

CHAPTER 3

The Exile

MITRINOVIĆ ARRIVED in London in early August 1914 armed only with an address in Golders Green given to him by his English teacher in Munich, a Miss Sanderson. He presented himself at the Serbian Legation from where, on August 15th, a telegram was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Niš enquiring whether they might appoint Dimitrije Mitrinović, who was in London without work and without means, to a position within the Legation. A further despatch of August 29th, stressed the importance of Mitrinović's knowledge of the Yugoslav question, and on September 14th arrangements were made for his appointment as a clerk at the salary of 150 dinars a month. This was an unlikely position for one who had spent much of the previous decade as a political organiser and propagandist and he did not remain deskbound for long. Mitrinović shared the view that the war would not last long and that by the summer of 1915 he would be able to resume his roving commission on behalf of the *Blut-bund*. Within a few months he was writing to the Serbian Prime Minister, Nikola Pasić, offering his services as a propagandist for the Yugoslav ideal. In the letter of early November 1914 he explained:

Be so kind as to forgive me for troubling you with this letter, since I have realised that I am not suited to office work I have had to resign the charge with which you and Monsieur the Minister have favoured me. I take the liberty of informing you personally why I have ceased working at the Legation so that my action may be rightly understood. In the meantime I hold that my national duty and my great obligation to the government of Serbia, which for years has assisted my education, will be best served if I devote myself to the propaganda of

Yugoslav cultural and political thought among the peoples who may best be of assistance to Serbia and to Yugoslavia.¹

At the end of November Pasić sent a reply to the London Legation: 'Let Mitrinović work as he proposes.' Mitrinović, for his part, took a short course in Spoken English at the Berlitz School of Languages in order to prepare himself for the public speaking engagements that he anticipated would accompany his new commission.

For Mitrinović the cause of Serbia and Yugoslavia could no longer be confined to a narrow nationalism. The development of his ideas with the Young Bosnians, expressed most fully in 'Aesthetic Contemplations', had prepared the ground for his involvement with Kandinsky, Gutkind and van Eeden in the movement for a new European order. Now, with the outbreak of hostilities there came the impetus to join the two strands together: the fate of his homeland with the future development of humanity as a whole. This concern to relate the specific to the general, the micro to the macro-level, was one of the key features of his approach to the world and to life. The true significance of a single part could be appreciated only within a context that embraced an organic view of the whole, within which the single part had a functional role to perform. In an article published in September 1914 he addressed the question of 'Who should possess Trieste?' Writing as the Secretary of the 'Serbo-Croat Organisation for Political Union' he combined a detailed analysis of the conflicting claims and interests of Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia and the embryonic Balkan Federation with a perspective which stressed that 'the question of Trieste should be settled not in the interest of one nationality or the other, but in the interest of the peace of the world.' He argued that 'in the independence and neutralisation of these two important towns (Trieste and Constantinople) lies the only way of achieving a permanent and peaceful settlement.' Such a settlement, he suggested, would enable 'the great Southern Slav state of tomorrow' to fulfil its historic function as 'the connecting link between the New Europe and the New East.'²

During the first few months immediately following his arrival in Britain Mitrinović was very much taken with the idea of going to America to further the aims of the *Blut-bund* and continue his work on the preparation of the proposed yearbook, *Aryan Europe*.

He had heard that the wife of the Serbian foreign minister was travelling to America from Niš on Red Cross business, and he wrote to Slavko Grujić, the minister, offering his services as a secretary on November 19th 1914. In his letter he informed the minister of his project with regard to the yearbook and stressed the importance of propaganda work for the Yugoslav cause in America:

Having fled from Munich here, firstly to be of use to the Serbian Legation here, and secondly to maintain myself materially while the war lasts, I have assisted in the office at the Legation; however I realised that I am not suited for that work. Secondly my faith in the yearbook has revived, and I hope it will be possible to gather friends together; and I am unshakably convinced that, besides the fact that it is categorically necessary to enlighten public political thinking in Europe and America about Serbia and the brotherhood with the Croats and the Slovenes, it is necessary to gain the respect of Europe, and of humanity in general, for the cultural works which Yugoslavia has already achieved: for the national art, literary, musical and textile; for works of artistic literature and for scientific work worthy of general recognition: for Mestrovic and brilliant works of art among the Slovenes and the Croats. It is necessary to advise the wide world of the high moral value of the Serbian peasant, not only when he is putting up a superhuman fight for his life; and of the human content and greatness of Yugoslav history. At this moment it is not opportune and it is not possible to begin such propaganda in England not even in Europe generally; in America humanity is not being crushed and is calm. The future peace will be not a congress of diplomats but the pan-human parliament of nations; America will, with its idea and plan for Peace, be one of the decisive factors in the Peace and therefore it is necessary to represent the just rights of Serbia there: in general Slavdom needs to enlighten people in America about itself.³

While he was waiting to hear the response of the Foreign Minister to his suggestion, Mitrinović busied himself working for the Yugoslav cause in Britain. In 1915 the Croatian poet Tucic edited a book in the *Daily Telegraph* 'War Library' series entitled *The Slav Nations*. For this Mitrinović prepared an article, 'Buried Treasure,' in which he reviewed the historic mission of Serbia and the Serbo-Croat people as 'a bulwark for Europe and Christianity against the invasion of Turkish barbarians and Islam.'⁴ He went on to proclaim the birth of a new age of Southern Slav history and culture, the central event of which process being the emergence of 'the artist-prophet Ivan Mestrovic.'⁵

In 1915 an exhibition of Mestrovic's sculptures and models was held in one of the large halls of the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington. Mitrinovic was closely involved with the organisation of the exhibition and in lecturing to visitors. A sense of the significance he attributed to Mestrovic's work is given by the report of a talk he gave on Mestrovic's behalf at the University of Leeds on October 5th. Described by the Vice-Chancellor Michael Sadler as possessing 'a wonderful command of the English language', Mitrinovic proclaimed in the course of his presentation:

... that if anything was to be the base of spiritual union between the Southern Slavs and the British people, the sublime work of Mestrovic ought to be that base. He then went on to suggest that ... the temple of Mestrovic had both the human and the Divine beauty; it was the embodiment of human glory and an immense, although human, peace. It might be said to be a reconciliation of mankind with eternity. It represented an eternal dawn of beauty and of New Aryandom. It was the visible perfection of pan-harmony ...⁶

'Pan-harmony', 'New Aryandom' – whether he was writing or talking about Mestrovic, about Serbia's past tribulations, or about the future union of the Southern Slavs within a federal state of Yugoslavia, Mitrinovic continually returned to the theme of a new order, the vision of a future age of peace, freedom and fellowship which he had portrayed in one of his early poems:

When the realm of human goodness is attained,
Soul of a brotherly, peaceful order,
When happiness will bestow lustre on all griefs,
The happiness of beauty.⁷

These lines were discovered by Paul Selver in an anthology of Yugoslav poetry. Selver, a translator of Czech poetry and a regular contributor to A. R. Orage's *The New Age*, had written an uncomplicated review of *The Slav Nations*, and of Mitrinovic's contribution 'Buried Treasure' in particular, in *The New Age*. Shortly after the review appeared, and much to his surprise, he received a letter from Mitrinovic expressing a wish to make his acquaintance. Selver accepted and the two met at Mitrinovic's lodgings in the Fulham Road, not far from the Redcliffe Arms. Selver's recollection of that first encounter provides a fascinating glimpse of how Mitrinovic presented himself at this time.

On my way there I wondered what kind of person I was about to meet, but the Mitrinovic of my imagination proved to be utterly different

from the real Mitrinović. At first sight he reminded me of Dr. Nikola, as pictured in the *Windsor Magazine*. He did, in fact, possess many of the attributes with which novelists of the Guy Boothby breed (no disparagement is implied here) equip mystery men from the Near East who form the centre of a highly tangled plot. Yes, Mitrinović outwardly fulfilled all the requirements in this respect, with his shaven head, his swarthinness, his dark garments and his hypnotic eyes. This latter item must not be dismissed as a hackneyed flourish. Hardly had I shaken hands with Mitrinović than I found myself so affected by his mere presence that I nearly lost consciousness. This had never happened before to me, nor did it ever happen again. But it left in my mind a strong impression that there was something, if not exactly sinister, at least uncanny about Mitrinović ...

Amid the uncertainties which blur the image of Mitrinović the man, I can bear witness to the fact that he was both accomplished and erudite. He spoke a choicely worded English, to which he imparted a solemn and musical intonation. Evidence of his wide reading and critical discernment asserted itself casually in the course of conversation. I spent many hours with him, studying the Serbian ballads, and I was impressed to observe that he never had to turn to the printed page. He knew them, and also other poetical texts, by heart.⁹

Whilst Mitrinović continued to work in his own way for the Yugoslav cause, he was also actively seeking to re-establish contact with his continental associates of the *Blut-bund* and attempting to revive the impetus necessary for the publication of the proposed Yearbook. Within a few days of his arrival in England he had written to van Eeden asking: 'How is this whole movement of bearers of culture who are seeking tomorrow and thinking rightly to be realised?' He continued:

And so now the truth time has come, willed by God, for a union of the leaders of mankind who will give birth to the idea of the cosmogony of races and who will be the entelechy of the total Europe – those who will lay the foundations of its pan-culture. I can put myself at your disposal because, insofar as I am able to put my truth and your truths side by side and discern their similarity and identity, I feel that in meaning and essence we intend absolutely the same. Especially for a union which would take the initiative for a world-embracing union, I will gladly give all my work and struggle so far as I have the strength. I myself shall try here in England, in pursuance of my request for contribution or collaboration in the editing of the Yearbook *The Aryan Europe*, to discuss the idea of such a concentration and cooperation

of the culture-bearers of the present-day mankind of tomorrow in a general way. And furthermore I believe that I shall write to some men on the continent about *The Aryan Europe* and then I could give them the feel of the suggestion for an ad hoc action ... I have become devoted to you since I read three weeks ago *World Conquest Through Heroic Love*, a book which has shaken me and brought deep healing. Gutkind sent it to me as a memento of our meeting in Jena. I also request most urgently, if you are at all able, that you lend me or give me a copy of *Sidereal Birth*. I came here in a terrible hurry because I had to escape from Austrian mobilisation and have not brought my copy of Gutkind with me.¹⁰

His offer of assistance was acknowledged by van Eeden in a letter to Henri Borel of August 31st 1914. He noted that: 'The Serbian Mitrinović is in London and has put himself at our disposal for all organisational work. He is a deserter and therefore cannot go back to Serbia.'¹¹ I have given him a number of addresses, Kropotkin, Wells, Shaw, Archer, Upward.'¹²

Unfortunately, the outbreak of war imposed strains on the *Blutbund* which it failed to withstand. The immediate claims of nationalistic feeling upon certain of the members outweighed the pious pronouncements of faith in internationalism. The first sign of such pressures was revealed in a letter from van Eeden to his friend Henri Borel of August 29th 1914, when he referred to the fact that one member of the circle, Florens Christian Rang, 'has unfortunately become patriotically inebriated.'¹³ A few weeks later van Eeden was bemoaning the spell cast by German nationalist feeling upon other members of the group. Gutkind, who in July had been advising Mitrinović to adopt an attitude of 'Buddhist calm', had evidently fallen under the spell of German xenophobia. After receiving a letter from Gutkind, van Eeden commented:

There is a real brutalising through 'nationalitis.' It is my plan to have this letter (of Gutkind's) reproduced together with my reply. It is of the utmost importance to establish how far the depravity can go which is caused to noble minds by patriotic fever. He talks about the 'English knout' and the 'hired murderers' from England!! and so on! I will answer him very forcefully ...¹⁴

Despite such signs of 'depravity' van Eeden remained committed to his ideal. On September 17th 1914 he confided to Borel: 'I do not believe that the circle will break. But things will get very hot. I said to Sinclair that he must come over because great things have

to be done. And, the Swedes are still there. Buber does not seem quite free from the infection. But I am very curious to know how Daubler feels about this.¹⁵

By late September however, Gutkind's stance, according to van Eeden, was worsening. 'He speaks of a "holy war" against the English Empire: he makes me think of the Mahdi!¹⁶ Moreover, Rudolf Eucken, that 'dear and noble old man' in the eyes of Mitrinović, was evidently failing to withstand the patriotic call. 'Have you read the silly twaddle from Eucken?' van Eeden asked Borel. 'They call that a philosopher!¹⁷

By 1915 a clear split had emerged within the group between the German and non-German members. Van Eeden placed the bulk of the blame on the shoulders of Martin Buber. In a letter to Borel written in the Spring of 1915 he enclosed a letter from Buber which had caused him considerable pain. He went on:

It is not a question of whether you agree with me. This is simply how I feel. I feel for all the members of the circle as you said you felt for me. They can do what they like, but those three days remain, and the circle remains and I remain – even if I am the only one. But it is sad – and Buber is really the worst one, because he is the strongest of the unfaithful ones, and he stands behind Landauer.¹⁸

Van Eeden's dismay was occasioned by a proposal from Landauer and Buber that a separate 'Bund' be formed of the continental members. The Dutchman called it the 'Berliner-Tageblatt-plan'. However, by September 1915 he was heartened to receive a letter from Gutkind promising his continued commitment to the original grouping. He wrote to Borel:

How much more powerful love is than reason. I too hold fast to the circle with 'loving firmness' and am certainly inclined to embrace Rang as well as Gutkind. My sharp pain originated from Landauer's letter, which quite simply meant lack of faith. And it is my opinion that Buber is the real schismatic. He is so cold, so self-sufficient, so arrogant. Will they ever come back? Everything is possible ... I will inform everyone in the circle and everyone who came into consideration (that means also Rathenau and Rolland) in quite a simple business-like way that Landauer and Buber do not want to have anything to do with the circle any longer, and that Landauer made a call for a new 'Bund' and invited Norlind, Bjerre, Borel, van Eeden and Rolland to it ... That Gutkind, Rang, Borel, van Eeden will hold fast to the original circle and will not let go of it.¹⁹

In fact the *Blut-bund* as an identifiable group was never to meet again. As the years of war continued, the personal tensions between the members occasioned by the hostilities, coupled with the serious problems of communication in a continent torn by war, caused the association to break up. Individual members were to continue to correspond with each other, but each went on to pursue their own separate ways. Van Eeden, a disillusioned and disappointed man, eventually joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1922. He died at Bussum on June 16th 1932. Gutkind emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1933 where he taught at the New School and at the College of the City of New York. He died in Chatauqua, New York on August 26th 1965, just two months after Martin Buber died at the age of 87 in Jerusalem.

Not all the members of the *Blut-bund* died peacefully in their beds. Rathenau was assassinated in 1922. Gustav Landauer was murdered in 1919. In 1916 he had told an associate who asked him why he remained so passive during a time of great tension and stress:

All my life I have worked for the downfall of this social system, this society founded on lies and betrayals, on this beggaring and suppression of human beings; and I know now that this downfall is imminent – perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in a year's time. And I have the right to reserve my strength until that moment. When the hour strikes I shall be ready.²⁰

His moment came in November 1918 when the soldiers and workers of Munich proclaimed the independent Republic of Bavaria. Encouraged by Landauer they proclaimed themselves a Soviet Republic in April 1919, shortly before they were overwhelmed by a 100,000-strong force under the command of General von Oven. Landauer was brutally murdered, along with 700 others, as the central power of the German state was re-established.

Isolated to a large degree from the intrigues, personality clashes, and rival nationalistic feelings that marred the history of the *Blut-bund*, Mitrinović in the early years of the war kept faith with his original commitment and continued his efforts to recruit 'bearers of culture who are seeking tomorrow'. He attempted to establish contact with H. G. Wells and with Kropotkin, who was living in Brighton at that time. Towards the end of 1915 he travelled to Paris on a Serbian passport where he remained until late February 1916.

His official business was to help with the arrangements for the staging of the Mestrovic exhibition in the French capital. He took advantage of his visit, however, to try and arouse interest in the *Blut-bund* project amongst such figures as Edouard Schuré, Anatole France, Charles Richet, Romain Rolland and Henri Bergson. In a letter to Schuré he described the *Blut-bund* as 'a spiritual alliance of all the principal men and of all the institutions and movements worthy to think and act for the reconstruction and divine birth of Europe.'²¹

He also tried to persuade Schuré to collaborate in the production of the proposed yearbook which he described as 'an Almanac of Cosmopolitan Pacifism' and which would be published in French and English and contain 'the contributions of prominent persons who believe in a spiritual Serbia and in a federated Europe of social harmony and synthetic culture.' Despite the apparent fact that the war was to drag on longer than he had anticipated, and the failure of his plan to go to America, Mitrinovic's spiritual optimism sustained his commitment to the vision of the seed of a new order emerging out of the remains of the old, war-torn age. To Schuré he wrote:

It is in the races that the gods are incarnated in history and even in our cataclysm: and if races, as people believe today, are all dead because they are absolutely all impure it remains only to invoke new gods, the God of Humanity without races, and to found by our absolute love and our intelligence a new Race, that of Christ.

There is no evidence that Mitrinovic had any success whatsoever in his attempts to recruit Schuré and the others to this seemingly fantastical venture to create a new Christendom within Europe.²² During his time in France, however, he did manage to re-establish contact with some of his friends and colleagues from the pre-war days of the Young Bosnians, people such as Vladimir Gacinic and Tin Ujevic who used to gather at the café 'Rotonde', which was also frequented by Picasso, Modigliani and Cocteau.

According to Palavestra, Mitrinovic had a bitter argument with Ujevic during the course of his stay in Paris, one consequence of which was a growing disillusionment on his part with Yugoslav émigré circles in Europe.²³ By March 1916 the London Yugoslav Committee was in disarray following a proposal from one of their number that the Croats break off relations with the Serbian

government. It appeared to Mitrinović that his ideal of a federation of the Southern Slav peoples was being distorted and corrupted by professional politicians and career diplomats. He wrote to his friend Mestrovic that the dream of a new Yugoslavia was being sabotaged by 'the shamelessness and folly of politicians who are demolishing it before it is built.'²⁴ It was possibly round about this time that he determined never to return to his native land. Henceforth his major concern was to be with the creation of a new Europe rather than with a new Yugoslavia.

One of his closest Serbian friends in London with whom he shared his dreams, his frustrations and his bitterness was Father Nicolai Velimirović, one of the leaders of the spiritual revival of the Serbian Orthodox Church and who was later to become Bishop of Žiça. Velimirović had rooms in Saville Row and was in the habit of eating at the Dickens Chop House in Warwick Street where he was frequently joined by Mitrinović. They were occasionally joined by Stephen Graham, the author and Slavophile, who had first met Mitrinović at the home of Canon Carnegie, the rector of St. Margaret's, Westminster. According to Graham the usual topic of conversation over the meal was the union of Christianity. To this subject Mitrinović brought his own particular perspective, as Graham recalled.

Dimitri was a born conspirator, which is curious considering that his life was so pacific. For him the young Christendom which he planned had to be a secret society. We must operate from the invisible towards the visible, from an initiated few to the many who were as yet unaware of the movement. His crusade must not be advertised from a broad platform to thousands as at a revival meeting. His message or doctrine must not be watered down.

He addressed himself particularly to me; it seems Fr. Nikolai already knew what he would say: 'It could start from us three,' he said. 'We are secretly committed to giving our lives to the realisation of the Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth and all we do will be directed to that purpose. We will cautiously seek allies and persuade them to join us and form a Christianly conscious nucleus. All in secret, all below ground. The more secret we are, the greater spiritual strength we draw, till we are ready to break surface and grow to a mighty tree.'

All this was said in a hushed voice as if the walls had ears and in a jargon which I have translated into clearer English. I did not myself fully understand this idea, but I agreed to form with him what he

called a 'personal alliance' with the reservation that I would see what would come of it.²⁵

Even allowing for a degree of 'artistic licence' in Graham's recollections, it is clear from this that during his early years of exile in Britain Mitrinović was looking for likely people who would be willing to commit themselves alongside himself to the creation of a new age. However fanciful and utopian such a vision might appear to others, for Mitrinović such a dream could never be realised unless people pursued it with all seriousness and the determination that comes from a conviction that the vision could be made real. Moreover, if the aim was to create a world of liberty and fellowship, where each would value the other as much as themselves, then the starting point lay with one's own life and one's relationships with friends and acquaintances. The seed there planted might one day evolve organically, to a stage where a determining influence on the shape and pattern of the wider world might be exerted.

This attempt to create a nucleus of individuals who, by their example and work, might act to transform social life was a consistent theme throughout Mitrinović's life. It was to reach fullest development during the late 1920s and the 1930s, but he had begun to explore the idea, if obliquely, in his 'Aesthetic Contemplations' articles. His reading of Solovyov and his encounter with the ideas of Gutkind further stimulated him, and his involvement with the *Blut-bund* initiative was to teach him some important lessons on the translation of such ideas into the realm of action. The difference between the later period and the years of his involvement with the *Blut-bund* initiative was that during the earlier period he still believed that it was possible to recruit to such a project the 'great names' of philosophy, art and science. This was the logic of the *Blut-bund*. If the leading spirits of the age would commit themselves to each other and to an initiative for a new and better world of peace and fellowship, then the results could be literally world-changing.

This was the project which Graham was invited to join. He responded by trying to arrange introductions for Mitrinović to various people of consequence with whom he had contact. One of these was the Earl of Sandwich, but Mitrinović 'half-closed his eyes as if beginning to pull down the shutters of a shop, and he did not ask him to join his secret society.'²⁶ Graham also tried unsuccessfully to arouse the interest of G. R. S. Meade, the theosophist and

gnostic scholar, and Father Fynes Clinton, the rector of St. Magnus the Martyr. Mitrinović, for his part, sought to interest Patrick Geddes in his ideas and in the *Blut-bund* initiative. At this time, in the late summer of 1915, Geddes was organising a course at King's College on the problems of the war and the post-war period. The meeting between the two men took place over the dinner table at the flat of a young woman who planned to go to Serbia to work as a nurse and who was learning Serbian from Mitrinović.²⁷ The evening had been arranged by a mutual acquaintance, Philip Mairet, who was at the time employed by Geddes to design illustrative diagrams for his lectures. Geddes was renowned for having an opinion upon every subject under the sun and for his habit of taking any opportunity to pronounce his views at length. He left early and remarked to Mairet as he went out: 'Tell your friend that I shall be pleased to contradict him upon any subject he may choose.' Mitrinović, for his part, enquired of the hostess as to the precise nature of Geddes' fame. When told that Geddes had made his name as a scientist he sighed: 'Ah, I see – a *popular* scientist.'²⁸ Geddes returned to India shortly after this encounter. Paradoxically, when he returned, knighted but broken in health and ignored by the academics and intellectuals of Britain in 1931, it was Mitrinović who provided him with a platform and a ready-made following in London in the form of the New Europe Group, of which Geddes became the President.

Philip Mairet was to be intimately associated with Mitrinović for over a decade. He was later to recall their first encounter at the Mestrovic exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum where Mitrinović had acted as a guide for Mairet and his party.

He was a little late, for which he apologised with the courtesy and charm of an accomplished diplomat. He was a tall dark handsome man, attired in the black frock coat of an official or a business executive, who spoke with a strong foreign accent but with noticeable freedom, fluency, and even eloquence. Beginning with the architectural model [Model of 'Temple of Kossovo?'], he plunged at once into a moving description of the popular traditions and aspirations that had inspired this monument and the specimens of sculpture grouped around it. These, however, were presented or interpreted as illustrations and symbols of a supra-national, pan-human idealism by which we were all spell-bound, though sometimes mystified. This epic of heroic sacrifice and invincible hope of a national death and resurrec-

tion was magnified in the Serbian orator's discourse into a sort of paradigm of the faith and destiny of mankind.

What moved me to admiration even more perhaps than the majestic vision of art and civilization that he unfolded, which indeed carried us far out of our depth, was the eloquence of his exposition. I had never heard anything like it. Here was a man who spoke with authority. What he said seemed to be guaranteed by what he was, for I felt almost as if I was listening to some messenger from a higher realm of knowledge about the predicament of mankind.²⁹

Mairet became, in his own words, 'an aspirant in search of a teacher' with Mitrinović as his mentor and guide.³⁰ This was the role to which Mairet was to consign himself throughout his years of association with the older man; a relationship which was only broken in the early 1930s when they agreed to part for the sake of Mairet's own personal development. This illustrates one of the many paradoxes about Mitrinović and his relationships with those who came under his influence. On the one hand the bulk of his life was concerned with working towards a new age of freedom and fellowship, a world constituted by individuals who could freely cooperate together as self-managing parts of a functionally ordered whole. At the same time, such was the breadth and depth of his learning and wisdom, such was the power of his personality, that most of those with whom he came into contact remained in awe of him and looked to him for direction and guidance – not perhaps the most appropriate training for the creators of a new social order. It was a problem of which Mitrinović was well aware and with which he was to struggle, not always successfully, throughout his active life.

Although Mairet returned to France, where he was working as a Red Cross auxiliary, convinced that he had found a 'master' at whose feet he might sit, his 'teacher' continued, during the war years, with his own course of study and self-instruction. He had moved his lodgings to the Bloomsbury area, partly in order to be nearer the British Museum where he spent much of his time. His library tickets from that period show his studies covering a wide range of subjects: the Upanishads, Lao Tse, the Kabbala, and various works on occult and ancient philosophy; as well as continuing with his study of the work of Solovyov and western philosophers. He was also gaining a name for himself in certain circles as something of an expert and teacher of oriental and ancient philosophy,

and began to take a few pupils for instruction. Some of these were introduced to him by Mr. G. Salby, the owner of one of the bookshops which Mitrinović frequented in the vicinity of the British Museum.

As for Mairat, whilst in France he had been deeply impressed by his reading of Rudolf Steiner's study of the German mystics which Mitrinović had given to him. He returned for extended leave over Christmas 1917, eager to resume his studies under his personal teacher. Mitrinović, however, quickly tried to impress upon the enthusiastic Mairat that philosophy was nothing if it could not be translated into a way of living. The aim, as he had written in 'Aesthetic Contemplations', was 'to change theory into practice and into practice introduce theory.' Mairat was later to recall the episode in his autobiography.

We were in his little study with the window overlooking the street. Most of the walls were darkened by brimming bookcases. There were books all along the mantle-shelf, piled on the table. 'Look now,' he said, pointing to a row of large volumes on the floor, ranged against the wainscot, 'there is the whole of the philosophy of Solovoyov. There he has said everything that needs to be said. It remains only for us to do it. Is not that the purpose of philosophy? How can it be anything else but to learn and to know the total truth about what we are and what we want to become ... We want men and the world to be better ... It is evident then that the work cannot begin until everyone has better ideas and thinks differently. But this we cannot do unless we feel differently, and that is not possible unless we *become* different beings ... Change of being is not impossible; only very difficult. For you must go back and begin at the very beginning; you must find the being that always was, and is and always will be, not only in your self but in every self whatever. This is something everyone knows because he is it; but its name is the great impregnable secret; the name by which no-one else can call you, or me. To all others I am "Mr. Mitrinović" or "you"; only to myself am I "I." This "I" is each one's private name for what philosophers call 'subject of consciousness' ...

'To be an "I" is to be a living centre of the universe, each one of which is looking at the same "everything," but each from his own separate place in space and time. . . That is the one simple truth about this infinitely complicated existence.

'That is the truth we all know, but that everybody forgets ... You remember only that you are Mairat who is at work, or is eating and drinking or reading and smoking: you forget that, at the same time,

you are a centre of the universal consciousness – which is divine. However hard you try you cannot keep this in mind. Perhaps fortunately, because you might mistake the way to do it and go mad like Nietzsche. You cannot do it alone. You may possibly – just sometimes – attain something of this remembrance, this divine *anamnesis*, together with one other person. A “you” and an “I” may become a “we” – spiritually. And these two persons could become three: then they could incorporate others, indefinitely. When this shall be rightly and really begun it will grow into a power of understanding that will change the mind of the human world. ... We must begin it now.’³¹

As one can imagine, Philip Mairet was partly mystified and somewhat frightened by this lecture, and by the last sentence in particular. It was obvious that Mitrinović was asking for something more than friendship. He was seeking commitment. But a commitment to what? Was it a religious movement that was being proposed? Were there any others who would be willing to participate in the earnest and dedicated collaboration that was being demanded? Mairet would have found some answers to these questions in the works on Mitrinović’s shelves and in Gutkind’s *Sidereal Birth* especially. The world lay on the brink of a new epoch in which, according to Gutkind, selfish egoism must be transcended and the ‘We’ must ‘put forth life.’ For Mitrinović it was not sufficient merely to verbalise this, one must seek to attain this ‘We-consciousness’ in concert with others. The task was to try, initially with one or two others, to create a relationship founded on the recognition of the organic relatedness of all things, wherein the conflict between the interests of the individual and the needs of others might be transcended. One would then be working towards a prototype of a new form of human relationship, an example and a model which others might follow as the need for a re-ordering of personal and communal life became ever more apparent to wider circles of people, and as people in increasing numbers began to take upon themselves the ‘God-like’ task of creating their world anew.

Mairet was joined in the preparation for the initiatives that lay ahead by another who had come under Mitrinović’s spell. This was Helen Soden, the wife of a doctor serving in France, who Mitrinović had encountered in the Palace Hotel, Bloomsbury, towards the end of 1916. A fairly conventional middle-class lady in early middle age, Helen Soden presented something of a contrast to the younger Mairet with his idealism, his sensitivity, his self-doubt, his

stammer and his search for truth and self-knowledge. This bringing together of people with disparate qualities and placing upon them the onus of working harmoniously and honestly together was, however, to become a characteristic feature of Mitrinović's method. The rationale, as it was explained to me by some of those who had participated in his projects, was that it was relatively easy to create a sense of community amongst those who thought and felt alike. The real world, however, is made up of people and communities with widely differing outlooks, beliefs and interests. If the task was to prepare for an initiative that would transform this wider world, then its heterogeneity should be reflected by the microcosm created within the group.

The three of them would meet regularly in Mitrinović's rooms. Occasionally Mairet and Soden received personal instruction but more frequently they met to discuss what they had been reading. In such sessions Mitrinović would try to convey something of his own understanding of the relevance of ancient mythology and oriental philosophy which expressed so strongly the inter-relatedness between all things. Together they explored the significance of Solovyov, focusing on his vision of Christ as the God-Man, the archetype for humanity to emulate, and his call for humans to work together with God to create the Kingdom of God (Sophia) on earth and in the process realise their own divinity. There was also Gutkind's significance to be explored.

It is impossible at this remove to gauge just how much of this the two students absorbed during the period of their early association with Mitrinović. Perhaps the level of their comprehension at the cognitive level mattered less to them than the fact that they felt they were in the company of a great man whose mind, spirit and soul was beyond their experience. Certainly, to Mairet, Mitrinović at times appeared in the guise of a prophet who presented him with a glimpse of a new life. Something of Mairet's mood and attitude is conveyed in the account he gave of one of their early encounters that took place in Mitrinović's rooms, with 'the teacher' still in his pyjamas, having just finished breakfast.

The memory image of his face is more vivid to me than almost all he said. His appearance was somewhat changed since my earlier meetings with him. The black hair, now close cropped, and the shaven lips and chin made him look more like one's imagination of a prophet ...

To my heightened sensitivity, his face seemed more radiant with the

supersensitive light which the ancient Christian artists used to symbolise by putting aureoles round the heads of Saints and Apostles. Indeed, I can clearly remember thinking, as I looked at him, that when the first Christian neophytes heard the great preachers St. Paul and St. Augustine for instance proclaiming the Gospel that was to make all things new, it must sometimes have been just like this. Then too, I thought, the scene may have been as peculiar as this rather dishevelled bedroom and the audience as small and undistinguished as we were now, beside this untidy bed; for this impassioned orator, speaking with his whole being, finally worked himself right out of bed onto the floor where he finished his allocution seated cross-legged on the carpet like an Indian Sadhu.³²

If Mitrinović appeared to Mairet, on such occasions, as a prophet, then Mairet for his part became an active proselytiser on his behalf. He introduced his wife, Ethelmary, to Mitrinović. A skilled and talented weaver, her work was much admired by Douglas Pepler, who was in turn a close friend of Edward Johnston the calligrapher and Eric Gill the sculptor. Gill had moved to the Sussex village of Ditchling in 1907 and was followed there by the Johnston family in 1912. Ethelmary Mairet was easily persuaded by Pepler to visit the growing craft colony and on her first visit she was accompanied by her husband. He was, by early 1918, entertaining thoughts of working on the land. He had resigned from the Red Cross and had become eligible for conscription. Farm work might be one way of avoiding this. Helen Soden, on Mitrinović's advice, had moved to a south coast resort for the duration of the war and so it seemed that there was little Mairet could do to further Mitrinović's work in London while the war lasted.

Encouraged by Mitrinović, Mairet settled in Ditchling. Working as a labourer on Douglas Pepler's farm, he continued his studies, discussing his ideas and those of Solovyov in particular with Eric Gill. The sculptor, who was at that time working on the great stone Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral, was a recent convert to Roman Catholicism and remained unreceptive. Edward Johnston, however, was greatly impressed by Mitrinović. Johnston had come across him standing by a cow-byre on the farm where Philip Mairet was working. Thinking the stranger was lost Johnston asked him if he needed directions. 'No,' he replied, 'I am only looking how noble an animal is the cow.' Johnston, recalling the incident with Mairet, observed: 'And you know, the way he looked and

the way he said it, made me think, yes, yes and how noble a human being it is that is now talking to me.³³

In London Mitrinović continued with his work as cultural propagandist for the Yugoslav cause. With Nikolai Velimirović he had planned a series of books under the general title of *The World of the Slav*. Amongst the proposed titles were *The Humanism of the Slavs* and *Dostoyevsky as the Prophet of Slavdom* by Velimirović, and *The Teachings of the Prophets: the Christian Thought of Tolstoy* by Mitrinović, and an edition of Solovyov's *Foundations of Christology*. Nothing came of this scheme, but by 1917 he was working with Velimirović and Niko Županić on the preparation of the monograph *The South Slav Monuments*, which was eventually published in 1918. Early in 1918 he resumed his friendship with Dušan Popović, secretary of the Serbian Social Democratic Party in exile who arrived in London from Stockholm. Together they planned a book on Marxism and its relevance to the Serbian people to commemorate the centenary of Marx's birth. Popović was to write something on Marx and Serbia, whilst Mitrinović was to contribute an article on 'Marx as an Internationalist'. It seemed that Mitrinović was beginning to take a more active part in political émigré circles with the arrival of his friend. In the spring of 1918 he was persuaded by Popović to deliver a lecture on Marx to the club of the Serbian Social Democrats in London. All this was brought to an end, however, by the untimely death of his friend on November 8th 1918 after an operation. Mitrinović took charge of the funeral arrangements, issuing the formal announcement of death, and accompanying the coffin to Highgate Cemetery, where Popović was buried, not far from the grave of Karl Marx.

The end of the war left Mitrinović facing something of a crisis in his life. He was still receiving a salary from the Serbs but his heart was not in the work. 'You are even paid for more than you do,' he remarked to Mairat.³⁴ He was bitterly disappointed by the realisation that Mestrovic's 'Temple of Kosovo', the planned monument to the *Serbian* heroes of Kosovo, would never be acceptable as a symbol of the new Yugoslavia as it would antagonise the Croats, Slovenes and the other peoples of the Balkans. He was disillusioned with the professional politicians and careerists who had, to his mind, distorted the ideals and values that had informed the movement of Young Bosnia. The revealed impotence and eventual

collapse of the *Blut-bund* project had left him bitter about the failure of the leading representatives of the cultural and scientific worlds to respond to a call for an initiative for world reconstruction, the apparent inability of the 'great names' to cooperate together on a common venture that transcended narrow national interests.

During the months following the cessation of hostilities he spent more of his time down at Ditchling, where Helen Soden had rented a small cottage and where Mairet had returned in 1919 after completing a prison sentence as a conscientious objector. It was a time of anguish and self-doubt, and his physical health suffered also. Stephen Graham witnessed this period and was moved to observe that 'he was so disastrously melancholy I feared he would end up by taking his life.'³⁵ After a period confined to bed in a guest house at Ditchling his health and spirits started to recover. He had come to a decision. He would not return to his native land. He would forfeit the promised security of a diplomatic career.³⁶ He would devote his life to the greater vision of a recreated world order. It was not an easy decision to reach, and it was with some trepidation and doubt about what the future might hold that he took it. 'I am jumping off into nowhere,' he told Philip Mairet on one of their walks across the Sussex Downs. 'No one will even know I am doing it. But this is bravery.'³⁷ To Helen Soden he wrote: 'I am determined more than ever and really to act and live according to my real conviction. Let that also give new orientation to yourself and real hope and faith.'³⁸

NOTES

1. Palavestra (1977), p. 4. Much of the information in this chapter is based on a private translation of the final chapter of Palavestra's book. Translated by D. Shillan and Dr. E. B. Goy, in the archives of the New Atlantis Foundation. The references use the pagination of this translation.
2. 'Who should possess Trieste?', *The Outlook*, September 26th 1914.
3. Palavestra (1977), pp. 4-5.
4. S. P. Tucić, ed., *The Slav Nations*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916, p. 181.
5. Tucić, p. 183.
6. *Yorkshire Post*, October 6th 1915.

7. Quoted in Paul Selver, *Orage and the New Age Circle*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1957, p. 59.
8. Paul Selver, 'Partial truth about the Slavs,' *The New Age*, January 28th 1915, pp.350-1.
9. Selver (1957), pp. 57-9.
10. New Atlantis Foundation archives.
11. This was obviously a misunderstanding on van Eeden's part. See Chapter 2 above.
12. Borel, p. 134.
13. Borel, p. 133.
14. Van Eeden to Borel, September 15th 1914, in Borel, p. 136.
15. Borel, p. 138. Theodor Daubler, 1876-1934, was a German poet associated with the expressionist movement.
16. Van Eeden to Borel, September 24th 1914, Borel, p. 143.
17. Borel, p. 144, September 27th 1914.
18. Borel, p. 154. The 'three days' refers to a gathering of *Blut-bund* members at Potsdam in June 1914.
19. Borel, p. 166.
20. Quoted in 'Gustav Landauer,' *Anarchy*, no. 54, August 1965, p. 248.
21. February 12th 1916.
22. The meeting with Schuré arranged for February 25th 1916 was cancelled as Schuré was suffering from influenza.
23. Palavestra (1977), p. 16.
24. Palavestra (1977), p. 17.
25. Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, London: Collins, 1964, pp. 121-2.
26. Graham, pp. 121-2.
27. According to Mairet, Mitrinović's lessons could be enjoyable 'if you were responsive to his singular method, which was to expand the study of every word into a dissertation upon the significance of the Slav spirit in world destiny.' P. Mairet, *Autobiographical and Other Papers*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1981, p. 91.
28. Mairet (1981), p. 94.
29. Mairet (1981), p. 85.
30. Mairet (1981), p. 86.
31. Mairet (1981), pp. 103-4.
32. Mairet (1981), p. 108.
33. Mairet (1981), p. 126.
34. Mairet (1981), p. 129.
35. Graham, p. 251.
36. The exact date of his resignation from the diplomatic corps is not clear, but it was probably during the summer of 1920. Certainly there is evidence that he was involved in work related to his position up to and throughout 1919. In that year he worked on a huge Latin-English

edition of Roger Boscović's *A Theory of Natural Philosophy* which was eventually published in 1922 with an introduction by J. M. Child of Manchester University. In November 1919 he gave the address at a dinner in London in honour of Dr. Niko Županić, the curator of the Royal Ethnological Museum in Belgrade, who had helped with the preparation of *The South Slav Monuments*.

37. Mairet (1981), p. 130.

38. Postcard to Helen Soden, Woodbine Cottage, Ditchling, dated August 17th, no year indicated but probably 1919 (New Atlantis Foundation archives).