

CHAPTER I

THE UNSENTIMENTAL SENTIMENT

But the thing a man does practically believe (and this is often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others); the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest.—CARLYLE.

EVERY man participating in a culture has three levels of conscious reflection: his specific ideas about things, his general beliefs or convictions, and his metaphysical dream of the world.

The first of these are the thoughts he employs in the activity of daily living; they direct his disposition of immediate matters and, so, constitute his worldliness. One can exist on this level alone for limited periods, though pure worldliness must eventually bring disharmony and conflict.

Above this lies his body of beliefs, some of which may be heritages simply, but others of which he will have acquired in the ordinary course of his reflection. Even the simplest souls define a few rudimentary conceptions about the world, which they repeatedly apply as choices present themselves. These, too, however, rest on something more general.

Surmounting all is an intuitive feeling about the immanent nature of reality, and this is the sanction to which both ideas and beliefs are ultimately referred for verification. Without the metaphysical dream it is impossible to think of men living together harmoniously over an extent of time. The dream carries with it an evaluation, which is the bond of spiritual community.

When we affirm that philosophy begins with wonder, we are affirming in effect that sentiment is anterior to reason. We do not undertake to reason about anything until we have been drawn to it by an affective interest. In the cultural life of man, therefore, the fact of paramount importance about anyone is his attitude toward the world. How frequently it is brought to our attention that nothing good can be done if the will is wrong! Reason alone fails to justify itself. Not without cause has the devil been called the prince of lawyers, and not by accident are Shakespeare's villains good reasoners. If the disposition is wrong, reason increases maleficence; if it is right, reason orders and furthers the good. We have no authority to argue anything of a social or political nature unless we have shown by our primary volition that we approve some aspects of the existing world. The position is arbitrary in the sense that here is a proposition behind which there stands no prior. We begin our other affirmations after a categorical statement that life and the world are to be cherished.

It appears, then, that culture is originally a matter of yea-saying, and thus we can understand why its most splendid flourishing stands often in proximity with the primitive phase of a people, in which there are powerful feelings of "oughtness" directed toward the world, and before the failure of nerve has begun.

Simple approbation is the initial step only; a developed culture is a way of looking at the world through an aggregation of symbols, so that empirical facts take on significance and man feels that he is acting in a drama, in which the cruxes of decision sustain interest and maintain the tone of his being. For this reason a true culture cannot be content with a sentiment which is sentimental with regard to the world. There must be a source of clarification, of arrangement and hierarchy, which will provide grounds

for the employment of the rational faculty. Now man first begins this clarification when he becomes mythologist, and Aristotle has noted the close relationship between myth-making and philosophy. This poetry of representation, depicting an ideal world, is a great cohesive force, binding whole peoples to the acceptance of a design and fusing their imaginative life. Afterward comes the philosopher, who points out the necessary connection between phenomena, yet who may, at the other end, leave the pedestrian level to talk about final destination.

Thus, in the reality of his existence, man is impelled from behind by the life-affirming sentiment and drawn forward by some conception of what he should be. The extent to which his life is shaped, in between these, by the conditions of the physical world is indeterminable, and so many supposed limitations have been transcended that we must at least allow the possibility that volition has some influence upon them.

The most important goal for one to arrive at is this imaginative picture of what is otherwise a brute empirical fact, the *donnée* of the world. His rational faculty will then be in the service of a vision which can preserve his sentiment from sentimentality. There is no significance to the sound and fury of his life, as of a stage tragedy, unless something is being affirmed by the complete action. And we can say of one as of the other that the action must be within bounds of reason if our feeling toward it is to be informed and proportioned, which is a way of saying, if it is to be just. The philosophically ignorant vitiate their own actions by failing to observe measure. This explains why pre-cultural periods are characterized by formlessness and post-cultural by the clashing of forms. The darkling plain, swept by alarms, which threatens to be the world of our future, is an arena in which conflicting ideas, numerous after

the accumulation of centuries, are freed from the discipline earlier imposed by ultimate conceptions. The decline is to confusion; we are agitated by sensation and look with wonder upon the serene somnambulistic creations of souls which had the metaphysical anchorage. Our ideas become convenient perceptions, and we accept contradiction because we no longer feel the necessity of relating thoughts to the metaphysical dream.

It must be apparent that logic depends upon the dream, and not the dream upon it. We must admit this when we realize that logical processes rest ultimately on classification, that classification is by identification, and that identification is intuitive. It follows then that a waning of the dream results in confusion of counsel, such as we behold on all sides in our time. Whether we describe this as decay of religion or loss of interest in metaphysics, the result is the same; for both are centers with power to integrate, and, if they give way, there begins a dispersion which never ends until the culture lies in fragments. There can be no doubt that the enormous exertions made by the Middle Ages to preserve a common world view—exertions which took forms incomprehensible to modern man because he does not understand what is always at stake under such circumstances—signified a greater awareness of realities than our leaders exhibit today. The Schoolmen understood that the question, *universalia ante rem* or *universalia post rem*, or the question of how many angels can stand on the point of a needle, so often cited as examples of Scholastic futility, had incalculable ramifications, so that, unless there was agreement upon these questions, unity in practical matters was impossible. For the answer supplied that with which they bound up their world; the ground of this answer was the fount of understanding and of evaluation; it gave the heuristic principle by which societies and arts could be ap-

proved and regulated. It made one's sentiment toward the world rational, with the result that it could be applied to situations without plunging man into sentimentality on the one hand or brutality on the other.

The imposition of this ideational pattern upon conduct relieves us of the direful recourse to pragmatic justification. Here, indeed, lies the beginning of self-control, which is a victory of transcendence. When a man chooses to follow something which is arbitrary as far as the uses of the world go, he is performing a feat of abstraction; he is recognizing the noumenal, and it is this, and not that self-flattery which takes the form of a study of his own achievements, that dignifies him.

Such is the wisdom of many oracular sayings: man loses himself in order to find himself; he conceptualizes in order to avoid an immersion in nature. It is our destiny to be faced originally with the world as our primary datum but not to end our course with only a wealth of sense impressions. In the same way that our cognition passes from a report of particular details to a knowledge of universals, so our sentiments pass from a welter of feeling to an illumined concept of what one ought to feel. This is what is known as refinement. Man is in the world to suffer his passion; but wisdom comes to his relief with an offer of conventions, which shape and elevate that passion. The task of the creators of culture is to furnish the molds and the frames to resist that "sinking in upon the moral being" which comes of accepting raw experience. Without the transcendental truth of mythology and metaphysics, that task is impossible. One imagines that Jacob Burckhardt had a similar thought in mind when he said, "Yet there remains with us the feeling that all poetry and all intellectual life were once the handmaids of the holy, and have passed through the temple."

The man of self-control is he who can consistently perform the feat of abstraction. He is therefore trained to see things under the aspect of eternity, because form is the enduring part. Thus we invariably find in the man of true culture a deep respect for forms. He approaches even those he does not understand with awareness that a deep thought lies in an old observance. Such respect distinguishes him from the barbarian, on the one hand, and the degenerate, on the other. The truth can be expressed in another way by saying that the man of culture has a sense of style. Style requires measure, whether in space or time, for measure imparts structure, and it is structure which is essential to intellectual apprehension.

That it does not matter what a man believes is a statement heard on every side today. The statement carries a fearful implication. If a man is a philosopher in the sense with which we started, what he believes tells him what the world is for. How can men who disagree about what the world is for agree about any of the minutiae of daily conduct? The statement really means that it does not matter what a man believes so long as he does not take his beliefs seriously. Anyone can observe that this is the status to which religious belief has been reduced for many years. But suppose he does take his beliefs seriously? Then what he believes places a stamp upon his experience, and he belongs to a culture, which is a league founded on exclusive principles. To become eligible, one must be able to say the right words about the right things, which signifies in turn that one must be a man of correct sentiments. This phrase, so dear to the eighteenth century, carries us back to the last age that saw sentiment and reason in a proper partnership.

That culture is sentiment refined and measured by intellect becomes clear as we turn our attention to a kind of barbarism appearing in our midst and carrying unmistakable

power to disintegrate. This threat is best described as the desire of immediacy, for its aim is to dissolve the formal aspects of everything and to get at the supposititious reality behind them. It is characteristic of the barbarian, whether he appears in a precultural stage or emerges from below into the waning day of a civilization, to insist upon seeing a thing "as it is." The desire testifies that he has nothing in himself with which to spiritualize it; the relation is one of thing to thing without the intercession of imagination. Impatient of the veiling with which the man of higher type gives the world imaginative meaning, the barbarian and the Philistine, who is the barbarian living amid culture, demands the access of immediacy. Where the former wishes representation, the latter insists upon starkness of materiality, suspecting rightly that forms will mean restraint. There is no need to speak of Vandals and Goths; since our concern is with the "vertical invasion of the barbarians" in our own time, I shall cite an instance from the modern period—and from the United States, so symbolical of the world of the future.

The American frontiersman was a type who emancipated himself from culture by abandoning the settled institutions of the seaboard and the European motherland. Reveling in the new absence of restraint, he associated all kinds of forms with the machinery of oppression which he had fled and was now preparing to oppose politically. His emancipation left him impatient of symbolism, of indirect methods, and even of those inclosures of privacy which all civilized communities respect. De Tocqueville made the following observation of such freedmen: "As it is on their own testimony that they are accustomed to rely, they like to discern the object which engages their attention with extreme clearness; they therefore strip off as much as possible all that covers it, they rid themselves of whatever separates them

from it, they remove whatever conceals it from sight, in order to view it more closely in the broad light of day. This disposition of mind soon leads them to contempt forms, which they regard as useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and the truth."

The frontiersman was seeking a solvent of forms, and he found his spokesmen in such writers as Mark Twain, a large part of whose work is simply a satire upon the more formal European way of doing things. As the impulse moved eastward, it encouraged a belief that the formal was the outmoded or at least the un-American. A plebeian distrust of forms, flowering in eulogies of plainness, became the characteristic American mentality.

Has America vulgarized Europe, or has Europe corrupted America? There is no answer to this question, for each has in its own way yielded to the same impulse. Europe long ago began the expenditure of its great inheritance of medieval forms, so that Burke, in the late eighteenth century, was sharply aware that the "unbought grace of life" was disappearing. America is responsible for the vulgarization of the Old World only in the sense that, like a forcing house, it brought the impulses to fruition sooner. It enjoys the dubious honor of a foremost place in the procession. Today over the entire world there are dangerous signs that culture, as such, is marked for attack because its formal requirements stand in the way of expression of the natural man.

Many cannot conceive why form should be allowed to impede the expression of honest hearts. The reason lies in one of the limitations imposed upon man: unformed expression is ever tending toward ignorance. Good intention is primary, but it is not enough: that is the lesson of the experiment of romanticism.

The member of a culture, on the other hand, purposely

avoids the relationship of immediacy; he wants the object somehow depicted and fictionized, or, as Schopenhauer expressed it, he wants not the thing but the idea of the thing. He is embarrassed when this is taken out of its context of proper sentiments and presented bare, for he feels that this is a reintrusion of that world which his whole conscious effort has sought to banish. Forms and conventions are the ladder of ascent. And hence the speechlessness of the man of culture when he beholds the barbarian tearing aside some veil which is half adornment, half concealment. He understands what is being done, but he cannot convey the understanding because he cannot convey the idea of sacrilege. His cries of *abeste profani* are not heard by those who in the exhilaration of breaking some restraint feel that they are extending the boundaries of power or of knowledge.

Every group regarding itself as emancipated is convinced that its predecessors were fearful of reality. It looks upon euphemisms and all the veils of decency with which things were previously draped as obstructions which it, with superior wisdom and praiseworthy courage, will now strip away. Imagination and indirection it identifies with obscurantism; the mediate is an enemy to freedom. One can see this in even a brief lapse of time; how the man of today looks with derision upon the prohibitions of the 1890's and supposes that the violation of them has been without penalty!

He would suffer poignant disillusion had he a clear enough pattern in his soul to be able to measure differences; but one consequence of this debauchery, as we shall see, is that man loses discrimination. For, when these veils are stripped aside, we find no reality behind them, or, at best, we find a reality of such commonplaceness that we would willingly undo our little act of brashness. Those will realize, who are capable of reflection, that the reality which

excites us is an idea, of which the indirection, the veiling, the withholding, is part. It is our various supposals about a matter which give it meaning, and not some intrinsic property which can be seized in the barehanded fashion of the barbarian. In a wonderfully prescient passage Burke foretold the results of such positivism when it was first unleashed by the French Revolution: "All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion."

Barbarism and Philistinism cannot see that knowledge of material reality is a knowledge of death. The desire to get ever closer to the source of physical sensation—this is the downward pull which puts an end to ideational life. No education is worthy of the name which fails to make the point that the world is best understood from a certain distance or that the most elementary understanding requires a degree of abstraction. To insist on less is to merge ourselves with the exterior reality or to capitulate to the endless induction of empiricism.

Our age provides many examples of the ravages of immediacy, the clearest of which is the failure of the modern mind to recognize obscenity. This failure is not connected with the decay of puritanism. The word is employed here in its original sense to describe that which should be enacted

off-stage because it is unfit for public exhibition. Such actions, it must be emphasized, may have no relation to gross animal functions; they include intense suffering and humiliation, which the Greeks, with habitual perspicacity and humanity, banned from their theater. The Elizabethans, on the other hand, with their robust allusions to the animal conditions of man's existence, were none the less not obscene. It is all in the way one touches this subject.

This failure of the concept of obscenity has been concurrent with the rise of the institution of publicity which, ever seeking to widen its field in accordance with the canon of progress, makes a virtue of desecration. In the nineteenth century this change came visibly over the world, bringing expressions of concern from people who had been brought up in the tradition of proper sentiment. Propriety, like other old-fashioned anchorages, was abandoned because it inhibited something. Proud of its shamelessness, the new journalism served up in swaggering style matter which heretofore had been veiled in decent taciturnity. It was natural that so true an apostle of culture as Matthew Arnold should have sensed the mortal enemy in this. After a tour of the United States in 1888, he recorded his conviction that "if one were searching for the best means to efface and kill in a whole nation the discipline of self-respect, the feeling for what is elevated, he could do no better than take the American newspapers." Is this why, two hundred years before, a governor of Virginia had thanked God, to the scandal of succeeding generations, that there was not a newspaper in the colony? Have we here another example of the evil discerned most clearly on its first appearance? What he beheld in germ has grown so immeasurably that today we have media of publicity which actually specialize in the kind of obscenity which the cultivated, not the prurient, find repugnant, and which the wisest of the ancients forbade.

In any case, it has been left to the world of science and rationalism to make a business of purveying of the private and the offensive. Picture magazines and tabloid newspapers place before the millions scenes and facts which violate every definition of humanity. How common is it today to see upon the front page of some organ destined for a hundred thousand homes the agonized face of a child run over in the street, the dying expression of a woman crushed by a subway train, tableaux of execution, scenes of intense private grief. These are the obscenities. The rise of sensational journalism everywhere testifies to man's loss of points of reference, to his determination to enjoy the forbidden in the name of freedom. All reserve is being sacrificed to titillation. The extremes of passion and suffering are served up to enliven the breakfast table or to lighten the boredom of an evening at home. The area of privacy has been abandoned because the definition of person has been lost; there is no longer a standard by which to judge what belongs to the individual man. Behind the offense lies the repudiation of sentiment in favor of immediacy.

There are arguments founded upon insidious plausibility which seem to vindicate this publicizing. It is contended that such material is the raw stuff of life, and that it is the duty of organs of public information to leave no one deceived about the real nature of the world. The assertion that this is the real world begs the most important question of all. The raw stuff of life is precisely what the civilized man desires to have refined, or presented in a humane framework, for which sentiment alone can afford the support. The sensations purveyed by the press are admittedly for the demos, which is careless of understanding but avid of thrills. We shall have occasion to observe in many connections that one of the great conspiracies against philosophy and civilization, a conspiracy immensely aided by technology, is just

this substitution of sensation for reflection. The machine cannot be a respecter of sentiment, and it was no accident that the great parade of obscenity followed hard upon the technification of our world.

It is inevitable that the decay of sentiment should be accompanied by a deterioration of human relationships, both those of the family and those of friendly association, because the passion for immediacy concentrates upon the presently advantageous. After all, there is nothing but sentiment to bind us to the very old or to the very young. Burke saw this point when he said that those who have no concern for their ancestors will, by simple application of the same rule, have none for their descendants. The decision of modern man to live in the here and now is reflected in the neglect of aging parents, whom proper sentiment once kept in positions of honor and authority. There was a time when the elder generation was cherished because it represented the past; now it is avoided and thrust out of sight for the same reason. Children are liabilities. As man becomes more immersed in time and material gratifications, belief in the continuum of race fades, and not all the tinkering of sociologists can put homes together again.

It is sometimes said when this point is brought up that urban living renders relationships of the older kind impossible. There can be little doubt of the truth of the proposition, but the very fact that it is put forward as apologia is an evidence of perversity. For motive is the decisive thing, and had our view of the world remained just, congested urban living, harmful in many other ways too, would not have become the pattern. The objectification in sticks and stones of our conception of living can hardly be pleaded as cause of that conception. When people set the highest value on relationships to one another, it does not take them long to find material accommodations for these. One is dealing

here, as at every other point, with our estimate of the good life.

In Megalopolis the sentiment of friendship wastes away. Friends become, in the vulgarity of modern speech, "pals," who may be defined as persons whom your work compels you to associate with or, on a still more debased level, persons who will allow you to use them to your advantage. The meeting of minds, the sympathy between personalities which all cultured communities have regarded as part of the good life, demand too much sentiment for a world of machines and a false egalitarianism, and one detects even a faint suspicion that friendship, because it rests upon selection, is undemocratic. It is this type of mentality which will study with perfect naïveté a work on how to win friends and influence people. To one brought up in a society spiritually fused—what I shall call the metaphysical community—the idea of a campaign to win friends must be incomprehensible. Friends are attracted by one's personality, if it is of the right sort, and any conscious attempt is inseparable from guile. And the art of manipulating personalities obviously presumes a disrespect for personality. Only in a splintered community, where the spirit is starved to the point of atrophy, could such an imposture flourish.

When the primordial sentiments of a people weaken, there invariably follows a decline of belief in the hero. To see the significance of this, we must realize that the hero can never be a relativist. Consider for a moment the traditional soldier (not one of the automatons that comprise modern armies) as hero. It may at first seem paradoxical to say that he is of all members of the laity farthest removed from pragmatism; yet his is an absolute calling. Give him prudential motives, and he at once turns into a Falstaff. His service is to causes which are formulated as ideals, and these he is taught to hold above both property and life, as

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ceremonies of military consecration make plain. One sees this truth well exemplified in the extreme formalization of the soldier's conduct, a formalization which is carried into the chaos of battle; a well-drilled army moving into action is an imposition of maximum order upon maximum disorder. Thus the historical soldier is by genus not the blind, unreasoning agent of destruction which some contemporary writers make him out to be. He is rather the defender of the *ultima ratio*, the last protector of reason. Any undertaking that entails sacrifice of life has implications of transcendence, and the preference of death to other forms of defeat, to the "fate worse than death," is, on the secular level, the highest example of dedication. There seems little doubt that the ancient solidarity of priest and soldier—a solidarity becoming impossible today, now that mechanized mass warfare has removed soldiering from the realm of ethical significance—rests upon this foundation.

In addition, the disappearance of the heroic ideal is always accompanied by the growth of commercialism. There is a cause-and-effect relation here, for the man of commerce is by the nature of things a relativist; his mind is constantly on the fluctuating values of the market place, and there is no surer way for him to fail than to dogmatize and moralize about things. "Business and sentiment do not mix" is an adage of utmost significance. It explains the tendency of all organic societies to exclude the trader from positions of influence and prestige; it accounts, I am sure, for Plato's strictures on retail merchants in the *Laws*. The empirical character of British philosophy cannot be unrelated to the commercial habit of a great trading nation.

Some form of sentiment, deriving from our orientation toward the world, lies at the base of all congeniality. Vanishing, it leaves cities and nations mere empirical communities, which are but people living together in one place,

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without friendship or common understanding, and without capacity, when the test comes, to pull together for survival. On the other side is the metaphysical community, suffused with a common feeling about the world which enables all vocations to meet without embarrassment and to enjoy the strength that comes of common tendency. Our plea then must be to have back our metaphysical dream that we may save ourselves from the sins of sentimentality and brutality. Does not its absence explain why

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity¹

Without this grand source of ordering, our intensities turn to senseless affection and drain us, or to hatreds and consume us. On the one hand is sentimentality, with its emotion lavished upon the trivial and the absurd; on the other is brutality, which can make no distinctions in the application of its violence. Ages which have borne reputations for cruelty are more to be regarded than those renowned, as ours is coming to be, for brutality, because cruelty is refined and, at least, discriminates its objects and intentions. The terrible brutalities of democratic war have demonstrated how little the mass mind is capable of seeing the virtue of selection and restraint. The refusal to see distinction between babe and adult, between the sexes, between combatant and noncombatant—distinctions which lay at the core of chivalry—the determination to weld all into a formless unit of mass and weight—this is the destruction of society through brutality. The roar of the machine is followed by the chorus of violence; and the accumulation of riches, to which states dedicated themselves, is lost in a blind fanaticism of destruction. Those who based their

1. From *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. By permission of the Macmillan Company, publishers.

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lives on the unintelligence of sentimentality fight to save themselves with the unintelligence of brutality.

The only redemption lies in restraint imposed by idea; but our ideas, if they are not to worsen the confusion, must be harmonized by some vision. Our task is much like finding the relationship between faith and reason for an age that does not know the meaning of faith.

CHAPTER II

DISTINCTION AND HIERARCHY

For if all things had come into being in this automatic fashion, instead of being the outcome of mind, they would all be uniform and without distinction.—ST. ATHANASIUS.

THE most portentous general event of our time is the steady obliteration of those distinctions which create society. Rational society is a mirror of the logos, and this means that it has a formal structure which enables apprehension. The preservation of society is therefore directly linked with the recovery of true knowledge. For the success of our restoration it cannot be too often said that society and mass are contradictory terms and that those who seek to do things in the name of mass are the destroyers in our midst. If society is something which can be understood, it must have structure; if it has structure, it must have hierarchy; against this metaphysical truth the declamations of the Jacobins break in vain.

Perhaps the most painful experience of modern consciousness is the felt loss of center; yet, this is the inevitable result of centuries of insistence that society yield its form. Anyone can observe that people today are eager to know who is really entitled to authority, that they are looking wistfully for the sources of genuine value. In sum, they wish to know the truth, but they have been taught a perversion which makes their chance of obtaining it less every day. This perversion is that in a just society there are no distinctions.

Our course has reached a point at which the question of whether man wishes to live in society at all or whether he wishes to live in a kind of animal relationship must be raised in all seriousness. For, if the proscription against

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Ideas
Have
Consequences

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