THE PATRIOTIC IDEA

By G. K. Chesterton

I

THE scepticism of the last two centuries has attacked patriotism as it has attacked all the other theoretic passions of mankind, and in the case of patriotism the attack has been interesting and respectable because it has come from a set of modern writers who are not mere sceptics, but who really have an organic belief in philosophy and politics. Tolstoy, perhaps the greatest of living Europeans, has succeeded in founding a school which, whatever its faults (and they are neither few nor small), has all the characteristics of a great religion. Like a great religion, it is positive, it is public, above all, it is paradoxical. The Tolstoyan enjoys asserting the hardest parts of his belief with that dark and magnificent joy which has been unknown in the world for nearly four hundred years. He enjoys saying, 'No man should strike a blow even to defend his country,' in the same way that Tertullian enjoyed saying, '*Credo quia impossibile.*'

This important and growing sect, together with many modern intellectuals of various schools, directly impugn the idea of patriotism as interfering with the larger sentiment of the love of humanity. To them the particular is always the enemy of the general. To them every nation is the rival of mankind. To them, in not a few instances, every man is the rival of mankind. And they bear a dim and not wholly agreeable resemblance to a certain kind of people who go about saying that nobody should go to church, since God is omnipresent, and not to be found in churches.

Suppose that two men, lost upon some gray waste in rain and darkness, were to come upon the light of a porch and take shelter in some strange house, where the household entertained them pleasantly. It might be that some feast or entertainment was going forward ; that private theatricals were in preparation, or progressive whist in progress. One of these travellers might lend a hand instinctively and heartily, might play his cards at whist in a fighting spirit, might black his face in theatricals and make the children laugh. And this he would do because he felt kindly towards the whole company. But the other man would say : 'I love this company so much that I dislike its being divided into factions by progressive

whist; I love so much the human face divine that I do not wish to see it obscured with soot or grease-paint ; I will not take a partner for the lancers, for that would involve selecting one woman for special privilege, and I love you all alike.' The first man would undoubtedly amuse the whole company more. And would he not love the whole company more ?

Every one of us has, indeed, been lost in a gray waste of eternity, and strayed to the portal of this earth, over which the lamp is the sun. We find inside the company of humanity engaged in certain ancient festivals and forms, certain competitions and distinctions. And, as in the other case, two kinds of love can be offered to that society. The prig will profess to join in their unity ; the good comrade will join in their divisions.

If the stray guests see something utterly immoral in the distinctions, something utterly wicked in the ritual, doubtless they must protest; but they should never protest because the distinctions are distinctions, and therefore in one sense exclusive, or because the ritual is ritual, and therefore in one sense irrational. If the stranger in the house has a moral objection, for instance, to playing for money, he ought to decline, though he ought not to enjoy declining. But he must not ask, ' Why am I arbitrarily

made a partner with So-and-so?' He must not say, 'What rational difference is there between spades and diamonds?' If he really loves his kind, he will, as far as he can, and in the great mass of things, play the parts given him. He will preserve this gay and impetuous conservatism; he will throw himself into the competitive sports of nationality; he will walk with relish in the ancient theatricals of religion.

Because the modern intellectuals who disapprove of patriotism do not do this, a strange coldness and unreality hangs about their love for men. If you ask them whether they love humanity, they will say, doubtless sincerely, that they do. But if you ask them touching any of the classes that go to make up humanity, you will find that they hate them all. They hate kings, they hate priests, they hate soldiers, they hate sailors. They distrust men of science, they denounce the middle classes, they despair of working men, but they adore humanity. Only they always speak of humanity as if it were a curious foreign nation. They are dividing themselves more and more from men to exalt the strange race of mankind. They are ceasing to be human in the effort to be humane.

The truth is, of course, that real universality is to be reached rather by convincing

ourselves that we are in the best possible relation with our immediate surroundings. The man who loves his own children is much more universal, is much more fully in the general order, than the man who dandles the infant hippopotamus or puts the young crocodile in a perambulator. For in loving his own children he is doing something which is (if I may use the phrase) far more essentially hippopotamic than dandling hippopotami; he is doing as they do. It is the same with patriotism. A man who loves humanity and ignores patriotism is ignoring humanity. The man who loves his country may not happen to pay extravagant verbal compliments to humanity, but he is paying to it the greatest of compliments—imitation.

The fundamental spiritual advantage of patriotism and such sentiments is this: that by means of it all things are loved adequately, because all things are loved individually. Cosmopolitanism gives us one country, and it is good; nationalism gives us a hundred countries, and every one of them is the best. Cosmopolitanism offers a positive, patriotism a chorus of superlatives. Patriotism begins the praise of the world at the nearest thing, instead of beginning it at the most distant, and thus it insures what is, perhaps, the most essential of all earthly considerations, that nothing upon

earth shall go without its due appreciation. Wherever there is a strangely-shaped mountain upon some lonely island, wherever there is a nameless kind of fruit growing in some obscure forest, patriotism insures that this shall not go into darkness without being remembered in a song.

There is, moreover, another broad distinction, which inclines us to side with those who support the abstract idea of patriotism against those who oppose it. There are two methods by which intelligent men may approach the problem of that temperance which is the object of morality in all matters—in wine, in war, in sex, in patriotism ; that temperance which desires, if possible, to have wine without drunkenness, war without massacre, love without profligacy, and patriotism without Sir Alfred Harmsworth. One method, advocated by many earnest people from the beginning of history, is what may roughly be called the teetotal method ; that is, that it is better, because of their obvious danger, to do without these great and historic passions altogether. The upholders of the other method (of whom I am one) maintain, on the contrary, that the only ultimate and victorious method of getting rid of the danger is thoroughly to understand and experience the passions. We maintain that with every

one of the great emotions of life there goes a certain terror, which, when taken with imaginative reality, is the strongest possible opponent of excess ; we maintain, that is to say, that the way to be afraid of war is to know something about war ; that the way to be afraid of love is to know something about it ; that the way to avoid excess in wine is to feel it as a perilous benefit, and that patriotism goes along with these. The other party maintains that the best guarantee of temperance is to wear a blue ribbon ; we maintain that the best guarantee is to be born in a wine-growing country. They maintain that the best guarantee of purity is to take a celibate vow ; we maintain that the best guarantee of purity is to fall in love. They maintain that the best guarantee of avoiding a reckless pugnacity is to forswear fighting ; we maintain that the best guarantee is to have once experienced it. They maintain that we should care for our country too little to resent trifling impertinences ; we maintain that we should care too much about our country to do so. It is like the Mohammedan and Christian sentiment of temperance. Mohammedanism makes wine a poison ; Christianity makes it a sacrament.

Many humane moderns have a horror of nationality as the mother of wars. So in

a sense it is, just as love and religion are. Men will always fight about the things they care for, and in many cases quite rightly. But there is another thing which should not be altogether forgotten, and that is this: that in so far as men increase in intelligence they must see that a quite primary and mystical affection is a foolish thing to put into violent competition with another thing of the same kind. Men may fight about a rational preference, because there victory may prove something. But an irrational preference is far too fine a thing to fight about, because there victory proves nothing.

When men first become conscious of splendid and disturbing emotions, it is their natural instinct, their first and most natural and most reasonable instinct, to kill people. Thus, for instance, the sentiment of romantic love went through the same historical evolution as the sentiment of patriotism. When a medieval knight or troubadour realized that there was an intensity in a pure and monogamous sentiment which was quite beyond anything in merely animal appetites, he immediately took a long spear and rushed round the neighbourhood offering to kill anybody who denied that he had fallen in love with precisely the right person. I do not think that it can be reasonably maintained that

romantic love has decayed in the centuries succeeding this; what has happened has been that people have perceived not that love is too insignificant to fight about, but that it is too important to fight about. Men have perceived, that is to say, that in these matters of the affections all combat is ineffective, since no combatant would ever accept its issue. Each of us thinks his own country is the best in the world, just as each of us might think his own mother the best in the world. But when we think this we do not proceed, or in the least desire to proceed, to the bellicose test. We do not set our mothers to fight each other in an ampitheatre, and for the excellent reason that if one mother overcame the other mother, it would not make the least difference to anybody. That is the only serious objection to the institution of the duel. That the duel kills men seems to me a comparatively trifling matter; football and fox-hunting and the London hospitals very frequently do that. The only rational objection to the duel is that it invokes a most painful and sanguinary proceeding in order to settle a question, and does not settle it. It is our belief, therefore, that the right way to avoid the incidental excesses of patriotism is the same as that in the cases of sex or war—

it is to know something about it. Just as, according to our view, there will always be in some degree the power of sex and the use of wine, so there will always be the possibility of such a thing as patriotic war. But just as a man who has been in love will find it difficult to write a whole frantic epic about a flirtation, so all that kind of rhetoric about the Union Jack and the Anglo-Saxon blood, which has made amusing the journalism of this country for the last six years, will be merely impossible to the man who has for one moment called up before himself what would be the real sensation of hearing that a foreign army was encamped on Box Hill. The light and loose talk about national victories impresses those who think with me merely as a mark of the lack of serious passion. The average reasonable citizen, of whatever political colour, would admit that such talk shows too much patriotism. We should say that it shows too little.

To the cosmopolitan, therefore, who professes to love humanity and hate local preference, we shall reply : 'How can you love humanity and hate anything so human?' If he replies that in his eyes local preference is a positive sin, is only human in the sense that wife-beating is human, we shall reply that in that case he has a code of morality

so different from ours that the very use of the word ' sin ' is almost useless between us. If he says that the thing is not positive sin, but is foolish and narrow, we shall reply that this is a matter of impression, and that to us it is his atmosphere which is narrow to the point of suffocation. And we shall pray for him, hoping that some day he will break out of the little stifling cell of the cosmopolitan world, and find himself in the open fields and infinite sky of England. Lastly, if he says, as he certainly will, that it is unreasonable to draw the limit at one place rather than another, and that he does not know what is a nation and what is not, we shall say : ' By this sign you are conquered ; your weakness lies precisely in the fact that you do not know a nation when you see it. There are many kinds of love affairs, there are many kinds of song, but all ordinary people know a love affair or a song when they see it. They know that a concubinage is not necessarily a love affair, that a work in rhyme is not necessarily a song. If you do not understand vague words, go and sit among the pedants, and let the work of the world be done by people who do.' It is better occasionally to call some mountains hills, and some hills mountains, than to be in that mental state in which one thinks, because there is no fixed height for a

mountain, that there are no mountains in the world.

II

Tolstoyanism, then, with all its earnestness, with all its honourable lucidity, we find, from our point of view, to be a frigid and arbitrary fancy, incomparable in its moral value to that intensity which has bound living men to an actual and ancient soil. It suffers in the comparison from the profound sense that we have that the former opinion is superficial, and the latter vital; that is to say, we have no doubt at all that an ordinary man, born in England, might profess himself a Tolstoyan and an opponent of patriotism with every mark of reason and sincerity; we also have no doubt at all that if he saw the Russian flag run up in Trafalgar Square he would go white to the lips. But this humanitarian theory of the wrongness of the national sentiment, though important, is by no means the most powerful opponent of that sentiment to-day. Another force is in the field, which is by its nature quite equally antagonistic to patriotism, and which is, unlike the other, equipped with power, with wealth, and with a fair chance of triumph in practical politics. This second enemy of patriotism is, I need hardly say, the idea commonly called Im-

perialism. Imperialism seeks to destroy patriotism, not by sketching a remote and unattainable fusion between different peoples, but by pointing out how and where at a particular moment such fusion may be made. Imperialism is an opportunist cosmopolitanism. It says in its rational moods (for it has perfectly rational moods, and of these only is it fair to speak) : ' We do not say we would annex Spain for fun or pick a quarrel with Norway for the sake of doing so. But wherever circumstances lead us more or less naturally to the opportunity of effacing a distinction, of pulling down a flag, of destroying a nationality, we will do so. Wherever we can turn some separate kingdom or republic, with special memories and symbols, into a part of the British or Russian or German Empire, and make it accept our memories and symbols, we will do so. We believe that civilization is on our side, and we enforce it against Fins or Boers, against Poles or Irishmen. We are Imperialists ; we are not the reckless enemies of patriotism, but we are its enemies.' That is the voice of sane and educated Imperialism. I am aware that in the late confusion of political parties the cause of Imperialism was to some extent strengthened by appeals to the immortal sentiment of patriotism. But this is merely

one of those electioneering bewilderments common in all practical politics, and especially in English politics. The patriotic feeling is used in favour of Imperialism just as the hatred of tyrants might have been used against the French Revolution, or the letter of the constitution against Pym and Hampden—that is, used quite honestly and with some reasonable significance, but without any reference to the real divisions between great ideas. It is perfectly evident when we consider the matter fundamentally that it is impossible to have an Imperial patriotism ; that is to say, it is impossible to have towards a sprawling and indeterminate collection of peoples of every variety of goodness and badness precisely that sentiment which is evoked in man, rightly or wrongly, by the contemplation of the peculiar customs of his ancestors and the peculiar land of his birth. Of course, it is quite reasonable to use as a metaphor such a phrase as having a patriotism for the Empire, just as it is permissible to use as a metaphor such a phrase as having a patriotism of humanity, or such a phrase as having fallen in love with Rouen Cathedral. But the perfectly legitimate sentiment which leads a man to support, on political grounds, a huge cosmopolitan confederation has about as much

resemblance to the passion which has made men sing of and die for a strip of land as an admiration for the architecture of Normandy has to the hunger in the heart of Romeo. I am not saying at this point in the discussion that this old and special attachment to some individual soil or blood is a correct sentiment. Perhaps the political theory which unites Jews like Disraeli or Germans like Lord Milner to a large modern civilization is a more rational sentiment than the old sentiment of patriotism. Perhaps patriotism is a brutal fancy of primitive man which it is possible for the world to outgrow. All this I shall discuss later. What I am concerned to point out at the moment is the more or less self-evident fact that this Imperial idea or plan for the consolidation and identification of an increasing number of different commonwealths cannot seriously be called patriotism according to any sense that that word has ever actually had among men. If patriotism does not mean a defined and declared preference for certain traditions or surroundings, it means nothing whatever. A thing like an empire, like the Roman Empire, which contained Greeks and Goths and ancient Britons ; a thing like the British Empire, which contains Dutchmen and Negroes and Chinamen in Hong Kong, may be a perfectly

legitimate object of a certain kind of intellectual esteem, but it is ludicrous to call it patriotism, or invoke the ancient deities of the hearth and the river and the hill. There may be good reason for supporting Mr. Beit in South Africa, but to ask us in the name of patriotism to remember that he is of our people is about as accurate as asking us in the name of family feeling to remember that he is our great-aunt.

Across the path of Imperialism as interpreted in a patriotic sense there lies the most insurmountable of human obstacles, an impossibility which is more than a political and more than a financial impossibility—a psychological impossibility. An empire has all the characteristics that render national attachments impossible. It is huge, it is mostly remote, it is everywhere diverse and contradictory. Above all, it is utterly undefined and unlimited. Not to see how this frustrates genuine enthusiasm is not to know the alphabet of the human heart. There is one thing that is vitally essential to everything which is to be intensely enjoyed or intensely admired—limitation. Whenever we look through an archway, and are stricken into delight with the magnetic clarity and completeness of the landscape beyond, we are realizing the necessity of boundaries. Whenever we

put a picture in a frame, we are acting upon that primeval truth which is the value of small nationalities. Wherever we write or read with pleasure the story of a man living adventurously and happily upon an island, we have hold of the truth which broke the Roman Empire, and will always break Imperialism. All Imperial poetry, even the very best (as in the earlier work of Rudyard Kipling) must be psychologically false, for when a man really loves a thing he dwells not on its largeness, but its smallness. The very psychology of patriotism is in the patriotism of Shakespeare, above all in that hackneyed and admirable passage in 'Richard II.' which is the very ecstasy of the little Englander. It is indescribably significant that Shakespeare, in glorifying his country, compares it to two things—a fortress and a jewel—

> 'This precious stone, set in a silver sea,
> Which serves it for the purpose of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house.'

A fort is a thing which appeals both to the boyish and the practical instinct as characterized by a certain quality which can only be called coziness. A jewel is a thing the intense value of which is enhanced by its being both rare and minute. A fortress not upon its defence, a jewel multiplied over

the earth like the pebbles of the shore, changes the note of feeling finally and beyond recovery. Imperialism is the opening of Shakespeare's fort and the cheapening of his jewel. Shakespeare was right in this particular kind of love-poetry, as in all other kinds. While the anæmic moderns are trying to evoke passion by raving about size and space and eternity, the gigantic Elizabethan remembers in the matter of patriotism also the great psychological verity that all love-poetry tends to diminutives.

It is instructive to compare this graphic Little England patriotism of Shakespeare with the best work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. That best work is very beautiful literature, but it is always at its truest and most beautiful when the writer is speaking of cosmopolitanism, of the sensations of the traveller in many lands. The point of John of Gaunt's utterance is that England satisfies; the point of the 'Sestina of the Tramp Royal' is that nothing satisfies, hardly even the whole globe:

> 'Gawd bless this world! Whatever she 'ath done,
> Excep' when awful long I've found it good.
> So write, before I die, "'E liked it all!"'

That is real poetry, and sentiment too, but it is the very reverse of patriotism. It is the light and not inhumane melancholy

of the man who has paid his vows to many gods and many women. Shakespeare's patriotism has the joy and pain of a passionate lover ; Mr. Kipling's has the gaiety and sadness of a philanderer among the nations.

Spiritually, then, we hold that a healthy man does not demand cosmopolitanism, and does not demand empire. He demands something which is more or less roughly represented by Nationalism. That is to say, he demands a particular relation to some homogeneous community of manageable and imaginable size, large enough to inspire his reverence by its hold on history, small enough to inspire his affection by its hold on himself. If we were gods planning a perfect planet, if we were poets inventing a Utopia, we should divide the world into communities of this unity and moderate size. It is, therefore, not true to say of us that a cosmopolitan humanity is a far-off ideal ; it is not an ideal at all for us, but a nightmare.

And now, having this purely idealistic faith in loyalties of this scope and groups of this kind, we have to turn from pure ethics and poetry to the discussion of the earth as it is at this moment. Hitherto I have attempted to suggest that the national idea is more noble and pleasing in the abstract than either the cosmopolitan or the

Imperial idea, if, indeed, Imperialism can be imagined as anything but cosmopolitan. But now let us turn to the practical people —*convertimur in gentes.*

Now, having this belief, that communities of a size much smaller than empires are the healthy homes for men, that they are better than either a cosmopolitan anarchy or Imperialism, we look out at practical history, and discover a rather remarkable fact. We discover that the civilization which has in practical politics led the world has not only, as a fact, branched or broken into communities of this type, but has made the outline and character of them a sacred thing. Europe, which is the most practical civilization, is also the only Nationalist civilization. Imperialism is Asiatic. We see it at its very best and most intellectual in a thing like the Chinese civilization. In Europe only is there this sense of the sanctity of a nation. In other places men fight for the independence of their own tribe. In our Nationalist Europe only is there any notion of respecting the independence of another tribe. And this is, of course, the only test of the existence of a religion. It is no proof that a man holds life sacred that he wishes to save his own life ; it is some proof of it if he refrains from murdering his enemy. And this was the whole of our

objection to the annexation of the Transvaal, that it was a crime committed against the European virtue of patriotism. For a man has clearly no more right to say that his British patriotism obliges him to destroy the Boer nation than he has to say that his sense of the sanctity of marriage makes him run away with his neighbour's wife.

There is undoubtedly a general notion abroad at the present time that small nationalities are dying out. There is a general notion that empires are living or destined to a continual life, that nationalities are dead or destined to die. Such an idea as this can only have arisen from ordinary ignorance of the history of Europe. It is true that empire often looks strong and nationality often looks weak, but that is merely because all the things that are eternal always look weak. That simple discovery has been the seed of all religions.

The practical truth is that the empires have been the light and transient things, brief as the butterfly; the nations have been the hard and solid and triumphant things, which nothing could break. The largest empire is really only a fashion. But the smallest nation is something greater than a fashion—it is a custom. Imperialism is not either a glorious discovery of the English, as some Englishmen think, or a

wicked invention of the English, as other Englishmen think. It is a tiresome old European fad or fashion, coming round to us after having been tried and found wanting by nearly all the kindred nations.

It neither starts anything nor ends anything: it merely recurs, like the crinoline. But while Imperialism goes out and in, like the crinoline, nationality remains, like the habit of wearing clothes.

Spain was once a colonial empire, far more brilliant and original than ours. Its empire has vanished, but there are still men who will die for Spain; there are still men who will strike you in the face if you say that they are not Spaniards.

France had an empire covering all Europe after the great ecstasy of the Revolution. It vanished utterly, and all its ideas are at a low ebb in Europe. But there are still men who will die for France. And when from our mortal nation also this immortal fallacy is passed, when all the colonies of England have gone the wild way of the colonies of Spain, when some strange and sudden Waterloo has made the little dream of Beaconsfield as mad as the great dream of Napoleon, something will remain, I am very certain, which matters more than all these levities. There will still be men who will die for England.

If any ordinary Englishman wishes to feel the difference between the unreality of Imperialism and the reality of Nationalism—I do not mind whether he is an Imperialist or anything else—let him try one simple test. Let him say first of all to himself such a sentence as this: 'It was largely due to the influence of England that Australia was ceded to Germany.' Such a sentence will no doubt fill him with a not illegitimate fury. He may rank it with Majuba, and call it a scandalous example of his country's weakness. But then let him say to himself this sentence: 'It was largely due to the influence of Australia that England was ceded to Germany.' He will not think that means the weakness of his country. He will think it means that he has no longer any country to be weak. He will not think that means Majuba, but Ragnarök, the twilight of the gods.

It is just because our modern Imperialists do not see the enormous abyss between the claim of the nation and the claim of the mere empire that their philosophy is so superficial and so insincere. It is no exaggeration at all to say that there is as much difference between asking an Englishman to give up his empire and asking him to give up his England as there is between asking him to alter the shape of his hat and

asking him to alter the shape of his head. The two things lie geographically very near together, and for persons with pedantic minds the frontier between hat and head may, for all I know, be the subject of elaborate negotiation.

The people who live in our large towns, and read our large newspapers—probably the most credulous people who have ever existed upon earth—have got an idea into their heads that such things as the annexation of the Transvaal are parts of a normal historic process. They believe that big European empires have always been eating up small European nations, just as whales have always been eating up herrings. This, again, is because they know no history. When we come to look at the facts, the really extraordinary thing is that the absorption of white nations should not have happened oftener. In this wild and wicked world the keenest Nationalist would expect it often to happen, and often to succeed.

As a fact, it has seldom happened: it has never succeeded. Fragments of nations have been bitten off, as in Alsace and Lorraine, and even those have not been easy to chew. Wild tribes, in a chaotic period, with no national sentiment at all in the European sense—tribes such as existed in Europe once, and exist in Asia still—

have overrun and eaten up each other; but a nation is a thing quite different to these.

Some Christian nations have been swallowed; not one has ever been digested. The chunks of Poland still lie heavy on the stomachs of the Central Empires; Ireland has been a perpetual dyspeptic pain. For living nations were not meant by Nature to be our food.

In the whole circle of Christian history and the Christian world there is one instance, and one instance only, of a patriotic European people living contentedly with their Government transferred to another capital. That instance is Scotland; and if ever there were on earth an exception that proved the rule it is here, for Scotchmen have held their heads up after absorption for precisely the same reason that Switzers hold their heads up after liberation—the fact that they were never conquered. If anyone wishes to make the case of the Transvaal a parallel to the case of Scotland, the step required is simple enough. Let Edward VII. leave his crown to President Steyn, and we will answer for the loyalty of the Dutch in South Africa.

We contend, then, that this Nationalism is, at any rate, an unbroken fact of our Europe. It is no more probable that the British Empire will outlast the patriotism

of the Dutch in Africa than it was probable that the Spanish Empire would outlast the patriotism of the Dutch in Europe. Nations are tenacious, empires are slovenly. And now we come to that other matter which is important, the question of whether empires, strong or weak, and nations, strong or weak, do good or harm. In supporting the Spanish Empire or the British Empire, are we supporting something likely to do good to mankind? For, of course, we should be quite willing in that case to side with their weakness, and their forlorn hope of resistance against the enduring tyranny of nationality.

There is one faith which many good men have in Imperialism which must not be despised, but which must respectfully be shattered. Many good men believe that a great conglomeration of peoples, like the British Empire, may be a unification of varied merits. They believe that by it may be extracted the best from the Sepoy, the Australian, the Irishman, the Dutchman, the negro, and the Cockney. All these, they say, may thus grow in one orchard, and civilization can gather the best fruit from each.

Now, this kind of empire has many beauties; it is varied, fascinating, and instructive. But it has one defect: it does

not exist. It is emphatically not true that when we conquer peoples we get the good out of them. So far from that, the reverse is rather true: when we conquer peoples we lose them for ever. Take an instance. Nothing has more profoundly interested us of late years, whether we are philosophers or children, than the study of the great mythologies. Nearly every baby is now brought up among the gods of Greece and the gods of Scandinavia. Many schoolboys could pass an examination as to who was the uncle of Mercury or the second cousin of Loki. We have ransacked every cranny of Olympus and Asgard, and all this time there existed in Europe another great mythology, as vast and varied, as powerful and as perfect.

The chief mark of such a great mythology is that the mere phrases of it are enough to establish its greatness. The mere phrase 'The Son of man' is enough to prove Christianity to be a great religion if no other trace remained of the personality of Christ. The mere phrase 'The Twilight of the Gods' is enough to prove that the Norsemen were poets and philosophers also. And as clearly and certainly a whole universe of primal imagination is revealed by such a mere phrase as 'The Country of the Young.' And the mythology of which

'The Country of the Young' is an example, of which other examples are such unfathomable conceptions as the Secret Rose, or the Black Boar, who in his brutal simplicity typifies the primitive darkness of things ;—where, in what corner of Europe, in what crevice of the Caucasian mountains, has this sumptuous mythology been discovered? It has been discovered in Ireland. It has been discovered in that country of all countries which was nearest to us and most despised, which we conceived as the withered limb of our Empire. Why did we know so much about German mythology and nothing about Irish mythology? Any person with even the simplest knowledge of the world as it is must realize that the reason lies in the fact that our material conquest of Ireland put us in an utterly artificial position towards everything Irish. The Irish would not sing to us any more than the Jews, as described in their stern and splendid psalm, would sing to the Babylonians. I find it difficult to believe that there can be anyone so ignorant of practical existence as not to know that any attempt on the part of the Irish for centuries after their conquest to say to us what they had to say about their history and legends would have been met with nothing except jokes about Brian Baroo.

We all know in reality that England would never have consented to learn from Ireland. It has learnt from France because it failed to conquer her. If Edward III. or Henry V. had succeeded in adding France to the Empire, we may be absolutely certain that we should have learnt as little from the song of Roland as we have from the legend of Maive, and that we should have profited as little from the genius of Mirabeau as we did from the genius of Parnell.

Or take another instance on a somewhat different plane. For centuries all European nations, and England as much as any of them, have been running round and round the metaphysical problem of being, of pessimism and optimism, of variety and unity. And all the time there existed in India an immense and lucid philosophy which, true or false, was, in the case of many English philosophers, the very thing that they were seeking ; in the case of many of them, the very thing that they were saying. The eighteenth century was full of sad speculations and wild speculations ; but they could not entertain quite so wild a speculation as that their sad philosophy had been reduced to its clearest elements by naked brown men in the wilds of Asia. It is strange to think that when poor Robert Clive stood with the pistol in his hand, and

asked himself the value of life and death, he might have learnt from some ragged fakir, whom he treated as dirt, a pessimism infinitely deeper and infinitely more rational than his own. Englishmen could not find it out, could not even realize that it was there. The discovery of the greatest of all philosophical schemes for the absorption of personality was left for Schopenhauer, a German. His hands were not tied with the utter helplessness of empire.

Experience, then, is wholly against the idea that by conquering a people we can reach or use the good in them. The idea that an empire absorbs the Irish qualities when it conquers the Irish, or possesses the Indian wisdom when it conquers India, is one of the thousand delusions which are characteristic of world politics. It is like the notion of the cannibals that it is possible to become brave by eating a brave man, or experts at horsemanship by eating an elegant horseman. We can no more get the secret of Chinese stoicism by annexing China than a savage could become a good actor by dining on Sir Charles Wyndham. And the reason is very evident. The relations of a subject to a ruling race are in themselves false relations, and neither can know anything valuable of the other. They are very like the relations a man bears to

his footman or his housemaid. If anybody told us that a duchess must know more of the soul of the butler than of her personal friends, because she saw the butler every day, and there was only a floor between them, we should not entertain a high opinion of that person's knowledge of the world. But it has never occurred to us that this is the reason why we have reaped profit from the French temperament, and no profit from the Irish temperament. The truth is, of course, that the friendship of nations is like the friendship of individuals. No such thing is possible unless both parties are free. National independence is as much needed if peoples are to be genuine friends as it is if they are to be genuine enemies. Often as we have heard of liberty, equality, and fraternity, we do not remember enough that the two things essential to fraternity are liberty and equality.

The English people, who are upon the whole the most generous people in the world, have this defect in their generosity —that they cannot be persuaded that there are any people in the world who do not want their commodities. In fact, the English have a peculiar and even mystical kind of generosity—a generosity which is willing to give all its goods to the poor,

but cannot be persuaded to let the poor keep the goods they have already. And consequently, when we begin to speak of self-government and independence and such matters, the typical Englishman always imagines that we mean a Parliament elected on the English system, with green benches and a Speaker wearing a wig; and as he imagines that this is the only possible kind of self-government, he says, with perfect truth, that no nation in the world has done as much for self-government as the English. It does not, however, seem to occur to him that every Government that ever existed in the world was a representative Government, and that every despot was elected silently by universal suffrage. Where a nation has a taste for politics, as in England, its politicians represent it; but where it has a taste rather for war, let us say, its warriors represent it; and where it has a taste for religious meditation, its saints and hermits represent it. Even in England, for instance, where we have some love of politics, and may admit, therefore, that Mr. Chamberlain represents us, we have a much greater love of cricket, and C. B. Fry represents us much better than Mr. Chamberlain.

In the light of this principle our relation to such a problem as that of the politics of

India becomes clear. The reason why it is undesirable to extend the franchise to the Hindoos in India is not that it would raise a rebellion or create a ridiculous spectacle, but simply that representative Government in India would not be representative. And the reason that it would not be representative is simply this: that the political faculty not being an Indian faculty, the politicians who would dominate the country would be the most un-Indian Indians who could be found. No suffrage, however wide, no political machinery, however faultless, could make the spouting, ranting, Europeanized, Bengali adventurer represent India. Nothing could alter the fact that he would despise the ancient peasant-life of India, and the ancient peasant-life, with a great deal more justification, would despise him. The political faculty would, of course, be cultivated and brought, perhaps, to a high perfection by certain Hindoos, but it would remain to the eyes of India a unique and elegant and somewhat unnecessary accomplishment. The Bengali politicians would, under whatever democratic forms, inaugurate in India a rule of experts—that is to say, of stupid and fanatical oppressors. India would be about as much really democratized by such a scheme as England would be if we had a General Election every three

years to choose the man whom the great soul of the people really believed to be the best player on the trombone.

So that this essentially generous English idea that we must provide all the parts of the earth which we can influence with our political institutions is dropped significantly, and dropped, if one may say so, with a crash at the first sight of the greatest British problem, the problem of India. Face to face with India, we are obliged to admit that what is one nation's meat is another nation's poison. And the moment we have admitted that, we have broken at a blow the whole conception of that extension of Anglo-Saxon civilization which is the essential of current Imperialism. If our political institutions would not necessarily improve or represent the Hindoo, then the whole thing is a matter of local temperament, and it is quite as possible that our political institutions never have improved or expressed the Irishman, and never will improve or express the Boer. It may be a good thing, of course, in particular cases to give our civilization to these people, but it can no longer be maintained that it is obviously a good thing to give it as it is a good thing to give a loaf to a starving man. The essential principle of Nationalism, that the institutions which are the

growth of the soil have an advantage as such, is admitted.

III

Civilization is a good thing, but it is not a thing like the love of God, by its nature infinite. A man may have too much civilization, as he may have too much beer, and the supreme evil of civilization may be expressed in one single phrase. It consists in permitting the human achievements to outrun the human imagination. A man possesses what he can think of, and not an atom more. If a man with twelve thousand millions a month received thirteen thousand millions instead, not a farthing would really have been given to him, for he could not even imagine the difference. Similarly, if a citizen of an empire already containing numberless alien and incomprehensible peoples has added to his heritage another alien and incomprehensible people, no difference has really been made. A man is a citizen of that commonwealth the nature of which he can conceive, and of no other. If that commonwealth is only a street out of the Blackfriars Road, that street is his country, and for that he ought to wear ribbons or shed his blood.

The danger of small commonwealths is narrowness, but their advantage is reality.

Now, at any specific stage in the world's history we ought to ask ourselves whether humanity is in a greater danger from the narrow arrogance of small people, or from the phantasmal delusions of empires. That is the question which confronts the serious European of to-day, and the answer is not very difficult. It is idle to tell him that Nationalism is sometimes an evil in the confusion of a heptarchy, when the fact stares him in the face that the modern evils arise from remoteness, from unreality, from the circulation of wealth far from its producers, from the waging of wars far from the seat of action, from the wild use of statistics, from the crude use of names, from the investor and the theorist, and the absentee landlord.

We have reached in the modern world a condition of such appalling unreality that everything is done on paper. Men know the destiny of countries when they have never met a native, and professed love and hatred for men whom, if they saw them in the street, they could not tell from Poles or Portuguese. For this immense theoretic method of modern times they have invented an admirable phrase—a phrase that expresses with a searching accuracy and irony of which they are quite unconscious the nature of their political occupation. They

have called it 'painting the map red.' Like children, they are wholly concerned with the colours in an atlas. So long as they can paint the map red they are quite contented that the countries depicted there should retain until doomsday their own alien and inexhaustible colours of forest and field.

There is a decadence possible for our modern civilization, and it is just at this point that my difference from the Imperialists comes in. They think Imperialism (otherwise Cosmopolitanism) is the cure. I think that Imperialism (otherwise Cosmopolitanism) is the disease. I ignore for the moment the question of whether, in the abstract, combinations and centralizations and steamboats and Marconi wires are good things or bad. But to attempt to cure the evil of Birmingham and save the soul of Chicago by more combinations and centralizations and more steamboats and more Marconi wires seem to me stark lunacy ; it is like a doctor ordering brandy to a man in delirium tremens. It is precisely from these things that we are suffering, from a loose journalism, from a vague geography, from an excitable smattering of everything, from an officious interest in everybody, from a loss of strong national types, of strong religious restraints, of the sense of

memory and the fear of God. We are not suffering from any very painful or dangerous resemblance to the arrogant and cruel zealots who ruled in Sparta or died in the fall of Jerusalem. We are suffering from a resemblance to the mob in decaying Rome.

Is there anyone to-day who can reasonably doubt that what led us into error in our recent South African politics was precisely our Imperialism, and not our Nationalism? was precisely not our ancient interest in England, but our quite modern and quite frivolous interest in everywhere else? Millions of instances might be quoted to show how utterly at sea we were and are still about the soul of South Africa. It is as well, perhaps, to concentrate them into two examples.

President Kruger and Mr. Cecil Rhodes had both great talents, great ambitions, and exciting lives; they both had many sincere sympathizers in England, and each one of them at the supreme crisis of his life did things which mystified and appalled their English supporters. No English Rhodesian could ever defend the Raid; no English Pro-Boer has ever explained the Ultimatum. The reason is that neither Rhodes nor Kruger were English politicians. We cannot understand them; probably they understood each other.

It is true that it is sometimes alleged that such things as telegraphy and journalism have really abolished distance. This is not only an error, but a horribly dangerous one. Telegraphy and journalism can indeed convey some things easily, but these are precisely the things that do not matter —the mere names, dates, and incidents. At the worst, journalism supplies us with falsehoods ; at the best, only with facts. And facts, taken apart from their atmosphere, local sentiment, and place in life, are quite as false as falsehoods. We know that a man is shot by a Boer policeman ; but what is the use of knowing that ? What we need to know is whether the thing was typical, whether it was exceptional, whether it was planned, whether it was excused, whether it was excusable. We want to know whether it was a thing like a German duel or a thing like a Whitechapel murder. And all this we could only know by living in the community. Our newspapers could not tell it to us, even if our newspapers were honest.

Or take the instance of newspapers themselves. How can that subtle thing, the prestige of a newspaper, be felt, except at close quarters ? We know that the editor of the *Canadian Tomahawk* has impeached Lord Dundonald, but what ordinary English-

man will be dishonest enough to pretend that he knows whether this means the *Times* or the *Daily Express?* We shall never know how much of a fool Mr. Chamberlain may have made of himself over the French caricatures of Queen Victoria, because we do not live in France, and feel the flavour and position of *Le Rire.* But how great a fool he may, perhaps, have made of himself we can easily imagine by supposing that the Kaiser made a speech to-morrow calling on God and his brave Brandenburg because there had been a paragraph about him in *Modern Society.*

We must at all costs get back to smaller political entities, because we must at all costs get back to reality. We must get nearer and nearer again to love and hate and mother-wit, to personal judgments and the truth in the faces of men. As it is, the game of world-politics is an enormous game of cross purposes. In the fantastic sunset of a decadence the shadows of men are far larger than themselves.

President Roosevelt is accepted in England as something much greater than he is in America. Mr. Seddon is taken much more seriously by Mr. Chamberlain than he is by New Zealand. The really bad work of Cecil Rhodes was not his influence on colonial politicians, whom he understood,

but his influence on English gentlemen, whom he could not understand.

It is characteristic of this vast bewilderment which we call world-politics that it so constantly leaves out of account the most important matters even in its own line. For instance, it perpetually tells us that the English race has a talent for colonization, and adjures it to find fresh continents and fresh islands in the seas of sunset or dawn. Yet there is one island which the English could colonize most easily, and which they are not permitted to colonize—England. In England alone, among all modern countries, the English people are imprisoned between hedges and driven along rights-of-way. England does not belong to them at all; belongs to them far less than the Transvaal before the war belonged to the Uitlanders. And it is in the main that very class whose immense and absurd estates make impossible the colonization of England which urges the English people to colonize something else, preferably something on the other side of the world. These owners very naturally desire what they call a spirited foreign and colonial policy. They desire that every lonely old theocratical State from the Transvaal to Thibet should be invaded by the English ; for all these enterprises put off the dreadful day when the English shall invade England.

But do not let us admit for a moment that in thus turning English loyalty to England we are serving merely England or ourselves. We are taking the turn which our great Christian civilization must take if it is to live. It is an old civilization, and it is for a season tired—tired of civilization, tired of cheap culture, tired of scepticism, tired of talk, tired of hearsay, tired, in a word, of Imperial politics. And it must return, as it did in the adoption of Christianity, to intensity and humility, to a devotion to particular things. About our European Imperialism let us remember primarily one thing, that it has all happened before. The end of the world happened a thousand years ago. At the end of the Roman era everything that was Roman seemed to have gone stale for ever. The world was with infinite agony made young again, because there were some tribes the Empire had never conquered, and some Scriptures that it had never read. The Empire and the continent were just saved by the failures of Imperialism. Strange religions came out of the virgin East, strange races came out of the virgin North, and became useful because they had been neglected. Such was the issue of the happy failure of Imperialism ; the human mind dares scarcely imagine its success. Who can face the

notion of a power which has destroyed everything but itself suddenly growing sick of itself? What pessimist could have pictured the great Empire, at the very instant when it had discovered Roman roads and Roman trophies to be vanity, stretching out its arms to the East and to the West, and finding nothing but its own intolerable omnipresence—finding nothing but Roman trophies and Roman roads?