CHAPTER VIII
THE CHARGE OF CYNICISM AGAINST HEMINGWAY
The purpose of this chapter is not simply to take up the cudgels against those who accuse Hemingway of cynical attitude towards life. On the other hand, this chapter examines in detail how the new concepts of Hemingway derived from his own 'lived experience' went contrary to the literary tastes in vogue. The sources of this matter-of-factness and stark realism have been traced back to the incidents of Hemingway's life. Without being an avowed moralist or a propagator of a certain ideology, Hemingway points out how even the most ordinary man can conduct himself in the troubled times if he possesses self-honesty, courage and probity. Hemingway was apolitical and lover of humanity and believed in the ideals of human justice. Of course, he has depicted man's hard lot but the ultimate impression is of courage and vigour. In Hemingway's phraseology courage implies knowledge, purpose and something to live for.

In this chapter, I have also dealt with the common misunderstanding about Hemingway that he deals with narrow range of characters and situations. It goes without saying that the form of short story itself does not allow elaborate and detailed examination of the life taken as a whole. Hemingway does not delight in violence
for its own sake. Hemingway, the artist has within his self-proclaimed narrow range shown the hero's determined effort to overcome the world of horrors. Hemingway has seen the brutalities of war, and instead of being heartbroken, he decided to be a writer to do his best to mitigate the horrors of life. The author with such a noble aim can never be a cynic.

The Way It Was

The Nobel Prize Citation praised "the powerful, style-making mastery of the art of modern narration," but it also described Ernest's early writings as "brutal, cynical and callous." Ernest was displeased by the reference of cynicism to his earlier writings which include most of his short stories. Dr. Hemingway's letter to Ernest on the publication of In Our Time echoes the reactions of many readers of Victorian background. The good doctor advised his son to "look for good, spiritual and beautiful because it is there." Dr. Hemingway returned all the six copies of In Our Time, even the copy meant for Ernest's mother, saying that it was a dirty thing. He could not tolerate such a filth in his house. Later on, when Ernest was becoming famous, his father Dr. Hemingway is known to have answered sadly of the question as to how the boy was making out, "Ernest has written another dirty book."
The above views, instead of proving the limi-
tations of Ernest, point out to the narrow vision of Dr. Hemingway himself. So is also true of all others who have similar views about him. Of course, his main pre-
occcupation is with war and violence but it is not his motiveless malignity. The primary intent of his writing, from first to last, has been to seize and project for the reader what he has often called "the way it was." The world in the first quarter of the twentieth century was a troubled one. This age of interrogation was subject to searching questions of a super-sensitive boy like Ernest whose aim was to find the truth and not merely the factual truth. With an impartial objectivity, he peeped deep into the things to study his reactions as they really are and not as they should be. In fact, Ernest is so much ahead of his time in this respect that the readers whose visions are bound by the pre-conceived notions of respectability and morality, cannot but call him a cynic. To them, his books may be dirty as they are to Dr. Hemingway. Ernest came face to face with death on July 8, 1918. He happened to collect the fragments of human dead bodies. He saw the misery of evacuation scene in Greco-Turkish war. The dehumanising influence of war on men and morals has become the theme of his stories. Apart from physical violence prevalent in our time, there is another danger to the individuality of human beings because of the growth of mass organisations
which leave the man but a cog in the machine. A close study of his stories tells us that it has been Ernest's effort from the beginning to show how an individual can rise above the commonly accepted values of life. Nick Adams's desire to make a "separate peace" is a fitting reply to those who level the charge of cynicism against Hemingway. When the first collection of the stories was published, the people were shocked by the stark realism. They did not want to come out of their ivory tower. Of course, when Dr. Hemingway calls Ernest's work filthy and dirty, the good doctor admits his own failure to see the things as they really are.

Closely connected with the charge of cynicism is also the charge that Hemingway is too limited. His characters are mute and insensitive. His hero is "a dull-witted, bovine, monosyllabic simpleton." For Edmund Wilson, the heroines of Hemingway are "amoeba-like." The characters lack inwardness, and the fictional situations are disparaged for the narrowness of their range. Ernest Hemingway could not overlook such adverse criticism. His anger at the critics in the form of a poem Valentine is wholly justifiable. Ole Andresen's ordeal is not "sordid little catastrophe", and Nick Adams can never be called "very vulgar." Ernest Hemingway's rejoinder that the pockets of the critics are "full of lye" expresses his genuine resentment on being misunderstood by the critics and the reviewers.
Ernest Hemingway has chosen simple people and simple incidents with a colour of imagination to elucidate the primary laws of human nature. When he portrays the character like that of Manuel Garcia, he shows him possessing the essential qualities of an ordinary human being. Ernest Hemingway is democratic in his attitude and shows vast potentialities in the ordinary people. Seen in this light, Hemingway is a classicist. He has seen the life in our time with the authority of a candid photograph and, at the same time, he has given us a glimpse of a universal and eternal truth. In The Chauffeurs of Madrid, Hemingway's heart goes with Hipoloto and not with Mussolini or Hitler. No doubt, violence and death are the integral part of Hemingway's work, but he is much concerned about the form his characters assume under the pressure of suffering and dying. His famous phrase "grace under pressure" implies moral courage.

"...he also possesses a heroic pathos which forms the basic element in his awareness of life, a manly love of danger and adventure with a natural admiration for every individual who fights the good fight in the world of reality overshadowed by violence and death." 10

However, he never admires raw courage unless it is only way of getting a job done. 11 He is not the man to be impressed by reckless courage. In Hemingway's mind reckless bravery is equated with foolishness.
"He was very blunt and very foolish," says Ernest Hemingway about Luis Delgade in the story The Denunciation. He also remarks:

"...and really cheerful people are usually the bravest and the bravest get killed quickest..."13

Hemingway has no sadistic pleasure in violence and brutality. He feels badly about Luis Delgade for having given the waiter the number of the counter-espionage bureau in Seguridad headquarters. He does not want Luis Delgade to be disillusioned about his favourite hotel and its waiters.

"...certainly any small acts of kindness you can do in life are worth doing...I did not want him to be disillusioned or bitter about the waiters there before he died."14

Cynicism implies a man of morose and melancholy temperament inclined more to dark thoughts than to bright ones. Hemingway cannot be a skeptic when he has kind feelings for his fellow-beings. Moreover, he believes that the sacrifices made by others for a noble cause do not go waste. He is of the firm opinion:

"Nobody ever dies — for what there is of greatness and fidelity and truth in each life, lives on."15

Hemingway does not admire the sentimental love of the husband of Indian wife when he commits suicide because
he cannot stand the screams of his wife. Uncle George retreats from the shanty. Soon the impression of the incident will be lost on uncle George and, that is why, Nick's father says about him.

"He'll turn up all right."

Uncle George will soon relapse into the state of callousness and indifference towards the sufferings of others. On the other hand, Nick Adams feels sure that he will never die. Thus Hemingway does not depict negative attitude towards life. Once he said that unhappy childhood is the best training ground for a writer. The unhappy childhood develops self-reliance in the man. Moreover, the man whose childhood had been unhappy, develops a genuine concern for the well-being of others provided he has an affirmative attitude towards life.

In the story *The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio*, one of the visitors to Cayetano has distrust for everybody particularly the nuns and priests. This negative attitude does not appeal to Mr. Frazer. On the other hand, Mr. Frazer has love and admiration for Sister Cecilia and Cayetano who have an ideal before them.

Hemingway is a writer with a wholesome attitude towards life. When Ernest lay wounded in Italy in 1918, he took a vow that if he managed to get through that night alive, he would do everything in his power to prevent a further war. If there is war, it must be won because "defeat brings worse things than any that can ever happen in a war."
Hemingway's short stories deal with a variety of human disasters: advancing age in *The Undefeated*, the cowardice of Macomber, Harry's self-indulgence. Yet in these stories the process of recovery, real or imagined, is strongly suggested. Manuel's last performance has a touch of magnificence. Macomber regains his nerves. The snow-covered top of Kilimanjaro is a radiant incarnation not of Harry's corrupted hopes but of the pure ideal. Hemingway has respect for lion as an animal that meets death with dignity. In *Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, the lion is described after being wounded.

"All of him, pain, sickness, hatred and all of his remaining strength, was tightening into an absolute concentration of a rush."

(p. 118)

A bull likewise behaves with dignity but the death of the hyena is altogether bereft of dignity. Cayetano, the card-player in *The Gambler*, the Nun and the Radio stoically bears the pain of two bullets. His silent behaviour is the opposite of that of the Russian beet-worker who is accidentally wounded in the thigh and screams in the hospital. It is this quiet manly behaviour that earns the highest respect of which Hemingway is capable of for Jesus Christ. Five times in the story *To-day is Friday*, the first soldier says of Jesus Christ, "He was pretty good in there to-day."
It is not correct to say that Hemingway's heroines are amoeba-like. Jig in *Hills Like White Elephants* and the American wife in *Cat in the Rain* have an individuality of their own. The first fault is of Macomber that his wife is infidel to him. His cowardice is equated with her infidelity. When faced with a limit-situation, she rises to the occasion. Instead of contempt for women, Hemingway has the realisation that the real charm in life is lost if the man has no real companionship of woman. He admires courage and stoical endurance in women as in men. In the story *Indian Camp*, we have admiration for the Indian woman who bears the labour pain for two days. He has concern for all human beings irrespective of their political leanings. In the story *Che Ti Dice La Patria*, the authorial tone is sympathetic towards the young fascist who, despite the energy and will, cannot rise to the full stature under a fascist regime. The hero in the story *Now I Lay Me* has genuine concern for his orderly John whom he remembers in his prayers. He feels relieved when John is not in active military service otherwise he would have been a constant worry to him. Such a deep concern for fellow-beings is enough to refute the charge of cynicism against Hemingway.

Hemingway's preoccupations with death and violence do not make him cynical towards life. On the other hand, the close vicinity to death and violence eliminates the trivial from existence and clearly establishes honest,
unadorned being which is worth seeking in our time.
Nick Adams in *Indian Camp* asks a pertinent question:

"Is dying hard, Daddy?"
"No, I think it's pretty easy, Nick.
It all depends."  
(p.193)

Dying is a mystical experience if the hero knows how to live in a proper dignified way. Hemingway has depicted the scenes of violence and brutality but a few policemen. He has provided his own kind of antidote to the terrors of the modern man who is in the danger of losing the control of his world. This antidote is always a moral one. Hence it is an error to accuse Hemingway of indifference to society. To face death, to renounce the complicated way of life in favour of simpler, more existential form, to learn to live in the world without God and to learn to live with a self-imposed code of conduct, is to live authentically in our time. There is no material more heroic than to live authentically.

Hemingway felt no liking for American life because it was too dull. Nothing important ever happened. His friend Irving Stone pointed out to him Roosevelt's social and economic revolution. Ernest said flatly that it was not his material.\(^9\) By selecting a common man, Hemingway gives his stories a classical universality.

In the relatively narrow range of characters and fictional situations there is a hidden dynamite. Those who accuse Hemingway of cynicism and narrowness of vision
correct themselves when they penetrate deep below the hidden part of the ice-berg. Stewart F. Sanderson has rightly pointed out:

"To interpret Hemingway's earlier works as brutal, cynical and callous is to mistake husk for the grain. It is true that Hemingway in In Our Time mostly deals with woundings, killings, suicides and sexual happiness; but these things are not there for their horrible sake. They are there because they spring from a tender and sensitive mind which is outraged by the apparent cruelty of life." 20
References

3. Ibid., p. 201.
9. Ibid., p. 4


