TRADITION AND PROGRESS

a Study of the Popular Literature of Ideas, 1899-1918,
as Shown in the Expository and Controversial Writings of

S H A W and W E L L S

B E L L O C and C H E S T E R T O N

by

D A V I D J A G O
Dedicated to

ADRIAN RUNSWICK

who first prompted me to study English Literature, and thus to set out on the long path which has led to this thesis
Acknowledgements

I wish to record my gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. G.S. Fraser, and to Professor A.R. Humphreys and Professor P.A.W. Collins, who have also helped me in my work; to Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Jebb and to Miss Dorothy Collins, who have talked to me about two of the writers here discussed; and to my mother, who has typed, as well as this final copy, innumerable intermediate drafts.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE PARADISE OF IDEAS.

The title of the present thesis, *Tradition and Progress*, points to that large and unanswerable question which lay behind all the disputes between the four men with whom we are here concerned: the question whether mankind is a fixed species or whether, at the most fundamental levels, it is subject to evolutionary development. According to the first view, there is nothing new under the sun; the human race has now been in existence long enough for it to have exhibited all the variants of behaviour of which it is capable. Therefore to understand our own nature and its potentialities we should turn to the record of history where we may see our strengths and weaknesses, our inclinations and limitations, mirrored in others, by whose endeavours and subsequent successes and failures we are provided with a means of plotting our own future course. According to the second view, the history of the modern world demonstrates how the contemporary human situation is unprecedented. Man to-day has power and knowledge of which his ancestors never dreamt. As a result, the scope of his life has changed out of all recognition: the possible prosperity, the possible disaster, that lie before him are on a scale never known before. Unprecedented circumstances inevitably call for an unprecedented response, and the act of making this response has brought about fundamental changes in human nature. These alternative
views provide us with a framework in which the controversies of the four men under consideration fall into perspective. The pattern is not a simple one; the temperament and environment of each created qualifications and contradictions; none was entirely consistent in his thought. Nevertheless this basic dichotomy of outlook is discernible through all the complications created by character and the more ephemeral controversies of their time.

The Edwardian period was one peculiarly favourable to controversy. In one aspect it was a time of change and disturbance. England's political relationship to the Continental Powers was undergoing a change which involved breaking the habit of centuries: the long friendship with Prussia was ruptured when the Prussian ruling House, now at the head of the German Empire, undertook in the last years of the nineteenth century to challenge British naval supremacy. Gradually, in the years up to 1914, Britain turned to the traditional enemy, France, who in her turn was allied to the Power whose policies had been continually frustrated by British Governments under Queen Victoria, Tsarist Russia. Yet appearances were kept up. When the King of England died, it was taken for granted that the funeral procession would be led not only by his heir but by his nephew, the German Emperor, while even as declarations of war were being made among the Continental Powers in 1914 the British Government was declaring its complete freedom of action. It is only with the advantage of hindsight that we are enabled to see the profundity of the changes that were taking place; to contemporary eyes, the long peace of the nineteenth
century seemed merely extended.

At the same time, however, though life seemed to go on much as before, everyone was very conscious that new and exciting ideas were in the air. High society in England had become gayer and livelier when the long and secluded widowhood of Queen Victoria came to an end and she was succeeded by a genial and pleasure-loving son. The change of atmosphere in the highest social circles seemed to symbolize a general emergence from a repressive and hypocritical way of life. Writers felt that they could become franker without having to set out to be deliberately and ostentatiously shocking, as had the so-called Aesthetes in the last two decades of the old reign. New ideas circulated, ideas which, people felt, corresponded to reality and to the needs of human nature in a way that older ideas did not. "Conventional morality" became a self-evident term of abuse.

One such body of new ideas was Socialism, to which frequent reference will be made. In one sense it was a protest against the misery of large sections of the community during the nineteenth century; if national prosperity was soaring, the profits from it were most unequally divided, and those who benefited least were those upon whom it depended, the working classes. In another sense it was a feeling that now for the first time these hitherto under-privileged classes could realize their potentialities and no longer be obliged to devote their energies to monotonous and fatiguing tasks more efficiently done by the new machines. When such people could be fully human beings
instead of chiefly beasts of burden, how might not the energies thus released for constructive and imaginative endeavour transform society! Socialism was an unavoidable topic at the time. One might attack it: one could not ignore it. At the same time, however, it had yet to be put into widespread practice; it was still far more a body of ideas than an existing system. One could not define what Socialism was, only what it might be, and on that there was no general agreement. It certainly involved a more equitable distribution of the national income; it certainly set its face against the exploitation of certain sections of the community by others. But these two marks by themselves hardly served to distinguish it from other forms of political thinking. If one went beyond them, however, one immediately became controversial even among those who professed to be Socialists.

The result was that to us there is a quality of weirdness about the Edwardians' sense of freedom. We can see that the existing way of life was moving steadily towards its destruction; they took its continuation for granted. They felt a slightly resentful boredom before the unending evenness of their life and turned for relief to mental excitement. They played with ideas like children who produce outstanding effects with fireworks which they would not have dared to do, had they known the lethal force of their toys. Now our appreciation of their display is sharpened by the knowledge of the explosion to which it led, and thus an extraordinary fascination is created.

It is in the light of such a view of Edwardian society that the
nature and function of the four writers we are here considering can most easily be explained. They were men who dealt in thought, in some sense successors of the Victorian sages such as Huxley and Ruskin, Arnold and Newman, and yet at the same time they were of a new type. The difference perhaps lies mainly in the attitude of their readers towards them. The initial impulse to write came, in the case of the Victorian sages, from the writers themselves; they had a particular viewpoint or belief and set out to convert society to that belief or at least to bring about greater understanding of it. A clear example of this is Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Before the book appeared, no-one would have supposed that the account of the process by which an Anglican clergyman slowly became convinced of his obligation to become a Roman Catholic would become widely read and revered by a strongly Protestant society. The impulse to write the book did not come from the belief that people were prepared to listen sympathetically - indeed Newman had every reason for believing the reverse; it came from a burning desire on his part to justify his actions, and the way in which he did so created a sympathetic audience where none had hitherto existed. The Edwardians, however, wanted to be startled, wanted original and unexpected thinkers; nor did they mind whether those thinkers were in general agreement with them or not - if the latter, so much the more stimulating, for having just thrown off the prejudices and intolerance of the Victorians (as they saw them) they were anxious to display broadmindedness themselves. The Edwardian sage, then, did
not have to create his audience; he found it waiting for him expectantly.

Such a situation could not but prove detrimental to a writer's quality. All too often, what he said was accepted uncritically and superficially. If he succeeded in stimulating them, his audience were very willing to acclaim him; but this did not mean that they had been deeply influenced by him, and books might have a wide sale without producing any lasting change in the climate of opinion. Moreover, the ease with which he had gained the popular ear encouraged him to lower his standards. Ideas did not have to be fully worked out, or fully defended, or completely consistent, for his work to achieve success. Nor was he held to one kind of writing; he was known simply as an author, not as a novelist or social thinker. Thus he could undertake any genre he wished, and, moreover, could mix one genre with another. If, for instance, he felt that his ideas about society would have greater impact expressed in a novel than in a treatise, then he would plan his next book accordingly. If he had the public ear as an essayist (and this was a period in which the literary man could rely on having the corner of a newspaper in which he could do more or less as he liked), then he could use the essay-form as a vehicle for deeply-felt convictions. In a word, the writer had every inducement to become careless and formless.

At the same time, he had very considerable scope in the various points of view that he might express. As I have said, not only did
the Edwardian period pride itself upon the freedom of its thinking, but for the most part that thought as yet remained in the realm of abstractions. Free from the restricting hand of cold experience, the writer could produce brilliant developments and combinations of ideas. He could, for instance, give his conception of what a Socialist society would be like, without needing to consider the possible objection that Socialist societies had never taken that form in the past; for there had been no Socialist societies in the past.

At such a period, it was obviously the latter of the two attitudes towards human existence that would prevail. It was generally felt that the twentieth century, for better or worse, was going to be quite different from anything that had ever been known before, and this view (in its optimistic aspect) was shared by George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. In these writers Edwardian society found the exposition of its own deepest beliefs; particular details or aspects of that exposition might arouse controversy, but on the whole both Shaw and Wells were at one with their age.

As literary phenomena, therefore, Belloc and Chesterton were far more striking. Belloc was brought up a Roman Catholic. His father was French, his mother one of the English Catholic minority. As will be shown in more detail later, he became increasingly aware of his own isolation from English society, caused partly by these two factors and partly also, it must be added, by his own temperament. Chesterton, on the other hand, received a very ordinary upbringing within the
declining English Protestant tradition, and his taste for a Catholic view of human destiny and hence of the community in which that destiny is worked out, was largely instinctive. On the whole, it is true to say that - disregarding the quality of each as a writer - it is matter for surprise to find such men as Belloc and Chesterton figuring prominently in the English literary scene at this time, in a way that it is not in the case of Shaw and Wells.
Chapter One.

THE YEARS OF FORMATION.

I take it as axiomatic that the greater a man's stature as a thinker, the less effect will his immediate circumstances have upon his thought. These men were not great thinkers. As the title states, the present thesis claims to deal with nothing more than "the popular literature of ideas", and the introductory chapter has, I hope, made clear the implications of that phrase as far as the Edwardian period is concerned. It is necessary therefore as a preliminary to an examination of the thought of the four men to enquire into the origins of each one and into his formative experience. A certain amount of biographical detail must be known before the reasons for the positions they later took up can be fully comprehended.

The task of narrating such details is simplified in that, although they were of differing ages (Chesterton was Shaw's junior by eighteen years, while Wells and Belloc were born at roughly equal intervals of time between them), this disparity is made somewhat less important by the fact that, since it was Shaw who had to struggle hardest for recognition, each emerged into the public eye at about the same time. Moreover, it was just then that the South African War began, which was to present each of them with a means of testing his principles against the realities of public life. The present chapter will therefore be largely concerned with the life of each man until the end of the nineteenth century.
Section 1. - George Bernard Shaw.

One of the most important facts about Shaw was his birthplace. He was born in Dublin and spent the first twenty years of his life there until 1876 when he left the city for London, never to return except for occasional, and usually rather unwilling, visits.

Shaw's Irish origins exerted a complex influence on him. On the one hand, no-one who had heard of his name was ignorant of them, for it was chiefly as a speaker that Shaw achieved what little success he did in the twenty years after he arrived in England, and the attractiveness of his voice was in no small way due to his Dublin accent. Furthermore, from the first, he was recognized as being different from the common run of men, and this difference might not have received such emphasis if it had not been for the initial specific difference of nationality. The unmistakeable marks of the great public image "G.B.S." - the beard, the Jaeger clothes, the vegetarianism, the claim to intellectual superiority, the pose of enfant terrible - all these would probably not have gained the significance they did, nor might Shaw have been moved to make conscious efforts to acquire and parade such noticeable eccentricities, if some difference had not been patently obvious from the very start to the members of the community whose attention he sought to gain.

For Shaw realized that his Irish origins could be exploited to promote that intellectual operation which he saw as being peculiarly his, viz. the telling of unpleasant, untimely, but undeniable truths.
It was not simply that he could stand apart from the English way of life and examine it with eyes not dulled by long familiarity. To a considerable extent, Belloc was also able to do this and yet was dismissed as just a foreigner who did not understand English ways and who through ignorance offended English sensibilities. But an Irishman, though he might be alien to English society, was not a foreigner; he came from a country which the English had for centuries been trying, and failing, to govern. Since the Great Hunger of 1845 their efforts had been growing steadily more strenuous and their failure more obvious — a fact which no Englishman could deny, whether he assigned the blame to the stubborn and unsympathetic administrators or to the feckless and ungrateful populace. The English were, therefore, extremely sensitive to a voice from Ireland.

They were least so when they could characterize it as expressing an attractive but typically diffuse and unpractical Celtic dreaminess. This, in the English view, was the mark of the Irishman, and it was precisely because of this, they held, that English rule over Ireland was a practical necessity. Shaw turned this preconception to his own advantage by cultivating a carefully unemotional lucidity and logic. He knew that the impact of a cool intellectual reasonableness would be vastly heightened by contrast with what Englishmen would assume his instinctive style to be.

But Shaw also had personal reasons for adopting such a style. His family background had been unhappy, and as a result throughout
his life he reacted against the emotional; only reason was entirely trustworthy. At first sight, his father's position in life might have seemed comfortable. The name of Shaw was in Dublin a considerable one; the head of the family, Sir Robert Shaw, was a baronet and a wealthy banker. Indeed, it was this fact that induced Shaw's mother, Lucinda Curly, to marry into the family. She had had a wretched childhood, with a widowed father who was chronically impecunious. As soon as she could, Lucinda had left his house and gone to live with an aunt, Ellen Whitcroft, who at once devoted herself to the task of finding an eligible bachelor for her niece. In Ellen Whitcroft's eyes, George Carr Shaw did not come within that category, and when Lucinda, desperate to gain a secure position of comfort and reasonable affluence, insisted on marrying him, her aunt disinherited her.

The marriage was a disillusionment. George Shaw was not as well-off as Lucinda had thought; he was a partner in a firm dealing in corn which, since he knew nothing of the business, was constantly on the verge of bankruptcy. Neither had Lucinda gained the entrée to the higher echelons of the Shaw clan as she had hoped. Her husband was socially unacceptable: he drank. Now Lucinda had been warned of this before the marriage by her aunt, who was trying to prevent her niece from throwing herself away on a man who, to crown all, was seventeen years older than she. When Lucinda had taxed George Shaw with it, however, he denied it. In doing so, he displayed an attitude towards morality which the younger Shaw was always to be at pains to avoid,
an attitude which St. John Ervire, Shaw's biographer, describes as follows:

He was, he protested, a strict teetotaller, a statement which he believed to be true, since he not only tippled, as he thought, in secret, but was morbidly ashamed of his habit when he was sober. ... He had convinced himself that when he slipped into a spirit-grocery shop and took half a glass of whiskey, he was not as those drunkards were who brazenly boozed in public-houses and were not ashamed to be drinking porter in open bars. 1

In other words, George Shaw subscribed to a moral principle which he could not maintain in practice, and made desperate efforts to conceal his failure. His son later reacted strongly against such an attitude, while his discovery as a small boy of his father's habit caused him to become a lifelong teetotaller.

As for Lucinda, she was not by temperament a warm-hearted woman, and her realization of her husband's comparative indigence, his lack of drive and ability, and his indulgence in alcohol had caused her to retire still further into an aloof self-sufficiency. Though she bore George Shaw three children, Shaw and his sisters were, he said,

abandoned entirely to servants who ... were utterly unfit to be trusted with the charge of three cats, much less three children. 2

This particular comment was made in 1888; he continued to speak of his childhood in similar terms throughout his life.

The lovelessness of his childhood was tempered, however, by the

2. Quoted ibid. p.17.
satisfaction he gained from music. His mother was a talented singer, who avidly pursued her interest, and amateur musicians were constantly gathering at the Shaws' house - not that it was an activity in which George Shaw ever took part. Shaw shared his mother's interest to the full and gained an early knowledge of most of the great classical choral works. Music served him as an important emotional outlet.

Though much of the substance of respectability had departed from the Shaw household, the signs of it were still maintained for a time, and one of the most important of these was Protestantism.

Irish Protestantism was not then a religion: it was a side in political faction, a class prejudice, a conviction that Roman Catholics are socially inferior persons who will go to hell when they die and leave Heaven to the exclusive possession of Protestant ladies and gentlemen. 3

Thus Shaw was sent to Sunday School until the age of ten "not for my salvation, but because my father's respectability demanded it". He also declared, however, that

by the time I was ten years old my parents had given up even the respectable pretence of churchgoing; and I myself, after reasoning the step quite deliberately, had stopped saying my prayers on the ground that I was an atheist. 4

Shaw thus implied that the religious observance practised by the society in which he was brought up was hypocritical and that he himself came from a family which, in this matter at least, had abandoned hypocrisy. So the religious form which he inherited was almost

4. ibid. pp.45 and 80.
immediately rejected. The force of his Irish Protestant environment was, however, strong enough to affect his view of Roman Catholicism until his death. To him the latter was never more than a particularly repugnant social force; he never saw it as having any religious significance. His attitude was well illustrated by his description of how at the age of thirteen he was sent for seven months to a school which was "undenominational and classless in theory but in fact Roman Catholic" and how this created in him "a shame which was more or less a psychosis". What is specially telling is that eighty years passed before he could bring himself to confess this detail of his boyhood. 5

In considering his comments on Catholicism and his reaction to the social outlook of Belloc and Chesterton, one must always bear his origins in mind.

When he was fifteen, his mother left for London with her two daughters in order to pursue a career as a singing-teacher, and she and her husband never lived together again. George Shaw and his son remained in Dublin, where the latter left school and started work in a land agent's office, remaining there until his own departure for London four years later. Shaw's success in this position was both striking and significant: after a year, he was obliged to fill the post of head cashier temporarily while a new man was sought,

but as I found no difficulty in doing the work, ... the
engagement of a mature cashier was first delayed and then
dropped. ... I was chief cashier, head cashier, sole cashier,
equal of any of the staff, and the most active and responsible
member of it. 6

The point is worth emphasizing because it shows how Shaw looked upon
his decision to turn to writing in a different way from Wells. The
latter, as we shall see, found that the job which was the natural one
for a person of his social class to take was simply intolerable to
him, and therefore struggled to free himself from it by educating
himself to the point where he was awarded a small grant to go to
university; then he put his knowledge to use as a novelist and thereby
reached a position of affluence and security. Shaw, on the other hand,
had abandoned affluence and security - or so it must have seemed to him
in the lean years that followed - in order to attempt, and to fail, to
make his name as a writer. He never saw the profession of writing as
a kind of bountiful saviour, as Wells did; his turning to it was an
act of apparent folly bringing nothing but poverty and failure.
Moreover, he felt no gratitude to his profession. Why should he? It
had yielded success late and reluctantly. Rather he felt pride in
himself at having forced its recognition of him. So it was that he
could say of the Dublin office:

I should have been there still if I had not broken loose in
defiance of all prudence, and become a professional genius. 7

6. ibid. p. 31.
7. ibid. p. 36.
It would be wrong to say that Shaw used the term "genius" simply because he had an inflated opinion of himself; it denoted, for him, one who had asserted his own individuality and who, without having made any concessions to the world, had nevertheless extorted recognition and fame from it.

At nineteen, then, he suddenly tendered his resignation and arrived in London on his mother's doorstep. There does not seem to have been any very clear reason why he should have done so at that particular time, and perhaps one is safest in attributing his departure to a growing disgust with Dublin. In London he wrote a first novel, *Immaturity*, which several publishers turned down. Five others followed and achieved no greater success. Between 1879 and 1885, Shaw earned £6 by his writing, £5 of which was a payment for a patent medicine advertisement. When in 1889 one of his novels was published, his royalties were 2s.10d. in that year and 7s.10d. in 1891, while another published three years earlier had fared no better. By this time, however, his fortunes had improved slightly in other ways. In 1885, through the help he received from William Archer, he was appointed fiction editor to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, as well as making various contributions to other journals. Archer, who was himself earning his living by journalism at this time, was interested in drama and particularly in the plays of Ibsen - a fact which was to alter Shaw's career in a decisive way. For the moment, however, Shaw continued to build up his journalistic contacts. His knowledge of music now stood

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him in good stead, and he also undertook theatre criticism. As a result, he was at last able to support himself: in 1885 he earned £117, compared with the £48 he had been earning as chief cashier - but that was nine years earlier, and the rise could not be called phenomenal. Moreover, to say that he could support himself by his writings is not to say that he had reached a position which he found tolerable. In 1901, only three years after he had at last achieved real success, he attacked journalism as a career:

Even weekly journalism is superhuman except for young men. The older ones must scamp it; and the younger ones must live plainly and cheaply, if they are to get their authority up to the pitch at which they are allowed to say what they think. Of course, they do nothing of the sort. If they did, journalism would train them in literature as nothing else could. Would, but doesn't. It spoils them instead.

The remark is interesting in that it shows Shaw denying that the activity on which he had depended so recently - it was in May 1898 that he had resigned his last permanent position as a critic - had brought him any lasting benefit at all.

At the same time as these struggles were continuing, however, Shaw was engaged in a second, quite different set of activities. In September 1882 he attended a lecture given by Henry George advocating the taxation of land values. As yet, these represented a vast section of the national wealth that was virtually untapped by the Exchequer. Shaw was deeply impressed by George's arguments, and this attraction towards what came to be known as Left-wing ideas was deepened when

9. Sixteen Self-Sketches p. 53
Shaw shortly afterwards read Marx's *Capital* - in a French translation, for it had not then been put into English. It should be added, however, that the influence of the two men upon him was only general and that at no time could he have been called a disciple of either.

Exactly two years after hearing George, Shaw came across a small group of people calling themselves the Fabian Society, whose aim was the study and propagation of Socialism. Frequent reference will be made to the Fabian Society in the course of this thesis, for it is important with regard not only to Shaw but to Wells, and it will be as well to pause for a moment at this point in order to consider briefly what its main characteristics were.

In the 1880's, English Socialism was gradually coming to life again after twenty years of near extinction. Chartism, which had flourished in the 1820's and 1830's, had been a movement relying on the solidarity of the working classes. Its main strength lay in the vast numbers who would flock to its banner, men whom it could deploy in mass meetings, protest marches and above all in strikes. Yet by 1850 the movement was a thing of the past. It had maintained its hold over its adherents by pointing to the appalling conditions in which they and their like had to live and work. As various ameliorative measures were passed by Parliament, it found that the source of its power was failing and that the workers, satisfied with what was being done on their behalf by those in authority, had no desire to see the more extreme doctrines of Chartism such as land nationalization put
into practice. In the 1880's Socialist ideas were once more gaining ground. The Fabians were determined that such ideas should not meet with the same fate a second time. They decided that they would rely, not on a vast and formless membership which was liable to vanish into smoke when circumstances changed, but on a small group of active enthusiasts who could be depended on to remain loyal to the Society's original aims. Furthermore, instead of producing millenial schemes for social improvement that were quite impracticable from the legislative point of view, they would themselves advocate that piecemeal amelioration which had sapped the power of the Chartists.

Where they would differ from the Liberals of earlier years would be in making sure that all the measures they advocated, however small they might be, were steps in the direction of a Socialist State, that is, a State which would control the great industries and use them to the benefit of all citizens, not of a favoured minority. If a proposed measure would benefit the working classes by a means which would strengthen the private control of industry, then they would oppose it. For the most part, however, they were anxious to appear positive and constructive, and set about the drawing up of detailed schemes of specific social improvement.

Shaw found the Society wholly in accord with his own outlook and rapidly became an important member. Only a fortnight after his election he was chosen to write its Manifesto, and he was a member of the Executive for the next twenty years. The work was hard and exacting,
as the following description of the duties expected even of ordinary members in the 1890's shows:

The Fabian member was required to supply the Executive with a list of his qualifications and specialities; he was expected to be ready to answer questions and prepare notes on his subject and to lecture and write (if he could and were good enough; the standard was high). ... Furthermore, he was expected to attend meetings regularly - ... he could be struck off if he did not, and Executive records show that this rule was taken seriously - and to discuss in detail the text of proposed publications, even though these had already been through the sieve of the Executive. 10

Shaw's connection with the Fabian Society thus increased his inclination to shun the vague and emotional and to place his trust in meticulous and incontrovertible detail. Indeed, he was himself very conscious of it as exerting a good influence over him:

The repeatedly brilliant and extraordinary Shaw was in fact brilliant and extraordinary because he had in the Fabian Society an incomparable critical threshing machine for his ideas. When I seemed most original and fantastic, I was often simply an amanuensis and a mouthpiece with a rather exceptional literary and dramatic knack cultivated by dogged practice. My colleagues knocked much nonsense, ignorance and vulgar provinciality out of me. 11

It was one of the many contradictions in his character that although he delighted in presenting himself as little more than a poseur, he, alone of the four men under consideration, demonstrated his ability to work in close co-operation with others over a long period of time and devoted himself to the most fatiguing and apparently unrewarding occupations with very great patience and stamina. Shortly after

joining the Fabian Society he began to lecture on Socialism both in and out of London in obscure places to tiny audiences. This aspect of his activity reached its climax in the seven years he was a member of the St. Pancras Vestry, or Borough Council as it became, from 1897 to 1904. Mr. Ervine's comment is apposite:

G.B.S. surprised his fellow vestrymen by being an uncommonly good committee man. They had expected him to be eccentric and tiresome, uttering untimely paradoxes and always being "funny" and Irish. But he showed himself to be an adroit business man in public affairs. 12

In expending his energies in this way, Shaw was doing nothing to promote his own success: the work was unpaid, and it could not help to bring him to the notice of the public. He also put his pen to the service of the Socialist cause, and one should note that for him there was a complete division between what he wrote in order to earn his living, i.e. his journalistic criticism, and what he wrote to further those causes which he had at heart. For instance, in 1889 he edited a collection of essays by various Fabians, including two contributed by himself, and the collection had an immediate success. But he did not thereby become a successful writer, in the normal sense of the word, for although nearly 30,000 copies were sold within two years, Shaw took no payment, while any prestige which the book earned was rather corporate than individual. Indeed,

he sometimes neglected work for which he would be paid [remarks Mr. Ervine], so that he might do unpaid work for the Fabian Society, work, indeed, which left him out of pocket. 13

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13. ibid. p. 205.
If 1885 may be chosen as the date at which Shaw first managed to support himself by his pen, 1892 takes us to the far more important date at which he first seriously considered trying to make a name for himself as a playwright. Already he had made one abortive attempt in collaboration with William Archer, and now something happened which caused him to take up the abandoned draft. Archer's interest in Ibsen had communicated itself to Shaw, who was in full sympathy with Ibsen's desire to see the theatre concern itself with the vital issues of contemporary life. Accordingly, in 1891 Shaw wrote The Quintessence of Ibsenism, a book praising Ibsen's ideas and putting forward his own. In the same year, Ghosts, the play of Ibsen's which aroused most antagonism on account of the use made of syphilis in the plot, had been given a first performance in England by a rich tea-merchant whose hobby was the promotion of avant-garde plays. Immediately a storm of abuse broke out, and the play had to be withdrawn. Shortly afterwards, however, in a conversation with Shaw, the merchant bemoaned the fact that there was no comparable English play that he could stage, and it was this conversation that prompted Shaw to return to the unfinished work. Under the title Widowers' Houses, it was given two performances at the end of 1892, and the amount of comment it aroused was out of all proportion to the shortness of the run. The change had been made, and Shaw's energies had yet another outlet besides journalism and the Fabian Society: by 1898 Widowers' Houses had been followed by six more plays. Though in England real success did not come until 1905,
there were various productions of his plays during the later 1890's, and at least one, The Devil's Disciple, achieved a success in America that it was as yet refused in England. Even for that, Shaw had to wait until the end of 1897, by which time he was past forty, with a long succession of failures behind him. In 1901, when his income was beginning to soar, he denied that he had ever known success:

What came to me was repeated failure. By the time I wore it down I knew too much to care about either failure or success. 14

Moreover, when one considers the various kinds of experience in writing which then lay behind him, it is clear that his triumph as a playwright owed very little to his apprenticeship as a novelist and as a journalist, and a great deal to his efforts on behalf of Socialism. The methods of persuasion, the necessity of lucidity, the art of holding an audience's interest by providing bright and interesting illustration without losing the thread of abstract arguments, all these are clearly basic to his dramatic technique in a way that the pungent and entertaining perceptiveness of his criticism is not. His pen was his means of subsistence; his pen was his way to success. And yet the two activities were almost wholly divorced.

At about the same time that he was reaching a position of affluence, he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, the elder daughter of a wealthy Anglo-Irish family. At this point, however, it is necessary

to go back a little to consider Shaw's relations with women before his marriage. According to his own later account, Shaw had found himself disregarded during his adolescence and early manhood until he had begun to establish himself:

When at last I could afford to dress presentably I soon became accustomed to women falling in love with me. I did not need to pursue women: I was pursued by them. 15

In the fourteen years from the time he was twenty-nine until his marriage, "there was always some kind lady available, and I tried all the experiments and learned what there was to be learnt from them". As a result of this, he "found sex hopeless as a basis for permanent relations, and never dreamt of marriage in connection with it". 16

He appears to have carried this attitude into his marriage, which remained unconsummated. In 1901 he declared that he knew no more of marriage than he did of success, for marriage was

the life of the youth and the maiden who pluck a flower and bring down an avalanche upon their shoulders. ... What can childless people with independent incomes, marrying at forty as I did, tell you about marriage? I know nothing about it except as a looker-on. 17

If we consider Shaw in 1900, then, we may find in him the following distinctive features arising from his upbringing and the early part of his career. He was as an Irishman aloof from English society without being alien to it. He had rejected Protestantism as being no more than social hypocrisy and Roman Catholicism as being a

15. Quoted Frank Harris Bernard Shaw p. 237.
17. Sixteen Self-Sketches pp. 53-54.
social element that was thoroughly repugnant and undesirable. He was devoted to Socialism of a kind which eschewed all emotional appeals and concentrated on presenting a rational and detailed case. He had made his mark late in life, and, though he was now in a secure position, he was never to forget the long effort of reaching that position and the many unsuccessful attempts he had made in the course of it. He showed a strong desire to avoid emotion in every way, not only in his politics but in his love affairs, which he was anxious to present as having been purely carnal, and in his marriage where his relations with his wife, however close, remained on the plane of friendship. The ruined marriage of his own parents, and the atmosphere of lovelessness in which he was brought up, are more than sufficient explanation for such an attitude.
Section 2. - Hilaire Belloc.

The fact that both were born outside England is one of the very few similarities in the early lives of Shaw and Belloc, and even in this case (as has already been pointed out) the similarity did not go very far. If, however, their place of birth affected each man differently, it was nonetheless extremely important to each.

Hilaire Belloc was born at La Celle St. Cloud, a village on the edge of Paris, on July 27th, 1870. His mother was English, his father French; both were Roman Catholics. The circumstances and nature of his parents' marriage were of a far happier sort than those which George and Lucinda Shaw had to endure; indeed, the story of how they came to marry is very pleasingly romantic. They met when, at the age of thirty-eight, Bessie Rayner Parkes rented a chalet in the grounds of the Belloc's house in which she could rest from her labours in the cause of Women's Rights. She was unmarried, having only recently freed herself from a twenty-year-long emotional entanglement with a man - she wrote of him in a letter that "it is not too much to say that he wore out the natural forces of my youth" ¹ - and now she entered, very touchingly, upon a second spring.

The man who now engaged her emotions was Madame Belloc's son, Louis. Bessie's junior by a year, he had for the past twelve years kept to the house as a permanent invalid, ever since two attacks of

¹. Marie Belloc Lowndes I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia p. 15.
brain fever had obliged him to give up work. The Belloc family were thus astonished to hear that shortly after her departure Louis had written to Bessie proposing marriage. They insisted on his undergoing a medical examination as they had always assumed that his poor state of health put marriage out of the question, and the doctor who examined him told Louis that at any rate it was impossible that he should have children. Meanwhile, the Bellocs took it that, in accepting Louis' proposal, Bessie had in mind no more than a mariage de raison. In this they were wrong, for Bessie was meanwhile writing shyly and apprehensively to her mother of the strength of her own feelings:

"I should fall in love with him if I didn't think it a foolish thing to do at the age of eight and thirty", and again: "I feel I must try and be as young and as good-looking as I can manage". 2 The wedding took place in London in September 1867, and the doctor who had pronounced on Louis was proved wrong by the birth of Bessie's first child, Belloc's sister, the following July.

The marriage was entirely happy but tragically short. Under Bessie's influence, Louis began to lead a normal and active life, apparently without ill effects, until in August 1872 he contracted sunstroke. For a long time Bessie was prostrated by his death. She deliberately spent the first anniversary of it in Paris itself so that she should not have to attend the Requiem Mass which was said for him,

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2. Quoted ibid. pp. 52 and 50.
and although each year on All Souls' Day she made a point of being at La Celle St. Cloud in order to take part in the French custom of visiting the graves of relations, she did so only on condition that Louis' gravestone remained blank - as it did throughout the fifty years of her widowhood.

Belloc thus grew up in an atmosphere of intense marital devotion, even though he himself had been too young to remember his father. Bessie, moreover, did her best to make up for this lack by giving her two children as full a view of the world as possible, in particular by acquainting them from their earliest years with the cities of London and Paris, for Bessie retained very close ties with her mother-in-law and spent much time at La Celle St. Cloud until the latter's death in 1881, while she had a house of her own in Westminster, where her own mother lived nearby. In France the children enjoyed a freedom which was denied to English children in those days, and were included in various adult activities. This accentuated Belloc's mental precocity, so that Bessie grew accustomed to treating him as though he were years older than he was.

In 1878 Bessie lost a great part of her money through lending it unwisely and as a result was obliged to move out of London. She decided to live in Sussex, and Belloc took an immediate liking to the county, a liking which was to remain with him until his death seventy-five years later. Sussex vividly impressed Belloc with a sense of the continuity of English country life and in particular with the continuity
of the landed gentry. The importance that he attached to the latter may be seen in the following comment he made in 1906 in the course of describing the county:

We shall be able to trace a most deplorable vicissitude in the ownership of certain manors which has, most unfortunately, not ceased to-day, but has rather increased, and which very seriously menaces the future integrity of the county. 3

Belloc linked continuity of ownership with social responsibility: an estate would be well cared for, as would those who worked on it, when it remained for generations in the possession of one line. Rural Sussex, which had managed to retain a certain remoteness and a sense of its own identity, seemed to Belloc to offer some hopes of maintaining this desirable way of life.

At the age of ten Belloc was sent to the Oratory School at Birmingham, over which the aged Newman still nominally presided. Belloc, however, never expressed any feeling of veneration for him; it was the active Manning whom he admired. His school years were most notable for the development of his taste for poetry. Even before he went there, he

took an intense interest in verse, and in what is called verse form. He soon acquired a remarkable knowledge of both English and French poetry. 4

Now he extended his appreciation to the classics:

I am getting fonder and fonder [he wrote when he was thirteen] of those "mighty minds of old" who put forth the affections and

and beauty of life so wonderfully. There are some passages in the "Iliad" which make me thrill with pleasure; there is a corresponding sound within me, like the waves, sounds strike their own chords in the ear.  

His interest is doubly significant. It caused him to lay all the greater stress on the primacy of Rome, in that she had gathered to herself the highest human culture as well as proclaiming the Christian Faith. It also points to his own talents as a poet which the constant pressure on him to write for profit caused him to leave largely unexercised, with a consequent increase of bitterness at England's treatment of him.

The separation from France which his attendance at the Oratory School entailed did nothing to make him feel less a part of it. In 1873 he wrote a poem which concluded:

Frank is Frank and Gaul is Gaul,  
And to me thou art my people and my land,  
Notre Dame.  

Nor was the sense merely subjective. Technically he was still a French citizen and as such liable for service in the French Army, a liability which he fulfilled in 1892, following five years of aimlessness and abortive attempts at various occupations after he had left school. He could, of course, easily have avoided this service by renouncing his citizenship; his actual ties with France were, after all, very few. Nevertheless, he served his turn as a matter of

principle. He had no special liking for the military life; indeed his letters home at this time showed the utmost anxiety that his mother should apply for the reduction of his time of service from the customary three years to one, which was her right by virtue of her widowhood. A hint of his reason for undergoing his service appears in a letter written to her shortly before his release:

Do not forget that ... I am your son who is sweltering away like a convict under canvas at the beck and call of everybody — for an idea. 7

One reason, I would conjecture, was that it made permanent his claim to be considered a part of the French nation, even though his links with France grew steadily more tenuous. Another, more important, reason, however, becomes apparent when one considers the location in which he chose to serve. The fact that he had a relative who held a high position in the French Army meant that he could have served his time in the comparative comfort of Paris. Instead he asked to be placed in a regiment stationed at Toul, on the Franco-German border. To see why he should have done this, it is necessary to return to his birth.

Belloc was born just after France had declared war on Prussia and four days before that fateful August when the speed and efficiency of the oncoming Prussian armies took the French by surprise. Bessie and Louis allowed almost a month to pass before deciding to leave

La Celle St. Cloud for the comparative safety of Paris, and even then they did not bother to evacuate the house of its contents. In the subsequent siege, the Prussian firing-line ran through the village, and Prussian soldiers were billeted on all the houses. When Bessie and Louis returned from England the following year - for they had left Paris by the last train to run before the siege began - they found the house devastated and all the family belongings destroyed. They refurnished it as best they could, but for Bessie it never regained its old beauty, and she impressed upon the minds of her children the havoc wrought by the Prussians. Thus it was that Belloc grew up in a strongly revanchiste atmosphere, and his army service was intended as a declaration of his solidarity with the French and as a gesture of defiance to Germany.

By chance, when it came to an end, he found himself maintaining the same attitude in very different circumstances. Still without any definite plans of his own, he was offered, and eagerly seized, the chance of going to Oxford. In the autumn of 1893 he went up to read History at Balliol College. Now History was, of all subjects, the one in the study of which his sensibilities concerning France were most likely to be violated. The History School emphasized the superiority of post-Reformation Europe to the Middle Ages and held that this had arisen from the dominant power having passed from the Latin and Catholic nations of the South to the Teutonic and Protestant nations of the North. Moreover, this outlook was maintained with regard to
contemporary Europe, in that England was assumed to have a natural affinity with the German Empire and a natural antipathy to France. Belloc set himself to combat this outlook, gaining for himself considerable success in the process. He won the Brackenbury Prize in the course of his studies and in 1895 gained a First. He was a notable speaker in the Oxford Union of which he became President, an office which, again and again, has been one of the first distinctions gained by men who have gone on to the highest achievements. By the summer of 1895 he seemed to have Oxford at his feet; Jowett, the great Master of his College, had told him that he was virtually assured of a Fellowship. But Jowett had recently died, and when Belloc presented himself as a candidate for election, he found himself passed over in favour of one of his fellow students, H.W.C. Davies, whose later books were impeccably in the established line of Oxford historical studies. Attempts at other Colleges proved equally unsuccessful, and finally in 1899 Belloc abandoned the hope of a University post with its security and leisure and left Oxford for London.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the effect of this failure upon Belloc. His bitterness against Oxford increased throughout his life, until in his last years it became an obsession. In 1936 he wrote:

Oxford is for me a shrine, a memory, a tomb and a poignant possessing grief. All would have been well if they would have received me in my young days of love and poverty: but they would not. Hence this complaint. There are places in Oxford I will not pass, lest the memories should be too violent....

One reason for this lasting resentment was the effect of his failure upon the kind of books he wrote. As a historian, he placed great emphasis upon the French Revolution, from which, he believed, sprang all the driving forces of modern Europe — except those which activated Prussia. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that two of his earliest books were biographies of Danton (1899) and Robespierre (1901). Yet the following incidental remark in one of the appendices to the latter shows that he was conscious of their lack of academic standing:

It would be an impertinence on my part to attack the great authority of Mr. Morse-Stephens, ... whose admirable work, the product of an Oxford leisure, has received its reward in an American endowment. 9

Moreover, these were not the books by which he made his name; what brought him to public notice were first of all his children's verses and next his travel books. Three volumes of children's verses appeared between 1896 and 1899, and their nature and tone may be inferred from the fact that they were illustrated by a friend of Belloc's undergraduate days: good though they are, essentially they are the effusions of youthful high spirits. They are not the kind of work which would gain a man the reputation Belloc was seeking. Again, the public greatly enjoyed The Path to Rome (1902), the first of several travel books, for Belloc had the ability to communicate his own delight in the open air; yet it is significant that the book

was punctuated with interruptions from a tiresome and naive "Lector", to whom Béloc as "Auctor" replied with a calculated cantankerousness. Sometimes, as in the following example, Béloc's expostulations had wider implications:

LECTOR. Why do you use phrases like "possible exception"? AUCTOR. Why not? I see that all the religion I have stuck into the book has no more effect on you than had Rousseau upon Sir Henry Maine. You are as full of Pride as a minor Devil. 10

There was indeed a great deal of religion in the book, and Béloc sought to instil a sense of Catholic feeling in a Catholic community into the English Protestant reader; he suspected that he was failing in this, however. The figure of "Lector", carping at Béloc's way of writing, impervious to the deeper meanings that Béloc was trying to inculcate into him, shows the light in which Béloc regarded his readers. His output, like Chesterton's, was enormous, but this was not, as it was in Chesterton's case, because he had an insatiable appetite for writing; it was simply because his books did not sell in sufficiently large numbers for him to be able to support his family on the royalties from his published work. As the years passed, so his irritability over the endlessness of his task increased.

Another reason for his resentment at his rejection by Oxford was that he believed his religion had played a determining rôle in it. This was partly why he clung to it so intensely and always

10. The Path to Rome p. 162.
saw English Roman Catholics as a beleaguered minority, subject to a tacit but effective persecution by exclusion.

Lastly, there was the violent change in his fortunes. He had begun at the top; during his two years as an undergraduate he was estimated the equal of the most talented young men in the country and was accorded the rewards of that estimation. If Shaw had known failure for so long that he did not recognize success when it came (even though that success was both tremendous and permanent), Belloc's fortunes took an opposite course. At present he was nothing, but his potentialities had already been noted once, and he hoped they would be again. He began to play an active part in politics, and four years after his arrival in London he sat for the Bar examination – perhaps because the Law was one of the main entries to the ranks of the politicians. Strangely (considering his success in the University examinations) he failed; it was an omen of the years to come.

Nevertheless he embarked auspiciously enough on a political career. In 1904 he became an official Liberal candidate (because of which he had to renounce his French nationality), and he was successful at the subsequent election in 1906, when the Liberals were swept to power. As a Member of Parliament, however, he was too much out of sympathy with the basic assumptions under-lying that institution to be a success. He assumed that he was answerable only to his constituents – and these, it must be confessed, he tended to equate with the ten per cent. of Catholics among them; he refused
to acknowledge any Party ties. Repeatedly, he attacked Ministers
for not fulfilling election pledges or for introducing measures of
which, he said, the majority of the country disapproved. Above all,
he attacked the secrecy of Party funds, their sources, their amount
and their use, on the grounds that these were the instrument by which
the Party leaders were able to ensure the subservience of their
backbenchers in the voting lobbies. In taking such a line, he was as
alienated from his own Party as from the Opposition - indeed, he came
to declare that there was no difference between the two Parties (which
was perfectly true, when it was a matter of dealing with troublesome
backbenchers like himself). By the time of the next election, in
January 1910, there was growing tension between himself and his local
Liberal association, while Party Headquarters in London did nothing to
promote his campaign. However, he stood once more as a Liberal and
was elected. But when the Government went to the country yet again in
December of the same year, he refused to stand under any label but that
of Independent, and not surprisingly his local association withdrew
their support. Belloc abandoned the idea of achieving anything through
Parliament and instead, the following summer, founded a political
weekly entitled the Eye-Witness (later the New Witness), in which he
and Cecil Chesterton (who shared his outlook and who succeeded him as
editor after a year) could expound their views with complete freedom.

In marriage he fared much more happily, for the romantic nature
of the circumstances of his parents' marriage was repeated in his own
case. It was in 1891, at a time when he still lacked direction and purpose in life, that he met Elodie Hogan, a young American from California then staying in London in the course of touring Europe with her mother. He fell in love with her at once and, when she returned to her home, resolved to follow her. He acquired the fare for the Atlantic crossing by selling his school prizes and supported himself in the journey across America by selling sketches which he drew as he went. His reception, however, was cool. Mrs. Hogan opposed the match, and Elodie was being encouraged to think that she had a vocation. Belloc returned home, having apparently achieved nothing. Eventually, in the autumn of 1895, Elodie tried her vocation at a house of the Sisters of Charity. The attempt was a failure and caused her to have a nervous breakdown. On hearing of this, Belloc immediately returned to California, and there, in June 1896, the couple were married.

In the years around 1900, two sons and two daughters were born to them, and it was in order to provide them with a stable background and to give them those roots in a definite locality of England which he himself possessed, that in 1906 he moved out of London and returned to Sussex, to an old farmhouse called King's Land in the little village of Shipley a few miles outside Horsham. Even to-day, Shipley is remote and exists in a different world from the expanding town with its rapidly growing population of commuters. There Belloc hoped to found a family line with a continuity similar to that which he praised
in the county's gentry. There is a false likeness in that each of
the other three men also moved to a country district within fairly
easy reach of London. They did so in order to gain the necessary
peace for writing. Belloc, on the other hand, rarely did any writing
at King's Land; he kept a room in London for that. King's Land was
rather his family seat, and it was as such that he apostrophized it:

Stand thou forever among human Houses,
House of the Resurrection, House of Birth;
House of the rooted hearts and long carouses,
Stand, and be famous over all the Earth. 11

To Belloc, the "rooted heart" symbolized the natural and proper human
situation.

Yet if his marriage began as romantically as his parents', it
ended as tragically: in February 1914 Elodie died of pneumonia.
Though he outlived her for thirty-nine years, Belloc never fully
recovered from this, and he showed the same pietas towards her as
his mother had done over his father's headstone:

Her room was closed and never again used during Belloc's lifetime;
but as he passed it on his way to bed, he would always pause
outside the door and trace upon it the sign of the Cross. 12

One must keep in mind these two marriages, his parents' and his own,
when one considers Belloc's attitude towards the social system and
the place of the family within it. The rightness of the Christian
institution of marriage and its consonance with the needs of human

nature were for him triumphantly demonstrated, in a way that is all the more striking when we compare Belloc's experience of it with Shaw's. It is no matter for surprise that each saw the nature of the marital relationship and the primary considerations involved in the upbringing of children in a totally different light.
Section 3. - G.K. Chesterton.

The two writers we have just been examining were both - though in quite different ways - déracinés. Each claimed by virtue of his non-English birth an insight into English culture such as could never be attained by those whose upbringing had been confined to England. G.K. Chesterton's position was quite different: he was by comparison insular. He had a very powerful instinctive feeling for a particular traditional English way of life, and he could express that way of life with great vividness; but he could not bring any detached criticism to bear on it. There is another difference to be noted. By contrast with Chesterton, Shaw and Belloc had extremely eventful early lives; Chesterton's was as humdrum as it was commonplace. As a result he was far less affected by events. We find in him an incessant mental activity which seized upon quite trivial happenings and elaborated them into vast symbols. An account of his early years will therefore contain far fewer details than the two previous sections but will compensate for this by paying more attention to mental development. The bare facts may be quickly told; the complexity arises when we consider what Chesterton made of them.

He was born in 1874 into a prosperous middle-class family in the London suburb of Kensington. His father was head of the family firm, an estate agent's, which had been founded two generations earlier and which continues to-day under the same name. His parents' marriage was happy and uneventful. His mother appears to have been something of a "character", for Chesterton's biographer Maisie Ward
quotes testimonies of her mild bullying of her family and of the
alarm which her "rather forbidding appearance" inspired in Chesterton's
school-friends. But such trivial matters do not detract from the
stability of a home, and Chesterton's circumstances were always to be
stable, whether the controlling hand was his mother's or later his
wife's.

His father and his father's side of the family deserve fuller
attention, if only because in his autobiography Chesterton was to
build them up into symbols, first of the self-respect, the dignity
and the vitality which he saw as the marks of the middle class until
the end of the nineteenth century, and second of the commercial
probity without any trace of disproportionate acquisitive instinct,
which he held, was the concomitant of that self-respect.

I was born of respectable but honest parents, that is, in a
world where the word "respectability" was not yet exclusively
a term of abuse, but retained some dim philological connection
with the idea of being respected.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider how Chesterton sought
to express this vanished social atmosphere: he did so not by
definition but by illustration. He declared that the lines,

And when we say we've always won,
And when they ask us how it's done,
We proudly point to every one
Of England's soldiers of the Queen,

represented a lapse from such lines as those describing the Duke of
Wellington coming to the deathbed of William IV:

44.

For he came on the Angel of Victory's wing,
But the Angel of Death was awaiting the King. ³

He continued after making the above quotations:

I cannot help having a dim suspicion that dignity has something
to do with style; but anyhow the gestures, like the songs, of
my grandfather's time and type had a good deal to do with dignity.

There is a momentary gesture towards definition, which collapses on to
the dismissive term "anyhow" and the deliberately vague "had a good
deal to do with". In the following sentence he embarked on an
illustrative anecdote. His method in all this was to appeal to
principles which were past but not yet forgotten, and it was effective
because he could thus give his readers the feeling that they were
taking an entirely new look at life even though he was requiring
comparatively little mental energy from them to assimilate what he
was saying.

This style and dignity was also clearly apparent, he claimed,
in the novels of Dickens:

What I can but call a Great Gusto breathed out of that epoch;
something now only remembered in the rich and rollicking
quotations of Swiveller and Micawber, ⁴

and on such evidence he extended his assertions to cover the lower as
well as the middle classes:

³. ibid. p. 11.
⁴. ibid. p. 20. Notice once again the shying away from attempting
   an exact definition: he "can but call" it such-and-such, but
   of course (he implied) we all knew what he referred to in
   Swiveller and Micawber so that there was no need for anything
   more precise on his part.
A glow of convivial courtesy covered everything; and the wing of friendship could never moult a feather. The amazing patience of our populace then went with a certain pomp, but it was a pompous geniality; and even their jeers were still jovial.

The middle classes of which his father and grandfather were examples had, he confessed, the weakness that they dissociated themselves almost entirely from the working classes; in their relations with them they showed "a sort of silence and embarrassment". Through the medium of Dickens' novels, however, Chesterton could claim a sort of second-hand acquaintance.

This was extremely important to him, for he presented the nineteenth century as a time in which the acceptance of the principles that had motivated the French Revolution had brought about a new respect for human dignity without regard for wealth or class, a respect which had been greatly diminished by the passing of time. Thus it was that he set himself against those attempts by the middle classes (of which the Fabian Society was a striking example) to help the working classes from above. He objected because this help did nothing to bring the two classes into closer understanding; indeed it emphasized the gulf between them and confirmed the middle classes in their sense of superiority, whereas in fact it was they who should be learning from the poor.

The traditions of the poor [he wrote in 1910] are mostly simply the traditions of humanity, a thing which many of us have not seen for some time. 6

Again in 1913 he wrote:

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6. What's Wrong with the World p. 245.
You may say if you will that the poor are always at the tail of the procession, and that whether they are morally worse or better depends on whether humanity as a whole is proceeding towards heaven or hell. When humanity is going to hell, the poor are always nearest to heaven.

Chesterton's intense feeling for the dignity of all men, however poor, arose, nevertheless, from purely literary sources. He received no immediate impact from the contemporary working classes, but he had a strong sense gained from his reading that human dignity ought to be maintained even under conditions of poverty, and this sense was jarred by the bureaucratic approach to working-class problems.

The scurrying mental activity so characteristic of Chesterton became apparent very early in his life. When his brother Cecil, five years younger than himself, was born in 1879, Chesterton welcomed his birth with the remark, "Now I shall always have an audience", a prophecy remembered by all parties because it proved so singularly false. As soon as Cecil could speak, he began to argue, and the brothers' intercourse thenceforward consisted of unending discussion.

A further manifestation was the Junior Debating Club which he founded at his school - he was a day-boy at St. Paul's School, Hammersmith - when he was sixteen. The Club was to Chesterton much more than an opportunity for further argument, however. It became to him a symbol of the ideal friendship. They were Knights of the Round Table. They were Jongleurs de Dieu. They were the Human Club, through whom and in whom he had made the grand discovery of Man. They were his youth personified. The note is still struck in the letters of his engagement period, and it was only forty years later, writing his "Autobiography", that he was able to picture with a certain humorous detachment this group of boys who met to eat buns and criticize the universe.

7. The Victorian Age in Literature pp. 80-81.
9. ibid. p. 31.
Thus his love of argument also involved an intense feeling for male comradeship, and he drew the three concepts of comradeship, a love of argument and a sense of the equality of men into one indivisible whole:

Comradeship is obvious and universal and open; but it is only one kind of affection; it has characteristics that would destroy any other kind. Anyone who has known true comradeship in a club or in a regiment, knows that it is impersonal. There is a pedantic phrase used in debating clubs which is strictly true to the masculine emotion; they call it "speaking to the question". Women speak to each other; men speak to the subject they are speaking about. Many an honest man has sat in a ring of his five best friends under heaven and forgotten who was in the room while he explained some system. This is not peculiar to intellectual men; men are all theoretical, whether they are talking about God or about golf. Men are all impersonal; that is to say, republican. No one remembers after a really good talk who has said the good things. Every man speaks to a visionary multitude; a mystical cloud, that is called the club.

When we consider the relatively unimportant detail from which this line of thought began - a school debating society - and the way in which it rapidly became complicated by taking to itself other ideas from different origins - such as his love of the ideas behind the French Revolution and his sense of the profound difference between the mental outlooks of the two sexes - we gain some understanding of the way in which so uneventful a life could yet produce such furious mental activity.

At the age of eighteen Chesterton was separated from his friends in the Club by his decision to go on to art school instead of to university: from 1892 to 1895 he studied at the Slade School. But art did not by any means absorb his whole attention. Later, indeed,

10. What's Wrong with the World p. 93.
he did produce a number of sketches (such as those which illustrate every one of Belloc's novels) and a book on the painter, G.F. Watts. But the sketches are negligible in proportion to his total output, while the study of Watts is concerned primarily with the ideas expressed and the attitudes exemplified by the painter. Chesterton's outlook was not affected in any fundamental way by his training in art. Even at the time, "none of the professors regarded him as a serious art student", an opinion probably reinforced by the fact that he was simultaneously attending lectures in English Literature at University College. 11

In his autobiography, Chesterton described this period of his life in gloomy terms. One reason why he should do so was that adolescence had come late to him, and it was only now that he was experiencing its turmoil. The pressures exerted by awakening sexuality are not to be left entirely out of account; he later spoke of having been able to "imagine the worst and wildest disproportions and distortions of ... normal passion". 12 What left a more lasting impact on him, however, was the intellectual pressures. In an essay published in 1909, he described himself as having been engaged "in discovering, to my own extreme and lasting astonishment, that I was not an atheist". 13 Earlier, Chesterton had abandoned the religious beliefs of his parents, who were Liberal

agnosticism, on the whole friendly to Christianity (Chesterton, for instance, had been baptized in the parish church, although they do not appear to have been regular worshippers), but assuming that, by universal consent, any dogmatic approach to religion had been abandoned as misguided and outmoded. Chesterton found such an attitude wholly inadequate and simply dismissed it; now, however, he became conscious of the need for some synthesizing view of life.

Contemporary evidence for his mental confusion is scanty. There are a number of unpublished notebooks, but most of these, it has been said, "resolutely ignore the statement of that which was all too present in his mind". 14 To find a full account of his mental progress, we have to go on to 1909 when, having overcome the crisis, he felt sufficiently secure to set down its stages under the general title of Orthodoxy. There, in two chapters entitled "The Maniac" and "The Suicide of Thought", he dealt with two abuses of reason and the solutions to them. The first, which he symbolized by the figure of the lunatic, was an excessive reliance upon it. The lunatic had a complete explanation of his situation in logical terms and was therefore proof against argument. His vulnerability lay in the fact that his explanation only achieved completeness by ignoring various facts of the situation; the explanation was much smaller than the situation it claimed to explain. Chesterton then drew analogies with the Materialist and with the man who refused to acknowledge that

14 Garry Wills Chesterton: Man and Mask p. 33.
anything existed outside his own mental processes. All three were
impervious to any attack along logical lines:

A man cannot think himself out of mental evil; for it is
actually the organ of thought that has become diseased,
ungovernable, and, as it were, independent. He can only be
saved by will or faith. 15

The ordinary man, said Chesterton, saved himself from ever reaching
such a position by accepting mystery as endemic in existence:

He has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If
he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he
would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. 16

In the second chapter, Chesterton went on to attack those who abandoned
reason altogether. One such was H.G. Wells, who had declared that
reason and logic, like everything else in existence, formed part of
the evolutionary process and therefore possessed no absolute validity.
Such a view, replied Chesterton, led to the destruction of thought;
the thinker had always to remember that "the human intellect is free
to destroy itself". 17 Others, following Nietzsche, had attempted to
escape from excessive rationalism by exalting the will above reason,
a line which had been taken by Shaw among others. But, said
Chesterton, you could not praise will, only the object of will;
otherwise it led to a contradiction in terms:

The worship of will is the negation of will. To admire mere
choice is to refuse to choose. 18

Once more the solution he presented was the acceptance of

15. Orthodoxy p. 35.
16. ibid. p. 47.
17. ibid. p. 56.
18. ibid. p. 67.
irreconcilables: in praising all choices, Nietzsche had paralysed choice and had reached an identical position with that of the Tolstoyan who declared that "all special actions are evil". 19 Therefore, just as he had before turned to the common man who accepted experience at the expense of logic, so now Chesterton turned to the figure of Joan of Arc who, by exercising her faculty of will, became at once more warlike than Nietzsche and more peaceable than Tolstoy.

The link between Joan and the common man was that both accepted the existence of things outside themselves, whereas the fault of all modern thinkers, whether they erred in giving too great or too small a rôle to reason, was that, like the lunatic, they believed in themselves, and this was "a hysterical and superstitious belief" 20, for "thinking in isolation and pride ends in being an idiot". 21

The cardinal point in his thinking was then that the individual must accept the absolute and independent nature of external existence and must always allow it primacy over his own thought-processes. This had obviously been worked out by Chesterton in the course of his turmoil during the 1890's, for it was precisely opposite to the outlook of the predominant literary school of that time: the Aesthetic movement. The Aesthetes laid great stress on the way in which the individual's perception altered the object perceived. Thus the paintings of Whistler and the drawings of Beardsley were obviously

19. ibid. p. 74.
21. ibid. p. 73.
"unrealistic" in the superficial sense, but they claimed to express a deeper realism in terms of the subjective reaction. Nothing was intrinsically beautiful or ugly; beauty or ugliness lay in the contemplation of the object, not in the object itself. Chesterton sought to counter this by celebrating the mere fact that other things besides himself existed and by declaring his obligation to be grateful:

Through what fierce incarnations furled
   In fire and darkness, did I go,
Ere I was worthy in the world
   To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars
   I bought my naked right to be,
Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave
   The wren, my brother, shame for me. 22

This thankfulness was his answer to the Aesthetes who took their own existence for granted and then subordinated all other existence to it.

One effect of his strong reaction to them was to make him look more favourably on Shaw and Wells, for even if he disagreed with the ideas they expounded, it had earlier seemed as though the exposition of ideas would be abandoned for the description of mere sensation. Chesterton was profoundly relieved that the Aesthetes had been succeeded by men who entirely repudiated their attitude and that the most striking literature in the closing years of the nineteenth century came, in his view, from two men who were primarily concerned with stating their beliefs: Shaw the Socialist and Kipling the Imperialist. This, he declared, conclusively demonstrated the primacy of philosophy

over art:

All the art of all the artists [he wrote in 1905] looked tiny and tedious beside the art which was a by-product of propaganda. The reason, indeed, is very simple. A man cannot be wise enough to be a great artist without being wise enough to wish to be a philosopher. A man cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything. 23.

This attitude considerably affected the tone of his later attacks on Shaw and Wells. In a sense, it was much more important that they should hold particular theories as to the nature of man and the desirable types of human society than that those theories should be erroneous in Chesterton's opinion; for he always retained a lively horror of the time when it was thought ridiculous for a man to hold any theories at all. In 1909 he praised Shaw for having brought about the disappearance of the cynics and pessimists of the period 1885-1893 who "yawned so wide as to swallow the world".

The last and best glory of Shaw is that in the circles where this creature was found, he is not. He has not been killed (I don't know why), but he has been turned into a Shaw idealist. This is no exaggeration. I meet men who, when I knew them in 1898, were just a little too lazy to destroy the universe. They are now conscious of not being quite worthy to abolish some prison regulations. This destruction and conversion seems to me the mark of something actually great. 24

The gradual moulding of his thought was accelerated when in 1896, the year after he left the Slade, he fell in love. Romantic love was, to Chesterton, the final gift bestowed on man, the last and greatest reason why he ought to be grateful. I have just quoted two stanzas

of a poem on this general theme; here the third and final stanza is relevant. The poem, entitled "The Beatific Vision", concludes:

But what shall God not ask of him
In the last time when all is told,
Who saw her stand beside the hearth,
The firelight garbing her in gold?

There are two important factors to be noted about the girl, Frances Blogg, with whom Chesterton fell in love. First she came from a somewhat arty suburb, Bedford Park, "that earliest of garden cities, so conventionally unconventional" 25, where Aestheticism flourished. Secondly, she stood out in strong contrast to her surroundings in that she was a practising Anglo-Catholic.

She actually practised a religion. This was something utterly unaccountable ... to me. ... Any number of people proclaimed religions, chiefly oriental religions, analysed or argued about them; but that anybody could regard religion as a practical thing like gardening was something quite new to me. 26

It is clear that his contact with Anglo-Catholicism through his fiancée had an immense effect on the clarification of his thought. The mere assertion of the independence of existence outside the believer is not in itself a very substantial basis on which to build a philosophy of life, and one may therefore hazard that Chesterton's ultimate philosophy could have taken a very different form had it not been for the fact that at the crucial moment his mind encountered a complete and coherent system. It is, however, remarkably difficult to pin down Chesterton's religious beliefs in the quarter-century

which elapsed before his submission to Rome in 1922. He was in close contact with a number of Anglo-Catholic clergy and always spoke of them with respect. His books from 1900 onwards all showed a deep Catholic feeling, and in two of them at least there appeared somewhat derogatory incidental references to Roman Catholicism. Yet Chesterton never showed any specifically Anglo-Catholic feelings; he never asserted that the Church of England was an integral part of the Catholic Church or took part in attempts to revive Catholic practices in it. Indeed, an Anglican friend later said of him in these years:

He had a religion of his own. He never went to Mass, most certainly never to Confession. He had no apparent direct connection with the Anglo-Catholic party and took no active part in Anglican worship.

The long period in which he belonged to neither Church must be put down to his fear of doing anything that would cause Frances pain and also to his virtual inability to take so practical a step without her assistance, for his lack of practicality was a byword. As a result,

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27. In Orthodoxy he contrasted the sleek Buddhist saint with the emaciated mediaeval saint and continued: " Granted that both images are extravagances, are perversions of the pure creed...." (p. 241). Four years later, in The Victorian Age in Literature, he commented as follows on the Oxford Movement: "It was certainly not a conscious reaching out towards Rome: except on a Roman Catholic theory which might explain all our unrests by that dim desire. It knew little of Europe, it knew nothing of Ireland, to which any merely Roman Catholic revulsion would have turned". (p. 43)

his Catholicism had a curiously abstract quality about it; it asserted the necessity for a central institution without bearing the marks of any specific institution upon it. From the point of view of gaining a hearing, this was all to the good, for, as Belloc found to his bitterness, nothing definitely Roman Catholic could have a wide appeal; nor, let it be added, has Anglo-Catholicism ever gained numerous adherents. But Catholicism as Chesterton expressed it, with extreme ingenuity and force and without violating any traditional English modes of feeling, was quite another matter. His books were read widely and wrypathetically.

The story of how Chesterton fared in his early years as a writer may be quickly told. One of his fellow-students at the Slade was a member of the family which controlled the publishing firm of Hodder and Stoughton and gave Chesterton some books to review for a periodical published by the firm. Thus began his free-lance journalism. On leaving the Slade, he supplemented this as yet meagre income by working in the office of another publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, until by 1900 this second source of income was no longer necessary. By 1901, he wrote that he could count on an income of £350 from what he wrote for the Speaker and the Daily News, besides what he could earn by his pen in other quarters. It was not until 1903, however, that he really made his name with a study of Robert Browning. Bristling with inaccuracies, it yet succeeded in conveying something of the nature of Browning's poetry and the outlook which had produced it. Then in
the following year he produced his first novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Its appeal for local loyalties caught people's imagination and made it immensely popular. By 1904 Chesterton was firmly established in the literary world, as may be seen from his being invited to offer himself as a candidate for the Chair of English Literature at Birmingham University, an invitation which he declined.

It is interesting to make a comparison here with Belloc. Chesterton had no academic ambitions; to write prolifically seems to have suited his temperament exactly. The books and articles poured out with equal profusion from both men, but Chesterton showed no sign of resenting the labour involved or of feeling that financial pressure was forcing him to produce a pile of meretricious work, when with leisure he could have produced work fit to stand the test of time. He was a singularly unambitious man, largely because he was content with his easily won achievements and at ease in his environment. To compare him with Belloc, failed don, failed barrister, bitterly writing, writing, is to realize the extent of the difference between them.
Section 4. - H.G. Wells.

The method of the present chapter - which is, to show how the thought of each of the men in his maturity was strongly influenced by his early experiences - is specially relevant in the case of H.G. Wells, for Wells was not only conscious that his mind and outlook had been formed by his upbringing; he made it a point of principle to expound his early life in order that others might learn from it. In 1913 he wrote a novel, The Passionate Friends, which purported to be the autobiography of a man who, realizing how complete his ignorance of the intimate nature of his own father and grandfather was, resolved to set the facts of his own life down, so that his son should be able to benefit by his experience:

Man is a creature becoming articulate, and why should those men have left so much of the tale untold - to be lost and forgotten? Why must we all repeat things done, and come again very bitterly to wisdom our fathers have achieved before us? ... All my life so far has gone in learning very painfully what many men have learnt before me; I have spent the greater part of forty years in finding a sort of purpose for the uncertain and declining decades that remain. Is it not time the generations drew together and helped one another? Cannot we begin now to make a better use of the experiences of life so that our sons may not waste themselves so much? 1

Wells set out his own life as an exemplum, both of what was to be sought and of what was to be avoided. Moreover, a man's real knowledge of human nature could only come from his observation of himself. When Wells wrote an Experiment in Autobiography, he declared:

1. The Passionate Friends p. 5.
I am being my own rabbit because I find no other specimen so convenient for dissection. Our own lives are all the practical material we have for the scientific study of living; the rest is hearsay. 2

It is evident, therefore, that Wells attached the highest importance to the events of his life, and particularly of his early life, for more than three-quarters of the autobiography was devoted to the first half of his life.

He was born in 1866 at Bromley, Kent, where his father, Joseph Wells, kept a china shop in the High Street called Atlas House. Both Joseph and his wife Sarah had started life in service, Joseph as a gardener, Sarah as a lady's maid, but on their marriage they had invested their savings in the shop. The venture was not a success. Joseph's real passion was cricket, and the shop, thus relegated to second call on his time and energy, failed to support the family in any tolerable standard of living. Joseph himself, feckless and easygoing, suffered comparatively little from this; the real burden fell on his wife. Sarah Wells had the task of maintaining her family (three sons and a daughter) in a thoroughly inconvenient and insanitary house, and the memory of her unending, hopeless struggle haunted Wells:

She is struggling up or down stairs with a dust-pan, a slop-pail, a scrubbing-brush or a greasy dish-clout. Long before I came into the world her poor dear hands had become enlarged and distorted by scrubbing and damp, and I never knew them otherwise. 3

3. Ibid. p. 70.
It is clear from the way Wells spoke of her that there was a strong element of guilt in his attitude; however sensitive he was towards her struggles in memory, he had not been so in his thoughtless youth.

Yet mixed with this guilt was an equally strong element of exasperation, for a great part of Sarah's efforts had been directed not so much to the family's well-being as to the maintenance of its respectability: as independent retailers, the Wellses had a social position to keep up. One manifestation of this attitude was his mother's devotion to Queen Victoria and her eagerness for any titbits of information about the Royal Family. Consequently the old Queen became for Wells the symbol of the fearful combination of exhausting grind with deadening respectability. Another manifestation was his mother's adherence to the Church of England, an institution which to Wells was a social form without any true religious content whatever. Certainly (he noted bitterly) all her pious devotion brought no alleviation to the family's position; instead, despite all her prayers, the one person in whom she might eventually have found sympathetic understanding, her daughter, died as a child from appendicitis. Wells refused to believe that, under the impact of such a catastrophe, his mother's faith could retain any substance, and declared, in flat contradiction of the evidence:

She could never talk about her religion except in set phrases but slowly the last vestiges of faith died out. ... She still went to Church but I doubt if she prayed with her will and her thought any more. 4

4. ibid. p. 176.
As for Wells' own religious beliefs, he claimed to have been a prodigy of Early Impiety. I was scared by Hell, I did not at first question the existence of Our Father, but no fear nor terror could prevent my feeling that his All Seeing Eye was that of an Old Sneak and that the Atonement for which I had to be so grateful was either an imposture, a trick of sham self-immolation, or a crazy nightmare.

The pattern here revealed (and it is very similar to what we have already seen in Shaw), of intellectual clear-sightedness slowly gaining sufficient courage to cast aside old superstitions which, hitherto apparently real and terrifying, vanished like smoke as soon as they were disputed, was one which not only Wells but the whole Edwardian period loved to see as its salient characteristic.

At the age of seven, Wells began his education. In contrast to Shaw, who liked to belittle the effect of his schooldays and to present himself as being entirely self-taught, Wells attached great importance to the manner of his education for reasons which will soon be clear. He began at a local private school known as Bromley Academy, and later he was grateful that he had been sent there and not to one of the Board Schools, on the grounds that the latter were designed to provide a lower-class type of education, whereas the Academy did give him a middle-class sense of individual self-reliance and individual dignity, however pretentious, of standards "a little above the common".

It is a revealing admission, for what had Sarah Wells been striving

6. ibid. p. 93.
62.

to achieve but this? What really made his parents' way of life intolerable to Wells was not so much their low social status in itself but their failure to achieve the middle-class aspiration of rising in the world. The Socialism he later advocated as the answer to the impossible situation in which his parents had found themselves - for he saw the eventual ruin of every small retailer as inevitable - had nothing to do with the rise to power of the working classes; he recoiled from the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat just as he recoiled from the Board Schools. Socialism for him meant the co-ordination of the economy so that the individual's efforts at self-improvement were not frustrated, an approach which ultimately rested on a confident belief in self-help.

But then the year in which Wells entered the Academy was only 1873, and his subsequent career could be presented as the classic example of the triumph of self-help. He remained at the Academy for seven years, at the end of which time he gained a notable success in the examinations of the College of Preceptors, towards which all the instruction given by the Academy was aimed. He was thus ready for wage-earning, as fully educated as anyone in his station of life had any right to expect, and, like his brothers before him, he was found a job in a draper's shop. Yet for all his examination success he proved simply incompetent and was dismissed after a few months.

Meanwhile, her three sons at last off her hands as she thought,
Sarah Wells was trying to improve the family fortunes by going into service again. By chance, the local big house, Up Park, was then occupied by a lady whose maid Sarah had once been, and accordingly she was able to obtain a post as housekeeper. So it was that, on returning home after his dismissal, Wells spent a few weeks in the big house, a time of which he made full use by reading the books from the library - but secretly, for he had no permission to do so. The house itself was in slow decline: its mistress was not a member of the family which had lived there for generations; moreover, she had only limited means with which to maintain it. Wells was struck by the contrast between this social decline and the immense stores of intellectual vitality represented in the accumulation of books and in the memory of the leisured cultured way of life which they symbolized.

Next, still in pursuit of schooling, Wells managed to spend a few weeks as a pupil at Midhurst Grammar School before his mother found him a second position at another draper's. This time he remained for nearly two years, and instead of being dismissed, it was he who ran away, back to Up Park and his horrified mother. Now he succeeded in returning to Midhurst Grammar School, but as an usher, not a pupil. During the following year, as well as teaching he studied for the examinations run by the Education Department and so won a grant of a guinea a week to enable him to study at the Normal School of Science (now the Royal College of Science) at South Kensington. This marked his final liberation from the world of
drudgery and servility to which, it seemed, his birth condemned him — and he had escaped solely by means of education.

Before we pass on to his years at the Normal School, it is necessary to mention two incidents which were to have a lasting effect in increasing his antipathy towards institutional Christianity. The first occurred during his time as a draper’s apprentice, when he attended a Roman Catholic service and was repelled by the sermon he heard on the sufferings of Christ. It seemed to him a wanton exploitation of the instinct of blood-lust, and from then on he saw the Roman Catholic Church as endeavouring to maintain its hold over its adherents by exciting in them an unhealthy emotionalism. The second incident was even more important, since it involved his acquiescence. In order to obtain the post at Midhurst Grammar School, he had to be a communicant member of the Church of England. He was therefore obliged to undergo instruction in the Faith from an alarmed and uncertain curate, to submit himself for Confirmation and to take Communion. Wells felt that he was being forced to violate his deepest convictions, and he never forgave the Church of England for the humiliation thus inflicted.

In 1884, then, Wells came to London as a penurious student. The following year was of paramount importance in his life, for in it he studied zoology under T.H. Huxley. He thus came into close contact with one of the great men of his time, for it was Huxley who forced the educated classes to accept Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis.
The year made a permanent impression on Wells in two ways. First, he took the evolutionary theory as being applicable to human life and read this in an optimistic sense, viz. that just as the rest of nature had passed through an unending series of increasingly complex forms, so the human race would steadily develop into greater and more perfect forms. In saying this, Wells did not envisage man's supercession by a different species; instead, he applied the evolutionary process by analogy to the spheres of intellect and imagination and emphasized the immense wastage of potentiality among large sections of society in its existing structure. Second, he saw the theory as having been forced on Darwin by the facts alone. Therefore, he believed, one had only to accumulate sufficient facts for a pattern to emerge which would be capable of general application. This was why he set down the facts of his life in his autobiography: when enough men had done this, then a pattern to cover every individual existence would emerge.

For both Huxley and Darwin Wells conceived an intense admiration:

They thought boldly, carefully and simply, they spoke and wrote fearlessly and plainly, they lived modestly and decently; they were mighty intellectual giants. 7

The nature of this admiration becomes plain, I think, when one compares this with what he had said a little earlier concerning the effect on him of the Roman Catholic sermon already mentioned: because of it he "had to declare the Catholic Church, ... with all its

divines, sages, saints and martyrs, ... wrong". Now he was setting up Darwin and Huxley as the first sages of a new Church, based on the dogmas of the perfectibility of man and the supremacy of external facts interpreted by the human intellect.

From now on, Wells worked the evolutionary principle into every part of his thought. The half-formed and doubtful education structure up which he had been climbing represented the new order of things struggling to appear. Sometimes, this new order was seen as the development of the old. Thus, in 1909, he declared contemporary England to be the development of the country house: Up Park (or its fictional counterpart, Bladesover) was the seed-bed of the recently founded intellectual centre at Kensington:

I struck out a truth one day in Cromwell Road quite suddenly as I looked over the Natural History Museum: "By Jove!" said I, "but this is the little assemblage of cases of stuffed birds and animals upon the Bladesover staircase grown enormous, and wonder as the corresponding thing to the Bladesover curios and porcelain is the Art Museum, and there in the observatories in Exhibition Road is old Sir Cuthbert's Gregorian telescope that I hunted out in the storeroom and put together".

And Wells' hero concluded that "England is a country of great Renascence landed gentlefolk who have been unconsciously outgrown and overgrown". Sometimes - in contradiction to this - the new order was said to have arisen independently of the old and to have superseded it. Thus in 1934 the Normal School was presented as

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a product of the irregular and convulsive thrusts made by the embryonic modern world-state in its unconscious efforts to free itself from the aristocratic system of eighteenth-century Europe. 10

There is, however, one important similarity between the two passages: in both of them, what had happened was said to have occurred unconsciously. Here lay the reason for Wells' taking Darwinian evolution as an optimistic theory: if more complex higher forms evolved through the force of circumstances and not because lower forms willed it, then one might foresee the continual improvement of mankind with entire confidence. Moreover, there is no sign that Wells himself was aware of the contradiction that has just been pointed out. Indeed, one can find a passage contradicting the second of those quoted only a few pages earlier, when he declared:

It is the country house that has opened the way to human equality, not in the form of a democracy of insurgent proletarians, but as a world of universal gentlefolk no longer in need of a servile substratum. 11

Wells was, in fact, involved in a love-hate relationship with the English upper classes (as with the English way of life in general) which will be explained more fully later.

At the end of his first year in the Normal School, under the stimulus of Huxley's teaching, Wells gained a First, and the prospect of an academic career in science seemed bright, but unfortunately facilities for him to continue his first-degree course in that subject

were not available. Instead, he had to study successively geology and physics in the two years that followed, neither of which captured his interest. As a result, he actually failed the finals of the latter course, and only took his degree when he re-sat them three years later in 1890. Wells took his exclusion from the academic world as bitterly as Belloc was to. He felt keenly his lack of defined status. When in 1920 he challenged the academics in their own field with his immensely popular Outline of History, he declared in his introduction that he was

by nature and choice as remote from academic respect as he was from a dukedom. ... He is a literary Bedouin, whose home is the great outside, who knows no prouder title than his name, whose only conceivable honour is his own. 12

The defiance discernible here arose from the fact that Wells depended for his position upon popular acclamation; he had no qualifications by which he could exact respect as a sage; he depended on the ephemeral respect gained for him by his books. It is significant that right at the end of his life he presented a thesis at London University and was awarded a D.Sc. - more on account of his general eminence, it is said, than of the merits of the thesis itself. In this aspect Wells appears as an outsider quite as much as Belloc, and like Belloc he resented his exclusion.

Wells' experiences in the years after his study at the Normal School had come to an end in 1887 confirmed his view of the fragmentary state of education in England. He worked at a depressing

12. The Outline of History p. 5. (1931 edition)
and badly run private school in Wales and then at another in London which, though better run, still aimed at nothing more than providing its pupils with the necessary certificates and qualifications, it could not in any sense be said to educate them. Wells' awareness of this failure was still further deepened when, having at last gained his degree, he became a tutor for the University Correspondence College. This method of instruction by post was for Wells the supreme example of the absurd state of education, and yet such was the general state of chaos that an institution of this kind performed an indispensable function; it was "at once preposterous and necessary".  

What was education in the true sense? The question was one to which Wells eagerly sought an answer, the more so because the whole matter seemed to him to be closely linked with evolution: both were chiefly concerned with the relationship of the individual with his environment. Thus he came to define the purpose of education as being "to correlate the intelligence, will and conscience of the individual to the social process". His own experience of the existing system, both as pupil and teacher, had shown him that there was a complete lack of any such purpose - with the exception of the year he had spent under Huxley.

Meanwhile, the particular teaching posts within his grasp did not promise a rosy future. The Correspondence College was in itself a drudgery and, from the point of view of an academic career, a complete

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blind alley. Wells' mind began to turn in the direction of writing. So far, with the exception of a textbook produced in connection with the Correspondence College, he had written little. An early and unfinished draft of what was eventually to become *The Time Machine* appeared in serial form in *The Science Schools Journal* in 1888. In 1891 an abstruse article on "The Rediscovery of the Unique", altogether too heavy for its medium, appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Shortly afterwards, in a book by J.M. Barrie, Wells came across the advice that the slighter the theme of occasional articles, the more likely editors were to accept them. Accordingly, he altered his approach and now found editors very willing to buy his work. During 1894 he began to establish himself as a free-lance journalist. The turning-point came at the end of that year when he completed the new version of *The Time Machine* and was offered £100 by W.H. Henley for the right to serialize it. This, together with its publication the following year in book-form, marked the end of his financial difficulties. From 1895 onwards, "quite accidentally I suddenly developed extraordinary earning power".

Of the four men under consideration, he was thus the first to achieve success. Shaw, although ten years his senior, had still to see a production of one of his plays that would be anything more than a succès de scandale, while Belloc and Chesterton, who were both

15. An exhaustive study of Wells' first literary attempts is to be found in Bernard Bergonzi's *The Early H.G. Wells* (1961).
slightly younger than Wells, were only just coming to the end of their student days. Moreover, his success was very considerable; the impact made by each of his books was tremendous and their sales wide. In the last five years of the dying century he burst upon the literary world.

From the point of view of Wells the sage, there were drawbacks to this. For one thing, his literary successes were not always consonant with his own beliefs. The Time Machine is the prime example of this. In that novel, Wells presented a world of general decadence and gave cogent reasons for doing so. Man, he said, was progressively mastering his environment so as to bring it in complete subservience to his own needs. But, as his hero pointed out,

"it is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger and trouble. An animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism. Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless. There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change". 17

On this line of reasoning, the triumph of human intelligence would involve its suicide: as soon as man had succeeded in adapting the world to his own purposes, he would begin to decline. This was the very opposite of the attitude which Wells wished to inculcate. He therefore appended a somewhat unconvincing epilogue, in which a friend of the hero's commented:

He, I know ..., thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon us and destroy its makers in the end. If that is so, it remains for us to live as

17. The Time Machine p. 130.
though it were not so. But to me the future is still black and blank - is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story. 18

Such doubtful remarks did nothing to counteract the impact of the foregoing story.

In any case, Wells was growing dissatisfied with the prospect of a purely literary career, particularly as in the years after 1897 he was coming into contact with the leading Fabians who infected him "with their pervading sense of the importance of social service as the frame of life".

They may have done much to deflect me from the drift towards a successful, merely literary career into which I was manifestly falling in those early Sandgate days. I might have become entirely an artist and a literary careerist. 19

A feature of his work after 1900 was the appearance of a second stream of activity beside that of the novels and short stories, one consisting of sociological works. Later, he tried to blend the two, by writing novels with a didactic purpose, conscious partly that it was above all as a novelist that he was gifted, partly that it was because of such books that the public was willing to give him its attention. Nevertheless, he resented their demands and saw himself as a social thinker who was obliged to make very great concessions to his public. Bertrand Russell tells a revealing anecdote of Wells in 1906, just after he had published a novel, *In the Days of the Comet*, which appeared to advocate free love and had consequently aroused protest. Wells thereupon had

18. ibid. p. 152.
denied that such an interpretation of the novel was correct, and when
Russell taxed him with inconsistency,

he replied that he had not yet saved enough money out of royalties
to be able to live on the interest, and that he did not propose to
advocate free love publicly until he had done so. 20

The picture of a man drawing money from the public by pandering to their
prejudices until he had obtained sufficient to be able to flout them
with impunity is not a pleasant one, but in any case Wells was deceiving
himself in taking up such an attitude, for, as Russell notes, Wells
"found unpopularity very hard to endure" 21, and although he might
envisage defying public opinion, in the event he usually managed to
keep any such overt acts to the minimum. Shaw, who possessed greater
independence of mind than Wells, had this advantage from his long
period of obscurity: than when he did eventually win, he did so on
his own terms; he made the theatre accept the kind of play he wished
to write. Wells produced the kind of novel the public wished to read
and then sought to turn the situation to his own advantage as a social
thinker, with much less complete success.

One element in his initial success was the help he received from
his wife, who acted as his secretary and critic, and who took over
the entire management of his growing income. This was not, however,
his first wife. To discover the circumstances of his first marriage,
we have to go back to the days when he was still struggling to make
a living as a teacher in London. At that time, he had chosen, as the

20. Portraits from Memory p. 78.
21. ibid. p. 79.
most economical means of accommodation, to lodge at the house of an aunt, and so it was that he came into regular contact with his cousin, Isabel. His attitude towards her - to use his own term - rapidly developed into a sexual fixation, which he represented in his autobiography as being simply the product of circumstances: he wanted a woman, his opportunities for meeting women were virtually non-existent, and his desires therefore became fixed on the one woman within his reach. Slowly and reluctantly Isabel accepted his proposal, and in 1891 the couple were married.

The marriage was not a success. Though Isabel remained as attractive in his eyes as ever, she was unable to respond to his love-making, and, thwarted in the marital bed, Wells began a series of extramarital relationships. A second cause of the rift was Isabel's inability to share in her husband's intellectual interests and their discovery that the opinions and general outlook of each were incompatible with those of the other. After little more than a year the couple separated.

Wells' attention now turned to a girl whom he was teaching privately, and in 1893, to the scandal of both their families, they declared that they were going to set up house together without getting married, on the grounds that they "did not believe in the institution of marriage" 22 - a fine gesture that may have been influenced by the fact that in any case Wells was not yet free to marry her; and indeed

they did regularize their position as soon as Isabel divorced Wells in 1895. The unexpected factor was that, whatever they believed the nature of the liaison to be beforehand, it did not develop into a passionate one, or in Wells' words: "There arose no such sexual fixation between us, as still lingered in my mind towards my cousin". 23 The relationship was based instead, partly on the fact already mentioned, that his second wife, Jane, was rapidly making herself indispensable to him, and partly on a web of whimsy and fantasy which they created between themselves. The birth of two sons in 1900 and 1902 made their marriage permanent, but once again Wells had to look outside his marriage for sexual satisfaction. In his autobiography, he explained this by saying that men swung between promiscuity and fixation. A more convincing picture had appeared earlier in 1916 in the autobiographical novel, Mr. Britling Sees It Through. There, Wells had romanticized his first marriage and, significantly, had shown Mr. Britling's first wife as having died in childbirth:

There is much to be said for that extreme Catholic theory which would make marriage not merely lifelong but eternal. Certainly Mr. Britling would have been a finer if not a happier creature if his sentimental existence could have died with his first wife or continued only in his love for their son. He had married in the glow of youth, he had had two years of clean and simple loving, helping, quarrelling, and the happy ending of quarrels. Something had gone out of him into all that, which could not be renewed again. 24

As for Mr. Britling's second wife:

23. ibid. p. 430.
For several unhappy years she thwarted him and disappointed him, while he filled her with dumb inexplicable distresses. ... Only very slowly did they realise the truth of their relationship and admit to themselves that the fine bud of love between them had failed to flower, and only after long years were they able to delimit boundaries where they had imagined union, and to become - allies. If it had been reasonably possible for them to part without mutual injury and recrimination they would have done so, but two children presently held them, and gradually they had to work out the broad mutual toleration of their later relations. 

Thus for Wells, the elements of sexual desirability and attractive domesticity were never fused. On the one side was the pleasant household run so efficiently by his wife, on the other a series of unsatisfying affairs. Such a situation could not fail to influence Wells' thought, as he came to consider the society of the future and which possible structures were likely to give the greatest happiness to those living within them.

There is one further point to make about Wells' life, and that concerns the place in which he chose to live. After the first years of his success, when he lived at Sandgate, near Rye, in a house specially built to his own requirements, he moved in 1912 to Essex, to a large and comfortable house bordering on the estate of the Countess of Warwick. In a sense, he had managed to instal himself permanently at Up Park.

Lady Warwick herself was a strange figure. Wealthy, and moving in the highest social circles - she was an intimate friend of Edward VII - she had nevertheless been converted to Socialist principles. Lord Russell notes drily:

25. ibid. pp. 103-104.
I used to visit [Wells] at week-ends at his house in Essex where, on Sunday afternoons, he would take his house-party to visit his neighbour Lady Warwick. She was an active supporter of the Labour Party, and her Park contained a lake surrounded by huge green porcelain frogs given her by Edward VII. It was a little difficult to adapt one's conversation to both these aspects of her personality. 26

Yet it is not surprising that a person of this type should have had an immense appeal for Wells. At the beginning of his career, he had been bitterly resentful of the classes in possession, and the narrow-minded and domineering dowager, quite unaware that the world around her was changed out of all recognition from that of her youth, was a stock butt in his novels. Yet his attitude towards the upper class had very soon taken on a double aspect. If from one point of view, they had been given all the opportunities and had squandered them, from another they were the one source for hope in that only they possessed culture and its prerequisite, leisure. He had come, as we have seen, to place the very highest value on education; but education was impossible without leisure. He himself, it is true, had struggled to success without the initial advantages conferred by birth, but how many others of his own class were prepared to do the same? Most appeared content, after minimal instruction, to settle down to lives of drudgery. The move to Easton Glebe represented for Wells not merely his emancipation from Atlas House but his abandonment of it.

Chapter Two.

IMPERIALISM AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR.

Section 1. - The Political and Historical Background.

The year in which the South African War began, 1899, by chance more or less coincided with the emergence of all four men into the public view. This is least true of Shaw, who had gradually been making himself felt as an advocate of Socialism for some years; yet, as we have seen, it was only now that he was beginning to gain that wider renown which was accorded to him for his plays. But for all of them, the War, with its fairly clearcut issues, provided an opportunity to declare their positions and to seek to influence public opinion. As a preliminary, therefore, it is necessary to summarize those issues.

The natures of the two opposing sides in the war formed a strong contrast to each other. On the one side were the Boers, a small nation of farmers, intensely conscious of their nationality and hostile to foreign influence or control. On the other was one of the most powerful nations in the world which, as one manifestation of her sense of power, had been seeking to extend the overseas areas she administered, with the object of colonizing newly acquired territories with emigrants from the mother country and thus creating daughter communities following the British way of life.

As a small, highly industrialized island with very large undeveloped colonies, Britain's aim was to turn those colonies into
into sources of raw materials which would then be shipped to her for processing. Inevitably, such a widely dispersed scheme required a complicated system of finance to back it, with the result that financiers became more and more important in the maintenance of British government as the Empire expanded. It is not surprising to find, therefore that the reason for the war against the Boers was primarily a financial one.

It had come about in this way. In the 1880's, in order to escape British rule, the Boers had trekked inland from the southern-most part of Africa where they had originally settled in the seventeenth century, and had set up independent republics in the African interior. These the British Government was prepared to tolerate, retaining no more than a general suzerainty over their foreign policies, until it was found that the newly occupied territory contained vast deposits of gold. The Boers themselves had little wish to abandon the agricultural basis of their community by exploiting these deposits, but from the British point of view it was out of the question that full-scale mining should not begin. Thus, although the Boers granted British companies concessions to work the mines, they demanded a high price for them. Furthermore, although the Boers allowed the entry of men to work the mines, these men, whom the Boers referred to as Outlanders, were debarred from taking any part in the running of the country.

The situation was inflammatory. The State in which the gold
had been found, the Transvaal, together with her sister republic, the Orange Free State, formed an enclave in the heart of British South Africa. Moreover, the Outlanders complained that they were subject to brutal ill-treatment by the Boers and in 1898 petitioned the Queen for protection. Britain had no legal right to intervene in the Transvaal's internal affairs; nevertheless, circumstances were such that the strict legality of the issues involved rapidly sank into the background. Since 1895 the Conservative Party had been in power in England, and its tendencies, at this time especially, were strongly Imperialist. At the Colonial Office was Joseph Chamberlain, and he was not a Tory of the old type - indeed, he was not a Tory at all, but a Liberal who had broken with Gladstone on the issue of Irish Home Rule and had allied himself and his adherents with the Conservatives. He was, moreover, a Birmingham manufacturer and thus precisely the kind of man who hoped to gain most from the Imperialist policy outlined above.

In the months following the Outlanders' petition, the situation rapidly worsened until war was declared - to the great enthusiasm of the British public - in October of the following year. At the time it seemed impossible that the war could last long. 50,000 men were the absolute maximum the Boers could muster, whereas the British could put 200,000 in the field and still have much greater numbers of reserves. Nevertheless, the war began very badly for Britain:
in one disastrous week in early December there were three separate British defeats. Partly these are to be ascribed to the ineptitude of the British commanders, partly to the quality of the Boers who, unlike the British, were fighting on terrain with which they were thoroughly familiar. The situation changed when in January 1900 Lord Roberts was sent out as Commander-in-Chief with Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. Together, they devised a general strategy which worked to such good effect that by August they occupied the two Boer capitals and proclaimed the annexation of the republics. The Government at home seized the opportunity of holding a General Election, the so-called "Khaki Election", and, not surprisingly, were returned to power. In December 1900 Roberts left South Africa, his task completed.

It quickly became apparent, however, that his departure had been premature. Though the capitals had been occupied, the Boer Army had not been destroyed; indeed, it was almost impossible to destroy. For one thing, the Boers avoided large-scale engagements and confined themselves to guerilla attacks, in which they met with considerable success. For another, they were not professional soldiers but armed civilians, able to disperse to their farms and then re-form as often as need arose. Thus, among the male population, no distinction could be made between belligerents and non-belligerents. Faced with this situation, Kitchener decided to take drastic measures. The entire country was divided into sections with barbed wire, and groups of
Boers, thus confined, were hunted down by the British in what were known as "drives", covering each section in turn. Ultimately all the Boers (including the women and children, who would otherwise continue to run the farms and keep their menfolk supplied with food) were to be confined in concentration camps. The method was virtually foolproof but singularly unheroic. Moreover, it was slow: the war dragged on for two years after Roberts' departure before the Boers finally submitted, and during that time considerable sympathy was aroused in Britain by the tenacity of the Boers, so that when the Boer leaders came to London after their submission, they were astonished at the warmth of their welcome by the crowds.

This lack of animosity shows the very great difference between the South African War and the Great War, and indeed if the two are directly compared, the former sinks into insignificance. Casualties were few, partly because it was taken for granted that in any engagement the losing side would surrender, once it became clear which way the decision was going. The hectic interest taken by the British public in the news of victories and defeats arose from the fact that the gains or losses resulting from the fighting never seemed out of all proportion to the number of lives lost; if national pride was particularly sensitive, this was because the war news was never of a sort to excite revulsion against fighting in general; one could be partisan without seeming callous and inhuman. Hence, this war gave rise to considerable debate, whereas the cost in endurance of the
Great War made debate seem out of place, unless it were on the question of how to avoid any repetition of it. Moreover, the South African War seemed to leave everything unchanged (except for the extension of British rule in Africa). Whereas the arguments put forward in 1914 seemed irrelevant by the end of the Great War not because they were necessarily wrong-headed or hasty but simply because they had been outstripped by events, the world did not seem very different in 1902 from what it had been in 1899. Men felt that they had leisure for debate; the war had been, not so much a breach in the long peace, as a diversion from it.
Section 2. - The War and the Financiers.

Though the great majority of the British public welcomed the war, there was a vociferous minority against it, and this minority came to be known as the "Pro-Boers". The grounds on which they objected were twofold: the first was that the country was going to war for the convenience and profit of the mineowners, and the second that the Boers were fully justified in attempting to maintain their national integrity. This latter ground, as we shall see in the next section, was that on which Chesterton made his stand against the war; Belloc, however, was wholly concerned with the first.

Imperialism was an outlook which, Belloc declared, was basically repugnant to the English; they supported it without properly understanding its nature, but the only people to whom such an outlook could be truly congenial were those who lacked any national ties.

The outbreak of the war coincided with Belloc's arrival in London from Oxford. It was a period when, apart from his various other activities, he was engaged - like Chesterton - in forming contacts for his free-lance journalism, and one such contact was the Speaker, a weekly magazine which in the autumn of 1899 had been turned into a platform for Pro-Boer opinion. Belloc's contributions to the Speaker appear, however, to have been limited to book reviews and literary essays. There is no sign in his own writings that he shared that sympathy with the Boers (as distinct from a dislike of the war) which the magazine expressed, while a reference to it in a letter
written in November 1904 showed that he looked upon it merely as a rather unsatisfactory source of income, complaining of the length of time it had taken for a review of his to appear in it and also of the low fee he had received.¹

From the military point of view, Bellocc considered the war as beneath his notice. In his second novel, *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election*, published in 1908, he dismissed it contemptuously:

> It will be remembered that a war of unprecedented dimensions was raging, at the time of which I speak, in the sub-continent of South Africa. The President of the South African Republic, thinking the moment propitious for a conquest of our dominions, had invaded our territory after an ultimatum of incredible insolence, and, as though it were not sufficient that we should grapple foe upon equal terms, the whole weight of the Orange Free State was thrown into the scale against us.²

At the same time, he was anxious that his lack of enthusiasm for this war should not be construed as an emotional recoil from war in general. During the war he wrote "Verses to a Lord who, in the House of Lords, said that those who opposed the South African Adventure confused Soldiers with Money-grubbers" - i.e. that those who opposed the war were unable to see military action as arising from any motives more creditable than a vulgar desire for gain.

Bellocc denied this:

> You thought because we held, my lord, An ancient cause and strong, That therefore we maligned the sword: My lord, you did us wrong.

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¹. Robert Speaight (edr.): *Letters from Hilaire Bellocc* p. 4.
². *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election* pp. 1-2.
He went on to demonstrate his own appreciation of military qualities by making the following stanzas a celebration of valour in battle. Here he sought to give the lie to the criticism made in the Lords by showing the gulf that existed between true soldiers and the mineowners, on whose behalf the war was being fought, yet who were themselves taking no part in the actual fighting. He did this by presenting them ironically as military heroes; the reader was expected to perceive the ludicrously inapposite context of the familiar names and to realize that the mineowners (and consequently the war they had provoked) were at the very furthest remove from soldiering:

We also know the sacred height
Up on Tugela side,
Where those three hundred fought with Beit
And fair young Wernher died.

The daybreak on the failing force,
The final sabres drawn:
Tall Goltman, silent on his horse,
Superb against the dawn.  3

To Belloc it seemed that, until 1914, the British had lost all sense of the dignity of warfare, and he saw the seriousness with which so trivial and ridiculously unequal a struggle was taken as final proof of this.

Belloc's estimate of the contemporary situation was set out in his first novel, Emmanuel Burden (1904), in which he dealt, not specifically with the war, but with the general state of affairs that

3. Sonnets and Verse p. 68.
had caused it. Emmanuel Burden was a middle-class London merchant of an old-fashioned type; Belloc presented him with considerable sympathy as a man who was strongly national in his outlook and completely honest in his business affairs - there is indeed a strong similarity between Burden and Chesterton's picture of his own father and grandfather. Nevertheless, Burden was as much impressed by the achievements of the Empire-builders as anyone:

He was gratified, and occasionally enthusiastic, over the expansion of our dominion. He had a grasp of the various stages by which the jealousy of foreign nations had been stilled, and their competition annulled. He had appreciated in latter years the decline of English commerce, the ruin of our agriculture, and the upbuilding of a Greater Britain beyond the seas. All the manifest destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race he had seen as clearly as the humblest clerk; he had received it with as religious an emotion as had the poorest and most vulgar of our electorate. 4

In fact, Belloc implied, the Empire-building was undertaken not by Anglo-Saxons but by Jews (those people without national sympathies to whom Imperialism was thoroughly congenial) who formed companies to undertake various schemes of Imperial development and who, once the projects had been successfully floated, withdraw from them, leaving the cost of the ensuing failure to be borne either by the shareholders or, if the Government intervened to save the company from ruin, by the taxpayers. Hence the paradox that an increase in financial activity was accompanied by a decline in commerce.

4. Emmanuel Burden p. 82. The words "the poorest and most vulgar of our electorate" are a gibe at the mandate given to a policy of Imperialism at the "Khaki Election".
Emmanuel Burden told the story of one such project and of the company's efforts to gain Burden's support; for since Burden had exclusive trading rights in the area concerned, they knew that the City would not invest in the project unless Burden lent his name. The directors of the company represented those parties in the financial world whom Belloc detested. Apart from a penurious and weak-willed peer, who was on the board in order to give the company some appearance of being English, they were of alien extraction and, for Belloc, symbolized Jewish international finance, which was self-seeking and which totally ignored the national requirements of the various countries in which it operated. A Jewish financier would probably have close relations in similar positions in other European countries; obviously, Belloc argued, his first loyalty would be to those relations, not to the country of his adoption. The great danger in the situation arose from the fact that such men always sought to appear to be entirely identified with the countries where they lived, by making suitable alterations to their surnames or (in England) by buying a peerage and thus being in a position to hide their true name altogether. Yet this identification was illusory; the Jew wished to merge into his national background and to conceal himself, but his first loyalty remained to his race.

They were assiduous in gaining influence and insinuating themselves into positions of power. Barnett's company, for instance, had an eager advocate in Burden's son, who, as an undergraduate, had
been given a very opportune loan by another of the directors and
was thus under an obligation to them. Having made the loan, the
director had

felt a kind of gladness,..; for he knew that he had gained
one more friend, and friends to all such men are (if we only
knew it!) the dearest part of the comfort they so easily
attain. 5

The Jews, said Belloc, lost no opportunity of forming links in this
way, hoping that later these would be of use to them. In this case,
the directors were able to bring pressure on Burden by means of his
son, with the result that Burden reluctantly agreed to sit on the
Board. He found the atmosphere with which he was there surrounded
thoroughly distasteful, however, and finally, when his fellow-
directors declared their intention of freezing out a friend of his
who had interests in the area but who refused to join the project,
he resigned and declared his intention of opposing them. The ruin
of the company was averted, however, by Burden's subsequent death
from a heart attack caused by the worry and anger arising from his
association with it. Since he had not had time to announce his
resignation, the company was able to claim his support, the shares
were sold, and eventually, when prices had first soared and then
dropped and when the directors had made enormous profits in the
process, the Government bought the company out. The original
promoters of the scheme were seeking nothing but financial gain,
and, when they had achieved this aim, public funds had to be used

5. ibid. p. 46.
to rescue a project in which they no longer had any interest.

This was one example of how the British Government was being made the tool of the financiers. The South African War was another. It proved vastly more expensive than had originally been estimated, and these enormous sums suddenly expended resulted in a permanent weakening of the economy. Writing in 1925, Belloc spoke with strong approval of an unnamed man who, at the outbreak of the war, had asserted

the simple truth that this adventure would be the beginning of a decline in the financial credit of England.

Yet that man had objected to the war on no other grounds. He did not confuse his conclusions with that disgusting antipathy to their own country which marked the most of those who protested against the War. As for the enemy, the South African Dutch, he knew them and heartily despised them. The Outlanders he also knew, and thought them the scum of the earth.

To Belloc, then, the South African War showed only one thing: viz. how far Britain had fallen under the power of non-English financiers who manipulated her policies with regard to nothing but the increase of their own wealth.
Section 3. - The War as a Test of Patriotism.

It was at this time, through the agency of common friends on the staff of the Speaker, that Bello and Chester came into contact with each other. Henceforth, the imprint of Bello's mind was to be seen in all Chester's thought. By nature, Bello was a far more dominating personality than Chester, and at this time the temperamental differences were emphasized by circumstances: Bello was academically qualified and politically ambitious; Chester was merely a free-lance journalist beginning to make his way in the world. Moreover, Bello's opinions were fully formed; Chester's were not. Nevertheless, although it is easy to assume from the tone of admiration with which Chester always spoke of Bello that he always took over Bello's views unchanged, there were in fact considerable divergences between them, divergences of which Chester was never perhaps wholly conscious. It will therefore be simplest to deal first with Chester's own attitude towards the

1. Bello's superior status and greater confidence emerge clearly from a description of their first meeting made by Chester in 1916. It took place in a Soho restaurant with Bello talking into the night and leaving behind "a glowing track of good things". He assured Chester that King John had not been the best king that ever reigned in England, but made the excuse that John had been Regent and that in all the Middle Ages there was no example of a successful Regent. "I, for one," commented Chester mildly, "had not come provided with any successful Regents with whom to counter this generalization; and when I came to think of it, it was quite true". (Introduction to Hilaire Bello, the Man and His Work by C. Creighton Mandell and Edward Shanks, p. vii).
war and then to consider the divergences separately.

Chesterton gave the fullest statement of his attitude in a symposium edited by Lucian Oldershaw and published in 1904 under the title *England; a Nation, being Papers of the Patriots' Club*. The general approach of the symposium was congenial to Chesterton in that Imperialism was dealt with as an ideology rather than as an economic system; it was presented by one of the other contributors as a quasi-religion,

a genuine, unhesitating belief that we were conquering a misgoverned country, in order to bestow on it some unique and sovereign order of things, of which we alone possessed the secret. ²

It was this aspect of Imperialism - not its merits or defects as an economic structure - that stimulated Chesterton to attack it. He therefore entitled his own contribution "The Patriotic Idea" and represented Patriotism and Imperialism as opposed ideologies.

The natures of the two were not identical, said Chesterton, for Imperialism, being a false ideology, was not rooted in human nature

² England: a Nation p. 30. How uncongenial an economic approach was to Chesterton appears from his reaction to J.A. Hobson, one of the most effective critics of Imperialism, who had produced a comprehensive study demonstrating that the demands of the Empire were a heavy drain on Britain's financial resources. Chesterton commented: "I disliked Imperialism; and yet I almost liked it by the time Hobson had finished speaking against it. ... I missed something as he picked holes in the British Empire until it consisted entirely of holes tied together with red tape" - a deficiency which Chesterton felt was made good when the next speaker painted "an historical picture like a pageant of Empires". (Autobiography pp. 270-271)
as Patriotism was. Men instinctively loved small things; large things they could not even know. So history taught that, whereas Patriotism or Nationalism was an instinct, Imperialism was only a fashion, often recurring but lacking durability. It taught, too, that an imperial Power never came to know the true nature of its dependencies, as was shown by the English failure in Ireland. Experience, asserted Chesterton, "is wholly against the idea that by conquering a people we can reach or use the good in them". 3 This lack of understanding increased, the greater an empire grew. Eventually, a central administration was so ignorant of the nature of its more distant dominions and their problems, that it could pass only the most general measures concerning them, a situation resulting in a growth of paper work which was a sign of "a condition of ... appalling unreality". 4 When this occurred, the only way in which a civilization could regain its vigour was to become fragmented, as in the case of the later Roman Empire, so that its member States could become more knowledgeable about smaller things. As we have already seen in our examination of Orthodoxy, Chesterton's main criterion was the presence or absence of contact with reality; the British Empire was in a position analogous to that in which he himself had been while at the Slade.

Chesterton elaborated upon his attack a year later in Heretics.

3. ibid. p. 184.
4. ibid. p. 36.
One of the chapters dealt with Rudyard Kipling, whom Chesterton accused of a lack of patriotism. Kipling, he said, knew many countries and appreciated none of them, for to appreciate a country one had to commit oneself to its way of life. Such commitment was not narrowing, however, for it was only by this means that one came into contact with those aspects of life which affected all men alike.

The man in the saloon steamer has seen all the races of men, and he is thinking of the things that divide men - diet, dress, decorum. ... The man in the cabbage field has seen nothing at all; but he is thinking of the things that unite men - hunger and babies, and the beauty of women, and the promise or menace of the sky. 5

The superficiality of the view taken by the man in the saloon steamer had led to the South African War. Cecil Rhodes, said Chesterton, took just such a view and sought to extend British rule in Africa without comprehending the nature of those who were to be submitted to it:

It is just as easy to think in continents as to think in cobblestones. The difficulty comes in when we seek to know the substance of either of them. Rhodes' prophecies about the Boer resistance are an admirable comment on how the "large ideas" prosper when it is not a question of thinking in continents, but of understanding a few two-legged men. 6

For the events of the war were to Chesterton a triumphant vindication of his views. The initial Boer successes had shown that great empires were not necessarily efficient because they were large. Even more telling was the way in which the Boers, far from giving way

6. ibid. pp. 52-53.
as Rhodes had predicted, showed themselves determined to protract the war as long as possible, for this showed that they saw themselves fighting for something that was vitally important; and since there was no possibility of their gaining an eventual military success by continuing to fight, it followed that what they were struggling to maintain was no material advantage, but their national integrity. 7

The fact that the war occurred just at this time caused Chesterton to give a much more precise definition of his feeling about men's instinctive preference for small things; it also created an atmosphere in which this feeling would arouse special interest. In the next chapter we shall consider its expression in The Napoleon of Notting Hill, a novel published in 1904, in which he envisaged just such a fragmentation of London as he had already advocated for the Empire as a whole.

Before passing on from Chesterton's more immediate reactions to the war, however, it is necessary to say something of the way in which he was influenced by Belloc. There can be no doubt that this influence was very great and that Chesterton's mind received the impress of Belloc's mode of thought. Nevertheless, his mind was very different from Belloc's, with the result that, even when he intended to express a Bellocian point of view, he so changed the emphasis upon the various ideas which composed it and so coloured

7. One should perhaps point out that the Boers were also hoping that a spirited resistance on their part would move other European Powers to intervene.
his exposition with his own characteristic way of expressing himself, that the final effect was unrecognizably different.

An example of this is the relative unimportance in Chesterton's writings of anti-Semitism. In his contribution to *England: a Nation* there was only one incidental reference, when he remarked:

> There may be good reason for supporting Mr. Beit in South Africa, but to ask us in the name of patriotism to remember that he is of our people is about as accurate as asking us in the name of family feeling to remember that he is our great-aunt.

Chesterton was poking fun at the situation where those who claimed to be most patriotic expressed their patriotism by supporting those who were not English at all. But the remark could have been deleted without making any hiatus in Chesterton's general argument, which was concerned with the way in which the Boers and the British demonstrated their patriotism, not with the Jews at all. Furthermore, the reference was so oblique that it might easily pass unnoticed, and so good-humoured that, even when noticed, it could hardly give offence. The same quizzical attitude is shown in the story told in his autobiography of a trick he and a friend had played on a Jingoist crowd at the time of the war. The two of them had proposed three cheers for Rhodes and had then gone on to "more and more dubious and semi-naturalised patriots" until the irony of their intentions was discovered and a fight broke out. It is a far cry from this to the sarcasm of Belloc's "Verses", quoted in the previous section.

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For Chesterton, the way in which the English Jingoists lined up behind the Jewish mineowners was merely inconsistent and absurd; for Belloc, English society was being corrupted at a fundamental level by Jewish infiltration. To a large extent, this divergence of attitude arose from their different upbringings. Chesterton's insularity of outlook meant that he could not envisage the English commonweal as being brought to the point of death (though of course its fortunes fluctuated from century to century); now could he believe that it might be changed out of recognition by an alien influx. Belloc had no such trust in the immutability of the English temperament, and, moreover, he had contact with anti-Semitic feeling in a way that Chesterton had not. He had paid very great attention to the Dreyfus Affair and was among the very small minority of anti-Dreyfusards in England. The Jew who gave away French military secrets to Germany was to Belloc only one small part of a general movement working to dissolve the distinct national entities of Europe. 10

10. For precisely the same reason, Wells approved of the Jews. In an incidental reference made in 1902 - for his approval of them played no significant part in his general attitude towards the war - he declared that the Jew "gives the lie to all our yapping 'nationalisms', and sketches in his dispersed sympathies the coming of the world-state". (Anticipations p. 317.)
Section 4. - Justification by Socialism.

At the outbreak of the war, it would have been reasonable to suppose that Shaw would attack it strongly, and in support of such a view one could have cited, for instance, a passage in Fabian Essays where he had spoken of

our present system of imperial aggression, in which, under pretext of exploration and colonization, the flag follows the filibuster and trade follows the flag, with the missionary bringing up the rear. 1

Nevertheless, this supposition would have been wrong, for in 1900 there appeared a Fabian pamphlet entitled Fabianism and the Empire, in which Shaw - who was the author, though on the title-page he claimed to be no more than the editor 2 - declared that Britain was right in undertaking the war.

His attitude was one of extreme pragmatism. Instead of discussing whether the Empire ought to exist at all, as Chesterton had done in England: a Nation, he took its existence as a given fact and went on to consider how the Mother Country ought to act towards it. The overriding aim, he said, should be "the effective social organization of the whole Empire, and its rescue from the strife of classes and private interests". 3 Seen in this light, the South African War was the strife between the private interests of the mineowners and the Boers, and of these two it was the Boers

1. Fabian Essays p. 199.
2. As is shown by a letter included by St. John Ervine in his Bernard Shaw p. 357.
3. Fabianism and the Empire p. 6.
alone who were hindering "effective social organization" by preventing the full exploitation of the Empire's resources. The cause of the war, said Shaw,

is that a troublesome and poor territory, which the Empire cast off into the hands of a little community of farmer emigrants, has unexpectedly turned out to be a gold-reef; and the Empire, accordingly, takes it back again from the farmers. 4

On Capitalist principles, he continued, this seizure was indefensible, for the Capitalist held that the individual landowner had an absolute and inalienable right to do whatever he wished with his own property. Thus, when rich mineral deposits were found on the land of a man who refused to allow them to be excavated, that man was in an unassailable position. The Capitalist-Imperialists were indeed determined to force the owner (in this case the Transvaal Republic) to allow the gold to be mined, but they did not believe that they had any moral right to do so. Hence the belligerence of the arguments with which they defended their action. But, said Shaw, if only they would approach the matter from the Socialist point of view, they would see that their actions were wholly justifiable, for the Socialist distinguished certain types of property from the rest on the grounds that they were social amenities; where these amenities were owned by an individual who used them to the disadvantage of the general public, the State had the right to coerce that individual for the public's benefit. Moreover, Shaw used the term "social" in a supranational sense, so that it was irrelevant to

4. ibid. p. 22.
object that the Boer republic concerned was virtually an independent State. Shaw rejected

the notion that a nation has the right to do what it pleases with its own territory, without reference to the interests of the rest of the world. 5

As yet no supranational authority existed which could intervene in such matters; yet this did not mean that national selfishness had to be tolerated, since there were Powers in existence which could act in lieu of such an authority:

Theoretically [the mines] should be internationalized ...; but until the Federation of the World becomes an established fact, we must accept the most responsible Imperial federations available as a substitute for it. 6

He based this assertion on the belief that

a Great Power, consciously or unconsciously, must govern in the interests of civilization as a whole. 7

The attitude that gave rise to such a belief was one which gave efficiency pride of place among its values. To the Fabians it was self-evident that men ought to make the fullest use of available resources; otherwise, there was no hope of achieving their aim of improving social conditions. It was equally clear that the Boers were not concerned with running the mines efficiently but with maintaining their own way of life. Hence they were failing in their duty to the rest of the world, and the rest of the world was morally justified in applying methods of coercion. But it also followed

5. ibid. pp. 44-45.
7. ibid. p. 23.
that, since the rest of the world was still fragmented, those sections of it were most fully justified which were best able to exploit the mines; the moral superiority lay with whichever had the greatest potential efficiency. In overcoming the Boer resistance, the British Empire was merely fulfilling its obligations to the remainder of the world.

If the position was both simple and logical, it was so only at the cost of excluding many considerations less amenable to being arranged into a pattern. But Shaw had already expressed a more disenchanted view of the Empire, and, as we shall see, his outlook was to become more complicated once again.
Section 5. - Patriotism and Efficiency.

Like Shaw, Wells attached great importance to efficiency. It implied co-ordination and the fullest exploitation of every available resource, and by these means, Wells hoped, mankind would achieve great measures of progress, for efficiency played an essential part in his view of human evolution. Thus for Wells it had much more grandiose implications than for the Fabians. He also differed from them in the way in which he linked the war with the concept of efficiency: whereas Shaw had declared that the need for efficiency in the running of the mines justified the war, Wells saw the conduct of the war as revealing with dismaying clarity just how inefficient and ill-suited to the more demanding life of the new century Britain was.

In 1902 Wells published Anticipations, in which he made various predictions about the new developments of the coming century, and in the chapter dealing with warfare, he strongly criticized armies in their existing form. The graphic picture he drew of outmoded and inefficient forces was composed of details taken from what he had seen of the British Forces as they paraded in London before embarking for South Africa. He spoke of

hundreds of thousands of more or less drunken and untrained young men marching into battle - muddle-headed, sentimental, dangerous and futile hobbledehoys, ¹

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¹ Anticipations p. 183.
103.

with

the general who learnt his art of war away in the vanished
nineteenth century, the altogether too elderly general with his
epaulettres and decorations, his uniform that has still its
historical value, his spurs and his sword - riding along on his
obsolete horse by the side of his doomed column. 2

I cannot foresee what such a force will even attempt to do,
against modern weapons. Nothing can happen but the needless
and most wasteful and pitiful killing of these poor lads, who
make up the infantry battalions, the main mass of all the
European armies of to-day, whenever they come against a sanely-
organized army. 3

Wells elaborated what he meant by such an army. It would be small
and professional; it would have all the most up-to-date and the
best-designed weapons; it would be flexible and would encourage the
individual initiative of its soldiers, instead of simply hurling
great masses of men at each other. In short, "war is being drawn
into the field of the exact sciences". 4

By criticizing the British Army in this way, however, Wells did
not mean to imply that the Boers possessed the "sanely-organized
army" before which it would be impotent; as yet, that army existed
only in men's imaginations, even though Wells believed that the
development of technical power in the military, as in every other,
sphere of human activity, made the eventual emergence of such an army
inevitable. If, then, his picture in Anticipations was drawn from
what he had himself seen in the London streets, he did not mean to
imply that those men were going to their doom in fighting the Boers;

3. ibid. p. 208.
4. ibid. p. 204.
he was deliberately mixing his observations with his prophecies. When he compared the British Army with the armies of the future, he emphasized its unsatisfactory aspects, but he implied, too, that under better leadership such an army was capable of improvement. The same could not be said of the Boers.

This appears from a short story he wrote in 1903 entitled "The Land Ironclads", in which a Boer army was utterly defeated when its opponents employed tanks against it. The story began with a description of the Boers' confidence in victory. One of them contemptuously summed up the enemy as "devitalized townsmen" who lacked any military ability:

"They're clerks, they're factory hands, they're students, they're civilized men. They can write, they can talk, they can make and do all sorts of things, but they're poor amateurs at war." 6 Wells' point of view was represented by a war correspondent who believed that there were other things in life better worth having than war; ... and the idea that any people, by living in the open air, hunting perpetually, losing touch with books and art and all the things that intensify life, might hope to resist and break that great development to the end of time, jarred on his civilized soul. 7 That is to say, that Boers' defiance of Britain represented for Wells an attempt by men at a lower and less complex stage of development

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5. It is not so named, but in 1903 no-one in Britain could have failed to make the connection, and there is furthermore a reference to the contempt felt by the townsmen for the countrymen as being akin to that which the latter felt for "some inferior kind of nigger". (The Short Stories of H.G. Wells p. 153). It is a reference which would be strained and unexpected except in a South African context.
7. ibid. p. 136.
to dominate those at a higher. As long as men had had to rely chiefly on their own muscles for a source of energy, this attempt was always likely to succeed. Now, however, in ceasing to concentrate on the development of their bodies, men achieved infinitely greater physical power through the machines they developed with their minds. Hence the war correspondent in the story remarked at the end:

"If there's no end to the surprises of science, the civilized people have it, of course. As long as their science keeps going they will naturally be ahead of open-country men". 8

Wells criticized the British Army because he was anxious to see it develop and improve; he criticized the Boers because he disliked their whole outlook.

His certainty that Britain was in the right appears from a reference to the war made in January 1902:

The arguments that centre about the present war in South Africa ignore any ideal of a great united South African state almost entirely, and quibble this way and that about who began the fighting, and what was or was not written in some obscure revision of a treaty a score of years ago. Yet beneath the legal issues the broad creative idea has been very apparent in the public mind during this war. 9

Chesterton might well have retorted that another, quite incompatible "broad creative idea" had emerged on the Boer side. Wells was assuming that the aspirations of the British public naturally expressed the highest ideals then current, and although this can be explained to some extent in terms of the attitude expressed in "The

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8. ibid. p. 156.
Land Ironclads", fundamentally it was an unreasoning patriotism that assumed his own country to be in the right.

In this he differed from Shaw. Although it might seem that Wells' "great united South African state" was only a stage on the way to Shaw's "Federation of the World", the reasons for each man's commendation of the Empire were different. Wells saw it as being good in itself; to Shaw it was merely a useful substitute for the greater federation that was not yet in being. Whereas Wells was an Imperialist, Shaw made use of the Empire. In so doing, Shaw came close to assigning an absolute value to efficiency; Wells thought he did likewise, but in fact his praise of it was disguised patriotism.

This was the period of intensive competition between Great Britain and the German Empire, the latter acting as both an example and a spur to Britain. Among the Fabians, admiration for Germany may have predominated (certainly this is true of the Webbs), but Wells' anxiety over British inefficiency arose from his fear that Britain no longer held a leading position in the world.

In 1904 Wells' confidence in British Imperialist ventures was shaken by Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for Tariff Reform with the aim of erecting a customs barrier between the Empire and the rest of the world. To Wells, this appeared as the corruption of the idea of Empire and its transformation to vulgar moneygrubbing. In Joan and Peter, a novel published in 1918 in which he summed up the developments that had occurred since 1890, he presented as the
truly inspiring part of Imperialism the things that were done in the rest of Africa, i.e. those parts where there was not already a white settlement fully established when the British came on the scene. Though the incoming European elements had at first seemed "as hopelessly blind and cruel as the old" (this had been Shaw's judgement in 1889),
civilization had in the long run won an astonishing victory. In a score of years, ... roads that had been decaying tracks or non-existent were made safe and open everywhere, ... vast regions of Africa which since the beginning of things had known no rule but the whim and arbitrary power of transitory chiefs and kings, awoke to the conception of impartial law.\(^{10}\)

In southern Africa, however, he saw little cause for pride. With the advantage of hindsight, he antedated the emergence of the "New Imperialism" to the time of Rhodes' dominance in southern Africa during the 1890's and declared that this "New Imperialism" had hustled the Empire "into a war for which there was no occasion".

But he was less interested in whether this earlier war, so trivial beside the Great War, ought to have been fought or not, than in the fact that it had "laid bare an amazing and terrifying amount of national incompetence".

After a monstrous wasteful struggle the national resources dragged [the war] at last to a not very decisive victory. ... Behind the rejoicings that hailed the belated peace was a real and unprecedented national humiliation. For the first time the educated British were inquiring whether all was well with the national system if so small a conquest seemed so great a task. \(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Joan and Peter p. 266.

\(^{11}\) ibid. p. 266.
The terms in which he wrote showed that he had no doubt that Britain was right to fight (though she may have been imprudent to do so) and that in considering the war he took into account nothing but its effect on his own country.

Moreover, despite the inefficiency, a British victory had been inevitable. Whereas Chesterton saw the war as the vindication of his beliefs in that it showed the lengths to which a small nation would go to maintain its independence, to Wells it taught precisely the opposite lesson, viz. that in the new century size was to be one of the pre-requisites for success. The "national resources" had enabled Britain to win even where they were badly deployed. When they were properly organized, she might therefore hope to rise to tremendous achievements.
Chapter Three.

THE SOCIALIST DEBATE.

Section 1. - The Condition of Socialism.

The dispute over the moral issues raised by the South African War was short-lived compared with that over Socialism. The latter had been continuing throughout the previous century and only grew more urgent as the numbers of Socialist or pseudo-Socialist measures in operation increased.

Already in our examination of Shaw's early life, we have glanced at the changing fortunes of Socialism in England during the nineteenth century and in particular at the way the Fabians were at pains to avoid the vague enthusiasm of the Chartists. We must now look back further at a somewhat skeletal version of the conditions which gave rise to Socialism in all its various aspects.

Socialism was primarily a protest against the economic structure which the Industrial Revolution had brought into being. The complexity of the new industrial methods had meant that no individual manufacturer possessed sufficient capital to finance the projects now made possible; accordingly, he sought loans by selling shares in the project and paid the shareholders interest out of the profits which their capital made possible. The result was the growth of a social class which received an income from the new industries without contributing anything beyond the original loan. The Socialists attacked this situation which, they

said, was a blatant perversion of justice: by rights the profits should go to those who worked to produce them. They advocated a reform by which the great industries should be taken over by the State and the profits be divided equitably for the good of the nation and not of a small privileged group within it.

A similar situation existed in the case of land, which was for the most part in the hands of a few great owners. The land which aroused the fury of the Socialists was not agricultural property (for English agriculture was declining steadily) but the land on the outskirts of towns. The decline of agriculture had been brought about by the steady drain of workers into the towns where they hoped to gain better living conditions by working in the new industries. As a result the towns had spilled over their old boundaries, and land which had previously been used only for agriculture now fetched the enormously higher prices caused by urban development. Ultimately, the money to pay these prices was gained by high rents; hence, said the Socialists, having been denied part of his wages because some of the profits from his labour went to one idle class, the worker had to pay part of what he did receive to yet another such class. Once again they advocated the replacement of that class by the State, which would manage property in the interests of all.

This was the core of Socialism. Yet the idea had taken many different forms over the years, and when it began to revive in England during the 1880's, there were three distinct manifestations of it.
First there was the Social Democratic Federation, founded in 1884. This may be regarded as the descendant of Chartism. Its outlook was at once revolutionary and ill-defined. Its tendency was fissiparous: there were "at least five main groups, each with a strong personality at its head". One group aimed first at building up Socialist representation in Parliament; another was primarily interested in changing the structure of Trade Unionism by securing the creation of unions of unskilled workers; yet another had close connections with Anarchism, and so on. To build up a consistent body of doctrine was not, however, its chief aim. What it sought to do was to rekindle the flame of social indignation which had been the power behind Chartism and, by gaining adherents in large numbers, to bring about greater social justice. But the conditions which had favoured Chartism no longer prevailed, and the adherents were not forthcoming.

The second manifestation, the Fabian Society, which was founded in the same year as the Social Democratic Federation, deliberately reacted against such an approach in a way already described. Moreover,

3. Since "English anarchism has never been anything else than a chorus of voices crying in the wilderness" (George Woodcock, Anarchism p. 414), I shall not deal further with it. It is worth noting, however, that Chesterton's novel, The Man Who Was Thursday, published as late as 1908, took its immediate motivation from a horror of Anarchism. It is the same survival of feeling aroused by what was by that time in the past that we have already seen in his attitude towards Aestheticism.
whereas the Social Democratic Federation, like the Chartists, appealed to the working classes to band together and fight for their rights, the Fabians fought for social improvement without bothering to gain the co-operation of those whose condition was to be improved; the members were all from the middle classes, except for one, a house-painter, who

was long cherished by the Society as its "exhibit" working-class member, the only one of his kind to join for some years. 4

What of the working classes as a whole, who declined to join the Social Democratic Federation and were not asked to join the Fabian Society? Here we come to the third and most curious aspect of Socialism. The organizations to which they belonged in large numbers were the Trades Unions, and in these, too, a change was to be seen during the 1880's. In 1880 the existing unions were largely limited to skilled workers and saw their main function as being to act as friendly societies for the benefit of their members. If they sought to protect their interests in the face of society at large, this action was, in such a time of unemployment and falling prices as the 1870's, largely defensive and was directed as much against the unskilled workers of lower status as against the employers. In Parliament, they looked to the Liberal Party to protect their interests, and union officials sat as Liberals for mining constituencies. Gradually, however, new unions of unskilled men grew up in

the last two decades of the nineteenth century, with the result that
the Trades Union movement became more and more representative of the
working classes as a whole. A change in a similar direction came in
1888 when, at the annual Trades Union Congress, suggestions began to
be made that a new Party should be formed to represent their own
interests, independent of both existing Parties, but it was only
slowly and painfully that the idea was put into practice. Though
in 1893 the Congress for that year agreed to the establishment of a
Parliamentary Fund to support independent union candidates, as late
as 1906, out of thirty Labour Members, only three had had to fight
for their seats against Liberal opposition. Moreover, the doctrinal
aspect of the change was minimized, and in choosing a name for the
new Party in 1893 - it became the Independent Labour Party - the term
"Socialist" was carefully avoided. Hence, the doctrinaire Socialists
were almost all from the middle classes; the working-class organ­
izations were extremely chary of Socialist ideas.

The effect of this situation was to keep English Socialism
in a state of remarkable fluidity. It could not be dismissed as
unpractical wordspinning, for there were many moves towards Socialism
being made by those who had no immediate connection with the movement.
One of the most striking of these occurred in 1894 when the Liberal
Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, introduced death
duties in his Budget with the remark, "We are all Socialists now".
The expenditure of the State was rising steadily (as, for instance,
on the system of free State education, which continued to be extended), and clearly the necessary funds would have to be taken from the wealthier sections of the community. Socialism, then, could not be dismissed as a piece of political theorizing that had had its day. On the other hand, it was not yet so much a part of political reality that theoretical arguments over its nature were rendered superfluous by the pressure of events. There were still many points open to dispute, even among Socialists themselves. Was Socialism class warfare or social justice, a remodelling of present society from its very roots or simply a modification of it? How extensive should nationalization be? How far should incomes be made equal throughout the community? Was Socialism simply a matter of economic reconstruction or did it also involve an entirely new view of the community? Was it inevitable, with each Party forced willy-nilly into enacting Socialist legislation by the sheer logic of events, or was it a grand opportunity which, once missed, would never offer itself again? Was the most typical Socialist working-class or middle-class, enthusiastic or intellectual? In the early years of the new century, Socialism offered very considerable scope for discussion, and the four men we are here examining were not slow to take advantage of the fact.
Section 2. - Shaw and Fabian Coolness.

It will be clear from what has earlier been said of him, that Shaw's attitude to Socialism must be considered within a Fabian context. The intellectual approach of the Fabians was highly congenial to him - though its impact on him was complex.

Several of his friends commented that, although for the most part Shaw adopted an attitude of calm common sense towards life in general, he was capable of very deep emotion; he was not capable, however, of expressing that emotion directly. A contrast may be drawn with the much more straightforward Wells. At his wife's funeral in 1927, Wells embarrassed the congregation by howling throughout the reading of the sermon; 1 after his mother's funeral in 1913, Shaw shocked a friend with him by cracking a joke - until the friend realized that this was Shaw's way of escaping the emotion tension. 2 I submit, therefore, that Shaw was deeply moved by the condition of the poor in London (again his own state of genteel poverty at this time must be borne in mind) and that he seized upon Fabian intellectualism as a means of emotional relief.

The fact that his motivation was not disinterested did not detract from the vigour with which he worked for the Society, or from the intellectual labour in which that vigour expressed

itself. Certainly Shaw himself felt that the Fabian approach was the only possible one. Yet his embracing intellectualism for reasons of emotion showed itself in an uneasy shifting of attitude that becomes apparent when we consider his work for the Society over a period of years and not - as in the previous chapter - on a single occasion.

The basis of all Fabian activities was brainwork; it took an objective look at reality, decided what it wanted to see changed, and then looked for the most effective methods to achieve that change. It did not, like many Socialists such as William Morris, start out with an imaginative vision of a society and then consider how such a society might be brought into being. Instead, it saw that large numbers of people had insufficient means to maintain themselves in a state of tolerable comfort, and set out to divert to them a greater proportion of the national income. In doing so, it neither idealized the poor nor vilified the rich - indeed, it saw the poor as the more repulsive of the two sections of society, though it blamed this upon their conditions rather than upon themselves. It conceded that the rich were often well-disposed towards the poor, even though their efforts to relieve them failed through their lack of understanding of the social processes they were trying to influence. The Fabians refused to fix the social blame on anyone or anything; the inequality of wealth, they said, forced all those within its grip to behave as they did. Nor did they assign any blame to the past for having created that inequality. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they could have done so. Their central belief was that the high level of
national prosperity was sufficient, if properly directed, to give every man a comfortable standard of living; but this prosperity was the product of the Industrial Revolution, itself the prime example of the inequality which the Fabians attacked. If the Industrial Revolution was a scandal and a shame, it was also the prerequisite of the present hope of the workers. Such an amoral approach to history appeared in a lecture given by Sidney Webb in 1888 where, after noting that all the earliest civilizations depended upon slavery, he concluded that "the renunciation of personal independence is ... the initial step towards civilization" - though as civilization advanced, it would eventually cause the disappearance of slavery. 3

If the Fabians looked back at history, they did so, not to pass judgement, but simply to find the explanation of existing circumstances. Having done so, they could hope to find more effective means of changing those circumstances. The passing of judgement - except in the one matter of the present condition of the poor - was a course to be avoided wherever possible. Hence it was, that in a lecture narrating the early history of the Society (published as a tract in 1892) Shaw emphasized the practicality of the Society while mocking the earnestness and moral fervour of such Socialist organizations as the Social Democratic Federation:

Our preference for practical suggestions and criticisms, and our impatience of all general expressions of sympathy with working-class aspirations, not to mention our way of chaffing our opponents in preference to denouncing them as enemies of the human race, repelled from us some warm-hearted and eloquent Socialists, to whom it seemed callous and cynical to be even commonly self-possessed in the presence of the sufferings on which Socialism declares war. 4

Such an approach, he continued, was essential to the Society's effectiveness, for

we know that for a long time to come we can only make headway by gaining the confidence of masses outside our Society, who will have nothing to do with us unless we first prove ourselves safe for all sorts of progressive work. 5

Provided it did not antagonize such people, the Society's ultimate success was assured, because

all men except those who possess either exceptional ability or property which brings them in a considerable unearned income, or both, stand to lose instead of to win by Unsocialism; and sooner or later they must find this out and throw in their lot with us. 6

In his writings for the Fabian Society Shaw was able to see what he was doing as something more than the release of emotion: as a practical means of destroying the conditions which he so detested. Hence he was willing to forgo the relief of emotional expression and to adopt instead a tone of light badinage and sweet reason. The tone which Shaw might otherwise have adopted was to be heard much more rarely. Consider this defence he made in 1885 against the charge that Socialist demands would eventually lead to civil war:

5. ibid. p. 23.
6. ibid. p. 27.
Civil war is horrible; but we have supped full of horrors in our city slums, and an open, well-ventilated battle-field, with wounded men instead of rickety children and starving women, would be an absolute improvement. The proportion of corpses would be about the same, and the suffering would be less prolonged, whilst excitement and hope would take the place of dulness and despair. 7

Such Swiftian sarcasm perhaps makes better literature than Fabian reason; it was not likely to be so effective, however, and it appeared only in flashes in these years.

Yet we should notice that the two approaches are not essentially different. Each is based on an appeal to reason, and perhaps the chief difference is that the Fabian approach sought to persuade without shocking, whereas in the other the shock was the actual means of persuasion. Reason is paramount in both, but the merely sarcastic method, though (in the instance quoted) it might make the reader concede that something would have to be done to improve slum conditions, offered him no constructive means of setting about the task, and was therefore inferior to the other, at any rate in immediate practical terms.

We might, therefore, be tempted to conclude that Shaw believed that there was a fundamental reasonableness in the conditions of life. When, however, we examine his contribution on Socialist economics to Fabian Essays (1889) we find him using reason as a weapon against himself. In this article he set out to prove that the ultimate emergence of a capitalist system was inevitable once private ownership

of land was allowed. This arose, he said, from the variation in the fertility of land: once let A farm a plot which, with the same labour, would produce twice the profit that could be obtained from B's plot, and the way was opened to the situation where B would willingly farm A's plot in return for as much money as he could get from his own, and pay the surplus to A, who would become an idle landlord.

Thus [commented Shaw] is man mocked by Earth his step-mother, and never knows as he toils at her closed hand whether it contains diamonds or flints, good red wheat or a few clayey and blighted cabbages. Thus too he becomes a gambler, and scoffs at the theorists who proate of industry and honesty and equality. Yet against this fate he eternally rebels. For since in gambling the many must lose in order that the few may win; since dishonesty is mere shadow-grasping where everyone is dishonest; and since inequality is bitter to all except the highest, and miserably lonely for him, men come greatly to desire that these capricious gifts of Nature might be intercepted by some agency having the power and the goodwill to distribute them justly according to the labor done by each in the collective search for them. This desire is Socialism; and, as a means to its fulfilment, Socialists have devised communes, kingdoms, principalities, churches, manors, and finally, when all these had succumbed to the old gambling spirit, the Social Democratic State, which yet remains to be tried. As against Socialism, the gambling spirit urges man to allow no rival to come between his private individual powers and Step-Mother Earth, but rather to secure some acres of her and take his chance of getting diamonds instead of cabbages. This is Private Property or Unsocialism. Our own choice is shewn by our continual aspiration to possess property, our common hailing of it as sacred, our setting apart of the word Respectable for those who have attained it, our ascription of pre-eminent religiousness to commandments forbidding its violation, and our identification of law and order among men with its protection. 8

When one considers Shaw's reliance upon reason elsewhere, this

statement is matter for surprise. Shaw was conceding that the illogicality in the social structure was not, as the mocking comparison between slums and a civil war implied, the result of human perversity and blindness, but of the very conditions of life. He could hardly have shown the sources of capitalism as going very much deeper. The Socialist was presented not as the intelligent organizer but as the eternal rebel. Whereas the general Fabian position was that Socialism was society rationalized, Shaw was here saying that Socialism was a man-made rational structure imposed upon natural conditions that incited man to immorality. Indeed, he gave Socialism the pseudo-religious overtones that Wells was later to give it, for he showed it as a principle of good in eternal conflict with a principle of evil.

The idealism of the passage in Fabian Essays was refuted by Shaw himself five years later in a tract entitled The Impossibilities of Anarchism, the main purpose of which was to show that the Anarchist ideal of a community existing without any administrative machinery was impracticable. Earlier, as we saw, he had spoken of the desire of men to distribute the gifts of Nature "justly according to the labor done by each in the collective search for them". Now he declared:

It is natural for the laborer to insist that labor ought to be the measure of price, and that the just wage of labor is its average product; but the first lesson he has to learn in economics is that labor is not and never can be the measure of price under a competitive system. 9

Nor did he go on to declare that in consequence the competitive system must be immediately destroyed. On the contrary: he saw no hope of this. Whereas before he had spoken of inequality as being "bitter to all except the highest, and miserably lonely for him", now he attacked the poor for their respect for a hierarchy of personal status based on property:

One is almost tempted in this country to declare that the poorer the man, the greater the snob, until you get down to those who are so oppressed that they have not enough self-respect even for snobbery. ... The moment you rise into the higher atmosphere of a pound a week, you find that envy, ostentation, tedious and insincere ceremony, love of petty titles, precedences and divinities, and all the detestable fruits of inequality of condition, flourish as rankly among those who lose as among those who gain by it. 10

True, these were only the "fruits of inequality of condition", but Shaw held out no immediate hopes for abolishing inequality; instead, he remarked:

Whilst we are hogs, let us at least be well-fed, healthy, reciprocally useful hogs, instead of - well, instead of the sort we are at present. 11

In a sense, this was a statement of the Fabian aims, but it is odd to hear it stated in these terms by a member of the Executive.

If the poor were corrupt, so - more understandably - were the rich:

The rich pay the piper and call the tune. Naturally, they use their power to steal more money to continue paying the piper; and thus all society becomes a huge conspiracy and hypocrisy. 12

11. ibid. p. 12.
12. ibid. p. 25.
Shaw saw this corruption as invincible. He went on to suppose that some individual protested, and though the individual was presented as an anarchist, he was clearly Shaw himself, for his protests were identical with Shaw's: he attacked the medical profession, the educational system, conventional clothes, established religion, the practice of eating meat, and the maintenance of an army. Shaw made him conclude:

"Your tyranny makes my very individuality a hindrance to me: I am outdone and outbred by the mediocre, the docile, the time-serving". 13

Yet Shaw firmly rejected his own protests:

The proclamation is not surprising under the circumstances; but it does not mend the matter in the least, nor would it if every person were to repeat it with enthusiasm, and the whole people to fly to arms for Anarchism. The majority cannot help its tyranny even if it would. 14

One may sum up the situation presented in the tract as Shaw the Fabian rebuking Shaw the idealist and individualist. Comparing this with the article in Fabian Essays, one sees that he now showed the good principle as being quite ineffectual; both rich and poor combined to maintain "Private Property or Unsocialism". Moreover, the solution he went on to offer, though entirely within the Fabian ethos, seems miserably inadequate within the context of the tract:

Shaw praised the "fine impartiality" of the policeman and the soldier and pointed out that the working classes had only to take over the

13. Tract no. 45 The Impossibilities of Anarchism p. 20.
14. ibid.
direction of the State (and their enormous voting power made this easy) to turn the machinery of the State to defending their interests instead of attacking them:

A House of Commons consisting of 660 workmen and 10 gentlemen will probably, unless the 660 are fools, order the soldier to take money from the landlords for the people. 15

It is matter for surprise to find a man so expert at exploding the over-simplified, over-optimistic generalization, actually composing one himself. Throughout the pamphlet, Shaw gave the Devil - whether in the shape of the anarchist or the would-be property-owner - all the best arguments, and his conclusion was notably unconvincing. This shows, I submit, Shaw's consciousness of the inadequacy of Fabian ideas before the greed of men and the perversity of the conditions under which they lived. It is also noteworthy that the year in which the tract appeared - 1894 - represented the nadir of his career: his work for the Society brought him no material success, his novels had proved failures, and now his plays seemed likely to meet with the same fate - for another two years were to pass before the success in America of The Devil's Disciple. Thus, from one aspect, the tract may be seen as a gesture of despairing defiance towards a society which seemed bent on maintaining its own errors and crushing his individuality.

If the Fabian solution seemed wholly inadequate to the problem, there was nevertheless no other in sight. Supposing the existing

15. Tract no. 45 The Impossibilities of Anarchism p. 27.
classes to be incorrigible, then there was nothing to be done; but at least the Fabian solution could be tried. It is relevant for us to return to Fabian Essays, to a second article which he contributed, entitled "The Transition to Social Democracy". At the conclusion of this we find two paragraphs in strange juxtaposition, which reveal the relationship Shaw believed to exist between his idealism and his Fabianism. The first was visionary:

One can see that the Local Government Board of the future will be a tremendous affair; ... that the disappearance of a variety of what are now ridiculously called "public opinions" will be accompanied by the welding of society into one class with a public opinion of inconceivable weight; ... that the economic independence of women, and the supplanting of the head of the household by the individual as the recognized unit of the State, will materially alter the status of children and the utility of the institution of the family. ... All these things are mentioned only for the sake of a glimpse of the fertile fields of thought and action which await us when the settlement of our bread and butter question leaves us free to use and develop our higher faculties.

The second returned to the deliberate self-limitations of the Fabians: referring to the programme of municipalization he had earlier outlined, he said:

This, then, is the humdrum programme of the practical Social Democrat to-day. There is not one new item in it. All are applications of principles already admitted, and extensions of practices already in full activity. All have on them that stamp of the vestry which is so congenial to the British mind. ... And they are all sure to come - landmarks on our course already visible to far-sighted politicians even of the party which dreads them. 16

The tone of this earlier article is far more optimistic than that of The Impossibilities of Anarchism, but the two have a common pattern: 16. Fabian Essays pp. 199-200.
Shaw saw the task of his generation as being to devote itself to the "Bread and butter question", the solution of which would enable succeeding generations to devote themselves to the really important problems. Nevertheless, he gave no hint, except in the most general terms, of how the one would lead to the other. Even if municipal enterprise did outstrip private enterprise as Shaw declared it would, was there any certainty that a better society would arise as a result?

As the years passed, the Fabians showed signs of becoming less certain. In a survey of "Twentieth Century Politics" published in 1901, Sidney Webb admitted that in a number of spheres of public activity "the law is in advance of the administration". The Fabian policy of permeation assumed that it was possible to bring a Socialist spirit into being by means of measures the ultimate effect of which was not realized by those who agreed to them. But what if this unconsciousness on the part of the legislators resulted in the impact of the legislation being nullified? In 1903 the Fabian Society published a lecture given ten years earlier by William Morris, in which Morris distinguished between Socialism as a mere system of administration which could be imposed upon any society without fundamentally changing it, and Communism as a change-of-heart whereby men became conscious of their mutual obligations and expressed that consciousness through Socialist measures. Shaw now wrote in an introduction that the lecture

gives the warning to the Fabians that it is one thing to formulate on paper a constitutional policy, and another thing to induce people to carry it out when the Equality and Communism to which it leads are abhorred instead of desired by them. 18

Moreover, Shaw's suspicion that rationality in the ordering of affairs was not enough continued to grow. In 1909 he described an incident when a health committee of which he was a member proposed to prosecute a man for not having an obligatory fitment - a mica valve - in good working order. Another member, a builder, objected that mica valves never were in order, but the committee decided nevertheless to prosecute. Shaw commented:

I said I thought if mica valves did not work we should give up compelling people to put them in, and I thought the committee very stupid; but now I think they were very wise, because the mica valve necessitated the plumber being sent for. It is perfectly possible that the particular type of sanitary appliance we were then enforcing increased the death-rate by, say, five per cent. But if the incidental attention it involved at the same time reduced the death-rate by, say, fifteen per cent., there was a net gain of ten per cent. 19

To act rationally, one had to seem to act irrationally. The pressure of logic had frequently to be resisted. "Intelligent individuals", he wrote in 1907,

see that the logical consummation of Free Trade is as unbearable a horror as the logical consummation of Socialism, or Anti-Socialism, or Christianity, or decency, or honesty, or anything else that is capable of a logical consummation. 20

It was a conclusion wholly out of keeping with the Fabian attitude.

18. Tract No. 113 Communism p. 4.
Section 3. - Wells and Constructive Socialism.

The ten years' difference in age between Shaw and Wells was important beyond what that comparatively short space of time might suggest, for during the 1890's Socialist ideas in England were developing fast. Looking back in his autobiography, Wells carefully placed Shaw and his associates in the Fabian Society in the previous generation to his own. Writing of his student days in the 1880's, he said:

Wearing our red ties to give zest to our frayed and shabby costumes, we went great distances through the gas-lit winter streets of London and by the sulphurous Underground Railway, to hear and criticize and cheer and believe in William Morris, the Webbs, Bernard Shaw, Hubert Blend, Graham Wallas and all the rest of them, who were to lead us to that millenial world. 1

The implication is that Shaw's brand of Socialism was something which Wells' generation had passed through and outgrown, and the reasons for this firm rejection become apparent when we consider Wells' relations with the Fabian Society.

The early contact with the Society mentioned above came to an end with the advent of his struggling years as a teacher, but at the turn of the century the Webbs, seeing in him a valuable potential member now that he had made his name as a writer, took the initiative in approaching him, and in February 1903 he became a member of the Society. A man of his repute could not but be given considerable scope, and his ideas were bound to be accorded respectful attention. Wells sought to exploit this situation by inviting the Society to

1. Experiment in Autobiography pp. 265-266.
remodel itself according to his principles. In February 1906 he delivered a paper entitled *Faults of a Fabian*, in which he attacked the Society's policy of deliberately keeping its membership low. Every trend of the new century was towards aggregation, he said; people had come to take it for granted that their institutions would be on a large scale. No small body could therefore hope to be effective at all. His conclusion was that the Society must raise greater funds through increased subscriptions, must acquire large and impressive offices and publish brighter tracts in greater numbers, so as to gain a much larger membership and exert that influence upon the contemporary outlook which was vital to the wellbeing of mankind and which only Socialism could provide.

Largely (one suspects) through guile, the Executive Committee responded by agreeing to set up a special committee which should examine Wells' criticisms and report on them; it even agreed that the members of this committee should be nominated by Wells himself. For if Wells was, provisionally, being invited to re-mould the Society after his own ideal, he was having to do so with the Society's habitual instruments, and this was thoroughly uncongenial to him. He did not understand the practice of hammering out ideas in committee or of drawing up reports in which independent and equal minds had actively co-operated. This deficiency did not, of course, reveal itself within the workings of the special committee, which consisted entirely of Wells' nominees, but it did appear in the way in which
that committee failed to come to any understanding with the Executive in the course of the drawing up of its report, with the result that when, in October 1906, the report, embodying all Wells' original criticisms, was circulated throughout the Society, it was accompanied by a reply written by Shaw on behalf of the Executive. Moreover, Shaw was far too adroit a campaigner to attack Wells as a heretic; instead, he welcomed the proposals in theory and then rejected them as impracticable. Where, he asked, was the money for the fine new offices? where were the authors to write the bright new tracts?

Now came a further stage which was no more congenial to Wells: the report, and the Executive's reply, were discussed at a series of general meetings between December 1906 and March 1907. Once again the advantage was Shaw's: he was as brilliant on the platform as Wells was ineffectual. With the battle fought on such a ground, it would have been surprising if Wells had won, and by March virtually all his proposals had been rejected. Nor was Wells a man to accept such a defeat gracefully; though he came fourth in the subsequent elections for the Executive, he rarely attended its meetings (a cardinal sin in a Fabian) and in September 1908 resigned from the Society altogether.

The episode is illuminating, not only in that it shows the contrast between Wells' version of Socialism - which will be examined more fully in a moment - and the Fabian version, but also in that it shows his strength and weakness as a purveyor of ideas.
Committee-work and public debate, at which Wells fared so poorly, entail a recognition that other minds than one's own are at work and that their attitudes must be taken into account. Wells' method, however, was to set his own ideas down on paper and then assume that his readers would find in his writing an expression of their own minds. Thus he hoped that the report of the special committee, which was, in effect, his own work, would light such a flame as the Executive would be unable to put out. In Shaw's words:

you send us [the Executive] a new basis with the proposal, not that we shall consider it, but that we shall immediately send it out to the Fabian groups in order, as you naively tell us, that they may override the committee by an overwhelming rally to the side of your popular pen. 2

Wells saw himself as a clearing-house of ideas. Whatever ideas were important to his contemporaries were important to him. His mind received their impact, brought them into relation with one another, and made the resulting synthesis articulate for the common reader. It must be admitted that Wells had an extraordinary instinct for selecting those ideas which would indeed excite the general interest. Yet the fact remained that he retained the prerogative of the final power of selection, and this qualification, which for the general reader might pass unnoticed by virtue of his popular instinct, at once became glaringly apparent in the quite different atmosphere of the Fabian Society. Wells wanted to be a teacher: the Fabians were not prepared to be his pupils.

We have now to consider the nature of this comprehensive Socialism for which he failed to make the Fabian Society the vehicle. The essential difference between the two was that whereas the Fabians sought to narrow Socialism in the cause of practicality, Wells sought to widen it and to include all advanced ideas under its aegis: wherever there was unrest over existing conditions, no matter how trivial or remote from the economic sphere the circumstances of it might be, there was to be seen yet another manifestation of the spirit of Socialism. One result of this synthesizing impulse was the appearance of a religious strain in his thought. We have seen how he rejected Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism; he now spoke of the acceptance of Socialism in terms analogous to those describing the conversion of the sinner which was so strongly emphasized in Evangelical Christianity. In 1906 he wrote:

I am, by a sort of predestination, a Socialist. I perceive, I cannot help talking and writing about Socialism, and shaping and forwarding Socialism. I am one of a succession - one of a growing multitude of witnesses. It does not - in the larger sense - matter how many generations of us must toil and testify. ... We have the light. We know what we are for, and that the light that now glimmers so dimly through us must in the end prevail. 3

A similar approach is to be seen in a novel written in 1913, where the hero became aware of

that wide estate of life that spreads about us all, open to all of us in just the measure that we can scramble out of our individual selves - to a more general self. I seemed to be hanging there at the brim of my stale and painful den staring at the unthought-of greatness of the world, with an unhoped-for wind out of heaven blowing upon my face.

I suppose the intention of the phrase "finding Salvation", as religious people use it, it is very much this experience. If it is not the same thing it is something very closely akin. 4

In these early years of the century he saw Socialism as a key to the whole chaos of human existence; inevitably, therefore, he invested it with religious overtones.

Such an attitude towards Socialism involved a different attitude towards the Industrial Revolution from that of the Fabians: whereas they, as we have seen, avoided passing judgement on it but concentrated on remedying the inequality it had brought about, Wells saw it as an event of profound moral significance. He believed that

the enormous development of mechanism which has been the cardinal feature of the nineteenth century ... by altering the method and proportions of almost all human undertakings, has altered absolutely the grouping and character of the groups of human beings engaged on them. 5

This declaration occurred in the first book in which he began to set down his ideas about society, and its full title, Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought, is applicable to a very large proportion of his total work. Wells saw the mere complexity of the new machinery as a powerful formative influence, for the technicians responsible for its maintenance

must keep on mastering new points, new aspects, they must be intelligent and adaptable, they must get a grasp of that permanent something that lies behind the changing immediate practice. In other words, they will have to be educated rather than trained after the fashion of the old craftsman. 6

5. Anticipations p. 66.
6. Ibid. p. 86.
Hence, in the continuation to *Anticipations*, entitled *Mankind in the Making*, Wells devoted himself to the question of education in the State of the future, concluding that

Thought is the life, the spontaneous flexibility of a community. A community that thinks freely and fully throughout its population is capable of a thousand things that are impossible in an unthinking mass of people. 7

Mechanization at once freed man from the necessity of mindless toil and forced him to exercise his mind. No more did he preach the pessimism of *The Time Machine* whereby this very mental exercise led to eventual mental inertia. Instead he declared that the extension of education among the community would lead to the individual's undergoing a profound change in his estimate of his own place within the community:

His individual thought and purpose has to swim in and become part of the general thought and purpose of the community. If that general flow of thought is meagre, his individual life will partake of its limitations. As the general thought rises out of its pools and narrow channels towards a wide flood, so each individual becomes more capable of free movements and spacious co-operations towards the general end. 8

When this process reached its culmination, the citizen of the then-existing State would "take his brain, blood, body and lineage as a trust to be administered for the world". 9 By taking this short-term view, therefore, Wells' thought reversed its character and became optimistic in the extreme.

The pre-eminence given to education in his thought is a symptom

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7. *Mankind in the Making* p. 357. Emphasis has already been laid on Wells' patriotism. Clearly this passage was written with a censorious glance towards German regimentation.
8. ibid. p. 356.
of its subjective quality. Wells had little aptitude for abstract thinking but a great tendency to turn his individual experience into processes affecting the whole of humanity. The supreme importance of education in his own career led him to give it a similar position in his political thought. The converse of this was his insistence that there was no place for the working classes in the society of the future. Manual Labour was being superseded by machines, and as a result the working classes had the choice of becoming the educated technicians in charge of the new machines or of forming part of a new social grouping - the urban poor, who were either criminal, immoral, parasitic in more or less irregular ways upon the more successful classes, or labouring, at something less than a regular bare subsistence wage, in a finally hopeless competition against machinery that is not yet cheap as their toil. 10

Although Wells declared that this group was a new phenomenon, it is difficult to see it as such. Rather it was the result of a personal terror of the working classes which arose from the fact that his parents' position on the lowest fringe of the middle class had been so precarious. It was to prevent their falling into the lower classes that Sarah Wells had toiled, first in her own home to bring up her children, then as housekeeper at Up Park to maintain the family income. Now her son was, in effect, saying that the working classes must either become middle-class or be exterminated, though he contradicted himself on how this extermination was to be achieved, saying first that the conditions in which they lived were

10. Anticipations p. 79.
so bad that it was impossible for them to breed, and later in the
same book that they "multiply in sheer ignorance" and would
willingly accept the imposition of wholesale birth control. 11
Wells was determined that future society should consist of fully-
trained people, soberly attached to their professional duties and
with a strong sense of the needs of the community. In 1901 he
located the most valuable social elements among the more prosperous
sections of the middle classes, "the most typical portion of the
central body, the section containing the scientific engineering
or scientific medical sort of people". 12

The mere fact that a man is an engineer or a doctor, for
example, should imply now, and certainly will imply in the
future, that he has received an education of a certain definite
type; he will have a general acquaintance with the scientific
interpretation of the universe, and he will have acquired
certain positive and practical habits of mind. 13

What had happened was that Wells, having freed himself (and his
parents, whom he now supported) from the threat of falling in the
social scale, had reached a higher position in the middle classes
and had thereby become aware for the first time of a social stratum
of people possessed of material security and a pleasant way of life.
He celebrated this happy change in his fortunes by consigning the
hitherto so terrifying working classes to social extinction and
presenting the higher sections of the middle classes as the leaders
of society (in all except its more frivolous and useless aspects,
such as fashions in clothes).

11. Anticipations pp. 80 and 305.
12. Ibid. p. 103.
13. Ibid. p. 104.
Wells could not, however, be entirely contented with so simple a solution. If it was true that the new urban poor consisted of all the failures in society, could the existing social pressures be trusted to select those failures rightly? Surely not.

It is a stupid superstition that "genius will out" in spite of all discouragement. The fact that great men have risen against crushing disadvantages in the past proves nothing of the sort; this roll-call of survivors does no more than give the measure of the enormous waste of human possibility human stupidity has achieved. 14

If the urban poor were vicious, might not this be due to their adverse circumstances? Wells was torn between the desire to see society rid of its worse elements and the feeling that, given better opportunities, those worse elements might change out of recognition. Thus although in 1905 he stated that there were bound to be social undesirables and that

these people will have to be in the descendant phase, the species must be engaged in eliminating them; there is no escape from that, 15

nevertheless, in the following year he read a paper to the Fabian Society which expressed his own feelings of guilt as, having himself reached a position of material comfort and hence of mental creativity, he thought of all those who were still in the conditions of genteel poverty that he remembered so well. A friend of his, he said - and the friend was a transparent fiction for himself - finds it ... a constant flaw upon a life of comfort and pleasant interests to see so many people, who might be his

agreeable friends and associates, detestably under-educated, detestably housed, in the most detestable clothes and boots, and so detestably broken in spirit that they will not treat him as an equal. 16.

Both attitudes, though contradictory, sprang from the same impulse, however: the working classes and the lower middle classes had to disappear from the social structure, whether they disappeared by being prevented from breeding or by being assimilated into the remainder of society. In 1906 he attacked "Socialist workers" (by which term he meant primarily the Webbs) because they
don't for a moment envisage a time when there will be no lower classes - that is beyond them altogether. 17.

By 1908 the break with the Fabians was complete, and in a book published in that year, New Worlds for Old, he demonstrated the fact by tracing the historical development of Socialism and presenting Fabian Socialism as an outmoded form. He named it Administrative Socialism and declared that it had failed because it believed that Socialist measures which would have the ultimate effect of changing the whole social ethos could nevertheless be put into practice by means of existing institutions. Socialism, said Wells,

has preached collective ownership and collective control, and it has only begun to recognize that this implies the necessity of a collective will and new means and methods altogether for the collective mind. 18

This new approach, after the Fabian blind alley, he called Constructive Socialism and characterized it by the concept of the

16. The Misery of Boots p. 73.
17. Socialism and the Family p. 16.
18. New Worlds for Old p. 276.
collective mind just mentioned, a concept which we may explain as a rather more developed and mystical version of the public-spiritedness which he had admired in the professional classes.

All individual achievement, fine books, splendid poems, great discoveries, lives of thought, are no more than flashes in this huge moral and intellectual being which grows now self-conscious and purposeful, just as a child grows out of its early self-ignorance to an elusive, indefinable, indisputable sense of itself. 19

One must concede that Wells was right, insofar as the steady extension of education was leading to a considerable growth of self-consciousness among the population at large. It must also be noted, however, first that Wells elevated this social phenomenon into a cosmic process, and second that it entirely suited his own view of his intellectual function within society. "Individual achievement" acquired social utility without becoming any less individual; without accepting any collective discipline (as Shaw did, for instance, as a member of the Fabian Executive), Wells could assert that his own work was part of a great collective move forward.

As the first decade of the new century advanced, Wells' thought developed in two important ways. In the first place his disillusionment with the Fabians joined with the general disillusionment with the impotence of the new Labour group in Parliament to make him declare that Socialism was not adequately represented by any so-called Socialist body. In 1911, Richard Remington, the hero of his novel

The New Machiavelli considered the Socialists and found them wanting:

"When you think of the height and depth and importance and wisdom of the Socialist ideas, and see the men who are running them. . . . A big system of ideas like Socialism grows up out of the obvious common sense of our present condition. It's as impersonal as science. All these men - They've given nothing to it. They're just people who have pegged out claims upon a big intellectual No-Man's-Land - and don't feel quite sure of the law". 20

Wells not unnaturally found the idea of this "big intellectual No-Man's-Land" inspiring, and he was encouraged to further optimism by the thought that Socialism was as "impersonal as science", because in saying this he had in mind the enormous strides made by scientific research during the previous century. In the following year he wrote an essay on the desirable society of the future entitled "The Past and the Great State", in which he refused to give any concrete details of what such a State would be like: such details could not yet be known, but this was rather a guarantee of their inevitability than a demonstration of their lack of substance - the Great State was "a project as dreamlike to-day as electric lighting, electric traction, or aviation would have been in the year 1850". 21

Just as nearly every man at work upon Voltaic electricity in 1850 knew that he was preparing for electric traction, so do I know quite certainly, in spite of a whole row of unsolved problems before me, that I am working towards the Great State. 22

We come once more to the idea of a large number of men, working quite independently of each other, who were all nevertheless part of a great forward movement and who could all be assured of the ultimate

21. The Great State p. 32.
22. ibid. p. 34.
usefulness of their contributions to that movement.

Hence Wells laid great emphasis on the need for increased mental activity, particularly in the form of research. The hero of *Marriage*, a novel published in the same year as *The Great State* (1912), complained to a Socialist of the vagueness of Socialism as it then existed:

"Does any one question that if we could have this socialist state in which every one is devoted and every one is free, in which there is no waste and no want, and beauty and brotherhood prevail universally, we wouldn't? But - You socialists have no scheme of government, no scheme of economic organisation, no intelligible guarantees of personal liberty, no method of progress, no ideas about marriage, no plan - except those little pickpocket plans of the Fabians that you despise as much as I do - for making this order into that other order you've never yet taken the trouble to work out even in principle." 23

The programme of research advocated here was of a daunting extensive-ness; the Fabians would have objected that it was quite impracticable except by a huge concerted effort, of which there was no sign. But Wells believed that there were signs of such an effort: a collective mind was beginning to emerge, and every piece of research undertaken would contribute to its emergence. Moreover, if such a programme could not be carried out except by mental activity upon the widest possible scale, this to Wells was only a further proof of its right-ness, for, as we have seen, he rejected the concept of Socialism as a body of beliefs maintained by a small group against the rest of society; on the contrary, Socialism was working through all men, whether they called themselves Socialists or not.

The second development in Wells' thought was his turning to a higher section of society as the one most likely to make the most valuable contribution. Once again, the change in his thought may be paralleled by a change in his circumstances - his move to the house on the edge of the Countess of Warwick's estate. The effect of the move may be seen in The New Machiavelli. There, although the hero's intellectual development was virtually the same as Wells', his social background was different. Though his parents were poor, they were middle-class people in reduced circumstances, not members of the servant classes trying to make their way in the world, as Wells' parents were. Remington's school was an ancient City foundation, from which he went on to Cambridge, financed by a wealthy uncle, and from there to a career in politics, unimpeached by the need to earn his living. Remington moved with ease among the upper classes and admired them considerably:

They were on the whole handsome people, charitable minded, happy, and easy. They led spacious lives, and there was something free and fearless about their bearing that I liked extremely. The women particularly were wide-reading, fine-thinking. ... I liked, too, the relations that held between women and men, their general tolerance, their antagonism to the harsh jealousies that are the essence of the middle-class order.... 24

It was the middle-class order that had impressed Wells so favourably at the turn of the century, with his picture of the sober, public-spirited professional man who gave "his principal energies to thought

and work" 25 and who had "a mind considerably engaged". 26 Now he attacked such people in the persons of those who attended Remington's meetings when he stood for Parliament as a Liberal:

They did not recognize themselves as mankind. Building an empire, preparing a fresh stage in the history of humanity, had no appeal for them. They were mostly every-day, toiling people, full of small personal solicitudes, and they came to my meetings, I think, very largely as a relaxation. ... They did not think politics was a great constructive process, they thought it was a dog-fight. 27

Wells rejected them. He rejected, also, the Webbs and their like, the professional administrators. Writing in 1912 on the measures immediately necessary for the country, he reasserted his ideal of an enlightened oligarchy based upon birth. The middle-class Fabians might praise efficiency, but they had shown themselves incapable of achieving it.

In theory I am a Socialist, and were I theorising about some nation in the air I would say that all the great productive activities and all the means of communication should be national concerns and be run as national services. But our State is peculiarly incapable of such functions; at the present time it cannot even produce a postage stamp that will stick; and the type of official it would probably evolve for industrial organisation, slowly but unsurely, would be a maddening combination of the district visitor and the boy clerk. It is to the independent people of some leisure and resource in the community that one has at last to appeal for such large efforts and understandings as our present situation demands. In the default of our public services, there opens an immense opportunity for voluntary effort. 28

27. The New Machiavelli pp. 262-263.
There is the similarity between this position and the one stated earlier in *Anticipations* that in each Wells saw grounds for hope in a comparatively small section of society and rejected the rest, whereas in the middle years of the decade he hoped that, if they were only given the opportunity, all parts of society would acquire the qualities of the desirable minority.

If, then, we ask what Wells meant by Socialism, it is extremely difficult to give an exact answer. Indeed, he saw the term itself as being expendable. Although in the essay already mentioned, "The Past and the Great State", he continued to speak of the various types of Socialism in the same way as he had done in *New Worlds for Old*, in the introduction to the symposium of which his essay formed part, he and his two fellow-editors, Lady Warwick and G.R.S. Taylor, declared:

*This is not a socialist volume, and the constructive spirit has long since passed beyond the purely socialist range. ... That old and largely fallacious antagonism of socialist and individualist is indeed dissolving out of contemporary thought altogether.*

He himself, however, still employed the term - though he attached his own particular meaning to it.

We must now consider his essay in this symposium a little more closely, especially as he there presented his own social theories in relation to what he conceived those of Belloc and Chesterton to be. Already, in 1901, he had declared that

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a population of small agriculturists that has got itself well established is probably as hopelessly immovable a thing as the forces of progressive change will have to encounter. 30— a statement with which Belloc would heartily have agreed. Now he returned to the consideration of such a community, naming it the Normal Social Life. Where it prevailed, communities were small and localized, with the family as the basic unit. The most important element in the life of such communities was the cultivation of the land, although forestry and hunting also had their place. There were a few "imperfectly specialized tradesmen" to serve the community, a law based on immemorial tradition, and, as the "primordial bond", the worship of a "local god or a localised saint".

One may define certain phases in the history of various countries when this was the state of affairs, when a countryside of prosperous communities with a healthy family life and a wide distribution of property, animated by roads and towns and unified by a generally intelligible religious belief, lived in a transitory but satisfactory harmony under a sympathetic government. I take it that this is the condition to which the minds of such original and vigorous reactionary thinkers as Mr. G.K. Chesterton and Mr. Hilaire Belloc for example turn, as being the most desirable state of mankind.31

The reason why such periods of harmony were transitory was that there also existed what Wells defined very vaguely as

the surplus life of mankind, the less-localised life of mankind, that life of mankind which is not directly connected with the soil but which has become more or less detached from and independent of it. 32

Although he represented this force as having operated throughout

30. Anticipations p. 94.
32. ibid. p. 10.
history (as having, indeed, been history, for the Normal Social Life was "as mute as the standing crops" 33), it seems clear that what he had in mind was chiefly the urbanization and mechanization of the Industrial Revolution. At any rate, though these disruptive forces had repeatedly operated in the past, they had never succeeded in overcoming the Normal Social Life; now, once more, the struggle between the two was reaching a climax.

At this point, one may note a recurrent weakness in Wells' thought - his desire to have his cake and eat it. For he strongly attacked those forms of Socialism which declared that the coming of a Socialist State was inevitable. The "purposeful and systematic types" (i.e. those who thought like himself) believed that the forces that have been assailing and disintegrating the Normal Social Life ... are forces of wide and indefinite possibility that need to be controlled by a collective effort implying a collective design, deflected from merely injurious consequences and organized for a new human welfare upon new lines. 34

Thus he demonstrated that, for the first time, mankind was able to assume command of its own destiny. Such a situation would seem to imply the possibility of failure; yet, he continued,

there is, we hold, a certain qualified inevitability about this greater social state because we believe any social state not affording a general contentment, a general freedom, and a general and increasing fullness of life, must sooner or later collapse and disintegrate again, and revert more or less completely to the Normal Social Life, and because we believe the Normal Social Life is itself thick-sown with the seeds of fresh beginnings. 35

33. The Great State p. 8.
34. ibid. p. 22.
35. ibid. p. 31.
It is one of the more striking examples of the (to us) almost incredible confidence and optimism of the period. Wells stated simultaneously that everything depended upon co-ordinated human effort and that, if that effort failed, the situation would eventually sort itself out.

We have already seen how Wells refused to be specific in his description of the Great State. He mentioned only three factors as being absolutely necessary to Socialism. The first was that private property had to be restrained - but how, or how far, he declined to say; earlier Socialists had presented over-simplified answers, but "Socialism is now old enough to know better".36 The second was that the status of women within the community had to be redefined to take account of the fact that no longer was it their sole function to be wives and mothers. Lastly - and this was certainly the most important of the three -

we have ... to invent for the Great State, if we are to suppose any Great State at all, an economic method without any specific labour class.37

Otherwise, Wells foresaw the division of society into a class of wasters and a "violently resentful and destructive rebel class", culminating in a social débâcle.38 Once again, Wells provided for the disappearance of the working classes, although on this occasion he confined himself to explaining how, with the advance of mechanization, their labour was unnecessary, without saying how they were

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36. The Great State p. 25.
37. ibid. p. 37.
38. ibid. p. 46.
The characteristics of Wells' approach to Socialism were the subjective nature of his thought and the extreme optimism arising from the impact on him of nineteenth-century advances in science and industry. A complicating factor was that although he was strongly excited by the idea of change, he was also very much part of his society - as has already been noted in connection with his marriage. In 1906 he wrote:

It is part of the queer composition of the human animal that its desire for happenings is balanced by an instinctive dread of real changes of condition, and the remark may be turned against himself. An instance of this (written in the same year) is the following declaration that begins by being bold and then makes a sudden retreat:

Let us be clear about one thing: that Socialism means revolution, that it means a change in the every-day texture of life. It may be a very gradual change, but it will be a very complete one.

The blunt belligerence of the opening is quite overlaid. Or in 1911 his hero Remington said of his scheme for the Endowment of Motherhood (whereby wives with children would no longer be dependent on their husbands), "It is no use pretending that this is not novel and revolutionary; it is", and then added half a dozen lines later, "I am convinced that a practical monogamy is a psychological necessity to the mass of civilized people".

40. The Misery of Boots p. 35.
41. The New Machiavelli p. 412.
however, when one considers the source of Wells' ideas. He was not a man who followed lines of thought to their logical conclusions or who formed intractable convictions upon firm moral principles. Instead, he reflected the outlook of his society, a society which was bored by the continuing stability of life, intrigued by the Socialist ideas, but quite unable to envisage any real change in its circumstances.
Section 4. - Belloc and Pope Leo's Encyclical.

To Wells, Socialism was part of the English way of life, and he therefore introduced it into every part of his work. To Belloc it was a perverse doctrine, to be taken into account only when its growing success made it a force to be reckoned with. In taking such a view, Belloc was acting in accordance with a Papal Encyclical of 1891 which seemed to have said the last word on the subject of the relations between the Church and Socialism.

This Encyclical, Rerum Novarum, had been promulgated by Leo XIII as a definition of the Church's attitude to "the spirit of revolutionary change", and contained a flat condemnation of Socialism. The grounds on which the condemnation was made were simple: part of Socialist doctrine was the denial of the right of the individual to own property. It was true that this denial might be very considerably qualified - Shaw, for instance, held that it applied only to land; but however much qualified, it still violated a part of the natural law, viz. that "every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own". 1

It is surely undeniable that, when a man engages in remunerative labour, the impelling reason and motive of his work is to obtain property, and thereafter to hold it as his own. 2

As for the argument, already noted in connection with Shaw, that private land ownership was tantamount to allowing slavery, Pope Leo said:

1. Rerum Novarum pars. 5.
2. ibid. pars. 4.
The earth, even though apportioned among private owners, ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all, inasmuch as there is no one who does not sustain life from what the land produces. Moreover, private land ownership could itself be a means of improving the bad social situation:

If working people can be encouraged to look forward to obtaining a share in the land, the consequence will be that the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought nearer to one another. A further consequence will result in the greater abundance of the fruits of the earth. Men always work harder and more readily when they work on that which belongs to them; may they learn to love the very soil which yields in response to the labour of their hands, not only food to eat, but an abundance of good things for themselves and those dear to them. That such a spirit of willing labour would add to the produce of the earth and to the wealth of the community is self-evident.

It will be seen that in this last passage, Pope Leo was doing far more than laying down the economic principles of a just society: he was advocating a society based on agriculture instead of industry. Indeed, the first of the quotations from the Encyclical implied that the aim of the industrial worker was to acquire sufficient money to enable him to return to agriculture as an independent small-holder.

Pope Leo was expressing the ideal of Peasant Proprietorship which predominated in some countries, such as Ireland, and to which the Fabian Society, like the majority of Socialist bodies, was firmly opposed. In 1894 Webb attacked a leading Irish Nationalist for lending his influence, not to secure the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland, but to tighten the grip which half-a-million individual Irishmen have on their particular holdings.

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4. *ibid.* para. 35.
5. Fabian Tract No. 51 *Socialism: True and False* p. 7.
In Bello's case, however, there were many circumstances, apart from his obligation as a Catholic to subscribe to the views expressed in the Encyclical, to make him oppose the Fabians. For one thing, his French origins meant that he was connected with a country where Peasant Proprietorship had survived; he possessed an immediate sense of it which few other Englishmen shared. For another, Bello had a strong feeling for particular types of countryside, a feeling which we have already seen impelling him to return with his family to Sussex after ten years away from it in Oxford and London. Much of his early work was concerned with describing the reactions aroused by various parts of England and France. He had a physical sense of locality which was certainly not shared by the three other writers, all of whom were essentially urban in their habits. As a result, although he had no liking for agricultural labour, Bello responded to Pope Leo's assertion that men ought to have this sense of unity with land.

Moreover, the Pope was appealing to traditional values. Such a statement, for instance, as "Men always work harder and more readily when they work on that which belongs to them" depends on the accumulated observation of men. Wells would have answered it by saying that what was true of the past was not necessarily true of the future. But Bello had a strong sense of traditional values and saw these expressed most clearly in the land and in the way in which it had been altered and developed by its occupants (for he saw simply as different aspects of one whole the nature of the land, the way in which it was
cultivated and the kinds of villages and towns that had grown up upon it). When in 1900, for instance, he wrote a history of Paris, he began with an extensive description of the site and the reasons why the city had been built at that particular point and then went on to deal with each period in its history by means of a detailed description of the building which made up the city at that time. History for Belloc was a concrete matter, to be read as much in the topography of town and countryside as in documents.

Again, in 1902 he wrote The Path to Rome, in which he told of how he had made a pilgrimage to Rome from Toul. In the course of this he noted how the change from one different culture to another was reflected in his surroundings. Thus, he commented as follows on passing from France into German-speaking Switzerland:

I had, as I passed on along this turning way, all the pleasures of novelty; it was quite another country from the governed and ordered France which I had left. The road was more haphazard, less carefully tended, and evidently less used. The milestones were very old, and marked leagues instead of kilometres. There was age in everything.

Even more telling, from our present point of view, is his description of passing from this area to that in which the Italian influence was predominant:

A hint or memory of gracious things ran in the slight breeze, the wreaths of fog would lift a little for a few yards, and in their clearings I thought to approach a softer and more desirable world. I was soothed as though with caresses, and when I began to see somewhat farther and felt a vigour and fulness in the outline of the Trees, I said to myself suddenly -

"I know what it is! It is the South, and a good part of my blood..."

... And ... my eyes filled with tears and I was as glad as a man come home again, and I could have kissed the ground. 7

Belloc held that the true and lasting values of Christendom possessed concrete expression, and this attitude was an extension of the sacramental idea - the spiritual taking physical form. The new ideas such as Socialism, on the other hand, obviously possessed no such expression, and Belloc used this fact as a means of dismissing them, speaking of them in 1901 as

the jargon of the evanescent and false philosophies by whose aid the academies attempt to escape from the traditions of Europe. 8

In the early years of the new century, he expressed his contempt for Socialism by simply ignoring it. Not until 1903 did he pay it any attention, and then it was in the form of a hostile pamphlet which he wrote for the Catholic Truth Society entitled An Examination of Socialism. Inevitably, he concluded by rejecting Socialism, but the path by which he reached that conclusion is instructive. In the first place he sought - somewhat as the Fabians had done - to delimit its sphere: the essence of Socialism lay in the economic sphere alone, and it had no intrinsic connection with such questions as the status of women in society. His purpose was to reduce his task to manageable proportions. Socialism in the Wellsian sense was rapidly growing so vast as to be beyond the range of discussion: it

included any scheme that made for greater social efficiency or happiness. Belloc therefore asserted that the one essential element in Socialism was that the means of production should be owned by the Government; it did not necessarily involve the total abolition of property or the equalization of incomes. Next, he admitted that society was in an unprecedented state of evil as the result of the accumulation of property, but went on to say that Socialism would only exacerbate this state:

To the loss of freedom which every man feels during those hours which he gives as a wage-earner to the capitalist who employs him must be added, under a Socialist system, a similar loss of freedom in all the other hours of his life.

Nor was this objection answered, he went on, by those who said that the citizen would ultimately be his own master since, in a democratic State, he would control the Government. For one thing,

a man voting as one of thousands or millions is quite a different thing from a man enjoying elastic and immediate control every moment over his own actions.

For another, government would be impossible if the wishes of minorities were not overruled.

These, however, were mere skirmishes. The crux of the matter was that the Socialists declared that the desire to own land and machinery was simply one manifestation of the desire to be rich and was to be distinguished from the desire for the expression of the individual personality by means of property, which men would still be free to gratify under Socialism. "The only answer to this," said
Belloc, "is to contradict it. Men do desire to own for its own sake". In other words, the Socialists held that for a man to desire immediate ownership of more than such personal possessions as his clothing or the furniture and ornaments of his house was for him to desire to dominate his fellow-men by controlling their livelihood; whereas Belloc held that the ownership of land was just as essential a part of personal expression as those matters in which the Socialists conceded the individual's right to property.

Nevertheless, Belloc admitted that the idea of a State based upon the principles he advocated had as yet hardly entered the consciousness of the English people, and the result of this was to make him turn all the more strongly to the concept of the Church as a political force. In the following year, 1909, he wrote a second pamphlet, The Church and Socialism, in which he did not merely appeal to his reader's instincts in his plea for the maintenance of the principle of property, but set up Catholicism and Socialism as two opposing and incompatible concepts. Both built a wholly consistent outlook upon clearly defined first principles - just as much as Catholicism, Socialism maintained "a general theory true under all conditions and at all times" - but these first principles were quite different in each case. The Church perceives in a certain proportion and order the exercise of human faculties; and having grasped that arrangement she refuses to sacrifice the greater to the lesser, the primary to the secondary thing.
Thus there could be no compromise or assimilation; men were presented with a stark choice. On the one hand, there was a Socialist State which ultimately would consist of a very small class of free owners and a very large servile class which had lost its sense of freedom. On the other, there was "a society in which the Church shall conquer", where there would be no proletariat, but highly divided properties bound together by free co-operative organizations.

It was abundantly clear, however (as Belloc had earlier admitted), that there was no sign of England's becoming a society of this latter sort. Belloc was thus setting himself against, not merely the Socialist doctrinaires, but all the prevailing social trends. He was advocating the creation of a society virtually from nothing, believing this to be possible on the grounds that only such a society was consonant with human nature and that therefore it must sooner or later emerge, even if it had to be preceded by a social débâcle such as the Dark Ages had been. Moreover, those policies to which Belloc objected most strongly were precisely those which as one of the young Liberal Members he might have been expected to endorse. A passing contemptuous reference to "what is called 'practical politics'" in the first of the two pamphlets indicates his unease in the Commons. For the Liberal Party was taking up the doctrines he abhorred. The efforts of the Webbs to influence the course of English politics at the highest level had not slackened, so that the historian Elie Halévy could write of these years about 1910 that "thus under a Liberal
Cabinet the social creed of the Webbs ... triumphed". 9

This creed must be distinguished from the earlier approach of the Fabian Society as a whole, though it was a logical development of it. The Fabians – among whom no-one was more prominent than Sidney Webb himself, of course – had aimed at the working classes becoming politically articulate by means of the existing democratic institutions, in particular local councils, for here they would be able to exert a much greater pressure through their representatives than at Westminster. Now, however, the Webbs found that they had the opportunity to influence those who already possessed the highest political power. Not the Labour Members, for these were almost all Trade Union officials, and relations between the Fabians and the Unions had never been particularly happy. The men who seemed most willing to listen were the Liberals, and of these by far the greater part came from the middle classes, virtually none from the working classes. The Webbs used their position to encourage the creation of a bureaucracy (against which we have already seen Wells reacting) which should regulate and improve the life of the masses. 10

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10. The efforts of the Webbs, and the social legislation passed during the years after 1906, should be seen against a far wider background: since the middle of the previous century the function of the Civil Service had been growing steadily, and this, like the steady rise in State expenditure and consequently in taxes, was a far vaster movement than any Government could hope to arrest. Nevertheless, the Webbs and the most dynamic of the Liberal Ministers - Lloyd George and Churchill – sought, on the contrary, to accelerate it.
One way in which they sought to do so was by regulating the wages and conditions within the various trades. The Government introduced measures which had the aim of eroding the old system of bargaining between employers and employed, a system with the ultimate sanctions of lock-outs on the one hand and strikes on the other. Instead, trade boards were set up which imposed a minimum wage. Though as yet these boards covered only certain trades in certain areas, it was hoped to increase their numbers and extent. As a further move in the same direction, the principle of compulsory arbitration was introduced, whereby a solution could be imposed on a dispute without either ultimate sanction being brought into use: both sides would be forced to take their cases to an independent arbitrator and to accept his judgement. The advocates of compulsory arbitration received further stimulus from the miners' strike in 1912, which very soon threatened to bring other sections of industry (such as the railways) to a halt because of the resulting shortage of coal. It was argued that any trade in such a position that a stoppage in it would directly affect the national economy as a whole ought to be put on a different basis from the rest, with its workers deprived of the right to strike but compensated by a full-scale system of independent arbitration.

Another aspect of the Government's social programme was its provision of sickness and unemployment benefits. It introduced these by means of the fiercely contested National Insurance Act of 1911, whereby the State, the employer and the employee all contributed to a fund from which the benefits were paid. The employer was given the
the responsibility of deducting the worker's contribution from his wage each week and of recording payment of it.

All these measures were opposed by Belloc, and the ineffectiveness of his opposition in the House led him to declare that the individual backbencher could achieve nothing except by conforming to the wishes of the Party machines. Moreover, he denounced the apparent division of the Commons between the Parties as a fiction; the real division was not that between the Government and the Opposition but between the two front Benches working in collusion and the remainder of the House. This governing body was socially homogeneous and consisted only of the wealthy upper classes together with such members of the middle classes (particularly lawyers) as were allowed to enter it (usually by marriage). Even this group did not hold the ultimate power in the country; that lay in financial, not in political, circles. Where the Webbs presented the State as intervening, independent and superior, between the warring classes, Belloc saw it as the tool of the employers being used to bring the working classes into subjection.

His general attitude towards the social legislation was summed up in a book written in 1912, two years after he had left Parliament. The title - a phrase which is perhaps his most enduring contribution to English politics - summed up his belief as to what the Government legislation was bringing about: The Servile State. Here he described the contemporary economic trends in the perspective of European civilization - characteristically, for Belloc's approach to every
matter was seen in such a perspective. He presented a picture of the Ancient Civilizations being based on the institution of slavery, which was only gradually dissolved by the influence of Christianity. The stable State made up of free men working in co-operation that existed in the Middle Ages was brought to an end when, at the Reformation, property began to pass into the hands of a single class, a process which had continued ever since. But the resulting State was no longer stable, for it maintained the legal fiction that all citizens were equal, even though the great majority of those citizens had been deprived of any portion in the means of production. Such a situation, in which, though all men were technically equal, the few had complete power over the many, could not of its nature endure. Moreover, since our civilization had begun by accepting the institution of slavery and had eradicated that institution only comparatively late in its history, it would seem that it had an inherent tendency to return to such an institution, a tendency encouraged by the fact that the re-establishment of slavery was the simplest and most direct means of resolving the existing anomaly. The working classes were obviously willing to acquiesce in such a development, provided it was not made too nakedly apparent. This was shown by the fact that "property is no longer what they seek, nor what they think obtainable for themselves". Instead, they sought higher wages and, above all, security. This desire for security explained the power of the capitalist, for

it meant that the worker was chiefly afraid of losing his job, so that
"private law had ... overcome public law". 12

That great mass of wage-earners upon which our society now
reposes understands as a present good all that will increase
even to some small amount their present revenue and all that
may guarantee them against those perils of insecurity to which
they are perpetually subject. They understand and welcome a
good of this kind, and they are perfectly willing to pay for
that good the corresponding price of control and enregimenta-
tion, exercised in gradually increasing degree by those who
are their paymasters. 13

It was, however, apparent that such reformers as the Webbs, though
they were certainly taking advantage of this general decay of the
instinct for property, could not be identified with the Capitalists,
since they themselves had no connections with financial circles.
Therefore Belloc declared that the impact of Socialism upon a
Capitalist State only resulted in an acceleration of the progress
towards Servility, even though this was far from being the Socialists'
intention. The Socialists wished to relieve the plight of the masses;
they also wished to dispossess the Capitalists and bring the national
wealth under the control of the State. In this latter purpose they
were effectively frustrated. They could not dispossess the Capitalists
by wholesale confiscation, because the effect of such an action upon
the complex structure of the modern State would be to
bring crashing down with it twenty times the wealth involved and
all the secure credit of our community. 14

Nor was it possible for the State to buy out the Capitalists, as the

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12. The Servile State p. 142.
13. ibid. p. 142.
Socialists (such as Shaw, in *Fabian Essays*) had argued was possible, pointing to the State's superior power of raising capital by means of imposing taxes. For, said Belloc, either such an operation would be profitable to the Capitalist (in which case he would reinvest his surplus income, so that the situation would not be basically changed), or it would not (in which case, the operation would meet with the same concerted opposition as would confiscation).

If the Socialist hope of creating a Collectivist State had failed, however, the same was not true of their hope of improving the lot of the working classes. In this sphere they found the Capitalist perfectly willing to co-operate with them - on condition that his status was recognized and defined:

"If you will define the relation between my employees and myself" [Belloc imagined the Capitalist as saying], "I will undertake particular responsibilities due to my position. Subject the proletarian, as a proletarian, and because he is a proletarian, to special laws. Clothe me, the Capitalist, as a Capitalist, and because I am a Capitalist, with special converse duties under those laws. I will faithfully see that they are obeyed; I will compel my employees to obey them, and I will undertake the new role imposed upon me by the State. Nay, I will go further, and I will say that such a novel arrangement will make my own profits perhaps larger and certainly more secure". 15

The Socialists, said Belloc, had succumbed to the pressures of their position and were helping the enforcement of such legislation. Their earlier ideals had failed, and now they were making what advance they could, but in quite a different direction from that in which they had originally set out.

The Insurance Act, for instance, was in no way a piece of Socialist legislation. It gave the status of employer and employed the force of law, while restricting the latter definition to the working classes and excluding the professional classes - proof that it was being used to further the subjection of the proletariat. Moreover, the Act placed the responsibility for collecting the employee's contribution upon the employer, a fact which Belloc called "the cardinal landmark of our times" 16, of equal importance with the substitution of the peasant for the serf in the reverse process at the beginning of the Middle Ages.

Again, Belloc attacked the enforcement of a Minimum Wage, for

by the worker's agreeing to it

there is withdrawn from him the power to refuse his labour and thus to aim at putting himself in possession of the means of production. 17

For once agreement was reached between the two sides as to the amount of the Minimum Wage, a contract would be drawn up to embody that agreement, and either side would, where necessary, be forced to keep to that contract by the courts. Belloc foresaw the time when such contracts, extending over considerable periods, would be accepted as the normal practice, and such a situation would, he said, be equivalent to a system of compulsory labour. His pessimistic beliefs - it is difficult to see how he could present a free contract as a means of compulsion - arose from his low opinion of the quality of the working

17. ibid. p. 168.
classes:

Remember ... how comparatively slight a threat is already sufficient to control men in our industrial society, the proletarian mass of which is accustomed to live from week to week under peril of discharge, and has grown readily amenable to the threat of any reduction in those wages upon which it can but just subsist. 18

We might object that if they were enfeebled to this extent, then they would be able to make little use of the strike-weapon, even if they retained it. But the point is that, on Belloc's view, any society which had lost the sense of property was so vitiated that it was presented with nothing more than alternative evils. For instance, one might present him as an advocate of laissez-faire, because of his vision of a market of free men offering their labour on a short-term basis. Thus he complained that

Society is recognised as no longer consisting of free men bargaining freely for the labour or any other commodity in their possession, 19

and again that

the State has begun to immix the action of positive law and constraint with the older system of free bargaining. 20

Yet in between these two narrowly separated references, he could speak of free bargaining in very different terms:

Normally, capital prefers free labour with its margin of destitution; for such an anarchy, ephemeral though it is of its nature, while it lasts provides cheap labour. 21

Was a system of free bargaining the only one consonant with human dignity, or was it a chaos from which only the Capitalist drew

18. The Servile State p. 175.
20. ibid. p. 172.
advantage? The contradiction is resolved when we continue the first of the above three quotations: Society no longer consisted of free men bargaining freely "but of two contrasting status, owners and non-owners". Belloc thus implied that no reform could be effective until the mass of society became owners if only because, until that occurred, the working classes would lack the will to make use of the opportunities it gave them. Whether the economic system of a society was based on laissez-faire or not was of no consequence as long as the members of that society differed in status. Once again we reach the conclusion that he wished to re-create society. His book might be a means of stimulating political thought, but it could hardly stand as a manifesto, for (as he said of the policy of confiscation) its implementation would involve such social upheaval as to be indistinguishable from social ruin. And if Belloc might have contested this statement, he himself declared, as in the earlier pamphlet, that the society which he desired was "a society in which the Church shall conquer". It was only by such a means that he was able to bring the book to a hopeful conclusion:

As I am upon the whole hopeful that the Faith will recover its intimate and guiding place in the heart of Europe, so I believe that this sinking back into our original Paganism (for the tendency to the Servile State is nothing less) will in due time be halted and reversed. 22

Now such a hope could not but be a long term one - and, in the case of England, a slender one. Hence it could not form the basis of a

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political career. For Belloc's contribution to the contemporary political debate was that it should be scrapped and begun again on a motion of his choosing. It is not surprising, therefore, that his suggestion went largely unheard.
Section 5. - Chesterton and the English Demos.

The two keynotes in Chesterton's outlook at the beginning of the century were locality and human dignity, and looking back on this period in his autobiography, Chesterton was conscious of how these preoccupations had set him apart from the majority of his fellow-countrymen:

The two great movements during my youth and early manhood were Imperialism and Socialism. They were supposed to be fighting each other; and so doubtless they did, in the sense of waving Red Flags against Union Jacks. But as compared with those dim gropings in my own imagination, the two things were in union. ... Both believed in unification and centralization on a large scale. Neither could have seen any meaning in my own fancy for having things on a smaller and smaller scale. 1

There was then for Chesterton the same potential isolation as for Belloc, but Chesterton's deep sense of unity with English society prevented it from coming to full development. For instance, whereas Belloc's sense of locality manifested itself in a sense of the powerful reality of the various national identities of Europe, Chesterton's was insular. Belloc reacted against Imperialism by seeing Britain within a European, instead of an Imperial, context; Chesterton, on the other hand, reacted by advocating an internal fragmentation which would make Britain a kind of continent on her own. He held that the shapelessness of post-industrial Britain could be remedied by creating within it clearly distinguishable parts which would nevertheless combine to form a clear and harmonious pattern.

This approach was embodied - as we stated earlier - in his novel, The Napoleon of Notting Hill (1904). It told how the King of England, Auberon Quin, decided in a fit of impish humour to make each of the London boroughs a virtually autonomous city under his central authority. Each was to have characteristics clearly differentiated from the rest and to be ruled by a provost. At first the practical changes caused by the King's new system were slight, because the men whom he appointed as provosts simply accepted it as one of the King's irritating jokes and, while conforming to his demands for outward pomp and circumstance, managed all the practical affairs of the capital in the old ways.

Such was the situation as one of the provosts, Buck, promoted a scheme which transcended the boundaries of his own borough:

A great thoroughfare was to be driven through three boroughs, through West Kensington, North Kensington and Notting Hill. ... The negotiations, buyings, sellings, bullying and bribing took ten years, and by the end of it Buck, who had conducted them almost single-handed, had proved himself a man of the strongest type of material energy and material diplomacy. And just as his splendid patience and more splendid impatience had finally brought him victory, ... a sudden obstacle appeared that had neither been reckoned with nor dreamt of, a small and strange obstacle, which, like a speck of grit in a great machine, jarred the whole vast scheme and brought it to a standstill. 2

What had happened was that the Provost of Notting Hill, Adam Wayne, had refused to sell a small and dirty backstreet, called Pump Street, which lay right in the path of the new road. To Wayne the street represented in its very smallness what a man most truly loved and cared for, because

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2. The Napoleon of Notting Hill pp. 89-90.
the patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it. 3

In particular, Wayne loved five shops which stood side by side in the street and which, in their diversity, seemed able by themselves to minister to every human need.

If Notting Hill was the heart of the universe, and Pump Street was the heart of Notting Hill, this was the heart of Pump Street. The fact that they were all small and side by side realised that feeling for a formidable comfort and compactness which, as we have said, was the heart of his patriotism and of all patriotism. 4

This, then, was what he sought to defend. As for Buck, Wayne dismissed him as a goldhunter, and later in the novel Buck admitted as much in conversation with one of his associates:

"The Hammersmith to Maida Vale thoroughfare was an uncommonly good speculation. You and I hoped a great deal from it." 5

Thus all spiritual values were on the side of those who opposed large-scale development.

This was precisely the opposite attitude to that taken up at the same period by Wells. Wells disregarded the financial aspect of development schemes except insofar as all development must create an increase in the general prosperity of the community, and even this prosperity was presented in a moral guise, as the product of a general alertness and eagerness to make full use of opportunities. In the same year as that in which The Napoleon of Notting Hill was published, Wells presented a similar incident in an exactly opposite light in

4. ibid. p. 137.
5. ibid. p. 218.
The Food of the Gods. There some young giants - giants in moral vision as well as in physical stature - attempted to make a great road which was as straight as a bullet:

They had been stopped before mid-day by a vast crowd of excited people, owners of land, land agents, local authorities, lawyers, policemen, soldiers even.

"We're making a road", the biggest boy had explained.

"Make a road by all means", said the leading lawyer on the ground, "but please respect the rights of other people. You have already infringed the private rights of twenty-seven private proprietors; let alone the special privileges and property of an urban district board, nine parish councils, a county council, two gas-works, and a railway company ...."

"Goodney!" said the elder boy Cossar.

"You will have to stop it".

"But don't you want a nice straight road in the place of all these rotten rutty little lanes?"

"I don't say it wouldn't be advantageous, but -" "It isn't to be done", said the eldest Cossar boy, picking up his tools.

Whereas Wells was concerned with the impact that men could make on the future, Chesterton declared that it was above all the impact made upon men by the past that was most important, if only because, by studying this impact, one could gain a more precise knowledge of the limits of human nature. Thus Wayne declared at the end of the novel:

"It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young. ... There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by nature with a perpetual infancy. No man who is in love thinks that any one has been in love before. No woman who has a child thinks that there have been such things as children. No people that fight for their own city are haunted with the burden of the broken empires. Yes, ... the world is always the same, for it is always unexpected". 7

Thus Chesterton saw the world as a vale of soul-making, and therefore he was little concerned with the distant future. What was vital was that the present generation should acquit itself honourably according to the ancient values of humanity; in attempting to do so, it would invest the recurring activities and preoccupations of humanity with a perpetual freshness. By not trying to break out of the human cycle, it would not be oppressed by its ever-returning pattern.

Such an outlook was bound to involve the belief that there was a normal human standard to which ultimately every deviation must return, and this was indeed the basis upon which, in *Heretics*, published the following year, Chesterton attacked the thought of Shaw and Wells. Both, he said, possessed brilliant minds, but both had failed to comprehend the nature of the human material with which they dealt. Thus Chesterton objected to Shaw's attacking generalizations:

What is the good of telling a man (or a philosopher) that he has every liberty except the liberty to make generalizations? Making generalizations is what makes him a man. In short, when Mr. Shaw forbids men to have strict moral ideals, he is acting like one who should forbid them to have children. 9

Chesterton accused Shaw of being more concerned with the consistency of his philosophy than with its conformity to human nature; where there was a conflict between the two, it was always the latter that Shaw wished to abandon.

Mr. Shaw cannot understand that the thing which is valuable and lovable in our eyes is man - the old beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable man. 9

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Chesenton set up man as almost a mystical ideal, so as to oppose Shaw's claim to see things with complete objectivity and clarity:

The truth is that Mr. Shaw has never seen things as they really are. If he had he would have fallen on his knees before them. ... When we really see men as they are, we do not criticise, but worship; and very rightly. For a monster with mysterious eyes and miraculous thumbs, with strange dreams in his skull, and a queer tenderness for this place or that baby, is truly a wonderful and unnerving matter. 10

Of course, however unnerving this may have been, the alternative was for Chesenton far more so. Shaw, he complained, had "a secret ideal that has withered all the things of this world" 11 - that is, Shaw was doing what he had himself been tempted to do in the Nineties: he was creating an internal mental universe by which to judge the external physical one, instead of allowing the impact of actuality (such as, for instance, the monster that was man) to correct and delimit his mental operations. If it failed to refer back constantly to normal human standards, intellectual activity could only become increasingly eccentric and unreal.

Chesenton's attack on Wells followed very similar lines. Whereas Shaw, he said, pursued an illusory objectivity, Wells gave a false primacy to scientific knowledge; in either case, the basic error was a failure to lay sufficient importance on the fact of human nature. Wells, he said,

is still slightly affected with the great scientific fallacy; I mean the habit of beginning not with the human soul, which is the first thing a man learns about, but with some such thing

11. ibid. p. 62.
as protoplasm, which is about the last. The one defect in his splendid mental equipment is that he does not sufficiently allow for the stuff or material of man. In his new Utopia he says, for instance, that a chief point of the Utopia will be a dis-belief in original sin. If he had begun with the human soul - that is, if he had begun on himself - he would have found original sin almost the first thing to be believed in. 12

Again, in the same book he attacked such people as the Fabians (though he did not mention the Society by name) who approached the working classes in order to gather details about their way of life as if the working classes belonged to a different species:

Most of our realists and sociologists talk about a poor man as if he were an octopus or an alligator, whereas a man ought to know something of the emotions of a poor man, not by being poor, but simply by being a man. 13

The vast curiosity of the middle classes for the details of working-class life, and the wonder with which they received them, were for Chesterton proof of the fragmentation of English society - a fragmentation wholly lacking in pattern or harmony - and of its lack of democratic spirit.

For Chesterton, Socialism and this lack of democratic feeling were two sides of a penny. The middle-class approach to the workers which was typified by Fabianism showed that the middle classes had no sense of the workers as fellow-men. But equally the fact that the workers did not object to be patronized in this way showed that they too acknowledged an inherent superiority in the upper sections of society:

12. Heretics p. 79.
The English lower classes do not fear the English upper classes in the least; nobody could. They simply and freely and sentimentally worship them. The strength of the aristocracy is not in the aristocracy at all; it is in the slums. ... It is in a certain spirit. It is in the fact that when a navvy wishes to praise a man, it comes readily to his tongue to say that he has behaved like a gentleman. 14

He therefore concluded that "everything in our age has, when carefully examined, this fundamentally undemocratic quality". 15

We have seen how Belloc attacked the social legislation of the period for giving legal definition to the distinction between owners and proletariat. Chesterton made a similar attack on it, though in much vaguer terms. He declared that the social evils which the politicians declared themselves determined to eradicate were always concerned with the vices of the poor:

We are always talking about the sin of intemperate drinking, because it is quite obvious that the poor have it more than the rich. But we are always denying that there is any such thing as the sin of pride, because it would be quite obvious that the rich have it more than the poor. We are always ready to make a saint or prophet of the educated man who goes into cottages to give a little kindly advice to the uneducated. But the mediaeval idea of a saint or prophet was something quite different. The mediaeval saint or prophet was an uneducated man who walked into grand houses to give a little kindly advice to the educated. The old tyrants had enough insolence to despoil the poor, but they had not enough insolence to preach to them. 16

"The modern laws", he concluded, "are almost always laws made to affect the governed class, but not the governing". 17

In the following year, 1906, Chesterton developed his ideas

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15. ibid. p. 273.
16. ibid. p. 274.
17. ibid. p. 275.
on democracy in a study of Charles Dickens, whom he made the symbol
of the democratic spirit. Dickens, he said, lived in a world which
despite the much greater misery and cruelty then prevailing, was a
much more optimistic world than the Edwardian period because it
believed in a "clear and happy philosophy", viz. "the developing idea
of liberalism, the French Revolution". 18

It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life
unless we are able at least to imagine this old atmosphere of a
democratic optimism - a confidence in common men. 19

Thus Chesterton's reason for championing Dickens was not primarily
literary but political: he saw Dickens' work as embodying a social
outlook which it was particularly necessary for the Edwardians to
understand and to revive.

Chesterton came increasingly to identify the "common men" with
the working classes, partly because he saw Dickens' attitude as having
been formed by his contact with those classes and as being given
fullest expression through his working-class characters, and partly
because Chesterton realized how out of sympathy with his own views
the Edwardian middle classes were. During the years of his poverty,
said Chesterton, Dickens observed the London poor at close quarters
and came to understand and respect their qualities.

Dickens had sympathy with the poor in the Greek and literal
sense; he suffered with them mentally; for the things that
irritated them were the things that irritated him. He did not
pity the people, or even champion the people; in this matter

19. ibid. p. 15.
he was the people. He alone in our literature is the voice not merely of the social substratum, but even of the sub-consciousness of the substratum. He utters the secret anger of the humble. He says what the uneducated only think, or even only feel, about the educated. 20

Thus Chesterton declared that the indignation at social wrongs which inspired social workers was not enough, because by itself it eventually led to the violation of human dignity, a violation which the working classes bitterly resented. He therefore emphasized Dickens' attacks upon social philanthropists. In nothing was Dickens so genuinely the voice of the uneducated, he said,

as in this fact of his fiercest mood being reserved for methods that are counted scientific and progressive. ... The working-classes are not indignant against the churches in the least. ...

The things the poor hate are the modern things, the rationalistic things - doctors, inspectors, poor law guardians, professional philanthropy. They never showed any reluctance to be helped by the old and corrupt monasteries. They will often die rather than be helped by the modern and efficient workhouse. 21

Yet even as he celebrated the working classes as the one social element which approached full human stature in the England of the time, he was obliged to take note of their defects, and these were of a vitiating nature. Once more, as in Heretics, he spoke of the inbred deference of the lower for the upper classes 22, and now he added a further failing: not only were the lower classes part of a fragmented society; they were fragmented themselves.

The only element of lowness that there really is in our populace is exactly that they are full of superiorities and very conscious of class. Shades, imperceptible to the eyes of others, but as

hard and haughty as a Brahmin caste, separate one kind of charwoman from another kind of charwoman. ... The democracy has a hundred exuberant good qualities; the democracy has only one outstanding sin - it is not democratic. 23

Such a conclusion was, in its context, deeply pessimistic. There can be no doubt that Chesterton believed this democratic feeling, this acceptance of, and respect for, another man simply because he was a man, to be of fundamental importance. Yet he had to observe that as our world advances through history towards its present epoch, it becomes more specialist, less democratic. 24

He saw the impetus of the French Revolution as having failed; the new century was "the decadence of the great revolutionary period". 25

In England the threefold truism upon which the Revolution had been based had failed in its full effect because one of its parts, the demand for liberty, had been allowed to overshadow the others, the demand for equality and fraternity. Hence it had led, not to democracy, but to chaos.

Already in Heretics Chesterton had urged the need for precise definition of basic principles so that men could see where they stood in relation to each other. This misunderstanding of the ideas behind the Revolution with its disastrous results was, for Chesterton, proof of the need for this definition. In What's Wrong with the World (1910), a book in which he summed up his social outlook, he returned to this idea. The impotence of contemporary social thought, he said, arose

23. Charles Dickens p. 70.
24. ibid. p. 84.
from the fact that men sought to find the means of reforming social abuses before they had found out whether they sought the same end, or even before they had decided what their end was.

It is the whole definition and dignity of man [said Chesterton at the very beginning of the book] that in social matters we must actually find the cure before we find the disease. 26

In other words, men must decide what kind of society they were aiming at, before they could see what aspects of existing society had to be changed. He went on to argue that the former decision - that dealing with ultimate aims - was concerned with idealism; only then did men start to think about specific propositions. And in the existing chaos, ideals possessed a far greater practical value than propositions:

This definite ideal is a far more urgent and practical matter in our existing English trouble than any immediate plans or proposals. For the present chaos is due to a sort of general oblivion of all that men were originally aiming at. 27

This, of course, was an inversion of the Fabian approach, which was to minimize the number of general ideals and then to keep this minimum in the background while laying strong emphasis on practical proposals arising from them. Chesterton went further: not only was the ideal more necessary than the proposal at that particular moment; it was so at all times:

By a strange inversion the political idealist often does not get what he asks for, but does get what he wants. The silent pressure of his ideal lasts much longer and reshapes the world much more than the actualities by which he attempted to suggest it. What perishes is the letter, which he thought so practical.

26. What's Wrong with the World p. 3.
27. ibid. p. 12.
What endures is the spirit, which he felt to be unattainable and even unutterable. It is exactly his schemes that are not fulfilled; it is exactly his vision that is fulfilled. 28

At this point it is perhaps useful to pause and compare Chesterton with the other three men. He differed from Shaw and Wells in this, that whereas they believed social change to be an immediate necessity and believed the ideas they possessed to be those which ought to govern it, Chesterton felt no such urgency. Society was indeed passing through a phase of degeneration, but he regarded this as something recurrent rather than as the forerunner of social cataclysm; he took a pessimistic view of his society, but this did not mean that he was a prophet of doom. Society was subject to continual changes of fortune, but it reposed on certain eternal verities, which always reasserted themselves in the end. Therefore if it was his fate to be a Cassandra, such a fate was frustrating rather than tragic. Moreover, in Chesterton's case even the frustration was minimized because, however much he abused English society, he was nevertheless at one with it. Here we reach the way in which he differed from Bello. In Bello's case the frustration was real. When Chesterton declared that England lacked democratic feeling, he did not conclude from this that he himself was without purpose. He could, like Dickens, embody this democratic feeling in his books, and one day his vision would be fulfilled. But Bello was not content with writing books; he wanted to be an active

political power. Therefore, when he admitted that the English people had no sense of ownership, when he admitted that only in the distant future, after the return of the Faith, would that sense of ownership reappear, he was declaring that society had no place for him.

In What's Wrong with the World, then, Chesterton set down his ideals and began by asserting the freedom of the reactionary:

If I am to discuss what is wrong, one of the first things that are wrong is this: the deep and silent modern assumption that past things have become impossible. There is one metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying, "You can't put the clock back". The simple and obvious answer is "You can". A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed. 29

In saying this much, Chesterton was — if not going further than Belloc in The Servile State — at least being more explicit. Indeed, Belloc even managed to present modern tendencies as being retrograde, for they were returning to the original servility of Western European civilization, whereas to redistribute property was to maintain that progress which had been made when slavery died out. But Chesterton did not stop here. Whereas two years later Belloc was to deny strongly that there was any necessary link between industrialization and a capitalist system, declaring that there is no conceivable link in reason or in experience which binds the capitalisation of a new process with the idea of a few employing owners and a mass of employed non-owners working at a wage, 30

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29. What's Wrong with the World p. 33.
30. The Servile State p. 73.
Chesterton was quite willing to go to extremes, denouncing the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul. ... If civilization really cannot get on with democracy, so much the worse for civilisation, not for democracy. Certainly, it would be far better to go back to village communes, if they really are communes. 31

The difference may be accounted for in terms of the different function of each man. Chesterton's was always a literary approach. He was not limited by having to take practical considerations into account; moreover, his vision of bucolic simplicity was far from unattractive to the ordinary reader - so long as it showed no sign of becoming more than a vision. Belloc, on the other hand, was trying to produce a social diagnosis that would be a basis for action; to have denounced industrialization would have been to accept failure from the start.

But we must return to Chesterton's general thesis in What's Wrong with the World. He divided the book up into three sections dealing with man, woman and child. Under the first he dealt with the error of Imperialism, under the second with that of the New Woman (with especial reference to the Suffragette Movement and to the growing tendency for women to go out to work and thus become financially independent of men), and under the third with the failure of State education.

The natural condition prevailing in male society, he said, was equality. The enthusiasm for Imperialism was one symptom of that

desire to dominate which was also reflected in the attractiveness for Chesterton's contemporaries of the concept of the Superman. "The real rowdy egalitarianism which is necessary (to males, at least)" was denied by the constant desire for speed and efficiency, which showed itself in an exaggerated respect for the expert. The true symbol of masculinity was presented as the public house, with its endless debate conducted among equals and carried on for its own sake, not in order to reach a conclusion. This was one place where human freedom showed itself. Another was the home, which was the one anarchist institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside the State.

Now, however, both places were under attack: in the name of hygiene and public welfare, the Socialists wished to have entry into the people's homes in order to regulate them, and to abolish the practice of drinking alcoholic liquor altogether. Moreover, Socialism was an upper-class philosophy, or at any rate had been taken over by the upper classes who "have always kept carefully on the side of what is called Progress". Now they were exploiting Socialist ideas to consolidate their control over the masses. The idea of collective control was quite alien to the fundamental desires of men:

The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still domestic, of one man one house - this remains the real vision and magnet of mankind.

32. What's Wrong with the World p. 96.
33. ibid. p. 50.
34. ibid. p. 69.
35. ibid. p. 78.
Men had never desired to have their lives administered by a small group as Socialism advocated - particularly when it was all too certain that the group would be that oligarchy which already possessed the political power.

Next Chesterton went on to discuss the place of women in society. Men, he said, liked endless discussion for its own sake; they were also obliged by economic necessity to devote a major proportion of their energies to the business of earning their living. Traditionally, women had a contrasting position. Their occupation was the maintenance of the home while the men were out at work, and in the course of this they were bound to extend their abilities, not to narrow them, like the men. It was their task to be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labours and holidays; to be Whiteley within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene.

The effect of such a task was to sharpen their sense of thrift. While constantly managing a home, they became used to making everything serve some purpose, and thus it was that they objected to the male enjoyments, all of which had an element of "fine fruitlessness." It was women on whom ultimately society was based, since it was they who both maintained homes for the men and gave initial training to the children. But in doing so, they acted as individuals: each woman had a passionate loyalty to her own family and devoted all her

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36. What's Wrong with the World p. 132.
37. ibid. p. 140.
energies to it. Whereas the male tended to join himself into large male gatherings, the female found her fulfilment in acting alone. Hence politics was an activity that came within the male sphere, and very properly, too, for government was simply a "collective act of coercion": it had an ugly side which could never be dissociated from it. Therefore men had always felt that women should play no part in "this human necessity of pains and penalties".

Finally Chesterton turned to the question of the education of the child. He attacked those who spoke as if education was an end in itself; it was simply a means, and the vital question was what a particular educational system was meant to teach. He instanced as an example of a notably successful system that of the English Public Schools, which had a clear concept of the kind of person they wished to produce and therefore achieved their purpose in producing him. The State schools, however, had nothing beyond a second-hand version of the former concept, a concept which was wholly opposed to the outlook of working-class parents. Once more Chesterton presented a picture of the upper classes attempting to foist themselves on the lower: whereas earlier he had shown them as trying to dictate the way the lower classes should live, now he declared that they were trying to make working-class children take a different view of life from that of their parents.

In Chesterton's discussion of Socialism, there was a notable

38. What's Wrong with the World p. 163.
39. ibid. p. 166.
absence of economic arguments - a wise decision on his part, for he had no understanding of such matters. Instead, he concentrated upon presenting an ideal society, skilfully compounded out of past elements so as to have a strong attraction for his readers. It was firmly based on his conception of the principles underlying the French Revolution: a society of small owners would be free and could not exist if there were not mutual respect existing among those owners. Against this, he set the lack of freedom in the ordered Socialist State (the vision of mankind co-ordinated into a single body which so intoxicated Wells had no attraction whatsoever for Chesterton) and combined this with the Bellocian thesis that England was already under the rule of an oligarchy who saw in the Socialist proposals an opportunity to extend their predominance far into the future.
Section 6. - Methods of Controversy: The Debate in the "New Age".

At some stage in the present thesis, it is desirable to turn from the four men as they appear in the permanence of their books, to consider them in the context of a more ephemeral medium, because all were celebrated for the quickness of their minds and because in such a context we can more easily appreciate how they reacted to one another.

One such occasion now conveniently offers itself, for at the turn of the years 1907-8 they took part in a kind of written debate on Socialism. This took place in the pages of the New Age, a weekly magazine which had been taken over in the spring of 1907 by A.R. Orage and turned into a general platform for Socialist ideas. Orage avoided committing himself to any one Socialist or Labour organization; he wanted the New Age to express as great a variety of Socialist ideas as possible - and we have seen in the course of this chapter how great that variety could be. This editorial freedom had its disadvantages. The New Age could not hope for any subsidy and therefore counted itself lucky if it could meet its printing costs - there was nothing over for the payment of contributors. It therefore required a certain adroitness on Orage's part to induce such well-known men to write for him; they were doing him a favour (for what they wrote in this comparatively obscure periodical could not add to their reputations), and this situation was reflected in a certain insouciance in what they wrote. Orage, as they well knew, would be
glad of any original material under their names.

If it be asked why he wished to include Belloc and Chesterton in the arrangement, the answer is that, although their views were thoroughly uncongenial to his readers, he knew that the letters of protest and argument that would follow upon their contributions would be to the benefit of the magazine. People liked the stimulation of articles that conflicted with their convictions - particularly when these articles appeared in conspicuous isolation against a reassuringly solid Socialist background. So Orage advertised Belloc's first contribution in large type on the front page and the next week made a special feature of letters attacking it.

There remains the question of why Belloc and Chesterton were willing to write for him. Chesterton enjoyed writing and was notoriously casual about making and breaking contracts with publishers; we may infer from this that it mattered little to him whether the particular piece on which he was working at any time would bring him financial gain or not. Belloc contributed because he admired Orage's editorial independence (which he imitated when he founded the Eye-Witness in 1911) and because Orage shared his disabused opinions over the nature of the Party struggle - Orage's Socialism did not look to the triumph of the Labour Party for its fulfilment.

Curiously, the first and most solid piece of writing in the New Age by any one of the four did not fall within the controversy. This was a series of nine articles by Shaw, entitled "On Driving Socialism Out of the Country", which appeared between October 1907
and January 1908. By the time the last article appeared, each of
the other three had written for Orange; yet none made any reference
to Shaw. One probable reason is that the economic plane on which
Shaw was arguing was unfamiliar ground, at least to Wells and
Chesterton (the articles Shaw was later to write in response to
Chesterton were of a wholly different tenor). Another may have been
simply that they did not normally read the paper; almost certainly
this applied to Belloc, whose first article consisted of an examination
of an issue taken at random, which happened to precede the first
article in Shaw's series by three weeks.

The reason why Belloc chose this method of responding to Orange's
invitation to contribute was that it was the line of least resistance.
He began - in a way that strongly emphasized how it was he who was
conferring the favour in writing at all - by saying that writing on
a set subject was the devil and that he did not feel up to it at that
moment; to look at an earlier issue would be the easiest way out.
But he continued with a declaration that, despite its surliness of
tone, is of central importance to Belloc's outlook:

Let me first say with what things I agree and then with what
things I disagree; and if anyone calls this method bombastic
or egotistical I call him in return a fool, for all judgment
and criticism whatsoever, if it is of any value, must be that
of the person backing it. The mere assertion is of value; the
assertion backed by reason is all that there is and all that
there can be of human opinion on anything. 1

What this assertion most immediately illustrates, I submit, is Belloc's growing sense of his own political isolation - he had, after all, been in the Commons for almost two years now, long enough to realize how completely out of sympathy he was with the temper of the House. It also illustrates an attitude implicit in the pamphlets he wrote for the Catholic Truth Society in 1908 and 1909: that there could be no debate between systems that denied each other's first principles. Hence discussion became almost valueless; influence could, it seemed, be exerted only by the strong-willed over the weak-willed and by those with firm convictions over those who lacked them.

From this, it was only a short step to perceiving that, however forceful a personality a man with Belloc's views might be, there was no chance of his being able to impose his views in the England of that time, since it was still a homogeneous Protestant society, though in decay.

This impotence, however, would not occur in countries outside England. Belloc may be likened to a detachment of troops cut off from the main body: although the enemy whom they faced was overwhelmingly greater in numbers, this imbalance would turn precisely the other way when contact with the main body was made once more. This main body stands for European opinion. So it was that Belloc concluded with the words:

The criticism I offer to collectivism is offered by the whole weight and mass of Catholic opinion; in other words, it is the criticism offered by all that is healthy and permanent in the intellectual life of Europe.
That is to say, the weight of assertion was against Socialism, not—as his readers believed—in its favour.

In minimizing the role of persuasiveness, in presenting debate as a kind of vying in mental compulsion by the various interests, Belloc was not abandoning the struggle; he was maintaining his position during the immediate phase, when advance was out of the question, and thus preparing for a later phase when the basic instincts and energies of Europe should rise to defeat the new and unnatural theories (a phase which he was to see as beginning at the outbreak of the Great War). For this reason, he made no attempt to win over the readers of the New Age to his way of thinking.

Such an approach aroused strong reactions among the readers but not among controversialists of greater experience. Shaw and Wells were not likely to feel the need for blowing off steam by simply contradicting Belloc. Accordingly, Orage invited Chesterton to give his views on Socialism, and he did so in an article entitled "Why I Am Not a Socialist", which appeared in the first issue of 1908. In it, Chesterton managed to present views very similar to Belloc's, without abandoning all hope of retaining his readers' sympathies. One way in which he did so was to treat the subject much more generally. He began by refusing to examine Socialism; instead, he would examine Socialists. He justified this course by saying that interest lay, not in what men succeeded or failed in doing, but in their motivations:
A successful revolutionary party may or may not put its manifesto into force; it cannot help acting according to its own character. 2

Therefore, he said, he was more interested in the Socialist atmosphere than in its specific proposals. It was an attitude which we have already come across in our examination of *What's Wrong with the World*, and now, considering it in the context of more immediate debate than was possible through books, one sees that it had considerable strategic advantages. Chesterton was refusing to discuss both what Socialists had achieved and also what they said they hoped to achieve; instead, he gave his own impression of what they were. In other words, he was conducting the debate on a level of airy generalities, where fruitful argument was out of the question. At the same time, he gave the appearance of digging down to essentials.

But he dealt with several airy generalities (or first principles - which term is used all depends on one's point of view), whereas Bellocc had reduced them to a single essential: the private ownership of land. Thus Chesterton possessed much more freedom of manoeuvre than Bellocc did. If Bellocc had returned to one fortress, tiny but (he believed) impregnable, from which he could later advance when times were more favourable, Chesterton maintained himself in the field by establishing several redoubts which would all have to be destroyed simultaneously if he was to be annihilated as a debating force. The working classes, he said, showed that they were still by far the

sanest, jolliest and most reliable part of the community by the fact that they were determined to maintain "the privacy of homes, the control of one's own children, the minding of one's own business"; by laughing at vegetarianism and respecting marriage, by denying themselves in order to have a fine funeral and believing

that when giving treats to friends or children one should give them what they like, emphatically not what is good for them.

No opponent could deal with such a shower of missiles one by one; as he turned to concentrate on repelling one, Chesterton would fell him with another.

Furthermore, the totality of these contentions constituted an appeal, not to a contemporary European outlook from which England had detached herself, but to a very English atmosphere in the immediate past - what Shaw referred to, in an article that we shall examine shortly, as "that totally imaginary Old Victorian England which Chesterton invented in his essay on G.F. Watts". Thus Chesterton appeared patriotic when Belloc appeared precisely the reverse.

Again Chesterton exploited the conservative's inherent advantage: he suggested that his readers were to be identified with the existing state of things, so that in attacking the latter the would-be reformers seemed to be making a personal attack on the very people they were trying to benefit; and this identification also enabled

3. V. infra p. 198.
him to present the existing state of things as - despite all its faults - real and substantial, whereas the alternatives put forward by the reformers were mere paper proposals. The working-class attitudes that have just been cited were, said Chesterton, "the ancient sanities of humanity; they are the ten commandments of man". It was a position that was very difficult to attack; yet though no-one could deny the general truth of the traits he attributed to the working classes, one might suspect that those traits were not eternal and were far less significant than Chesterton claimed.

At this point Wells entered the field. On January 11th there appeared an article which showed clearly how attractive he found the general tone of Chesterton's outlook, and which showed, too, why he had not made a reply to Belloc's earlier article. For he envisaged himself as a "painted Pagan God ... upon a ceiling", arguing and drinking with Chesterton endlessly, while Belloc, who had "a sort of partisan viciousness ... that bars him from my celestial dreams", appeared as no more than "a little quiver of the paint, a faint aura, about the spectacular masses of Chesterton". 4

The main message of the article was that now was not the time for them to dispute. Wells' constant desire for co-ordination and synthesis showed itself very strongly here. He gave no sign of understanding Belloc's contention that Capitalism and Socialism were two sides of the same penny. Instead, he declared that, once the

glaring evils of the present were righted, there would then be time and opportunity for disputes over lesser distinctions:

Our real difference is only about a little more or a little less owning. I do not see how Belloc and Chesterton can stand for anything but a strong State as against those wild monsters of property, the strong, big private owners. ... Either we have to let the big financial adventurers, the aggregating capitalist and his Press, in a loose, informal combination, rule the earth, ... or we have to construct a collective organization sufficiently strong for the protection of the liberties of the some-day-to-be-jolly common man. So far we go in common. If Belloc and Chesterton are not Socialists, they are at any rate not anti-Socialists. ... Our ideals will fight some day, and it will be, I know, a first-rate fight, but to fight now is to let the enemy in. When we have got all we want in common, then and only then can we afford to differ.

Wells was taking a precisely opposite view to Belloc's, one based on compromise instead of on absolutes. Motivated, as he was, primarily by a strong desire to do away with the misery in which the majority of the country lived, Wells saw that misery as being an evil so obvious as to be quite outside the field of political theory, which only became relevant at a later stage. Moreover, his pragmatic outlook (influenced, as I shall show later, by an analogy with scientific research 5) made him suppose that the pressure of actuality would automatically dispose of errors. Thus he met Chesterton's contention that Socialism violated the human feelings of the working classes by saying simply:

suppose that Chesterton is right, and that there are incurable things in the mind of the common man flatly hostile to our ideals; so much of our ideals will fail.

5. V. infra, p. 242.
Wells' article was not an exposition of his own beliefs; it was an appeal to Chesterton to abandon his "purely unhelpful criticism" and to put forward his own positive proposals just as Wells had done in books such as *A Modern Utopia*. For it is noteworthy that though, during the greater part of the article, Wells had linked the names of Belloc and Chesterton, that of Belloc suddenly disappeared when Wells made his appeal. The feeling emerges that Belloc was beyond the reach of persuasion but that Chesterton might yet be recalled to a more reasonable attitude. Two years later, when Cecil Chesterton, who had been a Socialist and had even been on the Executive of the Fabian Society, was showing strong sympathy with Belloc, a correspondent wrote to the *New Age*, asking,

What is the meaning of this fatal fascination which the name of Belloc exercises over the family of Chesterton?

and adding that Belloc

has made a political pervert of the elder Chesterton; I implore the younger to be on his guard.

This was a more outspoken form of that anxiety felt by Wells and also (as we shall see) by Shaw.

Two weeks later, Chesterton replied to Wells. His strategy was to continue to assert that Wells failed to understand and to provide for the needs of human nature; his tactics were to seize upon a digression in which Wells had deplored the practice of standing drinks in pubs as being "as proud and unspiritual as

cock-crowing". Chesterton therefore entitled his reply "On Wells and a Glass of Beer" and sought to prove from this attack how little democratic feeling Wells had. This lack arose, said Chesterton, from the fact that Wells had been born after the death of Dickens, at a time when aristocrats were writing novels about their disgust at the spectacle of the lower classes. Whereas Dickens' imagination was "inside certain human habits and sees them as large", Wells' was the reverse. And Chesterton summed up the whole situation as follows:

Mr. Belloc expresses fiercely and I express gently a respect for mankind. Mr. Shaw expresses fiercely and Mr. Wells expresses gently, a contempt for mankind.

In some sense we may agree that this was true, but the distinction must be seen in the light of that advantage, already noted, which Chesterton possessed as a conservative. It might well have been retorted that Chesterton was confusing a contempt for the people in themselves with a hatred of the conditions in which they had to live.

Orage now kept the controversy going by inviting Belloc to write a further article, which appeared on February 8th under the title "Not a Reply" — because, Belloc said, none of the attacks made on his previous article warranted one. He took Wells' assertion that Capitalism and Socialism were the practicable alternatives and drew one of the elaborate analogies of which he was very fond. The

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8. ibid. vol. II, no. 15, p. 289, February 8th., 1908.
Socialist, he said, was like one who approached a man suffering from toothache and offered to cure it by removing all his teeth. It was a cure of a sort, Belloc admitted, but not of the sort desired by the sufferer. So, also, the generality of men did not desire a Socialist State where the monstrous concentration of property would be corrected by eliminating property altogether; for the control exerted by an elected body over such a State was no substitute for the immediate influence exerted by the citizen as property-owner. (Once more, Belloc's disillusionment with the Commons was appearing.)

Now Shaw entered the controversy and took Wells' strategy a stage further. Wells, as we have seen, had complained of the negative rôle the two were playing and, by implication, invited Chesterton to state his views independently of Belloc. Shaw developed both points by caricaturing the two men as the Chesterbelloc, a creature that was similar to a pantomime horse and quite as remote from reality. They were playing at adopting grotesque political positions, but, he said, they were doing it merely in fun; it was "a game of make-believe of the sort which all imaginative grown-up children love to play". Chesterton pretended to be "a roaring jovial Englishman" and Belloc to be a "greedy, narrow, individualistic" French peasant — and the two together are to impose on the simple bourgeoisie of England as the Main Forces of European Civilization.

This method of retaliation by caricature was effective, not so much

against Belloc (since he had in any case refused to make a bid for the sympathies of the New Age readers) as against Chesterton, for it was one of the few methods which would drive a wedge between him and the working classes whom he was trying to clasp in a fraternal embrace. The richly human outlook which Chesterton claimed to understand and defend was shown up as simply a mask to be worn at a party; the "Old Victorian England" that we have already mentioned was a figment of the imagination. Shaw portrayed the two men imposing their deception on others and then showed himself and Wells performing their favourite operation of exposing hypocrisy and fraud with a single stroke.

Chesterton never says, "I, a hybrid Superman, and Grand Transmogrificator of Ideas, desire this, believe that, deny the other". He always says that the English people desires it; that the dumb democracy which has never yet spoken (save through the mouth of the Chesterbelloch) believes it. ... Belloc is still more audacious. According to him, the Chesterbelloch is European democracy, is the Catholic Church, is the Life Force, is the very voice of the clay of which Adam was made, and which the Catholic peasant labors. To set yourself against the Chesterbelloch ... is to set yourself against all the forces ... of humanity. Wells and I, contemplating the Chesterbelloch, recognize at once a very amusing pantomime elephant. ... To which they both reply "Not at all: what you see is the Zeitgeist". To which we reply bluntly but conclusively, "Gammon!"

But he also used his caricature as a means of developing Wells' attempt to separate the two. Temperamentally, said Shaw, they were wholly dissimilar, and (he implied) dissimilar in a way that was thoroughly to Chesterton's credit. For Chesterton
can make sacrifices easily; Belloc cannot. The consequence is that in order to co-ordinate the movements of the Chester-belloc, Chesterton has to make all the intellectual sacrifices that are demanded by Belloc in his fear of going to hell—particularly those sacrifices involved in accepting the superstitions of Christianity, such as the doctrine of the Resurrection. Thus Chesterton's private beliefs were much more reasonable than one might gather from his public utterances. (Shaw forebore to make the charge of intellectual duplicity which would seem to follow from this; for it was not to his purpose to do so). As for Chesterton's claim to a love for the ancient traditions of humanity, Shaw took advantage of the way he used a liking for beer as a symbol of human sympathy; Chesterton, he said, was interested in nothing else:

Whoever has studied Chesterton's articles attentively for a few years past will have noticed that though they profess to deal with religion, politics, and literature, they all really come at last to a plea for excess and outrageousness, especially in eating and drinking, and a heartfelt protest against Shavianism, tempered by a terrified admiration of it.

Shaw was turning Chesterton's weapons against himself. Chesterton had frequently attacked Shaw by using the latter's personal austerity—and especially his being a vegetarian and teetotaller—as a means of demonstrating his lack of humanity. Shaw now declared that Chesterton's repeated admiration for the public house only demonstrated his gluttony. He then sought to overcome the advantage Chesterton possessed in advocating an existing state of affairs, by showing how much greater opportunities for sensation men would have under Socialism. He contrasted his own craving for music and for
work with other men's craving for drink, and commented:

Cowards drink alcohol to quiet their craving for real stimulants: I avoid it to keep my palate keen for them.

He concluded in precisely the same way as Wells had done, except that he ruled Belloc out of the discussion explicitly:

And now, what has the Chesterbelloc (or either of its two pairs of legs) to say in its defence? But it is from the hind legs that I particularly want to hear; because South Salford will very soon cure Hilaire Forelegs of his fancy for the ideals of the Catholic peasant proprietor. He is up against his problems in Parliament: it is in Battersea Park that a great force is in danger of being wasted.

Any significant results arising from the debate between Shaw and Chesterton, however, threatened to remain obscured because of the men's very similar taste for elaborate mental gymnastics. I have maintained that Shaw had found a very ingenious way of turning Chesterton's own weapons against him; yet the two were so equally matched in this matter that no decisive advantage was possible on either side. Just as Chesterton had exploited Wells' attack on the practice of standing drinks, so he now exploited Shaw's caricature: both attacks, he said, demonstrated those writers' lack of human feeling. The more outlandish and ridiculous Shaw could make the Chesterbelloc, the more deficient in human sympathy Chesterton could make Shaw:

Shaw and Wells are two men of genius. Chesterton and Belloc is mankind. ... Shaw and Wells, never having seen mankind before in their lives, are naturally alarmed. This monstrous animal, the Chesterbelloc, with its horrible fore legs and its hideous hind legs, may well terrify them; it is Humanity on the move.

In the very act of trying to make Chesterton and Belloc irrelevant as social critics, Shaw showed himself to be inadequate as a social critic. Shaw attacked beer; but if he and Wells had not been isolated intellectuals, then they would have behaved like the vast majority of men and accepted fermented liquor as a normal part of life. Shaw had attacked miracles; Chesterton used precisely the same means of retaliation - the generality of men had always accepted the possibility of miracles. Ingeniously, he obtained a further advantage from this latter argument: a belief in miracles depended, he said, on a belief that that highest power in the Universe was not Law but Will, and this was the belief that Shaw very strongly asserted. Thus Chesterton was able to represent Shaw as fighting on his own side without realizing it:

I only remark that we are all going back, consciously or unconsciously, to the faith of Christendom, and that I am sorry for those who, like Shaw, will only discover where they are going when they get there.

From our present viewpoint, six decades afterwards, it is agreeable to wander through this controversy and take note of the mental agility displayed, in particular, by Chesterton and Shaw. But the New Age was not a literary magazine; it was concerned with the propagation of Socialism. Belloc and Chesterton, in a highly personal and idiosyncratic manner, attacked Socialism; Wells and Shaw, in just the same manner, attacked Belloc and Chesterton. All were equally remote from the chief aim of the paper. So it was that
protests against their inclusion appeared. On March 7th an article appeared by Filson Young, a regular contributor, attacking all four impartially. Their value, he said, lay in their "artistic endowment", and in arguing about Socialism they were all "attempting to take seriously things that are outside their real business in life". He had to concede that Shaw and Wells had gained for themselves a permanent place in the Socialist movement, but he did so grudgingly, saying of them, and also (surprisingly) of Webb, that the Socialists suffer these three because they must; but they are often restive under them - dull people that they are - and would be happier with men of less genius.

One cannot entirely discount Young's own literary pretensions - his article included elaborate play on the four men's names and parodies of Chesterton's social writings and Belloc's travel books; Young, I suspect, saw himself as one of the "men of less genius" with whom the Socialists would be happier. But his article was also a genuine protest at the frivolity of much of the debate and at the way personalities continually overshadowed ideas, and this protest was continued the following week by a correspondent, Eric Dexter, who likened the four men to kittens chasing one another's tails, "while we less gifted ones looked on and wondered what it was all about".

Belloc now seized upon Dexter's letter as a means of bringing the debate back within useful limits. "Mr. Dexter's letter", he wrote the following week,

has given me a motive to write, for he says with great justice that all the personalities we have been having are not to the point. I thoroughly agree. 13

He then tried to restrict the scope of the discussion by posing the question:

Given a social system in which the modern means of production are widely distributed among the citizens, why should it not endure?

- and he invited Wells to answer. In effect, he was rejecting the Chestertonian strategy and pursuing his own. Wells responded promptly, though the pertness of his concluding sentence - "I hope Mr. Dexter will appreciate the severity of my manner in this reply" 14 - showed that he did not respond to Dexter's call to order with Belloc's readiness. He agreed that Belloc's threefold division was an accurate statement of the possibilities facing the community (thus revealing how Belloc had influenced his ideas since his earlier article had appeared, for there he had admitted only two possibilities); he agreed, too, that a State built upon the principles favoured by Belloc need not be unstable. But he noted - and still Belloc would have agreed with him - that

the law will always be fighting at a disadvantage against the natural tendency of all large businesses to negotiate instead of compete,

and though it might be possible to counteract this tendency, it would be foolish to do so merely in order "to meet an alleged passion in the individual to 'own'".

Already the discussion, thus conducted on Belloc's lines, had reached an impasse. By staking his position on this one first principle, Belloc had ruled out the possibility of discussion, as he himself explicitly recognized in a letter replying to a correspondent two years later:

The difference between Mr. Schloesser and myself is simply one of judgment. I think there is a certain permanent European morality of which Catholicism is the concrete form. He does not. I think that if you train men to a servile condition in which they shall be well housed, well looked after, and thoroughly managed by other people at the cost of their honour and freedom, you do not tend to make of them men willing to sacrifice anything for an ideal. He does not. ... The difference between us is merely a difference of judgment. It is not susceptible of positive proof. 15

The impetus of the discussion now failed; a lull followed. After six weeks Belloc set out his by now familiar position yet again, under the predictable title "The Three Issues", but he appears to have done so only under pressure from Orage, for he ended with the words:

I should now like to conclude a series which is now becoming a little wearisome. 16

At this point I break off my examination of the four men as they appeared in the New Age, not because we have by any means examined all their contributions to it - there was sporadic controversy in the later months of 1908, which continued into the following year - but because those articles that have been considered in this section form a whole and are sufficient to demonstrate the reactions

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of the men in more immediate debate than that with which we have dealt so far.

In this context, there is a certain re-grouping: Shaw and Chesterton come much closer together because each had a similar controversial style; Belloc recoils from them and seeks a rapprochement with Wells. The reason for this re-grouping arose largely from each man's attitude - whether permanent or temporary - to politics. Shaw and Chesterton were disposed to rate them comparatively low in importance, Shaw because he had ceased his laborious efforts on behalf of the Fabian Society and was content to allow the fight for Socialism to pass to others while he himself took a wider view of human affairs; Chesterton because the day-to-day business of political manoeuvre never meant anything to him, and because he saw a society as expressing itself through its literature rather than its political institutions. To Belloc, however, political institutions were of the highest significance and affected a society at every level; political debate was thus never a matter to be taken lightly. And Wells, too, was extremely interested in political activity (though without ever fully understanding its nature). In his article on Belloc and Chesterton he was very severe on those who played around with political concepts without making every effort to gain political power:

A man who mingle in political development with no intention of taking on responsible tasks unless he gets all his particular formulae accepted is a pervert, a victim of Irish bad example, and unfit for decent democratic institutions....
Wells was all for effective working compromises at the expense of logical consistency; the political thinker seemed (for the moment) a dishonourable figure when placed beside that of the active politician. Hence his speedy response to Belloc's demand that the debate should be restarted on a more serious level.

Furthermore, it may be stated generally of the four men that they fell into this grouping, of Shaw and Chesterton as opposed to Belloc and Wells, because the former pair were willing to introduce humour into anything, while the latter reserved if for specifically humorous occasions. Wells and Belloc could certainly produce the comic set-piece, but they could also be earnest indefinitely; whereas this distinction between what was open to humorous treatment and what was not, simply does not exist in Shaw and Chesterton. Here, as throughout, we find a discussion of the men's outlooks complicated by the conflicting impact of their temperaments.
Chapter Four.

A WAY OF LIFE COMES TO AN END.

Section 1. - The Pattern of the War.

The events of July and August 1914 are often said, truly enough, to present one of the great breaks in history. The very name given to the ensuing struggle - the Great War - is evidence of this, while the permanence of the break is shown by the fact that we have now had to give it the far less striking name of First World War. To most people in England it came quite unexpectedly; in the previous years the rivalry between England and Germany had been only one of many preoccupations. As well as the violent disputes over the Liberal social legislation to which reference has already been made, there was growing tension in Ulster as the time approached when the Government would be able to make its Irish Home Rule Bill law in spite of the Lords and thus put Belfast under the power of Dublin; there was increasing industrial unrest, showing itself in a wave of strikes; and, arising out of the controversy over the place of women in the community, there was the violation of law and order by the Suffragettes. All these were thrust into the background by the declaration of war, and men hastily turned to face entirely new problems.

In the case of the South African War, there was a constant argument over the moral issues involved in it, that was still continuing when peace was signed; and the Great War looked as if
it would follow the same pattern when it began with a moral issue that seemed as straightforwardly black-and-white as any in history: for in order to gain a military advantage in her invasion of France, Germany violated Belgian neutrality, which had been guaranteed by the European Powers, including Prussia, in 1815 when the Belgian State had been set up and again in 1839. To find the reason why Germany gained an advantage by passing over Belgian territory, it is necessary to go back to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. On that occasion, German troops with Prussia at their head — for it was only as a result of this war that the German Empire was formed — had swept into France (at precisely the same time of the year) and overcome the French Army in a month. Now, Germany hoped to make history repeat itself, and this time the need for a speedy victory was made all the greater by the existence of a second Front in the East to be defended against Russia, so that Germany could not afford to have large numbers of troops engaged in the West for a long period. What militated against such a victory, however, was that the French had learnt from their earlier experiences and had strongly fortified their border with Germany, whereas to the north, where it bordered on Belgium, it was far weaker, since the French had not expected to have to face an invader from that quarter. Thus by passing through Belgium, the Germans could outflank the main French defences.

The move had the adverse effect for the Germans of uniting opinion in Great Britain against them. Until then it had been
divided, a large section taking the view that Britain had no reason for taking part in a purely Continental dispute. The determination of Germany to enter Belgium caused the British Cabinet to decide on an ultimatum (by a single vote), and, stirred by reports of atrocities committed by German soldiers against Belgian civilians, the British people rallied behind the Government. On August 4th the German Army crossed the frontier, and hasty preparations for mobilization were made in France and Britain. For more than a fortnight the Germans continued to mass in Belgium and to overcome the feeble resistance offered by the Belgian Army, and it was not until the 22nd that they made contact with the French supported by a small British Expeditionary Force beyond the Belgian town of Namur, the combined forces being outnumbered by the Germans by two to one. During the remainder of the month the Germans advanced steadily into north-east France, while the Allies retreated before them in as good order as possible. By the beginning of September they were threatening to outflank the Allied line on the west and take Paris, while to the east the lines stretched for two hundred miles as far as the Vosges Mountains on the German frontier.

At this point, the Germans hoped to inflict a crushing defeat, for the Allied Forces, though they had gained further French reinforcements in their retreat, still numbered considerably fewer than the Germans. An engagement followed, lasting from September 3rd to 13th, and known to history as the First Battle of the Marne.
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As a result of this the German hopes were dashed, for on September 9th the French General Foch, perceiving a weak point in the centre of the German line, launched his troops at it and succeeded in breaking the line. For the next three days the Germans were in retreat, until on the 13th, having crossed the River Aisne, they dug themselves in on the heights on the further side, and Allied assaults made over the following three days failed to make any significant impression.

The character of the War now changed into something that had never been known before. Instead of mobile strategy, such as had just won the Battle of the Marne, being all-important, the War became static. In such a position, the traditional answer was to attempt to outflank the enemy, and movements were begun by both sides on the western end of the line (the eastern being firmly bounded by mountainous country). The Germans had a further reason for undertaking them, for, under the assumption that victory could not long be delayed, they had marched straight towards the French capital and, in consequence, had made no attack on the Channel ports, even though, in the attempt to prevent the retreat before the invaders from becoming a rout, the Allies had been able to divert very few of their troops to defend them. If the Germans could reach them before reinforcements arrived from the main body of Allied troops, they would fall. Thus the series of outflanking movements became known as the "Race for the Sea". This second stage of the War ended on
October 19th, when the Allies succeeded in extending their line as far as the coast at a point east of Calais, so retaining command of the ports.

The War that ensued was a war of attrition. No considerable shifting of either line was possible, no matter how powerful the assaults. But the loss of life involved in thus maintaining the positions was immense and arose not only from enemy action but from trench fever. The combatants began to realize that a strategic stalemate had been reached. A change of attitude was required not only from the Commands but from the civilian populations at home, who had to become used to the prospect of the slaughter of their menfolk continuing at an appalling rate with no sign of reaching an end.

As such, the War presented an entirely new set of moral problems. To start with, however, the apparent simplicity of the situation had been made even starker by stories of German atrocities in Belgium, of murder, rape and wanton destruction, of the burning of the University library at Louvain and, as the Allies retreated into France, of the bombardment of the tower of Rheims Cathedral.

One thing, however, lay a little on the conscience of many Liberals. To oppose Germany, Great Britain had had to ally herself with Russia, and Russia, throughout the nineteenth century, had traditionally been Britain's enemy. Nor had there been any events in previous years to modify accepted opinions by stages, as there
had been in the case of France, for in the first years of the new century Tsarism had been as reactionary as ever, above all in the crushing of the revolt of 1905, so that the Liberal Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, had been under constant attack for his willingness to establish friendly relations with the Russian Government. There was, therefore, a certain embarrassment among Liberal idealists such as Wells (and a corresponding malicious glee at their discomfiture on the part of Shaw) when they found themselves obliged to treat Russia as a friend and ally, fighting for a common cause.

There is one more initial point that should be made, and that is that the changes brought about by the War surpassed all men's expectations. Few expected the fall of the Hapsburg and Hohenzollern Crowns in the event of an Allied victory, while none, right up to 1917, foresaw the Russian Revolution, still less the emergence of Communism as a world-force. The War changed the world even more than the most visionary of men dreamt in 1914.
Section 2. - The Bellocian Thesis.

When we come to consider the books written upon the War by Belloc and Chesterton, we find a curious situation. The attitude which both took towards the War emanated from Belloc and was an elaboration of the antagonism towards Prussia that we have already noted in him. Nevertheless, Belloc himself did little to propound these ideas; that task was left to Chesterton and to Chesterton's brother, Cecil, who had by now taken over the editorship of the New Witness from Belloc and who asserted all Belloc's ideas with as much vehemence and intransigence as did Belloc himself.

Belloc, meanwhile, devoted his energies to keeping the public informed as to the progress of military strategy. He had always been keenly interested in this aspect of human activity - as a historian he held that the course of history had repeatedly been determined by the results of battles, and the consequence of this belief was inevitably an interest in the way in which those results had been brought about - and now circumstances were causing a very large section of the public to share that interest. Belloc was a regular contributor to a weekly periodical called Land and Water, in which he simultaneously tried to instruct his reader in the rudiments of military strategy and to produce from the official communiqués of both sides a coherent account of what was happening on the various Fronts. Not surprisingly, he had a very wide readership: Land and Water had a circulation of 100,000 copies. Thus
it was said of him in a study published in 1916 that "at the present
time Mr. Hilaire Belloc is to his largest public quite simply and
solely the war expert". 1

His work in this field was a considerable achievement. Even
though the information available was necessarily fragmentary or even
misleading, the general outline put forward by Belloc remains tenable
to-day despite the passing of time and the acquisition of further
knowledge. Moreover, his power of exposition was considerable: his
style never failed him, nor his ability to order his material. But
his competence as a military commentator (rare among literary men)
did not gain him any lasting increase in reputation. He was not
enough of an expert to be included among the military historians,
while from the point of view of literature, his ability is no more
than an unusual idiosyncrasy.

One thing arises from it, however, that is of great, though
negative, importance. As a strategist, Belloc was of course bound
to treat losses in a wholly unemotional way, and inevitably, the
impression left is of a vast and fascinating game. It is true that
he himself contrasted the views of "the combatant, vividly recollect-
ing the violence and chaos around him" and of "the student of war,
writing his account of an action or a campaign long completed, and
surveying it as a whole, and with the aid of documents and maps", 2

1. C. Creighton Mandell and Edward Shanks *Hilaire Belloc -
The Man and His Work* p. 2.
2. *A General Sketch of the European War - The Second Phase*
p. 316.
but he did so only in order to point out how the latter was apt to exaggerate the foresight and organization behind a battle. Now while it may be said, truly enough, that he would have been the worse commentator had he taken any other view, nevertheless this absence of any apparent sensitivity to the suffering brought about by the War was not confined to work of this type; he never showed any sign of being affected by the sight of the overwhelming flood of violence which had been released. Indeed, he regarded this rather in the light of a return to normality. In 1925 he wrote of the peaceful years of the previous century that they were abnormal, for normal men live under a strain and a peril, and in active defence against the barbarian or the menacing enemy, while of books such as *Alice in Wonderland*, which he instanced as being characteristic of this period, he said:

When the terrors and the heroisms permanently return, the sawdust will run out of such things. 3

The past was to Béloc so vivid and immediate that he saw the tranquillity of the world in which he had been brought up (in England at any rate; one must not forget how narrowly he escaped the Siege of Paris) as an aberration; the barbarians were bound to return. When they did so, in the form of the German Army, he felt no surprise and no sense of outrage. This is not to say, however, that he was not stirred by events. At the conclusion of a pair of books dealing with the strategy of the opening weeks of the War, he declared:

I have throughout this book dealt with the story of the Marne as military problems should be dealt with, I think—that is, so that one indifferent to the victory of either side should be able from my narrative to comprehend the movement of troops and their effect, and be disturbed by nothing more. Had it been my task to turn to the awful reality, the living powers at work behind and beneath these phenomena of strategy and of tactics, I would surely have attempted a vision of personal spirits in conflict far beyond the scale of mankind. In such an attempt I should have failed. A thousand years will pass, and no historian will ever successfully record it. 4

In the same way, Chesterton was very willing to see supernatural forces at work. In 1915 he wrote:

Two friends of my own have been in villages sacked by the Prussian march. One saw a tabernacle containing the Sacrament patiently picked out in a pattern by shot after shot. The other saw a rocking-horse and the wooden toys in a nursery laboriously hacked to pieces. Those two facts together will be enough to satisfy some of us the name of the Spirit that had passed. 5

Before we turn to examine Chesterton's presentation of the Bellocian attitude, however, we must consider some lectures which Belloc wrote during the War, although they were not published until 1920, when they appeared under the title Europe and the Faith. The aim of these lectures was partly negative: as well as setting down his own ideas, Belloc was concerned to refute the picture of European history which had dominated the History School during his time at Oxford and which he saw as being the result of Prussian scholarship. This picture, said Belloc, began from the idea that the earlier Barbarian incursions into the Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries were made by a new race from the North, called the Teutons, who were in every way superior to the effete Latin stock of the

Mediterranean, not least in their constant striving after the freedom of the individual, though this aim was only gradually achieved over centuries, as the Teutonic nations threw off the bonds of a usurping religious authority at the Reformation and of absolute secular rulers in the nineteenth century. Contemporary Europe was pictured as consisting of a group of expanding and prosperous northern Protestant nations and a declining Catholic South.

Obviously such a scheme was highly congenial to an Imperialist outlook at the turn of the century. The twofold division of Europe seemed undeniable: of the Catholic nations, France was slowly recovering from the disaster of 1870, while Italy had only recently achieved unification and Spain and Portugal had long since lost the status of Great Powers; in the north, however, there seemed no limit to the growth and expansion of Great Britain and the German Empire. The scheme also explained the traditional antipathy between Britain and France, as well as the ties that existed between the two leading Teutonic nations, exemplified above all in the close relations of the House of Hanover and the House of Hohenzollern. When Britain did eventually enter the War, she was accused by a German professor of having broken "the bond of Teutonism". 

The bonds between Britain and Germany had, however, been giving way since before the new century began. At the same time as Belloc saw and detested the Prussian outlook at Oxford, Germany was embarking

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6. Quoted by Chesterton in *The Barbarism of Berlin* p. 84.
upon the policy of naval rivalry that could be nothing less than an intolerable affront to Britain. It might be temporarily overlaid by circumstances, but it could not lead to a position of permanent stability without a preliminary test of strength.

Even during the first decade of the new century, therefore, events were moving towards a general acceptance of Belloc's attitude by the British public. The Entente Cordiale brought about by Edward VII in 1903 was the beginning of a national rapprochement with France that echoed on a vast scale that deep sympathy and friendship which we encountered in the first chapter between Belloc's mother and his French grandmother. The growing public exasperation with Germany took the form of a hatred for the militarist aspect that Belloc had identified with Prussia. Germany was seen not merely as a rival, not even merely as an aggressive Power; she was seen as a nation instinct with militarism and this term, which denoted something entirely new in British experience (so it was generally thought), was taken to refer to a trait originating in Prussia and thence overlaying the entire German Empire. Militarism was defined as the belief that military superiority was synonymous with moral superiority and that a nation must therefore be prepared to sacrifice everything else to the building up of a military spirit; priority must always be given to the requirements of the armed services, not least in the matter of the attitudes and ideals which were to be instilled into the young.
The recognition and detestation of the militarist spirit was finally brought into sharp focus by the behaviour of the German Army in Belgium. The attempt to account for this led to a distinction being made by the British public between the military entourage of the Kaiser and the ordinary German, and this distinction tended to be simplified into one between Prussia and the other States of the Empire. So it was that the march of events caused the public to reach a point of view very closely akin to that which Belloc had always held.

Nevertheless, Europe and the Faith did not echo public opinion and consolidate it, as many of Wells' books did—Belloc would have recoiled from such an achievement with disgust. It did not stop at declaring that the War had been fundamentally a struggle against Prussia, but went on to expound a more positive thesis. The reason why evil had arisen in Prussia, said Belloc, was that she was an alien element in Europe, first because she had never formed part of the Roman Empire, and second because she had been evangelized late and so had not been permeated with Christianity as had the other European States. Here he outstripped public opinion, as he also did when he went on to declare that for a man fully to understand such matters, it was necessary for him to be a Catholic:

The Catholic alone is in possession of the tradition of Europe: he alone can see and judge in this matter. 7

As in the debate over Socialism, Belloc declared that acceptance of the Catholic Faith was the prerequisite of the understanding of the truth.

But we are running ahead, and must return to the first weeks of the War, when Chesterton was undertaking to present their case while Belloc devoted himself to an examination of military strategy. Away from the Front, these opening weeks were notable for a brisk battle of propaganda among the belligerent Powers. Both sides were eager to get world opinion in their favour and above all American opinion, for this already considerable Power might or might not throw her weight on to the Allied side. Moreover, as was said earlier in the chapter, the novelty and magnitude of events, the swiftness with which they developed, and the moral issue raised by the German invasion of Belgium, were all powerful inducements to argument, inducements that no longer existed after a year or two when Belgian wrongs had receded into the past, when the War in the West had subsided into a murderous tedium, and when America seemed determined to maintain her neutrality.

It was in these early days of excitement that Chesterton published a short pamphlet (a "very bellicose essay", he called it at the end of his life) called The Barbarism of Berlin. In it he developed the argument that Prussia was in some way morally inferior to all other nations and that her militarism was different in its nature from the belligerence that had been displayed by others in the past.

His method of approach was twofold: in the first place, he sought to prove that the facts supported the Allied justification of their actions, while the German justification rested on nothing more than hypotheses and suppositions; in the second, he declared that this dependence of the Germans upon the hypothetical demonstrated their lack of moral sense.

The Germans claimed, for instance, that the commercial advantage which Britain would draw from a German defeat proved the emptiness of the high moral considerations which, Britain had declared, moved her to enter the War. Chesterton replied that existing facts prevented matters from reaching the point where such an argument became relevant: at least Britain's actions to date did not prove that she was not moved primarily by moral considerations, as did Germany's:

The fact remains that we did not do what the Germans did. We did not invade Holland to seize a naval and commercial advantage; and whether they say that we wished to do it in our greed or feared to do it in our cowardice, the fact remains that we did not do it. Unless this common-sense principle be kept in view, I cannot conceive how any quarrel can possibly be judged. 9

Chesterton saw this abandonment of common-sense principles as proving that the German propagandists were inspired by moral perversity:

there was a reason for the falsity of their accusations that was something too omnipresent to be proved, too indisputable to be helped by detail. It is nothing less than the locating, after more than a hundred years of recriminations and wrong explanations, of a modern European evil. 10

10. ibid. p. 21.
One might reasonably object that to try to conduct an argument about matters that were "too omnipresent to be proved" was hardly less perverse than to try to conduct one dealing with hypotheses instead of facts. But the reason for this unsatisfactory method was that Chesterton found himself in the difficulty of the traditionalist whose natural procedure is to appeal to an accepted moral ethos, a body of right thinking, and who, when this does not exist, finds it difficult to rely on argument alone. Chesterton asserted that the Germans had withdrawn from the moral code of civilized life. If the reader shared that code, he would know what Chesterton meant; if he did not, then no explanation would make it clear to him.

Having demonstrated, then, that the Prussians were unable to argue clearly, Chesterton went on to prove that this blindness was a fundamental inadequacy. First he made the Prussian action over Belgium symptomatic of the grossest depravity by concentrating on the violation of a treaty involved. A promise was "the first mark of man"; it was something "on which the enormous apparatus of human life can be said to depend". 11 Therefore the Prussians could be described without exaggeration as barbarians, for if a promise could be broken whenever necessity required, "it would not only be the end of all promises, but the end of all projects". 12 Next, he said that the Prussian again showed himself to be a barbarian in that he was wholly self-centred in his thought:

11. The Barbarism of Berlin pp. 32 and 33.
12. ibid. p. 38.
Do what he will, he cannot get outside the idea that he, because he is he and not you, is free to break the law; and also to appeal to the law. 13

From these two basic divergences, Chesterton built up a picture of the Prussian as existing on an entirely different moral plane from other Europeans: he could gain satisfaction from attacking defenceless civilians; over two centuries he had supported many different Powers, whose only common feature was that they were all tyrannies; his professors would again and again "exhibit the illogical perversity that makes the brain reel" 14; and he failed, not only to understand England, but even to realize that he had failed.

In writing in these terms, Chesterton was wholly in the stream of popular opinion (though the general public would refer to the Prussians as "barbarians" without using the term in the strict Bellocian sense, viz. a people that had never been brought within the civilizing influence of the Roman Empire). It might be only a temporary convergence of views; still, for the moment Bellocian anti-Prussianism expressed with Chestertonian brilliance could not fail to find an echo in the great majority of hearts. Yet he was unwilling to allow such a facile situation to continue:

I am rather proud of the fact [he wrote in 1936] that if I wrote a little book called The Barbarism of Berlin, I also wrote during the War a rather larger book called The Crimes of England. For I was vividly convinced of the folly of England merely playing the Pharisee in the moment of intense moral reality. 15

Thus he deliberately abandoned his earlier pleasant situation in order to set himself somewhat athwart the current as a means of correcting it. This intention is what distinguished his action from Belloc's: Belloc devoted himself more and more single-mindedly after the War to Catholic apologetics, with a view to building up a Catholic minority in England so strong and united that it would exert an influence out of all proportion to its numbers, whereas Chesterton tried to modify the English attitude as a whole.

The difference is a symptom of that divergence of attitude towards the English commonweal that has already been noted in them. Another mark of difference is the very title of the book - The Crimes of England. In 1915 its power to shock must have been considerable, and this is far more akin to Shaw's approach than to Belloc's. True, the pattern of the book obviously derived from Belloc. It demonstrated how, ever since the emergence of Prussia as a Great Power under Frederick II, she had been consistently supported by Great Britain, and how this had led to Britain's setting herself against all those nations which, in her own interests and in obedience to her own instincts, she ought to have supported: Maria Theresa's Austria, Revolutionary France, Denmark over the matter of Schleswig-Holstein. The method of appealing to history was Belloc's; so, one feels, was much of the historical material. Indeed, one frequently hears the characteristic note of Belloc's style, as for instance:
Calvin was a Frenchman; an unpleasant Frenchman, it is true, but one full of that French capacity for creating official entities which can really act, and have a kind of impersonal personality, such as the French Monarchy or the Terror. 16

Chesterton could certainly not produce such confident generalizations about the French character from his own experience. For his dependence upon Bellow did not arise from any temperamental weakness but was severely practical. His traditionalist viewpoint obliged him to turn to the past for an explanation of the present; he needed a clear and consistent pattern of history. Now such a pattern is not to be gained by sesultory reading, and Chesterton had no sustained historical study in his youth on which he could fall back. Therefore he took over Bellow's description of European history, powerful, because lucid and consistent, and wholly congenial.

Nevertheless, the Shavian aspect of the book must be mentioned once more. "It is my whole purpose in these pages", wrote Chesterton, "not to spare my own country where it is open to criticism", 17 and this untimely candour was far more characteristic of Shaw's approach than of Bellow's, in that it deliberately set out to shock as a means of bringing about the changes desired by the writer.

The similarity, however, was more apparent than real. Although Chesterton specifically praised Shaw as being "a real critic of England offering "a rational criticism", his summary of that criticism was slanted to bring it into conformity with his own. Shaw, said Chesterton, thought Sir Edward Grey "an amiable and aristocratic

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17. Ibid. p. 107.
stick who failed to frighten the Junkers from their war". In Common Sense About the War (to which Chesterton was obviously referring), Shaw had written:

Sir Edward Grey is a Junker from his topmost hair to the tips of his shoes.  

Shaw, said Chesterton, attacked England for not being "sufficiently firmly and emphatically on the side of Russia". Shaw had written:

Fifty years ago the notion of England helping Russia and Japan to destroy Germany would have seemed as suicidal as Canada helping the Apaches to destroy the United States of America.

For though Chesterton sometimes assumed the Shavian manner, he did so only temporarily and without running the slightest risk of giving offence. Even the most extreme Jingoist, once he had been persuaded to open The Crimes of England, would have realized before he had read a dozen lines that there was nothing to raise his temper.

Into his attack on the Prussian spirit, Chesterton now incorporated Béloc's ideas on the growth of the Servile State, though typically he did so in quasi-philosophical terms, not economic or social. The idea which had inspired the French Revolution, he said, was that of the Citizen, for

the idea of the Citizen is that his individual human nature shall be constantly and creatively active in altering the State.

It was against this that the Germans were fighting in 1815 and again in 1870, seeking to make their own approach predominate, according

21. What I Really Wrote About the War p. 79.
to which the populace were passive material for the rulers to work on:

In Germany the ruler is the artist, always painting the Happy German like a portrait; in France the Frenchman is the artist, always painting and repainting France like a house. No state of social good that does not mean the Citizen choosing good, as well as getting it, has the idea of the Citizen at all. 22

The relevance of this attitude towards a condemnation of social legislation of the Prussian type is obvious; but before Chesterton went on to that, he turned aside to consider the nature of German thought. In a passage which brings to mind his own mental conflict in the Nineties, he declared that the individual German, as a kind of compensation for being prevented from taking any real part in the running of his country, was permitted complete mental freedom:

Within the iron framework of the fixed State, the German has not only liberty but anarchy. 23

The very fact that his thinking was not allowed to have any effect upon practical affairs led to its reaching extreme and fantastic stages of development:

The Germans sterilise thought, making it active with a wild virginity: which can bear no fruit. 24

Thus German philosophy violated one of the criteria defined by Chesterton in Orthodoxy: it followed lines of logical development to extremes, instead of accepting the impact of reality and conceding that qualities which were logically incompatible might nevertheless co-exist.

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24. ibid.
229.

Equally, German philosophy violated another criterion, in failing to give due prominence to the human will. It proceeded from the false assumption "that all important events of history are biological" 25 - thus denying the right of the human being to assert his own priorities by an act of will. At this point in his argument, Chesterton rejoined Belloc's line. The Servile State, Belloc had emphasized, would probably increase the material comforts of those whom it deprived of liberty. This, said Chesterton, was why the German approach ultimately led to the Servile State - because it denied the importance of Will in historical change and ascribed such change to biological impulses such as the search for food:

The theory of all history as a search for food makes the masses content with having food and physic, but not freedom. The best working model in the matter is the system of Compulsory Insurance; which was a total failure and dead letter in France, but has been, in the German sense, a great success in Germany. It treats employed persons as a fixed, separate, and lower caste, who must not themselves dispose of the margin of their small wages. In 1911 it was introduced into England by Mr. Lloyd George, who had studied its operations in Germany, and, by the Prussian prestige in "social reform", was passed. 26

It was characteristic of Chesterton that he should present the situation in terms of philosophy, that is, of differing views of the reason and purpose of man's existence. His writing had much greater popular appeal than Belloc's, because speculations about varying national outlooks are far easier to read than would-be irrefutable economic theses. Not only this, but whereas Belloc

found reason for hope only by looking to the peasant communities of Catholic Europe, Chesterton, by linking servile legislation with Prussian militarism, was able to present the people of England as rising against it. For he stressed how divided the highest counsels had been on the question of whether or not England should enter the War and declared that it was only public opinion that had provided a decisive answer:

England was saved by a forgotten thing - the English. Simple men with simple motives, the chief one a hate of injustice which grows simpler the longer we stare at it, came out of their dreary tenements and their tidy shops, their fields and their suburbs and their factories and their rookeries, and asked for the arms of men. In a throng that was at last three million men, the islanders went forth from their island ... with their faces to the dawn. 27

Although the "hate of injustice" which Chesterton declared to be the impulse that stirred the English people was the violation of Belgian neutrality and thus had nothing directly to do with social justice, nevertheless the general attitude which the English spontaneously sought to destroy was that which had resulted in the National Insurance Act. According to the Chestertonian picture, therefore, the English people had instinctively and irresistibly come over to his side.

Belloc and Chesterton had one great fear concerning the War, namely that the Allies might grow sickened of the long horrors of the entrenchment and accept a negotiated peace. Hence in 1915 Belloc pointed out that the Allies' advantage would grow, the longer

the War lasted. He based this assertion on two factors. First, through their dominance of the sea the Allies could maintain a blockade of the Central Powers, and although the latter possessed the means of feeding themselves, they depended on overseas supplies for the materials of war. Second, the Central Powers had (according to the Bellocian thesis) been preparing for invasion to take place in August 1914 over the previous three years. Therefore they were able to throw their maximum number of combatants and military equipment into the War from the start; whereas the Allies - and Britain in particular - had not been in such a state of preparedness. Thus once they had succeeded in holding the initial German thrust, they had time to develop their combative capacity to the full; the Central Powers, on the other hand, had no considerable reserves to call up, after their hope of a speedy conclusion to the War had proved false.

Nevertheless, as the War dragged on, voices began to be raised in England in favour of not forcing Germany to unconditional surrender, and in 1916 Cecil Chesterton wrote a book - which Belloc endorsed in a foreword - entitled The Perils of Peace. Here Cecil Chesterton repeated Belloc's argument that, in the matter of constantly pouring in reinforcements of men and materials, the total resources at the disposal of the Allies were greater than those at the disposal of the Central Powers. Moreover, said Cecil, if the Germans were not cured of their assumption that they were
superior to all other nations by a military defeat, they would seek to recover their self-esteem by fighting a second war, while the Allies, in the face of German resurgence, would start to mistrust each other's motives in having agreed to bring the War to a premature end. It was essential, therefore, that peace should be established on the basis of the Allies' terms alone, and the crucial part of those terms must be the isolation and permanent disarmament of East Prussia and the incorporation of the remainder of the German Empire into a central federation with Austria under the Hapsburgs. In his foreword, Belloc declared his agreement with this and went on to reply to those who asserted that if the War were fought to a finish then the victorious Allies would be faced with financial ruin no less than Germany and Austria. General disaster of this sort would be avoided, said Belloc, if after the War the conquered territories remained productive and if the wealth thus produced went to the Allies in the form of indemnities.

With the advantage of hindsight, what comment are we to make on these proposals? Clearly, the Germans were provoked into fighting a second war as a means of recovering their self-esteem, but for the very opposite reason that Cecil suggested: not because they had not had to face defeat, but because the humiliation consequent on their defeat was so great. Such a situation, one suspects, was the inevitable result of Belloc's solution to peacetime difficulties; for it was precisely such a solution that was followed. As far as
Cecil's proposals were concerned, on the other hand, the settlement of 1919 created two weak Germanic Powers instead of incorporating them under one Government, and insofar as his proposals implied his recognition of the need to avoid a power-vacuum in the centre of Europe, we may allow that they possessed a certain wisdom. At the same time, Cecil's hatred of Prussia led him to demand for her a kind of permanent expulsion from the communities of Europe which was hardly feasible.

It is difficult to avoid gaining the impression that for the two Chestertons and Belloc the satisfaction given by the War was very little alloyed. To them it was a crusade, and for Belloc at least there was this further satisfaction that it was a crusade against an evil of which he had been warning his English countrymen when they were as yet unconscious of it. His outlook was strongly revanchiste, and the pattern of events - a second German act of aggression, similar in intention to that of 1870, but this time thwarted - could not have been more satisfactory to one holding such views. To him, the fact that England had entered the War at all meant that the wishes of cosmopolitan financiers had been disregarded; the false and corrupting unity, the false and corrupting inactivity, that had lain over Europe for decades, were smashed. The death of his eldest son on active service in the last year of the War was an indescribable personal grief, and yet the cause for which he died was just. Again, Gilbert had to bear the loss of his brother, who
died of pneumonia on active service just after the Armistice was signed, but though his grief was considerable, it was not bitter. In Gilbert's eyes, his brother had not died in vain; he could write of him that he

died in a French military hospital of the effects of exposure in the last fierce fighting that broke the Prussian power over Christendom,

having seen "the end of an empire that was the nightmare of nations".\textsuperscript{28}

The completeness of the Allied victory justified all the enormous sacrifices that had been made to achieve it. Civilization had fought against barbarism and had thereby preserved itself. But, Chesterton pointed out at the end of his life, no victory, however great, did any more than that; its effects were bound to be negative. He gave the following analogy:

Mr. Brown is attacked by a burglar and manages to save his life and property. ... It is absurd to complain that Mr. Brown has not been turned into a Greek god merely by being bashed on the head. ... He had a right to defend himself; he had a right to save himself; and what he saved was himself, so far no better and no worse.\textsuperscript{29}

Chesterton drew this analogy in order to contest the view of the War taken by Wells, and to this view we must now turn.

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\textsuperscript{28} Introduction to Cecil Chesterton \textit{A History of the United States} p. xxv.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Autobiography} p. 247.
\end{flushright}
Section 3. - Wells in a World of Change

Like Belloc and Chesterton, Wells was immensely excited by the outbreak of war, but his excitement arose from a different source. Whereas to them it meant that issues which had long been cloudy were defined and the decisive conflict engaged, to Wells it meant the reappearance of change in a world where hitherto stagnation had been the dominant tendency since 1870. In 1917 he described the impact of the outbreak of war upon a fictional alter ego in the following terms:

Mr. Britling was in a phase of imaginative release. Such a release was one of the first effects of the war upon many educated minds. Things that had seemed solid for ever were visibly in flux; things that had seemed stone were alive. Every boundary, every government, was seen for the provisional thing it was.

For Wells the Darwinian, improvement came about through change, and therefore anything which promoted change was to be welcomed.

There were, however, other sides to Wells. One was the instinctive patriot, rallying to his country and feeling a strong indignation against its enemies and an accompanying warm sense of comradeship with its allies:

The role of England in this huge struggle is plain as daylight [he wrote in the first days of the War]. We have to fight. If only on account of the Luxemburg outrage we have to fight. If we do not fight, England will cease to be a country to be proud of; it will be a dirtbath to escape from.

1. Mr. Britling Sees It Through pp. 197-198.
2. The War That Will End War p. 15.
In such a passage, Wells was expressing the common sentiments and thus fulfilling his old role of spokesman for the inarticulate masses. If there is considerable resemblance at this point between his attitude and Chesterton's, that is because - as we have seen - circumstances were causing public opinion to align itself at least temporarily with the stand Belloc and Chesterton had long been taking.

A third side of Wells only became evident as the War continued. We have noted in the opening section that the unending slaughter of trench warfare had a profound impact on the general public, and Wells shared this mood of horror, even though he did not join those who were demanding a negotiated peace. The climax of the novel to which reference has just been made - Mr. Britling Sees It Through - was the way in which the hero sought to assimilate the news that his eldest son had been killed. This son was one of the few fictitious details in the book (Wells received many letters of condolence on his own supposed loss after the novel appeared), and we may conclude from this that only in so dramatic a manner could Wells express the intensity of his emotion at the steady slaughter of the men of his country. It is an aspect of the War that we have not had occasion to consider in our examination of Belloc and Chesterton.

Wells, then, changed as the War continued, though he never changed so much as to reject any earlier attitude completely.
The more dreadful an operation the War became, the more he saw the need for drawing the only possible advantage from it: that of gaining an Allied victory and imposing a wise peace. As always, he took care to record these changes in himself and wrote and published profusely throughout its course.

In the first days of the War he produced a twelve-page pamphlet, The War and Socialism, which was incorporated in September 1914 into a longer one, The War That Will End War, a heterogeneous collection of first reactions. Here, as in nearly all his work, Wells was engaged in clarifying his mind by writing, an activity of simultaneous clarification and communication which he saw as the never-ending duty of the "common intelligent people at large". The keynote of both pamphlets was moral indignation:

We face, perhaps, the most awful winter that mankind has ever faced.
But we English and our allies, who did not seek this catastrophe, face it with anger and determination rather than despair.

The very fact that (for Wells) the Allies were so self-evidently in the right, prompted him to suppose that they would inevitably achieve victory, and he shared the almost universal delusion that such a victory would come very soon. The French, he declared, would be over the Rhine within three months.

This denial of the seriousness of the military situation

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3. The War That Will End War p. 53.
4. ibid. p. 12.
left Wells free to consider the moral issues raised by the War.

"All the realities of this war," he asserted, "are things of the mind", adding,

Rifles do but kill men, and fresh men are born to follow them. Our business is to kill ideas.

The chief of these ideas was the delusion of their own superiority which had gripped the Germans:

We fight because a whole nation has become obsessed by pride, by the cant of cynicism and the vanity of violence, by the evil suggestion ... that they were a people of peculiar excellence destined to dominate the earth.

However, continued Wells, the madness that had seized upon them had not destroyed the basic goodness of their national temperament:

The older tradition of Germany is a pacific and civilising tradition. The temperament of the mass of German people is kindly, sane and amiable.

The responsibility for the War Wells placed firmly upon the Kaiser:

It was organised by a stupidly forceful statesman, it was fostered by folly upon the throne.

This was very much in line with the Bellocian thesis, according to which the Catholic South of Germany was corrupted by Protestant Prussia. That the similarity was no more than coincidental, however, becomes apparent when we consider a dictum of Wells' such as

We have to smash the Prussian Imperialism as thoroughly as Germany in 1871 smashed the rotten Imperialism of Napoleon III.

5. ibid. p. 90.
6. ibid. p. 91.
7. ibid. p. 90.
8. ibid. p. 15.
10. ibid. p. 9.
Not only does this illustrate the illusory nature of the agreement between the three men, but it also shows how unhistorical Wells' approach was: to present the Franco-Prussian War as being anti-Imperialist is absurd. Wells was simply not interested in the past, and when he did make the occasional reference to it, he did so not as one who held a coherent view of history but as one who had an isolated memory of some past event which seemed to bear some relationship to the present.

Why, then, the reader might object, did Wells devote his energies in the years immediately following the War to the compilation of *The Outline of History*, a book which sought to give a comprehensive picture of man's origin and his development up to the present? The answer is that Wells was not interested in history for its own sake or as the repository of patterns of human behaviour which might be revived for present use; instead, he saw it as demonstrating how man had progressed steadily from one generation to another. Thus he wrote in 1916:

To the prophetic mind all history is and will continue to be a prelude. The prophetic type will steadfastly refuse to see the world as a museum; it will insist that here is a stage set for a drama that perpetually begins.  

The thesis of *The Outline of History* was that the future would be different from anything in the past and also much better than anything in the past. He applied himself to history in order to
render further study of it superfluous, for once the shape of history had been revealed, men could concentrate their energies on the essential task of making sure that this pattern was continued into the future. The need for such a project was impressed on Wells by the events of the War, and even in so early a work as The War That Will End War we can see the germ of this idea in such an assertion as:

The real task of mankind is to get better sense into the heads of these Germans, and therewith and thereby into the heads of humanity generally, and to end not simply a war, but the idea of war. 12

His preoccupation with the future and his certainty of a speedy Allied victory combined to make him devote himself chiefly — even when the War had lasted only a month — to the consideration of how the international scene ought to be modified after the War so as to prevent a repetition of that disaster. Such an activity had to be carried out not so much by the politicians as by the "common intelligent people at large" mentioned earlier. Thus he commented on his own proposals for redrawing national boundaries after the War:

Quite manifestly in all these matters I am a fairly ignorant person. Quite manifestly this is crude stuff. And I admit a certain sense of presumptuous absurdity as I sit here before the map of Europe like a carver before a duck and take off a slice here and decide on a cut there. None the less it is what everyone of us has to do. I intend to go on drawing the map of Europe with every intelligent person I meet. 13

12. ibid. p. 91.
13. ibid. p. 52.
This picture of Wells in front of the map is to be taken quite literally. Mr. Britling roamed the fields about his house with a "big atlas, from which papers projected" \(^{14}\); his companion left him "drawing boundaries on his maps very carefully in red ink, with a fountain pen", and "knew that those red lines of Mr. Britling's might in the end prove wiser and stronger than the bargains of the diplomats". \(^{15}\)

To find out why Wells thought that such work was "what everyone of us has to do", we must turn to a pamphlet he published early in 1915, entitled *The Peace of the World*. Here he began from the assumption that the majority of mankind was always opposed to war. How was it, then, that wars were a constant feature of human history? It came about, Wells answered, because the majority was always disunited, so that the active minority was able to thwart their wishes. Once more we return to the idea that mankind could now, for the first time, co-ordinate its efforts to a common end and so pass on to achievements which in earlier ages had never entered men's minds. How was the majority to unite against those who were willing to make war? It could do so, said Wells, only by means of those men within it capable of articulate mental enquiry: they must apply their minds to the problem of how the will of the majority was to be imposed.

\(^{14}\) *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* p. 390.

\(^{15}\) ibid. p. 400.
Such an enquiry is manifestly the necessary first stage in any world pacification. So manifestly so that of course countless others are also getting to work upon it. It is a research. It is a research exactly like a scientific exploration. Each of us will probably get out a lot of truth and a considerable amount of error, the truth will be the same and the errors will confute and disperse each other. 16

As we have already seen in the matter of the Great State, Wells saw a complete analogy existing between sociological discussion and scientific research. Hence the optimism of his conclusion.

He next went on to ask who formed this minority that wanted war. Remembering the momentary waves of belligerence and a desire for revenge that swept over him from time to time, he declared the minority to consist of men in whom such moments predominated:

A few people always want war. It is these last who are, so to speak, the living nucleus of the war creature that we want to destroy. That liking for an effective smash which gleamed out in me for a moment ... is with them a dominating motive. It is not outweighed and overcome in them as it is in me by the sense of waste, and by pity and horror, and by love for men who can do brave deeds and yet weep bitterly for the misery and the deaths of good friends. These warlovers are creatures of a simpler disposition. 17

The implication in the concluding sentence - that there were among mankind individuals inferior to the rest and habitually evil in their intentions - was not, however, taken up. Indeed, of the

16. The Peace of the World p. 11. It should be noted that whereas in the first decade of the century "spacious" was Wells' favourite term of approbation, now "manifest" kept appearing in his writing. It did so because he saw his judgements as being self-evident; he was not trying to be original but simply stating the undeniable lessons taught by the march of events. Thus the hero of a novel written in 1917 explained his ideas "in the persuasive tone of a man who speaks of things too manifest for laboured argument". (The Soul of a Bishop p. 201.)

17. ibid. pp. 18-19.
belligerent academics who, "ill in their livers and sluggish in their circulations", found vent for suffering in savage thoughts, he remarked that

a vigorous daily bath, mixed society, a complete stoppage of beer, spirits and tobacco, and two hours of hockey in the afternoon would probably make decently tolerable men of all these fermenting professorial militarists. 18

On the whole, though, his method was to ignore them, to see the majority as inert and passive, and to present an opposing minority, the pacifists, the men of goodwill, who could win over the majority to making an active stand against war:

The people who positively admire and advocate and want war for its own sake are only a small feverish minority of mankind. The greater obstacle to the pacification of the world is not the warseeker, but the vast masses of people who for the most various motives support and maintain all kinds of institutions and separations that make for war. They do not want war, they do not like war, but they will not make sacrifices, they will not exert themselves in any way to make war difficult or impossible. 19

But, Wells implied, once let these "various motives" and these "separations" be unified, and the minority would be rendered powerless. Consequently, he turned to the question of how they were to be unified.

In considering this question, he followed his usual tactics of making the fullest use of existing circumstances - in this case, the international conference that would have to be convoked in

18. ibid. p. 21.
order to draw up a peace settlement. It would of course be attended
by the belligerents, but it was possible that neutral Powers would
also be represented, and if that was so,

there is no reason whatever why this Conference should dissolve;
why it should not become a permanent Conference upon the
inter-relations of the participating Powers and the peace of
the world. 20

For Wells this was the beginning of the idea of the League of
Nations.

But this solution only raised up a new vested interest in
opposition: the diplomats. One of Wells' chief aims in advocating
such an international body was to do away with secret negotiation
and to "end all that is usually understood by diplomacy". 21

Wells had a specific reason for standing firm on this point: it
was widely believed that if Britain had made it perfectly clear to
Germany in July 1914 that she would come to the aid of France,
instead of remaining undecided until the last moment, then Germany
would not have dared to begin the War. This Wells saw as the
final proof of the evil effect of the traditional methods of
diplomacy, and eventually he was to despair of anything being
achieved by means of the established channels. That development
did not occur, however, until after the period covered by the
present thesis. As yet, he had not made a complete break: even

21. ibid. p. 34.
though Britain "in the guise of Sir Edward Grey" would appear at a world congress "like a family solicitor among the gods"; nevertheless "Britain would follow a lead" and the family solicitor was "honest and well meaning". 22 Wells did not ask himself what would happen if there were no gods present.

Wells' fundamental difficulty was that he was torn between a transcendent and a practical view of man. He was never sure whether he ought to denounce, say, diplomats or generals for personal depravity in sticking to a dirty trade, or whether he ought to reason with them as good men who were blindly engaged in socially undesirable activities. He saw evil all round him; whence did it arise? The matter was further complicated by his consciousness that he himself shared those impulses - such as the impulse of belligerence already mentioned - which he saw wreaking havoc everywhere. His general solution was to deny that any man was entirely evil, but to say that every man had evil in him and that this evil might predominate if he was put in the wrong situation. Thus he could conclude that once confusion was eliminated from human affairs by the co-ordination of human effort, an almost entirely happy state of things would result.

In 1916, in a book entitled *What Is Coming?*, he sought to define the good and bad sides of men more closely, and here he kept

22. ibid. p. 63.
to the transcendental view, that is, he considered men as individual moral beings rather than as members of a community.

For everyone there are two diametrically different ways of thinking about life; there is individualism, the way that comes as naturally as the grunt from a pig, of thinking outwardly from oneself as the centre of the universe, and there is the way that every religion is trying in some form to teach, of thinking back to oneself from greater standards and realities. 23

Although morality for Wells consisted of subordinating one's own needs to those of the community, the act of subordinating them had to be left to the individual. He was not approaching the social organism like a politician; he was approaching the individual like a parson. Having presented the individual with this choice, Wells saw the War as giving grounds for hope; it would help to destroy individualism because men who cannot be swayed by the love of order and creation may be swayed by the thought of death and destruction. 24

In other words, Wells' pseudo-religious approach included his own version of Hell.

It was not only here that Wells saw the effect of the War as being beneficial; it operated in a similar way on a national scale:

The breakdown of individualism has been so complete in Great Britain that we are confronted with the spectacle of this great and ancient kingdom reconstructing itself perforce, while it wages the greatest war in history. 25

24. ibid. p. 95.
25. ibid. p. 110.
He went on to declare:

> I believe in the young France, young England and young Russia this war is making, and so I believe that every European country will struggle along the path that this war has opened to a far more completely organised state than has existed ever before.  

The legal profession would have a "quickened conscience"; education, "in these raw, harsh days of boundless opportunity", would be reformed (Wells had been much impressed at finding a Cambridge emptied of its students, "the apostolic succession of the old pedagogy ... broken"); women even now no longer wore the ridiculous and constricting clothes of pre-war days and were successfully undertaking useful work ("what reason is there to suppose that they will relapse into a state of superfluous energy after the War?"); and so on. Wells did not find it difficult to see the War as a galvanizing of the evolutionary process after the inertia of the end of the nineteenth century.

But there was still that third aspect of Wells: the man who was appalled by the suffering of the War. How could he reconcile this suffering with his view of the War as an event which, strangely enough, quickened human progress? He set out the problem, and the solution which he found to it, in the novel Mr. Britling Sees It Through, published, like What Is Coming?, in 1916. Here, in a chapter entitled "Malignity", Mr. Britling witnessed the death

26. ibid. p. 121.
27. ibid. p. 145.
28. ibid. p. 159.
29. ibid. p. 179.
of an elderly relative who was fatally injured by a bomb dropped from a Zeppelin, and he realized that

poor Aunt Wilshire was but the sample thrust in his face of all this mangled multitude, whose green-white lips had sweated in anguish, whose broken bones had thrust raggedly through red, dripping flesh....

As a result, he was forced to ask himself:

Is the whole scheme of nature evil? Is life in its essence cruel? Is man stretched quivering upon the table of the eternal vivisector for no end - and without pity?

For the suffering had reached such a scale that it was no longer possible to lay the blame simply upon the depravity caused by Prussian militarism. It seemed that either malignity was an ineradicable streak in all men, or else it was a power outside humanity whom it held at its mercy. Such was the view expressed to Mr. Britling by a woman whose husband had been reported missing:

"The world is cruel. It is just cruel. So it will always be."
"It need not be cruel," said Mr. Britling.
"It is just a place of cruel things. It is all set with knives. It is full of diseases and accidents. As for God - either there is no God or he is an idiot. He is a slobbering idiot. He is like some idiot who pulls the wings off flies."
"No," said Mr. Britling.

Wells, in the person of Mr. Britling, solved the problem under the impulse of the "invincible hopefulness of his sanguine temperament" by bringing God Himself within the evolutionary process:

"A finite God who struggles in his great and comprehensive..."
way as we struggle in our weak and silly way - who is with us - that is the essence of all real religion...."

In such words did Mr. Britling speak to the embittered woman, and she, according to Wells, went away comforted:

This God - if this was God - then indeed it was not nonsense to say that God was love, that he was a friend and a companion....

By this ingenious means, Wells was enabled to present every manifestation of malignity as a survival of the past and everything that offered hope as a sign of a better future. The source of malignity, he declared rather unconvincingly, was "necessity", which was

"a thing beyond God - beyond good and ill, beyond space and time, a mystery everlastingly impenetrable,"

and he hinted that eventually God would overcome necessity.

It would seem that Wells found the idea somewhat unsatisfactory, because in War and the Future, published early in 1917, he returned to his former position of placing the blame for the War on nationalism:

Years ago I came to the conviction that much of the evil in human life was due to the inherent vicious disposition of the human mind to intensify classification. I do not know how it will strike the reader, but to me this war, this slaughter of eight or nine million people, is due almost entirely to this little, almost universal lack of clearheadedness; I believe that the share of wickedness in making war is quite secondary to the share of this universal shallow silliness of outlook. These effigies of emperors and kings and statesmen that lead men into war, these legends of nationality and glory, would

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34. ibid. p. 397.
35. ibid. p. 400.
36. ibid. p. 397.
collapse before our universal derision, if they were not stuffed tight and full with the unthinking folly of the common man. 37

Nations had no real existence in his view; therefore wars between nations were obvious absurdities. Once more he had returned to the idea of evil as arising simply from confusion of thought: as soon as men had clarified their thinking and co-ordinated their efforts in the interests of mankind as a whole, then such disasters as the War would not occur.

But Wells was never willing to put the blame solely on confusion; there had to be an element of moral judgement as well. Thus in the same book he declared himself to be a pacifist - but one, let us note, of a curiously militant kind:

Most of the people I meet ... are pacifists like myself, who want to make peace by beating the armed man until he gives in and admits the error of his ways, disarming and reorganizing the world for the forcible suppression of military adventures in the future. 38

Wells was again dividing mankind into the good and the bad, without making it clear precisely where the division lay - save that England was in the right and Germany in the wrong. He was applying a nursery morality to international affairs and, further, was taking it for granted that England would be the nurse. For all his delight that the inert complacency of the pre-war period had come to an end, he assumed the continuing existence of firm moral values which were in fact losing their power over men's minds.

38. ibid. p. 193.
A few months after War and the Future, Wells returned to the ideas he had developed in Mr. Britling Sees It Through and gave them more elaborate expression in God the Invisible King. In his despair he turned once again to Evangelical Christianity, for although Wells rejected the doctrine of Original Sin, he certainly believed in the individual's sense of sin which precedes conversion, seeing it as the distress caused by the confusion of individualism, which was then brought into order by the acceptance of Socialism — in Wells' sense of the word. There was an initial state of distress with the aimlessness and cruelties of life, and particularly with the futility of the individual life, a state of helpless self-disgust, of inability to form any satisfactory plan of living. This is the common prelude known to many sorts of Christians as "conviction of sin"; it is, at any rate, a conviction of hopeless confusion .... ...

Then suddenly, in a little while, in his own time, God comes. The result of this coming of God was that one is assured that there is a Power which fights within us against the confusion within us and without, and, strengthened by this assurance, the adherent concentrated all his energies on the establishment of the "world-kingdom of God",

39. God the Invisible King pp. 25 and 27. Wells at once fell back on the familiar texts of Biblical Christianity. This, for instance, was a reminiscence of "A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me" (John xvi, 16), and it is all the more striking since, in Wells' context, it lost virtually all its meaning. Wells was not using it primarily to express the idea that God would come quickly, but to gain a suitably religious atmosphere.

40. ibid. p. 28.
which consisted of "a peaceful and co-ordinated activity of all mankind". 41 Thus the salient features of Wells' religion were warmth and comfort on the one hand and a call to moral endeavour on the other; he was careful not to leave the impression that the adherent could merely luxuriate in the friendship and nearness of God.

This eagerness to accept a version of Evangelical Christianity did not, I submit, spring from political considerations alone. A long section of Mr. Britling Sees It Through had dealt with the hero's growing suspicion that his long succession of love affairs had led him nowhere; and the tone of such expressions as "hopeless self-disgust" reminds one more of that side of Mr. Britling's life than the ostensible reason for his returning to a belief in God - the loss of his son. We are here mainly concerned with Wells' political and sociological outlook, however, and having thus taken note of this motivation, we must pass on to others.

Above all, the exploitation of Christianity for his own purposes suited Wells' desire to synthesize. As we have seen, he had spoken in What Is Coming? of the unself-centred way of life as "the way that every religion is trying in some form to teach", while Mr. Britling described his concept of God as "the essence of all real religion". 42 In his insularity, Wells assumed that

41. ibid. p. 127.
42. V. supra pp. 246 and 249.
Evangelical Christianity was a form which all other denominations might come to accept, because it contained the elements common to all without having doctrines peculiar to itself. Although Wells firmly rejected specific Christian doctrines, he took for granted the fact that England was a Christian country - Christian in a sense which is not affected by anything so superficial as a decline in churchgoing. Therefore, in spite of all his attacks on the Christian presentation of God, he took it for granted, I think, that he would meet with general approval among believers when he declared that "GOD IS COURAGE", "GOD IS A PERSON" and "GOD IS YOUTH". Who, he must have thought, could object to such unexceptionable beliefs?

As for Scientific Atheists, Wells pointed out that such men were increasingly coming to the conclusion that there existed a Life Force in the Universe, and if they continued to profess atheism, that was because they thought that to concede the existence of God entailed conceding the existence of a Creator. But Wells' God did not create the Universe. Such a God, he hoped, would unite believer and unbeliever, religious man and scientific man. Moreover, such a God would mean that the worshipper's attention was not directed to the past - for at the beginning of things God Himself did not exist - but to the future:

The turning round of the modern mind from a conception of the universe as something derived deductively from the past

43. God the Invisible King pp. 66 and 76.
to a conception of it as something gathering itself adventurously towards the future involves a release from the supposed necessity to tell a story and explain why. Instead comes the enquiry, "To what end?" 44

But alas, Wells' ingenious scheme totally failed in its purpose. In May 1918, precisely a year after God the Invisible King had appeared, he announced his abandonment of it:

For my own part I have thought of the idea of God as the banner of human unity and justice, and I have made some tentatives in that direction, but men, I perceive, have argued themselves mean and petty about religion. At the word "God" passions bristle. The Word "God" does not unite men, it angers them. But I doubt if God cares greatly whether we call Him God or not. His service is the service of men. 45

Wells, certainly, did not bother to call Him God any more; for by that time the idea of a League of Nations, with which he himself had toyed three years earlier, was arousing widespread interest, and, as Wells went on to say, this idea might succeed where the idea of God had failed:

This double idea of the League of Free Nations, linked with the idea of democracy as universal justice, is free of the jealousy of the theologians and great enough for men to unite upon everywhere. I know how warily one must reckon with the spite of the priest, but surely these ideas may call upon the teachers of all the great world religions for their support. 46

The passage just quoted comes from In the Fourth Year, subtitled Anticipations of a World Peace, and the reason for Wells' optimism in this book was not only the idea of the League of Nations but the man who had taken it up, President Wilson of the United

44. God the Invisible King p. 174.
45. In the Fourth Year p. 154.
46. ibid.
States, who had at last brought his country into the War the previous year. In that early pamphlet The War That Will End War, Wells had joined that chorus of voices from both groups of belligerents, urging America to take part in, or to remain aloof from, the European conflict. Wells had demanded:

Are you prepared now to take that lead among the nations to which your greatness and freedom point you? It is not for ourselves we make this appeal to you; it is for the whole future of mankind. 47

Now that America had entered the War, the rightness of the Allied cause was beyond dispute, Wells felt; for although it was very difficult for Britain to disprove the charge that she had entered the War for material gain, no such accusation could be levelled against America. We quoted him as saying in 1914 that "all the realities of this war are things of the mind"; now he could declare triumphantly:

The Americans have come into this war simply for an idea. Three years and a half ago a few of us were saying this was a war against the idea of imperialism, not German imperialism merely, but British and French and Russian imperialism, and we were saying this not because it was so, but because we hoped to see it become so. To-day we can say so, because now it is so. 48

Therefore Wells praised Wilson fulsomely: he was,

more than any other man, the leader of English political thought throughout the world to-day; 49

he was

47. The War That Will End War p. 80.
48. In the Fourth Year p. vi.
49. ibid. p.2.
that great, clear-minded leader among the Allies, that Englishman who more than any other single man speaks for the whole English-speaking and Western-thinking community.  

The Russian Revolution was also very cheering to Wells. In the first place it marked the fall of an empire, and all monarchical government was abhorrent to Wells because it entailed the apotheosis of an individual and because empires could only remain in existence by maintaining excessive national feeling among their citizens (who would otherwise realize the absurdity of investing one man with absolute power). Moreover, the action of the Revolutionary Government in repudiating the treaties which bound Russia to fight alongside her allies was seen by Wells as heralding that new age when all governments would renounce secret treaties made without the consent of the people.

Speaking as one of the hundreds of millions of "rank outsiders" in public affairs, I do not mean to respect any peace treaty that may end this war unless I am honestly represented at its making. I think everywhere there is a tendency in people to follow the Russian example to this extent and to repudiate bargains in which they have had no voice.  

But above all, the way in which men everywhere were seizing upon the idea of a League of Nations was the complete justification

50. ibid. p. 71. Wells' admiration was brought to a sudden end by the way in which Wilson used his influence at the Versailles Conference. By 1941 he was referring to him as one of the "tragic old men with coagulated minds". (Guide to the New World p. 75).

51. ibid. p. 20.
of the horrors of the War and the vindication of Wells' beliefs.

In the Fourth Year was, more than any other book that he had written, or was to write, the perfect example of what Wells felt the writer's true purpose to be: to make explicit, and thus to give shape to, those general aspirations which, as long as they remained formless, could not be anything but ineffectual.

In 1913 talk of a World League of Nations would have seemed, to the extremest pitch, "Utopian". To-day the project has an air not only of being so practicable, but of being so urgent and necessary and so manifestly the same thing before mankind that not to be busied upon it, not to be making it more widely known and better understood, not to be working out its problems and bringing it about, is to be living outside of the contemporary life of the world. ... All we writers find ourselves engaged perforce in some part or other of a world-wide propaganda of this the most creative and hopeful of political ideas that has ever dawned upon the consciousness of mankind. With no concerted plan we feel called upon to serve it. And in no connection would one so like to think oneself unoriginal as in this connection. It would be a dismaying thing to realize that one were writing anything here which was not the possible thought of great multitudes of other people, and capable of becoming the common thought of mankind. One writes in such a book as this not to express oneself but to swell a chorus. 52

The kind of response which he had tried and failed to elicit from the Fabians now seemed to be emerging on an altogether vaster scale. Mankind, he felt, was indeed being unified by an idea, and he was the mouthpiece of that idea. It is interesting to note the way in which Wells preserved his complete freedom of action while announcing that his work was only a part of a great corporate activity. His view was not that one ought to merge one's individuality into the

52. In the Fourth Year pp. vii-viii.
common spirit, but that if one developed one's individuality to the full, then it would necessarily express the common spirit. As a result, he could believe that the better order would come about effortlessly and painlessly:

The stars in their courses, the logic of circumstances, the everyday needs and everyday intelligence of men, all these things march irresistibly towards a permanent world peace based on democratic republicanism. 53

The Peace Congress that must sooner or later meet may itself become, after a time, the Council of a League of Nations. The League of Nations may come upon us by degrees, almost imperceptibly. 54

Once again, as in the case of the South African War, Wells and Chesterton could present the same events as demonstrating the rightness of their very different positions. In his urge towards synthesis, Wells tried to show that the vast majority of contemporary trends and activities were working in union, even though their promoters might not realize it, towards a better future. In principle he rejected as little as possible, by means of saying that a change of circumstances would bring about a change of heart - the belligerent academics would cease to be socially undesirable through an improved regimen, Cambridge would be altogether different now that the War had disrupted the old system, and so on. Though his irritable temperament repeatedly caused him to make violent attacks on many institutions, there were very few indeed which he was not prepared to seek to present in a more favourable light, once his temper had cooled.

53. In the Fourth Year p. 88.
54. ibid. p. 93.
Chesterton, on the other hand, followed Belloc in declaring that a preliminary clarification of issues was essential before any progress could be made. He had earlier praised revolution as a means of political change on the grounds that men would not revolt unless they had a clearly defined reason for doing so, and further that when a clean break with the past had thus been made, later generations could return to that past way of life if they wished. Such was the situation in France, whereas in England there has been no Revolution to leave ... a clear space for building or rebuilding. Frenchmen have all the ages behind them, and can wander back and pick and choose. But Englishmen have all the ages on top of them, and can only lie groaning under that imposing tower, without being able to take so much as a brick out of it. 55

It is true that for Wells the future was to be entirely different from the past, but he saw it as including everything in the past. If human potentiality had as yet hardly been exploited at all, this was not because the sum total of human effort of ability could be increased, but because it could be co-ordinated. So he had written in 1916:

Everything that has ever existed or that will ever exist is here - for anyone who has eyes to see. 56

Wells believed that there was some part of truth in everything and that all this truth must be gathered into one; to reject anything as incompatible with the rest was wilfully to reject a part of the truth.

For the most part, Wells pursued his own line of thought without reference to Belloc and Chesterton, but though their appearance in his books of this time was brief, it was also violent. To understand why it was so, we must return to the admiration of efficiency which he had very frequently expressed. One instance of this was A Modern Utopia, where his ideal society had kept a library of the thumbprints of all mankind, together with details of each individual's life.

"So", exclaimed Wells enthusiastically,

the inventory of the State would watch its every man and the wide world write its history as the fabric of its destiny flowed on. 57

Yet the Chestertonian view of society had a strong attraction for him, as becomes evident from his discussion, earlier in the same book, of whether his Utopians would permit alcoholic drink:

I have the utmost respect for all Teetotalers, Prohibitionists, and Haters and Persecutors of Inn-keepers, their energy of reform awakens responsive notes in me, and to their species I look for a large part of the urgent repair of our earth; yet for all that -

There is Burgundy, for example, a bottle of soft and kindly Burgundy, taken to make a sunshine on one's lunch when four strenuous hours of toil have left one on the further side of appetite. 58

Wells was taking a slightly guilty holiday from the rigours of Socialist efficiency. He continued:

58. ibid. p. 65.
Under no circumstances can I think of my Utopians maintaining their fine order of life on ginger ale and lemonade. ... Those terrible Temperance Drinks, solutions of qualified sugar mixed with vast volumes of gas, ... fill a man with wind and self-righteousness. Indeed they do. Coffee destroys brain and kidney ...; and tea ... tans the entrails and turns honest stomachs into leather bags. ... No! If we are to have no ale in Utopia, give me the one clean temperance drink that is worthy to set beside wine, and that is simple water. 59

This is a remarkable anticipation of Chesterton's poem "The Song of Right and Wrong", where he began:

Feast on wine or fast on water
And your honour shall stand sure,

and, like Wells, attacked tea ("He is poison when he's strong") and mineral waters:

As for all the windy waters,
They were rained like tempests down
When good drink had been dishonoured
By the tipplers of the town. 60

Chesterton's poem first appeared in his novel *The Flying Inn*, published a few months before the War, in which novel he elaborated his idea of English freedom, symbolized by the Public House, being eroded by the growing tyranny of experts and bureaucrats, mostly of foreign origin. Thus only a very short time after it appeared, Wells' urge towards total efficiency received a tremendous boost from the demands imposed on England by the War. This was no time for a lingering sentimentality over such pleasant but inessential things, and in 1915 he made a confused and intemperate attack upon Belloc and Chesterton, including in it a reference to another of

the poems from *The Flying Inn*, in which Chesterton had defended the illogical windings of English roads. Wells attacked

the humorous outlook of the followers of Mr. G.K. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc, who believe that this war is really a war in the interests of the Athanasian Creed, fatness, and unrestricted drink against science, discipline, and priggishly keeping fit enough to join the Army, as very good fun indeed, good matter for some jolly reeling ballad about Roundabout and Roundabout, the jolly town of Roundabout. 61

He returned to the attack the following year in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, where Mr. Britling quoted "Chesterton's happy verses" when the Belgian refugee staying with him criticized the lanes.

Mr. Britling sought to develop the Chestertonian viewpoint:

If our easy-going ways hampered a hard efficiency, they did at least develop humour and humanity.

Then he suddenly turned on it:

He did not believe a word of this stuff. His deep irrational love for England made him say these things ... For years he had been getting himself in hot water because he had been writing and hinting just such criticisms as Mr. Van der Pant expressed so bluntly. 62

By such means did he attempt to expel the attraction which this kind of England had for him. It was so much a part of him - this peaceful and profoundly idiosyncratic England - that only under a strong emotional impulse could he break free from it. Even then (though here we pass beyond the scope of the present thesis) his freedom was never complete.

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When one remembers how Shaw had gradually found that there was no logical pattern which would fit the whole of life or even any single one of its aspects, one realizes what a considerable opportunity the War offered him. Belloc and the Chesterton brothers believed that one simple pattern was discernible in the War: the struggle between the ancient European tradition and the Prussian intruder. Wells saw another, hardly less simple pattern: the forces of change compelling men to reconstruct society on a more efficient basis. In contrast to both, Shaw took delight in pointing out the gaps where ideals, arguments and official justifications failed to fit the circumstances for which they were intended. His underlying motive for doing so appears from his answer to the question why, in December 1914, he had written a lengthy pamphlet on the causes and issues of the War: "Because I have always loathed war!" ¹ His detestation of it made him react against all those who sought to justify it in terms of ethics or logic, and although he did not take a Pacifist line, he tried to prevent the War from being seen as anything but an unnecessary evil.

The pamphlet just mentioned was called - characteristically - Common Sense About the War, and in it Shaw used his nationality as a means of maintaining his independence of view:

Until Home Rule emerges from its present suspended animation, I shall retain my Irish capacity for criticizing England with something of the detachment of a foreigner, and perhaps with a certain slightly malicious taste for taking the conceit out of her. 2

The main target of criticism in the pamphlet was twofold: Shaw attacked the Balance of Power system which had been dominant in Europe since the Congress of Vienna had set the scene for the post-Napoleonic period. According to this, peace was kept by the major European Powers forming two alliances of roughly equal strength, so that any one Power would hesitate to embark upon a war which would inevitably lead to a widespread and evenly balanced conflict. Thus immediately before the First World War one bloc consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy faced another consisting of France, Russia and (somewhat more dubiously) Great Britain. The second part of Shaw’s criticism was the consequence of this system, viz. that all the Powers were obliged to maintain a high rate of armament, since otherwise the strength of the alliances would become disproportionate and the whole aim of the system would be thwarted.

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2. What I Really Wrote About the War p. 22. One comment on this — tart but just — came from Christabel Pankhurst: "If in the years preceding the war the Home Rule cause had depended upon Mr. Shaw’s activities, it would have been in a bad way". ("New York Times" Current History of the European War vol. 1, no. 1, p. 68.) Shaw was merely exploiting his Irish birth; he was not committing himself to Irish patriotism but declaring his freedom from English patriotism.
Now it was clear, Shaw argued, that no single Power who participated in such a system could be less responsible for any resulting war than the others, because the real causes of that war would have been, not the particular events that led to it but the system as a whole. Thus Shaw refused to entertain the idea taken for granted by the Chestertons, Belloc and Wells alike, that the Allies were in a superior moral position to the Central Powers. He explained why they were not, in his summary of the decades before 1914 in *Common Sense About the War*.

The outline was as follows. England, like all the rest of Europe, was terrified at the military efficiency displayed by Germany in 1870, and in reaction she at once started to build up forces comparable to those of Germany. Meanwhile Germany, in emulation of England, was trying to create a colonial empire. Thus the two Powers were very similar in their nature: both were imperialist, though here England had the advantage of being already the dominant colonial Power. This slight difference in their circumstances (and Shaw emphasized that it was purely by chance that England had acquired colonies first) allowed her to take up a position of moral superiority vis-à-vis Germany and to condemn all imperialist expansion — except what had already been achieved. This hypocrisy provided her with an excuse first for arming herself strongly and then for forming alliances against Germany (Shaw minimized the significance of the concept of "splendid isolation").
To both of these policies Shaw objected. Of the first he said that no Power which continued to arm while making assurances of its peaceful intentions could be sincere in the latter, of the second, that the existence of two opposing groups of allies only resulted in each trying to outdo the other in amassing arms. There would thus be an unrelenting atmosphere of tension everywhere, and this would inevitably lead to war of a kind that was unable to secure any final pacification:

A child in arms should be able to see that this idiotic notion of relaxing the military pressure on us by smashing this or that particular Power is like trying to alter the pressure of the ocean by dipping up a bucket of water from the North Sea and pouring it into the Bay of Biscay. 3

If a common enemy were quite destroyed, the former allies would then destroy each other; and in any case, history showed that Powers which lost wars were no less formidable as a result.

The only rule of thumb that can be hazarded on the strength of actual practice is that wars to maintain or upset the Balance of Power between States, called by inaccurate people Balance of Power wars, and by accurate people Jealousy of Power wars, never establish the desired peaceful and secure equilibrium. They may exercise pugnacity, gratify spite, assuage a wound to national pride, or enhance or dim a military reputation; but that is all. 4

In drawing attention to this aspect of the contemporary situation, Shaw was considering something which the other writers entirely failed to see, thereby distorting their view of the War. Shaw was right in saying that the Balance of Power system could only

3. What I Really Wrote About the War p. 32.
4. ibid. pp. 33-34.
lead to war sooner or later and that it must be changed. It would be quite uncharacteristic of him, however, if this plain, straightforward case was the most striking feature of the pamphlet. His main aim was to administer mental shocks.

One of these was the direct development of his case. Germany and England were similar Powers; therefore, he said, they had similar statesmen. In saying this, he was strongly offending English sensibilities. At a time when a book was available proving that, had he been a commoner, the Kaiser would have been certified as insane, Shaw seized upon the fact of the Kaiser's personal piety and his taste for sentimentally religious books to demonstrate that the German Emperor was just as well-intentioned as the other leaders of the belligerent Powers. Again, mention has already been made of the general assumption in England that the Kaiser's entourage were all militarists, and the German term for a Prussian landowner, "Junker", became an accepted term of abuse for such men. Shaw quoted a German-English dictionary, showed that "Junker" was translated as "country squire" and declared that Sir Edward Grey (head of a Northumbrian landowning family) was equally a "Junker".

Now clearly the English and German leaders could not simply be equated; the former had much more charm, affability and mildness. But these were only surface differences, and Shaw turned even these to his advantage. If anything, the English affability was a mark of special moral turpitude, because, with their militarist outlook
so well concealed, they could deceive people into thinking that they did not want war, whereas the Germans could not. Indeed, had it not been for this trait, there would have been no war. Shaw was as much impressed as Wells was by the argument that if Britain had made clear her intention to fight in the event of a German invasion of Belgium, Germany would never have dared to begin the War. Sir Edward Grey, said Shaw,

persuaded Germany that he had not the slightest serious intention of fighting. ... And Germany, confident that with Austria's help she could break France with one hand and Russia with the other if England held aloof, let Austria throw the match into the magazine. 5

Hence the universal reputation of England for hypocrisy, acquired because the English were so charming and honest in their social and personal dealings and so underhand and unscrupulous in their public dealings.

If you judge an English statesman by his conscious intentions, his professions, and his personal charm, you will often find him an amiable, upright, humane, anxiously truthful man. If you judge him, as a foreigner must, solely on the official acts for which he is responsible, and which he has to defend in the House of Commons for the sake of his party, you will often be driven to conclude that this estimable gentleman is, in point of being an unscrupulous superprig and fool, worse than Caesar Borgia and General Von Bernhardi rolled into one, and in foreign affairs a Bismarck in everything except commanding ability, blunt common sense, and freedom from illusion as to the nature and object of his own diplomacy. 6

It is easy to see how provocative such a passage must have been in the opening months of a war, and this quality was heightened by

Shaw's skilful deploying of his ideas. For he managed to say that
the English statesman was entirely unscrupulous and yet entirely
unsuccessful: if he was an amalgam of Borgia and Bismarck, he was
also a fool; if he was unscrupulous, he was also blinded by
illusion. Furthermore, Shaw did not give this as his own opinion;
it was the opinion of the hypothetical foreigner who had only
official reports to go on. Though the passage more than half implied
that the foreigner's opinion was the right one, Shaw never committed
himself to it and thus did not find himself with the task of proving
his assertions.

This charge of unconscious hypocrisy takes us back to his own
abandonment of precise reasoning and logical conclusions. To be
satisfied with over-simple patterns was to him the mark of intellec-
tual laziness; to bring such a situation to an end was his self-imposed function as a writer.

The general truth of the situation is, as I have spent so much
of my life in trying to make the English understand, that we
are cursed with a fatal intellectual laziness, an evil inheri-
tance from the time when our monopoly of coal and iron made
it possible for us to become rich and powerful without thinking
or knowing how. ... In the end we became fat headed, and not
only lost all intellectual consciousness of what we were doing,
and with it all power of objective self-criticism, but stacked
up a lumber of pious phrases for ourselves. ... We carried
Luther's doctrine of Justification to the insane point of
believing that as long as a man says what we have agreed to
accept as the right thing it does not matter in the least
what he actually does. In fact, we do not clearly see why a
man need introduce the subject of morals at all, unless there
is something questionable to be whitewashed. The unprejudiced
foreigner calls this hypocrisy: that is why we call him
prejudiced. But I, who have been a poor man in a poor country,
understand the foreigner better. 7

7. What I Really Wrote About the War pp. 35-36.
This function was, however, considerably hindered by that central vagueness which we have already noted. In the same month as Common Sense About the War appeared, Shaw contended, in an article entitled "The Last Spring of the Old Lion", that it was a triumph for English diplomacy that the War had begun at all. In Common Sense About the War, Shaw had spoken of Sir Edward Grey's deceiving Germany as to Britain's intentions (though he had also said that

the Foreign Office, of which Sir Edward is merely the figure-head, was ... deliberately and consciously bent on a long deferred Militarist war with Germany 8).

Now he confused matters even further by using the metaphor of the Lion for the English militarist spirit. Grey "knew nothing of the ways of lions, and would not approve of them if he did", but the German Ambassador "knew so much less of lions than Grey that he actually thought Grey was the lion". 9 As for Asquith, he had

ancient English depths behind his mirror-like lucidity in which something of lion craft could lurk without troubling the surface of the mirror. 10

Meanwhile,

the lion, with a mighty roar, sprang at last, and, in a flash, had his teeth and claws in the rival of England, and will now not let her go for all the Pacifists or Socialists in the world until he is either killed or back on his Waterloo pedestal again. 11

The effect of the elaborate metaphor is that we are quite unable to

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8. What I Really Wrote About the War pp. 36-37.
9. ibid. p. 117.
10. ibid. p. 118.
11. ibid.
identify the lion with any exactness. It might be something as specific as the Foreign Office; it might be something as vague as popular instinct.

Hence although Shaw's style (like his own view of Asquith) seems at first sight to be wholly lucid and extraordinarily concrete in its vocabulary, in fact he was adept at avoiding tying himself down. As an exponent of ideas, he is at the furthest extreme from Belloc, with his insistent reiteration of the plain fundamental issues. In consequence, he was chiefly effective in criticizing and destroying views which he disliked.

To see him in this destructive aspect, we must turn to his review of Cecil Chesterton's pamphlet *The Prussian Hath Said in His Heart* - (1914), where Cecil expounded his thesis of Prussia as a perverse and immoral member of the European family, springing from the evil genius of Frederick the Great. Shaw set out to spoil this picture of a ruler on the whole evil among rulers on the whole good:

All the exploits for which Mr. Cecil Chesterton holds up Frederick for execration were strictly in the line of the Most Christian kings. Nothing in them can be referred to his theism except the fact that he was not hypocritical about them, and this, surely, is a virtue which the Most Christian kings lacked, and not a villainy to which they were too pious to stoop. 12

Shaw's emphasis upon the title "Most Christian kings" arose from his dislike of any title expressing an ideal which was at odds with reality. So, too, he remarked that Cecil Chesterton

speaks often of modern civilization as Christendom, and of Christianity as a prevalent faith. Does it really look like that to him? To me the spectacle of Europe at the present moment suggests nothing in that connection except grim congratulations to Annas, Caïaphas, Judas Iscariot, and Pontius Pilate on having done their job so well.  

Shaw protested that

Mr. Cecil Chesterton's madness rises even to the acceptance of the war as a highly Christian spectacle.

One clear difference of belief between the two men came out in the course of the review. Cecil Chesterton had defined a Materialist outlook that had emerged during the previous century, characterized by a belief that physical pain was the highest evil and one to be avoided at all costs. This, said Cecil, was an error which led to the disparagement of war; we have seen Belloc attack it when he spoke of those who "maligned the sword"; therefore, in Cecil's view, the coming of the War demonstrated how the generality of men rejected this false theory and put the defence of their country above their physical wellbeing, as men ought to do.

Shaw reacted violently:

Physical torture is the one means by which the lowest humanity can degrade and destroy the highest. It is the foul blow in the glorious warfare of souls for salvation. The continual effort of the saint is to make himself incapable of it; and if the sinner takes advantage of this to make himself continually more proficient in the arts of violent coercion, the world will go straight to the devil. That is pretty simple, I think, and pretty obvious.

15. *V. supra* p. 85.
This was Shaw's instinctive reaction to pain and suffering. The later rational and controlled reaction that he learnt from the Fabians is to be seen in the way he dealt with *The Perils of Peace* (1916). Here Cecil was scandalized at an incident in which a German doctor refused to treat English prisoners of war among whom typhus was rife and instead, from a safe distance, called them English swine. Shaw commented calmly:

This is an amazing explosion. The Wittenberg horror was a very hackneyed horror of war: its history was the history of most typhus camps of prisoners of war, even in wars waged by the most humane and civilized peoples. 17

He added:

Mr. Cecil Chesterton ... has no suspicion of the normal atrocity rate as revealed by the cases at our assizes which could not possibly be reported in papers intended for family reading. 18

Shaw had schooled himself to recognize the amount of suffering and cruelty in the world through the knowledge he had earlier gained of the London poor; he was not prepared to condone it, however, or to accept the fact that in certain circumstances it must be increased. Cecil Chesterton, as the exponent of the Bellonian thesis, was generally repugnant to Shaw in this imposing of a simple pattern over the events of centuries, and specially repugnant in his disregard for human suffering.

When we seek a more positive side to Shaw's attitude, however, we are disappointed. As was said earlier, Shaw did not take up a

Pacifist stand. In some ways, the very reverse was true. Although we have seen him attacking the Armaments race which, he said, was the inevitable consequence of the Balance of Power system, he declared in Common Sense About the War:

I myself steadily advocated the formation of a formidable armament, and ridiculed the notion that we, who are wasting hundreds of millions annually on idlers and wasters, could not easily afford double, treble, quadruple our military and naval expenditure. ... Though often horribly wrong in principle, they [i.e. those who carried out the policy of armament] were quite right in practice as far as they went. But they must stand to their guns now that the guns are going off. They must not pretend that they were harmless Radical lovers of peace. 19

Shaw's attitude towards armaments expenditure was based on the fact that where so much money was wasted, it would be foolish to protest at what, in comparison, was a small sum. The management of the whole national economy was so utterly illogical, that there would be nothing gained by trying to make one very small section of it logical. As in the matter of the mica valves, reason tries to exist in a world of unreason by compromising with it. But Shaw was anxious to point out that accepting the fact that every part of an illogical situation will be illogical, is not the same as condoning the illogicality. Above all, having conceded that matters must be conducted on this lower level, Shaw was determined that those who did condone it should not be allowed means of justification from a higher level. Logic, reason, principle - the world must not be allowed first to flout these in

practice and then to exploit them in specious justification of that practice.

The same basic attitude appears in the following comment written in 1917 on a remark put into the mouth of Henry VI by Shakespeare:

A celebrated civilian playwright put into the mouth of a ruinously pious king the sentiment that "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just". Setting aside the obvious comment that there are no just quarrels in the world, because when people quarrel they cease to be just, and if they had been just before they would not have quarrelled, one must say bluntly that war is not concerned with the justice of its quarrel. That is one of the main objections to war as an institution, and the one that will eventually uproot it from human morality. But it is too late to consider it when the sword is drawn. You cannot vindicate outraged morality by surrendering it or allowing yourself to be beaten. On the contrary, if you are in the wrong, and desire to acknowledge it and make amends, you must achieve victory before your amends have any value. 20

The throwaway implication of the phrase "setting aside the obvious comment" must be discounted; it was Shaw's main point that war was totally dissociated from justice and would therefore eventually disappear, if men brought any moral sense to bear upon it. But his second point was that, so long as it was allowed to continue, no moral sense was to be brought to bear upon it because to do so would be only an abuse of such sense. Men showed no signs of ending their predilection for war, and Shaw accepted the fact, just as the Fabians had accepted the facts of the social and economic situation; but he was determined to stop them applying moral

theory when they refused to follow moral practice. Indeed, he continued, war involved an impossible moral situation since, once it had started, even where both sides sincerely desired to set matters right, it had to be fought to a finish before this could be done.

His task, then, was the debunking of attempts at moral justification. It was his only task, for he realized that the population of a nation at war would have no interests outside the business of bringing the war to a successful conclusion. In consequence, there was no need for him to be consistent. As far as the existing situation went, he had no view of his own to defend; that must wait until men were once more capable of behaving like rational, moral beings. For the time being, he was concerned only with attacking the views of others. Thus we find a certain inconsistency in, for instance, his attitude at the beginning of the War towards Belgian neutrality. In Common Sense About the War, he blamed England for not coming to the aid of Belgium more promptly (for British mobilization had been very slow compared with that of the other belligerents, and British troops formed only a small fraction of the Allied army at the First Battle of the Marne):

What have we done for Belgium? Have we saved her soil from invasion? Were we at her side with half a million men when the avalanche fell on her? ... We have not protected Belgium: Belgium has protected us at the cost of being conquered by Germany. It is now our sacred duty to drive the Germans out of Belgium. 21

21. What I Really Wrote About the War p. 56.
Yet in writing an open letter to President Wilson a week previously, Shaw had spoken as if the Allies should never have entered Belgium at all:

I may plead for a perfectly innocent neutral State, the State of Belgium, which is being ravaged in a horrible manner by the belligerents. Her surviving population is flying into all the neighbouring countries to escape from the incessant hail of shrapnel and howitzer shells from British cannon, French cannon, German cannon, and, most tragic of all, Belgian cannon; for the Belgian army is being forced to devastate its own country in its own defence. 22

The inconsistency is to be explained largely by the difference in audiences, one Allied and one neutral. In the first extract, Shaw was trying to make the English public feel that they had behaved badly to Belgium, instead of feeling that they were nobly trying to prevent the Germans from behaving badly to her. In the second, he was presenting all the European Powers as being as bad as one another, in order to prove the need for American intervention (of quite a different kind from that envisaged by Wells). Moreover, in both cases he was implying that Belgian neutrality, far from being a kindness shown to a small nation by the benevolent Great Powers, was in fact merely designed to serve their interests, to be violated whenever it did not. Thus, two months later, he wrote:

Neutrality is utter humbug. That is my position. There is no such thing as a breach of neutrality, because there is no such thing as neutrality. 23

Shaw rejected it so firmly (and any plain, firm statement from him

23. Ibid. p. 131.
usually has a significance far beyond its surface meaning) because the very idea of a guarantee of neutrality meant that unacceptable combination of moral principle and political practice. Moral obligations had no place in international affairs - so much the worse for international affairs, but at any rate the fact must be faced, and any attempt to mix the two could not be other than hypocritical and specious.

Was there, then, no hope at all until an entirely new order came into being? Such an attitude was just as unpractical in its way as the other. Clearly, men had not only to accept things as they were but also to do their best with them. Of course, said Shaw in Common Sense About the War, he did not mean to imply that all treaties were valueless; he conceded that "treaties are broken only at long intervals of years". 24 Why was this so, if there was no morality between nations? Shaw answered this question by building up what was essentially a moral system but one that depended ostensibly on self-interest alone:

No doubt nations will do what it is to their interest to do. But because there is in every nation a set of noisy moral imbeciles who cannot see that nations have an overwhelming interest in creating and maintaining a tradition of international good faith, and honoring their promissory notes as scrupulously as the moral imbeciles pay their silly gambling debts and fight their foolish duels, we are not, I presume, going to discard every international guarantee except the howitzer. 25

To-day that "I presume" has an air of ridiculous and naive defiance;

24. What I Really Wrote About the War p. 142.
25. Ibid. p. 93.
the violence of the coming decades was not to be frightened away by a haughty stare from Shaw. He failed to see that this scrupulousness in paying gambling debts and fighting duels was not the result of a permanently valid enlightened self-interest but the decaying remains of a moral tradition. Just as much as Wells, he was taking the stability of the old world for granted at the very time when it was breaking up.
Conclusion

EXPULSION FROM THE GARDEN

To conclude the thesis at this point is not merely a concession to the demands of space, for although all four men continued to write with equal vigour after 1918, I submit that they lacked the mental flexibility at this late stage in their lives to come fully to terms with the post-war world. They had defined their positions once for all in relation to circumstances at the turn of the century.

Wells was the most strongly affected, because he had always claimed an intimate cognizance of the details of social change. Now he was no longer able to express the public mind as he had been when his own generation had set the tone of public opinion. It is true that in Joan and Peter (1918) he had concluded with his hero explaining his ideas to his young ward and being disconcerted to find that the rising generation either took those ideas for granted or thought them outmoded. This was indeed Wells' own position. Yet for the next twenty-five years he continued to explain the contemporary world to those who were far more conversant with it than he was.

Shaw was much less affected, because outside his preoccupation with the minutiae of social life in his work for the Fabian Society, he had always gone to the other extreme in taking a generalized view of life. There was no hint in his plays of the Fabian desire
to influence contemporary politics. Caesar and Cleopatra (1901) expressed his idea of the Superman as ruler; it was not a political blueprint. In Man and Superman (1905) he declared that women played a far more active rôle in life than his contemporaries suspected, but he did not therefore hope that the play would help to gain women the vote. When he was no longer the conscientious administrator, Shaw retired to an Olympian eminence. It thus mattered little to him whether or not his ideas were well received by the public. We may note, however, that the thesis behind his major post-war work, Back to Methusaleh (1922), that man must seek to become pure intellect, was not to the taste of a period which had to cope with the results of the physical convulsions of the War. To flirt with such extreme theories had been far more to the taste of the Edwardians.

As far as Belloc was concerned, the War affected neither the position of the English Roman Catholics nor the domination of the House of Commons by the Party machines. He had grown accustomed to being a voice in the wilderness before the War, and he continued in that rôle after it. Moreover, as a historian he was aware of the inevitable flux of opinion from one generation to another. But what did that matter? To Belloc every other consideration faded into insignificance beside the position of the Church. In the years until his death in 1953 the Roman Catholic Church seemed to alter not at all, and this gave Belloc a feeling
of stability amid the vicissitudes of politics and opinions.  

Chesterton had always operated at one remove from current events. Now, however, after his brother's death, he attempted to continue Cecil Chesterton's political activities and to apply Belloc's remedy of widely distributed property to post-war England. Although the Distributist League, as his organization was called, made a certain impact, we have already seen how the political thinking of Belloc and Cecil Chesterton was outside the main field of British politics, and the changed conditions, together with Gilbert Chesterton's lack of political acumen, only increased this alienation.

In the post-war writings of all four men, there is therefore a sense of repetition. Even where their books of this period achieved considerable success, they did so for reasons other than their authors intended. Wells' Outline of History (1919-1920) was seen, not as a demonstration of how mankind, after the steady

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1. Since his death, matters have altered. The tone of the majority at the Second Vatican Council has been exactly opposed to Belloc's. Indeed, reference has been made to Chesterton, "the English apologist", in a condemnatory sense. Speaking during the Second Session, the Archbishop of Bombay contrasted the triumphalist picture of the Church given in Orthodoxy - "a Church always on the alert to smoke out errors and heresy so she can condemn them" - with a "servant Church", "in whose bosom all peoples of the East and the West find a warm refuge and shelter". (Council Speeches of Vatican III p. 191.) This is a far cry from Belloc's assertion in 1908 that the Catholic and anti-Catholic forces in Europe were becoming steadily more defined.
progress of its existence so far, was on the threshold of an unprecedentedly spacious and powerful age, but as a handy compendium of history written in a notably readable style. Shaw's St. Joan (1923) impressed the public as a re-creation of history, not as the depiction of another Shavian Superman enjoying the special favour of the Life Force. Moreover, except in the one instance of Wells' Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945), in which he suddenly abandoned his former optimistic view that the forces of natural change worked in conformity with human values, there was no important development in their thought after 1918.

We must now return to the question from which we began: do men remain essentially the same from one generation to another, or do they progress? The differing answers made to this pervade the work of the men we have been considering. The constant implication on the one hand that the limits of human potentiality have already been explored and that we must therefore look to the past in order to understand ourselves, on the other that the future will be unrecognisably different from the past and superior to it - these implications underlie every word they wrote.

Neither is satisfying to-day. The optimism of the latter view seems repulsively superficial. Writing on "Darwinism and Ethics" in 1958, Dr. D. Daiches Raphael declared (as had T.H. Huxley) that evolution involved the development of moral and immoral traits alike, and that consequently the responsibility
now rested upon men to ensure that their growing power of directing the evolutionary course was exercised in accordance with moral principles. This is as much a sobering as an inspiring idea, and above all it is not one which encourages abstract speculation of the kind which all four writers loved. Dr. Daiches Raphael's concluding words were:

A hundred years ago the advance of biological knowledge made a difference to human beliefs. Today it makes a difference to human life.  

One of the effects of this alteration in impact is that the rate of development has been slowed. Whereas beliefs can change very rapidly, and whereas in a single book Wells' imagination could go leaping ahead down the coming decades, it is an altogether slower business to observe and control the results of change as they occur. For Wells, the first crossing of the English Channel by air was an entirely novel event from which he could let his speculation grow along fairly simple deductive lines; for us, the existence of a comprehensive network of airlines cannot be shown to have this or that influence upon contemporary life, because the situation is far too complex to be summed up. To Wells, the question, "What difference will air travel make to human life?" seemed stimulating, exciting and inescapable; but

for us to try to answer the question, "What difference has air travel made to the events of the last half-century?" would be as futile as it is absurd. Even if we look to the future and ask, "What difference will the achievement of interplanetary travel make?", it is very difficult to give an answer, as Wells did, in moral terms, whether hopeful or otherwise. Or take another example. Can anyone say that this same half-century has either proved or disproved Belloc's thesis in *The Servile State*? I do not think so. A full century or more must pass before these opposing concepts of social structure, formulated by Belloc over a few brief years and grasped by his reader in a matter of minutes, can be shown by the course of events to have become dominant, or to have been superseded, or to have been illusions, mere mental abstractions, all the time. Thought moves like lightning: experience is slow.

Indeed, all these writers suffered from an excessive reliance on the brain. Chesterton's criticism of Shaw and Wells was justified: both devoted themselves entirely to mental exposition; neither was sufficiently in contact with ordinary humanity. Chesterton's charge against Wells, that he ignored the salient features of human experience such as Original Sin and gave pride of place to scientific details that were irrelevant to the human situation, is proved, I submit, by the later development of Wells' thought, and particularly by the mounting sense of guilt expressed in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* and *God the Invisible King*. Wells
first tried to present man as a dedicated and single-minded social engineer and then was forced to adopt less and less simple patterns. In the end, if Wellsian man still progressed, he did so by such painful and uncertain means that he was undistinguishable from the unchanging human nature of Chesterton's vision.

If one concedes the justice of Chesterton's criticisms, this does not, however, entail granting that he provides an adequate alternative. Though he was right in saying that Shaw and Wells were out of touch with ordinary men, the same objection applies to himself. He attacked Shaw and the Fabians because they legislated for the working classes without at all understanding them, but he himself was far more ignorant of working-class conditions, and his turning Dickens into a symbolic figure did not remedy this lack of knowledge. There is, moreover, a strong similarity between the way in which he looked only to the past and Wells only to the future. From a present-day viewpoint, to be prepared to abandon the whole material apparatus of modern life on the grounds that society can and ought to be reconstructed on a past model seems as impracticable as Wells' belief that the heritage of the past could be totally cleared away in order to make space for an entirely new future. Both men contemplated with complacency a violent and fullscale transformation, from which we, who know the destruction inevitable in such transformations, recoil.

It is also doubtful whether we can yield to Chesterton's
demand that the clear definition of principles should precede any attempt at practice. His protest against the absence of fundamental ideals in social thinking amounted to a protest against the moral fragmentation of society. The public schools, for instance, which he presented as a notably successful institution, rest upon a homogeneous class outlook. Where such an outlook does not exist, an equally effective institution cannot arise, and how to create this homogeneity from nothing has proved beyond the wit of man. For all the unanswerable logic behind Chesterton's ridicule of those who made efficiency or education or social improvement ends in themselves, I do not think that he offered any practicable alternative.

Belloc falls into a somewhat different category. In his work one feels the presence of the physical world, and especially the world of nature, in a way that one does not in that of the others. Though Shaw, for instance, had the habit of going for long walks, this was in order to keep his body in good trim. One of the chief effects of Belloc's considerable travelling, however, was that his mind received the impress of nature. In his work, the Sussex Downs, the Alps, the sea were all realities in their own right; they were not treated as simply a backdrop to human activities. It was this power of expressing them as entities quite independent of the human observer that created the fascination of his travel books for his contemporaries.
Yet the reality with which he was in contact was not that of the age in which he lived. If he understood the workings of many types of men, the Edwardian Englishman was not one of those types; hence his failure to create a single living character in his novels - with the possible exception of Emmanuel Burden. Belloc had, one must confess, a very simple recipe for the creation of moral homogeneity: England must become a Catholic society in which property was evenly distributed. Such an answer, however, raised far more difficulties than the question. Moreover, despite his remoteness from his society, Edwardian England exercised a very strong influence over the way in which Belloc expressed himself, for he over-emphasized the truths he possessed in order to convey them to a society which had lost them. Even when he was stating what to him were unchanging truths, the manner in which he did so was dictated by his circumstances.

This amounts to saying that Belloc's thought was vitiated by the imprint of his personal situation upon it, and the same is true of the others. Chesterton was deeply content with England, even if he disliked certain novel features of his time; hence his strong sense of an ancient tradition of a truly human society (even though that tradition was now much decayed). Wells' rapid rise in the social scale which he owed to his facility as a writer led him to see the whole of mankind making its way upwards through the exercise of its intelligence. Shaw, the extraordinary person,
for ever ill at ease in his environment, seized upon the idea of the Superman who dominated others by his innate ability.

Why, then, do these writers merit our attention? Not because we now have to apply ourselves to the question that they answered so definitely. Even though this question of whether or not man progresses must be formulated as part of an examination of their views, I do not believe that there is any purpose in our trying to answer it; that would be attempting to find the right answer to the wrong question. They claim our consideration chiefly for their literary value. The sociologist may ignore Wells and the historian Belloc; the student of literature can ignore neither. Wells was one of the most important novelists in the Edwardian period; Belloc, I submit, is unsurpassed as a prose-writer this century. Yet we cannot appreciate either for his literary qualities alone: it would be ludicrous (even if it were not impossible) to listen to Belloc's cadences while refusing to attend to his subject-matter.

This difficulty arises from the demands made on these writers by their society. Their readers wanted the double stimulation of ideas expressed through the medium of entertainment, and all were willing to accede to this demand. The most explicit example of this is Wells' A Modern Utopia, in which, he said in an introduction, he was
aiming throughout at a sort of shot-silk texture between philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other. 4

Though all four succeeded in producing the mixture, it could be done only at the cost of damaging both the philosophical or intellectual and the literary sides of their work. Thus their status as social thinkers was impaired by the very size of their audience. Speaking of Belloc in 1911, Ramsay MacDonald distinguished

between the handful of people who share his opinions and the vast number of people who delight in reading about his opinions, of whom I am one. 5

As for literary status, they refused for the most part to see this as a goal worthy of pursuit for its own sake. Chesterton had stated as part of his reaction from Aestheticism that all great art was the product of the artist's striving to become a philosopher. It was an exaggeration that relegated them to the position of minor artists as surely as the opposite exaggeration had done the Aesthetes.

Nevertheless, they are worthy of our attention. Here a difficulty arises: we cannot read them without becoming aware of their intention to influence our ideas, but we cannot understand the nature of that influence without some general grasp of the dominating issues of their time. It is true that this disparity between a writer's immediate intentions in his work and the reasons

5. Socialism and the Servile State p. 23.
for posterity's enjoyment of it operates in every case, and that there is always a similar disparity between a work's impact upon its author's contemporaries and upon later generations. In the case of these writers, however, these disparities are unusually great. Shaw's characters Candida and Ann Whitefield, for instance, are appreciated by present-day audiences as strong-minded women; to the Edwardians they were embodiments - whether alarming or inspiring - of Feminist agitation and the New Woman. Again, the very great emphasis laid upon the difference between the romantic world opened up to Wells' Mr. Polly by books and the drudgery of his subsequent job seems disproportionate unless we know something about the extent of State education and about the conditions of shop assistants in the Edwardian period. Or the reader is puzzled and unconvinced by the rich, scheming Jews who proliferate in Bellocc's novels. The phenomenon becomes intelligible not only when we know something about the period but when we know something about Bellocc's view of it. In the case of Chesterton, one finds a series of caricatures of contemporary forces which to us are merely extravagant jokes until we know what he is attacking. The villain of The Flying Inn, for instance, Lord Ivywood, is fully comprehensible only in the context of the desire to regiment working-class life and of the belief in the Superman.

It is because of the curious position of these writers that the present thesis was undertaken, and the nature of the thesis is
similarly curious, in that it is a non-literary piece of work with a literary aim. That is, it seeks to expound those conflicting systems of ideas which must be understood if their work is to be properly appreciated. Even without this ultimate aim, there is considerable intellectual pleasure to be gained from a study of those systems, not because they are specially relevant to modern life, but because, with their extremes of attitude, they present a not too strenuous form of mental exercise to whoever cares to trace them. Few, I think, would wish to become disciples of these men, but very many (now, as in their own time) would enjoy the pleasing exertion of following their thought. Nevertheless, though this immediate aspect inevitably bulks larger here, I believe that that ultimate aim is of greater value. Their ideas are to be studied as a means to appreciating their books. There is room, I hope, for the doctrinaire work within the field of enduring literature, but this can only be so if the intellectual position of the doctrinaire work is fully explained. This thesis will have served its purpose if it supports their literary position by helping to provide such an explanation.
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All works are listed in order of publication, except for those in Section 6, which are listed alphabetically.

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