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IN MY OWN WAY

an autobiography

Alan Watts

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1915–1965

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New World Library
Novato, California

New World Library
14 Pamaron Way
Novato, California 94949

Originally published by Pantheon Books, 1972; Vintage Books edition, 1973

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Text design and typography by Tona Pearce Myers

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Watts, Alan, 1915–1973.
In my own way : an autobiography, 1915–1965 / Alan Watts. — 2nd ed.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN-13: 978-1-57731-584-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-57731-584-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Watts, Alan, 1915–1973. 2. Zen Buddhists—United States—Biography. 3. Philosophers—United States—Biography. 4. Zen Buddhists—England—Biography. 5. Philosophers—England—Biography. I. Title.
BQ995.T8A3 2007
294.3'927092—dc22 2007006128

First New World Library printing, June 2007
ISBN-10: 1-57731-584-7
ISBN-13: 978-1-57731-584-1
Printed in Canada on acid-free, partially recycled paper

New World Library is a proud member of the Green Press Initiative.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

A foreword written by a father to his son's autobiography may not be unique but it must surely be something of a rarity; indeed the only somewhat similar instance I can recall is that of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, beautifully illustrated by his father, Lockwood Kipling.

What may appear to be another rather odd circumstance is that a person of Alan's breadth of outlook and depth of thought should have sprung from the parentage of a father who inherited much of the Victorian outlook and tradition and a mother whose family were Fundamentalists to whom the Bible was the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. And that without any upheaval of the relations between us.

Perhaps this circumstance may qualify me in some way to write this foreword, for I still do not go the whole way with him in some of his views, and it thus enables me to restrain the natural parental pride and admiration which I have for his work from becoming mere adulation.

As a child a gift of narrative showed in him before he could read or write, and an early need was to keep him supplied with material for illustrating tales he invented about an imaginary island and its people situated—appropriately in view of his later interest in the East—in the Pacific Ocean. Plenty of white kitchen paper, pencils, and colored chalks had always to be on hand.

He acquired quite early a characteristic handwriting, and when I went with him to open his first Post Office Savings Bank account, I had some difficulty in convincing the clerk that Alan had himself written the signature on the pass-book. The clerk said he had never seen so mature a signature by a child of that age.

It was while he was at King's School at Canterbury that his thoughts turned to the East and he became interested in Buddhism. He made the acquaintance there of one who had traveled in Japan and the Far East and who introduced him to the works of Lafcadio Hearn. He also corresponded with the Buddhist Lodge—as it was then—and when we attended one of its meetings, to which Alan had asked me to go with him, I remember the astonishment when a lad of sixteen introduced himself as their correspondent.

Incidentally, he wrote and published his first book while still at school.

Another episode of his school days is worth recording as a tribute to the broadmindedness of his Headmaster, Norman Birley. When Archbishop Tempe of York arranged a Convention on Religion in the Public Schools, Mr. Birley suggested to Alan that he should attend as one of the school's representatives, a liberal gesture from a school so closely connected with the Church of England.

It was at this time, during the school holidays and immediately after he left school, that probably the most interesting period developed in the relations between the three of us, mother, father, and son. The house in which we lived had a large room running from front to back which we used for meetings and discussion groups on the various subjects in which Alan was interested. He had now acquired a typewriter and often after an evening spent in composition he would come down and ask us to hear and discuss something he had written. Discussion continued sometimes until late in the night.

I have of course read with great enjoyment all his books and any of his articles which have come my way, and have learned much from them. Visits to the United States have also enabled me to attend his lectures and seminars and to take part in the discussions following upon them, and it is here, I think, that Alan excels. The lucidity with which he speaks—and writes—of matters which are enormously difficult to express in words is amazing. The discussions are to my mind models of what a discussion should be, not an antagonistic debate but an exchange of views in which each side learns something from the other, and here Alan shows the way by his courtesy and open-mindedness. Questions intended seriously are answered seriously, and no questioner is ever made to look or feel foolish. I have no doubt that such consideration, especially when it is extended to the youthful

inquirer, accounts largely for the interest taken in his philosophy by the young people of America.

Finally he has done more perhaps than any other writer to open the eyes of the West to the spiritual significance of Eastern religions and philosophies and to show that the Truth is not the monopoly of any one school of religious or philosophic thought.

Perhaps I may analogize this by supposing that four men approach an inaccessible mountain from different directions, and each writes a faithful description of the mountain as he sees it. Inevitably they will differ widely in detail and in opinion as to the best way to reach the summit, and although each account will be true as far as it goes, none will give a true picture of the mountain as a whole. But by putting the four accounts together, each taking from the others what it lacks, surely a much closer approximation to the whole will be achieved.

"The Paths are many but their End is One."

Laurence W. Watts

PREFACE

To be or to get in your own way means all at once to fulfill yourself and to obstruct yourself, for language is full of *double entendre*—as when to cleave means both to split and to adhere, when *sacer* means both sacred and accursed, and *altus* both high and deep. I had thought originally to call this book *Coincidence of Opposites*, but the publishers, rightly, thought it too highbrow and moved me to search for something more simple and direct that would convey the spirit and style in which I have tried to live. For I am committed to the view that the whole point and joy of human life is to integrate the spiritual with the material, the mystical with the sensuous, and the altruistic with a kind of proper self-love—since it is written that you must love your neighbor as yourself.

So I have always done things in my own way, which is at once the way that comes naturally to me, that is honest, sincere, genuine, and unforced; but also perverse, although you must remember that this word means *per* (through) *verse* (poetry), out-of-the-way and wayward, which is surely towards the way, and that to be queer—to "follow your own weird"—is wholeheartedly to accept your own *karma*, or fate, or destiny, and thus to be odd in the service of God, "whose service," as the Anglican Book of Common Prayer declares, "is perfect freedom."

I am, of course, playing with words. But that is the proper business of a philosopher who is also a poet, for the task and delight of poetry is to say what cannot be said, to eff the ineffable, and to unscrew the inscrutable.

I thought I had no business writing an autobiography, because I have been a sedentary and contemplative character, an intellectual, a Brahmin, a

mystic, and also somewhat of a disreputable epicurean who has had three wives, seven children, and five grandchildren—and I cannot make up my mind whether I am confessing or boasting. But I have not fought in wars, explored mountains and jungles, battled in politics, commanded great business corporations, or accumulated vast wealth. It seemed to me, therefore, that I had no *story* to tell as the world judges stories. But two women absolutely insisted that I write this tale: the first my publisher's editor, Paula Van Doren McGuire, who has watched over the whole project; and the second my wife, Mary Jane Yates (hereafter known as Jano), who has worked out with me every detail of taste, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

And, while giving thanks, thanks are also due to the advice of Henry Volkening and to my father, Laurence Watts, who prompted me to avoid certain indiscretions and corrected my memory on sundry matters of detail.

Now it is an essential principle of this book that I am describing myself largely in terms of other people and my reactions to them. The sensation called "self" is unrealizable without the sensation called "other," just as you would not know that you exist unless you had once been dead. Fortunately, there have been very few people in my life who could be regarded as my enemies—so few that I have not mentioned them. Unfortunately, there have been so many that I regard as friends that I have not been able to include them all, without making this book a monstrous compendium of the biographies of other people. Please, therefore, will the many who consider themselves my friends not be offended if I have said nothing about them.

Alan Watts
Sausalito, California
April 1972

IN MY OWN WAY

PROLOGUE

As I am also a you, this is going to be the kind of book that I would like you to write for me. It is not going to be in the linear dimension, since I do not subscribe to the chronological or historical illusion that events follow one another on a one-way street, in series. We think about them in that way because that is how we have decided to write and speak, and thus, if I am to communicate with you in words, I must "give you a line," and you must follow this string of letters. But of course, the world itself isn't strung out; it exists in many dimensions. I have, then, a preference for books that I can open at any place and begin to read—books like a garden in which I can roam, and not like a tunnel, maze, or superhighway where I must enter at Point A and come out at Point Z. This will not be so much the history as the mystery of my life, and I write it neither to edify you nor to justify myself, but to entertain both of us.

This next point may sound metaphysical, but like much that is metaphysical, it is rockily practical: I have realized that the past and the future are real illusions, that they exist only in the present, which is what there is and all that there is. From one point of view the present is shorter than a microsecond. From another, it embraces all eternity. But there isn't anywhere, or anywhen, else to be. History determines what we are only to the extent that we insist, now, that it does so. Likewise, the dream—or the nightmare—of the great tomorrow is a present fantasy which distracts us from both reality and eternity. For every sentient being is God—omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, and eternal—pretending with the utmost sincerity and determination to be otherwise, to be a mere creature subject to failure, pain, death,

temptation, hellfire, and ultimate tragedy. One of the most intelligent, pleasant, and scholarly men I know devotes himself to the creed that a noble human life is simply courage in the face of inevitable disaster and annihilation. But I won't argue with him, any more than I would argue with a fish for living in the sea. It's his game, his style, his posture; and he does it very well.

Thus, in telling this nonstory of my own life I shall always begin from the present, the *Fons et Origo*, Fount and Origin of all happenings, from which the past trails and vanishes like the wake of a ship. I have said that many times before, and one of the problems of a well-read author is to be accused of repetition by critics who do not seem to understand that repetition is the essence of music as, for example, in the *andante* movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or Ravel's *Bolero*. Each of the twenty books I have had published arrives at the same destination from a different point of departure, as the spokes of a wheel converge at the hub from separate points on the rim. Taking the premises of Christian dogmatics, Hindu mythology, Buddhist psychology, Zen practice, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, or logical positivism, I have tried to show that all are aiming, however disputatiously, at one center. This has been my way of making sense of life in terms of philosophy, psychology, and religion.

But—and as yet I am not quite sure whether this is simply a function of growing older or growing wiser—so many writings in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and religion now seem to me to be meaningless, without even attaining the charm of deliberate nonsense; and this is even, and perhaps especially, true of the harangues of logical analysts and scientific empiricists against poets and metaphysicians. This is not to say that I, as an eccentric and nonacademic philosopher, am disillusioned with and dejected about my own craft, since I have always been an intellectual critic of the intellectual life. What I am saying is that an enormous amount of philosophy, theology, and even psychology strikes me as a discussion of words and concepts without relation to experience—not exactly as empty words, but as intelligent and scholarly argument about problems not recognized as creations of grammar and forms of language, such as the arbitrary distinction between nouns and verbs, the rule that verb acts must have noun agents, and empty differentiations between substance and form, things and events. There is too little

recognition of the vast difference between the world as described and the world as sensed, too little recognition that what we describe in the physical universe as separate things are of the same order as areas, views, aspects, selections, and features—not *data* but *capta*, grasped rather than given.

My own work, though it may seem at times to be a system of ideas, is basically an attempt to describe mystical experience—not of formal visions and supernatural beings, but of reality as seen and felt directly in a silence of words and mindings. In this I set myself the same impossible task as the poet: to say what cannot be said. Indeed, much of my work is poetry described as prose (with margins adjusted) so that people will read it. As poets value the sounds of words above their meanings, and images above arguments, I am trying to get thinking people to be aware of the actual vibrations of life as they would listen to music.

I would therefore like, again, to approach this ever-entrancing hub of the wheel from a point on the rim which is not formally philosophical, theological, or psychological, but which is simply my own everyday life. Generally speaking, the task of autobiography so embarrasses the writer that he must either boast or confess. Men of action and adventure tend to boast. Men of piety and intellect tend to confess, as witness the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and Rousseau, and Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. I have nothing to boast about in the way of heroic adventures in war or exploration, and I am certainly not going to make a public apology or confession. Having had considerable experience as a father-confessor, counselor, and amateur psychotherapist, I have come to see that my own "sins" are as normal and as boring as everyone else's—which is not to say that I haven't had some splendid experiences that stuffy people would deem sinful. The point is that beyond boasting on the one hand, or confessing or apologizing on the other, I find my life intensely *interesting*. If it were not so I should probably commit suicide, for, as Camus so bluntly suggested, the only serious philosophical problem is whether or not to commit suicide. (Ultimately, of course, he is wrong, for to be or not to be is *not* the question, since the two states manifest each other. How would you know that you are alive unless you had once been dead?)

Somehow I have come to a place where I see through ideas, beliefs, and

symbols. They are natural expressions of life, but do not, as they so often claim, embrace or explain life. Thus I am fascinated with almost all religions, so long as their followers do not try to convert me, in the same way that I am fascinated with the various kinds of flowers, birds, and insects, or with different ways of dressing and cooking. And just as I don't like standard British, American, Mexican, or German cooking, I cannot imagine myself a Jehovah's Witness, a Southern Baptist, a Jesuit father (much as I respect some of those gentlemen), or a Theravada Buddhist monk. Everyone to his taste—but why fight about it? *Because it isn't that important.* Do you suppose that God takes himself seriously? I know a Zen master, Joshu Sasaki, who has let it be known that the best form of meditation is to stand up with your hands on your hips and roar with laughter for ten minutes every morning. I have heard of a sophisticated shaman-type fellow who used to cure ringworm on cows just by pointing at the scars and laughing. Truly religious people always make jokes about their religion; their faith is so strong that they can afford it. Much of the secret of life consists in knowing how to laugh, and also how to breathe. A failure of our schools is that their departments of "physical education" teach only mechanical and mathletic versions of body-play.[1]

Physical education is the fundamental discipline of life, but it is actually despised, neglected, and taught intellectually, because the true intent of our schools is to inculcate the virtues of cunning and calculation which will make money, not so much for the students themselves as for those who employ and govern them, and who, in turn (because they were educated in the same system), do not know how to transform money into physical enjoyment. They were never taught how to husband plants and animals for food, how to cook, how to make clothes and build houses, how to dance and breathe, how to do yoga for finding one's true center, or how to make love. "The

[1] In the same connection, it might be asked why the German army has lost two world wars. Because of the goose-step and brass bands, because of military stamp, pomp, and swagger. An effective army is inaudible and invisible; you cannot hear or see it coming. This is also why the French and the Americans have not been able to subdue Vietnam: their methods of war are too affectedly masculine.

establishment" is a class of physical barbarians. Consider simply the dowdy and scrubby masculine dress and appearance of Mr. Nixon, Mr. Heath, Mr. Kosygin, M. Pompidou, and (alas) the Emperor of Japan, who affects the absurdities of Edwardian formal dress or common business suits. When the rich and the powerful are falsely modest and afraid of color and splendor, the whole style of life deteriorates—there being no example to follow save that of cultivated mediocrity. High style and pageantry are then confined to the theater, and—being left out of all such serious domains as religion, government, and commerce—become signs of frivolity, with the disastrous result that seriousness (or, better, sincerity) must always be associated with a drab aspect.

My mother, before she married, was a teacher of physical education and home economics in a school for the abandoned daughters of missionaries who had gone off to India, Africa, China, and Japan under the strange impression that God had called them to teach religion to "the natives." She was a modestly expert cook, a most competent gardener, and a wizard at embroidery. She turned me on, bless her, to color, to flowers, to intricate and fascinating designs, to the works of Oriental art given to her by those missionaries in appreciation of her fosterage of their daughters—and all this despite the wretched fundamentalist Protestantism she had halfheartedly inherited from her parents. She lived in a world of magic beyond that religion—a world inhabited, not by the domineering prophets and sentimental angels upon the stained-glass windows of Christ Church, Chislehurst, but by sweet peas, scarlet-runner beans, rose trees, crisp apples, speckled thrushes, blackbirds, blue tits, and bouncy little robins. By bracken, maidenhair fern, blackberries on the bush, enchanted circles of beech trees on the South Downs, dew-ponds and wells of chalk-cool water in Sussex, and hopfields and oast-houses in the vast and miraculous garden of Kent.

This world was simply *not* the world of the "Bible-black" religion which has, according to my own prejudices, become the curse and menace of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (and Irish Jansenist Catholic) culture. The sexy, complex, gambling, diaphanous, ecstatic, and terrifying lilts of nature were no more designed by the biblical God-the-Father than the music of Ali Akbar Khan was composed by Elgar, or the poetry of Dylan Thomas

written by Edgar Guest.[2] My mother's world, which she did not have quite the full courage of conviction to set above the world of God *her* father (who really looked like God, beard and all), seemed rather to be designed by Kwan-yin of the thousand arms, the Bodhisattva of compassionate skill, forever trying to show sentient beings that "energy is eternal delight."

I am sure I was—at least until puberty—overly dependent on my mother, though I cannot remember anything even faintly resembling an Oedipus complex. On the contrary, I was disappointed in the fact that she did not seem to me as pretty as other women, and I couldn't abide the expression she wore when she first woke up in the morning. But, at least when I was little, she understood me, and always believed in me—or perhaps in her idea of me, for when I was naughty she would say that it just wasn't like *me* to do such a thing. She also gave me the impression that God had it in mind for me to do a great work in the world, and it is probably just as well that I remember this subtle reinforcement of my ego. It gave me comfort in the face of childhood sicknesses and dangers. Somehow it seemed that she disliked her own body, perhaps because she had had so much sickness just after marriage, and when she spoke of people being very *ill* she would swallow the word as if it were a nasty lump of fat, and take on a most serious frown. As I was an only child (she had two miscarriages and a baby boy who lived only two weeks) I think I picked up her anxiety for my survival and became something of a physical coward.

But she made up in personality for what she lacked in my conception of prettiness, and my father adored her, always. They would hold hands under the dining table at meals, and he would hug her like a bear. Although she never sang and couldn't hold a tune, she had a musical and lilting speaking-voice which held authority without forcing it. Having now become gently cynical about human nature I can say with some amazement that her eyes were as honest as her conscience, and that, though she may have been squeamish about things of the body, she was never at any time malicious, mean, greedy, conceited, or untruthful. I could never imagine what sins she

[2] But the biblical God of the Jews is perhaps another matter. He understands Yiddish.

was confessing in church when she joined in saying, "But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us most miserable offenders." The "us" must have meant me. The only unpleasantness I ever found in her was her annoying habit (especially to an Englishman) of probing for your real emotions when you were trying to keep a stiff upper lip. When I once berated her for this, rather forcefully, she said, "I think I'll go and shed a tear."

Although my parents suffered through two horrendous wars and the Depression, which hit them hard, I cannot imagine being born to a more harmonious and unostentatiously virtuous couple. Yet I feel that I never quite gave them what they wanted. I don't know what that was, and perhaps they didn't either. But I was a weird child. I was a fantast who believed in fairies and magic when all the other children had given them up for twaddle. I preferred watching birds to playing cricket. I adopted a strange and un-English religion, and went off on my own to a far country. They said I had "imagination," which was good but dangerous, and the neighbors would speak of Mrs. Watts as "Alan Watts's mother." I told anyone who would listen endless tales of fantasy and of blood-and-thunder. I would conduct funeral ceremonies for dead birds and bats and rabbits instead of learning tennis. I read about ancient Egypt and Chinese tortures and Aladdin's lamp instead of "good books" by Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens. I have no idea how I came to be so weird, but never for a moment have I regretted that I forgetfully reincarnated myself as the child of Laurence Wilson Watts and Emily Mary Buchan, at Rowan Tree Cottage in Holbrook Lane, in the village of Chislehurst, Kent, England, almost due south of Greenwich, on the morning of January 6, 1915, at about twenty minutes after six, with the Sun in Capricorn, conjuncted with Mars and Mercury and in trine to a Moon in Virgo, with Sagittarius rising, and under bombardment in the midst of the First World War.[3]

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[3] These details are given for the satisfaction of my many friends who believe in astrology—a primitive science which is correct in theory but inexact and unworkable in practice. Obviously, who and what you are is where and when you are in relation to the whole universe. But the map, or horoscope, is not the territory—or should I say the celestiary? Heaven is a big subject.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STONED WOOD

Topophilia is a word invented by the British poet John Betjeman for a special love for peculiar places. It sounds almost like a disease or a perversion, but it comes close to the Japanese *aware*, which signifies a sophisticated nostalgia. One may love special places either for their beauty, or for their fascinating ugliness, or for their inability to be described. In the first class put the Swiss-Italian lake district and Big Sur, California; in the second put residential North London, Philadelphia, or Baltimore; in the third put Chislehurst, which means a stoned or stony (or even astonished) wood. It is an area on a well-forested and flat-topped hill to the southeast of London, its soil abounding in round and grey-surfaced stones, some of which contain pockets of crystals, and some which, when broken, reveal an image of dark blue sky, dense with clouds. Large sections of this area are commons or public parks, wild and left generally to themselves. In the interstices lie palatial mansions, affluent suburban residences, three small shopping areas, seven churches, seven amiable pubs, and two respectable slums.

Even today it hasn't been too objectionably improved. Indeed, many of the mansions are now schools, offices, or service-flats, and a number of boxy, red-brick, quiet-desperation homes have filled up the old rural lanes. But the Royal Parade, the one-block-long principal shopping center, is almost exactly what it was fifty years ago. I was back there in June 1970 to celebrate my father's ninetieth birthday at the Tiger's Head pub on the village green, across from the ancient parish church of Saint Nicholas—and incidentally, it isn't so widely known that English pubs (as distinct from restaurants) can provide magnificent feasts. But there was the village center in its original

order, though ownerships had changed. Close to the prosperous-looking Bull Inn are Miss Rabbit's original sweet shop, and opposite, the incredible Miss Battle is still running the bakery. I can't account for her; she is a young woman about seventy years old. Mr. Walters (Junior) is still running the book, stationery, and greeting-card shop, though Mr. Coffin's excellent grocery has been taken over by a chain—and yet the goods and the service are unchanged. It smells as it always did of flavors of fresh coffee, smoked meats, and Stilton cheese, and is run with a dignity and courtesy which make it, for me, the archetypal grocery designed in heaven.

Mr. Francis's tobacco and barber shop is still there, though he has long joined his ancestors. It was here that I had my one and only personal encounter with that vivacious and ancient priest, Canon Dawson, rector of Saint Nicholas who, as a very High Church Anglo-Catholic, sported a fried-egg hat and cassock around the village. (All I can remember of his sermons is a series of enthusiastic coughs, but everyone loved him, and he lived in a magnificent and mysterious Queen Anne house—The Rectory—kitty-corner from the church, next to the Tiger's Head, and backed by a row of stately trees beyond which lay the acres of Colonel Edelman's spacious farms and crow-cawing pines.) The Rector was in a hurry and very affably asked me to yield place in line for a haircut. Naturally, I was delighted; he, the dignitary, the parson or person of the domain had treated a nine-year-old boy as a human being. I hadn't long to wait, for he was almost bald.

But vanished now is the drapery and dress shop run by the Misses Scriven, two elderly spinsters with put-up hair, bulging, with bun on top, and thoroughly clothed from neck to ankles with long-sleeved frilly blouses and tweedy skirts, granny-style spectacles with thin gold rims insulting their faces. Fashionable young ladies of today should note (since granny spectacles are back in vogue), that constructions of wire upon the face, especially upon ladies with angular figures, have about as much sex appeal as bicycles. To make things worse, the Misses Scriven displayed their frocks and dresses upon "dummies," which were headless, armless, and legless mock-ups of female torsos, having lathe-turned erections of dark wood in place of heads. These hideous objects gave me repeated nightmares until I was at least six years old, for in the midst of an otherwise interesting dream there would

suddenly appear a calico-covered dummy, formidably breasted (without cleft) and sinisterly headless. This thing would mutter at me and suggest ineffable terrors, but thereafter it would rumble, and I would have the sensation of dropping through darkness to find myself relieved and awake.

And then, just to the north, was the pharmacy of Messrs. Prebble and Bone, its windows adorned with immense tear-shaped bottles of brightly colored liquids, for ornament and not for sale, where medications were sold in an aromatic atmosphere which has prompted the riddle "What smells most in a chemist's shop?" Answer: "Your nose." Whereas Mr. Coffin's grocery was low and on the level, Mr. Prebble and Mr. Bone's establishment was lofty and looked down at you, and their mysterious bottles with occult labels were stored in high, glass-doored cupboards. They supplied Dr. Tallent's utterly illegible prescriptions in bottles and boxes with formal and punctilious labels entitled "The Mixture," "The Ointment," or "The Pills," followed with such paradoxical instructions as "Take one pill three times a day," which reminds me of a notice once posted on the buses of Sacramento, California: "Please let those getting off first."

Dr. Tallent also lived on the Royal Parade, at Walton Lodge, a pleasant begardened house oddly sequestered in the very middle of the row of shops. He was a confident, kindly, and clean-smelling man who officiated at my birth, upon whose brand-new suit I pissed at my circumcision, and from whom, as soon as I was articulate, I demanded a two-shilling fee (which he paid) for some unpleasant medical attention. His wife was, necessarily, a talented woman—a singer and actress resembling Mary Pickford—and I was secretly in love with his tall brunette daughter Jane without knowing how to do anything about it. She seemed to be on a higher rung in the social ladder, and thus went with the boys who played tennis and cricket (the ultimately boring game), and indulged in the lugubrious dangle-armed dancing of the 1920s. And then I was vehemently in love with a blond kindergarten mate named Kitty, who lived in one of the pretentious mansions near the Rectory, so much so that I got up the courage to propose marriage to her and was so flatly rejected that I didn't have the nerve to make amorous approaches to women until I was nineteen.

I have been told, in later years, that I look like a mixture of King George VI

and Rex Harrison, but *then* the boys told me I was a cross-eyed and buck-toothed weakling to whom no girl would ever possibly be attracted. But when I search through the records, like *Who's Who* and even the Greater London Telephone Directory, all those handsome and self-confident sportsmen, scholars, and snobs who were my successful peers in school seem to have vanished. It is unbelievable and awesome that I find no trace of the heroes of my childhood, save one or two whom the system rejected, like poet, travelogist, and (during World War II) Brigadier General Patrick Leigh Fermor, who was expelled from King's School, Canterbury, for taking a walk with the local greengrocer's daughter.

But back to Chislehurst. Rowan Tree Cottage, our home, is one block east of the Royal Parade, and takes its name from a mountain ash or rowan tree which grew in the front garden behind a hedge of sweetbrier and beside an arbor of jasmine and a magnificent tree of green cooking-apples upon which we used to hang coconuts, sliced open for the delectation of wrens and blue tits. The house is a semidetached cottage, that is, a mirror-image structure, one half occupied by ourselves and the other by an astonishingly ugly, garrulous, holy, and warmhearted lady known as Miss Gussy (Augusta Pearce—and may she rest in peace, fanned by the jeweled wings of her Anglo-Catholic angels.) Also let it be said, in passing, that most of the people mentioned in this book are to be recognized as my gurus—people from whom I have learned all that I value—and in this respect Miss Gussy had an important role.

Behind the house my parents had acquired an acre of land which adjoined the playing fields of Farrington's (Wesleyan) school for girls and gave access to the immense fields and forests of Scadbury Manor, where the lords of Chislehurst had lived from at least the thirteenth century. Just at the boundary between our land and Farrington's was a colossal sycamore tree exactly ninety feet high, where the sun rose, and where, in the late afternoon, my mother and I watched glistening pigeons against black storm-clouds. That was the axletree of the world, Yggdrasil, blessing and sheltering the successive orchards, vegetable gardens and (once) a rabbit farm which my father cultivated in time of economic distress. There was also a time when he let the back part of the garden go fallow, with grasses, sorrel, and flowering

weeds so well above my head that I could get lost in this sunny herbaceous forest with butterflies floating above. I was so happy in this miniature jungle that I still don't understand why those who have neither time nor skill for real gardening shouldn't just let their land go its own way, rather than insisting on lawn order, whereby grass is forced to imitate a billiard table.

We are compulsively and drearily tidy, and frantically flatten, rectangularize and uniformize the chthonic world into Euclidian patterns, which are wholly bereft of imagination and exuberance. Shouldn't we beg pardon for millions of square miles of cropped, unflowering grass? This was the magic of the Chislehurst commons—that all those acres were simply left alone, save for the attentions of jovial Mr. Cox, the Common-Keeper, who went about with a burlap sack and a spiked stick to pick up human trash—mostly paper. There were open acres covered with curly-ferned bracken and dotted with prickly, yellow-flowered gorse bushes. There were dark dense clusters of rhododendrons, dank mysterious pools under enormous oaks and cedars, sweet, sandy, and sunny groves of pines, and, at the bottom of Pett's Wood—just across the railway tracks—an almost tropical swamp, where the stream Marchristal (named after Margaret, Christine, and Alan, who explored it from end to end) flowed into a larger stream which ran eventually into the Medway River, through Maidstone, and into the Thames at Sheerness.

Margaret and Christine, incidentally, were sisters—two adorably feminine tomboys whom I hadn't the nerve to relate to except on the boy level of adventure and mild naughtiness, such as initiating Christine into smoking cigarettes under a bush on the commons. However, we followed that tiny stream through two miles of thickets, mostly young hazels, elm, and ash, over ground twinkling with wild primroses and celandine and blossoming (if that is the word) with pagodalike layers of tree fungus, with toadstools, and with that formidable red-topped, white-flecked mushroom *Amanita muscaria*—of whose properties we knew nothing except "Don't."

The Marchristal descended across a belt of pines, through a culvert under the tracks, and out into this vividly alive swampy area where flowering weeds grew far above our heads—white umbelliferae, yellow ragweed, something with small but imperially purple flowers, nettles, wild roses, honeysuckle, common bugle, foxgloves, wild poppies, vast thistles,

blackberry bushes, and high barleylike grasses—all of which was bewhizzed by kingfisher-blue dragonflies, by bumblebees and tiny pseudowasps called hover-flies, and befluttered by fritillaries, red admirals, swallowtails, painted ladies, tortoise-shells, orange-tips, small coppers, Camberwell beauties, graylings, common whites, commas, peacocks, clouded yellows, marble whites, chalkhill blues, and even an occasional purple emperor.

Yes, I am showing off my knowledge of folk entomology. My father was an amateur entomologist, and his guru in this pursuit was an extremely small, affable, and intelligent *bon vivant* named Samuel Blyth—a well-to-do solicitor, stockholder in the Bank of England, and confirmed bachelor, who lived with his splendidly witty mother and two devoted serving-maids in a Churriguresque house just south of the Royal Parade. Samuel Blyth was one of Canon Dawson's loyal henchmen, a devout and even militant High Churchman who hardly ever discussed religion. His ancestors had sailed with the Royal Navy, and his house was ablaze with the folk art of Africa, India, and Indochina—inlaid tables, silver canisters, an immense basket from Lagos, and all sorts of lacquered and marquetry boxes with images, in brilliant color, of Shiva, Krishna, Parvati, and Radha dancing it up amid stylized frameworks of creepers and vines. Furthermore, he presided at stately dinner parties to which a select company gathered in formal dress, where the cuisine—served by Annie I and Annie II—was English cooking at its best, accompanied by the best wines of Bordeaux, for which he had a special liking. Next to my mother, he may be considered my true teacher in the arts of the table, although now—in California—we attend formal dinners in outrageously imaginative costumes instead of black, silk-lapelled suits with boiled shirts and black bow ties.

Sam's mother was just the sort of woman I hope my own wife will become when she is eighty. She was somewhat stout, wore a black velvet choker, and carried a silver-topped ebony walking stick; a lady of wonderful presence and dignity who was, nevertheless, given to chuckling. Sam, also, had this particular and important grace for appreciating and giggling about nonsense—important, because I am not fully at ease with those who lack it. At a very early age I was presented with a handsome edition of the nonsense limericks of Edward Lear by the angular, (apparently) acid, and

bearded Mr. Chettle who, as headmaster of the school sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Stationers, had been the most respected of my father's teachers. He, then, was responsible for initiating me into a taste for such profound ridiculosities as

There was an Old Man of Vienna,
Who lived upon Tincture of Senna.
When that did not agree,
He took Camomile Tea;
That nasty Old Man of Vienna.

So, I told Sam Blyth and his mother about an insane cartoon-film I had seen called *The Worm That Turned* in which an officiously persecuted worm, ordinarily slow and limp in action, became galvanized with energy after drinking from a bottle labeled "Encouragement," and with electric convulsions banged all his persecutors to bits. Thereafter, on our return from night-time entomological expeditions, I was invariably given a Bottle of Encouragement which, as then appropriate for a small boy, was that most pleasant concoction—English ginger beer from a stone bottle. I am drinking some at the moment of writing, and though it comes from a nasty and ecologically pestiferous no-return bottle which says, with incongruous pomposity, "bottled under authority of Schweppes (U.S.A.) Ltd., Stamford, Conn., 06905, from essence imported from Schweppes, London, England," it is very good; though not quite the same thing as served by Samuel Blyth from a stone bottle or bought, homemade, from a rose-engarlanded cottage on an ancient Roman road just south of Canterbury.

Those entomological expeditions after dark were usually conducted in a long and ancient grove of trees on the west side of Pett's Wood, bordered by Colonel Edelman's open fields with their clusters, or spinneys, of pines. Sam and my father would paint the trees with a thin, one-foot strip of molasses mixed with essence of pear. Then, at the bottom of the grove, they would wait and light up their pipes (Sam, who was a perky little man, had the most enormous Dunhill I have ever seen), whereafter we would return with our flashlights examining the various moths which had visited our treacly traps. My father usually called them by their folk names, such as the Silver

Y, from the silvery Y-shaped mark on its upper wing, but Sam, as the guru, used the Graeco-Latin scientific names—in this case *gamma*—always pronounced in the flagrantly British distortions of Mediterranean languages. Thus the very rare and prized oleander hawk moth, which Sam once netted ecstatically over his flowering tobacco plants, is known to the science as *nerii*. He pronounced it "neary-eye." It is a gorgeous mottled green, almost bird-like moth which occasionally reaches the southern shores of England from Africa.

We would carefully identify the various specimens on the treacle, then proceed to capture those not already in our collections by inveigling them into glass-topped pillboxes, and thereafter spiflicate them in glass jars, or "killing-bottles," containing cyanide under a coating of plaster of Paris. Pounded laurel leaves would do just as well.

From all this I learned a love of moths, but I no longer catch, kill, and set them in cabinet drawers under glass. I have found that by talking gently to moths, even calling "Here kitty-kitty-kitty!" I can get them to alight on my hand, where I can inspect them alive and at leisure. I have even persuaded a huge Polyphemus to stay on my head for half an hour. By this means, if you are inclined to the scientific study of moths or butterflies, you can simply photograph them in color instead of killing them—and the sport of making friends with them is far more challenging than going out on the hunt. This applies equally to birds, deer, fish, and bears. I will no longer hunt for any creature which I do not seriously need to eat, although, for reasons which may be—as they say—Freudian, I have constantly practiced the arts of archery and riflery. In an autobiography one must surely be allowed to boast, just for fun. I have, at a range of twenty feet, shot the tobacco out of a cigarette and left the paper intact. At a range of thirty feet, I have split a target, edge towards me, with an air pistol. I am also the world's champion in a game called "You Are the Target," in which anyone better than I would be dead. The game is to shoot an arrow straight up and see how near to you it can be allowed to land. You have to watch its fall very carefully, but I have had it hit the ground exactly between my feet. Of course, there were no witnesses. Had there been, they would forcefully have discouraged the experiment. I was using a fifty-five-pound bow.

My father, although an admirably peaceful man, carefully instructed me in these arts. He made bows for me and taught me how to use his .22 carbine, as well as how to sling arrows with a string. Nature preserved him from the colossal folly of World War I by giving him a carbuncle on the neck, though he did weekly drill with the territorial troops on the local cricket ground with an Enfield rifle—a ritual operation, like the Officers' Training Corps fantasies with which I was later involved in school, which had absolutely nothing to do with the bloody realities of fighting. Drummers and buglers being in attendance, I called the affair "Daddy's Band." (This was 1917.) At that time I was absolutely delighted with sporadic German air raids, which provided me with an excuse for being taken out of bed in the middle of the night and down to the dining room, there to drink cocoa and wave a small Union Jack flag. The nearest hit was plunk in the middle of the village green, which shook everything up but killed no one, and the crater is there to this day, as a sort of memorial. The village was protected by an antiaircraft gun affectionately known as Archibald. I am told that, as I was being wheeled beside this gun in my perambulator, two soldiers came by with a basket of laundry and I convulsed them by saying, "Here come Archibald's nappies."

This is perhaps the place to say that I regard human wars as I regard storms and earthquakes—as totally irrational disasters, or forms of collective madness, which I will do my best to avoid under almost all circumstances, even though I am now living on top of the San Andreas Fault. The mere robber can take what he wants; however, I would probably give violent resistance to anyone attempting physical injury upon myself or my loved ones—although there would always be an element of judo in the tactics employed. But collective banding together for offense or defense is, as is now so obvious, a no-win game. Modern warfare is planetary destruction, a luxury we cannot afford. All offenders proclaim and even believe that they are defending themselves, since it is now becoming increasingly impossible to wage war for the good old-fashioned motive of capturing the territory and the women of other tribes. Nor do we need their men as slaves. We have machinery instead. To take sides in a modern, technological war is to take sides in a lunatic asylum—as between believers, and really ardent believers, in Dottlebonk and Geflugg, both out to prove their manhoodlumism. Call me

a physical coward, a sissy, a nervous Nellie, a traitor, a deserter, a chicken, a worm, a slug, a salamander, or anything you like, but I have always used my ingenuity to stay out of these ridiculous uproars. I would rather exercise my manhood in bed with the ladies, though those who do not approve of such delectable imploits say that I am out to "prove" my masculinity, whereas I am simply and innocently enjoying life and *im*proving my masculinity. It is so strange that everyone infected by psychoanalysis regards every form of exuberance as a neurotic excess, and classifies mere happiness under the clinical and diagnostic term "euphoria."

But to go back to Chislehurst. My father and mother brought me up in a garden flutant with the song of birds, especially at dawn and twilight. They decided, however, that I should be educated as a Brahmin, an intellectual, directed towards the priestly, legal, or literary professions. As soon as I was exposed to the ideals of these disciplines, which were studious and bookish, I lost interest and energy for the work of the garden, though I remained enchanted with the flowers and fruits of other people's work, so much so that in my old age I shall probably return to the craft of the garden, but of a very small garden, consisting mainly of culinary, medicinal, and psychedelic herbs, with nasturtiums, roses, and sweet peas around the edges. Alongside there will be a large redwood barn where the various herbs will hang from the beams to dry, where there will be shelves of mysterious jars containing cardamom, ginseng, ginger, marjoram, oregano, mint, thyme, pennyroyal, cannabis, henbane, mandrake, comfrey mugwort, and witch hazel, and where there will also be a combination of alchemist's laboratory and kitchen. I can smell it coming.

The garden at home was what is now called "organic," and, in my mind, I can still taste its peas, potatoes, scarlet-runner beans, and pippin apples which my father stored on wooden racks to last through the winter. (Having made recent tours of inspection, I can report that vegetables from this neighborhood are as good as ever.) But the advantage of being a small child is that you can see vegetables better than adults. You don't have to stoop down to them, and you can thus get lost in a forest of tomatoes, raspberries, and beans on sticks—and from this standpoint and attitude vegetables have nothing to do with the things served on plates in restaurants. They are glowing,

luscious jewels, embodiments of emerald or amber or carnelian light, and are usually best when eaten raw and straight off the plant when you are alone, when no one can see you doing it, and when the whole affair is somewhat surreptitious. This is, of course, what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and perhaps it was an unripe apple that made Eve ill. It is not usually understood that she was a little girl and Adam a little boy, because they are always portrayed as mature adults, but they were obviously a couple of kids scrounging around Big Daddy's garden. Having thoroughly satisfied themselves on gooseberries, raw peas, and green apples, they hid between the tomato plants and began to examine each other's private parts. But just then Big Daddy came along and said, "God damn it, get the hell out of here, you little bastards!"[1]

One of the major taboos of our culture is against realizing that vegetables are intelligent—an insight which I owe to an inspired eccentric named Thaddeus Ashby, who haunts and dismays the general area of Southern California, but who is an undoubted genius. Not so long ago he arrived at my door in the rig of a British field marshal, Montgomery-style, except that the golden badge on his beret proved, on close inspection, to be a Buddhist emblem. He explained that he was a true *field* marshal, representing the interests of the vegetable kingdom, and gave me a long discourse on the intellectuality, cunning, and compassion of the whole world of plants. This was in line with my own suspicion that every living and sentient being considers itself human—that is, as being at the center of the universe and as having attained the height of culture. He went into the amazingly beautiful and varied methods whereby plants disperse their seeds, and pointed out that fruit is sweet or tangy because the plant *wants* it to be eaten, so that seeds will be distributed through the alimentary canals of bugs, birds, or people. He further exemplified our dim view of the plant world by the fact that we call decrepit people "mere vegetables," and deplore homosexuals by calling them "fruits." He pointed out that, as distinct from mammals, birds, reptiles,

[1] The vulgar language is, as always, soundly grounded in theology. In the Catholic and Christian scheme of things we are sons of God by adoption and grace, not by nature, since God has only one Son, rendering the rest of us bastards essentially damned and in hell.

and fish, the brain and the sexual organs of plants are in the same place, and that they do not therefore have the problems over which Freud puzzled, namely the conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. He further suggested that the botanical world was so concerned about human misuse of the biosphere that it had decided to turn us on, psychedelically, so that we would come to our senses, or, if that wouldn't work, to turn us off by making itself increasingly poisonous.

Now it is the papal infallibility and orthodox dogma of the present scientific establishment that plants are mechanisms without intelligence, and that they have neither feeling nor capacity for purposeful action. A little child hasn't been told this, and therefore knows better. I knew that plants, moths, birds, and rabbits were *people*—as is exemplified in such tales as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and innumerable folk tales from all cultures. Anthropologists and historians of religion dismiss this as animism, the most primitive, superstitious, and depraved of all those systems and beliefs which, in the course of historical progress, eventually blossom into Christianity or dialectical materialism. It is thus that our entire civilization has no respect for plants or for animals other than pets—the flattering dog, the wily cat, the obedient horse, and the mimicking parrot. It is high time to go back, or on, to animism and to cultivate good manners toward all sentient beings, including vegetables, and even lakes and mountains.

In that garden I learned to talk with birds, to whistle all their calls, and, in winter especially, to feed them by hand on the window sill. As Henry Miller has pointed out, the birds of America (excepting perhaps the cardinal and the mockingbird) do not really sing. They squawk, chatter, screech, croak, cluck, and hoot—and he attributes this to our terrible bread and to "the tasteless products of our worn-out soil." We have nothing like a nightingale or skylark, although some years ago the California mockingbirds picked up the first half of the nightingale's song from listening to the record of Respighi's *Birds* being played on suburban patios. In Santa Barbara I whistled this melody back and forth with a mockingbird for about half an hour, and taught him some new variations. But at dawn in Chislehurst or, for that matter, any country place in Western Europe, the birds come on like a choir of angels in praise of the sun, and I used to lie in bed feeling my spirits

raised and raised by this bird-symphony of total delight in life. At sunset a solitary thrush would perch at the very top of the rowan tree and go into a solo to which I would rather listen than to even Tebaldi or Sutherland.

May I go into the topography and geography of my home, for it still fascinates me. It was (and is) a semidetached cottage of solid brick, facing west, having two stories and a mysterious attic which I hardly ever visited. There were two rooms on the front ground floor—to the north, an ample dining-room-cum-kitchen with a large black iron stove and oven in a niche under the chimney; to the south—interrupted by the front door, vestibule, and staircase—was the drawing room, used only on special occasions, but to me a place of magic and fascination. For it contained all my mother's Oriental treasures: a round brass mandala-designed coffee table from India, shining with intricate floral patterns; two large Chinese vases on either side of the fireplace (I would guess from the Ch'ien-lung period) showing mandarins in their courts and warriors on the battlefield, and containing raffia fans from Samoa; over the mantelpiece a *turista* Japanese woven picture of a teahouse jutting out over a lake, seen at moonlight; on the mantelpiece, a fine celadon vase from Korea and a tiny wooden coffin from China containing the "corpse" of the aristocratic deceased; on the sofa, two richly embroidered Japanese cushions depicting falcons on flowering trees; an upright piano at which my mother played and my father used to sing arias from Gilbert and Sullivan—and such amazing Edwardian sentimentalities as "Dumbledum Deary" and "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby. . . 'til rainbow visions rise, and all my songs shall strive to wake sweet wonders in thine eyes."

It was in this room, with its flavor of Oriental magic, that my father, in his perfectly unostentatious King's English accent, read to me the tales and poems of that much maligned and misunderstood author, Rudyard Kipling —the *Just So Stories*, *The Jungle Books*, and *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Today, Kipling is largely regarded as an imperialist and jingoist whose writings represented British colonialism at its most aggressive peak. Yes and no. Kipling was one of the major channels through which the high culture of India and the Himalayas flowed back into the west, and persuaded me, for example, through such books as *Kim*, to have more sympathy for Buddhism than Christianity. Kipling was not a Max Müller or an Arthur Waley on the level

of fine Oriental scholarship, but he spoke in a subtle and roundabout way to emotions in the solar plexus, the *manipura chakra*, and thus enchanted a small boy with curious, exotic, and far-off marvels that were simply not to be found in the muscular Christianity of the (Low Church) Church of England or in the boiled-beef-and-carrots English middle-class way of life.

It is important that this magical room was on the southwest of the house, although it ornaments were Oriental, for it was here that I acquired an interior compass which led me to the East through the West. I suppose I am some sort of human sunflower, for I always want to follow the sun—to the south, from England, and to the west. To the east of our home in Chislehurst was the wretched town of Sidcup. I called it "Sick-up," for it was a place which I prejudicially despised as I now despise Berkeley and Oakland from the standpoint of westerly Sausalito and Mount Tamalpais, upon whose beneficent slopes I am now writing. Beyond Sidcup there is a cruddy, run-down suburban and industrial area which ends up, believe it or not, in a place called Gravesend. I never went there, but judging from its position on the map,[2] it must be the rectum of England—not, perhaps, a real slum such as one finds in Whitechapel or Liddypool, but something even worse—a sordid monotony of identical babyshit-colored houses, adjoined row upon row.

So I am a mobile sunflower. I find myself incarnated at a pleasant—but often dingy and murky—point on a ball from which the sun is always south and constantly moves west. Being accustomed to the temperate zone, I don't want to live right under the sun, in the tropics, but I want to get a little warmer and to consort with people whose emotions are not quite so cold and standoffish. Look at this from the standpoint of a child who knows only his own immediate area. To the southwest of home there was the wild land of Pett's Wood and Colonel Edelman's sky-open estate. There were those elegant Elizabethan, Queen Anne, and Victorian mansions with their splendid gardens and cedar trees just south of Saint Nicholas's Church. There was the hopeful luminosity of the western sky in the early morning. There was

[2] The map of England, Scotland, and Wales shows an American Indian riding on a pig, pursuing the ball of Ireland to the West.

also, right on the edge of the commons, the home of my closest childhood friend, Ronald Macfarlane, who has now most sensibly become a student of Vedanta and breeds chickens on the open field in Cambridgeshire. He lived with his gentle and bewitchingly full-blown-rose-sexy mother and his warm-gruff father in an enormous house, appropriately called Brackenside, which smelled of the particular African tobacco that his father smoked constantly in a silver-lidded pipe. West also, at the bottom of Summer Hill, was Chislehurst Station—which is today almost exactly as it was fifty years ago—the point of departure for adventures in London and, better, for expeditions to the seacoast of Sussex. Much as I loved my home, that station—with the knock-knock sound of tickets being issued, the trring of the bell announcing an approaching train, and the murmuring rails as a train came in from the distance—was a center of liberation.

Like a moth drawn to the light I had to go west and south, following that interior compass which was aligned by the very topography of the place in which I was born—the southwest room of the house, and the southwest pleasantness of the village. Moving in that direction I always felt elated, and returning, depressed. So it was that in due course I discovered the Celtic-flavored Southwest of England, which from my point of departure, took off from the bare grassy hills of Berkshire with their dolmens (of burial mounds) from the days of the Druids, on to Avalon (or Glastonbury) in Somerset, where one felt the lurking presence of the Holy Grail, to Worle Hill—a lofty headland at the mouth of the Bristol Channel, crowned by a small, ruined, and ancient church in which I most earnestly sought the Christian God and didn't find him, and at which point I bought, from a curio shop in Weston-super-Mare, a small image of the Buddha—of the Daibutsu in Kamakura.[3] I liked the expression on his face. It wasn't judgmental or frantic, but stately and serene, and the title "Buddha" went along in my mind with buds.

This interior compass eventually drew me across the Atlantic, first to New York, then to Chicago, and at last to California—at which destination

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[3] Why has no one ever made a correct reproduction of this extraordinary statue? I have seen hundreds and possess two reasonable facsimiles, but they never get the correct proportions of the head.

I saw a fog-clouded horizon and knew that this was the end of the West. But I felt that I had arrived, that I was comfortable and in my proper place, and that I had only to make up my mind as to whether to go a little way north or a little way south. It might have taken me to Portugal, or to the Riviera, but in those days I could not make a living in such places, and there they were also having their periodic political fits. Of course, through the ravages of commerce and gross misgovernment, California is rapidly being turned into a desert (or a plastic nursery like Disneyland), but I have found myself a quiet forested valley as a retreat for writing, and there isn't a single human habitation in sight. At any moment there might be a formidable earthquake—yet that is the way things are. Elsewhere it might be a tornado, an ice storm, a plane crash, a war, or simply slipping on the soap in the bathroom.

I have carefully considered going back to Chislehurst, because the environment is a much more agreeable place for an adult than a child. But, as everyone knows, the main reason for England's imperial exploits was that its more imaginative natives wanted to escape from its climate and its cooking. Some also wanted to escape its three hundred religions. In winter, which can last most of the year, the east wind brings a damp cold which, although nowhere near as low in actual temperature as a Chicago winter, seems to penetrate and freeze one's very bones, and to perpetrate an affliction, almost unknown in America, called "chilblains," which are red and itchy swellings on the hands.

As for the cooking, this subject has been treated by innumerable authors. I can say only that when I was first sent to boarding school, at Saint Hugh's, Bickley, one of the masters, urgently warned my parents that I was eating nothing but bread. This is not entirely true, for there were also fried pork sausages of a peculiarly scrumptious type that are no longer available, served with mashed potatoes, and also bars of milk chocolate and chocolate-coated marshmallows. We also managed to get down slices of suet pudding smothered in Lyle's Golden Syrup. For the rest, it shall be nameless. And, as was quite otherwise in the good old days, there was no beer. Before children were invented, during the Industrial Revolution, and set off as a special class of subpeople, everyone drank beer—and, despite Löwenbräu, Heidsieck, Kirin,

and Doseches, there is no beer like the beer of England.[4] Yet, anachronistically, the school song was a drinking song in honor of Saint Hugh of Lincoln, tamer of wild swans, whose feast day was November 17.

> Cold's the wind and wet's the rain,
> Saint Hugh be our good speed!
> Ill is the weather that brings no gain,
> Nor helps good hearts in need.
>
> So—troll the bowl, the jolly brown bowl,
> And here, kind friend, "To thee!"
> Let's sing a song for Saint Hugh's soul,
> And down it merrily.

But if it is impractical physically, I must go back to Rowan Tree Cottage, Holbrook Lane, in the imagination, because, as I am suggesting, the layout of this house and garden gave me a compass for a life course. It wasn't forced on me. I feel, somehow, that I chose it and would not have had it otherwise, and I cannot find it in me to blame my parents in any way for the mazes and tangles through which I have had to go to get where I am, doing what I really want to do in this astounding valley. Thus far I have described only the two front rooms. Behind, and to the east, were a pantry, a larder, and an auxiliary kitchen. I was gently discouraged from investigating the pantry and larder too closely, and thus these little storage rooms became places of pleasant mystery. In the pantry we kept the china and glass, and, in later years, my father stowed there all the admirable beer which he made from Kentish hops by his own recipe. The larder was what would now be the refrigerator—actually a "cooler"—a solidly walled room with a wire window-screen where milk, butter, meat, vegetables, bread, and rock salt were kept. The little kitchen—auxiliary, because much of the baking and cooking was done on the iron stove in the dining room—was then more of a scullery. Massively stuffed into one corner was an enormous and formidable institution,

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[4] America has Rainier Ale and Meisterbrau Dark, the latter available only within a hundred miles of Milwaukee. The rest might just as well be ginger ale with alcohol added.

never used, known as "The Copper"—a receptacle with a fireplace beneath for boiling anything from laundry to a baron of beef.

Letters, excitement, friends, everything new came in by the western front door. But everything normal and regular came in by the eastern back door of the kitchen, where the representative of Mr. Coffin, the grocer, would call every day to take our orders, and where the milkman—who drove an incredible two-wheeled, horse-drawn chariot—would deliver the milk in metal canisters which, when empty, he would fling with clang and gusto into the chariot's bowels.

There was also in the dining room an amiable and mysterious monstrosity known as the Housetop. Below, it was a mahogany chest of drawers combined with a desk having, instead of a roll top, a hinged panel like one side of a roof. On the inside this panel was covered with green baize, and formed the writing surface when the desk was open. Above, it was a high matching cupboard, reaching almost to the ceiling, in which my mother hid away plum puddings wrapped in cheesecloth, fruit cake, brandy, *eau-de-vie*, and preserved fruits, amid cutglass decanters and such conceits of the Victorian silversmith as a fitted tray for four eggcups, accompanied by two chicks respectively loaded with salt and pepper. (I loved boiled eggs, and when my eyes were no higher than the edge of the table the appearance of eggs would set me to trotting around it saying, "Egg-egg-egg-egg-egg-egg...")

Inside the desk were small drawers and pigeonholes containing such delights as my father's checkbooks, printed in some ink that smelled of wealth and banks; but our olfactory vocabulary is so poor that it cannot be described. There were also drawers of semiobsolete fountain pens (the kind that one filled with a dropper), ordinary dip pens with scratchy points, screw pencils run out of leads, short rulers, compasses, and nameless gadgets with ivory handles for pricking, scoring, and scratching. There was another drawer for playing cards, with a box of Chinese chips in the form of ornate fish cut from mother-of-pearl. Here were Japanese-made gadgets for keeping score at bridge or whist—small rectangular tablets of black lacquer edged with hinged ivory tabs about the size and shape of a thumbnail, each inlaid with a different insect in varying shades of abalone shell.

In the center of this bank of drawers and pigeonholes was a small cupboard flanked by Corinthian columns with gilded capitals. It contained mostly photographs, postcards, and old letters, but there was a secret way of pulling out the whole unit to get access to two hidden compartments behind the columns. I didn't discover this until I was in my teens and, for some reason, have only the vaguest memory of what was kept there. Perhaps it was jewelry. But from as far back as I can remember I always had the fantasy that, somewhere, the Housetop contained some mystery, some hidden treasure, some magical entity that would be a key to the secret of life. The feeling was, of course, intensified because my parents kept me from exploring the Housetop too closely—for the simple reason that they didn't want all their papers disarranged. In 1968, when we had to sell the house because my father was too old to maintain it, I went through every nook and cranny of the Housetop—as well as all the chests of drawers and the attic—for even at the age of fifty-three that childish fantasy still lingered. Indeed, there were lots of interesting treasures and trinkets—but in all such quests and searches, as also in my pull to the West, it keeps coming back to me that the secret is in the seeker.

But it is fascinating to try to specify the external lure. Just what was it that I expected to find by following the sun, or hidden away in a secret box? I am quite certain that the pull to the West and South was the ancient search for the Paradise Garden—somewhere a courtyard with a fountain, set about with roses and magnolia trees, cypresses and willows, as may be seen in Persian miniatures, and with round arches through which one can look down upon an ocean fondling jagged islets with foam. And in this garden the point to which I drift, like a bee bewitched, is some flower—an iris, a jonquil, a crocus, or a morning glory. Indeed, I have sometimes wandered in such paradises with a magnifying glass, to gaze deeply into these translucent coronas of yellow and purple, ivory and coral with a contemplative devotion which is surely mystical. As my mother put it—once when showing me a morning glory—"Doesn't it make you feel jazzy inside!" Indeed, so many human beings have dreamed of this paradise that poets and literary people fear to seem trite in trying to evoke this beatific vision of the bee.

Of course it follows very simply that the thing I am hoping to find in

the secret box is a jewel, whether indestructible as a diamond or emerald, or temporary as a dewdrop or crystal of snow. To pass into it through the eyes, to integrate one's consciousness with its ecstatic center of energy, and so enter the point where all one's nerve currents flow back into the place from which they come, where the individual is the universal and the moment eternity. The ecstasy of the jewel and the flower, of the Buddhist *mani padma*, of the jewel in the lotus as in *Om mani padme hum*, is a fascination so widely spread that it must have some unexplored connection with our whole psychophysical structure, and perhaps with the very design of life.

Serious cruelwits may dismiss jewels and flowers as ornaments and baubles for the brief delectation of children and vacuous women. But if so, why are gems worth vast sums of money? Why are focal points of religious aspiration so often represented as the bright centers of mandalas and petaled aureoles? Why the rose windows of cathedrals, the Celestial Rose in Dante's vision of Paradise, the Rose Garden of Our Lady, and the Lotus Throne of Mahavairocana—the great Buddha of the Sun? It adds only another question to see in all this a symbolism of sex, of self-abandonment in the paradise of the vaginal flower, for why, in turn, is *that* so fascinating—for reasons which must go far beyond its function as a reproductive lure?

I carry over from childhood the vague but persistent impression of being exposed to hints of an archaic and underground culture whose values were lost to the Protestant religion and the industrial bourgeoisie, indeed to the modern West in general. This may be nothing but fantasy, but I seem to have been in touch with lingering links to a world both magical and mystical that was still understood among birds, trees, and flowers and was known—just a little—to my mother and perhaps to one or two of my nursemaids. Or was it just I who carried in my genes or in my "collective unconscious" the apprehension of whole worlds of experience which official culture repressed or ignored? The *disciplinum arcanum* of this culture, so easily mistaken in the child for idle reverie, was that intense contemplative watching of the eternal now, which is sometimes revived by the use of psychedelic drugs, but which came to me through flowers, jewels, reflected light in glass, and expanses of clear sky. I get it also from music that is not mechanical and does not march, as from the music of India which I loved at first hearing and which

continues, like a lost name on the tip of the tongue, to put me in mind of a long-forgotten afternoon in a sunlit room where magicians were playing on the heartstrings of the universe.

How well, then, is it remembered—for it is hardly mentioned today—that the contemplation of jewels is a way for the mind to understand itself and see its own reflection? I have just turned up the story of the Indian king Kankanapa, who learned yoga by gazing into the diamonds on his bracelet, following the instruction of a sage who told him, "Behold the diamonds of your bracelet, fix your mind upon them, and mediate thus: They are sparkling in all the colors of the rainbow; yet, these colors which gladden my heart have no nature of their own. In the same way our imagination is inspired by multifarious forms of appearance, which have no nature of their own. The mind alone is the radiant jewel, from which all things borrow their temporal reality."[5] A gypsy woman may use a crystal ball to probe the future, but a child who uses it to look into eternity may be better occupied than in memorizing multiplication tables.

All that I have so far described is a world that, to a child, needs no explanation or justification. The routine of shops on the Parade, the clop-clop of horses going by, the trees, fields, and bracken, the flowers, vegetables, and insects; and mother and father playing and singing in the drawing room with its Chinese embroideries—all this was unproblematic, a kind of incarnate music that was sufficient to itself and, as itself, the explanation of life.

Troubles began when you went to the bleak and unheated upstairs—to bed, bathroom, and prayers. Especially prayers. The rooms above had no features of beauty whatsoever—except their view of the garden. The bathroom was so abominable that I have made a drawing of it. It was constructed by a people, by a whole culture, which had never figured out delightful and amusing ways of handling such fundamentals of life as crapulation and bathing. Even an impecunious Japanese farmer has a reasonable bath where you can sit, soak, and laugh with the rest of the family, but it is kept separate from the

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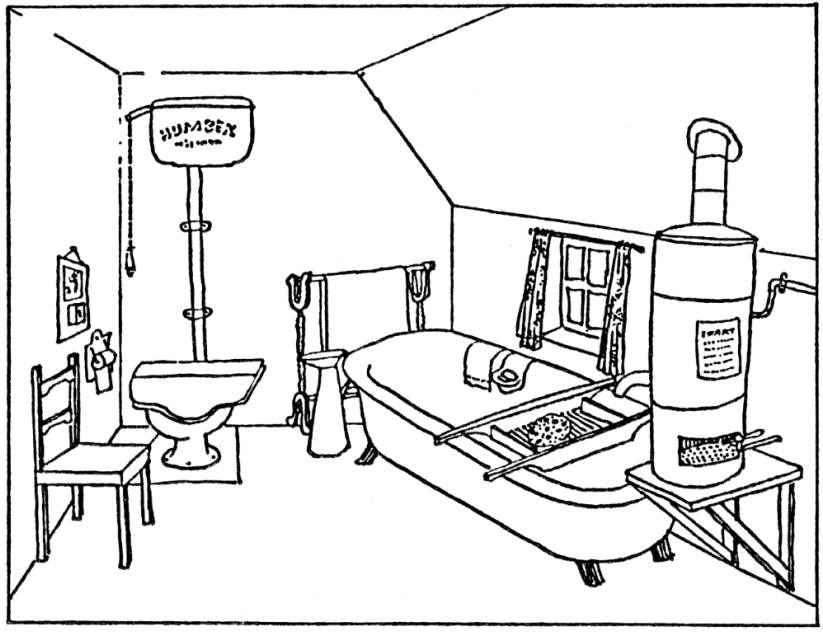
[5] Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959), p. 59.



THE BATHROOM AT ROWAN TREE COTTAGE, CHISLEHURST

Looking back at it now, it wasn't so bad after all—especially when compared with the washing facilities of most people in the world. But as a child I hated and despised the place. The contraption to the far right is a geyser, for the gas heating of water. The puffy object on the rack over the bath is a natural sponge, then widely used for rinsing oneself. The roll of toilet paper was of a brand called Novio, smooth, hard, and shiny, and almost completely useless for its intended purpose. Just above it is a calendar with a pad of tear-off sheets for each day, giving the day of the week, the date, and a quotation from the Bible.

crapatorium, or *benjo*, which is operated on a system that, instead of wasting millions of gallons of water and requiring complex and ridiculous thrones, enables human excrements to be recycled and returned to the earth. The amount of shit we allow to flow out into the oceans is simply wasted manure—wasted, neglected, ignored because our eyes, noses, and mouths go one way and our assholes another, and because we are "ladies and gentlemen" we do not deign to look backward. But this crick in the neck is killing us. Do not be like serpents. Go on. Go forward. Progress. Remember Lot's wife, who looked backward at Sodom and Gomorrah and was turned into salt—by a one-way God.

All my childhood preceptors—parents, nurses, and physicians—were fascinated, even obsessed, by the problems of constipation. They seemed to want, above all things, to know "Have you *been*?" They invaded the bathroom with an almost religious enthusiasm to discover whether you had made it. They insisted that you "go" every morning immediately after breakfast, whether or not you felt so inclined. If you didn't, they dosed you with "California Syrup of Figs" (which is not to be found in California, just as English muffins are unknown in England), and if that did not produce results the next step was senna tea, the next cascara sagrada, the next calomel, and at last, the final punishment of castor oil—a sickening poison which gives you instant diarrhea. And then, as Dr. Tallent once remarked to one of my constipation-panicked nurses, "There is always some constipation after diarrhea." Thus the vicious cycle of crapulatory anxiety went on and on. As the great Dr. Georg Groddeck, colleague of Freud, once said, "There is a hole at the bottom and it has to come out eventually," and as a fact of historical memorabilia a certain King Ferdinand VII of Spain, who flourished, as I vaguely remember, in the early nineteenth century, existed for twenty-seven days without a bowel movement.

Actually, in this connection I have an early memory of an incident which may be curiously revealing about my father's attitude to life. I had been lying in my crib exploring my body, as infants do, and had recovered a small piece of dry excrement. My father saw me playing with it and asked, "What have you got there?" I held it up. He took it from my fingers, looked at it carefully, and gave it back.

From a child's point of view most adults are plainly irrational. As I get

older, I begin more and more to feel that being brought up and "educated" is a form of hypnosis, brainwashing, and indoctrination that is extremely difficult to survive with one's senses intact. For me, being literate and articulate is a form of judo, of overcoming the game by its own method, though I must not be taken too seriously in this respect since I have a certain pride in my style as a Brahmin.

So, in this miserable bathroom I was taught prayers by my mother, and spanked by my mother who, for that purpose, sat upon the crapulatory throne, and told Bible stories by a governess, Miss Hoyle, who was forceful and ugly—unlike three other memorable and lovely nannies, Milly Hills, Miss Nielsen (from Denmark), and Miss Baumer (from the Netherlands), beneficent witches who beguiled me with fairy tales, and subtly represented the archaic resistance of Western Europe to the Christian invasion from Rome. Of course, my mother thought she was doing "the right thing," but she was regarded as the black sheep of her family for lack of true enthusiasm for their dreary and tiresome religion. She would sometimes mock their more lugubrious hymns, such as:

> Weary of earth, and laden with my sin,
> I looked at heav'n and longed to enter in.
> But there no evil [i.e., sexy] thing may find a home:
> And yet I hear a voice that bids me "Come."

And they don't seem to realize what doubletalk they are singing. The Misses Hills, Nielsen, and Baumer put—as the Scandinavian saying goes—raven's blood in my mother's milk. They gave me a sense of magic and the weird, which my mother, with her intense sensitivity to floral beauty, had not altogether renounced, and which my father simply compounded with tales from Kipling and the *Arabian Nights*.

In this same bathroom, then, my mother taught me my first prayer, which was not the usual "Now I lay me down to sleep," but

> Gentle Jesus, Shepherd, hear me:
> Bless thy little lamb tonight.
> Through the darkness be thou near me;
> Keep me safe 'til morning light.

Let my sins be all forgiven;
[Which I would repeat as: Let my sins be awful given;]
Bless the friends I love so well.
Take me, when I die, to heaven,
Happy there with thee to dwell.

This doggerel inspired in me entirely unnecessary terrors of darkness and death, and made "going to heaven" as depressing as the alternative, "going to hell," was horrendous. For Christians have never had a good idea of heaven.

Be my last thought, "How sweet to rest
For ever on my Savior's breast."

This might be fun for a nun, but for a man it is an invitation to the boredom of a homosexual paradise—which is not to say that I condemn homosexuality, but only that I do not enjoy it. There was also that twisted-head idea of heaven which describes the immense fun of eternity as

Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee.

Children notice these things and, though they may make jokes about them among themselves, are often seriously troubled by the apparent seriousness with which adults take them.

Children, as well as adults, make humorous, bantering, scurrilous, and abusive uses of the notion of hell as everlasting post-mortem damnation. But I was so appalled by this possibility that I would lie awake at night worrying about it, frightened of going to sleep because of the obvious analogy between sleep and death. People were always talking about someone or other who "died in his sleep." My mother tried to console me by quoting John 3:16, but there seemed to be no way of being really and truly sure that one actually and genuinely did believe in Jesus, or whether one had not inadvertently committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost by laughing at the limerick

Il y avait un jeune home de Dijon
Qui n'amait pas la religion.

Il dit, "O ma foi,
Comme drôle sont ces trois:
Le Père, et le Fils, et le Pigeon."

Which, I suppose could be translated into English as

There was a young fellow of Dijon,
Who took a dislike to religion.
He said, "Oh my God,
These three are so odd—
The Father, the Son, and the Pigeon."[6]

As one is tempted to fall over a precipice from vertigo, the child exposed to this grotesque Bible religion is apt to mutter compulsively under his breath, "Damn the Holy Ghost," and then suffer from paroxysms of guilt. Do the adults seriously mean that if you whisper this diabolic formula you will, when dead, squirm and scream in unquenchable fire forever and ever and ever, Amen? After all, a child is not theologically sophisticated, and takes this imagery literally.

My own bedroom was on the southwest of the upper floor, overlooking a wide area of vegetable gardens, or allotments, the Workmen's Clubhouse, and—beyond rows of trees—the spire of Saint Nicholas's Church. Until, in early adolescence, I made this room into a congenial den, it was a plain, boring, and purely functional bedroom to which one was sent as a place of punishment because one was being a nuisance on the lower floor, or because it

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[6] Why translate it? Because most of my American readers, especially the younger, do not understand French, or any language other than their own. Strangely, from a European point of view, they may otherwise be amazingly intelligent people. Also, unless they come from a respectably churchly family (Episcopalian or Presbyterian) or from the Bible-crazed South, they will not have read the Bible at all, and thus will not understand the reference John 3:16, a verse from the Gospel of Saint John in which it is said that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Even then, an intelligent young American hasn't the faintest idea of what is meant by an "only-begotten Son" or by "eternal life." Neither, for that matter, have most of the clergymen—except some of the very young set, who have recently been getting such excellent theological instruction that they are completely at odds with their parishioners.

was the proper time of evening to GO TO BED or, worse, to "take a rest" in the afternoon. Why don't adults understand that the siesta, however delectable for themselves after an ample luncheon with good wine, and with the companionship of a pleasing lover, is a colossal bore to a child who gets neither wine nor lover? Perhaps one might also ask why children, with their fantastic energy, do not realize how irritating they can be to adults. Of course, the mild and perfectly mannered children of Japan, China, and Mexico are simply undernourished, by our standards. They fill them up with starch. As soon as the children of prosperous and Westernized Japanese go on our diet they become objectionable brats, but so long as they stay on starch and vegetables they are allowed to stay up at night, and to doze off naturally into sleep when they are genuinely tired.

But the culture in which I and almost all whites were raised vainly imagines that hunger, sleeping, and excreting can be regimented. Amerindians have always mocked the palefaces for looking at clocks to know when they ought to be hungry. It is in the same clock-mad spirit that we are all supposed to "work" from nine to five on such preposterous projects as accounting for what we have done upon billions of square miles of paper derived from devastated forests, frittering away our time upon such dreary gambling games as playing the stock market or selling insurance in drab offices, turning out drillions of lines of chatter for people whose minds cannot be at peace unless perpetually agitated with information and misinformation, and manufacturing, selling, and advertising bizarre, noisome, and pestilential automotive contraptions for taking us all to and from these same projects at the same hours—thereby blocking the roads and jangling our nerves, presumably to give ourselves the message that we really exist and are really important.

Thus I could never understand why my beloved father had to dress himself in absurd black clothes, assume an umbrella, and top himself with a fatuous bowler (American: derby) hat to catch the eight-thirty train to the City and bore himself all day by selling tires for Monsieur Bibendum of the Michelin Company, which has, however, somewhat exonerated itself by providing its celebrated guide to the restaurants of France. Therefore, at about the age of twenty-one, I made to myself the solemn vow that I would never by an employee or put up with a "regular job." I have not always been

able to fulfill this vow. I have had to work (in a reasonably independent manner) for the Church and for a graduate school, but since the age of forty-two I have been a free lance, a rolling stone, and a shaman, as distinct from an apostolically successed priest. For the shaman gets his magic alone in the mountains and forests, whereas a priest gets his from being ordained by a guru or bishop. The first goes with a culture of nomads and hunters, and the second with cultures of agrarians or industrialists. Although I am, unofficially and on the side, an ordained priest of the Anglican Communion, my genes must have come from the nomads of Europe and my reincarnation from the Taoist poets of China or the *yamabushi*, or mountain hermits, of Japan. I am gregarious, but I like to be left alone.

I especially remember that bedroom on Sunday twilights. The British have, even now, a positive and supernatural genius for making Sunday depressing. They roll up not only the sidewalks but everything else, and permit only the celebration of their three hundred dreary religions. Those not disposed to religion swarm off to the seacoast in miles of traffic jams. But alone in that bedroom I would hear the bells of Saint Nicholas falling down through the major scale, ringing the changes forever downwards, to summon the faithful to Evensong, to the closing service of the day, with, as John Betjemen has put it, undertones of "death and hell at last."

Strangely enough, young people in Japan have the same feeling about the atmosphere of their parents' Buddhism—the atmosphere which is, to me, enchanting and magical with booming gong-bells and deep-throated and unintelligible sutrachanting. To them all this is *kurai*—a word which means deep, dark, dank, musty, gloomy, and sad. This was more or less the way I felt about the bells of Saint Nicholas on a Sunday evening. They were all at once sweet, melodious, and *kurai*. I love-hated them.

The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
The darkness falls at Thy behest;
To Thee our morning hymns ascended,
Thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

(Sung to a wobbly, sentimental tune called Saint Clement, composed in 1874.)

It is understandable, therefore, that I have an aversion to bedrooms—

to rooms specifically set aside for sleeping. Usually I curl up on a divan in my library or studio, cuddled up with (*a*) my wife and (*b*) a blanket—preferably a soft one made with vicuña or, according to the weather, one of those substantial Mexican blankets from Oaxaca or Toluca in which the wool of white sheep and black sheep are combined into those fundamental designs where the figure is always interchangeable with the background. The British and the Western Europeans in general, as well as the North Americans, waste the space of their homes with these rooms for ludicrously vast sleeping-machines—some with four pillars and a roof, some with iron fences at each end, topped with brass balls, and some with mahogany headboards whose function I have never yet understood. I would rather follow the Turkish proverb that "He who sleeps on the floor will not fall out of bed." In sum, I despise almost all furniture as monstrous, heavy, space-greedy, expensive, and pretentious. Most beds and chairs make me think of crutches and surgical appliances, and while these things have merciful uses for the aged and infirm, anyone who is healthy and under sixty, especially a child, can do without them.[7]

It was also in this room that I was trapped, with the very best of intentions, into having my appendix removed by Mister (the British make it a pundonor not to refer to surgeons as Doctor) Russell Howard, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, with the assistance of Doctors Tallent and Graham Hodgson (anaesthetist), and with the collaboration of my astonishing Aunt Gertrude, my mother's younger sister, who was a trained nurse at the London Hospital. Auntie Gertie was a pretty, vivacious tomboy who saved my life a few days after birth by discovering that I had an infected navel, and by watching me constantly through the cure. Before the operation she rubbed my belly (which she called my Little Mary) with some sort of iodine solution, and when I revived from the anaesthetic I beheld her in full nurse's uniform

[7] In some book of Victorian *curiosa* I have even seen a photograph of a special appliance, of carefully polished and elaborately shaped wood, that was supposed to be a sort of flattened-out chaise or support for the purpose of sexual intercourse, and one can imagine it being used by such a couple as is portrayed in Lautrec's *Divan Japonais*. She trussed in black, and he in his opera hat, with his amber-headed cane, and monocle, disdainfully fingering the menu.

like a guardian angel, and I was so turned on by the mixture of chloroform and ether which Dr. Hodgson had used that I found I could dream any dream I wanted to dream.

I had no sexual feeling for Gertrude Buchan. I can't even remember her figure—only her face and her style—but it simply has to go on the record—IN LOVING MEMORY—that this woman not only saved my life but was also the constant companion of my childhood, and had the incredible patience to listen attentively to the interminable tales which I made up on the spur of the moment. It is unbelievable how my adult relations tolerated me, for I talked and spun out stories incessantly, and when there was no one to listen I told them to myself. For several years (it must have been from four to eight) I elaborated, with illustrations, a serial-story about an island kingdom in the middle of the Pacific, most incongruously named Bath Bian Street, a name which I think echoed the sound of railway officials calling out the names of stations.

With the accompanying drawings you will see that these islanders were stickmen with varying types of heads. The inhabitants of Bath Bian Street itself had spoon-shaped heads, and were beneficently and heroically ruled by King Eecky, with the help of his Chief of Staff Forky, and his Generals Tocky and Bicky. The religion of the island consisted in the worship of a deceased little girl named Hiery, in whose honor they had built an immense temple with two mile-high towers known as the Hieress. Their repulsive enemies, on a neighboring island, were the Blacklanders, whose elongated heads fell back from their necks, and who tied their hair in buns. Their king was Guzzy-and-Seat, so named from the style of his walk, which was slightly to lower his seat, or bottom, after each step and thus proceed with the rhythm "Guzzy-and-Seat, Guzzy-and-Seat, Guzzy-and-Seat..." (As a child I was very conscious of people's walking rhythms—gliding, stomping, bouncing, or tripping—and used to make up ditties to describe them. The headmaster of King's School, Canterbury, in his black gown and mortarboard, went "Damson, damson, damson, damson.")

Perhaps it was this propensity for storytelling, combined with my mother's ill health and my father's necessity to take long trips all over the country in the cause of Monsieur Bibendum, that compelled them to get rid of me as often as possible—and I don't blame them! They employed four

Eecky, King of the Island
of Bath Bian Street.

Guzzy-and-Seat, King of Blackland.

Forky

Tocky

Bicky

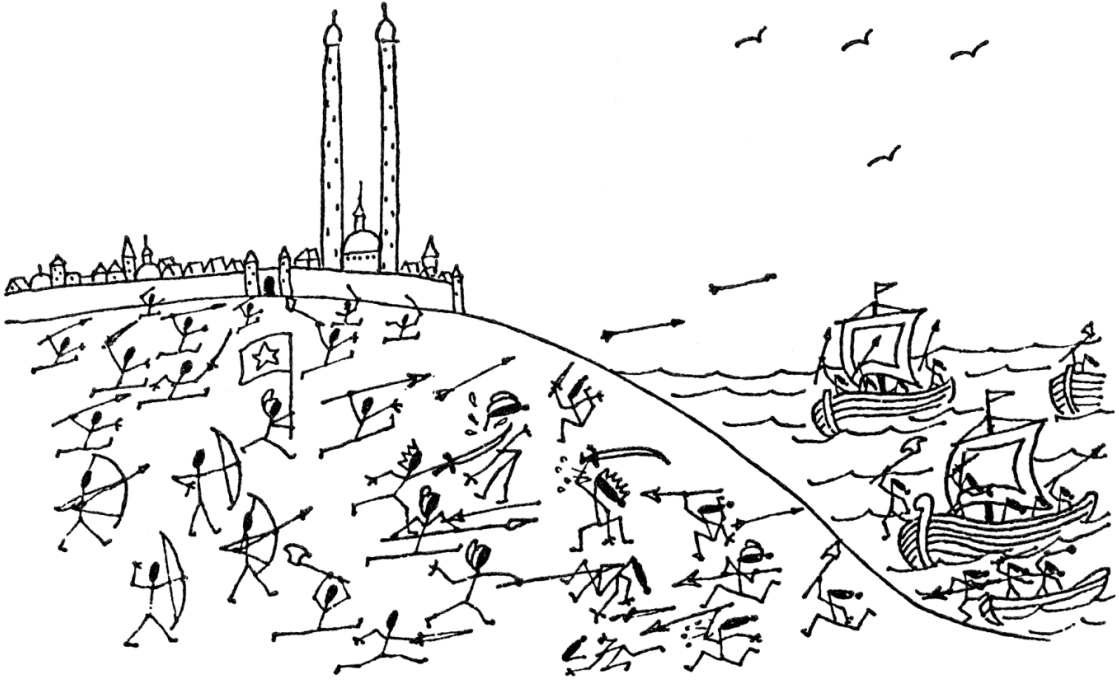
(Lieutenants of Eecky)

Blacklander, with extreme dolicocephalous
head, and hair in bun.

Bath Bian Street soldier, on the run.

An islander of Little Blownose,
allies of Bath Bian Street.

The Princess Hiery—always drawn
from behind, because of inability to make
a sufficiently beautiful face.



BATH BIAN STREET REPULSES AN INVASION OF THE BLACKLANDERS.

nannies or governesses to cushion themselves against me between birth and the age of seven-and-a-half, at which point I was sent off to a boarding school for instruction in laughing and grief, in militarism and regimented music, in bibliolatry and bad ritual, in cricket, soccer, and rugby, in preliminary accounting, banking, and surveying (known as arithmetic, algebra, and geometry), and in subtle, but not really overt, homosexuality. It was a school for aristocrats, attended by relatives of the Royal Family, of the Imperial House of Russia, of the Rajas of India, and sons of industrial tycoons. There was even a boy who had been buggered by an Arabian prince. And my parents knocked themselves out financially to send me to this amazing institution.

CHAPTER TWO

TANTUM RELIGIO

I was brought up in a culture that for more than a thousand years had been smothered in and diseased with religion. On at least the pretext of religious zeal it had initiated the Crusades, the Holy Inquisition, the Puritan Revolution, the Thirty Years War, and the subjugation and cultural destruction of India, Africa, China, and the native civilizations of North and South America. Diseases are not, of course, entirely bad. The finest incense in the world—aloeswood—is made from a diseased part of the tree, and pearls are a sickness of oysters. Thus there are esoteric or underground aspects of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which, though usually persecuted, are of surpassing interest. But in their exoteric and official aspects they are a repression of all ecstasies except those of righteous indignation, violence, and military pomp. "Those who take the sword shall perish by the sword" but, on the other hand, "I came not to bring peace but a sword," so "Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth." On the whole, therefore, I am ashamed of this culture and have done my best to tame it with more peaceful and convivial principles derived, for the most part, from Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy.

I said "on the whole," and therefore not entirely. For my life has been an attempt to reconcile what are supposed to be opposites, and my name "Alan" means "harmony" in Celtic and "hound" in Anglo-Saxon. Accordingly, my existence is, and has been, a paradox, or better, a coincidence of opposites. On the one hand I am a shameless egotist. I like to talk, entertain, and hold the center of the stage, and can congratulate myself that I have done this to a considerable extent—by writing widely read books, by appearing on radio

and television, and by speaking before enormous audiences. On the other hand I realize quite clearly that the ego named Alan Watts is an illusion, a social institution, a fabrication of words and symbols without the slightest substantial reality; that it will be utterly forgotten within five hundred years (if our species lasts that long), and that my physical organism will shortly pass off into dust and ashes. And I have no illusions that some sort of proprietary and individual soul, spook, or ghost will outlast it.

Nevertheless, I know too that this temporary pattern, this process, is a function, a doing, a *karma*, of all that is and of the "which than which there is no whicher" in just the same way as the sun, the galaxy, or, shall we be bold to say, Jesus Christ or Gautama the Buddha. How can I say this without offense—without seeming proud, haughty, and pretentious? I simply, and even humbly, know that I am The Eternal, even though such supremely enlightened people as Jesus, Buddha, Kabir, Sri Ramakrishna, Hakuin, and Sri Ramana Maharshi may have manifested this knowledge in a more forceful and authoritative style. I would be affecting the most dishonest false modesty if I did not acknowledge this, and yet the idea of my coming on as a messiah or great guru just breaks me up with laughter.

Because, at the same time, I am an unrepentant sensualist. I am an immoderate lover of women and the delights of sexuality, of the greatest French, Chinese, and Japanese cuisine, of wines and spiritous drinks, of smoking cigars and pipes, of gardens, forests, and oceans, of jewels and paintings, of colorful clothes, and of finely bound and printed books. If I were extremely rich I would collect incunabula and rare editions, Japanese swords, Tibetan jewelry, Persian miniatures, Celtic illuminated manuscripts, Chinese paintings and calligraphies, embroideries and textiles from India, images of Buddhas, Oriental carpets, Navajo necklaces, Limoges enamels, and venerable wines from France. Yet there have been two or three times in my life when I have had to abandon almost all possessions and go it alone, and thus I have also an attraction to being a no-strings-attached Taoist wanderer in the mountains, "cloud-hidden, whereabouts unknown." And, when the mood suits me, I also like to practice Buddhist meditation in the Zen or Tibetan *ʒog-chen* style, which is simply sitting quietly or walking rhythmically without thoughts or verbalizations in your head.

Sitting quietly, doing nothing,
Spring comes and grass grows by itself.

Or the Western version:

Sometimes I sits and thinks,
But mostly I just sits.

My wife, looking over my shoulder, has just suggested that this is the real meaning of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—to be clean of concepts, and thus to be in that state of awareness which yogis call *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and it struck us that if this news got around it would completely subvert and transform the Catholic Church.

For the Church is the world's most talkative institution, and the Church of England, in which I was most firmly brought up, is, of course, a branch of the Catholic Church—though politically and economically separated from the See of Rome.[1] But these impoverished Christians do nothing in their religious observances except chatter. They tell God what he ought and ought not to do, and inform him of things of which he is already well aware, such as that they are miserable sinners, and proceed then to admonish one another to feel guilt and regret about abominable behavior which they have not the least intention of changing. If God were the sort of being most Christians suppose him to be, he would be beside himself with boredom listening to their whinings and flatteries, their redundant requests and admonitions, not to mention the asinine poems set to indifferent tunes which are solemnly addressed to him as hymns.

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[1] But recently I took my wife's niece, Kathleen, to Mass at Westminster Cathedral, the Roman Catholic headquarters of England, and the service, uttered in English instead of Latin, was almost indistinguishable from the same service—celebrated a little way east—at Westminster Abbey. It was beautifully done, and the sermon was a brief and highly intelligent drawing of analogy between the order of God and the order of vegetation. But the Catholic Church has lost its magic by celebrating the mass in the vernacular instead of Latin. As Clare Booth Luce said to me a few days later, it is no longer possible to practice contemplative prayer at Mass. However, things being what they are, there is no longer the least reason why the Church of England and the Church of Rome should be at odds.

This was why I was always attracted to the old style of Roman Catholicism, wherein you could steal into church unnoticed and listen to a perfectly unintelligible service in splendid Gregorian chant. The whole thing was music, and God was not bored. But, alas, my mother, though not fanatical about it, was a Protestant of the Low Church persuasion, and took me off on Sundays to Christ Church for the didactic services of Morning Prayer or Ante-Communion, in English, where the scholarly and gentle vicar, Mr. Lightfoot, would discourse upon the Bible. He wore a neatly trimmed beard and looked like Jesus, and once presented me with a copy of the New Testament in Greek, though it should be noted that my mother brought about my real downfall by giving me the same scriptures in Chinese. The translation is atrocious, by Chinese literary standards, but that little green book seeded my lifelong interest in Chinese writing and in what Chinese sages and poets had to say about life.

However, when my mother was indisposed, Miss Gussy next door would take me to the ten-o'clock celebration of Choral Communion at Saint Nicholas's, where Canon Dawson and his curate, Mr. Horner, were getting away with something which resembled—as nearly as possible under the laws of the Church of England—a Solemn High Mass. No incense, but genuflections, the Sanctus bell, and a marvelously mantric and unintelligible way of reciting the prayers, so that Elizabethan English might just as well be Sanskrit.

Now, from a child's point of view religious services—at least as conducted by most Christians—are perfectly weird, especially when everyone lines up in pews so as to give the church the appearance of an enormous omnibus, with organ music instead of the sound of the engine. At Christ Church, established and built by the *nouveaux riches* of the Victorian era, the pews were actually rented and bore the name of the family in frilly goldish frames. There were also plush kneeling-hassocks, some of which were also boxes for containing prayer books and hymnals. In front of us were the pews of the Travers-Haweses and the Balmeses, and the hassock-box of the Balmeses contained one of those horrendous Bibles like spaniels, with leather bindings which flop over the edge of the book. Those were the days when women wore immense hats with ostrich feathers, coiled up their hair into buns like cow-pats, and would come to the church-bus in glovely garments of

thought of composing a book entitled *Hymns Haunting and Horrible*, bound in dark blue cloth, embossed with the mullion-forms of a Gothic church window, and the lettering in gold Olde English type, containing versical and musical parodies of these preposterously infantile ecclesiastical ditties. They are not like Hindu or Buddhist mantras, which are simply hummed for the contemplation of their sound, nor even like Alleluias in Gregorian chant. They are wretched bombastic, moralistic, and maudlin nursery rhymes, even though the choirs of King's College, Cambridge, and the Chapel Royal of London can sing some of them with the voices of angels.

Yet my attitude to these hymns is weirdly ambivalent, for they go on echoing in the dome of my skull. Just a few of them are, indeed, musically superb: *Veni creator, Coelites plaudant, Veni Emmanuel*, and those composed by Bach and Handel. But there are others which I fondle in my mind as the tongue strays over a hole in a tooth. They recall the vast, deserted darkness of Canterbury Cathedral when we all went into a small chapel in the south transept for Evensong, where a dwarf pumped the organ, and our diminutive chaplain with a big head, "Titch" Mayne, conducted the service, and we sang to a stately and triumphant melody:

> Give praise then for all them
> Who sought and here found Him,
> Whose journey is ended,
> Whose perils are past.
> They believed in the Light,
> And its glory is round them,
> For the clouds of earth's sorrows
> Have lifted at last.

And those tunes have far-off resonant names, like England's Lane, Kilmarnock, and Saffron Walden, Splendor Paternae and Woodbird, Regent Square and Saint Osyth, Monks' Gate and Down Ampney—names evoking very ancient Romanesque churchs in tiny, mysterious villages with venerable beech trees, or the ghosts of Benedictine fathers chanting Compline at nightfall in adoration of perpetual light, or solemn celebrations of Victorian pomp and circumstance in the musty hush of Westminster Abbey.

Not only did we sing hymns in church and at Uncle Harry's on Sunday nights: my father sang them to me as lullabies; we sang them morning and evening in school. I recollect a breakfast in the home of some Baptist missionaries back from China, where, while the breakfast got cold, everyone sang a hymn, read around the table a verse from some passage of scripture, and then knelt down at their chairs for interminable prayers. At the time, I didn't seriously object. I was impressed, terrified, comforted, and interested by this weird religion, as well as fascinated by tales of magic and adventure in The Bible, a volume which I was taught to regard as a sacred charm against evil and misfortune, as many Catholics regard the Blessed Sacrament.

My mother and father had the good taste to belong to the Church of England, as also did Uncle Harry, though he flirted with "chapel" people such as Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists who had a strange genius for worshipping God in buildings that looked like obscene mixtures of churches and factories—all entirely devoid of color, except for a peculiarly appalling yellow glass in the windows that was supposed, quite falsely, to give the impression of sunlight on cloudy days. But the Church of England, being the established religion of the land, is ruled by the King or Queen, and thus derives from the *shekinah* or radiance of their majesty a certain dignified splendor. To belong to the Church of England is to feel quite definitely connected with the Royal House, and with a hierarchy which eventually leads up to God in a clear and orderly manner. This peculiar experience is also available to the Japanese, through Shinto, whose style is oddly reminiscent of Anglican ritual; but most Americans know nothing of it, and are therefore lacking in public morale and true *esprit de corps*. This may or may not be a good thing, and I am simply pointing it out.

The style of the Church of England is heraldic. Just look at Westminster Abbey or the Chapel of Saint George at Windsor, with its elegant fan-vaulting and display of proud banners, and at once you are reminded of the noble Norman-French-English formulae of heraldry—"three lions passant regardant gules on a field or"—and this summons up associations with the knights of King Arthur and the High Quest of the Holy Grail. To me, the central shrine of this religion is the corona of Canterbury Cathedral, a high circular

structure at the far east end of the building, where stands the austere stone throne of Saint Augustine, who brought the Catholic faith to England in A.D. 595. All around this corona are tall narrow windows of stained glass, predominantly blue—as good as anything in Chartres—which, with their colors reflecting on the pale grey stone, give the whole place a sense of light and lofty airiness, jeweled transparency and peace. It was in this shrine that I once heard Sir Adrian Boult conduct the Good Friday music from *Parsifal*, and though I am not much of an admirer of Wagner, his mastery of the orchestra was such that the Grail itself seemed to be present. But what secretly amuses me is that an empty throne was the original symbol of the Buddha, of the prince who abandoned kingship and the quest for power.[2]

Once I saw this throne occupied, when I, as a boy of thirteen, carried the long red train of his Grace Cosmo Gordon Lang at his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury, amid an immense assembly of bishops, canons, priests, professors, and government officials. Ironically, it was this same Archbishop who—for quite the wrong reason—kicked Edward VIII off the throne of England, because he had chosen to marry a divorced woman. British politics, with all its pomp and circumstance, is a game of musical chairs. Americans play the same game without the music.

So then, I was partially enchanted by the splendor and dignity of this royal religion, by the Victorian dong-dong of Big Ben's clock at Westminster, by the triumphant bells of Canterbury's high towers, by the stately and pompously didactic music of that hymn "The Church's one foundation," and by the grandeur of singing the psalm "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills" to the ringing Anglican chant that usually goes with it—though I can't really get all this across, for relatively few people who read books can sight-read musical notation.

But there was something wrong. The sermons of the clergy—bleated or sonorously boomed for lack of electronic public-address systems—conveyed

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[2] The Japanese artist Saburo Hasegawa once rather slyly remarked to me, "You must always remember that one of the main differences between Buddhism and Christianity is that Jesus was the son of a carpenter, and Buddha the son of a king."

nothing beyond the emotional energies of their funny voices, which all of us used to mock and mimic. So, too, we would parody the hymns, such as the doggerel

Through the night of doubt and sorrow,
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
Marching to the promised land

as—with all the names referring to the school staff—

Life presents a dreary picture,
Dull and empty as the tomb,
Little Mo's in bed with stricture,
Judy's got a fallen womb.

Butler now through masturbation
Never laughs and seldom smiles,
Ralph has found an occupation
Crushing ice for Buckley's piles.

Thus one of the main reasons for the obsolescence of the Church of England and, for that matter, for the collapse of the British Empire, is that the children could not bring themselves to take it seriously. Canon Bickersteth had a voice so wobbly and up-and-downish in is tonality that he almost gave us hysterics, although laughing in church was most definitely not permitted. Canon Gardner had a magnificent and formidable rumble, especially when reading biblical denunciations of the Amalekites, Midianites, Hivites, and Perizzites. Canon Crum, a sweet and holy man, frail, ascetic, and archetypally priestly in appearance, would bleat his sermons—from which I remember only the phrase, "It is, as the Americans say, monkeying with the buzz saw, monkeying with the buzz saw!" Canon Jenkins, a very learned theologian, who awarded me first prize in Divinity for a highly unorthodox essay, used to declaim sermons, prayers, and scriptures in something close to a shriek, whereas Canon Helmore muttered everything as if he had a perpetually stuffed-up nose.

The Archbishop himself had an impeccably aristocratic, sonorous voice, but I cannot remember a single thing he ever said, except that he was an

extremely witty and accomplished after-dinner speaker. The Dean (when I first went to Canterbury in 1928) was G. K. A. Bell, subsequently Bishop of Chichester, of whom, or of one of his more ancient predecessors in that office, it is written:

> There was a young lady of Chichester
> Whose beauty made saints in their niches stir.
> One morning at mass,
> The curves of her ass
> Made the Bishop of Chichester's britches stir.

But it is true that Bishop Bell made the famous remark that the clergy are like manure—excellent when spread all over the country while doing their work, but when gathered together in a heap they stink.

He was later succeeded by the notorious Red Dean Hewlett Johnson (imagine a very tall and baldpated George Washington), who talked through his teeth, kept clearing his throat, but lived to trouble the Church until well over ninety. He, and in later years Father Grieg Taber of that scandalously high church of Saint Mary the Virgin, New York, taught me the fundamentals of ecclesiastical ritual, a matter upon which I consider myself something of an authority. I have even served as master of ceremonies at a pontifical Solemn High Mass, celebrated from the throne. As a High Churchman he reformed the style of services in the Cathedral and, among other things, taught us how to process in the right way—not marching and swaying in close order, but gently strolling, about two yards from each other. I was once among a small group of boys whom he invited to dinner in his splendid mansion, where he told us of his adventures in China and, without the slightest self-consciousness, explained the delights of his own way of life. For example, he slept in a camp bed in the open air on top of the Deanery tower—withdrawing to the stairway portico when it rained—and worked standing at a high desk in his white-paneled library, where he would also take his breakfast of fruit and health-food-type cereals.

However, the most beneficent and lovable of all these Canterbury clergy was Canon Trelawney Ashton-Gwatkin, rector of the bucolic parish of Bishopsbourne, a little south of town and approached through a spacious

of my childhood, although I found it later in the Christianity of G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, William Temple, Dom Gregory Dix, and Dom Aelred Graham. Throughout my schooling the religious indoctrination was grim and maudlin, though retaining fascination because it had something to do with the basic mysteries of existence. As I attained puberty I had to escape from it, and therefore took refuge in Buddhism. *Buddham saranam gacchami*. I had to get out from under the monstrously oppressive God the Father—nothing like my own father, who never used violence against me, and who constantly backed me up, consorted with me, helped me, and even followed me in my spiritual adventures. He went so far as to become treasurer of the Buddhist Lodge of London, after I joined it at the age of fifteen. I wouldn't even call him "Father." He was always a friendly fellow named Daddy.

But at Canterbury I had to undergo the rites of puberty, which consisted in being confirmed or initiated into the mysteries of the Church of England—mysteries which had altogether ceased to exist, apart from vague and gravely dreadful warnings against masturbation, homosexuality, and playing around with girls. We were given the impression that masturbation would result in syphilis, epilepsy, insanity, acne, pimples on the crotch, and the Great Siberian Itch—not to mention death, judgment, and everlasting damnation. I still wonder what kind of game was going on, because all our preceptors had once been lusty adolescents themselves, and, deprived as we were of women, almost everyone masturbated regularly at night. I felt as if I were in some madhouse where most of the rules were self-contradictory.

Misinformation about sex seemed to be the *ne plus ultra* of initiation into the Church—that is, as conveyed to a boy of fourteen. When aroused, go and dangle your balls in cold water—of which there was plenty, and in winter the jug in my cubicle in the school dormitory was coated with ice. Otherwise, there was a tremendous verbal build-up for the rite of Confirmation. We were given the whole history of the Church and of the Apostolic Succession, and told that the bishop, by virtue of his direct descent from Jesus Christ, would at the moment of laying his hands upon our heads confer upon us some mysterious power that would enable us to be Good, and that thereafter we would

be admitted to the rite of Holy Communion (which the boys called "Comuggers") and that this would make us even Gooder.

It was a letdown that when the moment came, the confirming bishop was not the Archbishop himself, but his suffragan, and when he laid his hands on my head absolutely nothing happened. When I first received the Holy Communion there was nothing interesting about it except the taste of the port, though everyone walked back from the altar rail looking like the cat that swallowed the canary. There was no joy, no camaraderie or conviviality, no sense of being turned-on, but only an intense and solitary seriousness. Everyone in his own private box with God, apologizing for having masturbated, fornicated, or adulterated. (One of the boys, lacking all sexual education, understood the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" as "Thou shalt not kick the poultry," a much more sensible admonition.)

Believe it or not, in our formal prayers we actually gave thanks to God for King Henry VIII, who endowed the school with funds plundered from the adjoining Benedictine monastery—now in ruins—and, while boasting the title *Fidei Defensor* (as if God needed any defense), married six wives of whom he had two ritually murdered. He also composed ecclesiastical music.[4] Most of us boys took all this "English History" of formal beheadings at the Tower of London and glorious wars and burnings at the stake and the naval prowess of that elegant pirate, Sir Francis Drake,[5] as a matter of course or even of grandeur.

But, for myself, I had no heart for this "Onward Christian Soldiers" approach to life. It was thus that at the age of fifteen, as a scholar supported by

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[4] There is still, I think, a convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where around the table of a former bishop's library stand six chairs bearing the images of Henry VIII's wives. The said bishop, upon hearing that a Christian Science Church had been established in town, drove up before it in his horse-drawn landau with footmen, stood up therein, took out his *Rituale*, and solemnly pronounced a curse upon the place. Next day it burned down.

[5] It is said that once, when he held a Spanish captain for ransom, he presented him with bottles of perfume, and entertained him in his cabin to a stately dinner served on gold plate, while listening to a string trio playing Renaissance music. Sir Francis was, apparently, no slouch in his ideas of how to live aboard ship.

the foundation of Canterbury Cathedral, the heart of the Church of England, I formally declared myself to be a Buddhist. As is coming to be known, Buddhism is not really a religion—a way of obedience to someone else's rules, a *regula vitae*—but a method for clarifying and liberating one's state of consciousness. I had found myself in agreement with Lucretius that *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*: that too much religion is apt to sway us into evils.

CHAPTER THREE

I GO TO THE BUDDHA FOR REFUGE

Speaking as of today, I do not consider it intellectually respectable to be a partisan in matters of religion. I see religion as I see such other basic fascinations as art and science, in which there is room for many different approaches, styles, techniques, and opinions. Thus I am not formally a committed member of any creed or sect and hold no particular religious view or doctrine as absolute. I deplore missionary zeal, and consider exclusive dedication to and advocacy of any particular religion, as either the best or the only true way, an almost irreligious arrogance. Yet my work and my life are fully concerned with religion, and the mystery of being is my supreme fascination, though, as a shameless mystic, I am more interested in religion as feeling and experience than as conception and theory.

The concerns of ethics and morality occupy a subordinate, though still important, place in my preoccupations, since it has long seemed to me that basic religion is beyond good and evil—indeed, beyond any choice between things which may be regarded as opposites. All such opposites define one another mutually in such a way that there can be no final choice between them. To be is, or implies, not to be, and what interests me is the field, the continuum, in which these opposites are poles. Supralogical experiences of this continuum have arisen in the human mind in all times and places, and will doubtless continue to arise no matter what creeds or opinions prevail, and no matter what forms of reasoning may be used to dub them meaningless or mad. To me they are as natural and perennial as anything else—such as electricity—which cannot be defined but which is nevertheless most definitely felt.

When it comes to the forms and styles of religion, I have, of course, purely personal tastes and prejudices—as in art and music. Prayer, for example, is alien to me, but as I have said, I love to meditate either informally or in the way of Zen, or of Tibetan *ʒog-chen*, or in the manner of mantra yoga, which employs the contemplation of sound, produced by the voice or by such instruments as gongs. Thus at the mountain cottage where I am now writing, I have installed a gonglike bell made from a large oxygen tank and set into vibration by a swinging trunk of eucalyptus wood, suspended on ropes, and it sounds like those immense bronze bells of the Buddhist temples in Japan, which hum along the ground instead of clanging out through the sky. It reminds me of the great bell of Nanzenji in Kyoto, to which I have often listened at four in the morning—when the monks begin meditation—sounding about once every minute.

If I am asked to define my personal tastes in religion I must say that they lie between Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism, with a certain leaning toward Vedanta and Catholicism, or rather the Orthodox Church of Eastern Europe. The Russian Cathedral in Paris is, for me, one of the most joyous shrines in the world for its combination of gold-glorious ritual, angelic *a capella* music, and dignified informality. In the middle of a two-and-a-half-hour morning liturgy you can go out for a smoke or to the vodka and caviar shop across the street, and come back refreshed for declaring the glory of God, kissing an icon, holding a candle, or just wandering about among friends in the standing congregation. But I am still more at home in the serene and nonmilitant atmosphere of such Buddhist sanctuaries as Koya-san and Chion-in where the deep and sonorous chant is measured by the easy pulse of a wooden drum, where pines and maples stand beyond the open screens, and the smoke of aloeswood hangs in the air.

For me, this rich and venerable tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, touched with the nature-wisdom of Taoism, has seemed one of the most civilizing and humanizing and generally amiable movements in all history. Its humane and compassionate attitudes, its tolerance of many views, and its incomparable expressions in architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature arise—most paradoxically for Westerners—from *prajña*, a way of experiencing ultimate reality so unencumbered with concepts and propositions that

of uniform ticky-tacky homes erected by Mr. Doelger under the constant fog of southwestern San Francisco. Not a shop, not a pub, not a bus stop, not a restaurant for miles and miles. Only seemingly empty dormitories, isolated even at night, with nothing but the dull-blue television screen showing through their darkened windows. In the United States you may not even take a walk in such areas without being stopped by the police on suspicion of being a thief or vagrant, that is, for not subscribing to the club of General Motors, since all the best thieves approach their objectives in a Cadillac. If you want to walk, take a dog with you, giving you the excuse that you are exercising your dog. Or put on shorts and a T-shirt and go "jogging": a style of flat-footed running which jolts the bones, jangles the nerves, and is supposed to turn you into a real man.

My parents had the good taste to buy a cottage on a rural lane, with bushes of wild roses, honeysuckle, and belladonna plants under the shade of sycamore and copper beech trees. My mother would have no truck with the usual suburban decor—except upstairs. From her sensitivity to Oriental design, lilt, and color she became a master embroidress, and later worked with Charles Johnson, architect and designer, in a project to remodel the chapel of Saint Hugh's School. He was the brother of the two headmasters of the school, the Reverend Frederick Johnson (the only preacher in the area who could hold my interest) and Mr. Alfred Johnson (a brilliant teacher of literature and music).

But Charles was out of another world. He was reputed to be vaguely insane, to have read books on mysticism, to have taken obscure drugs, and thus to have to be constantly accompanied by a male nurse disguised as a butler and chauffeur. He had lived for many years in Mexico, presumably as a remittance man, but returned to England during the last days of my schooling at Saint Hugh's to build a delightful Spanish-Mexican house on the outskirts of the school grounds. He was a plump, grey-haired, fastidious, and urbane fellow, utterly removed from the crickety-militaristic atmosphere of his brothers' school. He introduced me to a proper way of drinking tea—unmilked, weak, and with a thin slice of lemon, as distinct from the frightful English practice of drinking it so strong that a spoon will stand up in it, and polluted with milk and sugar.

Charles collaborated with my mother in making the reredos and altar cloths for our school chapel in High Renaissance style, and I had the privilege of watching this meticulous work and giving occasional assistance. He worked at the general designing and wood carving, and my mother at the appliqué and embroidery panels, which comprised not only icons of Saint Augustine and Saint Hugh, but also fleurs-de-lys, ferns, and bluebirds, all on a green and gold background. Charles could give me more education in five minutes than his brothers in five years—simply by his attitude and his pleasure in his work—and this is saying a great deal, because Alfred was in many ways the ideal schoolmaster. But Charles wasn't trying to *teach*; he was simply following his own weird and allowing me to watch while my mother worked along with him.

His sister, Elvira, was a handsome, witty, and equally sophisticated woman married to my principal childhood guru, Francis Croshaw, who was likewise reputed to be crazy, and as born of a mentally "tainted" ancestry—the story being that his father, a wealthy baron of Chislehurst, had once ordered five grand pianos to be delivered on the same day. Their son, Ivan, who in those days was in a somewhat compulsively scientistic frame of mind, was nevertheless one of my constant companions. He went to the same school, Saint Hugh's, and we shared a delight in fabricating nonsense, in which his mother Elvira would frequently join. We bandied such burbles as

Iheeyeeic Paragua
Married a jaguar
Who came from Aconcagua,
And said, "O what a fag you are."
You may telephone from here.

At breakfast, his father would give names to all the eggs—Pleen, Sondom, Paradiddle, and Transom—and ask us to take our choice.

Elvira was known to her friends as Vera and to her son as Pom (Poor Old Mother). Some mother. She controlled us simply by casting an influence. I never saw her punish her son, nor lose her temper. Her secret was a phenomenal sense of humor which somehow concentrated itself on the tip of a rather long and amusingly pointed nose, from which she would suffuse the

atmosphere with her particular kind of giggles. On the important social art of facial composure, she explained that to maintain a reserved and dignified appearance you should make your whole face say "Brush," and that if you wanted to appear genial and friendly you should make it say "Beesom," with a big smile. Pom's atmosphere was also glamourous, though not exactly in the sexy sense of the word for she was handsome and stylish rather than pretty, and her style was Continental and Parisian. She spoke exquisite French, and intrigued me with her cosmopolitan tastes in the arts and in her ordering of the household. Bedrooms, for example, were places for lounging and reading, not utilitarian compartments for the hygienic duty of sleep. I cannot remember any adult with whom I felt so completely at ease, and she, if anyone, is responsible for my adoption of what is sometimes called an un-English style of life. For me she became the archetypal representative of relaxed, urbane society seasoned with wit and fantasy—which is what I would like to be understood by the word "civilization."

Francis Croshaw was a vague and wealthy man of uncertain behavior. He would take off for London for the day in his two-seater Chrysler and not return for a week, explaining that it had suddenly occurred to him to visit Wales. He smoked black stogie cigars from Burma—with which he always kept me plentifully supplied—the kind that are open at both ends, nubbly in texture, and burn with a blue flame and hiss. He would wander about in a decrepit Moorish dressing gown known as the "Moorish piecey," and carry a dog whip though he had no dog. He would sit in his car on sunny afternoons reading paperbound French novels. He had two homes, the first a spacious tapestried house near Chislehurst, and the second a pleasant clapboard bungalow with verandas, by the sand dunes and the sea just to the south of Rye—a city of cottage-shops on a solitary hill, topped with an ancient church in which we once listened to the rector talking about God's purpose for the world, for you, and for me, without ever saying exactly what it was.

The first thing that Francis Croshaw did for me was to release me from the boiled-beef culture of England and let me realize that I was at least a European. In 1929 he took me with his family to France, via Jersey, sat me down in a café in Saint-Malo, and bought me my first drink. He, by the way, drank immense quantities of wine—much of it Moulin à Vent—and would toss

down a whole glass, and then, with a haughty sniff, gaze up into the air in a gesture of total detachment from things of this earth. He carried a red Moroccan wallet, as I myself do to this day, and one of those carved and brightly colored Mexican walking sticks.

Saint-Malo was then a solidly walled medieval city, centered about a plaza filled with open-air cafés. The very moment we stepped off the boat from Jersey I felt a vivacious, sunny human atmosphere that was quite new to me and luminously exhilarating. Within an hour we were eating melons, artichokes, *pâté maison*, and *coq au vin* at the Hotel Chateaubriand, and it suddenly dawned upon me that eating could be an art. He took us to Mont Saint-Michel, to the horse races, to a sumptuous restaurant on the beach at Dinard, to Saint-Jacut where we drank an intoxicating bitter cider looking like orange juice—and then on to Bordeaux, where we dined at the Chapon Fin, starting out with *oeufs en gelée*, topped with truffles and based on *pâté de fois gras*. We then went to the sandy and pine forested country of the Landes, by the Bay of Biscay, to stay at the Basque-style Hôtel du Lac at Hossegor, just North of Capbreton, which afforded us at least two weeks on an all-out gourmet binge. He took us to a bullfight in Bayonne, to the casino at Biarritz, and then on to a small village in the Pyrenees, Saar, where people were assembling from all the surrounding villages to watch a game of pelota. A party arrived in a pick-up truck, parked in the plaza, and brought out a large basket of bread, bottles of wine, and cheese, around which they all joined hands and danced; with a solo funnyman wearing a short black cloak, who capered about them and, with his cloak rising into the air, became an animated mushroom. Francis exclaimed, "Just look at that! You couldn't possibly see such a sight in England." *Certaine gaieté d'esprit.*

I came back from this adventure feeling like an adult. From then on the curriculum, the sports, and the ideals of King's School, Canterbury, seemed, with some few exceptions, to be futile, infantile, and irrelevant. And then one day in Goulden's bookshop I came upon Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*. I bought it because it comprised a chapter on ghosts, imagining that Japanese ghosts would be the ultimate in refined horror, whereas they turned out to be rather amiable. But the book contained a description of his house and garden in Matsue (which I have since visited four times), and

this, with all his poetical discourse on the various kinds of frogs, insects, and plants, and the art of giving the illusion of a wide landscape in a small space, made the glowing tinder of my interest in Oriental culture suddenly light the fire. I was aesthetically fascinated with a certain clarity, transparency, and spaciousness in Chinese and Japanese art. It seemed to float, whereas most Western art seemed chunky, cluttered, vaguely delineated, dark, and heavy. Apart from illuminated manuscripts, stained glass, and Italian "primitives" it was full of shadows and coarse-looking people, and, as I later discovered, there are no shadows in nature: everything is colored, because the whole material world is basically composed of light.

Quite recently I have looked over many reproductions of Far Eastern masterpieces to identify and put into words the particular view of nature which so captured my imagination. The characteristic first reaction of Westerners to such works is to call them "fantastic" or "stylized," and they see the roofs more curly, the rocks more jagged, and the eyes more slanted than they actually are. In looking at Chinese writing they see

Yet by the time I was twelve it was precisely the fantastic and outlandish which appealed to me, though as I became familiar with these styles they became almost more "natural" than even the photographic treatments of the West. For one thing, the brush gives a clear and fluid line, neither hard nor scratchy, and there is always enough background space to give full definition to the figure, which in turn is so positioned and related to the space that empty paper comes alive without having to be painted in as water, sky, or mist. This is the Mahayanist and Taoist feeling for pregnant emptiness. For another, these artists paint nature for itself, as its own subject, and not to moralize, illustrate a point, or serve as a background for human affairs, so that birds and grasses are given a marvelous purposelessness and freedom from human plots and schemes. This was the way I felt when I could go off

the problem of whether God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was *homoousios* or *homoiousios*, of the same substance or of similar substance with the Father. They slaughtered women and children and laid fields waste in verbal quarrels about transubstantiationism and antitransubstantiationism, as to whether, at Mass, the bread and wine became the veritable body and blood of Christ—whether they were, rather, consubstantiated in such manner that the Lord's body and blood became spiritually present—or whether the recelebration of the Lord's Last Supper was no more than a symbolic reminiscence. As an unabashed pantheist I am naturally a full-blooded transubstantiationist, knowing full well that the ground wheat of bread and the crushed grapes of wine are the body and blood of Christ, the Anointed One, or olive-oiled man who is so slippery that he has no hang-ups. But I'm not going to go to war about it, nor sizzle the testicles of those who don't agree with me by planting them on bonfires.

I regard my more remote European forefathers who engaged in these quarrels as utterly insane. They were hopelessly confused and hypnotized by their languages, by the crude linear symbolisms wherewith they sought to make "sense" of the world. Contrariwise, such an articulate, amusing, and reasonable atheist as Bertrand Russell was also hypnotized with words—with endless talk about talk—with making, as the French say, *précises* about this and that—all of which is an intellectual game of chess having very little to do with the realities of nature—until it came, of course, to his truly heroic and responsible protests against sexual proprietism and atomic bombs, for which he was barred from Columbia University and thrown into jail in England.

Notions of God, of the ultimate reality or the ground of being, must necessarily be vague—for the simple reason that, just as we cannot bite our teeth, we cannot make the energy that we ourselves *are* a precisely defined object. Verbal definitions of God in the form of creeds, dogmas, and doctrines are far more dangerous idols that statues made of wood, stone, or gold, because they have the deceptive appearance of being more "spiritual," and because a creedally formulated God has been *reduced* to words, and is no longer experienced immediately, like clear water or blue sky. This is why Christians have lost all magical powers except those of a false anointment, or

antichrist: petroleum, powering a technology which is fouling the whole human nest.

I am not trying to frighten the millionaires who control Standard Oil and the liquid wealth of Texas with visions of revolution and the gallows; I am only suggesting that they might be kinder to themselves. People do not generally realize that those who govern states and great corporations are not really in control of these monstrous organizations of human action. They are like the drivers of runaway trucks which will disintegrate if brought to a sudden stop, yet cannot be slowed because they are carrying emergency supplies to a scene of disaster. But it is not happiness to cultivate ulcers and heart disease while amassing millions of paper dollars and covering the world with smog and greasy grime. One of my missions in life, if I have any, is to show very rich and powerful people how to use their imaginations and enjoy themselves through being disabused of the notion that money and prestige have, in themselves, material reality. Love of money and imagination in spending it seem to be mutually exclusive. Furthermore, it could almost be stated as an equation: money = anxiety. Though a man of imagination, taste, and culture, Francis Croshaw lived in horror, not of death, but of the process of dying, and he was fascinated by that extreme interpretation of Buddha's doctrine which defines the very process of life as agony and the release as a method of absolute and final suicide. I was still in school when he was found dead on the path below his bedroom, and no one ever knew whether he had jumped, or whether he had stumbled over the sill in trying to open a jammed window.

His place as guru was taken by Christmas Humphreys and his fey, Celtic wife, Aileen, who ran the Buddhist Lodge from their flat in one of the long residential streets of Pimlico in Southwest London—a dreary street of high houses pressed together, identical and drab—where they had made a hideaway with a bright fire, Persian rugs, incense, golden Buddhas, and a library of magical books which promised me the most arcane secrets of the universe. Christmas and Aileen, who shall hereafter be identified by their nicknames Toby and Puck, gave me an education which no money could possibly buy, and the depth of my gratitude to them is immeasurable. Even though I now remonstrate, mildly, against some of Toby's interpretations of Buddhism, I

shall love him always as the man who really set my imagination going and put me on my whole way of life.

It must be understood that Toby and Puck were, first of all, Theosophists, disciples of that incredible and mysterious Russian lady Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in—of all places—New York City in 1875, thereafter moving off to Madras and London. Her story was that, as a young woman, she had gone into Central Asia and Tibet to become the student of supreme gurus Koot Hoomi and Maurya (which are not Tibetan names, and whose alleged photographs look like versions of Jesus), who thereafter wrote her constant letters by psychokinetic precipitation or telepathic amanuensis in a distinctly Russian style of handwriting. Madame Blavatsky's voluminous works reveal only the most fragmentary knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, but she was a masterly creator of metaphysical and occult science fiction, as well as being a delightful, uninhibited, and outspoken old lady who spat and swore and rolled her own cigarettes. Perhaps she was a charlatan, but she did a beautiful job of it, and persuaded a goodly number of British aristocrats to consider the *Upanishads*, the *Yoga Sutra*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the Buddhist *Tripitaka*. Those persuaded found them much more interesting and profound than the Bible, especially the Bible interpreted by run-of-the-mill Catholic and Protestant clergy at the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus it was through the work of Blavatsky that these traditions were delivered to Toby when he was a student at Cambridge, in company with psychiatrist Henry Dicks, and Ronald Nicholson, who later became the *sadhu* Sri Krishna Prem. They joined the Cambridge branch of the Theosophical Society, and Toby subsequently founded—in London—an independent Buddhist Lodge of the Society, of which he remains president and chief guru to this day, though there is no longer any formal connection with the Theosophists. He is a tall, slender, and limber fellow with big ears, and a clear authoritative voice—always tempered to make it even more so—in which he speaks the best King's English. He is now a Queen's Counselor and judge at the Old Bailey, and it would be hard to imagine a more fair-minded and lovingly cynical jurist.

He and Puck, silversmith with white witch in attendance, maintained an

establishment that was full of mystery. It wasn't just the Oriental art and the smell of pine or sandalwood incense. It was also that, on and off, they were visited by enigmatic and astonishing people such as Tai-hsü (patriarch of Chinese Buddhism), Nicholas Roerich (Russian artist and Buddhist), G. P. Malalasekera (Buddhist scholar and diplomat of Ceylon, who is probably the most reasonable man in the world), Alice Bailey (an updated Blavatsky), and, above all, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, unofficial lay master of Zen Buddhism, humorous offbeat scholar, and about the most gentle and enlightened person I have ever known; for he combined the most complex learning with utter simplicity. He was versed in Japanese, English, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, French, Pali, and German, but while attending a meeting of the Buddhist Lodge he would play with a kitten, looking right into its Buddha-nature.

Toby introduced me to the writings of Suzuki in 1930, though I didn't meet the man himself until he came to London in 1936 for the World Congress of Faiths, at which time I had become the editor of *Buddhism in England*. Suzuki fascinated me because he told endless *mondo*, or Zen stories, in which people who asked "What is the basic principle of Buddhism?" were given such answers as "The cypress tree in the garden" or "Three pounds of flax," and thereupon attained instant enlightenment and liberation from the problems of birth-and-death, instead of having to practice intense concentration on the neuropsychic centers (or *chakras*) in their spinal cords throughout fifteen incarnations. At this time (1930) I was also reading Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, and making preliminary experiments in *pranayama*, or control of the breath, so as to discover that what is at once voluntary and involuntary, what you do and what happens to you, is all one process, all *karma* of which the real meaning is not cause-and-effect but simply doing, action, or energy. When something "happens" to you, be it tragic or comic, hideous or delightful, the Hindus and Buddhists say it's your *karma*—which doesn't mean punishment or reward, as if someone were keeping books on you, but simply your own doing.

I was thus moving from the ideal of Christian love to that of Buddhist wisdom, from *agape* to *bodhi*. I didn't like Christian love as I saw it exemplified in the lives of those who preached it. They were always going to war with other people to save them. They believed that suffering was "good for

you" and considered flogging their children an act of mercy. Formerly, they had even burned heretics at the stake in a desperate attempt to save them from their own fantasies of everlasting damnation. Indeed, there were people around me, such as Aunts Gertrude and Ethel, who really lived Christian love; but they never preached it. Trying, then, to put myself back into an adolescent's point of view, it seemed to me that those who preached it didn't have it. They were solemn bombasts who, as might have been expected, ended up with the atomic bomb. "O how great a thing it is when the Lord putteth into the hands of the righteous invincible might."

I watched the antics of the Salvation Army—beating drums, blowing bugles, putting their girls' heads into ridiculous bonnets, and praying into their visored hats. They actually took them off and talked into them! Imagine the chaplains of an organization known as the Church Army wearing both surplices and military caps! Indeed, an enormous amount of anthropological research might be done concerning our bizarre hat rituals; of donning and doffing them according to the presence of ladies, or of God; of their being formally removed as a token of sincerity; of Quakers insisting that they remain hatted in church and court; of ladies' heads having to be covered in church lest the angels be tempted by the loveliness of their hair; and of the amazing case (about 1935) in which a British magistrate reluctantly permitted a female witness to be hatless in court if she felt this would not detract from the sincerity of her oath. For myself, I never cover my head except in circumstances of extreme cold, wet, or danger, for which I have a fur cap, a hooded jacket, and a tough plastic helmet. The very word "hat" is gauche and unpoetical.

"Can any man by taking thought (i.e., by being anxious) add a cubit to his stature?" Well, they try—by donning hats: top hats, heraldic helmets, busbys, turbans, stetsons, birettas, crowns, and monumentally pretentious miters (not to mention juridical wigs and academic mortarboards)—and then go on to frantically emotional debates, not only as to when and when not to don or doff these structures, but also as to whether whatever hair grows beneath them should be long or short, tonsured or completely shaved. Yet such people maintain asylums, or psychiatric prisons, for others deemed to be insane.

which he held an almost nonstop bull session with some fifty boys. He was immensely stout, and reputed to be a formidable trencherman. He had a belly-laugh which could be heard for miles. It rang out like church bells bewitched by elves. It undulated the air so as to make weak leaves fall from the trees. There was never such a laugh in all Christendom. Anyone who has read his *Nature, Man, and God* and the volume of his collected letters knows that he was also a superb philosopher-theologian and a veritable archetype of courtesy. Late at night, when just a few of us were sitting with him smoking our pipes and discussing the doctrine of Divine Grace, he told us a real secret—and this was the first time, so far as I was concerned, that an official of the Church had said anything interesting or important. He said, "When I was a boy in school I used to be set the task of composing poetry in Latin, which was, as you know, rather difficult. However, I was working by candlelight, and whenever I got 'stuck' and couldn't find the right phrase, I would pull off a stick of wax from the side of the candle and push it back, gently, into the flame. And then the phrase would simply come to me."

The next day he told us a story about Sir Walford Davies, who was then Master of the King's Musick. He had been present on an occasion when Sir Walford was instructing an untrained choral group in hymn-singing. He started then out with some familiar hymn which they bellowed forth with gusto to impress the Archbishop, and the musical effect was terrible. But there was also present a small professional choir, and Sir Walford asked them to go through several verses of a completely unfamiliar hymn so that everyone could memorize the tune. "Now," he said, "we're all going to sing this new hymn. But one thing is absolutely important: you must not *try* to sing it. Just think of the tune and let it sing itself." The result was such a marked improvement that he turned to the Archbishop and said, "Isn't that also good theology?" That was how I learned to breathe.

But on holidays from school I was sitting at the feet of Toby Humphreys, listening greedily to everything he and Puck had to say about Buddhism, Theosophy, and life in general; loving especially the occasions when there was no meeting of the Buddhist Lodge and I could be with them alone, or with a few of their fascinating friends—explorers, psychiatrists, doctors, and such romantic Russian singers as Vladimir Rosing and Olga Alexeeva, who,

for some reason that is still not quite clear to me, gave me a permanent interest in the world of Russian exiles, in their music, food, drink, religion, and general life-style. I was being enchanted by the music of Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Glazunov, and Rimsky-Korsakov, and Toby and I were such avid fans of the ballet that we had opera cloaks made for ourselves and attended the ballet at Covent Garden with ivory-handled black canes and white gloves. Toby had become my elder brother, and was giving me the education I would not be able to find in any university.

Meanwhile (this was when I was about seventeen), I was still reading Suzuki on Zen and trying to practice some form of Buddhist yoga, *za-zen*, or *satipatthana*—and simply couldn't make up my mind which specific method to follow, or exactly what state of mind or consciousness was *satori*, *samadhi*, *moksha*, or true enlightenment. Aside from Toby, who wasn't playing the guru role, for we were just fellow seekers, I had no spiritual master. I was a shaman, on my own in a religious jungle. When, at Canterbury, I had become the head-boy, or captain, of my house, The Grange, I had the privilege of going off by myself to study and meditate in an ancient Elizabethan room, where one could light a fire and stay up until late at night. It was in the autumn of 1932—windy, with fallen leaves skittering along roads and fields—and I was trying desperately to work out this problem: What is THE EXPERIENCE which these Oriental masters are talking about? The different ideas of it which I had in mind seemed to be approaching me like little dogs wanting to be petted, and suddenly I shouted at all of them to go away. I annihilated and bawled out every theory and concept of what should be my properly spiritual state of mind, or of what should be meant by ME. And instantly my weight vanished. I owned nothing. All hang-ups disappeared. I walked on air. Thereupon I composed a *haiku*:

All forgotten and set aside—
Wind scattering leaves
Over the fields.

CHAPTER FOUR

ON BEING HALF-MISEDUCATED

The title above is taken from George Bernard Shaw, as a description of education in England, and its American parallel would be Paul Goodman's title *Growing Up Absurd*. For we must now backtrack and look at another side of my peculiar story. Strictly speaking, I cannot regard myself as a well-educated person. I have not read Homer in Greek, nor do I understand Hebrew. In Latin I never mastered the style of Tacitus. In French I can read most technical works, but not idiomatic novels. German is beyond me, though I can often get the sense of it when spoken aloud. I have a large vocabulary in Sanskrit, but no syntax. I can write and read ancient Chinese, but do not speak it. I can get by with spoken Japanese for purposes of ordering food in a restaurant or giving directions for a taxi, but I have never bothered to find out how the language really works and thus cannot maintain an intelligent conversation. I let them do the work, for every educated Japanese has had at least seven years of English; but most are ashamed to speak it unless mildly drunk. (D. T. Suzuki, as a young man, taught English in Japan, but told me that when he first came to the West he found the spoken language there entirely different from what he had been teaching.)

I have concentrated rather thoroughly on the English language for, as Bernard Shaw also said, no man can truly master any other language than his own. However, when it comes to English literature, I am really an ignoramus. I have read most of Shakespeare and all ten volumes of S. R. Gardiner's *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Great Civil War, 1603–1642*; but I know almost nothing of Spenser, Boswell, Coleridge, Dryden, Thackeray, Hardy, the various people whose names

began Ford Madox, or of Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, or Carl Sandburg. I could go on with this catalogue of ignorance forever, but do not wish to be boring. Nevertheless I have now a library of at least four thousand volumes, some of which, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, I have not read entirely; though I can tell you from memory the alphabetical indices of all volumes of its great Eleventh Edition from A TO AND to VET TO ZYM.

This may be the moment to interpose a story about my much-admired friend Aldous Huxley. It is said that he had read the entire *Encyclopaedia*, but at random. He would, for example, look up the article on the letter P, then go off to a party at which he would gently move the conversation to this subject and then give an extremely learned, and invariably witty, discourse on the history of this letter. Once, when he was visiting Gerald Heard's coeducational monastery at Trabuco in Southern California, the gas stoves went out of order—whereupon Huxley went into the kitchen, gave a lecture on the whole history and engineering of gas stoves, but was unable to correct the trouble. He was a much, much more literate man than I; but, when his tutor at Balliol College, Oxford, suggested that he consider the career of a professor of English literature, he remarked in his extraordinarily lilting voice, "I have never felt that literature was something to be *studied*, but rather something to be *enjoyed*."

I was first sent off to *study* things at the kindergarten school of Saint Nicholas, next door to the church of Saint Nicholas, and managed—unbelievably—by a pretty brunette named Miss Nicholas. She was (and I think still is, for I visited her in 1958) an exceptionally warmhearted person, though I once became furious at her for making me the "It" in a game of General Post—similar to Blind Man's Bluff—in which I was blindfolded and supposed to capture other children moving from points identified as, say, Birmingham to Bristol. For some reason, blindfolding offended me so deeply that the next day I presented her with a set of drawings which showed Buckingham Palace on fire, King George V lying dead with an arrow in his heart, and knights in armor with flaming eyes saying, "How dared you do that to Alan?" These drawings had such an electric effect that she displayed them before the whole school and gave me a public lecture on my abysmal wickedness.

The kindergarten division of the school was run by Miss Nicholas and

her sister, Doris. They taught us to read by the old method of learning the sounds of the letters, which I had already found out from my mother, and to make scrawny paintings of flowers right in the middle of the sheet of paper, so that we discovered no sense of space or lively background. Doris taught us elementary French, which included collective chanting of the alphabet to its giggly climax—*u, vé, double-vé, iks, ygrec, zed*—especially with the lilt put into it by a plump and cheeky boy named John Bennett, with whom I had a peculiar affinity for the unintentional disruption of classes by mutually arising chuckles at any and every stray element of nonsense that struck our funny-bones. For such pleasure in nonsense, I, and millions of other children so inclined, have been considered silly, frivolous, and wanting in seriousness. But we have a secret forever closed to stuffy, sober, and serious people. I am still incapable of understanding such people. Do they have a secret closed to me?

The school overlooked the village green, set about with flowering chestnut trees and elms. Across and to the west was the Crown Inn, done in fake Tudor with stucco and wooden beams. Behind and to its left was a secluded estate entirely surrounded with a wall of dark red brick, old and mossy. When classwork became too arid and abstract to hold my interest, I would gaze out into this more real and lively world and wander mentally into the down-sloping gardens behind the houses opposite—one of which was a paradise dedicated to Saint Francis—and then on down the gravel road to Cheesman's farm, where Birdcage Walk—a bush-enclosed footpath—descended to the grassy embankment of the Southern Railway. By curling my left hand so that thumb and index finger touched, I could see an imaginary replica of that path, where my palm was the ground and my fingers the overarching shrubbery.

By such means I escaped from the misery of Miss E.—stout, bespectacled, red-haired, and ugly—who compelled us to memorize multiplication tables and thus permanently ruined my interest in arithmetic and calculation, though not in the more philosophical aspects of mathematics. This wretched woman would whack us on the legs with a ruler for not being able to recite—instantly—the uninteresting fact that 12 x 9 = 108. In a world of flowers, birds, butterflies, clouds, stars, music, friendly boys, and lovely girls,

it over and over again, so that the whole sense of flowing melody and rhythm was destroyed.

The notorious and ritualized brutality of British schools of the traditional upper-class type has been sufficiently described by such writers as Charles Dickens, Hugh Walpole, Somerset Maugham, and Aldous Huxley that I need not go into it—save to say that as a senior prefect, or monitor, at King's School, Canterbury, I had the nerve to admonish the headmaster to cease and desist from the custom of flogging because of its sexual complications. The French call it *le vice anglais*. Though I find pleasure in gently smacking the bottom of a comely girl, I have no pleasure whatsoever in hitting someone full tilt with an enormous cane so as to bruise him or her for days and draw blood. But British erotic literature, especially of the late Victorian era, abounds with scenes of utterly merciless whippings—especially upon girls—with everything from horsewhips to barbed wire. But my advice to the headmaster was in vain, and his immediate successor was a fervent believer in flogging—as I learned long after from an alumnus of a later generation whom I met by chance in Kyoto. At Saint Hugh's I could not escape this treatment, but at Canterbury, where it was vastly more brutal, I managed by sheer guile and skullduggery to avoid it altogether—only to learn the curious fact that a man who uses brains against brawn is, by the brawny, considered a sneak, a cheater, and a coward—almost a criminal. Nevertheless, I have continued thus far to use such brains as I may have against the periodic convulsions and emotional eruptions of brawny people. Once I was so baffled and frustrated by this school that I attempted to run away, more as a protest than as a serious attempt to be out of it—for the seemingly dreadful alternative, vaguely threatened, was the public County School for boys of the lower classes, where I would learn to say "ain't" instead of "isn't." The immediate cause for my protest was the furious rejection of a Latin exercise which I had most carefully written in Gothic script with a decorated initial capital, imagining that the teacher would be relieved of monotony and entertained by something resembling a medieval manuscript. But he reacted as to an insult, and this struck me as so irrational that I felt myself given over to the care of maniacal bullies. Doubtless the poor fellow was so illiterate as never to have seen such a manuscript. I, however, felt that a serious attempt to make a

work of graphic art had been treated as a prank, and that the judgment and taste of my preceptors was no longer to be trusted. Then, as later in life, people seemed to be telling me that the things I can do well are irrelevant.

What, in retrospect, astonishes me is that in these schools we learned nothing, except the English language, which was of much relevance to life—although there was a very pleasant Captain Walpole who taught me how to swim and who cured warts on the feet. And there was also a particularly amusing Mr. Mintoft who taught basic physics and electronics, a tall lanky man who never took the system seriously and was always poking subtle fun at Mr. Sladen, a former member of the Secret Service who taught Holy Scripture with earnest verve, occasionally appeared in Bedouin garb, gave us extracurricular lectures on such odd matters as deciphering codes, and had a military voice that could be heard for miles. He taught me how to put platoons through ritual drills so that I developed a voice of command like a marine sergeant.

There was also a humorous and very well-intentioned Mr. Lines at Saint Hugh's who taught mathematics and French with utterly disastrous results. All mathematics really comes down to the formula "If, then"—but I had the greatest difficulty, especially in algebra, in understanding how they got from "if" to "then." I could always understand the geometry of Euclid, but this turned out to be a method of formal logic which has completely confused the human race because we are always trying to straighten things out or put them in boxes, whereas the world so geometered is naturally wiggly. But in algebra we would be confronted with statements like:

$a(b^2 + a^3) - 3c.4d[x + 2y(a + b)^2 + c] = p - q,$
From which it is obvious that $f/x = p - a^2$.

If you presumed to ask *why* it was obvious, you were denounced as an idiot or smitten on the behind with the large wooden compass used for the blackboard.

The English method of teaching French was permanently bamboozled by a certain Monsieur Ahn who, at the turn of the century, submitted to a London publisher a book of lessons which he had written as a parody on the English approach to French. The publishers scratched their heads and

decided that, since hardly anyone would see the humor of it, they would issue it as a serious textbook. It is thus that generations of English schoolchildren have memorized such nonsense as:

> Avez-vous le parapluie de ma tante?
> Non, mai j'ai la plume de mon oncle.

And then, because everything was based on an artificial system of grammar, we received the weird information that there were six words ending in *–ou* which were pluralized by the addition of *x*:

> *Bijoux, cailloux, choux, genoux, hiboux, joujoux, poux.*
> Jewels, stones, cabbages, knees, owls, toys, lice.

This led on to such exercises as translating into French:

> Do you have some pretty jewels?
> No, but I have given water to the owls.

It was thus that we arrived in France with an amazing vocabulary concerning umbrellas, pens, owls, lice, blackboards, desks, benches, tables, and chairs, but incapable of ordering in a restaurant or understanding what French people were saying.

The study of history was basically propaganda for the British Empire and the Protestant religion according to the persuasion of the (Low) Church of England. It was largely a memorization of dates of kings, battles, revolutions, executions, assassinations, plots, and councils, and of short lists of the alleged causes of various wars—a succession of "good things" and "bad things," which led up to the glorious present, with George V and Queen Mary on top of the world and, coming up, that nice and gallant boy—Edward, Prince of Wales. It was almost exclusively a slanted political history. American history was practically ignored as being too short for serious consideration, although in one term at Canterbury we did read a brief account of the Civil War. But we learned nothing of the histories of art, science, agriculture, and architecture, and it was only through my parents that I found Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell's delightful *A History of Everyday Things in England*, with its clear and luminous drawings of costumes, buildings, and technical implements.

I had two extraordinary teachers in Latin: the first, at Saint Hugh's, a blond and extremely athletic young man, Mr. Lemon, who when we made mistakes used to turn us over his lap and spank us in such a comic style that no one resented it, at the same time shouting out the correct form of translation. Once when he was spanking a boy for not remembering the nature of an "ablative of respect," another member of the class exclaimed, "But, sir, that's an ablative of disrespect!"—for which he was at once given a good mark, much treasured because for lack of fourteen such prizes per week one was ritually whipped on Saturday mornings by Mr. Alfred Johnson.

The second of my extraordinary Latin teachers was at Canterbury, a formidable Mr. Goss, who wore a red toupee, and, although he instructed us in the absolutely boring histories of Livy, nevertheless introduced us to the poetry of Virgil and the stately prose of Cicero. In retrospect I realize that he was a considerable scholar, who started off my interest in etymology and word-play, later to be reinforced by reading Joyce and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Boring as Livy may be, Mr. Goss's lectures were invariably interesting, especially when he went into the historical problems of pronouncing Greek and introduced us to Sophocles with the *Antigone*.

But the main preoccupation of these schools was Sport. The American *Who's Who* does not, like the British, have a section under which celebrities list their recreations. Under this category Bernard Shaw wrote, "Anything but sport." Sport consisted mainly of cricket, soccer, rugger (American: football, though less violent), and track racing. I detested cricket. For one reason, I do not have binocular vision and thus cannot be quite sure of the correct position of a moving ball. For another, merely fielding for hours on a summer afternoon was a total waste of time. At Saint Hugh's I made the school team for rugger, but lost interest at Canterbury and went instead for fencing and rowing. We were not taught soccer properly and used too much force. Anyone who saw the victory of the Brazilian team for the World Cup of 1970 will realize that, by superb footwork, they literally danced their way to triumph, and, though apparently disorganized in the formal disposition of their team, could make rapidly interchanging passes with infallible accuracy. *Certaine gaieté d'esprit*.

On the whole I dislike formal games—bridge, chess, Monopoly, and even Japanese *go*. Yes, it is all right to play poker on a large table covered with bright green felt with a convivial company drinking beer. But, on the whole, formal games are a way of getting together with other people without ever meeting them. Whether they be intellectual games like chess or brawny games like wrestling, I see no point in finding my identity through competition with others. I regard others who excel in sports, arts, or sciences as my own admired delegates or limbs, without the least tinge of jealousy, and realize that I, in turn, am one of their limbs. Since about 1926, when I got into serious trouble for the childish prank of squirting acetylene liquid at the plump older sister of one of my boy companions—which did her no injury—I have known that beyond and beneath the superficial personality of "Alan Watts" there is an eternal and invulnerable center which Hindus would call the *atman*. This is not a center in the geometrical sense of the word, not a fixed and rigid point. It is T. S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world," and yet it is also Saint Bonaventure's "circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." I do not know whether this is a virtue or not, for I do not keep accounts on such matters. But I feel no need to prove myself by defeating others. Yet it is strange that I first found this out by being made to feel intensely guilty for perpetrating a practical joke, and finding a center in myself untouched by the feeling.

Meanwhile, Ronald Macfarlane joined me in my distaste for organized sports and games. Instead, we roved and zoomed over the commons of Chislehurst on our bicycles, carrying air rifles, and followed by his friendly elkhound, Taxel. We considered ourselves as quite apart from the common throng of nice boys who played cricket or tennis, whom we regarded as dismal squares, doomed to a future of office work in London. All such boys seemed to have a certain haughtiness and facial expression whereby they could be recognized instantly: they raised their eyebrows and looked down their noses at us. At roll call they said "Hah" instead of "Here." At another extreme there were low-class, ill-spoken, non-U, and tough-egg boys who dropped their aitches, and we also stayed away from them. Both categories seemed to be equally lacking in imagination, in any capacity for fantasy or

and in classical Chinese.[2] Actually, the main thing left out of my education was a proper love for my own body, because one feared to cherish anything so obviously mortal and prone to sickness.

King's School, Canterbury, is reputed to be the oldest Public School in England, and is believed to have been founded by Saint Augustine of Canterbury shortly after A.D. 595. I went there in the autumn of 1928, when Randall Davidson was about to retire as Archbishop and Norman Pellew Birley had just become headmaster. Although Canterbury was then a somewhat squalid city, the precincts of the Cathedral, which included the school, were literally a garden enclosed—walled and gated on all sides, the east wall being the original bastioned wall of the city. Almost every building was of pale grey stone, and the architecture Romanesque (Norman) and every variety of Gothic, though there were some modern stone buildings, tiled with slate, made so as not to clash too abruptly with the ancient.

The whole atmosphere was strangely light and airy, full of the sound of bells and the cries of jackdaws floating around the great Bell Harry Tower of the Cathedral, and when March came in like a lion the air swept through the buildings, slamming doors and rattling shutters, and seeming to cleanse the place of human meanness. The magic of these surroundings was naturally enhanced by contrast with the tedious disciplines of ritual learning (all real education being extracurricular); by the working out of pecking orders; by having to dress like dowdy dandies—in speckled straw hats, or boaters, with blue and white ribbons, in starched wing collars with black ties, and in black

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[2] This is a serious proposal, for Chinese is, for us, a far better language for "mind-training" than Latin or Greek because it is the most highly evolved and sophisticated language least like our own. Thus the patterns of thought upon which it is based bring out, by contrast, the implicit and largely unrecognized patterns of thought which underlie our own tongue—as that "events," represented by verbs, must be set in motion by "things," represented by nouns. Furthermore, anything said in English may be said in half the time in Chinese, while German and Japanese take twice the time. Some form of written Chinese would also be a marvelous language for computers, because it can be read at high speed, and because each character, or ideogram, is a nonlinear *Gestalt*, or configuration.

jackets with Oxford-grey trousers; and by a diet of boiled beef, boiled cabbage, boiled onions, boiled carrots, boiled potatoes, and slabs of near-stale bread, all of which we were allowed to supplement with our own jams and pickles. Thus the real eating was also extracurricular.

Underneath the arches which supported a spending medieval hall with stained glass and carved and canopied wooden thrones was the Tuck Shop, run by kind and patient Mrs. Benn, where we ruined our teeth with chocolate bars, barley sugar, butterscotch, toffee, marshmallow in chocolate, and ice cream sodas. Aside from this, we all owned or shared Primus stoves for the frying of sausages and eggs, for concocting Welsh rarebit, and for preparing what then seemed a splendid curry by the following recipe:

2 large onions
6 saveloys (American: small hot dogs)
1 handful raisins
Salt and pepper
Curry powder
Margarine or cooking oil

Slice onions and fry until rings have separated and are lightly browned. Add saveloys, cut into half-inch sections. While they are being stirred and browned, throw in the raisins. Season lightly with salt and pepper, and add a heaping tablespoon of curry powder. Sprinkle with somewhat less than a gill of water, stir all together, cover the pan, and simmer until the smell is irresistible.

Immediately opposite the school gate was a teashop with a rhomboid door—the whole being a most ancient house carefully preserved in mid-collapse—and here we could guzzle after classes on coffee, hot buttered scones, and nut cake with mocha icing. It was also possible to bicycle sufficiently beyond the city limits to escape surveillance and pop into country pubs, the best being some two miles beyond the fortified West Gate; a friendly place where no questions were asked, and which supplied a dark Kentish ale known as Gardner's Old Strong. This was a favorite resort of senior prefects, especially on Sundays after Morning Prayer in the Cathedral. So often I wonder why, instead of drinking in pubs, Americans put up with dark and

lugubrious saloons, glimmering with the phosphorescent light of jukeboxes. Presumably, so as to be invisible to their guilty consciences.

Probably the most important adult I met at Canterbury was Alec Macdonald, housemaster of The Grange. He had been a pilot in the air force during World War I, but was actually a true man of peace and culture. He had strangely dark eyes and always looked at you unwaveringly and directly. He maintained a spacious study carpeted in royal blue and surrounded with books on white shelves, mostly French and German classics. Although he could not sing a note or play an instrument, he was a fervent lover of music and used to play records of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven to us while entertaining small groups to afternoon tea. He worked out a system of musical notation similar to the Hindu and showed us how Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony could be represented graphically by a wavering and prancing line. Alec Macdonald always conveyed something extracurricular—a civilized, urbane culture outside the boring routines of school. Alas—from my point of view—he married Felicity Hardcastle, the Archdeacon's daughter, and disappeared for parts unknown, so that I have entirely lost contact with this inspired teacher of music and literature.

He was succeeded in office by R. S. Stanier, a stocky Calvinist, who debated stoutly and intelligently with my Buddhist views, and taught me inadvertently but interestingly all the fallacies of Western logic. I liked him so much that, for a while, I imitated his handwriting—so well that I could forge permissions for other boys to go out on the town after hours. He gave us fascinating lectures on Milton's *Paradise Lost* and on Plato's *Republic* in Greek, and challenged us to think deeply about the basic philosophical problems involved. He was a confirmed fatalist and predestinarian who, supporting capital punishment, believed that people could be "cured by death." The only point he missed was that to be inevitably compelled by God is to be one with God, and that in this way, determinism becomes freedom.

Then there was a genial and scholarly little Welshman, William Moses Williams, a real master of Latin and Greek, who, again inadvertently, taught me the art of public speaking. We had a school debating society which got down to really basic problems, and Mr. Williams would arrive as a principal speaker, at the last moment, knowing neither the subject of the debate nor

which side he was supposed to take. He would thereupon deliver a perfectly lucid and logically ordered speech, with items one, two, and three, straight off the top of his head, and from him I learned not only the art of talking spontaneously without notes, but also the dangerous truth that you can pitch a good argument for any cause whatsoever.

In these debates, held in that ancient room with stained-glass shields on the windows, and a canopied throne for the chairman, we spoke much of war and peace. I took the pacifist side and, in passing, derided the weekly antics of the obsolete Officers' Training Corps, which required interminable polishing of brass buttons and putting a drab green paste on canvas belts. If the thing had been realistic, we should have been learning how to drive tanks, fly planes, operate machine guns, practice karate, and strangle people noiselessly with piano wire. With such training there would have been no "heroic retreat" at Dunkirk. Furthermore, these military antics, held every Thursday afternoon, were canceled if it rained. Imagine an army unable to function in the rain! The whole ritual was so detested that almost everyone hoped it would rain, and we used to command a gracious but much-persecuted Egyptian boy—a Mohammedan named Kasimoff—to prostrate himself and pray for rain every Thursday morning. It often worked.

One other scholarly man must be mentioned, Mr. Edgerton-Jones, teacher of history and political science, who lisped, and once made the cogent remark that "A shchoolmashter is a man among shildren, and a shild among men." We had a system wherein one finished general education at the age of fifteen. Thereafter one specialized in a particular subject in preparation for the 'varsity, which meant Oxford or Cambridge. Because I respected Mr. Edgerton-Jones and his principal student, Peter Scott, an urbane intellectual-athlete who was then head-boy of the school (and also practiced yoga), I chose modern history, and was aiming at a scholarship at Trinity College, Oxford. We worked in the school library instead of the classrooms, and gathered there every so often for highly intelligent tutorial seminars with Mr. Edgerton-Jones. But I lost interest. I wanted to study Oriental philosophy, for which there were no facilities either at the school or, in those days, at Oxford—not, at least, for undergraduates. I failed to get a scholarship at Trinity because, as I was told later, I wrote the essay examination on Courage

in the style of Nietzsche, having just read his *Zarathustra*. Some theologically occidented examiner must have been offended. So I never went to college, and had to go it on my own—with Toby Humphreys, Geoffrey (Nigel) Watkins, Alan L. Watts (*sic*), Dmitrije Mitrinović, and others as my preceptors.

The mores of Canterbury involved the deplorable principle that one should not form friendships with boys of a lower class, grade, or age than one's own. I fought this system with fury because the only really interesting boy in the House was Patrick Leigh Fermor, an Irish lad about one year younger than myself, a romantic, a fine poet, a born adventurer, a splendid actor, and a gallant lover of women who, in sheer desperation, used to flirt with a dowdy blonde—one of the kitchenmaids—and who was gifted with an Arthurian and medieval imagination. We took bicycle rides and long walks together to visit ancient churches and pubs. We luxuriated in the landscape of eastern Kent, its circles of beech trees, its cedars, its rose gardens, and hop-fields. When utterly oppressed by the social system of the school, we would sneak off to Canterbury Cathedral—which, because of its colossal sanctity, could never be made out-of-bounds—to study the stained-glass windows, to explore the Anglo-Saxon crypt, or to read books in the serene and secluded garden adjoining the Cathedral library. Patrick, as an adventurer of extreme courage, was constantly being flogged for his pranks and exploits—in other words, for having a creative imagination—and finally, as I have said, suffered the ultimate disgrace of being expelled from the school for the peccadillo of taking a walk with Miss Lamar, a comely brunette who was daughter of a local greengrocer. A year or two later he took a ship across the Channel and walked to Constantinople, pausing awhile in Vienna to earn some money by making portrait-sketches on a plaza. On the way back he visited the monks of Mount Athos, which he discovered to be an elaborate homosexual organization, and then spent a year as the lover of a Rumanian princess. During World War II he slipped quietly into the German headquarters in Crete and—almost singlehanded—captured the General Staff.

Today Patrick is a highly respected prose-poet, published by my friend John Grey Murray, who now heads the venerable firm in London which once published the works of Byron. The oddity is that King's School, Canterbury,