

## SCIENCE AND THE END

(Concluded)

J. K. SNOWDEN

## XXXVI

**B**UT, in the light of what has been said, it appears that our present woes, though unexampled and not ended, are proportionate to the aberration which induces them. They seem a doubtful and amazing episode of the human story; but to think them disproportionate would be to refuse a lesson of experience and to leave the story signifying nothing. A science that should have no such explanation of them would be incompetent. It must suffer an eclipse very naturally, and credit go to those teachers who explained them so, with whatever notions of the fault. A science that should say there was no fault, and refer such woes to a law of Nature sufficiently known and unqualifiable, would justly incur contempt and hatred. They condemn the existing civilization. In Europe the balance of Nature had been out for at least half a century, and in the greatest countries far out. When the crash came it was equivalent to that error.

Consider the actual manner in which it came. This should persuade any mind still doubtful of the part which feeling plays, and of the balance. Germany, which launched the war, had given us formerly music and a literature attesting a beauty of feeling as great as any; but it is not doubtful that a one-sided science and a philosophy based upon it engrossed her, and had misled her. The perversion from which we suffered, and suffer still, was in her case espoused and logically followed; for she was not only, like other nations, intent upon material gains, she was steeped in that philosophy. Nietzsche, unnatural and keen-thinking, had found his interpreter for war in Bernhardt, and his popularizers in the whole

pedantic system of intellectual Germany. This nation was prepared to carry out the philosophy with a horrid consistency. In peace her chosen diplomats had no true sense of human feeling, and when she welcomed war her leaders ignored it. She roused a less logical world against her. But only the logic of events could have suggested that, among mankind, the fittest are not the least humane.

Consider, then, the sequel. In the struggle human dignity had risen to great heights of instinctive promise as well as of action; but the world, unaware of its secular authority, could make little of that promise wisely. The lesson of events is only glimpsed; there is no philosophy to confute that of Nietzsche, and a welter of other conflicts, loosed about us by material needs or notions, grows turbulent without new guidance from either science or religion. They are the quarrels of blind leaders of the blind on both sides, and some are bloody. What Nietzsche was to the ruling class of Germany, Karl Marx is to unhappy millions with little difference; for, although he speaks for human dignity, it is to material means that he directs their thought. In the absence of true guidance, there is no reason why these conflicts should not continue to the point of exhaustion, sowing the seed of others to come, which in turn will ripen and seed as those of war do; so that for wasted hopes and wasted life, tears and blood, the sole comfort is that ignorance finds when it feels.

In a sense, western civilization was always at stake. Time after time it has passed through crises. But it was never so tired, and between this and former crises there is no true resemblance. This crisis is unique as to cause, magnitude and possibilities, and it is without present remedy. No sure "touch of beauty moves away the pall from our dark spirits."

### XXXVII

It is reasonable to think that the crisis will not end until the balance of Nature shall have been redressed, instinctively or wisely.

What prolongs it is that material dispute is like jealousy, making the meat it feeds on. Following war, there is in most lands the mere struggle for existence, desperate as it cannot have been in early ages, when every man was face to face with Nature. A cheap outcry against materialism is idle; it mocks the victims. In any case

men will never cease to seek material gains, or at need to fight for them, and, when the need is great, considerations of human dignity are baffled or grow fierce. The struggle is lit with ideals formed by unassisted admiration, in the general ignorance of man's adventure; but they tend to be forgotten if gentle, and do but intensify the ordeal if not. They may even bear the fruit of horrors like those of the meanest war, as in Russia. War and social strife are alike in this, whatever happens, that it is only their inception and opening phase which excites any passion of sacrifice. Broils of instinct both, they must be spent and disappointed. It is only then that some attempt is made to find the normal balance, and in no material civilization will that be ever found.

We are in a vicious circle. It is a civilization which, ignoring half the law of life, provokes feeling to incessant revolts that are themselves ignorant; and it must change. *Naturam expellas furca tamen usque recurret.*

### XXXVIII

Apart from thought and a new spirit, what other means of redress can there be? None political, because the politics of such a civilization are always concerned with ways and means—with considerations in which any statesmanship is caught in a net. None religious, for lack of assurance, grasp and aim. None artistic, since art is always a mirror catching the tones of its time; those artists who miss or reject them are neglected.

It is notable that another obsession, that of curiosity, perverts all kinds of concern for our spiritual plight. The conquests of science have prepossessed them. Religious or esthetic, they have no very valiant trust in old principles, but rather expect that some discovery may change these any day, and many pietists and artists go themselves in search of discoveries, as if religion and art were branches of science. This is how it happens that, in an age singular for its exact knowledge, what used to be known as the black arts are in fashion, and one of them aspires again to religious value. But the case of art proper is a stranger instance.

Here is a domain that science did not and cannot infringe upon with any challenge of authority. Art had no beliefs to be recanted, or cryptic writings to be examined for their ill-known sense. Its

quest is not truth, but visible beauty; it has developed, apart and purely, from another instinct than that of curiosity. Science could enrich art's resources, but had nothing to do with its spirit, which must remain constant in whatever new expressions might be given to beauty. But votaries of art have tried to use the scientific method; expecting something new, they have attempted research. It is an age of much futility in this province of pleasure. Music and the graphic arts alike are kept in countenance by men who have forgotten or have not known the authority of beauty, and are made ugly to please the public appetite for novelty.

Impulses of instinctive redress there are in plenty, but they have either little wisdom or no ascendancy. The most popular and helpful of new creeds, calling itself Christian Science, is one of resolute self-illusion, even as to death. Humanitarian effort, however noble, beats the air as truly as Mr. Ford's faith in all-sufficient production is a dream of Alnaschar. We owe sanity chiefly to the inextinguishable interests of love and play, which are as much mistrusted by theorists as they are valued. The balance is not known.

### XXXIX

The claim of art to a larger place in life is urged eloquently and well. It has been heard since hand craft began to perish as uses were found for steam, and does not now, as at first, deny value to machinery, but insists on beauty as a human concern and civilizing agent. This claim is never denied. It is only heard like a counsel of perfection, with regret or indifference, by the busy mass of men. They do not suppose it vital. The assumption is that life as we know it is fairly normal, and that what is really pleaded concerns artists most; who, after all, should be glad of many opportunities to design and to advertise goods for sale, of new things like the cinema, and of more picture buyers than the world can ever have produced before. Art is a good thing, and beauty pleasant enough, but there is nothing to be done about this demand for more wages. There is, in fact, less and less to be done by good causes that cannot enter politics against material rivalries, or imitate the material tactics of strike and "ca' canny."

It occurs, in any case to few minds that, in order to be normal, all things men are conscious of, whether visible or not, must have

some tincture of beauty. What is the value allowed to a noble choir of poets? It is the poet to whom new thoughts capable of uplifting us come first. He is the only prophet. This may be known and felt in America, proud of a literature for the first time, as it was known and felt in England when the great Victorians wrote their masterpieces. But how many men in a thousand are touched with admiration more than to think there is some soul of meaning in things foolish? There was issued, a year ago, the report of a Royal Commission on the teaching of English, the greatest report ever printed for an English government, and by common consent wise, practical and necessary. It is already dished. Some fragments only of its wisdom can take effect, whereas it should have done for all schools what Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch is doing for a few fortunate students at Oxford. Properly, one of the arts is education. In place of it there is widely used a training for the material struggle, which cannot be escaped. The importance of education for progress is above that of any art else, yet in England there has been no first-class Minister of Education.

## XL

The balance will redress itself, and, great as they are, the miseries of our time will pass. We are taught as never before; but we shall not perish like one of Nature's temporary stocks, because we are shaped by factors stronger than the errors they permit, unfailing mentors of our ignorance. A gain proportioned to the stress we feel must follow.

To determine this subtle balance, kept eternally against error and for our advance, should be a task compensating men for any loss of old laws and prophets. For it is not a balance of scales in which we are austerely weighed. It is the propitious balance of a yacht that sweeps on her course, poised between wind and water, and there is this difference to make the metaphor poor, and our case better than a yachtsman's, that, the great factors of beauty and peril being constant, we may know them. We should be able with a teachable hand to feel the tiller. It indeed seems that, learning to admire well the travelling poise, and furnished with the chart here asked for, we might avoid the most distressing errors. Is this not the cosmic use of man's intelligence, foolish until then?



we have seen to be stronger than all destruction or dismay; and it must be the spirit of lasting religions. For what has come to the world is a new Apocalypse. To say so is not to be a voice crying in the wilderness, but to be one of many voices in the populous republic of letters who now, with one thought or another, praise beauty and proclaim its authority; and, as in Milton's day but far more universally, "there be pens and heads sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas, wherewith to present as with their homage and fealty the approaching reformation." We are "to outlive these pangs and wax young again, destined to become great and honorable." It is not doubtful. We have only to know first the ways of prosperous virtue—ways till now divined but doubted, admired but not authenticated, and lately lost. They will be established against wandering and question.

It is not without wonder at the prophecy that one sees how this must follow from the argument of the *Areopagitica*, making its faith in freedom good; nor without reverence for that order of the universe which Milton saw, as through a glass darkly.

## XLII

Why should it be feared that any true doctrine or good thought may be lost in such a reformation? As before, the law and the prophets are not destroyed but fulfilled, and with this knowledge, that fulfillment is itself the greatest of laws. The wonder is that a poet should have argued for liberty, the proved agent of that knowledge, as if he were aware of it; for to say that truth needs no policies and in saying so to expect a prosperous virtue implied this. But it is a far greater wonder that all men should presently know virtue to be part of the natural order, whereupon it must be the business of states no less than that of individual men, and governments be judged by their concern with it. We might be well content that such a meagre admiration as that of brute force cannot then mislead men, or ever again shake the faith of noble minds in a cataclysm. It is more than what they themselves admired as contrary to Nature will be valid, like the aims of a Ministry of Health.

Fear of such knowledge can only, indeed, trouble those who believe in an exclusive revelation. Instead of such a temporal and precarious light, there is something infinitely greater. There are

natural conceptions of goodness and of the mysterious Cause of things, such conceptions as every people and time must form; and it should be sufficient for good men to know that conception which responds best to the great abiding factors will best endure. As the new faith spreads and gains discretion, it must try them out.

But with this prospect no hierarchy, for plain reasons, can be satisfied. To welcome it would admit a misgiving where something is taught as exclusive truth, a test of that which claims to be above question, and an authority not that of the church itself. *Ex hypothesi* a church's authority is the highest, and has in one strong case avowed itself infallible. How is any test of it to be allowed? Here is a bold heresy bringing gifts, the gifts of a correcting and supplanting patronage, and every priest who is typical must murmur *Timeo Danaos*. Doubtless the "noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight," will be heard still.

There is one European people in whom the love of liberty is not lively, and there are others who let superstition choke it, though restive otherwise. These may be subservient to Rome. There are peoples outside Europe to whom the notion that life is anything worthy will appear too strange to let them accept the knowledge readily. But, although it is knowledge that will not be destroyed, and does not resemble in this the books of the Cumaean Sibyl, those rulers who may reject it will stand in the place of Tarquin, and their sway can only be beneficent as they grow humbler.

### XLIII

An older prescience than Milton's excites admiration. The supreme merit of Greek thought, which could not dream of progress, shone in its perception that esthetic sense is as much a part of wisdom as reason is. We have to return to this, retrieving the Renaissance, and with that return, the Renaissance is found to be an inexpugnable movement. It was correctly called a humanism. Confused, and not without grave error, it surged in the true line of our advance, and now, with a larger thought of beauty than even great Athenians knew, we see its consummation coming.

Alas! The thought may be larger, and better grounded: it is not, as in their day it was, a common heritage. A mind as subtle as Lord Balfour's could fail some twenty years ago, no more, to



seize this hope; because there is no standard of beauty and never can be one, he missed it. Lord Balfour made instead an ingenious plea for "authority." Man, he said, can be sure of nothing but that, and, undermining for it a true foundation of belief, he did not ask, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Yet the answer to that question brushed him like an angel's wing. There is a pathetic passage that shows it. He had seen that esthetic faculty is not evolved to aid the struggle for existence, or by it, and to say so helped his plea against naturalism. But mark: beauty's miracle abashed him as much as any man.

"We must believe," he wrote, though baffled, "that somewhere and for some Being there shines an unchanging splendor of beauty, of which in nature and in art we see (each of us from his own standpoint) only passing gleams and stray reflections, whose different aspects we cannot now co-ordinate, whose import we cannot fully comprehend, but which at least is something other than the chance play of subjective sensibility or the far-off echo of ancestral lusts."

Strange oversight! By man's mere gift of admiration, which beauty fosters, the nicest errors of authority—and some that were gross and ugly—have been directly judged. Because of this gift morals are more than mere utilities. It is also the heart of worship.

#### XLIV

There is no necessity to review the successive philosophies by which esthetics have been kept in a narrow field since the liberal thought of Athens defined itself imperfectly. Their scholastic hold is complete, of course, but will be loosed as it has been from time to time by new glosses. Schoolmen can only follow and do not pretend to lead the thought of their age. It is sufficient to see, for the present purpose, that the lore of philosophy, with that of theology and metaphysics, must undergo a sharp reevaluation and much of it be written off. Whatever zeal may atone for the negligence of science, urgent to repair this and to claim ascendancy, the scholastic delay must be reckoned with. Happily, there is no authority left so strong as that which science wields.

There is less need than there was thought to be of such intellectual glosses. The simplest facts of life, ascertained, have more than their value, which was never such as to influence men's be-

havior, and it is certain that a distinction between what is moral and what esthetic has nowhere been kept by the common sense of a people. In all languages, one may be sure, men have spoken of beautiful thoughts and fine deeds. It is not a Renaissance idiom. The ancient Hebrews praised the beauty of holiness and of wisdom, and even "the beauty of the Lord." This distinction, convenient but a false boundary, will not make the larger thought difficult for men in general, nor for the free churches. Now that these latter have cast behind them the fear of torture after death, or think of it vaguely, they will readily understand that it is beauty which most engages them—the beauty of heroism in many spiritual and moral aspects that dignify the life of man, and above all in that martyred teacher who, for Christians, was its divine incarnation.

It is among these churches and the fortunate peoples whom they serve that the verification of progress will have its first welcome. The free churches are steeped in humanism, and have not opposed to science the stiffest incredulity. Humanism may be said to have found in them, or even to have devised, a mysticism; and, however embarrassed still with outworn dogmas, they are a soil broken for new seed. The belief in progress took root here quickly. They had adapted to it much of their teaching when, in the heat of war, it withered, and the proof of its integrity and great worth is their justification. More: as against the popedom from which they broke away, this proof is the warrant of their liberty, their tolerant outlook and their bold reforms. It illuminates history. Reforms and a toleration bolder still must be its natural consequences among them, as liberty prospers.

But, all obstacles notwithstanding, I am persuaded that this revelation must take effect upon the world's life more rapidly, if yet unequally, than any new concept of past ages could have hoped to do. Not only is the effect made possible, obviously, by an organization for the wide diffusion of thought and knowledge, but it was the sun in a wise fable, not the wind, that stripped the traveler of his cloak. This revelation is genial. There must come a time, perhaps not distant, when the physical masteries and sleights that now beguile men will be commonplace, and there will then be natures quickened by them but not satisfied, more than there now are, ready to take a view of life which allows it lustre.

## XLV

This, then, is the darkest hour before a dawn. But one remembers how, even in the nightmare of war, a war not glorious but abominable, it was as if men instinctively knew what we are and shall be, such was the lustre shining on a race of heroes abused. For the choice of good rather than evil is a heroism. It calls but rarely for complete self-sacrifice, and only then can we glimpse again, for a moment, the splendor of that instinctive knowledge. However clear the revelation may be, it is not in cold blood that men aware of peril and beauty will ever see themselves as they are.

It is in cold blood that men have asked, but will not ask in time to come, why there is a contradiction between the bidding of plain self-interest and all that thrills and ennobles us, the conditions of survival and what makes life worth living; or that they have doubted that right must come before might and is the stronger force, so that it will not do to calculate, forgetting the contradiction or puzzled by it, but we have to use our strength liberally, as Nature uses hers. It was in cold blood that pathetic Jews tried long to think that godliness must prosper; and, in a bewilderment like theirs, we ourselves allege sometimes that honesty is the best policy. The truth rather seems to be packed in what was for most minds a dark saying: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."

One sees preparing among free peoples high-minded and laudable a happier civilization, rid of servile fancies, endowed with subtle knowledge and great powers, not abusing these gifts but enamored of a noble and manifest destiny. The peoples do not agree, in imagination, to worship in one church, or own one code of morals, or enrich one school of art, or practise one form of government, since Nature loves variety in all things; but, in a willing subjection to this destiny, they admire the variety and have one motive. It is a motive that should make men modest.

## XLVI

For what are we, beneath the Pleiades? We are a race that, after all, must vanish utterly away within a period, as Lord Balfour had reflected, trifling beside those tracts of time with which astronomers, and even geologists, "lightly deal in the course of their habitual speculations." We live and die, and our greatening race lives and dies: to what purpose? Mystery, and stupendous question!

I do not think that science will tell us the answer to this last question, or that all men will ever guess it alike. There are two guesses. Either the miracle of our conscious life, with all its achievement and dignity, has no purpose but itself, and this may satisfy our heroisms; or it portends an end unknown to us. I reflect, and it appears that to know the answer is not needful to men's right behavior under the miracle. Is the mystery? They are humbled by it more certainly than by any understanding of a sublime environment.

It is indifferent to the purpose of this writing whether one guess or the other be preferred. Here, however, is something greater than our minds and spirits, and everywhere men have thought it rational to worship this greatness as intelligent, rather than to think all due to the play of unconscious forces. It seems rational because, otherwise, these forces in all the universe would be inferior to a passing show, and we, so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty, should exceed what we come of and obey what is not sensible. We must regard the miracle, in that case, as not only an ancient but a *lusus naturae*; the less contains the greater. This I see, but not to dread with mind or spirit the God of such an evolution.

To whatever purpose one may submit quietly and gladly. We cease as single beings from the earth so that the race may know love and progress, and it may be that no life's excellence warrants a confident thought beyond death; yet, because our race itself is to cease at an unknown climax of development, the thought is tenable. Who, if he could, would annul the comfort of it? I only think that men have been too much concerned: God's beauty here and now shines clearly.