CLOGS TO CLOGS IN SIX HUNDRED YEARS

By

Count Henry Bentinck

Preface Pro

Preface ante

Vive la difference

CHAPTER ONE

Yin and Yang

The last time, so far as I know, that a Bentinck forbear of mine milked a cow as part of his living was in about 1300. I do so now morning and evening. In between I'm a swineherd, shepherd, poultryman, gardener, dairyman, butler and waiter. It's nice to think of him obeying the same disciplines - on freezing mornings or on long summer evenings always at about the same time, 6 a.m. or 6 p.m., and to know that for him the feel of the teats, the sound of the milk into the bucket, the smell of the cow, her fidgeting around, her placid chewing were the same to him, although centuries ago, as they are now for me. I am sure he wore clogs because he was Dutch. I don't because they are too expensive. If, however, I begin here which is getting near the end, the whole story of my life would be a flashback. On the other hand, if I started with the last Bentinck milking it would take too long to get back to me. So I'll start with my parents and work back and forth and round about among the bizarre denizens of the family trees whence I have ultimately fallen back either from contamination or grace, whichever way you like to look at it but, at last, to earth.

My father and mother were engaged for ten years. She was the eldest daughter of the Earl of Gainsborough. Her grandfather and his wife had simultaneously decided to become Catholics and the result was that her father, having married a suitably Catholic Irish girl, brought her and her brothers and sisters up as sort of super Catholics. Now, it has for a long time been a ploy, which aristocratic Catholic families will deny, that their daughters are enjoined to marry Protestant peers, the idea being to get back a majority of Catholics in the House of Lords. It worked like this. Whereas English law says a child shall follow the religion of its father, Catholics require the bridegroom to sign a paper agreeing that his children shall be brought up Catholics and that he won't interfere. Thus, a Catholic girl marrying a protestant peer produces in time a Catholic member of the Upper House. It doesn't matter now but around 1910 when most of the power and influence of the world's most powerful and influential countries was vested in the upper class, their forum was the Lords. This ploy is laughed at as "that hoary old chestnut", etc. Ask a Jesuit and he'll deny it at once. Look up Jesuit in the dictionary and you will find "dissembling person". Ask any Catholic family and they will laugh at you. All my Catholic cousins married Protestants, one was a peer. In my mother's generation it was even more important. This business about the Catholic church wanting (tacitly, sub-consciously?) influence and power in the lives of individuals and communities I encountered early. I do not understand the desire for power at all anywhere by any group or individuals. There are many people who don't. Experience has made it more and more incomprehensible. Indeed, so unaccountable that I wrote a book in order to explain it to myself. The characteristics necessary for a person to fight his way up to the top and grasp power preclude him from being fit to yield it.

It was explained to me that my mother, in having fallen in love with my father, had picked a very choice morsel. Not a peer, not a rich man but a Bentinck - a direct descendant of Hans Willem who came to England in 1660 with William III, and helped him to maintain religious freedom in Britain. At this particular time the Catholics were on the brink of regaining power in England at the end of the Restoration. But Dutch Bill, arriving from Holland said, "No, no, je m'attendrai", "I will maintain religious freedom"; and with Bentinck's help be did. "Truer friend," he said, "had no man

than Bentinck." Bentinck went to bed with him to take the smallpox off him; it being thought that if someone took it off you, you wouldn't die of it. There exists in the castle of Amerongen in Holland a painting of the king looking pretty good and five greats-grandfather peering over his shoulder looking rotten soon after the event. It is also thought that they went to bed as lovers. Maybe they did. Anyway, when William III came to England to marry Queen Mary the first piece of this sceptred isle five-greats-grandpa saw was Portland Bill, so in due course he took the title of Ear1 of Portland. His son was made up to Duke and from him the Dukes of Portland descend. The first Earl, Hans Willem, then went on to become William III's greatest, most trusted, most successful friend, courtier and diplomat. It was he whom William sent to the court of the Sun King whose Catholic hegemony he was at pains to contain, and he succeeded, and it is due to William and Mary with the help of his arch friend Bentinck that we now enjoy religious freedom in England to this day. The Catholics have been livid ever since. So obviously when Mama (pronounced Mummer) met Papa (rhyming with supper) they all rubbed their hands with glee at the prospect of getting their own back. But Papa and his lot of Bentincks were potty about their kind of Protestantism and said No. So, as I said, Mama and Papa were engaged for ten years and we'll see what happened in the end later on in this chapter.

They had met as follows. My aunt Clare, my mother's sister, came home one day saying "Norah, I've seen your dream man, tall, fair, blue eyes, walking along by the spinney." It was indeed Robert Bentinck. Somebody in the meantime had said to Papa, "Like to go to a concert in the village hall at Exton?" Exton Park was where the Gainsboroughs lived. "No," he said, "I hate music." Indeed, he was a good deal worried lest he be called upon to go at last to heaven because he had heard people sat about playing harps. However, he was persuaded. The singer came on. She was to do a world tour as the leading solo soprano of the prestigious Sheffield Choir. She was the eldest daughter of an Earl in 1910. It was unprecedented. She was my mother. She also had lovely legs and Papa was a leg man. So perhaps putting his fingers in his ears he consoled himself by thinking about her legs.

The Bentincks who were, I was brought up to believe, entirely penniless, for reasons we'll go into later, had at this time a hunting box in Cottesmore country. A few days later a field of about six hundred was fording a wide stream. Papa who was a good horseman and a strong silent character rather like Gary Cooper, saw that the horse of the little lady in front of him was just about to go down and roll in the water, so he hit it smartly with his whip. The horse leapt out of the stream and would have certainly left its rider behind had she not been riding side-saddle. With your legs wound round the pommels of a side-saddle you practically can't come off. However, she was furious. She was my mother. She was half Irish and her paddy flared up. She spun round to tell whoever had done it what was what. But Papa was already off his horse and standing on the off side of her horse with "my arm stuck through the girth - it was so loose." He asked if she would like him to tighten it up before her saddle slipped down and would put her on the floor.

They were like that. She mercurial, temperamental, intelligent, well-read, good memory, heretical, avant-garde, easy to talk to, hopeless in the house or kitchen. He was a good gardener and groom, carpenter, handyman, horseman, excellent shot, and one of the main things I remember about him was that whatever question I ever asked him, his invariable reply was, "I don't know." Because he didn't.

During their long engagement Mama went on her world tour with the Sheffield Choir, first to Canada. Papa had gone there "to speculate". They met again. He drove her in a buckboard. She saw him at his best here, I think. At home she would rehearse with a handful of friends and put on a play. Then they would tour it round their friends' statelies. She loved music, played the violin, liked

smart-Alec conversation with famous people, her memoirs are full of them. He, as I said, was at home on a prairie and didn't like conversation and was a teetotaller. When I say he didn't like conversation, I don't mean he didn't talk, he did. All his family talk a lot, they tell stories. I was in my teens rebuked for saying that all my relations lived the whole of their lives in their anecdotage. I suppose that's what I'm in now. She met him again there in Canada and they were perhaps happy for a little while. Then her tour took her further west to Vancouver and thence across the Pacific to Australia. While she was away then on her tour, let me tell you more about the family which had produced and now surrounded my father. I will then say a bit about that which produced my mother and we will be able to see what happened to these two sad unwilling puppets at the end of their tortuous engagement.

Papa at this time had, I was told later, gone to Canada "to speculate, I'm afraid". It was of course a dirty word to a Bentinck. He bought four houses in Winnipeg on the main street for something like £1,000. It's now worth about a billion dollars a foot. In 1956 I received a letter from his Executors, his estate was wound up, his assets sold. I received 7/6d. He was happy in a western saddle on the wide open prairies. He was good with animals. He discovered Robert Service (?) (said to be the only poet who ever made a million out of poetry). Because his name was Robert too, I, as a child got them confused and for me it was my father who featured in lines like, "The lure of little voices." Then there is "The Law of the Yukon" which has the lines in it:-

"This is the Law of the Yukon
And ever she makes it plain
Send not your weak and your feeble
Send me your strong and your sane
Strong for the red rage of battle
Sane for I harry them sore" etc.

And there is another one which goes:-

"There was a woman and she was wise
Woefully wise was she
She knew by heart from finish to start
The book of inequity."

These lines I remember. I haven't looked them up. I felt he was a man who had once belonged to somewhere else. This was augmented on the sectarian side by the fact that the Bentincks had been and still were in the persons of his first cousins colossally rich; and on the spiritual side by the fact that he reckoned his life belonged to God and that his function as a Christian was to ask Him at morning prayers what he could do for Him that day and then try to do it. All his family believed that - some more, some less – him probably less. The others reckoned, "Well, you see, Henry, God hasn't got hands and fingers and so on and we have. So we are the only way he can get things done in the world that he wants. It's what we're here for. So we must pray to Him each day to show us what it is that he wants us to do." I knew from the age of four when I went under the tea table at a party and reported on the frilly knickers worn by the prettiest young women that this was doing to be difficult for me. I reported on the knickers in confidence to my nanny Winnie. I cannot describe my reactions to her telling everyone about it as though I had performed some quaint endearing prank or that I was some kind of aspiring draper, nor to the fact that other people seemed to accept

it in those terms. Within myself I knew already at that age that I was in pursuit of a nameless wonder. At around this time also a flashy kitchen maid perched on a table preparing sprouts and was, I suppose, flirtatiously teasing me. I got intrigued by this and down I went to pick up imaginary fallen sprout leaves and I could see the top of her stockings, forsooth. This pre-occupation with doing God's will was then another component of my feeling that Papa was a man who had once - in this context still did - belong elsewhere.

He told me about cow catchers, train sirens, temperatures of 60 below. There were photographs of him in a racoon coat down to his ankles which he had bought new for £10. I still wear it. He told me of log cabins where you could just walk in and help yourself provided you cut more wood, shot more game, smoked it and left some money. Such was the camaraderie of pioneers in the limber lost.

I have mentioned that Mama's parents were super Catholics. Papa's were super Protestants. For example, his father, for some improbable reason a Colonel in the Coldstream Guards, was a preacher. He did not preach to the poor to save them from their sins but in the rich and aristocratic salons of Victorian and Edwardian London. He reckoned that it was more in God's interest to convert the influential and powerful. I don't know much about Grandpa Bentinck. He married a Miss McKerral, nicknamed her Kussie. He was part Dutch and part German, probably got in a muddle with his languages and it means Kissie, of course. He was, I was told, "mad about Kissie - couldn't take his hands off her". I expect that was a euphemism because from another source - an aged companion beginning to lose her marbles - my sister was told "he wouldn't leave her alone, not even when she was having her periods". So maybe I get my adoration of women from him. I have wondered whether very old families and royals have survived - in the case of Astor and Doria since Roman times (though Queen Elizabeth II goes back to Odin) simply because they were sexier than anybody else. The full extent of the royal and aristocratic amours has, so far as I know, not been diligently researched. However Grandpa's marriage to the beautiful - sexy? - certainly by all accounts totally brainless Kussie had a number of consequences.

The Bentincks were socking great Dutch snobs. The entire "holier than thou" syndrome which underlies Apartheid inspired their sense of being apart from, because better than, anybody else. The Bentincks were ruling Counts. We once had our own army - twelve men - and our own currency and ruled the principality of Aldenburg. There is a good story about that which I'll tell you later. However, we were granted at some time what in German is called Ebenburtigheit. It means equal blood with royalty so that royalty could marry Bentincks without its being a morganatic marriage. In the Almanac de Gotha which is the European peerage are listed the eight noblest families in Europe by which any thinking Bentinck means the world. Bentinck is among them. When my mother forgot her passport on a visit to Holland, she produced some identification and the official said, "Bentinck, a thousand pardons, go!" and made her out a laissez passer. When we returned from Holland the Vladivostock-Hook of Holland express was stopped by a gardener in clogs, with a red lantern so that we could go aboard at a wayside station.

"The king told Papa he could" is a chant my children tease me with because he told Grandpa he could wear the royal Stuart tartan. So my father's first cousin, a fully Dutch Count Bentinck, living at the castle of Middachten, used to walk about his estate in a kilt. Even in my own experience during the war I was on leave in Rome and at a party found myself talking to someone in French. It transpired he was on the staff of "Gotha". He asked me my name and when I said I was Count Bentinck he said, "Ah, mon cher, la fine fleur d'Europe." Lucky old cow – mine. But the family of my father were, as I said, snobs. They invented an odious word, "per". Originally it meant "poor" and was to distinguish the poor people from those who were not, but it had nothing to

do with riches, it simply had to do with being or not being what is commonly now known as “U”, except that the Bentincks reckoned that nearly all the people in Nancy Mitford's class of “U” were complete social write-offs. For example, anybody who played golf was per, so were those who fished. This was because the Bentincks didn't do it themselves and had never enquired as to whether or not it was pleasant or good fun. It was per for a man to dance well, in fact it was per to be clever or witty and of course all ladies' men mere dreadfully per. On the whole this meant that the Bentincks couldn't and didn't communicate in any way with the world, learned nothing from it, and drew back from it fastidiously, saying it was all so dreadfully per out there.

This was important to me because when I grew up and was thrown together with other people from noble families I couldn't get on with them at all. They were simply not in the least bit like the Bentincks and it has taken me practically until this moment to see exactly what bugged me. It was that I equated upper class-ness with religious obsession and also with being complete “ultimate” *(?tb)*. So did the family. They looked down their noses at those who drank or swore or womanised. No, the Bentincks were a race apart. They had no easy way with their fellows and the embarrassment this caused me who was used to looking up girls' skirts and swearing and smoking on the sly etc. was intense. However, I was saying that the Bentincks were great Dutch snobs and Grandpa had married a Miss. Let me explain what this meant to the others and what they made it mean to him and eventually to me.

The arch Dutch snob, namely my grandfather’s younger brother, William, had involved the Bentincks in “house laws”. The English don't have them. It means that if you marry beneath you, you are disinherited. By “beneath you” it meant that Grandpa had to marry a woman whose family had 16 quarterings. If not, his brothers collared his inheritance. 16 quarterings means the family has borne arms, i.e. has been noble and has married others likewise for 8 generations; because each time you marry you combine your arms with those of your wife.

Well, Miss McKerral didn't have 16 quarterings, so Grandpa lost his inheritance. He said he didn't care because he was too busy kissing Kussie and preaching the word of God to the VIPs of the time in their drawing-rooms. One of his helpers in this task, though chiefly in Holland, was a certain Myneer de Graaf. It means Mr the Count. Grandpa felt it his duty to help him because he was the result of my grandfather's having exercised Droit du Seigneur upon one of the peasants of his Dutch estate. I was told this by my late spinster super Christian Aunt Ursula about ten years ago when she was in her 80s. Great-Grandpapa, I may as well say, was a Coldstreamer and a General in the British army and his more illustrious brother was the same and commanded the Brigade of Guards at Crimea. I still have some of the grape-shot picked up by him at Sebastopol, some more picked up by my Uncle Henry on the Somme - the piece of shrapnel in a glass case which lamed my Uncle Arthur for life - and a 9 mm bullet in my own thigh which I suppose will drop out with a clunk on to the floor of my coffin when I have rotted down sufficiently.

So Grandpa married a Miss and he lost all the money. In return she poured into our genes her own remarkable obtuseness and her brother's physical prowess. My great Uncle Berto McKerral was a huge braw Scot. Mr Decathlon himself. He was once involved in a duel with a Frenchman (synonym for coward). Berto said “I chose 4lb. axes in a 12ft ring.” The Frenchman left the country. “My only problem,” Berto's words have been handed down, “was whether to split him down the middle or cut him in half”. Papa and his siblings worshipped their father. He expected each of them to be a more nearly perfect soldier of Jesus Christ than anyone had ever been before, and I know that they all genuinely tried to be this until the end of their lives. For the most part I loved them, some of them completely.

To get back to Grandpa having lost his Dutch inheritance. Mama and Papa went to law about it. It's a long story. Stories about legal wrangles bore me. Mama engaged a German lawyer - told him the whole case which she had prepared and which was an extremely strong one. He allowed her to finish. And then he said, “Now I must tell you that I have already been retained by the other side.” The cousin comprising “the other side” said that he knew that we would win in the end but that as he was rich and we were poor, we would go bankrupt and be unable to finish the case. So we stopped. Papa said anyway he liked his Dutch cousins too much to want to fight them in this way. All the same when he and I visited Holland he took me down to a small gate in the wall surrounding the 10 acre garden and showed me the 17th century castle rising pink and exquisite from its moat, and said, “That ought to have been yours,” But it wasn’t.

The reason we would have won the case reposes in a battered cylindrical tin propped up in the corner of my room. It contains a gaudy coat of arms done for the McKerrells and two sworn statements all very clearly inscribed and sealed by the Duke of Argyll. It explains that Laird means Lord and the McKerrells were knights - had born arms for donkey’s years, and that the Scots didn’t quarter their arms anyway (because they so seldom bother to get married, quipped the other side”) In short perfectly ok as mates for His Highness Ruling Count Bentinck, a mediatised Count of the Holy Roman Empire with “equal birth” like me or Grandpa.

I think that the mention of Great-Grandpapa, Charles Anthony Ferdinand Bentinck's brother, General Sir Henry Bentinck KCB, is a good point to explain about the Bentinck’s being Counts and about the association between the Bentincks and the Victoria Cross. General Sir Henry had no children. Queen Victoria wanted to reward him for services rendered in the Crimea etc. So he asked her to grant a royal licence for his brother and his children to use the title of Count and Countess of the Holy Roman Empire in front of their Christian names as British citizens in Britain. And this she did; for ever. It is unique except for the family of Count Charles de Salis. The point is this: Count is not an English title. Any foreigner having had a title given to him by the monarch of his foreign country - in the case of the Bentincks by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1716 - can use it as a courtesy title in England only so long as he retains his original foreign nationality. If he becomes a naturalised Englishman he must relinquish it. It is a matter of interest that there are plenty of people about who don't relinquish it. They who are in fact merely Mr. von Snufflestroober call themselves Baron or Prince. The Bentincks upon becoming British were given, as I said, a royal licence to use the title in front of their Christian names for ever. At the end or the First War this was rescinded by George V, and ends with me. My children have never used it.

While we are on the subject of Great Uncle Henry, let me say that during the Crimean campaign he had had struck and issued the Bentinck medal. Twelve were issued to NCO’s and Guardsmen of the Grenadiers and Scots Guards. None was issued to a Coldstreamer. The reason, it is said, is that when he was about to give the first medal to a Grenadier, a Coldstream officer said,

"Ooh, sir! Aren’t you going to give the first one to one of your own Lillywhites?"

And he is reported to have replied,

"Because such an unworthy suggestion should have been made by a Coldstreamer, no soldier in my regiment will ever receive one or my medals."

The medal was silver. I have two at home in a glass case. It was awarded for bravery and was one of the first medals, if not the first, thus awarded irrespective of whether the recipient was an officer or a private soldier. It is significant that soon afterwards the Victoria Cross was invented and issued to the same people for the same deed of valour and that it took on the ribbon, colour and

width of the Bentinck medal. Indeed, I was brought up to believe that Henry Bentinck's medal "fostered the institution" of the Victorian Cross. I am proud that Henry realised it didn't latter whether you were Private Bloggins or Lieutenant Lord Bloggins when someone was shooting at your navel. (It is standard training in all armies to "aim at the lower stomach" because badly wounded men are not only demoralising to soldiers in the front line but also sop up more of the enemy's resources than do the dead). I'm also proud of the fact that five Greats-grandpa helped William with religious freedom just as William the Silent who is my ancestor via three women, while himself a Catholic, nevertheless championed the right of the lowlanders to religious self-determination even against his own Catholic master, Philip of Spain. Not unnaturally Philip put out a contract on him and he was done by a hit man - referred to as a religious fanatic - (they called Lee Oswald a nutter too for a while). Anyway, he died with the following famous words on his lips, "Mon Dieu ayez pitié de ce pauvre peuple." Because he knew what Philip had in store for them.

These are all things I was told, brought up on by my parents though mostly by my uncles and aunts. I will come back to them in due course because they played an important role in shaping my attitude to life. They did terrible things to me and to my wife, to each other and to themselves which is a product of them being no better educated nor more cultured than their servants; obtuse, unobservant, insensitive, unintelligent, priggish, snobbish and above and beyond everything else, boring. They also had much humility, some could and most endearingly did laugh at themselves. For example, my Aunt Naomi who was the adoring twin sister of Uncle Arthur. Arthur made many distinguished excursions into remote parts of the Middle East. Naomi aged about 60, i.e. in about 1955, said one day said to me of him,

"Do you know why Arthur is so popular among the natives in Africa and the Middle East?"

"No, why?"

"Because he is one of the very few white men who will actually lift his foot up so that the natives can kiss it."

When I explained why I had nearly killed myself laughing, she slowly understood. Afterwards she would remember and chuckle richly in self-depreciation. In the course of the explanation which was long and tortuous her point of view, at once comprehensible to any Englishman, did emerge. It was in effect, "But I mean, foreigners do do funny things - I mean, Frenchmen kiss you - Charles used to be dreadfully embarrassed (Charles was an Ambassador) and natives do fall down and kiss your feet and Arthur hated it so much he used to pick his foot up. I mean, it was no good telling them not to, they just did..."

I did also get Uncle Arthur to see what a bon mot he had forged in the tradition of tight-lipped English understatements when a discussion took place about the fact that I - at Harrow - was reading the Seven Pillars of Wisdom by Lawrence of Arabia. The mere fact of my reading it embarrassed Arthur dreadfully because of the references to "male bodies quivering together in ecstasy in the sand". However, he said he had known Lawrence quite well during his Middle Eastern period, so I agog said, "Coo! What was he like?"

"Curious fellow," Arthur, the regular Coldstreamer replied quietly, "used to slop about without his belt on, I remember."

But Arthur, indeed all of them, not least Charles the Ambassador, were totally at sea in the ordinary world, as if they didn't understand what was said to them. It was as if they didn't understand the implications of what they did or said to others. This made them awkward and they took refuge in pinning the blame on the other chap. The examples are legion. Having a meal in a restaurant with Arthur was agony when you were 15 or 16. He would be reading the menu - with

Table d'hôte written clearly over the top. He would say to the waiter - "Why can't I have both the fish and the meat7"

"It's the table d'hôte menu, sir. You can have soup, then either fish or meat, then either cheese or sweet."

"I don't want soup or cheese or pudding, I want fish and meat."

"I'm afraid not, sir. I'11 get you the a la carte menu."

As he went away Arthur looking very embarrassed would say,

"'diculous man. Just made it up. I don't understand what he means. Do you?"

Sometimes he would be "rude to waiters". It was a pity because he was really a gentle and unrude man. But it embarrassed him that he never understood what the hell was going on, so he shouted in the same way that tourists do at foreigners. One day we came out of the Guards Club to get his small supercharged blue sports Lancia in about 1938. A terribly pretty girl asked me the way in a French accent. I was having an excellent time telling her in my best French. Like my mother and my children I am a good mimic. I can't actually talk French but I love to sound as much like a French lover as I can at all times, and I was giving a pretty good imitation right then. Suddenly Arthur comes belting round the back of the Lancia, lame as a duck because of the shrapnel in the glass jar, grabs me by my arm, hisses at me in the voice of one whose sacred job it is to protect a vestal virgin, "Never talk to French girls in Mayfair." Flings me into the car, roars the engine, lets in the clutch and goes into the back of a taxi.

So we had to go by bus.

We stood alone at the bus stop by the Ritz in Piccadilly to make a journey he had made hundreds of times. The No. 9 bus stopped.

"Do you go down KENSINGTON GORE??" he asked as though addressing a deaf moron.

"Yes sir."

"Oh! Then will you take us?"

"Yes sir."

"Oh." Pause for surprise. "Come on Henry, he can take us."

So we got on board. The fare was 1½d each. Arthur gave the man 6d and told him to keep the change.

Let me interpret the event. In Arthur's experience buses were entirely capricious things with information written on them which he couldn't understand, e.g. "Special" or "Knightsbridge Only" when generally that number went on to Olympia. Hence his first question. Secondly, conductors often in his experience rang the bell and drove off on purpose to annoy you, not because they were full which he would not have noticed or because the driver was a learner with a big red L all over everywhere which he wouldn't have noticed either. Thirdly, bus Conductors were often very short with him or made quick-fire remarks in cockney like "oo's funeral are you going to then?" which he didn't understand either.

Therefore, his relief that the whole thing had gong off so well and the man had been so nice made him give him a tip.

Peculiar things happened to my relations. Somehow they found people whom they had always believed existed and I never have. For example, Naomi was once travelling on the rear seats of a bus facing across the alley way and was wearing a pair of 1910 brown brogue shoes. She loved those shoes and kept them polished like a Guardsman. The conductor lurched and badly scuffed the toe. He apologised. She said if was all right - not his fault at all. Nevertheless, he went down on his knees and with his sleeve did his best to restore the polish.

Charles who was the Ambassador, while en post in Berlin as an attaché, was out walking in his top hat and morning coat with a friend one Sunday morning. It suddenly started to rain. His colleague jumped into a taxi to keep dry.

“Come on, Charles, hurry up.”

“No. It is forbidden - in the bible - to ride in a hired vehicle on the Sabbath day.”

“Oh, all right then, but at least give me your topper to save it from getting spoilt.”

“If it is forbidden for me to ride in a hired vehicle on the Sabbath, it is also forbidden for my top hat.”

In Sofia there he was by now Minister, a dog one day appeared at the Legation. He took it in and called it Doggy. It bit people. He taught it to walk upright on its hind legs and dressed it in white breeches, pink hunting coat and a top hat. In this garb it used to come in to official diplomatic dinners and bite the important guests that he supposed to be making friends with for England. When he went to Lima as Ambassador he did the same thing except that with ponderous tact, having "learned from experience" he now dressed Doggy in a sombrero and a poncho. It still bit people. I was told years afterwards that a report had gone around about a dinner at the British Embassy.

"We were entertained by Doggy - the Bentincks were also there."

In Catholic countries it is the custom that one only says grace at the beginning of a formal meal if there is a member of the church there to say it. Charles wasn't going to have any of that sort of nonsense. He always said grace out loud at the beginning of every meal. One day his Christian humility excelled itself. At the start of an official dinner he called for silence and said, "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful, and please God forgive me for being so rude to the cook about the mayonnaise this morning.”

He was a fierce teetotaller. On taking over the Embassy a senior member continuing from the outgoing Ambassador's staff advised him to use Caterer B, for the big party he was to give. Charles said that it was important to keep faith with trades people and since the previous Ambassador had always used Caterer A, he would continue to do so.

"But the man's a rogue - his employees are hopeless - the thing will be a shambles. That's why I'm telling you. Now is the perfect moment to change. We've all been wanting to for ages."

"No. We must show that we British are people of integrity."

So the party happened. The staff got drunk, filled up people's glasses to the brim with spirits etc, and at the end Charles said to his colleague,

"There you are, now you understand why it is that I hate whisky so much."

Nevertheless, when the Second War ended a Dutch cousin was stranded behind the Russian front with her husband on his estates in East Prussia and Charles, surprisingly, had the nous to send in a plane and fetch her out.

Charles when young was called Tuckerboy. He used to sleep with three bibles under his pillow, one big, one middle-sized and one small - three handkerchiefs, one clean, one half used and one dirty - a pen knife and a ball of string. If they weren't there he couldn't settle down. He sucked his thumbs so hard that he deformed them for the rest of his life. His nanny said that if he didn't stop she'd cut them off. She fetched a bowl for the blood and another one for the dressings and came towards him with a gigantic pair of scissors. My father and a sister "sat on his thumbs screaming” so that she couldn't get at them. Apparently they were successful. When Charles was asked what he was going to be, he said, "either a vicar or a diplomat". Having retired from diplomacy at the age of 65, he went back to square one, went to college with the young men, took orders and became in due course chaplain to the British Embassy in Brussels in the 50’s and 60’s. I

stayed with him there once. His praises as the great family linguist had been much sung to me. He was reputed to speak sixteen languages. I heard him talk French. He made it sound exactly like English. When I told my Aunt Naomi how frightful it was, she said, "Oh yes, we always used to chaff Charles that he spoke French much better when he was mimicking his French friends."

"How else does one speak French except by mimicking French people? I asked.

"Oh no, that's quite different." she said.

Years later I was to meet an Australian girl who visited France and on her return to Australia asked,

"Why do French men have to talk French in such a ridiculously affected way?" So apparently the Bentincks were not unique in this.

I have said a bit about the lives of the twins, Arthur and Naomi, both of whom were darlings, and about Charles. My Uncle Henry I never met. He is the most difficult and the most extraordinary. I have to say quite a lot about him because he was the idol of the family, the perfect Christian soldier, the ideal of the "parfait knight", like El Cid or Galahad. He was a great boxer – he used to punch his fist through Edwardian drawing room doors - He boxed with his sister damaging her nose - he was the best diver at Harrow. He had an incredible eye for a horse and with it bought cheap mounts and won the regimental races against brother officers on much more expensive horses - Henry was the apple of his father's eye, tall, fair, fearless, clean limbed, clean living. The introduction to the analects of Confucius describe the virtues which comprise the 'gentleman' and compare it to the ideal of the Edwardian gentleman which was a prescription for perfection which mankind has had held up before it for about two thousand years. Henry, I was indoctrinated to believe, had all of these virtues. He was killed on the first day of the Somme when three battalions of the volunteer British army's elite Coldstream Guards went over the top together and he was one of the thirty thousand casualties suffered in the first hour. His mother was inconsolable, did many strange things, I think started going dotty about then. His sister Ursula who worshipped him and was by extraordinary coincidence his nurse at his death, prayed that his soul should enter into mine and she told me this as soon as I could understand and pointed out that he died on the same day of the year that I was born, October 2nd, though this is not in fact true. (*Though this is in fact true – TB).* His sister collected his letters and published them. Most concern religion – comments or sermons – speculations – reports of discussions. The rest are about riding – soldiery and sport. (*More hand-written TB)* He called the Coldstream, "my darling regiment". I expect that he would have ended up commanding it and become a General, unless his "purity" which made it impossible to tell a dirty story in the mess would have prevented it. He started the war on duty in Egypt. His letters to his mother from there begging her to pull all the strings she could and telling her of the strings that he was pulling to get him posted to the western front were collected and published by his sister Ursula in 19 . They go right up to the hour of his death. There are about 200 of them and they come in years. Here are some:

He describes how they found an elephant and he shot at it and wounded it. "He staggered at the shot and the herd ran on. And now came the part which of all my big game shooting I have enjoyed the most. The three boys worked like a pack of hounds; when the line went straight forward, they ran on in single file. When they came to places where the elephant had stood about, they spread out at once like a fan and one, striking the line again, would speak to it and away we would all fly together. The elephant seemed to be frequently stopping and wandering about rather aimlessly and this combined with his tracks made me think we were on my wounded beast and that we were near him. Suddenly we were upon him and indeed from the way my companions behaved

I thought the old elephant must be charging but he pointed it out to me walking along about seventy yards ahead. I then proceeded to pump lead into him. I had two shots when he was partially turned away which I don't think did much damage. Then I got a couple broadside ones and creeping round to about thirty yards from him I saw he was with difficulty standing on his legs. As he had his back turned I didn't fire but Nelton watched him and at last he turned broadside on and after firing again he came down with a crash. It was a good finish to a fine hunt and all the lads were very bucked as they love elephant meat." A typical letter from the front in 1916 shortly before his death runs as follows:-

"I was rather interested in that sermon of Campbell Morgan's that I read. It seemed to throw fresh and more light on the Gospel, i.e. I think the way he put it was that the man who turned to God was saved by virtue of the death of Christ whether he knew anything about the atonement or not. Could it have been that the soul who knew nought of Christ but appealed to God the all merciful for forgiveness is saved by virtue of the death of Christ? Under these conditions it seems that a Mohammedan who has not had a real definite opportunity of rejecting Christ might be saved on appealing to God the all merciful by virtue of Christ's death for sinners. A right understanding of the atonement should then be the cause which produces a Christian life, i.e. a life influenced by love, gratitude and a desire to please. The Mohammedan touch sounds rather heretical but I don't see why the man who is brought up nominally Mohammedan should be worse off than the man brought up nominally Christian provided both appeals to God for forgiveness when both know nothing really of the work of Christ because Christ died for both equally."

Three days later the following letter was written from No,2. Red Cross Hospital, APO 2. B.E.F. 14.9.16.:-

"My dear Colonel,

My sister writes at my dictation from Rouen. I can only say I am very sorry indeed this has occurred. I hope it may not be of too long duration. Soon after the attack commenced I was hit in the head by shrapnel - slight - and on going about two or three hundred yards further I was hit through the right thigh with, I believe, a bullet. Two stretcher bearers assisted me back and I reached Rouen on Sunday. I had the leg off that night. They have been so optimistic with their accounts of fancy legs after my first gloomy thoughts of riding and soldiering that I still hope I may be able to retain the Coldstream uniform. I heard you were fit and trust that is correct. Everything else is disjointed. I shall be glad to have if only a line from you. I wish I hadn't left you. Yours ever, Druce. P.S. I feel so ashamed about everything. I couldn't walk after I was hit in the thigh."

Then a letter which he wrote afterwards to his sister was found in his bible after his death which runs:-

"I wrote to Mother today but this is in case anything happens. I could write lots but haven't time. I am very happy and wouldn't miss being with the 3rd Battalion in line for anything. I have no idea what is going to happen to me but 'I know whom I have believed' and am quite safe in His Hands. Renira knows what I want done with things.

Love to Mother and all,

Yours,

Henry."

He had lingered for a fortnight. Right from the beginning there had been little hope. The gangrene had got into his system and the amputation had failed to save his life. Indeed, he was too far gone even to suffer much pain. Yet the glimmer of hope sustained by those who watched him only went out at the very end. Perhaps it was not the loss of a limb but a craving for the satiety of love which caused him to look beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death. One of his sisters was

sitting with him a few days before the end and she heard him murmur, "Oh Lord Jesus, I wish he'd let me go."

"Do you want to go?", she asked.

"Yes," he said.

Early on the morning of October 2nd 1916 the Lord did let him go for he took "him home".

Oh, what a lovely war.

Ursula, like all of them having been brought up to reverence stoicism, cold baths, open windows etc, always slept under an open window with only one blanket. She was a nurse in the hospital in France to which Henry was taken and nursed him there. About 40 years afterwards she confessed to me or my sister that she thought she ought not to have made him sleep under an open window with only one blanket just after he had had his leg amputated.

I said they were obtuse. They were also humble. What does one do? I haven't said much about the other two, Aunt Ursula and Aunt Renira. Renira married a Dutchman and it was her large home that I used to go and stay in as a child up until the Second War, and I will come back to that. Ursula only died in 1975 so you will be hearing more about her influence on the general picture later on. So much then for a quick look at the Bentincks more or less immediately ranged in support of my father during the ten year long engagement to my mother.

So now let's look at my mother's family. They could hardly have been more different and for her, poor love, the greatest difference was that they were not on her side. That was the cruellest thing of all. The other differences we will look at. Their similarities lay in the fact that they were both very religious families. I don't want to let this bog down in religion if it hasn't already but Protestant Bentinck bigots are one thing, Catholic Noel bigots are quite different. There has to be a point at issue to keep the subject within bounds, and that point is me as a child and my subjective reaction to the two families. To a large extent this is implicit in the way I recall my encounters with them and since objective truth is, as jesting Pilate knew, a chimera, the only truth concerned is how they all seemed to, and affected, me. I called this chapter Yin and Yang because it is distressingly pertinent. Distressing to me because I see the philosophy of the pairs of opposites as an expedient to account for a frightening and unnatural dichotomy in human nature.

But the Noels wrapped in their exotic Papism were for me Yin - dark, subversive, namelessly female - down here, warm, sensuous, exciting too with something of the sybarite about them. The Bentincks, personified in Uncle Henry, were clear, bright, up there, hard, unfeeling, cold, authoritarian. It bewilders me that this formula so accurately describes unarticulated impressions I have stored since before I was five.

Great-Grandpa Gainsborough used to have the church bells rung in all the villages through which he passed in his coach as he drove back from London to Exton which is in Rutland. He used to throw golden sovereigns out of the windows to the cheering populace. We did the same with pennies from a T model Ford to the children who opened the gates for us. There's a pastel portrait of Great Grandpapa showing him as not just handsome but as a raving beauty with his wide misty blue eyes, translucent akin, languorous yet haughty too. There's a miniature of him with his long auburn curls, a sludge brown velvet shooting jacket with puffed sleeves and pouched pockets, a fouling piece over his shoulder, slightly Burne Jones in looks as he goes idly drifting by in his woods. My mother, looking for him once in the village, enquired of an old woman,

"Have you seen His Lordship. Mary?"

"Ah, m'lady, our dear Lord passed by this way not five minutes since."

Grandma Gainsborough used to have her money washed and polished before it was put by her maid into her purse. Grandpa had his Times ironed by the butler before it was brought to him on a silver salver in the morning. They built a huge chapel on to Exton plus living quarters for a resident priest whom they installed to say mass for them all the time. Tom Noel had started the Cottesmore Hounds. one of the most famous packs in the world. One of the female ancestors, my mother told me, used to gamble all night raking the coins into the lap of her dress "so that it stained the silk and she had to have a new one each time."

Lord Lonsdale, a forbear of the great sporting peer and namesake of the belt, used to come galloping with his four in hand through Exton Park as a short cut on his way to the Stamford races, "blowing his tan-tivvy and whooping and already probably drunk." Gainsborough told him to go round by the road. He didn't. He came whooping through one morning just the same. Gainsborough had

a wall built during the day straight across the road "just round that sharp corner at the back of the Home Farm". Lonsdale came rampaging home that evening and went straight into it.

One very hard winter the lake froze over so thick that Gainsborough told his coachman to get out a four in hand to be driven across the ice for a record. The coach and four arrived at the lake. The coachman said that it wasn't safe, and said he wouldn't do it. Gainsborough took the reins and drove it across. Half the county were disporting themselves on the ice. They wanted to be in on the record too and so jumped on the band wagon. Their weight was too much.

"I can still see the wheelers struggling on the busted edge and the leaders slippering and the people all jumped off in all directions. I can see it now, I can."

These are the words of Old Steeper, aged 90 odd in 1924, as he recalled what he had seen as a stable lad and told it as a wizened old man to a young chap in service at the Hall who later came to work for us - George Maiden, my childhood's dearest friend - Irish, singer, teller of tales, remembrancer - 'Podge' we called him and the relationship which existed between us is too rich and deep for the disciplines or psychology and sociology to properly fathom. You will perhaps understand that when in my thirties I came upon the line of one or the world's very greatest poets, Stephen Vincent Benet, in describing the way news travelled in Georgia and the south said, "And along ere the letter had told the master, the Doomsday rabbit had told the slave", I recognised my own familiarity with a whole mute indescribable sub-culture of intuition and precognition; Podge always knew things before I did, he had a happy-go-lucky knowing-together about us all. Maybe he was a huge leprechaun. As a stable boy at Exton he remembered being flattered at being told to wrap a rug very carefully round Her Ladyship's knees in the landau. "Very carefully, you see, Master Henry, because she was carrying you." he said.

My mother's siblings comprised Clare who married a Captain King and had a child Agnes; her brother, Viscount Camden, whose brothers and sisters called him Camden or ‘Cammie’ and who to me was simply Uncle Cammie, I never heard his Christian name. He married, sensibly, an American heiress resembling my mother. He always said he would "marry someone like Norah". He had three children, the present Earl, his brother Gerard and his sister Maureen. Then there was Charles who was almost too good-looking to be true who married a Scot and had six children, and then there was Robert who died of fever in Africa during the war. I only know him from photographs, one, dressed up as an Edwardian girl for theatricals at Cambridge. He had the Thespian gems as did my mother - I'm a good mimic and exhibitionist. My own daughter and son are both actress and actor. The gene comes from Mrs, Jordan, famous London actress - a comic of Irish descent who was William IV's mistress. Among the many children she bore him was a girl whom his Queen Adelaide married off so that she became Lady Elizabeth Fitzclarence and was my

mother's great-grandmother, thus the great-great-great grandmother of my Thespian children. About two hundred years ago a Noel father wrote to his son at school:-

"Write me some fun and put any odd comical thoughts which may enter your head sometimes into as gay language as you can ... I don't mind if you write me nonsense sometimes so that you write a good racy thing ..."

The Bentincks would have been awfully shocked although I must admit at very roughly this time my direct ancestress Charlotte Sophie, Countess Bentinck, was I think having an affair with Voltaire – which must have been fun. I used at one time to have a number of his letters to her, though I had to sell them to pay off the overdraft.

Well, so much for a quick shufti at the two families ranged up on opposing sides. It seems to me that the Bentincks did most of the ranging. From that day to this they hare been people of non-speculative minds and no outside interests, their only concern other than God and soldiering has been the' doings of other members of their family.

Mama had a great success on her world tour. She always used to sing Danny Boy - the Londonderry Air - as one of her encores, She was like me and my children, easily moved to tears - we all cry at the drop of a hat - I have no doubt that in some concert hall on the other side of the world as the long yearning notes of Danny Boy bound her audience for a moment in her own endemic Celtic sadness that tears filled her greeny eyes and that the vibes from the packed hall made her heart quake at the soaring possibilities of rapport.

I think it was rapport that she really lacked with my father as with his family who were ill at ease with her and her own who, over the religious question, were to become so deeply disapproving.

So there is a picture of the two families supporting the two lovers. What were they like, these two? He was tall, 6ft 1., well-made, strong with his hair parted fashionably in the middle and cut very short. He had blue rather dreamy eyes, was good-looking, gentle, liked teasing people, liked doing things, was practical and a non-intellectual, uninformed, non-speculative, liked telling anecdotes, the same one to any number of succeeding people. He hated music, had no sense of rhythm, couldn't dance. He had no aesthetic sense, his only criterion for colour was, "So it doesn't show the dirt." Yet he was intrinsically romantic and capable of deep affection. He was loyal, devout, direct - an utterly simple and open man. She was small, had a 20 inch waist, a pointed face, green eyes, soft brown hair, a way of pulling down her chin into her neck when laughing at things as though really one ought not to, perhaps at somebody else's expense. She had a slight stammer, worse then excited - was highly articulate, liked conversation and debate, was well read, had an excellent memory, taught me about Columbus's egg and Archimedes' theory and dozens of other oddments of that kind. She was romantic, quick-tempered, musical, vivacious, an encyclopaedia of genealogies, snobbish, loved art, colour, gardens, trees, nature, was ready to talk freely on any subject and had avant-garde views on nearly all.

So they got engaged and the debate began between them which could not in the very nature of things have been reported fairly to me. My mother wrote her memoirs and also a novel, "The Ring of Straw". It is about three generations of Catholic women and their marriages. It goes on and on over the same points in every possible circumstance, the Catholic girl who wants to marry a protestant man - the Catholic girl, a bit of a free-thinker, married to a man so Catholic he is revolted by marriage and hooked on the priesthood - the Catholic Duke and Duchess who contain their religion in a sensible way - a Canadian with the freedoms of the New World and the openness of the great open prairies in his eyes - the evil and sensual priest - the aesthetic and totally fair-minded noble priest, and so on. Through all of the conversations and manifestations of the encounters and

situations between such people my desperate mother examines and re-examines the things she has been indoctrinated to believe and the things her heart told her were more right than Rome. My father wasn't very articulate, he wasn't very self-searching nor speculative end be was completely uneducated. He read the Bible a great deal and also Wild West magazines with stories about cowboys, logging and bar fights. Funnily enough, one issue contained "a cowboy's prayer". The only bit I can remember went like this:-

"Oh Lord, I ain't never lived in the land where churches grow
I like creation better as it stood
That day you finished it so long ago
And looked upon your work and called it good."

I imagine that my mother for ten years tried with all her verve and intellectual skill to reach in his heart and hers a place of compromise and that he stood firm reminding her only of what it was that heart was telling her and that she should have the courage of its convictions. It is sad to think that neither of them would have understood as we do the real meaning of indoctrination, that it implants convictions below the threshold of reason and that its tenets cannot therefore usefully be debated. Sad because the Catholic priests had known it perfectly well ever since Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits had said, "Give me a child until he is seven and he is mine." I know that they knew about this because it was my mother who told me. But there was no means at that time whereby they could objectively understand what it really was within her that they were fighting such a desperate battle with.

"The Phenomenon of Man" by Pierre Tielhard de Chardin was not published until 1959, after his death and a long time after my mother's. Nevertheless, he was a contemporary of hers, indeed a little older. It would have been very interesting if she had had the privilege of meeting him. I wonder what would have happened.

That's what they were like. We have glanced at their backgrounds, their religions, their families. Here they were now in love for the reasons given. Rome versus the Reformation in microcosm getting ready for round two. What had been happening during those long years of their engagement? What had been going on in their minds or in their dialogue? Strangely enough, there exists a full record of all that transpired in their hearts, tribulations and meetings.

My mother had written a 150,000 word novel called The Ring of Straw in which through the lives of three generations she examines all possible attitudes to Catholicism ending with Lady Quendred who wanted to marry Simon de Villancourt who was a staunch and faithful Protestant. It is proper to identify my mother Quendred. She, Norah, was happiest with Robert Bentinck in the environment where he throve - the Canadian Prairies - his aristocratic background was foreign. It is therefore not unnatural that she invented the character of Simon de Villancourt making him a French-Canadian with a convenient noble French uncle for him to inherit from in due course. As to my mother being Quendred there is no doubt, she speaks her thoughts, she is her mouthpiece, she is wracked by the same terrible misgivings. But over and above all that there is a certain passage which I know is a verbatim report of a crucial episode in her life. So let's look at what these two had been saying to each other and themselves during those long unhappy years. At their first meeting Simon - from the prairies of Canada - says he doesn't know what people in towns think about and Quendred replies - "They don't - they never think - very few people ever do. They are either too occupied, too lazy or too callous." That's Mama all right! Then they speak - at their very first meeting - of religion and of a 'mixed marriage'.

"Even then the children are brought up Catholics," says Quendred.

"Not necessarily," replies Simon. "Isn't it the general rule for the boys to take after the fathers and the girls the mother's religion, and in certain cases the marriage can take place in a Catholic church without any promises being signed by the non-Catholic person."

"Oh, surely not, Mr. de Villancourt. That I certainly know to be impossible."

"How do you know it to be impossible - the word doesn't exist."

"Well, it is the church's teaching that it would be a mortal sin."

"Church! Mortal sin!" he said irritably. "Do you believe all that?"

"In a way I do, in a way I don't."

So much for their first meeting. In a conversation which Quendred has with somebody else we hear Norah chewing over her problems when she says, "It seems to me," said Quendred, "that we can read the bible to mean anything we like, and that is why St was so clever of my church to invent the idea of making the acceptance of her interpretation a condition of communion with her."

All the passages which I am using from her book are those which she herself had marked in the particular edition which I have on the shelf. Later Simon comes to stay at Quendred's home.

"Every day they went for long walks or rides together, and then the day came when, riding through the bluebell-carpeted woods he asked her if she would be his wife:-

"You have so wound yourself around my heart that I cannot pull you out," he said. "If I did so my heart would come too and I should die, for who can live without a heart?"

These words of my father's were handed down verbatim and I know them to be his. There then follows the reaction of the Catholic family and the priests who all say that Simon will be required to sign the paper and the paper is printed fully as follows:-

"Promises to be signed before application (to be signed by the Catholic party). I the undersigned hereby solemnly promise and engage that all the children of both sexes who may be born of my marriage shall be baptised in the Catholic church and shall be carefully brought up in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic religion; and I also promise that (according to the instructions of the Holy See) my marriage in a Catholic church shall not be preceded nor followed by any other religious ceremony. Signature.

"To be signed by the non-Catholic party. I, the undersigned, do hereby solemnly promise and engage that I will not interfere with the religious belief of ... my future wife (or husband) nor with her (or his) full and perfect liberty to fulfil all her (or his) duties as a Catholic; and that I will allow the children of both sexes who may be born of our marriage to be baptised in a Catholic church and to be carefully brought up in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic religion. Signature."

Quendred read the document. It was a terrible revelation.

"Like croaking birds of ill omen the little black letters seemed to dance a gig of delight at her misery. Her lips quivered, her face flushed, the thought of his burning words about freedom every one of which he meant and believed with all his manhood and strength came to her as her eyes gazed glassily dazed at the paper which trembled in her hand. She turned helpless and crushed to her mother. She went out for a walk in the rain saying to herself, "I know he won't sign it, I know he won't, and the Catholic church won't marry me and we shall have to part from each other. I can't, I can't, I love him far too much. Why should the church be so cruel? Why does she want to ruin people's lives? Who said she was to do so? Who gave her the power? I will, I <u>will</u> be free," she cried, "I will be <u>free</u>." And the echo returning to her from the bank at the other side or the lake where she was standing wailed mournfully free." (This was of course the place which she had called at Exton "Gibraltar" where there was a famous echo). "That night she showed the paper to

Simon. At first he laughed although he had heard the thing talked about. "It's not true, darling," he said, "it's a joke. Such things are of no avail in our sensible, broad-minded, fair modern days. They are only doing it to frighten you, it's a silly try-on."

"But it's not a joke, Simon, it's deadly earnest. They, the church, I don't know who, but they want to separate us because you're not a Catholic and this is the way they'll do it. You will sign it won't you. Say you will."

"It's damnable," he said, "those damnable priests."

And it was as Quendred knew, he absolutely refused to sign it.

"I will not sign that paper," he said, "even for you who I love better than my own flesh. I will never sign it. If you cannot marry me without it being signed, then I cannot marry you. It is not according to God's word. He never decreed it. It is a man-made law to proselytise by the church of Rome. She claims that her teaching never changes and that she cannot make a mistake and she stuffs this teaching down her prejudiced children's throats from babyhood upwards like geese are stuffed to make foie gras. I maintain that she can and does make mistakes. It is the duty of non-Catholics to maintain their rights against her and definitely to insist on her not meddling with the marriages of British subjects which is of course her most prolific and useful investment and from which she gets the best and quickest returns. You must marry me in my own church, darling, if they won't marry you in your own."

"But I couldn't, Simon. I couldn't be married in a Protestant church," she said. "They'd excommunicate me and send me to hell when I die, if I did. I'm much too terrified. Do you believe that they can send me to hell? All the priests tell me they can."

Tears shone in her large eyes.

"Of course they can't," said Simon angrily. "Why can't you see that it's all done to frighten you into submission and the whole system is based on threats and fears. I really can't understand how any thoughtful intelligent person can really believe it down in the bottom of their hearts. Don't let fear frighten you but rather you frighten fear."

Quendred then persuades Simon to go and have a talk with a priest which he does. The priest tells him that he is bigoted.

"Yes," said Simon dryly, "you call us bigoted if we stick out against your church's laws but you call your own people ardent and faithful if they stick out against ours."

The priest then says, "If you force Lady Quendred to marry you anywhere but in a Catholic church, you will be acting the part of Satan and deeply imperilling her salvation. Is this then a sign that you love her?"

They part coldly and Simon tells Quendred of the interview.

"She felt now that a final decision had to be made. She realised that she must now sift very carefully the chaff from the wheat in her faith and find out exactly what she did and what she did not believe."

This, I may say, is on Page 246 when we have now been brought through the lives of three generations of women each with different attitudes to their Catholicism until we now read the essential point in my mother's life, i.e. the (?TB) of her book and her dilemma, for the paragraph goes on:-

"Did she really believe that she would be damned if she were excommunicated? The church told her (through the mouths of her priests) that this would be so if she married a non-Catholic anywhere but in a Catholic church, and the church would not marry them unless the paper was signed and he wouldn't sign the paper. A dilemma."!... Would her religion or her lover prevail over her heart. She felt that much as she adored Simon she would give him up if she really and truly

believed with her whole mind and being steadfastly as her father believed that what the church taught was true; really really true. Yet on the other hand she couldn't see how it could be wrong to marry a man like Simon who was good, honourable, clean living, clean minded, an idealist and her beloved lover. The unfortunate girl was tormented by doubts, her tortured by her love on the one hand and her fear of the church on the other.”

And so the debate goes on and various people are involved. At last Quendred goes to see the Cardinal of all England and this brings us to the most crucial part of the whole book. Here the markings in the margins are heavy and almost continuous and lead up to the final remark by the Cardinal which is a staggering piece of awful history. The whole episode is almost a verbatim report Of my mother’s interview with Cardinal Bourne in London in 1913. She asks for a special permit and he says, "Tutt-tutt."

“I’m not a child, my lord," the girl flashed quickly. "I'm a woman and I want to talk about the things that matter, want to understand why I must believe in pain and going to hell, all the things which the Catholic religion has taught me. I am perfectly willing to believe if you can prove it to me, prove to my thinking brain that what you teach is true and that it is not largely an evasion of truth for the sake of expediency." The Cardinal looked pale. "Tutt-tutt," he said again. "You shouldn't think, you're sure to get out of your depth if you do. Let us do the thinking for you and you just take it on trust. You'll find it much less trouble, you know, far more comfortable. You ought to be, amusing yourself, not thinking."

The dialogue goes on and then returns to her essential fear. other way about and that she was the Protestant who wanted her Catholic lover to give into her bringing up their children in her faith?

"Why don't you convert him, Lady Quendred?" the Cardinal went on. "That is one of the greatest uses such charming ladies as you can put your powers to. Charm your lover into the church; and you attack the heart, we attack the mind. Perhaps you don't realise how powerful ladies can be in getting new recruits for our Holy Mother Church."

Quendred recoiled.

"Outward forms repel him, your Eminence," she said coldly. "To him Christ is the only mediator between his soul and God, so you see the church and her priests would have no significance for him." And at that moment her faith in the church of her education as the inspired mouthpiece of the most High died.” And, trying desperately to reassure herself in her mind, my mother writes:

"The Popes," Quendred thought to herself, "would have to find something more terrifying and more in tune with our times than the dieux-jeu of excommunication with which to frighten modern women. I wonder how much anybody really believes in such un-Christlike nonsense."

There is a pause then in the conversation between Quendred and Cardinal and he goes to the window and comes back thinking that she has changed her mind. Finding that she hasn't he tries to force the issue by saying the words that follow. It is here that my mother has written in the margin:- "These words were said to me by Cardinal Bourne in London in 1913, and I quote them."

"Well, of course, if you persist in your wicked behaviour," he said crossly, “and are married to this man in a non-Catholic church, you will in all probability go to hell when you die for you are doing it with your eyes open. It is a serious matter, and you do it willingly; therefore it is a mortal sin, which is - according to the teaching of Holy Mother Church - punishable by eternal torment."

There, after 251 pages, of debate running over a period of some 90 years, of the lives of three women, we come to the essential point, a report of a devout woman's debate with a Cardinal ending with a verbatim damnation issuing from his lips.

And do not think for a moment that her agony ended there. It was with her for the rest of her life until the very instant of her death. Do not think that the battle the Vtican fought with Protestant England of the Reformation and in which she was a soldier and a casualty has ended now in œcumenicalism. You have only to let it be suggested – whispered even – that a British monarch might be married to a Catholic to get this statement from Rome from which you will see how exactly it parallels the position of the Church's case of Bentinck v. Noel.

[Hand written Notes overleaf]

Sunday Telegraph Dec 10th 1978. Referring to a suggestion that Prince Charles might marry a Catholic and that this would be the end of the Monarchy since it would be obedient to Rome.

Mischief making remarks like this are hopelessly outdated now that the different Christian Churches are trying to draw closer together!

(An "official of the Vatican executor for Christian Unity" thus representing the moderate side of Vatican opinion) "We Roman Catholics are not trying to take over England" – Compare Cardinal B-----'s remark. "In this day and age (what has that got to do with it – either the values of the Church are clerical or they aren't – and the Vatican exists only to proclaim that they are) why should a Catholic be barred from the British throne" – Because (see end of same article) it is the law of England.

Enoch Powell's statement is utter nonsense.

"If a Catholic girl wanted to marry the Prince", continues the official, "she would have to give a verbal or written promise (as quoted in Mama's book) that she would do all in her power to preserve her own religious faith and to try to ensure that any children of the marriage would be brought up Catholics"

But obviously a girl marrying the Prince wouldn't be allowed to make that pledge – so thew Pope wouldn't give her his blessing for the marriage to go ahead, it would be inconsistent if he did.

He accused the British Monarchy of being bound by outdated laws from an entirely different period of history! He considered that the law should be changed so that British Royalty could marry without any religious curbs.

Other Vatican officials underline the personal anguish that someone like Princess Marie Astrid of Luxembourg would face if she were to marry the Prince, ""he is a very devout Catholic – giving up her faith and becoming an Anglican could cause a very serious trauma."

As Mama put it in her book –

What about the other way round.

The Palace said Prince Charles cannot marry a Roman Catholic, nor any other member of the Royal Family, without losing the right of succession to the throne. Nobody knows that better than Prince Charles. There is no question of his marrying a Roman Catholic against the law.

The leading article of that day also confirms – you can read it in the appendix.

And the debate with Simon goes on and on. Finally in desperation he offers to sign a paper of his own concoction and Quendred thinks that the church will instantly accept it, but the church never did. "Simon was furious, tearing up the paper he had written himself. He swore he would never go half way to meet them again. And so all was darkness this time and Quendred felt as if her mind would collapse. She couldn't bear all these conflicting emotions and she felt herself becoming terribly overwrought. Then the idea that had been craftily put into her mind that he didn't really love her enough to give into her begins to undermine her faith in and affection for him. She says, "I

feel that you don't really love me, you are making me so dreadfully unhappy. And yet everything lies in your power to change it, and make us happy as we were last week."

He replies, "How can you say such words to me? I not love you when you know you are my heart's desire and my only happiness? Who has been putting such wicked lies into your head? Come to me, show me your sweet face, I not love you?"

"She saw that there were tears in his eyes."

"They have made you cry with their lies," he said, "they're trying to break your spirit and no weapon is too small or mean to use if they can do it in the end." He takes her in his arms and finds her "worn out" and he marvelled to see this lovely radiant fearless girl all crumpled up by the mental thumbscrews which the church was applying. Later he goes back to Canada where he speaks in the Canadian parliament and she is in the audience and hears him using the quote from Milton, "Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience above all other liberties."

"Amidst the hub of applause he sat down and turned and looked at Quendred. Her heart beat fast, she glowed. He knew, he knew a voice was within her singing, he had seen it. "It was to me and for me that he said those words. He hasn't forgotten me as they said he would. He loves me still and they said he didn't because he wouldn't sign. Will he do as I ask him now or will it still be a miserable heartbreaking impasse? I can't go through with it again. I won't give him up at their command. I'm only doing it to please Mother <u>because I don't believe in it any more myself now</u>. I'll run away with him if the priests go on tormenting me so."

"During the last year much more worry had been caused to Quendred by receiving notes from her father to the effect that he was praying for her and that he hoped she would have strength to resist Simon's love or else bring him successfully into the church as a convert and of how much she would be blessed if she could achieve <u>this crowning action of a Catholic's life.</u> "

"Love?" she queried, "Does all this pressure and terror and bitterness mean love? I have read that love is something which never tires, which spurs one on to do great things and is not detained by things of earth. Love which desires liberty and freedom, love which nothing is sweeter, higher nor nobler. Love which flies and will not be held; is happy and gives warmth. asking no return. Love which watcheth and when sleeping slumbers not. Such love can do all things whereas he who loveth not faints and lies down. Such love is like a lively flame or torch all on fire: it mounts upwards and securely passes through all opposition. Whoso loveth knoweth the cry of this voice."

And Quendred indeed knew the cry. So well did she know it that she was sure that the united flame of her and Simon's love would mount upward and securely pass through all opposition.

Finally, an old friend of the family, a priest, agrees to marry them in a Catholic church without the necessity for Simon to sign the paper. I am not exactly sure how this came to pass in the life of my mother and father but it did because they were ultimately married in the Catholic chapel at Exton by a Catholic priest. Papa remained a Protestant, Mama remained a Catholic. He did not sign the paper and my sister and I were both brought up Protestants.

When this decision of the priestly friend of the family told Quendred in the novel, it says Quendred was speechless. "For nearly two years her mind had been tortured by threats of hell and all kinds of horrors, eternal and otherwise. Now suddenly the veil was lifted, light was poured in and all sadness and hopelessness vanished. And because Simon's life and religion complied in spirit with the highest ideals of the Roman Catholic church, ideals which she could generally only enforce from fear of the confessional and eternal punishment - he had won through. If, as is taught,

all priests represent the church, then Simon had won a victory over the church. What an extraordinary thing."

And it is my father's stalwartness and his confidence in the rectitude of his own beliefs which gave my mother the courage to accept the fact that her children were not to be brought up Catholics and to live with a Protestant despite the fact that she had in that way incurred the damnation laid upon her by many priests and by Cardinal Bourne in particular, and the effect which this was to have upon her life, more particularly after the courage and defence which my father afforded her was withdrawn at his early death will be seen.

But the whole book has been for my mother an exploration of the heretical notion that a Catholic can come to God other than by means of the church. And this dilemma is implicit in every word right until the very last page. Here she is talking to her beloved son, Christian. It is inevitable that I should see her hopes for him as her hopes for me. But as I said on the very last page in her conversation with him she is still going on and on and on about this idea which she was indoctrinated to believe was impossible, namely that you can be a good Christian without being a devout Catholic. So perhaps despairingly, Norah puts into the mouth of Quendred's son words with which to reassure her own self that she has got the message right and that she has been able to communicate it to her child, because Christian now grown up says on the last page of the book, "Mother, darling, I am so glad that you have come to know that God never made His work for men, churchmen and theologians to men. God is complete and finished but men seem to forget it. Men forget that He said, "Let us make man in our image," and insist on saying, "Let us make God in our image. In turning what was once simple and divine teaching into something distorted and un-divine which they call religion, men are in reality doing their best to set God's words at nought. His teaching was Godlike, so easy, so sincere, so straight, so noble, that men have contrived with their un-Godlike minds to make it so terribly difficult that their interpretation of His words again needs further interpretation which is then handed to the world as the only means of salvation! And so at last, separated from our shepherd and harried hither and thither by wolves disguised as sheep, we find ourselves in the most pitiful plight. We have lost the fount and origin, the real cause of all our hearts, peace and happiness in the grey mist created by the human exposition of divine thoughts and this mist has cast such a shadow over the world that it has left us in an eternal state of partial eclipse." Even here on the last page these words are underlined by my mother in her copy of the book which I am quoting from.

And so in their real lives Robert's belief that neither church nor dogma must be allowed to dictate to an individual the terms of his relationship with his God won through. As I said, they were married at Exton. The church never forgave him and spent the rest of my mother's life taking it out not on him but on her, as we shall from time to time so sadly see.

CHAPTER 2

The Dream Time

I said the Catholics weren't going to lie down after Papa had got away without signing the paper. One day when my parents were away from home at Yew Tree Cottage in the park about a quarter of a mile from Exton Hall, Grandma Gainsborough came up and took my sister Brydgytte from her cradle down to the chapel and had her baptised a Catholic. She was certain if she didn't Biddy would go to hell. She was always thereafter extremely fond of Brydgytte, called her "My Queen of Hearts" and left her £1000. which is about the equivalent of about £15,0O0 today. However, the immediate consequence for me was that when my mother was next pregnant she went to stay with the Bentincks at 53, Green street, Mayfair, where I was born on October 2nd 1919 in an upper room. I am told the Vicar was standing by with a jug to get our water in first.

Then we went to Exton and the dream time began. An experimentally though genetically predisposed infant began from scratch a mind-boggling accumulation and interpretation of sense data which brought me after 60 years to an idiosyncratic view of life which gives me goose pimples once or twice a day.

I have called the chapter "The Dream Time" because the aborigines of Australia and the Bushmen of the Kalahari both use the expression to describe the infancy and childhood of their racial memory. During this time in a state of innocence and rapport with the living earth and its creatures their intuitive subconscious sub-rational awareness of being a part of the whole was laid down. This happened to me for the most part at Exton. It was a period of wonder. The only time really that I have been "my own man." My sense of belonging to Exton, that is to its flora and fauna, its vibes and not to people seemed very natural and complete. I imbibed the sense of being an accepted part of the living earth which, as I said, was so natural I didn't become aware of it as a distinct and noteworthy reality until about six or seven years ago. During that time too I had many experiences some of which passed directly into the subconscious and are forgotten, though they are me. Others of which hover on the threshold tantalisingly vague, yet relevant to the meaning, expanding for ever like the universe and for ever impossible to catch up with. Others are more clear-cut and though a little less wonderful are better understood. It is from the last two categories that it is permissible to some extent to infer the first.

All of the dream time predisposed my psyche to interpret events during the rest of my life in a certain way. It also inclined me to take one course of action instead of another. It accounts for deja vu - synchronicity - the ease and naturalness of one course where one excels without meaning to and then makes a fantastic balls-up of other things where one's material advantage clearly lay. Thus one is predisposed to attract certain people and events and experiences almost as though one's psyche had put out feelers into time to apprehend its own future states and then modify its own point of view accordingly. Besides the people already mentioned, the only other person of importance at this time of my life was my nanny, Winnie. I do not really remember her not having been there. She was found in a revolving hut on the side of a hill by Aunt Naomi. The hut revolved so that the open side always faced down wind. She had TB. She had lain there alone for three years with nothing to read except the hymn book and this is the first thing she told me when she came to us. The idea of being thus abandoned terrified me. One of my reactions was that I wanted to protect her. She had a squint and I loved her and trusted her and took her love and care and good humour for granted as the only sure and simple think I knew of. She, like my father, could answer no

questions. The house we lived in was over against the Protestant church. Once it had been the vicarage. The village had stood around there too but some previous lord had found it too close to his own doorstep and moved it away. Quite near were the ruins of The Old Hall. One was forbidden to enter in case they fell on you but two bits were still pretty high and covered in ivy. Later I called them Fassalt and Fafner after the giants drawn by Arthur Rackham to illustrate our copy of Wagner's epic The Rheingold Cycle. The Yew Tree Cottage was an attractively proportioned house of local stone. Essentially it was two up, two down, but there was a small hall downstairs and a little dressing room above it. But there were also two attic rooms and a piece built on at the back with two maids' rooms, a kitchen and scullery below them. The bathroom contained the water cistern much higher than me, papered in a sploshy red floral design. It had a glass top on which were my mother's bowls of talcum powder and glass jars of bath salts etc. The bath itself was sunken flush with the floor. I don't know why but I thought all bathrooms were supposed to be like ours, and when I found they weren't I just reckoned that the other people had got it wrong. Outside the bathroom was the back stairs.

I slept in one of the attic rooms where, I was told, a man had hanged himself. The second of the main bedrooms was our nursery. It had blue lino and a large wall map of Europe. I am good at geography even now. Not so my cousins down at The Hall. They were taught by Nanny Jones. Entering their school room one day with my mother I was impressed at her typically impatient critical attitude as she at once said, "Oh, that idiotic woman has got the globe upside down again," and reversed it to put again England at the top again where, as we all knew, it had been placed by God.

My first memory is having a photograph taken when I was 2½. My sister has it still. My cousin, Maureen, now the Dowager Lady Dormer, and my sister also a widow were then two pretty little girls of 5½. One dark, one fair, and they were sitting in their white frocks on two fragile gilt chairs. I was told to stand between them. I can remember the occasion because I wanted to pose in my best protective male manner by leaning over them with my hands on the seats of their chairs.

The inside of Exton is big and high and grand. There's a great cedarwood staircase going up flanked by a panelled wall with family portraits inset in the panels. I think but I am not sure that there was a faint smell of incense escaping from the chapel. It was luxurious and beautiful and warm and romantic and of course dangerous because you might get whisked off into the chapel and turned into a Catholic or a toad. Indeed, things got pretty close to it once. Winnie told me this when I was 19 and again a few years ago when I went to visit her.

It was Christmas around 1924. She had taken me down to "The Hall" to tea with my cousins. At a certain point Grandma Gainsborough suggested that all us children went along to the chapel to look at the crib with little coloured statues of Mary and Joseph in the straw with the animals and the baby Jesus. Winnie at once grew nervous. After all, had not the Reformation been largely aimed at sweeping away such gaudy simulacra in obedience to the Second Commandment, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth'. Were not Bentincks who "believed the bible" from 'In the beginning...' to the end of revelation puritanically set against even a crucifix (a cross was ok being a symbol not an image). Whatever mould the Captain (my father) say? On the other hand, she was timid about standing up to a fully fledged Countess in her own castle. Just at that moment my father turned up and Winnie put her dilemma to him with much relief. Of course, he said, he would take me. After all it concerned the birth of Jesus the God of love whom we all worship. There must have been something in the way he was flashing around the

"whole armour of God" which Protestantism had got him kitted up in that annoyed Grandma because she flared at him, "Well anyway your daughter's a Catholic and your wife knows it."

"After that," said Winnie, "the Captain never really quite trusted her ladyship any more."

As I said, Winnie told me this when I was about 19 and again more recently. It took me back to the days in the 1920's and explained my father's reaction to an event which had occurred then. My mother had taught me the Pater Noster In Latin and told me to recite it to Papa because I said it so nicely. He reacted badly. I could not see why. But now I reaiise that he feared that this might be the thin end of the wedge. Poor Mama. The Roman liturgy is beautiful - to hear one's beloved child saying for the first time those sonorous words taken from the lips of the living Christ and repeated without change since the foundation of His church for nearly two thousand years must be a moment of deep emotional and spiritual meaning to a devout mother. Poor woman - poor bewildered woman who had with so much pain forged herself into the first most passionate ecumenicist at a time when that word meant, for her two bigoted families, only heresy or apostasy. Now her little moment of happiness had fostered my father's mistrust and been soured and spoiled.

[Insert after the Tudor house was burnt down]

Much of the furniture and pictures were saved and farmed out among family and friends. The family started adding on to the nearby game-keeper's cottage as a temporary place to live and this finally grew into the house I knew as Exton Park, most of which is still there and being lived in. It's a thumping big house, a rambling loveable house, pretty too but not a distinguished stately. It faces south over a sunken rose garden. It is surrounded by four or five acres of lawn. There are great cedars and trees and through the valley runs a chain of linked ponds. The land is all folded to cradle and hold it in its woods and trees, just so, just there, for the seasons to come and go, the leaves fall, the snows come, the spring bursts forth in beech and ash and the long slow summer to go gliding and gliding by.

The lawns were special because, looked at from the height of a three or four-year-old, they were vast and I used to walk up and down from one end to the other alongside the wide mower drawn by a horse in leather boots who was steered by Tyler. He wasn't exactly a man like Uncle Cammie or Uncle Arthur who were useless and incomprehensible, accomplishing nothing. I didn't think Tyler had been told to do it. I thought he and the mower and the lawns were all somehow part of "mowing to keep beautiful", which he did because he was the one who knew how, he was linked up in a kind of knowledge and usefulness which I could understand. I had a similar though solitary experience in The Rickett field before breakfast one dewy tingling morning. A man holding the long smooth plough lines was walking behind a pasture harrow drawn by a single horse. The harrow left a trail of dark grass. It was different when you turned round to come back and looked at it the other way, in fact there was a pale band of grass going in one direction and a dark band of grass going in the other. Up and down we went - I heard a dog barking in the far morning air. I longed to be the man thus brushing and combing a whole green field - I will do it yet - as soon as I've got a horse.

When I got back I was late for breakfast and there was a terrible row.

"Didn't you hear me shouting?" Papa said.

"I thought it was a dog barking."

This was considered rude and made my offence worse.

Most of my memories of Exton are out of doors. There was a great square leaden drainpipe that ran down the house and discharged into a stone built sump. This was so large that I could just

get into it. In its left hand corner it had a little rectangular hole. One day I saw a toad creep out there. To me the sump was his home and he Toad of Toad Hall. This made me sure that Kenneth Graham and I knew something other people didn't. This was strengthened later when I understood his account of Rat and Mole meeting the great God Pan. But then these and other experiences began to tell me that there is an unnamed, unidentified number of discrete individuals who know about these things too.

It was at Exton that I once lay on my back with my head near the wall of the Hall and saw big white clouds sliding and sliding by overhead so that it seemed that the wall was for ever toppling without falling or else it was the world turning. In my forties I wrote a song whose middle eight went like this:-

"I've looked for you among a million faces
Lonely to death in all the crowded places
Where the footsteps shuffle and the pavement glistens
Where the tower reels and the gargoyle listens
I've longed for you all through the night that mutters
Where the rat scratches and the heart flutters
Where the dream teases and the mind quickens
Till the dream falters and the heart sickens."

The image of the reeling tower was as vivid then as at four. The gargoyles were on the church near The Yew Tree Cottage. It is a shapely church which I found inspiring during my chivalry period because it had the tattered banners of some past affray rotting on their poles over our heads and helmets with grille visors stuck up high on the walls nearby. I did not learn the meaning of these rotting banners until I joined the Army and heard about regimental colours. They are consecrated, then shown to the soldiers so that they can recognise them. The best known ceremonial of this is Trooping the Colour on the Horseguards Parade. The reason a soldier needs to recognise his regimental colour is so that he can, upon the appropriate bugle call, fall back and rally to it for a last stand. Such a banner, once consecrated – "Oh God of Battles, steel thou my soldier's hearts." etc, - can never be destroyed but must be laid up in a church until it dies a natural death in a holy place, i.e. falls to bits, which is what the banners at Exton were doing. But the seeds for understanding this incredibly involved piece of double-think which sustains man during war in the name of the God of love and peace were sown here. They were watered at my school chapel where six hundred boys sang loud and well the lines:-

"Proudly they gathered rank on rank to war
As who had heard God's message from afar
Through dust of conflict and through battle flame
Tranquil you lie your knightly virtue proved
Your memory harrowed in the land you loved."

And that was written for the Great War.

I was already being exposed to the unspeakable memories of the Great War which traumatised the generation who brought me up. It was "bad form" to talk about it. The front was a nightmare place. It had swallowed up Uncle Henry. I was so affected the best thing to do seemed to

be to nip through the gates surrounding the Protestant war memorial in the village and kneel down and pray for him whom I had never met. I did so to the jeers of the village kids. The Catholic war memorial was elsewhere. I was about four. Uncle Arthur was still dead lame and remained so all his life because of the war. If you kill thirty thousand men in a few hours in a fairly small area by forcing them to stagger through mud and wire into an unending hail of machine gun bullets, a great many will writhe and scream there for days and the dead will soon stink. The stink of a rotting mammal makes you feel sick. I smelt one once when I was little and it did make me sick and I overheard a local workman say that it reminded him of the corpses on the front. If there are thousands and thousands of them and if the smell never goes way and their screaming is renewed day by day it's much worse. Then you had to get up time and time again and go forward over their rotting bodies. You would stumble into the face or belly of a rotting body so that it spurted putrescent gunge on to your clothes or face. All round were yesterday's wounded screaming for help and today's falling down with their balls hanging off. You would go on doing this for several weeks. And then you'd come out of the line and rest and go back again into something which horrified you so much That you went peculiar. This was euphemistically called “shell-shock" to make people think it had something to do with the noise of the bursting shells. If you were an officer you would not only have to go into the attack yourself, you would also have to force soldiers you liked to do the same, knowing in your heart of hearts as they did, that what you are telling them to do is so stupid that orders must have been given by some bugger who never got off his arse. Lots of people were still in hospital or on crutches or in agony or blind or coughing up their lungs in 1924. By lots I mean about two and a half million. Uncle Henry had been killed, Uncle Arthur wounded, I was taken to see him in military hospital, (I was taken to see him in military hospital where I saw hundreds of beds with wounded men in them and others walking about in the grounds of Roehampton in blue suits with limbs missing and bandages stained red still..... stick.) Aunt Ursula had been a nurse in France, everyone had lost or suffered in some way or another. The Bentincks and Noels were not alone in believing that this agony was a kind of atonement, a purgation, a kind of Calvary which ten million men had ascended to show that they were worthy of the infinite sacrifice of Christ by their own so great sacrifice to make war such a betrayal that no one could ever do it again, just as you can't sin without betraying Jesus’ sacrifice for you on the cross.

Obviously this is post hoc verbalisation but all these elements were latent, covert, implied, implicit in the vibes of my childhood. They were there in the prayers we prayed, the mourning, the reverence, the hushed tones but above all and beyond all in the nameless unutterable horror of the war and the front which Henry who had to be reincarnated in me had faced unflinchingly, a pure unspotted Christian. A very brief example of the way in which the shadow of the war flickered around the edges of one's life is in the story of the Zeppelin raids. One has to realise that attacks on the body of "this sceptred Isle" from the air were awe-inspiring for reasons deeper than I have seen discussed and to which I will return much later. The peculiar elemental associations - the aura of the supernatural that surrounded the descriptions I have given of the attitude to the war is exemplified by two stories, one which I had from my mother about the Zeppelin raids which contained this sentence. "... but long before we knew they were coming, quite suddenly in the middle of the night all the pheasants rocketed in Tunnelly Wood." That meant a hell of a lot of pheasants and the name Tunnelly Wood became loaded with portent. The other story was from Miss Sensickle, my governess. She said, "I remember I went out to put my bantams in for the night. But they wouldn't go. They knew. They hid in the ivy instead, it was very strange. Later that night

the Zeppelins came." Again the reference to the supernatural overtones of the war being different from all other wars.

Well that's one side of the coin of my sense of being different. Another is in the way I was treated. For example, Brydgytte was given for Christmas a very cute little doll's trunk with bands and hasps. I was given a shirt. It was the only one I had and Winnie used to wash it and iron it every night. I wore a tummy belt, combinations, liberty bodice, jersey, shoes and socks, all passed on from Brydgytte and shorts passed on from somebody else I expect. Once Aunt Alice, the American Viscountess Camden, gave us a huge cardboard Easter Egg case. My eyes goggled at the idea of so much chocolate. It contained two Oxo-patterned jerseys and a note saying, "To keep out the cold Easterly winds." I can distinctly remember hating the pun, and the jersey; even though it was the only new garment I ever remember having received until I went to boarding school.

One evening a tin bath full of water had been left on the landing at the head of the back stairs outside the bathroom. I thought I'd have a go at walking on water. I can remember perfectly clearly that my theory was that if you put one foot up on to the surface and than stepped up boldly as on to a stair, your foot would obviously break through the surface down to the bottom of the bath. On the other hand, I reckoned that if you could be standing level with the surface of the water and sneak your foot out gently and then ease your weight on to it the water wouldn't notice and it might work. My plan was to stand up on the rim of the bath and try this. About six gallons of dirty water went cascading down the stairs and somebody very angrily came charging up to punish me. When I explained that I trying to walk on water like Jesus, it stopped them. I was, after all, different.

My mother read that Coué and Freud believed that it is efficacious to whisper into a sleeping child's ear a message you want to implant in its subconscious. She waited until I was heavily asleep and then said four times distinctly, "Henry you must be a great good man - you must be Lord Chancellor of England." I am reputed to have replied in my sleep, "No, I'll be a chauffeur." Perhaps thereby according to my notions of the meaning of the dream time predisposing my eventual return to clogs. One other little incident concerning water. I was four and was once crossing some stepping stones carrying a child's spade. I remember my intention with the utmost clarity. I stopped and looked at the bottom of the pond at a point just before the water gushed between the stepping-stones and down a little waterfall. The water was still. I reckoned that I could touch the bottom with my spade. My idea was to hold the spade in both hands, let my weight tip forward until with the end of the spade on the bottom of the pond I would be propped with my feet on the stone, my hands on the spade and my body at an angle of 45º or even nearer to the water but still quite clear of it. A bad plan, I agree, and I didn't have any idea of how I was going to recover myself from that position but it was a perfectly clear-cut intention. In the event the water was deeper than I had thought, the spade never touched the bottom and I went in head first. My father pulled me out. No one minded me falling into water, because throwing it about and having water fights were all part of being a Bentinck. Indeed, my father as a boy sleeping in a four-poster in his Uncle's castle in Holland called Middachten had one morning poured two or three ewers of water into the canopy of the four-poster bed. He was discovered bouncing on the mattress as on a trampoline holding aloft his penknife so that at each leap he stabbed a hole in the canopy. When asked what he was doing he replied, "I wanted to have a showerbath in bed."

The whole of the dream time is centred around one part of Exton which is why I said in the preceding chapter that it pulses eternally for me. I have remarked upon my feeling of oneness with nature (horrid phrase), being more naturally acceptable than any similar feeling about people. I had at this time a pair of imaginary friends. I found them in the tangle of branches of a vast beech tree

which had fallen in mid-summer. The jungle of these leafy branches was to a four year-old almost unlimited. Also, I was flummoxed by the idea that these were topmost branches, creatures of the sky and yet I was in amongst them. I loved them, they loved me, I was beech. I liked the green branches, kissed them, chewed the nuts and leaves, wanted to enter into beechiness deeper. The two friends were called Winkey and Smiley. They knew about all this, in a vague way the feeling was erotic, they knew about that too - perhaps their slightly conniving names are symptomatic, at all events they understood when I undressed in those branches and rubbed my body on the wood, stroked it on the leaves, bestraddled limbs to force them into the intimacy of my crutch. Naturally, I could tell nobody of this.

The oneness with trees and earth was something grown-ups denied or failed to perceive. It extended also to animals. There, as with Kenneth Graham, I fell upon Kipling's "We are of one blood, ye and I" with open soul and familiarity.

At this time my father had a spaniel called Toby which he was trying to train as a gun dog. Toby was hard to train. Papa thrashed him when I was there until he howled and howled for mercy, not having had it explained to him what he was supposed to do intelligently enough. I find my pulse rate has gone up at remembering this. It was like witnessing the torture of some one nobody realised was your twin. It transcended conscious experience and became a horror of elemental quality. Papa shot Toby or got rid of him "because he is too intelligent, too highly strung." I think, though I am not sure, that I offered myself to be beaten in his stead. I was certainly refused though beating was not something for which my father needed encouragement, although I don't remember being beaten at Exton. I adored him. He was like Tyler, the mower, a peasant with thick warm dry hands. He changed the dressings on my cut knees - he was deft and handy - he fe11ed trees, split them with gunpowder, carted them home in a tumbrel, shot at Exton shoots where the bag might be six hundred pheasants and I never saw him miss - in fact I thought only second-rate people missed. He called me "Little Man" seldom "Henry". Once when I was older, about eight perhaps, I had vomiting and diarrhoea. I nipped out of bed, took down my pyjama trousers, reached for the potty, was overcome by sickness, vomited into the pot instead but the contractions produced a shaming mess all over everywhere from the other end. It was Papa who perfectly calmly fetched a long-handled hearth shovel and scooped up the mess, got a bowl of water to follow while I was sent along to the lavatory and later put me back to bed. My mother never did things like that nor did I ever see her so much as boil an egg or make a cup of tea.

I had, in addition to my general feeling of oneness with the living earth and its creatures, a particular affinity with yew. I climbed the tree often which the cottage was called after and the yew hedge around the churchyard. I didn't realise this affinity consciously until I was 59 when I climbed a yew tree to cut myself a special stick to bend into a shepherd's crook.

I mentioned Winkey and Smiley to Winnie and others. They and other aspects of my most secret life were joked about with unbelievable crassness just as dear Winnie marvelled aloud at my eccentricity in looking from under the table at women's frilly knickers as though I were an aspiring draper.

Before I tell you about the secret heart of Exton, let me just recount one very straightforward example of how events below or on the borderline of conscious memory leave an indelible imprint on one's "instincts". I know that this is basic to hypno- and psychotherapy - its implications are not, however, contained by these branches of knowledge. The phenomenon of man is contrived for an instant of time from near immortal atoms which at various other times have been components of other objects on earth and combine in us a mystery-laden variety of its attributes. Good! Now to the very banal soap opera type example.

At a party at Exton a boy called John Rowley, about my own age, got me down on my back on a sofa, gut a cushion over my face and sat on it. At a family wedding about twelve years ago I met an old relation who reminded me of the incident adding. "If I hadn't got you out, he'd have killed you - you were quite blue as it was." I heard from Winnie a few years ago that the boy on growing up spent much time in a mental home. If Brydgytte when ragging with me, got me down on my back and sat on me, I would, as it was called, "go mad". She didn't often do it. I become hysterically claustrophobic now if forced to lie on my back. Recently, after an operation on my eye, the worst part was being told I must lie still on my back. My reason for telling this story is that it was an event which had these consequences and I would not have understood them if I hadn't been told about John. As a matter of fact, knowing about it consciously doesn't help. I wonder if it would if I were hypnotised? My contention is that all the other events affecting our six senses, sharp or shadowy, are equally causal and I think some of the most enriching aspects of life consist in speculating about the causes and marvelling at the inspiring effects.

I was always in love. The most notable girl of the period was "the little girl in red knickers". She lived in the village and was, I suppose, roughly my age. I was overcome with sly joy whenever I saw her and used to hide behind Miss Sensickle's long tweed skirt. I can remember the feeling of it against my cheek. The little girl later became the undisputed belle of the village. I fell in love with almost every girl I met - my cousin Maureen and I invented a person called Aunt Sally who did disgusting things and we used to deliciously shock each other and ourselves with statements like, "Aunt Sally has a bagful of bird dirt," each trying to go one worse than the other. I was intrigued by my cousin Agnes because of her "imagination". I could feel that people were perturbed by it. I heard it said that it wasn't imagination, just lies, and I fell in love with her for her lies. I fell in love with various little girls at parties. Another cousin, more remote, more wonderful - Carol - developed a sudden special regard for me on the day that she said she had seen a fairy near some violets under the cedar tree at the ruins of the Old Hall. She was three years older than me which is a lot between four and seven, and accustomed to her younger brothers accepting what she said without answering back. I on the other hand told her it was nonsense and that fairies didn't exist. This was our first meeting. Secretly I wanted to believe in fairies but wasn't allowed to by the Bentincks. To discover that Carol whose okay-ness as a person was guaranteed by her being a relation believed in fairies offered me an opportunity for believing in them also and in this way, her memory shone for me with a special magic aura.

The dream time at Exton took me into its streams and woods which were to me limitless. All the trees and animals were people, the smells and sounds all particular and important, the quality of grass, sunlight, air so vivid I can now determine that such-and-such an incident must have taken place about 5.30 on a spring evening. All these were mine - we <u>knew</u>. It was only about five years ago that I came upon Walt Whitman's poem which begins "There was a child went forth and everything that child saw, that thing he became for an hour or a day or a period of days." If only some person had read and understood those lines and known that that child was me.

All of these notions had one special and ravishing centre at Exton. It was called Fort Henry, so of course it was already more than mine. Sometimes Grown-ups would say, "Then shall we take the kids to Fort Henry?", casually, and another grown-up might grunt indifferently. I would be speechless, a-tiptoe, waiting, when someone said, "Come on then, we're going down to Fort Henry this afternoon" a strange mixture of great joy and of not wanting it spoiled by other people flooded over me.

Exton park covers about five hundred acres. In those days it was simply a deer park. I remember it as brown, not green, rolling country with magnificent individual trees though on one

side there was Tunnelly Wood made elemental by the rocketing of precognitive pheasants. Across this we drove in our T-model Ford for miles and miles and miles (about two, in fact). Gradually then we descended a slope and there lay a lake. It was flanked on two sides by great trees growing down the side of a hill until their branches stretched out over the water. It seemed, therefore, to me that the water at a certain point became trees not land. When you reached the fence around these woods there was a big white gate. Somebody had to get out and open and shut it behind the car. Then you drove on down a track quite smooth and soft with fallen leaves until the trees ended in a clearing about fifty yards across. There was a beautifully kept mown lawn. On the left hand side the ground rose gently. A wide 'ride' of cut grass went up to the top where there was a bark folly - a bandstand perhaps. It was roughly cruciform and had a floor of bricks with small holes in them laid on the packed earth. It had pillars covered in bark holding up the roof like a temple. Between the pillars was rustic criss-cross balustrade work, also all made of or covered in bark. Back at the bottom where we had approached in the car on the other side of the flat piece of mown grass there was a magnificent cedar of Lebanon standing high and still and strong. Over the grass stalked peacocks slowly. Every now and then one of them with great deliberation and importance would go into display and utter his raucous cry which rang and echoed in the woods and sounded to me like "Kiaora", a treat drink one only got at Fort Henry.

But it was on the right hand side that the wonder lay. The mown lawn led right up to the wall of a tiny castle. It was made in the 18th century out of local honey-coloured stone. It was about forty feet across the front, about fifteen or twenty feet in depth and about eighteen feet high. It had a balustraded top and its walls and beautiful carved stone pinnacles were all cut from local stone. At ground level from either side low battlement walls about three feet high curved round with a ledge you could sit on and look over. On the other aide of these walls, as of the 'fort' itself, was a sheer drop of about twelve feet to a grassy landing stage with white painted wooden edging and white posts and there lay the lake quite still awaiting you. Under the fort was a round ceilinged boat-house. Back at the main level the architraves of windows and doors were carved from stone in a Tudor style. Inside there was one large room with windows on the other side overlooking the lake and a ceiling painted like the sky, pale blue with soft white clouds. At each end there was another small room leading off. The place was really just a boathouse and picnic place, the room downstairs being intended for servants to prepare food and then bring it up to the top room. I did not know then, when, why nor by whom it had been built. It was just there. It seemed to have grown there. Exton Park is beguiling - informal - no cages round the trees, no evident fences, and at its heart a secret place remote from the world was Fort Henry for ever and for ever.

We went out in boats, we played hide-and-seek, we climbed trees, we had picnic food. They seemed to think that that was what Fort Henry was about. I knew it wasn't.

The water of the lake lay there flat under the sun. On it were spread water-lily leaves and amongst them grew the large white and yellow lilies themselves. When you get close to one it's bigger than you think. Water droplets contract themselves to as tiny as they can go on its waxy surface, so firm and strong that it can keep perfectly absolutely still for ages and ages, for ever really without moving. And all the time water hens pick their way with high steps from one floating leaf to another under the still and silent pouring of the sun, pecking here and there looking for something. Sometimes one of them will panic and with wings and legs going like mad, will race across the surface until he folds up and lets his momentum swoosh him to the safety of some reeds. The water-lily is the same plant as the Lotus and it is not for nothing that it symbolises the core of oriental meditative mysticism. Its stem, I noticed, went down and down to the bottom, perhaps miles I thought. How could anything have such a long stem? It was lost in banks of green brown

weed. I couldn't swim then but once I came back and swam there - underwater as deep as I could go. The stems glided past my skin and I brushed past the weed looking for the wonder of a child's dream. Big white clouds were reflected in the water as was the castle so that it drifted there with the clouds sailing past it in the blue.

I loved this place in a way which I find it hard to describe. I this is because the experience was wordless and to try to recapture it in adulthood is impossible except in a moment of ecstasy. In Marganita Laski's book, "Ecstasy"', she asked roughly speaking the first sixty people she met if they had ever had an ecstatic experience (without drugs). Nearly all of them said they had, and she quotes their descriptions verbatim. From this it is evident that nearly everyone knows that the most profound and valuable experiences of our lives occur in a part of us where speech does not belong. This raises serious doubts as to whether we can ever understand ourselves in scientific terms. Perhaps we can't and perhaps in assuming that we can the assumer debars himself from the possibility of ever perceiving that this is not true. This puts people into two separate camps. I at Fort Henry at the age of about four was already in one, though of course I didn't know it by such a description.

I loved this place in a way which I have now explained cannot be described. It did, however, help me nearer to understanding the experiences and speculations of many great minds which I would otherwise not have been able to profit by as I grew up. Fort Henry for me was and is for ever. The peacock still preens, the castle is still looking at itself in the lake where the lilies stiffly grow and the sky goes sliding and sliding by. I am exalted by this. "Time present and time past are all perhaps present in time future," wrote T.S. Eliot, and I understood instantly at l4. It was at Fort Henry that I once sat alone in a part that we didn't generally visit. I stared and stared and stared at the lake with its water-lilies and reflections until time to seemed to stand still and to become for ever unalterable, there since the beginning and there until the end, and I was thinking that it all is as it is as it is. It got me bound down into itself so that I was, as I conceived it, 'is-ing' the dream. Later I found I could enter this state - not exactly at will - but sometimes. I did it once by the Rickett Pond when it was covered in ice and sat so long and motionless I became icy myself and thought I might be frozen in there solid till the thaw came, so I jumped up in a panic. But 'is-ing' is important.

There is one final aspect of 'is-ing' and Fort Henry, the heart of Exton, the place of the dream time. It is this. Back at home in bed at night I would remember Fort Henry. Certainly I have often imagined great adventures there, but one thing burned up in your mind making you sweat in the dark, namely that then at that very moment all by itself in the Park Fort Henry was still there looking at its reflection in the moonlit lake among the waxy water-lilies and the silvery clouds drifting and drifting by, It was there, and you weren't - so how could you ever be sure – ever?

[Handwritten notes enclosed with the manuscript for later inclusion]

Thrashing by Pa

When he came at me things went black and red at the same time. I gave up. I was wrong anyway. He really believed in his prayers. I was a fibber – I looked up women's skirts – I went down my [bed?] naked – hot girls – wanted to be like other people. I was utterly wrong anyhow so I couldn't even stand up to his horse whip rectitude. He started hitting me. It went on and on. Not 2 or 4 or (for just not being expelled) six but like for ever. I howled and screamed and didn't stop shuddering

and quaking with tears for all of the four hours that I was, at the end of the thrashing, locked in the nursery. I don't remember how many times he thrashed me but many. It never occurred to me in any way whatever that he was wrong or to be criticised or doubted.

He was a good kind fair upright loving Christian father who exemplified rectitude and I was expected to, and did, love and fear him.

I wonder whether subconsciously ..... what? Hated and wanted to take reprisals on him? I don't think so, I think all the subconscious influence was channelled into making me ambivalent – and which rejected naturally and slowly over the years the unexamined way of life he practised like a [brass wrought?] gentleman deep within me I could not replace it with the courage of my own instinctive convictions.

Americans have taught the world the righteousness of greed.

Rijn & Pia sexually compatible "everyone thought"

Bryanston or whatever "A bit long haired what?" Answer yes – I agree all the really reasonable people with [?] are not long haired and look where they got us.

Choice of people who have good sex relationships – it means they have time to think clearly about other issues.