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## SAMUEL PALMER: THE POLITICS OF AN ARTIST

WE know very little of English artists. Few have been studied. We have still only the beginnings of an art history. Books on English painting are mostly books of individual taste, category books (animal painters, water-colour painters, portrait painters, genre painters), and books which, whether 'histories' or picture galleries, repeat an arbitrary ranking of artists made first of all round about 1850. We know much, though, of English poets—almost all English poets. Experts and amateurs in scholarship work them over like ploughland; and even if their criticism or exposition neglects the general factors which bore upon their verse, we can say things about this or that poet with some certainty that we are not risking a prejudice or projecting nonsense. Minor poets, too, are not despised. They are edited. Minor poets have Mr. Blunden to watch over them, as well as anthologies to keep them known. But minor painters, yes, and major ones, too, are, if not despised—contempt should involve knowledge—at least neglected. Here is a list, as they come into my head, of some neglected artists: Patch, Walton, Stubbs, Fuseli, Cristall, Mulready, Stothard, Linnell, Flaxman, Danby, von Holst, Smetham. What kind of mark would you get if you were asked to 'place' each one in ten lines? And yet all of them have done work worth contemplating, and have done something to alter or make the practice and spirit of English art.

The cause of this neglect is not at all obscure. English art, historically and thoroughly, is a romantic art, an art of individuals. It grew up quickly. It had no time to establish itself, to enlist record and criticism, before it had been falsified, and emasculated, by the new values of a wealthy, moralizing, reforming, sentimental and, in many ways excellent middle-class. That is where the blame lies, if one can put the blame on to history. And if we try to blame the formalizing, bland influence of the Academy, or the ineptitude of many of the dabbling civil servants who have had charge of

public collections of English art, or the ill-informed, uninquisitive meddling of the wealthy or aristocratic dilettanti who appoint them,<sup>1</sup> or the apathy of the public educated to say either nothing or else No, or the unenterprising greed of publishers and art dealers, we are wasting our indignation upon a process. What remains is that English art stays almost, in its full nature, unknown. All accounts of it are inadequate. All Lives of English artists written until lately are in their degrees æsthetically or vitally worthless, often ridiculous, and invariably, by licking the boots of a moral or a snobbish code, dishonest. Knowles's *Life of Fuseli* is one early example, Leslie's *Constable* is another. Leslie's presentation of his friend is an idealised presentation. Not the *Constable* who caustically referred to Etty's *Youth at the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm* as Etty's bum-boat.

Samuel Palmer was also victimised—by himself, by his friends, by his son, who wrote his *Life* and burnt his papers, and by art critics, victimised, that is, by the process and by all its agents. What I shall do in this article is re-examine the first years of his life as an artist, using a good many new facts by which Palmer's relation to history and to English romantic art, or, in short, English art, can be fixed. In all accounts of him, the inaccuracy about Samuel Palmer begins early. He is represented as the son of a bookseller and a Baptist (a lowly and sentimentally correct and sentimentally romantic origin), who endured poverty during his visionary seclusion in the Kentish hills.

Palmer, in truth, came of a comfortable, middle-class, Church of England family, and though he was never rich, he inherited several thousand pounds as a young man, and was also, in a small way, a property owner at Shoreham. His grandfather, Christopher Palmer, was partner in a well-known firm of hatters, Moxon, Palmer and Norman, his great-grandfather was a Sussex clergyman. His uncle, Nathaniel Palmer (who did not approve of him as an artist), was a wealthy corn-factor and stockbroker. His father was indeed a bookseller, and a feckless man; but his bookshop in Broad Street (now the fag-end of High Holborn) was as much in one of the chief London thoroughfares as Zwemmer's in Charing Cross Road or Hatchard's in Piccadilly; and his wife, through whom he became a Baptist, was the daughter of a London

<sup>1</sup> An old complaint and a just one, *not* invented by Wyndham Lewis. See Leslie's *Handbook For Young Painters* (1854); p. 22 of the edition of 1870.

banker, William Giles. Palmer, as a young man, violently repudiated dissent, sealed his letters with a signet-ring bearing the Palmer coat of arms, and stood upon the ancient traditions of Church and State. These were facts which had to do with the peculiarity of his painting.

By the time Palmer began to paint, nearly sixty years had gone by since Diderot's order 'Soyez ténébreux!' And by this time—1823—everything vital in romanticism had been planted or had developed. There were varieties of achievement to come before the slow confusion of decay. The sublime and the picturesque had been painted, and the theories were there for Palmer to read about and the paintings for him to see. The gentle, enthusiastic Winckelmann had been absorbed and Flaxman had cut his firm, thin marble line. The Parthenon sculptures had been purchased. Blake and Fuseli were old men. Coleridge, whom Palmer much admired, had retired to Highgate. In 1823 Palmer met John Linnell, who introduced him to Dürer and, in person, to Blake. He had already been introduced to direct drawing from nature. Linnell and Blake now showed him what he called the grand old men, turned him away from being a 'naturalist', and gave him a religious ideal in his art. The degree of religion in romantic poetry and painting ought to be more thoroughly understood. A mechanical view of God was replaced by an emotional, individual apprehension of God. In Germany Tieck found Jakob Boehme's *Aurora* on a Berlin bookstall, and through him Boehme affected German romantic theory and poetry, and the painting, for instance, of Philip Otto Runge.<sup>1</sup> Coleridge read Boehme and said that Boehme contained all that was in Schelling. Blake read him and said that Boehme contained all that was in Swedenborg, and ten thousand times as much. James Ward was another English artist who knew of Boehme.<sup>2</sup> I do not know that Palmer makes any certain mention of him, though he may have learned about him through Blake and may easily have known the English translations. Certainly the influence of Boehme, direct or roundabout, did not give him much more—though that was plenty—than a view of nature and man in relation to God. He certainly read Blake's prophetic books and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but in love with the Church and

<sup>1</sup> See Ludwig Tieck, by Edwin Zeydel (Princeton, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> See *The New Trial of the Spirits*, by James Ward, R.A. (1835).

its teaching and the past, he resisted, or did not explore, Blake's unorthodoxy, a resistance for which he has been pointlessly reproved. But with Boehme and Blake and William Law he saw the terrestrial as the image of the celestial; in his well-known letter to Linnell in 1828 he called creation 'the veil of Heaven, through which her divine features are dimly smiling; the setting of the table before the feast; the symphony before the tune; the prologue of the drama; a dream, and antepast, and proscenium of eternity.' Compare with this Blake's 'Imagination, the real and eternal world of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow' (*Jerusalem*), or Boehme: 'When thou beholdest this world thou hast a type of heaven'—'View this world diligently and consider what manner of fruit, sprouts, and branches grow out of the *Salitter* of the earth, from trees, plants, herbs, roots, flowers, oils, wines, corn, and whatever else there is that thy heart can find out; all is a type of the heavenly pomp' (*Aurora, or Morning-Rednesse in the Rising of The Sun*: Sparrow's translation 1656).

However he came by them, Palmer's idealism, his humility, and his dependence on God, are spiritually in the temper of this German mystic;<sup>1</sup> and upon knowledge of these beliefs depends a full appreciation of all Palmer's finest work. It was religious work. He got up with terrors in the morning, fought against the Devil, prayed for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and found himself visited by the peace of God in the summer twilights at Shoreham, which he loved best of all hours of the day. He resisted, not only Blake's unorthodoxy, but also the extremity of Blake's (and Fuseli's) opposition to nature, while believing with them that 'excess is the essential vivifying spirit, vital spark, embalming spice . . . of the finest art'. He felt that his intense studies of nature—for instance of the huge oaks still growing in Lullingston Park—were a contradiction of Blake, but one which he justified and in which he continued; and he came to understand landscape,

<sup>1</sup> There may even be a link between Palmer and Wackenroder, Tieck's friend, who preached humility before masterpieces, and especially before Dürer. Palmer knew Charles Aders, the German merchant in the City, or had at least visited his remarkable collection of early German masters, as he told Crabb Robinson. The Aderses' friends included not only Blake, Linnell, James Ward, Wordsworth, Coleridge, but the Schlegels. It seems to me certain that the Aderses must have passed on to English painters some knowledge of the idealism of the German romantics.

especially landscape looking into infinity from a high ridge of hills, as a symbol of the promise of futurity—of eternal life. Of all the poems he wrote, but did not always complete, in his Shoreham notebooks, only one, so far as I know, has survived. It has not been published, but here it is, as the best of glosses upon his sepias and landscapes of Shoreham twilight:

And now the trembling light  
 Glimmers behind the little hills and corn,  
 Ling'ring as loth to part; yet part thou must  
 And though than open day far pleasing more  
 (Ere yet the fields and pearly cups of flowers  
 Twinkle in the parting light;)

Thee night shall hide, sweet visionary gleam  
 That softly lookest through the rising dew;

Till all like silver bright,  
 The faithful witness, pure and white,  
 Shall look o'er yonder grassy hill,  
 At this village, safe and still.  
 All is safe and all is still,  
 Save what noise the watch-dog makes  
 Or the shrill cock the silence breaks.

Now and then—

And now and then—

Hark! Once again,

The wether's bell

To us doth tell

Some little stirring in the fold.  
 Methinks the ling'ring dying ray  
 Of twilight time, doth seem more fair,  
 And lights the soul up more than day  
 When wide-spread sultry sunshines are:  
 Yet all is right and all most fair,  
 For thou, dear God, hast formed all;  
 Thou deckest every little flower,  
 Thou girdest every planet ball,  
 And mark'st when sparrows fall.

This, I believe, was written in 1825, when Palmer was twenty, and in the hot summer in which he painted the exquisite designs first illustrated by Mr. Sturge Moore a few years ago in *Apollo*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Apollo*: December 1936.

Palmer's political, religious and artistic beliefs and practice cohere, and need to be considered with the years through which he lived. He grew up in the turbulent and uneasy peace, when, after 1815, all the hammers of change were sounding, building and breaking, and when the reform was threatened, in Church and State, of institutions which, Palmer felt, contained the essence and goodness of life. Blake and Linnell and Fuseli turned him from modern painting to Dürer, Van Leyden, Claude, Elsheimer, Michelangelo, and the engraver Bonasoni, a taste for whom he shared with Linnell and Blake's friend, the poisoner Wainewright.<sup>1</sup> Blake—above all Blake's Virgil woodcuts—and Linnell, and his own predilection, and the unsettlement of the 'twenties and 'thirties, turned him to the primitivism of a Christian age of gold, different from what he called the 'flashy distracted present' (1823), and 'the wretched moderns and their spiders' webs and their feasts on empty wind, thistles and dung' (1824). These were his texts at this time (and always): 'The earth is full of thy richness' and 'the moon also to rule by night, for his mercy endureth for ever.' The party in the Church most in tune with these visionary realities was, to him, the Anglican Church of his fathers, the Church of spires under the steep slopes of the Kentish hills; and the political party, the High Tories. The repeal of disabilities on dissenters (1828) upset him as much as it upset the ageing Lord Eldon. Like Constable and Coleridge, he dreaded, as I shall explain in a minute, the Reform Bill. Rick burning, riots, machine-breaking, the wild speculation and greed and collapse of 1824–1826—all such things could be put down to the agitation of Whigs and dissenters and the influence of the new money-makers it was proposed to enfranchise. And the riots and the mutterings of change were accompanied by earthquakes, eruptions, disasters, and by the storms which broke up the hot English summers of 1825 and 1826, and showed Palmer those rising, swelling, immense clouds he so often drew. There was the portent of Irving—the crowded chapel, the apocalyptic sermons of this bizarre prophet of the millennium, with his presence, his black hair curling on to his shoulders, the unearthly shrieks of his company. Blake, Coleridge, Carlyle and many others thought highly of Irving, whom Blake called a sent man, adding that sent men sometimes went too far. The counterpart of his

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Criticisms of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright* (1880), p. 40 seq.

sermons (by which artists were much attracted) were the wide, apocalyptic canvases of Danby and Martin (Martin was a Reformer and a Radical), in which lightnings split the sky, the writing appeared on the wall, and the last moon sank in blood. One did not need to be what Palmer called himself, a 'quaint, crinkle-crinkle Goth', to be uneasy and apprehensive. Palmer, not under the compulsion of time, saw, as we may now realize, the evil course of things; and this blinded him to the immediate necessity of reforming what had outlived its virtue or its expediency. But more ordinary, harder-headed men than Palmer, better disposed towards reform, felt the earthquakes and the uncertainty as much. Harriet Martineau, in her *History of the Peace*, quotes Arnold of Rugby, who thought, whether Irving's activities were a real sign or no, that the day of the Lord was coming 'i.e. the termination of one of the great αἰῶνες of the human race. . . . The termination of the Jewish αἰὼν in the first century, and of the Roman αἰὼν in the fifth and sixth, were each marked by the same concurrence of calamities, wars, tumults, pestilences, earthquakes, etc., all marking the time of one of God's peculiar seasons of visitation.' Arnold ended this letter (October 25th 1831), 'We talk, as much as we dare talk of anything two months distant, of going to the Lakes in the winter. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

If Palmer's early sketchbooks or notebooks—the two were combined—had not been burnt, all save one, and if more of his early correspondence had survived, we should have had incomparable evidence of a perturbed soul at one of the climaxes of English life and art. A letter, unpublished, does remain, which he sent to George Richmond in 1828, from Shoreham:

'Politics we dabble in: Mr. L[innell], though of no party, magnifies the peasants; I, also, as you know, of no party, as I love our fine British peasantry, think best of the old high Tories, because I find they gave most liberty to the poor, and were not morose, sullen and bloodthirsty like the Whigs, liberty jacks and dissenters; whose cruelty when they reign'd was as bad as that of the worst times of the worst papists; only more sly and smoothlier varnish'd over with a thin shew of reason. On Theology, and church government, we keep up a perpetual running fight: I am for high church and the less of State expediency and money mix'd up with it the better.'

<sup>1</sup> Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, 12th ed., Vol. I, p. 266.



As the years moved on to the final passage of the Reform Bill, Palmer's fanaticism grew still more fanatic. His whole art, all the work he had done, all the moons, and leaves against the evening or morning light, all his rich fruit trees, and oaks, and thatched golden roofs, and round hills and spires, his reading of the Christian Fathers, the English divines, and the poets, his feeling for the pure and primitive, his love for Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher, all his visionary years at Shoreham, fought on his side against the Reform Bill. If it was passed, it would be the beginning of the new century, the new αἰὼν, and the end of an epoch in Palmer's life.

The ricks burnt around Shoreham, within sight of Palmer's house, under the moons that he had painted broad and full. The moons charmed away neither fire nor reform, and on June 4th, 1832, the Reform Bill was passed the House of Lords. The anti-Reformers still saw some last hope in the General Election which followed in December, and while purple banners were being stitched for the Tory candidate in West Kent with the arms of the county, St. George and the Dragon and 'King and Constitution', Palmer left painting to gesticulate in print against the change and the future. He wrote a violent anonymous pamphlet, printed at Sevenoaks. His son mentions the pamphlet in the 'Life and Letters', but does not quote from it, and I have not found a copy in any public library. But Palmer sent it for review to the Kentish papers, the *Kentish Observer*, the Tory paper, which promised to notice it, and never did, and the Reform paper, the *Kentish Gazette*, which gave it a column of quotation and abuse.<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet was called 'An Address to the Electors of West Kent'—by 'An Elector', and it was extraordinary enough. 'The ravings of this maniac', the *Gazette* called it, believing him at the same time to be a Kentish clergyman. But the ravings are authentic Palmer. Here are some of them:

'It is true we vastly, and beyond<sup>2</sup> comparison outnumber the enemy: but then we are men of peace; and they are beasts of prey. We are strongest by day: they ravine in the night; for their optics are adapted to darkness. And it is now a very dark night for Europe. . . .'

'You will NOT suffer those temples where you received the Christian name to fall an easy prey to sacrilegious plunderers!

<sup>1</sup> No. 1810, December 11th, 1832.



You will NOT let that dust which covers the ashes of your parents be made the filthy track of Jacobinical hyenas!’

‘Landholders, who have estates confiscated, or laid in ashes: Farmers who have free trade and annihilation impending over you: Manufacturers who must be beggared in the bankruptcy of your country: Fundholders, who desire not the *wet sponge*: Britons who have liberty to lose: Christians who have a religion to be blasphemed: now is the time for your last struggle!’

He appealed, it is true, for effectual reform ‘in God’s name’, and the strangling of corruption, ‘but leave not your hearths and altars a prey to the most heartless, the most bloody, most obscene, profane, and atrocious faction which even defied God and insulted humanity’.

The election was not party politics, ‘but Existence, or Annihilation, to good old England!’

It would be too much to say existence or annihilation to Samuel Palmer. But the Tory candidate for West Kent was at the bottom of the poll. The Jacobinical hyenas were in, by their own charter; and now began the gradual change and decline of Palmer’s art. Stepped up too high, it fell too low. The change might be compared with the rise and the crash of Edward Irving (who also disapproved of the Reform Bill).<sup>1</sup> To say gradual change is perhaps wrong. There was an immediate change, and gradual had better be tacked only to ‘decline’. First, a change of manner. In 1834 Palmer began to break up his life at Shoreham. He had bought a house near Paddington. He began sketching journeys to Devon and to Wales. But he seems a bit uneasily to have felt himself to be like Peacock’s modern poet (1820), ‘a semi-barbarian in a civilized community’ who ‘lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward.’ He remained a crab, but he began to convince himself that prudentially (a good adverb of the time) his years had not, altogether, been well spent. ‘It is a very trying situation in which I am at present placed—’ he wrote in October 1834 to his friend George

<sup>1</sup> ‘He objected clearly to my Reform Bill notions, found Democracy a thing forbidden, leading down to outer darkness.’ Carlyle: *Edward Irving*, in *Reminiscences*, Vol. 2 (1881).

Richmond, who was making money and had already come to terms with the new world as a portrait painter, 'wishing as soon as possible to struggle up into repute—I have not the money nor influence to do good with and I am in danger of having all my thoughts and affections absorbed into the means.' His religious fervour was quietening down, its extremity cooling to a Tractarian glow. 'I have a slowly but steadily increasing conviction that the religion of Jesus Christ is perfectly divine, but it certainly was not only intended to be enthroned in the understanding but enshrined in the heart, for the personal love of Christ is its beginning and end.' In Wales he painted waterfalls and mountains in a cooler, purer tinted, more realistic manner, with an easy, attractive thinness, a physical thinness in contrast to the thick pigments of *A Shoreham Garden*. The water-colours of this time are among the loveliest, though not among the most extraordinary of his works. But few are known, and many seem to be lost. He met Crabb Robinson in Wales in 1836, Robinson being attracted by his 'eye of deep feeling and very capacious forehead' and by his knowledge of Blake. Robinson helped Palmer, thought him 'probably a man of genius for the arts', but disapproved of his views: 'He is so much behind on moral subjects as to disapprove of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. He believes in Witchcraft.'<sup>1</sup> No doubt by this time Palmer had shaved off the luxuriant beard and clipped the shoulder length curls he had grown at Shoreham in the style of Albert Dürer. The effort to struggle up into repute went on, the art went down. He called on Robinson early in 1837 to inquire about Westmorland waterfalls. But in this year he made two decisions—he decided to marry and he decided to go to Italy. Perhaps it was now, too, that he read, as he afterwards told his patron L. R. Valpy, the essay on 'Decision of Character' in John Foster's *Essays in a Series of Letters to a Friend*. Foster was a Baptist, an admirer, and acquaintance, of Coleridge and a man who succeeded in overcoming his own imagination. His essays were exceedingly popular far on into the new century, and they were a convenient didactic bridge from the old outlook to the new. If Palmer read him on 'Decision of Character', no doubt he read the neighbouring essay on Romanticism, which dealt with the 'ascendancy of imagination over judgement.' 'Imagination', said

<sup>1</sup> Crabb Robinson's Journal, 19th December 1836. Unpublished entry.

Foster, who had been a romantic himself, 'may be allowed the ascendancy in early youth, the case should always be reversed in mature life; and if it is not, a man should consider his mind as either unfortunately constructed, or unwisely Disciplined.' If Palmer was too romantic and too irresolute, Foster on Decision showed him that he could try, at any rate, to put on the freezing shirt of character. '... Though it is improbable that a very irresolute man can ever become an habitually decisive one, it should be observed that as there are many degrees of determined character, and some very defective ones, it might be possible to apply a discipline which should advance a man from the first degree to the second, and from that to the third, and how much further I cannot tell; he may try.'

Palmer did try. He married unwisely, not merely a wife, but into a family. He married one of the daughters of the eccentric, ruthless, quarrelsome, talented, and detested artist John Linnell. Linnell had decision of character, all right. Though he and Palmer had been close friends, though Palmer owed much to him, though Linnell had been close to Blake, Linnell developed into a suspicious tyrannical, cruel egotist. Primitivism led Palmer to High Church and to some sympathies for the Oxford Movement (which had started to take shape after the Reform Bill). Primitivism led his father-in-law to become a Plymouth Brother, to go into a rage if, on a sketching tour, he saw candlesticks on an altar, to interfere between Palmer and his wife, and to call Palmer derisively and malignantly 'the Jesuit' or 'the Puseyite'. Palmer's wife was puritanical and was never, so her son declared, 'really in sympathy or touch with him.' None of the Linnells understood Palmer or his work; and by his marriage and his association with Linnell he was forced, so his son says again, to spend '42 years in the midst of surroundings which, with a few short exceptions, were hateful to him.' So much for his decision to marry. With his wife he went off to Italy in 1837 for a working honeymoon. Wiser artists resisted that Italian bait. Delacroix never went to Italy, wishing to keep the purity of his own style. Constable, no doubt deliberately, did not go to see the great Italians. Turner went, but, after a bad moment or two, continued to be Turner. Palmer visited Florence and Rome at a time of personal deflation and crisis. Brought up on the lessons of Blake and Fuseli, full of the Italian visions of Claude, expectant of

all the grandeur of the Sistine Chapel, and anxious to continue his climb into repute, Palmer set off from England ready to accept, worship, copy, and slave. He was amazed by the brilliance of Italy, and possessed not so much by Michelangelo and Raphael as by his experience of the Venetian landscape painters.

It is not so easy for us to understand how fatal such trips could be into sharp light and Old Masterland. Our painting since Seurat has been one, on the whole, of shape and surface, not of degrees of atmosphere. A 'composition' can be as well devised in a Glasgow fog as in a Mediterranean olive orchard. The lighting of a dream or an episode in the womb owes little to local peculiarities of sunlight; and what Sickert has called 'the roofy school of Collioure and Fitzroy Street' has dealt more in the generalized (and dull) ordering of tiles and walls, than with aerial subtlety. But things were not so between 1800 and 1840. Palmer's light, moonlight, twilight, or the flush on the summit, the light of Constable or Cotman, or the light of Caspar David Friedrich, was the northern light to which they were habituated and through which they know how to express their vision. Italian light and colour, however justified by too much veneration for holy ground and by the nineteenth-century yearning to be scientific, and 'accurate,' in colour, was alien and fatal to Palmer. In 1835 he had written from Tintern Abbey to George Richmond: 'if you are a Goth, come hither. If you are a pure Greek take a cab and make a sketch of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, before breakfast.' In 1839 he wrote to Richmond from Florence: 'I have been lately wholly absorbed in meditation and study of the ancient art of landscape as practised by Titian, Giorgione, etc., and am scarcely able to think of anything else<sup>1</sup>—it has worked and is working a complete renovation of my tastes and habits of thought—and appears to me so uncongenial with the most talented efforts of English art—clever as they are, that I am really afraid to come within the seducing atmosphere of living talent—knowing by experience its exciting and intoxicating influence.'

And when he came back he began that long series of primitive and pastoral subjects in a mixed manner of Italian light, Venetian colour, and English scenery, with which Palmer tried the

<sup>1</sup> A long remove from Blake, who detested the 'Venetian demons'. But then Palmer had shown his independence long before by admiring, as well as Nature, the 'most outrageous demon Rubens'.

tumbler's job of being true to himself, to his past, to Italy, and to the market.

Palmer did not become so soft and dull a painter as some people maintain. He had been too talented and was too sensitive. Some of his Italian watercolours I have seen are good (particularly the few that he made cool and 'English', like Turner's lovely sketches of Rome); and behind his hot Venetian pastorals were always, all through his life, skilful, exquisite drawings. In his over-praised etchings, too, tenderness and depth struggle with a soft, blunted pastoral formula, part English, part Virgilian. Palmer did not surrender to the nineteenth century. He went on—in spite of his practice, in spite of the Venetians—admiring all he had admired at Shoreham, Blake, Bonasoni, Fuseli, Claude, Elsheimer. He went on admiring excess and fanaticism as principles for the artist—in spite of Foster's essays. He went on being a Christian inclining towards the Oxford Movement<sup>1</sup> and he did not adopt an expedient or superficial morality. But he missed the fullness of life, shut, or limited, it would be fairer to say, both his eyes and his mind, turned his powerful bias into prejudice, and prejudice into dogma. He had been a considerable artist because for some fourteen years he had harmonized in a passionate, headlong expression the ideas he felt with the things he saw, the earthly things made in the image of Paradise.<sup>2</sup> He failed when that harmony failed. He heeded Foster's shrewd warning not to indulge the imagination, did not trust in himself, and by trying to avoid indulgence, drifted into the final state which Foster described: 'The whole mind may become at length something like a hemisphere of cloud scenery, filled with an ever-moving train of changing, melting forms, of every colour, mingled with rainbows, meteors, and an occasional gleam of pure sunlight, *all vanishing away, the mental like this natural imagery, when its hour is up, without leaving anything behind but the wish to recover the vision.*'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Palmer's intimate friend and cousin, John Giles, went from being a Baptist nearly over to Rome, 'nibbled at' through life by Cardinal Manning.

<sup>2</sup> There is a lesson on the importance and quality of beliefs in these two facts (i) that Palmer ground his own expensive colours at Shoreham, wanting them to be, as they still are, durable to the glory of God; (ii) that pictures by the great, art-worldly Reynolds drip and fade, and many pictures by the Radical sensationalist, Martin, have long ago gone black. But I do not mean that all painters of the Euston Road school should go off and read Boehme.

<sup>3</sup> Did Palmer ever admit that his Shoreham years produced the deepest

No doubt Palmer was buried under the changes of the 'thirties and also under the nineteenth century in his prim Surrey villa, but his spiritual and imaginative stamina, and not history, were to blame. He had gone outside his call as a painter, had tied his talent too close to religion and politics, and his talent suffered with the kick to his political faith and the inescapable cooling of his religious flame. He did not develop, that is the trouble. Better to have gone mad, and developed in the madhouse as Clare developed,—

I loved, but woman fell away;  
 I hid me from her faded flame.  
 I snatched the sun's eternal ray  
 And wrote till earth was but a name.

In every language upon earth,  
 On every shore, o'er every sea,  
 I gave my name immortal birth  
 And kept my spirit with the free—

than to have hatched his spirit with the maids and scones in the prison of his villa, guarded by conifers and begonias. He did not yield to the century. No, but he did not grasp it, use it and overcome it. He did not gain the deep, necessary worldliness of a Delacroix. He became peculiar and ineffectual, a disappointed eccentric. 'Anyone can have talent when he is five and twenty,' said Degas, 'the thing is to have talent when you are fifty.' Palmer's talent might have had better chances of that survival had he belonged, not to his own twilight generation, but to the slightly older, worldlier generation of Keats, Delacroix and Danby, or the slightly younger generation of Tennyson, Madox Brown, and Gautier (how would he have taken Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* with its fun against the new morality, the poetry of Catholicism, and the painters of the Angelic School?). But might have beens are all barren—barren except as definitions of what was; and Palmer was an absorbed, but limited visionary: he stood out for one moment in the glide of a free, full romanticism

painting of his life? I do not think so. He still praised fanaticism, but was diffident about his own fanatic past. I have just seen some notes of his written for a pupil in 1856: 'When [you] see anything *very* rich, put it into drawing at once—but only a little. Nature, never strong in extremes—fault of young artists [to be] struck with richness of nature.'

in firm possession of ideas (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake) towards sentimental romanticism, approved by morality and devoid of ideas, or towards that romanticism of defiant sensation, which grew in the air like a fine orchid without roots. Palmer believed in the mystery of God. Rossetti believed in mystery. Sir William Blake Richmond, R.A., son of Palmer's friend, son of the successful Victorian portrait-painter who watched Blake sing himself into death and then closed his eyes, follower-on of the Pre-Raphaelites—he believed in smooth, elongated prettiness from which all mystery had been squashed and squeezed.

The wheel had turned completely, for it was also Sir William Blake Richmond who was outraged upon inherited principle, when an uncompromising truth and worldliness came back to England with Whistler, with Degas, and with Sickert.

NOTE. The authorities for Samuel Palmer's Life are (1) *The Memoir of Samuel Palmer* (1882) by A. H. Palmer; (2) *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer* (1892), by A. H. Palmer; (3) *Catalogue of the Samuel Palmer Exhibition*, introduced by A. H. Palmer. Victoria and Albert Museum (1926); (4) *Memoir of Edward Calvert* (1893), by Samuel Calvert; (5) *Life of John Linnell* (1892), by A. T. Story; (6) *The Richmond Papers* (1926), edited by A. M. W. Stirling. Mr. Binyon's *Followers of William Blake* (1926) is a picture-book. I am grateful for unpublished letters to Mr. John Richmond, Mr. Martin Hardie, Mrs. F. L. Griggs, and Miss Wright, and for information of various kinds to descendants of John Linnell. Particulars of the Palmer family come from wills at Somerset House. I also thank the authorities of Dr. Williams, Library for leave to consult Crabb Robinson's journal and note-books.



EVELYN WAUGH

## MY FATHER'S HOUSE<sup>1</sup>

My father, it appeared, had been knocked down by a baker's van and had died without regaining consciousness. I was his only child and, with the exception of my uncle, his only near relative. 'All arrangements' had been made. The funeral was taking place that day. *'In spite of your father's opinions, in the absence of any formal instructions to the contrary,'* my Uncle Andrew wrote, *'your Aunt and I thought it best to have a religious ceremony of an unostentatious kind.'*

'He might have telegraphed,' I thought; and then, later, 'Why should he have?' There was no question of my having been able to see my father before he died; participation in a 'religious ceremony of an unostentatious kind' was neither in my line nor my father's; nor—to do him justice—in my Uncle Andrew's. It would satisfy the Jellabys.

With regard to the Jellabys, my father always avowed a ruthlessness which he was far from practising; he would, in fact, put himself to considerable inconvenience to accommodate them, but in principle he abhorred any suggestion of discretion or solicitude. It was his belief that no one but himself dealt properly with their servants. Two attitudes drove him to equal fury: what he called the *pas-devant* tomfoolery of his childhood—the precept that scandal and the mention of exact sums of money should be hushed in their presence—or the more recent idea that their quarters should be prettily decorated and themselves given opportunity for cultural development. 'Jellaby has been with me twenty years,' he would say, 'and is fully cognisant of the facts of life. He and Mrs. Jellaby know my income to the nearest shilling and they know the full history of everyone who comes to this house. I pay them abominably and they supplement their wages by cooking the books. Servants prefer it that way. It preserves their independence and self-respect. The Jellabys eat continually, sleep with the windows shut, go to church every Sunday morning and to chapel in the evening, and entertain surreptitiously at my

<sup>1</sup> See 'ABOUT THIS NUMBER', page 302