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## THE EDWARDIAN GOLDEN AGE AND NOSTALGIC TRUTH

NOSTALGIA IS ONE of the gentler emotions. In sheer power of effect it cannot compete with the terrible pity of *King Lear*, the ribald laughter of Rabelais, or the primeval passion of *Wuthering Heights*. Yet it is no less pervasive for all that, for it fixes its subtle hold over individual men and over entire generations. Man is given to looking to the past as well as to the future. And when he turns his gaze on the past, more often than not he finds that nostalgia has sweetened the bitter, smoothed away the troubled, made the lovely beautiful and the good better. Then the past appears as a kind of golden age, as a time of peace, security, and bliss. The Greeks looked back past the reign of the Olympian Gods and placed their golden age in the time of Father Saturn; generation after generation of Englishmen have located theirs in Merrie Old England. But for many moderns, the period preceding the Great War—the period of Edwardian peace, progress, and prosperity—is regarded with a sweetly aching nostalgia. The Edwardian period has assumed the dimensions of a great and significant golden age.<sup>1</sup>

This view of the Edwardian period as a golden age did not frequently appear until the latter half of the 1920s. It took time for people to digest and evaluate their experiences. But by the time Siegfried Sassoon published his nostalgic re-creation of the pre-war world in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), the Edwardian era had already begun to represent those qualities which later ages have remembered and for which they have longed.<sup>2</sup> In 1931, Arthur Waugh, recalling his life in an Edwardian villa, sighed: “manners have changed and standards with them. I make no sour comparisons. But . . . I like to remember the amenities of a quieter world, where the laws of guest and host were the laws of comity and grace.”<sup>3</sup> And as the years advanced, the view

seemed to gain even greater currency; in 1949 Dudley Carew announced that the Edwardian era represented a "golden and beneficent era of plenty, peace and prosperity."<sup>4</sup> In fact this assumption had become so widespread by 1956 that Charles Furth was able to note: "Many of us, looking back, see the period before 1914 in the golden haze of lost leisure, of a gracious and unhurried way of living. It seems always to have been gentle summer."<sup>5</sup> And by 1964 the nostalgia for the pre-war world had become so prevalent that Henry Fairlie could argue that it was the prime motive behind the current spurt of war books and memoirs:

The first [motive], of course, is the nostalgia (found on the left even more revealingly than on the right) for the days when the British Navy still steamed in line ahead, and the ideas of British writers followed in its wake; when there was an ordered society, to be as happily attacked as defended; when British currency or even just the promise of British currency would carry one through any fix in Europe; when the Dukes were Dichards, and rebels had causes which were not artificial.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, through the fifty years that separate us from the period, this nostalgia for the Edwardian era has been one of the nearly constant responses in a world where few things seem constant.

But of all the preceding ages formed by history or imagined by man, why is it that the Edwardian period is the era on which so many moderns have fastened as their own golden age? The answer, I think, lies with the horrible events of the Great War, that war which was fought "to save civilization", but which ended the century of Victorian peace, and destroyed the old civilization. Looking back at the old world from the vantage point of 1917, Clive Bell declared that in 1914 "society offered the new-comer precisely what the new-comer wanted, not cut-and-dried ideas, still less a perfect civilization, but an intellectual flutter, faint and feverish no doubt, a certain receptivity to new ways of thinking and feeling, a mind at least ajar, and the luxurious tolerance of inherited wealth. Not, I suppose, since 1789 have days seemed more full of promise than those spring days of 1914. They seem fabulous now, and a fairy-tale never comes amiss." However, he concludes his retelling of the fairy-tale by adding: "The war has ruined our little patch of civility as thoroughly as a revolution could have done; but so far as I can see, the war offers nothing in exchange."<sup>7</sup> The shots fired by a Serbian student not only killed the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria, but also, as Leonard Woolf insists, "destroyed the civilization of Europe. Civilization is a way of life and the way of 1914 de-

stroyed a new, and civilized or semi-civilized, way of life which had established itself or was establishing itself all over Europe. . . . We live today, and have lived ever since the shot fired at Sarajevo, with a background of battle, murder, and sudden death."<sup>8</sup> Explicit in these statements is the acknowledgment that the period had very definite and valuable qualities which are not to be found in the era of wars and rumours of wars that has followed 1918. Also explicit is the sad realization that the period seems to have been stopped in 1914; its civilization, like a mouse, prey to some malevolent cat, mauled before it was murdered in the trenches of France. Thus those four years of senseless slaughter, accompanied by a more rapid breakdown of the old social order, now appear as a gulf, a chasm across which the Edwardian period looms in bright and appealing contrast to our own dark world.

It is difficult to convey the significance and quality of this Edwardian golden age. Dreams lose much in the retelling. So in the following discussion I merely attempt to describe some of the components of the dream, hoping that the illustrations will impart something of the dreamers' mood. But the Edwardian period exists in fact as well as in men's imaginations, and these two facets of the age need to be put into perspective with each other. Hence, it is necessary to mention the forces of unrest and rebellion that increasingly broke out during the period, although most of this discussion deals with other qualities of the civilization, with the details on which the nostalgia is based.

For those who are disturbed by the chaos that has marked the modern age, the Edwardian era furnished the relief that only an ordered, stable, and traditional society can provide. For the Edwardian era, unlike the modern age, was not a rejection of the manners, morals, and social structure of the Victorian period. Rather it was a continuation and extension of the nineteenth century; it accepted the basic structures and conventions of the Victorians, while modifying them in detail. During this first decade of the century, as Edmond Taylor reminds us, "the monarchic-aristocratic order of society, based on a king by divine right and a ruling class largely recruited from the aristocracy which we carelessly tend to think of as having passed away with the eighteenth century, not only continued to co-exist with nineteenth-century bourgeois-nationalist democracy . . . but in several parts of the world still overshadowed its supposed successor."<sup>9</sup> In Britain the monarch, although he had long renounced his divine right to rule, still exercised great power and influence, if only because of his position at the apex of the pyramidal social structure. In this structure, each class occupied a definite position, and, more important, accepted both the position and the structure. For of all the social edifices inherited by

the twentieth century from the nineteenth, this pyramid was "the most intact, and its familiar and reassuring shape stood out on the Western horizon dominating a much less stable Europe."<sup>10</sup>

Although this social structure remained intact during Edward's reign, there was a shift in emphasis, a slight loosening of the Victorian structure and strictures. It became easier for the wealthy and witty to reach the higher levels of the pyramid, and more emphasis was given, on those levels, to the pleasures that money could buy. But this shift was due more to the difference in the characters of mother and son than to any revolutionary or radical principle. The death of the dour queen and strict, humourless mother certainly gave Edward and his court greater freedom to indulge their cosmopolitan taste for pleasure. This was not, however, a taste suddenly acquired with the crown. Edward, who had become the leader of society when Victoria retired to the country and her idolatry of Albert, was long settled in his tastes, loves, and conduct when he became king at the age of sixty. The new ruler and the members of his court, it must be remembered, had been born and bred Victorians: their love of pleasure may have been caused by a reaction against the strictness and austerity of their upbringing, but it was kept within bounds by the very conventions and traditions of that upbringing. For these reasons, the majority of the aristocracy still practiced *noblesse oblige*; and the country's backbone, the "upper and middle classes who recruited the professions and public services, lived through the reign still cherishing the Victorian discipline and traditions in which they had been nurtured. It [Edward's reign] supplied new heart and hope to the sane workers who still maintained a preference for, or at least a deference to, an ordered society. . . ."<sup>11</sup> This respect for the Victorian virtues and order, coupled with a love of the good things of life, prevailed in the palace and among the populace. It gave the Edwardian era its character and its significance.

Both this ordered society and its love of the good life found their fullest expression, their most lasting symbol, in "the stately homes of England". For it was during this period, when the wealth of the Empire cascaded into England, that country-house living reached its apogee.<sup>11</sup> Surrounded by its wide park, the country house dominated the church, the village, and the countryside. To the children of the period, as to young George Ponderevo, the house and park still symbolized the ancient and stable order of society:

[They] represented the thing that mattered supremely in the world . . . all other things had significance only in relation to them. They represented the Gentry, the Quality, by and through and for whom the rest of the world . . . breathed

and lived and were permitted. And the Quality did it so quietly and thoroughly, the great house mingled so solidly and effectually with earth and sky. . . .

The great house, the church, the village, and the labourers and the servants in their stations and degrees, seemed . . . to be a closed and complete social system. . . . It seemed to be in the divine order.<sup>12</sup>

Here in their houses, the very centre of traditional English life, the gentry gathered for sports, balls, politics, and conversations in rooms filled with orchids and champagne. From here justice and social services were meted out to the counties; from here emerged the ideas, decisions, and compromises later presented in Westminster; and most significantly, from here issued a healthy patronage and intelligent appreciation of artists and their works.<sup>13</sup> (Despite Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, patronage was not yet defunct.) Here such diverse artists as Nijinsky and Chaliapin, Augustus John and Ambrose McEvoy, Vaughan Williams and Ethyl Smyth, D. H. Lawrence and Max Beerbohm, found the intelligent appreciation that only such rich talents as Augustine Birrell, Maurice Baring, or the Duchess of Rutland could provide. Indeed, according to Clive Bell, the occupants of these pre-war houses "listened more willingly to the clever than to the [morally] good"; so that in the few golden years before the deluge Society "gave promise of becoming what it had not been since the French Revolution—something that a fastidious person could tolerate. It was becoming open-minded."<sup>7</sup>

Of all the groups who gathered in the country houses, perhaps the best known, and certainly the most important set was that known as "the Souls". Composed of such memorably witty, learned, and literary men as H. H. Asquith, Augustine Birrell, Arthur Balfour, George Wyndham, Lord Curzon, and Maurice Baring, and such gracious and talented women as Lady Elcho, Lady Desborough, Lady Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the Duchess of Rutland, and Margot Asquith—the Souls embraced an enriching variety of personalities, interests, and talents: they included leaders of both political parties, prime ministers and actor-managers, proud grandees and unbowed commoners, society hostesses who were recognized as esteemed painters and sculptors, and statesmen whose criticism and informal essays are still read with pleasure and profit. But the social importance of the Souls resides not so much in their very real contributions to politics, literature, and art, as in the climate of civility and intelligence they created and conveyed. What David Cecil says of the impact of the Souls upon Max Beerbohm can stand equally well as a final judgment on their influence over others who touched their circle. "The Souls", Lord David says,

were exquisitely agreeable, combining an eighteenth-century wit and stylishness with a refinement of feeling, a dash of imaginative sensibility, that proclaimed them the contemporaries of Henry James. The charming spontaneous Lady Elcho, the subtle brilliant Lady Desborough, was each in her own way supremely accomplished in the art of pleasing. Max savoured their agreeability to the full. It was also an aid to his own art. He may have been right in saying that frequenting London society did not help his career in any practical sense. But it was an inspiration to his talent. . . . Now in these great houses he was able to meet and talk to men as eminent as Gladstone had been in his boyhood; Rosebery and Balfour, Curzon and Haldane, Wyndham, and Randolph Churchill's sensational young son, Winston.<sup>14</sup>

One who touched the circle and was so influenced was Evelyn Waugh, a sensitive and talented writer whose works are haunted by nostalgia for the Edwardian Golden Age.<sup>15</sup> First introduced to the members of the circle by their sons and his contemporaries at Oxford, Waugh was soon choosing a large segment of his own circle of friends from among the families of the Souls—Laura Lister (later Lady Lovat and nurse-protector to Maurice Baring during his long, last illness), the Asquiths (especially those members of the family associated with Christopher Hollis and Lady Horner at Mells Manor), Alfred Duggan (novelist step-son of Lord Curzon), Mgr Ronald Knox, and Lady Diana Cooper. It is significant that when Waugh, famous for the strength of his hates and loves, first fell in love, it was not so much with an individual as with an entire family. Even more important is the fact that Gwen Plunkett-Greene, the mother of this family and the inspiration of its qualities of elegance, grace, humour, and serenity, “had grown up among the ‘Souls’ in the heart of late Victorian musical and artistic society.”<sup>16</sup> And as Waugh became increasingly dissatisfied with the aimless rebellion and outrageous insolence of the “Bright Young Things”, he turned with redoubled love to the values and standards represented by the Souls. Recounting a meeting with Max Beerbohm in the late 1920s, Waugh insisted that Beerbohm brought him a valuable lesson from the Edwardians: “And here from a remote and much better world came the voice of courtesy. The lesson of the master.”<sup>17</sup>

But of all these friends, the most important, both as an individual and as a symbol, was Ronald Knox. A companion of such brilliant scholars and wits as the Grenfell brothers, Charles Lister, Edward Horner, and Patrick Shaw-Stewart, only Knox survived the destruction of the War to emerge the “cherished and privileged survivor of a golden age”.<sup>18</sup> This Edwardian golden

age, Waugh argued, "is now legendary. It is effortless to say as I have often heard it said, that, had they grown to maturity, that heroic group loosely dubbed 'the Grenfells' would have developed the weakness of every other generation. All we know is that they died young leaving a unique reputation for brilliance, high-spirits, and grace, and that a rich, determining tradition in English life seems to have withered and died with them."<sup>19</sup>

For a satirist whose basic method is one of contrast, of juxtaposition of the corrupt and the innocent, the present and the past, the deviation and the norm, some standard against which he can measure his satiric victim is necessary. Waugh seems to have found in the Edwardian era, as represented by Knox, a standard which was personally meaningful and which also promised to be an effective contrast. It is for this reason that Knox and his generation are important: they came to represent that set of values, that common culture, that civilization which died with most of them in the War. Again and again Waugh laments the death of tradition. Again and again the same phrases occur in his references to the common culture: adherence to customary standards of behaviour, and acceptance of a rich, sustaining tradition of manners and morals; good conversation, good wine, good books; brilliance, grace, elegance, ease; security and serenity; in short, sweetness and light. Waugh admires the Grenfell Coterie because "they had standards of behaviour; they were often 'buffy', never sottish. They paid for the damage they did. They talked well. All of them loved poetry, and many of them wrote it. Several had outstanding good looks. They were fiercely hostile to the cult of decadence." To all this Waugh adds that the set were never bothered by problems of ethics: Lister may have been an ardent socialist and Shaw-Stewart an unabashed conservative, but "all accepted the moral law."<sup>20</sup> These are the values, these are the men by which Waugh judges the moderns. In his American lecture tour of 1949, Waugh chose Knox as the representative of the old tradition, declaring that he was unintelligible to the average modern "because he writes in the old tradition of a common culture—a tradition lost to the western world since the First World War."<sup>21</sup> And as a foil to Knox, Waugh chose Graham Greene, arguing that "Greene is a thorough modern, his impressions of life formed and *confined* in the years of, and immediately after, the First World War [like Waugh himself]. Before 1914, there was a world where sweetness of life could exist; afterwards, the world atmosphere was one of horror. Greene represents this new atmosphere."<sup>21</sup>

Of course Waugh's view of the pre-War world as an era over which sweetness, brilliance, and a traditional culture reigned, is not the view of a

professional historian. But it is fruitless to argue, as Barbara W. Tuchman does, that the Edwardian era was not the golden age, because it "was not a time *exclusively* of confidence, innocence, comfort, stability, security and peace. . . . A phenomenon of such extended malignance as the Great War does not come out of a Golden Age."<sup>22</sup> One always needs to differentiate between selective, nostalgic truth and that more complex and complete truth expounded by the historian. One must recognize that a view of a period may possess nostalgic truth even though it lacks the completeness of historical truth. Because our response to an era is coloured by very strong emotions, because we emphasize those qualities we admire or lack, and tend to forget the flaws of a civilization, any age that we view as golden is indeed a golden age. And no bold lists of wars and oppressions, no condemning tables of poverty and immorality, no strong insistence on the dross of history, can dim our golden vision. The Age of Pericles was an age of degrading slavery, mercantilism, demagoguery, poverty, and oppression, of bitter battles and pitiless peace. And it contained within itself the seeds of decadence, chaos, and that great, final, malignant war that bloomed later and destroyed the age. Yet these are not the qualities we think of when we refer to the Golden Age of Greece.

Similarly, when we think of the Edwardian golden age, it is not of the bestial drunkenness and incest in the warrens of the poor, of the degrading poverty and the inhuman filth in the murderous sweatshops. These heinous qualities abounded, but we tend to forget them. Instead of the murky rooms haunted by starvation and reeking of sewage, we think of "the sunniness of the Edwardian scene, young men in boaters, the box at the Opera, long lazy afternoons in the Park, tea out of the thinnest porcelain with cucumber sandwiches."<sup>23</sup> We emphasize the sense of order and security that prevailed, the innocence and optimism, the richness, the graciousness, and the idealistic hopes of an age which still placed its faith in the rationality and goodness of humanity, and in the principle of progress.

Yes, we emphasize these qualities, but only because they existed in sufficient abundance for us to discover and envy them. Our vision, while by no means a total view, does have nostalgic truth. Even Mrs. Tuchman admits that "people *were* more confident of values and standards, more innocent in the sense of retaining more hope of mankind, than they are today."<sup>22</sup> And this glimmer of nostalgic truth that Mrs. Tuchman admits becomes a shimmering gleam for such critics as B. Ifor Evans who maintain that the opening years of the century

had been full of hope, they formed a period of economic prosperity, of expanding



opportunity, and in many minds of an increased faith in humanity and its capacity for progress. England was not without self-criticism in those years, but it was allied to a generous belief that the "Island Pharisees" were capable of improvement, that social injustice could be eliminated by a process of gradualism, and that imperialism could in time and without force be assimilated to democratic ideals. Above all it was to be a world where man would have increasing opportunities of exercising his attainments to the full. . . . But the vocal elements, which were mainly of a middle class, as yet not deprived of its confidence, gave expression to a conviction of the desirability of the world in which it lived and of its faith in a general capacity for improvement.

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century there had been a literature of social criticism of which H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, and John Galsworthy were the main exponents. They were all anxious to reform the world, but they did not question the ultimate possibility of reform, nor postulate the inadequacy of man as an instrument for the good life.<sup>24</sup>

This optimism, innocence, and confidence can be attributed in part to the fact that the monarchy and society—the establishment, to use a term that has only lately become pejorative—still supported and guided the conventions and aspirations of the age. This is why André Maurois could compare the period to that of France in 1740, the France of the *Lettres Persanes* of Montesquieu: "The social framework of the monarchy still held society tightly braced, giving every one a sense of security which allowed ample freedom of mind. England may be said to have experienced a similar period of security and freedom in the time of King Edward."<sup>25</sup>

Nor are these feelings of security, freedom, and hope hard to understand. Darwin had been digested, and some sort of compromise between religion and science had been effected. In turn, science itself seemed to support the hopes of the time, either by improving man's physical condition, or by improving his moral and mental state through strict application of the scientific, rationalistic method.<sup>26</sup> The industrial revolution had been won. English goods were traded at the ends of the world, and the wealth of an empire covering one-sixth of the earth's surface flooded into London. England was the richest, the most powerful nation the world had ever known.

And the age insisted that this power be extended and this wealth be spent: society and its members were to be improved; life was to be enjoyed. Abroad, South Africa, with its diamonds and gold, was annexed, but the Boers were given generous terms that appealed to the traditional chivalry and fairness of a people who had not yet learned to cry "Hang the Kaizer!" or to convict defeated enemies of war crimes. At home, Parliament, having re-

stricted the Lords' veto, launched a massive attack against the social ills of the age. Legislation was enacted to provide free school meals and medical services, old age pensions, unemployment and health insurance. The government's improvement of social conditions was reinforced in the private business sector when Cadburys embarked on a new idea for a company town—to replace the drab, uniform hideousness of the typical mill town with a pleasant plot of suburbia which would reflect the pride and joy of its workers—and Bournville was born. In middle-class homes, as on lordly estates, food, servants, and other necessities were plentiful and cheap. Money and leisure gave one ample time to pursue the amenities of life. Friends were to be visited, charitable committees convened. There were books to read, and pictures to buy (perhaps a safe Sargent or, if one were really daring, one of the new post-impressionists exhibiting at the Grafton Galleries). One had to squeeze in a trip to see Diaghilev's new Russian Ballet, or to hear Chaliapin in *Boris* before leaving for the week-end at a country house. There were holidays at the sea to plan, houses to build or enlarge, and a new production at the amateur dramatic society to oversee. Secure and free, people plunged zestfully into the joys of life. Nowhere is this zest more evident than in the letters written by Rupert Brooke before the age ended and he had become its public symbol: "‘Life is splendid. I cannot contain myself at meals. They suspect me,’ he wrote to Dudley Ward. ‘I roll about and gurgle inside. Life, Dudley, life!’ and a day or two later it was ‘It is absurd to say the world is dull. It is superb . . . superb!’ And to Sybil Pye, ‘Since Monday I have read 11 plays, 3 novels, a book on Stocks and Shares, and *Principia Ethica* besides all the current magazines and papers. How gorgeous it is to work! Ha!’"<sup>27</sup> Life, so various, so beautiful, so new, seemed to lie before one like a land of dreams. These were "the few enchanted years just before the First World War, when summer appeared as if it would last for ever and each hour showed its own special glow and lustre: when Clio, the Muse of History, had apparently settled down to a placid middle age, and the only events she produced would turn out to be menus of pleasure."<sup>28</sup>

Edwardian England was not, of course, so quietly idyllic as we like to remember it: Jerusalem still had not been built in England's green and pleasant land. The small print at the bottom of the menus of pleasure whispered of vague unrest, of iconoclastic ideas and new-stirred violence. Paradoxically, these disturbances can be traced to the feelings that life was too secure, too safe, too smug, and at the same time to the fear that this stable way of life was threatened. Writers as diverse as Chesterton, Kipling, and Saki found special

fascination in violence.<sup>29</sup> Yet many of them, dreading the growing challenge of Germany, showed a strong preoccupation with the fear of a future war and invasion. This fear of outside violence was reinforced by a fear of internal disorder. New, disturbing ideas boomed out with the tiny voice of the "little magazines". An artistic manifesto delivered one week was denounced by another the next: *ism* propagated *ism*, *futurism* led to *vorticism*. But all were alike in demanding a change, a violent end to the old order. *Futurism* attacked the human in art by idolizing machinery and war. T. E. Hulme, who founded *imagism* to signal his revolt against romanticism, also found time to admire the cult of "proletarian violence" expounded in George Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*. Not to be outdone in belligerency, Wyndham Lewis issued his *Blast* against the traditional society in 1914. And young *avant garde* writers, such as Frederick Goodyear, argued that only the "neo-barbarians", those who "have forsaken civilization and sought to re-barbarize themselves", can lead mankind to the promised land, to the utopia of "The New Thelema".<sup>30</sup>

To our blood-dimmed eyes and manifesto-deafened ears, these visions of violence and change seem only stupidly naïve or touchingly innocent, but for an older, more peaceful age they represented very basic drives and fears. Part of the human personality had been controlled too strictly and too long; elements of chaos and anarchy sought to burst the chains with which security and ease had bound the individual. But often the liberation raised a conflicting longing for the very safety and stability the chains provided. One can see this striking conflict in Rupert Brooke who, in one mood, celebrated the joys of common life in "The Great Lover", and, in the next, praised "rebellion against the safeties and little confines of our ordinary life."<sup>27</sup>

This whole conflict of powerful, suppressed desires at war with loved principles and aspirations, is brilliantly demonstrated in George Dangerfield's standard work on the period, *The Strange Death of Liberal England 1910-1914*. Dangerfield shows that England was threatened on three fronts: by militant labour leaders who threatened to bring down the industrial structure with a general strike; by the Pankhurst Suffragettes who smashed windows, poured jam in mail boxes, burned houses, and even committed suicide in their war against the male-dominated order; and by the Unionists who rebelled over the Irish question, staged the famous mutiny at the Curragh, and threatened the constitution with a civil war. He argues convincingly that, in each case, the conscious assault upon the enemy was reinforced by an unconscious rebellion against oneself. He notes that it was the Conservatives, who honoured and respected the constitution above all else, who almost destroyed

it by their rabid and illegal support of the Orangemen. And, again, "It was the Trade Union leaders, and the members of the parliamentary Labor Party—[the worker's] own creation, his own particular symbols of law and order—against whom he turned, as though, by denying that 'sentiment of respect' which 'corresponds to real instincts in the human mind,' he was at last permitting himself to come alive."<sup>31</sup>

Yet, having mentioned the disturbances, the whispers of unrest and the groans of violence, it is wrong to stress them, for they did not really affect and involve England's citizens. Delighting in the golden light that seemed to promise to shrine their days forever, people failed to realize that the sun was, in fact, setting. Detached from the disturbances, the public zestfully danced its way to the abyss. "The loudest cries, the most lamentable predictions, failed to arouse in its bosom any stronger emotion than one of pleasant excitement."<sup>31</sup> And it is this pleasant excitement that Osbert Sitwell emphasizes in his perceptive recreation of the period. An air of gaiety prevailed:

Music flowed with the lightness and flash of water under the striped awnings and from the balconies; while beyond the open, illuminated windows, in the rooms, the young men, about to be slaughtered, still feasted, unconscious of all but the moment. For a hundred years the social scene had not been so attractive to the eye, and it was not destined to shine with such lustre again for several centuries; because the Age of Private Life, founded on the family, was nearing its end . . . the art of spectacle was again beginning to be understood, and hostesses took a pride once more in the beauty, no less than the costliness of their entertainments: while, in addition, in a few houses, the discovery had been made that life could be more enjoyable if you surrounded yourself with intelligent people, or at least admitted one or two to panic the assembled herds. Night by night, during the summers of 1913 and '14, the entertainments grew in number and magnificence.<sup>32</sup>

Never had there been such a profusion of rich-blossomed flowers, never had Europe seen such exotic mounds of hothouse fruit, never had there been such an abundance of champagne:

Never had Europe been so prosperous and gay. Never had the world gone so well for all classes of the community . . . in 1913 and the next few months, young men could face the future with confidence. . . . There was no disillusionment. Happier, wealthier, wiser—and younger, too, for our age—every day, we were being conducted by the benevolent popes of science into a Paradise, but of the most comfortably material kind. . . . How could you doubt? . . . Rich and poor became richer every year. How far distant did we stand, it seemed,

from the brutalities of the Georgian Age, and of the early Victorian, when whole mobs were sentenced to transportation for the most trifling offences. . . . No wonder the wealthier section of the British community felt justified in toasting itself and in entertaining the world!<sup>32</sup>

"The old world, in its sunset", Winston Churchill once said, "was fair to see."<sup>33</sup> But the sunset was succeeded by the evening, and the evening by night. On the night of August 4, 1914, the night when England declared war, Sir Edward Grey, watching the lights of London, declared to a friend, "the lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."<sup>31</sup> And with the last lamp, the nineteenth century was extinguished. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new"; the Edwardian era was over, the modern age had begun.

#### NOTES

1. In his excellent study, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968), Samuel Hynes objects that "writers on Edwardian England are inclined to call the time 'golden';" and he insists that "nostalgia is a pleasing emotion, but it is also a simplifying one; to think of Edwardian England as a peaceful opulent world before the flood is to misread the age and to misunderstand the changes that were dramatized by the First World War" (pp. 4-5). Because he is interested in what I call the "historical truth" of the period, Mr. Hynes is right to point out the simplifying effect of nostalgia. But, as I attempt to show in the following discussion, there is also a "nostalgic truth" of the Edwardian Golden Age; and it is a mistake to underestimate the tenacious strength of this "pleasing emotion", nostalgia. [For another appraisal of the Edwardian period, and of the book by Professor Hynes, see Review Article, "Edwardian Retrospect", *DR*, Vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 416-421.—ED.]
2. This nostalgia is sometimes placed even earlier. Bertrand Russell noticed it in 1920 ("Eastern and Western Ideals of Happiness", *Sceptical Essays* [London, 1935], p. 69), and James Cleugh said that 1923 was marked by nostalgia for the halcyon days before 1914 (*This Was Your World* [London, n.d.], p. 119).
3. Arthur Waugh, *One Man's Road* (London, 1931), p. 299.
4. Dudley Carew, *The House is Gone: A Personal Retrospect* (London, n.d. [1949]), p. 14.
5. Charles Furth, *Life Since 1900* (London, 1956), p. 5.
6. Henry Fairlie, "1914-18—And All That", *The Spectator*, 112 (May 1, 1964), 583-584. Fairlie is displeased by the spurt of war books, hence the ironic tone of his remarks. But the irony, by its mere presence, strengthens rather than weakens my contention that nostalgia for the Edwardian period has a strong existence. In this connection, see George Orwell's "Boys' Weeklies". Orwell

argues that childhood reading strongly influences one's later attitudes and beliefs, and he finds that the boys' weeklies, which are probably read by "an actual majority" of English boys, reflect a mental world that is "conservative, but in a completely pre-1914 style". In this mental world "the year is 1910—or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study. . . . The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battle-ships of the British Fleet are steaming up the Channel. . . . Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever." (*Inside the Whale and Other Essays* [Harmondsworth, 1962], pp. 189-190). Although Orwell has correctly spotted the symptoms, he has not, it seems to me, accurately diagnosed the cause. Orwell is too often given to seeing things in terms of powerful financiers and bureaucrats who have diabolical designs on the minds of the "people". In this essay, he argues that the Press Lords, especially Lord Camrose, using snob-appeal, pass these magazines off on the lower orders, thereby keeping them happy with the Conservatives. The explanation is much too simple-minded. One cannot believe that Lord Camrose is so Machiavellian as that. In particular, Orwell's explanation does not account for the choice of the pre-1914 period, with its attendant nostalgia, especially since he acknowledges that the boys are "absorbing a set of beliefs which would be regarded as hopelessly out of date in the Central Office of the Conservative Party" (p. 200).

7. Clive Bell, "Before the War", *Pot-Boilers* (London, 1918), p. 248, pp. 255-256, 250.
8. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again* (London, 1964), p. 43.
9. Edmond Taylor, *The Fall of the Dynasties: the Collapse of the Old Order, 1905-1922* (New York, 1963), p. 21.
10. André Maurois, *The Edwardian Era* (New York, 1933), p. 277.
11. John Gore, *Edwardian Scrapbook* (London, 1951), pp. xiii, 92.
12. H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (New York, 1935), pp. 8-9.
13. See David Spring, "The Role of the Aristocracy in the Late Nineteenth Century", *Victorian Studies*, 4 (Sept., 1960), 55-64. For further good examples of this point, see Osbert Sitwell's four-volume autobiography, especially *Great Morning* (London, 1948), pp. 209, 225, 246ff.
14. David Cecil, *Max* (London, 1964), p. 207.
15. See my "Evelyn Waugh: Tradition and a Modern Talent," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 68 (Autumn, 1969), 506-519.
16. Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (London, 1964), p. 218.
17. Evelyn Waugh, "Max Beerbohm: A Lesson in Manners", *Atlantic Monthly*, 198 (Sept., 1956), 76.

18. Evelyn Waugh, *Monsignor Ronald Knox* (Boston, 1959), p. 14.
19. Evelyn Waugh, "The Best and the Worst: V—Mgr Ronald Knox," *Horizon*, 17 (1948), p. 326.
20. *Monsignor Ronald Knox*, p. 83, 102. In addition to Waugh's biography of Knox, the Grenfell group appear in countless memoirs of the period. Some of the more interesting memoirs are: Ronald Knox, *Patrick Shaw-Stewart* (London, 1920); Lord Ribblesdale, *Charles Lister: Letters and Recollections with a memoir by his father* (New York, 1917); and especially, Diana Cooper, *The Rainbow Comes and Goes* (Boston, 1958). Charles Lister's support of the Independent Labour Party provides a very good example of the urbanity and open-mindedness of "the Souls". When informed of the young aristocrat's conversion to socialism, Mr. Balfour remarked to Lord Ribblesdale, Lister's father, "that it was better than keeping selling-platers or actresses" [*Ibid.*, p. 76].
21. "Waugh's Lecture", *Books on Trial*, 7 (1949), 277 (italics supplied).
22. Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before The Wars: 1890-1914* (New York, 1966), pp. xiii-xiv (italics supplied).
23. Graham Greene, "Introduction", *The Best of Saki* (New York, 1961), p. x.
24. B. Ifor Evans, *English Literature Between the Wars* (London, 1951), pp. 1-2.
25. Maurois, p. 386. It is interesting how often this comparison to eighteenth-century France is made. See Clive Bell quoted above.
26. The Bloomsbury Group, who dominated English literary and intellectual life between the wars, too easily espoused the rationalistic, scientific form of radicalism in their youth. They were Utopians, John Maynard Keynes later lamented, "who believe in a continuing moral progress by virtue of which the human race already consists of reliable, rational, decent people, influenced by truth and objective standards, who can be safely released from the outward restraints of convention and traditional standards and inflexible rules of conduct, and left, from now onwards, to their own sensible devices, pure motives and reliable intuitions of the good" (John Maynard Keynes, "My Early Beliefs," *Two Memoirs* [New York, 1949], p. 99). Interestingly enough, it was Keynes who, while retaining and refining his basic principles, has veered towards a more conservative view. He acknowledges the importance of tradition in phrases worthy of Waugh himself: "In short, we repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. We were not aware that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved" (*Ibid.*, p. 99).
27. Christopher Hassell, *Rupert Brooke* (London, 1964), pp. 232, 122-123.
28. Osbert Sitwell, *Tales My Father Taught Me* (London, 1963), p. 148.

29. For the material in this section, I am indebted to Bernard Bergonzi, "Before 1914: Writers and the Threat of War", *Critical Quarterly*, 6 (1964), pp. 126-134.
30. Frederick Goodyear, "The New Thelema", *Rhythm*, 1 (1911), 3. Significantly, when the War threw Goodyear out of his safe and civilized world into one of true barbarity, he typically lost his faith—all of it: "Personally, I think everything everywhere is bunkum." (Quoted in *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* [New York, 1941], p. 60).
31. George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-1914* (New York, 1961); pp. 395, 403, 424.
32. Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning* (London, 1948), pp. 231, 229-230.
33. Quoted in Edmund Taylor, *The Fall of the Dynasties: The Collapse of the Old Order 1905-1922* (New York, 1963), p. 21.

## COPPER NECKLACE

*Pauline Havard*

Her necklace, coiled upon the table, hissed,  
 It seemed. Did it not belong to one who missed  
 The true meaning of life—the giving of  
 Gentleness and a large proportion of love?  
 Instead, its wearer practised a creed of spite  
 And vengeance. The copper necklace hissed all right:  
 Possessed a killer's eyes and hidden fangs,  
 I'm sure! I see the owner in glasses, bangs  
 Awry from a nervous hand brushing her brow.  
 Still warm from her neck—I dare not touch it somehow,  
 This necklace; I feel the evil plainly here  
 From one whose presence leaves a taint of fear.