

# THE SOCIAL IDEAS OF MR. BERTRAND RUSSELL

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IT would scarcely be possible, within the limits of a single article, to discuss all the writings of Mr. Bertrand Russell. He has fetched too wide a compass, as man and as author. What shall we make of a man who has been a don of Trinity College, Cambridge, and also professor of philosophy in the Government University of Peking; who is the son of a viscount and grandson of an earl but is also a socialist and a pacifist; who is a Fellow of the Royal Society and has been an inmate of an English gaol? What shall we make of an author who combines the higher mathematics with modernist ethics, and realistic metaphysics with social and economic theorems; who has written on China and Russia and the industrial civilization of the West; and who has thrown in for good measure certain disquisitions on religion and psychology? We cannot serve him up whole at a single critical banquet;—at any rate the present writer is unequal to that Aristotelian task. So we shall leave aside all of the mathematics and most of the metaphysics, and bestow attention on the social ideas of our author. We shall descend with our author into the cave where the prisoners of time fight about the shadows of the eternal. For Mr. Russell has followed the prescription of that ancient philosopher who was also a socialist, and who declared that in the ideal State the philosophers must leave the upper realms of ideas, in order to “descend to the general underground abode and get the habit of seeing in the dark”. Plato maintained that they would understand things down below far better than the native inhabitants. But there are others who doubt this reasoning, and declare that the philosophers stumble helplessly in the world of common affairs, whether it is because their eyes are unaccustomed to the gloom, or perhaps for others reasons of a less flattering kind.

## I

Mr. Russell's first pronouncement on a social question occurred in 1896, when at the age of twenty-four he delivered and published a series of lectures on German social democracy. He was then a Fellow of Trinity College, devoted mainly to mathematical studies. The excursus was symptomatic of the deep and sympathetic interest

in new social movements which he had always combined with a love for abstract thought. His book does not reveal the characteristic positions which its author was later to reach. It treats the social democrats of Germany objectively and critically, without taking their side in the struggle, except in so far as it pleads that friendliness to the working classes on the part of the rulers of Germany is the "great and pressing necessity for Germany's welfare." But the author deprecates the class-consciousness of the socialists no less than the class-consciousness of their rulers. His hope is for the mitigation of both extremes, and a peaceful development towards moderate democracy. No doubt Mr. Russell's acquaintance with the struggles of the social democrats made a deep impression upon his mind, but it was only in later years that he found his own characteristic attitude towards these social problems.

From Marx and Bebel our author returned to the higher mathematics, and for many years he made no further descents into the cave. These were the days of his *Essays on the Foundation of Geometry*, his treatise on Leibnitz, and his *Principles of Mathematics*. Mathematics was for him a refuge from the disillusionment which the experience of life produced on a mind acutely responsive to the idea of perfection and acutely sensitive to the sufferings of mankind. In an essay on *The Study of Mathematics*, written in 1902, the author appears as the passionate spectator, *sub specie aeternitatis*, of this underworld of life. In it we read:

Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty—a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry. What is best in mathematics deserves not merely to be learnt as a task, but to be assimilated as a part of daily thought, and brought again and again before the mind with ever-renewed encouragement. Real life is, to most men, a long second-best, a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible; but the world of pure reason knows no compromise, no practical limitations, no barrier to the creative activity embodying in splendid edifices the passionate aspiration after the perfect from which all great work springs. Remote from human passions, remote even from the pitiful facts of nature, the generations have gradually created an ordered cosmos, where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and where one at least of our nobler impulses can escape from the dreary exile of the actual world.

Another essay of the same year, entitled *A Free Man's Worship*, attains the very peak of this austere philosophy. Mr. Russell has written nothing else that vibrates so tensely with the poignant contrast between human aspiration and human fate. It is Stoic in its attitude, with the resolution but not the calmness of the Stoic, with the resignation but not the consolation that the Stoic found. For Nature itself is regarded as hostile to man, hostile to his dreams and to his hopes, so that all that man prizes he barely holds through a brief hour of struggle until the unresting forces that lie without snatch it again from his hands. The free man is he who scorns the comfort of false beliefs, who faces without entreaty or submission a ruthless universe, who neither erects a vain God in the image of his ideals nor surrenders these ideals because the cosmos refuses to enshrine them. Amid such a world, Mr. Russell says, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system; and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

In such a world man is tempted to worship Power, to placate it, to name it good. Such was the creed of Nietzsche, and of the comforters of Job. But Power is largely evil, and no true object of worship. Yet it is vain to rebel against it, like Prometheus. The Christian attitude of resignation is the wiser. Freedom lies in the submission of our desires, but never of our thoughts. Through this gate of renunciation we pass to "the daylight of wisdom, by whose radiance a new insight, a new joy, a new tenderness, shine forth to gladden the pilgrim's heart." So we are led to a conclusion sombre but not unrelieved. In fact there is in it a note of that Promethean defiance which the author has just deprecated:

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless

way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

I have quoted these extracts from this remarkable essay, partly because it expresses most adequately that passionate and sensitive spirit, always critical and always searching, in which Mr. Russell confronts the facts of existence, partly also because it represents a milestone in the progress of his thought. For in certain respects he is an elusive and unstable thinker. His constructive vision is always dissolving into new forms. What holds fast is his sense of ultimate good and evil. What is good is the free creative spirit. Life is creation, and life is good, and its great enemy, the essential evil in the world, is the power that wars against creation, against all that crushes and restricts, against all that dominates and regiments, against the blind unreasoning will that exults in force. In the *Free Man's Worship*, Mr. Russell found that evil thing in the cosmos itself, whose might stood arrayed against the hopes and joys of men. It reminds one of the spirit which animates *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure*. But this evil power takes on a new character in the later writings of Mr. Russell. It is conceived as no longer without but within humanity. The cosmos is no longer the villain of the tragedy in which man is the suffering hero. Now the evil thing is made by man, or rather by men. It is the institutional system within which society is bound, and especially the forms of militarism and capitalism. And behind the forms there lurks the evil in the nature of man. The fatalism goes, though the conviction of good and evil abides. Man comes to play a double part, at once the hero and the villain of a tragedy that is peculiarly his own.

## II

The precipitate which effected this change of disposition was the war itself. In the years between the *Free Man's Worship* and the outbreak of the war, Mr. Russell was devoted mainly to philosophy. He became a leader of the so-called neo-Realists. He was engaged in elaborating theories of perception, enquiries into the nature of our knowledge of the external world, and in such congenial

tasks as the refutation of the flimsy anthropomorphism of the pragmatists. These happier activities were rudely broken by the war. Mr. Russell was no Hegel who could calmly pursue his disquisition on the Absolute while the guns were thundering outside his city. The war not only changed the current of his life, it changed his faith and his hope. "To me", he says, "the chief thing to be learnt through the war has been a certain view of the springs of human action, what they are, and what we may legitimately hope that they may become." His conclusions appeared in the volume named *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, published in America under the title, *Why Men Fight*. It is the most stimulating and optimistic of Mr. Russell's works. What is evil in the world, what causes war and hatred and the waste of power, is not human nature itself; it is the suppression and distortion of human nature through cramping necessities and social oppressions. It is the frustration of the entire principle of growth, which, being liberated, leads mankind to fulfilment with the same urgency as trees seek the light. "In the modern world, the principle of growth in most men and women is hampered by institutions inherited from an earlier age." Our impulses are not harmonized with our desires. The primitive hunter, for example, had an impulse to hunt, which was in harmony with his desire for food. The modern artisan has the same desire, but he has no impulse towards the work whose wages provide him with food. Mr. Russell, who must always have his devil because he is so impressed with the evil and the frustration of the world, now discovers him in outgrown institutions. But this devil, unlike the cosmos, can be overthrown, and Mr. Russell, against the cruel background of the war, advances with burning hope to the assault.

Power, the constant enemy, now takes the embodiment of Authority and Tradition. "All institutions", he declares, "if they are not to hamper individual growth, must be based as far as possible upon voluntary combination, rather than the force of the law or the traditional authority of the holders of power. None of our institutions can survive the application of this principle without great and fundamental changes; but these changes are imperatively necessary if the world is to be withheld from dissolving into hard separate units, each at war with all the others." The fortress of authority is the State, and our critic proceeds to show "how great, how unnecessary, how harmful many of its powers are, and how enormously they might be diminished without loss of what is useful in its activity." He admits that the State is indeed necessary, and that it renders an essential service by substituting law for force

and order for chaos. But it is obsessed by the ideals of power, and because it nourishes war and the fear of war it causes a vast amount of misery. The world is controlled by this false spirit, but it can be exorcised, and the task of all true thinkers is to reveal its falsehood, believing that truth, if joined to courage, will at length prevail. We must teach men that the fulfilment of their desires, and of those unguided impulses whose roots are deeper than desire, depends on the control of power. We must teach them that in order to live well they must have good relations with their fellow-men, and that the enemy of good relations is repressive or coercive power.

All our present institutions, Mr. Russell maintains, are infected with the same disease. Our property institutions encourage the acquisitive desires, and cramp the constructive and artistic impulses. They stimulate the love of money, and that love kills the springs of the more sensitive love of a hundred finer things. The fruits of the spirit are blasted by the winds of power. Take education. We want to control the young minds entrusted to our care; we want to produce belief rather than thought, and uniformity rather than free enquiry, so that on the subjects that really count the child is met "with dogma or stony silence". We are afraid of thought, for fear always rides with power. On this subject Mr. Russell writes with a glowing fervour which illuminates the protestant depths of his heart:

Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin, more than even death. Thought is subservient and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tryed wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. It sees man, a feeble speck, surrounded by unfathomable depths of silence; yet it bears itself proudly, as unmoved as if it were lord of the universe. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.

But if thought is to become the possession of many, not privilege of the few, we must have done with fear. It is fear that holds men back—fear lest their cherished beliefs should prove delusions, fear lest the institutions by which they live should prove harmful, fear lest they themselves should prove less worthy of respect than they have supposed themselves to be. Should the working man think freely about property? Then what will become of us, the rich? Should young men and young women think freely about sex? Then what will become of morality? Should soldiers think freely about war? Then what will become of military discipline? Away with thought! Back into the shades of prejudice, lest property, morals, and war should be endangered!

Better men should be stupid, slothful, and oppressive than that their thoughts should be free. For if their thoughts were free, they might not think as we do. And at all costs this disaster must be averted. So the opponents of thought argue in the unconscious depths of their souls. And so they act in their churches, their schools, and their universities.

All these fears are foolish or worse. Beyond our fears lie the truths which alone can save us. If we can learn to substitute trust for fear, trust in life, trust in humanity, a new age will be born, a truer religion, a finer morality, a better society. Before our eyes will dawn the shining vision of the future, and with the triumph of thought the springs of peace and joy will be unsealed.

So the brief sun of hope shone in our author's sky before the clouds of disillusionment darkened it again. We must remember that the work from which these passages are quoted was written in the earlier days of the war, when the sudden tragedy of civilization made new hope a necessity of life. But in Mr. Russell the vision of the future was not the projection of a faith which has first come to terms with the realities of the present. With his strong ethical preoccupation, he had now found the source of evil in outworn institutions, which stood in strange contrast with the innate spirit of man. So long as he was merely critical of an existing order, he was able to maintain this contrast. But when he turned to consider alternative institutions, the uncertainty of his position revealed itself. If the main fault lay with our institutions, then a new set of institutions would deliver mankind. But would it happen so? A doubt falls across the page whenever Mr. Russell raises this question.

We observe this doubt in our author's treatment of socialism. He calls himself a socialist, but he has always been a most uncomfortable one for all true believers. To begin with, he deprecates any elaborate system of organisation, and regards the existing power of the State as vastly excessive. And every now and again he makes some disconcerting utterance, disconcerting to any believer in his own theory of institutions, as when he says, for example, that "in a socialist community it is to be feared that instead of an increase of self-direction there would only be an increase of mutual interference."<sup>1</sup> And he makes incidental remarks concerning human motives and desires which suggest that pride and envy and malice and the love of power and a whole array of vices are inbred in humanity. But he cannot run with the theological hare of original sin and hunt with the socialist hound of economic determin-

1 *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, chap iv

ism. If the blame lies so entirely with institutions, he must exonerate human nature; and if he deplures the vices of men, he must at least in large part acquit institutions of the responsibility for the evils of the world. There is a hidden uncertainty in Mr. Russell's ethical thought which disturbs the discerning and sympathetic reader.

The uncertainty comes to light in the works which followed the *Principles*, especially in *Roads to Freedom* and *Prospects of Industrial Civilization*. In these works the author sets out to examine the alternative institutions which might liberate humanity from the prison of the past. *Roads to Freedom* was written in the later days of the war, when the sense of its wastefulness had become, to a mind like Mr. Russell's, a nightmare, when the first revulsive hopes of a new world had grown weary in the long days of attrition, and when the author himself had the peculiarly bitter experience of a complete alienation from the prevailing spirit of his countrymen, culminating—soon after the book was written—in a period of imprisonment. In this time of almost unendurable stress, Mr. Russell turned to the systems which promised a way out from the evils and sufferings that men brought upon each other. The roads that promised freedom were socialism (anarchism, in its proper philosophical sense), and syndicalism. One may observe in passing that the American publishers, with that intellectual timidity which characterises this continent, changed the title to *Proposed Roads to Freedom*. This is, in fact, all that these roads are to Mr. Russell, but in America even a title is sufficient *pour epater les bourgeois*.

The first part of the book consists in a descriptive account of the systems in question. It is in the second part that the particular attitude of the author is revealed, and in it we find in marked degree that uncertainty which is only suggested in the *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. For while Mr. Russell roundly declares that the abolition of private ownership of land and capital is a necessary step towards peace among men and between nations, the net effect of his criticism is to weaken the belief which his earlier work instilled, that men can by institutional change achieve salvation. There are, in fact, two unreconciled strains in his thought. He would reorganize the whole social structure, and yet he feels that all organization is restrictive and dangerous to the spirit of man. "All law and government is in itself to some degree an evil", he declares. Some law and government is a necessary evil, and therefore he cannot accept anarchism. But much government is an unnecessary evil, and so he is at odds with socialism. "State socialists argue as if there would be no danger to liberty in a State not based on capitalism. This seems



to me an entire delusion. Given an official caste, however selected, there is bound to be a set of men whose instincts will drive them toward tyranny." And even of guild socialism, to which he is more attracted, he expresses the fear that if the Guild Congress were all-powerful over the questions of economic production, "the evils now connected with the omnipotence of the State would soon reappear." Moreover, the evils of which he is so conscious now present themselves to him as lying deeper than institutions, as rooted in human nature itself. In speaking of the socialist view that capitalism is the source of war, he remarks: "The outlook of both socialists and anarchists seems to me, in this respect as in some others, to be unduly divorced from the fundamental instincts of human nature. . . Man is naturally competitive, acquisitive, and, in a greater or less degree, pugnacious," So the roads to freedom may lead instead, directly or indirectly, to tyranny. In his constant search for the devil, Mr. Russell turned from the cosmos to outworn institutions, and from institutions he now seems to be turning the heart of man to something that looks very like what the theologians call "original sin". For the attainment of a world full of happiness, he now tells us, "the obstacles imposed by inanimate nature are not insuperable. The real obstacles lie in the heart of man." And yet, so perplexing is our author, he remarks in this same volume, speaking of the proper social attitude towards crime, that "the first thing to recognize is that the whole conception of guilt or sin should be utterly swept away." But the spirit of *Erewhon* scarcely befits a world so full of the vision of evil.

The fact is that Mr. Russell is far more at home in the realm of ideals than on the difficult and doubtful roads whose signposts proclaim that they lead thither. On the roads he stumbles and gropes, and he is safe only when he takes the wings of thought and returns to his heights. There alone is he happy, and there his utterance is clear and strong. No one can resist the attraction of his picture of the world that might be, no matter how he doubts his companion picture of the world that is, or his route map of the *terra incognita* that lies between. "The world that we must seek is a world in which the creative spirit is alive, in which life is an adventure full of joy and hope, based rather upon the impulse to construct than upon the desire to retain what we possess or to seize what is possessed by others. It must be a world in which affection has free play, in which love is purged of the instinct for domination, in which cruelty and envy have been dispelled by happiness and the unfettered development of all the instincts that build up life and fill it with mental delights."

"Such a world", he adds, "is possible; it waits only for men to wish to create it." Yes, that's the rub. Not the cosmos now, not principalities and powers, not authority and tradition, but just the will of men. The goal is clear in his sight, and the starting-point is clear. But the building of the road between them—there is the age-long task. He who thinks it possible is brave, but he who thinks it simple is doomed to disillusionment and final despair.

### III

The roadway from the world that is to the world that might be is the perpetual problem of the ethical mind, and from now on it obsessed the mind of Mr. Russell. In his discontentment with the results of western civilization, he made eager pilgrimage to Russia. There too disappointment awaited him. The new order was founded, even more than the old one, on authority and usurpation. Its idealism was consumed from within by the fierce necessities of power. Perhaps, thought Mr. Russell, it is the whole industrial world that is on a wrong foundation. The Bolshevik commissary is but the revolutionary model of the American trust magnate. So the pilgrim pursued his quest to China. Here was a land of ancient civilization, almost untouched by the mechanizing process of industrialism, a land where contentment walked hand in hand with frugality, a land of quiet dignity and serener dreams. But though Mr. Russell found much to admire in Chinese life, he found also much to question. In China he had sought a solution and, as everywhere else, he found a problem instead. Perhaps he was seeking too much. Perhaps he did not sufficiently realize that ideals too are on the move, and must always far outstrip the heavy march of actualities. Perhaps he was asking for "better bread than can be made from wheat", which is indeed permissible if one is patiently cultivating wheat, but foolish if one thereby despises bread.

As byproducts of these investigations there appeared two volumes, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* and *The Problem of China*. They prepared the way for the latest of Mr. Russell's attempts at a social synthesis, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*. Before I turn to the latter, I shall briefly characterise the byproducts.

Mr. Russell went to Russia a theoretical believer in communism. He returned with a profound distrust of the practice of it, though still rather as one who regarded the practitioners as having betrayed the faith. This attitude produces here the same curious feeling of uncertainty in the reader which we discovered in some of Mr. Russell's earlier work. The author seems somehow to be living and moving "in worlds not realized." Is the faith sound, and only the

practice wrong? Is the system good, while the authors of it are evil? At any rate, Mr. Russell admitted, it had failed, and he asks in some perplexity, why? His answer is as follows. The principle of communism is good, but the world was not ready for it. The new world cannot be created until the opinions and feelings of ordinary people are prepared to receive it. The principle is good, but the men who realized it are fanatics who sought to impose it on the world, reckless of what they destroyed in the process,—other good things, better things.

We are not here concerned with the critique of communism, but with our author's response to it. From this standpoint the most interesting thing is that Mr. Russell's faith in the efficacy of institutions as prime movers in human deliverance had again received a shock. If communism as well as capitalism was capable of holding men in bondage, if in fact it added material squalor to spiritual subjection, how can we look for deliverance through any institutions? After all, if we have living ideals, will they not evoke the institutions that are best adapted to them, and if we have false gods, will not out best institutions be turned to their service? "The ultimate source", says Mr. Russell, "of the whole train of evils lies in the Bolshevik outlook on life; in its dogmatism of hatred, and its belief that human nature can be completely transformed by force." But still our author has not come to a final reckoning with institutions. He feels, I think rightly, that the doctrine of reaction which tempts the disheartened believer in institutions is also false; that is too cheap a conclusion which tells us, for example, to preach brotherhood and pay no heed to the unemployed, or peace and never mind about the League of Nations; that the glib poet was wrong who said

For forms of government let fools contest,  
Whate'er is best administered is best.

There is a curious passage in the book before us which throws light on the author's baffled but unended search. "I confess", he says, "that when the spectacle of present-day Russia forced me to disbelieve in Bolshevik methods, I was at first unable to see any way of curing the essential evils of capitalism. My first impulse was to abandon political thinking as a bad job, and to conclude that the strong and ruthless must always exploit the weaker and kindlier sections of the population. But this is not an attitude that can be long maintained by any vigorous and temperamentally hopeful person. Of course, if it were the truth, one would have to acquiesce. Some people believe that by living on sour milk one can achieve immortality. Such optimists are answered by a mere

refutation; it is not necessary to go on and point out some other way of escaping death. Similarly an argument that Bolshevism will not lead to the millennium would remain valid even if it could be shown that the millennium cannot be reached by any other road. But the truth in social questions is not quite like truth in physiology or physics, since it depends upon men's beliefs. Optimism tends to verify itself by making people impatient of avoidable evils; while despair, on the other hand, makes the world as bad as it believes it to be. It is therefore imperative for those who do not believe in Bolshevism to put some other hope in its place."

The chapter from which this quotation comes is entitled "Mechanism and the Individual". Its title suggests the new direction in which the thought of Mr. Russell turned from the *cul de sac* of the Russian Revolution. Might not the enemy—that evil thing which is the source of evils—be the control of organization over the human spirit, the subjection of the creative mind to its own creations? It is then no longer a simple question of capitalism *versus* communism. It is not a new evil, but an ancient one which takes Protean forms, and which must be fought anew in every age and under every system. It is not institutions themselves, but the bondage of institutions. Institutions are necessary; the mechanism of life is necessary, but it is also perilous. Our civilization has conquered us, enslaved our minds. We must look, thought Mr. Russell, to the Far East, where mechanism does not reign, where institutions are more simple and more in harmony with the inner life, where the restless organizing spirit of the West no longer frets away the native joy of things.

So he turned his face to China. One feels, however, by this time, that our author somewhat resembles the wanderer in the famous song, *Dort wo du nicht bist, dort ist das Gluck*.

In China he found indeed a less acquisitive society, more tolerant, more urbane, more sensitive to the natural beauty of the unhurried hours, but he found also vast poverty and vast ignorance.

He found also the cramping influence of family claims and of the excessive reverence for old age. Had Mr. Russell been a native of China instead of a visitor, one is tempted to think that, with his temperament, he would have been as much a rebel against these things as he is against the conditions of western life. Moreover, he found that China was looking eagerly towards that very West for deliverance and new birth, and that it needed badly some things which the West could bestow, above all, science and technical skill. He feared that in gaining these things it would also succumb to what he calls the mechanistic outlook. He explains in *The*

*Problem of China* just what he means by this expression. "I mean", he says, "something which exists equally in Imperialism, Bolshevism and the Y. M. C. A.; something which distinguishes all these from the Chinese outlook, and which I, for my part, consider very evil. What I mean is the habit of regarding mankind as raw material, to be moulded by our scientific manipulation into whatever form may happen to suit our fancy. The essence of the matter, from the point of view of the individual who has this point of view, is the cultivation of will at the expense of perception, the fervent moral belief that it is our duty to force other people to realize our conception of the world. The Chinese intellectual is not much troubled by Imperialism as a creed, but is vigorously assailed by Bolshevism and the Y. M. C. A., to one or other of which he is too apt to fall a victim, learning a belief from the one in the class-war and the dictatorship of the communists, from the other in the mystic efficacy of cold baths and dumb-bells. Both these creeds, in their western adepts, involve a contempt for the rest of mankind except as potential converts, and the belief that progress consists in the spread of a doctrine. They both involve a belief in government and a life against nature." The Chinese, he tells us, are free at present from this disease. "Unlike the Y. M. C. A., they have no wish to alter the habits of the foreigners, any more than we wish to put the monkeys at the Zoo into trousers and stiff shirts. And their attitude towards each other is, as a rule, equally tolerant." But he has grave forebodings. Mr. Russell is very much given, in his later writings, to utter forebodings. China is in the throes of transition. She must seek material advance, but there is danger that in the process she will lose her soul. In the East as in the West, the way of civilization is beset by perils.

## IV.

All the peculiar qualities of Mr. Russell's mind appear in an intensified form in the latest of his social studies, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, which he wrote in collaboration with his second wife. It has the same perplexing habit of inciting contrary hopes and fears. At one moment it offers the prospect of a better world under a new system; at another it shows human motives in so dark a picture that one wonders whether a new system would matter much. At one moment it points to science as the deliverer, at another to socialism, at another it suggests that the important issue is not that between socialism and individualism, communism and capitalism, but that between mechanism and life. At one moment it tells us that an optimistic view of the present discontents

is justified, and almost on the same page we read that "our own civilization appears to be growing decrepit and ready to fall". The inconsistencies and perplexities which we discover cannot be attributed to the joint authorship of the volume, for we have already seen their source in the mind of its main author. There is, moreover, a certain bitterness of comment, a readiness to impute motives of a sinister character, which checks that confidence in basic human nature on which alone our hopes can be built. The social synthesis which Mr. Russell here achieves is not so much a synthesis of the objective facts as a blending of his own hopes and fears, of his likes and dislikes, within which we vainly seek for either assurance or direction.

We conclude once more that our philosopher is not at home in the cave of the everyday world. He begins by expecting too much of the inhabitants of the cave, those creatures of habit and instinct, and in revulsion he tends to misconceive the motives that prompt their short-sighted actions, their struggles and their follies. In another book Mr. Russell declares that "men's morals in the mass are the same everywhere; they do as much harm as they can, and as much good as they must." Often he seems to see humanity in an unreal light. He tends to view everything in the sharpest contrasts of good and evil. He is an ethical impressionist. He cannot paint the varied greys of life: for him it is all sun or blackness. And where he cannot find the narrow gateway to heaven, he must find the broad road to hell.

In nearly all his social writings Mr. Russell has a way of enumerating the constituents of well-being or happiness, the things that make life good. The enumeration varies somewhat from book to book, but always it rings clear and true. Then he proceeds to show how, in the business of living, men treat those things that are desirable and lovely, and we no longer feel the same sureness of touch. It is true that, in this business of living, men stumble and miss the way. It is true that their passions drive them into the thorns and thistles, and that they take selfish short-cuts that end in the morass. But all is not said when these tales are told. There is endeavour as well as folly, there is triumph as well as disaster. And always, always the army is on the move. The too impatient critic, his eyes set on far-off goals, loses sight of the endless marvel of what humanity is and does.

These comments are particularly evoked by *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*. Following his wont, Mr. Russell enumerates four ingredients which are requisite in the good community, these being instinctive happiness, friendly feeling, enjoyment of beauty,

and knowledge. We wish he would stop to show us the place of these desirable things in the life of the individual and in the relations of men. We wish he would illustrate their effects and examine their operation, with the same impartiality with which one examines a mathematical principle. We wish he would convey to the reader that sense of their abiding values which is present in the author's mind. We wish he would even appeal to the reader, and exhort him so that he can more fully relate the appreciation of these values to his own way of life. But Mr. Russell does none of these things. He limns the ideal in a few lines and then, turning passionately to the inhabitants of the cave, cries out, Look on this picture—and on that! And the second picture is so utterly unlike the first that the contrast either arouses protest because most men do not believe it, or generates despair in those who do.

In fact, we cannot help feeling, as we read his later writings, that his temperament, always peculiarly sensitive to the spectacle of the evil in the world, and profoundly affected by the gigantic ravages of our times, has gained the ascendancy over his science. He is disillusioned with life, and though he holds as firmly as ever to his first ideals, he sees the world more and more through the distorting mirror of his disappointment. For it is the last, and perhaps the worst, illusion of the disillusioned man that he sees life steadily and sees it whole. He does not perceive that his very disillusionment is a temperamental screen between him and the truth.

Mr. Russell sees things in clear-cut antitheses. Man must be either hero or villain of the play. The alternatives are always salvation or damnation. He is an evangelist with a gospel—not always the same gospel. But he offers on each occasion the same dramatic choice. If society rejects this message, he says in effect, its doom is sealed. The time of acceptance is brief, and the engine of destruction is at the door. But society moves too slowly and too confusedly for his impatient zeal. So his thought tends to grow more catastrophic. In all his later books he conjures up visions of menacing disaster. His forebodings outrun his hopes. This is curiously illustrated by his recent little book named *Icarus*. The title is indicative—Icarus, given wings of wax by his father Daedalus, who flew too near the sun and dropped into the sea. The subject is the future of science, and Mr. Russell, who once hailed science as the deliverer of men, now pictures strange and sinister possibilities. Here is one of them. "It will be possible", he suggests, "to make people choleric or timid, strongly or weakly sexed, and so on, as may be desired. Differences of emotional disposition seem to be

chiefly due to secretions of the ductless glands, and therefore controllable by injections or by increasing or diminishing the secretions. Assuming an oligarchic organization of society, the State could give to the children of holders of power the disposition required for command, and to the children of the proletariat the disposition required for obedience. Against the injections of the State physicians the most eloquent socialist oratory would be powerless. The only difficulty would be to combine this submissiveness with the necessary ferocity against external enemies; but I do not doubt that official science would be equal to the task." Such fancies would be excellent material for an up-to-date *Gulliver's Travels*, but they sound too grotesque in the earnest discourse of a philosopher.

For Mr. Russell, let me repeat in conclusion, has at least kept faith with his ideals. The earth may dissolve, but he will still proclaim them. The heavens may fall, but he will still, in the language of his famous essay, "defy with Promethean constancy a hostile universe." We may feel that he is needlessly concerned over the dissolution of the earth and the falling of the heavens. We may feel that civilization is not so brittle as he fears. The events of our little day, the follies of an hour, will not overwhelm it. It is not so tender a plant, liable to be blighted by every cold wind, for its roots are deep in the buried ages of the earth, and its life is hidden in the abiding mystery of all that lives. The decision of an hour, no matter how momentous it seems to us, will neither destroy our civilization nor bring a new era to birth. Behind us as well as before us stretch the unknown horizons. What we see is a brief span, and what we foresee is nothing. True ideals shine in their own light, though our cave of time and space remains dark. It is Mr. Russell's great service that his ideals are clear and true. His ethics, in a word, is far surer than his sociology. And ideals, if they are true, abide, though all our prophecies pass with the prophets.