

CHAPTER VII - THE SHADOW OF THE PROBLEM

A traveller sees the hundred branches of a tree long before he is near enough to see its single and simple root; he generally sees the scattered or sprawling suburbs of a town long before he has looked upon the temple or the market-place. So far I have given impressions of the most motley things merely as they came, in chronological and not in logical order; the first flying vision of Islam as a sort of sea, with something both of the equality and the emptiness and the grandeur of its purple seas of sand; the first sharp silhouette of Jerusalem, like Mount St. Michael, lifting above that merely Moslem flood a crag still crowned with the towers of the Crusaders; the mere kaleidoscope of the streets, with little more than a hint of the heraldic meaning of the colours; a merely personal impression of a few of the leading figures whom I happened to meet first, and only the faintest suggestion of the groups for which they stood. So far I have not even tidied up my own first impressions of the place; far less advanced a plan for tidying up the place itself.

In any case, to begin with, it is easy to be in far too much of a hurry about tidying up. This has already been noted in the more obvious case, of all that religious art that bewildered the tourist with its churches full of flat and gilded ikons. Many a man has had the sensation of something as full as a picture gallery and as futile as a lumber-room, merely by not happening to know what is really of value, or especially in what way it is really valued. An Armenian or a Syrian might write a report on his visit to England, saying that our national and especially our naval heroes were neglected, and left to the lowest dregs of the rabble; since the portraits of Benbow and Nelson, when exhibited to the public, were painted on wood by the crudest and most incompetent artists. He would not perhaps fully appreciate the fine shade of social status and utility implied in a public-house sign. He might not realise that the sign of Nelson could be hung on high everywhere, because the reputation of Nelson was high everywhere, not because it was low anywhere; that his bad portrait was really a proof of his good name. Yet the too rapid reformer may easily miss even the simple and superficial parallel between the wooden pictures of admirals and the wooden pictures of angels. Still less will he appreciate the intense spiritual atmosphere, that makes the real difference between an ikon and an inn-sign, and makes the inns of England, noble and national as they are, relatively the homes of Christian charity but hardly a Christian faith. He can hardly bring himself to believe that Syrians can be as fond of religion as Englishmen of beer.

Nobody can do justice to these cults who has not some sympathy with the power of a mystical idea to transmute the meanest and most trivial objects with a kind

of magic. It is easy to talk of superstitiously attaching importance to sticks and stones, but the whole poetry of life consists of attaching importance to sticks and stones; and not only to those tall sticks we call the trees or those large stones we call the mountains. Anything that gives to the sticks of our own furniture, or the stones of our own backyard, even a reflected or indirect divinity is good for the dignity of life; and this is often achieved by the dedication of similar and special things. At least we should desire to see the profane things transfigured by the sacred, rather than the sacred disenchanting by the profane; and it was a prophet walking on the walls of this mountain city, who said that in his vision all the bowls should be as the bowls before the altar, and on every pot in Jerusalem should be written Holy unto the Lord.

Anyhow, this intensity about trifles is not always understood. Several quite sympathetic Englishmen told me merely as a funny story (and God forbid that I should deny that it is funny) the fact of the Armenians or some such people having been allowed to suspend a string of lamps from a Greek pillar by means of a nail, and their subsequent alarm when their nail was washed by the owners of the pillar; a sort of symbol that their nail had finally fallen into the hands of the enemy. It strikes us as odd that a nail should be so valuable or so vivid to the imagination. And yet, to men so close to Calvary, even nails are not entirely commonplace.

All this, regarding a decent delay and respect for religion or even for superstition, is obvious and has already been observed. But before leaving it, we may note that the same argument cuts the other way; I mean that we should not insolently impose our own ideas of what is picturesque any more than our own ideas of what is practical. The aesthete is sometimes more of a vandal than the vandal. The proposed reconstructions of Jerusalem have been on the whole reasonable and sympathetic; but there is always a danger from the activities, I might almost say the antics, of a sort of antiquary who is more hasty than an anarchist. If the people of such places revolt against their own limitations, we must have a reasonable respect for their revolt, and we must not be impatient even with their impatience.

It is their town; they have to live in it, and not we. As they are the only judges of whether their antiquities are really authorities, so they are the only judges of whether their novelties are really necessities. As I pointed out more than once to many of my friends in Jerusalem, we should be very much annoyed if artistic visitors from Asia took similar liberties in London. It would be bad enough if they proposed to conduct excavations in Pimlico or Paddington, without much reference to the people who lived there; but it would be worse if they began to relieve them of the mere utilitarianism of Chelsea Bridge or Paddington Station. Suppose an eloquent Abyssinian Christian were to hold up his hand and stop the

motor-omnibuses from going down Fleet Street on the ground that the thoroughfare was sacred to the simpler locomotion of Dr. Johnson. We should be pleased at the African's appreciation of Johnson; but our pleasure would not be unmixed. Suppose when you or I are in the act of stepping into a taxi-cab, an excitable Coptic Christian were to leap from behind a lamp-post, and implore us to save the grand old growler or the cab called the gondola of London. I admit and enjoy the poetry of the hansom; I admit and enjoy the personality of the true cabman of the old four-wheeler, upon whose massive manhood descended something of the tremendous tradition of Tony Weller. But I am not so certain as I should like to be, that I should at that moment enjoy the personality of the Copt. For these reasons it seems really desirable, or at least defensible, to defer any premature reconstruction of disputed things, and to begin this book as a mere note-book or sketch-book of things as they are, or at any rate as they appear. It was in this irregular order, and in this illogical disproportion, that things did in fact appear to me, and it was some time before I saw any real generalisation that would reduce my impressions to order. I saw that the groups disagreed, and to some extent why they disagreed, long before I could seriously consider anything on which they would be likely to agree. I have therefore confined the first section of this book to a mere series of such impressions, and left to the last section a study of the problem and an attempt at the solution. Between these two I have inserted a sort of sketch of what seemed to me the determining historical events that make the problem what it is. Of these I will only say for the moment that, whether by a coincidence or for some deeper cause, I feel it myself to be a case of first thoughts being best; and that some further study of history served rather to solidify what had seemed merely a sort of vision. I might almost say that I fell in love with Jerusalem at first sight; and the final impression, right or wrong, served only to fix the fugitive fancy which had seen, in the snow on the city, the white crown of a woman of Bethlehem.

But there is another cause for my being content for the moment, with this mere chaos of contrasts. There is a very real reason for emphasising those contrasts, and for shunning the temptation to shut our eyes to them even considered as contrasts. It is necessary to insist that the contrasts are not easy to turn into combinations; that the red robes of Rome and the green scarves of Islam will not very easily fade into a dingy russet; that the gold of Byzantium and the brass of Babylon will require a hot furnace to melt them into any kind of amalgam. The reason for this is akin to what has already been said about Jerusalem as a knot of realities. It is especially a knot of popular realities. Although it is so small a place, or rather because it is so small a place, it is a domain and a dominion for the masses. Democracy is never quite democratic except when it is quite direct; and it is never quite direct except when it is quite small. So soon as a mob has grown large enough to have delegates it has grown large enough to have despots; indeed the despots are often much the more representative of the two. Now in a

place so small as Jerusalem, what we call the rank and file really counts. And it is generally true, in religions especially, that the real enthusiasm or even fanaticism is to be found in the rank and file. In all intense religions it is the poor who are more religious and the rich who are more irreligious. It is certainly so with the creeds and causes that come to a collision in Jerusalem. The great Jewish population throughout the world did hail Mr. Balfour's declaration with something almost of the tribal triumph they might have shown when the Persian conqueror broke the Babylonian bondage. It was rather the plutocratic princes of Jewry who long hung back and hesitated about Zionism. The mass of Mahometans really are ready to combine against the Zionists as they might have combined against the Crusades. It is rather the responsible Mahometan leaders who will naturally be found more moderate and diplomatic. This popular spirit may take a good or a bad form; and a mob may cry out many things, right and wrong. But a mob cries out "No Popery"; it does not cry out "Not so much Popery," still less "Only a moderate admixture of Popery." It shouts "Three cheers for Gladstone," it does not shout "A gradual and evolutionary social tendency towards some ideal similar to that of Gladstone." It would find it quite a difficult thing to shout; and it would find exactly the same difficulty with all the advanced formulae about nationalisation and internationalisation and class-conscious solidarity. No rabble could roar at the top of its voice the collectivist formula of "The nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange." The mob of Jerusalem is no exception to the rule, but rather an extreme example of it. The mob of Jerusalem has cried some remarkable things in its time; but they were not pedantic and they were not evasive. There was a day when it cried a single word; "Crucify." It was a thing to darken the sun and rend the veil of the temple; but there was no doubt about what it meant.

This is an age of minorities; of minorities powerful and predominant, partly through the power of wealth and partly through the idolatry of education. Their powers appeared in every crisis of the Great War, when a small group of pacifists and internationalists, a microscopic minority in every country, were yet constantly figuring as diplomatists and intermediaries and men on whose attitude great issues might depend. A man like Mr. Macdonald, not a workman nor a formal or real representative of workmen, was followed everywhere by the limelight; while the millions of workmen who worked and fought were out of focus and therefore looked like a fog. Just as such figures give a fictitious impression of unity between the crowds fighting for different flags and frontiers, so there are similar figures giving a fictitious unity to the crowds following different creeds. There are already Moslems who are Modernists; there have always been a ruling class of Jews who are Materialists. Perhaps it would be true to say about much of the philosophical controversy in Europe, that many Jews tend to be Materialists, but all tend to be Monists, though the best in the sense of being Monotheists. The worst are in a much grosser sense materialists, and have

motives very different from the dry idealism of men like Mr. Macdonald, which is probably sincere enough in its way. But with whatever motives, these intermediaries everywhere bridge the chasm between creeds as they do the chasm between countries. Everywhere they exalt the minority that is indifferent over the majority that is interested. Just as they would make an international congress out of the traitors of all nations, so they would make an ecumenical council out of the heretics of all religions.

Mild constitutionalists in our own country often discuss the possibility of a method of protecting the minority. If they will find any possible method of protecting the majority, they will have found something practically unknown to the modern world. The majority is always at a disadvantage; the majority is difficult to idealise, because it is difficult to imagine. The minority is generally idealised, sometimes by its servants, always by itself. But my sympathies are generally, I confess, with the impotent and even invisible majority. And my sympathies, when I go beyond the things I myself believe, are with all the poor Jews who do believe in Judaism and all the Mahometans who do believe in Mahometanism, not to mention so obscure a crowd as the Christians who do believe in Christianity. I feel I have more morally and even intellectually in common with these people, and even the religions of these people, than with the supercilious negations that make up the most part of what is called enlightenment. It is these masses whom we ought to consider everywhere; but it is especially these masses whom we must consider in Jerusalem. And the reason is in the reality I have described; that the place is like a Greek city or a medieval parish; it is sufficiently small and simple to be a democracy. This is not a university town full of philosophies; it is a Zion of the hundred sieges raging with religions; not a place where resolutions can be voted and amended, but a place where men can be crowned and crucified.

There is one small thing neglected in all our talk about self-determination; and that is determination. There is a great deal more difference than there is between most motions and amendments between the things for which a democracy will vote and the things on which a democracy is determined. You can take a vote among Jews and Christians and Moslems about whether lamp-posts should be painted green or portraits of politicians painted at all, and even their solid unanimity may be solid indifference. Most of what is called self-determination is like that; but there is no self-determination about it. The people are not determined. You cannot take a vote when the people are determined. You accept a vote, or something very much more obvious than a vote.

Now it may be that in Jerusalem there is not one people but rather three or four; but each is a real people, having its public opinion, its public policy, its flag and almost, as I have said, its frontier. It is not a question of persuading weak and

wavering voters, at a vague parliamentary election, to vote on the other side for a change, to choose afresh between two middle-class gentlemen, who look exactly alike and only differ on a question about which nobody knows or cares anything. It is a question of contrasts that will almost certainly remain contrasts, except under the flood of some spiritual conversion which cannot be foreseen and certainly cannot be enforced. We cannot enrol these people under our religion, because we have not got one. We can enrol them under our government, and if we are obliged to do that, the obvious essential is that like Roman rule before Christianity, or the English rule in India it should profess to be impartial if only by being irreligious. That is why I willingly set down for the moment only the first impressions of a stranger in a strange country. It is because our first safety is in seeing that it is a strange country; and our present preliminary peril that we may fall into the habit of thinking it a familiar country. It does no harm to put the facts in a fashion that seems disconnected; for the first fact of all is that they are disconnected. And the first danger of all is that we may allow some international nonsense or newspaper cant to imply that they are connected when they are not. It does no harm, at any rate to start with, to state the differences as irreconcilable. For the first and most unfamiliar fact the English have to learn in this strange land is that differences can be irreconcilable. And again the chief danger is that they may be persuaded that the wordy compromises of Western politics can reconcile them; that such abysses can be filled up with rubbish, or such chasms bridged with cobwebs. For we have created in England a sort of compromise which may up to a certain point be workable in England; though there are signs that even in England that point is approaching or is past. But in any case we could only do with that compromise as we could do without conscription; because an accident had made us insular and even provincial. So in India where we have treated the peoples as different from ourselves and from each other we have at least partly succeeded. So in Ireland, where we have tried to make them agree with us and each other, we have made one never-ending nightmare.

We can no more subject the world to the English compromise than to the English climate; and both are things of incalculable cloud and twilight. We have grown used to a habit of calling things by the wrong names and supporting them by the wrong arguments; and even doing the right thing for the wrong cause. We have party governments which consist of people who pretend to agree when they really disagree. We have party debates which consist of people who pretend to disagree when they really agree. We have whole parties named after things they no longer support, or things they would never dream of proposing. We have a mass of meaningless parliamentary ceremonials that are no longer even symbolic; the rule by which a parliamentarian possesses a constituency but not a surname; or the rule by which he becomes a minister in order to cease to be a member. All this would seem the most superstitious and idolatrous mummery to the simple

worshippers in the shrines of Jerusalem. You may think what they say fantastic, or what they mean fanatical, but they do not say one thing and mean another. The Greek may or may not have a right to say he is Orthodox, but he means that he is Orthodox; in a very different sense from that in which a man supporting a new Home Rule Bill means that he is Unionist. A Moslem would stop the sale of strong drink because he is a Moslem. But he is not quite so muddleheaded as to profess to stop it because he is a Liberal, and a particular supporter of the party of liberty. Even in England indeed it will generally be found that there is something more clear and rational about the terms of theology than those of politics and popular science. A man has at least a more logical notion of what he means when he calls himself an Anglo-Catholic than when he calls himself an Anglo-Saxon. But the old Jew with the drooping ringlets, shuffling in and out of the little black booths of Jerusalem, would not condescend to say he is a child of anything like the Anglo-Saxon race. He does not say he is a child of the Aramaico-Semitic race. He says he is a child of the Chosen Race, brought with thunder and with miracles and with mighty battles out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. In other words, he says something that means something, and something that he really means. One of the white Dominicans or brown Franciscans, from the great monasteries of the Holy City, may or may not be right in maintaining that a Papacy is necessary to the unity of Christendom. But he does not pass his life in proving that the Papacy is not a Papacy, as many of our liberal constitutionalists pass it in proving that the Monarchy is not a Monarchy. The Greek priests spend an hour on what seems to the sceptic mere meaningless formalities of the preparation of the Mass. But they would not spend a minute if they were themselves sceptics and thought them meaningless formalities, as most modern people do think of the formalities about Black Rod or the Bar of the House. They would be far less ritualistic than we are, if they cared as little for the Mass as we do for the Mace. Hence it is necessary for us to realise that these rude and simple worshippers, of all the different forms of worship, really would be bewildered by the ritual dances and elaborate ceremonial antics of John Bull, as by the superstitious forms and almost supernatural incantations of most of what we call plain English.

Now I take it we retain enough realism and common sense not to wish to transfer these complicated conventions and compromises to a land of such ruthless logic and such rending divisions. We may hope to reproduce our laws, we do not want to reproduce our legal fictions. We do not want to insist on everybody referring to Mr. Peter or Mr. Paul, as the honourable member for Waddy Walleh; because a retiring Parliamentarian has to become Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, we shall not insist on a retiring Palestinian official becoming Steward of the Moabitic Hundreds. But yet in much more subtle and more dangerous ways we are making that very mistake. We are transferring the fictions and even the hypocrisies of our own insular institutions from a place where they can be tolerated to a place

where they will be torn in pieces. I have confined myself hitherto to descriptions and not to criticisms, to stating the elements of the problem rather than attempting as yet to solve it; because I think the danger is rather that we shall underrate the difficulties than overdo the description; that we shall too easily deny the problem rather than that we shall too severely criticise the solution. But I would conclude this chapter with one practical criticism which seems to me to follow directly from all that is said here of our legal fictions and local anomalies. One thing at least has been done by our own Government, which is entirely according to the ritual or routine of our own Parliament. It is a parliament of Poo Bah, where anybody may be Lord High Everything Else. It is a parliament of Alice in Wonderland, where the name of a thing is different from what it is called, and even from what its name is called. It is death and destruction to send out these fictions into a foreign daylight, where they will be seen as things and not theories. And knowing all this, I cannot conceive the reason, or even the meaning, of sending out Sir Herbert Samuel as the British representative in Palestine.

I have heard it supported as an interesting experiment in Zionism. I have heard it denounced as a craven concession to Zionism. I think it is quite obviously a flat and violent contradiction to Zionism. Zionism, as I have always understood it, and indeed as I have always defended it, consists in maintaining that it would be better for all parties if Israel had the dignity and distinctive responsibility of a separate nation; and that this should be effected, if possible, or so far as possible, by giving the Jews a national home, preferably in Palestine. But where is Sir Herbert Samuel's national home? If it is in Palestine he cannot go there as a representative of England. If it is in England, he is so far a living proof that a Jew does not need a national home in Palestine. If there is any point in the Zionist argument at all, you have chosen precisely the wrong man and sent him to precisely the wrong country. You have asserted not the independence but the dependence of Israel, and yet you have ratified the worst insinuations about the dependence of Christendom. In reason you could not more strongly state that Palestine does not belong to the Jews, than by sending a Jew to claim it for the English. And yet in practice, of course, all the Anti-Semites will say he is claiming it for the Jews. You combine all possible disadvantages of all possible courses of action; you run all the risks of the hard Zionist adventure, while actually denying the high Zionist ideal. You make a Jew admit he is not a Jew but an Englishman; even while you allow all his enemies to revile him because he is not an Englishman but a Jew.

Now this sort of confusion or compromise is as local as a London fog. A London fog is tolerable in London, indeed I think it is very enjoyable in London. There is a beauty in that brown twilight as well as in the clear skies of the Orient and the South. But it is simply horribly dangerous for a Londoner to carry his cloud of fog about with him, in the crystalline air about the crags of Zion, or under the

terrible stars of the desert. There men see differences with almost unnatural clearness, and call things by savagely simple names. We in England may consider all sorts of aspects of a man like Sir Herbert Samuel; we may consider him as a Liberal, or a friend of the Fabian Socialists, or a cadet of one of the great financial houses, or a Member of Parliament who is supposed to represent certain miners in Yorkshire, or in twenty other more or less impersonal ways. But the people in Palestine will see only one aspect, and it will be a very personal aspect indeed. For the enthusiastic Moslems he will simply be a Jew; for the enthusiastic Zionists he will not really be a Zionist. For them he will always be the type of Jew who would be willing to remain in London, and who is ready to represent Westminster. Meanwhile, for the masses of Moslems and Christians, he will only be the aggravation in practice of the very thing of which he is the denial in theory. He will not mean that Palestine is not surrendered to the Jews, but only that England is. Now I have nothing as yet to do with the truth of that suggestion; I merely give it as an example of the violent and unexpected reactions we shall produce if we thrust our own unrealities amid the red-hot realities of the Near East; it is like pushing a snow man into a furnace. I have no objection to a snow man as a part of our own Christmas festivities; indeed, as has already been suggested, I think such festivities a great glory of English life. But I have seen the snow melting in the steep places about Jerusalem; and I know what a cataract it could feed.

As I considered these things a deepening disquiet possessed me, and my thoughts were far away from where I stood. After all, the English did not indulge in this doubling of parts and muddling of mistaken identity in their real and unique success in India. They may have been wrong or right but they were realistic about Moslems and Hindoos; they did not say Moslems were Hindoos, or send a highly intelligent Hindoo from Oxford to rule Moslems as an Englishman. They may not have cared for things like the ideal of Zionism; but they understood the common sense of Zionism, the desirability of distinguishing between entirely different things. But I remembered that of late their tact had often failed them even in their chief success in India; and that every hour brought worse and wilder news of their failure in Ireland. I remembered that in the Early Victorian time, against the advice only of the wisest and subtlest of the Early Victorians, we had tied ourselves to the triumphant progress of industrial capitalism; and that progress had now come to a crisis and what might well be a crash. And now, on the top of all, our fine patriotic tradition of foreign policy seemed to be doing these irrational and random things. A sort of fear took hold of me; and it was not for the Holy Land that I feared.

A cold wave went over me, like that unreasonable change and chill with which a man far from home fancies his house has been burned down, or that those dear to him are dead. For one horrible moment at least I wondered if we had come to

the end of compromise and comfortable nonsense, and if at last the successful stupidity of England would topple over like the successful wickedness of Prussia; because God is not mocked by the denial of reason any more than the denial of justice. And I fancied the very crowds of Jerusalem retorted on me words spoken to them long ago; that a great voice crying of old along the Via Dolorosa was rolled back on me like thunder from the mountains; and that all those alien faces are turned against us to-day, bidding us weep not for them, who have faith and clarity and a purpose, but weep for ourselves and for our children.