CHAPTER III

'THE SHIFTING VEIL' - THE LITERARY-CUM-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE UPTO THE THIRTIES

"History is only war history, and politics are only a temporary substitute for war." (Oswald Spengler).
CHAPTER III

"THE SHUITING VEIL"

The Victorian Canvas:

The predicament of man has ever been there for those who could feel the 'giant agony of the world'. In the past it had been more often than not rapt up in personally romantic and idealized restlessness. Blake diagnosed it thus:

But vain the sword and vain the bow,
They never can work War's overthrow.
The hermit's prayer and the widow's tear
Alone can free the world from fear.¹

But when we come to the period immediately preceding our Twentieth century, we may be surprised to note how the Victorian canvas all along shone bright, optimistic, and complacent. Victorians — Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals alike — ignorant of the times, had built for themselves and the nation a glass house of self-complacency. They boasted of an empire on which the sun would never set. They gloated over the fruits of industrial and commercial progress which assured them smooth sailing for decades to come. There prevailed a mood of middle-class thankfulness for material prosperity of which Tennyson was the representative spokesman. It was quite natural for him to preach,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfilth Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

or to express the hope of seeing 'the Pilot far off
after crossing the bar', if we keep in view that again
a deluding faith in Progress or hopeful evolution. An Arnold
Dover Beach note was an exception, though even that did not
visualize the age coming to an end. It was at best an expression
of some undefined worry:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.¹

And yet without a doubt the veil was set a-shifting.
The seeds of conflict had been sown even with the flowering
of the Industrial Revolution. Scientific advancement—
both in the field of Technology through mechanical develop­ments, and of Knowledge through the publication of Darwin's
"Origin of Species"—had initiated the disintegration of
the old pattern. The social satires of Thackeray, the
humanitarian novels of Dickens, the views of the leaders of
Aesthetic Revival, and above all the voice of Carlyle, showed
that all was not well with the world. The Western Man's mind
was invaded by sciences — Physical and Natural Sciences,
Science of Wealth or money-making, Science of Political Eco­
nomy, Science of Politics. By 1883 Karl Marx had already been

¹ p. 63, Pocket Book of Modern Verse: from 'Dover Beach', by
M. Arnold.
writing in London and Socialism was forging ahead. Here was the new 'natural' man consciously seeking a satisfactory destiny by achieving a natural and harmonious development through the physical renewal of man's interest in social and political matters. Natural man conditioned his existence: "But in personal and moral makeup he covered that he is never quite satisfactory, this some residue of frustration or distortion always remains in him. This residue is taken to be due to the imperfection of our political and social system, and under a perfect constitution the assumption is that it would disappear. The corollary of the natural man is consequently the political man."¹ The stage was set for the enactment of the next scene - the twentieth century drama of despair, anxiety and fear, caused mainly by political insecurity.

The Change of Climate at the Turn of New Century:

The change over to the new century was ushered in with a new note of unprecedented evils of feared military clashes. The Boer War had been fought and won in the comfortable remoteness of South Africa, but many had even just after it begun to think of a Continental War.² Sagacious men like Winston

² Even in 1898 there appeared a book entitled 'La Guerre' by a Russo-Polish banker M. Bloch. The prophetic writer could, on the basis of the drift in European politics, visualize what horrible monster of iniquity was going to overwhelm the Western man: "In that remarkable book on the War of the Future in which the Russian writer Bloch foretold in the Nineties, almost to precisest detail, the nature of the war through which we have passed, he ended his prophecy by foretelling that the war would end with universal world-revolution." Harold Spender: 'Is it Peace?', The Contemporary Review, January 1920, p. 10.
Churchill could clearly foresee the awful horror which such a war would entail on England as well as the Europe... a speech delivered in Parliament on May 12, 1901* vide pp. 39-40, Winston Churchill by Lewis Broad, Hutchinson, 1941."

"I have frequently been astonished since I have been in this House to hear with what composure and how glibly members, even Ministers, talk of a European war. I will not expatiate on the horrors of war, but there has been a great change which the House should not omit to notice. In former days when wars arose from individual causes ... it was possible to limit the liabilities of the combatants. But now, when mighty populations are impelled against each other ... when the resources of science and civilization sweep away everything that might mitigate their fury, a European war can only end in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal commercial dislocation and exhaustion of the conquerors."

A shift was taking place from the erstwhile prevailing point of view. England had ever been English but

1. Quoted from a speech delivered in Parliament on May 12, 1901; vide pp. 39-40, Winston Churchill by Lewis Broad, Hutchinson, 1941.
the perspective of the thinking man sufficiently widened with the advent of the 20th century. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war had wide repercussions throughout Europe. Germany started fishing in troubled waters by acting as Russia's evil genius, profiting by war spoils, and hatching long-term schemes of aggrandizement. She tried to drive a wedge between Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian relations. Outwardly she was all praise and courtesy for British diplomacy, but she was at heart fired by Kaiser's dreams which could be materialized only by neutralizing Great Britain: "We must choose between France and Germany. If we choose the first we have a sincere and priceless ally. If the second we lose the substance to grasp at the shadow .... Our danger is that we are still too largely governed by the Mediterranean traditions, although the main business of the Navy in the near future will be nearer home. We have to prepare against Germany consciously, thoroughly, and with increasing vigilance."¹

The Decade Before the Great War:

Events moved dangerously. The Dardanelles incident showed as if Germany was manipulating to bring about a war. The German game meant sore worry for the lesser continental Powers as well as France and England. The general masses began apprehending a large scale peril being hatched by

¹ p. 402, 'Fortnightly Review', Sept. 1, 1904; from an article "The New German Intrigue" by Calchas.
Germany: "Meanwhile, it is curious to watch what has been the effect upon the people at large. At first, there was a natural indignation against Russia, but now this has been succeeded by an intense antagonism against Germany which is regarded as being so beside herself that she is considered responsible for her actions; but Germany is a malevolent Deus ex machina who is the real peril. In many ways this awakening is something to be thankful for, since there may now be some hope that adequate preparations may be made to meet the danger which is inevitable from Germany — when she is ready to impose it."

Germany thus was set upon achieving a threatening supremacy and she embarked upon ambitious Naval schemes causing fear and uneasiness to her neighbours. Mistrust could easily lead to tension, accusations and counter-accusations — the paving stones for deadly clashes: "We may view the present situation with calm satisfaction, but it is impossible to ignore the serious importance of the German Admiralty to construct battleships of the largest size .... The unfortunate fact is that those who view the growth of German Navy with fear and irritability are doing their best to embroil the two countries in war, because they are increasing the tension, and a time may come when some small and insignificant incident will lead to the gage being thrown down."2

1. pp. 489-90, 'Fortnightly Review', (July to Dec. 1904): from "Japan and Russia: Germany and Great Britain" by Alfred Stead.
It appeared as if large sections of humanity were growing reckless in many parts of the globe. People could sense symptoms of a new recklessness that concerned all western civilizations. We are told that public opinion is beginning to lose more control than at present it does another. Over these diplomatic negotiations which may lead to war, that at present public opinion only tolerates war because it is labouring under the great illusion that war brings profit, and that public opinion ought to condemn war as a barbarous survival which is checking the advance of modern civilization. Everyone, even the extreme anti-war party admits that we had very nearly a war last summer: everyone admits that the tension is by no means over.... The shift in sensibility was crystallized by the hot war (1914-18) succeeding mere rumours, and in turn being succeeded by a cold fit of demoralization, disillusionment, horrible misery and chill penury.

1. cf. "The years 1910 and 1911 will be remembered always as years of riot and unrest. Wherever your casual eye was cast the same vision confronted you of revolution and discontent .... It is as though insolence or licence were in the air which we breathe, penetrating the very fibre of the people". (vide pp. 138, 139 from 'The Letters of an Englishman', 1st Series, by Charles Whibley: Constable and Company, London, 1915).

The far-reaching nature of the change could be palpably seen by comparing the moods and expressions of a typical Edwardian like Walter de la Mare or Georgian poet Wilfrid Owen (killed in action 1918), who maintained that poetry lay in pity, the pity of war.

Hurt and regret:

For by my glee might men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.1

Or the divine anger at war-mongers:

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.2

The vision here is against all conventional ideals and practices of the Edwardian and Georgian poets: the former had the quiet assurance to sing of lasting things, the latter the nice and cultured townman's nice and modish enjoyment.

1. P. 381, 'The Pocket Book of Modern Verse', from the Poem "Strange Meeting" by W. Owen.
2. P. 383, 'Ibid.', from the poem "Insensibility".
of English countryside - but both seemed to regard the period as full of serene fulfilment and hope, showing little premonition of the impending disaster. Much has been said against the 'Romantics', but it might well be argued that there was a sort of 'escape poetry' or in other cases a variant of 'ivory tower' mentality because of the harshness of realities of modern existence. It was like deliberately turning one's back upon the anxiety throbbing in the pulse of the time. The age as a whole clung to some sort of surface optimism.¹

The Post-War Decade of Despair - The Miserable Twenties:

The outlook of the modern spirit since the first World War has been quite changed. It shows an intelligent and realistic awareness of the troubled times, vast human misery, and fear of disaster. Its recent intensity and essential nature are unprecedented. The consciousness of the common man has been overwhelmed by anxiety and uneasy fear. Hope and belief have been at the lowest ebb; frustration reigns supreme. The political set-up of nations, all of them Europeans and Christians, seems alarming in the extreme as it depicts the decay and disintegration of the existing state and forebodes nothing but dark confusion.

¹ cf. "Indeed one is tempted to be unfair to them, because, thinking and feeling so unexceptionably, they now seem to have been so unaware of the hour about to strike, too insulated from outside forces. They did not know the tension of mind and spirit so soon to be characteristic of modern world. Nothing seemed to them complex. Nearly all they wrote came only from the conscious levels of their well-regulated minds. But it is useless to blame them for limitations that were characteristic of their age." A.S. Collins, & 'English Literature of the Twentieth Century' p. 35.
The twentieth century goes on witnessing the march of the moderns. The Four-year First World War is a musical event which compelled European peoples to wake up from their rosy dreams and place upon an existence disillusioning in the realization that had in his famous poem "Nineteen Hundred and One, In diferente the alarm:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep ....

War had come to an end but with what results and at what a cost! The same misery and probably a greater worry: 'For it is now more than a year since the signing of the armistice, and yet over the whole of Europe war conditions still prevail .... There has been much talk of a German revival — even, in some quarters, of a new German war .... For the issue of the future still hangs in the balance — peace or war — war or peace. "Peace in our time" we used to pray; but now, after supping full of horrors, we pray "Peace for all time!" But are we willing to pay the price? .... If not, then another war within the period of a generation at most is humanly fixed and certain. There could not be a safer prophecy."

1. pp. 11, 16: The Contemporary Review, Jany. 1920 — quoted from an article 'Is it Peace?' by Harold Spender. An excellent account of the political developments during the Twenties and the Thirties appears in John Alfred Spenden's "Between the Two Wars".
The Nineteen Twenties realised with full intensity the dance of death and fear. The world seemed to be a bleak place - war was devoid of peace, faith and ideals appeared to be sacred or insignificant. While the majority dwelled in the deepest of blues, those who had lost their sense of purpose due to the shattering experience of war, indulged in desperate amusements in attempts to make the most of remaining life as long as it lasted.¹

The engagements were Jazz, night clubs, flippant comedies, sensation-seeking moods and sadistic pleasures. But the gaiety at the root of appearances was a brittle, soulless and delirious one. "In the 1920's, as I have pointed out, people asserted the force of pleasure against the nightmare deaths of the war. This tragic hedonism expresses a kind of honourable irresponsibility. To the 1920-ISH characters, their behaviour appeared as a dance of life against the background of an organized dance of death."²

¹. It is psychologically very significant that in Germany "Youth movements, "Nudism" and the like became popular in the post-World War I period or again in France in the late 'Forties after the Second World War. This type of social behaviour was symbolic of frustration and an attempt at avoiding the misery by deliberately ignoring it through sham enthusiasm. (vide pp. 474-75, "Social Psychology" by Richard T. LAPlERE & Paul R. Farnsworth (1936): 3rd edn., 1949, published by McGRAW-HILL Book Co., U.S.A.).

². p. 142, The Creative Element by Stephen Spender; Hamish Hamilton, 1953. For the counterpart of this spirit in the field of Art and Letters, the following remark may be compared "... the instinct for the morbid, the hideous ad the unclean. This instinct finds its violent expression in a good deal of modern European sculpture, as well as painting .... The methods of expressionism are now accepted by some of our younger writers who no longer regard the words of a language as the vehicle of thought, but treat them as a mere concatenation of agreeable sounds .... We have recently been introduced to the new methods of literature by which epithets, adjectives and imagery are no longer to be governed by thought, but by
Even the most sane and sober person must have felt all accepted values slipping fast out of his convictions as Psychoanalysis joined forces with the physical items of his contemporaries. Mr. Eliot did not shock his contemporaries when he said:

I think we are in the rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.¹

Mr. Eliot had the plummet with which he could sound the depths of tragic disillusionment. He voiced the painful bankruptcy—physical, intellectual, economic and spiritual—confusion, frustration and misery of the post-war years. The Waste Land (1922) represented the war scarred western world:
The Hollow Men expressed the sick mood of men in the Twenties in terms of a highly effective cynicism:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpice filled with straw ....

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of the dead man's hand
Under twinkle of a fading star.²

contd ....... the emotional state of the writer." (pp. 499,500, 504, London, Mercury, March 1927: from an article entitled 'A Cul-De-Sac' by Sir Reginald Blemfield, R.A.).¹

The cold detachment and the glacial irony suggested that the poet at the moment felt sharply, like his contemporaries, the helplessness of the hopeless conditions obtaining in Europe. Man was faced with insoluble problems; at best take refuge in his tragic cynicism:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but with a whimper.  

It should be noted that we can almost visualize the desperate despondency of the emotion which could have prompted the alarming conclusion of the above stanza. Due to the repercussions of the War (1914-18) all of the European nations were writhing in misery and gliding towards ruin. Misery, horror, and despair had become the concomitants of human life. If one had character enough one could, like Eliot, paint it in its tragic unhappiness and quell the questionings of the restless soul.

England had grown sick of war and her people desisted from any more mention of it. The mass consciousness would not have liked to be reminded of it — and this continued till the end of the decade. Though the political and economic re-adjustments were well on their way by the middle twenties, the major sections of society seemed to have "switched off" from things connected with war. The common

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man wishfully hoped for peace. The "Geneva atmosphere" seemed to be leading towards rehabilitation of European affairs: "The outstanding facts in all Europe East of the Rhine are war .... As the situation became less disorganized and full of horror and extinction for a long time, and the whole world exhausted and sick of war, it is almost physically impossible for war to break out in this part of the world for some years." 1

Thus the years immediately following the World War maintained a deliberate silence about it, probably because the brutal experience had left too bitter a taste in the Western man's mouth to admit of any more mention of the blood curdling horrors. The common mood was to feel reassured (by sentimentalizing or ignoring the harsh facts) against the aggressive intolerance among nations. This was typified in works like A.S. Hutchinson's "If Winter Comes" or in the genial comedies of A.A. Milne: "There were other writers of the same type, and in all the underlying mood was sentimental. This ignored the state of the world and the condition of human nature, yet with all its limitations it was the assertion by the common man and by the spokesmen of common men of a desire for a kindlier world, and a belief that man would be worthy of a finer life, if only his leaders

1. pp. 352-55, The Contemporary Review, September 1925: from an article "Peace and the 'Status Quo' " by Roth Williams. This sort of hopefulness, according to psychologists, characterizes the first stage of Anxiety.
and rulers would give him the chance.\textsuperscript{1}

But this was just a surface mood. This was established that there was a spate of war books over England and the country in 1929. "\textit{In Flanders Fields}' (\textit{Ibarra}), "\textit{All Quiet on the Western Front}" (\textit{Remarque}), "\textit{The Hero}" (\textit{R. Aldington}), "\textit{Journey's End}" (\textit{R.C. Sherwood}), "\textit{The Shepherd and the Child}" (\textit{John Owen}) etc. were some of the stirring war books which depicted the painfully raw part of warfare, the trench fights, the extreme physical and spiritual ordeal, and the permanent scalding left upon the mental and moral make-up of the soldiers. The books became widely popular\textsuperscript{2}, suggesting the fact that the reading masses were now ready to face imaginatively a war to remind themselves that no such horrors should be allowed to take place again. "We are saying that the frank, sometimes disgustingly out-spoken war books pouring from the press nowadays will do more to prevent another war than all the orthodox peace propaganda. There is nothing disgustingly outspoken in 'The Shepherd and the Child', but it ... is in its quieter way a more moving, more effective protest against war than are the abhorrent revelations of squalor of the trenches."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1} p. 105, English Literature between the Two Wars, by Sir Ifor Evans: Methuen.

\textsuperscript{2} cf. "The revival of public interest in war-books is generally spoken of as one of the most interesting features of recent publishing seasons. It followed a severe slump — a period of several years during which the reading public was understood to be 'sick of the war'." (vide p. 236, London Mercury, Jany. 1930: from 'Recent War Books' by Clennell Wilkinson).

\textsuperscript{3} 'Looking Backward' by St. John Adcock: The Bookman (p. 237, Jany. 1930).
The mood of blissful wishfulness of the Twenties... "Slowly but surely the shattered economic system of the world is being restored to its pre-war strength and smoothness. Slowly but surely humanity is recovering its voice and poise.... No credit is due to any Government that civilization did not disappear from Europe in the years immediately following the armistice. It was the individual man and woman, creatures of habit and convention, who carried on. With a dogged spirit and a dazed mind they went the daily round as before the cataclysm. This became a great mass movement which held the peoples of Europe more or less steady until those into whose hands power had been given could collect their forces, exercise their authority, and lay the foundations for a new structure to be built upon the ruins of the old," was a remarkable one. Similarly was that of cynical frustration: "When we come to our own time, we are no better off. At present there is a slump, and people are gloomy, losing money, unemployed.... Some novelists belong to the High Priest of Art school of thought. (They are frequently invalids with private means). To them it does not matter what is happening to the world.... But for the rest of us; who are not secure in our ivory towers, who do read newspapers, who cannot help worrying over a world that is now in a dreadful middle, this is a queer time for novels and

A certain amount of security, not simply material but also mental, spiritual, is necessary for the creation of a work of art.¹

This was like the first phase of anxiety, that is dread or anger or fight because it was not only in the following decade. The spate of war novels and this change of spirit and approach: The recent flood of the 'literature of disillusionment' or of 'War books' - a phrase which has just acquired this special significance - differs from what has gone before in that it is a flood in place of a trickle and that the water has grown decidedly muddier. Its characteristics are brutality, cynicism, contempt for motive and for leadership....²

The Dawn of the Pink Decade

The year Nineteen Hundred and Thirty sharply marked the end of an era. A far-reaching tone was initiated even as things touched bottom in 1929, the painful year which staged a crushing crash.³ There crept a pall of faint day light over a ten-year old night of post-war chaos, over the reckless gaiety of London night clubs, Noel Coward comedies, pleasure-seeking, jazz-loving heroes and heroines.

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1. pp. 153-54, Essays and Studies, 1932 (English Association, Oxford 1933); from an article entitled 'Some Reflections of a Popular Novelist' by J.B. Priestley.
3. cf. "In the crash of 1929, 'as if reluctant to die outmoded in its bed' said an American writer, a period 'leapt to a spectacular death'. (W. Gaunt: 'The March of the Moderns', Cape, 1949, p. 308).
The tide had turned. A newer sensitiveness was impressed upon the hearts and minds of the people as the full impact of the German Treaty, international peace efforts, armaments, the rise of Fascism in Italy etc. cast a dark shadow across the Continental sky. On the one hand "England became very much aware of the world outside, of the European consequences of the War, of the Russian Revolution, and of the great American slump," on the other: "the mirage of the gay twenties, sparkling and audacious, of Noel Coward comedies and high brow revues, of Firbank and Michael Arlen, of the husky voiced, pleasure-drugged heroines, the flippant poseurs, had passed and faded. A shiver of premonition came over the world —the foreboding of dreary years —and more, a sense of mounting tension." The new poet feelingly put it thus:

1. This is likely to happen as human nature is unpredictable. There are regular trade cycles of Booms and Depressions in Economics. A more or less similar cyclical tendency may be detected in the mass mind which is sharply conditioned by the socio-political weather in the modern times.


Who live under the shadow of a war
What can I do that matters?
My pen stops, and my laughter, dancing, stop
Or ride to a gap.

For often on the powerful crest of pride
I am shot with thought,
That halts the untamed horses of the blood,
The grip on good.

That moving whimpering and mating bear
Tunes to deaf ears:
Stuffed with the realer passions of the earth
Beneath this hearth.1

In the literary field the end of the Twenties coincided with the demise of D.H. Lawrence. Hardy and Bridges were gone. Eliot appeared to have buried his original make-up. With Joyce's ULYSSES, the very ground slipped from under the form of the traditional novel. Poetry broke into new fields. The significant books published in the year 1930 were: Ash Wednesday (Eliot), Poems (Auden), Apes of God (W.Lewis), Anna Livia Plurabelle (Joyce), Cakes and Ale (Maugham) and Her Privates We (Frederic Manning).

Insecurity, futility, economic misery and encroachment upon individual liberty were still making writers adopt a sneering tone, but their intellectual atmosphere was charged with expectancy of a new birth. Of course it was but natural that many did not concede this to the new imaginative writers. For example, look to this: "My own opinion is that

the younger generation, especially the most intelligent among them, are conscious of the coming of a new event, which they do not either love or desire, but which they intuitively hate to destroy." According to văn and manner of the new writers proclaimed both the period and the birth of an expected good one. This poet at best felt fed up:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

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2. Vide The Views of Prof. Ifor Evans in the article "The Decline of Myth", p. 51, The Contemporary Review, January-June 1930. C.E.M. Joad's letter to the Editor calling it the End of an Epoch: p. 11, N.S. and Nation, January 3, 1935. Of "(1930) was in two senses the end of a literary epoch. It was the end of the half-century beginning in 1880, when the contemporary world split off from the Victorian world, and it was the end of the self-contained period of 20 years from the crucial changes of 1910, a period of investigation and probing, of uneasiness and unrest and creation, which closes with the death of D.H. Lawrence." (p. 38: Assessment of Contemporary Literature by J. Issacs, Sacker & Warburg, London, 1952).

But the newer one wanted to have a go, hoping for the best:

Suppose that we, tomorrow or — some day,
Came to an end — in room — in kind to you,
Or a winter's chill
Would y that be possible...

Say what endurance given or not, it takes
Love's proved in its indemnity
Like leaf or linnet the true love's affection
Is born, dies later, asks no reassurance.

Over dark wood rises one dawn felicitious,
Bright through awakened shadows fall her crystal Cadenzas, and once for all the wood is quickened,
So our joys visit us, and it suffices.¹

Thus 1930 was a significant beginning. It ushered in a new decade most unforgettable for the present generation—a decade which preceded the severe holocaust of World War II. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times', wrote Dickens while describing France immediately before the French Revolution; so might it be said of the Thirties just before World War II. For the first time in the nation's life the fruits of applied Physics, Politics and Economics began to hold an obsessional sway on the life of the common man. Tom, Dick and Harry in England have ever taken an academic and intelligent interest especially in Political and Economic theories—in the governance of the country and the Free trade policy. But in the decade under review Science, Politics, and Economics became so much the actual—

ity, that the man-in-the-street could no longer go on feeling or behaving like a more dispassionate observer-cum-debater. The very form and spirit of the material way of life had undergone a change. Machines imperceptibly filled the consciousness of man as Nature had done till then. "A gust of mechanical changes has produced a revolution in our material way of life. There has been a great age of applied Physics .... The pace of life has been quickened by the motor-car, the aeroplane, the telephone, the wireless. We live at a different tempo." 1

And further: "Perhaps some of the social and political movements of our time on the continent of Europe are connected with the physical revolution through which we are going. They tend towards an idolization of the group — the race, the nation, the class .... Physics affects politics: physical inventions which make men move quicker, and in closer connection, tend to produce political movements of a rapid elan and a gregarious or collectivist temper." 2

2. Ibid., p. 514.
But Politics and Economics were much more important factors shaping the mood and emotions of an entire continent of which England was just a part. The term Political Economy had passed from the stage of merely being fashionable or resounding. The life of the nation was mainly a manifestation or practical verification of the political and economic ideologies being pursued then: "In politics, in economics, in finance, the world is passing through an extreme form of depression and unrest .... Whatever be the enlightened view or the sound interpretation, it is not easy for normal people to be cheerful in the contemplation of what is taking place. The world is spending more on armaments than it spent in 1913. Europe is still unsettled by fear and suspicion .... Great Britain is driving nearer to national bankruptcy than the oldest, most experienced city men ever could have believed, and British party politics have ceased to serve the interests of the British people".¹

Though optimists pointed out that there was a greater social justice, viz, equality of classes and sexes, England at home was writing under the agony of unemployment which the Labour Government under Mr. Macdonald could at best muddle and tinker with. It meant misery, doles, degradation and general lowering of the standard of living which was telling upon the masses in spite of State welfare policies (Insurance, Pension etc.). "The formal reason for England's participation in the War was the tearing up by Germany of the Treaty which guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium. The true motive was that the country was afraid that the German predominance -

on the continent would result in a lower standard of living in England. The War was won but the flame of the desire for increased material comforts burnt more brightly, to reveal the presence of a new danger - the employment of more than one million people that whilst foreign affairs have ostensibly ground, in reality England's chief anxiety has been employment. The pain of it appeared still more excruciating to those who thought that the unemployment relief was not only demoralizing the workers but also making them shamelessly complacent, and that the State was unduly making inroads upon individual liberty, the thing most cherished by the English character.

England abroad was preparing for the Naval Disarmament conference and not viewing with favour the American and French moves vis-a-vis the League of Nations. 'Merrie Old England' had been little England; now she began to feel herself as an integral part of Europe where peace had to be maintained if English people were to be spared the ordeal of another clash between nations. The revival of German nationalism too was engaging the general attention and causing fear: The entry of Great Britain into Europe is one of the permanent results of the War, and our duty to Europe is one of the permanent lessons which we have learned from it.

Another lesson, or another aspect of the same lesson,

is our duty to the cause of the organization of peace — the peace of Europe, the peace of world.  

In one sense this instability is a national disadvantage; the country needs more than ever, freedom from turmoil to enable it to continue with the restoration and reorganization of its industries. In another sense, it has its benefits. Now that the political process has become dramatic, the public may feel inclined to emerge from the apathy of the mere spectator and take a hand in preparing the next "curtain."

Thus when Economics, Politics, and Science made themselves not-to-be-ignored actualities of man's life, it was but natural that the distracting yet all-pervading and insistent milieu found urgent expression at the hands of the contemporary writer. Literature originates socially and the commencement of the new decade in 1930 too registered a reverberation of new social vibrations in that field of imaginative activity. The ideas, attitudes and expressions

of the poets, for example, were conditioned by contemporary situation and its new and independent apprehension by them. It was not mere naivety, which had already been worn threadbare by succours and followers of Eliot. (The 'modernist poetry' was strikingly original in its verse forms, allusiveness, symbolism, idea-pattern, sharp expression, and abstruseness). But its scope had been limited as the writers were obsessed with the sense of futility. Poetry in the Twenties was sincere yet narrow: "The age which followed the first World War was an age of social upheaval and disintegration. If poetry was to be a living force it had to represent the ugliness, the vulgarity, the confusion, and the stupidity of that strange transitional period. The new 'newness' lay in the execution of a striking vision. It was not an attempt at merely satirizing the vulgarity and futility of human life.

1. p. Literature and Life, (Addresses to English Association), Harrap & Co., London 1948: from an article 'Live Dogs and Dead Lions' by Prof. V. de Sola Pinto. The views of M. Roberts are worth noting in this connection: "Those poets who have in recent years attempted to satirize such a state of affairs, whilst being themselves the victims of it, were at a hopeless disadvantage; it is useless to show the futility of this or that if you believe that all alike is vanity."

Surely and effortlessly the machines, the economic misery, the political insecurity and the spiritual conflict seeped into the literary roots. The predominant literary attitudes previous to that had been (a) Bitter satire (as in Aldington or A. Huxley), (b) Frustrated cynicism (as in Eliot or Sitwells), (c) Passionate individualism (as in Lawrence or Yeats), (d) Esoteric modernism (as in Pound or Graves), and (e) Psycho-analytical labyrinth or the stream-of-consciousness (as in Joyce or Virginia Woolf). At the turn of the decade a changed literary climate began to be noticed. Writers and critics alike rejected private allusiveness and the chorus of frustration. Day Lewis roundly put it:

You that love England, who have an ear for her music... Listen. Can you not hear the entrance of a new Theme?  

He went on to impress upon his countrymen:

You above all who have come to the far end, victims  
Of a run-down machine, who can bear it no longer;  
Whether in easy chairs chafing at impotence.  
Or against hunger, bullies and spies preserving  
The nerve for action, the spark of indignation —  
Need fight in the dark no more, you know your enemies.  
You shall be leaders when zero hour is signalled,  
Wielders of powers and welders of a new world.  

2. Ibid., p. 116.
Life still was misery, but something was to be done about it besides evincing cynical detachment:

When have their lives been?
And airs that choke?
And where less prisoner, to let?
Like a sun strike?

No, no, no,
It is too late for anger,
Nothing prevails
But pity for the grief they cannot feel.¹

Life was meant to be lived and as such was it not proper not only to take stock of things but to set them in order and march ahead? As W.H. Auden put it:

Shall idleness ring then your eyes like the pest,
0 will you, unnoticed and mildly take the rest,
Will you join the lost in their sneering circles,
Forfeit the beautiful interest and fall
Where the engaging face is the face of the betrayer
And the pang is all?

Wind shakes the tree; the mountains darken;
But the heart repeats though we would not hearken:
"Yours is the choice to whom the gods awarded
The language of learning and the language of love,
Crooked to move as moneybag or cancer,
Or straight as a dove."²