

WRITERS AND READERS

In Europe and America universal primary education has created a reading public which is practically co-extensive with the adult population. Demand has called forth a correspondingly huge supply: twenty thousand million pounds of wood pulp and esparto grass are annually blackened with printer's ink; the production of newspapers takes rank, in many countries, among the major industries; in English, French and German alone, forty thousand new books are published every year.

A vast activity of writers, a vast and hungry passivity of readers. And when the two come together, what happens? How much and in what ways do the readers respond to the writers? What is the extent, what the limitations, of the influence exercised by writers on their readers? How do extraneous circumstances affect that influence? What are the laws of its waxing and its waning? Hard questions; and the more one thinks about them, the harder they seem. But seeing that they are of intimate concern to all of us (for all of us are readers, with an annual average consumption of probably a million words a year), it will be worth while at least to look for the answers.

The relations existing between scientific writers and their readers are governed by rules agreed upon in advance. So far as we are concerned, there is no problem of scientific literature; and I shall therefore make no further reference to the subject. For the purposes of this analysis, non-scientific writing may be divided into three main classes. In the first we place that vast corpus of literature which is not even intended to have any positive effect upon the reader—all that doughy, woolly, anodyne writing that exists merely to fill a gap of leisure, to kill time and prevent thought, to deaden and diffuse emotion.

To a considerable extent reading has become, for almost all of us, an addiction, like cigarette-smoking. We read, most of the time, not because we wish to instruct ourselves, not because we long to have our feelings touched and our imagination fired, but because reading is one of our bad habits, because we suffer when we have time to spare and no printed matter with which to plug the void. Deprived of their newspapers or a novel, reading-addicts will fall back on cookery books, on the literature that is wrapped round bottles of patent medicine, on those instructions for keeping the contents crisp which are printed on the outside of boxes of breakfast cereals. On anything. Of this kind of literature—the literature that exists merely because the second nature of habituated readers abhors a vacuum—it is unnecessary to say more than that there is a great deal of it and that it effectively performs its function.

Into the second class I put the two main types of propagandist literature—that which aims at modifying the religious and ethical opinions and the personal behaviour of its readers, and that which aims at modifying their social, political and economic opinions and behaviour.

For the sake of convenience, and because it must be given a name, we will call the third class imaginative literature. Such literature does not set out to be specifically propagandist, but may none the less profoundly affect its readers' habits of thought, feeling and action.

Let us begin with the propagandists.

What hosts of them there are! All over the world thousands of men and women pass their whole lives denouncing, instructing, commanding, cajoling, imploring their fellows. With what results? One finds it rather hard to say. Most propagandists do their work in the dark, draw bows at a venture. They write; but they don't know how far they will succeed in influencing their readers, nor what are the best means for influencing them, nor how long their influence will last. There is, as yet, no science of propaganda.

This fact may seem the more surprising when we reflect that there is something not far removed from a science of advertising. In the course of years advertisers have come to be fairly expert at selling things to the public. They know accurately enough the potentialities and limitations of different kinds of propaganda—what you can do, for example, by mere statement and repetition; by appeals to such well-organized sentiments as snobbery and the urge towards social conformity; by playing on the animal instincts, such as greed, lust and especially fear in all its forms, from the fear of sickness and death to the fear of being ugly, absurd or physically repugnant to one's fellows.

If, then, commercial propagandists know their business so well, why is it that ethical and political propagandists should know theirs on the whole so badly? The answer is that the problems with which the advertisers have to deal are fundamentally unlike the problems which confront moralists and, in most cases, politicians. A great deal of advertising is concerned with matters of no importance whatsoever. Thus, I need soap; but it makes not the smallest difference to me whether I buy soap manufactured by X or soap manufactured by Y.

This being so, I can allow myself to be influenced in my choice by such entirely irrelevant considerations as the sex appeal of the girl who smiles so alluringly from X's posters, or the puns and comic drawings on Y's. In many cases, of course, I do not need the commodity at all. But as I have a certain amount of money to spare and am possessed by the strange desire to collect unnecessary objects, I succumb easily to anyone who asks me to buy superfluities and luxuries. In these cases commercial propaganda is an invitation to give in to a natural or acquired craving. In no circumstances does it ever call upon the reader to resist a temptation; always it begs him to succumb. It is not very difficult to persuade people to do what they are all longing to do.

When readers are asked to buy luxuries and superfluities, or to choose between two brands of the same indispensable necessity, nothing serious is at stake. Advertising is concerned, in these cases, with secondary and marginal values. In other cases, however, it matters or seems to matter a great deal whether the reader allows himself to be influenced by the commercial propagandist or no. Suffering from some pain or physical disability, he is told of the extraordinary cures effected by M's pills or N's lotion. Naturally, he buys at once. In such cases the advertiser has only to make the article persuasively known; the reader's urgent need does the rest.

Ethical and political propagandists have a very different task. The business of the moralist is to persuade people to overcome their egotism and their personal cravings, in the interest either of a supernatural order, or of their own higher selves, or of society. The philosophies underlying the ethical teaching may vary; but the practical advice remains in all cases the same, and this advice is in the main unpleasant; whereas the advice given by commercial propagandists is in the main thoroughly pleasant. There is only one fly in the ointment offered by commercial propagandists; they want your money.

Some political propagandists are also moralists; they invite their readers to repress their cravings and set limits to their egotistical impulses, to work and suffer for some cause which is to bring happiness in the future. Others demand no personal effort from their readers—merely their adherence to a party, whose success will save the world automatically and, so to speak, from the outside. The first has to persuade people to do something which is on the whole disagreeable. The second has to persuade them of the correctness of a policy which, though it imposes no immediate discomforts, admittedly brings no immediate rewards. Both must compete with other propagandists. The art of political propaganda is much less highly developed than the art of commercial propaganda; it is not surprising.

Long experience has taught the moralists that the mere advertising of virtue is not enough to make people virtuous. During the last few thousands of years, incalculable quantities of hortatory literature have been produced in every

civilized country of the world. The moral standard remains, none the less, pretty low. True, if all this ethical propaganda had never been made, the standard might be even lower. We can't tell. I suspect, however, that if we could measure it, we should find that the mechanical efficiency of ethical propaganda through literature was seldom in excess of one per cent. In individual cases and where, for some reason, circumstances are peculiarly favourable, written propaganda may be more efficient than in others. But, in general, if people behave as well as they do, it is not because they have read about good behaviour and the social or metaphysical reasons for being virtuous; it is because they have been subjected, during childhood, to a more or less intensive, more or less systematic training in good behaviour. The propagandists of morality do not rely exclusively or even mainly on the written word.

Unlike the advertisers, political and social propagandists generally work in the dark and are quite uncertain as to the kind of effects they will be able to produce upon their readers. Propagandists themselves seldom admit this fact. Like the rest of us, they like to insist upon their own importance. Moreover, there has been a tendency among historians and political theorists to lend support to their claims. This is not surprising. Being themselves professional writers, historians and political theorists are naturally prone to exaggerate the significance of literature. In most studies of modern history, a great deal of space is devoted to the analysis of different political and economic theories; and it is tacitly or explicitly assumed that the propagation of these theories in the writings of literary men had a more or less decisive influence on the course of history. In other and more reverberant words, the literary men are credited with having 'built Nineveh with their sighing and Babel itself with their mirth.' Let us try to discover how far the facts confirm or invalidate this proud claim.

Consider the propagandist activities of the periodical press. Rich men and politicians have a fixed belief that if they can control the press they will be able to control public opinion—to control it even in a country where democratic institutions are allowed to function without gross interference. They buy up newspapers—partly in order to make money (for the production of newspapers is a very profitable industry), but mainly in the confident hope of being able to persuade the electorate to do what they want it to do. But in fact, as recent history proves, they fail just as often as they succeed. Thus, we see that the electoral successes of the English Liberal Party before the war, and of the Labour Party after, were won in the teeth of opposition by a newspaper press that was and is overwhelmingly conservative.

It can be shown by a simple arithmetical calculation that there must be millions of English men and women who regularly read a tory newspaper and regularly vote against the tories. The same is true of France, where it is clear that many readers of the conservative press vote socialist and even communist at elections. We are led to two conclusions: first, that most people choose their daily paper, not for its opinions, but for its entertainingness, its capacity to amuse and fill the vacancies of leisure. Second, that written propaganda is less efficacious than the habits and prejudices, the class loyalties and professional interests of the readers.

Nor must we forget that propaganda is largely at the mercy of circumstances. Sometimes circumstances fight against propaganda; at other times, they fight no less effectively on its side. Thus, during the khaki election which returned the first Coalition Government under Lloyd George, and during the gold-standard election of 1931, circumstances fought on the same side as the majority of press propagandists—and fought with tremendous effect. Significant, in this context, is the case of Allied propaganda during the World War. Up till the summer of 1918 the propaganda designed to undermine the will-to-fight of the German troops was almost perfectly ineffective. During and after that summer, when hunger and a series of unsuccessful battles had prepared the ground for it, this propaganda achieved its purpose. But the leaflets which Lord Northcliffe's organization scattered with such good effect during July and August could have done absolutely nothing to discourage the German troops during their victorious

offensive against Saint-Quentin in the month of March.

Propaganda by even the greatest masters of style is as much at the mercy of circumstances as propaganda by the worst journalists. Ruskin's diatribes against machinery and the factory system influenced only those who were in an economic position similar to his own; on those who profited by machinery and the factory system they had no influence whatever. From the beginning of the twelfth century to the time of the Council of Trent, denunciations of ecclesiastical and monastic abuses were poured forth almost without intermission. And yet, in spite of the eloquence of great writers and great churchmen, like St. Bernard and St. Bonaventura, nothing was done. It needed the circumstances of the Reformation to produce the counter-Reformation. Upon his contemporaries the influence of Voltaire was enormous.

Lucian had as much talent as Voltaire and wrote of religion with the same disintegrating irony. And yet, so far as we can judge, his writings were completely without effect. The Syrians of the second century were busily engaged in converting themselves to Christianity and a number of other Oriental religions; Lucian's irony fell on ears that were deaf to everything but theology and occultism. In France, during the first half of the eighteenth century, a peculiar combination of historical circumstances had predisposed the educated to a certain religious and political scepticism; people were ready and eager to welcome Voltaire's attacks on the existing order of things. Political and religious propaganda is effective, it would seem, only upon those who are already partly or entirely convinced of its truth.

Let us consider a modern example. Since the war two well-written and persuasive pieces of propaganda have figured among the very best of best-sellers—I refer to Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*. In Europe and America many millions of people read the German's indictment of war and the Englishman's plea for internationalism. With what results? It is hard indeed to say. All that we can be sure of is that nationalistic feeling was never so acutely inflamed as it is to-day and the expenditure on armaments never higher. Once more, circumstances have been more effective in moulding men's minds than conscious literary propagandists. The influence of Wells and Remarque, which was doubtless considerable at the time of the appearance of their books, lasted only as long as the post-war disgust with fighting and the post-war era of prosperity. A new generation, whose members had no first-hand knowledge of war, came to maturity, and along with it appeared the great depression. In the desperate effort to preserve a local prosperity, governments raised tariffs, established quotas, subsidized exports.

Economic nationalism was everywhere intensified. For every people all foreigners were automatically transformed into enemies. At the same time despair and the sense of having been wronged, of being the victims of a monstrous injustice, were driving millions to seek consolation and a vicarious triumph in the religion of nationalism. Why, we may ask in passing, did these unhappy victims of war choose nationalism as their consolation rather than Christianity? The reason is to be sought, not in the superior efficacy of nationalist propaganda, but in the historical situation as a whole.

The prestige of science is not sufficiently great to induce men to apply scientific methods to the affairs of social and individual existence; it is great enough, however, to make them reject the tenets of the transcendental religions. For a large part of the population, science has made the Christian dogmas intellectually unacceptable. Contemporary superstition is therefore compelled to assume a positivistic form. The desire to worship persists, but since modern men find it impossible to believe in any but observable entities, it follows that they must vent this desire upon gods that can be actually seen and heard, or whose existence can at least be easily inferred from the facts of immediate experience. Nations and dictators are only too clearly observable. It is on these tribal deities that the longing to worship now vents itself.

One of the oddest and most unexpected results of scientific progress has been

the general reversion from monotheism to local idolatries. The beginnings of this process are clearly observable among the German philosophers at the opening of the nineteenth century. Take a Moravian Brother; endow him with a great deal of intelligence, and subject him to a good eighteenth-century education and a first-hand experience of invasion and foreign tyranny; the result will be a deeply religious man, incapable of finding intellectual satisfaction in the traditional Christianity of his childhood, but ready to pour out all his devotion, all his will-to-worship, upon the nation. In a single word, the result will be Fichte. In Fichte's Addresses to the German Nation, the religion of Nazism is to a great extent anticipated. But whereas the Nazis have invented a jargon of their own, Fichte, it is significant, still employs the language of Pietism. He writes of patriotic experiences in the same words as were used by the Moravians to describe religious experiences. In Fichte, as well as in a number of his less eminent contemporaries, we can actually study an intermediate type between two distinct species—the revivalist Christian and the revivalist nation-worshipper.

Since the introduction of universal education innumerable people have gone through a process akin to that which caused Fichte to become dissatisfied with the Pietism of his childhood and made it natural for him to seek another outlet for his will-to-worship. The Napoleonic invasion gave intensity to Fichte's religion of nationalism; defeat and an imperfect victory in the World War have done the same for the Germans and Italians of our own generation. In a word, the historical circumstances of recent years have conspired to intensify nationalism and throw discredit on internationalism, whether religious or political, whether based on Christian theology or a rationalistic view of the world. At the same time, of course, governments have deliberately fostered nationalistic fervour to serve their own political purposes. To these causes must be added the apparently normal human tendency to delight in periodical changes of intellectual and emotional fashion. The very popularity of an author during a certain period is a reason why he should become unpopular later on. The conversions due to the preaching of Wells and Remarque were in general superficial and short-lived. It is not to be wondered at.

But now, let us suppose for the sake of argument, that these conversions had been for the most part profound and, in spite of changed conditions, lasting. Would that fact have greatly altered the present situation, so long as the world's rulers had remained unconverted? It is possible to argue that the really influential book is not that which converts ten millions of casual readers, but rather that which converts the very few who, at any given moment, succeed in seizing power. Marx and Sorel have been influential in the modern world, not so much because they were best-sellers (Sorel in particular was not at all a widely read author), but because among their few readers were two men, called respectively Lenin and Mussolini. In a less spectacular way, but still profoundly, the writings of Jeremy Bentham affected the course of nineteenth-century history. Their circulation was not large; but they counted among their readers men like Chadwick, Grote, Romilly, Brougham—administrators, educationists, legal reformers, who did their best to put into practice what Bentham had preached. It may be that the future ruler of some great country will grow up with a passion for Wells. In that case, The Outline will be not merely a record of past history, but indirectly a maker of history to come. Up to the present, in spite of its circulation, it has not affected the course of history.

Social and political propaganda, as I have said, is effective, as a rule, only upon those whom circumstances have partly or completely convinced of its truth. In other words, it is influential only when it is a rationalization of the desires, sentiments, prejudices or interests of those to whom it is addressed. A theology or a political theory may be defined as an intellectual device for enabling people to do in cold blood things which, without the theology or the theory, they could only do in the heat of passion. Circumstances, whether external or internal and purely psychological, produce in certain persons a state of discontent, for example, a desire for change, a passionate aspiration for something new. These emotional states may find occasional outlet in violent but undirected activity. But now comes the writer with a theology or a political

theory, in terms of which these vague feelings can be rationalized. The energy developed by the prevailing passions of the masses is given a direction and at the same time strengthened and made continuous.

Sporadic outbursts are converted by the rationalization into purposive and unremitting activity. The mechanism of successful propaganda may be roughly summed up as follows. Men accept the propagandist's theology or political theory, because it apparently justifies and explains the sentiments and desires evoked in them by the circumstances. The theory may, of course, be completely absurd from a scientific point of view; but this is of no importance so long as men believe it to be true. Having accepted the theory, men will work in obedience to its precepts even in times of emotional tranquillity. Moreover, the theory will often cause them to perform in cold blood acts which they would hardly have performed even in a state of emotional excitement.

Our nature abhors a moral and intellectual vacuum. Passion and self-interest may be our chief motives; but we hate to admit the fact even to ourselves. We are not happy unless our acts of passion can be made to look as though they were dictated by reason, unless self-interest be explained and embellished so as to seem to be idealistic. Particular grievances call not only for redress, but also for the formulation of universally valid reasons why they should be redressed. Particular cravings cry aloud to be legitimized in terms of a rational philosophy and a traditionally acceptable ethic.

The moral and intellectual vacuum is perpetually in process of formation, and it sucks into itself whatever explanatory or justificatory writing happens at the moment to be available. Clean or dirty, brackish or sweet—any water will serve the turn of a pump that has been emptied of its air. And, analogously, any philosophical writing, good, bad or indifferent, will serve the turn of people who are under the compulsion of desire or of self-interest, and who consequently feel the need of intellectual and moral justification. Hence the extraordinary success, at a particular historical moment, of books that, to a later generation, seem almost completely valueless; hence the temporary importance and power of manifestly second-rate and negligible writers. Let us consider a concrete example.

The organization of eighteenth-century French society was hopelessly inefficient, and its pattern so anachronistic that great numbers of individual Frenchmen, unable to fit into the scheme of things, suffered acute discomfort. The sense of grievance and the desire for change were intense; and correspondingly intense was the desire for a philosophy that should rationalize this desire and legitimize this grievance in terms of pure reason and absolute justice. Yearning to be filled, the moral and intellectual vacuum sucked into itself whatever writings were available. Among these was the *De l'Esprit* of Helvétius. This is a thoroughly bad book, full of preposterous stuff.

But though obviously untrue, some of its theses (such as that which affirmed the equality of all intellects and the consequent possibility of transforming any child at will into a Newton or a Raphael) were well suited to rationalize and justify the contemporary claims for political, religious and economic reform. During a few years the book was invested with a significance, and exercised an influence, which its intrinsic literary and philosophical merits could not justify. Its fortune was made, not by the ability of its author, but by the needs of its readers.

There have been writers whose influence depended neither on their own powers, nor yet on the necessities of their readers, but simply upon fashion. To us, the writings of most of the original fourteenth- and fifteenth-century humanists seem wholly unreadable. Nor are we singular in our judgment; for within a hundred years their works had fallen into an almost complete oblivion. And yet, for their contemporaries, these works were exciting and persuasive. The fact that a man could turn out a tolerably specious imitation of Cicero or Sallust was, for two whole generations of Renaissance readers, a sufficient reason for attaching importance to what he wrote. Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan was often

heard to say that a thousand Florentine cavalry could not do him so much harm as a single Latin letter from the Chancellor of Florence, the humanist Coluccio Salutati. The rediscovery of ancient literature was an event of profound significance.

It is easy to understand why so much importance came to be attached, during the fifteenth century, to pure Latinity: why it was that scholars like Valla and Poggio should have wielded such extraordinary power. But the fashion which, a century later, invested the ruffianly Pietro Aretino with the almost magical prestige that had belonged to the original humanists is wholly unaccountable. Aretino was a lively writer, some of whose works can still be read with interest. But why he should have wielded the influence that he did, and why all the kings and princes in Europe should have thought it worth while to pay him blackmail, are mysteries which we cannot explain, except by saying that for some reason he became the mode.

At every period of history certain writings are regarded by all or some members of a given society as being *ex hypothesi* true. They are therefore charged with an unquestionable authority. To show that this authority is on the side of the cause he supports has always been one of the propagandist's tasks. Where it is not possible for him to make them serve his purposes the propagandist has to discredit the existing authorities. The devil opens the attack by quoting Scripture; then, when the quotations fail him, trots out the Higher Criticism and shows that Scripture has no more authority than the Pickwick Papers. At any given moment there are certain fixed landmarks of authority; the propaganda of the period has to orientate itself in relation to these landmarks. Correct orientation to existing authority is one of the conditions making for success of propaganda.

We see, then, that the effectiveness of propaganda is determined by the circumstances of the time when it is written. These circumstances are of two kinds—circumstances external to the individual, and internal or psychological circumstances. External circumstances may change catastrophically, as during a war; or gradually, as when means of production are altered and economic prosperity is increased or diminished. Changes in external circumstances are, of course, accompanied by changes in internal circumstances. But internal circumstances may also change on their own account, independently, to a certain extent, of external circumstances and according to an autonomous rhythm of their own.

History pursues an undulatory course; and these undulations are the result, to some extent at least, of the tendency displayed by human beings to react, after a certain time, away from the prevailing habits of thought and feeling towards other habits. (This process is greatly complicated by the fact that in modern heterogeneous societies there are numerous co-existing groups with different habits of thought and feeling. But it is unnecessary to discuss these complications here.) The autonomous nature of psychological undulations is confirmed by the facts of history. Thus the ardour of all violently active religious and political movements has generally given place to relative indifference and worldliness after a period of anything from a few months to twenty-five years.

'All active religions,' writes Professor Crane Brinton, in the concluding paragraph of his recently published *Decade of Revolution*, 'tend to become inactive within a generation at most. The wise, experienced and consistently inactive religious institution known as the Roman Catholic Church has always been threatened by outbreaks of active religion. Until Luther, at least, such outbreaks were tamed, strait-jacketed with laws and institutions. . . . Since the Reformation the great outbreaks of active religion have taken place outside the Church of Rome. Of these, the earliest, Calvinism, has long since been sobered. . . . The second, Jacobinism, has in the Third Republic made its compromise with the flesh. . . . The third, Marxism, would appear to the outsider to be entering the inactive stage, at least in Russia.'

It is worth while to illustrate the undulations of history by a few concrete examples. It took the Franciscan movement about twenty years to lose the passion of its early zeal. Francis founded his first cell in 1209, and the Bull by which Gregory IX set aside his Testament and permitted trustees to hold and administer property for the benefit of the Order was promulgated in 1230. The French Revolution had its Thermidorean reaction after only five years, Savonarola ruled the city of Florence for eight years; but the popular reaction against his movement of religious and moral reform had begun some time before the end. The great Kentucky Revival lasted from 1797 to about 1805; but the Welsh Revival of 1904 was over in two years.

It is probably true to say that movements make up in duration what they lack in intensity. Thus, it seems to have taken a full generation for educated Englishmen to react away from the genteel religious scepticism which prevailed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Addison complained that in his time the very appearances of Christianity had vanished; Leibniz could record the fact that in England even 'natural religion' was languishing. And these are opinions which the facts confirm. The literature of unbelief was as popular as fiction. For example, Woolston's Discourses against miracles sold upwards of thirty thousand copies.

But a change was at hand. In a letter dated 1776 and addressed to Gibbon on the publication of the first volume of his history, Hume summed up his impressions of contemporary English thought in the following words: 'Among many other marks of decline, the prevalence of superstition in England prognosticates the fall of philosophy and decay of taste.' Fourteen years later, in 1790, Burke remarked that 'not one man born within the last forty years has read a word of Collins, Toland, Tyndal, or of any of that flock of so-called free-thinkers. Atheism is not only against our reason; it is against our instinct.' Forty years is probably a pretty accurate computation. Charles Wesley was converted in 1736 and John in 1738.

By 1750 the movement of which those conversions were at once a symptom and a cause must have gone far enough to spoil the market for deistic literature. After several minor fluctuations, a new period of educated scepticism set in about the middle of the nineteenth century and was succeeded towards the end of the century by another reaction towards faith. Owing, however, to the assaults of nineteenth-century rationalism, this new faith could not be exclusively Christian or transcendental in character, but expressed itself in terms of a variety of pseudo-religious forms, of which the most important was nationalism. Rudyard Kipling was the early twentieth-century equivalent of Cardinal Newman and Wesley. The mistake of all propagandists has been to suppose that the psychological movement which they observe in the society around them is destined to go on continuously in the same direction.

Thus we see that in a time of scepticism, sceptical propagandists announce with triumph that superstition is dead and reason triumphant. In a time of religious reaction, Christian and nationalistic propagandists announced with equal satisfaction and certainty that scepticism has for ever been destroyed. Both, it is hardly necessary to say, are wrong. The course of history is undulatory, because (among other reasons) self-conscious men and women easily grow tired of a mode of thought and feeling which has lasted for more than a certain time. Propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular feeling and desire; but it does not do much to create those movements. The propagandist is a man who canalizes an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain.

In a democratic state, any propagandist will have rivals competing with him for the support of the public. In totalitarian states there is no liberty of expression for writers and no liberty of choice for their readers. There is only one propagandist—the State.

That all-powerful rulers who make a regular use of terrorism should also be the most active propagandists known to history seems at first sight paradoxical. But

you can do anything with bayonets except sit on them. Even a despot cannot govern for any length of time without the consent of his subjects. Dictatorial propaganda aims first of all at the legitimizing in popular estimation of the dictator's government. Old-established governments do not need to produce certificates of legitimacy. Long habit makes it seem 'natural' to people that they should be ruled by an absolute or constitutional monarch, by a republican president, by a prince bishop, by an oligarchy of senatorial families—whichever the case may be.

New rulers have to prove that they have not usurped their title, but possess some higher right to govern than the mere fact of having grabbed power. Usurpation, like any other crime, has to justify itself in terms of the prevailing code of values—in terms, that is to say, of the very system which brands it as a crime. For example, in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were two acknowledged sources of political power: the Empire and the Church. For this reason the men who had succeeded, by fraud or violence, in seizing the government of a city, generally hastened to have themselves appointed Vicars of the Church or Hereditary Captains of the Empire.

To be able to tyrannize effectively they needed the title and appearance of constitutional authority. Since the French Revolution the recognized sources of power have been the People and the Nation. When modern despots have to legitimize their usurpations they do so in terms of nationalism and of that humanitarian democracy they themselves have overthrown. They issue propaganda to prove that their regime is for the good of the people or else, if the economic facts make nonsense of such a claim, for the good of that mystical entity, different from and superior to the mere individuals composing it, the Nation. But the general acknowledgment that his government is legitimate is not enough for the totalitarian dictator; he demands from his subjects that they shall all think and feel alike, and he uses every device of propaganda in order to make them think and feel alike.

Complete psychological homogeneity occurs among primitive peoples. But the conditions of such homogeneity are, first, that the population shall be small; secondly, that it shall live in an isolation due either to geography or to the exclusiveness of the local religion; and, thirdly, that its system of production shall be more or less completely unspecialized. European dictators may wish and try to make their peoples as homogeneous as a tribe of Melanesians, to impose upon them a conformity as complete as that which exists among the Australian aborigines. But circumstances must finally prove too strong for them. Fifty million professionally specialized men and women cannot live together without emphasizing one another's natural diversities. Nor, with the best will in the world, can the dictator isolate himself from all contact with the outside world.

This is one of the reasons why, in the long run, he is bound to fail. Meanwhile, he is sure of at least a partial and temporary success. Dictatorial propaganda demands obedience and even considerable financial and other sacrifices; but by way of compensation it assures the individual that, as a member of a chosen nation, race, or class, he is superior to all other individuals in the world; it dissipates his sense of personal inferiority by investing him with the vicarious glory of the community; it gives him reasons for thinking well of himself, it provides with enemies whom he may blame for his own shortcomings and upon whom he may vent his latent brutality and love of bullying. Commercial propaganda is acceptable, because it encourages men and women to satisfy their sensuous cravings and offers them escapes from their physical pains and discomforts.

Dictatorial propaganda, which is always nationalistic or revolutionary propaganda, is acceptable because it encourages men and women to give free rein to their pride, vanity and other egotistical tendencies, and because it provides them with psychological devices for overcoming their sense of personal inferiority. Dictatorial propaganda promotes the ugly reality of prejudice and passion to the rank of an ideal. Dictators are the popes of nationalism; and the creed of nationalism is that what ought to be is merely what is, only a good deal more so.

All individuals seek justifications for such passions as envy, hatred, avarice and cruelty; by means of nationalistic and revolutionary propaganda, dictators provide them with such justifications. It follows, therefore, that this propaganda of the dictators is certain to enjoy a certain temporary popularity. In the long run, as I have said, the impossibility of reducing a huge, educated population to the spiritual homogeneity of a savage tribe will tell against it. Furthermore, human beings have a strong tendency towards rationality and decency. (If they had not, they would not desire to legitimize their prejudices and their passions.) A doctrine that identifies what ought to be with the lowest elements of actual reality cannot remain acceptable for long. Finally, policies based upon a tribal morality simply won't work in the modern world. The danger is that, in process of proving that they don't work, the dictators may destroy that world.

Dictatorial propaganda may be classified under two heads: negative and positive. Positive propaganda consists of all that is written, negative propaganda, of all that is not written. In all dictatorial propaganda, silence is at least as important as speech, *suppressio veri* as *suggestio falsi*. Indeed, the negative propaganda of silence is probably more effective as an instrument of persuasion and mental regimentation than speech. Silence creates the conditions in which such words as are spoken or written take most effect.

An excess of positive propaganda evokes boredom and exasperation in the minds of those to whom it is addressed. Advertising experts are well aware that, after a certain point, an increase in the pressure of salesmanship produces rapidly diminishing and finally negative returns. What is true of commercial propaganda seems to be equally true, in this respect, of political propaganda. Thus, most observers agree that at the Danzig elections, the Nazi propagandists harmed their cause by 'protesting too much.' Danzig, however, was a free city; the opposition was allowed to speak and the ground had not been prepared for positive propaganda by a preliminary course of silence and suppression. What are the effects of excessive positive propaganda within the totalitarian state? Reliable evidence is not available.

Significant, however, in this context is the decline, since the advent of Nazism, in the circulation of German newspapers. Protesting too much and all in the same way, the propagandists succeeded only in disgusting their readers. *Suppressio veri* has one enormous advantage over *suggestio falsi*: in order to say nothing, you do not have to be a great stylist. People may get bored with positive propaganda; but where negative propaganda is so effective that there is no alternative to the spoken and written suggestions that come to them, all but the most independent end by accepting those suggestions.

The propagandists of the future will probably be chemists and physiologists as well as writers. A cachet containing three-quarters of a gramme of chloral and three-quarters of a milligram of scopolamine will produce in the person who swallows it a state of complete psychological malleability, akin to the state of a subject under deep hypnosis. Any suggestion made to the patient while in this artificially induced trance penetrates to the very depths of the sub-conscious mind and may produce a permanent modification in the habitual modes of thought and feeling. In France, where the technique has been in experimental use for several years, it has been found that two or three courses of suggestion under chloral and scopolamine can change the habits even of the victims of alcohol and irrepressible sexual addictions.

A peculiarity of the drug is that the amnesia which follows it is retrospective; the patient has no memories of a period which begins several hours before the drug's administrations. Catch a man unawares and give him a cachet; he will return to consciousness firmly believing all the suggestions you have made during his stupor and wholly unaware of the way this astonishing conversion has been effected. A system of propaganda, combining pharmacology with literature, should be completely and infallibly effective. The thought is extremely disquieting.

So far, I have dealt with the influence exercised by writers who wish to persuade their readers to adopt some particular kind of social or political attitude. We must now consider the ways in which writers influence readers as private individuals. The influence of writers in the sphere of personal thought, feeling and behaviour is probably even more important than their influence in the sphere of politics. But the task of defining that influence or of exactly assessing its amount is one of extraordinary difficulty. 'Art,' it has been said, 'is the forgiveness of sins.' In the best art we perceive persons, things and situations more clearly than in life and as though they were in some way more real than realities themselves. But this clearer perception is at the same time less personal and egotistic. Writers who permit their readers to see in this intense but impersonal way exercise an influence which, though not easily definable, is certainly profound and salutary.

Works of imaginative literature have another and more easily recognizable effect; by a kind of suggestion they modify the characters of those who read them. The French philosopher, Jules de Gaultier, has said that one of the essential faculties of the human being is 'the power granted to man to conceive himself as other than he is.' He calls this power 'bovarism' after the heroine of Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*. To some extent all men and women live under false names, are disguised as someone else, assume, whether consciously or unconsciously, a borrowed character. This persona, as Jung calls it, is formed to a great extent by a process of imitation. Sometimes the imitation is of living human beings, sometimes of fictional or historic characters; sometimes of virtuous and socially desirable personages, sometimes of criminals and adventurers.

It may be, in the significant phrase of Thomas à Kempis, the Imitation of Christ; or it may be the imitation of the heroines of Mr. Michael Arlen's novels; the imitation of Julius Caesar or of the Buddha; of Mussolini or Werther; of Stavrogin or Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux or the gunmen of penny dreadfuls. People have bovarized themselves into the likeness of every kind of real or imaginary being. Sometimes the imitator chooses a model fairly like himself; but it also happens that he chooses one who is profoundly dissimilar. What de Gaultier calls the bovaric angle between reality and assumed persona may be wide or narrow. In extreme cases the bovaric angle can be equal to two right angles. In other words, the real and assumed characters may have exactly opposite tendencies. Most of us, I imagine, go through life with a bovaric angle of between forty-five and ninety degrees.

Teachers have always tried to exploit the bovaric tendencies of their pupils, and the historical and literary model for imitation has from time immemorial played an important part in all moral education. Like other propagandists, however, educators are still unable to foresee how their pupils will respond to moral propaganda. Sometimes the response is positive, sometimes negative. We do not yet know enough to say, in any given circumstances, which it will be. The influence of books is certainly very great; but nobody, least of all their writers, can say in advance who will be influenced, or in what way, or for how long. The extreme form of bovarism is paranoia. Here the individual plays a part so wholeheartedly that he comes to believe that he actually is the character he is impersonating. The influence of books on paranoiacs must be very considerable.

People suffering from the paranoia of persecution often imagine that they are the victims of a diabolical secret society, which is identified with some real organization, such as that of the Freemasons or the Jesuits, about which the patient has read in history books or perhaps in works of fiction. In cases of the paranoia of ambition, books certainly serve to canalize the patient's madness. Megalomaniacs believe themselves to be divine or royal personages, or descendants of great historical figures, of whom they can have heard only in books. There is material here for an interesting medico-literary study.

Incidentally it may be remarked that many authors are themselves mildly paranoid

in character. Books become popular because they vicariously satisfy a common wish. In many cases, also, they are written with the aim of satisfying the author's secret wishes, of realizing, if only in words, his bovaristic dreams. Consult a library catalogue and you will find that more books have been written on the career of Napoleon than on any other single subject. This fact casts a strange and rather terrifying light on the mentality of modern European writers and readers. How are we going to get rid of war, so long as people find their keenest bovaristic satisfaction in the story of the world's most spectacular militarist?

The course of psychological history is undulatory; therefore it happens that the literary models most commonly imitated at one period lose their popularity with succeeding generations. Thus, in the early eighteenth century, what Englishman or Frenchman would have desired to imitate those monsters of honour, who figured in the romances and plays of the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries? And who at the same period would have dreamed of assuming the sentimental roles so popular after about 1760? In a majority of cases readers choose to play the parts that come easiest to them. Thus it is obviously extremely difficult to act the part of a saint. For this reason the New Testament, though more widely read in Europe and over a longer period than any other book, has produced relatively few successful imitators of its central character. People have always preferred to play parts that would allow them to satisfy their appetites or their will to power. As in the time of Paolo and Francesca, the favourite heroes are still personages like Lancelot—great warriors and great lovers.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso

esser baciato da cotanto amante,

questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.

Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse;

quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

Dante provides us with a perfect example of erotic bovarism actively at work.

Certain fictional personages continue to make their appeal even over long periods and through considerable fluctuations in the habits of thought and feeling. Stendhal's Julien Sorel, for example, is still alive in France; and I was interested to learn from a Communist friend that this exemplar of ruthless individualism had recently achieved a great popularity in Russia. The vitality of Hamlet after more than three hundred years remains so great that the Nazis have found it necessary to discountenance revivals of the tragedy for fear that it should cause young Germans to forget the 'heroic' rôle which they are now supposed to play.

It sometimes happens that writers who are without influence on the habits of thought and feeling of their contemporaries begin to exercise such an influence after their death, when circumstances have so changed as to make their doctrine more acceptable. Thus, William Blake's peculiar sexual mysticism did not come into its own until the twentieth century. Blake died in 1827; but in a certain sense he was a contemporary of D. H. Lawrence.

Along with Lawrence, he exercised a considerable influence over many people in post-war England and elsewhere. Whether the nature of this influence was what either Blake or Lawrence would have liked it to be is extremely doubtful. In a majority of cases, we may suspect, the mystical doctrines of Blake and Lawrence

were used by their readers merely as a justification for a desire to indulge in the maximum amount of sexual promiscuity with a minimum amount of responsibility. That Lawrence passionately disapproved of such a use being made of his writings, I know; and it is highly probable that Blake would have shared his feelings.

It is one of the ironies of the writer's fate that he can never be quite sure what sort of influence he will have upon his readers. Lawrence's books, as we have seen, were used as justifications for sexual promiscuity. For this reason they were outlawed by the Nazis when they first came into power, as mere Schmutzliteratur. Now, it appears, the Nazis have changed their minds about Lawrence; and his writings are accepted as justifications for violence, anti-rationalism, idolatry and the worship of blood. That Lawrence meant to make his readers turn from intellectualism and conscious emotionalism towards the Dark Gods of instinct and physiology, is unquestionable. But it is safe to say that he did not mean to turn them into Nazis. Men are influenced by books to assume a character that is not entirely their own; but the character they assume may be quite different from the character idealized by the writer.

Even propagandists may achieve results quite unlike those they meant to achieve by their writings. For example, by persistently attacking an institution authors hope to persuade either its supporters or its victims to reform it. But in practice they may just as easily produce a precisely opposite effect. For invectives often act as a kind of vaccination against the danger of reform. Mr. Shaw's writings are revolutionary in intention, and yet he has become a favourite among the more intelligent members of the bourgeoisie; they read his satires and denunciations, laugh at themselves a little, decide that it's all really too bad; then, feeling that they have paid the tribute which capitalism owes to social justice, close the book and go on behaving as they have always behaved. The works of revolutionary writers may serve as prophylactics against revolution. Instead of producing the active will to change, they produce cynicism, which is the acceptance of things as they are, combined with the derisive knowledge that they couldn't be worse—a knowledge that is felt by the person who possesses it to excuse him from making any personal effort to change the intolerable situation.

Cynicism can affect not only those who profit by the existence of an undesirable state of things, but also those who are its victims. During the centuries which preceded the Reformation, cynical acceptance of the evils of ecclesiastical corruption was common among those who paid the piper as well as among those who called the tune, among the intelligent laity as well as among the princes of the Church. The fact of corruption was accepted as inevitable, like bad weather—a kind of bad weather that was at the same time a joke. Boccaccio, Chaucer, Poggio and their lesser contemporaries denounced, but at the same time they laughed. Poggio's employers at the Vatican (he was a papal secretary) laughed with them.

At a later date Erasmus's ecclesiastical and princely friends laughed no less heartily over his satirical comments on kings and clerics. So did all the rest of the reading public. For Erasmus was, for his period, a prodigious best-seller. The Paris edition of his Colloquies sold twenty-four thousand copies in a few weeks—an incredibly large figure, when one reflects that the book was written in Latin. Of his Praise of Folly a hundred editions were printed between 1512 and 1676—most of them during the earlier part of that period.

After Luther had taken his revolutionary action, and when it had become clear that the movement for reform was a serious menace to the existing order of things, the official attitude towards Erasmus's writings began to change. In 1528 the Colloquies were suppressed, as being dangerously subversive. From fosterers of an amused acceptance and prophylactics against revolution, his denunciatory and satirical writings had been transformed, by the new circumstances, into dangerous revolutionary propaganda. Erasmus's failure to achieve what he meant to achieve was doubly complete. He meant to persuade the existing hierarchy to reform itself; he only succeeded in making it cynically laugh at itself. Then came Luther; and the writings which their author had

penned as propaganda for rational reform within the Church were transformed automatically into propaganda for a revolution, of which he disapproved. And when the Church did reform itself, it was not at all in the Erasmian way. But luckily for Erasmus, he was not there to witness that reformation. Three years before the Society of Jesus came into the world the old humanist had passed out of it—none too early.

Let us return to our imaginative literature. Readers, as we have seen, often borrow characters from books in order to use them, bovaristically, in real life. But they also reverse this process and, projecting themselves out of reality into literature, live a compensatory life of fantasy between the lines of print. One of the main functions of all popular fiction, drama and now the cinema has been to provide people with the means of assuaging, vicariously and in fancy, their unsatisfied longings, with the psychological equivalents of stimulants and narcotics. The power of such literature to impose upon those whom we may call its addicts a kind of drugged acceptance of even the most sordid realities is probably very considerable. In real life one Englishman out of every sixty thousand is a peer, one out of every three hundred thousand has an income of a hundred thousand pounds a year. A census of fictional characters has never, so far as I know, been made; but I should guess that one out of a hundred, perhaps even one out of fifty, was either a lord, or a millionaire, or both at once. The presence of so many aristocrats and plutocrats in our literature has two causes.

The first is that the rich and powerful enjoy more liberty than the poor and so are in a position to make their own tragedies, not merely to have disaster forced upon them from outside. There can be no drama without personal choice; and, proverbially, beggars cannot be choosers. Only people with incomes can afford to do much choosing in this world. 'Their rich and noble souls' (to quote one of Butler's Erewhonian authors) 'can defy all material impediment; whereas the souls of the poor are clogged and hampered by matter, which sticks fast about them as treacle to the wings of a fly. . . . This is the secret of the homage which we see rich men receive from those who are poorer than themselves.' Of the homage, too, that they receive from authors. The rich, the powerful and the talented are freer than ordinary folk and are therefore the predestined subjects of imaginative literature. The other reason why literature is so lavish with wealth and titles is to be sought in the very fact that the real world is so niggardly of these things.

Authors themselves and their readers desire imaginary compensations for their poverty and social insignificance. In the lordly and gilded world of literature they get it. Nor are poverty and powerlessness their only troubles; it is more than likely that they are also plain, have an insufficient or unromantic sex life; are married and wish they weren't, or unmarried and wish they were; are too old or too young; in a word, are themselves and not somebody else. Hence those Don Juans, those melting beauties, those innocent young kittens, those beautifully brutal boys, those luscious adventuresses. Hence Hollywood, hence the beauty chorus. When I was last at Margate a gigantic new movie palace had just been opened. Its name implied a whole social programme, a complete theory of art; it was called 'Dreamland.' At the present time, the cinema acts far more effectively as the opium of the people than does religion.

Hitherto I have described the more obvious effects produced by imaginative literature upon its readers. But it works also less conspicuously and in subtler ways:

Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind? . . .

He much, the old man, who, clearest-soul'd of men,

Saw The Wide Prospect and the Asian Fen,

And Tmolus hill, and Smyrna bay, though blind. . . .

And, in *The Waste Land*, Mr. Eliot uses the same metaphor:

O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe

Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih.

Words have power to support, to buttress, to hold together. And are at the same time moulds, into which we pour our own thought—and it takes their nobler and more splendid form—at the same time channels and conduits into which we divert the stream of our being—and it flows significantly towards a comprehensible end. They prop, they give form and direction to our experience. And at the same time they themselves provide experience of a new kind, intense, pure, unalloyed with irrelevance. Words expressing desire may be more moving than the presence of the desired person. The hatred we feel at the sight of our enemies is often less intense than the hatred we feel when we read a curse or an invective. In words men find a new universe of thought and feeling, clearer and more comprehensible than the universe of daily experience. The verbal universe is at once a mould for reality and a substitute for it, a superior reality. And what props the mind, what shores up its impending ruin, is contact with this superior reality of ordered beauty and significance.

In the past the minds of cultured Europeans were shaped and shored up by the Bible and the Greek and Latin classics. Men's philosophy of life tended to crystallize itself in phrases from the Gospels or the Odes of Horace, from the *Iliad* or the Psalms. Job and Sappho, Juvenal and the Preacher gave style to their despairs, their loves, their indignations, their cynicisms. Experience taught them the wisdom that flowed along verbal channels prepared by Aeschylus and Solomon; and the existence of these verbal channels was itself an invitation to learn wisdom from experience. To-day most of us resemble Shakespeare in at least one important respect: we know little Latin and less Greek. Even the Bible is rapidly becoming, if not a closed, at any rate a very rarely opened book. The phrases of the Authorized Version no longer prop and mould and canalize our minds. St. Paul and the Psalmist have gone the way of Virgil and Horace. What authors have taken their place? Whose words support contemporary men and women? The answer is that there exists no single set of authoritative books. The common ground of all the Western cultures has slipped away from under our feet.

Locally authoritative literatures are filling the vacuum created by the virtual disappearance from the modern consciousness of those internationally authoritative literatures which dominated men's minds in the past. *Mein Kampf* is a gospel and has had a sale comparable to that of the Bible—two million copies in ten years. For Russians, Marx and Lenin have become what Aristotle was for educated Europeans in the thirteenth century. (Lenin's works, in twenty-seven volumes, have already sold four million sets.) In Italy Mussolini ha sempre ragione; no higher claim was made by the orthodox for Moses or the Evangelists.

The peoples of the West no longer share a literature and a system of ancient wisdom. All that they now have in common is science and information. Now, science is knowledge, not wisdom; deals with quantities, not with the qualities of which we are immediately aware. In so far as we are enjoying and suffering beings, its words seem to us mostly irrelevant and beside the point. Moreover, these words are arranged without art; therefore possess no magical power and are incapable of propping or moulding the mind of the reader.

The same is true of that other bond of union between the peoples, shared information. The disseminators of information often try to write with the compulsive magic of art; but how rarely they succeed! It is not with fragments of the daily paper that we shore up our ruins.

The literature of information has, as its subject-matter, events which people feel to be humanly relevant. Unfortunately, journalism treats these profoundly interesting themes in what is, for all its flashing brilliance, a profoundly uninteresting, superficial way. Moreover, its business is to record history from day to day; it can never afford to linger over any particular episode. As little can the reader afford to linger. Even if the daily paper were well written, its very dailiness would preclude the possibility of his remembering any part of its contents.

Materially, a thing of printer's ink and wood pulp, a newspaper does not outlast the day of its publication; by sunset it is in the dust-bin or the cess-pool. In the reader's memory its contents survive hardly so long. Nobody who reads—as well as all the rest—two or three papers a day can possibly be expected to remember what is in them. Yesterday's news is chased out of mind by to-day's. We remember what we read several times and with intense concentration. It was thus, because they were authoritative and had a mysterious prestige, that the Bible and the Greek and Latin classics were read. It is not thus that we read the Daily Mail or the Petit Parisien.

In modern scientific method we have a technique for invention; technological progress proceeds at an accelerating speed. But social change is inevitably associated with technological progress. To quicken the rate of the second is to quicken the rate of the first. The subject-matter of the literature of information has been enormously increased and has become more disquietingly significant than ever before. At the same time improvements in the technique for supplying information have created a demand for information. Our tendency is to attach an ever-increasing importance to news and to that quality of last-minute contemporaneity which invests even certain works of art, even certain scientific hypotheses and philosophical speculations, with the glamour of a political assassination or a Derby result.

Accustomed as we are to devouring information, we make a habit of reading a great deal very rapidly. There must be many people who, once having escaped from school or the university, never read anything with concentration or more than once. They have no verbal props to shore against their ruins. Nor, indeed, do they need any props. A mind that is sufficiently pulverized and sufficiently agitated supports itself by the very violence of its motion. It ceases to be a ruin and becomes a whirling sandstorm.

In a certain sense our passion for information defeats its own object, which is increased knowledge of the world and other human beings. We are provided with a vastly greater supply of facts than our ancestors ever had an opportunity of considering. And yet our knowledge of other peoples is probably less thorough and intimate than theirs. In 1500 an educated Frenchman or German knew very little about current political events in England and nothing at all of the activities, so lavishly recorded in our literature of information, of English criminals, aristocrats, sportsmen, actresses. Nevertheless, he probably knew more about the intimate intellectual and emotional processes of Englishmen than his better-informed descendants know to-day. This knowledge was derived from introspection. Knowing himself he knew them.

Minds moulded by the same religious and secular literatures were in a position to understand one another in a way which is inconceivable to men who have in common only science and information. By discrediting the Bible and providing a more obviously useful substitute for the study of the dead languages, triumphant science has completed the work of spiritual disunion which was begun when it undermined belief in transcendental religion and so prepared the way for the positivistic superstitions of nationalism and dictator-worship. It remains to be seen whether it will discover a way to put this shattered Humpty-Dumpty together

again.

The end