wills and powers exist, independent of the minds and purposes of men.

It is at any rate essential to a genuine fairy-story, as distinct from the employment of this form for lesser or debased purposes, that it should be presented as ‘true’. The meaning of ‘true’ in this connexion I will consider in a moment. But since the fairy-story deals with ‘marvels’, it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or illusion. The tale itself may, of course, be so good that one can ignore the frame. Or it may be successful and amusing as a dream-story. So are Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* stories, with their dream-frame and dream-transitions. For this (and other reasons) they are not fairy-stories.⁷

There is another type of marvellous tale that I would exclude from the title ‘fairy-story’, again certainly not because I do not like it: namely pure ‘Beast-fable’. I will choose an example from Lang’s *Fairy Books*: *The Monkey’s Heart*, a Swahili tale which is given in the *Lilac Fairy Book*. In this story a wicked shark tricked a monkey into riding on his back, and carried him half-way to his own land, before he revealed the fact

⁷ See Endnote A, p. 78.

that the sultan of that country was sick and needed a monkey's heart to cure his disease. But the monkey outwitted the shark, and induced him to return by convincing him that the heart had been left behind at home, hanging in a bag on a tree.

The beast-fable has, of course, a connexion with fairy-stories. Beasts and birds and other creatures often talk like men in real fairy-stories. In some part (often small) this marvel derives from one of the primal 'desires' that lie near the heart of Faërie: the desire of men to hold communion with other living things. But the speech of beasts in the beast-fable, as developed into a separate branch, has little reference to that desire, and often wholly forgets it. The magical understanding by men of the proper languages of birds and beasts and trees, that is much nearer to the true purposes of Faërie. But in stories in which no human being is concerned; or in which the animals are the heroes and heroines, and men and women, if they appear, are mere adjuncts; and above all those in which the animal form is only a mask upon a human face, a device of the satirist or the preacher, in these we have beast-fable and not fairy-story: whether it be *Reynard the Fox*, or *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, or *Brer Rabbit*, or merely *The Three Little Pigs*. The stories of Beatrix Potter lie near the borders of Faërie, but outside it, I think, for the most part.⁸ Their nearness is due largely to their strong moral element: by which I mean their inherent morality, not any allegorical *significatio*. But *Peter Rabbit*, though it contains a prohibition, and though there are prohibitions in fairyland (as, probably, there are throughout the universe on every plane and in every dimension), remains a beast-fable.

Now *The Monkey's Heart* is also plainly only a beast-fable. I suspect that its inclusion in a 'Fairy Book' is due not primarily to its entertaining quality, but precisely to the monkey's heart supposed to have been left behind in a bag. That was significant to Lang, the student of folk-lore, even though this curious idea is here used only as a joke; for, in this tale, the monkey's heart was in fact quite normal and in his breast. None the less this detail is plainly only a secondary use of an ancient and very widespread folk-lore notion, which does occur in fairy-stories: the notion that the life or strength of a man or creature may reside in some other place or thing; or in some part of the body (especially the heart) that can be detached and hidden in a bag, or under a stone, or in an egg. At one

⁸ *The Tale of Gloucester* perhaps comes nearest. *Mrs. Tiggywinkle* would be as near, but for the hinted dream-explanation. I would also include *The Wind in the Willows* in Beast-fable.

end of recorded folk-lore history this idea was used by George MacDonald in his fairy story *The Giant's Heart*, which derives this central motive (as well as many other details) from well-known traditional tales. At the other end, indeed in what is probably one of the oldest stories in writing, it occurs in *The Tale of the Two Brothers* in the Egyptian D'Orsigny papyrus. There the younger brother says to the elder:

‘I shall enchant my heart, and I shall place it upon the top of the flower of the cedar. Now the cedar will be cut down and my heart will fall to the ground, and thou shalt come to seek for it, even though thou pass seven years in seeking it; but when thou hast found it, put it into a vase of cold water, and in very truth I shall live.’

But that point of interest and such comparisons as these bring us to the brink of the second question: What are the origins of ‘Fairy-stories’? That must, of course, mean: the origin or origins of the fairy elements. To ask what is the origin of stories (however qualified) is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind.

Actually the question: What is the origin of the fairy element? lands us ultimately in the same fundamental inquiry; but there are many elements in fairy-stories (such as this detachable heart, or swan-robcs, magic rings, arbitrary prohibitions, wicked stepmothers, and even fairies themselves) that can be studied without tackling this main question. Such studies are, however, scientific (at least in intent); they are the pursuit of folklorists or anthropologists: that is of people using the stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information, about matters in which they are interested. A perfectly legitimate procedure in itself—ignorance or forgetfulness of the nature of a story (as a thing told in its entirety) has often led such inquirers into strange judgements. To investigators of this sort recurring similarities (such as this matter of the heart) seem specially important. So much so that students of folk-lore are apt to get off their own proper track, or to express themselves in a misleading ‘shorthand’: misleading in particular, if it gets out of their monographs into books about literature. They are inclined to say that any two stories that are built round the same folk-lore motive, or are made up of a generally similar combination of such motives, are ‘the same stories’. We read that *Beowulf* ‘is only a version of *Dat Erdmänneken*’; that ‘*The Black Bull of Norrway* is *Beauty and the Beast*’, or ‘is the same story as *Eros and Psyche*’; that

the Norse *Mastermaid* (or the Gaelic *Battle of the Birds* and its many congeners and variants) is ‘the same story as the Greek tale of Jason and Medea’.

Statements of that kind may express (in undue abbreviation) some element of truth; but they are not true in a fairy-story sense, they are not true in art or literature. It is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is not the same as Layamon’s story in his *Brut*. Or to take the extreme case of *Red Riding Hood*: it is of merely secondary interest that the re-told versions of this story, in which the little girl is saved by wood-cutters, is directly derived from Perrault’s story in which she was eaten by the wolf. The really important thing is that the later version has a happy ending (more or less, and if we do not mourn the grandmother overmuch), and that Perrault’s version had not. And that is a very profound difference, to which I shall return.

Of course, I do not deny, for I feel strongly, the fascination of the desire to unravel the intricately knotted and ramified history of the branches on the Tree of Tales. It is closely connected with the philologists’ study of the tangled skein of Language, of which I know some small pieces. But even with regard to language it seems to me that the essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living moment is both more important to seize and far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history. So with regard to fairy stories, I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them. In Dasent’s words I would say: ‘We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled.’⁹ Though, oddly enough, Dasent by ‘the soup’ meant a mishmash of bogus pre-history founded on the early surmises of Comparative Philology; and by ‘desire to see the bones’ he meant a demand to see the workings and the proofs that led to these theories. By ‘the soup’ I mean the story as it is served up by its author or teller, and by ‘the bones’ its sources or material—

⁹ *Popular Tales from the Norse*, p. xviii.

even when (by rare luck) those can be with certainty discovered. But I do not, of course, forbid criticism of the soup as soup.

I shall therefore pass lightly over the question of origins. I am too unlearned to deal with it in any other way; but it is the least important of the three questions for my purpose, and a few remarks will suffice. It is plain enough that fairy-stories (in wider or in narrower sense) are very ancient indeed. Related things appear in very early records; and they are found universally, wherever there is language. We are therefore obviously confronted with a variant of the problem that the archaeologist encounters, or the comparative philologist: with the debate between *independent evolution* (or rather *invention*) of the similar; *inheritance* from a common ancestry; and *diffusion* at various times from one or more centres. Most debates depend on an attempt (by one or both sides) at over-simplification; and I do not suppose that this debate is an exception. The history of fairy-stories is probably more complex than the physical history of the human race, and as complex as the history of human language. All three things: independent invention, inheritance, and diffusion, have evidently played their part in producing the intricate web of Story. It is now beyond all skill but that of the elves to unravel it.¹⁰ Of these three *invention* is the most important and fundamental, and so (not surprisingly) also the most mysterious. To an inventor, that is to a story-maker, the other two must in the end lead back. *Diffusion* (borrowing in space), whether of an artefact or a story, only refers the problem of origin elsewhere. At the centre of the supposed diffusion there is a place where once an inventor lived. Similarly with *inheritance* (borrowing in time): in this way we arrive at last only at an ancestral inventor. While if we believe that sometimes there occurred the independent striking out of similar ideas and themes or devices, we simply multiply the ancestral inventor but do not in that way the more clearly understand his gift.

Philology has been dethroned from the high place it once had in this court of inquiry. Max Muller's view of mythology as a 'disease of language' can be

¹⁰ Except in particular cases; or in a few occasional details. It is indeed easier to unravel a single *thread*—an incident, a name, a motive—than to trace the history of any *picture* defined by many threads. For with the picture in the tapestry a new element has come in: the picture is greater than, and not explained by, the sum of the component threads. Therein lies the inherent weakness of the analytic (or 'scientific') method: it finds out much about things that occur in stories, but little or nothing about their effect in any given story.

abandoned without regret. Mythology is not a disease at all, though it may like all human things become diseased. You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the mind. It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology. But Language cannot, all the same, be dismissed. The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval. The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalization and abstraction, sees not only *green-grass*, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is *green* as well as being *grass*. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent. And that is not surprising: such incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives, a part of speech in a mythical grammar. The mind that thought *of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift*, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power—upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such 'fantasy', as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator.

An essential power of Faërie is thus the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy'. Not all are beautiful or even wholesome, not at any rate the fantasies of fallen Man. And he has stained the elves who have this power (in verity or fable) with his own stain. This aspect of 'mythology'—sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world—is, I think, too little considered. Is that because it is seen rather in Faërie than upon Olympus? Because it is thought to belong to the 'lower mythology' rather than to the 'higher'?

There has been much debate concerning the relations of these things, *of folk-tale* and *myth*; but, even if there had been no debate, the question would require some notice in any consideration of origins, however brief.

At one time it was a dominant view that all such matter was derived from ‘nature-myths’. The Olympians were *personifications* of the sun, of dawn, of night, and so on, and all the stories told about them were originally *myths* (*allegories* would have been a better word) of the greater elemental changes and processes of nature. Epic, heroic legend, saga, then localized these stories in real places and humanized them by attributing them to ancestral heroes, mightier than men and yet already men. And finally these legends, dwindling down, became folk-tales, *Märchen*, fairy-stories—nursery-tales.

That would seem to be the truth almost upside down. The nearer the so-called ‘nature-myth’, or allegory of the large processes of nature, is to its supposed archetype, the less interesting it is, and indeed the less is it of a myth capable of throwing any illumination whatever on the world. Let us assume for the moment, as this theory assumes, that nothing actually exists corresponding to the ‘gods’ of mythology: no personalities, only astronomical or meteorological objects. Then these natural objects can only be arrayed with a personal significance and glory by a gift, the gift of a person, of a man. Personality can only be derived from a person. The gods may derive their colour and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was Man who obtained these for them, abstracted them from sun and moon and cloud; their personality they get direct from him; the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon them they receive through him from the invisible world, the Supernatural. There is no fundamental distinction between the higher and lower mythologies. Their peoples live, if they live at all, by the same life, just as in the mortal world do kings and peasants.

Let us take what looks like a clear case of Olympian nature-myth : the Norse god Thórr. His name is Thunder, of which Thórr is the Norse form; and it is not difficult to interpret his hammer, Miöllnir, as lightning. Yet Thórr has (as far as our late records go) a very marked character, or personality, which cannot be found in thunder or in lightning, even though some details can, as it were, be related to

these natural phenomena: for instance, his red beard, his loud voice and violent temper, his blundering and smashing strength. None the less it is asking a question without much meaning, if we inquire: Which came first, nature-allegories about personalized thunder in the mountains, splitting rocks and trees; or stories about an irascible, not very clever, red-beard farmer, of a strength beyond common measure, a person (in all but mere stature) very like the Northern farmers, the *bændr* by whom Thórr was chiefly beloved? To a picture of such a man Thórr may be held to have ‘dwindled’, or from it the god may be held to have been enlarged. But I doubt whether either view is right—not by itself, not if you insist that one of these things must precede the other. It is more reasonable to suppose that the farmer popped up in the very moment when Thunder got a voice and face; that there was a distant growl of thunder in the hills every time a story-teller heard a farmer in a rage.

Thórr must, of course, be reckoned a member of the higher aristocracy of mythology: one of the rulers of the world. Yet the tale that is told of him in *Thrymskvitha* (in the Elder Edda) is certainly just a fairy-story. It is old, as far as Norse poems go, but that is not far back (say A.D. 900 or a little earlier, in this case). But there is no real reason for supposing that this tale is ‘unprimitive’, at any rate in quality: that is, because it is of folk-tale kind and not very dignified. If we could go backwards in time, the fairy-story might be found to change in details, or to give way to other tales. But there would always be a ‘fairy-tale’ as long as there was any Thórr. When the fairy-tale ceased, there would be just thunder, which no human ear had yet heard.

Something really ‘higher’ is occasionally glimpsed in mythology: Divinity, the right to power (as distinct from its possession), the due of worship; in fact ‘religion’. Andrew Lang said, and is by some still commended for saying,¹¹ that mythology and religion (in the strict sense of that word) are two distinct things that have become inextricably entangled, though mythology is in itself almost devoid of religious significance.¹²

¹¹ For example, by Christopher Dawson in *Progress and Religion*.

¹² This is borne out by the more careful and sympathetic study of ‘primitive’ peoples: that is, peoples still living in an inherited paganism, who are not, as we say, civilized. The hasty survey finds only their wilder tales; a closer examination finds their cosmological myths; only patience and inner knowledge discover

Yet these things have in fact become entangled—or maybe they were sundered long ago and have since groped slowly, through a labyrinth of error, through confusion, back towards re-fusion. Even fairy-stories as a whole have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man. The essential face of Faërie is the middle one, the Magical. But the degree in which the others appear (if at all) is variable, and may be decided by the individual story-teller. The Magical, the fairy-story, may be used as a *Mirour de l'Omme*; and it may (but not so easily) be made a vehicle of Mystery. This at least is what George MacDonald attempted, achieving stories of power and beauty when he succeeded, as in *The Golden Key* (which he called a fairy-tale); and even when he partly failed, as in *Lilith* (which he called a romance).

For a moment let us return to the ‘Soup’ that I mentioned above. Speaking of the history of stories and especially of fairy-stories we may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty. For this reason, to take a casual example, the fact that a story resembling the one known as *The Goosegirl* (*Die Gänsemagd* in Grimm) is told in the thirteenth century of Bertha Broadfoot, mother of Charlemagne, really proves nothing either way: neither that the story was (in the thirteenth century) descending from Olympus or Asgard by way of an already legendary king of old, on its way to become a *Hausmärchen*; nor that it was on its way up. The story is found to be widespread, unattached to the mother of Charlemagne or to any historical character. From this fact by itself we certainly cannot deduce that it is not true of Charlemagne’s mother, though that is the kind of deduction that is most frequently made from that kind of evidence. The opinion that the story is not true of Bertha Broadfoot must be founded on something else: on features in the story which the critic’s philosophy does not allow to be possible in ‘real life’, so that he would actually disbelieve the tale, even if it were found nowhere else; or on the existence of good historical evidence that Bertha’s actual

their philosophy and religion: the truly worshipful, of which the ‘gods’ are not necessarily an embodiment at all, or only in a variable measure (often decided by the individual).

life was quite different, so that he would disbelieve the tale, even if his philosophy allowed that it was perfectly possible in 'real life'. No one, I fancy, would discredit a story that the Archbishop of Canterbury slipped on a banana skin merely because he found that a similar comic mishap had been reported of many people, and especially of elderly gentlemen of dignity. He might disbelieve the story, if he discovered that in it an angel (or even a fairy) had warned the archbishop that he would slip if he wore gaiters on a Friday. He might also disbelieve the story, if it was stated to have occurred in the period between, say, 1940 and 1945. So much for that. It is an obvious point, and it has been made before; but I venture to make it again (although it is a little beside my present purpose), for it is constantly neglected by those who concern themselves with the origins of tales.

But what of the banana skin? Our business with it really only begins when it has been rejected by historians. It is more useful when it has been thrown away. The historian would be likely to say that the banana-skin story 'became attached to the Archbishop', as he does say on fair evidence that 'the Goosegirl *Märchen* became attached to Bertha.' That way of putting it is harmless enough, in what is commonly known as 'history'. But is it really a good description of what is going on and has gone on in the history of story-making? I do not think so. I think it would be nearer the truth to say that the archbishop became attached to the banana skin, or that Bertha was turned into the Goosegirl. Better still: I would say that Charlemagne's mother and the Archbishop were put into the Pot, in fact got into the Soup. They were just new bits added to the stock. A considerable honour, for in that soup were many things older, more potent, more beautiful, comic, or terrible than they were in themselves (considered simply as figures of history).

It seems fairly plain that Arthur, once historical (but perhaps as such not of great importance), was also put into the Pot. There he was boiled for a long time, together with many other older figures and devices, of mythology and Faërie, and even some other stray bones of history (such as Alfred's defence against the Danes), until he emerged as a King of Faërie. The situation is similar in the great Northern 'Arthurian' court of the Shield-Kings of Denmark, the *Scyldingas* of ancient English tradition. King Hrothgar and his family have many manifest marks of true

history, far more than Arthur; yet even in the older (English) accounts of them they are associated with many figures and events of fairy-story: they have been in the Pot. But I refer now to the remnants of the oldest recorded English tales of Faërie (or its borders), in spite of the fact that they are little known in England, not to discuss the turning of the bear-boy into the knight Beowulf, or to explain the intrusion of the ogre Grendel into the royal hall of Hrothgar. I wish to point to something else that these traditions contain: a singularly suggestive example of the relation of the 'fairy-tale element' to gods and kings and nameless men, illustrating (I believe) the view that this element does not rise or fall, but is there, in the Cauldron of Story, waiting for the great figures of Myth and History, and for the yet nameless He or She, waiting for the moment when they are cast into the simmering stew, one by one or all together, without consideration of rank or precedence.

The great enemy of King Hrothgar was Froda, King of the Heathobards. Yet of Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru we hear echoes of a strange tale—not a usual one in Northern heroic legend: the son of the enemy of her house, Ingeld son of Froda, fell in love with her and wedded her, disastrously. But that is extremely interesting and significant. In the background of the ancient feud looms the figure of that god whom the Norsemen called Frey (the Lord) or Yngvi-frey, and the Angles called Ing: a god of the ancient Northern mythology (and religion) of Fertility and Corn. The enmity of the royal houses was connected with the sacred site of a cult of that religion. Ingeld and his father bear names belonging to it. Freawaru herself is named 'Protection of the Lord (of Frey)'. Yet one of the chief things told later (in Old Icelandic) about Frey is the story in which he falls in love from afar with the daughter of the enemies of the gods, Gerdr, daughter of the giant Gymir, and weds her. Does this prove that Ingeld and Freawaru, or their love, are 'merely mythical'? I think not. History often resembles 'Myth', because they are both ultimately of the same stuff. If indeed Ingeld and Freawaru never lived, or at least never loved, then it is ultimately from nameless man and woman that they get their tale, or rather into whose tale they have entered. They have been put into the Cauldron, where so many potent things lie simmering agelong on the fire, among them Love-at-first-sight. So too of the god. If no young man had ever fallen in love by chance meeting with a maiden, and found old

enmities to stand between him and his love, then the god Frey would never have seen Gerdr the giant's daughter from the high-seat of Odin. But if we speak of a Cauldron, we must not wholly forget the Cooks. There are many things in the Cauldron, but the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly. Their selection is important. The gods are after all gods, and it is a matter of some moment what stories are told of them. So we must freely admit that a tale of love is more likely to be told of a prince in history, indeed is more likely actually to happen in an historical family whose traditions are those of golden Frey and the Vanir, rather than those of Odin the Goth, the Necromancer, glutter of the crows, Lord of the Slain. Small wonder that *spell* means both a story told, and a formula of power over living men.

* * *

But when we have done all that research—collection and comparison of the tales of many lands—can do; when we have explained many of the elements commonly found embedded in fairy-stories (such as stepmothers, enchanted bears and bulls, cannibal witches, taboos on names, and the like) as relics of ancient customs once practised in daily life, or of beliefs once held as beliefs and not as ‘fancies’—there remains still a point too often forgotten: that is, the effect produced *now* by these old things in the stories as they are.

For one thing they are now *old*, and antiquity has an appeal in itself. The beauty and horror of *The Juniper Tree* (*Von dem Machandelboom*), with its exquisite and tragic beginning, the abominable cannibal stew, the gruesome bones, the gay and vengeful bird-spirit coming out of a mist that rose from the tree, has remained with me since childhood; and yet always the chief flavour of that tale lingering in the memory was not beauty or horror, but distance and a great abyss of time, not measurable even by *zwei tusend Jahr*. Without the stew and the bones—which children are now too often spared in mollified versions of Grimm¹³—that vision would largely have been lost. I do not think I was harmed by the horror *in the fairy-tale setting*, out of whatever dark beliefs and practices of the past it may have come. Such stories have now a mythical or total (unanalysable) effect, an effect quite independent of the findings of Comparative Folk-lore, and one

¹³ They should not be spared it—unless they are spared the whole story until their digestions are stronger.

which it cannot spoil or explain; they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe.

If we pause, not merely to note that such old elements have been preserved, but to think *how* they have been preserved, we must conclude, I think, that it has happened, often if not always, precisely because of this literary effect. It cannot have been we, or even the brothers Grimm, that first felt it. Fairy-stories are by no means rocky matrices out of which the fossils cannot be prised except by an expert geologist. The ancient elements can be knocked out, or forgotten and dropped out, or replaced by other ingredients with the greatest ease: as any comparison of a story with closely related variants will show. The things that are there must often have been retained (or inserted) because the oral narrators, instinctively or consciously, felt their literary ‘significance’.¹⁴ Even where a prohibition in a fairy-story is guessed to be derived from some taboo once practised long ago, it has probably been preserved in the later stages of the tale’s history because of the great mythical significance of prohibition. A sense of that significance may indeed have lain behind some of the taboos themselves. Thou shalt not—or else thou shalt depart beggared into endless regret. The gentlest ‘nursery-tales’ know it. Even Peter Rabbit was forbidden a garden, lost his blue coat, and took sick. The Locked Door stands as an eternal Temptation.

And with that I think we come to the children, and with them to the last and most important of the three questions: what, if any, are the values and functions of fairy-stories *now*? It is often now assumed that children are the natural or the specially appropriate audience for fairy-stories. In describing a fairy-story which they think adults might possibly read for their own entertainment, reviewers frequently indulge in such waggeries as: ‘this book is for children from the ages of six to sixty’. But I have never yet seen the puff of a new motor-model that began thus: ‘this toy will amuse infants from seventeen to seventy’; though that to my mind would be much more appropriate. Is there any *essential* connexion between children and fairy-stories? Is there any call for comment, if an adult reads them for himself? *Reads* them as tales, that is, not *studies* them as curios. Adults are allowed to collect and study anything, even old theatre-programmes or paper

¹⁴ See Endnote B, p. 79.

bags.

Among those who still have enough wisdom not to think fairy-stories pernicious, the common opinion seems to be that there is a natural connexion between the minds of children and fairy-stories, of the same order as the connexion between children's bodies and milk. I think this is an error; at best an error of false sentiment, and one that is therefore most often made by those who, for whatever private reason (such as childlessness), tend to think of children as a special kind of creature, almost a different race, rather than as normal, if immature, members of a particular family, and of the human family at large.

Actually, the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the 'nursery', as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused.¹⁵ It is not the choice of the children which decides this. Children as a class—except in a common lack of experience they are not one—neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better, than adults do; and no more than they like many other things. They are young and growing, and normally have keen appetites, so the fairy-stories as a rule go down well enough. But in fact only some children, and some adults, have any special taste for them; and when they have it, it is not exclusive, nor even necessarily dominant. It is a taste, too, that would not appear, I think, very early in childhood without artificial stimulus; it is certainly one that does not decrease but increases with age, if it is innate.

It is true that in recent times fairy-stories have usually been written or 'adapted' for children. But so may music be, or verse, or novels, or history, or scientific manuals. It is a dangerous process, even when it is necessary. It is indeed only saved from disaster by the fact that the arts and sciences are not as a whole relegated to the nursery; the nursery and schoolroom are merely given such tastes and glimpses of the adult thing as seem fit for them in adult opinion (often much mistaken). Any one of these things would,

¹⁵ In the case of stories and other nursery lore, there is also another factor. Wealthier families employed women to look after their children, and the stories were provided by these nurses, who were sometimes in touch with rustic and traditional lore forgotten by their 'betters'. It is long since this source dried up, at any rate in England; but it once had some importance. But again there is no proof of the special fitness of children as recipients of this vanishing 'folk-lore'. The nurses might just as well (or better) have been left to choose the pictures and furniture.

if left altogether in the nursery, become gravely impaired. So would a beautiful table, a good picture, or a useful machine (such as a microscope), be defaced or broken, if it were left long unregarded in a schoolroom. Fairy-stories banished in this way, cut off from a full adult art, would in the end be ruined; indeed in so far as they have been so banished, they have been ruined. All children's books are on a strict judgement poor books. Books written entirely for children are poor even as children's books.¹⁶

The value of fairy-stories is thus not, in my opinion, to be found by considering children in particular. Collections of fairy-stories are, in fact, by nature attics and lumber-rooms, only by temporary and local custom play-rooms. Their contents are disordered, and often battered, a jumble of different dates, purposes, and tastes; but among them may occasionally be found a thing of permanent virtue: an old work of art, not too much damaged, that only stupidity would ever have stuffed away.

Andrew Lang's *Fairy Books* are not, perhaps, lumber-rooms. They are more like stalls in a rummage-sale. Someone with a duster and a fair eye for things that retain some value has been round the attics and box-rooms. His collections are largely a by-product of his adult study of mythology and folk-lore; but they were made into and presented as books for children. Some of the reasons that Lang gave are worth considering.

The introduction to the first of the series speaks of 'children to whom and for whom they are told'. 'They represent', he says, 'the young age of man true to his early loves, and have his unblunted edge of belief, a fresh appetite for marvels.' "'Is it true?'" he says, 'is the great question children ask.'

I suspect that *belief* and *appetite for marvels* are here regarded as identical or as closely related. They are radically different, though the appetite for marvels is not at once or at first differentiated by a growing human mind from its general appetite. It seems fairly clear that Lang was using belief in its ordinary sense: belief that a thing exists or can happen in the real (primary) world. If so, then I fear that Lang's words, stripped of sentiment, can only imply that the teller of marvellous tales to children must, or may, or at any rate does trade on their *credulity*, on the lack of experience which makes it less easy for children to distinguish fact from fiction in particular cases, though the distinction in itself is fundamental to the sane human mind, and to fairy-stories.

¹⁶ See Endnote C, p. 80.

Children are capable, of course, of *literary belief*, when the story-maker's art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called 'willing suspension of disbelief'. But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed.

A real enthusiast for cricket is in the enchanted state: Secondary Belief. I, when I watch a match, am on the lower level. I can achieve (more or less) willing suspension of disbelief, when I am held there and supported by some other motive that will keep away boredom: for instance, a wild, heraldic, preference for dark blue rather than light. This suspension of disbelief may thus be a somewhat tired, shabby, or sentimental state of mind, and so lean to the 'adult'. I fancy it is often the state of adults in the presence of a fairy-story. They are held there and supported by sentiment (memories of childhood, or notions of what childhood ought to be like); they think they ought to like the tale. But if they really liked it, for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe—in this sense.

Now if Lang had meant anything like this there might have been some truth in his words. It may be argued that it is easier to work the spell with children. Perhaps it is, though I am not sure of this. The appearance that it is so is often, I think, an adult illusion produced by children's humility, their lack of critical experience and vocabulary, and their voracity (proper to their rapid growth). They like or try to like what is given to them: if they do not like it, they cannot well express their dislike or give reasons for it (and so may conceal it); and they like a great mass of different things indiscriminately, without troubling to analyse the planes of their belief. In any case I doubt if this potion—

the enchantment of the effective fairy-story—is really one of the kind that becomes ‘blunted’ by use, less potent after repeated draughts.

“‘Is it true?’ is the great question children ask’ Lang said. They do ask that question, I know; and it is not one to be rashly or idly answered.¹⁷ But that question is hardly evidence of ‘unblunted belief’, or even of the desire for it. Most often it proceeds from the child’s desire to know which kind of literature he is faced with. Children’s knowledge of the world is often so small that they cannot judge, off-hand and without help, between the fantastic, the strange (that is rare or remote facts), the nonsensical, and the merely ‘grown-up’ (that is ordinary things of their parents’ world, much of which still remains unexplored). But they recognize the different classes, and may like all of them at times. Of course the borders between them are often fluctuating or confused; but that is not only true for children. We all know the differences in kind, but we are not always sure how to place anything that we hear. A child may well believe a report that there are ogres in the next county; many grown-up persons find it easy to believe in another country; and as for another planet, very few adults seem able to imagine it as peopled, if at all, by anything but monsters of iniquity.

Now I was one of the children whom Andrew Lang was addressing—I was born at about the same time as the *Green Fairy Book*—the children for whom he seemed to think that fairy-stories were the equivalent of the adult novel, and of whom he said: ‘Their taste remains like the taste of their naked ancestors thousands of years ago; and they seem to like fairytales better than history, poetry, geography, or arithmetic.’¹⁸ But do we really know much about those ‘naked ancestors’, except that they certainly were not naked? Our fairy-stories, however old certain elements in them may be, are certainly not the same as theirs. Yet if it is assumed that we have fairy-stories because they did, then probably we have history, geography, poetry, and arithmetic because they liked these things too, as far as they could get them, and in so far as they had yet separated the many branches of their general interest in everything.

And as for children of the present day, Lang’s description does not fit my own

¹⁷ Far more often they have asked me: ‘Was he good? Was he wicked?’ That is, they were more concerned to get the Right side and the Wrong side clear. For that is a question equally important in History and Faërie.

¹⁸ Preface to the *Violet Fairy Book*.

memories, or my experience of children. Lang may have been mistaken about the children he knew, but if he was not, then at any rate children differ considerably, even within the narrow borders of Britain, and such generalizations which treat them as a class (disregarding their individual talents, and the influences of the countryside they live in, and their upbringing) are delusory. I had no special childish 'wish to believe'. I wanted to know. Belief depended on the way in which stories were presented to me, by older people, or by the authors, or on the inherent tone and quality of the tale. But at no time can I remember that the enjoyment of a story was dependent on belief that such things could happen, or had happened, in 'real life'. Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded. It is not necessary to be more explicit here, for I hope to say something later about this desire, a complex of many ingredients, some universal, some particular to modern men (including modern children), or even to certain kinds of men. I had no desire to have either dreams or adventures like *Alice*, and the account of them merely amused me. I had very little desire to look for buried treasure or fight pirates, and *Treasure Island* left me cool. Red Indians were better: there were bows and arrows (I had and have a wholly unsatisfied desire to shoot well with a bow), and strange languages, and glimpses of an archaic mode of life, and, above all, forests in such stories. But the land of Merlin and Arthur was better than these, and best of all the nameless North of Sigurd of the Völsungs, and the prince of all dragons. Such lands were pre-eminently desirable. I never imagined that the dragon was of the same order as the horse. And that was not solely because I saw horses daily, but never even the footprint of a worm.¹⁹ The dragon had the trade-mark *Of Faërie* written plain upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was an Other-world. Fantasy, the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds, was the heart of the desire of Faërie. I desired dragons with a profound desire. Of course, I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighbourhood, intruding into my relatively safe world, in which it was, for instance, possible to read stories in peace of mind, free from fear.²⁰ But the world that contained even the

¹⁹ See Endnote D, p. 81.

²⁰ This is, naturally, often enough what children mean when they ask: 'Is it true?' They mean: 'I like this, but is it contemporary? Am I safe in my bed?' The answer: "There is certainly no dragon in England today" is all that they want to hear.

imagination of Fáfnir was richer and more beautiful, at whatever cost of peril. The dweller in the quiet and fertile plains may hear of the tormented hills and the unharvested sea and long for them in his heart. For the heart is hard though the body be soft.

All the same, important as I now perceive the fairy-story element in early reading to have been, speaking for myself as a child, I can only say that a liking for fairy-stories was not a dominant characteristic of early taste. A real taste for them awoke after 'nursery' days, and after the years, few but long-seeming, between learning to read and going to school. In that (I nearly wrote 'happy' or 'golden', it was really a sad and troublous) time I liked many other things as well, or better: such as history, astronomy, botany, grammar, and etymology. I agreed with Lang's generalized 'children' not at all in principle, and only in some points by accident: I was, for instance, insensitive to poetry, and skipped it if it came in tales. Poetry I discovered much later in Latin and Greek, and especially through being made to try and translate English verse into classical verse. A real taste for fairy-stories was awakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war.

I have said, perhaps, more than enough on this point. At least it will be plain that in my opinion fairy-stories should not be *specially* associated with children. They are associated with them: naturally, because children are human and fairy-stories are a natural human taste (though not necessarily a universal one); accidentally, because fairy-stories are a large part of the literary lumber that in latter-day Europe has been stuffed away in attics; unnaturally, because of erroneous sentiment about children, a sentiment that seems to increase with the decline in children.

It is true that the age of childhood-sentiment has produced some delightful books (especially charming, however, to adults) of the fairy kind or near to it; but it has also produced a dreadful undergrowth of stories written or adapted to what was or is conceived to be the measure of children's minds and needs. The old stories are mollified or bowdlerized, instead of being reserved; the imitations are often merely silly, Pigwiggenny without even the intrigue; or patronizing; or (deadliest of all) covertly sniggering, with an eye on the other grown-ups present. I

will not accuse Andrew Lang of sniggering, but certainly he smiled to himself, and certainly too often he had an eye on the faces of other clever people over the heads of his child-audience—to the very grave detriment of the *Chronicles of Pantouflia*.

Dasent replied with vigour and justice to the prudish critics of his translations from Norse popular tales. Yet he committed the astonishing folly of particularly *forbidding* children to read the last two in his collection. That a man could study fairy-stories and not learn better than that seems almost incredible. But neither criticism, rejoinder, nor prohibition would have been necessary if children had not unnecessarily been regarded as the inevitable readers of the book.

I do not deny that there is a truth in Andrew Lang's words (sentimental though they may sound): 'He who would enter into the Kingdom of Faërie should have the heart of a little child.' For that possession is necessary to all high adventure, into kingdoms both less and far greater than Faërie. But humility and innocence—these things 'the heart of a child' must mean in such a context—do not necessarily imply an uncritical wonder, nor indeed an uncritical tenderness. Chesterton once remarked that the children in whose company he saw Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* were dissatisfied 'because it did not end with a Day of Judgement, and it was not revealed to the hero and the heroine that the Dog had been faithful and the Cat faithless'. 'For children', he says, 'are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.'

Andrew Lang was confused on this point. He was at pains to defend the slaying of the Yellow Dwarf by Prince Ricardo in one of his own fairy-stories. 'I hate cruelty', he said, '... but that was in fair fight, sword in hand, and the dwarf, peace to his ashes! died in harness.' Yet it is not clear that 'fair fight' is less cruel than 'fair judgement'; or that piercing a dwarf with a sword is more just than the execution of wicked kings and evil stepmothers—which Lang abjures: he sends the criminals (as he boasts) to retirement on ample pensions. That is mercy untempered by justice. It is true that this plea was not addressed to children but to parents and guardians, to whom Lang was recommending his own *Prince Prigio* and

Prince Ricardo as suitable for their charges.²¹ It is parents and guardians who have classified fairy-stories as *Juvenilia*. And this is a small sample of the falsification of values that results.

If we use *child* in a good sense (it has also legitimately a bad one) we must not allow that to push us into the sentimentality of only using *adult* or *grown-up* in a bad sense (it has also legitimately a good one). The process of growing older is not necessarily allied to growing wickeder, though the two do often happen together. Children are meant to grow up, and not to become Peter Pans. Not to lose innocence and wonder, but to proceed on the appointed journey: that journey upon which it is certainly not better to travel hopefully than to arrive, though we must travel hopefully if we are to arrive. But it is one of the lessons of fairy-stories (if we can speak of the lessons of things that do not lecture) that on callow, lumpish, and selfish youth peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death can bestow dignity, and even sometimes wisdom.

Let us not divide the human race into Eloi and Morlocks: pretty children—‘elves’ as the eighteenth century often idiotically called them—with their fairy-tales (carefully pruned), and dark Morlocks tending their machines. If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults. They will, of course, put more in and get more out than children can. Then, as a branch of a genuine art, children may hope to get fairy-stories fit for them to read and yet within their measure; as they may hope to get suitable introductions to poetry, history, and the sciences.

Very well, then. If adults are to read fairy-stories as a natural branch of literature—neither playing at being children, nor pretending to be choosing for children, nor being boys who would not grow up—what are the values and functions of this kind? That is, I think, the last and most important question. I have already hinted at some of my answers. First of all: if written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms. But fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation, all things of which children have, as a rule,

²¹ Preface to the *Lilac Fairy Book*.

less need than older people. Most of them are nowadays very commonly considered to be bad for anybody. I will consider them briefly, and will begin with *Fantasy*.

The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present. The faculty of conceiving the images is (or was) naturally called Imagination. But in recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination has often been held to be something higher than the mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy); an attempt is thus made to restrict, I should say misapply, Imagination to 'the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality'.

Ridiculous though it may be for one so ill-instructed to have an opinion in this critical matter, I venture to think the verbal distinction philologically inappropriate, and the analysis inaccurate. The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind. The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality',²² is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. For my present purpose I require a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story. I propose, therefore, to arrogate to myself the powers of Humpty-Dumpty, and to use Fantasy for this purpose: in a sense, that is, which combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of 'unreality' (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed 'fact', in short of the fantastic. I am thus not only aware but glad of the etymological and semantic connexions of *fantasy* with *fantastic*: with images of things that are not only 'not actually present', but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there. But while admitting that, I do not assent to the depreciative tone. That the images are of things not in the primary world

²² That is: which commands or induces Secondary Belief.

(if that indeed is possible) is a virtue not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.

Fantasy, of course, starts out with an advantage: arresting strangeness. But that advantage has been turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute. Many people dislike being ‘arrested’. They dislike any meddling with the Primary World, or such small glimpses of it as are familiar to them. They, therefore, stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming, in which there is no Art;²³ and with mental disorders, in which there is not even control: with delusion and hallucination.

But the error or malice, engendered by disquiet and consequent dislike, is not the only cause of this confusion. Fantasy has also an essential drawback: it is difficult to achieve. Fantasy may be, as I think, not less but more sub-creative; but at any rate it is found in practice that ‘the inner consistency of reality’ is more difficult to produce the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World. It is easier to produce this kind of ‘reality’ with more ‘sober’ material. Fantasy thus, too often, remains undeveloped; it is and has been used frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains merely ‘fanciful’. Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say *the green sun*. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough—though it may already be a more potent thing than many a ‘thumbnail sketch’ or ‘transcript of life’ that receives literary praise.

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode.

In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature. In painting, for instance, the visible presentation of the fantastic image is technically

²³ This is not true of all dreams. In some Fantasy seem to take a part. But this is exceptional. Fantasy is a rational not an irrational activity.

too easy; the hand tends to outrun the mind, even to overthrow it.²⁴ Silliness or morbidity are frequent results. It is a misfortune that Drama, an art fundamentally distinct from Literature, should so commonly be considered together with it, or as a branch of it. Among these misfortunes we may reckon the depreciation of Fantasy. For in part at least this depreciation is due to the natural desire of critics to cry up the forms of literature or 'imagination' that they themselves, innately or by training, prefer. And criticism in a country that has produced so great a Drama, and possesses the works of William Shakespeare, tends to be far too dramatic. But Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted. Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy. This is, I think, well illustrated by the failure of the bastard form, pantomime. The nearer it is to 'dramatized fairy-story' the worse it is. It is only tolerable when the plot and its fantasy are reduced to a mere vestigiary framework for farce, and no 'belief' of any kind in any part of the performance is required or expected of anybody. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that the producers of drama have to, or try to, work with mechanism to represent Fantasy or Magic. I once saw a so-called 'children's pantomime', the straight story of *Puss-in-Boots*, with even the metamorphosis of the ogre into a mouse. Had this been mechanically successful it would either have terrified the spectators or else have been just a turn of high-class conjuring. As it was, though done with some ingenuity of lighting, disbelief had not so much to be suspended as hung, drawn, and quartered.

In *Macbeth*, when it is read, I find the witches tolerable: they have a narrative function and some hint of dark significance; though they are vulgarized, poor things of their kind. They are almost intolerable in the play. They would be quite intolerable, if I were not fortified by some memory of them as they are in the story as read. I am told that I should feel differently if I had the mind of the period, with its witch-hunts and witch-trials. But that is to say: if I regarded the witches as possible, indeed likely, in the Primary World; in other words, if they ceased to be

²⁴ See Endnote E, p. 81.

‘Fantasy’. That argument concedes the point. To be dissolved, or to be degraded, is the likely fate of Fantasy when a dramatist tries to use it, even such a dramatist as Shakespeare. *Macbeth* is indeed a work by a playwright who ought, at least on this occasion, to have written a story, if he had the skill or patience for that art.

A reason, more important, I think, than the inadequacy of stage-effects, is this: Drama has, of its very nature, already attempted a kind of bogus, or shall I say at least substitute, magic: *the visible and audible presentation of imaginary men in a story*. That is in itself an attempt to counterfeit the magician’s wand. To introduce, even with mechanical success, into this quasi-magical secondary world a further fantasy or magic is to demand, as it were, an inner or tertiary world. It is a world too much. To make such a thing may not be impossible. I have never seen it done with success. But at least it cannot be claimed as the proper mode of drama, in which walking and talking people have been found to be the natural instruments of Art and illusion.²⁵

For this precise reason—that the characters, and even the scenes, are in Drama not imagined but actually beheld—Drama is, even though it uses a similar material (words, verse, plot), an art fundamentally different from narrative art. Thus, if you prefer Drama to Literature (as many literary critics plainly do), or form your critical theories primarily from dramatic critics, or even from Drama, you are apt to misunderstand pure story-making, and to constrain it to the limitations of stage-plays. You are, for instance, likely to prefer characters, even the basest and dullest, to things. Very little about trees as trees can be got into a play.

Now ‘Faërian Drama’—those plays which according to abundant records the elves have often presented to men—can produce Fantasy with a realism and immediacy beyond the compass of any human mechanism. As a result their usual effect (upon a man) is to go beyond Secondary Belief. If you are present at a Faërian drama you yourself are, or think that you are, bodily inside its Secondary World. The experience may be very similar to Dreaming and has (it would seem) sometimes (by men) been confounded with it. But in Faërian drama you are in a dream that some other mind is weaving, and the knowledge of that alarming fact may slip from your grasp. To experience

²⁵ See Endnote F, p. 82.

directly a Secondary World: the potion is too strong, and you give to it Primary Belief, however marvellous the events. You are deluded—whether that is the intention of the elves (always or at any time) is another question. They at any rate are not themselves deluded. This is for them a form of Art, and distinct from Wizardry or Magic, properly so called. They do not live in it, though they can, perhaps, afford to spend more time at it than human artists can. The Primary World, Reality, of elves and men is the same, if differently valued and perceived.

We need a word for this elvish craft, but all the words that have been applied to it have been blurred and confused with other things. Magic is ready to hand, and I have used it above, but I should not have done so: Magic should be reserved for the operations of the Magician. Art is the human process that produces by the way (it is not its only or ultimate object) Secondary Belief. Art of the same sort, if more skilled and effortless, the elves can also use, or so the reports seem to show; but the more potent and specially elvish craft I will, for lack of a less debatable word, call Enchantment. Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose. Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. It does not matter by whom it is said to be practised, fay or mortal, it remains distinct from the other two; it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills.

To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when it is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches. At the heart of many man-made stories of the elves lies, open or concealed, pure or alloyed, the desire for a living, realized sub-creative art, which (however much it may outwardly resemble it) is inwardly wholly different from the greed for self-centred power, which is the mark of the mere Magician. Of this desire the elves, in their better (but still perilous) part, are largely made; and it is from them that we may learn what is the central desire and aspiration of human Fantasy—even if the elves are, all the more in so far as they are, only a product of Fantasy itself. That creative desire is only cheated by counterfeits, whether the innocent but clumsy devices of the human dramatist, or the malevolent frauds of the magicians. In this world it is for men unsatisfiable, and so imperishable. Uncorrupted it does not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and

delight, not slaves.

To many, Fantasy, this sub-creative art which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it, combining nouns and redistributing adjectives, has seemed suspect, if not illegitimate. To some it has seemed at least a childish folly, a thing only for peoples or for persons in their youth. As for its legitimacy I will say no more than to quote a brief passage from a letter I once wrote to a man who described myth and fairy-story as 'lies'; though to do him justice he was kind enough and confused enough to call fairy-story making 'Breathing a lie through Silver'.

'Dear Sir,' I said—'Although now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
Though all the crannies of the world we filled
With Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
And sowed the seed of dragons —'twas our right
(used or misused). That right has not decayed:
We make still by the law in which we're made.

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever get into that state (it would not seem at all impossible), Fantasy will perish, and become Morbid Delusion.

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So upon logic was founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll. If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen.

Fantasy can, of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil

uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their authors' own evil. But they have made false gods out of other materials: their nations, their banners, their monies; even their sciences and their social and economic theories have demanded human sacrifice. *Abusus non tollit usum*. Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.

As for the disabilities of age, that possibly is true. But it is in the main an idea produced by the mere *study* of fairy-stories. The analytic study of fairy-stories is as bad a preparation for the enjoying or the writing of them as would be the historical study of the drama of all lands and times for the enjoyment or writing of stage-plays. (Andrew Lang is, I fear, an example of this.) The study may indeed become depressing. It is easy for the student to feel that with all his labour he is collecting only a few leaves, many of them now torn or decayed, from the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales, with which the Forest of Days is carpeted. It seems vain to add to the litter. Who can design a new leaf? The patterns from bud to unfolding, and the colours from spring to autumn, were all discovered by men long ago. But that is not true. The seed of the tree can be replanted in almost any soil, even in one so smoke-ridden (as Lang said) as that of England. Spring is, of course, not really less beautiful because we have seen or heard of other like events: like events, never from world's beginning to world's end the same event. Each leaf, of oak and ash and thorn, is a unique embodiment of the pattern, and for some eye this very year may be *the* embodiment, the first ever seen and recognized, though oaks have put forth leaves for countless generations of men. We do not, or need not, despair of painting because all lines must be either straight or curved. The combinations may not be infinite (for we are not), but they are innumerable.

It remains true, nevertheless, that we must not in our day be too curious, too anxious to be original. For we *are* older: certainly older than our known ancestors. The days are gone, as Chesterton said, when red, blue, and yellow could be invented blindingly in a black and white world. Gone also are the days when from blue and yellow green was made, unique as a new colour. We are far advanced into Chesterton's

third stage with its special danger: the danger of becoming knowing, esoteric, privileged, or pretentious; the stage in which red and green are mixed. In this way a rich russet may (perhaps) be produced. Some will call it a drab brown (and they may be right); but in deft blendings it may be a subtle thing, combining the richness of red and the coolness of green. But in any case we cannot go much further, in the vain desire to be more 'original'. If we add another colour the result is likely to be much like mud, or a mere dead slime. Or if we turn from colour-allegory to fantastic beasts: Fantasy can produce many mythical monsters: of man and horse, the centaur; of lion and eagle, the griffin. But as Chesterton says: 'The offspring of the Missing Link and a mule mated with the child of a manx-cat and a penguin would not outrun the centaur and the griffin; it would merely lack all the interesting features of man and beast and bird: it would not be wilder but much tamer, not fantastic but merely shapeless.'

This stage was indeed reached long ago; even in fairy-tales it is sometimes found (not in good ones). But before we reach it, there is need of renewal and return. We must hark back, to purple and brown, to dragons and centaurs, and so maybe recover camelopards and green; even (who knows) we may see again yellow, blue, and red, and look upon horses, sheep, and dogs! This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. In that sense only, a taste for them may make (or keep) us childish.

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they are' and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them'—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness. Of all faces those of our *familiares* are the ones both most difficult to play fantastic tricks with, and most difficult really to see with fresh attention, perceiving their likeness and unlikeness: that they are faces, and yet unique faces. This triteness is really the penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them.

Of course, fairy-stories are not the only means of recovery, or prophylactic against loss. Humility is enough. And there is (especially for the humble) *Mooreeffoc*, or Chestertonian Fantasy. *Mooreeffoc* is a fantastic word, but it could be seen written up in every town in this land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle. That kind of 'fantasy' most people would allow to be wholesome enough; and it can never lack for material. But it has, I think, only a limited power; for the reason that recovery of freshness of vision is its only virtue. The word *Mooreeffoc* may cause you suddenly to realize that England is an utterly alien land, lost either in some remote past age glimpsed by history, or in some strange dim future to be reached only by a time-machine; to see the amazing oddity and interest of its inhabitants and their customs and feeding-habits; but it cannot do more than that: act as a time-telescope focused on one spot. Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you.

The 'fantastic' elements in verse and prose of other kinds, even when only decorative or occasional, help in this release. But not so thoroughly as a fairy-story, a thing built on or about Fantasy, of which Fantasy is the core. Fantasy is made out of the Primary World, but a good craftsman loves his material, and has a knowledge and feeling for clay, stone, and wood which only the art of making can give. By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory.

And actually fairy-stories deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting. For the story-maker who allows himself to be 'free with' Nature can be her lover not her slave. It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and

iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.

I will now conclude by considering Escape and Consolation, which are naturally closely connected. Though fairy-stories are of course by no means the only medium of Escape, they are to-day one of the most obvious and (to some) outrageous forms of 'escapist' literature; and it is thus reasonable to attach to a consideration of them some consideration of this term 'escape' in criticism generally.

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers of Escape are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in Criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter. Just so a Party-spokesman might have labelled departure from the misery of the Fuehrer's or any other Reich and even criticism of it as treachery. In the same way these critics, to make confusion worse, and so to bring into contempt their opponents, stick their label of scorn not only on to Desertion, but on to real Escape, and what are often its companions, Disgust, Anger, Condemnation, and Revolt. Not only do they confound the escape of the prisoner with the flight of the deserter; but they would seem to prefer the acquiescence of the 'quisling' to the resistance of the patriot. To such thinking you have only to say 'the land you loved is doomed' to excuse any treachery, indeed to glorify it.

For a trifling instance: not to mention (indeed not to parade) electric street-lamps of mass-produced pattern in your tale is Escape (in that sense). But it may, almost certainly does, proceed from a considered disgust for so typical a product of the Robot Age, which combines elaboration and ingenuity of means with ugliness, and (often) with inferiority of

result. These lamps may be excluded from the tale simply because they are bad lamps; and it is possible that one of the lessons to be learnt from the story is the realization of this fact. But out comes the big stick: 'Electric lamps have come to stay', they say. Long ago Chesterton truly remarked that, as soon as he heard that anything 'had come to stay', he knew that it would be very soon replaced—indeed regarded as pitifully obsolete and shabby. 'The march of Science, its tempo quickened by the needs of war, goes inexorably on ... making some things obsolete, and foreshadowing new developments in the utilization of electricity': an advertisement. This says the same thing only more menacingly. The electric street-lamp may indeed be ignored, simply because it is so insignificant and transient. Fairy-stories, at any rate, have many more permanent and fundamental things to talk about. Lightning, for example. The escapist is not so subservient to the whims of evanescent fashion as these opponents. He does not make things (which it may be quite rational to regard as bad) his masters or his gods by worshipping them as inevitable, even 'inexorable'. And his opponents, so easily contemptuous, have no guarantee that he will stop there: he might rouse men to pull down the street-lamps. Escapism has another and even wickeder face: Reaction.

Not long ago—incredible though it may seem—I heard a clerk of Oxenford declare that he 'welcomed' the proximity of mass-production robot factories, and the roar of self-obstructive mechanical traffic, because it brought his university into 'contact with real life'. He may have meant that the way men were living and working in the twentieth century was increasing in barbarity at an alarming rate, and that the loud demonstration of this in the streets of Oxford might serve as a warning that it is not possible to preserve for long an oasis of sanity in a desert of unreason by mere fences, without actual offensive action (practical and intellectual). I fear he did not. In any case the expression 'real life' in this context seems to fall short of academic standards. The notion that motor-cars are more 'alive' than, say, centaurs or dragons is curious; that they are more 'real' than, say, horses is pathetically absurd. How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm-tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist!

For my part, I cannot convince myself that the roof of Bletchley station is more 'real' than the clouds. And as an artefact I find it less inspiring than the legendary dome of heaven. The bridge to platform 4 is to me less interesting than Bifröst guarded by

Heimdall with the Gjallarhorn. From the wildness of my heart I cannot exclude the question whether railway-engineers, if they had been brought up on more fantasy, might not have done better with all their abundant means than they commonly do. Fairy-stories might be, I guess, better Masters of Arts than the academic person I have referred to.

Much that he (I must suppose) and others (certainly) would call 'serious' a literature is no more than play under a glass roof by the side of a municipal swimming-bath. Fairy-stories may invent monsters that fly the air or dwell in the deep, but at least they do not try to escape from heaven or the sea.

And if we leave aside for a moment 'fantasy', I do not think that the reader or the maker of fairy-stories need even be ashamed of the 'escape' of archaism: of preferring not dragons but horses, castles, sailing-ships, bows and arrows; not only elves, but knights and kings and priests. For it is after all possible for a rational man, after reflection (quite unconnected with fairy-story or romance), to arrive at the condemnation, implicit at least in the mere silence of 'escapist' literature, of progressive things like factories, or the machine-guns and bombs that appear to be their most natural and inevitable, dare we say 'inexorable', products.

'The rawness and ugliness of modern European life'—that real life whose contact we should welcome—is the sign of a biological inferiority, of an insufficient or false reaction to environment.'²⁶ The maddest castle that ever came out of a giant's bag in a wild Gaelic story is not only much less ugly than a robot-factory, it is also (to use a very modern phrase) 'in a very real sense' a great deal more real. Why should we not escape from or condemn the 'grim Assyrian' absurdity of top-hats, or the Morlockian horror of factories? They are condemned even by the writers of that most escapist form of all literature, stories of 'Scientifiction'. These prophets often foretell (and many seem to yearn for) a world like one big glass-roofed railway-station. But from them it is as a rule very hard to gather what men in such a world-town will *do*. They may abandon the

²⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, pp. 58, 59. Later he adds: 'Why is the stockbroker less beautiful than an Homeric warrior or an Egyptian priest? Because he is less incorporated with life: he is not inevitable but accidental.... The full Victorian panoply of top-hat and frock-coat undoubtedly expressed something essential in the nineteenth-century culture, and hence it has with that culture spread all over the world, as no fashion of clothing has ever done before. It is possible that our descendants will recognize in it a kind of grim Assyrian beauty, fit emblem of the ruthless and great age that created it; but however that may be, it misses the direct and inevitable beauty that all clothing should have, because like its parent culture it was out of touch with the life of nature and of human nature as well.'

‘full Victorian panoply’ for loose garments (with zip-fasteners), but will use this freedom mainly, it would appear, in order to play with mechanical toys in the soon-cloying game of moving at high speed. To judge by some of these tales they will still be as lustful, vengeful, and greedy as ever; and the ideals of their idealists hardly reach farther than the splendid notion of building more towns of the same sort on other planets. It is indeed an age of ‘improved means to deteriorated ends’. It is part of the essential malady of such days —producing the desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery—that we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil. So that to us evil and ugliness seem indissolubly allied. We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together. The fear of the beautiful fay that ran through the elder ages almost eludes our grasp. Even more alarming: goodness is itself bereft of its proper beauty. In Faërie one can indeed conceive of an ogre who possesses a castle hideous as a nightmare (for the evil of the ogre wills it so), but one cannot conceive of a house built with a good purpose—an inn, a hostel for travellers, the hall of a virtuous and noble king—that is yet sickeningly ugly. At the present day it would be rash to hope to see one that was not—unless it was built before our time.

This, however, is the modern and special (or accidental) ‘escapist’ aspect of fairy-stories, which they share with romances, and other stories out of or about the past. Many stories out of the past have only become ‘escapist’ in their appeal through surviving from a time when men were as a rule delighted with the work of their hands into our time when many men feel disgust with man-made things.

But there are also other and more profound ‘escapisms’ that have always appeared in fairy-tale and legend. There are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and aimlessness of the internal-combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. And even when men are not facing hard things such as these, there are ancient limitations from which fairy-stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation. Some are pardonable weaknesses or curiosities: such as the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird, that longing which the aeroplane cheats, except in rare moments, seen high and by wind and distance noiseless, turning in the sun: that

is, precisely when imagined and not used. There are profounder wishes: such as the desire to converse with other living things. On this desire, as ancient as the Fall, is largely founded the talking of beasts and creatures in fairy-tales, and especially the magical understanding of their proper speech. This is the root, and not the 'confusion' attributed to the minds of men of the unrecorded past, of an alleged 'absence of the sense of separation of ourselves from beasts'.²⁷ A vivid sense of that separation is very ancient: but also a sense that it was a severance: a strange fate and a guilt lies on us. Other creatures are like other realms with which Man has broken off relations, and sees now only from the outside at a distance, being at war with them, or on the terms of an uneasy armistice. There are a few men who are privileged to travel abroad a little; others must be content with travellers' tales. Even about frogs. In speaking of that rather odd but widespread fairy-story *The Frog-King* Max Müller asked in his prim way: 'How came such a story ever to be invented? Human beings were, we may hope, at all times sufficiently enlightened to know that a marriage between a frog and the daughter of a queen was absurd.' Indeed we may hope so! For if not, there would be no point in this story at all, depending as it does essentially on the sense of the absurdity. Folk-lore origins (or guesses about them) are here quite beside the point. It is of little avail to consider totemism. For certainly, whatever customs or beliefs about frogs and wells lie behind this story, the frog-shape was and is preserved in the fairy-story precisely because it was so queer and the marriage absurd, indeed abominable. Though, of course, in the versions which concern us, Gaelic, German, English, there is in fact no wedding between a princess and a frog: the frog was an enchanted prince. And the point of the story lies not in thinking frogs possible mates, but in the necessity of keeping promises (even those with intolerable consequences) that, together with observing prohibitions, runs through all Fairyland. This is one of the notes of the horns of Elfland, and not a dim note.

And lastly there is the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death. Fairy-stories provide many examples and modes of this—which might be called the genuine *escapist*, or (I would say) *fugitive*, spirit. But so do other stories (notably those of scientific inspiration), and so do other studies. Fairy-stories are made

²⁷ See Endnote G, p. 83.

by men not by fairies. The human stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness. But our stories cannot be expected always to rise above our common level. They often do. Few lessons are taught more clearly in them than the burden of that kind of immortality, or rather endless serial living, to which the ‘fugitive’ would fly. For the fairy-story is specially apt to teach such things, of old and still to-day. Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald.

But the ‘consolation’ of fairy-stories has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite—I will call it *Eucatastrophe*. The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale):²⁸ this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially ‘escapist’, nor ‘fugitive’. In its fairy-tale—or otherworld—setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.

It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the ‘turn’ comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality.

Even modern fairy-stories can produce this effect sometimes. It is not an easy thing to do; it depends on the whole story which is the setting of the turn, and yet it reflects a glory backwards. A tale that in any measure succeeds in this point has not

²⁸ See Endnote H, p. 84.

wholly failed, whatever flaws it may possess, and whatever mixture or confusion of purpose. It happens even in Andrew Lang's own fairy-story, *Prince Prigio*, unsatisfactory in many ways as that is. When 'each knight came alive and lifted his sword and shouted "long live Prince Prigio"', the joy has a little of that strange mythical fairy-story quality, greater than the event described. It would have none in Lang's tale if the event described were not a piece of more serious fairy-story 'fantasy' than the main bulk of the story, which is in general more frivolous, having the half-mocking smile of the courtly, sophisticated *Conte*.²⁹ Far more powerful and poignant is the effect in a serious tale of Faërie.³⁰ In such stories when the sudden 'turn' comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through.

Seven long years I served for thee,
The glassy hill I clamb for thee,
The bluidy shirt I wrang for thee,
And wilt thou not wauken and turn to me?

*He heard and turned to her.*³¹

Epilogue

This 'joy' which I have selected as the mark of the true fairy-story (or romance), or as the seal upon it, merits more consideration.

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details)³² are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: 'inner consistency of reality', it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. The peculiar quality

²⁹ This is characteristic of Lang's wavering balance. On the surface the story is a follower of the 'courtly' French *conte* with a satiric twist, and of Thackeray's *Rose and the Ring* in particular—a kind which being superficial, even frivolous, by nature, does not produce or aim at producing anything so profound; but underneath lies the deeper spirit of the romantic Lang.

³⁰ Of the kind which Lang called 'traditional', and really preferred.

³¹ *The Black Bull of Norrway*.

³² For all the details may not be 'true': it is seldom that the 'inspiration' is so strong and lasting that it leavens all the lump, and does not leave much that is mere uninspired 'invention'.

of the ‘joy’ in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a ‘consolation’ for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question ‘Is it true?’ The answer to this question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): ‘If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.’ That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the ‘eucatastrophe’ we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world. The use of this word gives a hint of my epilogue. It is a serious and dangerous matter. I am a Christian, and so at least should not be suspected of willful irreverence. Knowing my own ignorance and dullness, it is perhaps presumptuous of me to touch upon such a theme; but if by grace what I say has in any respect any validity, it is, of course, only one facet of a truth incalculably rich: finite only because the capacity of Man for whom this was done is finite.

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic,³³ beautiful, and moving: ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance; and at the same time powerfully symbolic and allegorical; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality’. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.

It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be ‘primarily’ true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed. It is not difficult, for one is not called upon to try and conceive anything of

³³ The Gospels are not artistic in themselves; the Art is here in the story itself, not in the telling. For the Author of the story was not the evangelists. ‘Even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written’, if that story had been fully written down.

a quality unknown. The joy would have exactly the same quality, if not the same degree, as the joy which the ‘turn’ in a fairy-story gives: such joy has the very taste of primary truth. (Otherwise its name would not be joy.) It looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.

But in God’s kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the ‘happy ending’. The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know.

ENDNOTES

A

The very root (not only the use) of their ‘marvels’ is satiric, a mockery of unreason; and the ‘dream’ element is not a mere machinery of introduction and ending, but inherent in the action and transitions. These things children can perceive and appreciate, if left to themselves. But to many, as it was to me, *Alice* is presented as a fairy-story and while this misunderstanding lasts, the distaste for the dream-machinery is felt. There is no suggestion of dream in *The Wind in the Willows*. ‘The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little house.’ So it begins, and that correct tone is maintained. It is all the more remarkable that A. A. Milne, so great an admirer of this excellent book, should have prefaced to his dramatized version a ‘whimsical’ opening in which a child is seen telephoning with a

daffodil. Or perhaps it is not very remarkable, for a perceptive admirer (as distinct from a great admirer) of the book would never have attempted to dramatize it. Naturally only the simpler ingredients, the pantomime, and the satiric beast-fable elements, are capable of presentation in this form. The play is, on the lower level of drama, tolerably good fun, especially for those who have not read the book; but some children that I took to see *Toad of Toad Hall* brought away as their chief memory nausea at the opening. For the rest they preferred their recollections of the book.

B

Of course, these details, as a rule, got into the tales, *even in the days when they were real practices*, because they had a story-making value. If I were to write a story in which it happened that a man was hanged, that *might* show in later ages, if the story survived—in itself a sign that the story possessed some permanent, and more than local or temporary, value—that it was written at a period when men were really hanged, as a legal practice. *Might*: the inference would not, of course, in that future time be certain. For certainty on that point the future inquirer would have to know definitely when hanging was practised and when I lived. I could have borrowed the incident from other times and places, from other stories; I could simply have invented it. But even if this inference happened to be correct, the hanging-scene would only occur in the story, (a) because I was aware of the dramatic, tragic, or macabre force of this incident in my tale, and (b) because those who handed it down felt this force enough to make them keep the incident in. Distance of time, sheer antiquity and alienness might later sharpen the edge of the tragedy or the horror; but the edge must be there even for the elvish hone of antiquity to whet it. The least useful question, therefore, for literary critics at any rate, to ask or to answer about Iphigeneia, daughter of Agamemnon, is: Does the legend of her sacrifice at Aulis come down from a time when human-sacrifice was commonly practised?

I say only ‘as a rule’, because it is conceivable that what is now regarded as a ‘story’ was once something different in intent: *e.g.*, a record of fact or ritual. I mean ‘record’ strictly. A story invented to explain a ritual (a process that is sometimes supposed to have frequently occurred) remains primarily a story. It takes form as

such, and will survive (long after the ritual evidently) only because of its story-values. In some cases details that now are notable merely because they are strange may have once been so everyday and unregarded that they were slipped in casually: like mentioning that a man 'raised his hat', or 'caught a train'. But such casual details will not long survive change in everyday habits. Not in a period of oral transmission. In a period of writing (and of rapid changes in habits) a story may remain unchanged long enough for even its casual details to acquire the value of quaintness or queerness. Much of Dickens now has this air. One can open to-day an edition of a novel of his that was bought and first read when things were so in everyday life as they are in the story, though these everyday details are now already as remote from our daily habits as the Elizabethan period. But that is a special modern situation. The anthropologists and folk-lorists do not imagine any conditions of that kind. But if they are dealing with unlettered oral transmission, then they should all the more reflect that in that case they are dealing with items whose primary object was story-building, and whose primary reason for survival was the same. The Frog-King is not a *Credo*, nor a manual of totem-law: it is a queer tale with a plain moral.

C

As far as my knowledge goes, children who have an early bent for writing have no special inclination to attempt the writing of fairy-stories, unless that has been almost the sole form of literature presented to them; and they fail most markedly when they try. It is not an easy form. If children have any special leaning it is to Beast-fable, which adults often confuse with Fairy-story. The best stories by children that I have seen have been either 'realistic' (in intent), or have had as their characters animals and birds, who were in the main the zoomorphic human beings usual in Beast-fable. I imagine that this form is so often adopted principally because it allows a large measure of realism: the representation of domestic events and talk that children really know. The form itself is, however, as a rule, suggested or imposed by adults. It has a curious preponderance in the literature, good and bad, that is nowadays commonly presented to young children: I suppose it is felt to go with 'Natural History', semi-scientific books about beasts and birds that are also considered to be proper pabulum

for the young. And it is reinforced by the bears and rabbits that seem in recent times almost to have ousted human dolls from the play-rooms even of little girls. Children make up sagas, often long and elaborate, about their dolls. If these are shaped like bears, bears will be the characters of the sagas; but they will talk like people.

D

I was introduced to zoology and palaeontology ('for children') quite as early as to Faërie. I saw pictures of living beasts and of true (so I was told) prehistoric animals. I liked the 'prehistoric' animals best: they had at least lived long ago, and hypothesis (based on somewhat slender evidence) cannot avoid a gleam of fantasy. But I did not like being told that these creatures were 'dragons'. I can still re-feel the irritation that I felt in childhood at assertions of instructive relatives (or their gift-books) such as these: 'snow-flakes are fairy jewels', or 'are more beautiful than fairy jewels'; 'the marvels of the ocean depths are more wonderful than fairyland'. Children expect the differences they feel but cannot analyse to be explained by their elders, or at least recognized, not to be ignored or denied. I was keenly alive to the beauty of 'Real things', but it seemed to me quibbling to confuse this with the wonder of 'Other things'. I was eager to study Nature, actually more eager than I was to read most fairy-stories; but I did not want to be quibbled into Science and cheated out of Faërie by people who seemed to assume that by some kind of original sin I should prefer fairy-tales, but according to some kind of new religion I ought to be induced to like science. Nature is no doubt a life-study, or a study for eternity (for those so gifted); but there is a part of man which is not 'Nature', and which therefore is not obliged to study it, and is, in fact, wholly unsatisfied by it.

E

There is, for example, in surrealism commonly present a morbidity or un-ease very rarely found in literary fantasy. The mind that produced the depicted images may often be suspected to have been in fact already morbid; yet this is not a necessary explanation in all cases. A curious disturbance of the mind is often set up by the

very act of drawing things of this kind, a state similar in quality and consciousness of morbidity to the sensations in a high fever, when the mind develops a distressing fecundity and facility in figure-making, seeing forms sinister or grotesque in all visible objects about it.

I am speaking here, of course, of the primary expression of Fantasy in ‘pictorial’ arts, not of ‘illustrations’; nor of the cinematograph. However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy-stories. The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a *visible* presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of *bread* or *wine* or *stone* or *tree*, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination. Should the story say ‘he ate bread’, the dramatic producer or painter can only show ‘a piece of bread’ according to his taste or fancy, but the hearer of the story will think of bread in general and picture it in some form of his own. If a story says ‘he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below’, the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but specially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word.

F

I am referring, of course, primarily to fantasy of forms and visible shapes. Drama can be made out of the impact upon human characters of some event of Fantasy, or Faërie, that requires no machinery, or that can be assumed or reported to have happened. But that is not fantasy in dramatic result; the human characters hold the stage and upon them attention is concentrated. Drama of this sort (exemplified by some of Barrie’s plays) can be used frivolously, or it can be used for satire, or for conveying such ‘messages’ as the playwright may have in his mind—for men. Drama is anthropocentric. Fairy-story and Fantasy need not be. There are, for instance, many stories telling how men and women have disappeared and spent years among the

fairies, without noticing the passage of time, or appearing to grow older. In *Mary Rose* Barrie wrote a play on this theme. No fairy is seen. The cruelly tormented human beings are there all the time. In spite of the sentimental star and the angelic voices at the end (in the printed version) it is a painful play, and can easily be made diabolic: by substituting (as I have seen it done) the elvish call for 'angel voices' at the end. The non-dramatic fairy-stories, in so far as they are concerned with the human victims, can also be pathetic or horrible. But they need not be. In most of them the fairies are also there, on equal terms. In some stories they are the real interest. Many of the short folk-lore accounts of such incidents purport to be just pieces of 'evidence' about fairies, items in an agelong accumulation of 'lore' concerning them and the modes of their existence. The sufferings of human beings who come into contact with them (often enough, willfully) are thus seen in quite a different perspective. A drama could be made about the sufferings of a victim of research in radiology, but hardly about radium itself. But it is possible to be primarily interested in radium (not radiologists)—or primarily interested in Faërie, not tortured mortals. One interest will produce a scientific book, the other a fairy-story. Drama cannot well cope with either.

G

The absence of this sense is a mere hypothesis concerning men of the lost past, whatever wild confusions men of to-day, degraded or deluded, may suffer. It is just as legitimate an hypothesis, and one more in agreement with what little is recorded concerning the thoughts of men of old on this subject, that this sense was once stronger. That fantasies which blended the human form with animal and vegetable forms, or gave human faculties to beasts, are ancient is, of course, no evidence for confusion at all. It is, if anything, evidence to the contrary. Fantasy does not blur the sharp outlines of the real world; for it depends on them. As far as our western, European, world is concerned, this 'sense of separation' has in fact been attacked and weakened in modern times not by fantasy but by scientific theory. Not by stories of centaurs or werewolves or enchanted bears, but by the

hypotheses (or dogmatic guesses) of scientific writers who classed Man not only as ‘an animal’—that correct classification is ancient—but as ‘only an animal’. There has been a consequent distortion of sentiment. The natural love of men not wholly corrupt for beasts, and the human desire to ‘get inside the skin’ of living things, has run riot. We now get men who love animals more than men; who pity sheep so much that they curse shepherds as wolves; who weep over a slain war-horse and vilify dead soldiers. It is now, not in the days when fairy-stories were begotten, that we get ‘an absence of the sense of separation’.

It is a curious result of the application of evolutionary hypothesis concerning Man’s animal body to his whole being that it tends to produce both arrogance and servility. Man has merely succeeded (it seems) in dominating other animals by force and chicane, not by hereditary right. He is a tyrant not a king. A cat may look at a king; but let no cat look at a tyrant! As for men taking animal form, or animals doing human things, this is dangerous indecent nonsense, insulting to the *Herrenvolk*. But strong or proud men talk of breeding other men like their cattle, and for similar purposes. For a self-chosen *Herrenvolk* always ends by becoming the slaves of a gang, a *Herrenbande*.

H

The verbal ending—usually held to be as typical of the end of fairy-stories as ‘once upon a time’ is of the beginning—‘and they lived happily ever after’ is an artificial device. It does not deceive anybody. End-phrases of this kind are to be compared to the margins and frames of pictures, and are no more to be thought of as the real end of any particular fragment of the seamless Web of Story than the frame is of the visionary scene, or the casement of the Outer World. These phrases may be plain or elaborate, simple or extravagant, as artificial and as necessary as frames plain, or carved, or gilded. ‘And if they have not gone away they are there still.’ ‘My story is done—see there is a little mouse; anyone who catches it may make himself a fine fur cap of it.’ ‘And they lived happily ever after.’ ‘And when the wedding was over, they sent me home with little paper shoes on a causeway of pieces of glass.’

Endings of this sort suit fairy-stories, because such tales have a greater sense and grasp of the endlessness of the World of Story than most modern 'realistic' stories, already hemmed within the narrow confines of their own small time. A sharp cut in the endless tapestry is not unfittingly marked by a formula, even a grotesque or comic one. It was an irresistible development of modern illustration (so largely photographic) that borders should be abandoned and the 'picture' end only with the paper. This method may be suitable for photographs; but it is altogether inappropriate for the pictures that illustrate or are inspired by fairy-stories. An enchanted forest requires a margin, even an elaborate border. To print it conterminous with the page, like a 'shot' of the Rockies in 'Picture Post', as if it were indeed a 'snap' of fairyland or a 'sketch by our artist on the spot', is a folly and an abuse.

As for the beginnings of fairy-stories: one can scarcely improve on the formula *Once upon a time*. It has an immediate effect. This effect can be appreciated by reading, for instance, the fairy-story *The Terrible Head* in the *Blue Fairy Book*. It is Andrew Lang's own adaptation of the story of Perseus and the Gorgon. It begins 'once upon a time', and it does not name any year or land or person. Now this treatment does something which could be called 'turning mythology into fairy-story'. I should prefer to say that it turns high fairy-story (for such is the Greek tale) into a particular form that is at present familiar in our land: a nursery or 'old wives' form. Namelessness is not a virtue but an accident, and should not have been imitated; for vagueness in this regard is a debasement, a corruption due to forgetfulness and lack of skill. But not so, I think, the timelessness. That beginning is not poverty-stricken but significant. It produces at a stroke the sense of a great uncharted world of time.

From *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*

Letter to Milton Waldman

J. R. R. Tolkien

You asked for a brief sketch of my stuff that is connected with my imaginary world. It is difficult to say anything without saying too much: the attempt to say a few words opens a floodgate of excitement; the egoist and artist at once desires to say how the stuff has grown, what it is like, and what (he thinks) he means or is trying to represent by it all. I shall inflict some of this on you; but I will append a mere resume of its contents: which is (may be) all that you want or will have use or time for.

In order of time, growth, and composition, this stuff began with me—though I do not suppose that that is of much interest to anyone but myself. I mean, I do not remember a time when I was not building it. Many children make up, or begin to make up, imaginary languages. I have been at it since I could write. But I have never stopped, and of course, as a professional philologist (especially interested in linguistic aesthetics), I have changed in taste, improved in theory, and probably in craft. Behind my stories is now a nexus of languages (mostly only structurally sketched). But to those creatures which in English I call misleadingly Elves³⁴ are assigned two related languages more nearly completed, whose history is written, and whose forms (representing two different sides of my own linguistic taste) are deduced scientifically from a common origin. Out of these languages are made nearly all the *names* that appear in my legends. This gives a certain character (a cohesion, a consistency of linguistic style, and an illusion of historicity) to the nomenclature, or so I believe, that is markedly lacking in other comparable things. Not all will feel this as important as I do, since I am cursed by acute sensibility in such matters.

But an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. I was an undergraduate before thought and experience revealed to me that these were not divergent interests—opposite poles of science and romance—but integrally

³⁴ Intending the word to be understood in its ancient meanings, which continued as late as Spenser; a murrain on Will Shakespeare and his damned cobwebs.

related. I am *not* ‘learned’³⁵ in the matters of myth and fairy-story, however, for in such things (as far as known to me) I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge. Also—and here I hope I shall not sound absurd—I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its ‘faerie’ is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains, the Christian religion.

For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world. (I am speaking, of course, of our present situation, not of ancient pagan, pre-Christian days. And I will not repeat what I tried to say in my essay, which you read.)

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story—the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths—which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our ‘air’ (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be ‘high’, purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other

³⁵ Though I have thought *about* them a good deal.

minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.

Of course, such an overweening purpose did not develop all at once. The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as ‘given’ things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. An absorbing, though continually interrupted labour (especially since, even apart from the necessities of life, the mind would wing to the other pole and spend itself on the linguistics): yet always I had the sense of recording what was already ‘there’, somewhere: not of ‘inventing’.

Of course, I made up and even wrote lots of other things (especially for my children). Some escaped from the grasp of this branching acquisitive theme, being ultimately and radically unrelated: *Leaf by Niggle* and *Farmer Giles*, for instance, the only two that have been printed. *The Hobbit*, which has much more essential life in it, was quite independently conceived: I did not know as I began it that it belonged. But it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole, its mode of descent to earth, and merging into ‘history’. As the high Legends of the beginning are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view—and the last tale blends them.

I dislike Allegory—the conscious and intentional allegory—yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. (And, of course, the more ‘life’ a story has the more readily will it be susceptible of allegorical interpretations: while the better a deliberate allegory is made the more nearly will it be acceptable just as a story.) Anyway all this stuff³⁶ is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, and to be apart from the satisfactions of plain ordinary biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. This desire is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of ‘Fall’. It may become possessive; clinging to the things made as ‘its own’, the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the

³⁶ It is, I suppose, fundamentally concerned with the problem of the relation of Art (and Sub-creation) and Primary Reality.

laws of the Creator—especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective—and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents—or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised.

I have not used ‘magic’ consistently, and indeed the Elven-queen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy, and for those of the Elves. I have not, because there is not a word for the latter (since all human stories have suffered the same confusion). But the Elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their ‘magic’ is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence). And its object is Art not Power, sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation. The ‘Elves’ are ‘immortal’, at least as far as this world goes: and hence are concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change, than with death. The Enemy in successive forms is always ‘naturally’ concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others³⁷—speedily and according to the benefactor’s own plans—is a recurrent motive.

The cycles begin with a cosmogonical myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making, or re-making). They are ‘divine’, that is, were originally ‘outside’ and existed ‘before’ the making of the world. Their power and wisdom is derived from their Knowledge of the cosmogonical drama, which they perceived first as a drama (that is as in a fashion we perceive a story composed by someone

³⁷ Not in the Beginner of Evil: his was a sub-creative Fall, and hence the Elves (the representatives of sub-creation par excellence) were peculiarly his enemies, and the special object of his desire and hate—and open to his deceptions. Their Fall is into possessiveness and (to a less degree) into perversion of their art to power.

else), and later as a ‘reality’. On the side of mere narrative device, this is, of course, meant to provide beings of the same order of beauty, power, and majesty as the ‘gods’ of higher mythology, which can yet be accepted—well, shall we say baldly, by a mind that believes in the Blessed Trinity.

It moves then swiftly to the *History of the Elves*, or the *Silmarillion* proper; to the world as we perceive it, but of course transfigured in a still half-mythical mode: that is it deals with rational incarnate creatures of more or less comparable stature with our own. The Knowledge of the Creation Drama was incomplete: incomplete in each individual ‘god’, and incomplete if all the knowledge of the pantheon were pooled. For (partly to redress the evil of the rebel Melkor, partly for the completion of all in an ultimate finesse of detail) the Creator had not revealed all. The making, and nature, of the Children of God, were the two chief secrets. All that the gods knew was that they would come, at appointed times. The Children of God are thus primevally related and akin, and primevally different. Since also they are something wholly ‘other’ to the gods, in the making of which the gods played no part, they are the object of the special desire and love of the gods. These are the *First-born*, the Elves; and the *Followers*, Men. The doom of the Elves is to be immortal, to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it even when ‘slain’, but returning—and yet, when the Followers come, to teach them, and make way for them, to ‘fade’ as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed. The Doom (or the Gift) of Men is mortality, freedom from the circles of the world. Since the point of view of the whole cycle is the Elvish, mortality is not explained mythically: it is a mystery of God of which no more is known than that ‘what God has purposed for Men is hidden’: a grief and an envy to the immortal Elves.

As I say, the legendary *Silmarillion* is peculiar, and differs from all similar things that I know in not being anthropocentric. Its centre of view and interest is not Men but ‘Elves’. Men came in inevitably: after all the author is a man, and if he has an audience they will be Men and Men must come in to our tales, as such, and not merely transfigured or partially represented as Elves, Dwarfs, Hobbits, etc. But they remain peripheral—late comers, and however growingly important, not principals.

In the cosmogony there is a fall: a fall of Angels we should say. Though quite

different in form, of course, to that of Christian myth. These tales are ‘new’; they are not directly derived from other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of ‘truth’, and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any ‘story’ without a fall—all stories are ultimately about the fall—at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.

So, proceeding, the Elves have a fall, before their ‘history’ can become storied. (The first fall of Man, for reasons explained, nowhere appears—Men do not come on the stage until all that is long past, and there is only a rumour that for a while they fell under the domination of the Enemy and that some repented.) The main body of the tale, the *Silmarillion* proper, is about the fall of the most gifted kindred of the Elves, their exile from Valinor (a kind of Paradise, the home of the Gods) in the furthest West, their re-entry into Middle-earth, the land of their birth but long under the rule of the Enemy, and their strife with him, the power of Evil still visibly incarnate. It receives its name because the events are all threaded upon the fate and significance of the *Silmarilli* (‘radiance of pure light’) or Primeval Jewels. By the making of gems the sub-creative function of the Elves is chiefly symbolized, but the *Silmarilli* were more than just beautiful things as such. There was Light. There was the Light of Valinor made visible in the Two Trees of Silver and Gold.³⁸ These were slain by the Enemy out of malice, and Valinor was darkened, though from them, ere they died utterly, were derived the lights of Sun and Moon. (A marked difference here between these legends and most others is that the Sun is not a divine symbol, but a second-best thing, and the ‘light of the Sun’ (the world under the sun) become terms for a fallen world, and a dislocated imperfect vision).

But the chief artificer of the Elves (Fëanor) had imprisoned the Light of Valinor in the three supreme jewels, the *Silmarilli*, before the Trees were sullied or slain. This Light

³⁸ As far as all this has symbolical or allegorical significance, Light is such a primeval symbol in the nature of the Universe that it can hardly be analysed. The Light of Valinor (derived from light before any fall) is the light of art undivorced from reason, that sees things both scientifically (or philosophically) and imaginatively (or subcreatively) and ‘says that they are good’—as beautiful. The Light of Sun (or Moon) is derived from the Trees only after they were sullied by Evil.

thus lived thereafter only in these gems. The fall of the Elves comes about through the possessive attitude of Fëanor and his seven sons to these gems. They are captured by the Enemy, set in his Iron Crown, and guarded in his impenetrable stronghold. The sons of Fëanor take a terrible and blasphemous oath of enmity and vengeance against all or any, even of the gods, who dares to claim any part or right in the Silmarilli. They pervert the greater part of their kindred, who rebel against the gods, and depart from paradise, and go to make hopeless war upon the Enemy. The first fruit of their fall is war in Paradise, the slaying of Elves by Elves, and this and their evil oath dogs all their later heroism, generating treacheries and undoing all victories. *The Silmarillion* is the history of the War of the Exiled Elves against the Enemy, which all takes place in the North-west of the world (Middle-earth). Several tales of victory and tragedy are caught up in it; but it ends with catastrophe, and the passing of the Ancient World, the world of the long *First Age*. The jewels are recovered (by the final intervention of the gods) only to be lost for ever to the Elves, one in the sea, one in the deeps of earth, and one as a star of heaven. This legendarium ends with a vision of the end of the world, its breaking and remaking, and the recovery of the Silmarilli and the ‘light before the Sun’—after a final battle which owes, I suppose, more to the Norse vision of Ragnarok than to anything else, though it is not much like it.

As the stories become less mythical, and more like stories and romances, Men are interwoven. For the most part these are ‘good Men’—families and their chiefs who, rejecting the service of Evil, and hearing rumours of the Gods of the West and the High Elves, flee westward and come into contact with the Exiled Elves in the midst of their war. The Men who appear are mainly those of the Three Houses of the Fathers of them, whose chieftains become allies of the Elflords. The contact of Men and Elves already foreshadows the history of the later Ages, and a recurrent theme is the idea that in Men (as they now are) there is a strand of ‘blood’ and inheritance, derived from the Elves, and that the art and poetry of Men is largely dependent on it, or modified by it.³⁹ There are thus two marriages of mortal and elf—both later coalescing in the kindred of Earendil, represented by Elrond the Half-elven, who appears in all the stories, even *The Hobbit*. The chief of the stories of the *Silmarillion*, and the one most fully treated, is the *Story of*

³⁹ Of course in reality this only means that my ‘elves’ are a representation or an apprehension of a part of human nature, but that is not the legendary mode of talking.

Beren and Luthien the Elfmaiden.⁴⁰ Here we meet, among other things, the first example of the motive (to become dominant in Hobbits) that the great policies of world history, ‘the wheels of the world’, are often turned not by the Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak—owing to the secret life in creation, and the part unknowable to all wisdom but One, that resides in the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama. It is Beren the outlawed mortal who succeeds (with the help of Luthien, a mere maiden even if an elf of royalty) where all the armies and warriors have failed: he penetrates the stronghold of the Enemy and wrests one of the Silmarilli from the Iron Crown. Thus he wins the hand of Luthien and the first marriage of mortal and immortal is achieved.

As such the story is (I think a beautiful and powerful) heroic-fairy-romance, receivable in itself with only a very general vague knowledge of the background. But it is also a fundamental link in the cycle, deprived of its full significance out of its place therein. For the capture of the Silmaril, a supreme victory, leads to disaster. The oath of the sons of Fëanor becomes operative, and lust for the Silmaril brings all the kingdoms of the Elves to ruin.

There are other stories almost equally full in treatment, and equally independent and yet linked to the general history. There is the *Children of Húrin*, the tragic tale of Túrin Turambar and his sister Níniel—of which Túrin is the hero: a figure that might be said (by people who like that sort of thing, though it is not very useful) to be derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo. There is the *Fall of Gondolin*: the chief Elvish stronghold. And the tale, or tales, of *Earendil the Wanderer*.⁴¹ He is important as the person who brings the Silmarillion to its end, and as providing in his offspring the main links to and persons in the tales of later Ages. His function, as a representative of both Kindreds, Elves and Men, is to find a sea-passage back to the Land of the Gods, and as ambassador persuade them to take thought again for the Exiles, to pity them, and rescue them from the Enemy. His wife Elwing

⁴⁰ It exists indeed as a poem of considerable length, of which the prose version in *The Silmarillion* is only a reduced version.

⁴¹ His name is in actual origin Anglo-Saxon: *earendel*, ‘ray of light’, applied sometimes to the morning-star, a name of ramified mythological connexions (now largely obscure). But that is a mere ‘learned note’. In fact his name is Elvish, signifying the Great Mariner or Sea-lover.

descends from Luthien and still possesses the Silmaril. But the curse still works, and Earendil's home is destroyed by the sons of Fëanor. But this provides the solution: Elwing casting herself into the Sea to save the Jewel comes to Earendil, and with the power of the great Gem they pass at last to Valinor, and accomplish their errand—at the cost of never being allowed to return or dwell again with Elves or Men. The gods then move again, and great power comes out of the West, and the Stronghold of the Enemy is destroyed; and he himself is thrust out of the World into the Void, never to reappear there in incarnate form again. The remaining two Silmarils are regained from the Iron Crown—only to be lost. The last two sons of Fëanor, compelled by their oath, steal them, and are destroyed by them, casting themselves into the sea, and the pits of the earth. The ship of Earendil, adorned with the last Silmaril, is set in heaven as the brightest star. So ends *The Silmarillion* and the tales of the First Age.

The next cycle deals (or would deal) with the Second Age. But it is on Earth a dark age, and not very much of its history is (or need be) told. In the great battles against the First Enemy the lands were broken and ruined, and the West of Middle-earth became desolate. We learn that the Exiled Elves were, if not commanded, at least sternly counselled to return into the West, and there be at peace. They were not to dwell permanently in Valinor again, but in the Lonely Isle of Eressëa within sight of the Blessed Realm. The Men of the Three Houses were rewarded for their valour and faithful alliance, by being allowed to dwell 'western-most of all mortals', in the great 'Atlantis' isle of *Númenóre*.⁴² The doom or gift of God, of mortality, the gods of course cannot abrogate, but the Númenóreans have a great span of life. They set sail and leave Middle-earth, and establish a great kingdom of mariners just within furthest sight of Eressëa (but not of Valinor). Most of the High Elves depart also back into the West. Not all. Some Men akin to the Númenóreans remain in the land not far from the shores of the Sea. Some of the Exiles will not return, or delay their return (for the way west is ever open to the immortals and in the Grey Havens ships are ever ready to sail away for ever). Also the Orcs (goblins) and other monsters bred by the First Enemy are not wholly destroyed. And there is *Sauron*. In the *Silmarillion* and Tales of the First Age

⁴² A name that Lewis derives from me and cannot be restrained from using, and mis-spelling, as Numinor. Númenóre means in 'Elvish' simply Westernesse or Land in the West, and is not related to *numen*, numinous, or *noumenon*!

Sauron was a being of Valinor perverted to the service of the Enemy and becoming his chief captain and servant. He repents in fear when the First Enemy is utterly defeated, but in the end does not do as was commanded, return to the judgement of the gods. He lingers in Middle-earth. Very slowly, beginning with fair motives: the reorganising and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, ‘neglected by the gods’, he becomes a reincarnation of Evil, and a thing lusting for Complete Power—and so consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and Elves). All through the twilight of the Second Age the Shadow is growing in the East of Middle-earth, spreading its sway more and more over Men—who multiply as the Elves begin to fade. The three main themes are thus The Delaying Elves that lingered in Middle-earth; Sauron’s growth to a new Dark Lord, master and god of Men; and Numenor-Atlantis. They are dealt with annalistically, and in two Tales or Accounts, *The Rings of Power* and the *Downfall of Númenor*. Both are the essential background to *The Hobbit* and its sequel.

In the first we see a sort of second fall or at least ‘error’ of the Elves. There was nothing wrong essentially in their lingering against counsel, still sadly, with the mortal lands of their old heroic deeds. But they wanted to have their cake without eating it. They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of ‘The West’, and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people, above wild Elves, dwarves, and Men, was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with ‘fading’, the mode in which the changes of time (the law of the world under the sun) was perceived by them. They became sad, and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming—even though they also retained the old motive of their kind, the adornment of earth, and the healing of its hurt. We hear of a lingering kingdom, in the extreme North-west more or less in what was left in the old lands of *The Silmarillion*, under Gilgalad; and of other settlements, such as Imladris (Rivendell) near Elrond; and a great one at the Western feet of the Misty Mountains, adjacent to the Mines of Moria, the major realm of the Dwarves in the Second Age. There arose a friendship between the usually hostile folk (of Elves and Dwarves) for the first and only time, and smithcraft reached its highest development. But many of the Elves listened to Sauron. He was still fair in that early time, and his motives and those of the Elves seemed to go partly together: the healing of the desolate lands. Sauron found their weak

point in suggesting that, helping one another, they could make Western Middle-earth as beautiful as Valinor. It was really a veiled attack on the gods, an incitement to try and make a separate independent paradise. Gilgalad repulsed all such overtures, as also did Elrond. But at Eregion great work began—and the Elves came their nearest to falling to ‘magic’ and machinery. With the aid of Sauron’s lore they made *Rings of Power* (‘power’ is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods).

The chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e. ‘change’ viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance—this is more or less an Elvish motive. But also they enhanced the natural powers of a possessor—thus approaching ‘magic’, a motive easily corruptible into evil, a lust for domination. And finally they had other powers, more directly derived from Sauron (‘the Necromancer’: so he is called as he casts a fleeting shadow and presage on the pages of *The Hobbit*): such as rendering invisible the material body, and making things of the invisible world visible.

The Elves of Eregion made Three supremely beautiful and powerful rings, almost solely of their own imagination, and directed to the preservation of beauty: they did not confer invisibility. But secretly in the subterranean Fire, in his own Black Land, Sauron made One Ring, the Ruling Ring that contained the powers of all the others, and controlled them, so that its wearer could see the thoughts of all those that used the lesser rings, could govern all that they did, and in the end could utterly enslave them. He reckoned, however, without the wisdom and subtle perceptions of the Elves. The moment he assumed the One, they were aware of it, and of his secret purpose, and were afraid. They hid the Three Rings, so that not even Sauron ever discovered where they were and they remained unsullied. The others they tried to destroy.

In the resulting war between Sauron and the Elves Middle-earth, especially in the west, was further ruined. Eregion was captured and destroyed, and Sauron seized many Rings of Power. These he gave, for their ultimate corruption and enslavement, to those who would accept them (out of ambition or greed). Hence the ‘ancient rhyme’ that appears as the leit-motif of *The Lord of the Rings*:

Three Rings for the Elven-Kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,

One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the shadows lie.

Sauron became thus almost supreme in Middle-earth. The Elves held out in secret places (not yet revealed). The last Elf-Kingdom of Gilgalad is maintained precariously on the extreme west-shores, where are the havens of the Ships. Elrond the Half-elven, son of Earendil, maintains a kind of enchanted sanctuary at *Imladris* (in English *Rivendell*) on the extreme eastern margin of the western lands.⁴³ But Sauron dominates all the multiplying hordes of Men that have had no contact with the Elves and so indirectly with the true and unfallen Valar and gods. He rules a growing empire from the great dark tower of Barad-dûr in Mordor, near to the Mountain of Fire, wielding the One Ring.

But to achieve this he had been obliged to let a great part of his own inherent power (a frequent and very significant motive in myth and fairy-story) pass into the One Ring. While he wore it, his power on earth was actually enhanced. But even if he did not wear it, that power existed and was in ‘rapport’ with himself: he was not ‘diminished’. Unless some other seized it and became possessed of it. If that happened, the new possessor could (if sufficiently strong and heroic by nature) challenge Sauron, become master of all that he had learned or done since the making of the One Ring, and so overthrow him and usurp his place. This was the essential weakness he had introduced into his situation in his effort (largely unsuccessful) to enslave the Elves, and in his desire to establish a control over the minds and wills of his servants. There was another weakness: if the One Ring was actually *unmade*, annihilated, then its power would be dissolved, Sauron’s own being would be diminished to vanishing point, and he would be reduced to a shadow, a mere memory of malicious will. But that he never contemplated nor feared. The Ring was unbreakable by any smithcraft less than his own. It was indissoluble in any fire, save the undying subterranean fire where it was made—and that was unapproachable, in Mordor. Also so great was the Ring’s power of lust, that anyone who used it became mastered by it; it was beyond the strength of any will

⁴³ Elrond symbolises throughout the ancient wisdom, and his House represents Lore—the preservation in reverent memory of all tradition concerning the good, wise, and beautiful. It is not a scene of *action* but of *reflection*. Thus it is a place visited on the way to all deeds, or ‘adventures’. It may prove to be on the direct road (as in *The Hobbit*); but it may be necessary to go from there in a totally unexpected course. So necessarily in *The Lord of the Rings*, having escaped to Elrond from the imminent pursuit of present evil, the hero departs in a wholly new direction: to go and face it at its source.

(even his own) to injure it, cast it away, or neglect it. So he thought. It was in any case on his finger.

Thus, as the Second Age draws on, we have a great Kingdom and evil theocracy (for Sauron is also the god of his slaves) growing up in Middle-earth. In the West—actually the North-West is the only part clearly envisaged in these tales—lie the precarious refuges of the Elves, while Men in those parts remain more or less uncorrupted if ignorant. The better and nobler sort of Men are in fact the kin of those that had departed to Númenor, but remain in a simple ‘Homeric’ state of patriarchal and tribal life.

Mean while Númenor has grown in wealth, wisdom, and glory, under its line of great kings of long life, directly descended from Elros, Earendil’s son, brother of Elrond. The *Downfall of Númenor*, the Second Fall of Man (or Man rehabilitated but still mortal), brings on the catastrophic end, not only of the Second Age, but of the Old World, the primeval world of legend (envisaged as flat and bounded). After which the Third Age began, a Twilight Age, a Medium Aevum, the first of the broken and changed world; the last of the lingering dominion of visible fully incarnate Elves, and the last also in which Evil assumes a single dominant incarnate shape.

The Downfall is partly the result of an inner weakness in Men—consequent, if you will, upon the first Fall (unrecorded in these tales), repented but not finally healed. Reward on earth is more dangerous for men than punishment! The Fall is achieved by the cunning of Sauron in exploiting this weakness. Its central theme is (inevitably, I think, in a story of Men) a Ban, or Prohibition.

The Númenóreans dwell within far sight of the easternmost ‘immortal’ land, Eressëa; and as the only men to speak an Elvish tongue (learned in the days of their Alliance) they are in constant communication with their ancient friends and allies, either in the bliss of Eressëa, or in the kingdom of Gilgalad on the shores of Middle-earth. They became thus in appearance, and even in powers of mind, hardly distinguishable from the Elves—but they remained mortal, even though rewarded by a triple, or more than a triple, span of years. Their reward is their undoing—or the means of their temptation. Their long life aids their achievements in art and wisdom, but breeds a possessive attitude to these things, and desire awakes for more *time* for their enjoyment. Foreseeing this in part, the

gods laid a Ban on the Númenóreans from the beginning: they must never sail to Eressëa, nor westward out of sight of their own land. In all other directions they could go as they would. They must not set foot on ‘immortal’ lands, and so become enamoured of an immortality (within the world), which was against their law, the special doom or gift of Ilúvatar (God), and which their nature could not in fact endure.⁴⁴

There are three phases in their fall from grace. First acquiescence, obedience that is free and willing, though without complete understanding. Then for long they obey unwillingly, murmuring more and more openly. Finally they rebel—and a rift appears between the King’s men and rebels, and the small minority of persecuted Faithful.

In the first stage, being men of peace, their courage is devoted to sea-voyages. As descendants of Earendil, they became the supreme mariners, and being barred from the West, they sail to the uttermost north, and south, and east. Mostly they come to the west-shores of Middle-earth, where they aid the Elves and Men against Sauron, and incur his undying hatred. In those days they would come amongst Wild Men as almost divine benefactors, bringing gifts of arts and knowledge, and passing away again—leaving many legends behind of kings and gods out of the sunset.

In the second stage, the days of Pride and Glory and grudging of the Ban, they begin to seek wealth rather than bliss. The desire to escape death produced a cult of the dead, and they lavished wealth and art on tombs and memorials. They now made settlements on the west-shores, but these became rather strongholds and ‘factories’ of lords seeking wealth, and the Númenóreans became tax-gatherers carrying off over the sea ever more and more goods in their great ships. The Númenóreans began the forging of arms and engines.

This phase ended and the last began with the ascent of the throne by the thirteenth king of the line of Elros, Tar-Calion the Golden, the most powerful and proud of all kings. When he learned that Sauron had taken the title of King of Kings and Lord of the World, he resolved to put down the ‘pretender’. He goes in strength and majesty to Middle-earth, and so vast is his armament, and so terrible are the Númenóreans in the day

⁴⁴ The view is taken (as clearly reappears later in the case of the Hobbits that have the Ring for a while) that each ‘Kind’ has a natural span, integral to its biological and spiritual nature. This cannot really be *increased* qualitatively or quantitatively; so that prolongation in time is like stretching a wire out ever tauter, or ‘spreading butter ever thinner’—it becomes an intolerable torment.

of their glory that Sauron's servants will not face them. Sauron humbles himself, does homage to Tar-Calion, and is carried off to Númenor as hostage and prisoner. But there he swiftly rises by his cunning and knowledge from servant to chief counsellor of the king, and seduces the king and most of the lords and people with his lies. He denies the existence of God, saying that the One is a mere invention of the jealous Valar of the West, the oracle of their own wishes. The chief of the gods is he that dwells in the Void, who will conquer in the end, and in the void make endless realms for his servants. The Ban is only a lying device of fear to restrain the Kings of Men from seizing everlasting life and rivaling the Valar.

A new religion, and worship of the Dark, with its temple under Sauron arises. The Faithful are persecuted and sacrificed. The Númenóreans carry their evil also to Middle-earth and there become cruel and wicked lords of necromancy, slaying and tormenting men; and the old legends are overlaid with dark tales of horror. This does not happen, however, in the North West; for thither, because of the Elves, only the Faithful who remain Elf-friends will come. The chief haven of the good Númenóreans is near the mouth of the great river Anduin. Thence the still beneficent influence of Númenor spreads up the River and along the coasts as far north as the realm of Gilgalad, as a Common Speech grows up.

But at last Sauron's plot comes to fulfilment. Tar-Calion feels old age and death approaching, and he listens to the last prompting of Sauron, and building the greatest of all armadas, he sets sail into the West, breaking the Ban, and going up with war to wrest from the gods 'everlasting life within the circles of the world'. Faced by this rebellion, of appalling folly and blasphemy, and also real peril (since the Númenóreans directed by Sauron could have wrought ruin in Valinor itself) the Valar lay down their delegated power and appeal to God, and receive the power and permission to deal with the situation; the old world is broken and changed. A chasm is opened in the sea, and Tar-Calion and his armada are engulfed. Númenor itself on the edge of the rift topples and vanishes for ever with all its glory in the abyss. Thereafter there is no visible dwelling of the divine or immortal on earth. Valinor (or Paradise) and even Eressëa are removed, remaining only in the memory of the earth. Men may sail now West, if they will, as far as they may, and come no nearer to Valinor or the Blessed Realm, but return only into the east and so back again;

for the world is round, and finite, and a circle inescapable—save by death. Only the ‘immortals’, the lingering Elves, may still if they will, wearying of the circle of the world, take ship and find the ‘straight way’, and come to the ancient or True West, and be at peace.

So the end of the Second Age draws on in a major catastrophe; but it is not yet quite concluded. From the cataclysm there are survivors: *Elendil* the Fair, chief of the Faithful (his name means *Elf-friend*), and his sons *Isildur* and *Anarion*. Elendil, a Noachian figure, who has held off from the rebellion, and kept ships manned and furnished off the east coast of Númenor, flees before the overwhelming storm of the wrath of the West, and is borne high upon the towering waves that bring ruin to the west of the Middle-earth. He and his folk are cast away as exiles upon the shores. There they establish the Númenórean kingdoms of Arnor in the north close to the realm of Gilgalad and Gondor about the mouths of Anduin further south. Sauron, being an immortal, hardly escapes the ruin of Númenor and returns to Mordor, where after a while he is strong enough to challenge the exiles of Númenor.

The Second Age ends with the *Last Alliance* (of Elves and Men), and the great siege of Mordor. It ends with the overthrow of Sauron and destruction of the second visible incarnation of evil. But at a cost, and with one disastrous mistake. Gilgalad and Elendil are slain in the act of slaying Sauron. Isildur, Elendil’s son, cuts the ring from Sauron’s hand, and his power departs, and his spirit flees into the shadows. But the evil begins to work. Isildur claims the Ring as his own, as ‘the Weregild of his father’, and refuses to cast it into the Fire nearby. He marches away, but is drowned in the Great River, and the Ring is lost, passing out of all knowledge. But it is not unmade, and the Dark Tower built with its aid still stands, empty but not destroyed. So ends the Second Age with the coming of the Númenórean realms and the passing of the last kingship of the High Elves.

The Third Age is concerned mainly with the Ring. The Dark Lord is no longer on his throne, but his monsters are not wholly destroyed, and his dreadful servants, slaves of the Ring, endure as shadows among the shadows. Mordor is empty and the Dark Tower void, and a watch is kept upon the borders of the evil land. The Elves still have hidden refuges: at the Grey Havens of their ships, in the House of Elrond, and elsewhere. In the

North is the Kingdom of Arnor ruled by the descendants of Isildur. Southward athwart the Great River Anduin are the cities and forts of the Númenórean realm of Gondor, with kings of the line of Anarion. Away in the (to these tales) uncharted East and South are the countries and realms of wild or evil men, alike only in their hatred of the West, derived from their master Sauron; but Gondor and its power bar the way. The Ring is lost, for ever it is hoped; and the Three Rings of the Elves, wielded by secret guardians, are operative in preserving the memory of the beauty of old, maintaining enchanted enclaves of peace where Time seems to stand still and decay is restrained, a semblance of the bliss of the True West.

But in the north Arnor dwindles, is broken into petty princedoms, and finally vanishes. The remnant of the Númenóreans becomes a hidden wandering Folk, and though their true line of Kings of Isildur's heirs never fails this is known only in the House of Elrond. In the south Gondor rises to a peak of power, almost reflecting Númenór, and then fades slowly to decayed Middle Age, a kind of proud, venerable, but increasingly impotent Byzantium. The watch upon Mordor is relaxed. The pressure of the Easterlings and Southrons increases. The line of Kings fails, and the last city of Gondor, Minas Tirith ('Tower of Vigilance'), is ruled by hereditary Stewards. The Horsemen of the North, the Rohirrim or Riders of Rohan, taken into perpetual alliance, settle in the now unpeopled green plains that were once the northern part of the realm of Gondor. On the great primeval forest, Greenwood the Great, east of the upper waters of the Great River, a shadow falls, and grows, and it becomes Mirkwood. The Wise discover that it proceeds from a Sorcerer ('The Necromancer' of *The Hobbit*), who has a secret castle in the south of the Great Wood.⁴⁵

In the middle of this Age the Hobbits appear. Their origin is unknown (even to themselves),⁴⁶ for they escaped the notice of the great, or the civilised peoples with

⁴⁵ It is only in the time between *The Hobbit* and its sequel that it is discovered that the Necromancer is *Sauron Redivivus*, growing swiftly to visible shape and power again. He escapes the vigilance and re-enters Mordor and the Dark Tower.

⁴⁶ The Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically *human* race (not Elves or Dwarves)—hence the two kinds can dwell together (as at Bree), and are called just the Big Folk and Little Folk. They are entirely without non-human powers, but are represented as being more in touch with 'nature' (the soil and other living things, plants and animals), and abnormally, for humans, free from ambition or greed of wealth. They are made *small* (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man—though not with either the smallness or the savageness of Swift, and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the

records, and kept none themselves, save vague oral traditions, until they had migrated from the borders of Mirkwood, fleeing from the Shadow, and wandered westward, coming into contact with the last remnants of the Kingdom of Arnor.

Their chief settlement, where all the inhabitants are hobbits, and where an ordered, civilised, if simple and rural life is maintained, is *the Shire*, originally the farmlands and forests of the royal demesne of Arnor, granted as a fief: but the ‘King’, author of laws, has long vanished save in memory before we hear much of *the Shire*. It is in the year 1341 of the Shire (or 2941 of the Third Age: that is in its last century) that Bilbo—The Hobbit and hero of that tale—starts on his ‘adventure’.

In that story, which need not be resumed, hobbitry and the hobbit-situation are not explained, but taken for granted, and what little is told of their history is in the form of casual allusion as to something known. The whole of the ‘world-polities’, outlined above, is of course there in mind, and also alluded to occasionally as to things elsewhere recorded in full. Elrond is an important character, though his reverence, high powers, and lineage are toned down and not revealed in full. There are allusions to the history of the Elves, and to the fall of Gondolin and so on. The shadows and evil of Mirkwood provide, in diminished ‘fairy-story’ mode, one of the major parts of the adventure. Only in one point do these ‘world-politics’ act as part of the mechanism of the story. Gandalf the Wizard⁴⁷ is called away on high business, an attempt to deal with the menace of the Necromancer, and so leaves the Hobbit without help or advice in the midst of his ‘adventure’, forcing him to stand on his own legs, and become in his mode heroic. (Many readers have observed this point and guessed that the Necromancer must figure largely in any sequel or further tales of this time.)

The generally different tone and style of *The Hobbit* is due, in point of genesis, to its being taken by me as a matter from the great cycle susceptible of treatment as a

amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men ‘at a pinch’.

⁴⁷Nowhere is the place or nature of ‘the Wizards’ made fully explicit. Their name, as related to Wise, is an Englishing of their Elvish name, and is used throughout as utterly distinct from Sorcerer or Magician. It appears finally that they were as one might say the near equivalent in the mode of these tales of Angels, guardian Angels. Their powers are directed primarily to the encouragement of the enemies of evil, to cause them to use their own wits and valour, to unite and endure. They appear always as old men and sages, and though (sent by the powers of the True West) in the world they suffer themselves, their age and grey hairs increase only slowly. Gandalf whose function is especially to watch human affairs (Men and Hobbits) goes on through all the tales.

‘fairy-story’, for children. Some of the details of tone and treatment are, I now think, even on that basis, mistaken. But I should not wish to change much. For in effect this is a study of simple ordinary man, neither artistic nor noble and heroic (but not without the undeveloped seeds of these things) against a high setting—and in fact (as a critic has perceived) the tone and style change with the *Hobbit*’s development, passing from fairy-tale to the noble and high and relapsing with the return.

The Quest of the Dragon-gold, the main theme of the actual tale of *The Hobbit*, is to the general cycle quite peripheral and incidental—connected with it mainly through Dwarf-history, which is nowhere central to these tales, though often important.⁴⁸ But in the course of the Quest, the Hobbit becomes possessed by seeming ‘accident’ of a ‘magic ring’, the chief and only immediately obvious power of which is to make its wearer invisible. Though for this tale an accident, unforeseen and having no place in any plan for the quest, it proves an essential to success. On return the Hobbit, enlarged in vision and wisdom, if unchanged in idiom, retains the ring as a personal secret.

The sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, much the largest, and I hope also in proportion the best, of the entire cycle, concludes the whole business—an attempt is made to include in it, and wind up, all the elements and motives of what has preceded: elves, dwarves, the Kings of Men, heroic ‘Homeric’ horsemen, orcs and demons, the terrors of the Ring-servants and Necromancy, and the vast horror of the Dark Throne; even in style it is to include the colloquialism and vulgarity of Hobbits, poetry, and the highest style of prose. We are to see the overthrow of the last incarnation of Evil, the unmaking of the Ring, the final departure of the Elves, and the return in majesty of the true King, to take over the Dominion of Men, inheriting all that can be transmitted of Elfdom in his high marriage with Arwen daughter of Elrond, as well as the lineal royalty of Númenor. But as the earliest Tales are seen through Elvish eyes, as it were, this last great Tale, coming down from myth and legend to the earth, is seen mainly through the eyes of Hobbits: it thus becomes in fact anthropocentric. But through Hobbits, not Men so-called, because the

⁴⁸ The hostility of (even good) Dwarves and Elves, a motive that often appears, derives from the legends of the First Age; the Mines of Moria, the wars of Dwarves and Orcs (goblins, soldiery of the Dark Lord) refer to the Second Age and early Third.

last Tale is to exemplify most clearly a recurrent theme: the place in ‘world politics’ of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil). A moral of the whole (after the primary symbolism of the Ring, as the will to mere power, seeking to make itself objective by physical force and mechanism, and so also inevitably by lies) is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless.

It is not possible even at great length to ‘pot’ *The Lord of the Rings* in a paragraph or two. It was begun in 1936, and every part has been written many times. Hardly a word in its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered. And the placing, size, style, and contribution to the whole of all the features, incidents, and chapters have been laboriously pondered. I do not say this in recommendation. It is, I feel, only too likely that I am deluded, lost in a web of vain imaginings of not much value to others—in spite of the fact that a few readers have found it good, on the whole.⁴⁹ What I intend to say is this: I cannot substantially alter the thing. I have finished it, it is ‘off my mind’: the labour has been colossal; and it must stand or fall, practically as it is.

[The letter continues with a summary (without comments) of the storyline of *The Lord of the Rings*, after which Tolkien writes:]

That is a long and yet bald resume. Many characters important to the tale are not even mentioned. Even some whole inventions like the remarkable *Ents*, oldest of living rational creatures, *Shepherds of the Trees*, are omitted. Since we now try to deal with ‘ordinary life’, springing up ever unquenched under the trample of world policies and events, there are love-stories touched in, or love in different modes, wholly absent from *The Hobbit*. But the highest love-story, that of Aragorn and Arwen, Elrond’s daughter, is only alluded to as a known thing. It is told elsewhere in a short tale, *Of Aragorn and Arwen Undómiel*. I think the simple ‘rustic’ love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero’s)

⁴⁹ But as each has disliked this or that, I should (if I took all the criticisms together and obeyed them) find little left, and am forced to the conclusion that so great a work (in size) cannot be perfect, nor even if perfect, be liked entirely by any *one* reader.

character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the ‘longing for Elves’, and sheer beauty. But I will say no more, nor defend the theme of mistaken love seen in Eowyn and her first love for Aragorn. I do not feel much can now be done to heal the faults of this large and much-embracing tale—or to make it ‘publishable’, if it is not so now. A slight revision (now accomplished) of a crucial point in *The Hobbit*, clarifying the character of Gollum and his relation to the Ring, will enable me to reduce Book I, Chapter II, ‘The Shadow of the Past’, simplify it, and quicken it—and also simplify the debatable opening of Book II a little. If *the other material*, ‘The Silmarillion’ and some other tales or links such as *The Downfall of Númenor* are published or in process of this, then much explanation of background, and especially that found in the *Council of Elrond* (Bk II) could be dispensed with. But altogether it would hardly amount to the excision of a single long chapter (out of about 72).

I wonder whether (even if legible) you will ever read this??

From *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*



C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

De Descriptione Temporum

C. S. Lewis

Speaking from a newly founded Chair, I find myself freed from one embarrassment only to fall into another. I have no great predecessors to overshadow me; on the other hand, I must try (as the theatrical people say) ‘to create the part’. The responsibility is heavy. If I miscarry, the University might come to regret not only my election— an error which, at worst, can be left to the great healer—but even, which matters very much more, the foundation of the Chair itself. That is why I have thought it best to take the bull by the horns and devote this lecture to explaining as clearly as I can the way in which I approach my work; my interpretation of the commission you have given me.

What most attracted me in that commission was the combination ‘Medieval and Renaissance’. I thought that by this formula the University was giving official sanction to a change which has been coming over historical opinion within my own lifetime. It is temperately summed up by Professor Sez nec in the words: ‘As the Middle Ages and the Renaissance come to be better known, the traditional antithesis between them grows less marked.’ Some scholars might go further than Professor Sez nec, but very few, I believe, would now oppose him. If we are sometimes unconscious of the change, that is not because we have not shared it but because it has been gradual and imperceptible. We recognise it most clearly if we are suddenly brought face to face with the old view in its full vigour. A good experiment is to re-read the first chapter of J. M. Berdan’s *Early Tudor Poetry*. It is still in many ways a useful book; but it is now difficult to read that chapter without a smile. We begin with twenty-nine pages (and they contain several mis-statements) of unrelieved gloom about grossness, superstition, and cruelty to children, and on the twenty-ninth comes the sentence, ‘The first rift in this darkness is the Copernican doctrine’; as if a new hypothesis in astronomy would naturally make a man stop hitting his daughter about the head. No scholar could now write quite like that. But the old picture, done in far cruder colours, has survived among the weaker brethren, if not (let us hope) at Cambridge, yet certainly in that Western darkness from which you have so lately bidden me emerge.

Only last summer a young gentleman whom I had the honour of examining described Thomas Wyatt as ‘the first man who scrambled ashore out of the great, dark surging sea of the Middle Ages’.⁵⁰ This was interesting because it showed how a stereotyped image can obliterate a man’s own experience. Nearly all the medieval texts which the syllabus had required him to study had in reality led him into formal gardens where every passion was subdued to a ceremonial and every problem of conduct was dovetailed into a complex and rigid moral theology.

From the formula ‘Medieval and Renaissance’, then, I inferred that the University was encouraging my own belief that the barrier between those two ages has been greatly exaggerated, if indeed it was not largely a figment of Humanist propaganda. At the very least, I was ready to welcome any increased flexibility in our conception of history. All lines of demarcation between what we call ‘periods’ should be subject to constant revision. Would that we could dispense with them altogether! As a great Cambridge historian has said: ‘Unlike dates, periods are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray.’⁵¹ The actual temporal process, as we meet it in our lives (and we meet it, in a strict sense, nowhere else) has no divisions, except perhaps those ‘blessed barriers between day and day’, our sleeps. Change is never complete, and change never ceases. Nothing is ever quite finished with; it may always begin over again. (This is one of the sides of life that Richardson hits off with wearying accuracy.) And nothing is quite new; it was always somehow anticipated or prepared for. A seamless, formless continuity-in-mutability is the mode of our life. But unhappily we cannot as historians dispense with periods. We cannot use for literary history the technique of Mrs Woolf’s *The Waves*. We cannot hold together huge masses of particulars without putting into them some kind of structure. Still less can we arrange a term’s work or draw up a lecture list. Thus we are driven back upon periods. All divisions will falsify our material to some extent; the best one can hope is to choose those which will falsify it least. But because we must divide, to reduce the emphasis on any one

⁵⁰ A delicious passage in Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (London, 1895), p. 241, contrasts the Middle Ages with ‘more normal periods of history’.

⁵¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London, 1944), p. 92.

traditional division must, in the long run, mean an increase of emphasis on some other division. And that is the subject I want to discuss. If we do not put the Great Divide between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where should we put it? I ask this question with the full consciousness that, in the reality studied, there is no Great Divide. There is nothing in history that quite corresponds to a coastline or a watershed in geography. If, in spite of this, I still think my question worth asking, that is certainly not because I claim for my answer more than a methodological value, or even much of that. Least of all would I wish it to be any less subject than others to continual attack and speedy revision. But I believe that the discussion is as good a way as any other of explaining how I look at the work you have given me. When I have finished it, I shall at least have laid the cards on the table and you will know the worst.

The meaning of my title will now have become plain. It is a chapter-heading borrowed from Isidore.⁵² In that chapter Isidore is engaged in dividing history, as he knew it, into its periods; or, as he calls them, *aetates*. I shall be doing the same. Assuming that we do not put our great frontier between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, I shall consider the rival claims of certain other divisions which have been, or might be, made. But, first, a word of warning. I am not, even on the most Lilliputian scale, emulating Professor Toynbee or Spengler. About everything that could be called ‘the philosophy of history’ I am a desperate sceptic. I know nothing of the future, not even whether there will be any future. I don’t know whether past history has been necessary or contingent. I don’t know whether the human tragicomedy is now in Act I or Act V; whether our present disorders are those of infancy or of old age. I am merely considering how we should arrange or schematise those facts—ludicrously few in comparison with the totality—which survive to us (often by accident) from the past.⁵³ I am less like a botanist in a forest than a woman arranging a few cut flowers for the drawing-room. So, in some degree, are the greatest historians. We can’t get into the real forest of the past; that is part of what

⁵² *Etymologiarum*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (2 vols. Oxford, 1911), v, xxxix.

⁵³ In his essay on ‘Historicism’ Lewis discusses at length the belief that ‘men can, by the use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process’. The essay is found in his *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (London, 1967), pp. 100-13.

the word *past* means.

The first division that naturally occurs to us is that between Antiquity and the Dark Ages—the fall of the Empire, the barbarian invasions, the christening of Europe. And of course no possible revolution in historical thought will ever make this anything less than a massive and multiple change. Do not imagine that I mean to belittle it. Yet I must observe that three things have happened since, say, Gibbon's time, which make it a shade less catastrophic for us than it was for him.

1. The partial loss of ancient learning and its recovery at the Renaissance were for him both unique events. History furnished no rivals to such a death and such a re-birth. But we have lived to see the second death of ancient learning. In our time something which was once the possession of all educated men has shrunk to being the technical accomplishment of a few specialists. If we say that this is not total death, it may be replied that there was no total death in the Dark Ages either. It could even be argued that Latin, surviving as the language of Dark Age culture, and preserving the disciplines of Law and Rhetoric, gave to some parts of the classical heritage a far more living and integral status in the life of those ages than the academic studies of the specialists can claim in our own. As for the area and the *tempo* of the two deaths, if one were looking for a man who could not read Virgil though his father could, he might be found more easily in the twentieth century than in the fifth.

2. To Gibbon the literary change from Virgil to *Beowulf* or the *Hildebrand*, if he had read them, would have seemed greater than it can to us. We can now see quite clearly that these barbarian poems were not really a novelty comparable to, say, *The Waste Land* or Mr. Jones's *Anathemata*. They were rather an unconscious return to the spirit of the earliest classical poetry. The audience of Homer, and the audience of the *Hildebrand*, once they had learned one another's language and metre, would have found one another's poetry perfectly intelligible. Nothing new had come into the world.

3. The christening of Europe seemed to all our ancestors, whether they welcomed it themselves as Christians, or, like Gibbon, deplored it as humanistic unbelievers, a unique, irreversible event. But we have seen the opposite process. Of course the unchristening of Europe in our time is not quite complete; neither was her christening

in the Dark Ages. But roughly speaking we may say that whereas all history was for our ancestors divided into two periods, the pre-Christian and the Christian, and two only, for us it falls into three—the pre-Christian, the Christian, and what may reasonably be called the post-Christian. This surely must make a momentous difference. I am not here considering either the christening or the un-christening from a theological point of view. I am considering them simply as cultural changes.⁵⁴ When I do that, it appears to me that the second change is even more radical than the first. Christians and Pagans had much more in common with each other than either has with a post-Christian. The gap between those who worship different gods is not so wide as that between those who worship and those who do not. The Pagan and Christian ages alike are ages of what Pausanias would call the *δρώμενον*,⁵⁵ the externalised and enacted idea; the sacrifice, the games, the triumph, the ritual drama, the Mass, the tournament, the masque, the pageant, the epithalamium, and with them ritual and symbolic costumes, *trabea* and *laticlave*, crown of wild olive, royal crown, coronet, judge's robes, knight's spurs, herald's tabard, coat-armour, priestly vestment, religious habit—for every rank, trade, or occasion its visible sign. But even if we look away from that into the temper of men's minds, I seem to see the same. Surely the gap between Professor Ryle and Thomas Browne is far wider than that between Gregory the Great and Virgil? Surely Seneca and Dr Johnson are closer together than Burton and Freud?

You see already the lines along which my thought is working; and indeed it is no part of my aim to save a surprise for the end of the lecture. If I have ventured, a little, to modify our view of the transition from 'the Antique' to 'the Dark', it is only because I believe we have since witnessed a change even more profound.

The next frontier which has been drawn, though not till recently, is that between the Dark and the Middle Ages. We draw it somewhere about the early twelfth century. The frontier clearly cannot compete with its predecessor in the religious field; nor can it boast such drastic redistribution of populations. But it nearly makes up for these deficiencies in other ways. The change from Ancient to Dark had, after all, consisted

⁵⁴ It is not certain that either process, seen (if we could see it) *sub specie aeternitatis*, would be more important than it appears to the historian of culture. The amount of Christian (that is, of penitent and regenerate) life in an age, as distinct from 'Christian Civilization', is not to be judged by mortals.

⁵⁵ *De Descriptione Graec*, II, xxxvii.

mainly in losses. Not entirely. The Dark Ages were not so unfruitful in progress as we sometimes think. They saw the triumph of the *codex* or hinged book over the roll or *volumen*—a technical improvement almost as important for the history of learning as the invention of printing. All exact scholarship depends on it. And if—here I speak under correction—they also invented the stirrup, they did something almost as important for the art of war as the inventor of Tanks. But in the main, they were a period of retrogression: worse houses, worse drains, fewer baths, worse roads, less security. (We notice in *Beowulf* that an old sword is expected to be better than a new one.) With the Middle Ages we reach a period of widespread and brilliant improvement. The text of Aristotle is recovered. Its rapid assimilation by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas opens up a new world of thought. In architecture new solutions of technical problems lead the way to new aesthetic effects. In literature the old alliterative and assonantal metres give place to that rhymed and syllabic verse which was to carry the main burden of European poetry for centuries. At the same time the poets explore a whole new range of sentiment. I am so far from underrating this particular revolution that I have before now been accused of exaggerating it. But ‘great’ and ‘small’ are terms of comparison. I would think this change in literature the greatest if I did not know of a greater. It does not seem to me that the work of the Troubadours and Chrétien and the rest was really as great a novelty as the poetry of the twentieth century. A man bred on the *Chanson de Roland* might have been puzzled by the *Lancelot*. He would have wondered why the author spent so much time on the sentiments and so (comparatively) little on the actions. But he would have known that this was what the author had done. He would, in one important sense, have known what the poem was ‘about’. If he had misunderstood the intention, he would at least have understood the words. That is why I do not think the change from ‘Dark’ to ‘Middle’ can, on the literary side, be judged equal to the change which has taken place in my own lifetime. And of course in religion it does not even begin to compete.

A third possible frontier remains to be considered. We might draw our line somewhere towards the end of the seventeenth century, with the general acceptance of Copernicanism, the dominance of Descartes, and (in England) the foundation of the Royal Society. Indeed, if we were considering the history of thought (in the narrower

sense of the word) I believe this is where I would draw my line. But if we are considering the history of our culture in general, it is a different matter. Certainly the sciences then began to advance with a firmer and more rapid tread. To that advance nearly all the later, and (in my mind) vaster, changes can be traced. But the effects were delayed. The sciences long remained like a lion-cub whose gambols delighted its master in private; it had not yet tasted man's blood. All through the eighteenth century the tone of the common mind remained ethical, rhetorical, juristic, rather than scientific, so that Johnson could truly say, 'the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind.'⁵⁶ It is easy to see why. Science was not the business of Man because Man had not yet become the business of science. It dealt chiefly with the inanimate; and it threw off few technological by-products. When Watt makes his engine, when Darwin starts monkeying with the ancestry of Man, and Freud with his soul, and the economists with all that is his, then indeed the lion will have got out of its cage. Its liberated presence in our midst will become one of the most important factors in everyone's daily life. But not yet; not in the seventeenth century.

It is by these steps that I have come to regard as the greatest of all divisions in the history of the West that which divides the present from, say, the age of Jane Austen and Scott. The dating of such things must of course be rather hazy and indefinite. No one could point to a year or a decade in which the change indisputably began, and it has probably not yet reached its peak. But somewhere between us and the Waverley Novels, somewhere between us and *Persuasion*, the chasm runs. Of course, I had no sooner reached this result than I asked myself whether it might not be an illusion of perspective. The distance between the telegraph post I am touching and the next telegraph post looks longer than the sum of the distances between all the other posts. Could this be an illusion of the same sort? We cannot pace the periods as we could pace the posts. I can only set out the grounds on which, after frequent reconsideration, I have found myself forced to reaffirm my conclusion.

⁵⁶ 'Life of Milton', in *Lives of the English Poets*, vol. I, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford, 1905), p. 99.

1. I begin with what I regard as the weakest; the change, between Scott's age and ours, in political order. On this count my proposed frontier would have serious rivals. The change is perhaps less than that between Antiquity and the Dark Ages. Yet it is very great; and I think it extends to all nations, those we call democracies as well as dictatorships. If I wished to satirise the present political order I should borrow for it the name which *Punch* invented during the first German War: *Govertisement*. This is a portmanteau word and means 'government by advertisement'. But my intention is not satiric; I am trying to be objective. The change is this. In all previous ages that I can think of the principal aim of rulers, except at rare and short intervals, was to keep their subjects quiet, to forestall or extinguish widespread excitement and persuade people to attend quietly to their several occupations. And on the whole their subjects agreed with them. They even prayed (in words that sound curiously old-fashioned) to be able to live 'a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty' and 'pass their time in rest and quietness'. But now the organisation of mass excitement seems to be almost the normal organ of political power. We live in an age of 'appeals', 'drives', and 'campaigns'. Our rulers have become like schoolmasters and are always demanding 'keenness'. And you notice that I am guilty of a slight archaism in calling them 'rulers'. 'Leaders' is the modern word. I have suggested elsewhere⁵⁷ that this is a deeply significant change of vocabulary. Our demand upon them has changed no less than theirs on us. For of a ruler one asks justice, incorruption, diligence, perhaps clemency; of a leader, dash, initiative, and (I suppose) what people call 'magnetism' or 'personality'.

On the political side, then, this proposed frontier has respectable, but hardly compulsive, qualifications.

2. In the arts I think it towers above every possible rival. I do not think that any previous age produced work which was, in its own time, as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the Cubists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and Picasso has been in ours. And I am quite sure that this is true of the art I love best, that is, of poetry. This question has often been debated with some heat, but the heat was, I think, occasioned by the suspicion (not always ill-grounded) that those who asserted

⁵⁷ 'New Learning and New Ignorance', *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama*, The Oxford History of English Literature, vol. III (Oxford, 1954), p. 50.

the unprecedented novelty of modern poetry intended thereby to discredit it. But nothing is farther from my purpose than to make any judgement of value, whether favourable or the reverse. And if once we can eliminate that critical issue and concentrate on the historical fact, then I do not see how anyone can doubt that modern poetry is not only a greater novelty than any other 'new poetry' but new in a new way, almost in a new dimension. To say that all new poetry was once as difficult as ours is false; to say that any was is an equivocation. Some earlier poetry was difficult, but not in the same way. Alexandrian poetry was difficult because it presupposed a learned reader; as you became learned you found the answers to the puzzles. Skaldic poetry was unintelligible if you did not know the *kenningar*, but intelligible if you did. And—this is the real point—all Alexandrian men of letters and all skalds would have agreed about the answers. I believe the same to be true of the dark conceits in Donne; there was one correct interpretation of each and Donne could have told it to you. Of course you might misunderstand what Wordsworth was 'up to' in *Lyrical Ballads*; but everyone understood what he said. I do not see in any of these the slightest parallel to the state of affairs disclosed by a recent symposium on Mr Eliot's 'Cooking Egg'.⁵⁸ Here we find seven adults (two of them Cambridge men) whose lives have been specially devoted to the study of poetry discussing a very short poem which has been before the world for thirty-odd years; and there is not the slightest agreement among them as to what, in any sense of the word, it means. I am not in the least concerned to decide whether this state of affairs is a good thing, or a bad thing.⁵⁹ I merely assert that it is a new thing. In the whole history of the West, from Homer—I might almost say from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—there has been no bend or break in the development of poetry comparable to this. On this score my proposed division has no rival to fear.

3. Thirdly, there is the great religious change which I have had to mention before: the un-christening. Of course there were lots of sceptics in Jane Austen's time and long before, as there are lots of Christians now. But the presumption has changed. In

⁵⁸ 'A Cooking Egg', *Essays in Criticism*, vol. III (July 1953), pp. 345–57.

⁵⁹ In music we have pieces which demand more talent in the performer than in the composer. Why should there not come a period when the art of writing poetry stands lower than the art of reading it? Of course rival readings would then cease to be 'right' or 'wrong' and become more and less brilliant 'performances'.

her days some kind and degree of religious belief and practice were the norm: now, though I would gladly believe that both kind and degree have improved, they are the exception. I have already argued that this change surpasses that which Europe underwent at its conversion. It is hard to have patience with those Jeremiahs, in press or pulpit, who warn us that we are 'relapsing into Paganism'. It might be rather fun if we were. It would be pleasant to see some future Prime Minister trying to kill a large and lively milk-white bull in Westminster Hall. But we shan't. What lurks behind such idle prophecies, if they are anything but careless language, is the false idea that the historical process allows mere reversal; that Europe can come out of Christianity 'by the same door as in she went' and find herself back where she was. It is not what happens. A post-Christian man is not a Pagan; you might as well think that a married woman recovers her virginity by divorce. The post-Christian is cut off from the Christian past and therefore doubly from the Pagan past.

4. Lastly, I play my trump card. Between Jane Austen and us, but not between her and Shakespeare, Chaucer, Alfred, Virgil, Homer, or the Pharaohs, comes the birth of the machines. This lifts us at once into a region of change far above all that we have hitherto considered. For this is parallel to the great changes by which we divide epochs of pre-history. This is on a level with the change from stone to bronze, or from a pastoral to an agricultural economy. It alters Man's place in nature. The theme has been celebrated till we are all sick of it, so I will here say nothing about its economic and social consequences, immeasurable though they are. What concerns us more is its psychological effect. How has it come about that we use the highly emotive word 'stagnation', with all its malodorous and malarial overtones, for what other ages would have called 'permanence'? Why does the word 'primitive' at once suggest to us clumsiness, inefficiency, barbarity? When our ancestors talked of the primitive church or the primitive purity of our constitution they meant nothing of that sort. (The only pejorative sense which Johnson gives to *Primitive* in his Dictionary is, significantly, 'Formal; affectedly solemn; imitating the supposed gravity of old times'.) Why does 'latest' in advertisements mean 'best'? Well, let us admit that these semantic developments owe something to the nineteenth-century belief in spontaneous progress which itself owes something either to Darwin's theorem of biological evolution or to that

myth of universal evolutionism which is really so different from it, and earlier. For the two great imaginative expressions of the myth, as distinct from the theorem—Keats's *Hyperion* and Wagner's *Ring*—are pre-Darwinian. Let us give these their due. But I submit that what has imposed this climate of opinion so firmly on the human mind is a new archetypal image. It is the image of old machines being superseded by new and better ones. For in the world of machines the new most often really is better and the primitive really is the clumsy. And this image, potent in all our minds, reigns almost without rival in the minds of the uneducated. For to them, after their marriage and the births of their children, the very milestones of life are technical advances. From the old push-bike to the motor-bike and thence to the little car; from gramophone to radio and from radio to television; from the range to the stove; these are the very stages of their pilgrimage. But whether from this cause or from some other, assuredly that approach to life which has left these footprints on our language is the thing that separates us most sharply from our ancestors and whose absence would strike us as most alien if we could return to their world. Conversely, our assumption that everything is provisional and soon to be superseded, that the attainment of goods we have never yet had, rather than the defence and conservation of those we have already, is the cardinal business of life, would most shock and bewilder them if they could visit ours.

I thus claim for my chosen division of periods that on the first count it comes well up to scratch; on the second and third it arguably surpasses all; and on the fourth it quite clearly surpasses them without any dispute. I conclude that it really is the greatest change in the history of Western Man.

At any rate, this conviction determines my whole approach to my work from this Chair. I am not preparing an excuse in advance lest I should hereafter catch myself lecturing either on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or on the Waverley Novels. The field 'Medieval and Renaissance' is already far too wide for my powers. But you see how to me the appointed area must primarily appear as a specimen of something far larger, something which had already begun when the *Iliad* was composed and was still almost unimpaired when Waterloo was fought. Of course within that immense period there are all sorts of differences. There are lots of convenient differences between the area I am

to deal with and other areas; there are important differences within the chosen area. And yet—despite all this—that whole thing, from its Greek or pre-Greek beginnings down to the day before yesterday, seen from the vast distance at which we stand today, reveals a homogeneity that is certainly important and perhaps more important than its interior diversities. That is why I shall be unable to talk to you about my particular region without constantly treating things which neither began with the Middle Ages nor ended with the end of the Renaissance. In that way I shall be forced to present to you a great deal of what can only be described as Old European, or Old Western, Culture. If one were giving a lecture on Warwickshire to an audience of Martians (no offence: Martians may be delightful creatures) one might loyally choose all one's *data* from that county: but much of what you told them would not really be Warwickshire lore but 'common tellurian'.

The prospect of my becoming, in such halting fashion as I can, the spokesman of Old Western Culture, alarms me. It may alarm you. I will close with one reassurance and one claim.

First, for the reassurance. I do not think you need fear that the study of a dead period, however prolonged and however sympathetic, need prove an indulgence in nostalgia or an enslavement to the past. In the individual life, as the psychologists have taught us, it is not the remembered but the forgotten past that enslaves us. I think the same is true of society. To study the past does indeed liberate us from the present, from the idols of our own market-place. But I think it liberates us from the past too. I think no class of men are less enslaved to the past than historians. The unhistorical are usually, without knowing it, enslaved to a fairly recent past. Dante read Virgil. Certain other medieval authors⁶⁰ evolved the legend of Virgil as a great magician. It was the more recent past, the whole quality of mind evolved during a few preceding centuries, which impelled them to do so. Dante was freer; he also knew more of the past. And you will be no freer by coming to misinterpret Old Western Culture as quickly and deeply as those medievals misinterpreted Classical Antiquity; or even as the Romantics

⁶⁰ On their identity see Comparetti, *Virgilio nel Medio Evo*, ed. G. Pasquali (Firenze, 1943), p. xxii. I owe this reference to Mr C. G. Hardie.

misinterpreted the Middle Ages.⁶¹ Such misinterpretation has already begun. To arrest its growth while arrest is still possible is surely a proper task for a university.

And now for the claim: which sounds arrogant but, I hope, is not really so. I have said that the vast change which separates you from Old Western has been gradual and is not even now complete. Wide as the chasm is, those who are native to different sides of it can still meet; are meeting in this room. This is quite normal at times of great change. The correspondence of Henry More⁶² and Descartes is an amusing example; one would think the two men were writing in different centuries. And here comes the rub. I myself belong far more to that Old Western order than to yours. I am going to claim that this, which in one way is a disqualification for my task, is yet in another a qualification. The disqualification is obvious. You don't want to be lectured on Neanderthal Man by a Neanderthaler, still less on dinosaurs by a dinosaur. And yet, is that the whole story? If a live dinosaur dragged its slow length into the laboratory, would we not all look back as we fled? What a chance to know at last how it really moved and looked and smelled and what noises it made! And if the Neanderthaler could talk, then, though his lecturing technique might leave much to be desired, should we not almost certainly learn from him some things about him which the best modern anthropologist could never have told us? He would tell us without knowing he was telling. One thing I know: I would give a great deal to hear any ancient Athenian, even a stupid one, talking about Greek tragedy. He would know in his bones so much that we seek in vain. At any moment some chance phrase might, unknown to him, show us where modern scholarship had been on the wrong track for years. Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you somewhat as that Athenian might stand. I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners. You see why I said that the claim was not really arrogant; who can be proud of speaking fluently his mother tongue or knowing his way about his father's house? It is my settled conviction that in order to read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the

⁶¹ As my examples show, such misinterpretations may themselves produce results which have imaginative value. If there had been no Romantic distortion of the Middle Ages, we should have no *Eve of St Agnes*. There is room both for an appreciation of the imagined past and an awareness of its difference from the real past; but if we want only the former, why come to a university? (The subject deserves much fuller treatment than I give it here.)

⁶² *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 1662).

habits you have acquired in reading modern literature. And because this is the judgement of a native, I claim that, even if the defence of my conviction is weak, the fact of my conviction is a historical *datum* to which you should give full weight. That way, where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen. I would even dare to go further. Speaking not only for myself but for all other Old Western men whom you may meet, I would say, use your specimens while you can. There are not going to be many more dinosaurs.

From *Selected Literary Essays*

Christianity and Literature

C. S. Lewis

When I was asked to address this society, I was at first tempted to refuse because the subject proposed to me, that of Christianity and Literature, did not seem to admit of any discussion. I knew, of course, that Christian story and sentiment were among the things on which literature could be written, and, conversely, that literature was one of the ways in which Christian sentiment could be expressed and Christian story told; but there seemed nothing more to be said of Christianity in this connection than of any of the hundred and one other things that men made books about. We are familiar, no doubt, with the expression 'Christian Art', by which people usually mean Art that represents Biblical or hagiological scenes, and there is, in this sense, a fair amount of 'Christian Literature'. But I question whether it has any literary qualities peculiar to itself. The rules for writing a good passion play or a good devotional lyric are simply the rules for writing tragedy or lyric in general: success in sacred literature depends on the same qualities of structure, suspense, variety, diction, and the like which secure success in secular literature. And if we enlarge the idea of Christian Literature to include not only literature on sacred themes but all that is written by Christians for Christians to read, then, I think, Christian Literature can exist only in the same sense in which Christian cookery might exist. It would be possible, and it might be edifying, to write a Christian cookery book. Such a book would exclude dishes whose preparation involves unnecessary human labour or animal suffering, and dishes excessively luxurious. That is to say, its choice of dishes would be Christian. But there could be nothing specifically Christian about the actual cooking of the dishes included. Boiling an egg is the same process whether you are a Christian or a Pagan. In the same way, literature written by Christians for Christians would have to avoid mendacity, cruelty, blasphemy, pornography, and the like, and it would aim at edification in so far as edification was proper to the kind of work in hand. But whatever it chose to do would have to be done by the means common to all literature; it could succeed or fail only by the same excellences and the same faults as all literature; and its literary success or failure would never be the same thing as its obedience or disobedience to Christian principles.

I have been speaking so far of Christian Literature *proprement dite*—that is, of writing which is intended to affect us as literature, by its appeal to imagination. But in the visible arts I think we can make a distinction between sacred art, however sacred in theme, and pure iconography—between that which is intended, in the first instance, to affect the imagination and the aesthetic appetite, and that which is meant merely as the starting-point for devotion and meditation. If I were treating the visible arts I should have to work out here a full distinction of the work of art from the icon on the one hand and the toy on the other. The icon and the toy have this in common, that their value depends very little on their perfection as artefacts—a shapeless rag may give as much pleasure as the costliest doll, and two sticks tied crosswise may kindle as much devotion as the work of Leonardo. And to make matters more complicated the very same object could often be used in all three ways. But I do not think the icon and the work of art can be so sharply distinguished in literature. I question whether the badness of a really bad hymn can ordinarily be so irrelevant to devotion as the badness of a bad devotional picture. Because the hymn uses words, its badness will, to some degree, consist in confused or erroneous thought and unworthy sentiment. But I mention this difficult question here only to say that I do not propose to treat it. If any literary works exist which have a purely iconographic value and no literary value, they are not what I am talking about. Indeed I could not, for I have not met them.

Of Christian Literature, then, in the sense of ‘work aiming at literary value and written by Christians for Christians’, you see that I have really nothing to say and believe that nothing can be said. But I think I have something to say about what may be called the Christian approach to literature: about the principles, if you will, of Christian literary theory and criticism. For while I was thinking over the subject you gave me I made what seemed to me a discovery. It is not an easy one to put into words. The nearest I can come to it is to say that I found a disquieting contrast between the whole circle of ideas used in modern criticism and certain ideas recurrent in the New Testament. Let me say at once that it is hardly a question of logical contradiction between clearly defined concepts. It is too vague for that. It is more a repugnance of atmospheres, a discordance of notes, an incompatibility of temperaments.

What are the key-words of modern criticism? *Creative*, with its opposite *derivative*;

spontaneity, with its opposite *convention*; *freedom*, contrasted with *rules*. Great authors are innovators, pioneers, explorers; bad authors bunch in schools and follow models. Or again, great authors are always ‘breaking fetters’ and ‘bursting bonds’. They have personality, they ‘are themselves’. I do not know whether we often think out the implication of such language into a consistent philosophy; but we certainly have a general picture of bad work flowing from conformity and discipleship, and of good work bursting out from certain centres of explosive force—apparently self-originating force—which we call men of genius.

Now the New Testament has nothing at all to tell us of literature. I know that there are some who like to think of Our Lord Himself as a poet and cite the parables to support their view. I admit freely that to believe in the Incarnation at all is to believe that every mode of human excellence is implicit in His historical human character: poethood, of course, included. But if all had been developed, the limitations of a single human life would have been transcended and He would not have been a man; therefore all excellences save the spiritual remained in varying degrees implicit. If it is claimed that the poetic excellence is more developed than others—say, the intellectual—I think I deny the claim. Some of the parables do work like poetic similes; but then others work like philosophic illustrations. Thus the Unjust Judge is not emotionally or imaginatively like God: he corresponds to God as the terms in a proportion correspond, because he is to the Widow (in one highly specialized respect) as God is to man. In that parable Our Lord, if we may so express it, is much more like Socrates than Shakespeare. And I dread an over-emphasis on the poetical element in His words because I think it tends to obscure that quality in His human character which is, in fact, so visible in His irony, His *argumenta ad homines*, and His use of the *a fortiori*, and which I would call the homely, peasant shrewdness. Donne points out that we are never told He laughed; it is difficult in reading the Gospels not to believe, and to tremble in believing, that He smiled.

I repeat, the New Testament has nothing to say of literature; but what it says on other subjects is quite sufficient to strike that note which I find out of tune with the language of modern criticism. I must begin with something that is unpopular. St Paul tells us (I Cor. xi, 3) that man is the ‘head’ of woman. We may soften this if we like by saying that he means only man *qua* man and woman *qua* woman and that an equality of

the sexes as citizens or intellectual beings is not therefore absolutely repugnant to his thought: indeed, that he himself tells us that in another respect, that is ‘in the Lord’, the sexes cannot be thus separated (*ibid.*, xi, 11). But what concerns me here is to find out what he means by Head. Now in verse 3 he has given us a very remarkable proportion sum: that God is to Christ as Christ is to man and man is to woman, and the relation between each term and the next is that of Head. And in verse 7 we are told that man is God’s image and glory, and woman is man’s glory. He does not repeat ‘image’, but I question whether the omission is intentional, and I suggest that we shall have a fairly Pauline picture of this whole series of Head relations running from God to woman if we picture each term as the ‘image and glory’ of the preceding term. And I suppose that of which one is the image and glory is that which one glorifies by copying or imitating. Let me once again insist that I am not trying to twist St Paul’s metaphors into a logical system. I know well that whatever picture he is building up, he himself will be the first to throw it aside when it has served its turn and to adopt some quite different picture when some new aspect of the truth is present to his mind. But I want to see clearly the sort of picture implied in this passage—to get it clear, however temporary its use or partial its application. And it seems to me a quite clear picture; we are to think of some original divine virtue passing downwards from rung to rung of a hierarchical ladder, and the mode in which each lower rung receives it is, quite frankly, imitation.

What is perhaps most startling in this picture is the apparent equivalence of the woman-man and man-God relation with the relation between Christ and God, or, in Trinitarian language, with the relation between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. As a layman and a comparatively recently reclaimed apostate I have, of course, no intention of building a theological system—still less of setting up a *catena* of New Testament metaphors as a criticism on the Nicene or the Athanasian creed, documents which I wholly accept. But it is legitimate to notice what kinds of metaphor the New Testament uses; more especially when what we are in search of is not dogma but a kind of flavour or atmosphere. And there is no doubt that this kind of proportion sum— $A : B :: B : C$ —is quite freely used in the New Testament where A and B represent the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. Thus St Paul has already told us earlier in the same epistle that we are ‘of Christ’ and Christ is ‘of God’ (iii, 23). Thus again in the

Fourth Gospel, Our Lord Himself compares the relation of the Father to the Son with that of the Son to His flock, in respect of knowledge (x, 15) and of love (xv, 9).

I suggest, therefore, that this picture of a hierarchical order in which we are encouraged—though, of course, only from certain points of view and in certain respects—to regard the Second Person Himself as a step, or stage, or degree, is wholly in accord with the spirit of the New Testament. And if we ask how the stages are connected the answer always seems to be something like imitation, reflection, assimilation. Thus in Gal. iv, 19, Christ is to be ‘formed’ inside each believer—the verb here used (*μορφωθή*) meaning to shape, to figure, or even to draw a sketch. In First Thessalonians (i, 6) Christians are told to imitate St Paul and the Lord, and elsewhere (i Cor. xi, i) to imitate St Paul as he in turn imitates Christ—thus giving us another stage of progressive imitation. Changing the metaphor we find that believers are to acquire the fragrance of Christ, *redolere Christum* (2 Cor. ii, 16): that the glory of God has appeared in the face of Christ as, at the creation, light appeared in the universe (2 Cor. iv, 6); and, finally, if my reading of a much disputed passage is correct, that a Christian is to Christ as a mirror to an object (2 Cor. iii, 18).

These passages, you will notice, are all Pauline; but there is a place in the Fourth Gospel which goes much farther—so far that if it were not a Dominical utterance we would not venture to think along such lines. There (v. 19) we are told that the Son does only what He sees the Father doing. He watches the Father’s operations and does the same (*ὁμοίως ποιεῖ*) or ‘copies’. The Father, because of His love for the Son, shows Him all that He does. I have already explained that I am not a theologian. What aspect of the Trinitarian reality Our Lord, as God, saw while He spoke these words, I do not venture to define; but I think we have a right and even a duty to notice carefully the earthly image by which He expressed it—to see clearly the picture He puts before us. It is a picture of a boy learning to do things by watching a man at work. I think we may even guess what memory, humanly speaking, was in His mind. It is hard not to imagine that He remembered His boyhood, that He saw Himself as a boy in a carpenter’s shop, a boy learning how to do things by watching while St Joseph did them. So taken, the passage does not seem to me to conflict with anything I have learned from the creeds, but greatly to enrich my conception of the Divine sonship.

Now it may be that there is no absolute logical contradiction between the passages I have quoted and the assumptions of modern criticism: but I think there is so great a difference of temper that a man whose mind was at one with the mind of the New Testament would not, and indeed could not, fall into the language which most critics now adopt. In the New Testament the art of life itself is an art of imitation: can we, believing this, believe that literature, which must derive from real life, is to aim at being ‘creative’, ‘original’, and ‘spontaneous’. ‘Originality’ in the New Testament is quite plainly the prerogative of God alone; even within the triune being of God it seems to be confined to the Father. The duty and happiness of every other being is placed in being derivative, in reflecting like a mirror. Nothing could be more foreign to the tone of scripture than the language of those who describe a saint as a ‘moral genius’ or a ‘spiritual genius’, thus insinuating that his virtue or spirituality is ‘creative’ or ‘original’. If I have read the New Testament aright, it leaves no room for ‘creativity’ even in a modified or metaphorical sense. Our whole destiny seems to lie in the opposite direction, in being as little as possible ourselves, in acquiring a fragrance that is not our own but borrowed, in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours. I am not here supporting the doctrine of total depravity, and I do not say that the New Testament supports it; I am saying only that the highest good of a creature must be creaturely—that is, derivative or reflective—good. In other words, as St Augustine makes plain (*De Civ. Dei* xii, cap. I), pride does not only go before a fall but is a fall—a fall of the creature’s attention from what is better, God, to what is worse, itself.

Applying this principle to literature, in its greatest generality, we should get as the basis of all critical theory the maxim that an author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom. Our criticism would therefore from the beginning group itself with some existing theories of poetry against others. It would have affinities with the primitive or Homeric theory in which the poet is the mere pensioner of the Muse. It would have affinities with the Platonic doctrine of a transcendent Form partly imitable on earth; and remoter affinities with the Aristotelian doctrine of μίμησις and the Augustan doctrine about the imitation of Nature and the Ancients. It would be opposed to the theory of

genius as, perhaps, generally understood; and above all it would be opposed to the idea that literature is self-expression.

But here some distinctions must be made. I spoke just now of the ancient idea that the poet was merely the servant of some god, of Apollo, or the Muse; but let us not forget the highly paradoxical words in which Homer's Phemius asserts his claim to be a poet—

Αὐτοδίδακτος δ' εἰμί, θεὸς δέ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἶμας Παντοίας ἐνέφυσεν. (*Od.* xxii, 347.)

'I am self-taught; a god has inspired me with all manner of songs.'

It sounds like a direct contradiction. How can he be self-taught if the god has taught him all he knows? Doubtless because the god's instruction is given internally, not through the senses, and is therefore regarded as part of the Self, to be contrasted with such external aids as, say, the example of other poets. And this seems to blur the distinction I am trying to draw between Christian imitation and the 'originality' praised by modern critics. Phemius obviously claims to be original, in the sense of being no other poet's disciple, and in the same breath admits his complete dependence on a supernatural teacher. Does not this let in 'originality' and 'creativity' of the only kind that have ever been claimed?

If you said: 'The only kind that ought to have been claimed', I would agree; but as things are, I think the distinction remains, though it becomes finer than our first glance suggested. A Christian and an unbelieving poet may both be equally original in the sense that they neglect the example of their poetic forbears and draw on resources peculiar to themselves, but with this difference. The unbeliever may take his own temperament and experience, just as they happen to stand, and consider them worth communicating simply because they are facts or, worse still, because they are his. To the Christian his own temperament and experience, as mere fact, and as merely his, are of no value or importance whatsoever: he will deal with them, if at all, only because they are the medium through which, or the position from which, something universally profitable appeared to him. We can imagine two men seated in different parts of a church or theatre. Both, when they come out, may tell us their experiences, and both may use the

first person. But the one is interested in his seat only because it was his—‘I was most uncomfortable’, he will say. ‘You would hardly believe what a draught comes in from the door in that corner. And the people! I had to speak pretty sharply to the woman in front of me.’ The other will tell us what could be seen from his seat, choosing to describe this because this is what he knows, and because every seat must give the best view of something. ‘Do you know’, he will begin, ‘the moulding on those pillars goes on round at the back. It looks, too, as if the design on the back were the older of the two.’ Here we have the expressionist and the Christian attitudes towards the self or temperament. Thus St Augustine and Rousseau both write *Confessions*; but to the one his own temperament is a kind of absolute (*au moins je suis autre*), to the other it is ‘a narrow house too narrow for Thee to enter—oh make it wide. It is in ruins—oh rebuild it.’ And Wordsworth, the romantic who made a good end, has a foot in either world and, though he practises both, distinguishes well the two ways in which a man may be said to write about himself. On the one hand he says:

[For] I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
 Deep, and aloft ascending breathe in worlds
 To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.

On the other he craves indulgence if

with this
 I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
 Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
 Contemplating; and who and what he was—
 The transitory being that beheld
 This vision.

In this sense, then, the Christian writer may be self-taught or original. He may base his work on the ‘transitory being’ that he is, not because he thinks it valuable (for he knows that in his flesh dwells no good thing), but solely because of the ‘vision’ that appeared to it. But he will have no preference for doing this. He will do it if it happens to be the thing he can do best; but if his talents are such that he can produce good work by writing in an established form and dealing with experiences common to all his race, he will do so just as gladly. I even think he will do so more gladly. It is to him an argument not of strength

but of weakness that he should respond fully to the vision only 'in his own way'. And always, of every idea and of every method he will ask not 'Is it mine?' but 'Is it good?'

This seems to me the most fundamental difference between the Christian and the unbeliever in their approach to literature. But I think there is another. The Christian will take literature a little less seriously than the cultured Pagan: he will feel less uneasy with a purely hedonistic standard for at least many kinds of work. The unbeliever is always apt to make a kind of religion of his aesthetic experiences; he feels ethically irresponsible, perhaps, but he braces his strength to receive responsibilities of another kind which seem to the Christian quite illusory. He has to be 'creative'; he has to obey a mystical amoral law called his artistic conscience; and he commonly wishes to maintain his superiority to the great mass of mankind who turn to books for mere recreation. But the Christian knows from the outset that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world: and as for superiority, he knows that the vulgar since they include most of the poor probably include most of his superiors. He has no objection to comedies that merely amuse and tales that merely refresh; for he thinks like Thomas Aquinas *ipsa ratio hoc habet ut quandoque rationis usus intercipiatur*. We can play, as we can eat, to the glory of God. It thus may come about that Christian views on literature will strike the world as shallow and flippant; but the world must not misunderstand. When Christian work is done on a serious subject there is no gravity and no sublimity it cannot attain. But they will belong to the theme. That is why they will be real and lasting—mighty nouns with which literature, an adjectival thing, is here united, far over-topping the fussy and ridiculous claims of literature that tries to be important simply as literature. And *a posteriori* it is not hard to argue that all the greatest poems have been made by men who valued something else much more than poetry—even if that something else were only cutting down enemies in a cattle-raid or tumbling a girl in a bed. The real frivolity, the solemn vacuity, is all with those who make literature a self-existent thing to be valued for its own sake. Pater prepared for pleasure as if it were martyrdom.

Now that I see where I have arrived a doubt assails me. It all sounds suspiciously like things I have said before, starting from very different premisses. Is it King Charles's

Head? Have I mistaken for the 'vision' the same old 'transitory being' who, in some ways, is not nearly transitory enough? It may be so: or I may, after all be right. I would rather be right if I could; but if not, if I have only been once more following my own footprints, it is the sort of tragi-comedy which, on my own principles, I must try to enjoy. I find a beautiful example proposed in the *Paradiso* (XXVIII) where poor Pope Gregory, arrived in Heaven, discovered that his theory of the hierarchies, on which presumably he had taken pains, was quite wrong. We are told how the redeemed soul behaved; '*di sè medesmo rise*'. It was the funniest thing he'd ever heard.

From *Christian Reflections*

Myth Became Fact

C. S. Lewis

My friend Corineus has advanced the charge that none of us are in fact Christians at all. According to him historic Christianity is something so barbarous that no modern man can really believe it: the moderns who claim to do so are in fact believing a modern system of thought which retains the vocabulary of Christianity and exploits the emotions inherited from it while quietly dropping its essential doctrines. Corineus compared modern Christianity with the modern English monarchy: the forms of kingship have been retained, but the reality has been abandoned.

All this I believe to be false, except of a few ‘modernist’ theologians who, by God’s grace, become fewer every day. But for the moment let us assume that Corineus is right. Let us pretend, for purposes of argument, that *all* who now call themselves Christians have abandoned the historic doctrines. Let us suppose that modern ‘Christianity’ reveals a system of names, ritual, formulae, and metaphors which persists although the thoughts behind it have changed. Corineus ought to be able to *explain* the persistence.

Why, on his view, do all these educated and enlightened pseudo-Christians insist on expressing their deepest thoughts in terms of an archaic mythology which must hamper and embarrass them at every turn? Why do they refuse to cut the umbilical cord which binds the living and flourishing child to its moribund mother? For, if Corineus is right, it should be a great relief to them to do so. Yet the odd thing is that even those who seem most embarrassed by the sediment of ‘barbaric’ Christianity in their thought become suddenly obstinate when you ask them to get rid of it altogether. They will strain the cord almost to breaking point, but they refuse to cut it. Sometimes they will take every step except the last one.

If all who professed Christianity were clergymen, it would be easy (though uncharitable) to reply that their livelihood depends on *not* taking that last step. Yet even if this were the true cause of their behaviour, even if all clergymen are intellectual prostitutes who preach for pay—and usually starvation pay—what they secretly believe to be false, surely so widespread a darkening of conscience, among

thousands of men not otherwise known to be criminal, itself demands explanation? And of course the profession of Christianity is not confined to the clergy. It is professed by millions of women and laymen who earn thereby contempt, unpopularity, suspicion, and the hostility of their own families. How does this come to happen?

Obstinacies of this sort are interesting. ‘Why not cut the cord?’ asks Corineus. ‘Everything would be much easier if you would free your thought from this vestigial mythology.’ To be sure: far easier. Life would be far easier for the mother of an invalid child if she put it into an institution and adopted someone else’s healthy baby instead. Life would be far easier to many a man if he abandoned the woman he has actually fallen in love with and married someone else because she is more suitable. The only defect of the healthy baby and the suitable woman is that they leave out the patient’s only reason for bothering about a child or wife at all. ‘Would not conversation be much more rational than dancing?’ said Jane Austen’s Miss Bingley. ‘Much more rational,’ replied Mr Bingley, ‘but much less like a ball.’

In the same way, it would be much more rational to abolish the English monarchy. But how if, by doing so, you leave out the one element in our State which matters most? How if the monarchy is the channel through which all the *vital* elements of citizenship—loyalty, the consecration of secular life, the hierarchical principle, splendour, ceremony, continuity—still trickle down to irrigate the dust-bowl of modern economic Statecraft?

The real answer of even the most ‘modernist’ Christianity to Corineus is the same. Even assuming (which I most constantly deny) that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern. Corineus wants us to move with the times. Now, we know where times move. They move *away*. But in religion we find something that does not move away. It is what Corineus calls the myth that abides; it is what he calls the modern and living thought that moves away. Not only the thought of theologians, but the thought of anti-theologians. Where are the predecessors of Corineus? Where is the epicureanism of Lucretius, the pagan revival of Julian the Apostate? Where are the Gnostics, where is the monism of Averroes, the deism of Voltaire, the dogmatic materialism of the great Victorians? They have moved with the

times. But the thing they were all attacking remains: Corineus finds it still there to attack. The myth (to speak his language) has outlived the thoughts of all its defenders and of all its adversaries. It is the myth that gives life. Those elements even in modernist Christianity which Corineus regards as vestigial are the substance: what he takes for the ‘real modern belief’ is the shadow.

To explain this we must look a little closer at myth in general, and at this myth in particular. Human intellect is incurably abstract. Pure mathematics is the type of successful thought. Yet the only realities we experience are concrete—this pain, this pleasure, this dog, this man. While we are loving the man, bearing the pain, enjoying the pleasure, we are not intellectually apprehending Pleasure, Pain, or Personality. When we begin to do so, on the other hand, the concrete realities sink to the level of mere instances or examples: we are no longer dealing with them, but with that which they exemplify. This is our dilemma—either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste—or, more strictly, to lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are outside it. As thinkers we are cut off from what we think about; as tasting, touching, willing, loving, hating, we do not clearly understand. The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think. You cannot *study* Pleasure in the moment of the nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyse the nature of humour while roaring with laughter. But when else can you really know these things? ‘If only my toothache would stop, I could write another chapter about Pain.’ But once it stops, what do I know about pain?

Of this tragic dilemma myth is the partial solution. In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction. At this moment, for example, I am trying to understand something very abstract indeed—the fading, vanishing of tasted reality as we try to grasp it with the discursive reason. Probably I have made heavy weather of it. But if I remind you, instead, of Orpheus and Eurydice, how he was suffered to lead her by the hand but, when he turned round to look at her, she disappeared, what was merely a principle becomes imaginable. You may reply that you never till this moment attached that ‘meaning’ to that myth. Of course not. You are not looking for an

abstract ‘meaning’ at all. If that was what you were doing the myth would be for you no true myth but a mere allegory. You were not knowing, but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment we *state* this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely.

When we translate we get abstraction—or rather, dozens of abstractions. What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*. Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.

Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It *happens*—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) *under Pontius Pilate*. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other.

A man who disbelieved the Christian story as fact but continually fed on it as myth would, perhaps, be more spiritually alive than one who assented and did not think much about it. The modernist—the extreme modernist, infidel in all but name—need not be called a fool or hypocrite because he obstinately retains, even in the midst of his intellectual atheism, the language, rites, sacraments, and story of the Christians. The poor man may be clinging (with a wisdom he himself by no means

understands) to that which is his life. It would have been better that Loisy should have remained a Christian: it would not necessarily have been better that he should have purged his thought of vestigial Christianity.

Those who do not know that this great myth became Fact when the Virgin conceived are, indeed, to be pitied. But Christians also need to be reminded—we may thank Corineus for reminding us—that what became Fact was a Myth, that it carries with it into the world of Fact all the properties of a myth. God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less. We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about ‘parallels’ and ‘Pagan Christs’: they *ought* to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren’t. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome. If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be *mythopathic*? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.

From *God in the Dock*

The Weight of Glory

C. S. Lewis

If you asked twenty good men to-day what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no natural connexion with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation. There is also a third

case, which is more complicated. An enjoyment of Greek poetry is certainly a proper, and not a mercenary, reward for learning Greek; but only those who have reached the stage of enjoying Greek poetry can tell from their own experience that this is so. The schoolboy beginning Greek grammar cannot look forward to his adult enjoyment of Sophocles as a lover looks forward to marriage or a general to victory. He has to begin by working for marks, or to escape punishment, or to please his parents, or, at best, in the hope of a future good which he cannot at present imagine or desire. His position, therefore, bears a certain resemblance to that of the mercenary; the reward he is going to get will, in actual fact, be a natural or proper reward, but he will not know that till he has got it. Of course, he gets it gradually; enjoyment creeps in upon the mere drudgery, and nobody could point to a day or an hour when the one ceased and the other began. But it is just in so far as he approaches the reward that he becomes able to desire it for its own sake; indeed, the power of so desiring it is itself a preliminary reward.

The Christian, in relation to heaven, is in much the same position as this schoolboy. Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire the ultimate reward. Just in proportion as the desire grows, our fear lest it should be a mercenary desire will die away and finally be recognized as an absurdity. But probably this will not, for most of us, happen in a day; poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.

But there is one other important similarity between the schoolboy and ourselves. If he is an imaginative boy he will, quite probably, be revelling in the English poets and romancers suitable to his age some time before he begins to suspect that Greek grammar is going to lead him to more and more enjoyments of this same sort. He may even be neglecting his Greek to read Shelley and Swinburne in secret. In other words, the desire which Greek is really going to gratify already exists in him and is attached to objects which seem to him quite unconnected with Xenophon and the verbs in $\mu\iota$. Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us,

but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object. And this, I think, is just what we find. No doubt there is one point in which my analogy of the schoolboy breaks down. The English poetry which he reads when he ought to be doing Greek exercises may be just as good as the Greek poetry to which the exercises are leading him, so that in fixing on Milton instead of journeying on to Aeschylus his desire is not embracing a false object. But our case is very different. If a transtemporal, transfinite good is our real destiny, then any other good on which our desire fixes must be in some degree fallacious, must bear at best only a symbolical relation to what will truly satisfy.

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but

remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies of Progress or Creative Evolution themselves bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere. When they want to convince you that earth is your home, notice how they set about it. They begin by trying to persuade you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile in earth as it is. Next, they tell you that this fortunate event is still a good way off in the future, thus giving a sop to your knowledge that the fatherland is not here and now. Finally, lest your longing for the transtemporal should awake and spoil the whole affair, they use any rhetoric that comes to hand to keep out of your mind the recollection that even if all the happiness they promised could come to man on earth, yet still each generation would lose it by death, including the last generation of all, and the whole story would be nothing, not even a story, for ever and ever. Hence all the nonsense that Mr. Shaw puts into the final speech of Lilith, and Bergson's remark that the *élan vital* is capable of surmounting all obstacles, perhaps even death—as if we could believe that any social or biological development on this planet will delay the senility of the sun or reverse the second law of thermodynamics.

Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. But is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any satisfaction to it? 'Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread.' But I think it may be urged that this misses the point. A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called 'failing in love'

occurred in a sexless world.

Here, then, is the desire, still wandering and uncertain of its object and still largely unable to see that object in the direction where it really lies. Our sacred books give us some account of the object. It is, of course, a symbolical account. Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience. The scriptural picture of heaven is therefore just as symbolical as the picture which our desire, unaided, invents for itself; heaven is not really full of jewelry any more than it is really the beauty of Nature, or a fine piece of music. The difference is that the scriptural imagery has authority. It comes to us from writers who were closer to God than we, and it has stood the test of Christian experience down the centuries. The natural appeal of this authoritative imagery is to me, at first, very small. At first sight it chills, rather than awakes, my desire. And that is just what I ought to expect. If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I must expect it to be less immediately attractive than ‘my own stuff’. Sophocles at first seems dull and cold to the boy who has only reached Shelley. If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.

The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like Him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have ‘glory’; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally, that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple. The first question I ask about these promises is: ‘Why any of them except the first?’ Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only. I think the answer turns again on the nature of symbols. For though it may escape our notice at first glance, yet it is true that any conception of being with Christ which most of us can now form will be not very much less symbolical than the other promises; for it will smuggle in ideas of proximity in space and loving conversation as we

now understand conversation, and it will probably concentrate on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity. And, in fact, we find that those Christians who attend solely to this first promise always do fill it up with very earthly imagery indeed—in fact, with hymeneal or erotic imagery. I am not for a moment condemning such imagery. I heartily wish I could enter into it more deeply than I do, and pray that I yet shall. But my point is that this also is only a symbol, like the reality in some respects, but unlike it in others, and therefore needs correction from the different symbols in the other promises. The variation of the promises does not mean that anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a Person, and lest we should imagine the joy of His presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and monotony, a dozen changing images, correcting and relieving each other, are supplied.

I turn next to the idea of glory. There is no getting away from the fact that this idea is very prominent in the New Testament and in early Christian writings. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendour like the sun and stars. All this makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy I am a typical modern. Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson, and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) ‘appreciation’ by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant.’ With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but in a good child—as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse.

Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; 'it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign'. I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall 'stand before' Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a

father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

And now notice what is happening. If I had rejected the authoritative and scriptural image of glory and stuck obstinately to the vague desire which was, at the outset, my only pointer to heaven, I could have seen no connexion at all between that desire and the Christian promise. But now, having followed up what seemed puzzling and repellent in the sacred books, I find, to my great surprise, looking back, that the connexion is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed. By ceasing for a moment to consider my own wants I have begun to learn better what I really wanted. When I attempted, a few minutes ago, to describe our spiritual longings, I was omitting one of their most curious characteristics. We usually notice it just as the moment of vision dies away, as the music ends, or as the landscape loses the celestial light. What we feel then has been well described by Keats as ‘the journey homeward to habitual self’. You know what I mean. For a few minutes we have had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that it is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken into the dance. We may go when we please, we may stay if we can: ‘Nobody marks us.’ A scientist may reply that since most of the things we call beautiful are inanimate, it is not very surprising that they take no notice of us. That, of course, is true. It is not the physical objects that I am speaking of, but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment the messengers. And part of the bitterness which mixes with the sweetness of that message is due to the fact that it so seldom seems to be a message intended for us, but rather something we have overheard. By bitterness I mean pain, not resentment. We should hardly dare to ask that any notice be taken of ourselves. But we pine. The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and

welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being ‘noticed’ by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him (I Cor. viii. 3). It is a strange promise. Does not God know all things at all times? But it is dreadfully re-echoed in another passage of the New Testament. There we are warned that it may happen to any one of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me.’ In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely *outside*—repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored. On the other hand, we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged. We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities. Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.

And this brings me to the other sense of glory—glory as brightness, splendour, luminosity. We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. I think I begin to see what it means. In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace, and power of which Nature is the image. That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They

talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that 'beauty born of murmuring sound' will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.

And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life. At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind, and still more the body, receives life from Him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will 'flow over' into the glorified body. In the light of our present specialized and depraved appetites we cannot imagine this *torrens voluptatis*, and I warn everyone most seriously not to try. But it must be mentioned, to drive out thoughts even more misleading—thoughts that what is saved is a mere ghost, or that the risen body lives in numb insensibility. The body was made for the Lord, and these dismal fancies are wide of the mark.

Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A

cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside. The following Him is, of course, the essential point. That being so, it may be asked what practical use there is in the speculations which I have been indulging. I can think of at least one such use. It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

From *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*



Charles Williams (1886-1945)

The Myth of the Alteration in Knowledge

Charles Williams

The word 'God' in the opening sentences of Genesis is practically characterless. It means only That which creates, and what it creates is good in its own eyes. The diagram of the six days develops with a geometrical precision, measured by the ambiguous word 'Day'. To give that word the meaning merely of the passage of a myriad years is impossible, so much is it defined by its recurrent evenings and mornings; it is nearer our twenty-four hour day than anything else. Yet time is pressed into it; it has a double relationship of duration, divine and human; and it repeats itself as a refrain of mathematical incantation—the first calculation and the first ritual. Along that rift of light, according to the double pulsing sound—'the evening and the morning were the Day'; 'God saw that it was good'—the geometry of creation enlarges. The universe exists, and earth, and the seas, and all creatures. But there is no further explanation of the God.

The heavens are here, no doubt, spatial skies in relation to spatial earth, and the earth is the place of limited perfection in time. Man exists upon earth, and with his appearance the imagination finds that it has abandoned its standpoint at the beginning of that primal ray, and has removed itself to earth. It is the opening of the great myth of man's origins. Earth exists and is good; the man and woman—the Adam—exist and are good; and their whole state is good.⁶³ It is not less good because there exists a prohibition. But the myth makes use of the prohibition to proceed to its account of the Fall.

There are, roughly, two bases for the idea of the Fall. One is the general Judaeo-Christian tradition; the other is the facts of present human existence. Both bases will be rejected by those who have already rejected their fundamental hypotheses. The first depends upon the whole doctrine of the Christian Church, and is a corollary of that doctrine. The second depends upon the hypotheses of an omnipotent and benevolent God and of man's free will. 'Either there is no Creator (in that sense) *or* the living

⁶³ There is a reading which takes the 'going up of the mist' to be a clouding of creation, after which the separation of the Adam into two creatures took place. But it is not possible in this book to ascend to such speculations. I follow everywhere the most commonplace interpretation.

society of men is in a true sense discarded from his presence', said Newman. Something must have gone wrong somewhere. If (on the hypothesis) it cannot have gone wrong with God, it must have gone wrong with us. If heaven is a name for a state of real perfection, we ourselves have most remarkably 'come down from heaven'.

This necessity of thought has been generally accepted by the Christian Church, though the Church has never defined the nature of that aboriginal catastrophe the tale of which it accepts. It has traditionally rather accepted the view that this catastrophe was the second of its kind, the first having occurred in the 'heavens' themselves, and among those creatures whom we call angels. Our own awareness of this explanation is generally referred to the genius of Milton, who certainly shaped it for us in great poetry and made use of it to express his own tender knowledge of the infinite capacity of man's spirit for foolish defiance of the God. But long before Milton the strange tale recedes, and long before Milton the prayers of Christendom implore aid against the malignity of fallen spirits. The popularity of the legend has perhaps been assisted by the excuse it has seemed to offer for mankind, by the pseudo-answer it has appeared to offer to the difficulty of the philosophical imagination concerning a revolt in the good against the good, and by its provision of a figure or figures against whom men can, on the highest principles, launch their capacities of indignant hate and romantic fear. The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence; he has, on occasion, been encouraged to reintroduce into Christian emotions the dualism which the Christian intellect has denied, and we have relieved our own sense of moral submission by contemplating, even disapprovingly, something which was neither moral nor submissive. An 'inferiority complex', in the slang of our day, is not the same thing as humility; the devil has often been the figure of the first, a reverse from the second, and the frontier between the two. While he exists there is always something to which we can be superior.

Of all this, however, the book of Genesis knows nothing (unless, indeed, in the sentence about the mist). The myth of the Fall there is formally limited to the Adam, and to the creature 'of the field', an immense subtlety twining into speech. There is not much difference apparently between the Adam and the beasts, except that he (or they) control them. There is nothing about intellectual power; in fact, so far as their

activities in Genesis are concerned, the intelligence of the Adam is limited to preserving their lives by obtaining food, by a capacity for agriculture, and by a clear moral sense, though behind these things lies the final incantation of the creation: ‘Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness’, and the decision upon that, as upon the earliest rift of light: ‘behold, it was very good’.

The nature of the Fall—both while possible and when actual —is clearly defined. The ‘fruit of the tree’ is to bring an increase of knowledge. That increase, however, is, and is desired as being, of a particular kind. It is not merely to know more, but to know in another method. It is primarily the advance (if it can be so called) from knowing good to knowing good and evil; it is (secondarily) the knowing ‘as gods’: A certain knowledge was, by its nature, confined to divine beings. Its communication to man would be, by its nature, disastrous to man. The Adam had been created and were existing in a state of knowledge of good and nothing but good. They knew that there was some kind of alternative, and they knew that the rejection of the alternative was part of their relation to the Omnipotence that created them. That relation was part of the good they enjoyed. But they knew also that the knowledge in the Omnipotence was greater than their own; they understood that in some way it knew ‘evil’.

It was, in future ages, declared by Aquinas that it was of the nature of God to know all possibilities, and to determine which possibility should become fact. ‘God would not know good things perfectly, unless he also knew evil things . . . for, since evil is not of itself knowable, forasmuch as “evil is the privation of good”, as Augustine says (*Confess*, iii, 7), therefore evil can neither be defined nor known except by good.’ Things which are not and never will be he knows ‘not by vision’, as he does all things that are, or will be, ‘but by simple intelligence’. It is therefore part of that knowledge that he should understand good in its deprivation, the identity of heaven in its opposite identity of hell, but without ‘approbation’, without calling it into being at all.

It was not so possible for man, and the myth is the tale of that impossibility. However solemn and intellectual the exposition of the act sounds, the act itself is simple enough. It is easy for us now, after the terrible and prolonged habit of mankind; it was not, perhaps, very difficult then—as easy as picking a fruit from a tree. It was merely to wish to know an antagonism in the good, to find out what the good would be

like if a contradiction were introduced into it. Man desired to know schism in the universe. It was a knowledge reserved to God; man had been warned that he could not bear it—‘in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die’. A serpentine subtlety overwhelmed that statement with a grander promise—‘Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil’. Unfortunately to be as gods meant, for the Adam, to die, for to know evil, for them, was to know it not by pure intelligence but by experience. It was, precisely, to experience the opposite of good, that is the deprivation of the good, the slow destruction of the good, and of themselves with the good.

The Adam were permitted to achieve this knowledge if they wished; they did so wish. Some possibility of opposite action there must be if there is to be any relation between different wills. Free will is a thing incomprehensible to the logical mind, and perhaps not very often possible to the human spirit. The glasses of water which we are so often assured that we can or can not drink do not really refract light on the problem. ‘*Nihil sumus nisi voluntates*’, said Augustine, but the thing we fundamentally are is not easily known. Will is rather a thing we may choose to become than a thing we already possess—except so far as we can a little choose to choose, a little will to will. The Adam, with more will, exercised will in the myth. They knew good; they wished to know good and evil. Since there was not—since there never has been and never will be—anything else than the good to know, they knew good as antagonism. All difference consists in the mode of knowledge. They had what they wanted. That they did not like it when they got it does not alter the fact that they certainly got it.

The change in knowledge is indicated by one detail. The tale presents the Adam as naked, and in a state of enjoyment of being naked. It was part of their good; they had delight in their physical natures. There is no suggestion that they had not a delight in their sexual natures and relationship. They had about them a free candour, and that candour of joy was a part of their good. They were not ashamed. They then insisted on knowing good as evil; and they did. They knew that candour as undesirable; they experienced shame. The Omnipotence might intelligently know what the deprivation of that candour would be like, and yet not approve it into existence. The divine prerogative could not enter other beings after that manner; they had to know after their own nature. The thing they had involved confused them, because its nature was

confusion. Sex had been good; it became evil. They made themselves aprons. It was exactly what they had determined. Since then it has often been thought that we might recover the single and simple knowledge of good in that respect by tearing up the aprons. It has never, so far, been found that the return is quite so easy. To revoke the knowledge of unlovely shame can only be done by discovering a loveliness of shame (not necessarily that shame, but something more profound) in the good. The Lord, it may be remarked, did not make aprons for the Adam; he made them coats. He was not so sex-conscious as some of the commentators, pious and other.

Another detail is in the interrogation in the garden. It is the conclusion of the first great episode in the myth of origin. The decision has, inevitably, changed the relationship of the Adam to the Omnipotence. It is in the garden and they are afraid. As they have a shameful modesty towards each other, so they have an evil humility towards the Creator. They do not think it tolerable that they should be seen as they are. Unfortunately the interrogation merely exhibits them as they are; a severe actuality is before them, and they dislike it. They know evil; that is, they know the good of fact as repugnant to them. They are forced into it. The well-meaning comment which blames Adam for telling tales about the woman overlooks the fact that he had no choice. In schools and in divorce-courts we used to be taught to lie on a woman's behalf; the fashion of morals may now have changed. But Adam is not in that kind of divorce-court. He has been dragged out from among the concealing trees of the garden, he is riddled now with a new mode of knowledge, but the old knowledge is forced to speak. The full result of their determination is exhibited. 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' So you shall. Sorrow and conception; the evil of the ground; the sorrow of life; the hardship of toil; all things in antagonism and schism; love a distress and labour a grief; all the good known in the deprivation of the good, in the deprivation of joy. Only the death which the serpent had derided returns to them as mercy; they are not, at least, to live for ever; the awful possibility of Eden is removed. They are to be allowed to die.

The contradiction in the nature of man is thus completely established. He knows good, and he knows good as evil. These two capacities will always be present in him; his love will always be twisted with anti-love, with anger, with spite, with

jealousy, with alien desires. Lucidity and confusion are alike natural, and there is no corner into which antagonism to pure joy has not broken. It is in the episode of Cain and Abel that this alteration of knowledge is most exhibited. It is shown also in a new development. The original tale had dealt almost wholly with the relation of the Adam to the Omnipotence; their relation between themselves had not been much considered. But the next generation sees a schism in mankind itself. The objection mostly raised to that episode of the myth is to the sacrifice of the 'firstlings of the flock'. It is a natural objection, and it certainly has to be left unanswered or answered only by the comment that from beginning to end the Bible is negligent of a great deal of our humane instincts. Man having got himself into a state when he was capable of willingly shedding blood, the shedding of blood could no longer be neglected. That pouring out of the blood 'which is life' was bound to become a central thing, for it was the one final and utterly irrevocable thing. It is that which Adam offers to the Lord, and which the Lord accepts. Cain himself seems to have had no humanitarian objections, or if he had they did not extend to his relations. But the main point is the first breach in humanity, the first outrage against *pietas*, and (more importantly) the first imagined proclamation of *pietas* from the heavens—from the skies or from eternal perfection. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth.' Human relationship has become to a man a source of anger and hate, and the hatred in its turn brings more desolation. It is the opening of the second theme of the Bible—the theme of *pietas* and the community. The curse of the primeval choice is now fully at work, and the great myth passes on to the first hint of the resolution of the lasting crisis of that curse.

The first book, as it were, of the myth is taken up by the entrance of contradiction into the spirit of man. The second is the period of the covenants. So far there has been no development of the character of the God; not, anyhow, in so many words. It is possible to make deductions, such as to observe Messianic prophecies from the talk of the head and the heel in the garden of Eden, and to discern a careful Providence in the making of coats of skins. But these are rather the drawing of what Wordsworth called 'the sustaining thought' from the progress of the tale, and Wordsworth, like any

other great writer (even the author, no doubt, of the book of Genesis), distinguished carefully between tales and sustaining thoughts drawn from tales. The second are much more patient of our own interpretations than the first, and there has so far been little interpretation of God in Genesis itself; no more, perhaps, than the implication that he is concerned at the breach of human relations in the murder of Abel. But now—by how little, yet by how much!—there is an alteration. The single rift of pure light in which all that has happened has so far been seen—the identities of heaven and earth, and man setting antagonism in his mind towards them, Adam and Eve passing over the earth, and Cain flying into the wilderness—this lies upon the Flood and changes. The pure light of mere distinction between God and man changes; it takes on colour and becomes prismatic with the rainbow. The very style of the Bible itself changes; the austere opening pulsates with multiplied relationships. Man becomes men.

The first covenant is that with Noah. It begins by repeating the single gift of power with which the Omnipotence had endowed Adam, but it adds to it the threat against Cain, and combines something new of its own. It proclaims a law: ‘At the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man.’ It is a declaration of an exchange of responsibility rather than of joy, but the web of substitution is to that extent created, however distant from the high end and utter conclusion of entire interchange. Into the chaotic experience of good as evil the first pattern of order is introduced; every man is to answer for the life of his brother. As the Omnipotence so limits man, it limits itself, and for the first time characterizes itself by a limitation—‘the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth’. It consents to agreement, to limitation, to patience, patience which is here the first faint hint of a thing yet unknown to the myth, the first preluding check on that activity of power which is presently to become a new mode of power—grace.

The second covenant is that made with Abraham, and afterwards renewed with Isaac and Jacob. It comes after the destruction of Babel; that symbolic legend of the effort man makes to approach heaven objectively only, as by the vain effort of the removal of aprons. It is a recurrent effort, since it is a recurrent temptation: if this or that could be done, surely the great tower would arise, and we should walk in heaven among

gods—as when the orthodox of any creed think that all will be well when their creed is universal. Yet the recurrent opposite is no more true, for unless something is done, nothing happens. Unless devotion is given to a thing which must prove false in the end, the thing that is true in the end cannot enter. But the distinction between necessary belief and unnecessary credulity is as necessary as belief; it is the heightening and purifying of belief. There is nothing that matters of which it is not sometimes desirable to feel: ‘this does not matter’. ‘This also is Thou; neither is this Thou.’ But it may be admitted also that this is part of the technique of belief in our present state; not even Isaiah or Aquinas have pursued to its revelation the mystery of self-scepticism in the divine. The nearest, perhaps, we can get to that is in the incredulous joy of great romantic moments—in love or poetry or what else: ‘this cannot possibly be, and it is’. Usually the way must be made ready for heaven, and then it will come by some other; the sacrifice must be made ready, and the fire will strike on another altar. So much Cain saw, and could not guess that the very purpose of his offering was to make his brother’s acceptable.

Babel had fallen, and the nations and peoples of the earth were established, in variation of speech and habit like the rainbow of the covenant above them. Out of that covenant a new order issues, and the first great formula of salvation. It is the promise and first establishment of Israel, but of Israel in a formula which applies both to it and to the future company of the New Testament, the Church. ‘I will bless thee . . . thou shalt be a blessing . . . in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed’ (Gen. xii, 1-3). Israel is to be exclusive and inclusive at once, like all modes of redemption, particular and universal. Their inclusive-exclusive statement is retained in the repetitions of the covenants, and it is permitted to become indeed a covenant. The covenant with Noah had been rather a one-sided promise than a covenant, but now a sign is established. Besides the exchange of responsibility, the *pietas* between man and man, there is to be a particular mode of adoration, ritual and deliberately ritual. It is the exclusive sign which is to be inclusive in its effects. The uncircumcized child is to be cut off from the people, yet all the earth is again to know beatitude. The mysterious promise of blessing is to be established in that intimate body of man, which had, in the old myth, swallowed the fatal fruit: ‘my covenant shall be in your flesh’. The precise

declaration is renewed to the generations; the single is to be a blessing to all.

There are two points here which may be remarked in the mere manner of the myth. The first relates to what are usually called the anthropomorphic appearances of the God. There is no doubt that they happen, but the point is that they are precisely appearances. They are rare, and they are condescensions. They succeed in their effectiveness because they are unusual condescensions. The God of Genesis is not a kind of supernatural man; he is something quite different, which occasionally deigns to appear like a supernatural man. Something unlike man behaves like man. It exists; it breaks off. 'And the Lord went his way . . . and Abraham returned unto his place.'

The second point refers to a question of style. The climax of those anthropomorphic appearances is in that most admirably composed passage of words with Abraham concerning Sodom. Up to then the few conversations between man and the Omnipotence have been extremely one-sided. But now there appears something new: the conversation becomes a dialogue. The remoteness and rigour of the Lord take on a tenderness—almost (but for the terror of the subject) a laughter—and there exists not only a promise but a reply. The promise, that is, becomes a fuller and richer thing; it is the whole meaning of prayer. Prayer, like everything else, was meant for a means of joy; but, in our knowledge of the good as evil, we have to recover it so, and it is not an easy thing. Prayer is thought of as a means to an end, but the end itself is sometimes only the means to the means, as with all love. The fantastic intercession of Abraham dances and retreats and salaams and dances again; and the thunder that threatens on the left the Cities of the Plain murmurs gently on the right above the tents. 'And the Lord went his way.'

The myth draws to a conclusion with what may, or may not, be a beginning of history, and yet at that beginning renews its full splendour of style. The last great outbreak of legend is laid among recognizable peoples and familiar titles. Kings and wizards, priests and prophets, caravans and armies, rich men and slaves, are habitual upon earth; something infinitely various is to be offered to the Lord. Such individual moments as the passion of Jacob for Rachel or of Rebekah for Jacob appear; though the numinous appearances linger, as in the figure that strives with Jacob. The

inclusive-exclusive thing is followed in its wanderings among the other existences, who do not know it and are to be blessed through it. But now something else has developed on the earth, the impiety of which Cain was the first incarnation. The development of man into peoples has developed also the dark fact of contradiction, and the law of exchange of responsibility is now outraged nationally as well as individually. The rejection of Joseph by his brethren expands into the slavery of the Israelites among the Egyptians. Impiety has reached through the whole social order, and the power of tyranny is established as an accepted thing in the world. It is exceptionally, in this instance, related to the 'chosen people', the means of returning beatitude, and it is in relation to the same people that, in the midst of so much evil still preferred, the God characterizes himself still further. He utters the first grand metaphysical phrase: the 'I am that I am'. Coleridge, as a poet as well as a philosopher, declared that it should be: 'I am in that I am'. But the alteration is sufficiently given in the message to Pharaoh: 'the I am hath sent me unto you'. The colours of the rainbows are assumed again into a clear light, and the God is no longer only creative but self-existent. It is this utter self-existence the sound of which is prolonged now through the whole book; 'I am the Lord' rings everywhere like the refrain of the heavens.

The first work of that declared self-existence is to free the inclusive-exclusive thing upon earth; indeed, it proclaims itself in the course of that freeing. There emerges at that moment a thing of which Christendom has never lost the vision or the tradition—revolution. The tale of it here may be incredible; it may even be disbelieved. The launching of the plagues on the land of Egypt, the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh into the thing that Pharaoh himself has wished, the locusts and the frogs and the Nile as blood—all these may be the romantic decorations of the legend. In effect the answer of Pharaoh is common enough: 'We will chance all that rather than let the people go'—till the dead lie in the streets of the cities. The vision of those streets has remained. In the night of death, when all the hopes and heirs of Egypt lie motionless, the victims of impiety are redeemed. The dispossessed and the rejected are in movement through the whole land. Renounce the myth and the vision remains. There is flung out for us the image of the great host, bribed and adorned with the jewels of their taskmasters, marching out under the prophet and the priest and the

woman; marching under the fire and the cloud of the terrible covenanted God. 'I am that I am'; 'I am the Lord'. The heavens go before the host, the habitation of the proceeding Power, and of the single voice in and beyond creation that is able to proclaim its own identity, the voice of the original good. They pour on; the waters stand up to let them pass, and nature is hurled back for the departure of the slaves. 'Why callest thou upon me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.' It is the law of exchange that advances, of the keeping of one life by another, of the oath that cannot be controlled by man; it is the knowledge of good as good breaking out of the knowledge of good as evil. 'The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.' In a symbol of universal application, the angel of the Lord and the cloud of heaven stand between the two hosts, and between the two methods of knowledge, and the sea roars down. In the morning the chariots and bodies of the dead are tossed on the shore, and the timbrels of the singing women mock at the wreckage of the possessors and the rich, while the shout of the free people adores the Divine salvation.

From He Came Down from Heaven

The Precursor and the Incarnation of the Kingdom

Charles Williams

The earliest of the Gospels is asserted to be that called 'of Mark'; it is certainly the shortest. As Genesis had explained what was happening by what had happened, so do the Gospels. They purport to be a record of the cause of certain definite experiences. The time and place of that cause are definitely marked. It occurs in certain named towns of the Roman Empire, in a period from 4 B.C. to A.D. 30, from forty to seventy years after the death of Julius Caesar, and from fifteen to fifty years after the death of Virgil. The administration of the Imperial Government organizes everything, and the events are plotted along the lines of that organization. The *pietas* of the early and mythical wanderers has become a supernational civilization. The documents of the New Testament are themselves composed in or directed to localities in that interrelated whole, and before it is well understood what the Church is, it is at least clear that it is universal. At the same time, history and contemporaneity again go together, the obverse and the reverse of the coins of the kingdom of heaven. Its missionaries declared a unity, as they do to-day, a unity no more divided by two thousand years than by two seconds. We certainly have to separate them in thought, because of the needs of the mind, as we have sometimes to divide form and content in poetry. But as the poetry is in fact one and indivisible, so is the fact; so even is the doctrine. The thing as it happens on the earth and in the world, the thing as it happens on the earth and in the soul, are two stresses on one fact; say, on one Word. The fact is the thing that is supposed to have appeared, and the Gospel of Mark is the shortest account. The Gospels called 'of Matthew' and 'of Luke' are longer and fuller. The Gospel called 'of John' comes nearer to describing the unity of the new thing in world and soul; it is the limit of the permissible influence of contemporary Greek philosophy, and the repulse of the impermissible. To observe something of the distinction one has only to consider the *Symposium* of Plato with the Gospel of John, and remark the difference in their attitude towards matter.

It is asserted that the Gospel according to Mark was in circulation at Rome by the year 75. If so, and if the Gospel of Mark represents at all what the

Church believed or tried to believe in the year 75, then certainly by the year 75 the Church at the centre of a highly developed society had already thrown over any idea (if any such idea had ever existed) of a figure only of brotherly love and international peace; the moral teacher expanding the old Jewish ideas of pardon and righteousness into a fresh beauty, and teaching ethics in the ancient maxim of the Golden Rule. Possibly a figure of this kind might be extracted from Saint John's Gospel, by leaving out rather more than half of Saint John's Gospel. But with the Gospel of Saint Mark the thing is impossible. To remove the apocalyptic is not to leave the ethical but to leave nothing at all.

It is, of course, arguable that the influence of Saint Paul, who is often regarded as the villain of early Christianity (the Claudius of a *Hamlet* from which Hamlet has been removed), had already had its perfect work. Or, since there had not been very much time for Saint Paul to do it, perhaps someone earlier, an *Ur*-Paul, or (documentarily) the fatal and fascinating Q, which no man has seen at any time but the contents of which we so neatly know. The weakness, credulity, and folly of that early disciple, or of all the early disciples, may have altered the original truth of the vagrant provincial professor of ethical beauty into something more closely corresponding to their romantic needs. Saint Mark may be dogmatically asserted to have been an intentional or unintentional liar. But at least we have to admit his lies for the purpose of explaining that they are lies. They are our only evidence for whatever it was he was lying about. And as he was not lying in a sub-prefecture of Thule, but right in the middle of the Empire, so he was not lying about events older than the dynasties of Egypt or the cities of Assyria, but about events done on a hill outside a city on a Roman highway under the rule of the Princeps Augustus and his successor Tiberius. They were (in one sense or the other—or both) historic lies.

Our contemporary pseudo-acquaintance with the Christian idea has misled us in another point. It is generally supposed that his lies (if lies) are simple and easy. It is only by reading Saint Mark that one discovers they are by no means simple or easy. It is very difficult to make out what is supposed to be happening. His book begins with a declaration: 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of

God'. What the Son of God may be he does not explain, preferring to follow it up with a quotation from the old prophets, which slides into an account of a certain John who came as the precursor of this Divine Hero. He has in Saint Mark no other business, and this (though highly wrought to a fine passion of declamation and heraldry) is so in Saint John. But in Saint Luke there is something more. It is recorded that certain groups came to the Precursor—the common people, the tax-collectors, the soldiers. All these ask him for some kind of direction on conduct. Saint Matthew adds the ecclesiastical leaders, but the Precursor offered them no more than invective. He answers the rest with instructions which amount very nearly to a gospel of temporal justice. All men are to share their goods freely and equally. The revenue officers are to make no personal profit out of their business. The soldiers are not to make their duties an excuse for outrage or violence; they (again) are to make no personal gain beyond their government pay. Share everything; neither by fraud nor by force let yourself be unfair to anyone; be content with your own proper pay. It is true he does not raise the question of the restoration of the dispossessed by force of arms; he is speaking of immediate duties as between individual and individual. 'He that has two coats let him give to him that hath none.' He prolongs the concern of the prophets with social injustice, without their denunciation of the proud. That had been declared, as a duty of the Imperial government, by the great poet dead forty-five years before:

*Pacisque imponere morem,
Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos:*

'To impose the habit of peace, to be merciful to the downtrodden, and to overthrow the proud.' There had been a similar note in the private song (again according to Saint Luke) of the Mother of the coming Hero: 'the rich he hath sent empty away'.

At this moment the Divine Thing appears (it will be remembered that Saint Matthew uses the neuter—'that holy thing'; students of the Gospel may be excused for sometimes following the example, if only to remind ourselves of what the Evangelists actually said). In the rest of Saint Mark's first chapter, the account of his coming is purely apocalyptic. Witness is borne out of heaven and on earth and from hell. He

(since the masculine pronoun is also and more frequently used) begins his own activities. He calls disciples; he works miracles of healing; he controls spirits; he teaches with authority. What does he teach? What do the devils fear and the celestials declare and men wonder at? 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel.'

Yes, but what gospel? What kind of kingdom? The Precursor had said almost the same thing. In some expectation one turns the page . . . several pages. The works of healing continue swiftly, interspersed with the Divine Thing's comments on himself, and his reasons for existing. They are still not very clear. The old prophetic cry of 'pardon' returns. He has power to forgive sins—does he mean forget? He calls himself the 'Son of Man'; he is lord of ritual observances such as the keeping of the Sabbath; there exists some state of eternal sin and damnation. There is something—presumably the kingdom of heaven—which cannot be reconciled with old things; new, it must be fitted to the new.

Presently, in the parables, the description of the kingdom is continued. It is a state of being, but not a state of being without which one can get along very well. To lose it is to lose everything else. It is intensely dangerous, and yet easily neglected. It involves repentance and it involves 'faith'—whatever 'faith' may be. It is concerned with himself, for he attributes to himself the power and the glory. He says: 'I say unto thee, Arise'; 'it is I; be not afraid.' The Sermon on the Mount is full of his own decisions, just as it ramps with hell and destruction and hypocrites and being cast into the fire and trodden under foot and demands for perfection and for joy (not for resignation or endurance or forgiveness, not even a pseudo-joy) under intolerable treatment. Moses in old days had momentarily taken the power and the glory to himself, and had been shut out of the temporal promise. But the present Hero does it continuously, until (in the topmost note of that exalted arrogance) humility itself is vaunted, and the only virtue that cannot be aware of itself without losing its nature is declared by the Divine Thing to be its own nature: 'I am meek and lowly of heart.' This in the voice that says to the Syrophoenician woman when she begs help for her daughter: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.' It is true her request is granted, in answer to her retort, something in the same manner as

the Lord spoke to Job in answer to his.

About half way through the book as we have it, there is a change. Up to Chapter viii it is possible to believe that, though the doctrine is anything but clear, the experience of the disciples is not unique. Figures are sometimes met who overwhelm, frighten, and delight those who come in contact with them; personality, and so forth—and what they say may easily sound obscure. But in Chapter viii there is a sudden concentration and even exposition. The Hero demands from his disciples a statement, not of their repentance or righteousness or belief in the I AM, which is what the old prophets clamoured for, but of their belief in himself, and he follows it up with a statement of his own. They say: 'Thou art the Christ.' No doubt when we have looked up annotated editions and Biblical dictionaries, we know what 'the Christ' means. It is 'the Anointed One'. But at the moment, there, it is a kind of incantation, the invocation of a ritual, antique, and magical title. Even if we look up the other Gospels and make it read: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' it does not much help. However inspired Saint Peter may have been, it seems unlikely that he comprehended in a flash the whole complex business of Christian theology. What is the Son of God? The apostles and the devils agree; that is something. But on what do they agree?

The Divine Thing approves the salutation. It proceeds to define its destiny. It declares it is to suffer greatly, to be rejected by all the centres of jurisdiction, to be seized and put to death, and after three days it is to rise again from the dead. Protests are abusively tossed aside. In all three gospels this definition of its immediate future is followed by a definition of its further nature and future; 'the Son of Man' is to be seen in the 'glory of his Father and with the holy angels', that is, in the swift and geometrical glory seen by Isaiah and Ezekiel, the fire of the wheels and the flash of the living creatures, the terrible crystal and the prism of the covenant above, the pattern of heaven declared in heaven. The formula of the knowledge of this pattern on earth is disclosed; it is the loss of life for the saving of life, 'for my sake and the gospel's'. It is the denial of the self and the lifting of the cross.

The denial of the self has come, as is natural, to mean in general the making of the self thoroughly uncomfortable. That (though it may be all that is possible) leaves

the self still strongly existing. But the phrase is more intellectual than moral, or rather it is only moral because it is intellectual; it is a denial of the consciousness of the existence of the self at all. What had been the self is to become a single individual, neither less nor more than others; as it were, one of the living creatures that run about and compose the web of the glory. 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.' The contemplation demanded is not personal, of the self and of others—even in order that the self may be unselfish—but abstract and impartial. The life of the self is to be lost that the individual soul may be found, in the pattern of the words of the Son of Man. The kingdom is immediately at hand—'Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power'; again the words are historic and contemporary at once.

The declaration of the formula is followed by what is called the Transfiguration. Secluded among a few of his followers, the Divine Thing exhibits itself in a sudden brightness, in which, as if it receded into the eternal state of contemporaneity, the ancient leaders of what had once been the inclusive-exclusive covenant of salvation are discerned to exchange speech with the new exclusive figure of inclusive beatitude. It is a vision which is to be kept a secret till the rising from the dead has been accomplished. But at least the kingdom has now been, to some extent, exhibited. Repentance is a preliminary to the denial of the self and the loss of the life, and the loss of the life for the saving of the life depends on that choosing of necessity by the Son of Man which will take him to his death and rising. 'He set his face to go up to Jerusalem.'

It is at some time during this period of the operation of the Christ that the problem of the Precursor reappears. Messengers from John arrive; 'art thou he that was to come?' After they have been dismissed, the Christ, turning to those that stood by (as it were to his mother and to his brethren), makes the astonishing declaration that 'among men born of women is none greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he'. The Church since then has implied that this can hardly be true in its literal sense, for the Precursor has been canonized (as it were, by acclamation) and been given a Feast to himself, a Primary Double of the First

Class. Even so, even assuming that as a matter of fact the Precursor was and is one of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, still the Christ must have had something in his mind. What, apart from the expectation of the Redeemer, was the gospel of the Precursor? It was something like complete equality and temporal justice, regarded as the duty of those who expect the kingdom. What has happened to that duty in the gospel of the Kingdom?

The new gospel does not care much about it. All John's doctrine is less than the least in the Kingdom. It cannot be bothered with telling people not to defraud and not to be violent and to share their superfluities. It tosses all that sort of thing on one side. Let the man who has two coats (said the Precursor) give one to the man who has none. But what if the man who has none, or for that matter the man who has three, wants to take one from the man who has two—what then? Grace of heaven! why, give him both. If a man has stolen the pearl bracelet, why, point out to him that he has missed the diamond necklace. Be content with your wages, said the Precursor. The Holy Thing decorated that advice with a suggestion that it is iniquity to be displeased when others who have done about a tenth as much work are paid as much money: 'Is thine eye evil because mine is good?' It is true that there is a reason: those who came in late had not been hired early. No one would accept that as a reason to-day—neither economist nor employer nor worker. But there is always a reason; the intellectual logic of the Prophets is carried on into the New Testament. Yet the separate and suitable reasons never quite account for the identical and indivisible command. The 'sweet reasonableness' of Christ is always there, but it is always in a dance and its dancing-hall is from the topless heavens to the bottomless abyss. Its balance is wholly in itself; it is philosophical and unconditioned by temporalities—'had, having, and in quest to have, extreme'.

Half a hundred brief comments, flung out to the mob of men's hearts, make it impossible for a child of the kingdom, for a Christian, to talk of justice or injustice so far as he personally is concerned; they make it impossible for him to complain of the unfairness of anything. They do not, presumably, stop him noticing what has happened, but it can never be a matter of protest. Judgement and measurement are always discouraged. You may have them if you will, but there is a sinister note in the

promise that they shall be measured back to you in the same manner: ‘good measure, pressed down and running over shall men give into your bosoms’. If you must have law, have it, ‘till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing’.

What then of all the great tradition, the freeing of slaves at the Exodus, the determination of the prophets, the long effort against the monstrous impiety of Cain? The answer is obvious; all that is assumed as a mere preliminary. The rich, while they remain rich, are practically incapable of salvation, at which all the Apostles were exceedingly astonished. Their astonishment is exceedingly funny to our vicariously generous minds. But if riches are not supposed to be confined to money, the astonishment becomes more general. There are many who feel that while God might damn Rothschild he could hardly damn Rembrandt. Are the riches of Catullus and Carnegie so unequal, though so different? Sooner or later, nearly everyone is surprised at some kind of rich man being damned. The Divine Thing, for once, was tender to us; he restored a faint hope: ‘with God all things are possible’. But the preliminary step is always assumed: ‘sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor’—and then we will talk. Then we will talk of that other thing without which even giving to the poor is useless, the thing for which at another time the precious ointment was reserved from the poor, the thing that is necessary to correct and qualify even good deeds, the thing that is formulated in the words ‘for my sake and the gospel’s’ or ‘in my name’. Good deeds are not enough; even love is not enough unless it is love of a particular kind. Long afterwards Saint Paul caught up the dreadful cry: ‘though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing’. It is not surprising that Messiah saw the possibility of an infinitely greater knowledge of evil existing through him than had been before: ‘blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended at me’.

The Incarnation of the Kingdom has declared its destiny, the formula by which man may be unified with it, the preliminaries necessary to the spiritual initiation. The records of the Synoptics proceed to the awful and familiar tale: to the entry of the Divine Thing into Jerusalem, to its making of itself a substance of communication through the flesh, to its Passion. ‘The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.’ In the ancient myth something of that kind had happened to the good, the good in

which the Adam had lived. But that good had not, in the myth, been imagined as a consciousness. The kingdom of heaven then had not been shown as affected by the sin of the Adam; only the Adam. The patience which had been proclaimed in the covenants had been the self-restraint of the Creator, but not—there—of the Victim. Another side of the aeonian process has issued slowly into knowledge: the operation of that in the Adam and in their descendants which had remained everlastingly related to the good.

The Gospel called ‘of John’ begins with that original. The Divine Thing is there identified with the knowledge of good which indefectibly exists in every man—indefectibly even though it should be experienced only as hell—‘the light which lighteth every man’. It is also that by which communication with the heaven of perfection is maintained, ‘ascending and descending’. But this state of being which is called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ in the Synoptics is called in Saint John ‘eternal life’. There is no space here to work out singly the various definitions of itself which it provides in this Gospel. Briefly, it declares itself to be the union of heaven and earth (i, 51); the one absolutely necessary thing for escape from a state in which the contradiction of good is preferred (iii, 16, 36); it is the perfect satisfaction of desire (vi, 35; x, 27-8); it is judgement (v, 25-30; xii, 46-8); it is in perfect union with its Origin (x, 30; xiv, 11); it is universal and inclusive (xv, 5; xvii, 21); it restores the truth (v, 33; vii, 31-2; xviii, 37). Of these the last is perhaps the most related to the present argument. For by truth must be meant at least perfect knowledge (within the proper requisite degrees). ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ Right knowledge and freedom are to be one.

It is this ‘truth’ of which the Divine Hero speaks at the time of the Passion which he had prophesied—as necessity and as his free choice. Before one of the jurisdictions by which he is rejected and condemned he declares: ‘To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice’. He formally claimed before another the ritual titles of Son of God and Son of Man, and his future descent ‘in the clouds of heaven’ and in the glory of heaven. But before then the earlier proclamation, ‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand’, has changed. It has become concentrated; if the

kingdom, then the moment of the arrival of the kingdom. The Gospels break into peremptory phrases: 'My time is at hand', 'this night', 'this hour'; an image of the hour absorbed into the Holy Thing is thrown up—'this cup'; the hour arrives—'behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners'.

Around that moment the world of order and judgement, of Virgil and the Precursor, of Pharaoh and Cain, rushes up also. Its good and its evil are both concerned, for it cannot very well do other than it does do. The knowledge of good as evil has made the whole good evil to it; it has to reject the good in order to follow all that it can understand as good. When Caiaphas said that 'it was good that one man should die for the people', he laid down a principle which every government supports and must support. Nor, though Christ has denounced the government for its other sins, does he denounce either Caiaphas or Pilate for his own death. He answers the priest; he condescends to discussion with the Roman. Only to Herod he says nothing, for Herod desired neither the ecclesiastical nor the political good; he wanted only miracles to amuse him. The miracles of Christ are accidental, however efficient; the kingdom of heaven fulfils all earthly laws because that is its nature but it is concerned only with its own, and to try to use it for earth is to lose heaven and gain nothing for earth. It may be taken by violence but it cannot be compelled by violence; its Incarnation commanded that he should be awaited everywhere but his effectiveness demanded nowhere. Everything must be made ready and then he will do what he likes. This maxim, which is the condition of all prayer, has involved the Church in a metaphysic of prayer equivalent to 'Heads, I win; tails, you lose'.

The three jurisdictions acted according to all they could understand of good: Caiaphas upon all he could know of the religious law, Pilate of the Virgilian equity, Herod of personal desire. The Messiah answered them in that first word of the Cross, which entreated pardon for them precisely on the ground of their ignorance: 'forgive them, for they know not what they do'. The knowledge of good and evil which man had desired is offered as the excuse for their false knowledge of good. But the offer brings their false knowledge into consciousness, and will no longer like the prophets blot it out. The new way of pardon is to be different from the old, for the evil is still to be known. It is known, in what follows, by the Thing that has come

down from Heaven. He experiences a complete and utter deprivation of all knowledge of the good. The Church has never defined the Atonement. It has contented itself with saying that the Person of the kingdom there assumed into itself the utmost possible capacities of its own destruction and they could not destroy it. It separated itself from all good deliberately and (as it were) superfluously: 'thinkest thou I cannot now pray to the Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' It could, it seems, still guiltlessly free itself, but it has made its own promise and will keep it. Its impotency is deliberate. It denies its self; it loses its life to save it; it saves others because it cannot, by its decisions, save itself. It remains still exclusive and inclusive; it excludes all consent to the knowledge of evil, but it includes the whole knowledge of evil without its own consent. It is 'made sin', in Saint Paul's phrase. The prophecy quoted concerning this paradox of redemption is 'A bone of him shall not be broken', and this is fulfilled; as if the frame of the universe remains entire, but its life is drawn out of it, as if the pattern of the glory remained exact but the glory itself were drawn away. The height of the process begins with the Agony in the Garden, which is often quoted for our encouragement; he shuddered and shrank. The shrinking is part of the necessity; he 'must' lose power; he 'must' know fear. He 'must' be like the Adam in the garden of the myth, only where they fled from their fear into the trees he goes among the trees to find his fear; he is secluded into terror. The process reaches its height after, speaking from the cross, he has asserted the pietas, the exchanged human responsibility, of men: 'behold thy son, behold thy mother', and after he has declared the pure dogma of his nature, known now as hardly more than dogma: 'today thou shalt be with me in Paradise'. This is what he has chosen, and as his power leaves him he still chooses, to believe. He becomes, but for that belief, a state wholly abandoned.

Gibbon, in that superb as well as solemn sneer which is one of the classic pages of English prose as well as one of the supreme attacks on the whole history, may have been right. The whole earth may not have been darkened, nor even the whole land. Pliny and Seneca may have recorded no wonder because there was no wonder to

record. The sun may have seemed to shine on Calvary as on many another more protracted agony. Or there may have been a local eclipse, or whatever other phenomenon the romantic pietists can invent to reconcile themselves to the other side. But that the life of the whole of mankind began to fail in that hour is not incredible; that the sun and all light, without as within, darkened before men's eyes, that the swoon of something more than death touched them, and its sweat stood on their foreheads to the farthest ends of the world. The Thing that was, and had always been, and must always be; the fundamental humanity of all men; the Thing that was man rather than a man, though certainly incarnated into the physical appearance of a man; the Thing that was Christ Jesus, knew all things in the deprivation of all goodness.

The darkness passed; men went on their affairs. He said: 'It is finished.' The Passion and the Resurrection have been necessarily divided in ritual and we think of them as separate events. So certainly they were, and yet not as separate as all that. They are two operations in one; they are the hour of the coming of the kingdom. A new knowledge arises. Men had determined to know good as evil; there could be but one perfect remedy for that—to know the evil of the past itself as good, and to be free from the necessity of the knowledge of evil in the future; to find right knowledge and perfect freedom together; to know all things as occasions of love. The Adam and their children had been involved in a state of contradiction within themselves. The law had done its best by imposing on that chaos of contradiction a kind of order, by at least calling definite things good and definite things evil. The prophets had urged this method: repent, 'cease to do evil, learn to do well'. But even allowing that, in all times and places, it was possible to know what was good and what was evil, was it as easy as all that? Or what of Job who had done well and was overthrown? Or Ecclesiastes who had sought out righteousness and found it was all much the same vanity in the end? How could the single knowledge be restored? Or if the myth itself were false, how could the single knowledge be gained—the knowledge of perfection in all experience, which man naturally desires and naturally believes, and as naturally denies and contradicts?

The writings of the early masters of the new life, the life that was declared after the Resurrection, are full of an awful simplicity. The thing has happened; the kingdom

is here. 'Fear not, little flock,' wrote one of them, 'it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' 'What shall deliver me', wrote another, 'from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' This clarity of knowledge rides through the Epistles. All is most well; evil is 'pardoned'—it is known after another manner; in an interchange of love, as a means of love, therefore as a means of the good. *O felix culpa*—pardon is no longer an oblivion but an increased knowledge, a knowledge of all things in a perfection of joy.

It is the name now given to the heavenly knowledge of the evil of earth; evil is known as an occasion of good, that is, of love. It has been always so known on the side of heaven, but now it can be so known on the side of earth also. Pardon, or reconciliation, was not defined by the prophets as more than oblivion, for in time mankind had not experienced that reconciliation. Nor could mankind, by itself, ever reach it, for mankind by itself could not endure the results of its choice, the total deprivation of good, and yet recover joyous awareness of good. What mankind could not do, manhood did, and a manhood which was at the disposal of all men and women. It was therefore possible now for mankind itself to know evil as an occasion of heavenly love. It was not inappropriate that the condition of such a pardon should be repentance, for repentance is no more than a passionate intention to know all things after the mode of heaven, and it is impossible to know evil as good if you insist on knowing it as evil. Pardon, as between any two beings, is a re-identification of love, and it is known so in the most tender and the most happy human relationships. But there is a profound difference between any such re-identification of love between heaven and earth and between earth and earth. What may be justly required in the one case must not be required in the other. It is all very well for the Divine Thing of heaven to require some kind of intention of good, not exactly as a condition of pardon but as a means of the existence of its perfection. Men were never meant to be as gods or to know as gods, and for men to make any such intention a part of their pardon is precisely to try to behave as gods. It is the renewal of the first and most dreadful error, the desire to know as gods; the reversal of the Incarnation, by which God knew as Man, the heresy of thought and action denounced in the Athanasian Creed—it is precisely the attempt to convert the Godhead into flesh and not the taking of the manhood into God. The

intention to do differently may be passionately offered; it must never be required—not in the most secret recesses of that self, which can only blush with shame to find itself pardoning and with delight at the infinite laughter of the universe at a created being forgiving another created being. The ancient cry of ‘Don’t do it again’ is never a part of pardon. It is conceivable that Saint Peter re-identified love between himself and his brother four hundred and ninety times in a day; it is inconceivable that each time he made it a condition of love that it shouldn’t happen again—it would be a slur on intelligence as well as love. To consent to know evil as good only on condition that the evil never happens again is silly; it is conditioning one’s knowledge—as if one consented to know that the Antipodes existed only on condition that no one ever mentioned the Antipodes. All limitation of pardon must come, if at all, from the side of the sinner, in the frequent cry of ‘I won’t do it again’, in the more frequent cry of ‘I won’t, but I shall. . . .’ Heaven has had to explain to us not only itself but ourselves; it has had to create for us not only pardon but the nature of the desire for pardon. It has therefore defined the cry of the sinner, but it has not suggested that other sinners should take upon themselves to demand the cry before they submit, with their brothers, to its single glorious existence in both.

He rose; he manifested; he talked of ‘the things pertaining to the kingdom’. He exhibited the actuality of his body, carrying the lovely and adorable matter, with which all souls were everlastingly conjoined, into his eternity. He left one great commandment—satisfy hunger: ‘feed the lambs’, ‘feed the sheep’. Beyond the Petrine law he cast the Johannine—‘if I will that he tarry till I come . . .’, but the coming may be from moment to moment and the tarrying from moment to moment. ‘Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?’ It is as if, from moment to moment, he withdrew and returned, swifter than lightning, known in one mode and another mode and always new. The new life might still be sequential (in the order of time) but every instant was united to the Origin, and complete and absolute in itself. ‘Behold, I come quickly’—the coming and the going one, the going and the coming one, and all is joy. ‘It is not for you to know the times and the seasons . . . but you shall be witnesses to me . . . to the uttermost ends of the earth’, through all the distances and all the operations of holy matter.

Then, as if it withdrew into the air within the air, and the air became a cloud about its passage, scattering promises of power, the Divine Thing parted and passed.

From He Came Down from Heaven

The Practice of Substituted Love

Charles Williams

Among the epigrams of the kingdom which Saint John arranged in his Gospel immediately before the triumph of the kingdom, he attributed to Messiah the saying: 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.' It is, on a second glance, a doubtful truth. Many men have exhibited their will of love in such a surrender, but many—perhaps more—have exercised among all kinds of hardship a steady tenderness of love besides which the other seems almost easy. But the phrase has to be understood in the context of other meanings. The 'greater love' is distinguished by the 'laying down the life': something similar had been decreed at Sinai: 'thou shalt not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live'. The definition does not, in the Gospels, necessarily mean physical death, even if that is sometimes involved. When Messiah said: 'Whosoever will lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall find it', he did not confine the promise to the martyrs nor deny to Saint John what he allowed to Saint James. Martyrdom might or might not happen. Saint Paul, in the passage already quoted, denied any value at all to martyrdom unless it were accompanied by *caritas*: 'though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing'. According to the Apostle, self-sacrifice by itself was as remote from the way of salvation as self-indulgence. As a technique, as a discipline, as a method, it might be useful: no more. But so may—if not self-indulgence at least things gratifying to the self. We are not to deny to others the means of their love because those means may seem to indulge us. 'Neither Jew nor Greek, but a new creature.' Neither self-sacrifice, as such, nor self-gratification, as such; both may be sacraments of love at any moment, but neither is covenanted. The denial of the self affects both. 'It is no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me' is the definition of the pure life which is substituted for both.

The taunt flung at that Christ, at the moment of his most spectacular impotency, was: 'He saved others; himself he cannot save'. It was a definition as precise as any in the works of the medieval schoolmen. It had been already accepted by the action—the action which restrained action—of Messiah, as it had been accepted still earlier by his words when he chose necessity. It was an exact definition of the kingdom of heaven in

operation, and of the great discovery of substitution which was then made by earth. Earth, at best till then under the control of law, had to find that no law was enough unless the burden of the law, of the law kept or the law unkept, could be known to be borne by heaven in the form of the Holy Thing that came down from heaven. Earth had to find also that the new law of the kingdom made that substitution a principle of universal exchange. The first canon of substitution had been declared in the myth of origin ages before, when the law of man's responsibility for man had been shaped. It had denounced there the first-born child of the Adam, though of the Adam no longer in the union of the knowledge of the good, but in the divided sorrow of conception and of work. The child was Cain, the incarnation of their union outside Paradise, and in some sense of the self-desirous spirit which troubles the divine glory in all lovers. An opposition to goodness was in his nature and is in theirs, a desire to trouble goodness with some knowledge of some kind of evil. He not only killed his brother; he also made an effort to carry on the intellectual falsity which his parents had experienced when they fled from facts in their new shame. He became rhetorical—it is, so early, the first appearance of a false style of words: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' It is a question asked by most people at some moment. 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.' That answer became a law in the covenants: 'At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.' As the single tyranny of Cain developed into the social tyranny in Egypt and in Israel itself, so the law gathered round itself the clamour of the prophets for social justice: 'seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow . . . what mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts.' Under the organized effort of Rome towards at least something of the Virgilian equity, this had been defined in the moral duty of all classes and individuals declared by the Precursor; it had become the gospel of the Precursor as of Virgil, except that the one gospel expected beyond itself what the other hardly could. Messias had shown that he would demand and assume its fulfilment by all who wished to follow his own gospel. It had to be left, then, to men to choose or not to choose. The direct concern of the new kingdom was with other things, with the love that had substituted itself for men, and with the love between men that was to form itself after the manner of that original love.

When Messiah removed his visibility, he left behind him a group of united followers; he had created the Church. If the Acts of the Apostles are any guide—say in Chapters ii, iii, iv—the Church began with direct statements of dogma and direct communication of rites. Necessarily, as it spread, it had to organize itself; it had to make decisions on fundamental questions. There was the question, as it grew, of what on certain points it did actually believe; it answered this by finding out in its Councils what in fact it did—in its various localities—actually believe. The message of the Councils to the localities after an inquiry tended to be not so much ‘we are telling you what is true’ as ‘it has been decided that *this* is what the Church actually believes’. Certainly, by rapid development of a hypothesis of its nature, the two things became identical, but there was a difference in method and indeed in idea. Occasionally a Council came to a decision which was not accepted, in which case the hypothesis sooner or later involved the view that it was not a proper Council. For the hypothesis was that there was operative within the Church the sacred and eternal reconciliation of all things, which the Church did not and could not deserve. The Church (it was early decided) was not an organization of sinless men but of sinful, not a union of adepts but of less than neophytes, not of *illuminati* but of those that sat in darkness. Nevertheless, it carried within it an energy not its own, and it knew what it believed about that energy. It was the power of the Reconciler, and the nature of the Reconciler was of eternity as of time, of heaven as of earth, of absolute God as of essential Man. ‘Let those who say *There was when he was not* be anathema.’

There was then, so to put it, a new way, the way of return to blissful knowledge of all things. But this was not sufficient; there had to be a new self to go on the new way. This was the difficulty of the Church then as it is now, as it always is after any kind of conversion. There are always three degrees of consciousness, all infinitely divisible: (i) the old self on the old way; (ii) the old self on the new way; (iii) the new self on the new way. The second group is the largest, at all times and in all places. It is the frequent result of romantic love. It forms, at any one moment, the greatest part of the visibility of the Church, and, at most moments, practically all of oneself that one can know, for the new self does not know itself. It consists of the existence of the self, unselfish perhaps, but not yet denied. This self often applies itself unselfishly. It

transfers its activities from itself as a centre to its belief as a centre. It uses its angers on behalf of its religion or its morals, and its greed, and its fear, and its pride. It operates on behalf of its notion of God as it originally operated on behalf of itself. It aims honestly at better behaviour, but it does not usually aim at change; and perhaps it was in relation to that passionate and false devotion that Messiah asked: 'Think ye when the Son of Man cometh he shall find faith upon the earth?'

Those who accuse the Church accuse it—justly—of not being totally composed of new selves; those who defend it defend it—justly—as being a new way. No doubt the old self on the new way is a necessary period, in most cases, of change. But the Apostles, to judge by the epistles, were not willing that the faithful should remain consistently faithful to themselves. They demanded, as Messiah had demanded, that the old self should deny itself. It was to be removed and renovated, to be a branch of the vine, a point of the pattern. It was to become an article of love. And what then is love?

It is possible here to follow only one of the many definitions the New Testament holds; the definition of death. To love is to die and live again; to live from a new root. Part of the experience of romantic love has been precisely that; the experience of being made new, the 'renovation' of nature, as Dante defined it in a particular experience of love. That experience is not sufficient to maintain itself, or at least does not choose to do so. But what is there experienced, and what has been otherwise experienced by many in religion, or outside religion, has to be followed by choice. 'Many are called but few are chosen': we are called from the kingdom but we choose from ourselves. The choice is to affect not only our relation with God but our relation with men. There is to be something of the same kind of relation in it. 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.' It is odd how rarely Messiah is seen as full of joy—but there it is. He said so; no one else. He proceeded towards our joy: 'This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.' The First Epistle of Saint John carried the same idea, and the Revised Version has it more sharply than the Authorized. 'Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren. ... if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us.' We are to love each other *as* he loved us, laying down our lives *as* he

did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. All life is to be vicarious—at least, all life in the kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious. The difference between life in the kingdom and life outside the kingdom is to be this. ‘Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven.’ But many of the Scribes and Pharisees were good and holy men? yes; what then? It is this love-in-substitution, this vicarious life, which is no more in their law than in the gospel of the Precursor. ‘Go, tell John, the blind receive their sight. . . . the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’

It has been the habit of the Church, since the earliest times, ostentatiously to use some such substitution, in one rite at least: in the baptism of infants. It is understood that this is largely due to the persecutions, but also to the nature of the sacrament itself; which was purposed for infants as well as adults, and yet demanded penitence and faith before its operation could be ensured. This responsibility was laid on the godparents: ‘at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man’. But it is others than infants who can swear more sincerely and more humbly by others’ mouths than ever by their own, though it must be with the agreement and desire of their own. It is one of the difficulties of the Church that her presentation of experience does not always coincide with realized experience. The conversion she demands and the sustenance she communicates come sometimes from alien and even from hostile sources; it is one conversion and one sustenance with hers. The invisible Church moves in another manner than the visible; indeed the invisible must include that earthly scepticism, opposition which the visible Church so greatly needs and yet cannot formally include. The sponsors in baptism exhibit the idea of substitution, as that habit which existed in the early Church of being baptized ‘for the dead’ exhibited it. Part of the fact which such an exhibition ritually and sacramentally presents is the making a committal of oneself from another’s heart and by another’s intention. It is simpler sometimes and easier, and no less fatal and blessed, to do it so; to surrender and be offered to destiny by another rather than by oneself; it is already a little denial of the self.

But that is as holy Luck may decide. Whatever the means of beginning, the life

itself is vicarious. The courtesies of that life are common enough—to lend a book, for example, is a small motion in it, an article of the web of glory. It is the full principle which is defined by the New Testament, and the making of contracts on that principle which exhibit, in the denial of self, the pattern of the web.

Saint Paul, in one of those letters which are at once mystical diaries, archiepiscopal charges, and friendly messages, threw out an instruction to the Church at Galatia (Gal. vi, 2). ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ It is, like the patience of Job, one of our most popular texts. In exterior things it is recognized as valid—at least until we become bored; the fiftieth rather than the first visit to the sick is distasteful. Interiorly, it is less frequently supposed to be possible, and even exteriorly it has a wider range than is, perhaps, allowed. Saint Paul’s injunction is to such acts as ‘fulfil the law of Christ’, that is, to acts of substitution. To take over the grief or the fear or the anxiety of another is precisely that; and precisely that is less practised than praised. ‘Mystical substitution’ we have heard from the text-books, or from other books that are less than the text-books. It is supposed to be for ‘nuns, confessors, saints, not us’: so much the worse for us. We are supposed to be content to ‘cast our burdens on the Lord’. The Lord indicated that the best way to do so was to hand these over to someone else to cast, or even to cast them on him in someone else. There will still be work enough for the self, carrying the burdens of others, and becoming the point at which those burdens are taken over by the Divine Thing which is the kingdom: ‘as he is, even so are we in this world’.

The technique needs practice and intelligence, as much intelligence as is needed for any other business contract. The commerce of love is best established by commercial contracts with man. If we are to make agreements with our adversaries quickly, we ought to be even quicker to make them with our friends. Any such agreement has three points: (i) to know the burden; (ii) to give up the burden; (iii) to take up the burden. It is perhaps in this sense also that Messiah said: ‘Deny the self, take up the cross, follow me’; it being admitted and asserted that the crucifixion itself is his. He flung out those two seemingly contradictory assertions, he who was rich in contradictions: ‘take up the cross’, ‘my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’. It is not till the cross has been lifted that it can be a burden. It is in the exchange of burdens that

they become light. But the carrying of a cross may be light because it is not to the crucifixion. It is 'of faith' that that is done; that is, it is the only part of the work still to be done that we should be fitted into the state where all is done, into the kingdom and the knowledge of everything as good. But a pride and self-respect which will be content to repose upon Messiah is often unapt to repose on 'the brethren'. Yet that too is part of the nature of all and of the action of the contract. The one who gives has to remember that he has parted with his burden, that it is being carried by another, that his part is to believe that and be at peace; 'brother, our will is quiet in the strength of love. . . herein love is fate'. The one who takes has to set himself—mind and emotion and sensation—to the burden, to know it, imagine it, receive it—and sometimes not to be taken aback by the swiftness of the divine grace and the lightness of the burden. It is almost easier to believe that Messiah was probably right about the mysteries of the Godhead than that he was merely accurate about the facts of everyday life. One expects the burden always to be heavy, and it is sometimes negligible; which is precisely what he said. Discovering that, one can understand more easily the happy abuse he flung at the disciples, say, at the two who went to Emmaus. 'Then he said unto them, O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things and have entered into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.'

The giver's part may be harder than the taker's; that is why, here, it may be more blessed to give than to receive, though in the equity of the kingdom there is little difference. It has a greater tendency towards humility and the intellectual denial of the self. In all the high pagan philosophies, now as then, there are many great virtues, and their leaders and teachers often were and are holy and humble men of heart. I do not remember that any of them cried out: 'See how meek and lowly I am!' No Christian has been encouraged to murmur of himself in that state which is called 'the inner chamber' what Christ proclaimed of himself to the world. It is the everlasting difference between the gospel of Christ as one who is to be imitated and one who is to be believed, between one who is an example of living and one who wheels the life itself; between the philosophies that advise unselfishness as the best satisfaction in life and

the religion that asserts exchange to be the only possible means of tolerable life at all. The denial of the self has become metaphysical. He came to turn the world upside-down, and no one's self-respect will stand for that. It is habitual to us therefore to prefer to be miserable rather than to give, and to believe that we can give, our miseries up.

There is, of course, a technique. If A is to carry B's burden he must be willing to do it to the full, even though he may not be asked to do it to the full. It is easy to sentimentalize, but the Day of Judgement exhibits our responsibilities in each case: 'at the hand of every man's brother will I require . . .' Messiah may, now, carry the burden if we ourselves deliberately neglect or forget the agreement, but the lucidity of the good knowing the evil as good is likely to exhibit the negligence or forgetfulness as much as the substitution of himself. It is therefore necessary (*a*) not to take burdens too recklessly; (*b*) to consider exactly how far any burden, accepted to the full, is likely to conflict with other duties. There is always a necessity for intelligence.

Our reluctance is inevitably encouraged by the difficulty of carrying out this substitution in the physical world; of developing between men the charismatic ministry. The body is probably the last place where such interchange is possible; it is why Messiah deigned to heal the body 'that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power *on earth* to forgive sins'. No such exchange is possible where any grudge—of pride, greed or jealousy—exists, nor any hate; so far all sins must have been 'forgiven' between men. In some states of romantic love it is felt that the power of healing exists, if only it could be brought into action, and on the basis of Romantic Theology it could so be brought into action. We habitually expect too little of ourselves. But it is not only in states of realization that the power exists. It is limited, peculiarly, by other duties. Most men are already so committed that they ought not, whatever their goodwill, to contemplate the carrying of the burden of paralysis or consumption or even lesser things. They are still bound to prefer one good to another. Certainly it is reasonable to believe that the kind of burden might be transmuted into another equivalent kind, and in a full state of the kingdom upon earth such a transmutation would be agreeable and natural. It remains at present an achievement of which our 'faith' is not yet capable. That is no reason why we should not practise faith, a faith in

the interchange of the kingdom operating in matter as out of matter, because whatever distinction there may be between the two is only a distinction between modes of love.

It is natural that, in certain happy states (e.g., the Beatrician love), there should be a desire to make any contract of the kind mutual, and so it often may be. At the same time the tendency is sometimes for the pattern not to return but to proceed. The old proverb said that there was always one who kissed and one who took kisses; that too, accepted, is in this sense a part of the pattern. The discovery that one cannot well give back or be given back what one has given or been given in the same place is sometimes as painful as the discovery that one is being loved on principle and not from preference: a good deal of conviction of the equality of all points in the web of the kingdom and of the denial of the self is necessary to make it bearable. Man—fallen man—has, oddly, the strongest objection to being the cause of the practice of *caritas* by someone else. Yet the Apostles in their epistles continually, and necessarily, exhort the faithful to the practice of such a submission: ‘let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth’. To be grateful for what one does not want is a step towards love, even if it is the rather difficult gratitude for the smirk of a well-meaning intercession by the official twice-born in the visible Church. Gratitude is a necessity of all life; it is love looking at the past as faith is love intending the future, and hope is the motion of the shy consciousness of love in the present self; and gratitude, like love, is its own sufficiency:

the grateful mind

By owing owes not but still pays, at once

Indebted and discharged.

It is with the intention of substituted love that all ‘intercessory’ prayer must be charged, and with care that there is no intention of emotional bullying. Even prayer for the conversion of others is apt to be more like prayer for their conversion to the interceder’s own point of view than to the kingdom. The old self on the new way has always enjoyed himself most at prayer. He can pray fervently for other people’s delivery from other people’s sins; he can indicate to Messiah where X is wrong; he can try and bring supernatural power to bear on X to stop him or divert him or

encourage. It is precisely because he is playing with a real power that this is so dangerous. It is dangerous, for example, to pray that Nero may be delivered from killing Agrippina; it looks a fairly safe petition but . . . What do we know of Nero, of Agrippina, of Messiah? But it can never be dangerous, without particularizing, without fluency, intensely to recollect Nero and Agrippina ‘in the Lord’, nor can it be dangerous to present all pains and distresses to the kingdom with the utmost desire that Messiah may be, and the recollection that at that moment he is, the complete reconciliation—through the point that prays, if conditions are so, but if not then through all and any of the points of the kingdom.

‘All and any.’ We operate, mostly, in sequence, but sequence is not all. ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’ There is no space here to discuss theories of time or the nature of the intercession of the saints. The vicarious life of the kingdom is not necessarily confined to sequence even among the human members of the kingdom. The past and the future are subject to interchange, as the present with both, the dead with the living, the living with the dead. ‘The living creatures ran and returned, as the appearance of a flash of lightning.’ The laying down of the life is not confined, in the universal nature of the Sole-Begotten, to any points of space or time. It flashes and returns, in a joy, in a distress, and often without joy or distress. Along such threads the glory runs, and along what are, at present, even fainter threads than those. The method of the new life which Messiah (he said) came to give so abundantly begins with substitution and proceeds by substitution. No such substitution accents the individual less; on the contrary, it is, for most, the strongest life of the individual. Even in the kingdom of this world those are greatest who (rightly or wrongly) have had assessed to them the desires, wills, lives of others, when Caesar was Rome and Napoleon was France. It is the touch of impersonality in Caesar, the hint that he had in his own strange way denied the self and become only Caesar even to himself that makes him so fascinating. His star burns on the ancient world, as Virgil saw it at Actium, over the homes, the families, the *pietas* of man, before it is answered by the other star that proclaimed the kingdom of a greater substitution.

In the old days David, or whoever wrote the Psalm, exclaimed that no man

could redeem or give a ransom for his brother, and in the ultimate sense that is so still, but it was said before the revelation of the secret of evil known as good, and before the mystery of the Atonement of Messiah had brought all things into the pattern of the Atonement. All goodness is from that source, changed and exchanged in its process. It was said of the Friars that one went patched for another's rending, and in the kingdom men go glorious for others' labours, and all grown glorious from the labour of all. Messiah, after he had spoken to the astonished soul of the five husbands that she had had, and none of them all he—no, not the present lover, however righteous, however holy, he—spoke yet more riddles to the returning Apostles. He looked on the fields, he saw them white to harvest, he cried out of wages and fruit and eternal life, and at once of him that sowed and him that reaped and their common joy. And even as he said it, he flung his words into a wider circuit: 'herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured and ye are entered into their labours.' What! after self-sacrifice and crosses and giving up goods and life, the mind perplexed, the heart broken, the body wrecked—is there not a little success of our own, our own in him, of course, but at least his in us? None; 'I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour'. The harvest is of others, as the beginning was in others, and the process was by others. This man's patience shall adorn that man, and that man's celerity this; and magnificence and thrift exchanged; and chastity and generosity; and tenderness and truth, and so on through the kingdom. We shall be graced by one and by all, only never by ourselves; the only thing that can be ours is the fiery blush of the laughter of humility when the shame of the Adam has become the shyness of the saints. The first and final maxim in the present earth is *deny the self*, but—there or here—when the need for denial has passed, it may be possible to be astonished at the self as at everything else, when that which is God is known as the circle whose centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere. 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.' 'The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.'

From He Came Down from Heaven

The Compensations of Success

Charles Williams

Christendom had set out to re-generate the world. The unregenerate Roman world was now handed over to it. No extreme difficulties were any longer to be put in its way, except under the noble but ill-fated effort of the Emperor Julian to restore the past. The old pagan rituals were not finally prohibited until the year 392, by Theodosius, and there was still a good deal of rhetorical and sincere opposition. But the no-man's land of religion, all the casual and fashionable sections of the Empire, became more or less formally Christian. All insincerity became Christian; neither Constantine nor the Church was to blame. Time had been a problem, and the Church had organized to deal with it; now space and numbers had become a similar problem. Christendom had been expanding within the Empire, and the acceleration had already become greater than the morality of Christendom could quite control. The acceleration and the corresponding loss of morality were highly increased.

Unfortunately they were so increased at the very moment when one of the profoundest divisions broke out—one can hardly say (by definition) within the Church, but within the apparent Church. The division had begun before Constantine; it was, in fact, the ostensible cause for the calling of Nicaea. Such divisions in the past had given opportunity for the activity of the worst emotions, even of sincere converts. The emotions of only half-sincere converts were even more damaging, and human destructiveness was loosed on a greater scale than ever before within the suddenly enlarged boundaries of Christendom. The grand Arian controversy had opened.

That this should have been possible at all, three centuries after Christ, shows how slow the Church had been towards exact dogmatic definition; it had been, and always has been, engaged on something else. Christ was the Redeemer, that was certain; and he was also, in some real sense, God; and, at least since the Montanists and Origen, there was a formal Trinity of Godhead. But in what sense was he God? in the same sense as the Father (allowing for the Persons)? or only in a similar sense to the Father? Was he co-eternal and co-equal? The alternative proposition was set forth by the persuasive, virtuous and ingenious deacon of Alexandria, Arius: 'There was when

He was not.’ If the Father was truly Father and Source, and the Son truly Son and Result, there must have been when he had not been. He was ‘of God,’ and the rest followed. It was as logical and simple as that.

The Synod of Alexandria conferred, and excommunicated Arius. He left the City. The bishop of Nicomedia and others received both him and his doctrine. The quarrel spread bitterly through the East. Both sides quoted Origen. The archdeacon of Alexandria, a small Egyptian named Athanasius, wrote against him on behalf of his bishop. The Emperor, hearing of the agitation, wrote letters to both sides pointing out that Christians ought to concentrate on living well: ‘he can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.’ He deprecated disputes over formulae. He can hardly be blamed. He had just defeated Licinius and restored peace and unity to the Roman world; he did not want his new Christian empire, its mobs and its magistrates, excited by abstract arguments. But the founder of a metaphysical empire has to put up with the drawbacks of the metaphysics. There had been civil wars in Rome, but none hitherto concerning the nature of the Godhead of the Emperor. But anything will do for a war. The world had been ready for its change, and Constantine had changed it. Three centuries of St. Paul’s developed vocabulary had had their effect. Constantine’s protest was natural; it was his misfortune that the point at issue should be one of the few more important and not one of the many less important. That is clear now; it was not everywhere equally clear then.

The Emperor summoned Nicaea; the Fathers got to work. The result is known. The question there asked was capable of translation into all categories, including the category of exchange. Was there, in the most Secret, in the only Adored—was there that which can be described only by such infelicitous mortal words as an equal relation, an equal goodwill, an equal love? was this in its very essence? was the Son co-eternal with the Father? If there had been no creation, would Love have practised love? and would Love have had an adequate object to love? Nicaea answered yes. It confirmed, beyond all creation, in the incomprehensible Alone, the cry of Felicitas: ‘Another is in Me.’ The Godhead itself was in Co-inherence. The doctrine of Arius had denied the possibility of equal exchange to God—outside creation. It is true that Arius, as well as Athanasius, held the doctrine of free-will, and that in that sense every soul has it at

choice to make exchange with God. But Nicaea went farther. Fourteen hundred years later, the doctrine was epigrammatized by an Anglican doctor when Dr. Hawarden, before the Queen of George II, asked Dr. Clarke: ‘Can God the Father annihilate God the Son?’ That the question is, so to speak, meaningless is precisely the definition of orthodoxy. The Divine Son is not only ‘of God’; he is ‘God of God.’

Nicaea then was a double climax. The spectacle of magnificence was accompanied by an intellectual ostentation of dogma. ‘The great and sacred Synod’ exhibited itself in the two worlds. Christ was throned in heaven and in Constantinople. Yet at times, as the jewels seem only jewels, so the words seem only words. ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ ‘Holy Spirit,’ ‘Person,’ ‘essence and nature,’ ‘like and unlike’—what has such a pattern of definition to do with a Being that must exist always in its own incomprehensibility? It is not surprising that the human mind should revolt against the jewels and words. It is, of course, a revolt of immature sensibility, an ignorant, a young-romantic revolt, but it is natural. ‘The great and sacred Synod’ looms sublimely anti-pathetic. From such revolts there have sprung the equally immature and romantic devotions to the simple Jesus, the spiritual genius, the broad-minded international Jewish working-man, the falling-sparrow and grass-of-the-field Jesus. They will not serve. The Christian idea from the beginning had believed that his Nature reconciled earth and heaven, and all things met in him, God and Man. A Confucian Wordsworth does not help there. Jewels and words are but images, but then so are grass and sparrows. And jewels and words are no less and no more necessary than cotton and silence.

Yet Christendom had felt the revolt even before Nicaea—only not as a revolt, but as a compensating movement. Antony had gone out into the desert and many had followed him. He had organized them, and away in south Egypt another hermit, Pachomius, had done the same thing for other bands. The great and sacred labour in the imperial palace was balanced by the sacred and ascetic labour of the solitaries. Sleep and food and drink and clothing were reduced to the barest needs—and to less. A rivalry in repudiation ran about the desert, and the rumours of the gaunt and holy figures of its practitioners percolated through the bazaars of the great cities. ‘The sign of the solitary ascetics’ wrote Athanasius (the Athanasius of Nicaea, of Alexandria, of humanism, of the Court and the Church) in his *Life of Antony*, ‘rules from one end of the earth to the other.’ It

dominated the impressionable everywhere; it was said (improbably) that in one city were 'more than two thousand virgins leading lives of ascetic excellence.' Many more admired it than practised it, but many practised it. The notion of the way of complete rejection, of the reduction of both soul and body to as near a state of nothingness under God as might be won—gained strangely on life. The huts, the caves, the pillars of the ascetics did indeed hold those who concentrated on nothing but their relation with God, to whom the whole outer world and (but for one thought) the whole inner world had become temptation. New temptations at once sprung up—of rivalry, of pride, of *accidia*. But even the wild tales we have show how they too were recognized and denounced. 'God hath not forgiven thee thy sins,' said the hermit Bessarion to the harlot Thais, 'because of thy repentance but because of thy thought to deliver thyself to Christ.' And so a certain Elijah said: 'Whatsoever hath its being for God's sake endureth and abideth for ever with those who are true.'

Exchange therefore to them was always on the Way and as between hurrying travellers. It was an exchange of humility and tenderness and (often) of remarkable intelligence. A danger, more obvious perhaps to us than to them, was in their awareness of virtue; they have sometimes that sense of strain which the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in a later century denounced. It is why they saw the devil so often. Their comments on humility examine that virtue too feverishly to be quite convincing. But the greatest of them were peculiarly lucid. Macarius said to Arsenius: 'I know a brother who had a few garden herbs in his cell, and to prevent himself having any sense of gratification, he pulled them up by the roots.' Arsenius answered: 'Good, but a man must do as he is able, and if he is not strong enough to endure, perhaps he should plant others.' They knew also the remote principle. A certain brother said: 'It is right for a man to take up the burden for them who are near to him, whatever it may be, and, so to speak, to put his own soul in the place of that of his neighbour, and to become, if it were possible, a double man, and he must suffer, and weep, and mourn with him, and finally the matter must be accounted by him as if he himself had put on the actual body of his neighbour, and as if he had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must suffer for him as he would for himself. For thus it is written *We are all one body*, and this passage also informs us concerning the holy and mysterious kiss.'

The old Gnostic view that matter was evil had no doubt affected them, and the newer Gnosticism that had begun, in the form of Manichaeism, to sweep inward from the East. It had been forbidden by Diocletian as un-European, as a Persian import, before it was rejected by Christendom as un-Christian, as a diabolic luxury. But of all the heresies it is one of the few most generally and most subtly nourished by our common natures. There is in it always a renewed emotional energy. It is due to Manichaeism that there has grown up in Christendom—in spite of the myth of the Fall in Genesis—the vague suggestion that the body has somehow fallen farther than the soul. It was certainly nourished within the Church by the desert ascetics—especially in their ingenuous repudiation of sex. This is probably the one thing generally known about them—except for the pillar of St Simeon Stylites—and the contempt and hatred they too rashly expressed for it has been heartily reciprocated against them by a later world. It was no more than a part of their general passion for singleness of soul, even when that singleness tended to become a singularity. Sex—the poor ignorant creatures thought—was one of the greatest, most subtle, and most lasting of all distractions; nor had the Church—at least since the suppression of the *subintroductae*—shown any striking sign of intending to exhibit it as sometimes the greatest, most splendid, and most authoritative of all inducements. Yet even in the Thebaid the rejection was, at best, regarded as no more than a method of the Way. ‘A monk met the handmaids of God upon a mountain road, and at the sight of them he turned out of the way. And the Abbess said to him: “Hadst thou been a perfect monk thou wouldst not have looked so close as to perceive we were women.”’⁶⁴ The answer would have been perfect if she had said ‘Thou wouldst not have perceived we were women.’ Perhaps she did.

There is, no doubt, a lordlier state than that, to observe with adoration all shapes, including women; but the rebuke was—or at least may have been—charming, and exhibits, in the desert as in the city, the desire which is the Glory of Christendom. ‘Look,’ said the first founder when he lay dying, ‘Antony ends *his* journey; he goes now wherever Divine Grace shall bring him.’

Counterchecking the asceticism it admired, the formal doctrine of Christendom

⁶⁴ *The Desert Fathers*, Helen Waddell. (The other quotations are from *The Paradise of the Fathers*, E. A. Wallis Budge.)

concerning matter remained constant. Two ancient canons, said to date from the second or third century, illuminate the official view. They run as follows: ‘If any bishop or priest or deacon, or any cleric whatsoever, shall refrain from marriage and from meat and from wine, not for the sake of discipline but with contempt, and, forgetful that all things are very good and that God made man male and female, blasphemously inveighs against the creation (*blasphemans accusaverit creationem*), let him be either corrected or deposed and turned out of the Church (*atque ex Ecclesia ejiciatur*). And so with a layman.’

‘If any bishop or priest or deacon does not feed on meat and wine on feast days, let him be deposed, lest he have his own conscience hardened, and be a cause of scandal to many.’⁶⁵

‘Blasphemously inveighing against the creation’—if the whole of Christendom had taken to the desert and lived among the lions, it remained true that the authority of the pillared pontiffs would have been compelled to assert that marriage and meat and wine were ‘*valde bona*’. Rejection was to be rejection but not denial, as reception was to be reception but not subservience. Both methods, the Affirmative Way and the Negative Way, were to co-exist; one might almost say, to co-inhere, since each was to be the key of the other: in intellect as in emotion, in morals as in doctrine. ‘Your life and your death are with your neighbour.’ No Affirmation could be so complete as not to need definition, discipline, and refusal; no Rejection so absolute as not to leave necessary (literally and metaphorically) beans and a wild beast’s skin and a little water. Those who most rejected material things might cling the more closely to verbal formulae; those who looked most askance at the formulae might apprehend most easily the divine imagery of matter. The Communion of the Eucharist, at once an image and a Presence, was common and necessary to both. The one Way was to affirm all things orderly until the universe throbbed with vitality; the other to reject all things until there was nothing anywhere but He. The Way of Affirmation was to develop great art and romantic love and marriage and philosophy and social justice; the Way of Rejection was to break out continually in the profound mystical documents of the soul, the records of the great psychological masters of Christendom. All was involved in

⁶⁵ *History of the Church Councils*, Hefele; the Greek original is there translated into Latin.

Christendom, and between them, as it were, hummed the web of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, labouring, ordering, expressing, confirming, and often misunderstanding, but necessary to any organization in time and particularly necessary at that time in the recently expanded space.

There are two documents, of a date later by a century or two, which present the division between the Ways in the world of definitions, and as regards the Nature of God. One is the great humanist Ode ‘commonly called the Creed of St Athanasius’; the other is the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius the Areopagite. Certainly the Creed talks about Incomprehensibility and Dionysius plans out the heavens. Neither document sustains the view of Eunomius bishop of Cyzicus, who ‘changed theology into technology’ and is reported to have declared: ‘I know God as well as He knows Himself.’⁶⁶ But the objective ‘humanist’ may serve for a division; the climax of the one is what is known, allowing the unknown; of the other what must be unknown, allowing the known. The union of both is in the phrase of Ignatius, quoted by Dionysius and dogmatically declared in the Creed: ‘My Love is crucified.’

The Creed is the definition of salvation, and it lays down a primal necessary condition—that one shall believe in the existence of salvation and in its own proper nature. It does not go back to that other demand for a decision of belief in one’s own existence, which is almost always a desirable preliminary. One feels, one thinks, that one exists, but one hardly ever makes a serious act of belief in one’s existence, whereas it might be held that a proper Christendom would be composed of people who believe that, through God, they exist but do not noticeably think or feel it. The Athanasian Creed, however, being a more advanced document, begins with the Creator. It sums up in those crossing and clamorous clauses all the business of Relationship in Deity; Deity, so, is one God—the word triumphs over the reduced plural: ‘there are not three gods, but one God.’ Thence it proceeds to the Incarnation: ‘it is necessary that he believe rightly.’ It is in this connection that it produces a phrase which is the very maxim of the Affirmative Way: ‘Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God.’ And not only of the particular religious Way, but of all progress of all affirmations: it is the actual manhood which is to be carried on, and not

⁶⁶ *History of the Christian Church*, Kidd.

the height which is to be brought down. All images are, in their degree, to be carried on; mind is never to put off matter; all experience is to be gathered in. Images can be as disciplinary as their lack; their rejection itself can be a temptation. By the Substitution and the Sacrifice, the ‘good works’ are all to be prolonged and gathered, and those who share in it are to find it eternal life. This is the principle which is to be kept ‘whole and undefiled’; and who can? none; therefore it will keep itself, it will correct and illuminate itself; without that grand union—‘perfect God and perfect Man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting’—man is bound to slip from vanity to vanity, from illusion to illusion, everlastingly perishing, everlastingly lost. ‘But the Catholic Faith is this . . .’

The other document is very different.

In the year 533 at Constantinople, the Patriarch of Antioch, Severus, a Monophysite, spoke of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. The books which were thus heretically invoked had at that time, as so many other writings had, an authority almost apostolic incorrectly attributed to them; to say ‘falsely’ would imply a moral intention of which no one then thought. Dionysius, it was supposed, was an Athenian, a direct disciple of St Paul, and (by his ordination) first bishop of Athens. He had produced a book on the Heavenly Hierarchy, and one on the Ecclesiastical, one on the Divine Names and one on Mystical Theology. It is now thought likely that he was a Syrian monk of the late fifth century, and a disciple of one Hierotheus, more or less identified with another Syrian, Stephen bar Sudaili. From the year 533 these writings have always hovered over Christendom almost like the unfooted Bird of Paradise—admired, worshipped, and yet by some distrusted. He was invoked as orthodox by Pope Victor I at the Lateran Council in 649; in 757 his books were sent by Pope Paul to the Church in Gaul; and the Emperor of the East Michael Balbus sent them also to Louis the Pious. They were translated, for Charles the Bald of France and for the West, by John Scotus Erigena. St John Damascene had learnt from and annotated them; in the full power of Scholasticism Aquinas quoted from them as from any other doctor of perpetual authority in the Church, and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, in his sublime rejection of images, and as he wrote of the final failing even of spiritual wit in the presence of the Alone, remembered one paragraph of Dionysius to

confirm his own last cry.

They are, in fact, the climax of one great mode of speculation and of experience; they are hardly, yet they are, within the orthodoxy of Christendom. They provide the great negative definitions infinitely satisfying to a certain type of mind when it contemplates intellectually the Divine Principle. The conclusion of the *Mystical Theology* soars into the great darkness, lit faintly by the very phrases it rejects.

‘Once more, ascending yet higher, we maintain that It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality, or inequality, and since It is not immovable nor in motion, or at rest, and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live, and is not life; nor is It personal essence, or eternity, or time; nor can It be grasped by the understanding, since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor do existent beings know It as it actually is, nor does It know them as they actually are; nor can the reason attain to It to name It or to know It; nor is It darkness, nor is It light, or error, or truth; nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature—free from every limitation and beyond them all.’

It has been said that this is not the kind of being to whom man can pray; no, but without this revelation there is no sort of thing to whom men can *pray*, and the orisons of Christendom will be too much circumscribed. And Dionysius himself knew the other Way, and his book on the *Divine Names* is more akin to it—as when he refers to St Paul, in its discussion of ‘My Eros is crucified.’ ‘And hence the great Paul, constrained by the Divine Yearning . . . says, with inspired utterance: I live, and yet

not I but Christ liveth in me'; true Sweetheart that he was and (as he says himself) being beside himself unto God and not possessing his own life but possessing the life of Him for whom he yearned.' For that which is beyond all categories and has only within itself its necessity of being, 'is touched by the sweet spell of Goodness, Love, and Yearning, and so is drawn from his transcendent throne above all things, to dwell within the heart of all things, through a super-essential and ecstatic power whereby he yet stays within himself.'⁶⁷

Yet perhaps neither the Egyptian hermits and monks nor the Syrians on their interior 'top of speculation' are the true compensation and balance of Nicaea, quite apart from the disturbances, riots, exiles, and excommunications which immediately followed Nicaea. The Arians split into Arians and Semi-Arians; the declarations of the 'great and sacred Synod' were hotly disputed, and if the Holy Spirit had there controlled the voice, he did not attempt to silence the voices, of Christendom. Bishops were banished and recalled; the Emperor swayed dangerously near the more understandable Arian point of view; Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria and fled and returned and was driven out. He took refuge with the desert monks who were fanatically orthodox. Arius came back to Alexandria, fell from his mule, and died, but his death did not put an end to his doctrine. Accidents to such distinguished leaders were, to their opponents, nearly always miracles of judgment, and during this period there was encouraged in Christendom the view which attempted to discern in exterior events an index to interior and spiritual truth; the false devotion which in a later day invented terrifying death-beds for atheists and agonizing diseases for Sabbath-breakers. This in itself is dangerous enough; it is made worse by that fatal tendency in men to hasten God's work and to supply, on his behalf, the deaths and the agonies which they think his inscrutable patience has rashly postponed. So fomented into fire and bloodshed the Arian controversy pursued its way through Constantine's otherwise peaceful empire.

This, however, was the result of Nicaea. About the middle of the century, about the time of the death of Antony and the third exile of Athanasius, the real compensation to Nicaea was born at Thagaste in Numidia; its name was Augustine. He

⁶⁷ *Dionysius the Areopagite*, C. E. Rolt.

came to redress (or, as some have thought, to upset for ever) the balance of the Church. Speculation had, in the East, ascended from the foot of the imperial throne to the height of the heavenly, and the idea of exchange had been followed into the extremest corners of heaven. With Augustine theology returned to man and to sin. The Church had always known about sin; some of her doctors (as Tertullian) knew a great deal about it. But on the whole, especially since the Alexandrian doctors, she had stressed the Redemption. So, no doubt, did Augustine; read the *Confessions*. Yet those very *Confessions* seem to contain everything except one thing, the *anima naturaliter Christiana*. They divide, in an agony, the natural body from the spiritual body, and their readers and followers have divided even more fervently. When St Monica drove Augustine's eighteen-years paramour, the mother of his son, back from Milan to Africa, something went with her which perhaps Christendom and Augustine needed almost as much as they needed St Monica, though not as much as Christendom needed Augustine. Christendom did not then get her. It got the style of Augustine instead, and that style never seemed quite to apprehend that a man could grow, sweetly and naturally—and no less naturally and sweetly in spite of all the stages of repentance necessarily involved—from man into new man. He certainly is the less likely to do so who dwells much on the possibility. But the movement exists and the great Augustinian energy of conversion, contrition, and aspiration lies a little on one side of it. Formally Augustine did not err; but informally? He also, for all his culture, followed the Way of Rejection of Images, and he inspired later centuries to return to that Way. He has always been a danger to the devout, for without his genius they lose his scope. Move some of his sayings but a little from the centre of his passion and they point to damnation. The *anthropos* that is Christ becomes half-hidden by the *anthropos* that was Adam. In Augustine this did not happen, for his eyes were fixed on Christ. But he almost succeeded, in fact though not in intention, in dangerously directing the eyes of Christendom to Adam.

‘Augustine, from his small seaport on the North African coast, swayed the whole Western Church as its intellectual dictator.’⁶⁸ He had been converted like St Paul; he had seized Christ through Paul. He rose into Christendom from what seemed

⁶⁸ *The Idea of the Fall*, N. P. Williams.

to him catastrophes. And the great primal catastrophe was the situation into which every man was born; the New Birth was the freedom from that catastrophe. Two famous sayings epigrammatize the change. The first is the reluctant sigh: 'Make me chaste, my Lord, but not yet!' The second is the reconciled joy: 'Command chastity; give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt!' Both come from the *Confessions*, which (Augustine said scornfully) men read from curiosity, or (he might have added) from a human sense of the human; it is not what that great Refuser of Images wished. Few things seemed to him more imbecile than that his autobiography should be admired for everything except the whole conclusion, climax, and cause of his autobiography. But a phrase in it—the second of the two quoted—was permitted by our Lord the Spirit to become the occasion of more controversy and of high decision in Christendom.

There was a meeting in Rome—perhaps a clerical conference or something of the kind. A certain Pelagius, an Irish Christian, was present at it. He was not a priest but he was in Rome on an effort to revive and excite religion; he was conducting a mission to the Romans. His particular method was to encourage men to be *men*. He was orthodox enough, and full of a real love for, and desire for the good of, his fellow-creatures, but he thought his fellow-creatures were perfectly capable of fulfilling the Will of God and of being chaste (or whatever) if they wished. Men need not sin unless they chose, and if they did not choose they need not sin. This too was orthodox enough. He had had some success, and his influence was spreading. At this meeting there was 'a certain brother, a fellow-bishop of mine,' says Augustine. The bishop during the meeting quoted from the *Confessions*, already in wide circulation, the phrase: '*da quod iubes*', 'give what thou commandest.' This, Augustine adds, *Pelagius ferre non potuit*—Pelagius simply could not stand that sort of thing. Man was not in that kind of situation at all; no doubt he was tempted, but he could resist temptation. 'Pull yourself together, my dear fellow,' he said in effect, and he actually did say that to talk of virtue being hard or difficult, or to say it could not be done, or to moan about the weakness of the flesh was to contradict God flatly, and to pretend either that he did not know what he had made or did not understand what he was commanding: 'as if . . . he had forced upon man commands man could not endure.'

But this, which to Pelagius seemed so scandalous, seemed to Augustine merely truth. Chaste was what the law had bidden him to be and what he had not been able to be. The law was precisely impossible. Man precisely was not *in* a situation—not even in a difficult situation. He was, himself, the situation; he was, himself, the contradiction; he was, himself, death-in-life and life-in-death. He was incompetent. Augustine had felt that acutely; since his conversion he had been teaching it—that man was the situation and only the grace of God could alter the situation. Both Pelagius and he felt strongly the desirability of man’s overcoming sin, but the problem was what was sin and how best did you overcome it. The expanding circles of doctrine spread outward from Rome and Hippo. Never before had Christendom felt the two views so fully and so honestly developed. It had previously accepted a general notion that men were in a ‘fallen’ state, but it had not pressed any definition of it. What definitions it had produced had tended to relate to the Person who redeemed men from the state. That, after all, was what its greatest minds and noblest souls had been concerned with. The clash of Pelagius and Augustine altered all that.

That man, in the person of Adam, had fallen was common ground. Pelagius said, in effect, that (i) Adam had been created in a state of natural good, (ii) that he had somehow sinned, and set a bad example of sinning, so that a sort of social habit of sin had developed, into which men were introduced as they grew up before they were reasonable, (iii) but that any man at any moment could get out of this distressing social habit by simply being firm with himself—‘have courage, my boy, to say no,’ (iv) and that therefore no particular grace of God was needed to initiate the change, though that grace was a convenient and necessary help: which was always to be found by the right-willing man. Against this the Augustinian view—with the great help of Augustine himself—asserted (i) that man was created in a state of supernatural good, of specific awareness of God, (ii) that Adam had got himself out of that state by sin, and his sin was ‘pride’—that is, ‘the act of deserting the soul’s true ‘principle’ and constituting oneself one’s own principle.’⁶⁹ He had, as it were, claimed to have, and behaved as if he had, a necessity of being in himself. He had, somehow and somewhere, behaved as if he were God. (iii) His descendants

⁶⁹ *St. Augustine and French Classical Thought*, Nigel Abercrombie.

therefore were not at all in a mere social habit of sinning; they did not merely sometimes sin; they were sinners, which was not at all the same thing. Nay, more, they had, all of them, been involved in that first original iniquity, and in its guilt. ‘*Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno quando omnes fuimus ille unus*’—we were all in that one man when we all were that one man. Thus, being all guilty, we all deserved, and were on our way to, hell by the mere business of getting ourselves born, though not, of course, *for* getting ourselves born. This was precisely the agony: to be born was good, but that good meant the utmost evil, life-into-death and death-into-life. Some who managed to die again before the age of reason might suffer less thereafter. But for the rest men were *corrupt*; they existed in the night of dreadful ignorance and the storm of perverse love; they were for ever and ever sharers in that primal catastrophe which was the result of Adam imagining that he had a principle and necessity of existence within himself. (iv) It was therefore blasphemous and heretical nonsense to talk of man as being mildly and socially habituated to sin: he was in sin, and he could not get out by his own choice. He could not move but by grace, by that principle which was not in him. To Augustine Pelagius was practically teaching men to follow, to plunge deeper into, that old original catastrophe; he was almost declaring that man was his own principle, that he did his own good deeds. But all Christendom, and especially Augustine, knew that only Christ could act Christ.

But if only Christ acts Christ, who acts Anti-Christ? If all our good doing is God’s doing, whose is our evil doing? Ours? Yes. God, as it were, determines and predestinates himself to do good in certain lives; this is his grace. And what of the lives in which he does not determine and predestinate himself to do good? Well—he does not. Those lives then are lost? Well—yes. God saves whom he chooses and the rest damn themselves. ‘His equity is so secret that it is beyond the reach of all human understanding.’ It is of the highest importance to realize that, in that sentence, Augustine from the bottom of his heart meant ‘equity’ and meant ‘beyond human understanding.’

‘The first modern,’ as Augustine has been called, had uttered the word ‘grace’ with a new accent. Adam had suddenly returned. ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ was to be analysed and discussed as the Nature of our Lord Jesus Christ had been. The

secrets of man's corruption were to become as much a matter for the brooding intellect of Christendom as the secrets of his Redemption had been. The inclusion of the Saviour in the Godhead was followed by the exclusion of Adam to the opening, at least, of the pit, and of all his children whom the unpredictable Equity did not choose out of so many myriads to redeem. Yet it may be noticed that Augustine, perhaps to the danger of his own thought, and certainly to the danger of the thought of his successors, was aiming at the same principle of inevitable relationship which in so many other things governed the orthodoxy of the Church. '*Fuimus ille unus*' he said; 'we were in the one when we were the one.' Whatever ages of time lay between us and Adam, yet we were in him and we were he; more, we sinned in him and his guilt is in us. And if indeed all mankind is held together by its web of existence, then ages cannot separate one from another. Exchange, substitution, co-inherence are a natural fact as well as a supernatural truth. 'Another is in me,' said Felicitas; 'we were in another,' said Augustine. The co-inherence reaches back to the beginning as it stretches on to the end, and the *anthropos* is present everywhere. 'As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive'; co-inherence did not begin with Christianity; all that happened then was that co-inherence itself was redeemed and revealed by that very redemption as a supernatural principle as well as a natural. We were made sin in Adam but Christ was made sin for us and we in him were taken out of sin. To refuse the ancient heritage of guilt is to cut ourselves off from mankind as certainly as to refuse the new principle. It is necessary to submit to the one as freely as to the other.

The new principle had been introduced into the web, and only that principle could separate one soul from another or any soul from the multitude. The principle was not only in the spirit but in the flesh of man. Pelagius declared that man had moral freedom, as Nestorius later declared that there were in Christ two beings united by a moral union and not one divine Person. 'The Nestorian God is the fitting Saviour of the Pelagian man.'⁷⁰ It was this that caused Nestorius to deny that the Blessed Virgin was *theotokos*, the mother of God. But he denied also, inevitably, that she was *anthropotokos*, the mother of Man. The opposite school maintained that she was both, for both the Fall and the Redemption were in soul and body. The mystery was in flesh and blood.

⁷⁰ *Our Lord's Human Example*, W. Gore; quoted by N. P. Williams, *The Idea of the Fall*.

It was this profundity of exchange and substitution, natural and supernatural, that the zeal of Augustine profoundly declared through Christendom. Christendom never quite committed itself to Augustine; it has spent centuries escaping from the phrases of Augustine. But without Augustine it might have ceased to be Christendom.

He did more. He did much more. ‘Seen against Christian philosophy as a whole even thinkers like Clement and Origen are only forerunners of Augustine; for they philosophize about God and human nature, but not about the divine sphere, the sphere of communion with God, which did not exist as a problem for the philosophical consciousness before the *Civitas Dei*.’⁷¹ It was not only the book called by that name which was the expression of that thing, nor only that Augustine was imagining a heavenly state. A hundred apocrypha of the apocalypse had imagined *that*; the Church had never paused in affirming *that*. There were in Augustine two points of farther greatness. He had carried the Redemption back, as it were, in man’s nature almost—quite—to the point at which man’s error began. The very sin which a man had committed in Adam before his own birth was the starting-point of the predestinating grace which, before his own birth, awaited the moment of his birth to begin its immediate operation. The City of God leaps upon its citizens, presiding like the god Vaticanus over the first wail of the child, separating it for ever from the transient earthly cities, making it a pilgrim and a sojourner. The Equity of Redemption is immediately at work; it predestinates whom it chooses, and it does not predestinate whom it does not choose. But its choice is (beyond human thought) inextricably mingled with each man’s own choice. It wills what he wills, because it has freedom to do so. Predestination is the other side of its own freedom. Words fall away from the inscrutable union, which can be the inscrutable separation.

And this heavenly state was a sphere of operation. The equity of predestination was to a state of love. Augustine gave his genius not to a description but to a suggestion of that *state* of love. The sensibility of the *Confessions* vibrates with this; the universals of the City of God make an effort to diagrammatize its relation with history—that is, with time as known by man. He hypothesized history into the

⁷¹ ‘Platonism in Augustine’s Philosophy of History,’ Ernst Hoffman (*Philosophy and History*, edited by R. Klibansky and H. J. Paton).

workings of the Divine Providence, and the hypothesis has been, intellectually, made too often merely dull. But the real significance was in the vast accident, the vast sense of opportunity. It is Augustine's sense of opportunity which springs active everywhere, and everywhere that dash of vision opens on all that opportunity holds. Christ had been the opportunity; St Paul had formed a vocabulary for that opportunity; Augustine turned the vocabulary into a language, a diction, a style. The Athanasian speech was the more highly specialized, Augustine's the more universal. He renewed the good news—man was utterly corrupt, and his scope was love. He renewed the City; he made humility possible for all. 'Perfection consists not in what we give to God but in what we receive from him.'⁷² The exterior crisis of the world in his age exposes to us that expansion of the Apostolic word at the moment when the world was ruining. On 24 August, in the year of the City 1164 and in the year of the Fructiferous Incarnation 410, the Goths under Alaric entered and sacked Rome. 'My voice sticks in my throat,' said Jerome, 'and sobs choke me as I dictate. The City which took the whole world captive is itself taken.' He uttered the sensations of all, both Christians and heathen. There has been no such shock to Europe since. Refugees fled to Sicily, to Syria, to Africa (Pelagius among the last; Augustine saw him in Carthage). Twenty years later, 'in the seventy-sixth year of his age and the thirty-fifth of his episcopate, Augustine died, 28 August, 430, his eyes fixed on the penitential psalms and the sound of a besieging host of Vandals in his ears. . . . They offered the Holy Sacrifice at his burial.'⁷³ It was the summary and consummation of his life and doctrine; he had saved Christendom at the moment when Honorius, Emperor of the West, lost Rome.

From *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church*

⁷² *The Life of the Church*, edited by M. D'Arcy, S J. Bk. II; *Christianity and the Soul of Antiquity*, by P. Rousselot, S J. and J. Herby, S J.

⁷³ *History of the Church*, Kidd.