

CHAPTER IV

TREES AND BABIES AND PAPAS AND MAMAS

Oh, damn the miserable baby with its complicated ping-pong table of an unconscious. I'm sure, dear reader, you'd rather have to listen to the brat howling in its crib than to me expounding its plexuses. As for "mixing those babies up," I'd mix him up like a shot if I'd anything to mix him with. Unfortunately he's my own anatomical specimen of a pickled rabbit, so there's nothing to be done with the bits.

But he gets on my nerves. I come out solemnly with a pencil and an exercise book, and take my seat in all gravity at the foot of a large fir-tree, and wait for thoughts to come, gnawing like a squirrel on a nut. But the nut's hollow.

I think there are too many trees. They seem to crowd round and stare at me, and I feel as if they nudged one another when I'm not looking. I can feel them standing there. And they won't let me get on about the baby this morning. Just their cussedness. I felt they encouraged me like a harem of wonderful silent wives, yesterday.

It is half rainy too--the wood so damp and still and so secret, in the remote morning air. Morning, with rain in the sky, and the forest subtly brooding, and me feeling no bigger than a pea-bug between the

roots of my fir. The trees seem so much bigger than me, so much stronger in life, prowling silent around. I seem to feel them moving and thinking and prowling, and they overwhelm me. Ah, well, the only thing is to give way to them.

It is the edge of the Black Forest--sometimes the Rhine far off, on its Rhine plain, like a bit of magnesium ribbon. But not to-day. To-day only trees, and leaves, and vegetable presences. Huge straight fir-trees, and big beech-trees sending rivers of roots into the ground. And cuckoos, like noise falling in drops off the leaves. And me, a fool, sitting by a grassy wood-road with a pencil and a book, hoping to write more about that baby.

Never mind. I listen again for noises, and I smell the damp moss. The looming trees, so straight. And I listen for their silence. Big, tall-bodied trees, with a certain magnificent cruelty about them. Or barbarity. I don't know why I should say cruelty. Their magnificent, strong, round bodies! It almost seems I can hear the slow, powerful sap drumming in their trunks. Great full-blooded trees, with strange tree-blood in them, soundlessly drumming.

Trees that have no hands and faces, no eyes. Yet the powerful sap-scented blood roaring up the great columns. A vast individual life, and an overshadowing will. The will of a tree. Something that frightens you.

Suppose you want to look a tree in the face? You can't. It hasn't got a face. You look at the strong body of a trunk: you look above you into the matted body-hair of twigs and boughs: you see the soft green tips. But there are no eyes to look into, you can't meet its gaze. You keep on looking at it in part and parcel.

It's no good looking at a tree, to know it. The only thing is to sit among the roots and nestle against its strong trunk, and not bother. That's how I write all about these planes and plexuses, between the toes of a tree, forgetting myself against the great ankle of the trunk. And then, as a rule, as a squirrel is stroked into its wickedness by the faceless magic of a tree, so am I usually stroked into forgetfulness, and into scribbling this book. My tree-book, really.

I come so well to understand tree-worship. All the old Aryans worshiped the tree. My ancestors. The tree of life. The tree of knowledge. Well, one is bound to sprout out some time or other, chip of the old Aryan block. I can so well understand tree-worship. And fear the deepest motive.

Naturally. This marvelous vast individual without a face, without lips or eyes or heart. This towering creature that never had a face. Here am I between his toes like a pea-bug, and him noiselessly over-reaching me. And I feel his great blood-jet surging. And he has no eyes. But he turns two ways. He thrusts himself tremendously down

to the middle earth, where dead men sink in darkness, in the damp, dense under-soil, and he turns himself about in high air. Whereas we have eyes on one side of our head only, and only grow upwards.

Plunging himself down into the black humus, with a root's gushing zest, where we can only rot dead; and his tips in high air, where we can only look up to. So vast and powerful and exultant in his two directions. And all the time, he has no face, no thought: only a huge, savage, thoughtless soul. Where does he even keep his soul?--Where does anybody?

A huge, plunging, tremendous soul. I would like to be a tree for a while. The great lust of roots. Root-lust. And no mind at all. He towers, and I sit and feel safe. I like to feel him towering round me. I used to be afraid. I used to fear their lust, their rushing black lust. But now I like it, I worship it. I always felt them huge primeval enemies. But now they are my only shelter and strength. I lose myself among the trees. I am so glad to be with them in their silent, intent passion, and their great lust. They feed my soul. But I can understand that Jesus was crucified on a tree.

And I can so well understand the Romans, their terror of the bristling Hercynian wood. Yet when you look from a height down upon the rolling of the forest--this Black Forest--it is as suave as a rolling, oily sea. Inside only, it bristles horrific. And it terrified the Romans.

The Romans! They too seem very near. Nearer than Hindenburg or Foch or even Napoleon. When I look across the Rhine plain, it is Rome, and the legionaries of the Rhine that my soul notices. It must have been wonderful to come from South Italy to the shores of this sea-like forest: this dark, moist forest, with its enormously powerful intensity of tree life. Now I know, coming myself from rock-dry Sicily, open to the day.

The Romans and the Greeks found everything human. Everything had a face, and a human voice. Men spoke, and their fountains piped an answer.

But when the legions crossed the Rhine they found a vast impenetrable life which had no voice. They met the faceless silence of the Black Forest. This huge, huge wood did not answer when they called. Its silence was too crude and massive. And the soldiers shrank: shrank before the trees that had no faces, and no answer. A vast array of non-human life, darkly self-sufficient, and bristling with indomitable energy. The Hercynian wood, not to be fathomed. The enormous power of these collective trees, stronger in their somber life even than Rome.

No wonder the soldiers were terrified. No wonder they thrilled with horror when, deep in the woods, they found the skulls and trophies of their dead comrades upon the trees. The trees had devoured them: silently, in mouthfuls, and left the white bones. Bones of the mindful Romans--and savage, preconscious trees, indomitable. The true German

has something of the sap of trees in his veins even now: and a sort of pristine savageness, like trees, helpless, but most powerful, under all his mentality. He is a tree-soul, and his gods are not human. His instinct still is to nail skulls and trophies to the sacred tree, deep in the forest. The tree of life and death, tree of good and evil, tree of abstraction and of immense, mindless life; tree of everything except the spirit, spirituality.

But after bone-dry Sicily, and after the gibbering of myriad people all rattling their personalities, I am glad to be with the profound indifference of faceless trees. Their rudimentariness cannot know why we care for the things we care for. They have no faces, no minds and bowels: only deep, lustful roots stretching in earth, and vast, lissome life in air, and primeval individuality. You can sacrifice the whole of your spirituality on their altar still. You can nail your skull on their limbs. They have no skulls, no minds nor faces, they can't make eyes of love at you. Their vast life dispenses with all this. But they will live you down.

The normal life of one of these big trees is about a hundred years. So the Herr Baron told me.

One of the few places that my soul will haunt, when I am dead, will be this. Among the trees here near Ebersteinburg, where I have been alone and written this book. I can't leave these trees. They have taken some of my soul.

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Excuse my digression, gentle reader. At first I left it out, thinking we might not see wood for trees. But it doesn't much matter what we see. It's nice just to look round, anywhere.

So there are two planes of being and consciousness and two modes of relation and of function. We will call the lower plane the sensual, the upper the spiritual. The terms may be unwise, but we can think of no other.

Please read that again, dear reader; you'll be a bit dazzled, coming out of the wood.

It is obvious that from the time a child is born, or conceived, it has a permanent relation with the outer universe, relation in the two modes, not one mode only. There are two ways of love, two ways of activity and independence. And there needs some sort of equilibrium between the two modes. In the same way, in physical function there is eating and drinking, and excrementation, on the lower plane and respiration and heartbeat on the upper plane.

Now the equilibrium to be established is fourfold. There must be a true equilibrium between what we eat and what we reject again by excretion: likewise between the systole and diastole of the heart,

the inspiration and expiration of our breathing. Suffice to say the equilibrium is never quite perfect. Most people are either too fat or too thin, too hot or too cold, too slow or too quick. There is no such thing as an actual norm, a living norm. A norm is merely an abstraction, not a reality.

The same on the psychical plane. We either love too much, or impose our will too much, are too spiritual or too sensual. There is not and cannot be any actual norm of human conduct. All depends, first, on the unknown inward need within the very nuclear centers of the individual himself, and secondly on his circumstance. Some men must be too spiritual, some must be too sensual. Some must be too sympathetic, and some must be too proud. We have no desire to say what men ought to be. We only wish to say there are all kinds of ways of being, and there is no such thing as human perfection. No man can be anything more than just himself, in genuine living relation to all his surroundings. But that which I am, when I am myself, will certainly be anathema to those who hate individual integrity, and want to swarm. And that which I, being myself, am in myself, may make the hair bristle with rage on a man who is also himself, but very different from me. Then let it bristle. And if mine bristle back again, then let us, if we must, fly at one another like two enraged men. It is how it should be. We've got to learn to live from the center of our own responsibility only, and let other people do the same.

To return to the child, however, and his development on his two planes

of consciousness. There is all the time a direct dynamic connection between child and mother, child and father also, from the start. It is a connection on two planes, the upper and lower. From the lower sympathetic center the profound intake of love or vibration from the living co-respondent outside. From the upper sympathetic center the outgoing of devotion and the passionate vibration of given love, given attention. The two sympathetic centers are always, or should always be, counterbalanced by their corresponding voluntary centers. From the great voluntary ganglion of the lower plane, the child is self-willed, independent, and masterful.

In the activity of this center a boy refuses to be kissed and pawed about, maintaining his proud independence like a little wild animal. From this center he likes to command and to receive obedience. From this center likewise he may be destructive and defiant and reckless, determined to have his own way at any cost.

From this center, too, he learns to use his legs. The motion of walking, like the motion of breathing, is twofold. First, a sympathetic cleaving to the earth with the foot: then the voluntary rejection, the spurning, the kicking away, the exultance in power and freedom.

From the upper voluntary center the child watches persistently, wilfully, for the attention of the mother: to be taken notice of, to be caressed, in short to exist in and through the mother's attention.

From this center, too, he coldly refuses to notice the mother, when she insists on too much attention. This cold refusal is different from the active rejection of the lower center. It is passive, but cold and negative. It is the great force of our day. From the ganglion of the shoulders, also, the child breathes and his heart beats. From the same center he learns the first use of his arms. In the gesture of sympathy, from the upper plane, he embraces his mother with his arms. In the motion of curiosity, or interest, which derives from the thoracic ganglion, he spreads his fingers, touches, feels, explores. In the motion of rejection he drops an undesired object deliberately out of sight.

And then, when the four centers of what we call the first field of consciousness are fully active, then it is that the eyes begin to gather their sight, the mouth to speak, the ears to awake to their intelligent hearings; all as a result of the great fourfold activity of the first dynamic field of consciousness. And then also, as a result, the mind awakens to its impressions and to its incipient control. For at first the control is non-mental, even non-cerebral. The brain acts only as a sort of switchboard.

The business of the father, in all this incipient child-development, is to stand outside as a final authority and make the necessary adjustments. Where there is too much sympathy, then the great voluntary centers of the spine are weak, the child tends to be delicate. Then the father by instinct supplies the roughness, the

sternness which stiffens in the child the centers of resistance and independence, right from the very earliest days. Often, for a mere infant, it is the father's fierce or stern presence, the vibration of his voice, which starts the frictional and independent activity of the great voluntary ganglion and gives the first impulse to the independence which later on is life itself.

But on the other hand, the father, from his distance, supports, protects, nourishes his child, and it is ultimately on the remote but powerful father-love that the infant rests, in a rest which is beyond mother-love. For in the male the dominant centers are naturally the volitional centers, centers of responsibility, authority, and care.

It is the father's business, again, to maintain some sort of equilibrium between the two modes of love in his infant. A mother may wish to bring up her child from the lovely upper centers only, from the centers of the breast, in the mode of what we call pure or spiritual love. Then the child will be all gentle, all tender and tender-radiant, always enfolded with gentleness and forbearance, always shielded from grossness or pain or roughness. Now the father's instinct is to be rough and crude, good-naturedly brutal with the child, calling the deeper centers, the sensual centers, into play. "What do you want? My watch? Well, you can't have it, do you see, because it's mine." Not a lot of explanations of the "You see, darling." No such nonsense.--Or if a child wails unnecessarily for its mother, the father must be the check. "Stop your noise, you little

brat! What ails you, you whiner?" And if children be too sensitive, too sympathetic, then it will do the child no harm if the father occasionally throws the cat out of the window, or kicks the dog, or raises a storm in the house. Storms there must be. And if the child is old enough and robust enough, it can occasionally have its bottom soundly spanked--by the father, if the mother refuses to perform that most necessary duty. For a child's bottom is made occasionally to be spanked. The vibration of the spanking acts direct upon the spinal nerve-system, there is a direct reciprocity and reaction, the spanker transfers his wrath to the great will-centers in the child, and these will-centers react intensely, are vivified and educated.

On the other hand, given a mother who is too generally hard or indifferent, then it rests with the father to provide the delicate sympathy and the refined discipline. Then the father must show the tender sensitiveness of the upper mode. The sad thing to-day is that so few mothers have any deep bowels of love--or even the breast of love. What they have is the benevolent spiritual will, the will of the upper self. But the will is not love. And benevolence in a parent is a poison. It is bullying. In these circumstances the father must give delicate adjustment, and, above all, some warm, native love from the richer sensual self.

The question of corporal punishment is important. It is no use roughly smacking a shrinking, sensitive child. And yet, if a child is too shrinking, too sensitive, it may do it a world of good cheerfully to

spank its posterior. Not brutally, not cruelly, but with real sound, good-natured exasperation. And let the adult take the full responsibility, half humorously, without apology or explanation. Let us avoid self-justification at all costs. Real corporal punishments apply to the sensual plane. The refined punishments of the spiritual mode are usually much more indecent and dangerous than a good smack. The pained but resigned disapprobation of a mother is usually a very bad thing, much worse than the father's shouts of rage. And sendings to bed, and no dessert for a week, and so on, are crueller and meaner than a bang on the head. When a parent gives his boy a beating, there is a living passionate interchange. But in these refined punishments, the parent suffers nothing and the child is deadened. The bullying of the refined, benevolent spiritual will is simply vitriol to the soul. Yet parents administer it with all the righteousness of virtue and good intention, sparing themselves perfectly.

The point is here. If a child makes you so that you really want to spank it soundly, then soundly spank the brat. But know all the time what you are doing, and always be responsible for your anger. Never be ashamed of it, and never surpass it. The flashing interchange of anger between parent and child is part of the responsible relationship, necessary to growth. Again, if a child offends you deeply, so that you really can't communicate with it any more, then, while the hurt is deep, switch off your connection from the child, cut off your correspondence, your vital communion, and be alone. But never persist in such a state beyond the time when your deep hurt dies down.

The only rule is, do what you really, impulsively, wish to do. But always act on your own responsibility sincerely. And have the courage of your own strong emotion. They enrich the child's soul.

For a child's primary education depends almost entirely on its relation to its parents, brothers, and sisters. Between mother and child, father and child, the law is this: I, the mother, am myself alone: the child is itself alone. But there exists between us a vital dynamic relation, for which I, being the conscious one, am basically responsible. So, as far as possible, there must be in me no departure from myself, lest I injure the preconscious dynamic relation. I must absolutely act according to my own true spontaneous feeling. But, moreover, I must also have wisdom for myself and for my child. Always, always the deep wisdom of responsibility. And always a brave responsibility for the soul's own spontaneity. Love--what is love? We'd better get a new idea. Love is, in all, generous impulse--even a good spanking. But wisdom is something else, a deep collectedness in the soul, a deep abiding by my own integral being, which makes me responsible, not for the child, but for my certain duties towards the child, and for maintaining the dynamic flow between the child and myself as genuine as possible: that is to say, not perverted by ideals or by my will.

Most fatal, most hateful of all things is bullying. But what is bullying? It is a desire to superimpose my own will upon another person. Sensual bullying of course is fairly easily detected. What is

more dangerous is ideal bullying. Bullying people into what is ideally good for them. I embrace for example an ideal, and I seek to enact this ideal in the person of another. This is ideal bullying. A mother says that life should be all love, all delicacy and forbearance and gentleness. And she proceeds to spin a hateful sticky web of permanent forbearance, gentleness, hushedness around her naturally passionate and hasty child. This so foils the child as to make him half imbecile or criminal. I may have ideals if I like--even of love and forbearance and meekness. But I have no right to ask another to have these ideals. And to impose any ideals upon a child as it grows is almost criminal. It results in impoverishment and distortion and subsequent deficiency. In our day, most dangerous is the love and benevolence ideal. It results in neurasthenia, which is largely a dislocation or collapse of the great voluntary centers, a derangement of the will. It is in us an insistence upon the one life-mode only, the spiritual mode. It is a suppression of the great lower centers, and a living a sort of half-life, almost entirely from the upper centers. Thence, since we live terribly and exhaustively from the upper centers, there is a tendency now towards pthisis and neurasthenia of the heart. The great sympathetic center of the breast becomes exhausted, the lungs, burnt by the over-insistence of one way of life, become diseased, the heart, strained in one mode of dilation, retaliates. The powerful lower centers are no longer fully active, particularly the great lumbar ganglion, which is the clue to our sensual passionate pride and independence, this ganglion is atrophied by suppression. And it is this ganglion which holds the spine erect. So, weak-chested,

round-shouldered, we stoop hollowly forward on ourselves. It is the result of the all-famous love and charity ideal, an ideal now quite dead in its sympathetic activity, but still fixed and determined in its voluntary action.

Let us beware and beware, and beware of having a high ideal for ourselves. But particularly let us beware of having an ideal for our children. So doing, we damn them. All we can have is wisdom. And wisdom is not a theory, it is a state of soul. It is the state wherein we know our wholeness and the complicate, manifold nature of our being. It is the state wherein we know the great relations which exist between us and our near ones. And it is the state which accepts full responsibility, first for our own souls, and then for the living dynamic relations wherein we have our being. It is no use expecting the other person to know. Each must know for himself. But nowadays men have even a stunt of pretending that children and idiots alone know best. This is a pretty piece of sophistry, and criminal cowardice, trying to dodge the life-responsibility which no man or woman can dodge without disaster.

The only thing is to be direct. If a child has to swallow castor-oil, then say: "Child, you've got to swallow this castor-oil. It is necessary for your inside. I say so because it is true. So open your mouth." Why try coaxing and logic and tricks with children? Children are more sagacious than we are. They twig soon enough if there is a flaw in our own intention and our own true spontaneity. And they play

up to our bit of falsity till there is hell to pay.

"You love mother, don't you, dear?"--Just a piece of indecent trickery of the spiritual will. The great emotions like love are unspoken. Speaking them is a sign of an indecent bullying will.

"Poor pussy! You must love poor pussy!"

What cant! What sickening cant! An appeal to love based on false pity. That's the way to inculcate a filthy pharisaic conceit into a child.--If the child ill-treats the cat, say:

"Stop mauling that cat. It's got its own life to live, so let it live it." Then if the brat persists, give tit for tat.

"What, you pull the cat's tail! Then I'll pull your nose, to see how you like it." And give his nose a proper hard pinch.

Children must pull the cat's tail a little. Children must steal the sugar sometimes. They must occasionally spoil just the things one doesn't want them to spoil. And they must occasionally tell stories--tell a lie. Circumstances and life are such that we must all sometimes tell a lie: just as we wear trousers, because we don't choose that everybody shall see our nakedness. Morality is a delicate act of adjustment on the soul's part, not a rule or a prescription. Beyond a certain point the child shall not pull the cat's tail, or

steal the sugar, or spoil the furniture, or tell lies. But I'm afraid you can't fix this certain soul's humor. And so it must. If at a sudden point you fly into a temper and thoroughly beat the boy for hardly touching the cat--well, that's life. All you've got to say to him is: "There, that'll serve you for all the times you have pulled her tail and hurt her." And he will feel outraged, and so will you. But what does it matter? Children have an infinite understanding of the soul's passionate variabilities, and forgive even a real injustice, if it was spontaneous and not intentional. They know we aren't perfect. What they don't forgive us is if we pretend we are: or if we bully.