THE
DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMANTIC IDEAL
THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

BY

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To

a romantic

who has not declined nor fallen

GORDON BOTTOMLEY
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An abridged version of chapters i–iii was delivered before the University College of North Wales at Bangor, as the three Ballard Mathews Lectures for 1935; and (in still shorter form) before the Royal Institution, in December of that year. Chapter v is a reprint of the Warton Lecture for 1933 to the British Academy, by whose permission it is republished here. I should like to express my gratitude to all three bodies for a kindness and hospitality that turned the lecturer’s task into a pleasure.

I have added an Epilogue for reviewers and others who may find the book too long.

F.L.L.

August 1936

Nearly thirty years have passed since this book was written under the shadow of coming war. The War came; and provided a grimmer example than ever of the destructiveness of a Romanticism gone rotten. For Hitler, though he might pride himself on ruthless realism, remained, still more, a perverted romantic, who hated reason, boasted of marching to his goal like a somnambulist, and intoxicated both himself and his countrymen with megalomaniac dreams. And so, though far smaller than that other romantic, Napoleon, he proved even costlier. On the other hand I should like to make it clear from the outset that this book is not an indiscriminate
NOTE

attack on all Romanticism. Both life and literature have, I believe, reached their best with those that kept a steady, yet flexible, balance between Romanticism, Realism, and Classicism, all three. For it seems perilous to become either too imaginative, or too cynical, or too dominated even by good sense and great traditions. I have here tried to discuss both the triumphs and the dangers of Romanticism; the triumphs remain; but the dangers also.

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

F.L.L.

March 1963