

REGENERATION

There is a certain triad through which everything can be made right, a triad beginning with emotion but with a new and different emotion such as we seldom experience except in drops too little to be effective. Let us call it the 'triad of Regeneration'. The ordinary triad of generation, of multiplication, of growth and blossoming of all things in organic life has the order of forces, C–O–N. The triad of regeneration is back again along the same track but in reverse, N–O–C. The force of circumstances which suddenly makes one see oneself as one really is, a really strong bite of conscience, these things may give one short experience of this triad; but to make any change in one's life, this triad has to increase greatly in intensity and in duration, and then it can have an effect on other people. This triad of regeneration is what Schools are for, in the sense in which Mr. Ouspensky used the word 'School'. It is given in the Gospel of St. John as the key to Eternal life, and when asked for an explanation, Christ gives the story of the Good Samaritan; and the name there used in Tudor English is 'mercy'.

Examples of this triad abound in Shakespeare, who makes his heroes and heroines graduate to full growth and perfection through different stages or degrees of mercy. In the play, *As You Like It*, Orlando's brother Oliver is plotting to kill him. The following is John Vyvyan's description:

Oliver, it will be remembered, has been ordered by the usurping duke to find his brother dead or alive, and he comes to the forest to do so. He almost loses his own life in the attempt; and Orlando discovers him asleep under a tree – lost, starving and in rags, a snake coiled round his neck, while a lioness

Lay crouching, head on ground, with catlike watch,
When that the sleeping man should stir –
IV. iii

Orlando is tempted. The enemy who plotted his destruction is now at his mercy. The principles of love and justice are in the balance. If he walks away, Oliver must meet the death he has deserved.

Twice did he turn his back and purposed so;
But kindness, nobler ever than revenge,
And nature, stronger than his just occasion,
Made him give battle to the lioness –
IV. iii

He kills the lioness, and is himself wounded; but there is much more to the situation than this surface. The fact that he has been constant to love and to 'nature' – that is, to his own true nature – confers on him, according to Shakespeare's regular scheme, the power to make creative mercy effective. The enmity is therefore destroyed. And just as Valentine was able to give 'Silvia' to Proteus – that is, to bestow on him as a gift the vision of true beauty that he himself had won by merit – so now Orlando's perfect forgiveness awakens Oliver to the knowledge of his real self. He recounts this in a conversation with the heroines:

Celia; Are you his brother?
 Rosalind; Was it you he rescued?
 Celia; Was't you that did so oft contrive
 to kill him?
 Oliver: 'Twas I; but 'tis not I, I do not shame
 To tell you what I was, since my conversion
 So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.

IV.iii.

In drama after drama, Shakespeare comes back to the supreme experience of self-discovery. The regenerating hero achieves it by merit; and he bestows it on his former enemy by grace. We find this conception in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* – one of the earliest comedies; we have it here, in a central play; and it occurs in what is possibly the last. With Prospero's help, Gonzalo tells us in *The Tempest*, the characters all found themselves, 'When no man was his own'. However reluctant many people may be to admit allegory in Shakespeare, I think everyone will agree that this life-long consistency demands some explanation.

(*Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty*, pp.115–117)

The possibility for this triad depends on the presence of a certain kind of energy, which in the ordinary way is all dissipated or is locked away, so before this triad of regeneration can take place, a great quantity of this energy must be stored up but ready for release when circumstances or conscious effort by some enlightened person can trigger it off. Two preliminary combinations of forces are necessary, and these constitute School work. If these are carried out over a period, the required energy will be ready in the right place; but for a long time we do not have control over the act of regeneration itself, and until a man has sufficient Self-knowledge and Will to bring it into action for and in himself, he cannot do it for other people. This energy has a certain taste or feel about it, and once it has been recognised as such, it can be recalled to memory and sought again and again. Unless one is acquiring this taste and this power of recall, School work is barren of that miraculous bread which in the Lord's Prayer we ask for.

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