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forward which have nothing Christian about them, and whose origin is rather to be sought in the influence of the higher paganism. When, however, such things have been cleared away, when we have made up our minds what the Christian Hope is, what it does and does not contain, let us not fail to recollect that it is equally certain with all other realities certified by the fact of Christ. He who looks with faith to Jesus is as sure of the life everlasting as of the forgiveness of sins.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

THE SENSE OF SIN IN GREAT LITERATURE.

IV.

THE REDEMPTION OF OUR SOLITUDE

(Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, Bernard Shaw.)

I THINK we have now abandoned for ever that way of dealing with august and accepted facts of human nature, or of society, which was the firstfruits of the scientific spirit, and remained in vogue until a saner and severer scientific method found it wanting.

The formula was, to trace some highly developed state of mind or social institution to its primitive and rudimentary form. Then, with an appearance of logic and candid thinking, to leave us to conclude, in the first place, that anything which is so natural must somehow not be authoritative for man; and, in the second place, that anything which had such a mean beginning, and which at the outset sustained itself by the help of ideas and of a view of life which are no longer possible, cannot be expected to have our moral and intellectual assent in these days when we all know so much.

The method was always the same. Indeed, I believe

its dulness and monotony contributed to its overthrow. It ceased to be interesting. The intention was so obvious, and the process in each case so precisely the same as in every other. It all worked with such neatness and reasonableness, that men's minds began to be quite sure that it was not the whole truth. Man was alleged to have affinities with the lower creatures. It took some time for us to see that this account of man left out any explanation of the very things in man which, as we say, make a man of him. For the decisive thing about man, the characteristic thing, lies, of course, not in those features which he shares in common with lower creatures; but in those features, those prejudices, and a certain resiliency of spirit, which are entirely his own, and amongst these the indomitable prepossession that he is not a lower creature. When you propose to a company of men to-day that they should regard themselves as mere animals, on the ground that once upon a time they were little if anything better, that company of men may shudder at your words, or they may laugh at you, or, if they happen at the moment to be in one of those fierce moods which descend upon us from time to time, they may even put you to death. And you are bound to explain that shudder, that laughter, and that fierceness in which man separates himself from all other creatures, and reveals something essential and central to his own nature.

By the same reasoning, it was discovered that "morals" was but another word for "manners." The Latin word was given. And we were left with the insinuation that our private and social moralities were simply the strictures which men had placed upon themselves in bygone times in order to dwell together in unity and to hold their own. In any case, these private and social moralities were to be considered as the tenements and dwelling-places of the

spirit of fear, of physical fear, or of religious fear,—and this, of course, had vanished in the general enlightenment.

We need not, however, further illustrate the method of reasoning, though it was applied in every field, and assailed all the securities for essential human life in our laws and in the Christian faith. The method has been frankly abandoned, and in this very sense that it is now employed to support an entirely opposite conclusion. The fact that man has arisen from lowly conditions, and has improved his status, is now made the basis, not for a contempt of ideals: it has become, on the contrary, the ground of a new rhetoric concerning human nature which may run to its own excess. When we say nowadays that man arose from lowly conditions, we put the emphasis upon the fact that he arose. For if he arose, it was by virtue of something within him which was never satisfied with its achievement at any particular stage, something which made him weary of every resting-place; and, if he lingered on, that weariness deepened into shame. And so, in our day, man is being conceived as a being who bears within himself a spirit, an impulse, still fresh and unexhausted, which, simply because it has led him on so far, must continue to lead him on.

Concerning the true nature of that mysterious urgency, we know—apart from the illumination of faith—nothing for certain except this; that it compels man onwards, in the line and direction of his earlier progress, never to the denial or frustrating of any moral dignity to which he had attained, but always to some further and finer application of itself. Man's progress, in short, is seen to lie along the line of a fuller expression, of a more sensitive apprehension of a principle of his nature, concerning which no fair-minded observer can be in doubt as to its tendency in past times, and as to the destiny it is seeking to accom-

plish in the midst of all our failures and protests and secret strife.

It is true that society might again be convulsed by war, and war of such violence and duration that the more delicate achievements of man's moral sense might be entirely lost. Or there might occur in our day, or in a later time, something which invaded and overwhelmed our heaped-up civilisation, as the Goths and Vandals swept over Europe.

In such a day, in a sheer struggle for life, the finer things of the soul would shrink back and hide behind the coarse and more necessary faculties. Round the platter of life the tiger in man would whet his teeth anew. The airy fretwork of the spirit, the more exquisite and subtle perceptions and demands, would all go down in that dark day.

But, unless that day returns, the moral sense in man will become more and more individual and delicate and subtle. His sins, the failures with which he charges himself, will also become more individual and delicate and subtle. He will arrive at a day in the evolution and refinement of his nature,—a day which has in every age dawned upon elect and rarer souls,—when he will live by the guidance of secret and spiritual signs, in an intenser solitude, liable to the thrustings and hauntings of most delicate fears, and to the encouragement and appeal of equally intangible approvals: the condition indeed predicted in a verse of a Psalm which promises that a day is coming when God will guide people with His eye, by the lights and the shadows i.e., on His answering countenance.

And serious men to-day no longer attempt to disparage these delicate and poignant distresses of the soul, by recalling the rude restraints and penalties of primitive societies. They rather perceive that this necessity which from the beginning was acknowledged, this willingness to

accept restraint and punishment, bears witness to something in man which is his true and differentiating sign.

And now, passing by many matters which, strictly speaking, intervene, I propose to bring before our minds one or two further illustrations and corroborations from the more serious literature of our time of the thesis underlying these studies. That thesis I might state in some such words as these: There is a way by which we must go, and that way is, on the whole, the way by which we have come.

For the modern period, Goethe's "Faust" is perhaps the classical illustration of a man setting out to test the findings of human wisdom in the region of morals. In "Faust," you have already those principles of revolt and experiment which reappear in much of our contemporary literature. In "Faust," in addition, you have the forecast of what, according to Goethe, who weighed the matter for a whole lifetime, is sure to be the outcome for the individual and for society of the application of those principles.

"Let me have him," said Mephistopheles, "and I pledge me he will eat the dust and that with joy." Well: eat the dust he did. He marched through blood and rapine to the satisfaction of every appetite. But never with joy, never with a moment of solid peace. "The tiger sleeps when he has devoured his prey, but a man sleeps not after he has sinned." If you retort that, on the contrary, he does sleep, we must answer with all great literature that, in that case, he is not truly a man.

But it is over a hundred years since "Faust" was written; and it may very well be that every age must write its own "Faust" as every man has, in fact, or in imagination, to enact his own "Faust."

There are three works of the imagination written in our own very language of feeling, and in the light of all

that we know who belong to this age. I shall briefly consider them from the point of view of these studies.

I am thinking of Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment," Tolstoy's "Resurrection," and Bernard Shaw's "The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet."

When men go deeply enough into the human soul, they find the same things: and when they go still more deeply, they find the same thing. That final thing, I would call, an awful loneliness and sense of God. But not to anticipate. Those three works are three determined experiments in living, determined adventures into the region of ultimate things, and in each case, I hold, the voyaging soul comes upon a limit and barrier in the very nature of things, which limit and barrier is—God. Now, in saying that this limit and barrier is God I am not saying something which would be only equal to saying that "X" is "X." I mean something more vital and constructive. I mean that in each of those studies of the soul a man in his passionate progress in one direction encounters a limit and barrier which simply blocks his way. But it is not a wooden barrier, or a stone wall: nor is it merely a precipice beyond which stretches chaos and old night. He is met by a living barrier, by something which has the qualities of a Person, something which has the effect of dealing with him in his despair and bankruptcy, something which can not only stop him but can turn him back. And not only turn him back, as one might come back sullenly and heavily, but turn him back, as in the case of Raskolnikov and Nekhludov, with a strong and sober gratitude to God for the moral inexorableness of things: and as in the case of Blanco Posnet, with a shining countenance.

In Dostoievsky's novel, moral nihilism forms the central theme. The hero of the story is a student whom all kinds of unhappy conditions have made miserable and tired of

life. In this frame of mind he takes up an attitude of revolt, not merely against the external order, such as social conventions, rights of government and the rest, but against the entire conception of personal responsibility. All the moral judgment and feelings which education has implanted in him now seem to be ridiculous childish prejudices, contemptible weakness, to emancipate himself from which is the mark of a free and strong mind. Encouraged by such reflections, he kills an old repulsive usuress in order to obtain money, but, at the same time, also to test his own theory, to test this idea which for a long time he had been handling and accustoming himself to, wearing down his own scruples, and working himself up to greater and greater boldness—the idea that one only needed to be strong enough and hard enough to go his own way and to prosper. "I wanted to know," he afterwards says in discussing the matter, "whether I was like all of them, merely vermin, or a man, whether I was able to break through the barriers, or not,—whether I would really stoop to gain power, or not; whether I was merely a trembling creature, or whether I had a right . . ." and so on. He commits the crime. No one saw him strike the blow. Besides, she was an old woman, one of a despised race too, and plying a disreputable trade. And these were circumstances which, from the moment after his deed, he had at once to summon to his aid, to keep back the first tricklings of the dark flood of reaction and remorse.

But he never has an hour's quiet. He must talk. He must talk even to a friend, who as a detective is engaged upon the case. He must set out again and again to see that detective friend, to talk about the case. The police fail. Raskolnikov might have escaped—except for himself and the inveterate demand of his own spirit that he shall not be alone, that he must talk, and, talking, must speak

about the things that are most urgent to himself. Speaking about these things, he cannot hide his feelings, until at last, noticing how it gives him a little happiness even to speak about the case, and a little more happiness the more he seems to implicate himself, he one day goes the whole length, and first betrays himself, then confesses everything, —and this to an accompaniment of moral happiness and ease so tumultuous and wonderful that he feels that he had never lived until that moment. When he confesses his guilt to his friend, the detective, the detective only replies, "I knew it all the time. The first day you came to see me, after the crime, I suspected you. When you began to speak of it, I became quite sure. I didn't lay hands upon you, for I knew that you were one of those who would have to come at last!"

"When I kept silent," says some one in the Thirty-second Psalm, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night, Thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity I did not hide. . . . I said, Thou art my hiding-place." So speaks a man to the mysterious One who haunts him in the deep places of moral solitude.

There is another voice from a Psalm which I recall: "These things thou hast done and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself. But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

And all great literature seems to have as its burden just this, that such beings we are, and in the hand of such an One.

In the last of his greater works Tolstoy has advanced, for those who did not acknowledge the teaching of the New Testament, the moral demand which the human soul must

henceforth make of all who would live honourably and at peace with themselves. I do not say that he was the first to proclaim our duty to make reparation to every one whom we have wronged. Tolstoy was not the first to say that. It was the greatness of Tolstoy that he was not the first to say anything. Anything that is said for the first time, might as well not have been said. It is quite certainly either not true or of no real importance. But it is Tolstoy's greatness, in that late work of his, to have recalled, with a fidelity to the facts of our conscience which is almost intolerably true, the instinct of the soul of man, aroused at length, and indignant at itself, and full of revenge upon itself,—the instinct of man to regard himself as no longer belonging to himself, but to that one, if there be such an one, whom he has pre-eminently wronged.

There is no doubt whatever that if confession ceases to be in some sense public, it is apt to lose its cleansing quality. If we say "it is enough that we confess to God in secret," the answer is, that it is not enough, and was never regarded as enough by finer souls. Besides, it is a bad sign, when we take our religion on its lowest terms. It is a bad sign when we wish to get clear of an offence with the least measure of sacrifice. We may, indeed, get off, but we simply get off. We are fixed there. We stand still.

Again, when we say, defending ourselves, that we are taking the easier way, we must remember that in morals the easier way is never the higher way. Besides, if we will but attend to the voice of our own soul in the hour when we confess ourselves to God, when we smooth out our secret life to the judgment of the Highest, we shall find that our conscience is not yet appeased. We shall hear an instruction from Him who is behind everything, commanding us, were it only to prove our sincerity, to go out and find him or her whom we have wronged.

"If thou art offering thy gift at the altar," said Jesus, "and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift."

It is when we recall the sèverity of such words,—and far from standing alone they arise out of the whole message of the New Testament,—that we wonder again how an entire ethical system should have arisen in our day based upon the idea that the ethics of Jesus are too soft and easy. This, though Jesus said more than once that there were circumstances in which a man might find himself when it would be as hard to follow Him as it would be for one to cut off his right hand with his left.

Prince Nekhludoff was summoned to act upon a jury. It was his turn. That is to say, it was one of those apparently casual things which, as we get older, we begin to suspect as having God very emphatically behind them. A prisoner was brought in, charged with murder, and this in circumstances of the utmost degradation. In a moment, as the Bible once again puts it (and if you know the Bible, you simply cannot keep it out of any deep consideration of life), in a moment "a dart struck through his liver." It is Maslova, an orphan, at one time a sweet, warm-hearted girl, who had acted as a kind of companion to Nekhludoff's aunts. And it was he, Nekhludoff, who had led Maslova out upon her disastrous way and had set her face towards hell.

Maslova is condemned, though innocent of the crime, and is banished to Siberia. And Nekhludoff accompanies her. A prince, a great landlord, a soldier, sought after by society, and Maslova, one whom he might have dismissed from his mind,—if what so many in our day say about the human soul were the whole truth! Nekhludoff does not hesitate even for a moment. Maslova has never re-

proached him. Even when it comes home to her that he is unhappy, and when she understands, first dimly, but at last quite clearly, that in his own feeling and belief Nekhludoff can never be at peace until she, Maslova, has forgiven him, and even then that he can never be at peace, she tries to put him off his own terrible seriousness, even saying that for herself, it is nothing, and that as for him, he is a prince, and besides she had loved him in that far-off time. But Nekhludoff has seen his way, and for him there is no other. Henceforward, and until God shall release the one or the other from this present world, and even thereafter in the other world, as in Dante's heart-shaking story of Paolo and Francesca, these two must share each other's thoughts, each other's life, and every day and at the last must stand before God hand in hand.

This is what I meant when I said that it had been given to Tolstoy to recall man to that demand which conscience makes upon us, not simply that we shall confess our sin, thereby separating ourselves from it, but that we shall make all possible reparation. If there live in the world one whom we have wronged, that one alone has the power to shut us out from heaven. Or rather, let me say, if God should forgive us our sin, it will be our first, and, until it is granted, our only petition, that we be given some task of prostrate love towards that one whom we, either in ignorance or with a high hand, caused to offend.

Speaking for myself, the terrible moral reality of Tolstoy makes even the Confessions of St Augustine sound far short of what is possible to the soul of man in the region of moral grief.

And now I come to a play of Bernard Shaw's, in which we find the soul of a man behaving in precisely the same way as in those two overwhelming stories.

The scene of the short drama is laid in the far west of

America,—in the midst of a wild and coarse-living community.

Blanco Posnet has stolen a horse, and is now standing his trial in a rough-and-ready court, the Sheriff and jury being men as wild and unscrupulous as himself. Though Posnet has been caught, and there is no doubt whatever of his guilt, still it is difficult to bring the crime home to him: for when he was apprehended he was walking on foot, the horse nowhere to be seen. A witness is pressed to give false evidence against him. She has no difficulty. Blanco Posnet behaves himself all through with an excitement and intoxication which we do not quite understand until later. He breaks out into snatches of a hymn, which he allows them to suppose is pure blasphemy,—as the censor who interdicted the play evidently considered it to be. And yet it is not pure blasphemy. In a moment of something like tenderness Posnet speaks about a woman and a child, but so indistinctly that his hearers can make nothing of it. He keeps saying: "They were not real," and "I see her whenever I look up." The sheriff and jury are getting tired, and about to execute judgment, when there is a stir at the door, which presently opens. A woman enters, pale and hurried. Whereupon Posnet appeals to the Court not to listen to a word she says; that she is not real, and that it is she whom he sees whenever he looks up.

But the woman speaks, and we learn the whole truth, the beautiful and even holy truth. This is what had happened. Blanco Posnet, riding off on the stolen horse, had been stopped on the way by a woman, this woman, who at the time was carrying a little child. She besought Posnet to lend her his horse that she might ride to the nearest doctor with her child. For the child was in the grip of a kind of croup. At first, Posnet spurns her. Why should he, why should any man, especially in this twentieth century,

when so many books have been written to prove that such a thing is absurd, weak, unworthy of the Nietzschean "blonde beast" which is supposed to exhaust the qualities of human nature, why should he be interrupted, brought to a standstill, be made tender, be converted, in fact, by this plea of a woman? And so he tries to push on. But the woman, with the ingenuity of love and of despair, lifts up the child to the man's neck, and Blanco Posnet feels the little fingers playing behind his ears, and in his hair. And with that, something melted, something went soft. He let the woman and child ride off with the horse, and he came back to be hanged. And, to the confusion of all those moderns who think that the fashion in morals of a decadent minority can withstand the ancestral voices of the soul, Blanco Posnet is not ashamed of what he has done. Looking round upon that court of wild men and women, he sees that, like himself, the very telling of the story has made them all go soft.

"Gosh, when I think that I might have been safe, and fifty miles away by now, with that horse; and here I am waiting to be hung up and filled with lead! What came to me? What made me such a fool? That's what I want to know. That's the great secret . . . It wasn't a man . . . He done me out of it . . . He means to win the deal and you can't stop Him . . . Boys, I'm going to preach you a sermon on the moral of this day's proceedings. . . . I started in to be a bad man like the rest of you . . . I took the broad path because I thought I was a man and not a snivelling, canting, turning-the-other cheek apprentice angel serving his time in a vale of tears . . . Why did the child die? Tell me that if you can. He can't have wanted to kill the child. Why did He make me go soft on the child, if He was going hard on it Himself? Why should He go hard on the innocent kid and go soft on a rotten thing like

me? Why did I go soft myself? Why did the Sheriff go soft? Why did Feemy go soft? What's this game that upsets our game? For seems to me there's two games bein' played. Our game is a rotten game that makes me feel I'm dirt, and that you're all rotten dirt as me. T'other game may be a silly game; but it ain't rotten. When the Sheriff played it, he stopped being rotten. When Feemy played it, the paint nearly dropped off her face. When I played it, I cursed myself for a fool, but I lost the rotten feel all the same. . . . What about the croup? It was early days when He made the croup, I guess. It was the best He could think of then; but when it turned out wrong in His hands, He made you and me to fight the croup for Him. You bet He didn't make us for nothing, and He wouldn't have made us at all if He could have done His work without us. By Gum, that must be what we're for! . . . He made me because He had a job for me. He let me run loose till the job was ready, and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging. And I tell you, it didn't feel rotten: it felt bully, just bully. Anyhow, I got the rotten feel off me for a minute of my life; and I'll go through fire to put it off me again. . . . There's no good and bad . . . but, by Jimmy, gents, there's a rotten game, and there's a great game. I played the rotten game; but the great game was played on me; and now I'm for the great game every time. Amen."

Not a word more shall I say. There is nothing more to be said.

"When I think that I might have been safe, and fifty miles away by now with that horse; and here I am waiting to be hung up and filled with lead! What came to me? What made me such a fool? That's what I want to know. That's the great secret."

That indeed is the secret. I hold that it is an open secret. I leave my case at that.

JOHN A. HUTTON.