

## A MAN WITHOUT A MASK<sup>1</sup>

THIS is Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, for to write, as does Mr. Bronowski, about William Blake without reference to his religious and visionary experiences is to leave out almost Blake himself. This is a pity, for the book is freshly written and far more readable than the works of many would be interpreters of the writer of the Prophetic Books.

‘How many have fallen there!

They stumble all night over bones of the dead . . . .

And wish to lead others when they should be lead.’

Of late years a host of writers have arisen who are, as Mr. Bronowski states, more interested in the mysticism than in the mystic, Blake. He himself goes to the other extreme, and while having a real feeling for the man, Blake, attempts to explain away his visionary writings by stating that these were written in cypher to avoid censorship. The prophetic Books are accounts of things seen in vision. They are concerned with the nature and destiny of the human soul. They mark a sharp departure, an entirely different set of problems, from those of the unfinished French Revolution of which Mr. Bronowski regards them as a continuation. By 1797 Blake had finished with Pitt and politics. He saw the evils of his day as symptoms of spiritual dry-rot and not as economic problems. Had they been written in the most straightforward language he would have had nothing to fear from the keenest censorship. Incidentally, we consider that in view of the shortness of the book, undue space and importance is given to the abortive trial for sedition of 1804.

With regard to Blake's religious opinions, Mr. Bronowski apparently identifies these with an anti-father complex manifesting in iconoclasm and anti-clericalism and with humanism tinged with anger at ‘man's inhumanity to man.’ He ignores Blake's development into a deep personal love of God as revealed in the person of Christ and his belief in the brotherhood of *man in God*, as the meaning of the fatherhood of God grew within him. True, he never ceased to rail at what he considered to be the distortions of ‘religious’ teaching as to the punishment of sin and the doctrine of an Eternal

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<sup>1</sup> *A Man without a Mask. A Study of William Blake.* By J. Bronowski. (Secker and Warburg; 8s. 6d.).

Hell. He also castigated the Deist presentation of God as Idea, infinitely removed from his creation, Man. To mistake lines, spoken by mythological personages representing these codes, for Blake's own thought, is to misrepresent their author grossly. We do not here forget a certain Manichean strain, a legacy of an early phase which crops up from time to time but this is not in key with the general orientation of the religious thought.

A common mistake, of those whose reading of Blake does not go beyond the Songs of Innocence and Experience and the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, is to imagine that the views expressed in these works are the poet's mature convictions. Mr. Bronowski should know better, for he has read his Blake and admits that he in the end moved 'almost to orthodox divinity' (p. 105). This he regards as 'unsaying a lifetime of hope.' The fact is, that Blake while adhering obstinately to his original doctrine of the right and duty of man to rebel against false beliefs, was forced by his uncompromising honesty and keen intellect to examine more closely into the nature and origin of certain vague generalities against which he had been inveighing. Hence in the Prophetic Books we find views of sexuality and the problem of sin and redemption which are in sharp contrast to the cynicism of Experience and the defiance of the Marriage as to these very subjects. The Jerusalem he claims to have been dictated by the Saviour, upon whose spirit of meekness and love he calls again and again.

Mr. Bronowski, and this is the main theme of the book, rightly stresses Blake's hatred of machinery and of the industrialisation of the once free craftsmen of England in the interest of the moneyed classes. He does not seem to realise the reason for the poet's hate which was not merely that of the humanitarian or of the displaced craftsman. 'And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not A Natural; for a Natural Cause only seems; it is a Delusion,' wrote Blake. The capitals emphasise his feeling.

His hatred for the machine sprang from his religious belief (but-tressed by his visions) that the individual was, primarily, a soul enshrined in a body and this unity he called a Form. The Form is inspired by Energy. Energy is a manifestation of some aspect of God such as love, wisdom or righteous anger. The life of the Form depends upon full and free expression of the inspiring Energy and this a man does through his daily life and work. Machine minding, grinding poverty, cramped home conditions are not expressions of the bounteous Creator. Insofar as a man was forced to typify these and thereby thwarted of his God-given rights and talents he was being murdered.

'And all the arts of life they chang'd into the arts of death,' wrote Blake in a passage describing the change from free craftsmanship to the factory system. His anger was against the cramping of the soul of the worker and the degradation of him into a 'hand,' a cog in the industrial machine.

' . . . . . to bind to labours  
Of day and night *the myriads of Eternity*, that they might file  
And polish brass and iron hour after hour, laborious workmanship,  
Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the *days of wisdom*  
In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of bread.'

Mr. Bronowski also ignores the philosophic root of Blake's hatred of the machine itself. He traced its rise to the Rationalising Deism of the mid-eighteenth century which from denying the fatherhood of God soon came to forgetfulness of the brotherhood of man. This, rather than revolt against the Industrial Revolution, *per se*, is the *leit motiv* of the Prophetic Books. Blake, who believed that evil must receive objective form before it can be cast out, saw in the machine the objective embodiment of 'the false Philosophy of Albion's Tree.' Hence, and not from personal prejudices only, arises the mechanical symbolism which hurtles and clatters through later works.

'I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe,  
And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose woof rages dire,  
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton; black the cloth  
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation. . . . .  
I see in deadly fear, in London, Los raging round his Anvil'

Mr. Bronowski writes of the degeneration of the Prophetic Books into 'pious but aimless rhetoric' in a world 'whose puzzles had become too hard and too bitter.' This is because he does not understand Blake's attitude towards Industrialism and to the problem of Evil. Industrialism was for him a symptom of perverted thinking. Having become objective, i.e. 'assumed Form' in the Dark Satanic Mills it would eventually be 'cast out.' Since every evil was due to a 'Spiritual Cause' it was to a Spiritual remedy that he looked.

' . . . . . none but the Lamb of God can heal

This dread disease, none but Jesus, O Lord, descend and save'  
With firm faith and lively hope he looked confidently to the day when the spirit of 'Jesus the Lord, the Universal Humanity,' would inspire the hearts of all men and cruelty and oppression would be no more. This is the climax of the Jerusalem. In that day, he saw in vision how

' . . . . . the Furnaces became  
Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine  
. . . . . and Self was lost in the contemplation of Faith  
And wonder at the Divine Mercy.'

With regard to the symbolism Mr. Bronowski is often mistaken. Thus it is incorrect to describe the Emanation as 'true state of man' (p.144). The Emanation is man's gentler, more feminine side and in conflict with his Spectre, (harsh or brutal aspect), is prone to cruelty, jealousy and deceit. In perfected man Spectre and Emanation are a unity. Nor is the Tyger ever a symbol of Christ (p.116).

The book is a short one and within its limits discussion of such subjects as Blake's attitude towards Deism, orthodoxy and the nature and destiny of the individual soul could not have been encompassed, but they should have been implied. They are fundamental to understanding of the man and his writings. Mr. Bronowski does not seem to be aware of them. As an analysis of the progress of the Industrial Revolution and of Blake's reaction to it his book is noteworthy. But the approach towards a great Christian poet is only a partial, and unfortunately the least important, one.

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## REVIEWS

THE RIGHTS OF MAN. By Jacques Maritain. (Bles; 5s.)

As an apologist of the social teaching of the Popes, M. Maritain has succeeded where the metaphysician or the theologian can barely hope to succeed, in reaching the ears of the secular conscience of our times. The significance of such an achievement is suggested in his earlier book *Redeeming the Time*. There, in the essay entitled 'The Catholic Church and Social Progress,' he distinguishes three 'zones of realization' of Catholic teaching. The first, which he rejects on grounds of its higher risk of failure and of its affinity with dictatorial forms of government, is the attempt 'to make out of the encyclicals an immediate program for a political or national reconstruction, to be brought about by the State's authority' (p. 184). 'Moreover,' he says (*loc. cit.*), 'the universal and highly conceived precepts of the Church's doctrine are therein applied to the contingencies of social material without the preliminary elaboration of a more particularized political philosophy which is closer to the concrete,' and (p. 185) 'contrary to the nature of things, one has