

PART IV

THE BREAKDOWNS OF CIVILIZATIONS

Why have some civilizations broken down in the past? I do not believe that civilizations are fated to break down, so I begin by exposing the fallacious arguments of the determinists. Having rejected determinist explanations, I look for an alternative. I find, first, that the very process by which growth is sustained is inherently risky: the creative leadership of a society has to resort to social 'drill' in order to carry along the uncreative mass, and this mechanical device turns against its masters when their creative inspiration fails. I then have to account for the failure of creativity, and I ascribe it to the spiritual demoralization to which we human beings seem to be prone on the morrow of great achievements – a demoralization to which we are not bound to succumb, and for which we ourselves therefore bear the responsibility. Success seems to make us lazy or self-satisfied or conceited. I muster a series of notable historical examples to show how this actually happens and how human beings have erred in each case.

20 Is determinism convincing?

ONE OF THE perennial infirmities of human beings is to ascribe their own failures to the operation of forces which are entirely beyond their control and immeasurably wider in range than the compass of human action. This mental manoeuvre, which promises to convert an importunate sense of humiliation into a new assurance of self-importance – by setting the great engine of the Universe in motion in order to break one human career – is among the most insidious of ‘the Consolations of Philosophy’. It is particularly attractive to sensitive minds in periods of decline and fall; and in the decline and fall of the Hellenic Civilization it was a commonplace of different schools of philosophers to explain the social decay which they deplored but could not arrest as the incidental and inevitable effect of an all-pervasive ‘cosmic senescence’. This was the philosophy of the Epicurean Lucretius in the last generation of the Hellenic time of troubles before the Hellenic Society obtained the temporary relief of the *Pax Augusta*.

The Universe itself is not exempt.
Its ramparts will be stormed; and this dread breach
Will make of it a foul putrescent ruin.
The mischief has begun. Why, our own age
Is broken-backed already. Mother Earth
Has lost her strength. Today she finds it hard
To bring forth pygmies – she who once brought forth
The life of all the ages; hers the feat
Of bearing the huge frames of monstrous beasts. . . .
Our bright crops and our smiling vineyards too
Are Earth’s gift, her spontaneous gift, to men.
Hers the sweet younglings, hers the smiling pastures.
Alas! Today, these hardly reach full growth,
Though human work now comes to Nature’s aid.
We work our teams, and teamsters too, to death,
Wear out our tools, yet hardly match Earth’s needs.
Our fields demand more work, yet grudge work’s fruits.
Shaking his head, the aging ploughman sighs.
His work has gone for nothing, he laments.
The present? A sad contrast to the past.
He envies the good fortune of his sire.
The ancients, he laments, were godly men.
They made a living, made it with great ease,
From holdings that are dwarfed by ours today.
The wizened grape-vine’s woeful husbandman
Arraigns time’s ruthless rush and pesters Heaven,
Blind to the Universe’s slow decay,
Worn down by aeons, destined for the grave.¹

The theme recurs in a work of controversy which was written by one of the Fathers of the Western Christian Church some three hundred years later, under the impression of the stricken Hellenic Society’s next relapse into a time of tribulation which had found Cyprian a pagan scholar and which saw him a Christian martyr before the crisis passed:

You ought to be aware that the age is now senile. It has not now the stamina that used to make it upstanding, nor the vigour and robustness that used to make it strong. This truth is proclaimed, even if we keep silence . . . by the world itself, which testifies to

its own decline by giving manifold concrete evidence of the process of decay. There is a diminution in the winter rains that give nourishment to the seeds in the earth, and in the summer heats that ripen the harvests. The springs have less freshness and the autumns less fecundity. The mountains, disembowelled and worn out, yield a lower output of marble; the mines, exhausted, furnish a smaller stock of the precious metals; the veins are impoverished, and they shrink daily. There is a decrease and deficiency of farmers in the fields, of sailors on the sea, of soldiers in the barracks, of honesty in the market-place, of justice in court, of concord in friendship, of skill in technique, of strictness in morals. When a thing is growing old, do you suppose that it can still retain, unimpaired, the exuberance of its fresh and lusty youth? Anything that is near its end and is verging towards its decline and fall is bound to dwindle. The Sun, for instance, radiates his beams with a less brilliant and fiery splendour when he is setting, and the Moon grows thin, with her horns all eaten away, when she is on the wane. The tree which was once so green and so luxuriant turns sterile later on, as its branches wither up, and grows ugly with old age; and old age likewise stops the flow of the spring, until the bounteous outpouring of its welling source dwindles into a bare trickle. This is the sentence that has been passed upon the world; this is the law of God: that what has been born must die, and what has grown up must grow old, and what has been strong must lose its strength, and what has been great must be diminished; and that this loss of strength and loss of stature must end, at last, in annihilation.²

We can perhaps hear an echo of Cyprian’s pessimism in the concern voiced in our own generation at the allegedly imminent exhaustion of our Earth’s store of natural resources; and we are even familiar with the idea of a cosmic sentence of death, since it has been repeated by those Western physical scientists who have postulated the ultimate disintegration of all matter in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics.³ But even if we were to accept this now disputed proposition, this sentence upon the material cosmos would bear with it none of that promise of spiritual liberation – through the extinction of our consciousness or else through its etherealization⁴ – which it bore for Lucretius and for Cyprian; for our Western cosmologists present a time-chart on which human history and cosmic history are plotted on such utterly different scales that, from the practical standpoint, they can be regarded as quite out of relation with each other.

Mankind is young. . . . Our civilization is still in its infancy, and the Earth itself is not half-way through its career; it is more than 4,000 million years old, but in 4,000 million years from now it will probably still exist.⁵

Accordingly, the latter-day Western advocates of a predestinarian or deterministic explanation of the breakdowns of civilizations appeal instead to a law of senescence and death with a shorter wave-length, for which they claim jurisdiction over the whole kingdom of life on this planet. One of the most celebrated members of this school, Oswald Spengler, argued that a civilization is comparable with an organism, and that it is subject to the same process of

childhood, youth, maturity, and old age as a human being or any other living organism.⁶ But we have already noted in an earlier chapter⁷ that societies are not in fact living organisms in any sense. In subjective terms they are the intelligible fields of study; and in objective terms they are the common ground between the respective fields of activity of a number of individual human beings, whose individual energies are the vital forces which operate to work out the history of a society, including its time-span.

Who can decree or forecast what the characters and the interactions of all these actors are to be, or how many of them are to appear upon a particular stage from first to last? To declare dogmatically, with Spengler, that every society has a predestined time-span is as foolish as it would be to declare that every play that is written is bound to consist of an equal number of acts.

Spengler does not strengthen the determinist case when he abandons the simile of an individual organism for the simile of a species of organisms or a genus:

The *habitus* of any group of organisms includes, among other things, a definite life-span and a definite *tempo* of development; and no morphology of history can dispense with these concepts. . . . The span of a generation – whatever creature may be in question – is a numerical value of almost mystical significance. And these relations are also valid for all civilizations – and this in a way that has never before been dreamt of. Every civilization, every archaic age, every rise and every downfall, and every inevitable phase of each of these movements, has a definite time-span which is always the same and which always recurs with symbolic emphasis. What is the significance of the fifty-year period in the rhythm of political, intellectual, and artistic life which is prevalent in all civilizations? . . . What is the significance of the millennium which is the ideal life-span of all civilizations, considered in proportion to the individual human being's 'three-score years and ten'?⁸

The conclusive answer to these questionings is that a society is not a species or genus, any more than it is an organism. It is itself an individual representative of some species of the genus 'societies', and the individual human beings who are the 'members' of a society are representatives of a species or genus likewise. But the genus of which we human beings are the individuals is neither the Western Society (or the Hellenic Society or any other society) in particular nor the genus of societies in general, but the genus *Homo*; and this simple truth absolves us from any obligation to examine here the Spenglerian dogma that genera and species have preordained life-spans on the analogy of the individual organisms in which the biological genera and species are represented. Even if we suppose for a moment that the genus *Homo* has a limited mandate for existence on the face of this planet, a brief consideration of the actual historical duration of biological genera and species to date shows at once that it is as impossible to link up the breakdown of any civilization with this hypothetical expiry of the mandate of the genus *Homo* as it is to link it up with the dissolution of the material Universe into radiation. The genus *Homo* is believed to have been in existence, in a recognizably human form, for between 300,000 and 500,000 years already,⁹ as against the 5000 or so years that have elapsed since the first emergence of the societies called 'civilizations'. What warrant is there for

assuming that the mandate of this genus (if it really is subject to any mandate) is not good for another 500,000 years at least? And, to come to grips again with our immediate problem of the breakdowns of civilizations, what ground is there for suggesting that these breakdowns are accompanied by any symptoms of physical or psychic degeneration in the individual human beings who happen to be alive in a society at the time of its dissolution? Were the Athenians of the generation of Socrates and Euripides and Thucydides and Pheidias and Pericles, who were overtaken by the catastrophe of 431 B.C., intrinsically poorer creatures in soul or body than the generation of Marathon, who shone in retrospect in the illusively intensified light of an age which appeared more glorious than it actually had been in contrast with the age that followed?

An explanation of the breakdowns of civilizations in terms of the supposed science of eugenics perhaps appears to be suggested by Plato in a famous passage of *The Republic*:

A society with the ideal constitution is not easily thrown out of equilibrium; but, after all, everything that has a genesis is foredoomed to eventual disintegration, and even the ideal constitution will not endure in perpetuity, but will break down in the end. The breakdown is connected with the periodic rhythm (with a short wave-length for short-lived creatures and a long wave-length for those at the other end of the scale) which is the rhythm of life in the animal as well as in the vegetable kingdom, and which is the determinant of both physical and psychic fecundity. The specific laws of human eugenics will baffle both the reason and the intuition of our trained ruling minority, in spite of all their intellectual power. These laws will elude them; and one day they will beget children inopportunistly. . . .¹⁰

Plato contrived a fantastically intricate numerical formula to express the wave-length of human life, and postulated that social disintegration would follow upon the neglect of this mathematical law of eugenics by a society's leaders. Even so, it is plain that Plato does not represent the racial degeneration, to which he attributes the social breakdown, as being an automatic or predetermined event, but rather as being an intellectual mistake, a failure of technique: a lapse in the sphere of human action.

There is, in any case, no warrant for following Plato in accepting racial degeneration as even a secondary link in the chain of causation through which a social breakdown leads on to a decline. For although, in times of social decline, the members of the declining society may seem to dwindle into pygmies or to stiffen into cripples, by contrast with the kingly stature and magnificent activity of their forbears in the age of social growth, to ascribe this malady to degeneration is a false diagnosis. The biological heritage of the epigoni is the same as that of the pioneers, and all the pioneers' endeavours and achievements are potentially within their descendants' reach. The malady which holds the children of decadence fast bound in misery and iron¹¹ is no paralysis of their natural faculties as human beings but a breakdown and disintegration of their social heritage, which debars them from finding scope for their unimpaired faculties in effective and creative social action. The dwarfing of the epigoni is the effect of social breakdown and not its cause.

We have now discarded three predestinarian explanations of the breakdowns of civilizations: the theory that

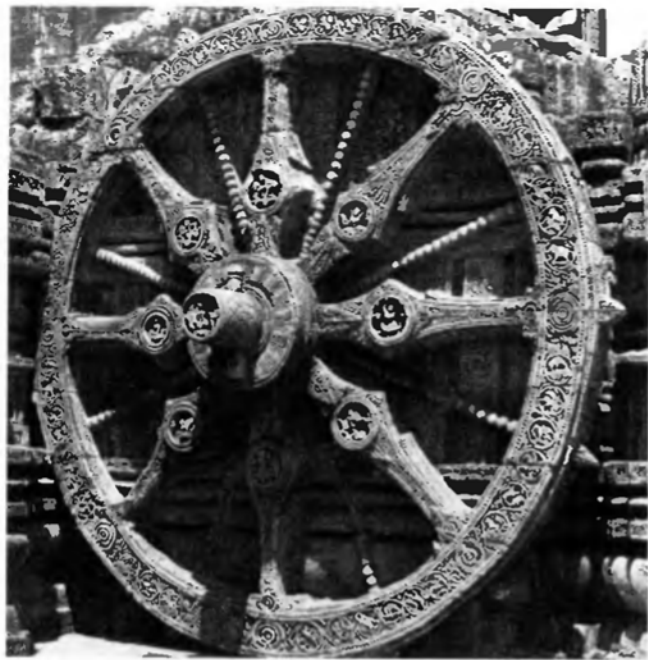


106 *Rota fatalis*: Western wheel of fate, using the same imagery of predetermined cycles.

they are the incidental consequence of a running-down of the clockwork of the physical Universe; the theory that a civilization, like a living organism, has its own inherent life-span and life-curve; and the theory that the breakdown of any civilization at any given date is due to the racial degeneration of its human components. We still have to consider one further predestinarian hypothesis, which assumes that civilizations succeed one another by a law of their nature which is the common law of the cosmos, in a perpetually recurrent cycle of alternating birth and death.¹²

The application of this theory of cycles to the history of Mankind was a natural corollary to the sensational astronomical discovery, which appears to have been made in the Babylonian World by the end of the third millennium BC¹³ and which was popularized by Greek astronomers after the fourth century BC, that the three conspicuous and familiar astronomical cycles – the terrestrial cycle of day-and-night and the lunar cycle of the month and the solar cycle of the year – were not the only instances of periodic recurrence in the movements of the heavenly bodies; that there was also a larger co-ordination of stellar movements which embraced all the planets as well as the Earth and Moon and Sun; and that 'the music of the spheres', which was made by the harmony of this heavenly chorus, came round full circle, chord for chord, in a cycle of great cosmic months and years which dwarfed the solar year into insignificance. The inference was that the annual birth and death of the terrestrial vegetation, which was manifestly governed by the solar year-cycle, had its counterpart in a recurrent birth and death of all things on the time-scale of the cosmic year-cycle; and minds which came under the spell of this idea were apt to project this pattern of periodicity into every object of their thought.¹⁴

Hellenic literature abounds in references to this cyclic philosophy. Plato was evidently fascinated by it, for the theme recurs throughout his writings.



107 *Rota vitalis*: Indic wheel of life, symbolic of the eternal round of procreation.

Athenian Stranger. Do you feel that the ancient legends have any truth in them?

Cleitias of Crete. Which legends?

Stranger. The legends of repeated destructions of the human race by floods and plagues and many other catastrophes, in which only a tiny remnant of Mankind survived.

Cleitias. Why, certainly, the whole of that body of legend carries conviction with everybody.¹⁵

Elsewhere Plato develops this brief exposition of the cyclic hypothesis, applying it to the history of the Hellenes¹⁶ and to the pattern of the cosmos as a whole, which he represents as a perpetual alternation of catastrophe and rehabilitation.¹⁷ The same doctrine reappears in Virgil's poetry:

The last age of the Sibyl's song is here.
The sequence of the ages starts again.
The past returns – the Virgin, Saturn's Realm –
A new race from High Heaven descends to Earth. . . .
Another Tiphys steers another Argo,
Laden with heroes; yes, and other wars
Bring great Achilles once again to Troy.¹⁸

But where Virgil sees a triumphant renewal of an heroic age, Marcus Aurelius, writing some two hundred years later under the shadow of a melancholy age, feels only the desolation of endless repetition:

There is a deadly monotony about the cyclic motion of the cosmos – up and down, world without end. . . . Soon we shall be buried under the Earth, and next the Earth herself will be transformed, and then whatever has arisen out of her transmutation will undergo the same process again and again to infinity.¹⁹

This philosophy of sheer recurrence, which intrigued, without ever quite captivating, the Hellenic genius, came to dominate contemporary Indic minds.

Hindu thinkers had evolved a cyclic theory of time. The cycle was called a *kalpa* and was equivalent to 4,320 million earthly years. The *kalpa* is divided into 14 periods and at the end of each of these the universe is recreated and once again Manu (primeval man) gives birth to the human race. At the moment we are in the seventh of the 14 periods of the present *kalpa*. Each of these is divided into 71 Great Intervals and each of these is divided respectively in 4 *yugas* or periods of time. The *yugas* contain respectively 4,800, 3,600, 2,400, 1,200 god-years (one god-year being 360 human years), and there is a progressive decline in the quality of civilization. We are now in the fourth of these *yugas*, the *kaliyuga* when the world is full of evil and wickedness, and thus the end of the world is by comparison imminent, though there are several millennia yet before the end!²⁰

Are these 'vain repetitions'²¹ of the Gentiles really the law of the Universe and, therefore, incidentally the law of the histories of civilizations? If we find that the answer is in the affirmative, we can hardly escape the conclusion that we are the perpetual victims of an everlasting cosmic practical joke, which condemns us to endure our sufferings and to overcome our difficulties and to purify ourselves of our sins – only to know in advance that the automatic and inevitable lapse of a certain meaningless measure of time cannot fail to stultify all our human exertions by reproducing the same situation again and again *ad infinitum*, just as if we had never exerted ourselves at all.

This conclusion may be tolerable to an unusually robust intellect in an unusually sanguine mood. A modern Western philosopher has even succeeded in making the 'law of eternal recurrence' a matter for rejoicing:

Sing and bubble over, O Zarathustra, heal your soul with new songs, so that you may bear your great destiny, that was never yet the destiny of any man! For your animals well know, O Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold, *you are the teacher of eternal recurrence*, that is now *your* destiny! . . . Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally, and we ourselves with them, and that we have already existed an infinite number of times before, and all things with us. . . .²²

Aristotle, too, shows no signs of distress when he pricks the bubble of his own philosophy by making the casual observation, in the middle of a treatise on meteorology, that in human history the recurrence of identical scientific views does not happen just once or twice or a small number of times; it happens *ad infinitum*.²³

In another passage, Aristotle deals with the problem of periodicity in human affairs, through the concrete example of the implications of a recurrence of the Trojan War, as if these implications were nothing more than an intellectual conundrum.²⁴ He contemplates with a dispassionate calm the proposition that 'human life is a vicious circle' of repetitive genesis and decay, and feels no pang. Virgil, too, in the passage that we have already quoted, dismisses the recurrent Trojan War as a slight and momentary recrudescence of the Old Adam, which simply serves as a foil to the swiftly and securely redawning golden age. Yet, when the poet returns from his day-dream of an earthly paradise regained to resume the spiritual burden of his own tormented generation, he confesses that the heroic warfare of the Achaeans in the pre-Hellenic interregnum has led on, through a continuous chain of *karma*, to the internecine warfare of the Roman war-lords.

In full, long since, with Roman blood,
We have atoned for Trojan breach of faith. . . .
A world where right spells wrong, and wrong spells right!
So many wars! So many shapes of crime!
The plough despised! The ploughman reft away!
The widowed fields unkempt! The sickle's curve
Melted to mould a sword-blade's stiff straight edge. . . .
Neighbours break bonds of friendship, take up arms;
The wicked war-god rages everywhere.
The pace is quickening like the chariots' pace
When they burst out to speed along the course.
No use, poor charioteer, to draw thy reins.
Thy chariot's masters are thy racing steeds.²⁵

Is the Trojan War to recur innumerable times over, when it is fated each time to precipitate an age-long avalanche of wickedness and woe? This question, which Virgil dares not face, is answered by Shelley in a chorus which begins as a Virgilian reminiscence and ends on a note which is altogether Shelley's own:

The World's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The Earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. . . .

A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies;
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.

Oh! write no more the Tale of Troy,
If Earth Death's scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
Which dawns upon the free,
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew. . . .

Oh cease! Must Hate and Death return?
Cease! Must men kill and die?
Cease! Drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The World is weary of the Past:
Oh might it die or rest at last!

If the law of the Universe is really the sardonic law *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*,²⁶ no wonder that the poet cries for the Buddhist release from a wheel of existence which may be a thing of beauty so long as it is merely guiding the stars in their courses, but which is an intolerable tread-mill for our human feet.

Does reason constrain us to believe that the cyclic movement of the stars is also the movement of human history? What, 'in the last analysis', are those movements of Yin-and-Yang and challenge-and-response which we have taken some intellectual pleasure in discerning and bringing to light? Certainly, in these movements of the forces that weave the web of human history, an element of sheer recurrence can be detected; indeed, it stares us in the face. Yet the shuttle which shoots backwards and forwards across the loom of time in a perpetual to-and-fro is all this time bringing into existence a tapestry in which there is

manifestly a progress towards an end and not just an 'endless repetition' in the likeness of the shuttle's own action. The transition from Yin to Yang, in any given case, is no doubt one repetition of a repetitive action; yet this repetition is neither vain nor stale, since it is the necessary condition for an act of creation which is new and spontaneous and unique.²⁷ Similarly, the response to a challenge which provokes a further challenge and thereby evokes a further response which is likewise provocative in its turn no doubt sets up a cyclic movement. Yet we have seen that it is precisely this kind of response – the response which inaugurates a cyclic movement by providing for its own successor – that releases the Promethean *élan* of social growth.²⁸

The simple truth is that, in any analysis of rhythm, we have to distinguish between the movements of the part and those of the whole, and between the natures of the means and of the ends. There is no law of pre-established harmony which decrees that the end must have the same nature as the means, or the whole the same movement as the part; and this is immediately obvious in the case of the wheel, which is the original simile and permanent symbol of the whole cyclic philosophy. The movement of the wheel is admittedly repetitive in relation to the wheel's own axle; but the wheel has been manufactured and fitted to its axle only in order to become a part of a vehicle; and the fact that the vehicle can move only in virtue of the wheel's circular movement round the axle does not compel the vehicle itself to travel like a merry-go-round in a circular track. The wheel is indispensable to the vehicle as a means of locomotion, but it is incapable of dictating the course on which the vehicle is to move. The course depends upon the manipulation of the reins or the steering-gear by the driver. Indeed, if the relations between the wheel and the vehicle – or part and whole, or means and end – are governed by any law at all, it is not a law of identity but a law of diversity, under which a repetitive movement of the wheel (or the part or the means) brings about a non-repetitive movement of the vehicle (or the whole or the end); conversely, the end attains its unique realization, and the whole its unique individuality, and the vehicle its unique goal, through the repetitive employment of similar means and the repetitive juxtaposition of standard parts and the repetitive revolutions of the wheel round its axle.

This harmony of two movements – a major irreversible movement which is borne on the wings of a minor repetitive movement – is perhaps the essence of what we mean by rhythm; and we can discern this play of forces not only in the mechanized rhythm of our man-made machinery but likewise in the organic rhythm of life. The annual procession of the seasons, which brings with it the annual blossom and decay of vegetation, has made possible the secular evolution of the vegetable kingdom. The sombre cycle of birth and reproduction and death has made possible the evolution of all higher animals up to Man himself. The pumping-action of the lungs and heart enables the human being to live out his life; the bars of music, and the feet, lines, stanzas, and cantos of poetry enable the composer and the poet to expound their themes; the cyclic rotation of the praying-wheel carries the Buddhist towards the goal of *nirvana*; and even the wheel of

existence, from which the Buddhist discipline promises release, produces the abiding burden of *karma* which is handed on, to be aggravated or mitigated, from one incarnation-cycle to the next and thereby transforms a trivial round into a tragic history. The repetitive 'music of the spheres' dies down to an undertone in an expanding Universe of nebulae and star-clusters which are apparently receding from one another with incredible velocity, while the relativity of the space-time framework gives to each successive position of the vast astral arrays the irrevocable historic uniqueness of a dramatic 'situation' in some play in which the actors are human personalities.

Thus the detection of periodic repetitive movements in our analysis of the process of civilization does not by any means imply that the process itself, to which these contributory movements minister, is of the same cyclic order as they are. On the contrary, if any inference can be drawn legitimately from the periodicity of these minor movements, we may rather infer that the major movement which they bear along on their monotonously rising and falling wings is of the diverse order, or, in other words, that it is not recurrent but progressive. This interpretation of the movement of life in terms of two modes of rhythm has been precisely expressed in the philosophies of the African Civilizations, and perhaps at its most sophisticated in the cosmogony of the Dogon people of the Western Sudan.

Their conception of the universe is based, on the one hand, on a principle of the vibrations of matter, and on the other, on a general movement of the universe as a whole. The original germ of life is symbolized by the smallest cultivated seed. . . . This seed, quickened by an internal vibration, bursts the enveloping sheath, and emerges to reach the uttermost confines of the universe. At the same time this unfolding matter moves along a path which forms a spiral or helix. . . . Two fundamental notions are thus expressed: on the one hand the perpetual helical movement signifies the conservation of matter; further, this movement . . . is held to represent the perpetual alternation of opposites – right and left, high and low, odd and even, male and female – reflecting a principle of twin-ness, which ideally should direct the proliferation of life. These pairs of opposites support each other in an equilibrium which the individual being conserves within itself. On the other hand, the infinite extension of the universe is expressed by the continual progression of matter along this spiral path.²⁹

This tentative conclusion is sufficient for our purpose at the moment. We are not condemned to believe in the cyclic version of predestinarianism as the supreme law of our human history; and this was the last form of the necessitarian doctrine with which we had to contend. The goddess with whom we have to do battle is not *Saeva Necessitas*³⁰ with her lethal armoury, but, on the evidence of the fates of civilizations in past history, only probability, whom mortal valour wielding mortal weapons may one day drive ignominiously off the field. The civilizations which have already died are not 'dead by fate'; and therefore a living civilization such as the Western Civilization is not doomed inexorably in advance *migrare ad plures*: to join the majority of its kind that have already suffered shipwreck. The divine spark of creative power is instinct in ourselves; and, if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then 'the stars in their courses'³¹ cannot defeat our efforts to attain the goal of human endeavours.

21 The mechanicalness of mimesis

IF WE HAVE PROVED to our satisfaction that the breakdowns of civilizations are not brought about by the operation, either recurrent or progressive, of forces which are outside human control, we still have to find the true causes of these catastrophes; and the conclusions that we reached in our earlier chapter on the nature of growth¹ will provide us with a sure pointer in our present search. We found there that growth is the concomitant of self-determination; can we now reverse this, and argue that breakdowns come about as a result of the loss of this power of self-determination? In other words, shall we find that civilizations have met their deaths not from the assault of an external and uncontrollable assassin, but by their own hands?

This was the conclusion which was divined with a sure intuition by a modern Western poet.

In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
We are betray'd by what is false within.²

And Meredith's flash of insight is not a new discovery of nineteenth-century Western wisdom, like the Origin of Species or the Law of the Conservation of Energy. A century earlier the genius of Volney had casually exploded the eighteenth-century doctrine of the natural goodness and automatic improvement of human nature by testifying that 'the source of his calamities . . . resides within Man himself; he carries it in his heart'.³ The same truth is declared in a fragment of Menander, which almost anticipates Meredith's own words:

Things rot through evils native to their selves,
And all that injures issues from within.⁴

And a Western Christian bishop reached the same conclusion in the fourth century of the Christian Era: 'The enemy is right inside you, the cause of your erring is there inside, I say, shut up in ourselves alone.'⁵

The concept of self-determination as a religious issue is also found in the philosophies of the African Civilizations, which see the misfortunes that befall a man or his community as the fruits not of fate but of sin; in other words, as the results of irresponsible behaviour. 'Onipa ne asem, say the Akan [a West African people]: it is mankind that matters – meaning, in this context, that any man can always be responsible for himself.'⁶

This truth about the lives of human beings is equally true of the lives of societies. A Hellenic philosopher, Dicaearchus, is reported to have maintained – in a lost work called *How Men go to Destruction* – that the greatest danger to Man is Man. Volney applied his intuition that 'the source of his calamities . . . resides within Man himself' to the destruction of bodies politic, in lieu of the untenable hypothesis that communities, like individuals, have a limited life-span and a formulated life-curve;⁷ and this is anticipated in a passage of Saint Cyprian, in which the African Father applies the same truth to the entire field of social life.⁸

You complain of the aggression of foreign enemies; yet, if the foreign enemy were to cease from troubling, would Roman really be able to live at peace with Roman? If the external danger of invasion by armed barbarians were to be stamped out, should we not be exposed to a fiercer and a heavier civil bombardment, on the home front, in the shape of calumnies and injuries inflicted by the powerful on their weaker fellow citizens? You complain of crop-failures and famines: yet the greatest famines are made not by drought but by rapacity, and the most flagrant distress springs from profiteering and price-raising in the corn-trade. You complain that the clouds do not disgorge their rain in the sky, and you ignore the barns that fail to disgorge their grain on terra firma. You complain of the fall in production, and ignore the failure to distribute what is actually produced to those who are in need of it. You denounce plague and pestilence, while really the effect of these scourges is to bring to light, or bring to a head, the crimes of human beings: the callousness that shows no pity for the sick, and the covetousness and rapine that are in full cry after the property of the dead.⁹

In this passage a man of penetrating insight and deep feeling has given the true explanation of the breakdown which had cut the growth of the Hellenic Civilization short some 600 or 700 years earlier, and which had brought the broken-down society to all but the last stage of its decline and fall in Cyprian's own day. The Hellenic Civilization had broken down because, in its growth-stage, at some point something had gone wrong on the home front with that interaction between individuals through which the growth of a growing civilization is achieved.

What is the weakness that exposes a growing civilization to this risk of stumbling and falling in mid-career and losing its Promethean *élan*? If we recall our analysis of growth in a previous chapter,¹⁰ we shall realize that, on our own showing, the risk of such a collapse is constant and acute, because it lies in the very nature of the course which a growing civilization is obliged to take.

This course is not the narrow way 'which leadeth unto life – and few there be that find it'.¹¹ Although the few that find this way are precisely those creative personalities who set a civilization in motion and carry it forward, they cannot simply lay aside every weight and run the race that is set before them,¹² because, being 'social animals', they cannot go on moving forward themselves unless they can contrive to carry their fellows with them in their advance; and the uncreative rank-and-file of Mankind, which in every known society has always been in an overwhelming majority, cannot be transfigured *en masse* in the twinkling of an eye.

Perfection . . . is not possible while the individual remains isolated: the individual is obliged, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward.¹³

In these conditions, which are inherent in the very nature of social life, the creative personalities are challenged to

attempt a *tour de force*: 'to convert a species, which is essentially a created thing, into creative effort; to make a movement out of something which . . . is a halt'.¹⁴

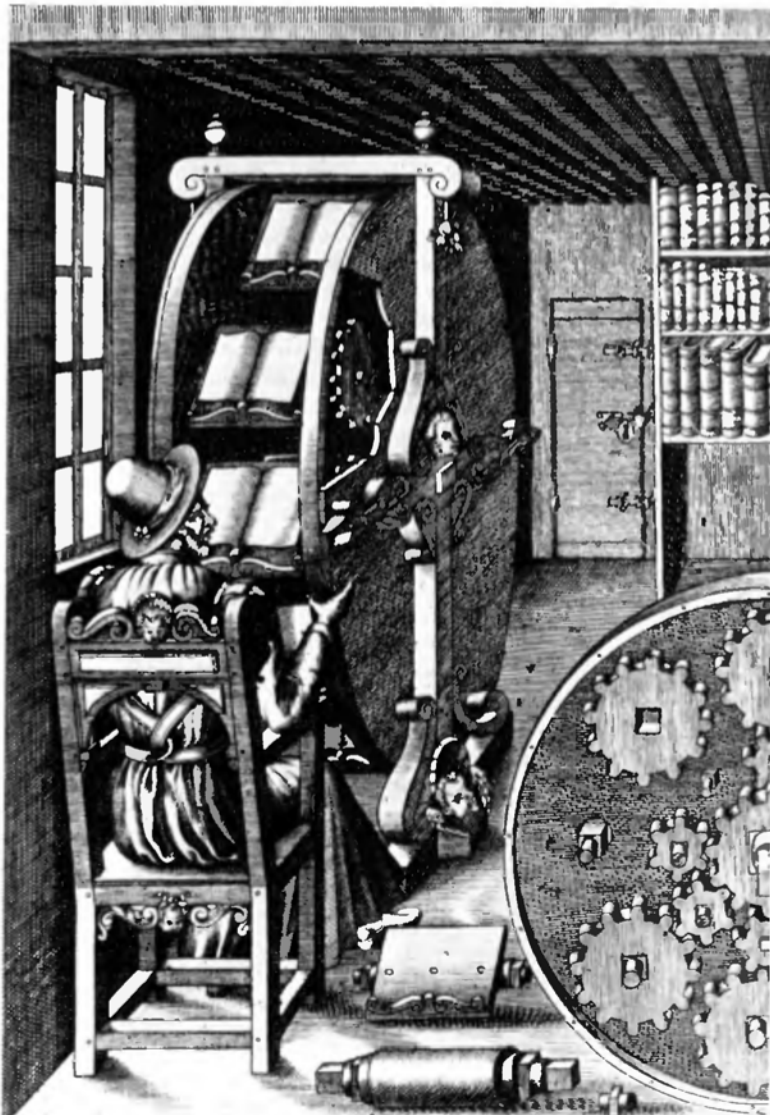
This *tour de force* is not impossible to achieve; and indeed there is a perfect way: the 'strenuous intellectual communion and intimate personal intercourse' that impart the divine fire from one soul to another 'like light caught from a leaping flame'.¹⁵ Yet it is an unpractical counsel of perfection to prescribe this way, as Plato prescribes it, to the exclusion of others; for the inward spiritual grace through which an unilluminated soul is fired by communion with a saint is almost as rare as the miracle that has brought the saint himself into the world. The world in which the creative personality finds himself, and in which he has to work, is a society in which his fellows are ordinary human beings. His task is to make his fellows into his followers; and Mankind in the mass can only be set in motion towards a goal beyond itself by enlisting the faculty of mimesis, or imitation.¹⁶ For this mimesis is a kind of social drill;¹⁷ and the dull ears that are deaf to the unearthly music of Orpheus's lyre are well attuned to the drill-sergeant's raucous word of command. The rank-and-file can only catch their leader up by taking a short cut, and they can only find room to march by deploying into the broad way that leadeth to destruction.¹⁸ When the road to destruction has perforce to be trodden on the quest of life, it is perhaps no wonder that the quest should sometimes end in disaster.

Moreover, there is a weakness in the actual exercise of mimesis, quite apart from the way in which the faculty may be exploited. For, if it is true that mimesis is a kind of drill, it is also true that drill is a kind of mechanization of human movement and life; and our concept of the 'machine' has an ambiguous connotation. When we talk of 'a delicate mechanism' or 'mechanical ingenuity' or 'a skilled mechanic', the words call up the general idea of a triumph of life over matter and the particular idea of the triumph of human will and thought over the physical environment of a human society. The invention of machinery immensely extends Man's power over Man's environment by so manipulating inanimate objects that they are made to carry out human purposes, as the drill-sergeant's commands are executed by his platoon of mechanized human beings.

Nature herself has implicitly complimented Man upon his mechanical ingenuity by anticipating him in the use of mechanical devices. She has made an audaciously extensive use of them in the piece of natural mechanism with which we are most familiar: her *chef d'œuvre*, the human body. In the heart and lungs she has constructed two self-regulating machines which are models of their kind; and, by adjusting these organs to the performance of their appointed tasks with such perfection that they 'work automatically', Nature has released a margin of our muscular and nervous and psychic energies from the monotonously repetitive task of making breath follow breath and heart-beat follow heart-beat, and has set these marginal energies free to do the 'original work' of locomotion and sensation and thought. This is the trick by which, in the evolution of organic life, she has succeeded in building up ever more and more elaborate organisms. At every stage in this advance she has acted as Orpheus acts when he resorts to

MACHINE SUBSERVIENT

109 Ingenious rotary machine for comparative study of several books.





the methods of the drill-sergeant. In each successive organism in her ascending series she has introduced the maximum possible amount of drill, or, in other words, of automation. In fact, a natural organism is made up, like a human society, of a creative minority and an uncreative majority of 'members'; and in a growing organism, as in a growing society, the majority is drilled into following the minority's lead mechanically.

When we have lost ourselves in admiration of these natural and human mechanical triumphs, it is disconcerting to be reminded that there are other phrases – 'machine-made goods', 'machine-like movements', 'mechanical behaviour', 'the party machine' – in which the connotation of the word 'machine' is exactly the reverse. Yet there is no doubt about it: in each of the phrases in this second group the idea that is suggested is not the triumph of life over matter but the mastery of matter over life; and, instead of experiencing a thrill of self-confidence and pride, we feel a shock of humiliation and misgiving as we realize that the master-tool of life and mind, which promises to give them a boundless dominion over the material Universe, may actually turn in their hands into an instrument for their own subjugation to the Kingdom of Ancient Night.

A bondage lurking under shape of good –
Arts in themselves beneficent and kind,
But all too fondly followed and too far.¹⁹

The powers which, one moment ago, seemed to have discovered the secret of setting the Universe on fire, now suddenly turn out to have quenched their own flame and put out their own light by rashly smothering the spark under its potential fuel.

This Janus-like quality in the nature of machinery is disconcerting because at first sight it seems like a betrayal; but on second thoughts it becomes apparent that it is 'all in the game'. For the mechanic to denounce his machine because it has 'caught him out' is as irrational as it would be for the losing team in a tug-of-war to blame their rope for their defeat when they have gone out of their way to challenge the other team to a trial of strength and have woven the rope with their own hands in order to make the match playable. The discomfited team's error has lain in taking it for granted that, when once battle was joined, it could not fail to win. Yet the team's rope does not, of course, in itself guarantee a victory to either side. It is merely a neutral way and means for a trial of strength in which the issue is not a foregone conclusion. And, in the

cosmic tug-of-war between life and matter, this neutral function is fulfilled by everything that comes under the category of machinery. Machines are ambiguous in their essence, and to call this ambiguity a betrayal is to convict oneself of being the bad workman who complains of his tools. *Homo faber* has apprenticed himself to a dangerous trade; and anyone who sets out to act on the principle of 'nothing venture, nothing win' is manifestly exposing himself to the risk of losses as the price of putting himself in the running for the victor's crown.

If this risk is involved in Man's use of machinery for dealing with his physical environment, it must be incurred, *a fortiori*, when he resorts to the device of mechanization in his relations with himself and his fellow men.²⁰ An expedient which is dangerous to life when it is employed in the struggle between life and matter becomes a sheer *tour de force* when life attempts to exploit it against life itself.

Thus a risk of catastrophe proves to be inherent in the use of the faculty of mimesis, which is the vehicle of mechanization in the medium of human nature; and it is evident that this inherent risk will be greater in degree when the faculty of mimesis is called into play in a society which is in dynamic movement than when the same faculty is given rein in a society which is in a state of rest. The weakness of mimesis lies in its being a mechanical response to a suggestion from some alien source, so that the action that is performed through mimesis is, *ex hypothesi*, an action that would never have been performed by its

performer upon his own initiative. Thus all action that proceeds from mimesis is essentially precarious because it is not self-determined; and the best practical safeguard against the danger of its breaking down is for the exercise of the faculty of mimesis to become crystallized in the form of habit or custom. In 'the cake of custom'²¹ the double-edged blade of mimesis is comfortably padded. But the breaking of 'the cake of custom' is of the essence of the change through which the passive Yin-state of a pre-civilizational society gives way to the dynamic Yang-drive.²² In this movement the edged tool of mimesis is not discarded, but is employed with enhanced effect now that the breaking of 'the cake of custom' has laid its cutting edges bare. This baring of the blade means the removal of a safeguard; and the necessity of using the tool of mimesis without the protection of a customary régime – a necessity which is the price of growth – condemns a growing civilization to live dangerously. Indeed, the danger is perpetually imminent, since the condition which is required for the maintenance of the Promethean *élan* of growth is a condition of unstable equilibrium in which 'the cake of custom' is never allowed to set hard before it is broken up again.²³ In this hazardous pursuit of the goal of human endeavours there can never be such a thing as a provisional insurance against the perils which mimesis entails. There can only be an ultimate and radical solution of the problem through the complete elimination of mimesis in a society which has transformed itself into a

MACHINE MAN

III Victims of corrupted power, drilled into passivity.



communion of saints; and this consummation, which is nothing less than the attainment of the goal, has never been even distantly approached by any known civilization hitherto.

In the meantime – and, on the scale of human lives, the time is long-drawn-out – the mechanized column of route is perpetually in danger of coming to a halt or of falling out of formation on the march if ever the rank-and-file are left to act without a lead in some situation without a precedent. The abyss which always yawns open before the feet of human beings who are taking the broad road towards civilization is continually revealed in abnormal accidents like shipwrecks or fires, which usually evoke exhibitions of astonishing demoralization as well as astonishing heroism; and the depth of this moral abyss is still deeper where the abnormal ordeal is not a natural accident but a social malady like a war or a revolution. In the history of Man's attempt at civilization hitherto there has never been any society whose progress in civilization has gone so far that, in times of revolution or war, its members could be relied upon not to commit atrocities. To confine ourselves to the history of our own society in our own generation, we can cite the behaviour of the Nazis in the Second World War and of the Western forces in Korea in 1950–51 and of the Americans in Vietnam in the 1960s and of the French settlers and professional soldiers in Algeria in 1954–62 and of the French police at home in Paris in 1968 as proof positive that, in certain conditions of abnormality and under a certain degree of strain, atrocities will be committed by members of the least uncivilized societies that have yet existed. In times of stress the mask of civilization is torn away from the primitive countenance of raw humanity in the rank-and-file; but the moral responsibility for the breakdowns of civilizations lies upon the heads of the leaders.

The creative personalities in the vanguard of a civilization who have had recourse to the mechanism of mimesis are exposing themselves to the risk of failure in two degrees, one negative and the other positive.

The possible negative failure is that, undesignedly and perhaps unconsciously, the leaders may infect themselves with the hypnotism which they have deliberately induced in their followers; and in that event the docility of the rank-and-file will have been purchased at the disastrous price of a loss of initiative in the officers. 'If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.'²⁴ If the mechanical rhythm by which ninety per cent of an organism is made subservient to the rest, in order that the remaining ten per cent of energy may be concentrated on creative evolution, is extended to the whole, then 'a marvel of mechanical ingenuity' is degraded into the monstrosity of 'a machine-like automaton'. The difference between ninety per cent and one hundred per cent of mechanization is all the difference in the world; and there is just this kind of difference between a society that is in growth and a society that has become arrested.

The arrested societies which we surveyed in an earlier chapter²⁵ have achieved so close an adaptation to their environment that they have taken its shape and colour and rhythm instead of impressing the environment with a stamp which is their own. The equilibrium of forces in

their life is so exact that all their energies are absorbed in the effort of maintaining the position which they have attained already, and there is no margin of energy left over for reconnoitring the course of the road ahead. In the cases of arrest we have a classic illustration of the negative failure in which the leaders themselves become hypnotized by the drill which they have inculcated into the rank-and-file. In this predicament the column comes to a dead halt, at whatever point on its route it may happen to find itself at the moment, simply because there is nobody left at the head of the column to give fresh orders.

This negative failure, however, is seldom the end of the story. In abandoning Orpheus's music for the drill-sergeant's word of command, the leaders have played upon the faculty of mimesis in the rank-and-file by an exertion of power – as a substitute for the uncoercive play of the charm of genius that is attractive only to kindred spirits. In the interaction between leaders and led, mimesis and power are correlatives; and power is a force which is perhaps rarely brought into play without being abused. In any event, the tenure of power is an abuse in itself if those who hold the power have lost the faculty of leadership. Accordingly, the halt of the column of route, which we have pictured in our military simile, is apt to be followed by mutiny on the part of the rank-and-file, and by 'frightfulness' on the part of the officers – who make a desperate attempt to retain by brute force an authority which they have ceased to merit by any signal contribution to the common weal. The result is a hideous pandemonium, in which the military formation breaks up into an Ishmaelitic anarchy. This is the positive failure which is the nemesis of the resort to mimesis in the life of a growing civilization; and in the language of another simile this failure is familiar to us already. It is that 'disintegration' of a broken-down civilization which declares itself in the 'secession of the proletariat' from a *ci-devant* band of leaders which has degenerated into a 'dominant minority'.²⁶ The successive transformations of the prophet into the drill-sergeant and of this martinet into a terrorist explain the declines and falls of civilizations in terms of leadership.

In terms of relation or interaction, the failure of the Promethean *élan* declares itself in a loss of harmony. In the movement of life a change in any one part of a whole ought to be accompanied by sympathetic adjustments of the other parts if all is to go well; but when life is mechanized one part may be altered while others are left as they have been, and a loss of harmony is the result. In any whole a loss of harmony between its component parts is paid for by the whole in a corresponding loss of self-determination; and the fate of a declining civilization is described in Jesus's prophecy to Peter:

When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old . . . another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.²⁷

A loss of self-determination is the ultimate criterion of breakdown, for – as we suggested by anticipation at the beginning of this chapter – it is the inverse of the criterion of growth. In the succeeding chapters we shall examine some of the forms in which this loss of self-determination through loss of harmony is manifested.

22 The reversal of roles

ANOTHER ASPECT of that failure of self-determination which we have been considering is the apparent nemesis of creativity. It looks as if it were uncommon for the creative responses to two or more successive challenges in the history of a given society to be achieved by one and the same minority or individual. So far from this being the rule, the party that has distinguished itself in dealing with one challenge is apt to fail conspicuously in attempting to deal with the next. This ironical and disconcerting yet apparently normal inconstancy of human fortunes is one of the dominant motifs of the Attic drama, and it is discussed by Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, under the name of *peripeteia*, or 'the reversal of roles'.¹ It is also one of the principal themes of the New Testament.

In the drama of the New Testament a Christ whose epiphany on Earth in the person of Jesus is, in Christian belief, the true fulfilment of Jewry's long-cherished Messianic hope is nevertheless rejected by a school of Scribes and Pharisees which, only a few generations back, has come to the fore at a critical juncture by leading an heroic Jewish revolt against the triumph of Hellenization. Yet now, in this far more momentous crisis, the Jews that comprehend and accept the – in Christian eyes – authentic Jewish Messiah's message are the least within the community, the publicans and the harlots.² The Messiah himself comes from 'Galilee of the Gentiles';³ and his greatest executor, Paul, is a Hellenized Jew from Tarsus, a city beyond the traditional horizon of the Promised Land. In the numerous presentations of the drama of *peripeteia* in the parables and incidents of the Christian Testament, the roles that are reversed are sometimes played by the Pharisaic élite and the outcasts from the Jewish fold,⁴ and at other times by Jewry as a whole and the Gentiles;⁵ but whether it is the Pharisees who are challenged, as in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican,⁶ or the Jewish community itself, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan,⁷ the moral is the same:

The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.⁸

In its own historical setting, the Christian rendering of the theme of *peripeteia* is a variation on an ancient rendering in the Jewish Scriptures. The New Testament and the Old Testament are, both alike, regarded as instruments through which God has bequeathed a supernatural heritage to human beneficiaries; and the common plot of a twice played tragedy is a reversal of roles through a transfer of God's priceless gift from an apparently assured recipient to one with far less apparently promising prospects. In the original performance of the play it is Esau, the first-born, who sells his birthright to his younger brother Jacob; and in the second performance it is the heirs of Jacob who, by their rejection of Christ, now forfeit their prize to Esau. The Christian version of the plot thus presents a double *peripeteia*, a reversal of a reversal; but the literal historical sequence depicted in the New Testament has at the same

time a deeper significance as an allegory of a mystery which is illustrated in the course of history because it lies at the heart of life. On this plane the operation of the principle of *peripeteia* is proclaimed in the New Testament in terms that transcend the historical limits of a particular time and place:

If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all.⁹ He that is least among you, the same shall be great.¹⁰

And the actors in the reversal of roles are, in this context, neither Pharisees-and-Publicans nor Jews-and-Gentiles, but are adults-and-children:

Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.¹¹

This paradoxical *peripeteia* between sophistication and simplicity was affirmed by Jesus in a quotation from Jewish Scripture:

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.¹²

The mystery symbolized here in the reversal of roles between children and adults flashes out of its sheath of allegory in the exultant phrases of Saint Paul:

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.¹³

But what is the explanation of a principle which plays so prominent a part both in the New Testament and in the Attic drama? In the absence of the deeper insight which posterity has gained through sharper suffering, primitive minds were inclined to give a cynical answer to this question. They sought to explain the downfalls of pre-eminent human beings as acts of external powers that were human in their ethos but were superhuman in potency. They supposed the overthrowers of great men to be gods and their motive to be envy. 'The envy of the gods' is one of the *Leitmotivs* of primitive mythology, and it was a subject of special fascination for Hellenic thought.

God loves to cut short everything that overtops its kind. In this way a great army is destroyed by a small army in certain circumstances – as, for instance, when God in His envy sends down panic upon them, or thunder. Then they perish, and their last state is unworthy of their first. God suffers no one to be proud except Himself.¹⁴

This passage from Herodotus occurs in a fictitious speech from the mouth of Xerxes' uncle Artabanus, after Xerxes has announced his project of conquering Hellas; and Herodotus makes Xerxes, in the course of his address, incur the envy of no fewer than three great gods: Poseidon,



113 SURFEIT – OUTRAGEOUS BEHAVIOUR – DISASTER According to Herodotus, Croesus flaunted his vast prosperity and happiness before Solon, but was warned by the sage that no man could be judged happy until his end were known. His pride wounded, Croesus dismissed Solon in fury; but he went on to suffer a series of disastrous misfortunes, culminating in his capture by Cyrus who condemned him to death by burning. On the pyre, Croesus remembered Solon's words and called out his name, moving Cyrus to mercy; but the raging flames were only extinguished when Apollo intervened.

through his announcement of his intention to bridge the Hellespont; Zeus, through his boast that he will divide with him the lordship of the Universe; and Helios, through his declared intention of extending the range of his own dominion from sunrise to sunset.¹⁵ In this tragedy of Xerxes' greatness and fall the protagonist irrevocably seals his own doom when, on the eve of his passage of the Hellespont, on the road to defeat, the spectacle of his grand army and armada tempts him to declare himself divinely happy. The moment after uttering this blasphemy, Xerxes recollects himself; but it is too late now for repentance.

In a more serious vein the same thesis is pronounced by Herodotus in the parables of Croesus and of Polycrates.¹⁶ The Herodotean godhead shows a touch of human kindness in the parable of Croesus, who is as wantonly presumptuous as Xerxes, yet manages to save his soul alive by a repentance at the eleventh hour; but the divine attributes of malignity and implacability reveal themselves, naked and unashamed, in the parable of Polycrates. He seeks to anticipate the wrecking of his fortunes through 'the envy of the gods' by marring his own prosperity through his own act, but is frustrated when his favourite signet-ring, which he has to this end cast ceremoniously into the sea, is miraculously and untowardly restored to him by the implacable Divinities. This Herodotean note is recaptured by Horace, an accomplished Latinizer of Greek verse and Hellenic ethos, in a meditation on the fatal consequences of human audacity:

Nothing is too difficult for us mortals to dare;
In our folly we aspire to scale Heaven itself.
By our crimes we foil Jove,
Who would fain forget his wrath and cease to hurl his bolts.¹⁷

Or we may quote the words of a Roman philosopher-poet whose testimony is even more impressive, considering that he had made it his life-work to preach the illusoriness of the belief that there is any supernatural intervention in human affairs.

Do not the nations tremble, and proud kings
Shudder, convulsed by fear of wrath divine?
They count their guilty deeds and reckless words.
The dreadful day of reckoning – has it come?¹⁸

The cynical explanation of the working of the Universe that was postulated by Lucretius in a disintegrating Hellenic Society was given in the Sinic World too in a comparable time of troubles:

Stretch a bow to the very full,
And you will wish you had stopped in time;
Temper a sword-edge to its very sharpest,
And you will find it soon grows dull. . . .¹⁹

And, if we turn to a world more remote from the Hellenic in ethos in spite of its geographical proximity, we shall find in the book of an Israelitish prophet of the eighth century BC a curiously close anticipation of the words which Herodotus put into the mouth of Artabanus some three hundred years later:

The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low. . . . And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.²⁰

This philosophy is found too in Ecclesiastes, which was written in the second century BC under the influence, perhaps, not only of the Jewish tradition but also of post-Herodotean Hellenic thought;²¹ and even some two centuries after this we can find, in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, the suggestion that God's intervention in human affairs is due in the first place to a desire to exercise power, and only secondly to a concern for justice and mercy:

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.²²

It was a Greek and not a Jew who, with an insight reaped from his own spiritual travail, first proclaimed the truth that the cause of *peripeteia* is not to be found in the intervention of any external power but is an aberration in the soul of the sufferer himself, and that the name of this fatal moral evil is not envy but sin.

A grey word liveth, from the morn

Of old time among mortals spoken,
That man's Wealth waxen full shall fall
Not childless, but get sons withal;
And ever of great bliss is born

A tear unstaunched and a heart broken.

But I hold my thought alone and by others unbeguiled;
'Tis the deed that is unholy shall have issue, child on
child,

Sin on sin, like his begetters; and they shall be as they were.
But the man, who walketh straight, and the house thereof,
tho' Fate

Exalt him, the children shall be fair.²³

The sinner is brought to destruction not by God's act but by his own. His offence lies, not in rivalling his Creator, but in deliberately making himself utterly unlike him; and God's part in this human tragedy is not active but passive. The sinner's bane is not a divine envy, but a divine inability to continue to use as an instrument of creation a creature that has insisted upon alienating itself from the life of its Creator.²⁴ The sinful soul comes to grief because, so long as it wills to sin, God's grace is unable to inspire and inform it. According to this view, *peripeteia* – the reversal of roles – is produced by the inward spiritual working of a moral law, and not by the impact of some external agency; and, if we examine the plot of this psychological tragedy, we shall discern two variations on it. In one version the subject errs through an untimely passivity, while in the other he rushes actively to seek his doom.

The passive aberration to which a creative human being is prone in the sequel to an achievement is to 'rest on his oars' in a fool's paradise where he dreams that, by having exerted himself once upon a time, he has won a title to 'live happily ever after'. Short of this degree of folly, the victor in yesterday's battle is apt to dream that, if time does refuse to stand still, then he has merely to repeat mechanically the motions that served him so well last time in order to be sure of overcoming any new challenge. It is plain that the creative individual who yields to this passive mood is falling into the posture of the arrested society²⁵ which has achieved so exact an equilibrium with its environment that

it becomes its slave instead of remaining its master. In the case of an arrested society this posture is only tenable so long as the environment happens to remain constant, and it spells disaster as soon as the environment begins to change. The same fate awaits a creative individual or minority which has become infatuated with his own works. In the Syriac legend of the Creation, the completion of the physical Universe resulted in a static paradise, and it needed the Serpent's undesignedly beneficent intervention to liberate God's energies for performing a fresh act of creation in spite of Himself.²⁶ In terms of modern Western physical science the nemesis of creativity, in this passive form, is seen in the over-specialization of a species which condemns it to extinction if it becomes incapable of adapting itself to a change in the environment.

If the moral of this passive aberration that overtakes some creative spirits is 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall',²⁷ we shall find that 'pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall'²⁸ is the epitaph of those others who rush to seek their doom.

This second version of the plot is familiar in Greek literature as a tragedy in three acts: *koros* (surfeit), *hybris* (outrageous behaviour), and *ate* (disaster) – an active psychological catastrophe in which the subject, spoilt by success, loses his mental and moral balance and courts disaster by attempting the impossible. It was the commonest theme in what we now know of the fifth-century Athenian drama: the story of Agamemnon in Aeschylus's play of that name, and of Xerxes in his *Persae*; of Ajax in Sophocles' play of that name, of Oedipus in his *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and of Creon in his *Antigone*; and the story of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In Plato's words:

If one sins against the laws of proportion and gives something too big to something too small to carry it – too big sails to too small a ship, too big meals to too small a body, too big powers to too small a soul – the result is bound to be a complete upset. In an outburst of *hybris* the overfed body will rush into sickness, while the jack-in-office will rush into the unrighteousness that *hybris* always breeds.²⁹

In these two variant versions of a single plot, we can discern and comprehend the nemesis of creativity; and, if it is true in 'real life' that the successful creator of one chapter is severely handicapped, by his very success, in endeavouring to resume the creative role in the next, then it is plain that we have here run to earth a very potent cause of the breakdowns of civilizations. We can see that in the drama of social life this nemesis of creativity would bring on social breakdowns directly in two distinct ways. First, it would seriously diminish the number of candidates for the creator's role in the face of any given challenge, since it would tend to rule out those who had responded successfully to the last challenge; and these, *ex hypothesi*, were potential creators before their very success threatened to sterilize their creativity in the act of demonstrating it. In the second place, this frequent sterilization of the *ci-devant* creators would handicap the society in its next ordeal out of all proportion to the mere numerical ratio between a handful of lost leaders and a host of creative spirits; for, *ex hypothesi* again, the very past achievement which has fatally disqualified them from achieving anything further has also brought them to the front and lodged them in key



114 'The first shall be last; and the last shall be first': a Christian allegory, showing the proud man cast to destruction, while the meek man is raised to Heaven. (Florentine engraving, 1470-80.)

positions where their senile impotence to create is aggravated by their lasting potency *ex officio* to thwart and hinder.

Can this nemesis of creativity be averted? Clearly it can; for otherwise every civilization that ever came to birth would be arrested inexorably at the threshold of life, whereas we know that the great majority of civilizations³⁰ have avoided this fate and have gone on from strength to strength. Yet the way of salvation is narrow and difficult to find. The question is, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'³¹ And the answer is that, 'except ye be con-

verted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'³²

How often do creative minorities which have discovered a successful response to one challenge then qualify themselves, through a spiritual rebirth, to take up the next challenge and the next? And how often do they disqualify themselves by fatuously 'resting on their oars' or by wilfully rushing down the steep place that leads from *keoros* through *hybris* into *ate*? Our best hope of finding an answer to this question lies in resorting to our usual method of making an empirical survey.

23 Athens and Venice: the idolization of an ephemeral self

WHILE the attitude of 'resting on one's oars' may be described as the passive way of succumbing to the nemesis of creativity, the negativeness of the mental posture does not certify an absence of moral fault. A fatuous passivity towards the present springs from an infatuation with the past; and this infatuation is the sin of idolatry which, in the primitive Hebrew scheme of religion, is the sin most apt to evoke the vengeance of 'a jealous god'. Idolatry may be defined as an intellectually and morally purblind worship of the part instead of the whole, of the creature instead of the Creator, of time instead of eternity.¹ It is an abuse of the highest faculties of the human spirit, and its effect is to transform one of 'the ineffably sublime works'² of God into an 'abomination of desolation'.³ In practical life this moral aberration may take the comprehensive form of an idolization of the idolater's own personality, or own society, in some ephemeral phase of the ceaseless movement which is growth; or, again, it may take the limited form of an idolization of some particular institution or technique which has once stood its devotee in good stead. Let us look at each of these forms of idolatry in turn.

A notorious example of the idolization of an ephemeral self is presented by Athens, who succumbed to the nemesis of creativity by becoming infatuated with her transitory role as 'the education of Hellas'.

We have seen⁴ how Athens earned a temporary claim to this magnificent title through her triumphant conquest of the physical and human challenges that faced her in her early career, and through the supremely brilliant domestic culture that she went on to create. Her gifts to Hellas were indeed immense; yet the very occasion on which the title 'the education of Hellas' was conferred upon her might have reminded her sons that their achievement was far from perfect. The phrase was coined by Pericles in the funeral oration⁵ which he delivered in praise of the Athenian dead in 431–430 BC – the first year of an Atheno-Peloponnesian War which was the outward visible sign of an inward spiritual breakdown in the life of the Hellenic Society. This fatal war had broken out because Athens had proved unable to conquer the next challenge set by her own outstanding domestic successes: the challenge of being called upon to create an Hellenic political world order. In the circumstances of the year 431–430 BC the orator's proclamation of Athens as 'the education of Hellas' should therefore not have moved his audience to a thrill of self-adulation, but rather have moved them to 'abhor' themselves and 'repent in dust and ashes'.⁶ The military overthrow of Athens in 404 BC, and the greater moral defeat which the restored Athenian democracy inflicted upon itself in 399 BC by the judicial murder of Socrates, did indeed provoke one contemporary Athenian man of genius to repudiate Athens and almost all her works.⁷ Yet this gesture neither profited Plato himself nor impressed his fellow-citizens; and the epigoni of those Athenian pioneers who had made their city 'the education of Hellas' sought to vindicate their claim to a forfeited title by the perverse method of proving

themselves unteachable. They idolized the dead self of Athens as she had been, for a fleeting moment, in the Periclean Age; and they thereby debarred a post-Periclean Athens from having any part or lot in later Hellenic acts of creation.

On the political plane, Attic egoism brought successive disasters upon Athens as she repeated the errors which, in 404 BC, had resulted in the loss of her own political primacy in Hellas and in the breakdown of the Hellenic Civilization as a whole. Her inveterate egoism ruined the Hellenic World's chance of countering the threat of Macedonian domination in the fourth century BC; and it was not until she found herself hopelessly outclassed by the new Great Powers of titanic calibre which were rising on the periphery of the Hellenic World that Athens reluctantly renounced her pretence to the status of an Hellenic Great Power. Even then, her reading of the lesson was fatally negative, for she withdrew into a selfish isolation from which she looked on passively while Rome delivered knock-out blows to rival titans, and overwhelmed Athens' own neighbours, who had been attempting – without Athenian help – to avert this catastrophe by the expedient of federation. With a supreme inconsequence Athens waited until Rome's world power had been placed on an impregnable basis by the overthrow of all serious competitors, and then she abandoned her latter-day policy of isolation and plunged into the mêlée on the anti-Roman side. She paid for her folly in 86 BC, when the Roman conqueror Sulla took the city of Athens by storm; and, though Athens was spared annihilation – for the sake, as Sulla explained, of the living Athenians' dead ancestors⁸ – and though she survived as a *chef d'œuvre* of architecture and a seat of intellectual life, this last absurd excursion into the arena of international politics was the inglorious end of Athenian political history.

The Athenians stand convicted of having brought their political misfortunes upon themselves through the moral fault of infatuation with their own past; and it is here that we must look for the psychological cause of their inveterate self-stultifying egoism. This explanation will be confirmed if we take a comparative view of the contemporary creative achievements of certain other Hellenic communities which conspicuously lacked the Athenians' intellectual endowment, but were also, by the same token, exempt from the incubus of a Periclean halo.

Take, for example, the Athenian Xenophon's contemptuous description of his Achaean and Arcadian comrades in the motley band of Greek mercenaries which, in 401 BC, was seeing service with the Achaemenian pretender Cyrus.⁹ In this miniature Hellas-under-arms Xenophon observed, half irritably and half condescendingly, that the Achaeans and Arcadians were more wayward, impulsive, improvident, refractory to discipline, and in fact in every way more crude and barbaric, than the representatives of the more sophisticated and progressive Hellenic communities of the day, like his own Athenian self or his Spartan and Boeotian friends. Xenophon's observation was apt at



CIVIC APOTHEOSES
115 The goddess Athene, a monumental example of civic pride; Late Hellenistic statue.

the time; yet so rapidly were the roles reversed that the Arcadian historian Polybius (*vivebat* c. 202–120 BC) could not only severely condemn the fourth-century Athenian politician Demosthenes for his narrow parochialism, but could compare his poor statesmanship unfavourably with the political wisdom of Polybius's own Arcadian forebears in the same generation.¹⁰

This accurate comparative judgment was even more conspicuously valid for the ensuing period of Hellenic politics. In the third century BC it was Achaëa and Arcadia that led the movement to liberate Hellas from her Macedonian shackles, and that devised the political system of voluntary federation which was the sole means by which the small city-states could maintain their national independence without sacrificing their local autonomy. Even the rigidly traditionalist Spartan state found a new power of flexibility and experimentation which temporarily lifted it out of its centuries-old lethargy. Only Athens, in this critical moment when Hellas was desperately trying to stave off her fate, remained coldly aloof and lethally negative.

This torpor of Athens in her latter days comes out still more strikingly when we turn our attention from politics to culture; for culture, even more than politics, was the sphere of activity in which Athens excelled in the spring-time of her history, and in this field her *floruit* came later and lasted longer. In the souls of Euripides and Thucydides and Socrates and Plato the very onset of the political adversity that was heralded by the outbreak of the Atheno-Peloponnesian War had the effect of a challenge which evoked the highest moral and intellectual flights of the Attic spirit; and the fourth century BC, which saw the beginnings of the political autumn of Athenian history, marked the height of its cultural summer. The decline was slow, but by Polybius's time Athens could no longer claim to possess a monopoly of the higher Hellenic culture; and even in the field of philosophy, which she appeared to have made peculiarly and inalienably her own, the conceit of being 'the education of Hellas' led her into a suicidal self-betrayal.

The rejection of Paul by the Athenians is the analogue of his Master's rejection by the Jews. Though Paul preached by public colloquy, according to Athenian custom, his message of the Resurrection proved an insuperable stumbling-block to an Athenian generation which was infatuated with a Stoic and Epicurean past.¹¹ Paul's first impression of Athens as a 'city wholly given to idolatry' was indeed a true intuition of Athens as she had come to be in the Apostle's day. Athens refused to be charged with a spiritual mission which she might have taken as the crown of her long philosophic preparation; and the function of serving as a seed-bed in which the germs of Hellenic philosophy and Syriac religion would mingle and blend was fulfilled, not by Attica, but by Asia Minor.

Three centuries after Paul's departure, when the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church were laying the ecclesiastical foundations of a new social order, Athens was inspiring the Emperor Julian with his tragically academic dream of a paganism reminted in a Christian image and resuscitated by artificial respiration. A hundred years further on, Athens was the scene of a strange cultural alliance between a scholastic intellectualism and an archaistic revival of

primitive superstitions which the live genius of Hellenic philosophy had apparently strangled with ease, a thousand years before, in its Ionian infancy. In this age, when Hellenism was at bay in an Attic fastness, the first and last things in the Hellenic tradition – its lowest and highest elements – thus entered, at Athens, into a desperate defensive *union sacrée*. The activities of these latter-day professors of a senile Attic pedantry were eventually snuffed out by the long-delayed enforcement of the imperial government's decree against paganism, when the University of Athens was closed in AD 529. The ejected Athenian professors sought refuge in Asia with Rome's Sasanian enemies; yet in migrating eastwards to the Zoroastrian Chosroes' Ctesiphon they were actually moving nearer to the very source of the aggressive Syriac culture whose far-projected radiation had just completed the disintegration of Hellenism in its homeland. If the Syriac spirit was strong enough, even in an Helleno-Syriac syncretism such as Christianity, to make it impossible any longer to lead the life of an Hellenic philosopher in Athens, how could that life conceivably be lived in Ctesiphon, where the people's religion was Christianity in its Nestorian form, while the government's religion was a Zoroastrianism which was an undilutedly and militantly anti-Hellenic expression of the Iranian genius? It is not surprising that the Athenian refugees soon found themselves incurably homesick for the inhospitable world whose dust they had shaken off their feet with so antique a gesture. Fortunately this tragi-comedy had a happy ending. When Chosroes negotiated peace terms with Rome in AD 533, he had a special clause inserted in the treaty which secured the readmission of his protégés into Roman territory with a guarantee of liberty for them to live out their lives as pagans unmolested by the imperial police. This Attic addiction to idolatry did not die finally with its last professional adepts: the first successful re-establishment of the cult of images in Orthodox Christendom was the work of the Athenian-born Empress Irene (*imperabat* AD 780–802).

We have now glanced at the political and cultural role played by Athens during the long-drawn-out process of the disintegration of the Hellenic Society; and our cursory survey has brought to light a paradoxical fact. Here is a period of Hellenic history which might aptly be labelled 'the Atticistic Age', in acknowledgment of the truth that the creative work of Athens in the age immediately preceding had left the strongest impress upon the Hellenic Society of the time; and yet, in an age which bears this conspicuous stamp of Attic achievements in the past, Athens makes herself conspicuous – once again, but this time in exactly the opposite way – through the absence of any contemporary Attic contributions to the solution of current Hellenic problems.

The Attic paradox, for which we have found an explanation in Athens' fatal aberration of idolizing her dead self, has a parallel in the Western World in the similar contrast between the respective roles that Italy has played in successive chapters of Western history.

If we scrutinize the countenance of the Western Society in that 'modern' chapter of its history which runs from the latter part of the fifteenth century of our era to the latter part of the nineteenth, we shall find that its modern



116 A voluptuous Venice, enthroned in the clouds among the Olympians, is crowned by Victory. Detail from a ceiling painting by Veronese in the Council Hall of the Doge's Palace, sixteenth century.



THE DECEPTIONS OF PRIDE

123 The infamous sack of Constantinople by Crusaders in 1204 was seen by Venice merely as a glorious episode in her long commercial career.

124 Venice's naval victory in 1668 over the Turks at Candia gratified her pride but brought no solid advantage: the town was lost again in 1669.



from it, even at the price of accepting another servitude. The inferiority of Athenian to Venetian statesmanship comes out as clearly in its handling of the problem of how a small state at the geographical centre of an international system should keep its footing after it has been dwarfed by the rise of new titans on an expanding periphery. The persistent ineptitude of the Athenians in coping with this problem affords a remarkable contrast to the masterliness of Venetian diplomacy, which managed to stave off for nearly three hundred years that partition of the Republic's Italian dominions among the Transalpine Powers which was the grand design of the League of Cambrai (1508).

The secret of Venice's success was an ability to rise above the vice of self-worship to which Athens owed her failures. But the success of modern Venice has been only relative and negative; on the whole and in the end, Venice failed to make any fresh creative contribution to the life of the society in which she managed to survive; and this Venetian failure can be explained by the fact that Venice, too, did succumb, in her own way, to the nemesis of creativity.

In the field of domestic politics the infatuation with a dead self which had nerved Venice to maintain her own medieval republican constitution at the same time inhibited her from anticipating or emulating the modern constitutional achievements of Switzerland or the Northern Netherlands by transforming her latter-day Italian empire into a federal state on a republican basis. While Venice was never so wrong-headed as to oppress her subject-cities, she was also never so broad-minded as to take them into partnership; and so, in AD 1797, when the Venetian Republic was overthrown by Napoleon, the political régime in the Venetian dominions was still just what it had been in AD 1339: that is, a mild hegemony under which a number of subject-communities had to take their orders from a single privileged sovereign state.

Again, in the field of foreign policy, the extraordinary skill with which modern Venetian statesmanship succeeded in maintaining the integrity of the latter-day Venetian dominions in Italy, without involving Venice herself in efforts beyond her strength, did not find its counterpart in the contemporary policy of Venice in the Levant. In her dealings with the Western Powers, Venice took care not to exhaust her limited energies, yet in the east she defied the overwhelming strength of the 'Osmanlis in the forlorn hope of defending her ancient Levantine empire. Through her unseasonable intransigence in the War of Candia (*gerebatur* AD 1645-69), Venice permanently weakened her stamina without any result beyond the unprofitable satisfaction of knowing that she had compelled the Ottoman Power to pay an exorbitant price for its victory.

The modern Venetian idolization of the medieval Venetian Empire in the Levant, which inspired the Venetians to this vain act of self-immolation, drove them on to renew the unequal struggle at the first opportunity. When the tide turned against the 'Osmanlis after their second unsuccessful siege of Vienna in AD 1682-83, the Venetians hastened to intervene on the anti-Ottoman side, and their efforts were momentarily rewarded by their acquisition of large tracts of Ottoman territory on the mainland. But the victory was ephemeral, for in 1715 the Venetians duly lost all their new conquests, and more into the bargain, and the



125 The frivolity of eighteenth-century Venice can be seen as a psychological compensation for the years of intolerable strain. Carnival Scene by Canaletto.

only permanent effect of their ill-judged intervention was to create a diversion which allowed the Habsburgs and the Romanovs to extend their own empires at the 'Osmanlis' expense. Indeed, this Venetian policy was unprofitable economically as well as politically, for the territorial possessions that Venice had been seeking to retain or acquire were by this time commercially valueless, owing to the diversion of the mainstream of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Thus the Levantine stake for which Venice played her ruinous game against Turkey was nothing more substantial than a passion to 'save her face' by retaining the cumbersome territorial tokens of a past political greatness. The fact that this passion should have mastered the habitually cool and calculating Venetian mind is a striking testimony to the deadliness of the malady of self-idolization.

The nemesis of Venetian medieval creativity took a stern material shape in the massive military fortifications which modern Venice has left as her cenotaph in her old Levantine *places d'armes*; and the same writing on the wall is no less plainly manifest in the melancholy works of art which were being created at home. At first sight it may seem incredible that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Venetians who were living that elegantly frivolous carnival life which the music and pictures commemorate were the

same flesh and blood that fought and died in the Levantine wars; but second thoughts tell us that the very sharpness of the contrast in ethos proves the two moods complementary. The intolerable strain which modern Venice was incurring in the Levant demanded, and received, in psychological compensation, an Epicurean relaxation of Venetian life at home. In Canaletto's meticulous portraits of a Venice from whose atmosphere the sunlight has faded we seem to see the ashes of a holocaust in which the Venetians had burned their energies out since the days when they had savoured the full-blooded colours of Titian and Tintoretto; and the same note of 'dust and ashes' struck the poet Browning's ear in 'A Toccata of Galuppi's'.

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it brings.

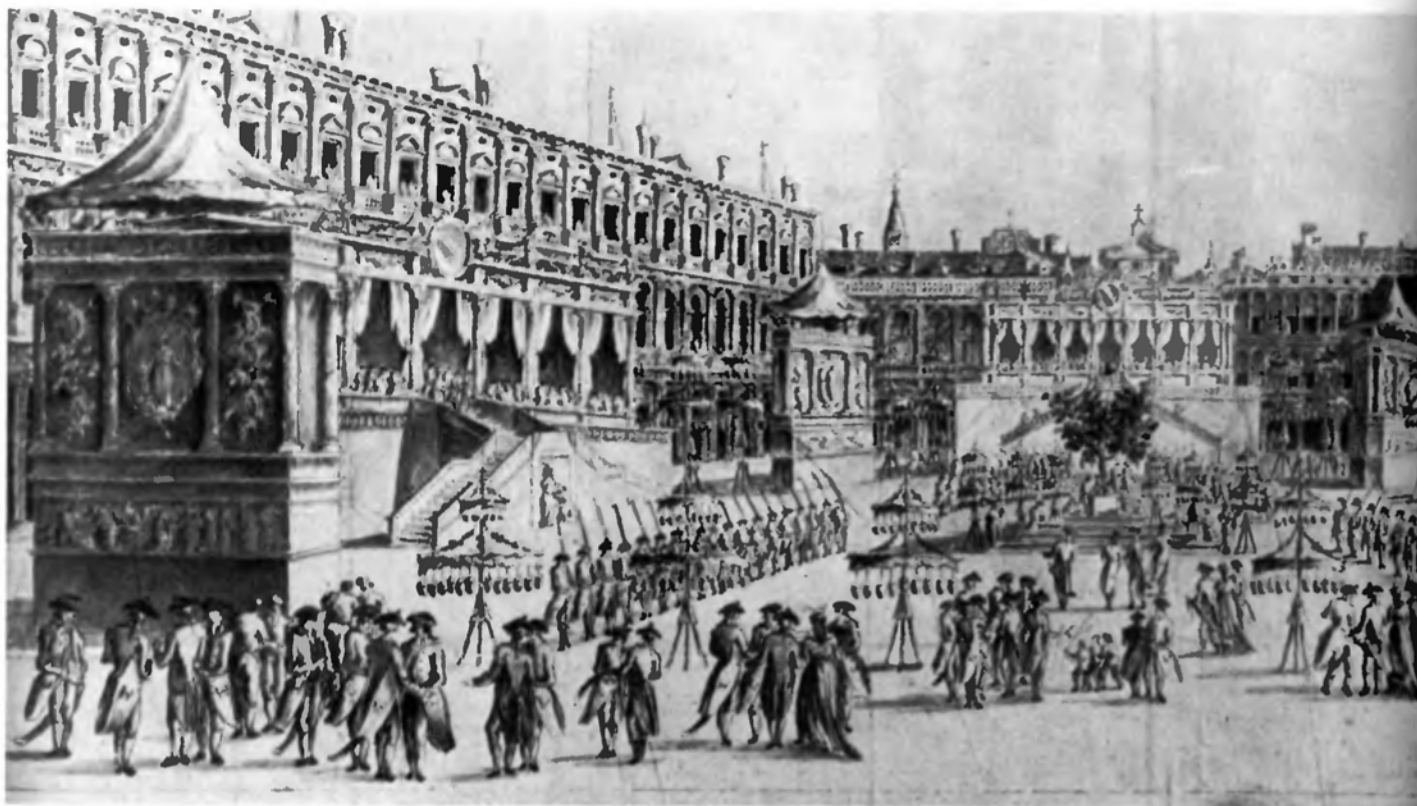
What, they lived once thus at Venice, where the merchants were the kings,

Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,

Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions – 'Must we die?'

Those commiserating sevenths – 'Life might last! we can but try!'



THE LAST SPARK DIES

126 In 1797 Venice was overthrown by Napoleon. Celebrations round the Tree of Liberty were staged in Saint Mark's Square.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:

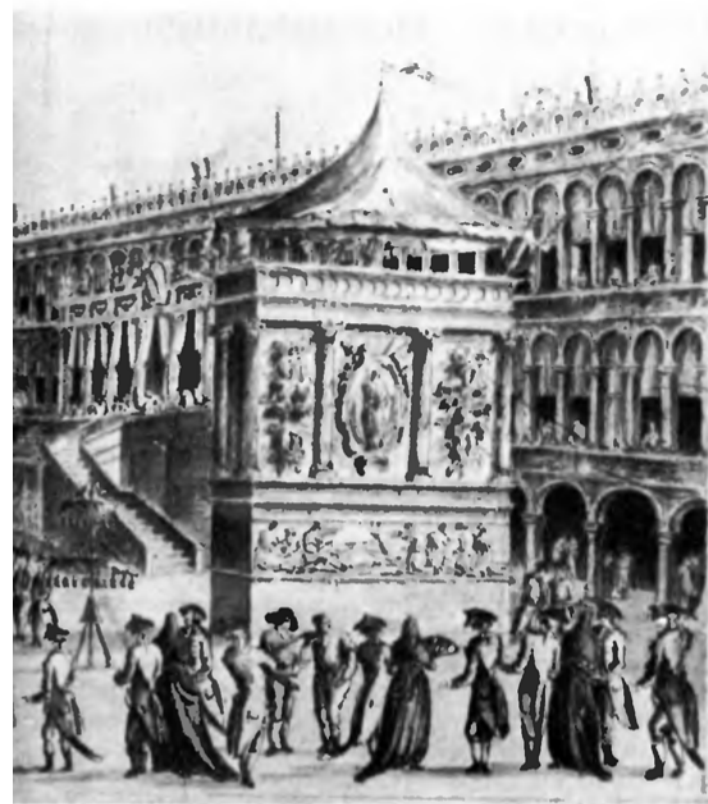
'Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned!

'The soul, doubtless, is immortal – where a soul can be discerned.'

Nor was this Epimethean chapter of Venetian history, for which Galuppi has written the dirge and Canaletto painted the hatchment, the last phase of Venice's participation in the life of the Western World. Venice, together with the rest of Italy, has been reprieved from an eighteenth-century life-in-death by undergoing a nineteenth-century *Risorgimento*. Superficially this recent Italian social miracle might seem to testify that Venice has eventually triumphed over the nemesis of her previous creativity by facing it out and living it down; but, when we look for the creative forces by which the *Risorgimento* was actually achieved, we shall observe that they almost all arose outside the bounds of those historic city-states which were the seed-beds of Italian creativity in the Middle Ages. If modern Italy eventually rose again, this was because the stage was so set that the outcome did not depend upon the actors' own merits, but was decided by the play of irresistible external forces. The first strong political stimulus was the temporary incorporation of Italy in the Napoleonic Empire, which brought her into association with modern France. The first strong economic stimulus was the reopening of the trade route through the Mediterranean between Western Europe and India – an eighteenth-century English fancy

which was transformed into a reality by the after-effects of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The troubling of Mediterranean waters by the wash of French and English hulls broke in vivifying waves upon Italian shores, when the building of a railway from Cairo to Suez was followed up, in 1869, by the opening of the Suez Canal. These Transalpine stimuli did not, of course, produce their full effects in Italy until they had communicated themselves to Italian agents; but the Italian creative forces by which the *Risorgimento* was brought to fruition did not arise on any Italian ground that had already borne the harvest of a medieval Italian culture.

In the economic field, the first Italian port to win a share for itself in modern Western maritime trade was neither Venice nor Genoa, but Leghorn – the modern creation of a Tuscan Grand Duke who planted it with a settlement of Iberian crypto-Jewish refugees; and it was these immigrants, and not the descendants of the native pioneers of commerce, who made Leghorn's fortune in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the political field, the unification of Italy was the achievement of an originally Transalpine principality which scarcely had a foothold on the Italian side of the Alps before the eleventh century, and which did not lose the last of its Transalpine possessions until 1860. Piedmont, the Cisalpine base of the dominions of the House of Savoy, was Transalpine in spirit and tradition, with little share in the city-state culture of Cisalpine Italy; and this sense of being alien from the rest of Italy persisted even after the Savoyard state's centre of



127 The 1848 rising against Austria was inspired by past glories, but no amount of heroism could revive them.

gravity had shifted to the Italian side of the mountains in the fourteenth century. Not until 1848 did the House of Savoy throw in its lot with the Italian people, by laying aside its own parochial ambitions and putting itself at the head of a national movement of unification.

In 1848 the Austrian régime in Lombardy and Venetia was threatened simultaneously by a Piedmontese invasion and by risings in Venice and Milan and the other cities within the Habsburgs' Italian provinces; and it is interesting to reflect upon the difference in the historical significance of these two anti-Austrian movements which took place at the same time and which both figure officially as blows struck in a common cause. The risings in Venice and Milan were strokes struck for liberty, no doubt, and were no less heroic for being unsuccessful; but the vision of liberty which inspired them was the recollection of a medieval past. Compared with the heroism of the Venetian insurgents, the Piedmontese military performance in 1848-49 was not very creditable; yet Piedmont survived the disgrace of its shameful defeat at Novara to take its revenge ten years later at Magenta; and the British-like constitution which Charles Albert granted to his subjects in 1848 survived his abdication to become the basis of the constitution of a united Italy. By contrast, the incontestably valorous feats of Milan and Venice were not repeated and both cities thereafter sank back passively into the arms of their Austrian rulers and waited for the work of liberation to be performed by Piedmont and her Transalpine ally France.

The explanation for this contrast is that the Venetians and the Milanese were virtually foredoomed to failure because the spiritual driving-force behind them was still that idolization of their own dead selves, as medieval city-states, which had been defeating the finest efforts of Italian statesmanship since the time of Machiavelli. The nineteenth-century Venetians who responded to Manin's call in 1848 were fighting for Venice alone, and not for Piedmont or Milan or even for Padua. They were striving to restore an obsolete Venetian Republic and not to create a new Italian national state; for this reason their enterprise was a forlorn hope, whereas Piedmont could survive a more shameful defeat because the Piedmontese were not the slaves of an unforgettable historic past: they were psychologically free to identify themselves with the dominant political forces of the day and to throw themselves into the novel enterprise of creating a unified Italian state.

On this showing the revolts of 1848 played an essentially negative role in the Italian *Risorgimento*; indeed, their immediate failure was an indispensable preliminary to the success which crowned the struggles of 1859-70. In 1848 the idols of a medieval Milan and a medieval Venice were so cruelly battered and defaced that at last they lost their fatal hold upon the idolaters' souls; and it was this belated effacement of a medieval Italian past in the seats of its former greatness that cleared the ground for a successful Italian *Risorgimento* under the leadership of the one modern Italian state that was free from the spiritual incubus of overpoweringly poignant medieval memories.

24 The East Roman Empire: the idolization of an ephemeral institution



128 Caesaro-Papism: the concentration of secular and religious authority in the single person of the East Roman Emperor is signalized in a tenth-century ivory of Christ crowning the Emperor Constantine VII.

129 Caesar and Pope: opposite, Saint Peter gives spiritual power to Pope Leo III and temporal power to the Emperor Charlemagne, reflecting the actual division of authority in the nascent Western Christian World of the ninth century A.D.

THE NEMESIS of creativity, which we have just been studying in the form of an idolization of an ephemeral self, may also take the form of an idolatrous worship of some ephemeral institution: and, although an institution is manifestly a lesser idol than the human self which was its author, both alike are created things and, as such, unfit to be made recipients of a worship that is due to none but their Creator. A moral and intellectual aberration which thus remains in essence the same is not made any the less deadly by being indulged in on a narrower human range. A classic case in which the idolization of an institution brought an entire civilization to grief is the infatuation of Orthodox Christendom with a ghost of the Roman Empire, an ancient institution which had fulfilled its historical function and completed its natural term of life before the Orthodox Christian Society made its fatal attempt to resuscitate it.

Signs of the breakdown of the Orthodox Christian Civilization were visible by the end of the tenth century of the Christian Era, the most prominent of these being the outbreak of the disastrous Bulgaro-Roman War of AD 976-1018. This disaster overtook Orthodox Christendom, and blighted its growth, barely three hundred years after its first emergence out of the chaos of the post-Hellenic interregnum; and this growth-span is miserably short by comparison with the life-history of Western Christendom - a sister-civilization which was coeval with Orthodox Christendom in its birth, and which has not demonstrably broken down even now, nearly a thousand years after the date at which its twin civilization entered on its time of troubles.

How are we to account for this striking difference between the fortunes of two societies which started life at the same moment and in the same circumstances? The actual outcome, as the passage of a thousand years has unfolded it before our eyes today, is the more remarkable considering that it is the exact inverse of what would have been prophesied by any impartial observer who might have happened to make a comparative study of Orthodox and Western Christendom in the middle of the tenth century of our era. An observer at such a date would certainly have declared that the Orthodox Christian Civilization's prospects were brighter than those of this Society's Western sister. He would have recalled that, two and three hundred years before, Arab invaders had overrun all of North-West Africa and the Iberian peninsula and had passed the line of the Pyrenees before they had met with any effective resistance from Western Christendom, whereas Orthodox Christendom had brought the Arabs' eastern offensive to a halt at the line of the Taurus and had thus saved all of its Anatolian patrimony from the Umayyad Power. Our hypothetical observer could have gone on to point out that the means by which Orthodox Christendom had achieved this success was by rallying and concentrating its hard-pressed forces through an evocation of a ghost of the Roman Empire; and this great political work of the Emperor Leo Syrus (*imperabat* AD 717-41) would have



appeared to him all the more brilliant by contrast with the miserable failure of the corresponding attempt in the West, when this was made by Charlemagne two generations later.

Why was it, then, that the Orthodox Christian Civilization so soon belied its early promise, while the Western Civilization has so very much more than made up for an unpromising start? The explanation lies precisely in the contrast between Charlemagne's failure and Leo's success. If Charlemagne's attempted resuscitation of the ghost of the Roman Empire had not been a fiasco, then the infant Western Civilization on whose shoulders he had imposed

this crushing incubus might well have succumbed. If the West was saved in this way by Charlemagne's failure, we may find that, inversely, the Orthodox Christian Society was ruined by Leo's very success. Leo's achievement, in effectively reviving the institution of the Roman Empire on Orthodox Christian soil, was a response that was over-successful to a challenge that was excessive; and the over-strain of this *tour de force* exacted its penalty in the shape of a malformation. The outward symptom was a premature and excessive aggrandizement of the state in Orthodox Christian social life at the expense of all other institutions.



EMPEROR

130 Mosaic portrait of Justinian, dominating his church at Ravenna as he dominated the whole Eastern ecclesia.

The inward aberration was the idolization of a particular historic polity which had been conjured back from the grave and been decked out in the prestige of an emotionally glorified past in order to save a nascent society from imminent destruction. If we look at the Constantinopolitan Empire in this light, and not in the rarefied glow of its superficial military achievement, we shall find that we must turn back to an earlier page of its history in order to understand the long process by which successive emperors squandered their true heritage and sacrificed it on the altar of an impious presumption.

In the last chapter of the history of the Roman Empire, which may be taken, for our present purpose, as having begun with the death of the Emperor Theodosius the Great in AD 395, there had been, at first, a notable differentiation in the fortunes of the Hellenic universal state in its Latin provinces on the one hand and in its Greek and Oriental provinces on the other. In the Latin provinces there had been an immediate financial, political, and social collapse; the framework of the Empire had broken up, and the political vacuum had been occupied by the automatically emancipated proprietors of the great agricultural estates and leaders of powerful barbarian war-bands, while the Church had stepped into the social breach. Meanwhile, in an age which thus saw the dissolution of the Empire in the West, the imperial régime in the Greek and Oriental provinces succeeded in riding out one after another of the waves by which its counterpart in the Latin provinces was being broken up. By strong-minded statesmanship and determined military reform Leo the Great (*imperabat* AD 457-74) had released the Empire in the East from its perilous dependence upon barbarian mercenaries from the no-man's-land beyond the imperial frontiers; and his successors Zeno and Anastasius wrestled successfully with the problems of administrative and financial reform and parried the doctrinal dispute that threatened to split the Greek from the Oriental provinces of the Empire.¹ In fine, the imperial régime in the Constantinopolitan Empire distinguished itself, throughout the fifth century, by determined efforts to maintain the Empire as 'a going concern' which stand out in sharp contrast to the contemporary 'defeatism' of the imperial régime in the West; and for the moment these efforts seemed to have been rewarded with a triumphant success. Yet by the sixth century the contrast was shown to be, after all, superficial and impermanent. Everything that Leo and Zeno and Anastasius had sedulously and cumulatively gathered in was scattered to the winds in the single reign of Justinian (*imperabat* AD 527-65), who was betrayed, by an idolization of the vanished Empire of Constantine and Augustus, into indulging the same prodigious ambition, with the same disastrous results, as his latter-day Austrasian mimic Charlemagne. The slender store of energy which had been so carefully hoarded up and so conscientiously bequeathed to him by his predecessors was burnt up by Justinian in his abortive effort to restore the territorial integrity of the Empire by reincorporating in it the lost Latin provinces in Africa and Europe. His death in AD 565 was the signal for a collapse of the Empire in the Greek and Oriental provinces which resembled the collapse in the West after the death of Theodosius the Great - except that it came

with redoubled swiftness and force in revenge for having been staved off for 170 years longer. In the almost unintermittent warfare that supervened in the 152 years between Justinian's death and Leo Syrus's accession, the Constantinopolitan Empire lost its Oriental provinces and Justinian's African conquests to the Arabs, while its European provinces in South-Eastern Europe and in Italy were overrun by the Slavs and Lombards. Thus, *de facto*, the Roman Empire perished in its central and eastern provinces after the death of Justinian as, after the death of Theodosius, it had perished *de facto* in the West.

There were, indeed, certain indications that a nascent Orthodox Christian Society was, in the seventh century, about to enter – tardily but decidedly – on the same course that had already been chosen for the sister society of Western Christendom by Pope Gregory the Great (*pontificali munere fungebatur* AD 590–604). After the break-up of the Empire in the West, it may be said that, broadly speaking, the vacuum left by the dissipation of political authority into plural and parochial units was eventually filled by the ecclesiastical authority of an ecumenical Church, symbolized in the Roman Patriarchate or Papacy. Gregory's achievement in the West was nearly paralleled in the East by the Orthodox Patriarch Sergius (*patriarchico munere fungebatur* AD 610–38), who could have had a similar chance of creating an ecumenical ecclesiastical alternative to the vanished Empire when the Emperor Heraclius, hard pressed by the Sasanian advance against Constantinople in AD 618, planned to shift the seat of imperial authority to Carthage. In the event, it was Sergius himself who forced Heraclius to renounce this plan, and thereby ensured the survival of an imperial régime centred on Constantinople. If Heraclius had succeeded in withdrawing, the Orthodox Christian Patriarchate of Constantinople might, we may guess, have played the same part as its Western counterpart; it might have transfigured the face of its society. But, by his very *tour de force* of transforming Heraclius into a hero *malgré lui*, Sergius ruled out for himself the opportunity of playing Gregory's heroic role; and, more than that, he kept open for Leo Syrus the opportunity for giving Orthodox Christian history a quite un-Western turn a hundred years later. For, by his threefold achievement of salvaging the prestige of the Empire and establishing the prestige of Constantinople and retrieving the Asiatic patrimony of Orthodox Christendom from the clutches of Oriental invaders, Sergius bequeathed to Leo Syrus the indispensable material for that solid reconstruction of a Roman Empire, based on Orthodox Christian soil in Asia Minor, which was Leo's formidable handiwork. And the restoration of the Empire precluded a development of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the style of the Papacy.

The ghost of the Roman Empire which was successfully evoked on Orthodox Christian ground in the eighth century of the Christian Era materialized in a substantial and efficient centralized state which maintained itself for nearly five hundred years. In its main features this Eastern *Imperium Redivivum* succeeded in being what it set out to be. It was a recognizable reproduction of the original Roman Empire, and it anticipated the political development of Western Christendom by some seven or eight hundred



EMPRESS

131 Theodora, wife of Justinian, given equal prominence as befitted her position in the East Roman state.



IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT

132 Soldiers and ministers from Justinian's retinue, members of an administrative and military system unknown in the West.

years; for no state comparable to the eighth-century East Roman Empire ever made its appearance in the Western World until after the radiation of Italian efficiency into the Transalpine kingdoms at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The new Orthodox Christian Power was founded, to begin with, on a solid territorial basis: for Leo and his successor Constantine V succeeded in reuniting a block of territory from Adrianople in the Balkan peninsula to Caesarea in eastern Asia Minor, together with the scattered islands of the Aegean archipelago and beach-heads of continental territory round the coasts of Italy and the Balkan peninsula. The extent of this territory gave the Orthodox Christian Power great material resources; the compactness of its torso offered it the possibility of maintaining these resources intact; and the conservation of the Empire's energy was the cardinal principle of imperial statesmanship from Leo's reign onwards for two centuries. The efficiency with which Leo and his successors were able to avoid over-ambitious military adventures and unprofitable entanglements was itself the fruit of two East Roman institutions – a standing army and a permanent civil service – which were both virtually unknown in the West at any time between the fifth century and the fifteenth. These two institutions were conceivable only in a state which could command the economic and cultural resources to provide for the education of a professional military and administrative establishment; and it was the educated corps of officers and the educated hierarchy of civil servants which alone made it possible for the resuscitated ghost of the Roman Empire in Orthodox Christendom to achieve its most remarkable and most unfortunate triumph, the effective subordination of Church to state. It is in the relations between Church and state that the histories of Orthodox Christendom and Western Christendom show the widest and most momentous divergence; and here we can locate the parting of the ways that respectively led the Western Society forward along the path of growth and the Orthodox Christian Society along a path that was to end in destruction.

Leo Syrus and his successors on the East Roman imperial throne succeeded in attaining a goal which in the West was never approached by Charlemagne or Otto I or Henry III. The East Roman emperors, in their own dominions, turned the Church into a department of state and the Ecumenical Patriarch into a kind of imperial Under-Secretary of State for Ecclesiastical Affairs, with a status that was professional but a tenure that was by no means secure. In relegating the Church to this position, the East Roman emperors were simply putting into effect one important part of their programme of making the restoration of the Roman Empire a solid reality; for this relation between Church and state was precisely that which had been contemplated by Constantine the Great when he decided to take the Christian Church under his patronage; and this Constantinian conception had actually been realized *de facto* in the history of the later Roman Empire from the reign of Constantine himself to the reign of Justinian inclusive.

Constantine's policy of incorporating the Christian Church in the body politic of the Roman Empire was highly successful. The Church fell into the place which he

had designed for it, and it did not make any motion to assert its independence until action was forced upon it by the catastrophe of its protector's demise. Thereafter, the Popes, as well as the Patriarchs, persisted in lamenting the loss of their comfortable imperial carapace and in attempting to find their way back into it. In Western Christendom this dilemma was solved by the reintegration, in the Papal *Respublica Christiana*, of Church and state through the subordination of a multiplicity of local states to a single ecumenical Church which was the principle of unity and the source of authority in the Western Christian body social; and this 'hierocratic' constitution of society was a wholly new creation.² In the corresponding chapter of Orthodox Christian history, there was no comparable creative act, because in an earlier chapter the Orthodox Christian Society, by achieving its successful restoration of the Roman Empire, had renounced the possibility of creation in favour of the easier course of idolizing an institution which was a legacy from the past; and this natural yet disastrous aberration accounts for Orthodox Christendom's premature downfall.

In this Orthodox Christian idolization of the ghost of the Roman Empire which Leo Syrus had evoked, the subordination of the Orthodox Church to the East Roman state was the crucial act; and this act was conscious and whole-hearted. In Leo's own assertion – 'Imperator sum et sacerdos'³ – we hear the founder of the East Roman Empire making the 'Caesaro-papistical' claim of a Constantine in the imperious accents of a Justinian. We shall not be surprised to find that Leo's success in imposing the imperial government's overriding authority upon the Church in the greater part of his dominions is the first link in a fatal chain of causation which ends in the breakdown of the Orthodox Christian Civilization some two and a half centuries later.

If we study the tragedy of Orthodox Christian history, we shall observe that the destructive effect of Leo Syrus's deed of reincorporating the Church in the state declares itself in two distinct ways – one of them general and the other particular.

The general effect was to check and sterilize the tendencies towards variety and elasticity and experimentation and creativeness in Orthodox Christian life; and we can roughly measure the extent of the damage done to the development of the Orthodox Christian Civilization in this way by noting some of the conspicuous achievements of the sister-civilization of the West, in the corresponding stage of its growth, that have no Orthodox Christian counterparts. In the Orthodox Christian body social in its growth-phase, we not only find nothing that corresponds to the Hildebrandine Papacy; we also miss the rise and spread of self-governing universities, corresponding to the new Western centres of intellectual activity at Bologna and Paris, and of self-governing city-states, corresponding to the new Western centres of life in Central and Northern Italy and in Flanders.⁴ Moreover, the Western institution of feudalism, which was independent of and in conflict with the medieval Western Church and the medieval city-states, was, if not entirely absent in the East, at least effectively repressed, like the Orthodox Church – with the unfortunate consequence that, like the Church, this feudalism asserted

itself belatedly and violently in Orthodox Christendom when the weakening of the imperial Power gave it its opportunity at last.

This eventual self-assertion of both feudalism and the Church in the Orthodox Christian World shows that, in these two spheres at any rate, the relative sterility and monotony of Orthodox Christian life in the preceding chapter of history were not due to any lack of vitality or creative power in the Orthodox Christian body social, but to the artificial and temporary repression of these faculties by *force majeure*; for, of all the seeds that had been planted in the Orthodox Christian social landscape, one – the 'Caesaro-papal' East Roman *Imperium Redivivum* – shot up with such abnormal speed and vigour that it completely outstripped its fellows and blighted their growth. In contrast to the diverse and well-proportioned institutions flourishing in the West, the landscape in Orthodox Christendom now presented a painful picture of that disharmony which is the penalty of misgrowth.

The view that it was repression, and not sterility, that prevented the healthy growth of the Orthodox Christian Society will be reinforced if we look at some of those rare flashes of creative genius which the Orthodox Christian Society emitted at certain points in space and time at which it happened to be free from its almost ubiquitous imperial incubus.

To the west of Thrace, for example, in an area which was spared the full weight of the imperial régime, the Orthodox Christian Church found in Macedonian Mount Athos a base of operations for its counter-offensive against the imperial Power; and in still more distant Calabria a handful of Basilian monks, who had been expelled from their Sicilian monasteries by the island's African Muslim conquerors, succeeded in reconverting a derelict and supine province into a settled and orderly community – an achievement equal to that of the Irish monks who had set out to recapture a paganized England in the sixth and seventh centuries. This same Calabrian monastic settlement was later the home of a vein of vigorous religious speculation and philosophy which stood in strong contrast to what is popularly supposed to be the narrow 'Byzantine' ethos.

Even more significant are those flashes of Orthodox Christian creative genius that blaze out beyond the range of the East Roman imperial régime by eluding it in its time-dimension. Perhaps the most astonishing example of this creativity is the fourteenth-century mosaic decoration in the *ci-devant* monastery church of Chora, which is now the Kahriye Camii Museum. Here, within the boundaries of the imperial capital, we can still gaze today at this exhibition of an Orthodox Christian art which was able to achieve in the intractable material of the Byzantine artist's choice, at a date by which the imperial government had become enfeebled, an effect of movement and life that is scarcely surpassed by any contemporary Italian work in oil or tempera.

Two hundred years later, after the Orthodox Christian Society had been disburdened of the leaden cope of the East Roman Empire in order to be draped in an Ottoman funeral-pall, we can detect an afterglow of the deceased civilization. In Domenico Theotokopoulos 'El Greco' (*vivebat* AD 1541–1614) the Orthodox Christian island of



ART OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH 133 The fourteenth-century flowering of Byzantine art: mosaic from the Kahriye Camii.

Crete gave the Western World an artist whose art would appear to be the antithesis of the rigid canon of the Athon iconists. And yet, in spite of appearances, El Greco's inspiration must have derived from a native idiom, since it was so manifestly remote from the contemporary style of painting in the West that it was long regarded as an unintelligible *lusus naturae*.

This case may also remind us of another tragic feature in Orthodox Christendom's fate. Both the good and the evil that this luckless society has done have largely accrued to some other society's benefit.

Like El Greco at Rome and Toledo, the Basilian monks in Calabria did their pioneer work for the future advantage of the alien Christendom in the West; and there is a more notorious example of the same involuntary altruism to the profit of the same neighbour in the fructification of the culture of the West, at the beginning of the modern chapter of Western history, through the Western discovery of the literature of the Hellenic Civilization among the ruins of the sister Christendom's collapsing edifice. This fruitful Western discovery could never have been made if Orthodox

Christian piety had not sedulously preserved these precious monuments of a common parent-culture through the tempests and earthquakes of the post-Hellenic interregnum, in order to bring them out of its treasure-house in a Byzantine renaissance which began in the same generation as the Carolingian renaissance and continued until the fifteenth century. This preservation and resurrection of the mighty works of the Hellenic genius in the bosom of the Orthodox Christian Society ought to have brought its due reward in the fullness of time by inspiring Orthodox Christendom – as it did afterwards most effectively inspire Western Christendom – to achieve original works of its own; but in Orthodox Christian cultural history there was never any struggle for emancipation from Hellenic leading-strings corresponding to that 'Battle of the Books' between the Ancients and Moderns which was waged in the West through decade after decade of the seventeenth century until there could be no mistake about the Moderns' victory.

Accordingly in Orthodox Christendom the reborn Hellenic culture, like the East Roman *Imperium Redivivum*, became an incubus instead of a stimulus. It was not until



134 *The Agony in the Garden* (c. 1585) by the Cretan artist El Greco, last heir of the Byzantine tradition.

its transmission to the lively mental environment of fifteenth-century Italy that this potent mental tonic was able to produce its proper stimulating effect; and thus, as it turned out, Orthodox Christendom actually performed her pious cultural labour for her Western sister's benefit.

The notorious evil deed of the Orthodox Christian Society which redounded to the advantage of the West was the extermination of the Paulicians, a sect which seems to have been a local survival in Armenia and Asia Minor of the archaic 'Adoptionist' school of Christianity.⁵ Asia Minor had been the seed-bed of Christianity, and in fulfilling this historical function the Asiatic peninsula had produced a rich experimental variety of the crop with which it had been so successfully sown. One of the first-fruits of this Asiatic inheritance had been the iconoclastic movement, which was suppressed after more than a century of conflict (AD 726–843). But the unconventional Asiatic religious spirit which had thus been repressed in the metropolitan provinces of the East Roman Empire still remained incarnate in the Paulicians, and when, at some date in the ninth century, the Paulicians set up a militant

republic of latter-day saints in a remote and barely accessible no-man's-land between the Empire and the 'Abbasid Caliphate, they offered to the dissident elements in Asia Minor a rallying-point which was independent of the waning fortunes of iconoclasm. If this interesting Paulician community had been allowed to survive, it might conceivably have saved the life of Orthodox Christendom by preserving for it, and eventually restoring to it, those vital elements in the Orthodox Christian social heritage which were incompatible with an East Roman régime in which the Church was subjected to the state *de facto*. In the imperial capital at Constantinople and in the Paulician headquarters at Tephrike the component elements of the Orthodox Christian religious genius were polarized. As soon as the conflict over the status of icons had been terminated by the definitive rejection of iconoclasm, the imperial government set out to extirpate the Paulician heresy; and the military as well as the theological strength of the East Roman Empire was thrown into the conflict. In a war *à outrance* between powers so unequally matched the outcome could not be in doubt, though it might be long delayed; and, after a



ORTHODOX INTOLERANCE

135 The brutality that could be unleashed by religious controversy is apparent in this ninth-century Biblical illustration. The artist was surely aware of such events as the extermination of the Paulicians, the Orthodox Church's unimaginative response to ideological challenge.

struggle which lasted from 843 to 875, the hornet's nest at Tephrike was smoked out by the master of the imperial beehive at Constantinople.

From the East Roman government's standpoint this was a famous victory; for the vehemence of the Empire's assault upon the Paulicians betrayed a conviction that the existence of the Paulician Republic was a menace to the Empire's security. Considering the incompatibility of principle between the two régimes, we may well believe that the official view was right; but we may also pass the private judgment that in this matter the East Roman Empire's victory was the Orthodox Christian Society's defeat. In eliminating the Paulicians the East Roman government did the same disservice to Asia Minor that the Christian 'successor-states' of the Umayyad Caliphate did to the Iberian peninsula when they expelled the Jews and the Muslims, or Louis XIV to France when he expelled the Huguenots, or the National Socialist régime to Germany when it expelled the Jews and liberals. Nor did the crushing of the Paulicians by the East Roman government make Orthodox Christendom immune against the dualistic form of religion which the East Roman Paulicians had adopted.

Thanks to the imperial Power's policy of deportation, batches of Paulicians were planted on the Bulgarian frontier of the Empire, in Thrace, in AD 755 or 757; and further deportations followed the destruction of the Paulician centre of military operations at Tephrike in AD 872, thus giving them a fertile new mission-ground. Within a century the laborious weeding operations of the East Roman Emperor Basil I had been more than offset by the assiduous sowing of the Bulgarian 'dualist' heresiarch Bogomil. This man of destiny was a Slavophone priest of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria. We do not know whether he derived his dualism from his country's new Paulician neighbours or thought it out independently for himself. In Bulgaria in the tenth century, social conditions were bad enough to suggest, without any prompting from abroad, that goodness was not omnipotent in the Universe. In any case, Bogomil's dualism spread far and wide over the continent of Europe, finding a second base of operations in Bosnia, and eventually appearing in the Latin World under the name of 'Catharism'. In Western, as in Orthodox, Christendom the appearance of these goats among the sheep evoked active counter-measures, and the East Roman Emperor Basil's militant policy against the ninth-century Paulicians was echoed 350 years later in Pope Innocent III's anti-Albigensian Crusade.⁶ Was this war of extermination that was levied in Christ's name by the Papacy at the height of its power the sin that doomed the master-institution of Western Christendom to meet with its tremendous downfall? Whatever the answer to this question may be, it is certain that the tragedy of Albi reproduced the tragedy of Tephrike on a larger material scale; yet a challenge to which Orthodox Christendom had responded only with a bloody crime evoked in the West an act of creation as well as an act of destruction. The Franciscan and Dominican responses to the challenge which Catharism presented to Western Christianity at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries put fresh life in the West into the Christian institution of monachism, for Francis and Dominic brought

the monks out of their rural cloisters and thrust them into the world to minister to the spiritual needs of Western Europe's growing urban population. We look in vain for any Orthodox Christian parallel to this movement. In Orthodox Christendom, Paulicianism was not only denied the opportunity of performing any creative act of its own; it was not permitted there even to create by proxy through calling into play the creative powers of its Orthodox opponents and destroyers.

Having now surveyed the general effect of East Roman 'Caesaro-papism' in stunting the growth and pruning out the variety of Orthodox Christian life, we can next examine the particular way in which this overwhelming institution was directly responsible for the breakdown of the Orthodox Christian Civilization.

We have already observed in passing⁷ that the outward visible sign of this breakdown was the great Bulgaro-Roman War of AD 976-1018. We may now go on to observe that, while one of the belligerents in this war was that simulacrum of the Roman Empire which had been established in the nucleus of a nascent Orthodox Christian World, the other belligerent was the most important among the neighbouring barbarian communities that had been incorporated in a growing Orthodox Christian body social in the process of its expansion. In other words, the expansion and the breakdown of the Orthodox Christian Society were intimately connected with each other. In an earlier chapter⁸ of this Study we noted that mere expansion is not in itself the criterion of growth. At the same time, when a society which does bear the genuine marks of growth is found simultaneously to be expanding in the geographical sense, we might expect *a priori* that the expansion would recruit the growing society's strength. This was, in fact, the effect of the expansion of Western Christendom in the four centuries beginning with the reign of Pope Gregory the Great (*fungebatur* AD 590-604), when the outlying regions of Northern and Central Europe were successively incorporated in the body social of Western Christendom. In contrast to the fruitful effects of this Western expansion, the corresponding expansion of Orthodox Christendom did nothing to enhance that society's strength and vitality, but, on the contrary, precipitated its breakdown by setting the lists for an internecine struggle between the Bulgarian converts and their East Roman instructors. We can compare the conversion of the Bulgars in the ninth century with the corresponding conversion of the Saxons by the Franks in the preceding hundred years. In the West, the conversion of these pagan neighbours was followed by their firm incorporation in the political and social fabric of Western Christendom; but the contemporary Orthodox Christian Bulgars were divided from their new East Roman co-religionists by a deeper moral gulf than had existed between them a hundred years earlier, when the gulf had been religious as well as political.

Before we attempt to explain this striking difference in the respective effects of the Western and the Orthodox Christian Society's expansion, we should note another difference that was antecedent. By comparison with the performance of Western Christendom, Orthodox Christendom was astonishingly slow in addressing itself to the task

of enlarging its own borders through the conversion of the barbarians at its European gates. After an early and apparently abortive spurt of missionary activity in the Western Illyricum in the seventh century, the pagan inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula were ignored for the best part of two hundred years. The conversion of Bulgaria to Orthodox Christianity did not take place until 864, by which time Western Christendom had, for its part, not only recaptured all of the ground that had formerly been held in this quarter of Europe by the Roman Empire, but had pushed beyond this old frontier and penetrated as far as the Elbe. This extreme inequality of achievement in the European mission-field is even more striking when we remember that the Orthodox Church had kept its hands free from one formidable handicap to missionary work which the Western Church had imposed upon itself. In Western Christendom it was taken for granted from the outset that Latin must be the exclusive and universal liturgical language, irrespective of the native vernacular of the Church's converts. On this linguistic question the Western ecclesiastical authorities were intransigent, even at the risk of losing the allegiance of their new converts. In sharp contrast to this tyranny of Latin in the West, the Orthodox Christian Church cultivated a remarkably liberal policy. It made no attempt to confer upon the Greek language the liturgical monopoly which the Western Church conferred upon Latin as a matter of course; and there can be no doubt that this policy of translating the Liturgy into the local vernacular gave Orthodox Christendom a signal advantage over Western Christendom in the field of missionary enterprise. On this showing, the *de facto* success of Western Christendom in outstripping Orthodox Christendom in the mission-field will appear more paradoxical than ever. To resolve this paradox we must suppose that the advantage accruing to Orthodox Christendom from its linguistic liberalism was heavily outweighed by some formidable handicap; and as soon as we look for this handicap it leaps to the eye.

The missionary work of the Orthodox Church was crippled by the subjection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the secular authority of the East Roman imperial government; for this servitude of the Orthodox Church to the East Roman state presented a painful dilemma to all prospective converts to the Orthodox faith. If they accepted Christianity at the Ecumenical Patriarch's hands, and so came under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the change that they were making in their own status would not be only a change of religious belief and practice. In accepting the Patriarch's ecclesiastical jurisdiction they would be accepting implicitly, in the same act, the political sovereignty of the Patriarch's secular master. In other words, they really had to choose between a persistence in their ancestral paganism and a conversion to Christianity which involved a forfeiture of their political independence; and, in the circumstances, it is not surprising that they should flinch from making this latter choice - notwithstanding the inducement of being permitted to employ their mother tongue for the celebration of the Christian Liturgy. This was a dilemma which did not confront those barbarians who were invited into the Christian fold by the missionaries of the Western Church; for the acceptance of

the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Roman See, though it involved a submission to the linguistic tyranny of the Latin language, did not carry with it the more formidable servitude of acknowledging the political sovereignty of a foreign government. Although the Papacy eventually succeeded in its second attempt to resuscitate a ghost of the Roman Empire in the West, neither the Carolingian nor the Saxon incarnation of this Western *Imperium Redivivum* was either universal or permanent; for instance, the English remained loyal sons of the Roman Church without following Pope Leo III's example of paying allegiance to the imperial authority of Charlemagne; and their relations with the Holy See thus were not affected by the evocation of the Western Holy Roman Empire.

The expansion of Orthodox Christendom could not proceed on these happy lines because the subjection of the patriarchal to the imperial Power was there not an empty form but a stern reality; and the unfortunate consequences which this difference entailed were not slow to work themselves out when in 864 the East Roman government felt itself compelled at last to secure the conversion of Bulgaria.

The inherent disastrousness of the Orthodox Church's subjection to the East Roman state, which disclosed itself in this emergency, is thrown into relief by the fact that, in this affair as in others, the East Roman government displayed its customary moderation. A disastrous institutional structure inexorably produced its inevitable effect in spite of a statesmanlike policy.

To begin with, the conversion of Bulgaria to Orthodox Christianity in 864 was brought about by an East Roman naval and military demonstration. This misuse of political power for religious purposes was indeed tactful by comparison with the bitter religious wars waged by Charlemagne in a corresponding situation. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian Khan Boris reacted strongly to even this light touch of an East Roman political whip; for, though he had been gently handled this time, Boris saw himself exposed in perpetuity to the humiliation of being subject to the East Roman government's political control. Only two years after the Romano-Bulgarian agreement of 864, Boris had broken its terms by transferring the ecclesiastical allegiance of Bulgaria from the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Roman



ORTHODOX MISSION

136 The Byzantine Emperor Michael III and his Empress preside over the baptism of the Bulgarian Khan Boris in AD 865; from a fourteenth-century Slavonic manuscript.

See; and, although he voluntarily retransferred his allegiance to the Patriarchate in 870, this first Bulgarian attempt to escape the political implications of allegiance to the Ecumenical Patriarchate was ominous of evils to come.

The prodigal's return to the fold was greeted by a tactfully conciliatory policy on the part of the imperial government. A *modus vivendi* of sorts was reached between Boris and the Emperor Basil, and this persisted until 893, when Boris's son Symeon succeeded to the Bulgarian throne and deliberately forced the political problem into the open again. Educated in Constantinople, Symeon had been captivated in the course of his studies by 'the great idea' of an Hellenic universal state – an idea which had been raised from the dead and enshrined in Constantinople in the imposing political institution of the East Roman *Imperium Redivivum*. With the crown of Bulgaria on his head, Symeon was not long content with the status of an inferior princeling; and, in the circumstances in which he found himself, Symeon could acquire his sovereign independence only by using the throne of Bulgaria as a mounting-block for climbing on to the throne of the East Roman Empire itself. He decided to bid for the imperial crown, and in taking this decision he signed the death-warrants not only of the kingdom which he possessed and of the Empire which he coveted, but also of the society in which these two states had their being.

Symeon's ambition developed in the course of the two wars which he waged with the East Roman Empire in 894–96 and 913–27. Despairing at last of mounting the imperial throne at Constantinople, Symeon resolved to secure his sovereign independence as best he could, by assuming the imperial title within the frontiers of his Bulgarian patrimony and by setting up a local Patriarch of his own. Accordingly he proclaimed himself in 925 'Emperor of the Romans and Bulgars' and, perhaps in the following year, raised the Archbishop of Preslav to the status of Patriarch of the new Empire. The East Roman government naturally enough did not recognize either of these acts; but, in 927, when Symeon died and a peace settlement was negotiated, the East Roman government made the unprecedented concession of recognizing Symeon's successor Peter as an Emperor, with a Patriarch of his own, in exchange for a Bulgarian recognition of the territorial integrity of the East Roman Empire, within the pre-913 frontiers.

The peace which was concluded on these terms lasted for forty-two years; yet, in fact, though not in form, it was no more than a truce. It was a compromise which could not be permanent, for it underlined the incompatibility between ecclesiastical subordination and political independence which Symeon himself had recklessly chosen to emphasize. By 927 it had become impossible to thrust this formidable problem back into the oblivion in which Boris and Basil had sought to bury it fifty years before, and equally impossible to feign blindness to its true solution. It was now conclusively demonstrated that in Orthodox Christendom the jurisdictions of the East Roman Emperor and the Ecumenical Patriarch must be geographically coextensive; and, since Symeon had failed to bring about this necessary and inevitable state of affairs by his expedient of attempting to annex the Empire politically to the Patriarch's foreign

ecclesiastical province of Bulgaria, it followed that sooner or later the indispensable political unification would have to be brought about by the inverse process of annexing Bulgaria to the Empire. Thus the two leading states in the Orthodox Christian World were doomed to continue their struggle until one of them succumbed to a 'knock-out blow'. On a superficial view it might seem as if this evil had been brought on Orthodox Christendom by Symeon's personal wrong-headedness. The fundamental cause of the disaster was, however, the practical subjection of the Church to the state in the East Roman Empire; for it was this that had driven Symeon down the wrong path in the first instance and then made the consequences of his error irretrievable. Within the bosom of a single society there was not room, in perpetuity, for more than one 'totalitarian state'.

The first round of the struggle closed in 972 with the defeat of the Bulgarians and the annexation of Eastern Bulgaria, the original nucleus of Bulgaria, by the East Roman Emperor John Dzimiskes. But within four years the remnant of the Bulgarian state had found leadership in a new dynasty of rulers, and the ensuing half century of war – from 976 to 1018 – wore out the Orthodox Christian Society. The 'knock-out blow', which was the sole practicable means of eliminating one of the two rival Empires, was delivered in 1018 by the East Roman Emperor Basil II; and, at the cost of more than a hundred years of war in all, the whole of Orthodox Christendom now found itself reunited under one imperial rule.⁹ Moreover, the victim of this long-drawn-out Romano-Bulgarian contest was not the *ci-devant* Bulgarian state, which was now incorporated in the body of the East Roman Empire; the true victim was the officially victorious East Roman Empire itself, and it duly succumbed to its own nemesis in 1071, when Asia Minor was occupied by the Saljuq Turks after the Emperor Rhomanos Dhioyenes had been taken prisoner.

Moreover, while Bulgaria lived to make abortive attempts to throw off the East Roman yoke in 1040 and 1073, and a successful secession in 1185–87, the East Roman Empire never recovered from the social disorders which it had brought upon itself through its demonic pursuit of military victory. The deep derangement, in this age, of Orthodox Christian social life within the East Roman frontiers revealed itself in the outbreak and progress of two maladies which interacted disastrously with one another. The first malady was an agrarian crisis; the second was a bout of militarism; and both were portents, because they were complaints from which the Orthodox Christian body social had been singularly free in the days of its good health.

When the nascent Orthodox Christian Civilization had emerged from the post-Hellenic interregnum at the turn of the seventh and eighth centuries of the Christian Era, it had started life in possession of one immensely valuable social asset. The legislation of the eighth-century East Roman Emperors Leo Syrus and Constantine V shows that Orthodox Christendom in their day was very much freer than the contemporary West from that concentration of the ownership of land, and consequent polarization of agrarian society into a handful of magnates and a multitude of serfs, which had been one of the mortal diseases of the moribund

Hellenic Civilization in the last days of the Roman Empire. This healthy agrarian foundation was doubtless one of the causes of the rapid growth which the Orthodox Christian Civilization achieved during the next two hundred years; but after the wars between the East Roman Empire and Bulgaria in Khan Symeon's reign (893–927) a sinister change began to show itself. The East Roman legislation of this period contains repeated enactments for protecting the small freeholder against the encroachments of the great proprietor; and, if this may be taken as evidence, we may infer that the evil of *latifundia* was now making its first appearance in Eastern and Central Asia Minor since Justinian had legislated against the great landed proprietors of Cappadocia in the sixth century. It can hardly be an accident that both of these sets of laws dated from times that followed an exhausting foreign war. One of the commonest social effects of war upon a belligerent country is to produce a maldistribution of wealth or to aggravate some existing maldistribution. This was no doubt the connexion between the Bulgarian Wars and the contemporary East Roman agrarian legislation that reached its climax and its unsuccessful termination in the reign of Emperor Basil II 'the Bulgar-Killer'; and such a view would be confirmed by the fact that other and more violent symptoms of social *malaise* appeared as the wars grew longer and more exhausting. One of these symptoms was a series of *pronunciamientos* by magnates in Asia Minor, beginning with Nikephoros Phokas's successful *coup* in 963. The grievances – or ambitions – of these pretenders to the imperial crown got the better of their patriotism. The peasantry in Asia Minor, which had provided the imperial government with tax-payers and with soldiers, was also alienated. When in the eleventh century the heart of Asia Minor was occupied by the Saljuq Turks, the peasantry was glad to see the last of the extortionate imperial taxation officers and the land-grabbing local magnates. The peasants now turned Turk and turned Muslim *en masse*. This wholesale cultural and religious apostasy suggests that before ever their new Turkish masters appeared on the scene the peasants had become spiritually estranged not only from the East Roman political régime, but also from the Orthodox Christian Civilization upon which the East Roman Empire had imposed itself as a crushing incubus. It would have been surprising if the East Roman peasants had not been embittered by their experience, for this had been shockingly ironic. The peasant-soldiers' hard-won victories had freed Asia Minor from the scourge of Muslim raids, only to make the country safe, not for the peasants themselves, but for the tax-collectors and for the land-grabbers.

If the East Roman agrarian crisis had this utterly disastrous dénouement, the extremeness of the disaster is perhaps partly to be accounted for by the fact that the agrarian evil was accentuated by the accompanying malady of militarism. Even before the end of the Bulgarian Wars, which had been forced upon an unwilling East Roman government by Symeon's megalomania, this government had so radically changed its policy that it deliberately embarked on a course of military aggression against its Muslim neighbours on the opposite frontier. From 926, when an East Roman expedition was sent to win territory

on the Euphrates, the government persisted for a century and a quarter in pursuing a forward policy which weakened its defences, exposed its heart to attack, and aggravated the internal social strains which the Bulgarian Wars had already produced. The virus of militarism – personified from 963 to 1025 in the officer-emperors Nikephoros Phokas and John Dzimiskes and Basil II 'the Bulgar-Killer' – carried the Empire onwards with an ever-increasing momentum until it precipitated the irretrievable collapse of 1071.

In wantonly opting for this policy of conquest at the expense of stability and security, the East Roman government showed that it had lost that spirit of statesmanlike moderation and restraint which had formerly been the Empire's saving grace; and, when once this spirit was lost, an institution which had always been an incubus upon the life of Orthodox Christendom became intolerable. It was not, however, the irrational play of chance or a malicious stroke of fortune or 'the envy of the gods' that transformed the original ethos of the East Roman Empire into its antithesis, with this fatal consequence. The transformation was due to an inward impulse and not to an external accident; for it was natural that a growing society should expand, and inevitable, in the circumstances of Orthodox Christian social history, that an expansion should bring with it an aggravation of the incubus with which the expanding society was already saddled. Since there was not room for more than one ghost of the Roman Empire to haunt a single house, a life-and-death struggle between the East Roman Empire and its Bulgarian double followed the conversion of Bulgaria inevitably. In this internecine warfare between two idolized ghosts, the Orthodox Christian Civilization went down to destruction.

We have dwelt at some length upon the idolization of the East Roman Empire and its consequences, because this tragic story throws light upon something more than the nemesis that attends the idolization of an ephemeral institution; it shows up the perverse and sinful nature of idolatry itself as a transference of loyalty from the whole to the part and the transference of worship from the Creator to the creature. In Orthodox Christendom from the eighth century onwards the loyalty which should have been reserved for the Orthodox Christian Society as a whole was restricted to a single institution – the East Roman Empire – which was confined to one plane of social life and had been erected there by its worshippers' own hands. From the tenth century onwards, when the expansion of Orthodox Christendom had come to embrace the Bulgars as well as the Greeks within the Orthodox Christian fold, the unworthy object of the idolatrous society's worship was still further narrowed down by being multiplied from the singular into the plural and thereby ceasing to be co-extensive with the society in range, even on its own superficial plane. From 927 onwards the misguided devotion of the Orthodox idolaters to a political fetish was divided between one parochial Empire at Constantinople and another at Preslav. Since both Empires claimed an ecumenical jurisdiction by divine right, a life-and-death struggle between them was inevitable; and, when the idolaters' house was thus divided against itself, it is no wonder that it could not stand.¹⁰

25 David and Goliath: the idolization of an ephemeral technique



GIANT-KILLERS

138 Above, David and Goliath, fifteenth-century wood-carving.

139 Vietnam guerrilla warfare, contemporary cartoon.



IF WE TURN now to consider the idolization of techniques, we shall find in the history of warfare a classic forum for observing the grave retribution exacted for the commission of this sin. Taking the legendary duel between David and Goliath¹ as our starting-point, we shall see the same drama enacted and reperformed in a continuous series of matches between new-fangled and old-fashioned military techniques.

Before the fatal day on which he challenges the armies of Israel, Goliath has won such triumphant victories with his massive spear and impenetrable armour that he can no longer conceive of any alternative armament, and believes himself invincible. He therefore challenges the enemy of the day to choose a champion to meet him in single combat, on the assumption he too must be a spearman armed *cap-à-pie*, and in the assurance that any Israelite who has the hardihood to fight the Philistine champion with his own weapons will be an easy prey for him. So hard set is Goliath's mind in these two ideas that, when he sees David running forward to meet him with no armour on his body and nothing in his hand that catches the eye except a staff, Goliath takes umbrage, instead of taking alarm, at his adversary's apparent unpreparedness, and exclaims: 'Am I a dog, that thou comest to meet me with staves?' Goliath does not suspect that this youth's impertinence is not a piece of boyish folly but is, on the contrary, a carefully considered manoeuvre (David having actually realized, quite as clearly as Goliath himself, that in Goliath's own accoutrements he cannot hope to be Goliath's match, and having therefore rejected the panoply which Saul has pressed upon him); nor does Goliath notice the sling in the hand which does not hold the staff, nor wonder what mischief may be hidden in the shepherd's bag. And so this luckless Philistine triceratops stalks forward pompously to offer his unvizored forehead as a target for the sling-stone which is to slay him at one shot before ever his contemptible adversary comes within range of his hitherto lethal spear.

While this classic tale sums up for all time a philosophic truth that is illustrated by the slowly unfolding history of competition in armaments, it is at the same time a matter of historical fact that the individual hoplite champion did not succumb to a single challenger, but to a phalanx; and the essence of the phalanx did not consist in the equipment of its component men-at-arms, but rather in the discipline which had transformed a barbaric rabble of individual warriors into a military formation whose orderly evolutions could accomplish ten times as much as the unco-ordinated efforts of an equal number of equally well-armed men.

This new military technique, of which we already catch some anticipatory glimpses in the *Iliad*, made its indubitable entry upon the stage of history in the shape of the Spartan phalanx which was forged under the pressure of the Second Messeno-Spartan War (*gerebatur* c. 650-620 BC); but the phalanx's triumph was not definitive, for it succumbed in its turn to new techniques as soon as the Spartans were tempted to 'rest on their oars' after their victory in the

Atheno-Peloponnesian War of 431–404 BC. Within thirty-three years of the Athenian débâcle, this triumphant Spartan phalanx had itself been routed: in 390 by an Athenian swarm of peltasts – light-armed footsoldiers – and then in 371 by a Theban column, a decisive tactical innovation which, with its uneven distribution of depth, weight, and drive, capped the old asset of discipline with the new element of surprise. The Athenian and Theban techniques were, however, as swiftly and surely undone by their own triumphs as the Spartan phalanx itself; for their respective victories were both cancelled at one stroke in 338 BC by a Macedonian formation in which a highly differentiated skirmisher and phalangite had been skilfully integrated with a heavy cavalry into a single fighting force. The list of military Powers defeated by the Macedonian army under Philip II and Alexander is long indeed; yet an even more impressive testimony to its prowess is the avowal of Lucius Aemilius Paullus after his victory at Pydna in 168 BC that ‘the Macedonian phalanx was the most formidable and terrifying sight that had ever met his eyes.’²

Paullus’s eulogy of the defeated Macedonian formation was at the same time a funeral oration pronounced over its dead body by the master of the Roman formation which had dealt the phalanx its death-blow. Through the senile adulation of a hitherto invincible technique, the Macedonian army of the second century BC had become as little able to cope with the Romans as the Athenian or Theban or Achaemenian forces had been able to cope with the Macedonian army of Philip and Alexander five generations earlier. While the Macedonians had ‘rested on their oars’ after their relatively easy conquest of the Achaemenian Empire, the Romans had been revolutionizing the art of war through an experience gained from their tremendous struggle with Hannibal, and consummated on the fields of Cynoscephalae in 197 BC and Pydna. The Roman legion triumphed over the Macedonian phalanx because it had improved on the Macedonian technique of integration between light infantryman and phalangite, a system which depended upon a meticulously exact co-ordination between two forces utterly distinct in equipment and training and even segregated in separate units. If the co-ordination between these highly specialized units broke down – for example, through such uncontrollable factors as the fog at Cynoscephalae or the broken ground at Pydna – then the formation was dislocated and left at the mercy of a more versatile and efficient adversary. In contrast to this crucial weakness of the Macedonian system, the post-Hannibalic Roman army – forewarned by its fatal reliance on the old-fashioned phalanx at the disaster of Cannae in 216 BC – had developed a superb flexibility, based on a new type of formation and armament which made it possible for any soldier or any unit to play either the light infantryman’s or the hoplite’s part, and to change over from the one kind of tactic to the other at a moment’s notice. It was this versatility, combining the advantages of individualism with those of drill, that was the characteristic feature of the mature Roman military genius; by uniting in each legionary the mobility of the skirmisher with the irresistibility of the hoplite, and refining this technique under the supreme generals who mastered – and misused – it during the last century of the republican régime, the Roman

THE MORPHOLOGY OF WAR



140 Hoplite champions, detail of relief, c. 400 BC.



141 Greek phalanx, from a vase of the late seventh century BC.



142 Roman and Sarmatian cavalry; detail from Trajan's Column.



143 Cataphract – mail-clad lancer – of the second or third century AD.

144 Cavalry versus cavalry: fourteenth-century view of the heavy-armed Mamluk horseman in action.



army was able to attain the greatest efficiency possible for infantry before the invention of firearms.

At the very moment of reaching this perfection, however, the legionary received the first of a long series of defeats from a pair of mounted men-at-arms – the light horse-archer and the mail-clad lancer or cataphract – who, between them, were eventually to rout the footsoldier. The victorious horse-archers at Carrhae (53 BC), though forestalling by five years the classic infantry combat at Pharsalus, were an omen of the ultimate overthrow of the legionary by the cataphract that took place more than four centuries later at Adrianople (AD 378). In this disastrous engagement the Roman army was defeated by its own over-confidence in its traditional military technique: falling victim to a simple tactical ruse of their Gothic adversaries, Valens's legionaries allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the enemy's heavy cavalry, which burst upon them 'as a thunderbolt bursts against a mountain-range',³ and which inflicted unparalleled casualties on the densely packed and helpless Roman formation. The Romans had forgotten the lessons that they had learned at the similar battle of Cannae some six hundred years earlier, when their infantry had been at the mercy of Hannibal's heavy cavalry; they had 'rested on their oars', like the

Macedonian phalangites before them, until they were overtaken and ridden down by an Oriental type of heavy cavalry that was even more formidable than Hannibal's squadrons. Though the Romans had received repeated warnings since Cannae of the legionary's inferiority to Oriental cavalry – in Crassus's disaster of 53 BC, Valerian's of AD 260, and Julian's of AD 363 – they had not been stimulated to make any fresh creative advance in infantry technique. They had left the legion, unreformed, to its fate; and, when disaster duly overtook them at Adrianople, they could think of no more original remedy than to discard the defeated legionary outright and take over the victorious cataphract at second-hand into their reconstituted army.

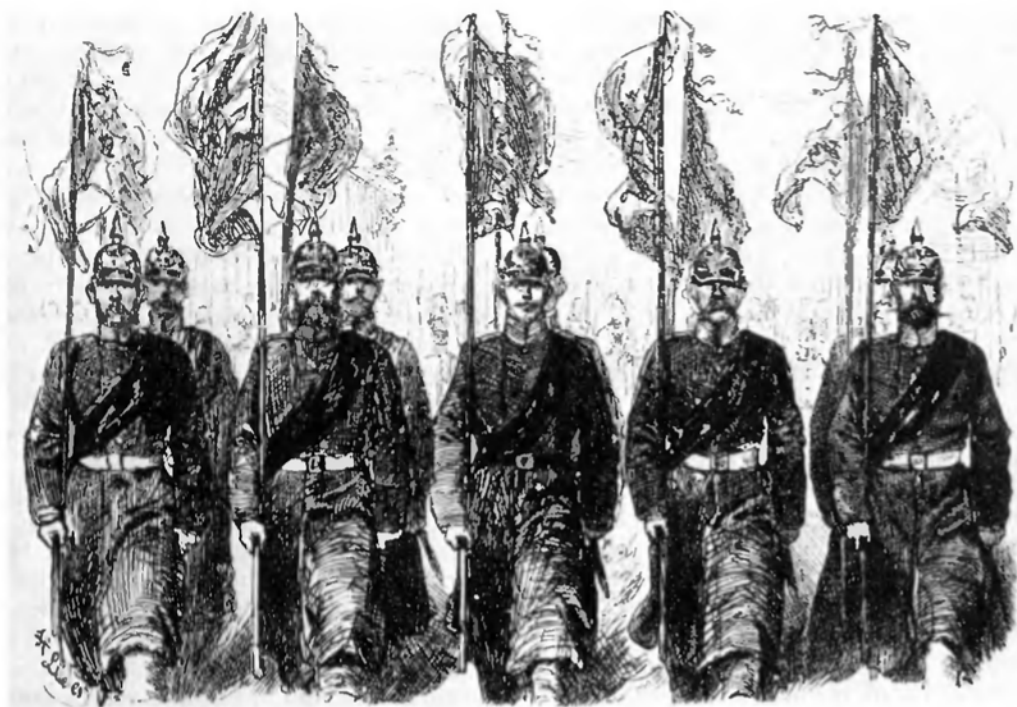
The cataphract was a degenerate compound of Assyrian heavy-armed infantryman and Nomad horse-archer, yet he had won his ascendancy before the invention of stirrups had made it possible for him to charge home without losing his seat in the saddle. He was to dominate military technique for a millennium, appearing with astonishing uniformity across the length and breadth of Europe and Asia; but already this very range and scale were bad omens for his future. By the end of this chapter the cataphract had lapsed into an armour-plated travesty of himself; in a

repetition of the legendary encounter between David and Goliath, the unwieldy Iraqi cataphract at the battle of Nahr Bashir (AD 1258) fell victim in individual combat to the light-armed and mobile Mongol horse-archer – the typical Nomad invader, long known and feared in South-Western Asia.⁴ His latest triumph was, however, short-lived, for, just as the heavy-armed phalangite had found success by combining armour with drill, so in the new Cavalry Age the individual Mongol champion was promptly overcome by the disciplined heavy cavalry of the Egyptian Mamluks. These had given warning of the approaching supremacy of their technique at the battle of Mansurah in AD 1250, when the Frankish army of Saint Louis had paid a disastrous penalty for the thoughtless individualism of its knights, each anxious for personal honour at the expense of disciplined formation.⁵

So by the close of the thirteenth century the Mamluks stood in the Levant in a position of unchallenged supremacy, comparable to that enjoyed by the Romans after Pydna; but, like the Romans during the five and a half centuries between Pydna and Adrianople, the Mamluks, too, 'rested on their oars', ignored signs of a vulnerability arising from stagnation, and in AD 1798 were taken unawares in their turn by an old adversary armed with a new

145 Scimitar versus firearm: Egyptian cavalry and French infantry in the battle of the Pyramids, 1798.





146 Prussian ranks on parade, 1871.

technique – in this case Napoleon’s French expeditionary force, the unrecognizable heirs of Saint Louis’s unruly French knights. Despite the presages of a revival of infantry technique in the victories of the Ottoman Janissaries in 1516–17, and notwithstanding the Mamluks’ partial recovery and emancipation from Ottoman domination in Egypt in the eighteenth century, the Mamluks ‘had forgotten nothing and learned nothing’⁶ as a result of their experience of adversity and eclipse. While they had allowed their military tradition to fossilize and their tactics and equipment to degenerate, the Western World had been rediscovering and reinvigorating the technique of a disciplined infantry force, which this time was equipped with firearms. The motley conscript army raised and drilled in post-revolutionary France was a passable imitation of the Ottoman corps of Janissaries which was now in the last stage of its decline, and by 1798 the French were ready to repeat the exploit of their Ottoman exemplars of 1516–17 in conquering Egypt. The humiliating French victory over the blindly self-confident forces of Murad Bey⁷ demonstrated conclusively the disastrous effect of four and a half centuries of irremediable stagnation.

We have now traced our chain of destruction from Goliath, the first of the hoplites, to Murad Bey, the last of the cataphracts, and we need not linger long over the latest and more familiar links. The new infantry technique developed in the West in the age of firearms has neither remained static nor been held as a permanent monopoly by a single Western nation. The success of the French *levée en masse* over the small but superbly professional army perfected in eighteenth-century Prussia stimulated the defeated Power to produce a pleiad of military and political geniuses who outdid the French in the new *tour de force* of combining

discipline with numbers; and this with such effect that Prussia’s humiliation in the war of 1806–07 was wiped out in the *Befreiungskrieg* of 1813–14. So little did the French learn from the lesson that they brought a yet more calamitous defeat upon themselves in 1871, though in the long run it was the Prussians who suffered more from their victory than the French from their defeat. Dazzled by the brilliance of its own success, the Prussian General Staff allowed its strategic thinking to stagnate, with the result that in the war of 1914–18 the Prussian war-machine brought defeat upon Germany by evoking the unforeseen riposte of a siege on an unprecedented scale. Their blind faith in the successful techniques of trench warfare and economic blockade then concealed from the Western Allies the threat presented by the new technique of mechanized mobility developing in Hitler’s armies, which in 1939–40 shattered their adversaries’ comfortable prediction of a second *Sitzkrieg* and provoked them to accept a war on these new terms. Since then we have seen the technique of mass mechanization itself challenged on the one hand by the obsolescence of large-scale mobilizations of manpower in the face of the impersonal machinery of atomic warfare, and on the other hand by the impotence of the concentrated resources of a technically sophisticated military Power when faced with bands of guerrilla skirmishers, vastly inferior in equipment but adept at joining battle on their own chosen terrain and their own chosen terms. So in our own times as in previous eras the connexion between breakdown and idolatry has continued to be exemplified; and our final example suggests very forcibly that it is the act of idolization that does the mischief and not any intrinsic quality in the persons or objects or techniques themselves.

26 The Roman See: the intoxication of victory

ONE OF the more general forms in which the tragedy of *koros-hybris-ate* presents itself is the intoxication of victory – whether the struggle in which the fatal prize is won be a war of arms or a conflict of spiritual forces. Perhaps the most notable example of the disastrous consequences of a victory won in the spiritual field is afforded by a chapter in the long, and still continuing, history of the Papacy.

In this chapter, which began in AD 1046 and closed in 1870, the ecclesiastical head of Christendom was compelled twice over to capitulate in his own See to a secular sovereign. In 1046 it was the Emperor Henry III who deposed three rival Popes at the Synod of Sutri and installed his own nominee in their place; in 1870 it was the troops of King Victor Emmanuel who occupied Rome and deprived the Papacy of its last vestiges of territorial sovereignty outside the Vatican; and the eight hundred years which separate these two disasters saw the magnificent creation of the medieval *Respublica Christiana* and the tragic vitiation of this supreme spiritual achievement. Thus the wheel of fortune revolved full circle, bringing the Papacy from an extraordinary defeat to an extraordinary victory, and from victory to defeat again; and the weapon which overcame this greatest of all Western institutions was not wielded by Papal Rome's external foes; it was turned by her own stubborn hands against herself.

When the Tuscan Hildebrand took up his abode in Rome in the second quarter of the eleventh century, he found himself in a derelict outpost of the East Roman Empire which was occupied by a degenerate offshoot of the Byzantine Society, militarily defenceless and morally bankrupt. In this despised and alien city Hildebrand and his successors succeeded in creating the master-institution of Western Christendom. Attempts have been made to compare the Hildebrandine Papacy with other institutions, such as the Theban régime of the chief priest Hrihor, which have combined secular with religious authority, but there is a vein of uniqueness in this Papal *Respublica Christiana* which defies any description of its character by the method of analogy. It is best described in negative terms, as an exact inversion of the East Roman imperial régime which we have looked at in an earlier chapter,¹ and against which it was a social reaction and a spiritual protest; and this description gives perhaps the most fitting measure of Hildebrand's achievement. Papal Rome secured an empire which had a greater hold than the Empire of the Antonines upon human hearts, and which on the mere material plane embraced vast tracts of Western Europe never visited by the legions of Augustus and Marcus Aurelius. Indeed, this Papal dominion was wider than Charlemagne's, who had succeeded – though at ruinous cost – in advancing his frontier from the Rhine to the Elbe and thereby achieving a feat which had been beyond the strength of Augustus; for even Charlemagne never pushed his conquests beyond the Channel or the Baltic, whereas the medieval Papacy had inherited a spiritual dominion over England from the pontificate of Gregory the Great two hundred years before

Charlemagne, and had gone on to make a spiritual conquest of Scandinavia – and of Poland and Hungary too – some two hundred years after Charlemagne's death.

These Papal conquests were partly due to the constitution of the Christian Republic whose frontiers the Popes were enlarging; for it was a constitution which inspired confidence and affection instead of evoking hostility and resistance.² The Papal *Respublica Christiana* was based on a combination of ecclesiastical centralism and uniformity with political diversity and devolution; and, since the superiority of the spiritual over the temporal power was a cardinal point of constitutional doctrine, this combination made the note of unity predominant, without depriving the adolescent Western Society of those elements of liberty and elasticity which are indispensable conditions for growth. Indeed, the acceptance of the social unity of Western Christendom, which was implicit in a common recognition of the spiritual authority of the Pope, carried with it a certain guarantee for the political independence of any local community that took upon itself the Papal yoke – a burden which, in the eleventh century, was still apostolically light. It was by entering into direct relations with the Holy See, and thereby becoming acknowledged members of the Western Christian Society in their own right, that the newly converted barbarian kingdoms of Hungary and Poland exorcized the danger of being conquered and annexed by the *Regnum Teutonicum*, as the Saxons, in their day, had been forcibly 'Westernized' by Charlemagne, and as the Irish and the Prussians in a later century were to be subjected, respectively, by the English crown and the Teutonic Order.³ Thanks to the Holy See, the Hungarians and the Poles were able, like the English, to enjoy the social and cultural benefits of membership in the society of Western Christendom without having to pay the price of forfeiting their political independence. It was also thanks, in large measure, to an alliance or community of interests with the Holy See that the city-states of Lombardy were able to vindicate their political autonomy against the Emperor Frederick I and to maintain it against the Emperor Frederick II.

Nor was the medieval Papacy illiberal in its attitude towards aspirations after local self-government, even in those Central Italian territories over which it claimed secular as well as ecclesiastical authority in virtue of the successive donations of Pepin and Charlemagne and Matilda. It appears to have accepted the situation without protest when the movement which was turning cities into city-states spread from Lombardy, where it had first asserted itself, into Romagna and the Marches and Umbria. In Tuscany in AD 1198 Pope Innocent III gave his recognition to the newly formed league of city-states, and urged Pisa to join it; and this benevolence extended to the *Ducatus Romanus* itself, which was the Papacy's metropolitan province. Papal influence was here exerted to protect the nascent civic liberties of Tivoli and Tusculum and Viterbo against the aggressiveness of the citizens of Rome;



147, 148 Humility and pomp of the Roman Church. A fifth-century Roman mosaic personifies the Church as a modest woman; by the thirteenth century she has become a jewelled empress.



and the Holy See was quick to make peace with the civic movement in Rome itself when it broke out there, in 1143, in a militant and revolutionary form. The Roman revolution of 1143 was followed by the settlement of 1145 between the new republic and Pope Eugenius III; and this settlement was revised and renewed in 1188 during the pontificate of Clement III.

The reason why a majority of the princes and city-states of Western Christendom accepted the Papal supremacy with so little demur was that the Pope was not then under suspicion of attempting to trespass upon the domain of the secular power. So far from claiming a monopoly of territorial sovereignty, like the contemporary Emperors at Constantinople, or a primacy *inter pares*, like the Holy Roman Emperors in the West from Otto the Great onwards in their relations with the independent Kings of France or England or León, the Holy See in this age was not concerned in the competition for territorial rulership. It was exercising on an ecumenical scale an authority of a spiritual character which was on a different plane from any territorial prerogative, and which, so long as it remained on this plane, did not become a danger to local political liberties. This statesmanlike aloofness from territorial ambitions was combined, in the Papal hierarchy at its zenith, with an energetic and enterprising use of the administrative gift which was the Byzantine dowry of Papal Rome. While in Orthodox Christendom this gift had been fatally applied to the *tour de force* of putting substance into the resuscitated ghost of the Roman Empire, and thereby crushing an adolescent Orthodox Christian Society under the incubus of an intolerably heavy institution,⁴ the Roman architects of the *Respublica Christiana* turned their administrative resources to better account by building a lighter structure, on a new plan, upon broader foundations. The gossamer filaments of the Papal spider's web, as it was originally woven in the eleventh century, drew medieval Christendom together in an unconstrained unity which was equally beneficial to the parts and to the whole; and it was only later that the silken threads turned into iron bands which threatened to cramp and stunt the Western Society's growth.

In this Papal work of creation it was not, of course, either a capacity for administration or an avoidance of the snare of territorial ambitions that was the vital creative force. The fundamental reason why the Roman See was able in this age to conjure into existence a Christian Republic under a Papal aegis was that the Papacy had consciously taken upon itself the moral leadership of an expanding society in its growth-stage. The Hildebrandine Papacy gave expression and organization to the inarticulate aspirations of the *Plebs Christiana*, transforming them from the day-dreams of isolated individuals or scattered minorities into common causes of supreme value and established authority. The victory of the Christian Republic was won in campaigns for the purification of the clergy from the two moral plagues of illicit concubinage and financial corruption, for the liberation of the life of the Church from the interference of secular Powers, and for the rescue of the Oriental Christians and the Holy Land from the clutches of the Turkish champions of Islam. But this was not the whole nor the best of the Hildebrandine

Papacy's work. A genius for despoiling the seeds of noble things and for bringing the crop to harvest was the crowning virtue of the Papacy in the days of its Hildebrandine greatness; and this genius was displayed, not in the 'holy wars' of the crusading Church Militant, but in a fruitful patronage of such promising institutions as the universities and the religious Orders, and in the triumphant enlistment of the best talents of Western Christendom in the service of the Holy See.

The fall of the Hildebrandine Papacy is as extraordinary a spectacle as its rise; for all the virtues that had carried it to its zenith seem to change, as it sinks to its nadir, into their own exact antitheses. The ethereal institution which had been fighting and winning a battle for spiritual freedom against material force was now infected with the very evil which it had set itself to cast out from the body social of Western Christendom. The Holy See which had taken the lead in the struggle against simony now required the clergy throughout the Western World to pay dues at a Roman receipt of custom for those ecclesiastical preferments which Rome herself had forbidden them to purchase from any secular Power. The Roman Curia which had been the head and front of moral and intellectual progress – a tower of strength for the saints who were raising the monastic life to new heights and for the schoolmen who were creating the universities – now turned itself into a fastness of spiritual conservatism. The ecclesiastical sovereign Power in the Christian Republic now suffered itself to be deprived by its local secular underlings – the princes of the rising parochial states of Western Christendom – of the lion's share of the product of financial and administrative instruments which the Papacy itself had skilfully devised in order to make its authority effective. This loss was not made good by the consolation prize of political sovereignty over a minor principality. Has any other institution ever given so great occasion as this to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme?⁵ The downfall of the Hildebrandine Papacy is a more extreme case of *peripeteia* than any that we have yet encountered in our study of the nemesis of creativity. How did it happen, and why?

How it happened is foreshadowed in the first recorded transaction in Hildebrand's public career.

The creative spirits in the Roman Church who set themselves in the eleventh century to rescue the Western World from a feudal anarchy by establishing a Christian Republic found themselves in the same dilemma as their spiritual heirs who are attempting in our day to replace an international anarchy by a political world order. The essence of their aim was to substitute a reign of spiritual authority for the reign of physical force, and in their struggle against violence the spiritual sword was the weapon with which their supreme victories were won. No physical force was exerted in Hildebrand's act of deposing and excommunicating the Emperor Henry IV in AD 1076; yet the moral effect of the Pope's winged words upon the hearts of the Emperor's Transalpine subjects was so intense that within a few months it brought Henry to Canossa. There were, however, other occasions on which it seemed as if the established régime of physical force was in a position to defy the strokes of the spiritual sword with impunity; and it was in such situations that the Roman Church Militant

was challenged to give its answer to the riddle of the Sphinx. Was the soldier of God to deny himself the use of any but his own spiritual arms, at the risk of seeing his advance brought to a standstill? Or was he to fight God's battle against the Devil with his adversary's own weapons, if the only practicable way of ejecting his adversary from his entrenchments was to hoist him with his own petard? Which was the true Christian act of faith?

The question presented itself in an urgent practical form to the would-be reformer Pope Gregory VI when he assumed the burden of Papal office in AD 1045. In order to serve as the instrument of reform, the Holy See must be efficiently organized; to be organized, it must have money; and the necessary supplies of this were not forthcoming; for, while the old Papal revenues from the *Patrimonia Petri* had disappeared with the *Patrimonia* themselves, the new revenues arising from the offerings of pilgrims were being stolen from the very altar of Saint Peter's own church by the brigand-nobles of the *Ducatus Romanus*. No one would dispute that this sacrilegious robbery was as criminal in itself as it was damaging to the interests of the Papacy and the Christian Republic; and there was no prospect of the criminals yielding to any spiritual appeal. Was it then justifiable to meet force with force in this flagrant case? The question was answered when Gregory VI appointed Hildebrand to be his *capellanus*; for the guardianship of Saint Peter's altar, with the gifts which were heaped upon it, was the *capellanus's* principal duty; and Hildebrand promptly fulfilled it by raising troops and routing the brigands by force of arms.

At the moment when Hildebrand took this first momentous step in his career, the inward moral character of his act was ambiguous and difficult to divine. But in his last hour, forty years later, its true nature had become more apparent. In AD 1085, when he lay dying as a Pope in exile in Salerno, his See had just been looted and burnt by the Normans whom he had called in to assist him in a military struggle which had gradually spread from the steps of Saint Peter's altar until it had engulfed the whole of Western Christendom. The climax of the physical conflict between Hildebrand and Henry IV gave a forecast of the deadlier and more devastating struggle which was to be fought out *à outrance* two centuries later between Innocent IV and Frederick II; and by the time of Innocent IV's pontificate the character of Hildebrand's act had become clear. In choosing the alternative of meeting force with force, Hildebrand had set the Church upon a course which was to end in the victory of his adversaries the World, the Flesh, and the Devil over the City of God which he had sought to bring down to Earth.

If the Papacy became possessed by the demon of physical violence which it was attempting to exorcize, this gives us the explanation of the other changes of Papal virtues into their opposing vices; for the substitution of the material for the spiritual sword is the fatal and fundamental change of which all the rest are corollaries. The establishment and improvement of a system of taxation by a Papacy which had once set out to eradicate simony was manifestly due to the ever-increasing demands upon the Papal Exchequer which were being made by the perpetually recurring warfare between the Papacy and the Empire; and, when the



PAPAL PRETENSION

149 The mounted Pope was a motif of supremacy taken from Roman imperial tradition. A thirteenth-century fresco illustrating the 'Donation of Constantine' shows the Emperor conferring dominion over Rome on Pope Sylvester I, and then leading him into the city.

Papacy succumbed at Avignon to the domination of one of its secular rivals, it was certain that the local secular princes would inherit, sooner or later, the whole of the administrative and financial power which the Papacy had gradually been acquiring for itself throughout Western Christendom. When the Papacy exhausted its strength in its deadly conflict with the Holy Roman Empire, it placed itself at the mercy of the parochial secular states, and was promptly despoiled by them of the panoply with which it had equipped itself for fighting its medieval battle. The sole compensation which the Papacy received from its despoilers was a tiny share in the territorial sovereignty which the local secular princes were forging for themselves out of their Papal spoils. In yielding – or being forced to yield – to this new dispensation of parochial sovereignty, the Papacy was simply allowing itself to drift on a now irresistible tide; and the consciousness that it was now drifting with the tide, and that it had lost control over its own destiny, was no doubt the psychological cause of the conservatism to which the Papacy abandoned itself after the shock of the Reformation. Since it had lost the power of voluntary initiative, the Papacy came to see its safety in stagnation; and it was in this spirit that it set its face not only against the theological and hierarchical innovations of the Protestant Reformation, but also against most of the new discoveries of modern Western physical science and new ideas of modern Western social philosophy.

We have now perhaps found some answer to the question of how the Papacy came to suffer its extraordinary *peripeteia*; but in describing the sequence of events we have not explained the cause. We may be justified in our thesis that the downfall of the Papacy in every sphere can be traced back to its abandonment of the spiritual in favour of the material sword, and that this fatal change can be traced, in its turn, to Hildebrand's first act of his public life. Yet, even if it were demonstrable that Hildebrand's original decision to parry force with force was the ruin of the whole Hilde-

brandine enterprise as a matter of fact, this would not prove that what did happen was bound to happen *a priori*. The single example of the Hildebrandine tragedy proves no more than the truism that the use of material means towards a spiritual end is a dangerous game. To live dangerously, however, is the inevitable condition of being alive at all; and there is no moral law which states that defeat is inherent in the resort to a dangerous manœuvre. It is not enough to show that in Hildebrand's case a disaster did occur; we also have to answer the question why.

Why was it that the medieval Papacy became the slave of its own tools, and allowed itself to be betrayed, by its use of material means, into being diverted from the spiritual ends to which those means had been intended to minister? The explanation of the Papacy's ultimate defeat is to be found, so it would seem, in the untoward effects of an initial victory. The dangerous game of fighting force with force had in this case a fatal result, because, to begin with, it had succeeded only too well. Intoxicated by the success which the hazardous manœuvre obtained for them in the earlier stages of their struggle with the Holy Roman Empire, Pope Gregory VII and his successors persisted in the use of force, and carried it to extremes, until it defeated the users' purpose by becoming an end in itself. While Gregory VII fought the Empire with the object of removing an imperial obstacle to a reform of the Church, Innocent IV fought the Empire two hundred years later with the object of breaking the imperial Power. The downfall of the Hildebrandine Papacy was a supremely tragic performance of the drama of *koros-hybris-ate*.

We can verify the working out of this *Leitmotiv* in two ways: both by contrasting some earlier and later scenes in the play, and by analysing the plot as a whole.

Compare, for example, the outwardly similar but inwardly diverse scenes in which three rival claimants to the Papacy appear before a council of the Church summoned by a Holy Roman Emperor, with the result that two are



150 A fifteenth-century painting repeats the same motif: the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa leads Pope Alexander III into Rome, to symbolize the submission of Frederick to papal authority after the reconciliation of Empire and Pope in 1177.

deposed as illegitimate and a third is compelled to abdicate. In AD 1046 it was Pope Gregory VI who was obliged to abdicate in this way by the Synod of Sutri, which the Emperor Henry III had convened; and in AD 1415 it was Pope John XXIII who suffered the same fate at the hands of the Council of Constance held under the auspices of the Emperor Sigismund. Externally the two scenes might seem almost indistinguishable, but there is a difference in ethos between the two protagonists which gives some measure of the moral débâcle to which the Papacy had succumbed in the course of the four intervening centuries. Pope Gregory VI was an unworldly saint who had rendered himself technically guilty of the offence of simony by purchasing the Papal office in order to rescue it from the hands of his unworthy godson, Pope Benedict IX. The condemnation of Gregory VI was a travesty of justice which aroused indignation all over Western Christendom and inspired Hildebrand to devote his life to fighting for the liberation of the Church from an arbitrary 'Caesaro-papism'. Yet the victim of this judicial act of injustice accepted and endorsed his sentence without a murmur. Not so the *condottiere* Baldassare Cossa, 'the most profligate of Mankind',⁶ whom the Council of Constance had to deal with as Pope John XXIII. 'He fled, and was brought back a prisoner; the most scandalous charges were suppressed; the Vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy, and incest.'⁷ The poison of worldliness had worked potently in the course of less than four hundred years to produce the contrast between these two scenes.

There is another pair of scenes in which a Pope invades Southern Italy with an armed force, meets with an ignominious defeat, and dies of chagrin. In the first scene it is Pope Leo IX who is defeated, in AD 1053, by the Normans; and in the second scene it is Pope Innocent IV who is defeated, in AD 1254, by Manfred. Outwardly, Leo was more grossly humiliated at the hands of his conquerors than was Innocent; but, if we compare the two exploits in terms of



151 Dante, in conversation with Pope Nicholas III, rebukes the Papacy for its avarice and prodigality.



152 PAPAL HUMILIATION Pope Gregory VII expelled from Rome. Gregory's presumption of supreme secular and spiritual authority led him into constant conflict with the Emperor Henry IV; despite their reconciliation at Canossa in 1077, Gregory was later deposed by Henry, and ended his days in exile in Southern Italy.

153 Innocent III, self-styled 'Vicar of Christ'; a portrait from Old St Peter's, Rome.



motives and states of mind, we shall see that it was really Innocent who suffered the greater moral defeat. Pope Leo was attempting, in co-operation with the secular arm of the Emperors of both East and West, to carry out a police operation against a band of wholly disreputable brigands; and what broke his heart was not his own defeat but the slaughter of the men who had embraced his cause. Innocent IV, on the other hand, was on the warpath against the son of a dead and defeated enemy against whom he nursed such an implacable hatred that he was prepared to pursue his vendetta into the second and third generation. The chagrin that killed him was his rage at being foiled in an attempt to carry his war into the enemy's country and to chey out of his ancestral kingdom a prince who had abandoned his father's aggressive ambitions and who was only anxious to be left in peace. Militarily, Innocent's and Leo's expeditions ended in much the same way, but morally there is no comparison between them; and this moral gulf gives the measure of the Papacy's spiritual degeneration during the intervening span of two hundred years.

The operation of *koros-hybris-ate* which we can detect in these comparisons is revealed still more clearly when we take the play as a whole and analyse the plot. The first act opens in AD 1046 with the first steps in the career of Hildebrand, a man who had discerned and accepted the challenge presented to the Papacy by the contemporary reawakening of the Western Christian World from its vegetative lethargy. It was only in a society that was numb with misery – as Western Christendom had been from the twilight of Charlemagne's generation to the dawn of Otto the Great's – that the prerogative of moral leadership could be left, even nominally, in the hands of an institution which was disgracing itself as the Roman See disgraced itself during that profligate passage in its history. From the moment when the Western World as a whole began to shake off its moral torpor and to aspire to a better life, the Roman See was confronted with the alternative of leaping at one bound from the lowest to the highest rung of the moral ladder as it stood in that age, or else being pilloried in its actual state of degradation and seeing its kingdom being numbered and finished and divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.⁸ In this hour Hildebrand set himself the tremendous task of substantiating the Church's claim to the moral leadership of the Western World; and in thirty years of titanic labour he succeeded in achieving the impossible. By 1075 the double battle against the sexual and financial corruption of the clergy had been won throughout the Western World, and the victory had been gained by the moral prowess of a Roman See whose profligacy had been the greatest of all the scandals of the Western Church in the preceding century. It was in the moment of his triumph, in the third year of his pontificate, that Hildebrand took a step which, though perhaps inevitable, was almost certain to prove disastrous. In AD 1075 Hildebrand extended his field of battle from the sure ground of concubinage and simony to the debatable ground of investiture.

Logically, perhaps, the conflict over investiture might be justified as an inevitable sequel to the conflicts over concubinage and simony if all three struggles were looked upon as aspects of one single struggle for the liberation of the Church. To Hildebrand at this critical point in his

career it might almost seem labour lost to have freed the Church from her servitude to Venus and Mammon, if he were to leave her still fettered by her political subjection to the secular Power. So long as this third shackle lay heavy upon her, would she not still be debarred from doing her divinely appointed work for the regeneration of Mankind? But this argument begs the question whether the possibility of sincere and fruitful co-operation between the Church and the secular Power had in fact wholly vanished by 1075; and on this question the onus of proof lies with the Hildebrandines, for at least two reasons.

In the first place neither Hildebrand nor his partisans ever sought – either before or after the promulgation in 1075 of Hildebrand's decree prohibiting lay investiture – to deny that the secular authorities had a legitimate role to play in the procedure for the election of clerical officers of the Church. In the second place, during the thirty years ending in 1075 the Roman See had found it possible to work hand in hand with the Holy Roman Empire in the older conflict over the issues of concubinage and simony. In these circumstances the need for a deliberate policy of limiting or prohibiting the intervention of the secular authority in investiture must be accounted questionable, for it is conceivable that, if Hildebrand had not chosen to throw down the gauntlet in 1075, a compromise leading to a new and fertile era in co-operation might have been achieved.

The gravity of Hildebrand's action is revealed by the dimensions of the catastrophe which was its sequel. On this issue of investiture Hildebrand staked the whole of the moral prestige which he had won for the Papacy in thirty years; and his hold upon the conscience of the *Plebs Christiana* in the Emperor Henry IV's Transalpine dominions was strong enough, in conjunction with the strength of Saxon arms, to have brought the Emperor to Canossa in AD 1077. Yet, although Canossa may have dealt the imperial dignity a blow from which it perhaps never quite recovered, the sequel to that moral triumph was not an end, but a resumption, of the struggle which Hildebrand had let loose two years before. Despite a series of attempts to settle the dispute in the next fifty years, the conflict remained as an unhealed wound in the Western body social which threatened to break open again under the strain of later crises. The fire which Hildebrand had kindled in 1075 was still burning fiercely a hundred years later.

The second act in the tragedy opens with a respite which coincided in time with the pontificate of Pope Innocent III (*Jungebatur* AD 1198–1216). With Germany torn in two by civil war, and with the child-king Frederick of Sicily under Innocent's own guardianship, the young Pope had his hands free to play the part of President of the Christian Republic as Hildebrand had conceived of it; and Innocent III did duly become the Solomon or Suleyman the Magnificent or Harun-al-Rashid of the Hildebrandine Papacy. This was a brilliant role, and it was impressively sustained by a noble figure; yet Innocent's pontificate was not so triumphant in reality as it appeared to be on the surface. As a man of action he was unquestionably noble; but this nobility was tarnished by a touch of *hybris* and balked by a grain of obtuseness. The fallibility of his judgment is

154 Gregory IX, patron of Saint Francis, as he appears on a mosaic from Old St Peter's.



revealed in his handling of the weapon of the Crusade; in his dealings with the Empire and the House of Hohenstaufen; and in his attitude to the greatest man of his generation, Saint Francis.

Innocent's first act after his accession was to preach a crusade for the rescue of the remnants of the Frankish principalities in Syria from the grasp of the Ayyubid Power; and this enterprise went grievously awry when the Western Christian expeditionary force was diverted from its original objective to take part in an irrelevant and nefarious campaign against the Crusaders' fellow-Christians in the East Roman Empire. In this painful situation Innocent's idealism was convincingly demonstrated in his distress at such a scandalous betrayal of the honour of Western Christendom. But this evidence of a noble spirit only increases our wonder at seeing him, just four years after the lesson of 1204, deliberately launching another assault of Christians upon Christians, and this time not even on the alien soil of Orthodox Christendom, but in Languedoc, at the heart of his own Christian Commonwealth. Did the Pope who had deplored the horrors of the sack of Constantinople by French Crusaders imagine that his French ecclesiastical subjects would behave less brutally if they were let loose upon one of the richest provinces of the Western *Respublica Christiana*, when this time they even had the Pope's official support? And did Innocent suppose that he would succeed any better this time than before in controlling the fearful forces of violence and wickedness that he was letting loose?

This vein of ingenuous ineptitude which comes out in Innocent's handling of his Crusades is also apparent in his dealings with the affairs of the Empire and the Hohenstaufen. He threw himself into the imperial dispute on the anti-Hohenstaufen side, only to be betrayed by his own candidate, the Welf Otto of Brunswick, when the latter eventually attained the imperial crown. Faced with this defection, Innocent could think of no more original plan than to enlist a Hohenstaufen to overthrow the Welf whom he had previously brought into power in order to overthrow a Hohenstaufen. More than this, he actually selected for his new candidate a boy who already wore the Sicilian crown and who would therefore be in a position to execute his father Henry's design of taking the Roman See between two fires if Innocent's assistance enabled him to win the imperial crown as well. Although Innocent, on his deathbed in 1216, exacted from the young Frederick a promise that, as soon as he should have received the imperial crown, he would hand on the Sicilian crown to his son, there was no guarantee that this pledge would be honoured; and thus Innocent left the great institution, which had been placed in his keeping in so prosperous a political condition eighteen years before, at the mercy of a successor of Rome's old imperial enemies, Henry IV and Frederick Barbarossa.

This lack of intuition in divining character, which Innocent showed when he lent his support to two such unsatisfactory protégés, is more flagrantly apparent in his attitude towards Saint Francis; and here it is difficult to draw the line between obtuseness and *hybris*. Innocent's first reaction to this saintly man was negative, and the credit for his subsequent change of mind is due to the

Bishop of Assisi and to the future Pope Gregory IX, who was Francis's solitary champion in Innocent's Curia. Did Innocent's coldness signify an unawareness of Francis's greatness or an indifference to it? Did his aloofness from the deepest spiritual movement of his age reflect the pre-occupation of a man of affairs or the superciliousness of an aristocrat? We might give Innocent the benefit of the doubt and acquit him of the charge of *hybris* here, but there is another count on which the charge cannot be rebutted. A Pope whose predecessors had been content to style themselves 'Vicar of Peter' assumed the style 'Vicar of Christ'. This was an ominous departure from the humility of Gregory the Great, who had taken the title *Servus Servorum Dei* when his colleague John the Faster at Constantinople had proclaimed himself 'Ecumenical' Patriarch. Innocent III's failure of judgment can be measured best, like Hildebrand's, by marking its sequel; for the breathing-space which had opened with Innocent's accession did not outlast his death. It was followed by a battle between the Papacy and the Emperor Frederick II which surpassed in fury all the earlier battles between Rome and the Empire, and which produced in Western Europe a devastation and a misery unparalleled since the dawn of the Western Society.

The third act of the Papal tragedy opens on 13 December 1250, which is the date of Frederick II's sudden and premature death. Would the Papacy, now represented in Pope Innocent IV (*fungebatur* AD 1243-54), accept this opportunity of restoring peace to Western Christendom, or would the vendetta against Frederick's house be pursued to the bitter end? Notwithstanding the frightful effects of this latter-day Hannibalic War, Innocent insisted on maintaining the stand which he had taken three years before, when he had declared his determination never to make peace so long as either Frederick or any of his sons remained King or Emperor; and this declaration, which assuredly was no mere error of judgment but was a moral aberration as well, spelled the suicide of the Hildebrandine Papacy.

This stance of implacable hostility was the policy which Innocent IV bequeathed to his successors in the Holy See; and it duly ended in the extinction of Frederick's line through the death of his sons - Manfred in battle in 1265 and Conradin on the scaffold in 1268. The note of *hybris* which Innocent III had struck when he proclaimed himself the 'Vicar of Christ', and Innocent IV when he included Frederick's children in the remorseless vow which he had taken against Frederick himself, was sounded for the third time by Pope Boniface VIII (*fungebatur* AD 1294-1303) when he seized the occasion of the turn of the century to inaugurate the institution of the Papal Jubilee. In the pilgrims who flocked to Rome in the Holy Year 1300 Boniface fancied that he saw the human witness of his own territorial omnipotence; yet at the same time his ears were deaf to the dissenting murmurs of a distant provincial clergy who were still being called upon to pay the Papal war-taxes a generation after the Papal Punic Wars had been brought to their dreadful termination. He did not understand that neither the clergy nor the *Plebs Christiana* would be willing to risk life and fortune to support a Papal against a secular tyranny; he assumed that they would rise at his call as they had risen at Hildebrand's. Under this delusion



156 Boniface VIII, inaugurator of the Papal Jubilee: a statue attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio.

he provoked the King of France into drawing his sword, and then ran straight upon the extended sword-point, in the confidence that any secular weapon must crumple under the drum-fire of his own ecclesiastical artillery.

The sequel to this suicidal act was the Pope's arrest at Anagni and the 'Babylonish Captivity' at Avignon and the Great Schism which rent Western Christendom in two; and each of these calamities might have been foreseen and feared and averted by Boniface himself if his vision and judgment and action had not been confounded by the *ate* that was incarnate in him. Precedent could have told him that a *coup de force* against the Pope's own person was the first counter-attack that any Pope had to expect from a secular prince upon whom he had declared war, as Paschal II had been kidnapped in 1111 and Hildebrand himself in 1075. Again, the attraction of the Papacy into the French orbit was a recurrent phenomenon that had a history stretching back to the eleventh century. So long as French power was balanced by imperial power, the pull had not been irresistible. But, when the threat from Germany was removed – as it had been by Boniface's day – who then was left to challenge the ambitions of the King of France? As for the Great Schism, it had already been foreshadowed by the time of Boniface's pontificate in the series of inter-regnums which had been interrupting the Hildebrandine succession for some fifty years past. Enough proof had been given during this period that the electoral machinery which had been installed on Hildebrand's initiative in 1059 was badly out of gear and might quite cease to work if it were subjected to another violent strain or shock. That Boniface should have challenged the King of France when the Papacy was in this parlous state would be inexplicable in a man who was altogether in his right senses.

So we come to the fourth and last act in the Hildebrandine tragedy, which opens after the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with the advent of the Conciliar Movement. The scandal of the Great Schism moved the provincial clergy to come to the rescue of the most venerable institution in Western Christendom, and their attitude, of which the Conciliar Movement was the outcome, combined filial piety with moral reprobation. The reformers were anxious to save the Papacy from suicide, but their anxiety was for the sake of the Christian Republic as well as for the sake of the Papacy itself. They were determined to reconstruct the falling house, but on a new plan which would restore balance to the critically top-heavy Papal edifice. The reconstructed pyramid must be given a lower apex and a broader base. Thus the condition to which the Papacy was asked to assent as the price – and guarantee – of its rehabilitation was the introduction of a parliamentary element into the constitution of the Western body ecclesiastic. Would the Papacy be willing to atone for its past and to assure its future by bowing, in this matter, to the will of Christendom? Once again a Pope had to take a decision which was momentous for the fate of the Western World as well as for that of the Roman See; and, once again, the answer was in the negative. The Papacy rejected the parliamentary principle and opted for an unrestricted sovereignty in a restricted field as the alternative to accepting a limited constitutional authority over a loyal and undivided Christian Commonwealth.



157 Martin V, successor to the deposed Pope John XXIII; bronze medal.

This was the decision which was taken at the Council of Constance in the crucial year 1417 and was confirmed at Basel in 1448. In the thirty years that separated these two occasions, the Papacy did, it is true, attempt to carry out many of the reforms demanded by the Council of Constance. But these Papal efforts at reform were stultified by the fatal weakness of their not being the Papacy's paramount aim or interest. During these critical years the Pope's overriding concern was to assert his own pretension to exercise an autocratic authority; and this Papal impulse to subordinate the reform of the Church to the aggrandizement of the Papacy was perhaps responsible, more than any other factor, for that misunderstanding between the Papacy and the Conciliar Movement which came to an open breach in the quarrel between Pope Eugenius IV and the Council of Basel. In the intoxication of its victory over the Conciliar Movement in this naked trial of strength, the Papacy abandoned itself once more to that lust for power which had been its besetting sin since the days of Hildebrand. With one hand it clung to the despotic ecclesiastical power over the provinces of the Western Church which it had been unexpectedly successful in retaining; with the other hand it continued to build up its secular territorial power in Central Italy; and, in playing their part as fifteenth-century Italian despots, the Popes became steeped in that pride of life which was the dominant note of the medieval Italian culture in its fifteenth-century over-ripeness. Within less than a hundred years after the dissolution of the Council of Basel in 1449 the Papacy was in even worse case than it had been when the Council of Constance had opened in 1414. The Pope had defeated the Conciliar Movement to his own undoing. 'He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.'

The sixteenth century saw the nemesis of the Papacy's fifteenth-century relapse into *hybris*. As a logical consequence of the path that it had chosen to take, the Papacy was treated by the Transalpine Powers as one midget in the covey of Italian secular principalities, and a feeble one at that. It learnt its lesson and withdrew from active participation in the international war-game; but this tardy Papal recognition of the drawbacks of territorial sovereignty did not save Pope Innocent XI from being bullied by Louis XIV or Pope Pius VII from being dragged at the chariot-wheels of Napoleon.

While the Pope suffered a grievous fate as an Italian secular prince, he suffered still worse misfortune as the ecumenical sovereign of the Western Church. The whole of his power was reft away from him in the states that turned Protestant, and four-fifths of it in those that professedly remained Catholic. The sixteenth-century Catholic response to the challenge of Protestantism was not led by the Papacy, but by a band of inspired individual saints; indeed, it was the dead weight of Papal tradition that brought these saints' impetuous advance to a premature halt. They liberated the Papacy from the pride of life, but its lust for power proved too strong for them; and so the sixteenth-century rally failed, after all, to save the day. The Roman Church lapsed into a spiritual torpor, from which it awoke only to stage a counter-revolution against the secular intellectual revival of the eighteenth century. Remaining impervious to the challenge of the new forces of democracy



158 The scholar, diplomatist, and Renaissance patron Aeneas Silvius, later Pope Pius II, travelling to the Council of Basel in 1431.

159 Seal of the Council of Basel, where the Conciliar Movement suffered accumulative defeat as the Papacy struggled to maintain its autocracy.



and nationalism, the Papacy was overtaken on its own ground by the Italian *Risorgimento*, and the extinction of its territorial sovereignty on 20 September 1870 marked the nadir of the material fortunes of the Hildebrandine institution.

This political bankruptcy was, however, far less tragic for the Papacy than its spiritual self-defeat, and the Papacy had inflicted this on itself in a series of acts which began with Saint Francis's patron Pope Gregory IX's excommunication of the Emperor Frederick II in 1227 and culminated in the Papacy's provocation of the sixteenth-century Protestant revolt against the authority of the Roman Church. Since the Reformation, a Church which had once been the institutional expression of Western Christendom's unity has been only one among a number of rival Western Christian sects whose rancorous mutual hostility has torn the Western World in pieces, has brought Christianity itself into discredit there, and has thus opened the way for the supplanting of Christianity by nationalism, a post-Christian resuscitation of the pre-Christian worship of collective human power.

The twentieth century has seen a movement for self-reform in the Roman Church which recalls the fifteenth-century Conciliar Movement and the eleventh-century awakening that found its leader in Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII; and this time the Roman Catholic clergy and laity has twice been given a Papal lead. Pope Pius XI retrieved the political error of his namesake Pope Pius IX by concluding with the Italian state the Lateran Agreements of 1929, in which the Papacy renounced its claim to temporal power outside the Vatican City, in exchange for Italy's recognition of Papal political sovereignty within this miniature domain. Far more important has been the Church's spiritual *aggiornamento* ('bringing up to date') by Pope John XXIII. In his brief reign (1958-63), this saintly and genial Pope has 'made history'. He has given vent to the most dynamic of any of the movements among the Western Catholic clergy and laity since the eleventh-century spiritual revival. Angelo Giuseppe's assumption of the name 'John' was as intentionally significant as Achille Ratti's assumption of the name 'Pius'. Each of these two Popes was setting out to redeem the reputation of a name that at least one previous Pope Pius and a number of previous Pope Johns had brought into disrepute.

The twentieth-century crisis manifestly resembles the fifteenth-century crisis. It cannot yet be foreseen whether it is going to have a happier outcome, but we can already guess that, if the present movement for reform comes to grief in its turn, the Papacy's claim to autocratic power will have been, once again, the fatal stumbling-block. Will the two sessions of Pope John XXIII's Vatican Council have succeeded in counteracting the effect of the Council of 1869, in which Pope Pius IX compensated the Papacy in advance for its imminent loss of temporal power by obtaining acceptance of the dogma of the Pope's infallibility in his pronouncements *ex cathedra*? And will Pope Paul VI's



160 Pius IX, who made Papal Infallibility a dogma.

efforts to assert his authority enforce submission, or will they provoke revolt?

At all stages of its history the Catholic Church has been a seed-bed of saints. Saint Francis of Assisi is the greatest soul that has appeared in the Western World so far. Yet, time and again, the example given by the saints' self-abnegation has been robbed of its spiritual harvest by a Pope's thirst for power. This tragedy need not repeat itself. The saintly Pope John XXIII's large-hearted policy may prevail, and, if it does, this will benefit the whole of the Western Society by giving a fresh inspiration to the oldest of its Churches. On the other hand, if the present spiritual revival within the Roman Church were to be frustrated once again, the price would be paid, this time, by the Roman Church's own 'Establishment'; for Western Christendom has already paid the price of the Papacy's forfeiture of its former ecumenical leadership. The price has been the replacement of the medieval Western *Respublica Christiana* by a bevy of idolized national states. For the Western Civilization, as well as for the Roman Church, this has been a grievous change for the worse, and the guilt lies with those predecessors of Pope John XXIII who failed, at successive crucial turning-points of history, to rise to the spiritual demands of their high office. They failed spiritually because they had been intoxicated by worldly success. Their failure is a signal illustration of the nemesis of creativity.