

NEUROSIS AND INDUSTRIAL CIVILISATION

MAN is a creature rooted in earth and drawing his breath from heaven. Apart from the truism that nature itself and every created thing comes from God, there is a sense in which we may make a legitimate distinction between the origins of man's bodily and spiritual parts, regarding the one as from nature, the other from God. This union and integration of the corporal and spiritual in one creature is man's unique distinction; and in most cases the normal, uninhibited man is emotionally aware of his kinship with the earth and with God. Throughout history this feeling of kinship has expressed itself in the two activities most perfectly characteristic of humanity, namely agriculture and religion. All civilisations have tended to approximate to the rural-religious pattern in some form or other until the last few centuries in the West and very recently in the Far East. Since the rural-religious life is essentially normal to man and satisfies the supreme appetitions of his being, it follows that he can only achieve true happiness and integration when his relation to nature and God is harmoniously satisfied. It does not, of course, follow that rural-religious societies will be *necessarily* happy or integrated: original sin is not so easily overcome; but it does follow inexorably that if men apostatise from nature and God they will inevitably be unhappy and disintegrated.

If contact with either of man's origins be denied him, a dangerous tension is set up in the ego which leads to a neurotic condition. Psychologists rightly insist upon the dangers arising from the repression (not the voluntary sublimation) of any particular instinct; but the repression or denial of an essential part of one's very being, an original appetite prior to and greater than any instinct, must be disastrous. To be uprooted from the earth-life of which we are a vital part, or to be denied access to God by Whom and for Whom we are directly created, is to be de-humanised. It may be possible to survive the temporary loss of nature providing a vital religious life is preserved, for man's spiritual capacity outruns his feeling for nature; even so, such a loss would create an unhealthy tension that would ultimately damage religion. But though an urban-religious society is possible, a purely naturist civilisation without God is inconceivable, since the absence of religion would stifle the soul in its highest sphere. Thus the naturist society advocated by W. H. Hudson, implicitly in all his work but explicitly in *A Crystal Age*, is un-

convincing because it does not make sufficient allowance for the cultivation of religion. An urban-religious society may temporarily survive: a naturist-secular society could not even begin; nor is there any record of such a society. The fact is that an exclusively rural or an exclusively religious society is only theoretically possible: in practice the weakening of the one leads to the destruction of the other; for the human creature is a unity. As T. S. Eliot has written: 'We may say that religion, as distinguished from modern paganism, implies a life in conformity with nature. It may be observed that the natural life and the supernatural life have a conformity to each other which neither has with the mechanical life.'

Modern industrial civilisation is divorced from both nature and God: it is essentially urban and atheistic, and tends to regard man as a system of reflexes (indeed it *turns* him into a system of reflexes) which are conditioned by wireless, press, and cinema. Thus the human product of industrial civilisation is denied contact with the earth-life and the life of worship: the proletarian neither ploughs nor prays: the glories of the countryside and of the house of prayer are strangers to him; and since his roots are cut and his breath is stifled, his dammed-up energy expresses itself in the explosive fantasies of neurosis. D. H. Lawrence, with all his failings, saw the truth when he wrote: 'We are bleeding at the roots, because we are cut off from the earth and sun and stars.' And a wiser man has written: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.' What hope is there when we are not only bleeding at the roots but sick and restless with an unsatisfied longing for the Divine Air by which we breathe?

In order to make clear the relation of industrial civilisation to neurosis, it will help if we accept the usual rough division of the neuroses into those of egoistic and those of sexual manifestation. Actually, as Adler has shown, the division is artificial and misleading, since all neuroses are basically egoistic, and sexual and sexually-related anomalies can be shown to be forms under which our hidden egoism masquerades. But it will simplify matters to use the generally accepted division here, as *externally*, at any rate, a distinction between the egoistic and sexual neuroses exists.

The genesis of the conflict of ego and object is metaphysical and need not concern us here; but its principal effects are fear and the compensations of withdrawal or aggression. Now environmental forces play an enormous part in producing situations which threaten the ego, and help to disintegrate it. The superficial effects of industrialism are obvious—its impersonality, violence and crudity, and the fact that by herding men together in masses it intensifies the

struggle for existence. But its subtlest effect is the creation of false values. An industrial society creates and fosters the false value from which our age, more than any in history, is suffering: the false value of *anthropocentrism*. Divorced from nature and God, man becomes the supreme end and value for man. All forms of totalitarianism—communist, fascist, capitalist—are anthropocentric; but it is quite a different thing from the old individualistic humanism. Anthropocentrism is secular humanism after it has become *mechanomorphic*—the word coined by Gerald Heard to describe thinking of reality in terms of the machine. Man is the supreme end; but *man in the mass*, after the pattern of the machine. It follows that if the individual cannot always transcend his egoism even when he believes in God, he will inevitably fail to transcend it in the abstraction of mechanical man. Where nature and God are denied access to the soul, or pushed into the background, and where man remains the ultimate value-object, the result is always neurotic defeat. If this is true, even of the old individualistic humanism, it is peculiarly so of industrial anthropocentrism. Mechanised mass-man is an abstraction; but this abstraction, because it exists in the heads of individuals, only applies to *other men*: the living concrete emotional reality is still the self. If I regard man as an abstraction, my ego becomes, by contrast, the supreme concretion; for the attempt to transcend one's egotism in the mass always ends by intensifying its isolation in relation to the mass and in throwing it back on itself in despair. The futility and utter unlovability of man in the mass, divorced from God, fosters the neurotic conflict in the ego. All the forces of fear and hate are let loose, and violent egoists war with each other in a society in which, theoretically, there are no egos at all. Revolutions and wars increase, and with vicious circularity, increase insecurity and neurosis.

The sexual group of neuroses, which directly include the perversions, and indirectly various sexually-related anomalies, are almost inseparable from industrial civilisation. Significantly, as one psychologist has pointed out, the perversions (and, we might add, almost all neurotic acts) are *mechanical* in content. It is obvious, even to those who do not accept the Adlerian theory in its entirety, that disturbances within the ego—insecurity, inferiority, fear, antagonism—lead directly to sexual disturbances; but industrial life not only fosters the egoistic conflict on which the sexual anomalies flourish, but also directly encourages anomalous sexuality in itself. Normal sexuality is essentially creative. A rural society, close to the creative forces of nature, is rarely other than natural in its sexual life, though its ratio of illegitimates may at times be high. But the sheer

uncreativity of mechanised industrialism is in direct ratio to the artificiality of sexual neurosis. In passing we may note that the (relatively small) over-urbanisation of the later Roman Empire tallied with the increase of sexual abnormality. Modern industrial society is propertyless; and since personal responsibility is undermined in propertyless societies, the family tends to disintegrate. Freud, in spite of his dreary atheism, regarded the break-up of family life as a great evil—the word evil, as he understood it, meaning, of course, a harbinger of increased sexual neurosis. All neurotic sexuality (that is, exaggerated or displaced sexuality) tends to batten on discouragement and disillusionment: it is, as Allers says, a compensation for the joyless. Now Carl Otten has pointed out that wherever totalitarianism is powerful—chiefly in the dictator countries, but to some extent in all industrial societies—increased sexual licence is substituted for decreased political responsibility. ‘The greatest freedom in the sexual sphere with none at all in the political’ is the totalitarian ideal for the masses. Could anything be more conducive to neurosis? Finally, the loss of religion weakens any moral sanctions and higher values that might canalise the unrestrained libido. Even art, which is capable of sublimating neurosis to some extent, is denied expression in modern urban life.

This is not meant to be a picture of what industrial civilisation is like everywhere. The ratio varies; but the *tendencies* are everywhere the same. One could add many other industrial incentives to neurosis: monotony of work, perpetual noise, ugliness of surroundings, and so on. But the main reasons are given above.

The growth of modern industrial civilisation is traceable to the interactions of the reciprocal attack on the land and on the Faith begun in the sixteenth century. Its direct result was the suppression of the monasteries and the enclosure of land, which in turn led to the centralisation of wealth and the creation of a dispossessed proletariat. The final upshot of it all was the capitalist system, which, battering upon the new mechanical inventions and misusing them to its own advantage, flourished upon greed, the sin of the owners, and hate, the sin of the dispossessed—a terrible example of the reciprocal effect of the weakening of morals, the loss of the land, the decay of faith, and the collapse into neurosis. A third factor in the loss of the land and the Faith was the abstract-mechanical way of thinking that grew up with the new discoveries of science, with the result that to-day we live in a world in which psychology has emasculated man, physics has dissolved nature, metaphysics has annihilated God, and sociology has reduced the living community to an economic mechanism, Emotionally divorced from the concrete

realities of nature and God for which he was created, intellectually emasculated into an unreal world of abstractions and ruled by the machine, modern industrial man is doomed to neurosis.

Neurosis, like original sin, is as old as man and, in some degree, inescapable; but there are conditions in which the opportunities of achieving normality are generous, and of these the life devoted to the service of nature and to the worship and understanding of God is the fullest and most nearly perfect. And there are conditions absolutely inimical to normality, such as those resulting from modern industrialism.

It is true that imperfect or corrupt religion weakens human life and creates abnormal conditions almost as bad as those produced by industrial civilisation. Thus certain types of Hindu religion have an enervating and sexually devitalising effect upon masses of the population, and the result is a superstitious, impoverished peasantry. But the fact that many rural-religious societies have been and are debased does not affect the truth that the earth-life and the life of worship are essential to a full human existence. The great rural-religious civilisations of China and India may have been vitiated by ignorance and by imperfect ethical systems; but they have endured; and they have endured because they are fundamentally sound. There is every reason to believe that in spite of poverty and superstition, the life of the average Chinese or Indian peasant is happier, and (what is far more important than mere happiness) more *integrated* than that of the average European, American or Japanese proletarian—though this will seem absurd to those who are blinded by the false standards of cheap comfort and the misleading abstractions of emasculated thought.

If, then, the rural-religious community is the norm of human life, we shall expect to find life at its fullest and richest when, to the earth-life is added the religion of Christ. On the whole, the Middle Ages were perhaps the nearest approximation to the ideal human society ever reached—not if judged from the false and absurd standpoint of absolute perfection, but from the realistic standpoint of a world of universal sin and suffering. Of course there were gross imperfections and anomalies; but that is not the question. The question is: was medieval life more integrated than modern life. And it may be that some indication of the answer can be found in *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and the facade of Wells cathedral. Somewhere or other, Professor Whitehead, a doyen of modern philosophers, certainly a thinker suffering from no illusions, has said that the Clunian ideal is the nearest approach to social perfection.

One is not advocating a complete return to nature—a kind of uni-

versal rural-monasticism without the celibacy : such a state of affairs is impossible. There will always be towns, and probably a good deal of mechanisation ; and there will always be exceptional groups and individuals who have no love of nature or understanding of the deeper issues of religion. But unless a Christian rural-religious society becomes once more the *norm* of Western civilisation there is little hope for the future. It is, surely, a matter of common sense that man cannot be happy or integrated apart from the earth and from God, since he originates from them and is akin to them.

The future, as always, is unpredictable. No one can hope to know what the upshot of this war will be ; but among many possibilities one is that industrial civilisation may be in progress of slowly smashing itself up out of its own contradictions, and that after a new dark age a new medievalism may arise, finer than the old and purged of much of its ignorance—a second spring in which man will find himself anew in a rough, simple, but integrated life. Sin and neurosis will not pass away : they are our heritage ; but the latter will no longer be, as to-day, widespread and malignant. Or it may be that the war will end conventionally in a stalemate or a defeat for one or other party, and the industrial world, purged of certain excesses, will drag itself on for a time. But it cannot endure. The neurotic tensions generated by the modern apostasy from the earth and from God, and fostered by a false abstracted view of life, must destroy the individual and society. Neurosis, mass neurosis, and increasingly malignant neurosis, is the inevitable result of our industrial civilisation.

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A MODEL STUDY-CIRCLE

IN the winter of 1920-21 there was founded in Vienna the Association known as *Logos*. It was an Association or club of members of the University who sought to solve their problems and difficulties by discussion and research. There were under-graduates and graduates, scholars and professors, men and women of the learned professions : historians, scientists, doctors, lawyer, metaphysicians, linguists, social-philosophers and economists. Those were days of hardship and misery in Austria. The dismemberment of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, the breakdown of a world built five centuries before, the reversal of age-old traditions, poverty and unemployment, anti-religious movements and modern materialistic-