

After this intimate interlude and more of the kind, I decided to take up my cross, and having otherwise no idea how to spend my time, to take up some occupation which tied in, approximately at least, with my interests. I thought it over for years, tried first this and then that, but the limitations, the routine, and the compulsion involved in all forms of work with which I was unable to identify myself, repelled me. All right: the orchid and the marigold can exist in a swamp and in a village both the cretin and the carver of crucifixes, in the town there's the pub-crawl on Saturday night and the Sunday outing to the country, it's the fate of humanity to be either hammer or anvil. Knowing as I did that a board of examiners gave the future German dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann C minus for German language, and that another board declared Giuseppi Verdi to be unmusical, on the whole I felt more inclined to test the competence of the board of examiners than to follow the dubious reciprocal procedure. Finally, I was obliged - pecunia olet - to take the plunge, I was assessed as of average intelligence and was given excellent marks. I noticed the intolerable arrogance of these little asses, the presumption which issued from their heads, leaving them hollow. It amused me. I translated the bill of lading of a British trading vessel from the King's English into Lutheran German. A truckload of files shipped from Bombay, heading for Liverpool. I was taken aback. Could this be a portent? To clarify the situation I added to my translation a comment that the bill of lading must be fictitious. Like all colonial powers, England only exploited her colonies (in this case India) by importing raw materials. So as to keep the colonies trotting along on a lead, weak and well-behaved, they processed the booty in the mother country. Those were the golden years when the illiterate natives had to work for the primary school literate white colonisers. All this, together with opium plantations and other tricks, was presumably the cause of starvation and poverty in the developing countries today, and had led in these parts of the world to the total loss of prestige of the European countries. Thus I became a bank clerk, but the manager explained to me that



commentaries were out of place here and that I should confine myself to handling the financial operations of the bank. How did Brecht put it? It is more lucrative and criminal to found a bank than to rob it. I saw the way that the employees didn't dare to go home after working hours, the way that they watched each other and worked on, because they were afraid of the sack. This servility revolted me to such an extent that I chose the lesser of two evils, true to the proverb: non scolae sed vitae discimus, and continued my studies. I busied myself with characterology and occupational idiocy, and once I had confronted the individual occupations - stripped of the nimbus which they diffused - with reality, I arrived at extraordinarily depressing conclusions. Primarily, I was interested in those professions, spiritual, intellectual and secular, which form the backbone of society. This added up to a moral deficit, the debit and credit of which appeared to have sprung from the mind of a maniac, a public danger poisoning all other living beings. Again and again I had to call to mind the remark of the English historian Lord Acton, so as to understand the state of the world: power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. This corruption begins at the root of the incipiently rotten fruit, with the teacher and the young. The young person is brought up to be a good citizen, normally speaking a human being with many duties and no idea of his in any case scanty rights. Take any state form at random: dictatorship, oligarchy, democracy, and the teacher is an obedient mercenary who is compelled to cook, suppress or over-emphasize the facts, so that he is training the young person rather than teaching him. The results we saw and we see in the faithful subject, venial and without character, a vegetative creature erroneously equipped with a brain. Brains on toast. It is only in the natural sciences, since the Pope and le bon dieu have withdrawn a little, that it is seldom possible to act the white sepulchre, at nuclear defence (or attack) parties. I have often wondered what the definition of the state is, and who has convincingly defined it. I had the choice, and on account of my own experiences I chose no submissive constitutional philosopher but an independent thinker, the Danish



philosopher Kierkegaard with his epigrammatic bullseye: "The state is the most antisocial being". Shakespeare once transplanted a saying ~~by~~ spoken by Hamlet which is now proverbial (i.e. it is valid for all the world) to Denmark: "There is something rotten in the state of Denmark." That this applied in neither case to Denmark alone, or in the second case only to Shakespeare's time, I don't need to point out, the 20th century too was never short of dead men. This is the angle from which civil servants are to be considered. The politicians in their dirty trade, who lost face long ago but are able to bluff their way through because politics are off limits for the people. The opportunist~~ic~~ way they shift their ground, yes/no compromises, in case of necessity their change of allegiance and use of force. The judge who represents the threadbare legal principles of his state, so that one state demands the death sentence, another, life, the third an acquittal. The subjective, arbitrary character of the judgments, months or years according to discretion, the varying capacity of the judge, from stupidity to the human average, the latent venality, politisch when the Reichstag burned, financial, not charging Krupp with aiding and abetting murder, but giving him an order for distinguished public service, aside from that the poor subservient accused, who puts the judge in a milder mood, on his historical career from the Inquisition to political trials, judgments coloured by the trends of the time, judgments arising from social prejudices, superstition, faith, unbelief, that all adds up to something in the course of time. The soldier who was always ready to march towards all points of the compass and to shoot at anyone he was told to shoot, anonymous and obedient, the horde. The policeman who carries out every order, against no matter whom, a tool, devoid of all willpower, of every social order, primitive and brutal, an automaton with a mental outlook confined to the police station. The parson who mouths his empty phrases, blesses and crowns the rich, preaches humility to the poor and promises them the Kingdom of Heaven, who pours curses upon Communism because it demands heaven on earth for all, not for the few. Who as a Puritan is convinced that the citizen (human being) partakes of divine grace in proportion to his wealth in earthly goods, so that the wealthiest is closest to God, the poorest furthest from HIM.



Emperors, kings and the nobility used to belong to the first category, now it's arms manufacturers, owners of oilwells, giants of industry. The doctor, who "in case of necessity" performs euthanasia and the vivisection of political unreliables. The industrialist, who liquidates the weaker party, when business stagnates, puts the worker on minimum wages, grants him a weekly or monthly gratuity. The peasant with his rapacity and stupid piety. The worker with his reduced intellectual needs, he wants to go to the movies, watch television or football; this mental zero with his public library.

With its past and present every European country, civil servants and citizens, has a history which would bring a criminal into prison as ~~an~~ incorrigible.

So I sailed into the arms of prohibition, which would almost have crushed me, had I not heard his voice from Mount Olympus: What is to be done, spake Zeus, the gods are drunk. I decided to take my place in the ranks of the righteous band of the Gothamites and misfits and study philosophy and psychology to discover what keeps the world in one piece in spite of everything. For a while I flew the flag at half mast. Yet no one mourned. Bit by bit I shifted the navel of my world from place to place, a globetrotter to whom the earth's surface, these trifling 510 million square kilometres, is always too small, trying all the time to discover what's under its make-up, in my own way, on the unending journey from the magma core to Etna, from the zero meridian to the fixed star, from the fixed star to Fort Knox, from Fort Knox to the Mount of Olives, from the Mount of Olives to the Bobaum, from the Bobaum to Mecca, Manchester and Peking. I came back into this world at last, only to set off for another. Thus began my ballet in the rococo theatre with the straw: I kiss your hand, Pan, mouth to mouth with a nymph. Sounds of a flute. Valhalla of the muses. But when I noticed that in my fatal position there were some movements which I was unable to make, such as praying, going down on my knees, aiming at hearts or heads, the customary protuberances of hysteria developed. In the capacity of steward I boarded a jet, flew upwards, later I noticed that I was flying down again (to the runway). I landed. Mute, I listen to



La Traviata as it whizzes through the air, I water the Sahara, murder tsetse flies, conduct the Pacific Ocean into the Mediterranean, cross the Atlantic, raise my Atlantis once more from the waters and in daytime sink it again in a Red Sea, and dive nightly like a shark mannikin into the yellow sea before the white house, smoke a meerschaum pipe among pike, for I can feel that land and water are no more. With an elevation superbe I arise from out of primeval floods and sit in the lobby with the keys of Heaven and Hell. No one closes and no one opens.

(Translator: Stella Musulin)

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