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IT would be interesting to write a history of the European subconscious, of the images projected by artists of the recurrent dream which lies hidden beneath all the surface achievement and rational exploit. Because this dream was first explicit in Greece we are apt to visualize it purely in terms of classical mythology, verging almost on to classical history; Helen of Troy became Cleopatra, Hector, Alexander, until, as time went on Orpheus and Virgil were interchangeable to the medieval mind. Perhaps what we are apt to formularize as 'our debt to Greece and Rome' is a debt only of etymology. Heloise and Madame Bovary may be the sisters and not the daughters of Penelope, and Prometheus but one actor in a drama of which 'Huis Clos' is not the final scene.

The artist, no matter what his medium, comes into contact with this great flow of imagery and feeling mainly through the instrumentality of his instinct. The painter is in closest touch with the irrational; more than any other artist he deals in magic, in deception, and the use of myth and of symbols is to him a necessity, not a luxury of his craft. Fifty men may say the same thing in the same way, but to put even a dab of paint on a canvas, a line on a paper, is immediately to surrender oneself to the tyranny of personality.

It was not until the nineteenth century that the older forms of mythological or religious expression became, as far as living art was concerned, irrelevant. The Impressionists were realists, who made visual reality and the documentation of appearances their chief weapon in the onslaught on apprehension. It was their quest for 'reality' which made possible that dominance of intellect in painting which resulted first in Cézanne, and then in Cubism. Every artistic movement of the last half-century has been coloured by its reaction to this rational quest for reality. Preoccupied with the quest for a purity or a logic of expression which eventually developed into a stylization so extreme as to become a kind of algebra, Cubism and its offshoots integrated human feeling and human thought only in so far as the artist was concerned. The lay

spectator, whether cultured or not, was predominantly conscious of an aridity, of a lack of common humanity, giving that phrase all the undertones of lyricism and emotionalism which have come always to be associated with it. The dualism of form and content of poetry and plasticity, of body and soul, had ceased to be internal to every painting, and had become instead an objectivized struggle, a latter-day statement of the rivalry between Poussinistes and Rubensistes.

It is typical, therefore, of the nostalgia humanity always cherishes for those qualities which it does not possess, that it was not until the advent of Cubism that any strong feeling developed about the Sunday, or Primitive painter. When Rémy de Gourmont, Alfred Jarry and Apollinaire began to hail the Douanier Rousseau as a great painter, they were suggesting the nature of the fascination exercised over them by the kind of painting which they were helping to demolish. The strongest support for the Primitives has always come from the *littérateurs*, who, starved of poetry by the artists' quest for a purely plastic perfection, found it again in the meticulous realism of the 'innocent eye'. Although Rousseau, Bombois or Vivin might teach artists a quality to envy, there could never be a faux-Rousseau, a disciple of Bombois or a school of Vivinistes.

The appreciation of the Primitive painter has been occasioned by a phase in the history of painting and a reaction in the more general psychology of our time. Rousseau was the first Primitive to be treated as an individual artist, and, since his time educated European taste has come to savour the personal mythologies of Bombois, of Vivin, of Peyronnet, of Séraphine, of Jean Eve and of Bauchant. It is one of the outstanding features of the work of all these painters that they acquire naturally and inevitably, not only a highly personalized technical approach, but also a recognizable and immensely significant mythology of the kind which their more sophisticated brethren seek, usually in vain. As Bernard Dorival has pointed out (*Les Étapes de la Peinture Moderne*, vol. 3, p. 27), 'Le grand anonymat du savoir tend à confondre ceux qui savent dans une foule anonyme. Chaque technique dépersonnalise', and because, by their very nature they were free from this anonymity, the Primitives have been able to tap directly the sources of European iconography. Because they are bound to reality by the limitations of their vision, they have

become the most poetic of all painters; because they are limited to detail they have become the most abstract.

Free to paint whatever they liked, and whatever attracted them, their style and subject-matter assumes a greater significance for their own age. Vivin and Utrillo are the only Canalettos of our own urban scenery (the same type of subject appealed also to Greaves and to Lowry), whilst the tropical extravagances of Rousseau, the Barbizon-Fontainebleau idylls of Bombois, and the maritime preoccupations of Peyronnet have a relevance surpassing the merely documentary. With Bauchant the position is a more interesting one; just as Rousseau has been one of the few modern artists to achieve a means of reconciling portraiture with the artistic responsibilities of his development, so Bauchant has achieved the even more remarkable feat of introducing into modern art 'les grandes machines'. The reminiscence of Poussin is inescapable, and paintings such as his 'Jesus in the Court of the High Priest' recall Poussin's 'David with the head of Goliath', from Dulwich, in form and composition as well as in feeling. Translating literally the dreams of Europe and of Western civilization, with the intellectual equipment of an individualist peasant of the Third Republic, he has found himself in the tradition of Watteau and of Corot. It was Michelet who was first responsible for reaffirming a belief in the cultural significance of ordinary people, and their relevance to the general scheme of things, and Bauchant repaid the debt by constructing his artistic syntax from the writings of the nineteenth-century popularizers of history. It was an attitude not dissimilar to that of Hugo. Both have the unacademic attitude towards the past, looking upon it rather as it were a part of contemporary life, with something of the same feeling which, in the eighteenth century removed the element of incongruity from a bewigged Caesar or a Venus in hooped skirts. The nearest literary equivalent to Bauchant is a passage from Hugo's 'Zim-Zizimi', in which the poet describes the tomb of Cleopatra.

Passants, quelqu'un veut voir Cléopâtre au lit;  
Venez, l'alcôve est morne, une brume l'emplit;  
Cléopâtre est couchée à jamais; cette femme  
Fut l'éblouissement de l'Asie, et la flamme  
Que tout le genre humain avait dans son regard;  
Quand elle disparut, le monde fut hagard;

Ses dents étaient de perle et sa bouche était d'ambre;  
Les rois mouraient d'amour en entrant dans sa chambre. . . .  
O vivants, allez voir sa tombe souveraine;  
Fière elle était déesse et daignait être reine;  
L'amour prenait pour arc sa lèvre aux coins moqueurs;  
Sa beauté rendait fous les fronts, les sens, les cœurs,  
Et plus que les lions rugissants était forte;  
Mais bouchez-vous le nez si vous passez la porte.

This is a sort of classical 'Image d'Épinal', and shows Hugo, like Bauchant, treating the great with a familiarity which eventually is fruitful of more than contempt.

Because the Primitive artist is the product of an environment which is very different from that which is assumed to be the average one of the 'intellectual', it is more necessary to pay attention to the details of his biography than it is with those whom we settle easily against the background of nineteenth-century Paris. André Bauchant was born on 24 April 1873, in the village of Châteaurenault, near Tours. His father, a gardener, came from the lower fringe of the *petite bourgeoisie*, and might have risen above the possession of his eventual two hectares, had it not been for an economically inhibiting addiction to the joys of the bottle. André attended the École Communale in the daytime, and in the evening worked with his elder brother, Hippolyte, in the parental fields. By the time he was fourteen his education was finished, and he concentrated on the orientation of his life. During 1894 he spent ten months in the army, but was released because his brother had been stricken by rheumatism, that occupational disease of the European peasant. At the almost canonical age of twenty-seven André married Alphonsine Bataillon, a village girl. It was the year of the Universal Exhibition, and they spent their honeymoon in Paris, gaping at the miracles of art and industry, and being particularly struck by the relevance of a Sèvres vase ornamented with an allegorical subject, 'L'Amour se dévolant'.

Then followed fourteen years of village life, dominated, physically by the twelfth-century donjon which gave its name to the village, and spiritually by the struggle for economic survival, a struggle set within the framework of the soft Touranian landscape and marked by the passage of the inevitable seasons. Then came the war. Bauchant rejoined his regiment at Tours, but

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was preserved by a benevolent providence from any more destructive experience than boredom, the tireless, unending, irrelevant boredom of army life. This indeed was not without value in the formation of his character. Condemned, perhaps even blessed, by fate with a life secure within the defence of that ceaseless activity of the peasant, he had never been faced with the responsibility of adventuring into the world of passivity. An army life is a monastic one, not only in the emotional sense, but in that it confers freedom from the world. Introduced to obligatory inactivity, Bauchant was able to explore his own personality, and that was valuable if only because it revealed to himself the possession of an extraordinary visual memory. The internal revelation was followed by an external one. He volunteered for service in the Dardanelles, and in 1916 spent ten months in Greece. This was the formative period of his life. The French peasant, nurtured in a language which assimilated rather than reproduced the great names of Greece and made them its own, a language which knew Plato as Platon, and counted as one of its greatest lines of verse,

‘C’est Vénus toute entière à sa proie rattachée’,

had come into contact with his own spiritual homeland. He was not yet a painter; he had not yet come to that mode of expression, but, as he sat outside his army tent in the cool of the evening, he could discern the outlines of Troy, and his mind took on the shape and contours which it was always to retain.

Bauchant, though he had left school at the age of fourteen, was a product of that French educational system which was Clemenceau's most enduring monument, and the sole good fruit of the Franco-Prussian war. It was a system which was resonantly ‘laic’, harking back for its inspiration to the rationalists of the enlightenment, but doing so with an unselfcritical vigour peculiar to the *bourgeoisie* from which it emanated. Over against it, part opposing, part implementing, was the religious order and scheme of things, appealing to a different set of instincts, and emphasizing that duality which was to underlie modern French civilization. Bauchant was very much a product of his time and country in feeling this conflict. He was a peasant; he was a Catholic, and, eventually, he was an artist, and all these things are connected with traditionalism, even with retrogression; they are the qualities which made El Greco and Cézanne *bons bourgeois*. On the other hand, his education and subsequent reading, with which, even

before he joined the army, he beguiled the inactive hours of his life, had inclined him towards that type of enlightenment which in England is typified by the Thinker's Library and the activities of the Rationalist Press. His mind was nurtured on the work of the secondary Michelets, the inferior Taines, on the work of such popularizers of history as Victoire Duruy's *Histoire des Grecs* and Royau's *Histoire des Empereurs Romains*. His staple imaginative diet came from an older and more distinguished source, from a period when the tradition of the encyclopaedists was beginning to merge with that of the great historians. Constantin François de Chassebœuf was born in 1757 and died in 1820. A member of the enlightened liberal aristocracy, it was typical of him that he should have put the vague, sentimental orientalism of his time into practice, for, leaving France, he spent his early manhood in the East, and became exceptionally well acquainted with Arabic literature. He became a representative of the Tiers État in the États Generaux, and on the advent of Napoleon was offered the position of fellow consul, and then that of Minister of the Interior. He wisely declined both, and devoted the rest of his life to the study of history. His most famous book, and the one which by some curious accident of circumstance became Bauchant's most treasured possession, was *Les Ruines, ou, Meditations sur les Révolutions des Empires*, which was published in 1791. Few titles give a clearer picture of the book and of the age in which it was written. Robert of the Ruins was still translating into paint and canvas the architectural reveries of Piranesi, and the decrepit was still a forceful influence in current aesthetics. The meditative element, however, derived from the Rousseauesque tradition, was already demanding a more rigorous exegesis, and the stately resonance of *les Révolutions des Empires* implied Hegel and hinted at Marx.

The actual appearance of Greece—he had not expected it to be so rocky—gave to Bauchant some embodied image of those imaginative rhapsodies which de Chassebœuf had already kindled in his mind. The divergent elements in his character were somehow fused, and his career as an artist began when he was forty-three. Returning to France, he was quite accidentally made a draughtsman in the signals office. It was like coming home: all the old memories of school returned, the hot afternoons with the pencil and the fruit-like shapes of the continents; he drew vigorously, easily and accurately. But he was not content to leave

it at that; he felt a desire to outstep the rigid confines of schematic drawing, and ornamented his maps with curious decorations of flowers, of little landscapes and of birds'-eye views of the country he was anatomizing. His artistic achievements became well known within the limits of his company, and his fellow-soldiers made a point of always trying to find him paints and canvas. By the time of the Armistice he was a non-commissioned officer.

He returned to Châteaurenault on 8 January 1919. During the course of the war, external circumstances had conspired to vindicate his emancipation from the position of a mere peasant. His wife had become insane, and his holding had become completely ruined. But, though he was offered a job in a Ministry in Paris, he refused it, feeling that the hold exercised over him by his native countryside was too strong to be denied. He rented a house on the banks of the Brenne, and, going to live there with his wife, devoted himself entirely to the task of learning how to paint. Starting off on flower pieces, with an occasional portrait, he graduated to largely conceived landscapes, and eventually to those mythological compositions by which he is today chiefly known.

In 1920 he went up to Paris to see the Salon d'Automne at the Grand Palais, and was so impressed by it that in the following year he sent in sixteen canvases, nine of which were hung. They attracted immediate attention, and informed opinion re-echoed the critic who said 'c'est du Rousseau, amélioré par Marie Laurencin'. Corbusier came to see him, and published an article on him in *L'Esprit Nouveau* which he was then editing. Mme Jean Bucher was an early supporter, and Diaghilev, understandably enough, was impressed by the work of a painter who translated into terms of Western painting something of the Russian Orphic spirit. In 1928 he commissioned Bauchant to do the costumes and scenery for a ballet and took him to Monte Carlo. This was the year of Bauchant's first exhibition, in Paris, one which was subsequently shown at the Lefèvre gallery.

Bauchant was of the generation of the Fauves, but it would be useless to seek in his work any of the characteristics associated with the conscious artistic movements of his time. The formula of 'Rousseau, improved by Laurencin' is too facile to carry conviction. Comparison with Rousseau is inevitable, and, indeed, the nature of Bauchant's genius is only to be understood against the background of the work of his fellow-Primitives, whilst it

might, with some show of justice be said that all women painters are Sunday-painters at heart. The suggestion of Laurencin obviously comes from his light, lyrical colouring, but Dufy would have been an apt, and more stimulating, analogy.

From his fellow-Primitives Bauchant is distinguished by the fact that he is never urban; he has remained a peasant and never migrated to Paris or become involved in an especially 'artistic' community. Though painting occasional portraits and always yielding to that essentially 'primitive' desire to paint flowers and flower-pieces, his most characteristic genre is that to which the tradition of European painting has always attributed pride of place. He is a history painter, and his landscapes are but a province of that more distinguished sphere of artistic activity. The perfection of physical detail which always accompanies the work of the Primitive painter is, in his case, reflected in a precision of historical accuracy, derived partly from his reading, partly from a painstaking study of the work of nineteenth-century artists to be found in such luxuriant abundance in most of the provincial art galleries of France. Paintings such as the medieval 'Hunt in the Forest of Châteaurenault', with its curious reminiscences of Paolo Uccello and the later 'Greek Chorus' are almost documentary in their accuracy. Bauchant indeed is, in his powers of historical perspective, the direct antithesis of Hollywood and the effects which it achieves in its costume pictures. He feels the past rather than knows it, and his interpretation of it lacks the glamour of retrospection. His Greek soldiers, his Egyptian maidens and his eighteenth-century generals are free from the aseptic, unconvincing verisimilitude which has distinguished so many extras in the film studios of the world.

Knowing the urban paintings of Vivin, the circus paintings of Bombois, and the general preoccupation of the Primitives with the mystery surrounding the tedium of daily life, one might be tempted to use the work of these proletarian painters as a prop in the defence of an ideology. But the charm of the Primitive lies in his identity with life; he has the courage of his own convictions, and turns to his dream world with an instinctiveness which knows no shame. Escapism is a word which to him has no undercurrent of accusation; Rousseau's real or imagined journey to Mexico, and Bauchant's actual experience of Greece have a certain inevitability about them. We do not know Bauchant's opinion of the

work of those whom taste places in the same category as himself, but we remember Rousseau protesting that he could give Cézanne a few hints on painting, and Bombois' reluctant confession that he did not like the works of the Douanier because they were not 'realistic' enough. The sophisticated artist can be frank about his time and comment on its implications because his intellectual equipment gives him a sense of detachment which, at its worst, is a kind of insulation. What is curious is that of all the Primitives, Bauchant should be the only one to take to religious imagery. His 'Assumption of the Virgin', a flat, flower-bedecked image, posed against an intensely blue sky, is perhaps, the final European statement of that once familiar theme, and his most recent painting is a 'Christ Carrying His Cross'.

Struggling with the problems of expression, as though no one had ever done so before, Bauchant has achieved an act of pure painting, free from any implications save those of so profound a kind as to evade the superficiality of the deliberate. An excellent draughtsman, he elevated his quest for monumentality and magnificence of composition into a permanent part of the revolt against the ephemerality of and looseness of Impressionism. His innate lyricism has become a counterblast against the cold intellectuality of Post-Fauvism. A painter of excellence by any standards, his work emphasizes the fact that the Innocent Eye of the Primitives, of the 'maîtres populaires de la réalité' is not accompanied by an inept hand, and that artistic simplicity is a matter of apprehension, not of execution.

## AUGUSTUS JOHN

### FRAGMENTS OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY—XVII

COCOA is one of the slowest of coolers . . . relinquishing my cup in despair, I rushed out of the kitchen, seized my satchel, and with death in the soul headed for school. I had, perhaps, ten minutes before the bell and over a mile to run through the devious lanes of the lower quarter of the town. At last, bursting into the precincts by way of the playground, I raced across it to arrive