

Edward Shils

The Intellectuals

I. Great Britain

Blimps and Dissidents

WHEN Basil Seal joined the Commandos, Sir Joseph Mainwaring, an old Blimp, said, "There is a new spirit abroad. I see it on every side," and Evelyn Waugh, who was himself invaded by the new spirit, closed the book with the words: "And poor booby, he was bang right."

He was bang right. It was the end of two decades of rebellion against society, against the middle classes, against capitalism, against British institutions and manners. Even as the period came to an end, one of England's most brilliant poets, perhaps the leading figure of his generation, renounced his country and took up residence in America. There went with him one of the more talented writers of the period. Earlier, two of the most esteemed writers of the twenties, Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence, had already expatriated themselves, one to California, the other wandering restlessly until his death. Other eminent British writers, e.g. Norman Douglas, Richard Aldington, Robert Graves, *et al.*, found life at home unsatisfactory and preferred to live abroad. English writers were on the move: travel books became a category of literature with a new intellectual significance. Who had a good word to say then for Britain among the intellectuals? Who had a good word then to say for British

towns, where "every street (was) a blow, every corner a stab"; or for the British countryside and for English village life—those scenes of harsh inequality, of social snobbery and death-bringing gossip? "England's Green and Pleasant Land" was the façade of iniquity, and the British past was an elaborate pretence.

T. S. Eliot was still the poet of those who felt contemporary England to be a waste land. Graham Greene, whose specifically political interests had died very soon after their birth, portrayed a seedy, peeling, sinister, violent and treacherous England, an England without faith and without order, while Evelyn Waugh's England was a contemptibly irresponsible, frivolous land in which silliness ruled. E. M. Forster was not much of a revolutionary but his three cheers for friendship and his devotion to "love, the Beloved Republic" took their place—a more refined place, to be sure—in the general alienation from institutions and traditions.

The capitals of the intellectuals' ideal commonwealths varied. For some it was Moscow, which held the hearts of more than members of the Communist Party; for others, it was Baghdad, or Paris, or Berlin, or Los Angeles—it was in any case not London. It was certainly not Manchester or Bristol or Liverpool or Glasgow. It might be in some other period or it might be in the realm of the imagination; it

was certainly not in 20th century Britain. A dreary country, ruled by an "old gang," by philistines and middlebrows, where the muse lay dying or in chains—who could give his heart to it?

The thirties was the time of the Left Book Club, whose authors seized any stick with which to beat the British dog, and every pretext to announce its death; it was the time of *In Letters of Red*, of *Fact*, of *The Coming Struggle for Power* and *Forward from Liberalism* and of the powerful movement of Marxism in British science. The London School of Economics was at the height of its reputation as a fountain of radical criticism of British life and institutions, as well as a mine of scholarship. The hatred of British society was not a matter simply of the fervent revolt of adolescence and youth, nor was it just a criticism of particular aspects of British life while leaving the whole untouched.

Indeed, even when he loved his cottage, or his Regency house, or some little spot of English soil, the intellectual's love of Britain was overshadowed by a feeling of repugnance for its dreary, unjust, and uncultured society, with its impotent ruling classes and its dull and puritanical middle classes. It was not particular institutions or attitudes that were repellent but the whole notion of Britain or of England. This was not just the view of the Communists or the aesthetes. It was the view of nearly everyone who in the 1920's and 1930's was considered worthy of mention in intellectual circles in Great Britain.

The pattern of alienation by no means covered all parts of the intellectual class—nor were the alienated uniformly and equally alienated. The Civil Service was not swept off its feet nor the whole of the journalistic world, nor every one in the universities, new and old. Nonetheless, the prevailing attitude, in quantity and emphasis, was one of alienation. Divergence from this view was a sort of disqualification for being taken seriously. *The Times* and *The Times Literary Supplement* were the stuffy representatives of a deadening official culture, a writer like Arnold Bennett was as contemptible as a businessman. Those who were still proud of their country or who invoked its

history and traditions were dismissed as Blimps.*

Rediscovering the Old School Tie

LOOK at the British intellectuals now. Could anything be less like what I have just described? How rare has become the deeply critical voice. Not long ago I heard an eminent man of the Left say, in utter seriousness, at a University dinner, that the British Constitution was "as nearly perfect as any human institution could be," and no one even thought it amusing. Who criticises Britain now in any fundamental sense, except for a few Communists and a few Bevanite irreconcilables? There are complaints here and there and on many specific issues, but—in the main—scarcely anyone in Great Britain seems any longer to feel that there is anything fundamentally wrong. On the contrary, Great Britain on the whole, and especially in comparison with other countries, seems to the British intellectual of the mid-1950's to be fundamentally all right and even much more than that. Never has an intellectual class found its society and its culture so much to its satisfaction. Is it conceivable that any British literary periodical—of the few that now survive—would have the audacity to publish, as *Horizon* did about ten years ago, a series on "Where Should John Go?" in which the young Briton, bored and fed up with his country, had surveyed for him the wide range of possible places to which he could emigrate? (But even at that moment Mr. Connolly was already out of touch with the times—has not Mr. V. S. Pritchett recently attributed to him a mid-19th-century Bohemianism?)

The post-war years, it is true, tarnished the patriotic enthusiasm of 1944 and 1945 for the new Britain. Socialism turned out to be less than some had hoped it would be, others found it more than they cared for. The merciless appetite of the Inland Revenue is complained about on all sides but it is not accused of injustice, and the public and the welfare services which

* The chief admirers of British institutions during most of this period were the Germans, who found in England the ideal of the Christian gentleman and an austere responsible aristocratic governing class.

impel its action are not assailed in principle, even by their severest critics. The arbitrary and inflexible rulings of bureaucracy have given rise to a little restiveness and the unforthcomingness of many of the beneficiaries of the bounties of the Labour Government has caused sardonic disgruntlement and crankiness. But criticism of the comprehensive schools from one side, of the American alliance in foreign policy from the other, and of many more details, from all sides, never give the impression of a deeply penetrating cleavage or withdrawal. Fundamental criticism of the trend of British society has become rare. Whereas in the interwar period, Wyndham Lewis was distinguished only by his talent and his violence of expression and not by his fundamental negation of society, now he is a rare bird.

The British intellectual has come to feel proud of the moral stature of a country with so much solidarity and so little acrimony between classes.

The disapproval of public school culture—long a stock in trade—still crops up from time to time, but it is no longer of serious concern to either side. The public schools have stealthily crept back into the hearts of the intellectuals where they repose more securely and more vitally than ever before. To cite only one of many examples, not long ago the *New Statesman and Nation*, in response to a recommendation by one of the younger M.P.s for the abolition of the Public Schools by legislative action, replied that they represented quality and not just privilege. It was not even embarrassed to say that “even the conscientious socialist with a little money is forced to send his child to a private school or to face the self-criticism that he has sacrificed his chances in life to a political prejudice. The “old school tie” has ceased to be an accusation of British injustice; it is now taken as evidence of British quality.

Even India, that ancient sore on the conscience of the forward-looking, has become in retrospect a credit to Britain. Philip Woodruff's work on *The Men Who Ruled India* is everywhere and rightly acclaimed, but one is struck by the reviewer's tone of national self-

congratulation for having produced such a class of men capable of ruling with such justice and humanity. Practically everyone agrees that it was proper to have withdrawn from India; at the same time, there seems to be no question at all that the British Raj itself was something very great indeed—the very extreme opposite of that cause for shame which it was once alleged to be by the liberal intellectuals.

When, in 1942, the late George Orwell rehabilitated Kipling against the unjust denigration of “pansy-left circles” and praised him in particular for his identification with the official classes and for his sense of responsibility for the maintenance of an orderly society, it was clear that one of the extreme positions was being evacuated. Another had been evacuated from the other side in the previous year, when the poet of *The Waste Land* took on himself the task of reasserting the merits of that same “vulgar apologist” of imperialism.

While the welfare state has raised the floor of British society, the symbols of hierarchy and authority have found increasing acceptance. Do the fifties have anything to match the refusal of a peerage by one of the greatest intellectuals of the twenties and thirties, reported in Dr. Thomas Jones's correspondence? On the contrary, it can show an avowed anarchist and an ardent exponent of the *avant garde* in art and literature accepting a knighthood.

What has brought the intellectuals back to the nation? What has made them with all their complaints and grievances, conscious and proud of being British? What has put them at ease with the symbols of sovereign authority? Why have they come once more to appreciate British institutions? What has produced this extraordinary state of collective self-satisfaction?

II

AS SIR JOSEPH MAINWARING sensed, it was with the war that the new spirit began. It was, however, really not a beginning. It was rather a renewal. The cranky antinomianism of the twenty years between the wars was more like a digression from the main course of the British intellectual class in its relations with British institutions. The intellectuals in the first half of the 19th century had never been

as revolutionary, as æsthetic, as anti-bourgeois, as anti-political, as hostile to the symbols of authority as their opposite numbers on the Continent. There had been lots of criticism and disagreement in the second half of the century, but the union of the intellectuals with the Civil Service, the Church, the Houses of Parliament, the Press, and the leadership of the political parties, through the ancient universities primarily, but also through kinship and through the social and convivial life of London upper-class society, constituted a bond from which few could escape and which no other country could then or has since matched. Neither socialism nor the æsthetic revolt of the turn of the century ever bred a doctrine or practice of complete alienation. Many of the major figures in the twin, sometimes separate, sometimes joint, revolts of art and justice, were outsiders—Irishmen mainly. The British intellectuals might have appeared dull to the Continental firebrands and gypsies but they were dutiful and loyal.

This residual loyalty which had been beaten down by the rancour of rebelliousness, this civility which had been suppressed by æsthetic disdain, had been lying in wait all through the inter-war period to be summoned back to ascendancy. It was embarrassing at first for many to perceive within themselves the stirring of national sentiments against which they had earlier set their faces and the denial of which had indeed been central to their outlook. Richard Hillary was one of the first to record his return to the bosom of the nation. He was not describing himself alone when he told of how anomalously uneasy he felt to act in the service of the symbols of a society which he had rejected and to which, despite his conscious rejection, he became aware of a genuine attachment below the surface.

Unlike the First World War of 1914-18, there was no butchery from thoughtlessness in the Second; there was boredom but there was little waste of human life in aimless large-scale military operations. Two of the most eminent British generals of the 1939-45 war were renowned for their humane concern for their troops. The purblind unimaginativeness which

sacrificed so many young men's lives in the First World War, and which contributed so mightily to the greatest alienation of the British intellectuals from civil society in the entire history of Great Britain, was absent in the Second World War.

Furthermore, the war against Nazism and Fascism made a little more sense to the newly-ideological intellectuals, who were thus enabled more easily to disregard the suspect influence on their conduct of considerations of national interest and national loyalty. The alienation of the twenties and thirties was an alienation from the primordial institutions. It was an alienation from kinship, from tradition of tribe and land, from the established church and the civil state—all in the name of life in accordance with principles freely chosen. It was a smoother passage to return to the objects of primordial attachment through what seemed to be a war for principles.

Then, too, the war gave much more for intellectuals to do as intellectuals. Not only the scientists but the historians, economists, linguists, the philosophers, and other scholars, found hospitality in official circles, in the Cabinet Offices, in the Ministry of Information, in the Political Warfare Executive, in the BBC, in Military Intelligence, in the War Office Selection Boards, etc. These and others provided an appreciative audience for the intellectuals in their intellectual capacities—and it contrasted very sharply with the intellectual's image of official anti-intellectualism of the period between the wars. British society too seemed to become more cultivated during the war. The Committee for the Encouragement of Music and Arts—the parent of the Arts Council—the concerts in the National Gallery, the increase in the sale of books and some corresponding increase in their reading, the flowering of discussion circles even under official auspices, as in ABCA and the National Fire Service, facilitated the growth among the intellectuals of the idea that the country was not hostile to them.

The Blurring of Ideologies

OF at least equal importance was the fact that the Government during the war,

despite inefficiencies and errors, gave the appearance of being just.

The WOSB was a direct refutation of the old complaint by outsiders and rebels that the Public School system, in the words of Captain Grimes, "never lets one down." It disregarded breeding, accent, and background and concentrated on what was necessary for the effective performance of the duties of the officer. Rumours, true or untrue, that Lord So and So's nephew or Sir This and That's son had been unable to meet the requirements of the Selection Board contributed to the impression that considerations of inefficiency and justice had penetrated into a sphere which had hitherto been reserved for the Old Guard. The system of officer selection in the Second World War helped to dissolve some of the rancour against antebellum Britain.

No one seemed to be getting rich out of the war, and the nearly universal discomfort, squalor and poor food were equated with virtue. There were black marketeers, but they were not seen as products of the moral deficiencies of the ruling class, and society was not to be blamed for them. Many thought they were foreigners.

The magnanimous wartime figure of Mr. Churchill, above parties and especially above the old gang of vulgar businessmen, bloated Tories, and exploiting imperialists, was a reassurance that bourgeois Britain would not come back into the saddle after the war. The victory of the Labour Party at the polls in 1945 was a further reassurance that intellectuals could continue to regard Britain as their own country, where, in union with civil servants, they could either rule or feel themselves intimately affiliated with those who ruled. Mr. Attlee, with his background in a professional family, his Oxford education, his respectable military record, and his almost exaggerated restraint in speech and attitude, kept the conservative intelligentsia from alienation, however much they disliked the expected consequences of some of the policies of his government. On the other hand, the mere incumbency of the Labour Party in the seats of authority reconciled many of its intellectual members, who were disgruntled on specific issues, to the

society against which their doctrine and principles logically aligned them.

Responsibility, through their party, for the fortunes of the country curbed the oppositional mentality. Such responsibility at a time when the country seemed to be declining in power in the world, and to be in great economic trouble as well, reinforced the curb. The latent patriotism which had been partially suppressed when the country appeared safe and powerful came back to the surface of consciousness when the country was threatened. Those who had ridiculed and abhorred patriotism began to find themselves patriots. The emancipation of India, Burma, and Ceylon, which politically-minded Leftist intellectuals had sought so long, had many repercussions. The feeling of being without an empire, a feeling of being bereft of something, a feeling of loss, enhanced the sense of national identity. Also, the nation seemed to be cleaner and more worthy of being embraced when it was divested of its immoral imperial appurtenances. Little Englanders could feel more comfortable in such a country and could love it more easily, and they could embrace its past without feeling that its present disgraced them.

Then, too, there was America. From a harmless, amiable, good natured, powerful, ridiculous, loyal ally—a sort of loutish and helpful nephew—it suddenly seemed to develop into a huge challenging empire, wilful, disregarding Britain, criticising Britain, lording it over Britain, and claiming to lord it over everyone everywhere. Loyal British backs were arched at this peril, and the terrible economic crises of the second half of the forties accentuated impatience with America. Patriotism in this atmosphere was nurtured by anti-Americanism.

Animosity against naïve, boorish, and successful America heightens the gratification which British intellectuals derive from their national self-contemplation.

On the Continent, in the years after the war, France went without governments, and Italy and Germany were in ruins, the rich ate well, the poor rummaged in dustbins—and that too enhanced British self-esteem. Whereas in the great days of the Empire, imperialistic Britons thought Britain should be tutor to the world

by active teaching, and the intellectuals denounced such arrogance, now former anti-imperialists began to think of Britain as a model commonwealth, a paragon of how to do things without corruption, with public spirit, with a sense of responsibility, with respect for the past and an openness towards the future, free from ideological fanaticism, and without ambitions of self-aggrandisement. This imaginative self-transformation into an ideal commonwealth was fed by and made for patriotism.

There is another factor too in this process. Although the war, for the previously alienated intellectuals, had been a war of principle, the war itself, and the course of events in Britain and in the world at large since then, marked a downward path for ideology. As I have just said, the rediscovery of national sentiments in the wartime experience, and partly the state of siege in which Britain lived during most of the postwar decade, focussed attention and feeling on the symbols of the nation. Symbols of party and class lost some of their power. Abroad and at home, meanwhile, an almost complete evaporation of the basis for a doctrinal socialism was occurring.

British socialism has never been doctrinaire—except for inconsequential corners—and the vicissitudes of governing and the achievement of many of their most tangible goals had made it even less so. The practical conservation by the Conservative Government of most of Labour's innovations has helped to blur the edges of the socialist ideology. The extremes of planning or of *laissez-faire* are not espoused in Britain today by very many intellectuals. There are still a few extremists who would underscore the differences, but for the most part there is not a wide difference between the intellectual proponents of liberalism and socialism. The differences are, moreover, not made into differences in fundamentals, in *Weltanschauung*, and a consensus of matter-of-factness has settled over most discussions of economic policy. The main direction of present-day British political philosophy is to emphasise the inarticulate and inarticulable wisdom of institutions and traditions, and to delimit the power of man to control events through the

strength of his reason and the power of his organisations.

As a result of this evaporation of ideology, and of socialist ideology in particular, the range of dispersion of the British intellectuals has been much narrowed. Without a doctrine which they can espouse, the handful of extremists are forced to confine their extremism to mood and disposition and to express it *ad hoc*. They can scarcely form a sect on such a basis.

One more factor may be mentioned—the fostering of cultural institution by public authority. How can a society which maintains, the Third Programme, the Arts Council, the British Council, etc., with their numerous opportunities for the employment of intellectuals, be regarded as lacking in sympathy for intellectual things? On the contrary, such a society arouses the intellectual's appreciation as well as giving him a sense of responsibility for its support.

III

THERE is, however, something deeper than this. It is the vindication of the culture associated with the aristocracy and gentry, and its restoration to pre-eminence among the guiding stars of the intellectuals. It is a change which is not confined to the intellectuals. All English society has undergone this process of submission to the moral and cultural—but not the political or economic—ascendancy of the aristocracy and gentry.

For nearly a century, the culture of the aristocracy and gentry was in retreat. When their political power and their privileges were increasingly restricted and their economic strength damaged by American and Australian agriculture and the legislation of pre-1914 Liberalism, their cultural power too seemed to be broken. It had been subjected to fierce criticism by the intellectuals. Nineteenth-century radicalism, the aestheticism of the end of the century and after, the diversified and penetrating denunciation of H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, D. H. Lawrence, and G. B. Shaw made people distrustful of class privilege, of snobbery, of elaborate etiquette, of the display of power.

In contrast, bourgeois culture—the culture of the business classes—seemed slowly and steadily on the upgrade in the 19th century, both in London and the provinces—especially in the provinces. As long as Dissent lived in inner exile, excluded from the ancient universities, and excluded therefore from the opportunities to which those universities gave access, as long as it was shunned by the gentry and nobility because it was “in trade” or manufacture, its culture maintained a high intensity in both its religious and secular forms. After or alongside of money-making it made the improvement of civic life its concern; it founded literary and philosophical societies, libraries, and above all, through its own benefactions and through the local government which it controlled, it raised its chief monuments, the modern universities—to show that it too, even though excluded and thought barbarous, could pursue truth and glorify the dingy cities in which its money was made. Living to itself, puritanical, pharisaical, proud, and excessively sensitive to the slights and denials of the traditional society, the bourgeoisie of the big provincial towns, partly from local patriotism, partly from resentment, partly from a love of learning, created, before their submission, a genuine civilisation—earnest, searching, and profound. Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, and the other great critics of the Victorian bourgeoisie which was dissenting and provincial, did less than justice to their victims.

However that may be, the businessman’s Dissenting culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries—the culture which founded the modern universities, the musical and literary institutions of the provinces—has now been routed. Sons sent to Oxford or Cambridge, or into the Army as professional officers, themselves removed southward and Londonward, the Chapel renounced for the Church—these are the signs of the surrender of the British bourgeoisie to its upper-class antagonists.

The London – Oxford – Cambridge Axis

THE movement towards London in the twenties and thirties was not merely a demographic fact. It was associated with the assertion of the cultural supremacy of London

society—and with it, of Oxford and Cambridge—over the provincial centres.

The aristocratic-gentry culture has now come back into the saddle, and with little to dispute its dominion. The twenties and thirties which did it so much damage, did even more damage to the provincial bourgeois culture. The rebellion of the intellectuals was rather against bourgeois culture than against the aristocratic-gentry culture. The latter never abdicated. Some of its offspring might revolt against it, but they could not find anything to substitute for it except Bohemianism and an utterly spurious proletarianism, both completely unviable. Bourgeois culture on the other hand, as soon as it came freely into contact with aristocratic-gentry culture, lost its self-esteem and its spiritual autonomy. It could not win the youth, even those brought up in its own atmosphere. It seemed paltry and mean alongside aristocratic-gentry culture.

This is not relevant solely to the description of the class structure of contemporary Britain. It has the most significant consequences for the development of the British intellectuals because the change in the status and self-esteem of the classes was paralleled by changes in the status and self-esteem of the cultural institutions patronised by the classes. I shall illustrate with reference to the relations between the ancient and the modern universities.

The modern British universities, which in scholarship and science take second place to none in the world, have—despite efforts of the University Grants Committee and many worthy men who have loved them—been belittled in their own eyes. They have never had a place in that image of the right life which has evolved from the aristocratic, squirearchal, and higher official culture. To those who accept this image, modern universities are facts but not realities. They would not deny that Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and the other urban universities actually exist and yet they do not easily admit them to their minds. Oxford and Cambridge are thought of spontaneously when universities are mentioned. If a young man, talking to an educated stranger, refers to his university studies, he is asked “Oxford or Cambridge?” And if he says

Aberystwyth or Nottingham, there is disappointment on the one side and embarrassment on the other. It has always been that way.

True, very many more persons are now factually aware of the modern universities than, say, thirty years ago. They have established themselves as bulwarks of research in science and scholarship, and without them Great Britain would be poorer in every respect. Nonetheless, fundamentally, the situation has scarcely improved. It has perhaps become even worse. The deterioration is revealed in the diminution in self-esteem which these universities have undergone among their own staff, graduates, and patrons.

The modern universities have by no means declined in relative intellectual stature. On the contrary, in some subjects the modern universities now take the lead. The differences in prestige, however, have probably been accentuated. There is less contentment now in being in a modern university than there used to be. It is becoming more difficult to get first class younger men to leave Oxford and Cambridge—and London—for professorships in the provincial universities, however superior the traditions of the chair to be filled. It is more difficult to keep young men in the provinces; they are less contented with the prospect of a career in one of the great provincial universities, and look on them instead as jumping-off places, as places where they can keep alive and wait until something better comes along. They are moreover even quite open in disclosing their motives, as if that were and always had been quite the normal thing. And the writers of the present day who are setting out to show the humanity and vitality of provincial life—particularly Mr. William Cooper, Mr. Kingsley Amis, and Mr. John Wain—do not their heroes, on their different levels of talent, find their appropriate salvation in Oxford and London? Does not Dr. C. P. Snow's chronicle of the world of Lewis Eliot move southward and reach its plateau in the professional class in London and Cambridge, where over sunlit polished tables on which stand old silver milk jugs, few appear to do any hard work and all live graciously and spaciouly?

IV

THE internal unity of the British élite has often been remarked. The re-establishment of amicable and harmonious relations between the intellectuals and British society has really been the unification of the intellectuals with the other groups of the ruling élite; it has been a resumption of friendly relations with the Government, with the Houses of Parliament and the Civil Service, and with the complex of institutions around the central institutions of authority, the Law Courts and the Inns of Court, the Church of England, the ancient Universities, etc.

The culture which has now regained moral ascendancy is not an aristocratic culture in the sense that it is the present culture of an active aristocracy, nor is it the actual culture of the gentry. It is the culture traditionally inspired by those classes, the culture appropriate to certain institutions allied to these classes. Many of the aristocracy and gentry are quite ignorant and boorish but when they become cultivated, their culture takes that tone: moderate, unspecialised and unobsessed, civil, restrained, diversified and personally refined.

It is a pluralistic culture within itself: it has room for politicians, for sportsmen, for travellers, for civil servants and judges and barristers and journalists, for artists and writers of different persuasions. It is an un-bourgeois culture, even though members of the bourgeoisie and their offspring people it most densely. It is an exclusive culture into which the rest of the society is rarely admitted except on the terms of the host. The "insideness" of the British élite is part of a great social machine for creating "outsiders." Its internal unity is intimately related to the tangibility of its external boundaries.

Their conquest, like all conquests, is incomplete. It has left under the surface of the conquered a mass of sentiments and loyalties and suspicions which are far from dissolved. For years, the division of British society—on the one side, the society of the aristocracy and gentry and their allied institutions, and, on the other the Dissenting bourgeois with their provincial, modern society—rendered possible and even easy the public expression of the

cultural aspirations and social and æsthetic sensitivity of "the other nation." The reconquest by aristocratic-gentry culture has rendered this expression more difficult, just as it has obscured the persistent and effective division of the nation and given a spurious impression of unity. Among the British intellectuals there are thickly scattered Judes and Leonard Basts and Bruce Truscotts, experiencing with distress, while hating to acknowledge, the line which separates them from the inside, from the charmed circle of cultivation, affluence, worldliness, and ease.

Earlier there was rivalry and even antagonism between the two nations of British culture but there was little emulation. The bourgeoisie was too concerned with the intrinsic importance of its own cultural and philanthropic works, and too apprehensive of rebuff to worry itself profoundly about its conformity with the standards of the aristocracy and gentry. Indeed, the mere notion that the aristocracy and gentry prized one way of doing things led the business classes to follow another path. The small class of clerks, shop assistants, and self-educated workmen were not sufficiently in contact with, or near to, the uppermost classes in the social hierarchy to be substantially affected by their standards. When they studied at night it was from sheer love of learning or to advance themselves in the knowledge required for progress in their own occupations.

The intellectual's desire to move in the aura of the aristocratic-gentry culture is only about half a century old—its first distinguished representative in the 20th century was Leonard Bast and only in the 1930's did such young people become noticeable in large numbers. The two wars with the opportunities which they afforded for great numbers of young men to be schooled as officers and gentlemen, the increase in the demand for professional and clerical skills, the increase in grammar school and university attendance between the wars and their tremendous increase after the Second World War, have all created a public zealous for the culture of the refined classes.

Continental holidays, the connoisseurship of wine and food, the knowledge of wild flowers and birds, acquaintance with the writings of

Jane Austen, a knowing indulgence for the worthies of the English past, an appreciation of "more leisurely epochs," doing one's job dutifully and reliably, the cultivation of personal relations—these are the elements in the ethos of the newly emerging British intellectual class. It is around an ethos of this sort that nowadays the new attachment to Great Britain is formed. It is in its attachment to symbols of a culture which have always been associated with a "stake in the country" that the British intellectual has been finding its way home. It is through the limited range of sympathy characteristic of that culture, elegant and admirable though it is, that the present-day British intellectual restricts his attachment to British society, and it is around that ethos that the misery and uneasiness of the incompletely assimilated are focussed.

Insiders and Outsiders

THE triumph of the contemporary version of the aristocratic-gentry culture has not resulted in the complete assimilation of the intellectuals to the nation and its institutions. It has only meant a reattachment to a sector of the upper classes. The aristocratic-gentry culture assumes and implicitly praises a considerable stratification of the British society; it makes clear the inferiority of the business world, of the mere technician, of the practical man, and of the enthusiast, moral, religious, and political. It praises the authority which rests ultimately on the Crown and on the land, and it derogates authority which is unconnected with those two sources. It measures its praise in accordance with the proximity of a person to those sources or to the institutions associated with them. The acceptance of this ideal by the intellectuals, then, cannot be without serious consequences for a society which is still a largely bourgeois society in its economic organisation and which still possesses much more than traces of cultures other than the aristocratic-gentry one.

The reconquest has created the problems which are characteristic of situations in which a superior culture is superimposed on more backward cultures. There is a tendency

towards "over-assimilation"—becoming more genteel than gentility requires—on the part of marginal persons, and there is also much resentment generated within the minds of those who "over-assimilate." At the same time, on the top, there is a tendency for the beneficiaries of the superior culture to confine themselves to their own culture and its realm and to close themselves off from the rest.

Let us deal first with the latter consequence—the narrowness of the range of sympathy and curiosity of the British intelligentsia within its own society. Many students of English literature over the past half century have remarked on the limited scope of its subject-matter. Novels of working-class life are certainly extremely rare, both in general and among the writers who succeed in being taken up by the arbiters of taste in the literary reviews, on the BBC, etc. If one surveys the works of the chief writers of the present day, what does one find? In the writings, for example, of Anthony Powell, Julia Strachey, William Cooper, William Plomer,* Elizabeth Bowen, Elizabeth Lake, Antonia White, *et al.*, we do not find the working classes treated at all. Do we find shopkeepers, clerks, small business? There is a little more openness there. William Sansom treats Suburbia because its dull placidity is an excellent foil for diabolism; V. S. Pritchett comes closer to a sympathetic depiction but nonetheless *It May Never Happen*, effectively, and *Mr. Beluncle*, ineffectively, use a petit-bourgeois atmosphere to uncover amusing eccentricities, minor and fairly amiable madnnesses. Businessmen do very poorly. The old-fashioned business brute whom Mr. Pritchett kills off in *Nothing Like Leather*, the cultured Northern business family so fascinating to the narrating outsider and so sympathetically described by Mr. Priestley in *Bright Day*, are as close as the present-day British intellectual comes to intimacy with the world of commerce and industry. Mr. J. D. Scott contrasts the business twisters—significantly enough, of the film world which apparently represents the world of business at large—with the edu-

cated, dutiful, and virtuous Civil Servant and the glamorous film creator; Mr. Geoffrey Cottrell contrasts the business scoundrels, to whom the climber from the lower middle classes has gained connections by marriage, with his old friends who have virtuously gone ahead in Labour politics.

This is not intended as criticism of the contemporary English novel, but only as an indication of the spontaneous inclinations and the objects of aversion of the intellectuals. It reveals the very special area of attachment of the intellectuals to British society. Their very attachment, and the patriotism associated with it, blinds them to British society in its wider reaches. It does not to be sure, breed hostility or bitterness or contempt towards the other classes in society; and the attachment to this culture makes for a greater homogeneity within the class itself. While this is, morally and politically, an advantage, it is intellectually a disadvantage. It makes them less good as intellectuals, among whose tasks—there are many others—is the truthful interpretation of their national society and its culture to their own countrymen and the world.

There is another consequence of this specialised affection of the intellectuals for British society. This is the invisible but painfully tangible ring *within* the intellectual class which shuts off those inside the charmed circle from the fellow-travellers and aspirants—which separates those who are thought to live fully in the culture of the aristocracy and gentry from those who admire them for doing so, and who would do so themselves if they could.

It is manifested in many ways. Recently we have heard again the charges that there is a literary clique, an organised body of friends, which dominates British literary life. This is an extreme manifestation, it is true, of that eternal affliction of the "outsider" in every society, —namely, the belief that at the centre of the magic circle a closed group schemes and rules to the deliberate disadvantage of the excluded. For years Dr. Leavis has assailed the wickedness of Bloomsbury, its coterie culture, its meretricious standards and its improper influence *via* the BBC, the British Council, and other official

* William Plomer's *The Invaders* is an exception which argues that an effort to enter into contact with the lower classes will be hopelessly frustrated.

organs, and his lament sounds once more as an overtone in the skirmishes of the new provincialism against the Oxford–Cambridge–London triangle. This preoccupation with an inner circle, is very evident in the modern universities where Oxford and Cambridge—and London, as far as the provinces are concerned—are invisible presences; in the Common Rooms, appointments and disappointments at Oxford and Cambridge are as real and immediate as if they were happening right there. Questions about students in the modern universities are very often met with a bitter complaint that the students at the local university are poor—with the addition that the good ones go to Oxford or Cambridge, and sometimes London is added in a sober afterthought. The desire to be at the institution as little as possible, and away as much as possible, is part of the injury done to corporate and individual self-esteem by the vestigial but persisting traces of the barrier between the Two Nations within the intellectual class—the Nation of London, Cambridge, Oxford, of the higher Civil Service, of the genteel and sophisticated; and the Nation of the provinces, of petit-bourgeois and upper working-class origin, of bourgeois environment, studious, diligent, and specialised.

The Unsolved Problem

THE assimilation of the new intellectuals into the ideal pattern of the old intellectual class is a terribly difficult task which still remains to be solved. On the surface, it appears to go on merrily and cheerfully; the new intellectual rejoices in every new cultural acquisition which brings him nearer the old—like the brilliant young university lecturer who, a few years ago, could not tell grape juice from wine except by the after-effects and who now takes such pleasure in sparing no one from his knowledge of vintages and vintners, and who even can tell the difference between the wines produced on two neighbouring California hillsides.

Underneath the surface, however, all does not go so well. At the very top of the profession, a man who has talent, genius, or good fortune, finds acceptance by his peers and ad-

mission to their society. The strain of being an outsider is more painfully experienced in the young and in those who do not quite reach the pinnacle of achievement. The insecurity is not, by any means, just a matter of personal achievement; it is also affected by the status of school and university through which this man has passed as a student, and of the institution of which he is a member. It is also in part a matter of his social or family origin although that is less important than the other factors mentioned. The man doomed to live at a provincial university feels it—he feels it if he is a graduate of a provincial university and he feels it worse if he is a graduate of an ancient university. Injured sentiments, memories of slights and rejections accumulate, and fantasy accentuates it all. Mostly, however, the sense of being in the outer circle is expressed in faint sniffs of distaste for students, in mockery and irony. It affects the young more than it does their elders and students more than staff.

Nor is it entirely a matter of the subjective creation of a barrier by those who feel themselves to be outsiders. Part of the exclusiveness of the aristocratic-gentry higher civil service culture arises, not from the organisation of a coterie, but from the fact that it is a humanistic culture, hostile to unbalanced specialisation and hostile therefore to those professions, the practice and traditions of which necessitate the preoccupations of specialisation, and in which the modern universities are so strong. We see it in the ambivalence towards post-graduate research at Oxford and Cambridge and in a more trivial way we see it in the attitude towards the academic titles of address of Professor and Doctor in those universities. Much more importantly we see it in the long-drawn-out and unsatisfactory discussion about the development of institutions of higher technological studies. The training of technologists on this level is repugnant to the ancient universities and their proponents who feel perhaps rightly that such studies are too practical and too “unhumane” to be admitted to their universities; at the same time, they also do not like the idea of independent specialised institutions of University rank where technological research and studies can be carried on, as if they

were on the same dignity as traditional university studies.*

Finally a word may be said on the influence of the coterie itself. It seems to be no more important in England than in any other centralised country where the leading men in each field of intellectual activity come to know one another personally, either because they happen to have been at school together or because their eminence at the peak of their profession has brought them together. On the whole, although there occasionally seem to be some odd goings-on made possible by anonymous reviewing, British intellectual life does not seem to be regulated internally by personal attachments to a much greater extent than in other countries. To a very considerable degree it seems to be governed by impersonal standards that are in part standards which have been associated with certain restricted classes and institutions, themselves the objects of strong, if ambivalent, sentiment.

Those who have grown up inside the culture of these classes and institutions, feel very much at home in them nowadays. But those who have not, are powerfully attracted by them and are yet put off by the implication of their unworthiness for not having been so born. It is not an accident that the *New Statesman* and

* It has sometimes been said that the reason why scientists, especially in Great Britain, have been inclined towards political radicalism lies in the nature of the subject, which requires the use of reason unaided by tradition and which involves the manipulation of material things in accordance with rational principles. Quite apart from the dubious picture of scientific work which this explanation adduces, it seems to suffer from disregard of some simple facts: namely, that in Great Britain, science which is less than pure science is *infra dig*, and that a disproportionately large amount of the best scientific work of Great Britain, pure as well as applied, is carried on in the modern universities which can confer on their numbers little prestige beyond what they can achieve by their work. Scientists, even pure scientists, and certainly applied scientists in Great Britain, live and work in an atmosphere which makes at least some of them regard themselves as outsiders.

Nation with its wide circulation should present an apparently contradictory table of contents: cranky radicalism in its political pages and genteel culture in its literary and cultural sections; or that it should combine Bevanism in politics with a special wine supplement.

V

THE New Elizabethans who were conjured up in aspiration two years ago as the carriers of British tradition have petered out into thin air. The culture of this age is nothing like the old Elizabethan culture. The new Elizabethan age is an age of very notable talent but it is a talent of fine lineaments, of delicate but not deep voice, of restraint which binds no passion, of subtlety without grandeur. Outside the China of the Mandarins, no great society has ever had a body of intellectuals so integrated with, and so congenial to, its ruling class, and so combining civility and refinement. The consensus thus achieved is remarkable. What are the costs?

Just as in the 19th century the public schools and the universities had the task of assimilating into the ruling classes the heirs and descendants of wealthy businessmen who had made the necessary concessions to the spiritual *ancien régime*, so present-day Britain has the equally important task of assimilating into its great traditions the new aspirants to the ruling classes, broadly conceived, who come from the lower-middle and upper-working classes. It was easier to assimilate newcomers when they were only a trickle and when the institutions of assimilation were thoroughly governed by the older culture. It is more difficult now, when the numbers are greater and when many of the institutions themselves have only an ambivalent and uncertain hold on the older culture. The success of the present process of assimilation and refinement is being achieved at the cost of a narrowing of sensibility and imagination, and of a hard, conflict-engendering pressure on those who crowd the periphery.

Four Poems by Alan Ross

VENETIAN GAMES

ALL day, on seats along the curved Schiavone,
They move their glittering Coca-Cola tops
Like draughts about mosaic boards, whose stony
Surfaces are polished by the mops
Of early-morning cleaners. Gently a bony
Hand pushes its tinny piece to some new square,
Or eyes are raised to S. Giorgio Maggiore, green against the copper air.

Outside churches, in drowsy piazzas off the Grand Canal,
Or on small campos that are never quite banal,
Urchins play a kind of bowls with rubber heels—
Though lacking bias, these drop true—in place of woods.
Soiled notes change hands depending how they fall.
Cool nuns and scurrying monks peer out from hoods
To mark the winner, whooping as he turns cartwheels.

Beneath the clock tower where two Moors
Of enviable muscle strike the hours, green-baize
Tables glow inside saloons with swinging doors.
White cats on windows mild in sun raise
Quizzical whiskers as a shot is missed,
Or narrow their pupils to judge when balls have kissed:
Inside, light smokes on skulls, on ivory, through persistent haze.

GIUSEPPE OF CARLOFORTE, SARDINIA

HEAD heavy as a cut white chrysanthemum,
Bobbing between masts, as though it were in fact
A flower he was carrying, a gift that must be treated
With care, he moves—a professional good fellow—
From boat to boat, unloading anecdotes while others work,
Easing his linen belly like a faded drum
Over sun-warmed decks. And so great is his presence