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NO. 4775

MATTHEW ARNOLD: THE HEROIC DIMENSIONS
OF MAN'S BEST SELF

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas

December, 1973

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Matthew Arnold instructed his friend Arthur Hugh Clough: "resolve to be thyself." The quotation is from one of Arnold's own poems of 1850 censuring Clough for his ambivalence. The phrase is a synthesis of Socrates' "Know thyself" and Thomas Carlyle's "Know what thou canst work at." In Sartor Resartus Carlyle refuted the possibility of the Socratic imperative, but Arnold's eclecticism permitted him to vary the original in order to accommodate both theories. A study of the poetry reveals what Lionel Trilling calls Arnold's "eclectic and dialectical method."¹ This practice of taking the best from existing theories while formulating his own permeates the works of Matthew Arnold.

Unlike Clough, who doubted his own teachings and was in a constant flux of opinion, Arnold managed a certain flexibility that allowed him to reassess a changing world without nullifying his own basic assumptions.

During Matthew Arnold's lifetime England was in permanent transition: the emergence of a modern industrial society, the new science and liberalized Christianity, and

¹Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1965), p. 13.

the democratic and humanitarian movements. To be a writer during this time required a curious and precarious balance: an alternation of steadfastness and change. In a letter to his sister Jane, Arnold explains his apparent contradictions: "Fret not yourself to make my poems square in all their parts. . . . My poems are fragments. . . . Do not plague yourself to find a consistent meaning . . . which in fact they do not possess through my weakness."² Trilling says that Arnold's effort to synthesize "produces a body of poetry which is philosophical but not systematic; what is declared at one point is contradicted at another."³

Arnold's moving back and forth between the traditions of romanticism and rationalism does present a challenge to the contemporary reader; no single or systematic approach can be applied to his works. An examination of a selection of Arnold's poems, written predominantly between 1845 and 1857, shows the author's reassessment of man's place in the new cosmology as necessitated by the scientific and technological advances of the century. The poems selected also suggest movement away from the romantic concept of the greatness of the past and yesterday's larger-than-life hero toward an acceptance of the best life as represented by the present generation of men. Arnold's theory, that the best self or right reason manifests itself in heroic men, in leaders,

²Ibid., p. 80

³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

and confirms ordinary men, is found throughout the poems studied.

Definition of Terms

Arnold wished to take the best from inherited institutions and assimilate it with contemporary thought. In the process he managed to coin various phrases that have become readily identifiable with the poet. The handy catchwords have, however, contributed in part to the failure of Arnold's appeal to the ordinary twentieth-century reader. His seeming delicacy and highmindedness lack the fiber and expedience demanded by many of today's readers. Trilling, one of Arnold's best modern critics, says that what is generally known about a writer's works "often reaches a point in its career where what he actually said is falsified even when he is correctly quoted."⁴ Trilling then uses some of Arnold's best known expressions: "the grand style," "culture," "sweetness and light," and calls them "pious and ridiculous phrases" as they often are used to misrepresent Arnold's real point of view.⁵ Arnold faced the problem of misrepresentation by his critics in his own lifetime.

The "pious and ridiculous" phrases become meaningful when enlarged upon and traced back to his special use of them. It is in On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer that Arnold discusses "the grand style."

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

The evidence of it occurs "when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject."⁶ Arnold had read Sir Joshua Reynolds and was indebted to him for the idea of the grand style. Reynolds meant the grand style in painting when he spoke of "leaving out particularities and retaining only general ideas," in order to achieve the "whole."⁷ However, Arnold applied Reynold's theory in a literary sense. Reynolds added the concepts of the heroic and the ideal to his theory of the "whole," according to Trilling, and gave as examples the events of Greek and Roman literature as the best sources of the heroic and the ideal. Reynolds said that Alexander's shortness was not important to the whole effect of Alexander's life and that he should not be represented as such. Trilling concludes that what Reynolds meant by the grand style was the effect the whole work of art had upon the viewer; Arnold meant the feeling one had from reading great literature.⁸

"Culture," as the English defined it, was given a negative sense, Arnold said. To them it suggested a

⁶Matthew Arnold, On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer, p. 265, cited in Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1965), p. 173.

⁷Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses Delivered in the Royal Academy, p. 40, cited in Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1965), p. 173.

⁸Trilling, op. cit., p. 174.

"frivolous and unedifying activity." To Arnold culture meant something altogether different. He believed that the motive for culture was social: "to leave the world better and happier than we found it." It is the study of perfection; it "moves by the force of scientific passion for pure knowledge and of the moral and social passion for doing good."⁹ However, he said that culture was not "acting and instituting," and he warns against action without thought, against the English preference of doing to thinking.¹⁰ Even though Arnold believed the old notions of society, politics, and religion had been too rigid, and though he was pleased to see the new flexibility, he cautioned man about the ephemeral lure of novelties. He contended that it was just in this sense that culture was needed, in the study of perfection, to help man distinguish between the faddish and the lasting.¹¹

Arnold further defines culture as an internal condition: it is "the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality."¹² Perfection, then is not something that is gained and forgotten, for with Arnold, it is "a growing and becoming."¹³ He speaks of culture as an internal condition, but he does not mean to imply that it is necessarily an individual thing. On the contrary, he intends

⁹Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, edited by J. Dover Wilson (London, 1960), pp. 43-45.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 46.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 47.

¹³Ibid., p. 48.

a culture that is social: "a general expansion," "a harmonious expansion of 'all' the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature, and is not consistent with the over-development of any one power at the expense of the rest."¹⁴ Though both strive for perfection, it is at this point that Arnold says that "culture goes beyond religion" as religion exercises influence over the moral side of man at the expense of the rest.¹⁵ These thoughts echo the lines from Reynolds' Discourses on the "whole."

Arnold forecast a bleak future for the advocate of culture in the nineteenth century. Even during his own day he was referred to as an "elegant or spurious Jeremiah."¹⁶ He saw three major areas of conflict between nineteenth century England and the promoter of culture: the idea of culture as "inward" opposed the mechanical and material civilization of the period, the idea of perfection as "a general expansion of the human family" clashed with the English notions of individualism and insular pride, and, finally, the idea of a "harmonious" expansion met headlong with the inflexibility of the day. The latter is what Arnold called the "intense energetic absorption in the particular pursuit we happen to be following."¹⁷

Extending the idea of the "particular pursuit" to mean the interests of the various classes of English society,

¹⁴Ibid. ¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 49. ¹⁷Ibid.

Arnold declared that culture sought to abolish classes and to make "the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere."¹⁸ He cited such men as Abelard of the Middle Ages, Lessing and Herder of eighteenth century Germany, and Saint Augustine as great men of culture "because they 'humanised' knowledge; because they broadened the basis of life and intelligence; because they worked powerfully to diffuse sweetness and light, to make reason and the will of God prevail."¹⁹

"Sweetness and light" was a term coined by Jonathan Swift, but it has become almost synonymous with the name of Matthew Arnold. Culture, to Arnold, was the study of perfection, and "sweetness and light" were the two most important characters of perfection. He thought that the "light" of culture would lead man from his provincial and therefore blind drift toward anarchy. He was concerned about such a possibility because of class attitudes on individual freedom and subsequent strikes and riots around the country. His disgust at the inertia of the ruling class paralleled his fear of strikes and riots. Arnold blamed the condition on the misuse of freedom: "Having, I say, at the bottom of our English Hearts a very strong belief in freedom, and a very weak belief in right reason, we are soon silenced when a

¹⁸Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 70-71.

man pleads the prime right to do as he likes, because this is our prime right too. . . ."20

Arnold was distressed to see the growing faith in "machinery"; he defined machinery as the means rather than the end or goal of legitimate human endeavor. He felt that freedom had become only more machinery for the Englishmen to worship, an end in itself without application to human life. He believed that the populace was in revolt without really knowing why they were revolting or what they wanted. Arnold's hope for the future lay in the State. He further believed that of the various types or categories of each class there existed a "best self," capable of rising above the class to form the State. The "extricated and elevated best self" from all classes would be found through the light or right reason of culture. The State, through implication, is also machinery according to Arnold, a State made up of "a collective best self or national right reason," but he believed that whatever good man invested in the State, it would come back to him in greater form and power. Thus, ideally, the State became the machinery of man.²¹

Sources of Data

No study of Matthew Arnold and his works would be complete without a reading of Trilling's work. Trilling's "biography of Arnold's mind" is an intimate record of

²⁰Ibid., pp. 78-79.

²¹Ibid., pp. 94-97.

Arnold's life and works. "We cannot be too grateful that Arnold has finally been interpreted by an intelligence as alert and supple as his own," wrote George F. Whicher in The New York Herald Tribune on the first publication of Matthew Arnold. The work follows the complexity and scope and unity of the mind of its subject. Trilling's treatment of Arnold's ideas as they developed is a particularly good book for this study with its nearly chronological analysis of the poems of 1845 to 1857.

For a complete and fully annotated edition of Arnold's poetry, Kenneth Allott's The Poems of Matthew Arnold is the best in print. The poems are arranged by order of their composition with lucid, yet succinct, footnoted information illuminating the meaning of each poem. There is also a head-note before each poem giving its date and source. Trilling's biography and Allott's annotated edition of the poems are essential companion pieces for the study of Arnold's poetry.

In spite of the degree of local reference in Arnold's own Culture and Anarchy, it is a work that touches on innumerable contemporary issues. For that reason alone, it is still a readable classic. The collection of essays dealing with social and political conditions was published in 1869, more than ten years following the writing of his best poetry (although much of the poetry was not published until as late as 1867). In the essays are found some of Arnold's most famous arguments for the role of literary culture in the

spiritual life of man. The essays deal with the study of perfection and contend that "in each man's breast" there is a "best self." Culture and Anarchy is a prose statement of what Arnold attempted earlier to say in poetry. Even though the work post-dates the poems discussed in this study, its relevance is seen because of the unity of Arnold's complete body of writings. Trilling says that the "poet's vision gave the prose writer his goal. 'To see the object as it really is' is no less the aim of the poet than of the practical man; Arnold the poet saw first the problems Arnold the practical man tried to solve."²²

In addition to the sources already referred to, selected essays from various periodicals, anthologies, histories, and critical works are valuable for their scholarship and criticism. Their commentary, of real interest and significance relating to the poems and ideas discussed, has added strength and incisiveness to this study.

Method of Procedure

In order to show Arnold's reassessment of man's place in the universe as well as his synthesis of the traditions of romanticism and rationalism, it has been necessary to read the poetry supporting this assumption in light of the historical period in which he lived. It has also been necessary to take into consideration certain biographical incidents

²²Trilling, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

made known through correspondence to friends and relatives, as they reflect on his poetry. In addition to the historical and biographical influences, Arnold's philosophical assumptions, "undulating and diverse," have had to be considered.

Significance of the Study

To study a Victorian writer in the framework of the time in which he lived and worked is an arduous task, but a rewarding one. Not only is there the challenge and intellectual stimulation gained by reading the works within the framework of the Victorian period itself, but there is also the recognition of the similarities between that age and our own. Trevelyan, the nineteenth century historian, said of the Victorian era: "Man had acquired formidable tools for refashioning his life before he had given the least thought to the question of what sort of life it would be well for him to fashion."²³ The remarks sound familiarly like Marshall McLuhan on the electronic revolution today.

Kenneth Allott calls Arnold's relevance his "modern sensibility." "He teaches man to understand what he feels and how to live with his feelings. . . ." "To my way of thinking he expresses better than any other Victorian poet, and better than most poets, what it feels like to live

²³G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History, (Toronto, 1947), p. 464.

in a world that has not been arranged to please its inhabitants."²⁴

²⁴Kenneth Allott, "Matthew Arnold," Victorian Literature, edited by Robert O. Preyer (New York, 1966), p. 119.

CHAPTER II

INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Scientific and Technological Advances

In order to understand fully the changing time and rapid events of the nineteenth century, it is helpful to look back to the meaning and importance of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. Trevelyan says that "sometimes in forming a mental picture of a period of the past, people seize hold of the new features and forget the overlap of the old."¹ As a result of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 the Englishman's consciousness was changed; his social relationships and his philosophy were revolutionized. Parliamentary authority (assured by William III and Mary II's acceptance of the Bill of Rights) replaced the rigidity of human relationships and ideas that were a result of the social structure of the Middle Ages. The wealth and power of the governing class did not depend on technical advances or scientific experiment. On the contrary, the feudal lords were chiefly concerned with maintaining the status quo. The social status and intellectual conservatism of the feudal order finally resulted in its own breakdown. In the eighteenth century it was replaced by the freedom-seeking

¹Trevelyan, op. cit., p. xi.

commercial bourgeoisie committed to trade, exploration, and invention.²

The positiveness and assurance of the Period of Enlightenment with its "landed aristocrat and commercial gentlemen" was by 1750 giving way to the rise of industrialism and the reign of the industrial capitalist.³ The new sciences, propounded by Charles Darwin and Sir Charles Lyell, the Industrial Revolution, and the growth of democracy and humanitarianism were three of the issues clouding the Victorian scene that writers would seek to make clear.

When Matthew Arnold warned his friend Clough that he must not try to solve the universe in his poetry, he was quick to add: "there [is] a difference between solving life and integrating and unifying it."⁴ The disunity of the nineteenth century is what Arnold tried to cope with in his poetry. From the upheaval of the times Arnold sought to preserve the best, to "conciliate epochs."⁵ His despair of the changing times is heard in a short poem called "To Fausta," written around 1844:

Joy comes and goes, hope ebbs and flows
Like the wave;

²"Glorious Revolution," The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York, 1968).

³"Enlightenment," The Reader's Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. (New York, 1969).

⁴Trilling, op. cit., p. 32.

⁵Ibid., p. 13.

Change doth unknit the tranquil strength of men.

 Dreams dawn and fly, friends smile and die
 Like spring flowers;
 Our vaunted life is one long funeral.

Men dig graves with bitter tears
 For their dead hopes, and all,
 Mazed with doubts and sick with fears,
 Count the hours.

We count the hours! These dreams of ours,
 False and hollow,
 Do we go hence and find they are not dead?
 Joys we dimly apprehend,
 Faces that smiled and fled,
 Hopes born here, and born to end,
 Shall we follow?⁶

The diction of the poem is pessimistic, but the overall tone of the poem can be interpreted as hopeful. The key words are "joy," "hope," "change," and "funeral," "graves," "dead." The cycle indicated by the choice of words suggests the changing times in which Arnold lived. It was the end of long-held traditions, but his optimism for the two people of the poem is indicated by the invitation of the concluding line: "Shall we follow?" Arnold's belief that man should seek happiness is in the "hope springs eternal" feeling of the end of the poem. "A Question" was a later title for the poem and probably a more personal reflection of Arnold's state of mind. "Fausta" refers to Jane, his favorite, older sister, and the person of whom the question is asked.⁷

⁶Kenneth Allott, The Poems of Matthew Arnold (New York, 1972), p. 48.

⁷Ibid., p. 48.

Geological theories concerning the age of the earth were being made known by the end of the eighteenth century by the Scottish geologist James Hutton. There was great religious opposition to Hutton's theory of Uniformism as it ran contrary to the Genesis account of creation. As great as the opposition was, however, it could not halt the progress the new sciences were making by the early nineteenth century.⁸

Low and Sanders in their political history of England said that if the Victorian period lives "as a distinct epoch, [it] will do so because of its science rather than its politics." They continued by saying that the statesmen failed to grasp the importance of the scientific movement, but the men of letters were deeply affected by it. "The scientific temper impressed its stamp upon the Victorian literature, and directly or indirectly affected most of its leading minds."⁹

Matthew Arnold believed that a poet's thoughts had to remain with the main stream of life if he were to be heard. His poem "To an Independent Preacher," written between 1844-1847 and retitled "In Harmony with Nature," is evidence that Arnold was contemplating the new science. At this point Arnold urges the superiority of man over nature:

⁸"Uniformism," The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York, 1968).

⁹Sidney Low and Lloyd C. Sanders, The Reign of Queen Victoria, Vol. XII of The History of England, 3rd ed., 12 vols. (London, 1911), p. 455.

'In harmony with Nature?' Restless fool,
 Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,
 When true, the last impossibility--
 To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool!

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
 And in that more lie all his hopes of good.

.
 Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
 Nature and man can never be fast friends.
 Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!¹⁰

The last two lines seem to echo Darwin's "survival of the fittest." But Arnold implies that between man and nature there is no contest if man will only realize the "more" of his being.

Sir Charles Lyell was carrying on the work of Hutton and was the person who led Darwin to write about his inbreeding experiments and his theory of evolution by natural selection. In 1840 Darwin published his findings as a naturalist aboard the Beagle (1831-1836) in the pamphlet Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle. Four years later, at Lyell's prompting, Darwin wrote an essay on his theory of evolution, but did not publish it until 1858, one year before his Origin of Species.¹¹ With all the scientific activity it is no wonder that the writers of the period were steeped in it.

Allott's note on "In Harmony with Nature" points out the recurrence of the nature theme much later (1873) in Arnold's

¹⁰Allott, Poems, pp. 53-54.

¹¹"Charles Robert Darwin," The Reader's Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. (New York, 1969).

Literature and Dogma. Arnold muses: "Ah, what pitfalls are in that word Nature! . . . Do you mean we are to give full swing to our inclinations. . . . The constitution of things turns out to be somehow against it . . . the free development . . . of our apparent self has to undergo a profound modification from the law of our higher real self, the law of righteousness."¹² The "more" of man's being implies the "real" self, or, his best self, an idea Arnold recalls again in "In Utrumque Paratus."

Allott says of "In Utrumque Paratus": "The alternatives of the title are the world as emanation (man has descended) or as eternal matter achieving consciousness in man (man has ascended)."¹³ The poem reiterates the metaphysical "Who am I and from where did I come?" The poet is imagining that the earth was formed by "the silent mind of One all-pure" but that once it was made, the creator "Took then its all-seen way." Man was left alone to try and discover "the all-pure fount. . . ." Emulating Plotinus, the poet then declares that the only way that man can rediscover the "Fountain" is "by lonely pureness."

If, in the silent mind of One all-pure,
 At first imagined lay
 The sacred world; and by procession sure
 From those still deeps, in form and colour dressed,

¹²Matthew Arnold, The Works of Matthew Arnold, VII, 357, 361, cited in Kenneth Allott, The Poems of Matthew Arnold (New York, 1972), pp. 53-54.

¹³Allott, Poems, p. 54.

Seasons alternating, and night and day,
The long-mused thought to north, south, east, and west.
Took then its all-seen way;

O waking on a world which thus-wise springs!
Whether it needs thee count
Betwixt thy waking and the birth of things
Ages or hours--O waking on life's stream!
By lonely pureness to the all-pure fount
(Only by this thou canst) the coloured dream
Of life remount!

In the second half of the poem the scientific notions
of the day are again alluded to:

But, if the wild unfathered mass no birth
In divine seats hath known;
In the blank, echoing solitude if Earth,
Rocking her obscure body to and fro,
Ceases not from all time to heave and groan,
Unfruitful oft, and at her happiest throe
Forms, what she forms, alone.¹⁴

The diction of the fourth stanza seizes the coldness of
science as it pictures Earth as some fatherless, mindless
mute rocking back and forth in the great void of time and
space. The ceaseless heaving and groaning of earthly for-
mation suggest the "big bang" theory of the origin of the
universe. The last two stanzas are a synthesis of the first
four:

O seeming sole to awake, thy sun-bathed head
Piercing the solemn cloud
Round thy still dreaming brother-world outspread!
O man, whom Earth, thy long-vexed mother, bare
Not without joy--so radiant, so endowed
(Such happy issue crowned her painful care)--
Be not too proud!

Oh when most self-exalted most alone,
Chief dreamer, own thy dream!

¹⁴Ibid., p. 55.

Thy brother-world stirs at thy feet unknown,
 Who hath a monarch's hath no brother's part;
 Yet doth thine inmost soul with yearning teem.
 --Oh, what a spasm shakes the dreamer's heart!
 'I, too, but seem.'¹⁵

Man's evolution (ascent) from the "still dreaming brother-world" is an allusion to the Victorian idea of evolution. The poet scolds haughty man: "Be not too proud" to recognize your mother Earth and your baser brothers; their existence is as real as yours! Man's "crown" is perhaps his gift of intelligence. The concluding two lines are beautiful, yet in content they strike a frightening note. Arnold may be saying that in those private moments when man transcends worldly matter and believes in his divine origin--his reign of supremacy over nature--he must still be reminded that his intelligence is subordinate to a higher one. The "yearning" may mean to suggest the possibility that man only imagines he is superior to other earthly forms. The "what if" game the poet-dreamer plays has a definite nightmarish quality about it. The idea that universal nature has nothing to do with man looks forward to the theme of "Empedocles on Etna."

The Reform Bill of 1832 was the outward manifestation of England's gradual conversion to liberalism. By this time the rise of industrial power was in full swing. To think of the change from conservatism to liberalism as an overnight thing would be erroneous, however. The shift from an agrarian and

¹⁵Ibid., p. 56.

commercial society of the feudal system to a modern industrial one, though striking, was a very slow process. Raymond Williams says that the English were painfully slow "in perceiving exactly where they were in a process of change," that it wasn't until the 1830s that the term "industrialism" was first used in England. And even then it was very late in naming something that had been in existence for many years.¹⁶

It was the inventions of the eighteenth century that made it possible for England in the nineteenth century to become the world leader in textiles. Coal mines and the use of steel became of paramount importance to the time. Factories and industrial towns sprang up all over the country. Railroads and steamboats brought new changes and altered the life of the nation.¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle expresses with poignancy the effect of the tumultuous time on the people:

And yet I will venture to believe that in no time, since the beginnings of Society, was the lot of those dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us. It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched; many men have died; all men must die. . . . But it is to live miserable we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire; it is to die slowly in

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, cited in Robert O. Preyer, editor, Victorian Literature (New York, 1967), p. xi.

¹⁷ R. J. Evans, The Victorian Age 1815-1914 (London, 1960), pp. 96-97.

the accursed iron belly of a Phalaris' Bull! This is and remains for ever intolerable to all men whom God has made. Do we wonder at French Revolutions, Chartisms, Revolts of Three Days! The times, if we will consider them, are really unexampled.¹⁸

The industrialism that divided English life into opposing classes of labor and capital and brought with it much of the overall misery of the period contributed in large measure to the spiritual sickness Carlyle describes.

Industrialism also brought about a rise in the level of material goods. Arnold's wry comment can be appreciated:

. . . since Queen Elizabeth's time the production of silk-stockings has wonderfully increased, and silk-stockings have become much cheaper, and procurable in greater abundance by many more people, and tend perhaps, as population and manufactures increase to get cheaper and cheaper. . . . But bread and bacon have not become much cheaper with the increase of population since Queen Elizabeth's time, nor procurable in much greater abundance by many more people. . . . And if bread and bacon have not kept pace with our population, and we have many more people in want of them now than in Queen Elizabeth's time, it seems vain to tell us that silk-stockings have kept pace with it, and that we are to get our comfort out of that.¹⁹

The notion of increased production of goods unrelated to man's essential needs when so many went hungry, were poorly housed, and ran ragged seemed ridiculous to Arnold.

Written at mid-century, "To George Cruikshank," is still another comment on the spiritual illness besetting the

¹⁸Thomas Carlyle, "Democracy," Past and Present, cited in Robert O. Preyer, editor, Victorian Literature (New York, 1967), pp. xiv, xv.

¹⁹Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, pp. 188-189.

Victorian era. On seeing for the first time George Cruikshank's painting of "The Bottle," a plea for abstinence, Arnold supposedly composed the sonnet later retitled "Human Limits":

Artist, whose hand, with horror winged, hath torn
From the rank life to towns this leaf! and flung
Valleys and men to middle fortune born,

Not innocent, indeed, yet not forlorn--
Say, what shall calm us when such guests intrude
Like comets on the heavenly solitude?
Shall breathless glades, cheered by Dian's horn

Cold-bubbling springs, or caves?--Not so! The soul
Breasts her own griefs; and, urged too fiercely, says:
'Why tremble? True, the nobleness of man

May be by man effaced; man can control
To pain, to death, the bent of his own days.
Know thou the worst! So much, no more, he can.²⁰

Arnold's first stanza vividly portrays one of the real outward problems of the period, drunkenness among the working class. But it is that which led to the problem that was the real enigma. Unexplained melancholy, ennui, and pervasive loneliness seemed to be the curse of the Victorian. Trilling suggests a basis for the condition:

[Science depicts] a cosmos without soul, and science creates the machine that shapes the new society. Loss of belief in a cosmic order requires men to retreat to their individual selves, and the result of this philosophic act is confirmed by the individualism of a manufacturing society. 21

Trilling's words are not unlike Carlyle's "heartworn, weary, isolated man."

²⁰Allott, Poems, pp. 59-60.

²¹Trilling, op. cit., p. 111.

"Say, what shall calm us when such guests intrude" brings to mind Arnold's "Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind?"²² Arnold's allusive answer says it is Homer of "the grand style" and Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher, but most of all, it is Sophocles, "of the Attic stage. . . ." He "saw life steadily and saw it whole." The three men represent what Arnold believed culture meant in its truest sense. Sophocles was a synthesis of Homer's "sweetness and light" and Epictetus' discipline.

Arnold says that man cannot elude his inexplicable curse through "the bottle"; he must control his fate. The noble or "best" self must be extricated so as to conquer the spiritual disease. The "best" self or right reason is the "light" that Arnold means as one of the characters of perfection.

The last line of the sonnet "Know thou the worst!" refers to Cruikshank's final plate in a group of eight showing a drunkard's decline. The inscription under "The Bottle" reads: "The bottle has done its work--it has destroyed the infant and the mother, it has brought the son and the daughter to vice and to the streets, and has left the father a hopeless maniac."²³ Such heavy-handed didacticism makes the contemporary reader squeamish, but it was a significant utterance for the time. True to the tone of the painting, Arnold's poem, too, is didactic. He concludes by

²²Allott, Poems, p. 105. ²³Ibid., p. 60.

saying that this man can do no more. His "nobleness" has been "effaced." What is noteworthy here is Arnold's constant theme of the possibility of the presence of man's best self.

The Social and Political Milieu

As the political actions of the Reform Bill of 1832 extended power to the middle class, the Chartist Movement was a similar attempt to solve working class problems. Though Chartism itself failed, industrial trade unions (that are much the same today) grew from it. The Miner's Association, formed in 1841, was the first such union. The Mines Act of 1842 made it illegal for mine owners to hire women and children under ten. This was one of the first humanitarian acts of the reform period. Many other trades formed protective unions and hired lawyers to manage their affairs, while others emphasized the importance of education for the working man.²⁴

The implications of the new reforms were farther reaching than the acts themselves. Evans notes with irony this fact:

The newly enfranchised class of merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers, and farmers who would henceforth determine the composition of the Commons, really had more in common with classes below them than with the aristocrats to whom they owed their new power; and sooner or later they would want to extend the

²⁴Evans, op. cit., p. 100.

franchise in order to obtain a greater share of political power for themselves. Of still more importance was the fact that in changing the Constitution they had sanctioned the principle of change itself. Hitherto, the Constitution had been sacred, untouchable; now it had become a piece of mere machinery, and what had been done once could be done again. The nature of politics had changed.²⁵

The Whig Aristocrats, who were responsible for the Reform Bill of 1832 that changed the "sacred and untouchable" Constitution to meet the national demand for economic and social reform, created a more democratic act than they had intended.

The shift of importance from the House of Lords to the House of Commons meant the transfer of power to a new ruling class. What followed this momentous development was a gradual shift of emphasis from the politically important individuals that made up government to the body of government itself, one concerned with the problems of the national life.²⁶

Writers and historians see this shift fairly clearly in retrospect, but for one to have had this kind of vision during the time of the upheaval is unusual. Matthew Arnold had that kind of vision. In 1869 Arnold's idea of a collective best self that made up the national center of authority or the all-important State sounds remarkable like the one Evans describes.

Arnold's "Horatian Echo," written in 1847, refers to the Chartist agitation of the same year. The strikes and riots of the period were the result of an "invading populace." The

²⁵Ibid., p. 65.

²⁶Ibid., p. 68.

poem also hints at the idle polemics of the opposing parties in Parliament:

Omit, omit, my simple friend,
 Still to enquire how parties tend,
 Or what we fix with foreign powers.
 If France and we are really friends,
 And what the Russian Czar intends,
 Is no concern of ours.

Us not the daily quickening race
 Of the invading populace
 Shall draw to swell that shouldering herd.
 Mourn will we not your closing hour,
 Ye imbeciles in present power,
 Doomed, pompous, and absurd!

And let us bear, that they debate
 Of all the engine-work of state,
 Of commerce, laws, and policy,
 The secrets of the world's machine,
 And what the rights of man may mean,
 With readier tongue than we.

.....

The day approaches, when we must
 Be crumbling bones and windy dust;
 And scorn us as our mistress may,
 Her beauty will no better be
 Than the poor face she slights in thee,
 When dawns that day, that day.²⁷

The first and last stanzas seem to be directly connected.

The first instructs his "ambitious friend" ("To An Ambitious Friend" was the original title) not to be concerned with affairs of state, politics and foreign affairs. The last stanza justifies the first's instruction by suggesting that everything is a victim of time, and whatever directs man, is his "mistress" now will be no more enduring than that man

²⁷Allott, Poems, pp. 57-59.

himself. "Ye imbeciles in present power, /Doomed, pompous, and absurd": Could Arnold have foreseen the eventual change of power implied by the new reform?

The "bad days" in "To a Friend"²⁸ and the "thousand discords" of "Quiet Work" further note the troubled time in which Arnold was living and writing some of his best poetry. In the first poem Arnold says that in the "bad days" man can receive comfort and elevation from great men of the past. He suggests blind Homer, "the clearest souled of men"; Epictetus, the Stoic, for the disciplined demeanor necessary for the times; and, Sophocles, "whose even-balanced soul . . . business could not make dull, nor passion wild."

"Quiet Work" is an apostrophe to Nature. The poet is asking Nature to teach him patience. He compares the toiling, scheming, hurrying tendencies of his day to the cosmic tranquility which the silent stars perfect:

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,

.....

Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplished in repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry!

Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,
Man's fitful uproar mingling with his toil,
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,

Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting;
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.²⁹

²⁸Ibid., pp. 104-105.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 106-107.

Allott notes that Arnold's attitude toward nature can be traced to Spinoza and Goethe.³⁰ What Arnold suggests in the poems, he later says explicitly in Culture and Anarchy: Man should avail himself of the "best that has been thought and known in the world." It is through a striving for perfection that man will achieve happiness.

By 1850 a slight but significant movement is seen in Arnold's thought. At mid-century he is still lamenting the passing era--yesterday is still "The Golden Age," but his poem entitled "Courage" suggests more action, though subtle, than the previous Arnold. The Carlylean/Goethean influence, that the act of renunciation may offer a real beginning of life,³¹ is evident in the following lines:

True, we must tame our rebel will;
 True, we must bow to Nature's law;
 Must bear in silence many an ill;
 Must learn to wait, renounce, withdraw.³²

In the second and third stanzas the poet appeals to man to will himself not to act haphazardly even though it may become necessary to renounce the concept of Nature. He cautions man not to get caught up in the "accept it because it is new and compelling" movement, but to draw upon the "light" of the men of another day who saw the world in proper perspective:

Yet now, when boldest wills give place,
 When Fate and Circumstance are strong,

³⁰Ibid., p. 106.

³¹Ibid., p. 141.

³²Ibid.

And in their rush the human race
Are swept, like huddling sheep, along;

Those sterner spirits let me prize,
Who, though the tendence of the whole
They less than us might recognize
Kept, more than us, their strength of soul.³³

The fourth stanza lauds as heroic the "dauntless" suicidal death of Cato, great-grandson of Cato the Censor, who chose to die of his own hand rather than surrender to Caesar. Again, we see a note of approving action, but this time it is only because Cato's act was sanctioned by Stoic teaching.³⁴ Stanzas five and six praise Byron's force of will to stand "in anguish, doubt, desire." Though it is the courage of both men that Arnold is praising, it is still an interesting pair to put side by side: the thoughtful, Stoical Cato, and the energetic, swashbuckling Byron.

The last stanza of the poem is a wish for mankind to will a kind of heroic courage:

Our bane, disguise it as we may,
Is weakness, is a faltering course,
Oh that past times could give our day,
Joined to its clearness, of their force.³⁵

Arnold sees the demise of the old routine; he realizes that change is imminent. He petitions for courage to renounce the old and accept a change, but he still has one foot in the past as he sees in it the strength and clearheadedness that his own age does not reflect.

³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid. ³⁵Ibid., p. 142.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Decline of Traditional Beliefs

There were various causes that led to the weakening of religious faith. One of the main reasons was the widespread interest in science and the subsequent discrediting of the non-historical Mosaic account of creation. The universities were not producing men of the Church because the "creed demanded a credulity which their intelligence could not allow."¹ It was not only the bright university men, however, who were beginning to question religion. A lack of faith was growing even among the working people. "Secularism" was replacing the Victorian moral structure and the belief in a life hereafter. Evans believes that the leadership in the Church was not keeping pace with the changing times and blames the decline in moral values on the narrow perspective of the Church leaders:

. . . scientific and industrial inventions and discovery had effected a revolution in the everyday life of man which required a re-examination of the orthodox formulae, and a restatement of the Christian religion, in the light of the new knowledge which was opening up a sublime concept of creation, infinitely greater than anything based on the more limited data of previous generations. The Anglo-Catholic movement offered a return to mediaevalism, and insisted on the

¹Trilling, op. cit., p. 209.

insufficiency of man alone, while everything in daily life stressed modernity, and the dazzling prospects of man's own powers.²

The decreasing influence of Christianity led to a struggle between the traditions of romanticism and rationalism. Nineteenth century man could no longer believe in the idea of a cosmos depicted by Christianity alone. Rationalism had begun to reveal a universe where the "course of nature and the values of man" ran contrary.³ Matthew Arnold's poem "Self-Dependence" pictures a man caught between the old and the new:

Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At this vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the starlit sea.⁴

The imagery of a ship being carried out to sea parallels the rapid changes nineteenth century man was experiencing. The helplessness of the vessel set adrift is similar to man's futility in the current of historical progress.

Allott suggests the title of "Self-Dependence" may have come from Emerson's "Self-Reliance."⁵ The transcendental note of the remainder of the poem further indicates an Emersonian influence. The poet is apostrophizing:

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send;
'Ye who from my childhood up have calmed me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end!

²Evans, op. cit., p. 348.

³Trilling, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴Allott, Poems, p. 142.

⁵Ibid.

'Ah, once more,' I cried, 'ye stars, ye waters,
 On my heart your mighty charm renew;
 Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
 Feel my soul becoming vast like you!'⁶

The desperation of these lines reveals the frustration of the poet. They also hint at the poet's loss of communion with nature. At least the answers he once found in nature seem to be no longer what the poet is seeking. The voice that answered the poet's cry commands him to be strong of will:

'Wouldst thou be as these are? Live as they.

.

For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting
 All the fever of some differing soul.

'Bounded by themselves, and unregardful
 In what state God's other works may be,
 In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
 These attain the mighty life you see.'

In Arnold's Discourses in America he speaks of the "voices [that] were in the air . . . a voice also from this side of the Atlantic,--a clear and pure voice. . . ." ⁷ The "voice" in Discourses is definitely Emerson's, (and it is likely that the "air-born" voice of "Self-Dependence" is also that of Emerson). The last stanza of the poem reaffirms the philosopher's teachings in "Self-Reliance":

O air-born voice! Long since, severely clear,
 A cry like thine in mine own heart I hear:

⁶Ibid., p. 143.

⁷Matthew Arnold, Discourses in America, IV, 349, 352 of The Works of Matthew Arnold, 15 vols., cited in Kenneth Allott, The Poems of Matthew Arnold (New York, 1972), p. 52.

'Resolve to be thyself; and know that he,
Who finds himself, loses his misery!

"Self-Dependence" might be looked at as a poem of transition. Arnold is still "speaking" to nature but he does not seem to be listening to her. The voice that reassures him is not nature's. It is the remembered voice of a man. It is in the end his own voice that he heeds. Again, Arnold has alluded to the best self that resides within man. "Self-Dependence" is Arnold's attempt to get at his own best self. The poem probably postdates Arnold's romantic involvement with his famous Marguerite and may reflect his dejection at the end of the affair, as well as his feelings about man and the cosmos.

Trilling says that Arnold left Marguerite in order "to approach his true self," and that Arnold also believed that this seeking after "his true but unrealized nature" was somehow meant to be.⁸ At the end of the Marguerite affair, Arnold wills himself to return to his writing, but Trilling notes that "between his separation from Marguerite and the full course of his life of action there intervenes a period of profoundest melancholy. It is not the old cosmic and philosophical melancholy: it is personal and intimate."⁹ The resolve to be firm of will may not be as strong as the last lines of "Self-Dependence" make it seem.

⁸Trilling, op. cit., p. 131. ⁹Ibid., p. 132.

The malady of spirit that Arnold expressed is "one of the inevitabilities of a social organization in which the wisdom of society can no longer be accepted."¹⁰ A turning inward is the logical action, but it may lead to a feeling of hopelessness until the transition is made. Arnold's poetry at this time carries that note of despair.

To speak of a decline in religious faith without also mentioning the rise of evangelism during the same period of time, although the two facts seem to be contradictory, would be a serious omission. During the first one-third of the nineteenth century many changes were taking place because of the diffusion of evangelical religion into all levels of English society. Perhaps the evangelical movement would have had a much less significant effect had it not been for the French Revolution and its threat of "French Republican atheism."¹¹ The dread of a loss of a way of life gave rise to the Non-Conformist movement. Trevelyan says that "indifferentism and latitudinarianism in religion now seemed seditious and unpatriotic, and a concurrent change in manners took place, from license or gaiety to hypocrisy or to virtue."¹² The French threat, coupled with the humanitarian movement of the time, reinforced the religious seriousness and the influence of evangelical

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130. ¹¹ Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 492-494.

¹² Ibid., p. 493.

religion in English society. The Established Church, bound by rules and tradition, had allowed the Non-Conformists to increase in number and power by their own indifference to the needs of the day. The Church "had neither the organization nor the zeal"¹³ to carry Christianity to the new industrial areas. To the Establishment it was the Church that took precedence over soul saving anyway, but the evangelists welcomed the opportunity to go out into the industrial districts. It was the Church's lack of vision and proper reforms that made it possible for the growth of the Non-Conformist sects which eventually led to the contention between the Establishment and the Dissent.¹⁴

The pious, zealous activity of the Nonconformists was in part that which helped popularize the term "Philistine." The new man with his combination of "individualist commercialism and equally individualist type of religion"¹⁵ unquestionably produced a self-reliant member of society, but neither allowed a place for art or beauty. It was at that point that Matthew Arnold took up the banner for culture.

The self-reliance Arnold believed to be good. He was concerned, however, with so much activity without its being preceded by a great deal more thought. His fear of acting without thinking, of following some light of reason without carefully examining that "light" to make certain that it was

¹³Ibid., p. 494. ¹⁴Ibid. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 493.

the very best light possible explains his seeming inactivity. It also explains why Arnold was condemned by many as "bookish" and "pedantic." Arnold was a liberal himself but one "tempered by experience, reflection, and renouncement."¹⁶ He did not disapprove of the Non-Conformists; he did condemn their "Philistinism." He wished to add to their liberal tendencies the "sweetness and light" of culture.

However, Arnold himself had problems with right direction. At mid-century he was bothered by doubt and inactivity. The frustration and despair of "Empedocles on Etna" may be the tragic drama of Arnold's own spiritual dilemma. H. W. Garrod contends that "so far as he [Empedocles] has life, [he] has the life of his poet."¹⁷ Garrod talks about the unhappy lot of the academician, the thinker, and says that this type of man is given for the most part to the mind while the senses and the spirit are sacrificed. To Garrod, Arnold was such a man; Empedocles was also such a man.¹⁸

Empedocles is a complex embodiment of Arnold's own feelings toward religion and society. Trilling aptly puts it when he describes Empedocles' condition:

¹⁶Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, p. 41.

¹⁷H. W. Garrod, Poetry and The Criticism of Life (Cambridge, 1931), p. 42.

¹⁸Ibid.

Though the misery of Empedocles is chiefly the misery of a man facing a cosmic fact he cannot endure, there is another cause for his despair: he cannot endure the social world; not only has he lost community with Nature, he has lost community with his fellow-men.¹⁹

Cut loose from everything, Empedocles has descended to the depths of despair and is set wandering in the labyrinth of his own reason. Although this chapter's emphasis is mainly on religion, other influences will have to be included in the discussion if "Empedocles on Etna" is to be used to point up the decline in traditional beliefs. Karl Marx talked about how the material mode of life in the end determined the intellectual, and though he never insisted that the economic element was the only determiner, he did feel it was the necessary one.²⁰ Just as materialism and intellectualism seem to present a dichotomy, upon close analysis a connection between the two can be detected. The same method of reasoning can apply to "Empedocles on Etna." Some critics see the poem as a social statement; some see it as history; and still others contend it is about religion and philosophy.

"Empedocles on Etna" is about all those things. The poem is really a reflection of the times, yet it is the poet's personal feelings about the whole scene: past, present, and future. The connections are there, but they are not

¹⁹Trilling, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁰Ralph Fox, "Marxism and Literature," The Novel and the People, cited in Mark Schorer, Criticism (New York, 1958), p. 135.

observable without some effort. The decline of the influence of the Church, the rise of power of the Non-Conformists, the struggle between rationalism and romanticism urged on by the work of the new scientists are all somehow wound up into the tragic drama of "Empedocles on Etna." John P. Farrell says that Arnold saw history as a tragic action and that the nineteenth century "evolved something like a cosmic authority out of history, out of man's temporal experience."²¹ Farrell goes on to explain the nature of Empedocles by saying that "Arnold attempts to generalize the fate of his protagonists by relating their experience to a tragic disorder in the movement of history."²² If one sees Empedocles' problem as being contrary to the universal scheme of things, Farrell's interpretation, then, is a credible one.

Trilling does not see the real drama of the poem as being in the "internal struggle of its hero or in its resolution." He thinks the juxtaposition of the rational, scientific Empedocles with the romantic, sensuous Callicles presents the real drama of the poem.²³ In other words it is the contrasting worlds of the past and present set side by side that presents the conflict. Trilling gets at the heart of Empedocles' tragedy when he says that "while the philosopher

²¹John P. Farrell, "Matthew Arnold's Tragic Vision," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXXXV (January, 1970), 108.

²²Ibid. ²³Trilling, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

chants the rational and scientific facts of painful, unharmonious life, the poet continues to sing in rich and fluent verse of the ancient world of myth."²⁴ Trilling goes on to say that for Empedocles imagination is gone, "killed by his knowledge." The philosopher, grown old and tired, can no longer believe in "the ancient world, sunlit and warm and mysterious,"²⁵ that Callicles offers for his solace. The disappearance of a life secure in its myth forces Empedocles to turn inward for his answers:

Once read thy own breast right,
And thou hast done with fears;
Man gets no other light,
Search he a thousand years.
Sink in thyself! There ask what ails thee, at that
shrine!²⁶

But Empedocles is not satisfied with those answers that only he himself can give. Something is missing that the mind alone cannot appease. Empedocles is deep in thought at the edge of the crater:

But mind, but thought--
If these have been the master part of us--
Where will they find their parent element?
What will receive them, who will call them home?
But we shall be in them, and they in us,
And we shall be the strangers of the world,
And they will be our lords, as they are now;
And keep us prisoners of our consciousness,
And never let us clasp and feel the All
But through their forms, and modes, and stifling veils.
And we shall be unsatisfied as now;
And we shall feel the agony of thirst,
The ineffable longing for the life of life

²⁴Ibid., p. 83. ²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Allott, Poems, p. 162.

Baffled for ever; and still thought and mind
 Will hurry us with them on their homeless march,
 27

It was suggested earlier in the chapter that Arnold's own state of mind at the time he was writing "Empedocles on Etna" was similar to that of his subject: a melancholy of a cosmic and philosophical nature. He is a man like his own Empedocles who feels that his "mind was fed on other food, was trained/By other rules than are in vogue to-day." Arnold was young when he was writing "Empedocles on Etna." His unusual fatigue and weariness with life may be a result of a mental and emotional drain at the end of his affair with Marguerite. The frequent reference to his personal unhappiness and loss of joy is a further indication of exhaustion. In lines 273 and 274 Empedocles says that "joy and the outward world" are dead to him. Again in lines 321 and 322 he says that he is "dead to life and joy, therefore I read/In all things my own deadness." In the immediately following lines, Empedocles longs for the power to be like the glowing Etna, or to be full of life like the sea. He mentions, in fact, all the elements of life, and longs to be filled with them. But he can only wish for these things. In his suffering he concludes:

But no, this heart will glow no more; thou art
 A living man no more, Empedocles!
 Nothing but a devouring flame of thought--
 But a naked, eternally restless mind!28

²⁷Ibid., p. 189.

²⁸Ibid., p. 188.

Arnold's concession to the "restless mind" may be another biographical note. Even at an early age Arnold worried about the loss of youth and its power of song, but even as he worried, he wished for the maturity of age and the stability that accompanied it. To protect his youthful, poetic nature he would perform in such a manner of high spirits that it often annoyed his serious friends. Arnold may have felt himself pulled to the philosophical side and wanted to protect the vulnerable, poetic part of his nature. By the time of "Empedocles on Etna" it is obvious to the student of Arnold which side won, though perhaps not a total victory. Only moments before Empedocles leaps into the fiery depths of Mount Etna he confesses:

. . . I have lived in wrath and gloom,
 Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
 Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.
 But I have not grown easy in these bonds--
 But I have not denied what bonds these were.
 Yea, I take myself to witness,
 That I have loved no darkness,
 Sophisticated no truth,
 Nursed no delusion,
 Allowed no fear!²⁹

Although his mind has had the most of him, that other part, perhaps the best of him, has given fight to the end. Empedocles believes, therefore, that the elements have granted him "not to die wholly, not to be all enslaved." His last words "receive me, save me" indicate the hope of a life

²⁹Ibid., p. 191.

hereafter, or of some life, somewhere after the earthly trial. He feels the weight lifted from him, and he asks "Is it but for a moment?" Callicles begins his song somewhere below Mount Etna. He sings of Apollo and his choir. He believes he sees them passing on the mountainside singing their prophecy:

--Whose praise do they mention?
Of what is it told?
What will be for ever;
What was from of old.³⁰

Arnold has used the objectivity of the classical Greek form to express his own feelings about the spiritual ills of his day. Arnold the prose writer, like Empedocles, the philosopher, could give advice to other men to lead lives of discipline, temperance. But Arnold the poet, like Empedocles at the mouth of the volcano, could not take his own advice. Neither could he live piecemeal, for to live at all required a total participation. Empedocles' despair was a religious one, but it was social, too. Arnold himself said of Empedocles: "Into the feelings of a man so situated there entered much that we are accustomed to consider as exclusively modern."³¹ He sees the story of Empedocles as a parallel of the decline of the Greek State.³² And as Trilling reiterates: Arnold believed "the cosmological despair of Empedocles

³⁰Ibid., p. 194. ³¹Ibid., p. 591.

³²Trilling, op. cit., p. 113.

was not eccentric but part of a general cultural condition, similar to the contemporary one. . . ."33

"Empedocles on Etna," then, seemingly about a Greek scholar of the fifth century, is in reality Arnold's own reflections about nineteenth century man. More specifically the poem is about the decline of traditional beliefs and the emergence of an age of science and reason and how the change affected nineteenth century man.

Search for New Meaning

At the time of "Dover Beach" Arnold's outlook seems changed from his state of mind in "Empedocles on Etna," though both poems were written fairly close together. Critics do not agree about the date of composition of "Dover Beach." Some believe that lines one through twenty-eight were written when Arnold visited Dover, but that lines twenty-nine through thirty-seven were from an earlier poem. Allott disagrees with this idea, saying that it is more likely that lines twenty-nine through thirty-seven "were written at Dover in late June on A.'s first visit there after his marriage," and that the first part of the poem was "added in London shortly afterwards."³⁴ At any rate, Arnold is still concerned about the lack of religious faith in the country, even though love

³³Ibid.

³⁴Allott, Poems, p. 240.

and an imagined "land-of-dreams and certitude"³⁵ prevail at the end of the poem. The difference in tone of the two parts of the poem may truly reflect Arnold's thoughts at the time. He was still committed to religious orthodoxy and profoundly saddened by its demise:

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.³⁶

The overtone of "sad-and-everlasting-things"³⁷ marks the first two stanzas of "Dover Beach," but there is a shift in thought and tone in the last stanza of the poem. Although he and his love are "on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight/Where ignorant armies clash by night," there seems to be some comfort in knowing that he is not alone. The lines "Ah, love, let us be true/To one another!" signal the poet's ending of isolation and his beginning search for new meaning.

The last stanza of the poem is a grim picture of the day. The "confused alarms of struggle and flight" suggest an overtone of "meaningless-and-ephemeral-things."³⁸ The

³⁵John Ciardi, How Does a Poem Mean? (Boston, 1959), p. 837.

³⁶Allott, Poems, p. 242. ³⁷Ciardi, op. cit., p. 837.

³⁸Ibid.

beautiful world that offers "neither joy, nor love, nor light/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" too is meaningless. What is meaningful, the poet seems to be saying, is love--the commitment of one human being to another. Though they are swept along with the confusion of the day, they may survive if they remain "true to one another!" Accepting Allott's theory of the date of composition (after Arnold's marriage), it seems feasible that Arnold's change in attitude might be the result of peace of mind afforded by the stability of his personal life.

The harsh bitterness of much of "Dover Beach" appears in marked contrast to the note of love in the third stanza. The bitterness of "Dover Beach" is the same bitterness, however, as in "Empedocles on Etna." The love in the later poem is more like desperation than conventional love. In his hopelessness to rejoin nature, the poet has surrendered his romantic idealism and turned toward the accessible. Arnold does not abandon completely his earlier attitude toward religion even though he has grown impatient with its ineffectiveness for him personally. He fears that the "frigidity" of science and reason that has lessened the "warmth" of religious ardor will be man's curse.³⁹

By 1852 Arnold had apparently made peace with himself, for he seems to have lifted the banner for the "new"

³⁹Allott, Poems, p. 260.

religion--the religion of self. The poem "Progress" ruminates the advanced thought of the period, the liberal ideas in religion in particular. Arnold detests the coldness of reason that is ever present, but he does not ignore its presence. Instead, he seeks ways in which to explain how man might best use the new knowledge. He uses Christ and the New Testament as an example of a "new" law that was added to the old. Arnold is careful about his counsel, however:

The Master stood upon the mount, and taught.
He saw a fire in his disciples' eyes;
'The old law,' they cried, 'is wholly come to nought,
Behold the new world rise!'

'Was it,' the Lord then said, 'with scorn ye saw
The old law observed by Scribes and Pharisees?
I say unto you, see ye keep that law
More faithfully than these!'

'Too hasty heads for ordering worlds, alas!
Think not that I to annul the law have willed;
No jot, no tittle from the law shall pass,
Till all have been fulfilled.'⁴⁰

By using the Sermon on the Mount as his basis for argument, Arnold is saying that the new knowledge of science should not replace the faith in religion. It should, instead, provide a new light by which to assess all religious beliefs.

'Children of men! the unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath looked on no religion scornfully
That men did ever find.'⁴¹

In a letter to his friend Clough, around 1853, Arnold's admission that he was aware of his two-sidedness is noted:

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 261.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 262.

I cannot conceal from myself the objection which really wounds and perplexes me from the religious side is that the service of reason is freezing to feeling, chilling to the religious mood. And feeling and the religious mood are eternally and deepest being of man, the ground of all joy and greatness for him.⁴²

His "religious side" despairs to see this new coldness in his fellow man and in himself, but Arnold, ever aware of the times, could not dwell long in the past. Always searching for ways to reconcile the past and present, Arnold's poem "Progress" reaffirms his idealization of reality:

Thou must be born again!⁴³

Arnold sees the Biblical command as a key to coping with the times for "sunk, self-weary man." The reasoning side of Arnold sees the religious maxim in a new light, however. Into the last stanza of "Progress" comes the note of self-dependence that is heard in so much of Arnold's work. He is very clear about the kind of life into which he wishes man to be "born again."

'Children of men! not that your age excel
In pride of life the ages of your sires,
But that ye think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well,
The Friend of man desires.'⁴⁴

Arnold wants a wholly functioning man: one who thinks clearly and one who feels deeply, all the while sowing seeds of his own goodness.

Whether Arnold meant "progress" as the development or cumulative improvement of man or civilization, or as the

⁴²Ibid. ⁴³Ibid., p. 263. ⁴⁴Ibid.

simple act of proceeding on in time and space is questionable. "To lay the old world low/To clear the new world's way" accentuates man's restlessness and haste to get on with the scheme of things. The lines that refer to the religious man's blind faith and his consequent intellectual impairment indicate a desire to lay this aside, too. All this seems to indicate an onward movement, but the last stanza of the poem would have the accent fall on the first syllable of the word "progress." This stanza entreats the "children of men" to strive for perfection, not perfection peculiar to the previous generation but to their own. He wants them to imbibe of the "sweetness and light" of their own day. Arnold moves farther away from the romantic concept of the greatness of the past and yesterday's larger than life models toward the acceptance of the best life as represented in the present generation of men. "Think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well" is surely implicit in Arnold's definition of culture--the study of perfection.

The problem of the nineteenth century as Arnold's poetry reflects it was the decline of the institutional church, a general loss of faith in religious traditions, social traditions, and in authority. The people's trust in science and technology and free enterprise supplanted their former allegiance to Church and State. Arnold, the poet, appealed to nineteenth century man to "be born again," to rise from his deathbed by "thinking clearly," and "feeling deeply."

He wished to inspire men beyond their middle-class comfort or their lower-class hopelessness. Arnold suppressed his "Empedocles on Etna" in 1853 because he did not feel it would be inspirational, because it lacked the "joy" toward which he believed all art should be directed.

Arnold is often called a passive poet. Trilling says that "his poetry had probed the spiritual lacks of modern life" but that "his utmost activity had been the erection of defensive attitudes against the slings and arrows of the new era which History had brought."⁴⁵ Arnold would contend that developing defensive attitudes is the thing that art does best. Trilling paraphrased Arnold's Preface remarks: "true art can settle no questions, give no directives; that it can do no more than cultivate what is best in the reader--his moral poise."⁴⁶ Whether it be the self-cultivation of "Self-Dependence," the tragic catharsis of "Empedocles on Etna," or the cosmic wisdom of "Dover Beach," there is something ennobling and animating in Arnold's emerging affirmation of modern life.

⁴⁵Trilling, op. cit., p. 159.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 153.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANCE AND REASON

Matthew Arnold did not see as fully satisfactory either "romance" or "reason," as the terms related to traditions of thought. His poetry "is an attempt to weave them together into a synthesis."¹ He believed that together the "modern intellectual traditions" offered a great deal for man. The distinction between the terms is more than "rule and line" on the one hand and the fantastic and imaginative on the other. It is entirely possible to be fantastic and relevant, too. Arnold's "Mycerinus" is an example of the combination.

The subject of the poem is a young Egyptian king who has been told by an oracle that he will die within six years. The young king has lived a good and virtuous life and cannot understand why he must die early when his wicked, cruel father has enjoyed a long life. Mycerinus becomes frustrated and bitter at the news and chooses to end his life "giving his days to revel and fleshly delight."² The amazing story of Mycerinus, whose virtue prevented Egypt's one-hundred and fifty year curse from being fulfilled, is at the same time fantastic and a "succinct expression of the religious problem

¹Trilling, op. cit., p. 79.

²Ibid., p. 82.

as it struck the men of Arnold's time," too.³ What, then, was Mycerinus' reward? Where was divine justice?

The distinction between romanticism and rationalism as they are evidenced in Mycerinus is found in his escapist behavior and in the logic that prompted such anarchy. According to Trilling, "when the new 'frozen' universe was thrust upon Mycerinus . . . he responded to it by an assertion of the self, . . . the gratification of desires formerly checked by a divine morality, and in an arrogant strength of soul. The gods dead, the self must fill the world. . . ."⁴ As Mycerinus' life goal was taken away, he had to seek a new direction for his remaining years on earth.

Arnold's "Mycerinus" was, of course, his view of contemporary man's spiritual condition. Rationalism was attempting to create "a new picture of the cosmos," prompted by the scientific discoveries on the one hand but deterred by religion on the other. Trilling contends that "behind the struggle of romanticism and rationalism lay the diminution of the power of Christianity."⁵ Arnold, aware of the condition, attempted to allay the frustration by pointing man in a new direction. The "self" that emerged from Mycerinus' confusion was an embryo of the "self" that the thinking Arnold would later conceptualize. The sensuality of the doomed young king is at one instance Byronic romanticism, but at another an existential search for experience. Trilling says that with the

³Ibid., p. 81.

⁴Ibid., p. 97.

⁵Ibid., p. 80.

"goal of the spiritual life removed, the furious search for strength and experience begins" for Mycerinus.⁶ The searching new self that emerges is on the surface wild and free; the responsibility that should accompany freedom is not at first apparent, but perhaps is there. The following lines suggest more than carefree revelry:

It may be that sometimes his wondering soul
 From the loud joyful laughter of his lips
 Might shrink half startled, like a guilty man
 Who wrestles with his dream; as some pale shape
 Gliding half hidden through the dusky stems,
 Would thrust a hand before the lifted bowl,
 Whispering: A little space, and thou art mine!
 It may be on that joyless feast his eye
 Dwelt with more outward seeming; he, within,
 Took measure of his soul, and knew its strength,
 And by that silent knowledge, day by day,
 Was calmed, ennobled, comforted, sustained.⁷

Allott says that the preceding lines present "Mycerinus as a Stoic disguised by his revelling."⁸ Mycerinus is in many ways a very good example of Arnold's effort to synthesize the two intellectual traditions. The king is a strong, heroic leader in the romantic tradition; he apparently cultivates emotion and sensation for their own sakes, another characteristic of romanticism. Yet, Mycerinus is somehow more than his actions. To participate vicariously in his experience is to feel and know the "buried self" of Mycerinus. It is to see as Allott does the Stoic disguised, the well of strength beneath the carefree facade. It is to see Arnold's "whole" personality in the creation of his young king. Mycerinus'

⁶Ibid., p. 97.

⁷Allott, Poems, p. 31.

⁸Ibid.

wholeness is not as perfectly evolved as Arnold perhaps intended it to be. The last lines of the poem with the water imagery, "the murmur of the moving Nile," may indicate Arnold's belief in man's rebirth prior to his wholeness. If Arnold intended the water imagery as symbolic of Mycerinus' need for purification, at this point (1843-44) the rebirth notion was probably mainly religious in nature and did not suggest the broader interpretation of Arnold's "thou must be born again" as he meant it later in "Progress."

Mycerinus might be regarded as the living example of two distinct influences on Western man: Hebraism and Hellenism. The early Mycerinus is a reflection of the strictness of conscience and the obedience of Hebraism. The revelling Mycerinus is, perhaps, the "spontaneity of consciousness" that Arnold associated with Hellenism and its refusal of nothing to the self.⁹ The end of the poem hints at the perfect man, one who had realized his own wholeness by "seeing things as they really were,"¹⁰ by seeing the contributions of both influences on his life and understanding that neither represents "wholeness," but combined they represent perfection:

. . . he, within,
Took measure of his soul, and knew its strength,
And by that silent knowledge, day by day,
Was calmed, ennobled, comforted, sustained.

⁹Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, p. 137.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 131.

Arnold, the poet, could not maintain the spiritual condition that allowed for the balance of imagination and reason he seemed very near to achieving in "Mycerinus." His Carlylean type of hero, the romantic individualist with mythical powers of leadership, in a few years gave way to his philosopher king Empedocles, himself once a cult hero, but as Arnold presents him, lost in his relentless pursuit of reason. From philosophers and kings Arnold moves to educated wanderers.

Arnold's "Scholar-Gipsy" is a clear contrast with his Empedocles. According to Allott the Scholar-Gipsy is a Callicles "miraculously preserved from turning into an Empedocles."¹¹ Trilling says that Arnold saw nineteenth century man's fate and offered his "Scholar-Gipsy" as "a passionate indictment of the new dictatorship of the never-resting intellect over the soul of modern man."¹² Presented in the form of a romantic idyll, the "Scholar-Gipsy" is then a harsh criticism of Victorian society.

For his story Arnold uses Joseph Glanvill's two-hundred year old story to contrast the "bright morning of glad surprise" of the past, "when wits ran clear beside the sparkling Thames,"¹³ with the "strange disease of modern life."¹⁴ According to Glanvill, a young Oxford scholar because of poverty was forced to leave the University. He joined a band

¹¹ Allott, Poems, p. 332.

¹² Trilling, op. cit., p. 112.

¹³ Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁴ Allott, Poems, p. 342.

of gypsies who grew so fond of the young scholar that they soon began to share their magic lore with him and train him in their art. After traveling with the gypsies for a few years, the Scholar-Gipsy was seen by two of his former school friends and begged for the story of his sojourn with the gypsies. He told the two former friends his story and how the gypsies' power of imagination could bind people to them. He spoke of their traditional kind of learning and vowed that as soon as he learned from them all that he could, he would go away and give the world their secret.¹⁵

Arnold called "The Scholar-Gipsy" an elegy and intended it to be a lament for the lost energies of youth,¹⁶ a time in his own life when, with friends, he would take off from Oxford and ramble the Oxfordshire and Berkshire country to escape the "bonds and formalities" of the University.¹⁷ The Scholar-Gipsy is a figure who, because of his chosen situation, becomes able to maintain the energetic freedom that most men have only as youths. In a letter to his brother Tom, Arnold says that "The Scholar-Gipsy" was "meant to fix the remembrance of those delightful wanderings of ours in the Cumner Hills. . . ."¹⁸

Arnold's image of the free and innocent wanderer set against the "disease of modern times" allows the poet to

¹⁵Ibid., p. 333.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

comment alternately about certain Romantic attitudes and the intellectual traditions of his own day. The poet, speaking to the Scholar-Gipsy, admonishes his own day:

Thou waitest for the spark from heaven! and we,
 Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
 Who never deeply felt, nor clearly willed,
 Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
 Whose vague resolves never have been fulfilled;
 For whom each year we see
 Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
 Who hesitate and falter life away,
 And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day--
 Ah! do not we, wanderer! await it too?¹⁹

Nineteenth-century man's lack of resolve and direction, an indecisiveness noted several times in Arnold's works, is compared to the Scholar-Gipsy's natural response to life, his intuitive feel for religion. His own time's "casual creeds" do not evoke man's commitment. The "half-believers" represent what Arnold noted was "The misery of the present age . . . [men's] incapacity to suffer, enjoy, feel at all, wholly and profoundly."²⁰ The lines quoted from the poem repeat the closing of "Progress." The words are nearly the same, but the sentiment is far different. In "Progress" the poet's words are used as a stimulant to motivate men to "Think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well." There is still hope that man will heed the words of the poet and "be born again." The lines from "The Scholar-Gipsy" lack the positive ring of "Progress."

¹⁹Ibid., p. 340.

²⁰Ibid.

Arnold's own hearkening back to "the golden age" of his youth accentuates the tempestuous events of the Victorian era. The rapid changes in all areas of life left Victorian man in a state of flux. In a letter to Clough written about the same time that "The Scholar-Gipsy" was published, Arnold speaks to this reed-like condition of his own: "You will laugh if I tell you I am deplorably ennuye. I seem to myself to have lost all ressort--One gets tired at last of one's own elasticity."²¹ "The Scholar-Gipsy" records these thoughts poetically:

For early didst thou leave the world, . . .

 Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt
 Which much to have tried, in much been baffled,
 brings.
 O life unlike to ours!
 Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
 Of Whom each strives, nor knows for what he
 strives,
 And each half-lives a hundred different lives;
 Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.²²

In retrospect Arnold saw his own youth as idyllic in comparison with his present day. Through the Scholar-Gipsy he sees an escape from Victorian civilization. Arnold is still romantic in his flight from reality, but he is getting closer to earth in this particular escape. The gypsy-band does

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

involve mystique, but gypsies are real. Callicles' flight was to the ethereal heights of the gods.

T. E. Hulme, in discussing Romanticism, says "that the whole of the romantic attitude seems to crystallise in verse round metaphors of flight . . . into the eternal gases."²³ While he might see Callicles as reaching toward infinity, Hulme would probably place the Scholar-Gipsy among those who "even in the most imaginative flights . . . remember always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas."²⁴ According to Hulme; "the essence of poetry to most people is that it must lead them to a beyond of some kind."²⁵ The state of the Scholar-Gipsy is a "beyond of some kind," Though he does promise the University friends that he will return one day, most readers believe he never will. Nevertheless, Arnold is questioning certain Romantic attitudes whether he intends to or not. Allott notes that the "same image of sailing into the unknown is used for both the Romantic 'madman' [of "A Summer Night"] and the 'grave Tyrian trader' who is the Scholar-Gipsy's representative."²⁶

The following lines from "The Scholar-Gipsy" not only testify to the poet's own dilemma regarding the ideal and the

²³T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Criticism, edited by Mark Schorer (New York, 1958), p. 259.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 261.

²⁶Allott, Poems, P. 342.

actual, but also indicate Arnold's condemnation of his society:

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
 For strong the infection of our mental strife,
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils
 for rest;
 And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
 Like us distracted, and like us unblest.²⁷

The awful rationalism of his day, brought on by science and technology, is likened to an infectious disease. The tragedy of the thing is that intellectual man seems helpless to conquer it even though he is given the freedom to choose which tradition of thought he wishes to follow. Once his "restless mind" is set in motion, he seems powerless to halt it. In Arnold's move toward reality he casts about and lands on the idea of the Scholar-Gipsy as a route of escape for weary man. The peace and calm he longs for, however, are not permanently or satisfactorily found in escaping. For this reason "The Scholar-Gipsy" is still not the kind of contribution that Arnold was wanting to make in behalf of mankind.

Arnold ends the poem by commanding the Scholar-Gipsy to become like the Tyrian trader who fled the crowds of Greeks. Critics disagree about the clarity of the parallel of the Scholar-Gipsy and the Tyrian trader. Saintsbury says that "No ingenuity can work out the parallel between the 'uncloudedly joyous' scholar who is bid avoid the palsied,

²⁷Ibid., p. 343.

diseased enfants du siècle, and the grave Tyrian who was indignant at the competition of the merry Greek, and shook out more sail to seek fresh markets."²⁸ E. K. Brown, however, contends that "The Tyrian trader's flight before the clamorous spirited Greeks is exactly analogous to the Scholar-Gipsy's flight before the drink and clatter of the smock-frocked boors." He says that "little ingenuity is required to discover a similarity between the gipsies and those "shy traffickers, the dark Iberians" to whom the Tyrian trader flies."²⁹

What is more interesting than the parallel between the Scholar-Gipsy and the Tyrian trader is Arnold's insistence upon escape as the only means of achieving peace and calm. Mycerinus' escape was women and wine; Empedocles found comfort in the fiery pit of Etna; the Scholar-Gipsy's solace was wandering with a band of exotic mesmerists. In both "Mycerinus" and "Empedocles on Etna" Arnold alludes to the strength of the inner life as a means of coping with the external world. Even though neither Mycerinus nor Empedocles succeeds in externalizing the best self, there is mention of its existence. In "The Scholar-Gipsy" no such mention is made. Again Arnold chooses to end his poem with the mention of water. The Scholar-Gipsy is told to be like the Tyrian trader who set sail into a stormy sea in order to rid himself

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

of his dreaded company. The symbolic imagery--water's purity--might again suggest Arnold's attitude about the need for rebirth, as well as hint at a better self than the external one.

During the fall of 1857, Matthew Arnold delivered his inaugural address as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Trilling says that "Arnold's incumbency of the chair of poetry was revolutionary"; he "demanded that poetry give men an 'intellectual deliverance' from its oppressiveness," that "poetry [should be] adequate to the time in which it is written."³⁰ He said that only poetry that "orders the world" for man should be called adequate.³¹ The open declaration of activism is something new for Arnold. Indications of a drift in this direction were hinted at earlier, but an open suggestion marks a new public posture for Arnold. Speaking of the end of the Romantic movement in literature, T. E. Hulme said that "A romantic movement must have an end. . . . It may be deplored, but it can't be helped--wonder must cease to be wonder." He concluded that "Wonder can only be the attitude of a man passing from one stage to another, it can never be a permanently fixed thing."³²

Hulme could be speaking of Arnold. The poet tried to hold onto his youth, to his subjectivity; but maturity and

³⁰Trilling, op. cit., pp. 158-161.

³¹Ibid., p. 161.

³²Hulme, op. cit., p. 265.

social change would not allow it. He fought to resist the changes being wrought by the nineteenth century. Eventually he concluded that "it is no longer a time for resistance but for 'intelligence and ideas.'" Trilling says that "Gently and sweetly, Arnold sweeps away the old order, while he holds out a gracious hand to detain it."³³

Thomas Carlyle's cult of the leader as expressed in Heroes and Hero-Worship was first delivered as a lecture. Carlyle's doctrine of heroes stated that "the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked there." He believed that the accomplishments of the world should be accredited as the "Thoughts that dwell in the Great Men sent into the world."³⁴ When Tom Brown's School Days was published in 1857 celebrating Dr. Thomas Arnold as a Carlylean hero, it received a wide readership and provoked Fitzjames Stephens to write a criticism of it in the Edinburgh Review. Stephens referred to Dr. Arnold as a "narrow bustling fanatic."³⁵ The two publications are what led Arnold to finally write "Rugby Chapel," an elegy to his father, though Allott notes that the publications did not influence Arnold's view of his father as expressed in "Rugby Chapel."³⁶

³³Trilling, op. cit., p. 163.

³⁵Ibid., p. 444.

³⁴Allott, Poems, p. 450.

³⁶Ibid.

Matthew Arnold did regard his father as a hero in the Carlylean sense, but he went beyond the Carlylean doctrine. Carlyle's catalog of heroes is made up of men larger than life who lived in a time of rosy retrospect. Dr. Arnold, as he is presented in "Rugby Chapel," is a living man, filled with the energy and enthusiasm demanded by the age in which he lived. Though himself an object of hero-worship, Dr. Arnold of "Rugby Chapel" lacked the mystique and ethereality of the typical Carlylean hero. He was a man of his own time. And Matthew Arnold saw him as a man representative of the nineteenth century. According to Arnold's inaugural teachings it was work, involvement, commitment that man now needed, not romantic self-contemplation. In "Rugby Chapel" he speaks of Dr. Arnold's strength: "Zealous, beneficent, firm!" These are the qualities men of his time needed for survival.

"Rugby Chapel" offers insight regarding Arnold's attitude toward "ordinary" man as he related to heroic men like Dr. Arnold. He describes three types of men:

What is the course of the life
 Of mortal men on the earth?
 Most men eddy about
 Here and there--eat and drink,
 Chatter and love and hate,
 Gather and squander, are raised
 Aloft, are hurled in the dust,
 Striving blindly, achieving
 Nothing; and then they die--³⁷

Arnold says that when this man dies, no one asks more about what happened to him than what happened to the swell of a

³⁷ Ibid., p. 447.

particular wave. The second kind of man differs from the first in that he has a goal:

Ah yes! some of us strive
 Not without action to die
 Fruitless, but something to snatch
 From dull oblivion, nor all
 Glut the devouring grave!
 We have chosen our path--
 Path to a clear-purposed goal,
 Path of advance!--but it leads
 A long, steep journey, through sunk
 Gorges, o'er mountains in snow.³⁸

He goes on to describe the awful storms that such men often encounter in life. And while they set out originally with friends, "We, we only are left!/With frowning foreheads, with lips/Sternly compressed, we strain on." The inn-keeper inquires after the others as he swings a lantern to see who has arrived. This man answers: "We bring only ourselves! we lost/Sight of the rest in the storm."

The third type of man Arnold describes is the representative man, the contemporary hero, a man such as his father.

But thou would'st not alone
 Be saved, my father! alone
 Conquer and come to thy goal,
 Leaving the rest in the wild.

 Still thou turnedst, and still
 Gavest the weary thy hand.

 Pure souls honoured and blest

 Not like the men of the crowd

 But souls tempered with fire,
 Fervent, heroic, and good,
 Helpers and friends of mankind.³⁹

³⁸Ibid., p. 448.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 449-450.

The hope of mankind lies in this type. The poem ends on a note of optimism as Arnold says that just when mankind seems to be at its lowest ebb, men of such stature appear like "beacons of hope." He says that their presence inspires the brave, gives hope to the weary; and "order and courage" return. He says that the waste of civilization is cleared away by such men and their leadership. This new note of positivism for society is made possible through men who have the particular faculty of mind to see things as they really are and to discipline themselves in their task. This is the kind of man Arnold declares must arise from the great crowds of humanity.

Trilling says that Arnold "falls . . . into 'rationalizations' and contradictions in his attempt to forge an affirmative attitude to modern life."⁴⁰ But Arnold's basic insights are not lessened by his "failure in realism." His belief that literature should be "fortifying,"⁴¹ that it should be "no mere ornament of life but one of its prime instruments"⁴² is the evolving synthesis of the two traditions of thought: romance and reason.

⁴⁰ Trilling, op. cit., p. 166.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴² Ibid., p. 166.

CHAPTER V

THE COLLECTIVE SELF

In 1869 Matthew Arnold praised the Duke of Wellington for his "strong sagacity" in recognizing that after 1832 there would be great social change in England. Because Wellington stood his ground for what he believed, many of his contemporaries accused him of being "implacably hostile to all change."¹ But to some his actions were heroic: "He gave up again and again his most cherished convictions . . . in order that he might not stand in the way of the Queen's Government and the proper carrying of it on."² In 1869 Arnold was looking back. What had happened to the hero? Where was the familiar character that ordinary man might learn on? What had happened to the things that he stood for? Did the hero and those things disappear together? When the man of reason began to negotiate values, had heroism become more difficult? Could reasoning man replace the hero?

According to Arnold men like Wellington did not negotiate values. In 1844 Arnold answered Wellington's critics in a sonnet entitled "To the Duke of Wellington." It commends the great soldier for his heroic decisions. Arnold believed that Wellington possessed the vision for seeing the

¹Allott, Poems, pp. 50-51. ²Ibid., p. 51.

whole picture of his time and its relation to the future of England. With the capacity to see, Wellington was able to choose a course of action and follow it to its inevitable end. To Arnold, Wellington's steadfastness was a result of his singular "'vision of the general law'--which was that the wheels of history go round not urged by human hands only, but also by powers more efficacious, powers not human."³ The superhuman qualities of Wellington--his "vision of the general law," his "splendour," his "clue to life"--for Arnold constituted heroism. The statesman's "clue to life" may have been the strength of an inner life Arnold so often alluded to.

A similar tone of hero-worship is to be found in another sonnet written the same year as the one to Wellington. Arnold's "Shakespeare" is seen as "out-topping knowledge."⁴ In a letter to Clough, Arnold speaks of Shakespeare's enigmatic style: "I keep saying Shakespeare, Shakespeare, you are as obscure as life is."⁵ Arnold's adulation of the poet is obvious in the following lines from the sonnet:

And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
 Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure,
 Didst tread on earth unguessed at.--Better so!⁶

Shakespeare, the self-made man, too is a hero. He too possessed the universal vision. Shakespeare not only represented the complete man, there was also something godlike

³Trilling, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴Allott, Poems, p. 49.

⁵Ibid., p. 48.

⁶Ibid., p. 50.

about him. Arnold referred to his "immortal spirit."⁷ Thomas Carlyle said of him: "We did not account him a god . . . while he dwelt with us."⁸

In 1844 Arnold's heroes were men who appeared to be larger than life: The Duke of Wellington, Shakespeare, Emerson. But a careful reading of the sonnets commemorating the three reveals not only their stature among other men, but it also intimates the presence of a great personal strength. Shakespeare was "self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure." Wellington possessed the kind of "splendour" acquired by the "laborious, persevering, serious, firm" commitment to his personal vision. Arnold referred to Emerson as a hero with "voice oracular," and he paraphrased his essays in the sonnet on Emerson:

The seeds of godlike power are in us still;
Gods are we, bards, saints, heroes, if we fill!--⁹

The suggestion here is that though Emerson appears to be oracular, it is only that he has willed it so. Ordinary man has within him the same possibility, if only he will realize it. The lines from the sonnet parallel the ideas in Emerson's "Essay on Man."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thomas Carlyle, Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. 113, cited in Kenneth Allott, The Poems of Matthew Arnold (New York, 1972), p. 50.

⁹ Allott, Poems, p. 53.

What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand.¹⁰

The 1844 sonnets laud the greatness of great men, giants of men. The inner life is hinted at but the emphasis is still on larger-than-life historical figures as representative heroes. By mid-century Arnold, disillusioned with romanticism, searches for new meaning. His Empedocles says

And we feel, day and night,
The burden of ourselves,--
Well, then, the wiser wight
In his own bosom delves,
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he can.¹¹

Answers that Arnold once found comforting no longer satisfied him. Contemplation of nature was once its own reward, but he was no longer content with that. In his effort to get at the roots of his discontentment, he advised through Empedocles: "Sink in thyself! there ask what ails thee, at that shrine!"¹²

Empedocles is Arnold's reasoning man. The dialogue between the three characters of "Empedocles on Etna" allows him to role-play his various hidden selves. He is alternately Callicles, Pausanias, and Empedocles. Working his way through time, Arnold's young harp player represents romanticism and the golden era of yesterday. Pausanias, the physician, is the man of science, and Empedocles represents the historical product of the two former influences.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 161.

¹² Ibid., p. 162.

At the time Arnold was writing "Empedocles on Etna" he had not evolved his philosophy of the "self." The three characters of the poem combined, however, formed the whole man that Arnold would later conceptualize. Arnold himself had not made the transition from the old order to the new at the time he was writing "Empedocles on Etna." He could create the individual characters--Callicles, Pausanias, and Empedocles--and speak to their differences, but he could not see the three intermingled into one personality. Arnold's own state of mind at the time he was creating Empedocles paralleled his character so closely that it was this third of the triad he emphasized.

The poem ends with Callicles' song, but the impetus of the poem lies with the tragic character of Empedocles. Even though Callicles lives, the reader does not have the intense feeling for the voice of the past that he has for the dying, suffering Empedocles. Interestingly, Pausanias is the intermediary character. He might be thought of as the transitional man--somewhere between Callicles and Empedocles. He is the century's new man, ever curious, ever practical. When he asks Empedocles to teach him to "stay the spells" of the gods, and Empedocles answers "Man has a mind with which to plan his safety."¹³ Pausanias becomes the man of science and reminds Empedocles:

¹³Ibid., p. 157.

But thine own words?
 'The wit and counsel of man was never clear,
 Troubles confound the little wit he has.'
 Mind is a light which the gods mock us with,
 To lead those false who trust it.¹⁴

What is underlined here is the faith Pausanias has in observation. He has seen Empedocles cure the dying and has heard him calm the madman with his lyre. He cannot trust reason alone. As the man of science, he demands action and proof.

In "Empedocles on Etna" Arnold turns more and more to the strength of the self. At one point Empedocles says that man has a mind and he needs no other help.¹⁵ On another occasion he tells Pausanias, "Be neither saint nor sophist-led, but be a man."¹⁶ He says that man should not depend on any "doctor" or his "school." The irony of the direction in which Empedocles is leading Pausanias with this line of thought is that Empedocles, in the deepest of despair, is counseling Pausanias to learn to cope with life: "Thou hast no right to bliss/No title from the gods to welfare and repose."¹⁷ Man is new, he says, "the world is from of old"; therefore, "To tunes we did not call our being must keep chime."¹⁸ The Stoicism that Empedocles recommends parallels the discipline Arnold advocated for his time. The idea of the inner self or buried self as having greater strength than

¹⁴Ibid. ¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 163. ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 164-165.

the surface self is a Stoic notion.¹⁹ Arnold would later explore the possibilities of the buried life.

"The person with a craving for life, however satisfied with his own choice, will always long for the realms of experience that had to be passed by."²⁰ Laurence Perrine was writing about Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," but the comment might just as well have been written about Matthew Arnold. Trilling says that Arnold "always carried the doubt of fulfillment, [the] question of a life that he--or the world--has wrongly buried."²¹

. . . often, in the world's most crowded streets,
 But often, in the din of strife,
 There rises an unspeakable desire
 After the knowledge of our buried life;
 A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
 In tracking out our true, original course;²²

The quotation is from Arnold's "The Buried Life" and like Frost's poem about choices it is "an expression of regret that the possibilities of life experience are so sharply limited."²³

In "The Buried Life" Arnold examines one of his favorite ideas: the buried self. The poem begins by suggesting that

¹⁹Ibid., p. 273.

²⁰Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense (New York, 1969), p. 86.

²¹Trilling, op. cit., p. 136.

²²Allott, Poems, p. 273.

²³Perrine, op. cit., p. 86.

no person can really ever know another--not even true lovers:

Alas! is even love too weak
 To unlock the heart, and let it speak?
 Are even lovers powerless to reveal
 To one another what indeed they feel?²⁴

The poet continues this line of thought by saying that even lovers are powerless to speak their innermost selves because ". . . that which seals [their] lips hath been deep-ordained."²⁵ He realizes the great mass of men "concealed their thoughts" from other men "for fear that if revealed" they would be misunderstood, "or with blame reproved." Even though "the same heart beats in every human heart," men still posture and disguise and are alien to others as well as to themselves. All this he knows, "But we, my love!--doth a like spell benumb/Our hearts, our voices? must we too be dumb?"²⁶

Arnold says that even love fails to cut through the many layers of identities man has superimposed over his real self. The poem suggests that "Fate" foresaw the various roles man would assume in a lifetime and in order to protect the "buried stream" planted it in the "deep recesses of [his] breast."²⁷ He contends the stream is, nonetheless, the real influence in man's life.

And that we should not see
 The buried stream, and seem to be

²⁴Allott, Poems, p. 272.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 272.

²⁷Ibid., p. 273.

Eddying at large in blind uncertainty
 Though driving on with it eternally.²⁸

The poem then proceeds to say that in an effort to know his origin, man sometimes inquires of his own heart the true nature of his existence. Man tries "a thousand lines," but hardly, if ever, has he been on his "own line." He tries and fails and repeats the routine over and over. Man eventually tires from all the striving, but still

. . . from time to time, vague and forlorn,
 From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
 As from an infinitely distant land,
 Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
 A melancholy into all our day.²⁹

In "The Buried Life" Arnold does say finally that even though it happens rarely, once in a while man does seem to break through his layered facade and realize for a moment "his life's flow," and "then he thinks he knows/ The hills where his life rose,/And the sea where it goes."³⁰ Perhaps Arnold's message is that man can only realize his true self as it is affirmed by another human being. Because his identity is often obscured by the roles he assumes, the true self hardly ever emerges for other men to know.

In spite of the elusiveness of the real self, Arnold believed in a "power which, by shaping the impulses even against [the] conscious will, works out to the individual's

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 274.

³⁰Ibid., p. 275.

good, even though, to him, it does not seem good."³¹ Arnold wanted to be a poet, but his love of philosophy and comparative religion led him away from "quiet living." In a letter to Clough in 1853 he wrote, "I feel immensely . . . what I have (I believe) lost and choked by my treatment of myself and the studies to which I have addicted myself."³² Though he could write this to a friend, Arnold apparently felt compelled to continue on with his pursuit of knowledge. In a poem entitled "The Second Best" he contrasts the well-modulated life with the complicated one:

Moderate tasks and moderate leisure,
 Quiet living, strict-kept measure
 Both in suffering and in pleasure--
 'Tis for this thy nature yearns

But so many books thou readest,
 But so many schemes thou breedest,
 But so many wishes feedest,
 That thy poor head almost turns.

And (the world's so madly jangled,
 Human things so fast entangled)
 Nature's wish must now be strangled
 For that best which she discerns.³³

The idyllic life of the first stanza in "The Second Best" would have bored Matthew Arnold. The life alluded to in the second stanza frustrated him, but it was the only life he could live. Believing as he did that man should be forever striving for perfection, Arnold's books and schemes and wishes

³¹Trilling, op. cit., p. 34. ³²Allott, Poems, p. 279.

³³Ibid., p. 278.

are reflections of his notion of "growing and becoming" as characteristics of perfection.³⁴

Looking for the best self, man often permits his affairs to become "jangled" and "entangled." Reading, scheming, and wishing all suggest intellectual activities and are the kinds of addictions to which, if not careful, the man of reason becomes enslaved. Arnold implies that while these pursuits may be beneficial in discovering the real self, they should not be followed to excess. Temperance in all things is Arnold's imperative. He chastizes the thinking man, but the man of action fairs no better. He believes that the English preference of "doing to thinking" is an outright barrier to the Englishman's discovering his best self or right reason.

Would it appear, then, that what Arnold proposed was nearly impossible? How might man discover his real self? Through Empedocles Arnold told man to look inward. But in "The Buried Life" he says that the secret stream is so obscured by the many layers of disguises imposed on him by society that it almost never surfaces. He said that the search, to "Know thyself," is essential, but then he cautions man about the "restless mind." The rush and rant of the man of action was not the answer either.

What Arnold proposed in his poetry was that man become answerable to and for himself. In his poetry, he explored

³⁴Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, p. 90.

the various alternatives open to man; he offered no solutions. As a poet Arnold was a catalyst. As a prosewriter he became the facilitator. What he proposed in his poetry, he outlined objectively in his prose. In Culture and Anarchy he contrasts the two ideologies that have had so much influence on the habits and thoughts of the Englishman. He discusses the intellectual impulse of Hellenism and the moral impulse of Hebraism and concludes that Western man alternates between the two.³⁵ He believes that the confusion of man lies in alternating--one to the exclusion of the other.³⁶

In his own day the Puritans declared that what was needed was "fire and strength," not "sweetness and light." Arnold answered them by saying that therein lay their own imbalance. They did not need more of what they already had, he informed them. The moral impulse of their Hebraic nature demanded strictness of conscience. What they needed, according to Arnold, was the "spontaneity of consciousness" of Hellenism, to develop all sides of their nature and bring out the best self.³⁷

Looked at totally, Arnold's work seems to demand of man a unique flexibility that will allow him to discover new roles without suffering the psychic fragmentation a transition from yesterday's reality to today's might cause. The

³⁵Ibid., p. 139. ³⁶Ibid., p. 147.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 149-150.

"best self" is perhaps not a central self with proliferating disguises, but is instead a montage of images that when taken wholly suggest one personality. The various images or stages may point out the self-actualizing individual. The boredom and fatigue Arnold so often alluded to in his poetry were the result of man's unused potential and the senseless activity he substituted for meaningful work. The self-discovery that Arnold proposed disallows the possibility of ennui or the confusion of the real self with one of the many roles man assumes as he copes with his world.

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