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978-1-107-66318-3 - The Kingdom of Free Men  
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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*The English Inheritance*

(S.C.M. Press)

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# THE KINGDOM OF FREE MEN

BY

G. KITSON CLARK

*Reader in Constitutional History in the  
University of Cambridge*

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1957

Cambridge University Press  
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[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America  
by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107663183](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107663183)

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First published 1957  
First paperback edition 2011

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-66318-3 Paperback

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS book is founded on a series of seven lectures which I delivered for the Divinity Faculty at Cambridge in the Michaelmas Term of 1955, as a course open to all members of the University. Since they were delivered from notes rather than from a completed manuscript, it has been necessary partially to rewrite them in more coherent form. In doing this I have made use of a certain amount of information which came to hand after the lectures were given, and have expanded some of the arguments which the shortness of the time available for each lecture had forced me to truncate. Nevertheless, my notes were full and what is published here is substantially the same as the lectures which I gave. In the circumstances, however, it seemed better to call the lectures 'chapters'.

I feel that I ought to apologize for dealing with topics on which I have no expert knowledge and with disciplines in which it will be clear that I have no expert skill. I am no theologian, no philosopher, no economist, and I pretend to no special knowledge of Eastern Europe, still less of the Far East. Yet I would plead that the importance of the subjects which I have tried to handle is of a nature to tempt a fool to rush in, indeed to give him something of a moral duty to do so, perhaps in the hope that angels will follow.

It seems to me that some of the gravest dangers which confront humanity spring from the large organized mass movements of fanatical opinion which are, perhaps increasingly, among the most potent weapons of modern

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politics. Much of the history of communism, of fascism, of the various nationalist movements at work in the world today, provide examples of what I mean, but the most notorious and terrible example is that of the Nazi movement in Germany. When the leaders of that movement had achieved power in the State, they used all the force at their disposal to impose their doctrine on all alike and to override the limitations which the standards of more old-fashioned creeds might have set upon action. Such books as Mr Wheeler-Bennett's *The Nemesis of Power. The German Army in Politics, 1918-45* (London, 1953), Mr Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution. The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (London, 1953), E. Crankshaw's *Gestapo. Instrument of Tyranny* (London, 1956) show clearly how complete was their success, how ambition, greed, moral uncertainty, fear or even a sense of duty led men of all sorts of traditions and positions to become the accomplices of the Nazis in deeds of an atrocity which earlier generations would not have thought to be credible. But many of those who so prostituted themselves seem to have been in fact only accomplices; however august their position, in the last analysis they were camp followers, attracted or compelled by the power of the movement, but not the source of its power. The source of power, the dynamic instrument which Hitler used to conquer the State and as a main source of energy when he controlled it, was the mass of fanatical opinion in the Nazi party itself, a body of opinion which he inspired, organized and on occasion betrayed. Without that he would surely have been nothing.

This body of opinion was truculent, dogmatic and very



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emotional. It was fed on ideas which to minds that are not Nazi and not German seem unlikely to survive critical inquiry. This, however, mattered very little. For men and women, particularly for inexperienced and ignorant young men and young women, whose passions were involved, and for whom the Nazi movement seemed to provide all that life had to promise of hope and pride, here was a creed which was final and compulsive, worthy of their absolute sacrifice and devotion. For them any case that might have been urged against its teaching would not have been worth consideration, even if they had had a chance to consider it, and for them traditional ideas, older political traditions, must have seemed obsolete and without appeal, if not laughable or disgusting. So they yielded themselves up to be the docile and enthusiastic servants of tyranny, the motive power of one of the most dangerous forces that have ever threatened Europe.

Now the history of German opinion, and particularly of the opinion of German youth, between the wars was no doubt controlled by circumstances peculiar to itself. No doubt it was in a special way and in a special degree fated and tragic. Mr Leslie Paul's chapter on the 'Revolt of German Youth' in his *Annihilation of Man* (London, 1944) seems well worthy of consideration even by those who have not the leisure to read larger works, but it is much to be hoped that those who have expert knowledge of German life and history will instruct us further in this very important matter. It would, however, be very wrong to believe that the general problem which the history of Nazism suggests is confined to Germany. It is rather the result of conditions which are to be found in many

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countries today. In very many countries the formation, the manipulation and the direction of mass opinion are the keys to power, the machinery and techniques which enable men to use these keys are everywhere available, and the conditions which favour their use probably exist in most advanced societies.

It seems, for instance, possible that such movements of mass opinion are assisted by the rootlessness of modern urban life, and more certain that they receive force from the uncertainties and recurrent frustrations, as also possibly from the dull unrewarding routine, of modern economic conditions. It also seems to be very probable that the way is prepared for these movements by the education which the modern State extends to large numbers of its subjects and the limitations of that education. Young men and young women are often brought to a point at which they are no longer prepared to accept traditional orthodoxies; they can understand new ideas, but are not yet endowed with adequate powers, with the patience, the scholarship, the catholic sympathies and the knowledge, to criticize the ideas presented to them, or to place them in relation to other ideas and traditions. At the same time they have often been encouraged by the kind of education they have received to believe, not unnaturally, that they have a right to a way of life and a position, or at least opportunities to attain such a position, in the community which society, as traditionally organized, is unable or unwilling to afford to them. They are therefore apt to dislike all that seems to be compromised by association with the traditions of society.

All these things probably facilitate the exploitation of

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the generosity, the need for hope, the pride and force of youth. They present a problem which is very difficult and deserves a more penetrating diagnosis than I can give. But one thing seems certain: the conditions which create it are not confined to Germany. Indeed those who were engaged in university education in Britain in the ten years between 1929 and 1939 will remember how communism took its toll of some of the best and most intelligent undergraduates. They were young men who desperately needed a faith and some programme which offered hope for themselves and for mankind. Secular hope in years which were shadowed from behind by the depression and from ahead by oncoming war was not easy to find; nor were they prepared to consider the case for the programmes of older political parties either of the right or the left, and they derided the religions of their forefathers. They were not always, indeed not often, personally unfriendly, but they were emotionally impermeable to argument. So they gave themselves recklessly, generously, credulously to a creed which was unworthy of them, and in due course might be ruthlessly exploited by men who were playing nakedly—for all but their dupes to see—the oldest game of all, the game of power politics. Conditions in Great Britain, and, despite their repeated claims to represent ‘Youth’, the relative smallness of the numbers affected, made anything like a mass movement impossible. In most cases this seems to have been a phase which men passed through and left behind; the worst that it did was to leave behind a certain number of individual personal tragedies; in other cases the experience may have done good and been enlightening

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for aught I know. Yet in the attitude revealed, in their emotionalism and their dogmatism, in the extreme harshness of the scepticism and cynicism with which these young men viewed traditional beliefs, and the unusual gullibility with which they accepted what was offered to them in the name of their new revelation, in fact in the habits of mind which led to the easy exploitation of youthful idealism by men of coarser moral fibre, the experience of these years may perhaps suggest some of the conditions of mind which make these mass movements of opinion the dangerous things that they are. It may not be too fanciful to say that they present as great a danger to humanity as the hydrogen bomb.

But these two dangers require very different treatment. The danger of the hydrogen bomb may perhaps be averted by stalemate. If two groups of potential enemies build up countervailing systems of armament, then it is possible that the balance may bring peace, that the chance of success will not suffice to tempt, and the certainty of receiving serious damage will be a strong argument to deter, a potential aggressor; for it must be remembered that it is not historically true to say that competitive armaments have always led to war. It is otherwise with the organization of massed bodies of opinion. Two masses of strongly held opinion, fanatical, ignorant, uncritical, constantly recharged from the batteries of propaganda and consciously directed against each other, are not likely to lead to peace between the nations, and they are very likely to lead to tyranny in their own bounds. The only answer to this danger is not to oppose like to like but to extend education still further, and to appeal from

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mass opinion to the individual intelligence, to increase the power and ability to criticize and analyse, and to encourage men and women to extend their knowledge and understanding of men and women in different historic situations with different historic traditions.

But by knowledge must be meant accurate knowledge, as far as it can be compassed, of all the facts, even when the facts are exceedingly unpleasant. Nothing could be more dangerous for humanity than to indulge in the moral indolence of an easy-going and ignorant tolerance. We can never afford to let bygones be bygones. In the last half-century very terrible things have happened; in the world of today very terrible things are still happening. It is of the first importance to find out what has been done, what is being done, and who have done it or are doing it, and to try to probe the motives and conditions that make it possible for men to do these things. The object of this is not to feed hate, or to encourage men and women to indulge in the luxury of moral indignation, nor yet to pass moral judgments on the agents of these actions, a task which, I believe, is beyond the capacity of human beings. The object is rather to try to understand the source of evil in order that we may perhaps guard against it or possibly eliminate it, to realize that the world is what it is and not what we would like it to be, and to stigmatize evil actions for what they are lest the moral currency of mankind be debased.

Inquiry into such matters will I believe reveal the terrible power of the forces of history over those who are at the same time their agents and their victims. But the inheritance from the past not only works for evil, it works

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for good as well. In particular we who live in the liberal democracies have inherited, not through our own merits but by good fortune and by reason of the merits of our ancestors, three things which if extended and made more effective can be of the greatest value to mankind. They are liberal institutions, the tradition of humanity and the Christian faith. It is, however, clear from all modern experience that traditional values can no longer simply rely on traditional authority for acceptance. As education develops they must increasingly rely on the inherent strength of their case and appeal not to inherited complacency, or to simple faith, but to the intellect. There are grave dangers in this situation, but it has to be accepted, and those who care for the self-respect and moral stature of mankind will, for all its dangers, be glad that it is as it is.

It is possible that at this moment conditions may be unusually favourable for securing the reconsideration of these inherited values. It is possible that in Europe at least the secular fanaticisms of the recent past may be burning themselves out, and that men may again, as in the eighteenth century, learn to look back on their wars of religion and see how fruitless and terrible they were. Certainly in Great Britain, during and since the war, a much more level-headed generation of young men and women has arisen who are more readily prepared to give a fair hearing to what is presented to them, even to the case for those things in which their grandparents believed. It is all-important that they should discuss these matters and form their judgments upon them, and it was my object in my lectures to stimulate such discussion. Certainly those who wish to consider many of the topics which I handle

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would be well advised to refer them to more expert authorities than myself, but at the least an amateur presentation may initiate debate, and it is possible that a university teacher should seek to do no more.

While preparing these lectures I have received much kind help from many people, so many in fact that it is impossible to name more than the principal ones. Professor Michael Oakeshott of the London School of Economics gave me advice on the definition of the totalitarian state. The Rev. H. M. Waddams of the Church of England Council of Foreign Relations gave me much help and information, and Colonel J. B. Barron very kindly read through my manuscript. Mr Douglas Woodruff, editor of *The Tablet*, gave me assistance, and the Catholic Truth Society sent me relevant pamphlets. The Rev. George Appleton, Mr Wallace C. Merwin, Mr B. D. Nicholls, the Rev. A. E. A. Sulston, Mr N. C. Pateman and Canon H. A. Wittenbach gave me very interesting information about China, and Dr W. O. Lewis and Mr Percy J. Buffard about Spain. My brother-in-law the Rev. Derwas Chitty has given me much assistance about the Orthodox Church. Sir Ernest Barker, Mr G. F. A. Best and the Rev. H. A. Williams, with great kindness, read through the lectures when in type. To all these people my very warm thanks are due; but in all cases I alone am responsible for the information presented and the views expressed; indeed, there are without doubt not a few statements and opinions in my lectures with which several of my advisers would most strongly disagree.

G. K. C.

*August 1956*

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## POSTSCRIPT

Since the earlier part of this Preface was written events in the world have moved swiftly, and they may seem to have rendered obsolete some of the problems advanced in it, or in the rest of the book. There has been the partial modification of the communist régime in Poland, the revolt in Hungary, its bloody suppression and the renewal of tension between Russia and the West. The renewal of tension does not touch my argument. The cold war is necessarily affected by passing events, contemporary needs and the individuals who may happen at any given moment to dominate the stage of history. At the moment it has become more virulent, in the near future it may very well become more virulent still, but in due course, unless fighting actually breaks out, there is likely to be another attempt to find a more peaceful *modus vivendi*. None of these secular changes affects the basic conflict of principle which divides the governments of the world, and it is no more, and no less, necessary to draw attention to what is fundamental in that conflict. However, something of profounder significance may be suggested by what has happened, what may even now be happening, in Europe. The revolt in Hungary, the movement even among communists which led to the changes in Poland, even the reports which have come through from time to time of the disillusion and discontent among young people and professional writers in Russia itself, may perhaps help to define the boundary beyond which the modern State, even the totalitarian State, can no longer control the mind and the spirit of man.



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If that is so the matter is important indeed; it may well be the beginning of a new chapter in history. But in the present state of our knowledge it is more than usually necessary to be cautious, and to discriminate. Clearly conditions differ widely in different countries. In Hungary the official creed against which the revolt was directed was one imposed by a foreign power through the agency of a government of exceptional cruelty and ferocity, which was also the agent for the ruthless economic exploitation of the country for the benefit of the foreigner. In such a case a revolt both intellectual and physical was probable. In Poland the situation may have been in many ways comparable, but in Poland the hatred of Russia may well have been balanced in some degree by fear and hatred of Germany, a link upon which the Russian government may have known that it could rely. Even so, if what has happened in either case suggests limitations on the power of the modern State, with all its apparatus for propaganda and indoctrination, to control the minds of men, it must be remembered that in either case the State was encumbered by peculiar disadvantages. Obviously conditions are likely to be different elsewhere.

Conditions are likely, for instance, to be very different in those Asian or African countries where governments are using the mass movements of resurgent nationalism to consolidate their independence and to increase their force. This is perhaps particularly likely to be true of those countries, and there may come to be more of them, where nationalism makes use of the categories of communism or where communism exploits the passions of nationalism, and there is a large, poor, relatively unlettered but partially

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awakened mass to draw upon. The condition of opinion in Russia itself, or of some opinion in Russia itself, may be an interesting variant if it is true that some young people have become cynical about, some writers have reacted against, the wearisome reiterations of an endlessly dull and hidebound official orthodoxy. That certainly would suggest a limit to the power of the State to control the thought and the imagination of mankind. Even so it would be interesting to know how many even of those who are discontented still retain, without question, the basic assumptions about the nature of man, the shape of history or the condition of the non-communist world, which a communist upbringing has imposed upon them. Men may revolt against official propaganda and yet continue to bear on their minds the scars of official teaching; and, if that is so, their minds are still, in part at least, in the grip of the totalitarian State.

On all this more knowledge is needed. In fact if we are at the beginning of a new chapter the two most important problems it may raise may be: first, for how long can any State maintain a monopoly control over men's minds? And, second, if that control breaks down what takes its place? But there will certainly be a third question in it, carried over from what took place before this chapter started: for how long can the totalitarian States continue to control men's bodies? To that question at the moment the evidence gives no very encouraging answer, and it is a critical question. For however resilient the mind and spirit of man may prove to be, if the physical control remains in the hands of men who believe in totalitarian principles, or even of men who find it convenient to assume totalitarian

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principles, life will still be lived at discretion and the free development of the soul and intellect will never be secure.

But, whether we are at the beginning of a new chapter or no, I do not feel that even the secular issues raised in my book have become obsolete, or are likely to become obsolete for a very considerable period. I feel this the more because I am certain that what is most important is what is positive, and not what is negative. A revolution may be a very notable and significant event; but it is what comes after a revolution, or what is achieved without revolution, that controls the future. And to make the future secure for mankind there are needed not just a hatred of tyranny, or a rejection of official orthodoxies, but positive principles which may enable men to maintain their own freedom and will make them protect as their own the freedom of others, even of others with whom they disagree. It is to the consideration of such principles, and of their relation to Christianity, that I wish to turn men's minds.

Since writing the first part of the Preface I have acquired a new debt of gratitude—to my brother Commander E. Bidder Clark and to Dr L. Radzinowicz for their help with the Italian of Cardinal Ottaviani's speech, and also to the editor of *Osservatore Romano* for sending me the Italian version of the speech.

G.K.C.

*April 1957*

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