REASONS for ANGER

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Reasons for Anger

The general title under which these essays and articles are collected is not of my choosing, passably misfits them, and is mildly libelous on myself. It was suggested by an amusing remark of Mr. Harold Nicolson's. Reviewing a little book of mine devoted to the discussion of a distressing subject—the blighting, namely, of the tap-root of emotional life, happiness, and creative power by irrational conventions derived from superstition, fiercely, savagely, and angrily enforced—Mr. Nicolson was good enough to state that he entirely agreed with it. To his expression of assent he appended, however, the curious query: "But why get angry about it?" The question is as interesting as it is startling, and suggests others which are worth examining.

It raises, in the first place, a linguistic or quasi-grammatical point. To judge a writer's emotions by his printed output is never very safe. I could cite a number of popular English novelists and poets who labor to convey the impression that they have emotions, whereas they have none. On the other hand, even more numerous and fraudulent writers, such as professors of sociology, philosophers, Ministers of the Crown, or of the Church, critics on the staff of the Times Literary Supplement and other propagandist sheets, strive to create the oppo-
site illusion. They suggest that they have no emotions, that they are inhumanly detached, frigidly objective in their balanced judgments; while they are, in reality, seething with the fierce fire of furibund and fanatical prejudice. Whether any statement be accounted hot or cold depends not alone upon the emotions of the writer, but also, and to a far greater extent, upon those of the reader. When Galileo made, in distressing circumstances, the quite unexciting statement that the world moves, it was received by infuriated priests as an expression of testy and malicious insolence. I have often observed that people who become exasperated by some platitude which I might throw out casually, thinking little of it, transfer, by a common process, their state of mental ebullition from themselves to the speaker. If I should, for example, assert that Mr. William Randolph Hearst is a menace, the proposition is not an expression of emotion, but a statement of fact. It appertains to the same grammatical category as the somewhat dull affirmation: “Socrates is a man.” The predicate “menace” merely defines the concept already presented by the subject, William Randolph Hearst, in the same manner as the term “Socrates” is explicated by its pedestrian predicate. Every such predication implies, it is true, some sort of point of view. The scholastic proposition, “Socrates is a man,” reeks of insufferable pedantry. It quite unwarrantably excludes and ignores the opposite point of view contained in the much more intelligent statement: “Socrates was an old woman.” It assumes too much, and its pretense of being merely logical is sheer hypocrisy. It assumes, for instance, an undue sentimental attachment to Oxford—a simple faith which, again, Mr. Nicolson recently pro-

claimed by an assertion even more amazing than his query about my alleged anger, to wit, that Marcel Proust would have been the better for going to Oxford. Since we are on the ground of pure logic, it may be pointed out that the only strictly logical form of proposition is not “Socrates is a man,” but “Proust is Proust,” and that, had Marcel Proust suffered the calamity of being sent to Oxford, Proust would not have been Proust—which is absurd.

What is intended as a measured and dispassionate statement of fact may, then, easily be mistaken for an expression of anger by a reader who is himself stimulated to anger by that statement. Almost any intelligent statement will, for example, shock a person addicted to the pernicious habit of tuning in to the B.B.C. or of reading The Times. That one given to such practices should take a definition for an invective is not surprising. I was once invited by the B.B.C. to take part in a radiophonic symposium, or so-called “debate,” on the principles of social anthropology. The purpose of the series of broadcasts, which was under the patronage of the Archbishop of York, was educational. It was hoped that the views represented by some of the essays in the present volume should receive a glaring public refutation, and that I should be reduced, within the hearing, if not under the eyes, of a million listeners, to a humiliating state of titubating confusion. Professor Malinowski, of the London School of Economics, undertook to act as public executioner. After inspecting my manuscript, he rewrote his six times. As the hour of judgment approached, he desired to rewrite it a seventh time. But the Archbishop’s committee suggested the simpler alternative of drastically censoring,
cutting, and editing my manuscript. Though I was thus handed over gagged and bound, my public execution was so bungled and messy that it turned out an utter foolzie. The very editor of the Radio Times, in his report, could not altogether conceal that the performance somewhat sickened him, and the poor fellow had to be given the sack. The educational series of broadcasts was accompanied by an expensively printed program, giving, for the benefit of earnest students, a lengthy bibliography of the subject, drawn up by Professor Malinowski. It gave all the editions, reprints, reviews, etc., of the writings of Professor Westermanck and Professor Malinowski. It made no allusion to any work of mine. On my mildly drawing the attention of the B.B.C. to the presumably inadvertent oversight, I received a courteously worded reply pointing out that my writings on social anthropology were "controversial." I have ventured to weary the reader with the unimportant incident merely to elucidate the signification of the term "controversial" in current English usage. Nice linguistic distinctions have always interested me.

"Controversial" opinions always emanate from an unseemly state of mind. It is a sound rule of scholarly English criticism to avoid replying to controversial opinions directly. A much safer course is to look carefully for misprints and errors of spelling or grammar in the expression of such opinions. The literary style in which they are conveyed generally leaves much to be desired. My first book, published in America under the title Rational Evolution, was, according to the Times Literary Supplement, so badly written as to "verge on the unreadable." Controversial opinions are, moreover, in-

variably in bad taste. The English cannot abide bad taste. Another convenient method of disposing of controversial opinions is to psychoanalyze the writer, or at least to analyze him psychologically, so as to demonstrate what a queer fish he is. One may discover that he is angry. Dr. Havelock Ellis has explained my views on sociology by a perverse inborn disposition of mine to think differently from every one else.

The psychological method of disposing of controversial opinions is, however, becoming somewhat old-fashioned. In the balmy days of liberalism, the conclusions of man's rational faculty were regarded as a purely individual matter, a personal characteristic, like the configuration of his nose or the color of his hair. Differences of opinion were, by hypothesis, respectable, democratic liberalism rejecting all norms and standards of valid judgment. Although no one was so given to arguing as a liberal, he was in conscience bound to repudiate the validity of any argument, for muddle-headed liberalism rested upon the ludicrous postulate that every man has a right to his opinions. Not one man in ten thousand has, of course, the slightest right to his opinions. But the amusing liberal principle furnished occasion for an agreeable parlor game, conducted by paid professionals known by the name of "critics." The game consisted in constructing from a man's casual use of an adjective or two a complete psychological portrait of the user of the adjective. Volumes issued from the press on "The philosophy of Mr. Brown, the poet," or "The philosophy of Mr. Smith, the novelist," or even, I believe, "The philosophy of Mr. Mencken."

That old parlor game of criticism is, like liberalism,
dated. The reason is that opinions have become much more controversial, and that there are many more controversial opinions than there used to be. It has now become impossible to maintain that all opinions are entitled to respect. Opinions which make even a liberal foam at the mouth are not entitled to respect. Hence, not only has the game of criticism had to be modified by new rules, making it much more envenomed and almost as dangerous as football and as bloody as a bullfight, but the operation of legal censorship in democratic countries like England, famed for freedom of opinion and speech, has had to be tightened up to such an extent that no ground is left in England for envying Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. The methods followed in the latter countries are, of course, coarse and clumsy beside the subtle and ingenious methods of English censorship. "There is no censorship in England." Dear me, no! Thought and speech are as free as nature first made man. Anything can be published. But, once published, the author, publisher, printer, and bookseller's assistant are liable to be clapped into jail and all their worldly goods confiscated. Following the tried traditional methods of English criticism, no frontal attack is undertaken, but the book displaying a controversial spirit, that is to say, contrary to the spirit of English Public Schools, is searched for grounds for libel or "obscenity." These may easily be found in any book. Not only may the casual mention of a Russian ex-Grand Duke or Habsburg blackguard supply occasion for the imposition of a fine passing the dreams of avarice, which will keep the esurient exile in luxury for the rest of his life, but I have it on competent legal authority that the mention of a haber-

dasher's goods as being more popularly priced than the creations of Chanel is good legal ground for putting the author of such a rash statement in the wrong box. No libel action, it may be noted, is ever dismissed in England, so that anyone is afforded the opportunity of levying blackmail. The judge, who, like Nazi 'Popular Tribunals,' is invested with full arbitrary powers, is invariably on the side of good taste. As for "obscenity," Bernard Shaw has pointed out that it can be found in every book except the telephone directory. Shaw, as usual, exaggerates. There are names in the London telephone directory which I could not bring myself to ask a publisher to print. The English literary terrorism is, beyond all comparison, more effective than are the barbaric Nazi and Fascist procedures. English publishers have to engage permanently a staff of lawyers and to consult them before issuing an unexpurgated reprint of Shakespeare, and are in a state of nervous prostration and financial bankruptcy. Incidentally, English literature has, as a result, become practically extinct.

The unscientific postulate of muddled liberalism, that opinions are the outcome of individual idiosyncrasies, is no longer tenable. It is no longer acceptable to liberals themselves. Differences of opinion are now known to be not a matter of private judgment, but of private property. That is why the old parlor game of psychological criticism has become demoded. Differences of opinion can no longer be dismissed politely with reference to fantastic liberal axioms, such as Quot homines, tot sententiae, or every one has a right to his opinion. The whole matter has become immensely simplified. There are no longer personal opinions agreeing with the color of one's hair,
or one's temperament, or, as we should say nowadays, one's glands. There is very much less diversity of opinion than was supposed in the days of liberal ignorance. A person's views are either conventional or controversial, they are either perfectly harmless or they reek of Bolshevism, according as he is anxious or not about his private property. And the casual use by him of an adjective does not betray his glandular composition, but whether his views on every subject under and above the sun belong to the conventional or the controversial class. It is easy to perceive how that unprecedented clear-cut classification necessitates the tightening of critical judgment and of English censorial laws for the abolition of controversial thought and living literature.

The views of the controversial writer on crime and fraud are prone to give tolerant liberals and English judges the impression that he is very angry, that is to say, they make tolerant liberals very angry. An angry attitude toward crime and fraud is controversial and sharply at variance with the most approved moral tradition. Such an attitude calls therefore for condemnation and for a careful search of the author's writings for misprints, libels, and obscenities.

The alternative and conventional attitude toward crime and fraud arising from the freedom enjoyed in those respects in an anarchic society by abusive power is the approved attitude of acquiescence, meekness, saintly patience, nonresistance, or passive resistance. That attitude has at all times been of good repute. It has even aroused sublime enthusiasm. It is easy to see why. By such an attitude the very thing is secured, at a small cost, which all abusive power is above all anxious to secure.

Its victims are voluntarily disarmed. Privileged abusive power is effectively disarmed against resistance and revolt. There is no more valuable auxiliary of social abuse than that saintly and admirable attitude.

In the ancient Eastern theocracies the sublime virtue of resignation and nonresistance to evil developed, accordingly, into the supreme good of moral philosophy. To this day the term "philosophy" retains the connotation of mental castration as regards impulses to anger. The Wisdom of the East, which was so perfectly adapted to the interests of tyranny, was chiefly concerned with bringing about and cultivating that politically safe state of mind. To the Western student, startled and perplexed by the clotted moonshine of Oriental philosophy, it is necessary to explain that its object is not the clarification of thought or the discovery of truth, but the fostering of a particular mood or condition of the mind. Oriental philosophical discipline is, in fact, intended to operate on the mind in exactly the same manner as opium or hashish. Mysticism avowedly purposes to produce that state of mental intoxication. Theories of the universe, of the macrocosm and microcosm, ontologies, the esoteric mysteries of theology, are, in the original Oriental view, regarded as secondary adjuvants serving, by the obfuscation of the rational mind, to "tame the passions" of the initiate and to render him totally incapable of anger or critical apprehension. That condition of perfect docility to the purposes of predatory exploitation is termed "being in tune with the Infinite."

Western, or European thought, had its origin in the revolt of Ionia against the hoary tradition of Oriental theocracies. The great pre-Socratic thinkers, such as
Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, rejected not only the mystic jabberwocky of the East, but also the wilted attitude of saintly humility and submission that the religious dope was designed to engender. They were angry philosophers. Their outlook on the way the world was going was, like all tonics, distinctly bitter.

Like all revolutions down to the present day, which neglected to liquidate the kulaks, the Ionic revolt against the Wisdom of the East, while it laid the imperishable foundations of European intelligence, was itself eventually defeated by the forces of reaction. Philosophy became, in decadent Greece, once more sublimely meek and nonresistant. Its purpose was declared to be, not to resist evil, but to fortify the individual by philosophical isolation and resignation, whether in the form of stoical renunciation or epicurean hedonism and opportunism. With undisguised egoism, it proposed, as the object of wisdom, personal salvation. It offered comfort and consolation to the individual. The individual thus insulated from the wickedness of the world found once more his soul, wallowed in narcissistic self-approval, a good conscience, the humble knowledge that he was the salt of the earth. By the syncretic pleroma of Oriental spiritual opium, Egyptian hermetic Gnosticism, with Platonic mystagogy, the Christian spirit crept over the ruins of decadent European civilization. The Oriental saint reascended the altar of moral edification, rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar’s, loved his enemies and the enemies of human society, forgave them, turned the other cheek, resisted not evil. To the delight of Caesar, he filled with exalted enthusiasm the servile multitude that looked up, as to the peak of moral excellence, to the humble saint.

One of the most unreal, and therefore pernicious, implications of the Christian view is that the abuses of privileged power may be amended by the holders of privileged power themselves, and social improvement be thus brought about from above. It is suggested that such is the transcending, nay, absolute, moral excellence of the doctrine of nonresistance and saintly meekness, so extremely convenient to holders of abusive power, that they may be inspired to restrict of their own accord the exercise of that power, in the interest of those over whom it is wielded. Christian history is illumined by the vision of the good and wise ruler, the father of his people, and is filled with fulsome adulation of Merovingian monsters and of the most murderous blackguards known to human annals until the advent of the gangsters of Nazi Germany. The Christian Church devoted itself to the education and guidance of princes, the dispensers of justice, the well-beloved fathers of their loyal people. Liberalism, the residiary legatee of the Christian Church, has continued to this very day in the same tradition, and still devises Plans and New Deals whereby the Augean stables of capitalist power shall be cleansed by the capitalists themselves, who, it is suggested, will voluntarily renounce profits for the good of humanity, provided licensed profitable depredation be securely protected against the anger of the exploited.

Even could the wild paradox be, for argument’s sake, contemplated, and revolution be effected from above by exploiters inspired with good will, they would be quite incapable of carrying out their good intentions. For the
apprehension of social abuses is possible only to those who suffer from those abuses and are consequently inspired by anger. The inherent impotence shown in this respect by privileged holders of power arises from their incapacity to be angered by abuses which are to them a source of profit. Every amendment that has ever taken place in social conditions has been the outcome of unchristian anger on the part of the victims of those conditions. The moral commandments themselves were dictated by angry gods. The prohibition of murder has not originated in the moral conscience of murderers but in the anger of murderees.

In flat contradiction to that patent law of elementary dynamics the tradition of the Wisdom of the East, coeval with predatory society, and represented by all school textbooks of history, has pictured social good as being the effect of sublime sentiments, of aspirations to perfection, of humanitarianism contributing to fashionable charities and soup kitchens, of the emotions of men of good will, of the concern of profiteers for justice, and of the game of cricket as practiced on the playing fields of Eton.

The outstanding merit of Karl Marx is that he was the first to counter those sublime interpretations of history with a distinctly articulated “oh yeah?”—to translate into current American his crabbed German. Marx said in effect: “Let us be quite honest. I am aware that you gentlemen, bankers, captains of industry, are inspired in all your acts by the good of humanity, concern for the welfare of the people, and the sublime ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. But I, being of much more pedestrian mind, am inspired by concern for bread and butter. I suggest to you, much as the conclusion may be distasteful to your refined, Christian-bred minds, that business is business. I suggest that the innumerable petty bourgeois, who are enabled to live charming respectable lives by the crumbs dropped from your countingsh house counters after you have dined, are above all inspired by a desire to secure the continuance of that fall of manna. I suggest that, when the reasonable desire to maintain profits within attractive dimensions and to provide crumbs for the domestic creatures under the table necessitates the cutting down of the proletarian producers’ bread and butter, the proletarians are inspired by hunger.”

To this intolerably gross and crassly materialistic view of things, the residuary legatees of Christianity, drawing from the fountainhead, replied: “Man does not live by bread alone.” If one’s faculty for amazement were not blunted by the wonders of this mysterious universe, one might gape at the abysmal ignorance displayed the other day by Bertrand Russell, who repeated the charge against the Marxian view of history that it ignored that truism. The greater portion of it is devoted to holding up to admiration the infallible accuracy with which all the sauces in which capitalistic bread may be dunked are flavored so as to harmonize perfectly with the menu of capitalistic interests. With uncanny aesthetic sense, the whole of literature, art, science accord in their least inflection and modulation with the interests of good business. As the genius of English critics has amply demonstrated, good taste in literature is synonymous with a fine emotional reverence for sacred things, that is, for the interests of English property. In art, the Royal Academy, no less than the French École, has no other excuse for
inducing yearly attacks of nausea than the preservation of sound artistic tradition devoid of application to unpleasant existing objects of emotion. Science, having fulfilled its utilitarian functions in the interests of big business, proves itself no less sound a prop of those interests in domains transcending bread alone, as is amply illustrated by uncontroversial sociology, to say nothing of economics. It is small wonder that occasion is found in these days to deplore with some warmth the bad taste and lack of aesthetic sensibility and scientific objectivity which would tend to swamp the high and detached purposes of pure art and pure science under a flood of tendentious thought and blatant propaganda. But it is, after all, in the Wisdom of the East and its Christian and Liberal derivatives that the triumph of mind over common sense, in the interests of peaceful exploitation, is most brilliantly displayed. One is always brought back to fundamentals, to the Rock of Ages upon which Christian civilization is founded.

To many people—the people who, more particularly, do not live by bread alone, of whom Marx was one and Lenin another—the nice adaptation of all thought, literature, art, science to the interests and requirements of predatory power is a cause of anger even more infuriating than is to the proletarian the snipping off of coupons from his thin slice of bread and butter. The point has been insufficiently emphasized, and after having called attention to it a hundred times, I make no apology for returning to it a hundred and first time. That people should be greedy and should be prepared to fight tooth and nail for the protection and extension of their power and possessions is perfectly normal. If a battalion of bankers should march, fully armed, on a mob of factory workers and farmers, telling them plainly that their sole concern is to retain their coupons, and that they are prepared to fight the workers and farmers to the last ditch in the defense of high rates of interest, there would be some sporting satisfaction about the spectacle. But when the bankers, sitting in their offices and paying a government, a journalistic press, and a university council to fight for them, declare that man does not live by bread alone and that their sole concern is “the redemption of the world through the blood of Our Blessed Lord,” one’s stomach heaves with pangs more poignant than those of hunger.

Too many tears have been shed over the proletarian. The starving proletarian is by way of being pampered and spoiled. After all, the worst thing that can happen to him is that he should starve to death. The statistical bureau of the League of Nations has calculated that it takes, on an average, four years to kill an unemployed proletarian. But death is, I maintain, more tolerable than a life condemned to breathe nothing but the poisoned air of lies. The callousness that wears down and kills—and sadism is, like eroticism, singularly limited in scope—is not so unkind. The devilish ingenuity and rich resourcefulness of prevaricating thought, false taste, false art, false science, refined, polished, and perfected through five thousand years of mathematical adaptation to the vested interests of exploitation, is more fiendish than any pang inflicted by hunger. That ingenuity is inexpugnable. It has always the last word, because it is woven into the last rootlets of thought and feeling, and its least twig and shoot are bound up with premises and axioms that dip
deep beyond conscious thought itself into the most ancient cunning of policies refined by ages of service in the defense of tyranny and exploitation. So that to answer the most casual sophistry, thrown out with a conclusive and scornful smile, one would have to go back, like Leibnitz, when commissioned to write the history of some piddling German principality, to the creation of the world and the beginnings of thought.

That is one reason why there is a limit to the uses of argument. Argument can pluck the scales from duped eyes only that have begun to open. It has no place where interested prejudice is at bay. That is also why the reasons adduced to restrain argument are specious. I have frequently been told by liberals that an inopportune endeavor to make my meaning clear alienates those who might otherwise be persuaded. Might they? There is not the slightest likelihood that I, or anyone else, will ever persuade a Fascist or a Christian. The sole use of words is to clarify ideas. There is thus an inevitable limit to it, beyond which the specious pretenses of democratic argumentativeness must give place, for a time, to the dictatorship of the abused and oppressed. Disputation must then yield to the armed defense of humanity.

That defense has been betrayed again and again, it has never been aided, by doctrines of nonresistance and personal salvation. Social progress has invariably been the outcome of anger called forth by abuse, not of the searchings of a self-condemning moral conscience. No apology is therefore needed for so beneficent a natural reaction, for which no substitute has yet been found in any form of parliamentary procedure. Manuals of military instruction, which are as a rule remarkably sensible and realistic,
throughout the past century. The World War was brought to an end by revolutions in Germany and Russia, and followed by revolutionary outbreaks in almost every European country. It is, I suggest, historically more exact to speak of revolution as a process which, whether simmering or breaking out into flame, has been continuous for the last hundred and fifty years in Europe—to say nothing of the American Revolution, which constituted a not unworthy introduction to the effort initiated by European civilization in the eighteenth century to emerge from the Dark Ages.

Most of those efforts, as is well known, failed. Hence the course of revolution had to be several times resumed, and the dreaded word, instead of denoting, as it should, a single process, came to connote in loose popular parlance any given political change attended with street brawling. Fascist and Nazi gangsters have even the quite apt impertinence to speak of their holdups of civilization as "revolutions."

It is also usual—for quite intelligent people, this time —to speak of the French Revolution and several others as "bourgeois revolutions." I do not altogether endorse that terminology. For the simple reason that bourgeois are no more capable of making a revolution than colonels are of making a war. It is the people who fight, in war and revolution. In order to make a war, the colonels and their friends must first make the people angry, or somehow get them in such a mental state that they don't know what they're doing. When bourgeois find it convenient to have a revolution, they have no need to make the people angry. The people are angry already. The bourgeois have merely to tell the people that they—the bourgeois—

intend to give effect to the will of the people. That is, of course, as absurdly mendacious as anything the colonels tell the people when they wish to have a war. But the American and the French people in the eighteenth century had not apprehended the obvious fact that a bourgeois cannot give effect to the will of the people. It took over a century to learn that lesson, during which time the people, inspired by anger, got themselves killed on barricades and on battlefields to give effect to the will of the bourgeois.

The failure of revolution during the nineteenth century was owing to a number of other mistakes which could be rectified only by experience. One of the most serious was that the people, although moved to revolt by anger, were insufficiently angry. The silly people's anger fell as soon as they had planted the red flag on the town hall or royal palace. It is exceedingly difficult for Christian bourgeois, most Christian kings, or Holy Fathers, who see red the moment revolution is mentioned, to understand the excessive tenderness of heart and gentleness of proletarians. One must have had some experience of real, prolonged suffering, and of the mutual assistance which suffering proletarians spontaneously bestow on comrades in misfortune, to develop those feelings of pity that Christian bourgeois and Holy Fathers know only as occasions for unctuous rhapsody and tender sentiments of self-approval. The anger of a revolutionary proletariat can never rise to the demoniacal and bloodthirsty rage of reactionary repression. In putting down the Paris Commune, the troops of Monsieur Thiers and General Gallifet, which had been restored to them by the Germans from the army of Bazaine that had surrendered without
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a blow at Metz, massacred thirty thousand people—more than any revolutionary terror ever did. Such was their maniacal fury that they did not trouble, after a while, to discriminate between Communists and bourgeois, and butchered men, women, and children indifferently for days, till their arms were tired and they waded through blood in the streets of Paris. Many bourgeois, men and women, who a few days before had been cursing the Communists, threw themselves on the barricades singing the Internationale, and the butchery had at last to be stopped from fear of the nauseating that it was beginning to produce in foreign countries. Similar atrocities attend every repression of revolution. The behavior of Russians, or of the present rulers of Hungary on entering a defeated Commune, was considerably worse. The anger of revolutionists has never been able to rise to the heights of reactionary anger. The Russian Bolshevists themselves were such fools that when they held all the White Guard generals safely under lock and key, they let them loose, on their word of honor, to organize the counter-revolutionary armies, equipped by England, Germany, and France, and to furnish the European press with accounts of Bolshevist atrocities. One ineradicable cause of that weakness is that the conception of vengeance and punishment, which lies at the root of the juridic ideals of Law and Order, is devoid of meaning or appeal to minds purged by revolutionary thought. The sole purpose which they can perceive in the exercise of violence is the defense of revolution, a purpose which is obviously far narrower in its scope than the quenchless thirst for vengeance of reactionary anger.

It is said that anger is a sign of weakness. That moral

platitude is nowise in contradiction with the fact that to fail to be angry in the presence of triumphant crime and mendacity is a sign of idiocy. Immediately after the World War, the majority of intelligent persons were filled with amazement bordering upon despair. It appeared incredible that, following upon such a course of forcible eye openers, things should proceed serenely as before—only very much more so. All intelligent persons, including the most intelligent, Lenin, had expected world revolution. They, instead, got jazz and the rise to power of Fascism. Mendacity multiplied a hundredfold, and stupidity in all forms of cultural expression dropped to depths hitherto unplumbed. In Russia, revolution sat triumphant, but haggard and starving, on a heap of ruins. All the energies, propagandas, policies, internal and external, schemes, acts, thoughts, and deeds of Western capitalist powers were directed to one sole concern, the putting down of revolution. Never was the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto more exactly descriptive of existing conditions. It seemed but a question of time till the tender seedling of the New World should be overwhelmed by the universal forces of the Old. Those were the days of anger—of anger and despair, when men cried: “How long, O Lord, how long?”

Revolution won through after a century and a half because it had learned to eliminate compromises. But men still doubted whether revolution was not itself a compromise. Could the Old World which had produced capitalist exploitation, the World War, and the teeming mendacity by which its abominations were justified be cleansed by the revolutionary Day of Wrath? Was not the only fate that could purge it the Christian Day of
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Wrath that should consume it utterly in flames of fire—when the stars should fall from heaven upon Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth?

We now know, without the aid of faith, that the Christian solution is not true. The world need not be destroyed in order to be saved, but only the antisocial canker of personal profit opposed to public profit, personal salvation opposed to social salvation, personal opinions molded by the calculation of antisocial interests and not by the direct operation of natural reason. Faith in reason has justified itself by its fruits. With the rapidity of these accelerated times, which causes centuries to pass before the eyes of young men, and old men to live to see what they had dreamed of as visions of a nebulous future, the logic of social facts has become materially visible, and the scene, twenty years after, is completely changed. The vigorous growth of the New World and the corresponding progressive decrepitude of the Old have proceeded at such a pace that the contrast is reversed and is growing ever more disproportionate. The Old World, which threatened haggard revolution seated on ruins, has itself shriveled down to pathetic helplessness. It lies impaled upon the multitudinous horns of insoluble dilemmas. The economic and political contradictions of capitalism and their resulting deadlocks have their counterpart, even more insoluble, in the chaos of thought which has for ages enslaved and crippled the natural functions of the human mind, fettered to the interests and defense of abusive power. From being a menace to the revolution which has supplanted it by social order, that antisocial anarchy is a menace to itself alone.

A world entangled in pretenses and mendacities is not fairly matched, no matter of how much poison gas it disposes, against a world that stands on realities and has no interest in lying. As in the Pleistocene age, the unwieldy saurian monsters which had hitherto possessed the earth died out before the mammal, placed by his perfected brain in closer relation with environing realities, so the servile societies which have grown out of barbaric banditism protected by drugged thought must of necessity fade out when confronted with even a single society founded upon social realism and in which thought is undeflected by interested mendacity. The barbaric servile societies of the West, the last phases of the Dark Ages, are sinking deeper and deeper into the mire of deadlocked economy, irreducible internecine oppositions, cultural retrogression, and baffled imbecility. The New World which has thrown off the handicapping legacies of antisocial anarchy is rising to a plane whence they appear fitter objects of pity than of passion.

A Soviet peasant who, less than a generation ago, could not read is, beyond comparison, saner, more realistic, and more reliable in his judgments and views, however limited their range, than an Oxford don or any leader of thought or policy in the Western world. For his judgment is not deflected and stultified by haunting concern for the protection of individual profit, is under no necessity of guarding security by mendacity. He and the society in which he dwells have no need to press perpetuated ignorance, mysticism, nationalistic prejudice fanned to hysterical fury, and disseminated through every channel of propaganda, education, press, literature, and standards of good taste, into the service of class interests desperately
on the defensive. The Russian muzhik has not, like the pleistocene mammal, acquired a perfected brain; he has nevertheless acquired a mind newly restored to sanity. And it is as superior to the twisted and crippled mind of the denizen of a capitalist liberal democracy as the brain of the mammal was superior to the saurian's. That development is permanent and inalienable. The human mind has grown in shackles. To free it from those shackles may be an agelong process. But, once unshackled, it is practically impossible to reimpose the fetters of artificial prejudice, of artificial ignorance, of artificial imbecility. A genial People's Commissar told me, in answer to some question, that the whole of Western propaganda, literary, political, religious, could now be securely let loose on the people of Soviet countries and freely permitted to do its damnedest. It would be received by the least peasant with a tolerant and amused smile.

The Day of Wrath is past. For common sense is no longer weak, but irresistibly strong. Where it has established its rule, imbecility cannot breathe. And, from the New World, triumphant common sense is everywhere shooting inextinguishable radiance and drying up the slime of the fair earth. For the first time, the future is secure. The geologists of the New World are wonderfully calm over the saurian monsters of the pleistocene prime. In that larger perspective, the disputes and anxieties which agitate the Old World are very trifling. What will the penniless pantaloone Caesar, strutting up and down the Way of Empire, do to the League of Nations? Will Corporal Hitler lose his head? Or will Otto Habsburg have the Pope of Rome crown his? And what do