

another Dauphin were actually crowned at Rheims; if another Joan of Arc actually bore a miraculous banner before him; if mediaeval swords shook and blazed in every gauntlet; if the golden lilies glowed from every tapestry; if this were really proved to be the will of France and the purpose of Providence—such a scene would still be the lasting and final justification of the French Revolution.

For no such scene could conceivably have happened under Louis XVI.

THE SEPARATIST AND SACRED THINGS

In the very laudable and fascinating extensions of our interest in Asiatic arts or faiths, there are two incidental injustices which we tend nowadays to do to our own records and our own religion. The first is a tendency to talk as if certain things were not only present in the higher Orientals, but were peculiar to them. Thus our magazines will fall into a habit of wondering praise of Bushido, the Japanese chivalry, as if no Western knights had ever vowed noble vows, or as if no Eastern knights had ever broken them. Or again, our drawing-rooms will be full of the praises of Indian renunciation and Indian unworldliness, as if no Christians had been saints, or as if all Buddhists had been. But if the first injustice is to think of human virtues as peculiarly Eastern, the other injustice is a failure to appreciate what really is peculiarly

Eastern. It is too much taken for granted that the Eastern sort of idealism is certainly superior and convincing; whereas in truth it is only separate and peculiar. All that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in the East is rooted in Pantheism; but all that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in us is concerned with denying passionately that Pantheism is either the highest or the purest religion.

Thus, in turning over some excellent books recently written on the spirit of Indian or Chinese art and decoration, I found it quietly and curiously assumed that the artist must be at his best if he flows with the full stream of Nature; and identifies himself with all things; so that the stars are his sleepless eyes and the forests his far-flung arms. Now in this way of talking both the two injustices will be found. In so far as what is claimed is a strong sense of the divine in all things, the Eastern artists have no more monopoly of it than they have of hunger and thirst.

I have no doubt that the painters and poets of the Far East do exhibit this; but I rebel at being asked to admit that we must go to the Far East to find it. Traces of such sentiments can be found, I fancy, even in other painters and poets. I do not question that the poet Wo Wo (that ornament of the eighth dynasty) may have written the words: "Even the most undignified vegetable is for this person capable of producing meditations not to be exhibited by much weeping." But, I do not therefore admit that a Western gentleman named Wordsworth (who made a somewhat similar remark) had plagiarised from Wo Wo, or was a mere

Occidental fable and travesty of that celebrated figure. I do not deny that Tinishona wrote that exquisite example of the short Japanese poem entitled "Honourable Chrysanthemum in Honourable Hole in Wall." But I do not therefore admit that Tennyson's little verse about the flower in the cranny was not original and even sincere.

It is recorded (for all I know) of the philanthropic Emperor Bo, that when engaged in cutting his garden lawn with a mower made of alabaster and chrysoberyl, he chanced to cut down a small flower; whereupon, being much affected, he commanded his wise men immediately to take down upon tablets of ivory the lines beginning: "Small and unobtrusive blossom with ruby extremities." But this incident, touching as it is, does not shake my belief in the incident of Robert Burns and the daisy; and I am left with an impression that poets are pretty much the same everywhere in their poetry—and in their prose.

I have tried to convey my sympathy and admiration for Eastern art and its admirers, and if I have not conveyed them I must give it up and go on to more general considerations. I therefore proceed to say—with the utmost respect, that it is Cheek, a rarefied and etherealised form of Cheek, for this school to speak in this way about the mother that bore them, the great civilisation of the West. The West also has its magic landscapes, only through our incurable materialism they look like landscapes as well as like magic. The West also has its symbolic figures, only they look like men as well as symbols. It will be answered (and most justly) that Oriental art ought to be free to follow its own

instinct and tradition; that its artists are concerned to suggest one thing and our artists another; that both should be admired in their difference. Profoundly true; but what is the difference? It is certainly not as the Orientalisers assert, that we must go to the Far East for a sympathetic and transcendental interpretation of Nature. We have paid a long enough toll of mystics and even of madmen to be quit of that disability.

Yet there is a difference, and it is just what I suggested. The Eastern mysticism is an ecstasy of unity; the Christian mysticism is an ecstasy of creation, that is of separation and mutual surprise. The latter says, like St. Francis, "My brother fire and my sister water"; the former says, "Myself fire and myself water." Whether you call the Eastern attitude an extension of oneself into everything or a contraction of oneself into nothing is a matter of metaphysical definition. The effect is the same, an effect which lives and throbs throughout all the exquisite arts of the East. This effect is the Sing called rhythm, a pulsation of pattern, or of ritual, or of colours, or of cosmic theory, but always suggesting the unification of the individual with the world. But there is quite another kind of sympathy the sympathy with a thing because it is different. No one will say that Rembrandt did not sympathise with an old woman; but no one will say that Rembrandt painted like an old woman. No one will say that Reynolds did not appreciate children; but no one will say he did it childishly. The supreme instance of this divine division is sex, and that explains (what I could never understand in my youth) why Christendom called the soul the bride of

God. For real love is an intense realisation of the "separateness" of all our souls. The most heroic and human love-poetry of the world is never mere passion; precisely because mere passion really is a melting back into Nature, a meeting of the waters. And water is plunging and powerful; but it is only powerful downhill. The high and human love-poetry is all about division rather than identity; and in the great love-poems even the man as he embraces the woman sees her, in the same instant, afar off; a virgin and a stranger.

For the first injustice, of which we have spoken, still recurs; and if we grant that the East has a right to its difference, it is not realised in what we differ. That nursery tale from nowhere about St. George and the Dragon really expresses best the relation between the West and the East. There were many other differences, calculated to arrest even the superficial eye, between a saint and a dragon. But the essential difference was simply this: that the Dragon did want to eat St. George; whereas St. George would have felt a strong distaste for eating the Dragon. In most of the stories he killed the Dragon. In many of the stories he not only spared, but baptised it. But in neither case did the Christian have any appetite for cold dragon. The Dragon, however, really has an appetite for cold Christian—and especially for cold Christianity. This blind intention to absorb, to change the shape of everything and digest it in the darkness of a dragon's stomach; this is what is really meant by the Pantheism and Cosmic Unity of the East. The Cosmos as such is cannibal; as old Time ate his children. The Eastern saints were saints because they wanted to be swallowed up. The Western

saint, like St. George, was sainted by the Western Church precisely because he refused to be swallowed. The same process of thought that has prevented nationalities disappearing in Christendom has prevented the complete appearance of Pantheism. All Christian men instinctively resist the idea of being absorbed into an Empire; an Austrian, a Spanish, a British, or a Turkish Empire. But there is one empire, much larger and much more tyrannical, which free men will resist with even stronger passion. The free man violently resists being absorbed into the empire which is called the Universe. He demands Home Rule for his nationality, but still more Home Rule for his home. Most of all he demands Home Rule for himself. He claims the right to be saved, in spite of Moslem fatalism. He claims the right to be damned in spite of theosophical optimism. He refuses to be the Cosmos; because he refuses to forget it.

THE MUMMER

The night before Christmas Eve I heard a burst of musical voices so close that they might as well have been inside the house instead of just outside; so I asked them inside, hoping that they might then seem farther away. Then I realised that they were the Christmas Mummers, who come every year in country parts to enact the rather rigid fragments of the old Christmas play of St. George, the Turkish Knight, and the Very Venal Doctor. I will not describe it; it is indescribable; but I will describe my parallel sentiments as it passed.

One could see something of that half-failure that haunts our artistic revivals of mediaeval dances, carols, or Bethlehem Plays. There are elements in all that has come to us from the more morally simple society of the Middle Ages: elements which moderns, even when they are mediaevalists, find it hard to understand and harder to imitate. The first is the primary idea of Mummery itself. If you will observe a child just able to walk, you will see that his first idea is not to dress up as anybody—but to dress up. Afterwards, of course, the idea of being the King or Uncle William will leap to his lips. But it is generally suggested by the hat he has already let fall over his nose, from far deeper motives. Tommy does not assume the hat primarily because it is Uncle William's hat, but because it is not Tommy's hat. It is a ritual investiture; and is akin to those Gorgon masks that stiffened the dances of Greece or those towering mitres that came from the mysteries of Persia. For the essence of such ritual is a profound paradox: the

concealment of the personality combined with the exaggeration of the person. The man performing a rite seeks to be at once invisible and conspicuous. It is part of that divine madness which all other creatures wonder at in Man, that he alone parades this pomp of obliteration and anonymity. Man is not, perhaps, the only creature who dresses himself, but he is the only creature who disguises himself. Beasts and birds do indeed take the colours of their environment; but that is not in order to be watched, but in order not to be watched; it is not the formalism of rejoicing, but the formlessness of fear. It is not so with men, whose nature is the unnatural. Ancient Britons did not stain themselves blue because they lived in blue forests; nor did Georgian beaux and belles powder their hair to match an Arctic landscape; the Britons were not dressing up as kingfishers nor the beaux pretending to be polar bears. Nay, even when modern ladies paint their faces a bright mauve, it is doubted by some naturalists whether they do it with the idea of escaping notice. So merry-makers (or Mummers) adopt their costume to heighten and exaggerate their own bodily presence and identity; not to sink it, primarily speaking, in another identity. It is not Acting—that comparatively low profession-comparatively I mean. It is Mummery; and, as Mr. Kensit would truly say, all elaborate religious ritual is Mummery. That is, it is the noble conception of making Man something other and more than himself when he stands at the limit of human things. It is only careful faddists and feeble German philosophers who want to wear no clothes; and be "natural" in their Dionysian revels. Natural men, really vigorous and exultant men, want to wear more and more clothes when they are revelling. They want worlds of waistcoats and

forests of trousers and pagodas of tall hats toppling up to the stars.

Thus it is with the lingering Mummers at Christmas in the country. If our more refined revivers of Miracle Plays or Morrice Dances tried to reconstruct the old Mummers' Play of St. George and the Turkish Knight (I do not know why they do not) they would think at once of picturesque and appropriate dresses. St. George's panoply would be pictured from the best books of armour and blazonry: the Turkish Knight's arms and ornaments would be traced from the finest Saracenic arabesques. When my garden door opened on Christmas Eve and St. George of England entered, the appearance of that champion was slightly different. His face was energetically blacked all over with soot, above which he wore an aged and very tall top hat; he wore his shirt outside his coat like a surplice, and he flourished a thick umbrella. Now do not, I beg you, talk about "ignorance"; or suppose that the Mummer in question (he is a very pleasant Ratcatcher, with a tenor voice) did this because he knew no better. Try to realise that even a Ratcatcher knows St. George of England was not black, and did not kill the Dragon with an umbrella. The Rat-catcher is not under this delusion; any more than Paul Veronese thought that very good men have luminous rings round their heads; any more than the Pope thinks that Christ washed the feet of the twelve in a Cathedral; any more than the Duke of Norfolk thinks the lions on a tabard are like the lions at the Zoo. These things are denaturalised because they are symbols; because the extraordinary occasion must hide or even disfigure the ordinary people. Black faces were to mediaeval mummeries what carved masks were to Greek plays: it was called being

"vizarded." My Rat-catcher is not sufficiently arrogant to suppose for a moment that he looks like St. George. But he is sufficiently humble to be convinced that if he looks as little like himself as he can, he will be on the right road.

This is the soul of Mumming; the ostentatious secrecy of men in disguise. There are, of course, other mediaeval elements in it which are also difficult to explain to the fastidious mediaevalists of to-day. There is, for instance, a certain output of violence into the void. It can best be defined as a raging thirst to knock men down without the faintest desire to hurt them. All the rhymes with the old ring have the trick of turning on everything in which the rhymsters most sincerely believed, merely for the pleasure of blowing off steam in startling yet careless phrases. When Tennyson says that King Arthur "drew all the petty pryncedoms under him," and "made a realm and ruled," his grave Royalism is quite modern. Many mediaevals, outside the mediaeval republics, believed in monarchy as solemnly as Tennyson. But that older verse

When good King Arthur ruled this land
He was a goodly King—
He stole three pecks of barley-meal
To make a bag-pudding.

is far more Arthurian than anything in *The Idylls of the King*. There are other elements; especially that sacred thing that can perhaps be called

Anachronism. All that to us is Anachronism was to mediaevals merely Eternity. But the main excellence of the Mumming Play lies still, I think, in its uproarious secrecy. If we cannot hide our hearts in healthy darkness, at least we can hide our faces in healthy blacking. If you cannot escape like a philosopher into a forest, at least you can carry the forest with you, like a Jack-in-the-Green. It is well to walk under universal ensigns; and there is an old tale of a tyrant to whom a walking forest was the witness of doom. That, indeed, is the very intensity of the notion: a masked man is ominous; but who shall face a mob of masks?