

SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE ENGLISH NOVEL OF THE GREAT WAR

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE DEPARTMENT
OF
ENGLISH

WE ACCEPT THIS THESIS AS CONFORMING TO THE
STANDARD REQUIRED FROM CANDIDATES FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

MEMBERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April

1954

Precis of Thesis

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There is a marked difference of purpose discernible in representative European, American and English novels of the Great War. The European war novel depicts the brutality and the horror of war; the American novel deals with the soldier's rejection of war; the English novel investigates the society from which the British soldier emerges. This thesis examines certain of the English war novels with a view to proving that they are effective social commentaries. The novels examined are Ford Madox Ford's Some Do Not ..., No More Parades, A Man Could Stand Up and The Last Post, all of which are published as the tetralogy Parade's End, Henry Major Tomlinson's All Our Yesterdays, Charles Edward Montague's Rough Justice and Richard Aldington's Death of a Hero.

In Rough Justice and in Death of a Hero the English public school is discovered to be incapable of producing thoughtful, imaginative leaders. The Great War reveals the serious intellectual shortcomings of teacher and student alike, each of whom is a victim of a traditional insistence upon scholastic and recreational standardization.

The Great War also reveals that the marriage institution in England is weak and decaying. Death of a Hero tells of the marriages in three generations of the same family and shows that neither the Victorian marriage tradition nor the reaction which grew up against it and took the form of free-love relationships is valuable. In Parade's End three marriages representing three social levels are shown to be insufficiently strong to withstand modern social pressures.

A further instance of low standards revealed by wartime behaviour in England is revealed in the degree to which sexual immorality motivates certain people. The ugliness of sexuality appears clearly in such figures as George Winterbourne's mother and her paramour Sam Browne in Aldington's Death of a Hero. It also appears in Sylvia Tietjens, young Brownlie and General Campion in Ford's Parade's End.

Further examples of moral ugliness come to light in the actions of Mrs. Macmaster in Parade's End and of Sir George Roads in Rough Justice. Each is ambitious; each is ruthlessly determined to succeed financially and socially. Materialism on the grand scale is depicted in Tomlinson's All Our Yesterdays with the story of Jim Maynard's trip into Africa and of the intense jealousy shown by vested interests over useless jungle territory.

Selfishness of massive proportions appears in the war novels in the form of imperialism. Kipling's influence on the growth of imperialistic attitudes is noted. Aldington hates imperialism with a bitter hatred but finds it not surprising considering that public school graduates have the responsibility of formulating British policy. Tomlinson is less bitter but equally devastating in his examination of imperialism. He feels that war results from imperialistic policies.

Tomlinson shows how wide the gulf is, in wartime, between the soldier and his government and his society. Tomlinson, Aldington and Ford are all particularly bitter over the inept leadership provided by British officials. Each author attacks with determination the interference by government official and civilian in military affairs during critical times.

Self interest is again examined, this time as it manifests itself in class hatred and intolerance, particularly in Rough Justice. All Our Yesterdays expresses extreme disillusionment with the irreligious attitudes held by lay people and even by certain clergymen. Parade's End discovers society to be so thoroughly disenchanting that life in the trenches is preferred by at least one soldier to life with civilians.

The criticism of society launched by the veteran writer is, in general, valid. Evidence of social historians and of educationists supports the criticism of the school system. Statistics show a heavy increase in divorces. Investigating bodies agree that new attitudes to the marriage conventions are setting in. Sexuality, personal ambition, materialism and other attributes of people cannot be verified factually but the criticism of them which is found in the war novels is assumed to be valid in the absence of any disproving factors. Imperialism is shown by historians to have existed as a well defined nation policy at the turn of the century, one which enjoyed great public support. The general tenor of the soldier writers' criticisms of society is accurate and often provable and the novels are proven to be significant social commentaries.

CONTENTS

Chapter

I. Introduction	1
II. The Failure of the English Schools	13
III. The Breakdown of Marriage	32
IV. Sexual Morality	55
V. Aggressive Individualism	70
VI. Imperialism and Bureaucracy	93
VII. Social and Religious Antagonism	116
VIII. Summary and Conclusion	136
Bibliography	150

But when you've pondered
Hour upon chilly hour in those damned trenches
You get at the significance of things,
Get to know, clearer than before,
What a tree means, what a pool,
Or a black wet field in sunlight.

Richard Aldington

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The outstanding characteristic to be noted from a broad reading of twentieth-century war literature concerns the difference of approach discernible in the English, the American and the European war novels. The three groups are widely separated in purpose, so much so as to cause their representative novels to be entirely dissimilar as works of art and as war commentaries.

A particular approach is characteristic of the three European war novels which are best known to the English-speaking world. Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, Arnold Zweig's Education Before Verdun and Henri Barbusse's Under Fire, the first two written by Germans and the last by a French soldier, have in common a deep and serious concern with the life and ideas of the front line soldier. They consider war for its waste of humanity, for its impact upon the man in the trench, for its effect on his personality, for its dehumanizing influence, for the physical agony it causes the man in uniform, for the courage and determination it inspires in the soldier. These novels are not concerned with war as a manifestation of social or economic evil. They separate war from the society which gives rise to it and consider it only in its own terms.

One need read only the introductory paragraphs to these

novels to find that the war setting is established. That setting exists throughout the books, even to the last few paragraphs. For example, Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front begins with these words:

We are at rest five miles
behind the front. Yesterday we
were relieved, and now our
bellies are full of beef and
haricot beans. We are satisfied
and at peace.¹

Barbusse's Under Fire opens with the symbolic hospital scene of a ward full of dying tuberculosis patients who, reading of war's outbreak, see through visionary eyes the

tranquil expanses of the valley ...
become alive with movements of men,
whose multitudes swarm in distinct
masses. Attacks develop, wave by
wave, across the fields and then
stand still. Houses are
eviscerated like human beings and
towns like houses. Villages ...
in crumpled whiteness as though
fallen from heaven to earth. The
very shape of the plain is changed
by the frightful heaps of wounded
and slain.²

Zweig's Education Before Verdun opens with a realistic scene of one of the many battles fought in the war of attrition.

Since the middle of May the
battle had come to a deadlock.
Now, half-way through July, its
formless shape still rolled over

1 Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front, New York, Little, 1929, p. 7.

2 Henri Barbusse, Under Fire, New York, Dutton, 1917, p. 2.

the low ground between Fleury village and Fort Souville, bloated and beyond all human compass, a swaying, heaving mass of explosions, swaths of acrid smoke, clouds of dust, pulverized earth.... At night, cloven by the flash and roar of gunfire, the rattle of machine-guns.³

It is only occasionally that the soldiers in the three novels are allowed to leave the trenches and their immediate environs to mingle with their civilian contemporaries. When they do leave the front they demonstrate their creators' conclusions that the front line soldier of European nationality has lost completely his civilian identity. He and the civilian are strange to each other. They do not understand one another. Their separation is complete.

It is noteworthy that the European soldier does recognize this separation but makes no effort to offset it. He cannot persuade himself that anything matters beyond the day-to-day struggle for existence and some slight comfort. Food, an occasional letter from loved ones, cigarettes, a dry bed, a quiet night and a sight of tomorrow's dawn, these are the hoped for things about which his trench life revolves.

It is also noteworthy that the European soldier does

³ Arnold Zweig, Education Before Verdun, New York, Viking, 1936, p. 3.

not allow himself to think in terms of retreat from war. He is, of course, intensely hopeful that he will survive the war and he is fully prepared to suffer and even to seek out wounds if it will mean relief from the trenches. He also realizes that, as long as he is unwounded, he must stay in the trenches even to the limit of his endurance.

The same type of endurance, the same passive acceptance of duty and the ugliness of war is not a characteristic of the central figures of the best known American novels of the Great War. The novels are Ernest Hemingway's A farewell to Arms and John Dos Passos' Three Soldiers. The American authors create a military setting, one which their soldiers endure briefly and from which they retreat immediately the war becomes too onerous for them.

Hemingway establishes a less harshly realistic war scene than do the European writers.

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees.⁴

⁴ Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms, New York, Modern Library, (c1929), 1932, p. 3.

Dos Passos begins Three Soldiers with a passage similar neither to Hemingway's opening nor to the opening paragraphs of the European stories.

The company stood at attention, each man looking straight before him at the empty parade ground, where the cinder pile showed purple with evening. On the wind that smelt of barracks and disinfectant there was a faint greasiness of food cooking. At the other side of the wide field long lines of men shuffled slowly into the narrow wooden shanty that was the mess hall.⁵

The central figures, Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms and John Andrews in Three Soldiers, have nothing of the European soldier's doggedness and determination. Neither can understand the war nor does he feel any compulsion that it must be brought to a successful conclusion. His homeland has never been endangered by foreign armies. Thus his country has no military tradition which might be expected to help and strengthen him, as a soldier, to endure the agony of war. America is young and immature: American soldiers are young and immature. Frederick Henry, complaining bitterly that the war "did not have anything to do with"⁶ him is eventually to desert his position as

⁵ John Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, New York, Modern Library, 1921, p. 31.

⁶ Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms, p. 39.

ambulance driver with the Italian army. He retreats from the Caporetto river with the fleeing Italian troops, avoids the military police, finds the nurse with whom he is in love and with her escapes to Switzerland. John Andrews needs no routed army to instill in him the desire to flee the futility of war. His love for music proves to be the strongest motivating power of his life. He deserts to a lonely French farm and tries to compose his symphony. But in each case the end result is the same. The disillusioned American soldier deserts from the war not to return to society but to retreat into an intense personal world from which he hopes to exclude both society and war.

The English war novelist finds that he cannot dissociate war from society in the manner in which his European contemporaries did. For the Englishman of 1914 the long years of almost complete peace which had preceded that year, years in which war meant only comparatively small scale fights in far off Crimea or the Sudan or on the veldt, meant that war on the grand scale was unimaginable. Thus England found herself in 1914 faced with war and possessed of no war experience worth the noting. She could only fight a major war with citizen soldiers. War could superimpose itself over the existing way of life but the very elements of that way of life must be expected to condition the manner in which the war was to be regarded by civilians and fought by soldiers.

The English writer finds too that he cannot create a war book entirely around the theme of desertion from the field of battle. Such is not the way of English soldiers. England is an integral part of the European scene and it has always been, in modern times, essential that she participate in wars which threaten to exclude her from the European group. She is not separated from European custom and culture by an Atlantic ocean but only by a narrow channel. The Englishman collectively cannot choose to ignore European affairs; the individual Englishman, when in uniform, does not choose to ignore the war.

The result of the two circumstances, the years of peace and the proximity of his land to Europe, means that the English war writer develops for his country a type of war novel which differs fundamentally from those of his continental and his American colleagues. He examines the society from which his soldiers emerge in terms of its effect upon the life which the civilian soldier is forced to live during wartime. For it is essential to the understanding of the English novel of the Great War to appreciate that it, being neither completely concerned with trench life nor with retreat from trench warfare is, rather, a social commentary, revealing a deep concern with the standards adhered to by pre-war and wartime English society.

The ills of English society are not the literary discovery and property of England's twentieth century soldier novelists. Concern with certain aspects of English life is

clearly apparent in the middle and late nineteenth century in the work of such English novelists as Charles Dickens and Samuel Butler. At the close of the century Herbert George Wells is protesting social evils. The dramatist George Bernard Shaw is penning his indictment of various social institutions. Sufficient criticism has been written by novelist and playwright and social scientist by the time the Great War breaks over Europe that many people are suspicious, if not acutely aware, that Victoria's England was not the perfect England they had taken for granted.

After the war many more people share this disenchantment with Butler, Shaw, Wells et al. Among them are the soldiers and the soldier writers. When in the 1920's, the soldier finds it possible to write of the war years he finds that he must write as Wells and Shaw and Butler had written of peace time. For the pre-war social critic and the post-war veteran writer is each critical of the basic tenets of English society. Whether or not the war writer is as constructive as Wells and Shaw will be brought out in the body of the paper.

It is necessary to emphasize, at this point, that each of the novels which is to be examined in this paper is the work of a soldier who had served in the trenches of Flanders. While many fine novels of protest and disillusionment have been written by civilians, that is to say non veterans, they have not always been as powerful, as perceptive, as inspired and, indeed, as outraged as are the soldiers' novels. For

the soldier develops his wartime investigation of society from the vantage point, as it were, of the front lines, while the civilian is generally too much a part of his own war waging society to be able to evaluate it clearly. Furthermore, the soldier, having experienced both civilian and military life, is often the better qualified of the two to evaluate the effect of the one upon the other.

England's soldier writers attack, with varying degrees of intensity, most of the institutions and attitudes held to be sacrosanct by late nineteenth century England. The educational system, for example, is bitterly attacked by Richard Aldington in Death of a Hero. Charles Edward Montague is less bitter but equally emphatic in his criticism of the schools in Rough Justice. Family and marriage, long held to be the basis of the English social structure, are pilloried by Aldington and particularly by Ford Madox Ford in Parade's End, his war tetralogy.⁷ Individual selfishness is the target of bitter comment by Ford and by Montague. Imperialism is decried by Aldington and by Henry Major

⁷ Ford Madox Ford, Parade's End, New York, Knopf, 1950.

The tetralogy consists of the following titles with their dates of copyright: Some do Not...., 1924, No More Parades, 1925, A Man Could Stand Up, 1926, and The Last Post, 1928. The Knopf edition of 1950 marks the first publication of the four novels as a literary entity. Since they should be regarded as such and also for the sake of simplicity, all references made to Ford's war novels will be made to Parade's End rather than to the particular novel actually containing the referred to passage.

Tomlinson, the latter being most penetrating in All Our Yesterdays.

English society is stripped of all superficial covering by the war novelists; its unhealthy moral standards and decaying values are examined and, with or without comment, presented for public inspection. No two writers despair equally of the same two elements in social behaviour: their works must be examined side by side in order for the student to develop an appreciation of the picture of disillusionment painted by them. The thesis of this paper, therefore, is that the most important war novels dealing with England's part in the Great War are primarily concerned with the decaying social structure around which the lives of English people, civilian and soldier, revolve. They are less concerned with the horror and waste of war than are their continental counterparts; they are less concerned with personal rejection of the war than are their American counterparts. They owe their existence entirely to the fact that their authors were inspired by their war experience, both at home and overseas, to examine society and to record their findings.

One need compare only the opening paragraphs of the novels with the opening lines already quoted from European and American war books. Aldington's Death of a Hero, for example, begins properly in Victorian England.

A very different England,
that of 1890. In some ways so

remote from us; in others so near, terrifying near and like us. An England morally buried in great foggy wrappings of hypocrisy and prosperity and cheapness. Victoria, broad-bottomed on her people's will; the possessing class, heavy-bottomed on the people's neck.⁸

Henry Major Tomlinson begins less bitterly his All Our Yesterdays:

I could hear progress. It was on its way. It was pouring about in a triumphant muddle of noise too loud to be doubted. There was no need to repose on faith in the favoured evolution of man. That wonderful conjuration of good things out of this planet by the steam-engine and the cotton jenny was dominant.⁹

C. E. Montague's Rough Justice begins on an idyllic note with the picture of a baby tumbling about on the lawn of an English country house.¹⁰ Ford's Parade's End begins on a disarmingly unmilitary note but hints at disillusionment to come when, with its opening description of two young men in a

⁸ Richard Aldington, Death of a Hero, New York, Garden City, 1929, p. 33.

⁹ Henry Major Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, London, Heinemann, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁰ Charles Edward Montague, Rough Justice, London, Chatto & Windus, 1926, 1930, p. 1.

railway carriage, it says "they were of the English public official class" which "administered the world."¹¹ The last two war novels, in spite of their gentle opening words, go on to join Death of a Hero and Parade's End as penetrating investigations of England's wartime society and to take their places beside them as significant social commentaries.

¹¹ Ford, Parade's End, p. 8.

CHAPTER 11

THE FAILURE OF THE ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Since these novels are at one and the same time war novels and social commentaries, it is necessary to examine them with a view to discovering the relationship in them between military and civilian life. It is imperative to inspect closely the battlefield sections for clues which point back to pre-war conditions. For if the war caused Richard Aldington and his contemporaries to become disenchanted with society then the war must have caused the soldier to reveal certain qualities which reflect and point up the war authors' disillusionment and which also reflect the lacks in the social structure which developed such qualities. These qualities are thus the direct link between the soldier and his civilian background.

One such quality which Aldington investigates is the lack of ability to lead which is demonstrated by many officers, most of whom had been chosen from the graduates of the English public schools. In his investigation Aldington makes clear his serious objection to the manner in which society educates its young men.

One of the young men, educated in a public school and therefore found wanting, is Lieutenant Evans in Aldington's Death of a Hero.

Evans was the usual English public-school boy, amazingly ignorant, amazingly inhibited, and yet "decent" and good-humoured. ... He accepted and obeyed every English middle-class prejudice and

taboo.... Evans was an "educated" pre-war Public Schoolboy, which means that he remembered half a dozen Latin tags, knew a little of the history of England, and had a "correct" accent. ... Evans possessed that British ... equipment of mingled ignorance, self confidence and complacency which is triple-armed against all the shafts of the mind.... He was stupid, but he was honest, he was kindly, he was conscientious.... There were tens of thousands like him.¹²

It is obvious that Aldington is out of sympathy with England's pre-war educational system. One reads his outspoken and sweeping generalization with a sense of shock and disbelief, in particular the final remark, "There were tens of thousands like him." Aldington is saying exactly what H. G. Wells is to say later about the English school system.

Wells, writing in his Experiment in Autobiography, discusses his own experiences as a school boy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He states that the young Englishmen of his day left school

incapable ... of writing, or speaking ... unable to use their eyes and hands ... and with just enough consciousness of their deficiencies to make them suspicious of and hostile to intellectual ability and equipment.¹³

¹² Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 298.

¹³ Herbert George Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, Toronto, Macmillan, 1934, p. 264.

What Wells and Aldington say is actually a restatement of the thesis offered by one of England's most competent students of education, John William Adamson. He states in part that

the truth seems to be that modern studies were at best only tolerated and at worst permitted to degenerate into a mischievous farce.¹⁴

He states that education has reached its sorry stage because educational institutions are governed by "heads who constituted an oligarchy which resisted all change."¹⁵ Any expression of individuality by student or educator was resisted because of the danger inherent in such expression to the standardization which was so jealously guarded by school authorities.

In contrast standardization is abhorred by Wells who charges it with being at least partly responsible for a system wherein "a vast amount of educational jerry-building"¹⁶ went on. The same abhorrence is prominent in Aldington's Death of a Hero and in Montague's Rough Justice. For the system as it stood in 1900, the system which

14 John William Adamson, A Short History of Education, Cambridge, University Press, 1922, p. 314.

15 Ibid., p. 275.

16 Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, p. 278.

educated George Winterbourne and Auberon Garth gives excellent demonstration of the degree to which the standardization procedure had been carried.

In discussing the educational system it should be borne in mind that the main tendency in nineteenth century teaching circles was to adhere closely to the eighteenth century or neo-classical theories of education. In its simplest terms it meant that teaching in an industrialized age was carried on in accordance with the theories of a completely unindustrialized age. In practice it meant that the classics were taught to the almost complete exclusion of scientific subjects. Mr. Adamson goes so far as to say that

at all the schools the primary study, and in some the only real "business", was the classical literatures¹⁷

A knowledge of the ancients was standard equipment for the young graduate.

Beyond the obvious impracticality of the classical curriculum lay the fact that athletic games had become, since the days of Dr. Arnold at Rugby, so important in the school boy's life as almost to overshadow the classroom aspect of education. "Organized games," says George Macaulay Trevelyan, "grew up automatically, dominating and

17 Adamson, A Short History of Education, p. 314.

further popularizing Public School life."¹⁸ It is clear that "organized games" are another manifestation of "standardization". The implication is that the educational system which is dominated by games and emphasizing the teaching of classical subjects is not capable of helping the young imaginative student to develop so as to take a place in a progressive, industrial world. It is far less able to help him face the unnatural demands made of him by years of modern warfare.

Richard Aldington pens his indictment of the school system in the childhood of George Winterbourne, the central figure of Death of a Hero. For Aldington saw, in France, "tens of thousands" such as Lieutenant Evans and he tells the tale, as he sees it, in the life of Winterbourne. Winterbourne was not "stupid," not "ignorant," not "triple-armed against all the shafts of the mind." He was merely subjected to the same system that had made the Evanses what they were, but where the Evanses, with very little thought of resistance, succumbed to it, George Winterbourne fought it continually in order to retain his own personality, his own inner vitality.

Winterbourne is a member of a middle class English family. There is in him a spark of sensitivity, an appreciation of beauty, both visual and written. He is

¹⁸ George Macaulay Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, London, Longmans, 1952, vol. 4, p. 57.

curious, eager to learn. His home life provides him with the worst possible environment for the appreciation of beauty. Entering school fills him with the hope that he will be helped to an understanding of the urge to know beauty which so strongly affects him. His driving need is to know how to paint with brush and oil the beauty which he sees about him. His hope is never fulfilled. School does less for him than his home life had done. He is driven in despair deep within himself although on the surface he had conformed to the standards expected of him.

Long before he was fifteen George was living a double life--one for school and home, another for himself. Consummate dissimulation of youth, fighting for the inner vitality and the mystery. How amusingly, but rather tragically he fooled them. How innocent-seemingly he played the fine healthy barbarian schoolboy, even to the slang and the hateful games. Be ye soft as doves and cunning as serpents. He's such a real boy, you know--viz., not an idea in his head, no suspicion of the mystery. "Rippin' game of rugger to-day, Mother, I scored two tries." Upstairs was that volume of Keats, artfully abstracted from the shelves.¹⁹

Aldington finds disillusionment not in the fact that games are played to such an extent but rather in the distorted thinking which makes the school authorities

19 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 72.

determined that every boy shall play them. The schools have no understanding of and therefore no respect for "individuality!" There is no room for it in the business of "making a man" of George. That business was pursued with remarkably little success, in George's case, even with the aid of physical force. The Head used to explain to impressed parents that

"The type of boy we aim at turning out ... is a thoroughly manly fellow. We prepare for the Universities, of course, but our pride is our excellent Sports Record."²⁰

After months of compulsion, including many actual beatings, George, still in possession of his determination not to become "standardized", is spoken to by the Head of the school.

"If you go on like this, Winterbourne, you will disgrace yourself, your parents, your House and your School. You take no interest in the School life, and your Games record is abominable."²¹

But for George

the English poets and the foreign painters were his only real friends. ... his interpreters of the mystery, the defenders of the inner vitality which he was fighting ... to save.

²⁰ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 78.

²¹ Ibid., p. 79.

Naturally, the School was against him. They set out to produce "a type of thoroughly manly fellow," a "type" which unhesitatingly accepted the prejudices, the "code" put before it, docilely conformed to a set of rules. George dumbly claimed to think for himself, above all to be himself. The "others" ... really had no selves to be. They hadn't the flame. ... He didn't mind going to hell ... if only he could go to hell in his own way. That's what they couldn't accept--the obstinate, passive refusal to accept their prejudices, to conform. ... They worried him, they bullied him ... but they didn't get him. ... I wish he hadn't stood up to that machine-gun just one week before the Torture ended.²²

The fact that he chose to stand up to the gun after having endured several years of trench life can be interpreted either as defeat or victory for Winterbourne. Neither interpretation, however, is more than an indirect commentary on the educational system of pre-war England.

If one chooses to regard Winterbourne's demise as that of an exhausted, neurotic war wreck who sought out death in a moment of extraordinary depression one can, to some extent, substantiate his choice by pointing out that nothing whatsoever in George's school training had helped to fit him for adult life, either civilian or military. He had of course, allowed himself to become "standardized" in wartime

22 Aldington, Death of a Hero, pp. 80-81.

to the extent that he obeyed the orders of his military superiors. But the very act of continuous obedience to orders given by less intelligent men in the normal conducting of an unintelligent war had gradually taken from him all will to resist. Thus his strength is finally broken and society, having destroyed the individuality, destroys the man. Winterbourne is completely defeated.

The alternative interpretation of Winterbourne's death lies in the possibility that his "inner vitality" had not been destroyed but had, in fact, reached its peak. His decision is to give up life itself rather than accept the fact that, in peace as in war, the forces of conformity will succeed eventually in compromising his independence. The war, in this latter case, can be said to have brought to full development the spirit of resistance demonstrated so strongly by the school-boy Winterbourne. His choice of death thus marks his victory over the forces of conformity. But in either case, be his suicide an expression of defeat or of victory, it must be accepted as an extraordinary indictment of an educational system which provides no training and no opportunity within its framework for the individualist.

Parallel to George Winterbourne's "blind, instinctive struggle--the fight against the effort to force him into a mould"²³ is the conflict with the forces of conformity which

23 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 85

Auberon Garth faces in C. E. Montague's Rough Justice. In this book the central figure has much the same sort of mental vitality and intellectual curiosity which Winterbourne had demonstrated. Garth, however, has nothing of the resistance to conformity which Winterbourne displayed. He enters public school from a home wherein his imagination had been given full rein. Once there he encounters teachers and students who wish speedily to disabuse him of the idea that his lessons should seem "like a kind of new world to explore."²⁴ His fellow students in particular find it difficult to comprehend his anxiety to learn. Montague puts it that "learning was dross in their sight; base was the slave who worked or was poor."²⁵ Added to the attitude of Auberon's school-mates is the mistaken idea he has of what his father expects of him. His father's reticence leads Auberon to think that his father wants him to develop into what Aldington has called "the thoroughly manly fellow," good at games and not much else. Therefore Auberon

schooled himself ... to talk and look like the accepted leaders of his school-world. He packed away out of sight any freakish ways or individual notions he had of his

²⁴ Montague, Rough Justice, p. 94.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

own. ...he did his level best to conform. ...in his nineteenth year he was in outward seeming, a pattern of self-surrender to that mystic power, the "public school spirit."²⁶

It should, however, be noted to Auberon Garth's credit that two or three times before leaving school

he awoke with a sudden sureness upon him that he was just a shirker, sneaking along from one funk'd battle to another, or letting a whole river of splendid opportunities flow past him unused.²⁷

It is also in his favour that his teachers were interested only in the glory of the school, its games records, its famous old boys. The headmaster at St. Mary's, Auberon's college, owner of a passion for "knowing everybody who was worth knowing,"²⁸ chose among would-be entrants to the college "with an unflinching resolve to do no injustice either to blood without wealth or wealth without blood."²⁹ Preachers at church would excite Auberon with "clarion calls to play the man"³⁰ and "next day Mr. Chaytor-Tonge would be

26 Montague, Rough Justice, p. 128.

27 Ibid., p. 130.

28 Ibid., p. 131.

29 Ibid., p. 132.

30 Ibid., p. 129.

calling all the foundation scholars 'prize pigs,' as before...."³¹ The end result is discouraging. In his senior years Garth "laid well and truly the foundation stones of an ignominious degree...."³² With such a degree he graduates just before the outbreak of the Great War.

In discussing the wartime performances of the public school graduates who become soldiers in Aldington's and Montague's books we must appreciate that in the former's Death of a Hero the hero demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the schooling he received while in the latter's Rough Justice the hero's close childhood and school friends reveal the serious shortcomings of the English public school system.

Throughout his life George Winterbourne has made continuous effort to withstand pressure aimed at making him "conform". At no time, however, does the act of withstanding ever earn for him anything of positive value. For him life is a gradual retrogression from the finely imaginative and highly introspective life which he had made for himself in school, down through a stultifying post-school period when he had failed to paint because he would not conform to accepted theories. The retrogression continues down through years of depreciating self respect brought about through his living with a woman in open defiance of Victorian convention

³¹ Montague, Rough Justice, p. 129.

³² Ibid., p. 155

and standards. The steady downward trend in his life stems from the fact that he is asked always to conform and the standards to which he is required to conform are always superficial. He encounters for a brief while the decent standards of his fellow soldiers but it is too late. For in the army he loses his ability to turn inward and to gain solace and strength from his personal thoughts. His cultured taste begins to degenerate from the long hours of manual labour and the strict, impersonal military discipline which "must inevitably degrade a man's intelligence."³³ Continual pressure, by military authority, unending effort expended to make certain that he continues to "conform" lead directly to the degradation of his spirit so that he becomes "less able to enjoy anything intellectually abstruse. He came to want common amusements in place of the internal joy he had felt in beauty and thought."³³

Auberon Garth, on the other hand, faces army life and its insistence upon conformation with admirable calm. Intensely patriotic, he fits himself into his low position in the army hierarchy with a minimum of personal inconvenience. Since the discipline which he encounters is supported by a patriotic purpose he finds no trouble in accepting it. He becomes the ideal soldier.

His closest family and school friends become something

³³ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 301.

less than ideal soldiers. Auberon, by right of his position as son of a highly respected Tory land owner and Member of Parliament, could easily have gained a commission. He refuses, preferring to serve with the enlisted men. His friends, Colin March and Claude Barbason have quite different attitudes to military service and England's extremity.

Of the two friends Claude Barbason has chosen the permanent army as a career. He is a renowned cricketer and for him pre-war army life is largely a series of leaves of absence granted in order that he might play for Marlebone Cricket Club. Colin March, witty but irresponsible young public school graduate, takes a commission in the army and, in company with Barbason, proceeds to prove Garth Senior's contention that the authorities are wrong in following the policy of taking army officer_s from the upper and upper middle or public school classes. Immediately upon the outbreak of war Auberon's father writes to an old army friend, saying that "a break should be made with the well to do youth as a God-given officer and the less well to do as a private."³⁴ The "God-given" officers, Claude and Colin, apply diligently what they have learned of playing the game the public school way. Their entire wartime careers are spent in treating the war as a game to be enjoyed from the farthest possible vantage point. Their sole aim is to collect as many ribbons as possible with as little personal

34 Montague, Rough Justice, p. 231.

risk as possible. While Auberon loses a hand in action, while their common friend Victor Nevin fails under fire, deserts and degenerates into squalor, and eventually is executed for cowardice, these two, more cowardly than Nevin in that they make no effort whatsoever to be brave, carry on their game. As army officers and products of the upper classes and of a futile public school system they treat England's peril as something to be exploited for their personal glory.³⁵

The system of officering the army from the upper class young men of England is a direct offshoot of the social system which existed at the end of Victoria's reign. Of it Trevelyan says

The old landed gentry, the professional men and the new industrialists were educated together, forming an enlarged and modernized aristocracy, sufficiently numerous to meet the various needs of government and of leadership in Victoria's England and Victoria's Empire.³⁶

The abolition of the purchase of officer's commissions in 1870 had little bearing on the situation. Officers were still appointed and, until the middle years of the war when

³⁵ Montague's short story, Honours Easy, is one of the most powerful stories to come out of the Great War. It develops fully the story of the efforts of Claude Barbason and Colin March to out-do each other in the race for decorations.

³⁶ Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, vol. 4, p. 57.

terrible casualties made it necessary to promote from the ranks, they were appointed from the public school class of young Englishmen. It is the young men of this class, the "well-to-do" youth of Rough Justice and the "tens of thousands" of Death of a Hero, who officer the army of 1914 and 1915. Products of an economic and educational system which reflects the amalgamation of the upper and middle classes they, in the persons of Lieutenant Evans and George Winterbourne, Claude Barbason and Colin March, establish irrefutably in the war novels the fact that the educational system provided men completely unfitted for leadership. They are the men through whom Aldington and Montague have chosen to reveal their deep disillusionment with England's school organization.

Aldington and Montague are not alone in their criticism of English education. We have already noted that H. G. Wells is outspokenly critical of the educators' insistence on standardizing the pupil. Somewhat earlier than Wells Samuel Butler had decried what seemed to him to be a decided emphasis upon forcing conformity upon the student. In The Way of All Flesh he writes apropos the training of Ernest Pontifex.

If their wills were "well broken" in childhood ... they would acquire habits of obedience which they would not venture to

break through till they were over
twenty-one years old.³⁷

George Bernard Shaw, noted for his iconoclastic attitude towards the more sacred of England's institutions, writes that

schools are machines for forcing
a spurious literacy on children
in order that your universities
may stamp them as educated men
when they have fairly got hold
of the wrong end of every stick
in the faggot of knowledge.³⁸

Shaw's use of the word "machine" immediately brings to mind a picture of a mechanized process by which standardized pupils are "stamped" into shape. It is clear that Aldington and Montague have developed criticisms of at least one aspect of the modern social structure which was apparent to certain of their literary predecessors.

The two war writers are supported by social historians and educationists. One is instantly reminded, when he reads the following excerpt from Trevelyan's Illustrated English Social History, of Lieutenant Evans in Death of a Hero and Auberon in Rough Justice.

37 Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh, New York, Modern Library, n. d., p. 31.

38 George Bernard Shaw in Our Corner, May, 1888, cited in R. F. Rattray, Bernard Shaw: a Chronicle, Luton, Leagrave Press, 1951, p. 64.

In the microcosm of 'public school' life wherein the boys were left to form and govern their own society, character gained more than originality, and intellect was less encouraged than sturdy schoolboy faithfulness to comrades.³⁹

The lack of intellectual encouragement mentioned above is, of course, a restatement of the criticism leveled against slack minded schoolmasters by Aldington and Montague. The blunt comment of another social historian adds further support to the soldier writers' indictment. Pauline Gregg writes:

But, even where it was not vicious English schoolteaching from the monitorial schools to the public schools, was for the most part unimaginative and unproductive.⁴⁰

We have already noted the comments of J. W. Adamson on the situation.

The truth seems to be that modern studies were at best only tolerated and at worst permitted to degenerate into a mischievous farce.⁴¹

And another war veteran writes that "Conventional British

³⁹ Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, vol. 4, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Pauline Gregg, A Social and Economic History of Britain 1760-1950, London, Harrap, 1950, p. 240.

⁴¹ Adamson, A Short History of Education, p. 315.

education before the war had been exceedingly repressive in all varieties of school⁴²

There seems thus to be a high degree of unanimity in the criticisms of the modern school system in England. Richard Aldington and C. E. Montague are not innovators. They are expressing the very sentiments expressed in literature by Butler and Shaw and Wells and in history by Trevelyan and Adamson. Their service in France, where they saw at first hand how the public school graduates accepted the responsibilities and the dangers of war, allows them to speak with real authority of the weakness of England's school organization and the people who administered it.

⁴² Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, The Long Week End A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939, New York, Macmillan, 1941, p. 198.

CHAPTER 111

THE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE

Soldiers are dreamers: when the guns begin
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.
Siegfried Sassoon

One must decide whether the weakness of the school system, revealed as it is by the manner in which the public school graduates accept the responsibilities of wartime and war service, is paralleled by war demonstrated weaknesses in other social institutions. Among those social establishments which must be considered to have exerted influence on the majority of soldiers is that of the family. The family is, for the purpose of this paper, considered to be a group of people of any size living together and closely related by ties of blood or marriage. The married couple, usually without children and with or without in-laws, as well as the common law man and wife, are the family units which are treated to the most searching examination by the veteran writers.

The family which reveals to investigation the most serious examples of weakness in respect to its own standards is the married couple. In the war novels the couple is usually examined by itself and apart from any children to which it may have given life. For it is the simple condition of being married rather than that of having fathered children which leads to anguish of soul for the man

in the trenches. It is his absence in the service of his country which provides the opportunity for marriage to reveal itself as a weak and puny thing. And it is a weak and puny thing, so the soldier authors insist, if it will not stand up to the vicissitudes of wartime life.

That marriage will not stand the strain of war enforced separation is hinted at with the presentation of the argument in the war novels that marriage as a social institution had begun to weaken in the years prior to the outbreak of the Great War. Changing attitudes became apparent in the relationship between young men and women of the 1910's when the young people examined and rejected the marriage conventions. They rejected the mental cruelty which so often accompanied marriage and which is, for Aldington at least, the outstanding attribute of Victorian marriage. That the marriage institution of the Victorian and Edwardian eras provides no firm foundation for the support of wartime marriages is obvious from an examination of the marriages discussed in Death of a Hero.

The married state as it existed for George Winterbourne's forebears is an unattractive one.

George's grandma ... was a dominating old bitch who destroyed ... (George's grandfather's) initiative and courage, but in the eighties hardly anyone had the sense to tell dominating old bitch-mothers to go to hell.⁴³

43 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 34.

The "bitch-mother," having ruined her husband, transfers her attention to her son and, in her possessiveness, ruins him too. He, in protest against his mother's control, is forced into making the same mistake his father had made. He falls easy prey to a sympathetic but potentially domineering woman. The pattern of ruination is repeated in his marriage. For neither partner is sufficiently mature to choose a mate except on the grounds of physical attraction. Neither of them can appreciate that the future holds exactly the same life which they so desperately wish to avoid. Neither of them can understand that it will be necessary to live on the same basis as their elders live.

Largely because it was forced upon them by their elders and social convention, they began on a basis of humbug; unfortunately they continued on a basis of humbug.⁴⁴

The "humbug" is, for Aldington, the complete lack of harmony in the ordinary marriage relationship. Intense discord results from the continuous efforts of the woman in both marriages to dominate the man. For George's mother applies exactly the same technique as his grandmother had used. She dominates her husband and destroys his individuality as a man. Then she turns her attention to her son and he, having no manly father to guide and encourage him, becomes highly

⁴⁴ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 47.

introspective in the effort to gain some sort of free and unfettered development.

In fairness to George's mother it is to be noted that having come from a background where poverty and insecurity were the rule rather than the exception and where her father, as master of the house, had provided only poverty and insecurity, she is perhaps simply seeking security when she insists on retaining control over her husband and her son.

The humbug is further emphasized when one remembers that disillusionment and disharmony result from the first physical contact between the young husband and the young wife. For George's mother is one of the young brides of the Victorian era who are handed over

in their ignorance and sweetly-
prettiness to ignorant and
clumsy young men for them to
brutalize and wound in their
ignorance.⁴⁵

Victorian tradition, with its prudishness and obstinate refusal to consider sex in any healthy manner resulted, so Aldington argues, in the triangle of

father, mother, child, which
is ... so much more productive
of misery than the other triangle
of husband, wife and lover.⁴⁶

Thus, with Victorian convention meaning what it seems to, it

45 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 45.

46 Ibid., p. 53.

is not difficult to appreciate that dissatisfaction with it develops. Many young "George Winterbournes" and their female counterparts broke with and discarded tradition and conventionality. They broke because

They had seen in their own homes the dreadful unhappiness and suffering caused by Victorian and indeed Edwardian ignorance and domestic dennerly and swarming infants, and they reacted violently against it. So far, good. But they failed to see that ... they were merely setting up another tyranny, the tyranny of free love.⁴⁷

The "free love" which is the result of breaking with Victorian marital tradition, consists mainly of experimenting with pre-marital sexual contact. Young people

actually used their intelligence before embarking on a joint sexual experience. That's the great break in the generations. Trying to use some intelligence in life instead of blindly following the instincts and the collective imbecility of the ages as embodied in social and legal codes.⁴⁸

The "tyranny" with which Aldington is concerned enters into the picture because, while their reaction against the "imbecility of the ages" is in itself a laudable thing, the young people allow themselves to become so involved in their new concept of man-woman relationships that they merely

47 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 45.

48 Ibid., p. 147.

replace one source of discord with another. The terrible disharmony caused by the forcing of mismated and entirely unsuited persons to spend a lifetime together is contrasted to an equally serious social disruption which develops when young people, having discovered the mysteries of sex, are plagued with the continual desire for thrill and excitement and are rendered incapable of enjoying any mature and permanent sexual relationship. They are too undeveloped emotionally to be satisfied with the sameness which results from intimate knowledge. Being unmarried they can easily set aside the "love" of the moment and, in obedience to the demand of the "tyrannous" craving for excitement, take on a new lover. At this point the war and wartime attitudes of society enter into the picture.

War can only pander to and inflame the craving for excitement which besets those who, in Death of a Hero, are not required to fight in the war. One notices with deep disgust the sexual excesses of George Winterbourne's mother when, upon being notified of the death of her son, she finds the information to be "rather exciting and stimulating ... especially erotically stimulating."⁴⁹ But one senses the extreme disillusionment which is Aldington's when it becomes apparent in the novel that Elizabeth and Fanny, George's wife and mistress, are growing increasingly indifferent to

⁴⁹ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 22.

George's memory. As the war wears on they forget the only thing which ever bound them to George; that is the sexual excitement they shared with him. They had noticed only that he was much less sophisticated and much less interested in their superficial chatter when he returned on leave from France. When he is dead they remember almost nothing of him. Memory is short when life is simply a matter of living for the pleasure of the moment and the war, of course, provides Elizabeth and Fanny with unlimited opportunity for sexual pleasure. As the number of their affairs with other men increases, their memory of George decreases.

In France George finds the situation becoming increasingly acute because, while he is being forgotten by his wife and his lover, he is clinging all the more tightly to the memory of them. While they are "developing that rather hard efficiency of the war and post-war female, veiling the ancient predatory instincts of the sex"⁵⁰ he

was living in a sort of double
nightmare--the nightmare of war
and the nightmare of his own life.
Each seemed inextricably interwoven.⁵¹

George is doomed by the modern standards of man-woman relationship. When he first went to France he had much time in which to ponder the sex ideals of his contemporaries.

⁵⁰ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 233.

After having served many months there and having adhered strictly to his personal standards of fidelity, he returns to London on leave to find that his wife is living in adultery. He discards his old standards as he takes his wife's close friend in adultery and makes her his mistress. It is at this point that he begins to appreciate the instability of the relationship between modern men and women. When he realizes that his wife and his mistress, in their very shallowness, represent "what hope of humanity he had left,"⁵² when he finds that "in them alone civilization seemed to survive,"⁵³ he acknowledges the growing hopelessness of his situation. For he realizes fully that his standards, both old and new, are unsuited to the modern world and that, in the final analysis, none of the standards of the young people are capable of standing up to the complexities of modern social life nor are they any more productive of harmony between man and woman than were those of his Victorian predecessors. He finds his answer in the front lines when he completely rejects marriage and the sex-relationship by rising to his feet in front of a traversing German machine gun.

With George's battle field repudiation of marriage and women the breakdown of modern marital standards as envisaged

52 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 233.

53 Ibid., p. 234.

by Aldington is complete. The grandmother's actions represent the first step in the deterioration of marriage values when they indicate the woman's determination to dominate the man. There is not, however, in the case of George's grandparents any indication of sexual infidelity. The mother's treatment of her husband and her son seem to be based on approval of the grandmother's for she too is determined to dominate the men in her household. She adds infidelity to the family relationship when she takes lovers, presumably in search for the masculinity she had destroyed in her husband. George's wife and his mistress, aided by the intensely anti-conventional reaction which is growing among the young people of pre-war England and further aided by the slack moral atmosphere generated during the war years proper, complete the deterioration of the man-woman relationship by ignoring the marriage vow and by being unfaithful to husband and to lover alike. Perhaps the most agonizing aspect of the whole situation for Aldington is in the complete indifference with which the women of England treat the absent soldier. At least George's father and grandfather were noticed, albeit to their sorrow, by their wives; George is simply a fading and somehow irritating memory to his. With the disappearance of the memory of George the deterioration in marital relations is complete. Marriage, after generations of stultifying conventionality and four years of war, has degenerated into chaos.

Just as Aldington finds that marriage as an institution

is so fibreless that it cannot hold together, so does Ford Madox Ford find that modern marriage relations are decaying into a state of anarchy. The novels in Parade's End discuss in more or less detailed fashion the ruined marriages of three front line soldiers. All three marriages, as well as pointing up the weakness of the marriage institution itself, argue for Ford that war is the tragedy which gives impetus to the final revelation of the disorder in the modern marriage.

The first marriage is that of Christopher Tietjens, ailing officer husband of a beautiful but unpredictable and wanton wife. He is commanding an army replacement unit in northern France. Plagued by the actions of the wife who is determined to ruin him, he finds that he must suffer the additional inconvenience of having under him two men, O Nine Morgan and Captain McKechnie, who are also enduring the torture of knowing of their wives' infidelities. Morgan, a faithful man, has asked for leave to return home because his wife is said to be living with another man. Tietjens refuses the request, having been asked to do so by the police in Morgan's town who fear that the soldier will be killed by his wife's lover. (Tietjens may also be seeking to keep Morgan from the pain which he, Tietjens, suffers from the sure knowledge of his wife's adulteries.) A few hours after having had his leave refused Morgan is struck and killed by falling shrapnel. He dies at Tietjens' feet. Tietjens, reminded of his own trouble, muses as he waits for Morgan's body to be removed.

He himself must be a -- eunuch.
By temperament. That dead
fellow down there must be one,
physically. ... That would be
why his wife had taken up with
the prizefighter.... If he had
given the fellow leave the
prizefighter would have smashed
him to bits. ... So he was
better dead. Or perhaps not.
Is death better than discovering
that your wife is a whore and
being done in by her cully?
Gwell angau na gwillth, their own
regimental badge bore the words
"Death is better than dishonour."⁵⁴

Captain McKechnie, an excellent and much decorated
officer, had been sent on leave home to divorce his wife who

during his absence in France, had been
living with an Egyptologist in
Government Service. Then, acting
under the conscientious scruples of
the younger school of the day, he had
refrained from divorcing her.
Campion had in consequence threatened
to deprive him of his commission....
The poor devil -- who had actually
consented to contribute to the costs
of the household of his wife and the
Egyptologist -- had actually gone
mad.⁵⁵

McKechnie's attitude toward divorce, whether or not it is
schooled by conscience, is that of an idealist and, as it
evolves, is not unlike that held by Christopher Tietjens.
In his state of shock and war nerves, accentuated as it is by
his personal family relations, McKechnie tells much of his
story to Tietjens. When he chooses the hours, deep in the

⁵⁴ Ford, Parade's End, p. 309.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 364.

night, immediately following Morgan's death, for the telling "with a real male fury, his really very painful story"⁵⁶ it is not unexpected that Tietjens is forced into further consideration, introspective yet strangely objective, of his own marriage. As he sits in his sleeping bag, writing down facts as he recalls them, a most unusual picture of his marriage and the woman who is his wife unfolds itself.

The lady, Mrs. Tietjens, was certainly without mitigation a whore; he himself equally certainly ... had been physically faithful to the lady and their marriage tie ... after the last of her high handed divigations from fidelity he had accorded to the lady the shelter of his roof and his name.⁵⁷

He continues the picture as he jots down notes from his memory of the marriage.

"When I married Miss Satterthwaite ... unknown to myself, she imagined herself to be with child by a fellow called Drake. ... The matter is debatable. I am passionately attached to the child who is my heir The lady was subsequently, on several occasions ... unfaithful to me. She left me with a fellow called Perowne

"My wife ... wrote and told me that she wished to be taken back into my household My principles prevent me from divorcing any woman

"During this absence of Mrs. Tietjens ... I made the acquaintance of a young woman, Miss Wannop, ... I was ... aware ... sympathetic but not violent attachment

⁵⁶ Ford, Parade's End, p. 364

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 343.

for Miss Wannop. ... we exchanged no confidences. ... A disadvantage of being English of a certain station.

"The position continued thus for several years. Six or seven. ...

"On the day before my second going out to France

"In St. James's Park I invited Miss Wannop to become my mistress. She consented It is to be presumed that that was evidence of her affection for me. We have never exchanged words of affection. ...

"But we didn't. We were together And nothing happened. We agreed that we were the sort of persons who didn't.

"I got home towards two.... I sat thinking.... Then Sylvia spoke. ... She had apparently been banking on the idea that if I had physical contact with Miss Wannop I might satisfy my affection for the girl and feel physical desires for her. But she knew, without my speaking, that I had not.... She threatened to ruin me; to ruin me in the Army; to drag my name through the mud. ... I never spoke. ... She struck me in the face. And went away.⁵⁸

In No More Parades, the second novel of the Parade's End tetralogy, Sylvia goes to France to carry out her avowed promise to ruin her husband. She, seated in a hotel lobby with her ex-lover Perowne, falls into a reverie and muses over the events of the marriage as they appear to her. It appears that the basic reason for her infidelities lies in the fact that she cannot abide her husband's superior mental

and moral strength; she, therefore, elopes with men like Perowne because "it would be the most humiliating thing (she) could do to Christopher."⁵⁹ The story of the marriage is, in effect, the story of a sustained effort on the part of the wife to humiliate the husband and an equally sustained effort on the husband's part to resist his wife's efforts and to retain his own dignity at the same time.

That their marriage is probably doomed without the assistance of wartime circumstances is made clear in Some Do Not, the first book of the tetralogy. Early in the story the sensitive and idealistic Tietjens is shocked into comment on modern sex standards by his consideration of the treatment to which a cruel wife has subjected him.

"Damn it. What's the sense of all these attempts to justify fornication? England's mad about it."⁶⁰

In his anger at modern sex ethics and at the fact that he has told a close friend of his own wife's adulteries, he comments on Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti, the subject of the friend's monograph. He is caustic in his embarrassment.

"Well, you've got your John Stuart Mill's and your George Eliot's for the high class thing. Leave the furniture out! Or leave me out, at least I tell you it revolts me to think of that obese, oily man who never took a bath, in a grease

⁵⁹ Ford, Parade's End, p. 389.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

spotted dressing-gown and the underclothes he's slept in, standing beside a five-shilling model with crimped hair"61

The revulsion and indignation are those of an honourable responsive man who has been reminded that he has been forced to marry a woman who is pregnant, possibly by another man. They are those of a man whose wife has eloped with a hopelessly stupid man, whose wife "had simply reacted in a violent fit of sexual hatred from her husband's mind."62 They are the protest of a man who is eventually to realize that his wife "is certainly without mitigation a whore" and who feels that his problem, one of completely antagonistic sex attitudes, exists for the whole of society. For he says: "It's insoluble. It's the whole problem of the relations of the sexes."63

The marriage of Christopher and Sylvia Tietjens is definitely doomed with the advent of war. Tietjens, carrying on a discussion of modern sexual standards, says to the friend who doubts the possibility of war just as he doubts that the sexual mores of the country have deteriorated.

"War, my good fellow ... is inevitable, and with this country plumb in the middle of it. Simply

61 Ford, Parade's End, p. 17.

62 Ibid., p. 389.

63 Ibid., p. 347.

because you fellows are such damned hypocrites. There's not a country in the world that trusts us. We're always, as it were, committing adultery -- like your fellow with the name of Heaven on our lips."⁶⁴

He continues the comparison:

"Yes, a war is inevitable. Firstly, there's you fellows who can't be trusted. And then there's the multitude who mean to have bathrooms and white enamel. ... It's like you polygamists with women. There aren't enough women in the world to go round to satisfy your insatiable appetites. And there aren't enough men in the world to give each woman one. And most women want several. So you have divorce cases. I suppose you won't say that ... there shall be no more divorce? Well, war is as inevitable as divorce"⁶⁵

The ruination of his marriage is as inevitable as is the war which Tietjens forecasts. For in many respects Tietjens' wife is as chaotic and as illogical and as unpredictable as is war itself. It is not to be understood that war's inevitability is paralleled by the inevitability of divorce for the Tietjens's. Such a move is in opposition to Tietjens' principles. He is merely voicing his suspicion that sexual standards, already low, will deteriorate further with the outbreak of war. In so doing he is pointing forward to the very situation in which he later is to find

⁶⁴ Ford, Parade's End, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

himself when, in France, he, his runner Morgan and his colleague McKechnie suffer so much from the immoralities of their wives.

In Parade's End Tietjens' wife is aided in her attempts to ruin her husband by the wartime situation in which he finds himself. Commanding a unit within a base camp, he is so located that it is comparatively easy for his wife to register at a nearby hotel. With the renewal of contact with her husband the wife begins again to torment him.

Shortly after her arrival in France she and her husband are in attendance at a social function. Her husband succeeds in smoothing over a fairly knotty problem in international relations which seems to be on the verge of causing disruption between English and French interests. In her complete dissatisfaction that Tietjens should do a thing so well, in so superior a fashion, Sylvia tells her husband's commanding officer that he, Tietjens, is a Socialist. Her motive is negative, ruinous, entirely unimaginative and unintelligent. It is perhaps beside the point that the General, a stupid man when dealing with women, more than half believes her. It is directly to the point that he finally posts Christopher, who is seriously ill with a chest ailment, back to a front line regiment. For, having listened to and believed the many vicious rumours begun by Sylvia about Christopher, General Campion finds that he can no longer tolerate within his command a man who, he believes, is a

scoundrel. He tries to explain to Tietjens his decision to post him away.

"I will emphasize what I am saying. ... No officer could -- without being militarily in the wrong -- have a private life that is as incomprehensible and embarrassing as yours...."⁶⁶

The "incomprehensible" element in Tietjens' life is his wife. To understand her actions one must appreciate that Ford has drawn two characters, in Sylvia and Christopher, who are as opposite in outlook as two persons can be. They are actually caricatures or even abstracts portrayed for the purpose of setting against one another the two extremes of modern attitudes and values. For Sylvia is unceasingly active and relentless in her determination to force her husband to admit his humiliation, his awareness of her efforts. She is the personification of wickedness and modern moral chaos. Christopher, as far as society can discover, is completely passive to her attempts. Outwardly he retains his calm attitude; to her undisciplined attacks he reacts in his usual orderly and disciplined manner. He is, of course, the personification of everything that is good by eighteenth century social standards. He thinks of church in terms of Handel's music; he feels that no good novel has been written since the eighteenth century; he thinks of the Lord as an eighteenth century land owner with responsibility toward his

⁶⁶ Ford, Parade's End, p. 478.

tenants. He is, above all, possessed of an instinct for reasoning things out. Never in the most embarrassing moments or faced with the most critical situation does Tietjens lose his ability to reason things to their logical conclusions. It is clear, in Parade's End, that Christopher Tietjens represents that which is best in moral values and social attitudes. It is equally clear that his wife represents that which is worst. He represents reason and moral responsibility: she represents emotion and moral irresponsibility.

That Ford allows Tietjens, in the final analysis, to disappear into the country to live quietly with Valentine Wannop, without benefit of divorce, is perhaps his strongest commentary on modern marriage. It is the extreme in disillusionment for Ford that Tietjens, the personification of eighteenth century propriety, should have to admit the defeat of his very principles. For Tietjens is, in fact, doing what George Winterbourne did. He is discarding convention. He is discarding convention and in that act he is repudiating marriage as he had been trained to regard it. He is allowing that his own high standards have been destroyed by those of his contemporaries, that his reasonable and intelligent passivity cannot stand before the emotional and unintelligent activity of his wife.

It is to be remembered that Richard Aldington emphasizes in Death of a Hero the activity of the wife and

the passivity of the husband in marriage. Aldington chooses to portray, in the lives of three generations of the same family, the steadily worsening attitudes to marriage, culminating in ruination in wartime. Ford portrays three contemporary wartime marriages which represent three distinct social levels and thereby argue for his thesis of a universal deterioration of marriage morals. The combined attitudes of the two writers leave little unsaid regarding the depreciated standards of marriage conduct. Their positive statements are reinforced by the fact that nowhere in the war novels is there any argument favouring marriage as it is practised in early twentieth-century England, either before or during the Great War.

To recapitulate the matter as briefly as possible we may state that for Aldington and Ford modern marriage is in a state of ruination. Evidence gleaned from non-literary sources supports, in general, their theses. Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, writes of English marriage

I cannot say myself that I view the present state of affairs as satisfactory. It has certain undesirable features imposed upon it by conventional moralists, and until conventional morality is changed, I do not see how these undesirable features are to disappear.⁶⁷

67 Bertrand Russell, Marriage and Morals, London, Allen and Unwin, 1929, p. 126.

This seems to be definite support for the war writers by a thinker who appreciates the need for change in "conventional morality". The young people in Death of a Hero and in Parade's End go beyond the mere changing of the morality of marriage. They repudiate it completely. It is apparent that the philosopher and the novelists agree that the fundamental problem is one of outmoded morality and that a new approach is needed. They are in discord only in regard to the degree of change or newness which is suitable.

At least one Christian group, composed of English church and lay figures, finds that the old standards in man and woman relations are gone. These investigators, examining the status quo of marriage in the England of 1924, write:

The old order in general sex relations is gone, and we live amidst the first experimental efforts to establish another.⁶⁸

George and Elizabeth and Fanny had, in Death of a Hero, made the attempt to establish the new order in their relations with each other prior to and during the Great War. Tietjens and Valentine Wannop, in Parade's End, make the same attempt as soon as they meet again after the Armistice. While the group of Christian investigators does not

⁶⁸ Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship at Birmingham, April 5-12, 1924, The Relation of the Sexes, London, Longmans, Green, 1924, p. 14.

necessarily feel that the old order needed changing it is realistic enough to see that it is being replaced and that the reactions of the young people to the old fashioned tradition in morality are firmly lodged. The examining group admits that the reactions portrayed by the young people of the war novels are, in actual fact, taking place.

The war writer is, however, most closely supported in his judgment of modern marital attitudes by Felix Adler who writes:

And the widespread revolt against what is called in general bourgeois morality, and against the marriage institution in particular, is to no small extent attributable to ... impatience of constraint in any form, a certain emotional thin skinnedness that chafes under binding ties, finds them intolerable and seeks to shake them off. And because marriage is that relation in which the binding tie is most intimate, the attack on marriage is more vehement and convulsive than on any other of the social institutions and marriage has become the centre of the modern revolt.⁶⁹

Certainly marriage is the centre of the "modern revolt" which is presented in the pages of Death of a Hero and Parade's End. George Winterbourne and Elizabeth and Fanny and many of their associates rebel against moral convention

⁶⁹ Felix Adler, "Permanence or Impermanence of Marriage", Hibbert Journal, vol. 22 (Oct, 1923), p. 20.

before and during the War. Tietjens and Valentine Wannop sense the need for revolt early in the war and eventually they repudiate conventionality when, immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, they begin to live together without benefit of divorce for Tietjens. The wives of O Nine Morgan and Captain McKechnie revolt against modern morality when they reject their duties to their soldier husbands and live in sin. It is true that Aldington and Ford, through the medium of their novels, attack the marriage institution. It is perhaps true that the attack is "more vehement and convulsive than on any other of the social institutions." It is generally true that the social critic referred to in this paper, be he philosopher, churchman, layman, social scientist or novelist, is agreed on the fundamental point that marriage as a social institution is in a process of decay. Whether the decay be from within and due to inherent weaknesses or from without and due to the rejection of marriage by young men and women is immaterial.

CHAPTER 1V

SEXUAL MORALITY

The thesis that modern marriage is based on insufficiently strong foundations for it to endure the strain of wartime circumstances leads one to question whether the weaknesses which become so clear in wartime are not generally present and apparent, at least to some extent, in peace time. Social critics of any period in social history usually argue that a breakdown of such institutions as marriage and family life represents a culmination, a final result and that the factors leading to it are characteristic rather than short lived.

Marriage as an institution was discussed with some of its ramifications in the previous chapter. The traditional and the modern views as Aldington understood them, the disharmony resulting from each, the ruination of of certain marriages by war enforced separation as Aldington and Ford saw it, all were discussed at some length. But underlying the relationship which exists between people as individuals rather than as partners in marriage is another quality. That quality is sexuality.

Sexuality is characteristic in humans, not an attribute brought about by war. Considered quite apart from marriage it is seen to be a vital force, one which has great influence on the manner in which men and women act toward their fellow human beings. In order to establish

whether it has, in the eyes of the soldier authors, any degrading or disillusioning quality, the ugliness of which is emphasized by the war, one must establish that the writers found it to be ugly and unappealing in its role in the human relations which existed in civilian (as opposed to military) society.

Richard Aldington, in noting that the sex drive in men and women is powerful, particularly emphasizes that it is instinctive. Note the stress he places on "instinct" in the relations between the sexes when he writes:

However much you may be on
your guard, however much you may
think you dislike it, you will
find yourself instinctively
angling for feminine flattery --
and getting it. Oh yes, you'll
get it, as long as that subtle
instinct warns them there is
potency in your loins⁷⁰

Death of a Hero reveals other types of instinct all based to some extent upon sexuality. It is the instinct for flattery which draws George Winterbourne to Elizabeth and later to her friend Fanny. It is the feminine instinct for protection and security which leads Elizabeth to insist upon marriage when she is faced with the suspicion that she is pregnant. It is also instinct which leads Elizabeth to the realization that platitudes about "free love" are insufficiently strong to make unmarried

motherhood acceptable in Victorian society. It is partly instinct which drives George into Fanny's arms when, upon his return from France on leave, he is rejected by his wife.

It is debatable that George, even forced on by his intense loneliness and need of human sympathy, would have gone to Fanny had she not encouraged him with her own sexuality. She is entirely aware of the "potency in his loins". Her sexuality gives to her the power of which Aldington writes so bitterly:

... let it be noted that "seduction" is one of those primitive notions which could only inhabit the degenerate minds of lawyers and social uplifters, since in nine cases out of ten the "seducer", if any, is the woman.⁷¹

Aldington does not state categorically that the act of seducing a man arises from any instinctive, ever-present drive in women but he does comment on the purely sexual relationship between men and women in wartime. The following passage indicates a certain connection between seduction and what might be called "war passion", the two attributes being, for Aldington, common to women rather than to men.

Odd, but perhaps in the nature of things that those men who

71 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 166.

have most contempt for women are generally most successful with them. There must be a vast amount of latent masochism in women, ranging from the primitive delight in being knocked down to the subtle enjoyment of complex jealousies. How ghastly -- If you think about it -- their passion for soldiers! To breed babies by him who has slain men -- puh! there's too much spilt blood....⁷²

One is led to associate this passage, which must be appreciated for its quality of generality, with the passage which describes Mrs. Winterbourne's particular reactions upon being notified of the death, in action, of her son.

The "reactions" (as they are called) of Mrs. Winterbourne were different. She found it rather exciting and stimulating at first, especially erotically stimulating.⁷³

It is possible to interpret Mrs. Winterbourne's reactions in one of two ways, keeping always in mind Aldington's premise that sexuality is at the base of all male-female relations. The first possibility is that she is instinctively anxious, being faced with the death at war of the issue of her own flesh, to pass on life, to reproduce. If such is the case it is merely the tremendous natural urge of the human being to recreate itself that is

⁷² Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 9.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 6.

making itself felt.

The other possibility takes into consideration the fact that, at the moment of hearing of George's death, Mrs. Winterbourne is involved in one of a long series of adulterous affairs. She is carrying on the current affair with one Sam Browne, an army officer who was

... one of those nice, clean
sporting English men with a
minimum of intelligence and
an infinite capacity for being
gulled by females.... 73

Mrs. Winterbourne may, therefore, be merely exploiting Browne's gullibility in her own desire to retain something of her youth and physical charm. George's death would, in this latter case, be simply a reminder to his mother that she is getting older. But whichever facet of human reaction the mother does display it carries with it a deep and disillusioning reflection on womanhood and its instincts.

One must comment at this point that the relationships between men and women in Death of a Hero establish a pattern of extraordinary selfishness which appears again and again in the other war novels herein considered. In one novel only does the sexual instinct meet with even tacit approval. Henry Major Tomlinson speaks sympathetically of the girl Betty Whittaker who, in All Our Yesterdays, had had a child

by a young clergyman with whom she was in love. Later serving as a nurse in France, she demonstrates sympathy for the bitterly lonely soldiers by giving freely of her body. Two of her friends discuss the situation.

"It seemed that she gave herself of her merry heart. The fellows wanted her, and she was a giver. What about that?"

"What do you think?"

"I'll let the proud virgins answer who think it glorious for our friends to die.⁷⁴

The generosity and sympathy with which Betty Whittaker treats lonely soldiers is in sharp contrast with the attitude held by Sylvia Tietjens who is thoroughly bored with all men other than her husband. Of them she thinks:

You had not been for ten minutes in any sort of intimacy with any man before you said: "But I've read all this before...." You knew the opening, you were already bored by the middle, and especially, you knew the end....⁷⁵

Sylvia is bored, it is true, by other men but not until she has no further use for them. A case in point is her affair with Major Perowne, by whom she is bored to complete distraction once her need for his presence is satisfied. More important in respect to Sylvia's sexuality as a characteristic in her

⁷⁴ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 462.

⁷⁵ Ford, Parade's End, p. 394.

is the manner in which she associates herself with nature in the following scene. She is standing at the top of an English cliff:

Sylvia stayed for a long time watching the convolutions of the eagle. It pleased her to see that, though nothing threatened the gulls, they yet screamed and dropped their herrings.... The whole affair reminded her of herself in her relationship to the ordinary women of the barnyard. ...it was her preoccupation just as turning down nice men ... was her hobby.⁷⁶

Sylvia continues with her introspective consideration of her own sexual standards.

Once, in the early days of the Great Struggle, a young man -- she had smiled at him in mistake for someone more trustable -- had followed ... and flushed with wine, glory and the firm conviction that all women in that lurid carnival had become common property, had burst into her door

Yet she hadn't really told him more than the way one should behave to the wives of one's brother officers then actually in the line, a point-of-view that, with her intimates, she daily agreed was pure bosh.

She knew that, like her intimates ... she was man mad.⁷⁷

Aldington shows sexuality in the female to be a commentary in itself on female standards. Ford, on the

⁷⁶ Ford, Parade's End, p. 146.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 146-7.

strength of the last quoted passage, seems close to Aldington and his already noted concern over the indifference which women exhibit for their men who are in the trenches.

The soldier writer is also concerned with sexuality in women, be it in wartime or in peace time, as an urge over which the woman has no intellectual control. Sylvia Tietjens, Mrs. Winterbourne, Betty Whittaker, all use sex and physical attraction to gain for themselves ends which are usually based on emotional rather than reasoned arguments. It is clear that the veteran novelist finds little to the credit of women in so far as their sexuality and their emotional direction of their sexuality is concerned.

A lack of intelligent direction of sexual interest by women does not argue that the men in the English war novels apply logic in their own dealings with the opposite sex. Sexuality is not, in these war novels, of concern to the men in the trenches in the same general and powerful manner in which it affects women.

It probably exists for them but it never manifests itself as a general declaration of low or lowering male standards. Sam Browne, of course, may not be taken as a case in point since he is led on by the sexuality in Mrs. Winterbourne rather than by his own. And it may be pointed out that he is not in the trenches when his interest in sex makes itself known. He is merely representative of

the men who have no particularly intelligent approach to sex.

One might argue that young Brownlie, in Parade's End, is inspired by sexuality when, in his position as a bank clerk, he returns Christopher Tietjens' cheques to the latter's mess and to his club in a deliberate attempt to cause the man's social and military disgrace. Brownlie's purpose is to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Tietjens, with whom he is infatuated. He had stated that he intended to catch Christopher

on the hop--that's his own expression--and dishonour the next cheque of his that came in. He said he had been waiting for the chance since the war.⁷⁸

Brownlie is only slightly more reprehensible and no less unintelligent than Ruggles, an acquaintance of Tietjens' brother Mark, whom Mark has empowered to investigate his brother's army career. Ruggles is, of course, motivated by no sexual urge of any sort but rather by his proclivity to gossip and scandal mongering. Not understanding that the investigation is merely to assure Tietjens Senior that his son is not in need, Ruggles did his work to the best of his ability.

Armed with this commission Mr. Ruggles appears to have displayed extraordinary activity in preparing a Christopher Tietjens dossier. It is not often that an inveterate gossip gets a chance at a man whilst

being at the same time practically shielded against the law of libel. And Ruggles disliked Christopher Tietjens with the inveterate dislike of the man who revels in gossip for the man who never gossips. And Christopher Tietjens had displayed more than his usual insolence to Ruggles. So Ruggles' coat-tails flashed round to an unusual number of tall portals during the next week.⁷⁹

Ruggles' mass of circumstantial evidence and rumour about Christopher is reported by him directly to Tietjens Senior. As a result the older man commits suicide.

The debased actions of Browne, Brownlie and Ruggles have a common denominator of unintelligence; it is usually but not always inspired by sexuality. General Campion too, should be noted as a particularly unintelligent man. He finds Tietjens to be completely an enigma and he finds Tietjens' wife to be a good and a beautiful woman. Campion's interest in Mrs. Tietjens leads him to remonstrate with his godson Christopher who has been seen walking with a woman not his wife. Campion will not believe that the woman can be other than Christopher's "mistress". Tietjens reacts in cold, controlled fury to the general's hard headed insistence.

"You might," he says, "let your rooted distrust of intelligence It's natural of course; but you might let it allow you to be just to me."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ford, Parade's End, p. 206

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.71

That it never does allow the general to be dispassionate has already been pointed out in the discussion of his unfairly having sent Christopher back to trench service.⁸¹ The important point is that the elderly general, more than a little infatuated with a beautiful woman, is incapable of rendering any sort of unbiased judgment against the woman's husband.

It is perhaps apparent at this stage that the activity generated by an abundance of sexuality is always generated by women. The woman is the positive, motivating force in sexual affairs. When the man acts in a positive fashion it is because he is reacting to feminine sexuality. In the cases of both men and women the sexuality is shown to be emotional rather than logical in nature. In every case where it is effective, that is to say, where sexual activity satisfies physical or emotional craving or unrest, it is associated in the soldier novelists' minds with self interest. The attribute of being sexually anxious is a selfish one in the war novels and is demonstrative of a fundamental weakness in the civilian character which contributes directly to the authors' pictures of deteriorated social standards. Or, as it has been stated elsewhere, sexual promiscuity

is usually grossly selfish. It is the supreme example of the pursuit of personal pleasure without concern for the effect on others.⁸²

⁸¹ See above, p. 48.

⁸² B. Seeborn Rowntree and G.R. Lavers, English Life and Leisure A Social Study, London, Longmans, Green, 1951, p. 214.

It is difficult to judge accurately the degree to which Aldington's and Ford's statements apply to the population in general. It is true that the war writers found the ugly aspects of sexuality to have been emphasized by the war and it is probably true that many people exhibit the same unattractive qualities as the Sam Brownes, the Fannys, the Brownlies and the Elizabeths of English society. But beyond probability the critic cannot go. Rowntree and Lavers state the case realistically.

In the whole field of human relationships there is probably no subject about which it is harder to get reliable information than about sexual promiscuity.⁸³

It is true that the divorce rate increased very rapidly in England after the Great War.⁸⁴ This fact implies a serious and general lowering, in wartime, of moral standards. It does not prove the point. Wingfield-Stratford says that a candid comment on the war time sexual situation might be

that the War was responsible for not a little indulgence of carnal affection and disregard of sexual inhibitions among the younger woman in all classes of society.⁸⁵

83 Rowntree and Lavers, English Life and Leisure, p. 203

84 Gerald Heard, Morals Since 1900, New York, Harper, 1950, p. 113.

85 Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Harvest of Victory 1918-1926, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1935, p. 293.

He seems here to absolve men from responsibility of moral or sexual circumspectness and then retrenches and says that

the solid rock of British upper-
and middle-class respectability
remained impervious to anything
worse than a little chipping of
the surface.⁸⁶

It is hardly necessary to point out that the classes of English society most seriously criticized by Aldington and Ford are the upper and middle classes. Therefore Wingfield-Stratford is saying, in effect, that the war novelists' comments apply only to isolated cases.

Probably such a charge would be fair. For it is most difficult to find evidence anywhere that will support the charge of widespread sexual immorality which is inherent in Death of a Hero and Parade's End. Neither Tomlinson in All Our Yesterdays nor Montague in Rough Justice nor H.G. Wells in Mr. Britling Sees it Through nor Ernest Raymond in Tell England nor Sylvia Thompson in The Hounds of Spring nor very many other writers of war stories would support Aldington and Ford in such a charge. Indeed they generally say no word at all about the matter. Nor is there clear support for Aldington and Ford from other sources. Social workers' reports are not helpful because they generally are concerned with lower classes and the results of economic and environmental privations. The social critic Robert Graves, for example, says nothing of war

⁸⁶ Wingfield-Stratford, The Harvest of Victory 1918-1926, p. 302.

time or post-war promiscuity in The Long Week End.⁸⁷ Therefore, on the basis of the available evidence, Aldington and Ford are not able to charge with validity that the sexual immorality which certain of their figures display is widespread. It is a case of generalizing on the basis of the isolated cases and in this connection to do so would patently be to stand alone.

⁸⁷ Graves and Hodge, The Long Week End, New York, Macmillan, 1941.

CHAPTER V

AGGRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

The outstanding characteristic possessed by the persons who are discussed in the previous chapters is selfishness. The essential reason for the failure of many marriages in wartime is that self interest is a stronger motivating influence on private lives than duty or filial responsibility. There is no sense of marital obligation demonstrated by Captain McKechnie's wife or by O Nine Morgan's wife when they choose to live in adultery during their husbands' absence on war service. Mrs. Tietjens acts with complete irresponsibility toward her husband and he reciprocates by refusing to acknowledge that she has any claim to his personal concern. George Winterbourne's grandmother and his mother, motivated by a strong power complex, impose their wills on their husbands in such a manner as effectively to break their spirits. One of the important reasons for George's suicide in France is his wife's complete indifference to his life as a soldier.

These are all extreme examples of the degree to which selfishness, usually based on sexuality, debases the treatment which the front line soldier receives from the civilian whom he is fighting to protect. The self interest which actuates human relations, however, is not based entirely on sexual hatred, indifference or love. Egoism is important in determining all manner of personal dealings and the war author finds it to be of particular consequence

in his discussion of the unattractive and shallow social standards which had become common in England during pre-war years.

To study and appreciate properly the emphasis which the soldier writers place on self interest as a manifestation of decaying social values one must look closely at certain of the civilian figures in their novels. For it is among the non military that there appear the men and women who, in their opportunism and ambition, are set off against the major figures, particularly against those who are in uniform and fighting for England. The civilians are shown to be utterly unconcerned with the soldier's welfare and eventual fate so long as their own aims are successfully advanced.

A consideration of the desire for social recognition reveals that shallow standards exist among certain of the members of England's society. The person who is determined to succeed socially allows no regard for civilian or for soldier to stand in his way. There is no better example of the selfishness of the social climber than that revealed by Vincent Macmaster and his wife in Ford's Parade's End.

Macmaster, son of a poor Scottish grocer, is morally and financially indebted to Christopher Tietjens, whose father has financed much of Macmaster's university training and who has assisted him socially. He is regarded so highly by Tietjens that he is the only person with whom the latter will discuss his wife's perfidies. Macmaster's ambition, and that of his wife, is first revealed with the announcement that Macmaster has been awarded a CB for his excellent work in

distributing Royal Literary Bounty money.⁸⁸ Tietjens, speaking with his wife, says of Mrs. Macmaster's part in the earning of the award.

The geniuses swarm around her, and with the really select ones she corresponds. ... When they go abroad she sends them snatches of London literary happenings.... And then, every now and then, she slips in something she wants Macmaster to have. But with great delicacy. ... Say it's this CB ... she trans-fuses into the minds of Genius One, Two and Three the idea of a CB for Macmaster.... Genius No. One lunches with the Deputy Sub-Patronage Secretary, who looks after literary honours and lunches with geniuses to get the gossip....

"Why," Sylvia said, "did you lend Macmaster all that money?"

"Mind you," Tietjens continued his own speech, "it's perfectly proper. That's the way patronage is distributed in this country; it's the way it should be. The only clean way."⁸⁹

Parallel to Edith Ethel Macmaster's ambitious activity on behalf of her husband is his activity on behalf of himself. His wife tells Valentine Wannop that the king, in recognition of her husband's excellent work in the civil service, is "seeing fit to confer the honour of knighthood on him." She continues:

⁸⁸ Ford, Parade's End, p. 158.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

"It's ... not for mere plodding. That's what makes it so gratifying. It's for a special piece of brilliance, that has marked him out. It's, of course, a secret. But...."⁹⁰

Valentine, close friend to both Tietjens and to the Macmasters, recognizes that Macmaster's statistical "piece of brilliance" is, in actual fact, Tietjens' work. She is shocked to realize that while Tietjens is fighting in Flanders his closest friend is stealing his work.

The miserable Macmaster hadn't even confided to his wife that the practically stolen figures weren't his own. He desired to have a little prestige in the family circle; for once a little prestige! Well! Why shouldn't he have it?⁹¹

The immense irony of the situation is revealed by Mrs. Macmaster's opinion that the work, deemed valuable to the British war effort because of its importance to the government's understanding of the seriousness of the war destruction in France, could not possibly have been done under any circumstances by Christopher Tietjens.

"Of course a fellow like that ... could not understand matters of high policy. It is imperative that these fellows should not have the higher command. It would pander to their insane spirit of militarism. They

⁹⁰ Ford, Parade's End, p. 256.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 256.

must be hindered ... To let them have their way, even if it led to earlier success, would be to establish a precedent ... compared with which the loss of a few lives...."

Valentine sprang up, her face distorted.

"For the sake of Christ ... as you believe that Christ died for you, try to understand that millions of men's lives are at stake"

Mrs. Duchemin smiled.⁹²

"My poor child," she said, "if you moved in the higher circles you would look at these things with more aloofness"⁹³

Mrs. Macmaster's indifference to the possible loss of human life through war action is contrasted with her great satisfaction over her husband's success in the civil service, the very contrast pointing up sharply Ford's insistence that the civilian who exploits war born opportunities does so with complete indifference for the soldiers who are fighting that England may survive. Mrs. Macmaster does, indeed, reveal a further and more shockingly callous neglect for the soldier's sensibilities, this time when she makes an effort to have cancelled her husband's money debts to Christopher Tietjens. Mrs. Macmaster has seen Tietjens return from France, terribly ill, only partly sane and completely alone. Knowing of the deep love which exists between Tietjens and Valentine Wannop, and suspecting that Valentine does not as yet know of the soldier's return, Mrs. Macmaster phones Valentine.

⁹² Mrs. Duchemin is the widow of a country clergy man. She married hastily after her husband's death but for the sake of propriety did not immediately announce the marriage. She is referred to both as Mrs. Duchemin and as Mrs. Macmaster.

⁹³ Ford, Parade's End, p. 258.

"So I thought, my dear Val, in remembrance of old times, that.... If in short I were the means of bringing you together again.... For I believe you have not been corresponding.... You might in return.... You can see for yourself that at this moment the sum would be absolutely crushing...."94

Mrs. Macmaster's willingness to capitalize financially to the extent of pandering, for that is actually what her suggestion indicates, marks the low point among the low ethics revealed elsewhere in Parade's End. It is Ford's bitterest comment on the appreciation which an ambitious and money conscious person has for the sacrifices made by the soldier that an honourable man should be subjected to so humiliating an experience.

The particularly unattractive qualities which Mrs. Macmaster reveals in her affairs with Valentine Wannop and Christopher Tietjens are paralleled, to some extent, by similar qualities demonstrated by George Roads, the newspaper publisher in Charles E. Montague's Rough Justice. Both Roads and the lady have the intense desire for money which seems to be characteristic of people who wish to be accepted by the higher echelons of society. Lacking blood lines, they feel that they will be helped toward their goal by the possession of money. Mrs. Macmaster's social ambition is matched by that of Road's, who says to Thomas Garth in a pathetic moment

94 Ford, Parade's End, p. 514.

of unguarded confidence, "I do wish to God that I could be a gentleman."⁹⁵ Since Roads can never, by force of circumstance, be a "gentleman" the only hope for him is to make as much money as possible in as short a time as possible.

The fundamental difference in the struggles up the social ladder of the Macmasters' and the Roads's as depicted in the Ford and the Montague novels is that while Mrs. Macmaster's personal ambition appears in its worst light in her relationship with the soldier who is her husband's friend and creditor, Roads' self advancement is shown in his exploitation of the overall war situation. Where Tietjens is Mrs. Macmaster's victim the whole of England is Roads'. The disgust generated by the woman's treatment of a soldier is not paralleled in Rough Justice because Montague has chosen not to relate Roads closely to any particular soldier. Roads is, in fact, related only indirectly by his actions to the British Army since his primary purpose is to exploit the British public. Through such activity he exploits the soldier inasmuch as the soldier is still a part of the public body.

It is irony of another type than Ford's which prompts Montague to reveal Roads' activity through the perception of Colin March, who has already been discussed in this paper as the slacker who played at war in order to earn more ribbons than his best friend earns. March's friends and hosts, the Garths, junior and senior, the former minus a hand lost in

95 Montague, Rough Justice, p. 72.

France, the latter absorbed to the point of exhaustion in war work, are required to entertain Roads, now Sir George. It is March who perceives and, in his own cynicism toward the war, understand and is drawn to Roads' "invincible roguery."

"He's Godlike," said Colin, "Britain's extremity's his opportunity. He pre-secutes his conquest of England all the harder while poor old England tries to conquer Germany. War hath her victories for him, no less renowned than peace's. He fills his rags with yarns about the German ladies'-maids in England with bombs in their vanity bags--the cheapest 'copy' he can buy--and then pesters the Cabinet to buy the paper by millions as 'propaganda' to scatter all over the world for the good of the cause. ... You've heard his latest masterpiece of strategy--no? At least you know how the country's swarming with war profiteers.... Well, Roads has got his Cabinet friends to put a whopping big tax on all these wild war profits. See how it works?

"... they must spend it on advertising themselves in the papers of Roads and his bretheren. For then, you see, it won't be taxed....

"... So Roads is dorny--can't lose so long as there's war...."96

The irony discernible in Mrs. Macmaster's expression of opinion regarding the actual author of her husband's "work" and in the revelation by Colin March of the real meaning of Sir George Roads' "patriotism" is contrasted with an urgent and ever present need for money expressed by one of the civilian characters in H. M. Tomlinson's All Our Yesterdays.

For it is intense irony which has Tomlinson's character Charles Bolt, a shipwright, speak favorably of the pre-1914 munitions race when he hears that his employers have been awarded a contract for the building of "another ruddy war ship." Bolt is one of the truly "patriotic" men of England and he believes firmly in the greatness of the Empire and in the rightness of waging the Boer war for imperialistic reasons. He is arguing in favor of war preparedness when he gives voice to his ultimate argument, the one which, he feels, settles the discussion in his own favor. Of the granting of contract for the capital ship he says:

"... Old Jones, it means fifty-two more pay days. That's what it means. Come and feel what it's like to be glad."⁹⁷

Bolt, a kindly man, has no idea of the irony contained in his "feel what it's like to be glad," since the "ruddy warship" is being built as a part of a force the existence of which is meant to dissuade Germany from increasing her naval power. Britain's naval force fails to dissuade the Germans from arming and in the war which comes Bolt loses both his sons. He, dependent upon the manufacture of war equipment for his very livelihood, wishes only to be able to feed and clothe his family; instead he finds that the work for which he was

⁹⁷ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 25.

so thankful contributes, through the eventual failure of the purpose for which the ship was built, to the death of his sons.

Bolt's need for money and his "exploitation" of the nation's need for warships is not a reflection of the disillusionment which characterizes the soldier writer's attitude toward greed as expressed in Parade's End and in Rough Justice. Nor does it parallel in any respect any interest in money which Sir William Carroll presumably has. As the wealthy and socially prominent owner of the Thames Ironworks, which employs Bolt, Carroll has no personal need for money, either for its own sake or for its help in a struggle for social recognition. But because of the tense international situation which followed the Boer war, money continues to pour into his shipyards. He, the impersonal, shadowy figure who rises so far above Bolt's head and who "couldn't build a ship and couldn't navigate one" but who "had grown to be a peer and a millionaire out of ships"⁹⁸ continues passively to grow wealthier.

It is noticeable that the personal element, so important in the association of Mrs. Macmaster and Captain Tietjens and Valentine Wannop, is quite subdued in Rough Justice and completely absent in All Our Yesterdays. In the former war story Roads is not associated, in his search

⁹⁸ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 241.

for wealth, with any particular individual. In All Our Yesterdays Carroll is associated with no one in any respect. For while Montague permits Roads and his wife to reveal something of the hopes which inspire them Tomlinson allows Carroll to speak no word whatsoever. Carroll remains in the background, insofar as he appears in the novel, aloof, silent, absolutely impersonal, the very symbol of materialistic power.

Tomlinson is much more concerned with the effect of the struggle for wealth and power on society as a whole than he is with the greed and mercenary attitudes demonstrated by individuals in war time. That which Parade's End illustrates on the individual level exists on the national level in All Our Yesterdays. While the characteristic of greed lacks the personal application which makes it so disillusioning in the former novel, it is, in the latter novel, more seriously disturbing because, where in one case the greedy person shows no concern for the victim of his greed, in the other case the selfish nation shows no concern for the entire society of which it is composed nor for the other nations with which it should, ideally, co-exist in peace.

To carry forward the examination of Tomlinson's deep concern over national selfishness and self aggrandizement, one must consider in some detail the trip to Africa made by Jim Maynard, the major figure in All Our Yesterdays. Maynard is sent to Africa to carry supplies to a medical

researcher who is working on the headwaters of the Mungubeira river, in imaginary Novobambia. On his trip he meets many men and he learns many things, particularly things which emphasize Britain's interest in the exploration of certain African areas and which emphasize too the fact that other industrialized nations of the world are interested in and are jealous of British attention to Novobambia. The conflict which in 1908, the year of Maynard's trip to Africa, appears to be imminent between European nations cannot be helped or hindered, in actual fact, by control of the particular African area in question, for it is largely mud-flats and useless jungle. Tomlinson takes pains to emphasize the very uselessness of the country concerned; he describes in considerable detail the silent, deserted and jungle covered mining camp which is used as headquarters by the medical researcher, Buckle. The proven futility of trying to develop the country is ignored in All Our Yesterdays as powerful interests engage in a pointless race to investigate the area's wealth. It is actually jealousy alone which causes financial powers of various nations to struggle for knowledge of and control of Novobambia.

On the journey out from London Maynard is forced continually to parry leading questions. When the ship rides at anchor off his port of debarkation the captain of the ship says, in reference to his passenger's "mysterious" reason for being in Africa:

He just sits and smiles at us. But something's going on here. ... Funny thing it's such a great land all of a sudden for--what you call 'em--entomologists, bug-hunters. Things like that. Two Germans and a Frenchman last trip. Quite a run on the bugs here, nowadays. I shouldn't wonder if our own Foreign Office wants a collection of local cockroaches now.⁹⁹

Although the captain is heavily humourous over what he thinks is a cover for Maynard's real purpose in Africa, Broderic, the trader in the African sea port, is unbelieving when his guest tells him that there seems to be little concern in London over Novobambia. For a different reason he feels that Maynard is not truthful. He says

"Every man is playing his own game and you can only guess what that is. You would guess wrong. Remember that he isn't what he pretends to be, and you get clear as soon as you can."¹⁰⁰

The materialism which is eventually to lead to Maynard's discouragement with society seems to have reached out and made sceptical the man in the jungle town. But Maynard, upon leaving the gloomy trader, is lead to reflect by the freedom which he senses in the jungle proper:

Let men in the sour and soiled places of the world glower at each other from their cities and make their troubles, and let the learned prove that wrong is the natural growth of history and evil as right as roses, if not so sweet: he was out of it.¹⁰¹

99 Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 155.

100 Ibid., p. 166.

101 Ibid., p. 172.

He is, however, less "out of it" than he supposes. The American, Hoyt, discovers Maynard lost in the jungle, the victim of gangs presumably hired to destroy him and prevent supplies from reaching Buckle, thus making impossible further research. Hoyt is wise in the ways of international interest in Novobambia and he tells Maynard:

"You're in the limelight, young fellow. ... There are dossiers about you in Berlin and Paris and what not. You've got them guessing.¹⁰²

He goes on to ask, apropos Broderic and the trader's possible part in the loss of Maynard's cargo. "Is he English or French or German or plain swine?" He continues:

"I'd like to know who pays Broderic now. You haven't heard, by any chance? ... It won't be the place where my money comes from--and yet I don't know...."¹⁰³

Later Hoyt, speaking musingly of the situation, explains to Maynard that the whole country

whatever fancy you had for it, was only a cockpit for big grafters elsewhere. The grafters would never see it. It was no good to them, and none of them would want it if they could be sure the others didn't. But the rest would raise hell, in the name of God, if one of them tried to rush its mineral rights. "And look at it," Hoyt invited. "... Did you

¹⁰² Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 186.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 188

ever see anything like this
forsaken midnight of much."¹⁰⁴

Still later when Hoyt and Maynard have found Buckle, and the trio is deploring modern commercialism Hoyt, greatly disturbed over European ways and Europe's malignant influence on Africa, speaks further:

there they are, and every now
and then they give the progress
of civilization their solemn and
diplomatic notice, strictly on
the quiet, like hell, and then
everything has to go the way
they want it ... The snag in it
is each wants all Creation under
his own flag, just to show that
trade and morality go together.
So they can't ever agree ... if
we get in the way we'll be pulped
between, and won't know what got
us, either. Some of those clever
God-damned swine thought they'd
put a spoke in our wheel here ...
It was against some interest or
another that we should go on ...
Which gang did it? I'd like to
hear but in the cause of civiliza-
tion we're bust.¹⁰⁵

In greater and ever increasing anger Hoyt speaks of the coming war, "when France and Germany play their great crap game."¹⁰⁶ Maynard perceives that Hoyt's rage is caused by his dismay upon realizing that Buckle's efforts in the name of humanity have been brought to a halt by the machinations of some far away, unknown and indifferent figure. He joins Hoyt in an effort to convince the scientist

¹⁰⁴ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 192.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 203.

that he cannot succeed in the face of international intrigue. In his returning disillusionment with what seems to him to be the interference of vested interests Maynard speaks in bitterness.

"... Your job brings light to ignorance. Put it like that. But as for theirs, usually it is better for them to keep their doings dark. They don't want to be seen while they are busy. They're not like you. They hate light. They cannot work safely in it. They put it out, sometimes, when it gets too bright; and they have an apology for causing darkness. Not in the public interest...."¹⁰⁷

In juxtaposition to the raging, frightened Hoyt and the weary, depressed Maynard, Tomlinson places the idealistic Buckle, the true scientist whose faith in the idea that knowledge is valuable for its own sake leads him to speak:

"... Those men can't put out the light. I'm not afraid of that. I say they cannot put it out. I won't believe it. Not all the winds of the world can blow it out. If others do not know it is there, because it is hidden, we do. Don't we? We've got to stand by. It will be wanted, some day."¹⁰⁸

This idealism serves best to focus attention on the deep disillusionment which is Hoyt's and Maynard's.

Coming out of the jungle at a port far from that at

¹⁰⁷ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 205.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 207

which Maynard had disembarked, the three men are met by a British consular official who, bringing them up to date on the very situation which Hoyt had suspected, says:

"... I've been more than a little anxious.... It might have been war. It was really ugly, more than once. ... But once or twice I thought we'd have quite a phenomenal storm. When these international complications begin, men like ourselves can only come in out of the wet, if it happens to be possible."¹⁰⁹

On the ship home to England Maynard reads a letter from young Charley Bolt, son of the shipwright, who says, in pathetic trustfulness:

It was but recently that the Thames was filled with warships. ... I never learned the reason for this terrifying object lesson, but there the ships were, a most dubious but impressive spectacle ... It is lucky that we have a peaceful Liberal Government, or I'd have been nervous about it, and have wondered.¹¹⁰

The enraged protests of Hoyt against civilization and its influence, the pessimism of Dickson, the British consul, the disquieting news in Bolt's letter, all these point up to Maynard the possibility of war between Europe's nations and something of the expectations and preparations for it. It is noticeable that as Maynard approaches nearer to the civilization which he had so recently left so does he approach

¹⁰⁹ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 211

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 217

nearer to the fountainhead of discontent and war.

Notice that Tomlinson emphasizes that war is a direct outgrowth of the greed which is rampant in so called civilized countries. When Maynard left England he was weary of the industrialized civilization of which he was a part. For him "the thought of the huge drift of the mindless crowd the wrong way was horrifying."¹¹¹ In the jungle he had felt for a brief time the intense certainty that if

he had only a week to live he knew how the seven days ought to go. Maynard's heart rose to the thought of his release, to the prospect of his freedom in which he had one thing to do, and that not for himself.¹¹²

The altruism brought out in Maynard by the dangers he finds on every hand in the primeval African jungle and by the danger set in his path by the forces which wish to stop Buckle's research is dissolved as he returns to the influence of civilization. His desire to do things "not for himself" is counterbalanced by a return to disillusionment as he reads Bolt's message of preparation for war.

For Tomlinson the coming war is not an isolated historical incident with indistinct origins. His portrayal of international interests' activities in Africa is one of a particular situation which has been developing for many years. Rising directly out of England's and Europe's economic affairs and

¹¹¹ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 148.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 172.

the radical changes they had undergone during the nineteenth century is the increasing competition both for sources of raw materials and for markets. The world is becoming more and more materialistic and Tomlinson reveals lost hope for its future when he writes:

But our new century was only
the same as before to London.
We were safe from change through
the wakening of passion, or from
mischance latent in the order of
our life. The surface of our
accustomed ways, hardened by the
traffic of a century of engines,
would never again flow molten through
the heat of central fire; the earth
had lost its heart. Lord, though we
had a war--and we had another one
then...it was a war fabled to us
from somewhere south of the equator,
from among South African kopjes and
sputs and desert scenes, where
soldiers died of errors and of
fevers and not by the sword; and its
glory was mocked by the ribald, who
said it was no more than a trick to
expand the claims of usurers, a war
devised by money-lenders with dubious
names who wanted new ground for the
larger growth of gold, and so must
use a rich compost of the bones of
young men. Mammon himself is without
blood, yet must be fed with it. And
who cared? The springs of life were
stagnant in a desert of factories.
Surprise and joy had gone from a
drama which could have no curtain,
because there could be no triumph
in serving truth, nor nobility in
defeat before the gates of folly.
What could likely lads make of it?113

113 Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, pp. 17-18

"Likely lads" could make nothing of it. When the new war does arise from the ashes, so to speak, of the old one, when the war comes which Hoyt calls the "crap game" of European nations, when one country's materialism comes into final conflict with that of other countries, there is nothing for "likely lads" to do except help their country as best they can. That they are able to help at all, in the face of the intensive demands made on them as individuals and as soldiers, is a comment on their strong qualities and a further comment on the selfishness of the individuals and of the society which is so thoroughly self seeking. In almost every case, the soldier repudiates, at one or another time, that society. Captain Tietjens, for example, having been beset and hounded by his wife and by the self interest of Sir Vincent and Lady Macmaster, retreats into post-war seclusion in the English countryside. Auberon Garth who, minus a hand lost in action, found that life in war time England "was rather too much like the life of a boy outside a big round tent, with a circus in full blast within," begs of the War Office a job which will allow him to "retreat" to his old army life in France. Maynard, unable to retreat, returns to civilization with the knowledge, sure and certain, that civilization is doomed and that he must make the best of it.

On every level of society intensive greed is made apparent by the actions of one or another member of war time and pre-war society. In every case it is characterized by a complete lack of concern for the person or persons affected.

From the machinations of Mrs. Macmaster against the members of her immediate circle, through the more widespread but none the less selfish activity of Sir George Roads and the equally far reaching but impersonal activity of Sir William Carroll, and even through the actions taken by "vested interests" and international groups, it is clear that materialism, be it on individual, group or national level, is considered by the soldier writers to be a manifestation of the deteriorated values adhered to by modern society.

There can, of course, be no very accurate testing of the validity of the opinions expressed by the novelists and studied in this chapter. It is certain that there are social climbers and it is highly probable that the instincts and actions of social climbers are selfish. It is equally probable that some climbers use influence, as did the Macmaster's, and that others use money, as did the Roads'. Regarding the presence of the social climbing and money making traits in individuals and in groups in modern English society, it should be pointed out that such characteristics probably existed in all countries, among all groups and in every period. However that may be, the very emphasis placed on these points by soldier authors indicates the strength of feeling which they hold against the materialists and social opportunists in their country.

CHAPTER VI

IMPERIALISM AND BUREAUCRACY

The materialistic outlook which is so apparent in the actions of Mrs. Macmaster and George Roads and which is also apparent behind the actions of those unidentified interests which wish to control Novobambia is often paralleled, in actual history, on the national level. For just as the Macmasters and the Roads's of English society sought to gain wealth and to increase their prestige so did England, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, seek to increase her national wealth and to strengthen the prestige which she had been able to build by virtue of her fortunate position in the history of the Industrial Revolution. Near the end of the century she found it necessary to increase her efforts to protect her world girdling empire and in particular she had to make great exertions to offset the economic crisis which threatened as a result of increased industrial competition from German and American sources. One direct result of the competition was to cause a sharp upsurge in the enthusiasm for imperialism which characterized the final decade of the last century.¹¹⁴

Another influence on the increasing spirit of imperialism, one which can hardly be overestimated in its total effect, is the awareness of India and the East contained in Rudyard Kipling's work. It is not easy to assess the degree to which Kipling alone gave impetus to the interest in Empire which

¹¹⁴ Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History Volume Four, p. 96.

swept England in the 1890's but it is fair to say that, of all men of letters of the period, he had the greatest effect on the growth of the "blatant, jingoistic imperialism" of that decade.¹¹⁵ The English historian Ensor states the case in its proper light when he writes:

Looking behind the books to the lines of thought, we shall find that the one most immediately affecting national policy was imperialism. W.E. Henley's editorship of the National Observer (1888-93) exerted a strong literary influence here, but the greatest was the work of Rudyard Kipling.¹¹⁶

He goes on to say of Kipling:

For him imperialism was a missionary spirit; the English, a Chosen People, had a duty to rule the 'lesser breeds without the law'; he coined for it the phrase 'the White Man's Burden'.¹¹⁷

Kipling's Recessional expresses clearly the 'missionary spirit' of which Ensor speaks. The poem rings with reverence for the idea of Empire and with faith that imperialism is of divine inspiration.

God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine,
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!

Kipling's fervid Empire worship is eventually replaced,

115 Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948, p. 1504.

116 R.C.K. Ensor, England 1870-1914, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 331.

117 Ibid., p. 332.

during the Great War, by a fierce hatred of Germany, a country which he comes to regard as the betrayer of Western civilization and world peace.¹¹⁸ The hatred which his work expresses for a nation whose aspirations endanger the Empire is paralleled by a bitter hatred for imperialism itself, expressed by most war writers but most adequately by Richard Aldington in Death of a Hero.

Aldington sees imperialism, stripped of all glamour, as a force, exerted on the national level, for the simple purpose of expanding British control over foreign parts of the world in order to increase British wealth and power. Aldington's first comments on imperialism are in conjunction with his comments on the Public School system which caused George Winterbourne to suffer so acutely. He feels that minor positions in the civil service, somewhere within the framework of empire, are a fitting reward for the "thoroughly manly fellows" turned out by schools which are qualified to teach only the classics and traditionalism. Of Lieutenant Evans, the Public School graduate who typifies, in Death of a Hero, all that is wrong with the educational system, Aldington writes:

Evans had a superstitious reverence for War. He believed in the Empire; the Empire was symbolized by the King-Emperor; and the King--poor man-- is always having to dress up as an Admiral or a Field Marshal or a brass hat of some kind.¹¹⁹

118 Baugh, A Literary History of England, p. 1505.

119 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 347.

In direct opposition to Kipling's glorification of imperialism Aldington classifies it, in the above and in the following passages, as a co-relative of the plodding, unimaginative adherence to standardization which he pillories so bitterly. Concerning those who, with Evans, believe in imperialism and war, and who unfortunately represent the majority of the school graduates Aldington writes:

They wanted to be approved and healthy barbarians, cultivating a little smut on the sly, and finally dropping into some convenient post in life where the "thoroughly manly fellow" was appreciated-- mostly one must admit, minor and unpleasant and not very remunerative posts in unhealthy colonies. The Empire's backbone. George ... wasn't going to be a bit of any damned Empire's backbone, still less a part of its kicked backside.¹²⁰

In Death of a Hero Aldington's comments on British imperialism become increasingly bitter as Winterbourne advances through school and into manhood and into uniform. George, the intensely individualistic school boy, cannot abide the standardization which, for his school chums, includes the unquestioning acceptance of the Victorian theory of Empire. His contemporaries feel that he is characterized by an "obstinate, passive refusal to accept their prejudices, to conform to their minor gentry, kicked-backside-of-the-Empire code."¹²¹

¹²⁰ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 80.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 81.

Maturity approaches and young manhood finds George living in London, still resisting all effort to make him conform. Aldington, discussing the opportunities for happiness which exist for young people in the face of pressure applied by conformists states, in effect, that it matters little because the fundamentals of adult life revolve around "two centres or poles of activity,"¹²² these being "the need to eat and the will to live again."¹²³ Life's major problem, expressed in its simplest form, is the age old struggle against hunger and death. On one level the solution is simple, particularly for the man who cannot think.

The primitive, the proletarian, the common man and woman solution is merely one of quantity. Get all the grub and copulation you want and more than you want and ipso facto you will be happy. Put money in thy purse. Excellent Iago, what a fool you are! Noble Caliban, what a silly beast! Savages, the heroes of Homer and working men gorge themselves on the flesh beeves. To sack a town and rape a ll the women was the sexual ideal of centuries of civilized savages. To do the same with money sneakingly, instead of openly, is the actual ideal of Dr. Frank Crane's world-famous business man. The judgment of the wiser world is upon them all. Let them join the megatherium and the wild ass.¹²⁴

Aldington's bitter comment on modern business practice

¹²² Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 171.

¹²³ Loc. cit.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

and modern attitudes leads him to consider the application of the same practice and attitudes on the national level.

Then you have the Rudyard Kipling or British Public School solution. Not so far removed from the other as you might think, for it is a harnessing of the same primitive instincts to the service of a group--the nation--instead of to the service of the individual. Whatever is done for the Empire is right. Not Truth and Justice, but British Truth and British Justice. Odious profanation! You are the servant of the Empire, never mind whether you are rich or poor, do what the Empire tells you, and so long as the Empire is rich and powerful you ought to be happy.¹²⁵

The young George Winterbourne and his Elizabeth are happy in their new love but their happiness is not, as far as they are concerned, related in any way to British imperialism. Yet Aldington chooses to remind us of Empire when, as the lovers stroll hand-in-hand along London's Embankment, their happiness is rudely if only briefly dissolved by the sight of the poor people of the Empire.

And there they crouched and huddled in rags and hunger and misery, freeborn members of the greatest Empire the earth has yet seen, citizens of Her who so proudly claimed to be the wealthiest of cities, the exchange and mart of the whole world.¹²⁶

125 Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 172.

126 Ibid., p. 190.

Aldington makes no further comment at this point. It is sufficient for him to contrast the soaring, idealistic first-love happiness of young people with the suffering of the Empire's destitute. At this juncture Aldington displays something of the passion which is to characterize his later remarks on the subject. There is noticeably an increased bitterness in the above mentioned passage. Where Aldington previously had directed his scorn against those who held to the "kicked-backside-of-the-Empire" attitude, he is now directing attention to the fact that people are actually made to suffer acutely because of it.

With his final comments on imperialism, brought about by the realization that Winterbourne is losing his personality and intelligence and sense of beauty in the degradation that is war, Aldington reaches the climax of his protest.

In what seems to be an effort to establish a relationship between the sexual urge and imperialism, and to link imperialism to war Aldington interposes an intermediate stage into his argument. He transposes, arbitrarily, the sexual urge into the economic pressure which results from increasing birth-rate. He multiplies a millionfold the love of man for woman and exploits the result into an argument which names sexuality, indirectly at least, as one of the causes of war.

Aldington's reasoning follows this rough pattern. The basis of man-woman relationships is in sexuality. Sexual relations result in children. Continued sexual excitement means more and more children, all of whom must be fed. Eventually

all room for growing food and for living is used up and the population overflows the country's boundaries. If, in so doing, it encounters the expanding populations of other countries war ensues. Thus does sexuality lead to war. All war, says Aldington, is fundamentally a population war.

You encourage, you force people to have babies, lots of babies, millions of babies. As they grow up, you've got to feed 'em. You need bread. We all live from the land. England, and the rest of the world after it, went crazy with the Industrial Revolution--thought you could eat steel and railways. You can't. The world of men is an inverted pyramid based on the bowed shoulders of the ploughman--or the steel-tractor--on the land. It's the hunger and death business again. "Increase and multiply." ... We're a sacrifice to over-breeding. Too many people in Europe.... The people could be made to see, are beginning to see it--but the hurray-for-our-dear-Fatherland people, and the priests and the fanatics and the timid and the conservative, won't see it. Go on, breed, you beauties--breed in column of fours, in battalions, brigades, divisions, army corps. ... Lovely. Wonderful. England uber alles. ... Colonize. Why, ... England's got huge colonies. Germany very small ones. The Germans breed like tadpoles. The British breed like rather slower tadpoles. What are you going to do with them? Kill 'em off in a war? Kind. Humane. Kill 'em off, and grab land and commercial advantages from the defeated nation? Right. And what next? Oh, go on breeding. Must be a great and populous nation. And the defeated nation? Suppose

they start breeding harder than
ever? Oh, have another war, go
on having 'em, get the habit.
Europe's decennial picnic of
corpses....¹²⁷

The foregoing is Aldington's most piercing protest against the place in modern history which has been held by imperialism and imperialistic war even as the death of his hero is his ultimate outcry against the meaninglessness of civilization's continual effort to impose its will upon the individual. For just as Winterbourne's intense childhood individuality deteriorated with age and maturity to the stage where he chose to die rather than to live with modern society, so does Aldington's fury against imperialism increase to the stage where any consideration of the horror that is the Great War results in a furious outburst against the social elements which might be responsible for it.

Imperialism is decried by Aldington and only slightly less bitterly deplored by H.M. Tomlinson in All Our Yesterdays. Where the former states that war is directly related to oldest human instincts in the struggle for existence, the latter presents his point of view in the words of a churchman of East End London. The clergyman, Talbot, says, in a discussion with a Radical politician who has chosen to argue against the rightness of the Boer War:

"Most of your political friends
are just like the other good

127 Aldington, Death of a Hero, pp. 252-253.

Romans, determined on their
Rome and their Empire. ... like
the rest of us you are the sons
of Adam and war is in your
hearts. ... They're not against
war ... but only a particular
war the reason for which they
don't like. Your friends ...
have always made as much gun-
powder as the other side,
built as many ships, and laid
as many trains to the magazines....¹²⁸

The Englishman's desire for war is emphasized by Tomlinson in the early chapters of All Our Yesterdays: there public opinion is shown to be heavily in favour of the Boer War. There is, for example, the incident early in the story when, at the Theatre of Varieties, the audience mobs a non-conformer who, in the midst of an intensely patriotic music-hall revue which idealizes Joseph Chamberlain and the Empire, dares to shout "To hell with Chamberlain."¹²⁹

Later during a conversation which considers the arguments favouring and opposing imperialism Talbot, the clergyman, thinking of the Franco-Prussian war remembers that:

We felt sorry for France when
she tumbled, though more
important people were secretly
glad to see our old enemy off-
set by a new power.¹³⁰

The Radical, Langham, irritated by the churchman's jibe at England's imperialistic and anti-French interests, retorts:

¹²⁸ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, pp. 62-63.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

"I understand your congregation prefers the worst thing Kipling wrote to the 'Church's One Foundation,' these days. Isn't that so?"¹³¹

The clergyman makes no rejoinder until later, when he says, speaking of the French again, "From all I hear they'd rejoice if Mr. Kruger didn't leave enough of our dear flag to wipe an orphan's nose."¹³² Then he agrees with Langham that "We are not very popular on the Continent."¹³² The talk moves back and forth, finally to include young Charley Bolt and reference to his father's comment about the war-ship contract and its attendant pay-days. Langham directs his bitterness toward Bolt the father through his remarks to Bolt the son. He says:

"Why, what's the matter with that new warship..... You've surely thought of what it means--beer for the shipwrights, some of the back rent for the landlords, you selling the starting prices and racing news like hotcakes... and Talbot here with a full offertory every Sunday. ... You ask Bolt whether his dad hasn't got a bit on the Derby already, on the strength of armour-plate."¹³³

He continues, this time speaking to Talbot.

"Your friends would rather attack the whole hierarchy of angels

¹³¹ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 52.

¹³² Ibid., p. 53.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 55.

than Joseph Chamberlain. They don't doubt the sacred nature of the business when the bishops bless the flags to lead the bayonets into Naboth's vineyard. Chamberlain and Rhodes have started the dogs barking and you can hear scabbards rattling all over Europe."¹³⁴

In such a way has Tomlinson outlined his belief that war is "in the hearts of men" and that, consciously or unconsciously, Englishmen of the 1890's were almost unanimous in their support of Britain's imperialistic policies. He is strongly supported by such statements as those of H.W. Nevinson and L.T. Hobhouse. Nevinson says, speaking of the time just before the Peloponnesian War:

Thucydides tells that all Greece, being ignorant of the realities of war, stood a-tiptoe with excitement. It was the same in England just before our disastrous South African War. Readers of Kipling gloated over imaginary slaughter, and Henley cried to our country that her whelps wanted bleeding.¹³⁵

Hobhouse writes of the same decade:

All classes alike give way to jingoism, and shut their ears to wisdom and humanity....¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 57.

¹³⁵ H.W. Nevinson, Peace and War in the Balance, cited in Caroline E. Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, London, Allen and Unwin, 1928, p. 185.

¹³⁶ L.T. Hobhouse, Democracy and Reaction, cited in Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, p. 173.

And jingoism is defined by J.A. Hobson as

that inverted patriotism
whereby the love of one's
own nation is transformed
into the hatred of another
nation, and the fierce
craving to destroy the
individual members of that
nation....¹³⁷

Having considered Aldington's thesis that imperialism and war rise at least indirectly out of the basic human urges to reproduce and to find food, and having considered Tomlinson's argument that war "is in the hearts of men" and the support for that argument, we must now consider whether or not the soldier is hindered or aided by his government in the waging of the war in which he and it are embroiled. For in the war novels written by ex-soldiers, war is generally only to be found in the hearts of the men who do not have to fight it. The soldier almost invariably and almost unquestioningly does his duty, but he is by no means a proponent of imperialism and militarism. Trevelyan interprets thus the attitudes extant in 1900 and the years prior to the outbreak of the Great War.

The carefree Victorians knew
little about the spirit and
inner workings of the mili-
tarized continent.... They
knew more about Australia,
America, Africa in a human
and business way.... We
were islanders with an

¹³⁷ J.A. Hobson, The Psychology of Jingoism, cited in Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, p. 167.

overseas Empire, not
continentals. We were
sailors not soldiers.¹³⁸

With the advent of the war years and, in particular, the year 1916, the Radical Langham is shown in All Our Yesterdays to have become more powerful politically and so important that he has been made a member of Lloyd George's Coalition Government. As a representative of government he visits British troops in France. He finds that the English make excellent troops but do so by force of circumstance and natural courage rather than by choice or by any proclivity towards militarism. He also discovers that the enlisted man and the officer is each lacking in faith in his government and the manner in which it is waging the war. Langham appreciates that lack of faith when, in reply to a senior officer's demand for "some evidence of genuine power and resolution in Whitehall"¹³⁹ he states, with thinly veiled sarcasm:

"Oh, don't worry ... Lloyd George means it when he talks of going through to the bitter end. We shall get there."¹⁴⁰

He continues, now in open sarcasm, speaking of the presence of "a new and insidious gas ... crafty discharges made on behalf of peace."¹⁴⁰ He has already said to a general who has

¹³⁸ Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, vol. 4, p. 124.

¹³⁹ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 445.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 446.

commented on civilian morale.

"... The rabble which feeds you with ammunition really has its feeling. There they are. It is possible to disappoint it. It is likely that the country whose civilian riff-raff gets the most grievous hacking about of its jolly expectations loses the war."¹⁴¹

The complete separation of military and civilian attitude is represented in Langham's words. But the complete separation of the soldier and the government, the latter represented by Langham, is pointed up in Tomlinson's comment on Langham's presence at the front.

He did not know he had become inapplicable. The most miserable example of a Hun prisoner in a barbed-wire enclosure was more akin to some of us at that table than that sprightly and well-informed administrator fresh from Whitehall.¹⁴²

The ultimate in discouragement with government is revealed when the narrator in All Our Yesterdays, having been present at Langham's reception in the officer's mess, speaks of the affair with an officer friend who says:

"Could you make anything of it--
that general--that politician?"
I admitted that I could

¹⁴¹ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 439.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 444.

make very little of it. "What is there to make of it? When I hear that sort of talk, and think of the millions of people at home who are waiting for men of that kind to save what is left, and when I think of the fellows in the mud and wire, waiting to be got out of it somehow, by those same men, I come up to bed and say "Well, God, it's up to you!"¹⁴³

Despair over leadership and its negative qualities is more eloquently voiced by Aldington. Where Tomlinson divorces the military and the government in the eyes of the soldiers, Aldington credits the greater fault to peace time rather than wartime leadership. In an outburst directed against the enemies of the common man, the enemies who move in high places in government and financial circles, he cries:

But what were they really against, who were their real enemies? He saw the answer with a flood of bitterness and clarity. Their enemies--the enemies of German and English alike--were the fools who had sent them to kill each other instead of help each other. Their enemies were the sneaks and the unscrupulous; the false ideals, the unintelligent ideas imposed on them, the humbug, the hypocrisy, the stupidity. If those men were typical, then there was nothing essentially wrong with common humanity, at least so far as the men were concerned. It was the leadership that was wrong--not the war leadership but the peace leadership. The nations were

¹⁴³ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 453.

governed by bunk and
sacrificed to false ideals
and stupid ideas. It was
assumed that they had to be
governed by bunk ...? De-
bunk the World. Hopeless,
Hopeless.... Why agonize
about it? The most he could
do was die. Well, die then.
But O God, O God, is that all?¹⁴⁴

Aldington has little more to say of actual governmental guidance. It remains for Ford Madox Ford to develop the theme of actual interference by government in the conduct of the war and in soldiers' personal careers. For what is often called leadership is, to Ford, nothing more than civilian interference motivated by desire for personal gain or personal glory. Ford establishes his protest against interference through a portrayal of concrete examples of official meddling and the effect of the meddling on the thoughts of the two most important soldier figures in Parade's End.

There is the case of General Campion and his position of trust as an army commander on the Western Front. His position is rendered insecure because of the pressure exerted by certain members of the Home Government to force the evacuation of the battlefields of France. Their desire is to have available more men for service in the Near and Middle East. Two reasons for this desire are apparent. The first and foremost is that the extra troops will be available to strengthen and expand the bounds of Empire. The second is that the abandonment of France as an ally will mean the ruin of a nation with serious

¹⁴⁴ Aldington, Death of a Hero, pp. 269-270.

colonial aspirations of her own. General Campion muses to himself:

owing to divided opinions in the Cabinet, it might at any moment be decided to move the bulk of H.M. forces to somewhere in the East. The idea underlying this--as General Campion saw it--had at least some relation to the necessities of the British Empire and strategy embracing world politics as well as military movements.... There was this much to be said for it: the preponderance of British Imperial interests might be advanced as lying in the Middle and Far East.... The present operations on the Western front, arduous, and even creditable ... were very remote from our Far Eastern possessions and mitigated from, rather than added to, our prestige. ... Thus a demonstration in enormous force ... might point out to Mohammedans, Hindus, and other Eastern races, what overwhelming forces Great Britain ... could put into the field. It is true that that would mean the certain loss of the war on the Western front ... we could no doubt come to terms with the enemy nations, as a prize for abandoning our allies that might well leave the Empire, not only intact, but actually increased in colonial extent.¹⁴⁵

And to General Campion the "prospect of widening the bounds of the British Empire could not be contemptuously dismissed at the price of rather sentimental dishonour."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ford, Parade's End, pp. 465-66.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 466.

Ford goes on to say:

But when it came to tactics ... General Campion had no doubt that the plan was the conception of the brain of a madman. The dishonour of such a proceeding must of course be considered--and its impracticability was hopeless.¹⁴⁷

As General Campion continues to ponder over the utter impossibility of evacuating the Western theatre of operations he thinks of the terrible losses which must, of necessity, follow such a move. He feels certain that

the civilian element in the Government was so entirely indifferent to the sufferings of the men engaged in these operations, and was so completely ignorant of what are military exigencies, that the words he had devoted to that department on the subject were merely wasted....¹⁴⁸

For Captain Tietjens, far lower in rank and far closer to his men, the situation is considerably more personal. Where General Campion is required to give an opinion to the War Office regarding war time strategy and can, because of his rank and his reputation, consider without fear possible governmental reaction to his remarks, Tietjens, ill and war weary and subject to pressure from above, can only hope that circumstances will not crush him. He knows, of course, from his peace time

¹⁴⁷ Ford, Parade's End, p. 466.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 467.

life in the Civil Service, the extent to which interested groups can exert influence on and through government. Notice that Tietjens thinks of the government from the point of view of the common soldier and the junior officer who must do the actual fighting. Tietjens' feelings as expressed in the following passage contrast with those of the general officer who has primarily to consider strategy and tactics and whose personal feelings for his men must of necessity remain secondary.

He seemed to see the draft ... he had had command of for over a couple of months ... superintending their morale, their morals, their feet, their digestion ... their desires for women He seemed to see them winding away over a great stretch of country ... up against a barrier that stretched from the depths of the ground to the peak of heaven

Intense dejection, endless muddles, endless follies, endless villainies. All these men given into the hands of the most cynically carefree intriguers in long corridors who made plots that harrowed the hearts of the world. ... all the agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politician's speeches without heart or even intelligence. Hundreds of thousands of men tossed here and there But men. Not just populations. Men you worried over there. Each a man a man with a backbone, knees, breeches, braces, a rifle, a home, passions, fornications, drunks, pals, some scheme of the universe.... The Men; the Other Ranks! And the poor little officers. God help them. ...

Heavy depression settled down more heavily upon him. The distrust of the home Cabinet ... became like

physical pain. These immense sacrifices It was the worries of all these wet millions in mud-brown that worried him.¹⁴⁹

The degree to which Tietjens worries over his men is fully developed by Ford, developed to an extent that shows Tietjens to be very close to a nervous breakdown.

Completely exhausted Tietjens is told, suddenly, that he is to be transferred from his base-camp work to front-line duty. He is transferred on orders from room G14R at the War Office, the room which deals with civilian requests for the services of active-force men and officers.

To the adjutant who asked what the devil a civilian request for the employment of officers could have to do with sending Captain Tietjens to the XIXth division, Sergeant-Major Cowley presumed that it was because of the activities of the Earl of Beichan... interesting himself in army horses.... He owned several newspapers. So they had been waking up the army transport-animals' department to please him.¹⁵⁰

To the deathly tired Tietjens this final example of selfish interference with his work as a soldier is the culmination of a long series of interferences, some petty, some serious. He is outspoken in his fury.

He said the army was reeling to its base because of the continual inter-

¹⁴⁹ Ford, Parade's End, pp. 296-297.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 372.

ference of civilians. He said it was absolutely impossible to get through his programmes of parades because of the perpetual extra drills that were forced on them at the biddings of civilians. Any fool who owned a newspaper, nay, any fool who could write to a newspaper, or any beastly little squirt of a novelist could frighten the Government and the War Office into taking up one more hour of the men's parade time¹⁵¹

Thus does Ford demonstrate his argument that the government, seeking to lay down rules of strategy that will help advance the bounds of Empire, is paralleled by influential civilians who seek to have officers transferred to do work in which the civilian is personally interested. In Parade's End the government deals with the senior officer, a subordinate transfer office deals with the junior officer.

Whether the effort expended in the interests of imperialism be considered, as by Aldington, as a national necessity based on the human instinct to propagate and feed itself, or by Tomlinson as a taking advantage of the human instinct for war by such builders of Empire as Chamberlain and Rhodes, or by Ford as a manifestation of governmental desire to spread the bounds of Empire, it is universally deplored by the soldier novelists. Whether interference by civilians be as depicted by Ford, or civilian indifference be as Aldington sees it, or misguided civilian enthusiasm be as Tomlinson presents it, the

¹⁵¹ Ford, Parade's End, p. 373.

veteran writers condemn the civilian's lack of understanding. The indifference and interference, the separation of civilian and military aims and the divorce of civilian and military understanding, these things are, in the English war novel, treated without exception as manifestations of the high degree to which selfishness motivates the wartime deeds of England and Englishmen.

CHAPTER VII

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ANTAGONISM

Civilian interference in the soldier's job is a manifestation of civilian selfishness and of a serious lack of unity in civilian and military interpretations of England's war aims. The war novelist is less concerned with the lack of unity in the top echelons of England's war planning boards, expressed for example by the fact that Captain Tietjens has to indent to Dublin for supplies for Canadian troops, than he is with the lack of unity which he sees when he regards wartime English society as an entity. He is less concerned that Britain's leaders may desire to abandon France and so split the Allied front than he is that the English may have allowed themselves to have been split into opposing factions so that, in a time of national crisis, they are completely disorganized.

England, which should present a solid front to her enemies, is troubled by peace time and wartime manifestations of class distinction and the hatred engendered by it. The soldier-novelists are all aware of the problem although none of them treats it as a major element in his theme of social criticism. Richard Aldington makes only general mention of class-hatred and that on a single occasion which is not in connection with England's war effort. Class hatred is, for Aldington, a characteristic of working class mentality. Writing of George Winterbourne's introduction into the newspaper world as a "cub" reporter for a London newspaper he says:

The strike was George's first introduction to the reality of the "social problem" and the bitter class hatred which smoulders in England and at times bursts into fierce crises of hatred, restrained only by that mingling of fear and "decency" which composes the servile character of the British working man.¹⁵²

Beyond this sweeping statement and the indirect comments which are to be found in his remarks about the graduates of the Public School system, Aldington remains silent on the issue of class distinction.

Ford Madox Ford is likewise only slightly concerned with social discrimination. His comments are few but pointed. He does not develop the class theme in Parade's End; it is part of the background in that Ford's characters reveal the standards of their particular classes by their own actions. Ford does, however, mention the presence of "class" in the opening paragraphs of the tetralogy. The story opens with the establishment of a social setting for two of the major characters of the series. Christopher Tietjens and his close friend Vincent Macmaster, civil servants, are making a trip.

The two young men--they were of the English public official class--sat in the perfectly appointed railway carriage

Their class administered the world If they say policemen misbehave, railway-porters lack civility, an insufficiency of street lamps, defects in public services or in foreign countries, they say to it, either with nonchalant Balliol

¹⁵² Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 117.

voices, or with letters to the Times asking in regretful indignation: "Has the British This or That come to this!" Or they wrote ... articles taking under their care, manners, the Arts, diplomacy, inter-imperial trade, or the personal reputation of deceased statesmen and men of letters.¹⁵³

The actions of the character's in Parade's End provide sufficient commentary on the moral values adhered to in their respective classes and it is only occasionally that comment is made orally by one or another of them. For example, the following outburst by Christopher Tietjens comes only after he has been made aware of the degree to which gossip and rumour-mongering is rife among his social equals. Tietjens is walking through an English field with Valentine Wannop, a young woman who has impressed him greatly with her character.

"By God," he said, "Church! State! H.M. Ministry: H.M. Opposition: H.M. City Man. ... All the governing class! All rotten! ... Then thank God for the upright young man and the virtuous maiden ... Le Tory of Tories... she suffragette of the militants.... As she should be! In the early decades of the twentieth century however else can a woman keep clean and wholesome! ...

"But by God! we're both under a cloud! Both! ... That kid and I! And General Lord Edward Campion, Lady Claudine Sandback and the Hon. Paul, M.P. (suspended) to spread the tale....¹⁵⁴

153 Ford, Parade's End, p. 3.

154 Ibid., pp. 106-107.

Ford's and Aldington's reluctance to make a major issue of class distinction and of the values adhered to by any particular class of society means, that Charles E. Montague alone investigates class distinction and intolerance in wartime society. For Montague the issue is one of real and vital concern, a manifestation of a serious canker in the body of English social life.

Disillusionment with class distinction appears suddenly in Montague's Rough Justice. With little or no warning the mood of the novel shifts from one of idyllic family happiness to one of disenchantment. Thomas Garth has reached the point where he must, for their own good, send his children away from him to school. As he contemplates the outside world and its possible effect on young minds he realizes with a sudden sense of shock that the

English world that he loved, and believed in, seemed now to be failing, and failing first at the top. ... The old riders seemed to be falling out. ...

Not that Garth despised our new rulers, the men of directors' fees and dividends. ... Only he hated the way that most of them seemed to think of the "lower orders" as so many wolves to be tricked or dazzled or scared into harmlessness. Almost everywhere ... he found a standing assumption that things had finally gone wrong, that the great days were over ... that nothing was left but to see that you and your set did not "get left" while old England broke up. "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"--it was not said, but that was the spirit; it broke out in a new type of flaunting bravado of

luxury ... flouting the eyes
and ears of the mob. That
way lay war between the classes,
the last abomination of all, the
utter failure of England's
family.¹⁵⁵

Montague contrasts the despair and sorrow in Garth's heart with the harsh, unthinking selfishness of the intolerant and socially conscious upper middle class. Mrs. Barbason, "one of the most militant hostesses of the Conservative party."¹⁵⁶ At dinner Mrs. Barbason, having listened to the conversation concerning a possible war with Germany, bursts into the discussion:

"A great War?--that's all we need--all of us. But the dregs need it most. They're simply flabby with comfort--absolutely uppish and pert with sheer safety. They need a life-or-death job, in the field, to let 'em see the hole they'd be in if they hadn't their betters to lead 'em."¹⁵⁷

Montague makes further mention of the social caste system in England when he writes of the newly-rich March family.

During seventy years of cobotinage and bravura the Marches had picked up a peerage, a good deal of money, though less than they spent, and a good-humoured contempt for the more ancient and less vivid patriciate--the helpless old world of good breeding and dullness that was now crumbling before the assaults of the

155 Montague, Rough Justice, pp. 49-50.

156 Ibid., p. 65.

157 Ibid., p. 68.

vulgar. Democracy had covered
the face of the earth and nothing
was left ... beyond the grotesque
adventure of keeping afloat....¹⁵⁸

It is not coincidental that Claude Barbason and Colin March are examples of the "militant Conservative" and the "newly rich" families of England's upper strata of society. They are also the two Public School graduates who spend their entire careers as army officers in a competitive search for decorations. They are contrasted with Auberon Garth, representative of the Tory landed class of England. Garth has neither money nor has he contempt for others who do not have it. He has an intense love for England, intense enough for it to send him to war where, in France, he loses his hand. The comparison speaks for itself.

Montague emphasizes his foreboding that England's people are, if not on the verge of class war at least entirely conscious of the possibility of its being waged. Thomas Garth, speaking to a university group which cannot understand the reason for his concern, concentrates on two or three points in his talk. He speaks of a "new streak" which is apparent in the tenor of English life.

It was this. Some crazy impulse
Among slight-minded people in London
chatter about a coming "class war"
was becoming the fashion; some of it
among people soured by poverty of
their own, or naturally prone to
envy, or sickened by some passion of

pity that had curdled into spite; more of it among the rich illiterates and their harems, who canvassed aloud in flash restaurants the chances of roping the Army into a "push" to shut up "the talk-shop at Westminster" and scrap "all this representative rot" before Labour could get into power.¹⁵⁹

Wingfield-Stratford is probably presenting the middle-class point of view when he writes:

It was among the rank and file that the new spirit of class warfare was beginning to spread.¹⁶⁰

The combined remarks of the novelist and the social historian are a sufficiently clear commentary on the precarious situation which H.G. Wells has in mind when he

could warn his countrymen, in the columns of the Daily Mail, that England was "in a dangerous state of social disturbance", that "the discontent of the labouring mass of the community is deep and increasing" and that it might be that "we are in the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war."¹⁶¹

Wingfield-Stratford interjects:

This was a grave but hardly exaggerated estimate of the situation. For the worker ... did not consider that he was getting fair play from his politicians, or his bosses, or even his own class leaders.¹⁶²

159 Montague, Rough Justice, pp. 146-147.

160 Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Victorian Aftermath, New York, Morrow, 1934, p. 299.

161 Ibid., p. 302.

162 Loc. cit.

And certainly the working man was getting no fair play from the outspoken Mrs. Barbason. Of her Montague writes:

The Barbason dowager was in her glory tonight. The fumes of war were well up in her head She positively shouted about all the good things that the war would bring back to old England--the social health, the true British grit, the discipline of the nation....
... Mere common sense, she said; nothing more "You see, a war is a pretty hard fact. No voting an enemy down. No good going on strike against him. All these mobs of ours will soon find their level, once they come under fire. Thank God, we'll have the nation's real leaders leading again."¹⁶³

Mrs. Barbason's final argument bears no contradiction.

"Isn't every one of our class born to lead men?" the lady demanded.¹⁶⁴

While it is true that social distinction and intolerance are not developed by the soldier writer as major manifestations of social disharmony, it is equally true that the writer is disturbed over their implications in both wartime and peace time. Whether intolerance is based on tradition or blood lines, on the colour of the school tie one is entitled to wear or on the success of a struggle for wealth, it is indicative of serious social schism.

¹⁶³ Montague, Rough Justice, p. 197.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 198.

Certainly a potential social schism is discernible in a situation which gives rise to the following comment.

Nothing was at once so heartlessly obtuse and yet revealed so clear an understanding of human nature and of the social problem as the coinage of the upper middle-class phrase "temporary gentleman" for officers promoted from the ranks in the 1914-1918 war.¹⁶⁵

One might apply to these comments on social attitudes the theory of examination outlined by Ford Madox Ford in his book The English Novel. He states, in part, that it should be possible for the critic to

observe, at any rate roughly as it were, a complete cross-section of the lives from cradle to coffin of a whole social order.¹⁶⁶

Ford and his veteran colleagues dissect the whole social order and examine its component parts under pre-war and, in particular detail, under wartime conditions. The novelists, in spite of their protests against class distinction, seem to acknowledge that they, having endured the war together, have become members of a new social class, bound together by reason of their war experiences and by reason of their common determination to reveal for public inspection the advanced

¹⁶⁵ Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, The English Middle Classes, New York, Knopf, 1950, p.19.

¹⁶⁶ Ford Madox Ford, The English Novel From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1929, p. 16.

state of decay which they find to be common in all strata of society.

There is hopelessness apparent in Charles E. Montague's consideration of England's position in the summer of 1914. He sees the country on the brink of war with no real leadership upon which it can depend.

But where to find it? In the men like Hubbock-Orde, the Forcible Feeble ... crying out for his poor little untaught will to be done? In Wynnant, that jolly atheist ... to whom England was an agreeable house soon to come down? Drink up ... eat up ... that was the wisdom of the Wynnants. In Roads? Poor Roads, a fit object for pity ... but also a new peril, a new breed added to England's old parasites.... And those women at dinner, hot even waiting for a "class-war" to be waged by hosts from the slums, but waging it themselves already with their puny, poisoned darts.... Poor old ship! Poor old England! 167

Henry Major Tomlinson is not concerned, in All Our Yesterdays, with class distinction as a cause of social unrest but he is, nonetheless, very aware of a different type of disunity apparent in various European societies. He speaks of the incident at Serajevo and of the complete lack of concern apparent in Belfast when the news of the assassination is received.

Light did not manifest itself there,
nor anywhere else in Europe, that

one could see, to reveal to
men the rifts in the structures
of their societies.¹⁶⁸

For in Belfast hatred for the English, side by side with approval of the English, is leading to preparations for more serious activity than argument. Civil war is very near. The narrator in the novel meditates over the "rift" in Ireland's social structure and in particular the dogmatic, unbending attitudes disclosed by the adherents to nationalism and by those to imperialism and above all by the religious leaders of both factions. There is no mention of brotherly love in the following passage.

Presbyterian divines, without a thought of the Irish tailor in whose trousers and black frock-coat they stood, named the Amalekites with anger, and called for the sword of the Lord and Gideon. In the temples of the opposition, with its rites modified by the newer and gentler influences of the mother and the babe, the aid of the same god was invoked, but for another cause. The ghosts were stirring ... the captains who drew men on were the spectres of the dead.¹⁶⁹

The activity of Presbyterian and Roman Catholic divines in Ireland is treated with considerable irony in All Our Yesterdays. The fact that antagonistic churches in Ireland should be praying to the same god for aid in a planned civil war is in contrast with the fact that the England of the previous decade, embroiled in the war with the Boers and

168 Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 258.

169 Ibid., p. 259.

helping to lay the groundwork for the Great War, had no use whatsoever for any god. Talbot, the clergyman, and Langham, the politician, used to discuss religion and materialism and their places in society. They called them Zion and Birmingham to lend point to their arguments. The clergyman's deep discouragement forces him to admit that even among the clergy there is often more respect for Birmingham than for Zion.

This difference of ours cuts clean across family and church, and it is bound to leave most of us, and most of the church, on the side of--well, Birmingham. Everybody is sure about that prosperous city. ... But the city not made with hands ... I find it not easy to point out. It's towers are faint and far, even from a pulpit--I'm seldom sure of them myself So I've ceased to expect them to be more than empty air to those whose trust is in Baal and the familiar solid walls.¹⁷⁰

In this connection one is reminded of Caroline Playne's comment on the place of the church in the scheme of things at the time of the Boer War.

The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, for instance, especially used his organ, the Methodist Times, for wildly bellicose propaganda. Other leaders, like the Rev. R.F. Horton, timidly allowed themselves to be wafted into the jingo camp by the obsessions of their congregations. Most of the Churches

¹⁷⁰ Aldington, All Our Yesterdays, p. 58.

vehemently encouraged war-passions or else they drifted hopelessly on the tide.¹⁷¹

Wingfield-Stratford is less concerned with church support for imperialism and war than he is with the fact that evolutionism and rationalism have made serious inroads on the church's hold over people. He refers to the religion of the immediate pre-war years as "bankrupt orthodoxy."¹⁷²

The comment made by Caroline Playne and the explanation of the change of attitude toward religion which is contained in Wingfield-Stratford's chapter provide an understandable background for the gloomy picture which is revealed in All Our Yesterdays. Talbot's disillusionment anticipates the general social disenchantment which will cause the soldier novelists to make almost no mention whatsoever of religion's part in the waging of the Great War or in the moral strengthening of the populace during that war. The narrator in Tomlinson's novel, writing from the front, reports that

It no longer shocked us to see Law and Religion derelict, as were other honoured things, on the flood which had left traditional bearings below the horizon of 1914.¹⁷³

He develops his items of disillusionment with the church into a comment on the whole social picture.

171 Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, p. 192.

172 Wingfield-Stratford, Victorian Aftermath, p. 119.

173 Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 443.

Generals were generals ... yet even they shared the common lot wherein the wreckage of Society's moral safeguards was like the policeman's battered helmet in the gutter the morning after the joy of Mafeking night. We were looking for clues to a new order, if there were any, because a new order might not be easy to find since most of Europe's younger men had a duty, as good soldiers, to deride and destroy all that priest and schoolmaster had once advised them was of divine ordination. Our elders, in the desperation of their fears, had allowed youth to see how much society had ever deserved its respect and fidelity.¹⁷⁴

The Great War brings to a head all the disillusionment with society which C.E. Montague feels for the twentieth century. But, where Montague was looking for some "clues to a new order" in 1917 and 1918, Richard Aldington points out that many people thought the "new order" had appeared with the outbreak of hostilities in August, 1914. In a voice, sick with bitterness, he tells of 1914 and of the spirit of rationalization evinced by certain proponents of the militaristic "new order."

Talleyrand used to say that those who had not known Europe before 1789, had never known the real pleasure of living. No one would dare substitute 1914 for 1789 in that sentence. But such a wholesale shattering of values had certainly not occurred since 1789. God knows how many governments and rulers crashed down in

¹⁷⁴ Tomlinson, All Our Yesterdays, p. 444.

the earthquake, and those which remain are agitatedly trying to preserve their existence by the time-honoured methods of repression and persecution. And yet 1914 was greeted as a great release, a purgation from the vices supposed to be engendered by peace! My God! Three days of glory engender more vices and misery than all the alleged corrupters of humanity could achieve in a millenium ... the nauseous poppycock which was written in 1914-15 in England.... "Our splendid troops" were to come home ... purged and ennobled by slaughter and lice, and were to beget a race of even nobler fellows to go and do likewise. We were to have a great revival in religion, for people's thoughts were now turned from frivolities to great and serious themes.¹⁷⁵

Aldington continues his indictment of England and in this instance relates the pre-war or Victorian attitudes and habits to those of the war years.

The long unendurable nightmare had begun. And the reign of Cant, Delusion and Delirium....

If you're going to argue that Cant is necessary (the old political excuse) then for Heaven's sake let's chuck up the game and hand in our checks. But it isn't necessary. It can only be necessary when deceit is necessary, when people have to be influenced to act against their right instincts and true interests. ...

It was the regime of Cant before the War which made the Cant during the War so damnably possible and easy. On our coming of age the Victorians generously hand us a

charming little cheque for fifty guineas--fifty-one months of hell, and the results.... But it wasn't their fault? They didn't make the war? It was Prussia, and Prussian militarism? Right you are, right ho! Who made Prussia a great power and subsidized Frederick the Second to do it, thereby snatching an Empire from France? England. Who backed up Prussia against Austria, and Bismarck against Napoleon III? England. And whose Cant governed England in the nineteenth century? But never mind this domestic squabble of mine--put it that I mean the "Victorians" of all nations.¹⁷⁶

Aldington, speaking for the "Victorians" of all nations is actually speaking for all mankind, and for mankind he has no respect and little hope. In a moment of pure agony he cries:

Yet why should we mourn, O Zeus, and why should we laugh? Why weep, why mock? What is a generation of men that we should mourn for it? As leaves, as leaves, say the poet, spring, burgeon and fall generations of Man--No! but as rats in the rolling ship of the Earth as she plunges through the roar of the stars to the inevitable doom. And like rats we pullulate, and like rats we scramble for greasy prey, and like rats we fight and murder our kin... And-O gigantic mirth!--the voice of the Thomiste is heard.¹⁷⁷

Ford Madox Ford finds a fundamental rottenness in mankind which leads him to remark, in words much less furious than those used by Aldington in the above passage, that society is probably doomed or, as he has put it elsewhere, "The world was foundering."¹⁷⁸ He writes:

176 Aldington, Death of a Hero, pp. 228-230.

177 Ibid., p. 159.

178 Ford, Parade's End, p. 359.

Now see in such a world as this, an idealist--or perhaps it's only a sentimentalist--must be stoned to death. He makes the others so uncomfortable. ... No, they'll get me, one way or the other. And some fellow--Macmaster here--will do my jobs. He won't do them well, but he'll do them more dishonestly. Or no. I oughtn't to say dishonestly. He'll do them with enthusiasm and righteousness. He'll fulfil the order of his superiors with an immense docility and unction. He'll fake figures against our allies with the black enthusiasm of a Calvin and, when that war comes, he'll do the requisite faking with the righteous wrath of Jehovah smiting the priest of Baal. And he'll be right. It's all we're fitted for.¹⁷⁹

This passage of Ford's, which stresses the bitterness and bewilderment of the decent man, contrasts with the following excerpt which comments on the less admirable elements of a particular segment of English society and in so doing makes it easier to understand Tietjens' complete disillusionment.

Amongst Sylvia's friends a wangle known as shell-shock was cynically laughed at and quite approved of. Quite decent and, as far as she knew, quite brave menfolk of her women would openly boast that, when they had had enough of it over there, they would wangle a little leave or get a little leave extended by simulating this purely nominal disease, and in the general carnival of lying, lechery, drink, and howling that this affair was,

179 Ford, Parade's End, pp. 237-238.

to pretend to a little shell-shock
had seemed to her to be almost
virtuous.¹⁸⁰

Even Sylvia Tietjens, as representative as she is of a
decayed society, has been led by her consideration of society's
brutality and indifference to ask:

How was it possible that the most
honourable man she knew should be
so overwhelmed by foul and base-
less rumours? It made you suspect
that honour had ¹⁸¹ a quality of
the evil eye....

Honour is a quality which does not exist, broadly speaking, for
the members of English society who move through the pages of
Parade's End. Christopher Tietjens sees clearly an honesty of
purpose behind the waging of the Great War by England, but the
basic qualities of men offset the validity of that purpose.

"It's an encouraging spectacle,
really. The beastliness of human
nature is always pretty normal. We
lie and betray and are wanting in
imagination and deceive ourselves,
always, at about the same rate. In
peace and in war! But, somewhere in
that view there are enormous bodies
of men If you got a still more
extended range of view over this
whole front you'd have still more
enormous bodies of men. Seven to
ten million.... All moving towards
places towards which they desperately
don't want to go. Desperately!....
But they go on. An immense blind
will forces them in the effort to
consummate the one decent action

¹⁸⁰ Ford, Parade's End, p. 168.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 166.

that humanity has to its credit
in the whole of recorded history;
the one we are engaged in. That
effort is the one certain creditable
fact in all their lives But
the other lives of all those men
are dirty, potty and discreditable
little affairs Like yours...
Like mine.¹⁸²

Is Ford saying, in spite of his hatred of war, that man
is free of the degradation of being a member of modern society
only when he is away from its entanglements and engaged in war-
fare? It would seem so, particularly when the foregoing
passage is read in conjunction with the following one.
Tietjens, having seen a German prisoner, is led to consider the
meaning of freedom and its relationship in society.

It was not sensible, but he knew
that if he had had to touch a
prisoner he would have felt
nausea. It was no doubt the
product of his passionate Tory
sense of freedom. When, then, a
man was deprived of freedom he
became like a brute. To exist
in his society was to live with
brutes, like Gulliver amongst the
Houyhnhnms!¹⁸³

When Ford insists, as he does here, that society is so debased
that the life of trench warfare is preferable to association
with one's civilian contemporaries he is voicing his ultimate
protest against the degree to which English society has
deteriorated, both morally and spiritually.

182 Ford, Parade's End, pp. 453-454.

183 Ibid., pp. 620-621. P. 620.

The characteristics of society which Ford and his war colleagues discuss individually in this chapter should not be considered lightly for the mere fact of being developed by only one of the war writers. Montague's distress over class hatred and Tomlinson's anxiety over irreligion are manifestations of the concern of sensitive and perceptive men for what are actually serious social problems. The support they gain from such critics as Playne and Wingfield-Stratford tends strongly to validate their comments. Aldington's furious outburst against cant and insincerity and Ford's contempt for mankind in general are, of course, highly subjective opinions and incapable of verification. But verifiable or otherwise, the sum total picture of a society characterized by hatred and irreligion and hypocrisy is one of extreme disenchantment. The individual treatment of these social traits has the effect of adding detail to the picture which is so strongly blocked in by the results of the investigations which are discussed in the early chapters of this paper. Thus the view of pre-war and wartime society as presented in the soldiers' novels is one of thorough and complete disillusionment.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is stated in the introductory chapter that the English war novels, Death of a Hero, Parade's End, Rough Justice and All Our Yesterdays are fundamentally social novels and that they reveal their authors' deep concern with the standards which were adhered to by pre-war and wartime English society.¹⁸⁴ It remains to conclude whether, in the light of the foregoing statement, the novels are fair and accurate in their criticism of the several social institutions and attitudes which so far have been discussed.

Social malfunctioning is the prime target of these novels. In spite of their general acceptance as war novels¹⁸⁵ the war element in them provides primarily the background against which individuals and institutions reveal basic and serious weaknesses. The war, for example, shows Lieutenant Evans in Death of a Hero to be a reliable but utterly unimaginative soldier. Aldington presents Evans as a typical product of the public schools and proceeds harshly and sardonically to criticize the system. Montague, only slightly less disturbed, makes an equally penetrating examination of the lack of opportunities for individual development which the Victorian

¹⁸⁴ See above, p. 9.

¹⁸⁵ The following refer to the novels herein considered as being war novels: A.C. Ward, The Nineteen Twenties; E.A. Baker, The History of the English Novel; Robert Lovett, The History of the Novel in England; A.C. Baugh, A Literary History of England.

school presents. The public school graduates in Rough Justice are notable for the manner in which they don the uniform of the commissioned officer but avoid all his responsibility. Aldington and Montague, in adding to the charges of educational standardization made by such earlier critics as Samuel Butler and H. G. Wells,¹⁸⁶ are supported by such social historians as George Macaulay Trevelyan and such educationists as John William Adamson.¹⁸⁷

If the war pointed up the weakness of the school system it did no less to the highly respected institution of marriage and family life. If it created disillusionment in Aldington and Montague with the vision of the public school graduates fighting bravely but stupidly or not fighting at all, it created near despair in Aldington and Ford when it revealed the decayed state of the marriage institution.

Trevelyan states that about the turn of the century³

the professional and social emancipation of women went forward on the lines advocated in Mills' Subjection of Women (1869): women's colleges were founded ... and women's secondary schools were much improved ... the 'equality of the sexes' began to be advocated in theory, and found its way increasingly into the practice of all classes.¹⁸⁸

The social emancipation of women is a fait accompli, except for the lack of the vote, by the end of the first decade of

186 See above, p. 14.

187 See above, p. 17.

188 Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, vol. 4, p. 91.

the new century. Aldington writes of the old fashioned, Victorian attitude to women as he sees it in Mrs. Shobbe. She had married only to escape parental control.

Her well-off Victorian parents had given her a good education of travel and accomplishment, and had systematically and gently crushed her.¹⁸⁹

In contrast to Mrs. Shobbe, who is shy and self-conscious, Aldington sketches fully an Elizabeth, vivacious, chatty, eager, interested and above all free from family tyranny. She has, however, fallen prey to a despotism largely of her own generation's making. She is controlled by her determination to be free; she can be true to no condition, self imposed or otherwise, which compromises her freedom. Therefore, in wartime, while her husband is enduring the steady intellectual and physical degeneration which accompanies front line war service and even while social instinct warns her that some degree of circumspection is desirable, she repudiates responsibility and follows her much stronger personal inclinations. Harshly though he castigates the "domestic deninery" of Victorian and Edwardian married life, Aldington is fully aware of the serious social weakness which results from the concerted rush by the younger generation away from tradition and convention in marriage mores. Such a rejection of responsibility is antithetical to the ideal wherein social energy is directed toward a goal of better human relations.

¹⁸⁹ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 130.

The rejection, during wartime, of matrimonial obligation by Elizabeth Winterbourne, is paralleled by Sylvia Tietjens in Ford's Parade's End. She too, it should be noted, has attained nearly complete social emancipation. Ford establishes her wealth and social prominence and, in order to portray her as a person responsible only to herself, shows her to have eloped from her marriage. He demonstrates further that she is morally chaotic. Sylvia leaves unexplored no approach in her determination to ruin her husband's social life and military career. At times her efforts are carefully planned; generally they occur on the spur of the moment. But invariably they constitute the abandonment of marital responsibility.

It is not sufficient to say that the repudiation by Elizabeth and Sylvia of marital obligation is a direct result of wartime conditions. Tietjens married Sylvia before the war while she was with child. George and Elizabeth Winterbourne had lived together before the war in planned and open defiance of Victorian marital codes. Thus the rejection of established sexual mores had obviously existed in peace time. Ford and Aldington argue, in effect, that the war, by providing opportunities for infidelity, through the separation of husband and wife, brought to light the fact that the morals of the day were basically and extraordinarily flabby. They endeavour to prove that the sexual behaviour of the pre-war way of life helped to "condition the manner in which the war was to be regarded by civilians and fought by soldiers."¹⁹⁰ The marital

¹⁹⁰ See above, p. 6.

irresponsibilities of his English wife added intolerably, to be sure, to the burdens already being borne by the soldier, the worry occasioned by his wife's infidelities greatly impairing his fighting ability and general morale.

It is not easy to find factual evidence to support Ford and Aldington in their charges that decay in marriage was widespread. There is evidence, however, that the divorce rate increased sharply in Great Britain during the latter years of the war and during the first years of the post-war period. In Great Britain, in 1913, there were 827 divorces. In 1918 there were 1,596 or nearly double the number for 1913. In 1919 the rate increased sharply again, there being 2,483 divorces in that year. In 1920 a further increase took place with 3,886 marriages being dissolved. Thus in the seven years between 1913 and 1920 the rate of divorce had increased over four fold.¹⁹¹ During the same years the population of Great Britain had fluctuated between forty-five and forty-seven million; in 1922 it was actually less than it had been in 1913.¹⁹² In 1922 there was also a sharp decline in the number of divorces granted. The only possible interpretation of these statistics argues that wartime conditions gave great impetus to a growing dissatisfaction with marriage. It is impossible to believe that, had the war not occurred, the divorce rate would have undergone so drastic and sudden a rise. The increased divorce rate could only mean that many marriages were based on crumbling

¹⁹¹ Statistical Abstract for the United Kingdom ... 1913 and 1917 to 1930, London, HMSO, 1932, p. 21.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 5.

foundations.

Added to the statistical evidence there is the occasional statement which supports the argument that the young people of the early twentieth century tended to reject conventional sexual morality. Gerald Heard, in Morals Since 1900, states that there has been, in the twentieth century

a greater revolution in sexual morality than in any of the other moralities. Sexual morality has declined from being morality per se to being regarded as little more than a crabbed prejudice¹⁹³

Certainly sexual morality is lightly regarded by Elizabeth and Fanny in Death of a Hero and presumably so by Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. McKechnie in Parade's End, and even by Betty Whittaker in All Our Yesterdays.

It must be emphasized at this point that the English war novelists are not at all concerned with the sexual immorality of the soldier at the front.¹⁹⁴ The soldier figures in the novels, George Winterbourne, Christopher Tietjens, Captain McKechnie, Charles Bolt et al, are none of them sexually immoral while in France. The war writers deliberately emphasize the immorality of the women at home while allowing absolutely no hint of moral laxity to detract from their pictures of the suffering soldier. They do so in order to accentuate that their novels are first and foremost

¹⁹³ Heard, Morals Since 1900, p. 96.

¹⁹⁴ The only instance of sexuality which concerns a soldier in France is the seduction, by a sex-starved French war-widow, of the deserter Victor Nevin, in Montague's Rough Justice.

social commentaries on and criticisms of society at home.

Aldington and Ford argue successfully for their theses that sexuality in its various manifestations is indicative of extraordinary selfishness. But selfishness, they add, is an attribute commonly found in all levels of human relationship. They add further that selfishness is generally so widespread that under the stress of wartime circumstances it becomes characteristic of the majority of the people. It becomes so strong that many people reject entirely their responsibility to England and to their countrymen in uniform.

The acute desire for wealth and social position evinced by Lady Macmaster and by Sir George Roads is aptly commented on when these figures are shown continually to exploit the soldier. The desire to exploit a national crisis is depicted in Mrs. Barbason, the "militant" dowager who would see the working classes brought to heel through being forced to fight England's war. Such an eventuality would ensure the return to Conservative hands of the leadership of England and that, for Mrs. Barbason, is of greater importance than any understanding of the working man and his problems.

Materialism on a higher, or at least a more impersonal level, is disclosed with Tomlinson's depiction of the situation in Novobambia. Greed and acquisitive jealousy are attacked in All Our Yesterdays. They are related to the war when Tomlinson endeavours to show how they can lead a nation into war for the protection of its overseas holdings.

The materialistic instinct demonstrated by the Macmasters and the Roads', as individuals, and by the groups or

corporations which operate in All Our Yesterdays, is paralleled on the national level to the extent that Ford, Aldington and Tomlinson all pillory imperialism. That imperialism is attractive, in one or another of its aspects, to almost every type of British mind is indicated by Caroline Playne when she writes in her very illuminating study of the British mind of the years 1900-1914, The Pre-War Mind in Britain.

The influences which prompted imperialist undertakings may be summed up in the following way:-- First, the prompting to acquire, derived from the primitive struggle for existence and justified by the crude "evolution" doctrines popular in our day.

Second, the allurement of lording it, of mastery over other men and lands. This is justified by the doctrine of power, by the philosophy of brute force scientifically expounded in our day.

Third, the idealistic trend of belief in apostleship, in a mission to teach, reform, remodel the unenlightened regions and backward areas of the earth. Evangelicalism, whether in puritanical clothing or canonical vestments, has great energizing force, a force to which the Anglo-Saxon mind in particular seems to yield.¹⁹⁵

However the war novelist does not differentiate between these influences although certain of his characters would without doubt respond to them. The writer is concerned with the national self interest which is the actual basis of imperialism

195 Caroline Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, p. 166.

and with the effect of that self interest on the soldier. For the soldier is actually gulled by the proponents of imperialism and war because he understands only dimly or not at all what imperialism is. And in all cases the sacrifices of the credulous and faithful soldiers are emphasized by the utter waste and horror of what Aldington calls Europe's "decennial picnic of corpses."¹⁹⁶

This paper has made no specific reference to the courage, determination and dignity which, in spite of the horror of the war, characterizes the conduct of the British soldier in the lines. Descriptions of the "decennial picnic of corpses" are not lacking in the English war novel nor are they understated when they do appear. That they might seem to be less intense in comparison with the battle descriptions and scenes of carnage which are found in All Quiet on the Western Front and in Under Fire is a direct result of the English writers' purpose. For while Remarque and Barbusse write solely of war the British veteran writes primarily of society and for him the war points up his general contention that society is decadent and doomed.

Society, which should be struggling "towards the goal of perfect human relations", has abandoned the struggle. In Death of a Hero and in Parade's End any dynamic energy which may once have inspired people to look upward has become per-

¹⁹⁶ Aldington, Death of a Hero, p. 252.

verted and reversed, and society, instead of improving morally is rapidly approaching a state of anarchy. Rough Justice and All Our Yesterdays are less emphatic regarding a dynamic downward trend. In these novels a more or less static state has been reached, a state wherein the efforts of the higher minded elements of society are cancelled out by the self interest of the individualistic and ambitious elements. Society, as an entity, is neither bettering nor worsening its position. It is merely marking time. But the very act of marking time is essentially negative since society is making no collective use of its experience.

It is to be noted that the advocates of the theory of depreciating quality, Aldington and Ford, do not always criticize the same social element. Aldington and Montague are united in their severe criticism of the public school system. For example, Death of a Hero and Rough Justice emphasize the lack of quality in England's public school system and also the historical fact that the graduate of that system is most often the very man who leads English affairs. Of the system Trevelyan has this to say:

The 'middling orders of society' found in the reformed Public School the door of entrance for their sons into the 'governing class.' The old landed gentry, the professional men and the new industrialists were educated together, forming an enlarged and modernized aristocracy, sufficiently numerous to meet the various needs of government and of

leadership in Victoria's
England and Victoria's
Empire.¹⁹⁷

If one desires specific information showing that positions of governmental leadership were held by public schools graduates he need only glance through any volume of the British Who's Who. The 1921 edition tells us, for example, that Stanley Baldwin attended Harrow and that Joseph Chamberlain graduated from Rugby.¹⁹⁸ It is entirely likely that the war novelists would choose such men as outstanding examples of their arguments that the public school graduate had so much responsibility for the entering into and the inept conducting of the war. To quote Trevelyan again it should be noted that, although he gives credit to the public school system for its successes in British life, he also states that

much of the failure of modern
England can be attributed to
the Public Schools.¹⁹⁹

Just as Aldington and Montague attack so strongly the school system so do Aldington and Ford attack marriage and sexual morality. Aldington, of course, finds nothing salutary in any social institution nor does he draw civilian characters who have even vestiges of decency and moral strength. Ford is critical of most social institutions but

197 Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, p. 57.

198 Who's Who, London, Black, 1921.

199 Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, vol. 4, p. 58.

he does offer some relief from unremitting disillusionment in that he portrays several decent characters. His determination to reveal modern social decay is pointed up by the fact that the good people who move through his war novels are essentially, in training and attitude and interest, of the eighteenth century. The very worthless people in Parade's End, of whom there are many, display what Ford considers to be entirely modern characteristics. Sylvia, for example, personifies the general moral breakdown; Lady Macmaster represents greed and social ambition; General Campion portrays suspicion; Perowne stands for dull, determined lechery.

Montague and Tomlinson, while no less penetrating in their criticism of English society, are more balanced, more willing to acknowledge the good which does exist. Montague, for example, emphasizes Mrs. Barbason's intolerance but offsets it with a parallel depiction of Thomas Garth's open-mindedness. Tomlinson, on the other hand, does not comment on society by means of the actions of his individual characters but rather through those thoughts and comments of the story's unidentified narrator, which grow out of the actions and attitudes of society in general.

The noticeable lack of redeeming qualities in society in Death of a Hero and in Parade's End might reasonably be taken as an indication of distorted and biased criticism. These social criticisms, however, were inspired by intensely disillusioning war experiences and the authors, having chosen to examine the major weaknesses in society, are quite

within the rights allowed them by their own decisions to exclude all mention of ameliorating conditions and circumstances. For example, both Aldington and Ford, in presenting the senior Winterbournes and the Macmasters, distort their pictures of society in that they depict families which cannot be accepted as average families. Nonetheless that very distortion is the primary influence in pointing up, sharply and steadily, the unattractive qualities which, for Aldington and Ford, characterize that society. Even though the extent to which they distort their pictures vitiates somewhat the force of their arguments, the meaning and intensity of their criticisms is clear and strong.

On the other hand Montague and Tomlinson are less bitter, less furious, but equally persistent and penetrating in those parts of their war novels which are critical of society. The fact that many of the individuals in Rough Justice and in All Our Yesterdays are fundamentally decent and believable should not blind one to the fact that they are struggling to preserve their decency in a world which suffers from moral poverty.

In the final analysis the veteran writers are critical of the same things; the basic difference in their criticisms is one of degree only. For Aldington and Ford, bitter and disgusted, and Montague and Tomlinson, sorrowful and disillusioned, have in common a determination to reveal the weakness of English society as they see it. As veterans of a terrible and wasteful and entirely useless war they have

chosen to write commentaries on a society which, by the very shallowness of its own standards, is rendered completely undeserving of the sacrifices of the soldiers who died to defend it.

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