

## MYSTICAL MARXISM

THE life of Mr. Middleton Murry as told by himself in the early part of his book on God is moving and tragic; tragic, not only because of the temperamental difficulties which made his relations with his wife, Katherine Mansfield, so painful both to him and to her, not only because of her sudden though not unexpected death, but because his own character is such that he seems to have spent most of his life in a state of spiritual darkness, struggling to find a gleam of light, and yet, by some strange psychological perversity, shutting his eyes when the light appeared. He has studied the Gospels. The sayings of Christ fall from his pen as easily as from the lips of a fervent Christian. But he is not a Christian (though he has said in the *Scots Observer* that he counts himself one), for he rejects Christ's claim to be divine. He is not even a theist, for he has written in so many words 'God does not exist' (*God*, p. 233). Yet he looks upon himself as a mystic. 'We mystics, we fanatics! Yes, that is true . . . Out of our serene impartiality, out of our final loss of all illusion, arises mysticism, arises fanaticism.' (*The Necessity of Communism*, pp. 113-4).

Although he is evidently by temperament an introvert, excessively conscious of his own consciousness, his mysticism appears to date back to an experience which befell him very shortly after the death of Katherine Mansfield in 1923. That death was a spiritual blow to him which he compares to a physical shock he received from lightning when he was a boy. It drove him away from his fellows into a remote cottage in a forest. While there, one evening in the dark of his sitting-room, he had an experience which profoundly affected him; some sort of consciousness of being one with the universe, so that (in his own rather touching words) he 'could never be alone any more.' This he considers to have been a mystical experience, though later in his life he was to find it exactly repeated when he

was being anaesthetised for an operation. This is not the place to trace Mr. Murry's spiritual evolution in detail, but his present position appears to be that of accepting a sort of materialistic Monism (to call it Pantheism would imply that he is a theist, which he is not), and of believing in a process of inevitable world evolution. His mysticism shows itself in a panegyric of self-abnegation, of self-surrender, of self-annihilation.

He is quite clear about the need for positively rejecting all religion and all belief in 'a supernatural God and a supernatural soul,' though he professes an enormous admiration for Christ as the great and supreme exemplar of disinterestedness, 'the pure instrument of human destiny.' He seems to have a positive hatred of Christianity, accusing orthodox Christianity of having made disinterestedness impossible owing to its doctrine of rewards and punishments; yet he admits the social and charitable services of the mediaeval Church. For him true Christianity and Catholicism are the same. 'Other forms of Christianity than the Catholic seems (*sic*) to us either dishonest or incomplete' (*God*, p. 272). He tells those who desire to be Christians to join the Catholic Church (*ibid.*, p. 229).

As for himself, he proclaims himself a Communist. Communism, he holds, is the successor to Christianity; he calls it 'the absolute antithesis of Catholicism.' Marx he looks upon as the last of the Jewish prophets, proclaiming a new era which will supersede Christianity; and he has formed for himself a picture of Marx strangely unlike that of the real Marx as disclosed by his biographers. Similarly Mr. Murry's Communism is something very different from that of the Communist International. It is distinctively English, and Mr. Murry has hard words for the Russian variety and for the British Communist Party. The latter has not been backward in attacking its critic, calling him 'that peddler of quack anarchist individualism and comfortable gradualness' (*Communist Review*, June 1933). Our English Communism, he says, will come about by peaceful means, by the conversion of the English bour-

geistic, and above all by making the Labour Party Marxist, a task which Mr. Murry considers urgent and imperative.

Mr. Murry is not at all clear as to what sort of a polity we shall have when we are all Communists, nor does the question seem to interest him particularly. The keynote of his *Necessity of Communism* is the necessity of disinterestedness, the readiness to sacrifice everything for the proletariat. He admits that we cannot look for this disinterestedness in more than a small minority of the population, but he demands it from this minority as imperatively as Christ demanded from all men complete self-surrender to Himself. What Mr. Murry does not do is give any adequate motive for this disinterestedness, for this utter self-annihilation (his own word) in the interests of the proletariat. Christ demanded self-surrender from men because He was God, the Beginning and the End; a point, by the way, which Mr. Murry seems to overlook, being too inclined to pick and choose what suits him in the teaching of Our Lord.

Perhaps he intends to provide the missing motive by telling us that we are to love others as ourselves, one of the many Christian phrases of which he makes use. But that does not say that we are to love others *more* than ourselves; that we are to sacrifice ourselves utterly for other creatures. Why should we? Are we not men as much as they? If we are to love men, then we must love ourselves as well as love others. It is only God, our Creator, Whom we can rightly love more than ourselves. It is their love of God which has driven the Saints to such heroic acts of sacrifice for their fellow-men, and which has called forth in countless Christians a disinterestedness which Mr. Murry ignores. If there be no God, there is nothing left in man that is worth sacrificing oneself for. Man has lost his dignity. He has become a mere part of a blind process of historical evolution. We too, if Mr. Murry be right, must be a part of this same necessary process; and then what becomes of our power to choose whether we will sacrifice ourselves or not?

This problem of free will bothers Mr. Murry a great deal. He maintains that men have 'a choice between catastrophe and control.' He says that by complete surrender to Communism we become truly free. He uses a Hegelian phrase popular with Communists, 'Freedom is knowledge of necessity.' In other words, we become 'free' when we recognise that we are governed by an iron destiny. But what sort of freedom is this? Nothing but the freedom from a sense of responsibility for our actions; comfortable doctrine indeed for the sinner, but not so comfortable for those against whom he sins.

Verbally Mr. Murry is a Communist. Verbally he agrees with Marx about materialism and the dialectic. But he is very far yet from being either an orthodox Communist or an orthodox Marxist. To be either he has yet to make a greater surrender, a greater act of self-annihilation than any he has yet made; surrender to the Communist International, which brooks no rival. One cannot imagine him doing this. Yet for such a restless heart as his there is but one alternative if he is to find peace and fullness of life; surrender to Christ, man and God.

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