of touch, who while cutting the corns of some famous man speaks of the coming abolition of all privilege: 'genius too is a privilege we shall abolish'.

In the world that Balzac has created it is the intensity of the struggle—an intensity beyond that of real life—which makes his common soldiers, his valets, his commercial travellers, all men of genius; and I doubt if law had for him any purpose but that of preserving the wine when the grapes had been trodden, and seeing to it that the treads know their treads. 'The passionate-minded', says an Indian saying, 'love bitter food.'

When I close my eyes and pronounce the word 'Christianity' and await its unconscious suggestion, I do not see Christ crucified, or the Good Shepherd from the catacombs, but a father and mother and their children, a picture by Leonardo da Vinci most often. While Europe had still Christianity for its chief preoccupation men painted little but that scene. Yet what Christian economists said of the family seemed to me conventional and sentimental till I had met with Balzac. Now I understand them. Soloviev writes that every industrious man has a right to certain necessities and decencies of life; and I think he would not object to Aristotle's proposed limitation of fortunes, however much he might object to us, who are jealous and still lack philosophy, fixing the limit. But that the community should do more for a man than secure him these necessities and decencies, he denounces for devil's

work. The desire of the father to see his child better off than himself, socially, financially, morally, according to his nature, is, he claims, the main cause of all social progress, of all improvements in civilisation. Yet all the while his attention is too much fixed upon the direct conscious effects—he sees the world as child, father, grandfather, and all virtues as derivative from our veneration for the past we inherit from, or our compassion for the future that inherits from us—and not enough upon its indirect unconscious effects, upon the creation of social species each bound together by its emotional quality.

Yesterday I came upon a little wayside well planted about with roses, a sight I had not seen before in Ireland, and it brought to mind all that planting of flowers, all that cleanliness and neatness that the countryman's ownership of his farm has brought with it in Ireland, and also the curious doctrine of Soloviev, that no family has the full condition of perfection that cannot share in what he calls 'the spiritualisation of the soil'—a doctrine derivable, perhaps, from the truth that all emotional unities find their definition through the image, unlike those of the intellect, which are defined in the logical process. However, Soloviev is a dry ascetic half-man, and may see nothing beyond a round of the more obvious virtues approved by his Greek Church. I understand by 'soil' all the matter in which the soul works, the walls of our houses, the serving-up of our meals, the chairs and tables of our rooms, and the instincts of our bodies; and by 'family' all institutions, classes, orders, nations, that
arise out of the family and are held together, not by a logical process, but by historical association, and possess a personality for whose lack men are ‘sheep without a shepherd when the snow shuts out the sun’.

Men who did not share their privileges have died for and lived for all these, and judged them little. Certainly no simple age has denied to monk or nun their leisure, nor thought that the monk’s lamp and the nun’s prayer, though from the first came truth and from the second denial of self, were not recompense enough, nor has any accomplished age begrudged the expensive leisure of women, knowing that they gave back more than they received in giving courtesy.

If, as these writers affirm, the family is the unit of social life, and the origin of civilisation which but exists to preserve it, and almost the sole cause of progress, it seems more natural than it did before that its ecstatic moment, the sexual choice of man and woman, should be the greater part of all poetry. A single wrong choice may destroy a family, dissipating its tradition or its biological force, and the great sculptors, painters, and poets are there that instinct may find its lamp. When a young man imagines the woman of his hope, shaped for all the uses of life, mother and mistress and yet fitted to carry a bow in the wilderness, how little of it all is mere instinct, how much has come from chisel and brush. Educationalists and statesmen, servants of the logical process, do their worst, but they are not the matchmakers who bring together the fathers and mothers of the generations nor shall the type they plan survive.

VII

When we compare any modern writer, except Balzac, with the writers of an older world, with, let us say, Dante, Villon, Shakespeare, Cervantes, we are in the presence of something slight and shadowy. It is natural for a man who believes that man finds his happiness here on earth, or not at all, to make light of all obstacles to that happiness and to deny altogether the insuperable obstacles seen by religious philosophy. The strength and weight of Shakespeare, of Villon, of Dante, even of Cervantes, come from their preoccupation with evil. In Shelley, in Ruskin, in Wordsworth, who for all his formal belief was, as Blake saw, a descendant of Rousseau, there is a constant resolution to dwell upon good only; and from this comes their lack of the sense of character, which is defined always by its defects or its incapacity, and their lack of the dramatic sense; for them human nature has lost its antagonist. William Morris was and is my chief of men; but how would that strong, rich nature have grasped and held the world had he not denied all that forbade the millennium he longed for? He had to believe that men needed no spur of necessity and that men, not merely those who, in the language of Platonists, had attained to freedom and so become self-moving, but all men, would do all necessary work with no compulsion but a little argument. He was perhaps himself
Explorations II

half aware of his lack, for in News from Nowhere he makes a crotchety old man complain that the novelists are not as powerful as before Socialism was established.

Bernard Shaw, compelled to believe, not as Morris did, that men will slaughter cattle and skin dead horses for a pastime, but that men can be found to force them to it, and yet neither bully, nor accept bribes, nor put the wrong man to the work, has invented a drama where ideas and not men are the combatants, and so dislikes whatever is harsh or incomprehensible that he complains of Shakespeare’s ‘ghosts and murders’ and of Ibsen’s ‘morbid terror of death’. It has been the lot of both men, the one a great many-sided man, and the other a logician without rancour, and both lovers of the best, to delight the Garden City mind. To the Garden City mind the slightness and shadowiness may well seem that of the clouds at dawn; but how can it seem to us in Ireland who have faith—whether heathen or Christian—who have believed from our cradle in original sin, and that man lives under a curse, and so must earn his bread with the sweat of his face, but what comes from blotting out one half of life?

When I went every Sunday to the little lecture hall at the side of William Morris’s house, Lionel Johnson said to me, his tongue unloosed by slight intoxication: ‘I wish those who deny eternity of punishment could realise their unspeakable vulgarity’. I remember laughing when he said it, but for years I turned it over in my mind and it always made me uneasy. I do not think I believe in the eternity of punishment, and yet I am still drawn to a man that does—Swedenborg for instance—and rather repelled by those who have never thought it possible. I remember, too, old John O’Leary’s contempt for a philanthropist, a contempt he could never explain. Is it that these men, who believe what they wish, can never be quite sincere and so live in a world of half-belief? But no man believes willingly in evil or in suffering. How much of the strength and weight of Dante and of Balzac comes from unwilling belief, from the lack of it how much of the rhetoric and vagueness of all Shelley that does not arise from personal feeling?

If I were Four-and-Twenty

VIII

Logic is loose again, as once in Calvin and Knox, or in the hysterical rhetoric of Savonarola, or in Christianity itself in its first raw centuries, and because it must always draw its deductions from what every doll can understand, the wild beast cannot but destroy mysterious life. We do not the less need, because it is an economic and not a theological process, those Christian writers whose roots are in permanent human nature. They, too, have their solution of the social question. To Balzac indeed it was but personal charity, the village providence of the eighteenth century, but Soloviev and the economists are more scientific, and have fostered a movement which, instead of attacking property, distributes it as widely as possible, and this movement has been in practice co-operation, and there Ireland is not Russia’s pupil, but her teacher. Their design is always to guard and strengthen family ambition; content to be the midwife of Nature and not
a juggling mechanist who would substitute an automaton for her living child.

A family is part of history and a part of the soil, and it seems to me a natural thing that co-operative Denmark should have invented the phrase: “to understand the peasant by the saga and the saga by the peasant”. Socialism is as international as Capital or as Calvinism, and I have never met a Socialist who did not believe he could carry his oratory from London to Paris and from Paris to Jericho and there find himself at home.

If we could but unite our economics and our nationalism with our religion, that, too, would become philosophic—and the religion that does not become philosophic, as religion is in the East, will die out of modern Europe—and we, our three great interests made but one, would at last be face to face with the great riddle, and might, it may be, hit the answer. Yet no man can hit the answer till certain discoveries have had time to change the direction of speculation and research. To take but one straw from a haystack, I have known a dream to pass through a whole house—I could never blind myself to the implications of that fact—but what I do not know is whether it so passed because all were under one roof, or because all shared certain general interests, or because all had various degrees of affection for one another. Now all these writers of economics overrate the importance of work. Every man has a profound instinct that idleness is the true reward of work, even if it only come at the end of life, or if generations have to die before it comes at all, and literature and art are often little but its preparation that

If I were Four-and-Twenty

it may be an intensity. I have no doubt that the idleness, let us say, of a man devoted to his collection of Chinese paintings affects the mind even of men who do physical labour without spoken or written word, and all the more because physical labour increases mental pursuits.

I have studied the influence as it were in the laboratory, and I cannot exclude this fact, to which the world may not be converted for fifty years, from my judgment of the social system and its reformers; but I do not know if this influence would be strengthened if labourer and idler used churches, or furniture, or listened to or read stories, and wore clothes which had all, as let us say in Minoan or Egyptian civilisation, a common character. Albert de Rochas suspected something of the kind, and I do not know how large a portion of our day’s thought—though I suspect the greater portion—has its direction or its intensity from such influence.

Did some perception of this create among primitive people the conviction that ordinary men had no immortality, but obtained it through a magical bond with some chief or king? Perhaps it may be possible in a few years to apportion the values of idleness by a science that traces the connections of thought and by a religion that judges the result. With Christianity came the realisation that a man must surrender his particular will to an implacable will, not his, though within his, and perhaps we are restless because we approach a realisation that our general will must surrender itself to another will within it, interpreted by certain men, at
once economists, patriots, and inquisitors. As all realisation is through opposites, men coming to believe the subjective opposite of what they do and think, we may be about to accept the most implacable authority the world has known. Do I desire it or dread it, loving as I do the gaming-table of Nature where many are ruined but none is judged, and where all is fortuitous, unforeseen?

IX

When Dr. Hyde delivered in 1894 his lecture on the necessity of 'the de-anglicisation of Ireland', to a society that was a youthful indiscretion of my own I heard an enthusiastic hearer say: 'This lecture begins a new epoch in Ireland'. It did that, and if I were not four-and-fifty, with no settled habit but the writing of verse, rheumatic, indolent, discouraged, and about to move to the Far East, I would begin another epoch by recommending to the Nation a new doctrine, that of unity of being.

1919

"Court"

asked me to introduce Midnight Court. I had magazine; praised its repeated; and because I could discover no reason for refusal that did not make me a little ashamed, I consented. Yet I could wish that a Gaelic scholar had been found, or failing that some man of known sobriety of manner and of mind—Professor Trench of Trinity College, let us say—to introduce to the Irish reading public this vital, extravagant, immoral, preposterous poem.

Brian Mac Giolla Meithre—or to put it in English, Brian Merriman—wrote in Gaelic, one final and three internal rhymes in every line, pouring all his mediaeval abundance into that narrow neck. He was born early in the eighteenth century, somewhere in Clare, even now the most turbulent of counties, and the countrymen of Clare and of many parts of Munster have repeated his poem down to our own day. Yet this poem which is so characteristically Gaelic and mediaeval is founded upon Cadenus and Vanessa; read

1 The Midnight Court, translated from the Gaelic by Percy Arland Usher (Jonathan Cape, London, 1926).
2 Mr. Robin Flower pointed this out to me. Cadenus and Vanessa, which has the precision of fine prose, is the chief authority for the first meeting of Swift and Esther Vanhomrigh. I think it was Sir Walter Scott who first suggested 'a constitutional infirmity' to account for Swift's emotional entanglement, but this suggestion is not supported by Irish tradition. Some years ago a one-act play was submitted to the Abbey Theatre reading committee which showed Swift saved from English soldiers at the time of the Drapier Letters

Y.E.—T