

THE FALSE FRUITS OF MODERN DEMOCRACY

I

ONE of the chief characteristics of our time is the growing supremacy of quantity over quality. The latter is being ousted by the former in politics, in culture, in all departments of our civilisation. This struggle can, of course, have various disguises, and it can take place on several planes. Even the most conspicuous mass-movement may not necessarily be directed by quantitative valuations; or it may be first prompted by higher impulses and only later adopt a purely quantitative tendency. And a growing tendency of this kind is noticeable in the whole of modern 'egalitarian' democracy. This does not mean that democracy is altogether devoid of ideals, but that its ideals—provided there still be any—are on the wrong plane: on the plane of mere economic factors and of class-struggle, which not only conceal but invariably distort all deeper (ethical and spiritual) considerations. Its ultimate vision is not so much a dignified but a comfortable life: not the complete Christian Man, but the standardised Universal *Bourgeois* ruthlessly controlled by his equally standardised 'comrades.'

There is, of course, nothing easier or more seductive than reducing everything to 'economic factors.' Moreover it has the virtue of simplifying all problems to such an extent as to explain the whole mystery of life in a sixpenny pamphlet which everyone can carry in his pocket. But a valuation of life as a whole under the auspices of economic factors alone puts the cart before the horse: it makes both life and mankind only an appendage to economics. The natural result is a materialistic attitude towards everything, and a tendency to grab as many economic privileges as possible. All 'ideals' are ultimately degraded to mere shields

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in the scramble for these privileges. In this respect both antagonistic groups—the exploited and the exploiters—are on the same level. Neither of them has a conception of life which transcends mere ‘economics.’ Hence the actual aim of most revolutionaries seems to be but the diluted plutocratic ‘ideal’ made universal.

II

As a matter of fact, plutocracy and modern pseudo-democracy may struggle on the surface: yet underneath they are complementary. They have a common root, and the plane of their planetary functions is in essence the same. Their gospel is that of an ‘economic’ heaven. And the ladder which brings one into it is that of utilitarianism of the narrowest kind. One begins to look upon everything, even upon human souls, as a means for ‘practical’ ends. Eventually one commercialises all aspects of human activity; and things which cannot be turned into cash soon become considered irrelevant or even unnecessary.

Such a trend may be favourable to the growth of a materialistic civilisation, but is fatal to culture. Cultural values are indeed the first to be dragged down to the level of ‘general education.’ The inevitable further process converts them into a source of vulgar pleasures on the one hand, and into a source of income on the other. The tastes of quantity become the decisive factors; and Muses which do not pander to these tastes are ostracised. Sentimental, lecherous and vulgar pot-boilers sell in countless copies; while good books are ignored precisely on account of their excellence. Journalism has to become a literary house of ill-fame in order to succeed at all—until it reaches the level of the popular Sunday Press with its weekly rations of murders, executions and sexual turpitudes swallowed every Sunday morning by millions of readers together with their eggs and bacon. A boxing

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match which ends in bruised and broken jaws can attract—in our glorious Twentieth Century—innumerable masses, and even upset the whole of the international Stock Exchange; while a good symphony or a really excellent play often has not the remotest chance of being produced, because ‘there is no money in it.’ Cult of plebian tastes and instincts, growing indifference to everything that does not pay, and mad chase after ‘pleasure,’ brutalisation, and a love of comfort for its own sake—these are some of the most conspicuous traits of modern ‘democratic’ mentality both above and below.

III

There are many causes—inner and external—of such a state of affairs. One of them—and the most profound—is the national apostacy from the Catholic Faith. And another of them is our confusion of those values and ideas which should not be confused.

It is known, for instance, that the two ideas which lie at the bottom of all modern revolutionary impulses—liberty and equality—are incompatible to such an extent as to exclude each other: and yet we pronounce them with equal enthusiasm! Liberty involves a free exercise of one’s individual energy, will-power, talents and ambitions. As long as this exercise is really free, equality is impossible. Even if you distribute wealth according to the Communist gospel, the difference in talents, in ambitions and energies, remains; and these can be kept on an ‘equal’ level only by means of a most ruthless tyranny. Liberty involves inequality in spite of all theories; for this is the law of living life.

Another fatal confusion is that of social castes or classes with social hierarchy. Rebelling against an imposed and tyrannical hierarchy, the egalitarian apostles usually mistake all hierarchy for tyranny, without realising that the principle of class-division subjects the whole social body to the interests of a

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single class; while the true hierarchic principle has in view a harmonious growth of the entire social organism. These two principles are in fact poles asunder. As soon as the idea of 'classes' takes the upper hand, the social growth degenerates into an external social struggle. And since wealth is the only means of power in this struggle, it is bound to become the absolute standard of values and the only aim of all who take part in it. The old aristocracy had at least the idea of honour and dignity. But its illegal heir, the modern plutocracy, has exchanged even these two things into cash.

IV

When a race has utterly atrophied its instinct of organic hierarchy, true democracy (in the traditional, Graeco-Roman sense of the word) becomes impossible; for democracy of this kind rests not upon class struggle, nor upon equality, but upon a complete freedom within a free and organic hierarchy dictated by the highest creative potencies of the social bodies as a whole. Democracy in this sense is only an extension of aristocracy in the best sense of the word; and the Catholic Church is a living and speaking example of it in the world to-day. All the rest is plebianism and glorification of the mob—the mob on the top and below.

The muddle and misery of the modern European class struggle and of economic competition is obvious to every eye. And over the whole of it one can see the looming shadow of a new world war: a war conducted with so perfect a technique that entire populations will be exterminated within a few hours

Is it possible to imagine a more ironical epilogue to the (once) Christian and Aryan civilisation of Europe? As matters stand, such an epilogue would be quite logical.

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