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BORN MAY 29, 1880. DIED MAY 8, 1936

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST  
*Der Untergang Des Abendlandes*

VOLUME ONE: FORM AND ACTUALITY  
*Gestalt und Wirklichkeit*

VOLUME TWO: PERSPECTIVES OF WORLD-HISTORY  
*Welthistorische Perspektiven*

SHORT LOAN

OSWALD SPENGLER  
THE DECLINE OF  
THE WEST

Volume I  
FORM AND ACTUALITY

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION  
WITH NOTES BY  
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LONDON  
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
SYDNEY

## INTRODUCTION

I

In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfilment — the West-European-American.

Hitherto the possibility of solving a problem so far-reaching has evidently never been envisaged, and even if it had been so, the means of dealing with it were either altogether unsuspected or, at best, inadequately used.

Is there a logic of history? Is there, beyond all the casual and incalculable elements of the separate events, something that we may call a metaphysical structure of historic humanity, something that is essentially independent of the outward forms — social, spiritual and political — which we see so clearly? Are not these actualities indeed secondary or derived from that something? Does world-history present to the seeing eye certain grand traits, again and again, with sufficient constancy to justify certain conclusions? And if so, what are the limits to which reasoning from such premisses may be pushed?

Is it possible to find in life itself — for human history is the sum of mighty life-courses which already have had to be endowed with ego and personality, in customary thought and expression, by predicating entities of a higher order like "the Classical" or "the Chinese Culture," "Modern Civilization" — a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence? For everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime are fundamentals — may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?

The decline of the West, which at first sight may appear, like the corresponding decline of the Classical Culture, a phenomenon limited in time and space, we now perceive to be a philosophical problem that, when comprehended in all its gravity, includes within itself every great question of Being.

If therefore we are to discover in what form the destiny of the Western Culture will be accomplished, we must first be clear as to what culture *is*, what its relations are to visible history, to life, to soul, to nature, to intellect, what the forms of its manifestation are and how far these forms — peoples, tongues

and epochs, battles and ideas, states and gods, arts and craft-works, sciences, laws, economic types and world-ideas, great men and great events — may be accepted and pointed to as symbols.

## II

The means whereby to identify dead forms is Mathematical Law. The means whereby to understand living forms is Analogy. By these means we are enabled to distinguish polarity and periodicity in the world.

It is, and has always been, a matter of knowledge that the expression-forms of world-history are limited in number, and that eras, epochs, situations, persons are ever repeating themselves true to type. Napoleon has hardly ever been discussed without a side-glance at Cæsar and Alexander — analogies of which, as we shall see, the first is morphologically quite unacceptable and the second is correct — while Napoleon himself conceived of his situation as akin to Charlemagne's. The French Revolutionary Convention spoke of Carthage when it meant England, and the Jacobins styled themselves Romans. Other such comparisons, of all degrees of soundness and unsoundness, are those of Florence with Athens, Buddha with Christ, primitive Christianity with modern Socialism, the Roman financial magnate of Cæsar's time with the Yankee. Petrarch, the first passionate archæologist (and is not archæology itself an expression of the sense that history is repetition?) related himself mentally to Cicero, and but lately Cecil Rhodes, the organizer of British South Africa, who had in his library specially prepared translations of the classical lives of the Cæsars, felt himself akin to the Emperor Hadrian. The fated Charles XII of Sweden used to carry Quintus Curtius's life of Alexander in his pocket, and to copy that conqueror was his deliberate purpose.

Frederick the Great, in his political writings — such as his *Considérations*, 1738 — moves among analogies with perfect assurance. Thus he compares the French to the Macedonians under Philip and the Germans to the Greeks. "Even now," he says, "the Thermopylæ of Germany, Alsace and Lorraine, are in the hands of Philip," therein exactly characterizing the policy of Cardinal Fleury. We find him drawing parallels also between the policies of the Houses of Habsburg and Bourbon and the proscriptions of Antony and of Octavius.

Still, all this was only fragmentary and arbitrary, and usually implied rather a momentary inclination to poetical or ingenious expressions than a really deep sense of historical forms.

Thus in the case of Ranke, a master of artistic analogy, we find that his parallels of Cyaxares and Henry the Fowler, of the inroads of the Cimmerians and those of the Hungarians, possess morphologically no significance, and his oft-quoted analogy between the Hellenic city-states and the Renaissance republics very little, while the deeper truth in his comparison of Alcibiades

and Napoleon is accidental. Unlike the strict mathematician, who finds inner relationships between two groups of differential equations where the layman sees nothing but dissimilarities of outward form, Ranke and others draw their historical analogies with a Plutarchian, popular-romantic, touch, and aim merely at presenting comparable scenes on the world-stage.

It is easy to see that, at bottom, it is neither a principle nor a sense of historic necessity, but simple inclination, that governs the choice of the tableaux. From any *technique* of analogies we are far distant. They throng up (to-day more than ever) without scheme or unities, and if they do hit upon something which is true — in the essential sense of the word that remains to be determined — it is thanks to luck, more rarely to instinct, never to a principle. In this region no one hitherto has set himself to work out a *method*, nor has had the slightest inkling that there is here a root, in fact the only root, from which can come a broad solution of the problems of History.

Analogies, in so far as they laid bare the organic structure of history, might be a blessing to historical thought. Their technique, developing under the influence of a comprehensive idea, would surely eventuate in inevitable conclusions and logical mastery. But as hitherto understood and practised they have been a curse, for they have enabled the historians to follow their own tastes, instead of soberly realizing that their first and hardest task was concerned with the symbolism of history and its analogies, and, in consequence, the problem has till now not even been comprehended, let alone solved. Superficial in many cases (as for instance in designating Cæsar as the creator of the official newspaper), these analogies are worse than superficial in others (as when phenomena of the Classical Age that are not only extremely complex but utterly alien to us are labelled with modern catchwords like Socialism, Impressionism, Capitalism, Clericalism), while occasionally they are bizarre to the point of perversity — witness the Jacobin clubs with their cult of Brutus, that millionaire-extortioner Brutus who, in the name of oligarchical doctrine and with the approval of the patrician senate, murdered the Man of the Democracy.

## III

Thus our theme, which originally comprised only the limited problem of present-day civilization, broadens itself into a new philosophy — *the* philosophy of the future, so far as the metaphysically-exhausted soil of the West can bear such, and in any case the only philosophy which is within the *possibilities* of the West-European mind in its next stages. It expands into the conception of a *morphology of world history*, of the world-as-history in contrast to the morphology of the world-as-nature that hitherto has been almost the only theme of philosophy. And it reviews once again the forms and movements of the world in their depths and final significance, but this time according to an entirely different ordering which groups them, not in an ensemble picture

inclusive of everything known, but in a picture of *life*, and presents them not as things-become, but as things-becoming.

The *world-as-history*, conceived, viewed and given form from out of its opposite the *world-as-nature* — here is a new aspect of human existence on this earth. As yet, in spite of its immense significance, both practical and theoretical, this aspect has not been realized, still less presented. Some obscure inkling of it there may have been, a distant momentary glimpse there has often been, but no one has deliberately faced it and taken it in with all its implications. We have before us two possible ways in which man may inwardly possess and experience the world around him. With all rigour I distinguish (as to form, not substance) the organic from the mechanical world-impression, the content of images from that of laws, the picture and symbol from the formula and the system, the instantly actual from the constantly possible, the intents and purposes of imagination ordering according to plan from the intents and purposes of experience dissecting according to scheme; and — to mention even thus early an opposition that has never yet been noted, in spite of its significance — the domain of *chronological* from that of *mathematical number*.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, in a research such as that lying before us, there can be no question of taking spiritual-political events, as they become visible day by day on the surface, at their face value, and arranging them on a scheme of "causes" or "effects" and following them up in the obvious and intellectually easy directions. Such a "pragmatic" handling of history would be nothing but a piece of "natural science" in disguise, and for their part, the supporters of the materialistic idea of history make no secret about it — it is their adversaries who largely fail to see the similarity of the two methods. What concerns us is not what the historical facts which appear at this or that time *are*, per se, but what they signify, what they point to, *by appearing*. Present-day historians think they are doing a work of supererogation in bringing in religious and social, or still more art-history, details to "illustrate" the political sense of an epoch. But the decisive factor — decisive, that is, in so far as visible history is the expression, sign and embodiment of soul — they forget. I have not hitherto found one who has carefully considered the *morphological relationship* that inwardly binds together the expression-forms of *all* branches of a Culture, who has gone beyond politics to grasp the ultimate and fundamental ideas of Greeks, Arabians, Indians and Westerners in mathematics, the meaning of their

<sup>1</sup> Kant's error, an error of very wide bearing which has not even yet been overcome, was first of all in bringing the outer and inner Man into relation with the ideas of space and time by pure scheme, though the meanings of these are numerous and, above all, not unalterable; and secondly in allying arithmetic with the one and geometry with the other in an utterly mistaken way. It is not between arithmetic and geometry — we must here anticipate a little — but between chronological and mathematical number that there is fundamental opposition. Arithmetic and geometry are *both* spatial mathematics and in their higher regions they are no longer separable. *Time-reckoning*, of which the plain man is capable of a perfectly clear understanding through his senses, answers the question "When," not "What" or "How Many."

early ornamentation, the basic forms of their architecture, philosophies, dramas and lyrics, their choice and development of great arts, the detail of their craftsmanship and choice of materials — let alone appreciated the decisive importance of these matters for the form-problems of history. Who amongst them realizes that between the Differential Calculus and the dynastic principle of politics in the age of Louis XIV, between the Classical city-state and the Euclidean geometry, between the space-perspective of Western oil-painting and the conquest of space by railroad, telephone and long-range weapon, between contrapuntal music and credit economics, there are deep uniformities? Yet, viewed from this morphological standpoint, even the humdrum facts of politics assume a symbolic and even a metaphysical character, and — what has perhaps been impossible hitherto — things such as the Egyptian administrative system, the Classical coinage, analytical geometry, the cheque, the Suez Canal, the book-printing of the Chinese, the Prussian Army, and the Roman road-engineering can, as symbols, be made *uniformly* understandable and appreciable.

But at once the fact presents itself that as yet there exists no theory-enlightened art of historical treatment. What passes as such draws its methods almost exclusively from the domain of that science which alone has completely disciplined the methods of cognition, viz., physics, and thus we imagine ourselves to be carrying on historical research when we are really following out objective connexions of cause and effect. It is a remarkable fact that the old-fashioned philosophy never imagined even the possibility of there being any other relation than this between the conscious human understanding and the world outside. Kant, who in his main work established the formal rules of cognition, took *nature* only as the object of reason's activity, and neither he himself, nor anyone after him, noted the reservation. Knowledge, for Kant, is mathematical knowledge. He deals with innate intuition-forms and categories of the reason, but he never thinks of the wholly different mechanism by which historical impressions are apprehended. And Schopenhauer, who, significantly enough, retains but one of the Kantian categories, viz., causality, speaks contemptuously of history.<sup>1</sup> That there is, besides a necessity of cause and effect — which I may call the *logic of space* — another necessity, an organic necessity in life, that of Destiny — the *logic of time* — is a fact of the deepest inward certainty, a fact which suffuses the whole of mythological religions and artistic thought and constitutes the essence and kernel of all history (in contradistinction to nature) but is unapproachable through the cognition-forms which the "Critique of Pure Reason" investigates. This fact still awaits its theoretical formulation. As Galileo says in a famous passage of his *Saggiatore*, philosophy,

<sup>1</sup> One cannot but be sensible how little depth and power of abstraction has been associated with the treatment of, say, the Renaissance or the Great Migrations, as compared with what is obviously required for the theory of functions and theoretical optics. Judged by the standards of the physicist and the mathematician, the historian becomes *careless* as soon as he has assembled and ordered his material and passes on to interpretation.

history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms. The professional historian, on the contrary, sees it as a sort of tapeworm industriously adding on to itself one epoch after another.

But the series "ancient-medieval-modern history" has at last exhausted its usefulness. Angular, narrow, shallow though it was as a scientific foundation, still we possessed no other form that was not wholly unphilosophical in which our data could be arranged, and world-history (as hitherto understood) has to thank it for filtering our classifiable solid residues. But the number of centuries that the scheme can by any stretch be made to cover has long since been exceeded, and with the rapid increase in the volume of our historical material — especially of material that cannot possibly be brought under the scheme — the picture is beginning to dissolve into a chaotic blur. Every historical student who is not quite blind knows and feels this, and it is as a drowning man that he clutches at the only scheme which he knows of. The word "Middle Age,"<sup>1</sup> invented in 1667 by Professor Horn of Leyden, has to-day to cover a formless and constantly extending mass which can only be defined, negatively, as every thing not classifiable under any pretext in one of the other two (tolerably well-ordered) groups. We have an excellent example of this in our feeble treatment and hesitant judgment of modern Persian, Arabian and Russian history. But, above all, it has become impossible to conceal the fact that this so-called history of the world is a limited history, first of the Eastern Mediterranean region and then, — with an abrupt change of scene at the Migrations (an event important only to us and therefore greatly exaggerated by us, an event of purely Western and not even Arabian significance), — of West-Central Europe. When Hegel declared so naïvely that he meant to ignore those peoples which did not fit into his scheme of history, he was only making an honest avowal of methodic premisses that every historian finds necessary for his purpose and every historical work shows in its lay-out. In fact it has now become an affair of scientific tact to determine which of the historical developments shall be *seriously* taken into account and which not. Ranke is a good example.

## VIII

To-day we think in continents, and it is only our philosophers and historians who have not realized that we do so. Of what significance to us, then, are conceptions and purviews that they put before us as universally valid, when in truth their furthest horizon does not extend beyond the intellectual atmosphere of Western Man?

Examine, from this point of view, our best books. When Plato speaks of

<sup>1</sup> "Middle Ages" connotes the history of the space-time region in which *Latin was the language of the Church and the learned*. The mighty course of Eastern Christianity, which, long before Boniface, spread over Turkestan into China and through Sabæa into Abyssinia, was entirely excluded from this "world-history."

humanity, he means the Hellenes in contrast to the barbarians, which is entirely consonant with the ahistoric mode of the Classical life and thought, and his premisses take him to conclusions that *for Greeks* were complete and significant. When, however, Kant philosophizes, say on ethical ideas, he maintains the validity of his theses for men of all times and places. He does not say this in so many words, for, for himself and his readers, it is something that goes without saying. In his æsthetics he formulates the principles, not of Phidias's art, or Rembrandt's art, but of Art generally. But what he poses as necessary forms of thought are in reality only necessary forms of Western thought, though a glance at Aristotle and his essentially different conclusions should have sufficed to show that Aristotle's intellect, not less penetrating than his own, was of different structure from it. The categories of the Westerner are just as alien to Russian thought as those of the Chinaman or the ancient Greek are to him. For us, the effective and complete comprehension of Classical root-words is just as impossible as that of Russian<sup>1</sup> and Indian, and for the modern Chinese or Arab, with their utterly different intellectual constitutions, "philosophy from Bacon to Kant" has only a curiosity-value.

It is *this* that is lacking to the Western thinker, the very thinker in whom we might have expected to find it — insight into the *historically relative* character of his data, which are expressions of one *specific existence and one only*; knowledge of the necessary limits of their validity; the conviction that his "unshakable" truths and "eternal" views are simply true for him and eternal for his world-view; the duty of looking beyond them to find out what the men of other Cultures have with equal certainty evolved out of themselves. That and nothing else will impart completeness to the philosophy of the future, and only through an understanding of the living world shall we understand the symbolism of history. Here there is nothing constant, nothing universal. We must cease to speak of the forms of "Thought," the principles of "Tragedy," the mission of "The State." Universal validity involves always the fallacy of arguing from particular to particular.

But something much more disquieting than a logical fallacy begins to appear when the centre of gravity of philosophy shifts from the abstract-systematic to the practical-ethical and our Western thinkers from Schopenhauer onward turn from the problem of cognition to the problem of life (the will to life, to power, to action). Here it is not the ideal abstract "man" of Kant that is subjected to examination, but actual man as he has inhabited the earth during historical time, grouped, whether primitive or advanced, by peoples; and it is more than ever futile to define the structure of his highest ideas in terms of the "ancient-medieval-modern" scheme with its local limitations. But it is done, nevertheless.

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. II, p. 362, foot-note. To the true Russian the basic proposition of Darwinism is as devoid of meaning as that of Copernicus is to a true Arab.

Consider the historical horizon of Nietzsche. His conceptions of decadence, militarism, the transvaluation of all values, the will to power, lie deep in the essence of Western civilization and are for the analysis of that civilization of decisive importance. But what, do we find, was the foundation on which he built up his creation? Romans and Greeks, Renaissance and European present, with a fleeting and uncomprehending side-glance at Indian philosophy — in short "ancient, mediæval and modern" history. Strictly speaking, he never once moved outside the scheme, not did any other thinker of his time.

What correlation, then, is there or can there be of his idea of the "Dionysian" with the inner life of a highly-civilized Chinese or an up-to-date American? What is the significance of his type of the "Superman" — for the world of Islam? Can image-forming antitheses of Nature and Intellect, Heathen and Christian, Classical and Modern, have any meaning for the soul of the Indian or the Russian? What can Tolstoi — who from the depths of his humanity rejected the whole Western world-idea as something alien and distant — do with the "Middle Ages," with Dante, with Luther? What can a Japanese do with Parzeval and "Zarathustra," or an Indian with Sophocles? And is the thought-range of Schopenhauer, Comte, Feuerbach, Hebbel or Strindberg any wider? Is not their whole psychology, for all its intention of world-wide validity, one of purely West-European significance?

How comic seem Ibsen's woman-problems — which also challenge the attention of all "humanity" — when, for his famous Nora, the lady of the North-west European city with the horizon that is implied by a house-rent of £100 to £300 a year and a Protestant upbringing, we substitute Cæsar's wife, Madame de Sévigné, a Japanese or a Turkish peasant woman! But, for that matter, Ibsen's own circle of vision is that of the middle class in a great city of yesterday and to-day. His conflicts, which start from spiritual premisses that did not exist till about 1850 and can scarcely last beyond 1950, are neither those of the great world nor those of the lower masses, still less those of the cities inhabited by non-European populations.

All these are local and temporary values — most of them indeed limited to the momentary "intelligentsia" of cities of West-European type. World-historical or "eternal" values they emphatically are not. Whatever the substantial importance of Ibsen's and Nietzsche's generation may be, it infringes the very meaning of the word "world-history" — which denotes the totality and not a selected part — to subordinate, to undervalue, or to ignore the factors which lie outside "modern" interests. Yet in fact they are so undervalued or ignored to an amazing extent. What the West has said and thought, hitherto, on the problems of space, time, motion, number, will, marriage, property, tragedy, science, has remained narrow and dubious, because men were always looking for *the* solution of *the* question. It was never seen that many questioners implies many answers, that any philosophical question is really a veiled desire

to get an explicit affirmation of what is implicit in the question itself, that the great questions of any period are fluid beyond all conception, and that therefore it is only by obtaining a *group of historically limited solutions* and measuring it by *utterly impersonal* criteria that the final secrets can be reached. The real student of mankind treats no standpoint as absolutely right or absolutely wrong. In the face of such grave problems as that of Time or that of Marriage, it is insufficient to appeal to personal experience, or an inner voice, or reason, or the opinion of ancestors or contemporaries. These may say what is true for the questioner himself and for his time, but that is not all. In other Cultures the phenomenon talks a different language, for other men there are different truths. The *thinker* must admit the validity of all, or of none.

How greatly, then, Western world-criticism can be widened and deepened! How immensely far beyond the innocent relativism of Nietzsche and his generation one must look — how fine one's sense for form and one's psychological insight must become — how completely one must free oneself from limitations of self, of practical interests, of horizon — before one dare assert the pretension to understand world-history, the *world-as-history*.

## IX

In opposition to all these arbitrary and narrow schemes, derived from tradition or personal choice, into which history is forced, I put forward the natural, the "Copernican," form of the historical process which lies deep in the essence of that process and reveals itself only to an eye perfectly free from prepossessions.

Such an eye was Goethe's. That which Goethe called *Living Nature* is exactly that which we are calling here world-history, *world-as-history*. Goethe, who as artist portrayed the life and development, always the life and development, of his figures, the thing-becoming and not the thing-become ("Wilhelm Meister" and "Wahrheit und Dichtung") hated Mathematics. For him, the world-as-mechanism stood opposed to the world-as-organism, dead nature to living nature, law to form. As naturalist, every line he wrote was meant to display the image of a thing-becoming, the "impressed form" living and developing. Sympathy, observation, comparison, immediate and inward certainty, intellectual *flair* — these were the means whereby he was enabled to approach the secrets of the phenomenal world in motion. *Now these are the means of historical research* — precisely these and no others. It was this *godlike* insight that prompted him to say at the bivouac fire on the evening of the Battle of Valmy: "Here and now begins a new epoch of world history, and you, gentlemen, can say that you 'were there.'" No general, no diplomat, let alone the philosophers, ever so directly felt history "becoming." It is the deepest judgment that any man ever uttered about a great historical act in the moment of its accomplishment.

And just as he followed out the development of the plant-form from the leaf,

the birth of the vertebrate type, the process of the geological strata — *the Destiny in nature and not the Causality* — so here we shall develop the form-language of human history, its periodic structure, its *organic logic* out of the profusion of all the challenging details.

In other aspects, mankind is habitually, and rightly, reckoned as one of the organisms of the earth's surface. Its physical structure, its natural functions, the whole phenomenal conception of it, all belong to a more comprehensive unity. Only in *this* aspect is it treated otherwise, despite that deeply-felt relationship of plant destiny and human destiny which is an eternal theme of all lyrical poetry, and despite that similarity of human history to that of any other of the higher life-groups which is the refrain of endless beast-legends, sagas and fables.

But only bring analogy to bear on this aspect as on the rest, letting the world of human Cultures intimately and unreservedly work upon the imagination instead of forcing it into a ready-made scheme. Let the words youth, growth, maturity, decay — hitherto, and to-day more than ever, used to express subjective valuations and entirely personal preferences in sociology, ethics and æsthetics — be taken at last as objective descriptions of organic states. Set forth the Classical Culture as a self-contained phenomenon embodying and expressing the Classical soul, put it beside the Egyptian, the Indian, the Babylonian, the Chinese and the Western, and determine for each of these higher individuals what is typical in their surgings and what is necessary in the riot of incident. And then at last will unfold itself the picture of world-history that is natural to us, men of the West, and to us alone.

## X

Our narrower task, then, is primarily to determine, from such a world-survey, the state of West Europe and America as at the epoch of 1800-2000 — to establish the chronological position of this period in the ensemble of Western culture-history, its significance as a chapter that is in one or other guise necessarily found in the biography of every Culture, and the organic and symbolic meaning of its political, artistic, intellectual and social expression-forms.

Considered in the spirit of analogy, this period appears as chronologically parallel — "contemporary" in our special sense — with the phase of Hellenism, and its present culmination, marked by the World-War, corresponds with the transition from the Hellenistic to the Roman age. *Rome*, with its rigorous realism — uninspired, barbaric, disciplined, practical, Protestant, *Prussian* — will always give us, working as we must by analogies, the key to understanding our own future. The *break of destiny that we express by hyphenating the words "Greeks=Romans" is occurring for us also, separating that which is already fulfilled from that which is to come.* Long ago we might and should have seen in the "Classical" world a development which is the complete counter-

part of our own Western development, differing indeed from it in every detail of the surface but entirely similar as regards the inward power driving the great organism towards its end. We might have found the constant *alter ego* of our own actuality in establishing the correspondence, item by item, from the "Trojan War" and the Crusades, Homer and the Nibelungenlied, through Doric and Gothic, Dionysian movement and Renaissance, Polycletus and John Sebastian Bach, Athens and Paris, Aristotle and Kant, Alexander and Napoleon, to the world-city and the imperialism common to both Cultures.

Unfortunately, this requires an interpretation of the picture of Classical history very different from the incredibly one-sided, superficial, prejudiced, limited picture that we have in fact given to it. We have, in truth been only too conscious of our near relation to the Classical Age, and only too prone in consequence to unconsidered assertion of it. Superficial similarity is a great snare, and our entire Classical study fell a victim to it as soon as it passed from the (admittedly masterly) ordering and critique of the discoveries to the interpretation of their spiritual meaning. That close inward relation in which we conceive ourselves to stand towards the Classical, and which leads us to think that we are its pupils and successors (whereas in reality we are simply its adorers), is a venerable prejudice which ought at last to be put aside. The whole religious-philosophical, art-historical and social-critical work of the 19th Century has been necessary to enable us, not to *understand* Æschylus, Plato, Apollo and Dionysus, the Athenian state and Cæsarism (which we are far indeed from doing), but to begin to realize, once and for all, how immeasurably alien and distant these things are from our inner selves — more alien, maybe, than Mexican gods and Indian architecture.

Our views of the Græco-Roman Culture have always swung between two extremes, and our standpoints have invariably been defined for us by the "ancient-medixval-modern" scheme. One group, public men before all else — economists, politicians, jurists — opine that "present-day mankind" is making excellent progress, assess it and its performances at the very highest value and measure everything earlier by its standards. There is no modern party that has not weighed up Cleon, Marius, Themistocles, Catiline, the Gracchi, according to its own principles. On the other hand we have the group of artists, poets, philologists and philosophers. These feel themselves to be out of their element in the aforesaid present, and in consequence choose for themselves in this or that past epoch a standpoint that is in its way just as absolute and dogmatic from which to condemn "to-day." The one group looks upon Greece as a "not yet," the other upon modernity as a "nevermore." Both labour under the obsession of a scheme of history which treats the two epochs as part of the same straight line.

In this opposition it is the two souls of Faust that express themselves. The danger of the one group lies in a clever superficiality. In its hands there remains

finally, of all Classical Culture, of all reflections of the Classical soul, nothing but a bundle of social, economic, political and physiological facts, and the rest is treated as "secondary results," "reflexes," "attendant phenomena." In the books of this group we find not a hint of the mythical force of Æschylus's choruses, of the immense mother-earth struggle of the early sculpture, the Doric column, of the richness of the Apollo-cult, of the real depth of the Roman Emperor-worship. The other group, composed above all of belated romanticists — represented in recent times by the three Basel professors Bachofen, Burckhardt and Nietzsche — succumb to the usual dangers of ideology. They lose themselves in the clouds of an antiquity that is really no more than the image of their own sensibility in a philological mirror. They rest their case upon the only evidence which they consider worthy to support it, viz., the relics of the old literature, yet there never was a Culture so incompletely represented for us by its great writers.<sup>1</sup> The first group, on the other hand, supports itself principally upon the humdrum material of law-sources, inscriptions and coins (which Burckhardt and Nietzsche, very much to their own loss, despised) and subordinates thereto, often with little or no sense of truth and fact, the surviving literature. Consequently, even in point of critical foundations, neither group takes the other seriously. I have never heard that Nietzsche and Mommsen had the smallest respect for each other.

But neither group has attained to that higher method of treatment which reduces this opposition of criteria to ashes, although it was within their power to do so. In their self-limitation they paid the penalty for taking over the causality-principle from natural science. Unconsciously they arrived at a pragmatism that sketchily copied the world-picture drawn by physics and, instead of revealing, obscured and confused the quite other-natured forms of history. They had no better expedient for subjecting the mass of historical material to critical and normative examination than to consider one complex of phenomena as being primary and causative and the rest as being secondary, as being consequences or effects. And it was not only the matter-of-fact school that resorted to this method. The romanticists did likewise, for History had not revealed even to their dreaming gaze its specific logic; and yet they *felt* that

<sup>1</sup> This is conclusively proved by the selection that determined survival, which was governed not by mere chance but very definitely by a deliberate tendency. The Atticism of the Augustan Age, tired, sterile, pedantic, back-looking, conceived the hall-mark "classical" and allowed only a very small group of Greek works up to Plato to bear it. The rest, including the whole wealth of Hellenistic literature, was rejected and has been almost entirely lost. It is this pedagogue's anthology that has survived (almost in its entirety) and so fixed the imaginary picture of "Classical Antiquity" alike for the Renaissance Florentine and for Winckelmann, Hölderlin, and even Nietzsche.

[In this English translation, it should be mentioned, the word "Classical" has almost universally been employed to translate the German *antike*, as, in the translator's judgment, no literal equivalent of the German word would convey the specific meaning attached to *antike* throughout the work, "antique," "ancient" and the like words having for us a much more general connotation. — Tr.]

there was an immanent necessity in it to determine this somehow, rather than turn their backs upon History in despair like Schopenhauer.

## XI

Briefly, then, there are two ways of regarding the Classical — the materialistic and the ideological. By the former, it is asserted that the sinking of one scale-pan has its cause in the rising of the other, and it is shown that this occurs invariably (truly a striking theorem); and in this juxtaposing of cause and effect we naturally find the social and sexual, at all events the purely political, facts classed as causes and the religious, intellectual and (so far as the materialist tolerates them as facts at all) the artistic as effects. On the other hand, the ideologues show that the rising of one scale-pan follows from the sinking of the other, which they are able to prove of course with equal exactitude; this done, they lose themselves in cults, mysteries, customs, in the secrets of the strophe and the line, throwing scarcely a side-glance at the commonplace daily life — for them an unpleasant consequence of earthly imperfection. Each side, with its gaze fixed on causality, demonstrates that the other side either cannot or will not understand the true linkages of things and each ends by calling the other blind, superficial, stupid, absurd or frivolous, oddities or Philistines. It shocks the ideologue if anyone deals with Hellenic finance-problems and instead of, for example, telling us the deep meanings of the Delphic oracle, describes the far-reaching money operations which the Oracle priests undertook with their accumulated treasures. The politician, on the other hand, has a superior smile for those who waste their enthusiasm on ritual formulæ and the dress of Attic youths, instead of writing a book adorned with up-to-date catchwords about antique class-struggles.

The one type is foreshadowed from the very outset in Petrarch; it created Florence and Weimar and the Western classicism. The other type appears in the middle of the 18th Century, along with the rise of civilized,<sup>1</sup> economic-megalopolitan<sup>2</sup> politics, and England is therefore its birthplace (Grote). At bottom, the opposition is between the conceptions of culture-man and those of civilization-man, and it is too deep, too essentially human, to allow the weaknesses of *both standpoints alike* to be seen or overcome.

The materialist himself is on this point an idealist. He too, without wishing or desiring it, has made his views dependent upon his wishes. In fact all our finest minds without exception have bowed down reverently before the picture of the Classical, abdicating in this one instance alone their function of unrestricted criticism. The freedom and power of Classical research are always

<sup>1</sup> As will be seen later, the words *zivilisierte* and *Zivilisation* possess in this work a special meaning. — Tr.

<sup>2</sup> English not possessing the adjective-forming freedom of German, we are compelled to coin a word for the rendering of *grossstädtisch*, an adjective not only frequent but of emphatic significance in the author's argument. — Tr.



hindered, and its data obscured, by a certain almost religious awe. In all history there is no analogous case of one Culture making a passionate cult of the memory of another. Our devotion is evidenced yet again in the fact that since the Renaissance, a thousand years of history have been undervalued so that an ideal "Middle" Age may serve as a link between ourselves and antiquity. We Westerners have sacrificed on the Classical altar the purity and independence of our art, for we have not dared to create without a side-glance at the "sublime exemplar." We have projected our own deepest spiritual needs and feelings on to the Classical picture. Some day a gifted psychologist will deal with this most fateful illusion and tell us the story of the "Classical" that we have so consistently revered since the days of Gothic. Few theses would be more helpful for the understanding of the Western soul from Otto III, the first victim of the South, to Nietzsche, the last.

Goethe on his Italian tour speaks with enthusiasm of the buildings of Palladio, whose frigid and academic work we to-day regard very sceptically: but when he goes on to Pompeii he does not conceal his dissatisfaction in experiencing "a strange, half-unpleasant impression," and what he has to say on the temples of Pæstum and Segesta — masterpieces of Hellenic art — is embarrassed and trivial. Palpably, when Classical antiquity in its full force met him face to face, he did not recognize it. It is the same with all others. Much that was Classical they chose not to see, and so they saved their inward image of the Classical — which was in reality the background of a life-ideal that they themselves had created and nourished with their heart's blood, a vessel filled with their own world-feeling, a phantom, an idol. The audacious descriptions of Aristophanes, Juvenal or Petronius of life in the Classical cities — the southern dirt and riff-raff, terrors and brutalities, pleasure-boys and Phrynes, phallus worship and imperial orgies — excite the enthusiasm of the student and the dilettante, who find the same realities in the world-cities of to-day too lamentable and repulsive to face. "In the cities life is bad; there are too many of the lustful." — *also sprach Zarathustra*. They commend the state-sense of the Romans, but despise the man of to-day who permits himself any contact with public affairs. There is a type of scholar whose clarity of vision comes under some irresistible spell when it turns from a frock-coat to a toga, from a British football-ground to a Byzantine circus, from a transcontinental railway to a Roman road in the Alps, from a thirty-knot destroyer to a trireme, from Prussian bayonets to Roman spears — nowadays, even, from a modern engineer's Suez Canal to that of a Pharaoh. He would admit a steam-engine as a symbol of human passion and an expression of intellectual force if it were Hero of Alexandria who invented it, not otherwise. To such it seems blasphemous to talk of Roman central-heating or book-keeping in preference to the worship of the Great Mother of the Gods.

But the other school sees *nothing but* these things. It thinks it exhausts the

essence of this Culture, alien as it is to ours, by treating the Greeks as simply equivalent, and it obtains its conclusions by means of simple factual substitutions, ignoring altogether the Classical *soul*. That there is not the slightest inward correlation between the things meant by "Republic," "freedom," "property" and the like then and there and the things meant by such words here and now, it has no notion whatever. It makes fun of the historians of the age of Goethe, who honestly expressed their own political ideals in classical history forms and revealed their own personal enthusiasms in vindications or condemnations of lay-figures named Lycurgus, Brutus, Cato, Cicero, Augustus — but it cannot itself write a chapter without reflecting the party opinion of its morning paper.

It is, however, much the same whether the past is treated in the spirit of Don Quixote or in that of Sancho Panza. Neither way leads to the end. In sum, each school permits itself to bring into high relief that part of the Classical which best expresses its own views — Nietzsche the pre-Socratic Athens, the economists the Hellenistic period, the politicians Republican Rome, poets the Imperial Age.

Not that religious and artistic phenomena are more primitive than social and economic, any more than the reverse. For the man who in these things has won his unconditional freedom of outlook, beyond *all* personal interests whatsoever, there is no dependence, no priority, no relation of cause and effect, no differentiation of value or importance. That which assigns relative ranks amongst the individual detail-facts is simply the greater or less purity and force of their form-language, their symbolism, beyond all questions of good and evil, high and low, useful and ideal.

## XII

Looked at in this way, the "Decline of the West" comprises nothing less than the problem of *Civilization*. We have before us one of the fundamental questions of all higher history. What is Civilization, understood as the organic-logical sequel, fulfilment and finale of a culture?

For every Culture has *its own* Civilization. In this work, for the first time the two words, hitherto used to express an indefinite, more or less ethical, distinction, are used in a *periodic* sense, to express a strict and necessary *organic succession*. The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture, and in this principle we obtain the viewpoint from which the deepest and gravest problems of historical morphology become capable of solution. Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.

So, for the first time, we are enabled to understand the Romans as the successors of the Greeks, and light is projected into the deepest secrets of the late-Classical period. What, but this, can be the meaning of the fact — which can only be disputed by vain phrases — that the Romans were barbarians who did not precede but closed a great development? Unspiritual, unphilosophical, devoid of art, clannish to the point of brutality, aiming relentlessly at tangible successes, they stand between the Hellenic Culture and nothingness. An imagination directed purely to practical objects — they had religious laws governing godward relations as they had other laws governing human relations, but there was no specifically Roman saga of gods — was something which is not found at all in Athens. In a word, Greek *soul* — Roman *intellect*; and this antithesis is the differentia between Culture and Civilization. Nor is it only to the Classical that it applies. Again and again there appears this type of strong-minded, completely non-metaphysical man, and in the hands of this type lies the intellectual and material destiny of each and every "late" period. Such are the men who carried through the Babylonian, the Egyptian, the Indian, the Chinese, the Roman Civilizations, and in such periods do Buddhism, Stoicism, Socialism ripen into definitive world-conceptions which enable a moribund humanity to be attacked and re-formed in its intimate structure. *Pure Civilization*, as a historical process, consists in a progressive *taking-down* of forms that have become inorganic or dead.

The transition from Culture to Civilization was accomplished for the Classical world in the 4th, for the Western in the 19th Century. From these periods onward the great intellectual decisions take place, not as in the days of the Orpheus-movement or the Reformation in the "whole world" where not a hamlet is too small to be unimportant, but in three or four world-cities that have absorbed into themselves the whole content of History, while the old wide landscape of the Culture, become merely provincial, serves only to feed the cities with what remains of its higher mankind.

*World-city and province*<sup>1</sup> — the two basic ideas of every civilization — bring up a wholly new form-problem of History, the very problem that we are living through to-day with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a *city, a point*, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman. This is a very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end — what does it signify? France and England have already taken the step and Germany is beginning to do so. After Syracuse, Athens, and Alexandria comes Rome. After Madrid,

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. II, pp. 117 et seq.

Paris, London come Berlin and New York. It is the destiny of whole regions that lie outside the radiation-circle of one of these cities — of old Crete and Macedon and to-day the Scandinavian North<sup>1</sup> — to become "provinces."

Of old, the field on which the opposed conception of an epoch came to battle was some world-problem of a metaphysical, religious or dogmatic kind, and the battle was between the soil-genius of the countryman (noble, priest) and the "worldly" patrician genius of the famous old small towns of Doric or Gothic springtime. Of such a character were the conflicts over the Dionysus religion — as in the tyranny of Kleisthenes of Sikyon<sup>2</sup> — and those of the Reformation in the German free cities and the Huguenot wars. But just as these cities overcame the country-side (already it is a purely civic world-outlook that appears in even Parmenides and Descartes), so in turn the world-city overcame them. It is the common intellectual process of later periods such as the Ionic and the Baroque, and to-day — as in the Hellenistic age which at its outset saw the foundation of artificial, land-alien Alexandria — Culture-cities like Florence, Nürnberg, Salamanca, Bruges and Prag, have become provincial towns and fight inwardly a lost battle against the world-cities. The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of "home,"<sup>3</sup> cold matter-of-fact in place of reverence for tradition and age, scientific irreligion as a fossil representative of the older religion of the heart, "society" in place of the state, natural instead of hard-earned rights. It was in the conception of *money* as an inorganic and abstract magnitude, entirely disconnected from the notion of the fruitful earth and the primitive values, that the Romans had the advantage of the Greeks. Thenceforward any high ideal of life becomes largely a question of money. Unlike the Greek stoicism of Chrysippus, the Roman stoicism of Cato and Seneca presupposes a private income;<sup>4</sup> and, unlike that of the 18th Century, the social-ethical sentiment of the 20th, if it is to be realized at a higher level than that of professional (and lucrative) agitation, is a matter for millionaires. To the world-city belongs not a folk but a mass. Its uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of the Culture (nobility, church, privileges, dynasties, convention in art and limits of knowledge in science), the keen and cold intelligence that confounds the wisdom of the peasant, the new-fashioned naturalism that in relation to all matters of sex and society goes back far beyond Rousseau and Socrates to quite primitive instincts and conditions, the reappear-

<sup>1</sup> One cannot fail to notice this in the development of Strindberg and especially in that of Ibsen, who was never quite at home in the civilized atmosphere of his problems. The motives of "Brand" and "Rosmersholm" are a wonderful mixture of innate provincialism and a theoretically-acquired megalopolitan outlook. Nora is the very type of the provincial derailed by reading.

<sup>2</sup> Who forbade the cult of the town's hero Adrastus and the reading of the Homeric poems, with the object of cutting the Doric nobility from its spiritual roots (c. 560 B.C.).

<sup>3</sup> A profound word which obtains its significance as soon as the barbarian becomes a culture-man and loses it again as soon as the civilization-man takes up the motto "*Ubi bene, ibi patria*."

<sup>4</sup> Hence it was that the first to succumb to Christianity were the Romans who could not afford to be Stoics. See Vol. II, pp. 607 et seq.

ance of the *panem et circenses* in the form of wage-disputes and football-grounds — all these things betoken the definite closing-down of the Culture and the opening of a quite new phase of human existence — anti-provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable.

This is what has to be *viewed*, and viewed not with the eyes of the partisan, the ideologue, the up-to-date novelist, not from this or that "standpoint," but in a high, time-free perspective embracing whole millenniums of historical world-forms, if we are really to comprehend the great crisis of the present.

To me it is a symbol of the first importance that in the Rome of Crassus — triumvir and all-powerful building-site speculator — the Roman people with its proud inscriptions, the people before whom Gauls, Greeks, Parthians, Syrians afar trembled, lived in appalling misery in the many-storied lodging-houses of dark suburbs,<sup>1</sup> accepting with indifference or even with a sort of sporting interest the consequences of the military expansion: that many famous old-noble families, descendants of the men who defeated the Celts and the Samnites, lost their ancestral homes through standing apart from the wild rush of speculation and were reduced to renting wretched apartments; that, while along the Appian Way there arose the splendid and still wonderful tombs of the financial magnates, the corpses of the people were thrown along with animal carcasses and town refuse into a monstrous common grave — till in Augustus's time it was banked over for the avoidance of pestilence and so became the site of Mæcenas's renowned park; that in depopulated Athens, which lived on visitors and on the bounty of rich foreigners, the mob of parvenu tourists from Rome gaped at the works of the Periclean age with as little understanding as the American globe-trotter in the Sistine Chapel at those of Michelangelo, every removable art-piece having ere this been taken away or bought at fancy prices to be replaced by the Roman buildings which grew up, colossal and arrogant, by the side of the low and modest structures of the old time. In such things — which it is the historian's business not to praise or to blame but to consider morphologically — there lies, plain and immediate enough for one who has learnt to see, an *idea*.

For it will become manifest that, from this moment on, all great conflicts of world-outlook, of politics, of art, of science, of feeling will be under the influence of this one opposition. What is the hall-mark of a politic of Civilization to-day, in contrast to a politic of Culture yesterday? It is, for the Classical rhetoric, and for the Western journalism, both serving that abstract which represents the power of Civilization — *money*.<sup>2</sup> It is the money-spirit which

<sup>1</sup> In Rome and Byzantium, lodging-houses of six to ten stories (with street-widths of ten feet at most!) were built without any sort of official supervision, and frequently collapsed with all their inmates. A great part of the *cives Romani*, for whom *panem et circenses* constituted all existence, possessed no more than a high-priced sleeping-berth in one of the swarming ant-hills called *insula*. (Pohmann, *Aus Altertum und Gegenwart*, 1911, pp. 199 ff.)

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. II, 577.

penetrates unremarked the historical forms of the people's existence, often without destroying or even in the least disturbing these forms — the form of the Roman state, for instance, underwent very much less alteration between the elder Scipio and Augustus than is usually imagined. Though forms subsist, the great political parties nevertheless cease to be more than reputed centres of decision. The decisions in fact lie elsewhere. A small number of superior heads, whose names are very likely not the best-known, settle everything, while below them are the great mass of second-rate politicians — rhetors, tribunes, deputies, journalists — selected through a provincially-conceived franchise to keep alive the illusion of popular self-determination. And art? Philosophy? The ideals of a Platonic or those of a Kantian age had for the higher mankind concerned a general validity. But those of a Hellenistic age, or those of our own, are valid exclusively for the brain of the Megalopolitan. For the villager's or, generally, the nature-man's world-feeling our Socialism — like its near relation Darwinism (how utterly un-Goethian are the formulæ of "struggle for existence" and "natural selection"!), like its other relative the woman-and-marriage problem of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Shaw, like the impressionistic tendencies of anarchic sensuousness and the whole bundle of modern longings, temptations and pains expressed in Baudelaire's verse and Wagner's music — are simply non-existent. The smaller the town, the more unmeaning it becomes to busy oneself with painting or with music of these kinds. To the Culture belong gymnastics, the tournament, the agon, and to the Civilization belongs Sport. This is the true distinction between the Hellenic palaestra and the Roman circus.<sup>1</sup> Art itself becomes a sport (hence the phrase "art for art's sake") to be played before a highly-intelligent audience of connoisseurs and buyers, whether the feat consist in mastering absurd instrumental tone-masses and taking harmonic fences, or in some *tour de force* of colouring. Then a new fact-philosophy appears, which can only spare a smile for metaphysical speculation, and a new literature that is a necessity of life for the megalopolitan palate and nerves and both unintelligible and ugly to the provincials. Neither Alexandrine poetry nor *plein-air* painting is anything to the "people." And, then as now, the phase of transition is marked by a series of scandals only to be found at such moments. The anger evoked in the Athenian populace by Euripides and by the "Revolutionary" painting of Apollodorus, for example, is repeated in the opposition to Wagner, Manet, Ibsen, and Nietzsche.

It is possible to understand the Greeks without mentioning their economic relations; the Romans, on the other hand, can *only* be understood through these. Chæronæa and Leipzig were the last battles fought about an idea. In the First Punic War and in 1870 economic motives are no longer to be overlooked. Not

<sup>1</sup> German gymnastics, from the intensely provincial and natural forms imparted to it by Jahn, has since 1813 been carried by a very rapid development into the sport category. The difference between a Berlin athletic ground on a big day and a Roman circus was even by 1914 very slight.

till the Romans came with their practical energy was slave-holding given that big collective character which many students regard as the die-stamp of Classical economics, legislation and way of life, and which in any event vastly lowered both the value and the inner worthiness of such free labour as continued to exist side by side with gang-labour. And it was not the Latin, but the Germanic peoples of the West and America who developed out of the steam-engine a big industry that transformed the face of the land. The relation of these phenomena to Stoicism and to Socialism is unmistakable. Not till the Roman Cæsarism — foreshadowed by C. Flaminius, shaped first by Marius, handled by strong-minded, large-scale men of fact — did the Classical World learn the *pre-eminence of money*. Without this fact neither Cæsar, nor "Rome" generally, is understandable. In every Greek is a Don Quixote, in every Roman a Sancho Panza factor, and these factors are dominants.

## XIII

Considered in itself, the Roman world-dominion was a negative phenomenon, being the result not of a surplus of energy on the one side — that the Romans had never had since Zama — but of a deficiency of resistance on the other. That the Romans did *not* conquer the world is certain; <sup>1</sup> they merely took possession of a booty that lay open to everyone. The *Imperium Romanum* came into existence not as the result of such an extremity of military and financial effort as had characterized the Punic Wars, but because the old East forwent all external self-determinations. We must not be deluded by the appearance of brilliant military successes. With a few ill-trained, ill-led, and sullen legions, Lucullus and Pompey conquered whole realms — a phenomenon that in the period of the battle of Ipsus would have been unthinkable. The Mithradatic danger, serious enough for a system of material force which had never been put to any real test, would have been nothing to the conquerors of Hannibal. After Zama, the Romans never again either waged or were capable of waging a war against a great military Power. <sup>2</sup> Their classic wars were those against the Samnites, Pyrrhus and Carthage. Their grand hour was Cannæ. To maintain the heroic posture for centuries on end is beyond the power of any people. The Prussian-German people have had three great moments (1813, 1870 and 1914), and that is more than others have had.

Here, then, I lay it down that *Imperialism*, of which petrifacts such as the Egyptian empire, the Roman, the Chinese, the Indian may continue to exist for hundreds or thousands of years — dead bodies, amorphous and dispirited masses of men, scrap-material from a great history — is to be taken as the typical symbol of the passing away. Imperialism is Civilization unadulterated.

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. II, 529.

<sup>2</sup> The conquest of Gaul by Cæsar was frankly a colonial, i.e., a one-sided, war; and the fact that it is the highest achievement in the later military history of Rome only shows that the well of real achievement was rapidly drying up.

In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set. The energy of culture-man is directed inwards, that of civilization-man outwards. And thus I see in Cecil Rhodes the first man of a new age. He stands for the political style of a far-ranging, Western, Teutonic and especially German future, and his phrase "expansion is everything" is the Napoleonic reassertion of the indwelling tendency of *every* Civilization that has fully ripened — Roman, Arab or Chinese. It is not a matter of choice — it is not the conscious will of individuals, or even that of whole classes or peoples that decides. The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage, willy-nilly, aware or unaware. <sup>1</sup> Life is the process of effecting possibilities, and for the brain-man there are *only extensive* possibilities. <sup>2</sup> Hard as the half-developed Socialism of to-day is fighting against expansion, one day it will become arch-expansionist with all the vehemence of destiny. Here the form-language of politics, as the direct intellectual expression of a certain type of humanity, touches on a deep metaphysical problem — on the fact, affirmed in the grant of unconditional validity to the causality-principle, that *the soul is the complement of its extension*.

When, between 480 and 230, <sup>3</sup> the Chinese group of states was tending towards imperialism, it was entirely futile to combat the principle of Imperialism (Lien-heng), practised in particular by the "Roman" state of Tsin <sup>4</sup> and theoretically represented by the philosopher Dschang Yi, by ideas of a League of Nations (Hoh-tsung) largely derived from Wang Hü, a profound sceptic who had no illusions as to the men or the political possibilities of this "late" period. Both sides opposed the anti-political idealism of Lao-tse, but as between themselves it was Lien-heng and not Hoh-tsung which swam with the natural current of expansive Civilization. <sup>5</sup>

Rhodes is to be regarded as the first precursor of a Western type of Cæsars, whose day is to come though yet distant. He stands midway between Napoleon and the force-men of the next centuries, just as Flaminius, who from 232 B.C. onward pressed the Romans to undertake the subjugation of Cisalpine Gaul and so initiated the policy of colonial expansion, stands between Alexander and Cæsar. Strictly speaking, Flaminius was a private person — for his real power was of a kind not embodied in any constitutional office — who exercised a dominant influence in the state at a time when the state-idea was giving way to the pressure of economic factors. So far as Rome is concerned, he was the arche-

<sup>1</sup> The modern Germans are a conspicuous example of a people that has become expansive without knowing it or willing it. They were already in that state while they still believed themselves to be the people of Goethe. Even Bismarck, the founder of the new age, never had the slightest idea of it, and believed himself to have reached the *conclusion* of a political process (cf. Vol. II, 529).

<sup>2</sup> This is probably the meaning of Napoleon's significant words to Goethe: "What have we to-day to do with destiny? Policy is destiny."

<sup>3</sup> Corresponding to the 300-50 B.C. phase of the Classical world.

<sup>4</sup> Which in the end gave its name to the Empire (Tsin = China).

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. II, 521-539.

type of opposition Cæsarism; with him there came to an end the *idea of state-service* and there began the "will to power" which ignored traditions and reckoned only with forces. Alexander and Napoleon were romantics; though they stood on the threshold of Civilization and in its cold clear air, the one fancied himself an Achilles and the other read Werther. Cæsar, on the contrary, was a pure man of fact gifted with immense understanding.

But even for Rhodes political success means territorial and financial success, and only that. Of this Roman-ness within himself he was fully aware. But Western Civilization has not yet taken shape in such strength and purity as this. It was only before his maps that he could fall into a sort of poetic trance, this son of the parsonage who, sent out to South Africa without means, made a gigantic fortune and employed it as the engine of political aims. His idea of a trans-African railway from the Cape to Cairo, his project of a South African empire, his intellectual hold on the hard metal souls of the mining magnates whose wealth he forced into the service of his schemes, his capital Bulawayo, royally planned as a future Residence by a statesman who was all-powerful yet stood in no definite relation to the State, his wars, his diplomatic deals, his road-systems, his syndicates, his armies, his conception of the "great duty to civilization" of the man of brain — all this, broad and imposing, is the prelude of a future which is still in store for us and with which the history of West-European mankind will be definitely *closed*.

He who does not understand that this outcome is obligatory and insusceptible of modification, that our choice is between willing *this* and willing nothing at all, between cleaving to *this* destiny or despairing of the future and of life itself; he who cannot feel that there is grandeur also in the realizations of powerful intelligences, in the energy and discipline of metal-hard natures, in battles fought with the coldest and most abstract means; he who is obsessed with the idealism of a provincial and would pursue the ways of life of past ages — must forgo all desire to comprehend history, to live through history or to make history.

Thus regarded, the Imperium Romanum appears no longer as an isolated phenomenon, but as the normal product of a strict and energetic, megalopolitan, predominantly practical spirituality, as typical of a final and irreversible condition which has occurred often enough though it has only been identified as such in this instance.

Let it be realized, then:

That the secret of historical form does not lie on the surface, that it cannot be grasped by means of similarities of costume and setting, and that in the history of men as in that of animals and plants there occur phenomena showing deceptive similarity but inwardly without any connexion — e.g., Charlemagne and Haroun-al-Raschid, Alexander and Cæsar, the German wars upon Rome and the Mongol onslaughts upon West Europe — and other phenomena of

extreme outward dissimilarity but of identical import — e.g., Trajan and Rameses II, the Bourbons and the Attic Demos, Mohammed and Pythagoras.

That the 19th and 20th centuries, hitherto looked on as the highest point of an ascending straight line of world-history, are in reality a stage of life which may be observed in every Culture that has ripened to its limit — a stage of life characterized not by Socialists, Impressionists, electric railways, torpedoes and differential equations (for these are only body-constituents of the time), but by a civilized spirituality which possesses not only these but also quite other creative possibilities.

That, as our own time represents a transitional phase which occurs with certainty under particular conditions, there are perfectly well-defined states (such as have occurred more than once in the history of the past) *later* than the present-day state of West Europe, and therefore that

The future of the West is not a limitless tending upwards and onwards for all time towards our present ideals, but a single phenomenon of history, strictly limited and defined as to form and duration, which covers a few centuries and can be viewed and, in essentials, calculated from available precedents.

## XIV

This high plane of contemplation once attained, the rest is easy. To this *single* idea one can refer, and by it one can solve, without straining or forcing, all those separate problems of religion, art-history, epistemology, ethics, politics, economics with which the modern intellect has so passionately — and so vainly — busied itself for decades.

This idea is one of those truths that have only to be expressed with full clarity to become indisputable. It is one of the inward necessities of the Western Culture and of its world-feeling. It is capable of entirely transforming the world-outlook of one who fully understands it, i.e., makes it intimately his own. It immensely deepens the world-picture natural and necessary to us in that, already trained to regard world-historical evolution as an organic unit seen backwards from our standpoint in the present, we are enabled by its aid to follow the broad lines into the future — a privilege of dream-calculation till now permitted only to the physicist. It is, I repeat, in effect the substitution of a Copernican for a Ptolemaic aspect of history, that is, an immeasurable widening of horizon.

Up to now everyone has been at liberty to hope what he pleased about the future. Where there are no facts, sentiment rules. But henceforward it will be every man's business to inform himself of what *can* happen and therefore of what with the unalterable necessity of destiny and irrespective of personal ideals, hopes or desires, *will* happen. When we use the risky word "freedom" we shall mean freedom to do, not this or that, but the necessary or nothing. The feeling that this is "just as it should be" is the hall-mark of the man of

a pure Civilization; and it dissipates the world-picture of the Culture that has gone before. For us, its success will lie in resolving all the older problems into one, the genetic. The conviction that what *is* also *has become*, that the natural and cognizable is rooted in the historic, that the World as the actual is founded on an Ego as the potential actualized, that the "when" and the "how long" hold as deep a secret as the "what," leads directly to the fact that everything, whatever else it may be, must at any rate be *the expression of something living*. Cognitions and judgments too are acts of living men. The thinkers of the past conceived external actuality as produced by cognition and motivating ethical judgments, but to the thought of the future they are above all *expressions and symbols*. *The Morphology of world-history becomes inevitably a universal symbolism.*

With that, the claim of higher thought to possess general and eternal truths falls to the ground. Truths are truths only in relation to a particular mankind. Thus, my own philosophy is able to express and reflect *only* the Western (as distinct from the Classical, Indian, or other) soul, and that soul *only* in its present civilized phase by which its conception of the world, its practical range and its sphere of effect are specified.

## XVI

In concluding this Introduction, I may be permitted to add a personal note. In 1911, I proposed to myself to put together some broad considerations on the political phenomena of the day and their possible developments. At that time the World-War appeared to me both as imminent and also as the inevitable outward manifestation of the historical crisis, and my endeavour was to comprehend it from an examination of the spirit of the preceding centuries — not years. In the course of this originally small task,<sup>1</sup> the conviction forced itself on me that for an effective understanding of the epoch the area to be taken into the foundation-plan must be very greatly enlarged, and that in an investigation of this sort, if the results were to be fundamentally conclusive and necessary results, it was impossible to restrict one's self to a single epoch and its political actualities, or to confine one's self to a pragmatistical framework, or even to do without purely metaphysical and highly transcendental methods of treatment. It became evident that a political problem could not be comprehended by means of politics themselves and that, frequently, important factors at work in the depths could only be grasped through their artistic manifestations or even distantly seen in the form of scientific or purely philosophical ideas. Even the politico-social analysis of the last decades of the 19th century — a period of tense quiet between two immense and outstanding events: the one which, expressed in the Revolution and Napoleon, had fixed the picture of West-European actuality for a century and another of at least equal significance that was

<sup>1</sup> The work referred to is embodied in Vol. II (pp. 521 et seq., 562 et seq., 631 et seq.).

visibly and ever more rapidly approaching — was found in the last resort to be impossible without bringing in *all* the great problems of Being in all their aspects. For, in the historical as in the natural world-picture, there is found nothing, however small, that does not embody in itself the entire sum of fundamental tendencies. And thus the original theme came to be immensely widened. A vast number of unexpected (and in the main entirely novel) questions and interrelations presented themselves. And finally it became perfectly clear that no single fragment of history could be thoroughly illuminated unless and until the secret of world-history itself, to wit the story of higher mankind as an organism of regular structure, had been cleared up. And hitherto this has not been done, even in the least degree.

From this moment on, relations and connexions — previously often suspected, sometimes touched on but never comprehended — presented themselves in ever-increasing volume. The forms of the arts linked themselves to the forms of war and state-policy. Deep relations were revealed between political and mathematical aspects of the same Culture, between religious and technical conceptions, between mathematics, music and sculpture, between economics and cognition-forms. Clearly and unmistakably there appeared the fundamental dependence of the most modern physical and chemical theories on the mythological concepts of our Germanic ancestors, the style-congruence of tragedy and power-technics and up-to-date finance, and the fact (bizarre at first but soon self-evident) that oil-painting perspective, printing, the credit system, long-range weapons, and contrapuntal music in one case, and the nude statue, the city-state and coin-currency (discovered by the Greeks) in another were identical expressions of one and the same spiritual principle. And, beyond and above all, there stood out the fact that these *great groups of morphological relations*, each one of which symbolically represents a particular sort of mankind in the whole picture of world-history, are strictly symmetrical in structure. It is this perspective that first opens out for us the true style of history. Belonging itself as symbol and expression to one time and therefore inwardly possible and necessary only for present-day Western man, it can but be compared — distantly — to certain ideas of ultra-modern mathematics in the domain of the Theory of Groups. These were thoughts that had occupied me for many years, though dark and undefined until enabled by this method to emerge in tangible form.

Thereafter I saw the present — the approaching World-War — in a quite other light. It was no longer a momentary constellation of casual facts due to national sentiments, personal influences, or economic tendencies endowed with an appearance of unity and necessity by some historian's scheme of political or social cause-and-effect, but the type of *a historical change of phase* occurring within a great historical organism of definable compass at the point preordained for it hundreds of years ago. The mark of the great crisis is its innumer-

able passionate questionings and probings. In our own case there were books and ideas by the thousand; but, scattered, disconnected, limited by the horizons of specialisms as they were, they incited, depressed and confounded but could not free. Hence, though these questions are seen, their identity is missed. Consider those art-problems that (though never comprehended in their depths) were evinced in the disputes between form and content, line and space, drawing and colour, in the notion of style, in the idea of Impressionism and the music of Wagner. Consider the decline of art and the failing authority of science; the grave problems arising out of the victory of the megalopolis over the country-side, such as childlessness and land-depopulation; the place in society of a fluctuating Fourth Estate; the crisis in materialism, in Socialism, in parliamentary government; the position of the individual *vis-à-vis* the State; the problem of private property with its pendant the problem of marriage. Consider at the same time one fact taken from what is apparently an entirely different field, the voluminous work that was being done in the domain of folk-psychology on the origins of myths, arts, religions and thought — and done, moreover, no longer from an ideal but from a strictly morphological standpoint. It is my belief that every one of these questions was really aimed in the same direction as every other, viz., towards that *one* Riddle of History that had never yet emerged with sufficient distinctness in the human consciousness. The tasks before men were not, as supposed, infinitely numerous — they were one and the same task. Everyone had an inkling that this was so, but no one from his own narrow standpoint had seen the single and comprehensive solution. And yet it had been in the air since Nietzsche, and Nietzsche himself had gripped all the decisive problems although, being a romantic, he had not dared to look strict reality in the face.

But herein precisely lies the inward necessity of the *stock-taking* doctrine, so to call it. It had to come, and it could only come at this time. Our scepticism is not an attack upon, but rather the verification of, our stock of thoughts and works. It *confirms* all that has been sought and achieved for generations past, in that it integrates all the truly living tendencies which it finds in the special spheres, no matter what their aim may be.

Above all, there discovered itself the *opposition of History and Nature* through which alone it is possible to grasp the essence of the former. As I have already said, man as an element and representative of the World is a member, not only of nature, but also of history — which is a second Cosmos different in structure and complexion, entirely neglected by Metaphysics in favour of the first. I was originally brought to reflect on this *fundamental* question of our world-consciousness through noticing how present-day historians as they fumble round tangible events, things-become, believe themselves to have already grasped History, the happening, the becoming itself. This is a prejudice common to all who proceed by reason and cognition, as against intuitive per-

ception.<sup>1</sup> And it had long ago been a source of perplexity to the great Eleatics with their doctrine that through cognition there could be no becoming, but only a being (or having-become). In other words, History was seen as Nature (in the objective sense of the physicist) and treated accordingly, and it is to this that we must ascribe the baneful mistake of applying the principles of causality, of law, of system — that is, the structure of rigid being — to the picture of happenings. It was assumed that a human culture existed just as electricity or gravitation existed, and that it was capable of analysis in much the same way as these. The habits of the scientific researcher were eagerly taken as a model, and if, from time to time, some student asked what Gothic, or Islam, or the Polis *was*, no one inquired why such symbols of something living *inevitably* appeared just *then, and there, in that form, and for that space of time*. Historians were content, whenever they met one of the innumerable similarities between widely discrete historical phenomena, simply to register it, adding some clever remarks as to the marvels of coincidence, dubbing Rhodes the "Venice of Antiquity" and Napoleon the "modern Alexander," or the like; yet it was just these cases, in which the *destiny-problem* came to the fore as the true problem of history (viz., the problem of time), that needed to be treated with all possible seriousness and scientifically regulated *physiognomic* in order to find out what strangely-constituted necessity, so completely alien to the causal, was at work. That every phenomenon *ipso facto* propounds a metaphysical riddle, that the time of its occurrence is *never* irrelevant; that it still remained to be discovered what kind of a *living* interdependence (apart from the inorganic, natural-law interdependence) subsists within the world-picture, which radiates from nothing less than the whole man and not merely (as Kant thought) from the cognizing part of him; that a phenomenon is not only a fact for the understanding but also an expression of the spiritual, not only an object but a symbol as well, be it one of the highest creations of religion or art or a mere trifle of everyday life — all this was, philosophically, something new.

And thus in the end I came to see the solution clearly before me in immense

<sup>1</sup> The philosophy of this book I owe to the philosophy of Goethe, which is practically unknown to-day, and also (but in a far less degree) to that of Nietzsche. The position of Goethe in West-European metaphysics is still not understood in the least; when philosophy is being discussed he is not even named. For unfortunately he did not set down his doctrines in a rigid system, and so the systematic philosophy has overlooked him. Nevertheless he was a philosopher. His place *vis-à-vis* Kant is the same as that of Plato — who similarly eludes the would-be-systematizer — *vis-à-vis* Aristotle. Plato and Goethe stand for the philosophy of Becoming, Aristotle and Kant the philosophy of Being. Here we have intuition opposed to analysis. Something that it is practically impossible to convey by the methods of reason is found in individual sayings and poems of Goethe, e.g., in the Orphische Urworte, and stanzas like "Wenn im Unendlichen" and "Sagt es Niemand," which must be regarded as the expression of a *perfectly definite* metaphysical doctrine. I would not have one single word changed in this: "The Godhead is effective in the living and not in the dead, in the becoming and the changing, not in the become and the set-fast; and therefore, similarly, the reason (*Vernunft*) is concerned only to strive towards the divine through the becoming and the living, and the understanding (*Verstand*) only to make use of the become and the set-fast" (to Eckermann). This sentence comprises my entire philosophy.

outlines, possessed of full inward necessity, a solution derived from one single principle that though discoverable had never been discovered, that from my youth had haunted and attracted me, tormenting me with the sense that it was there and must be attacked and yet defying me to seize it. Thus, from an almost accidental occasion of beginning, there has arisen the present work, which is put forward as the provisional expression of a new world-picture. The book is laden, as I know, with all the defects of a first attempt, incomplete, and certainly not free from inconsistencies. Nevertheless I am convinced that it contains the incontrovertible formulation of an idea which, once enunciated clearly, will (I repeat) be accepted without dispute.

If, then, the narrower theme is an analysis of the Decline of that West-European Culture which is now spread over the entire globe, yet the object in view is the development of a philosophy and of the operative method peculiar to it, which is now to be tried, viz., the method of comparative morphology in world-history. The work falls naturally into two parts. The first, "Form and Actuality," starts from the form-language of the great Cultures, attempts to penetrate to the deepest roots of their origin and so provides itself with the basis for a science of Symbolic. The second part, "World-historical Perspectives," starts from the *facts of actual life*, and from the historical practice of higher mankind seeks to obtain a quintessence of historical experience that we can set to work upon the formation of our own future.

The accompanying tables <sup>1</sup> present a general view of what has resulted from the investigation. They may at the same time give some notion both of the fruitfulness and of the scope of the new methods.

<sup>1</sup> At the end of the volume.

## CHAPTER II

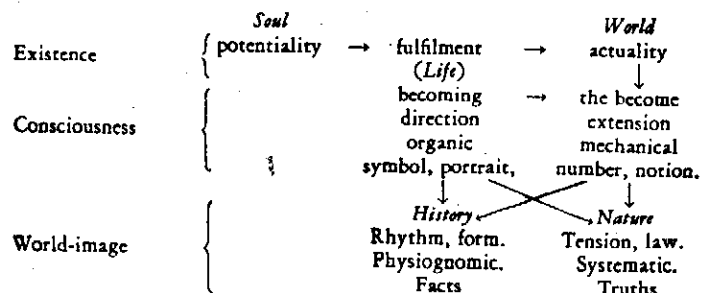
### THE MEANING OF NUMBERS



research reaches up to a final or superlative truth — Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis.<sup>1</sup>

The nature-researcher can be educated, but the man who knows history is born. He seizes and pierces men and facts with one blow, guided by a feeling which cannot be acquired by learning or affected by persuasion, but which only too rarely manifests itself in full intensity. Direction, fixing, ordering, defining by cause and effect, are things that one can do if one likes. These things are work, but the other is creation. Form and law, portrayal and comprehension, symbol and formula, have different organs, and their opposition is that in which life stands to death, production to destruction. Reason, system and comprehension kill as they "cognize." That which is cognized becomes a rigid object, capable of measurement and subdivision. Intuitive vision, on the other hand, vivifies and incorporates the details in a living inwardly-felt unity. Poetry and historical study are kin. Calculation and cognition also are kin. But, as Hebbel says somewhere, systems are not dreamed, and art-works are not calculated or (what is the same thing) thought out. The artist or the real historian sees the becoming of a thing (*schaut, wie etwas wird*), and he can re-enact its becoming from its lineaments, whereas the systematist, whether he be physicist, logician, evolutionist or pragmatist, learns the thing that has become. The artist's soul, like the soul of a Culture, is something potential that may actualize itself, something complete and perfect — in the language of an older philosophy, a microcosm. The systematic spirit, narrow and withdrawn ("abs-tract") from the sensual, is an autumnal and passing phenomenon belonging to the ripest conditions of a Culture. Linked with the *city*, into which its life is more and more herded, it comes and goes with the city. In the Classical world, there is science only from the 6th-century Ionians to the Roman period, but there was art in the Classical world for just as long as there was existence.

Once more, a paradigm may help in elucidation.



<sup>1</sup> "All we see before us passing  
Sign and symbol is alone."

From the final stanza of *Faust II* (Anster's translation). — Tr.

Seeking thus to obtain a clear idea of the unifying principle out of which each of these two worlds is conceived, we find that mathematically-controlled cognition relates always (and the purer it is, the more directly) to a continuous present. The picture of nature dealt with by the physicist is that which is deployed before his senses at the given moment. It is one of the tacit, but none the less firm, presuppositions of nature-research that "Nature" (*die Natur*) is the same for every consciousness and for all times. An experiment is decisive for good and all; time being, not precisely denied, but eliminated from the field of investigation. Real history rests on an equally certain sense of the contrary; what it presupposes as its origin is a nearly indescribable sensitive faculty within, which is continuously labile under continuous impressions, and is incapable therefore of possessing what may be called a centre of time.<sup>1</sup> (We shall consider later what the physicist means by "time.") The picture of history — be it the history of mankind, of the world of organisms, of the earth or of the stellar systems — is a *memory*-picture. "Memory," in this connexion, is conceived as a higher state (certainly not proper to every consciousness and vouchsafed to many in only a low degree), a perfectly definite kind of imagining power, which enables experience to traverse each particular moment *sub specie aeternitatis* as one point in an integral made up of all the past and all the future, and it forms the necessary basis of all looking-backward, all self-knowledge and all self-confession. In this sense, Classical man has no memory and therefore no history, either in or around himself. "No man can judge history but one who has himself experienced history," says Goethe. In the Classical world-consciousness all Past was absorbed in the instant Present. Compare the entirely historical heads of the Nürnberg Cathedral sculptures, of Dürer, of Rembrandt, with those of Hellenistic sculpture, for instance the famous Sophocles statue. The former tell the whole history of a soul, whereas the latter rigidly confines itself to expressing the traits of a momentary being, and tells nothing of how this being is the issue of a course of life — if indeed we can speak of "course of life" at all in connexion with a purely Classical man, who is always complete and never becoming.

## VI

And now it is possible to discover the ultimate elements of the historical form-world.

Countless shapes that emerge and vanish, pile up and melt again, a thousand-hued glittering tumult, it seems, of perfectly wilful chance — such is the picture of world-history when first it deploys before our inner eye. But through this seeming anarchy, the keener glance can detect those pure forms which underlie all human becoming, penetrate their cloud-mantle, and bring them unwillingly to unveil.

<sup>1</sup> This phrase, derived by analogy from the centre of gravity of mechanics, is offered as a translation of "mithin in einem Zeitpunkte gar nicht zusammengefasst werden können." — Tr.

But of the whole picture of world-becoming, of that cumulus of grand planes that the Faust-eye<sup>1</sup> sees piled one beyond another — the becoming of the heavens, of the earth's crust, of life, of man — we shall deal here only with that very small morphological unit that we are accustomed to call "world-history," that history which Goethe ended by despising, the history of higher mankind during 6000 years or so, without going into the deep problem of the inward homogeneity of all these aspects. What gives this fleeting form-world meaning and substance, and what has hitherto lain buried deep under a mass of tangible "facts" and "dates" that has hardly yet been bored through, is the *phenomenon of the Great Cultures*. Only after these prime forms shall have been seen and felt and worked out in respect of their physiognomic meaning will it be possible to say that the essence and inner form of human History as opposed to the essence of Nature are understood — or rather, that we understand them. Only after this inlook and this outlook will a serious philosophy of history become feasible. Only then will it be possible to see each fact in the historical picture — each idea, art, war, personality, epoch — according to its symbolic content, and to regard history not as a mere sum of past things without intrinsic order or inner necessity, but as an organism of rigorous structure and significant articulation, an organism that does not suddenly dissolve into a formless and ambiguous future when it reaches the accidental present of the observer.

*Cultures are organisms*, and world-history is their collective biography. Morphologically, the immense history of the Chinese or of the Classical Culture is the exact equivalent of the petty history of the individual man, or of the animal, or the tree, or the flower. For the Faustian vision, this is not a postulate but an experience; if we want to learn to recognize inward forms that constantly and everywhere repeat themselves, the comparative morphology<sup>2</sup> of plants and animals has long ago given us the methods. In the destinies of the several Cultures that follow upon one another, grow up with one another, touch, overshadow, and suppress one another, is compressed the whole content of human history. And if we set free their shapes, till now hidden all too deep under the surface of a trite "history of human progress," and let them march past us in the spirit, it cannot but be that we shall succeed in distinguishing, amidst all that is special or unessential, the primitive culture-form, *the Culture* that underlies as ideal all the individual Cultures.

I distinguish the *idea* of a Culture, which is the sum total of its inner possibilities, from its sensible *phenomenon* or appearance upon the canvas of history as a fulfilled actuality. It is the relation of the soul to the living body, to its expression in the light-world perceptible to our eyes. This history of a Culture

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 33 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Not the dissecting morphology of the Darwinian's pragmatic zoology with its hunt for causal connexions, but the seeing and overseeing morphology of Goethe.

is the progressive actualizing of its possible, and the fulfilment is equivalent to the end. In this way the Apollinian soul, which some of us can perhaps understand and share in, is related to its unfolding in the realm of actuality, to the "Classical" or "antique" as we call it, of which the tangible and understandable relics are investigated by the archæologist, the philologist, the æsthetic and the historian.

Culture is the *prime phenomenon* of all past and future world-history. The deep, and scarcely appreciated, idea of Goethe, which he discovered in his "living nature" and always made the basis of his morphological researches, we shall here apply — in its most precise sense — to all the formations of man's history, whether fully matured, cut off in the prime, half opened or stifled in the seed. It is the method of living into (*erfühlen*) the object, as opposed to dissecting it. "The highest to which man can attain, is wonder; and if the prime phenomenon makes him wonder, let him be content; nothing higher can it give him, and nothing further should he seek for behind it; here is the limit." The prime phenomenon is that in which the idea of becoming is presented net. To the spiritual eye of Goethe the idea of the prime plant was clearly visible in the form of every individual plant that happened to come up, or even that could possibly come up. In his investigation of the "*os intermaxillare*" his starting-point was the *prime phenomenon of the vertebrate type*; and in other fields it was geological stratification, or the leaf as the prime form of the plant-organism, or the metamorphosis of the plants as the prime form of all organic becoming. "The same-law will apply to everything else that lives," he wrote, in announcing his discovery to Herder. It was a look into the heart of things that Leibniz would have understood, but the century of Darwin is as remote from such a vision as it is possible to be.

At present, however, we look in vain for any treatment of history that is entirely free from the methods of Darwinism — that is, of systematic natural science based on causality. A physiognomic that is precise, clear and sure of itself and its limits has never yet arisen, and it can only arise through the discoveries of method that we have yet to make. Herein lies the great problem set for the 20th Century to solve — to explore carefully the inner structure of the organic units through and in which world-history fulfils itself, to separate the morphologically necessary from the accidental, and, by seizing the *purport* of events, to ascertain the languages in which they speak.

#### VII

A boundless mass of human Being, flowing in a stream without banks; up-stream, a dark past wherein our time-sense loses all powers of definition and restless or uneasy fancy conjures up geological periods to hide away an eternally-unsolvable riddle; down-stream, a future even so dark and timeless — such is the groundwork of the Faustian picture of human history.