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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITICISM IN THE WORKS OF ERNST WIECHERT

by

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by Bernard J. Fridsma, Sr.

The introductory chapter of this study, written for the purpose of supplying background, briefly sketches the life of Ernst Wiechert and characterizes his works. The succeeding chapters attempt a rather detailed examination of Wiechert's critical position in regard to (1) urban civilization, (2) education, (3) the Fatherland, (4) the war system, (5) Christianity and the Church, (6) National Socialism, and (7) art and science. The examination is carried out in the light of the poet's total literary production, to which constant reference is made.

The study, in analyzing Wiechert's social and cultural criticism, points out that the poet considers Western culture on the decline since the days of Goethe and Beethoven. There is in Germany and the West, he feels, an excessive preoccupation with the things of the intellect ("Geist"), which has brought on a process of secularization ("Entgötterung") and an estrangement from the spiritual and supernatural ("das Magische"). He sees the evidence of this decline in practically all forms of art. He sees it also in the rise of a materialistic science, which has done much to rob life of its mystical dimensions and thereby, in turn, has led to a lack of reverence for life and a disregard for man's dignity and individuality. He sees it even in the face of the modern Massenmensch which, he believes, registers an estrangement from God. He sees it especially in the rise of Nazism (which to him is no uniquely German movement) and in the dropping on Hiroshima of the first atomic bomb.

Wiechert's social and cultural criticism, the study finds, is largely in terms of men. This it holds to be consonant with the poet's position that man's troubles stem fundamentally not from bad systems, methods, or techniques, but from bad hearts. The poet is not a believer in the romantic notion of the inherent goodness of man, but he realistically senses the presence in the world of radical evil ("das Urböse"), against which, in the last analysis, education and social reform are impotent. Wiechert sees as the primary requisite of a new society spiritually reborn men.

The study defends Wiechert against the charge that he is "anti-intellectual." It also rejects the theory that there are two Wiecherts: the heroic fighter against Nazism and the impractical "Eastern" mystic whose writings tend to foster a dangerous political lethargy. It seeks to indicate that there was no paradox in the poet's life, and that his valiant stand against Hitler was very much related to, in

fact rooted in, his affinity with the East. It holds that not Wiechert's mysticism, but his strong-willed idealism and perfectionism lie at the root of his so-called "unpolitical" attitude.

In its ethical tenor, the study maintains, Wiechert's message is largely that of the Law and the Prophets, of Christ and His apostles. For Wiechert, too, love is the fulfillment of the law. His ethic of love, however, is nowhere in his works related to a God of love. Thus, the study concludes, the Christian ethic is completely divorced from its ageless dynamic, the Christian Gospel. There is reason to fear that the poet's work, instead of doing its bit in the fight against "Entgötterung" may, in fact, be promoting it.

PREFACE

This study was completed under the guidance of Dr. Fred B. Wahr of the University of Michigan. I take this opportunity to express to him my genuine thanks for his wise and pleasant counseling.

I also wish to express my thanks to the other professors of the German Department from whose stimulating teaching I might benefit, particularly to Dr. Henry W. Nordmeyer, head of the Department, with whom I had the privilege of taking a good share of my courses.

Finally, I feel a word of gratitude is due to my wife for her patient help in correcting the manuscript and in proofreading.

B. J. F.

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INTRODUCTION

Ernst Wiechert, it may unhesitatingly be said, is increasingly becoming a literary figure of international reputation. His books are well known in the Scandinavian countries, in the Lowlands, in Switzerland, and in France. Though not widely known in the United States, his stature here is bound to increase as more and more of his works are translated. At present only six works of the author are available in English; these are listed separately in the bibliography at the end of this study.

In an article on "Raabe's and Wiechert's Novel Trilogies," Lydia Baer makes the point that Raabe wrote the cultural history of the nineteenth century. She then adds: "No less may be said of Wiechert, who was a Raabe devotee, and who in turn related the cultural history, as he saw it, of the first half of the twentieth century in Germany...."[1] This observation would seem justified to any serious student of Wiechert; in fact, it would seem so even to any one who had read nothing more than the author's monumental Die Jeromin-Kinder.

In writing the cultural history of his time, Wiechert spared no criticism. Speaking in his autobiography Jahre und Zeiten of the great spiritual needs of youth, Wiechert exclaims: "Und was für ein steinernes Brot reichen ihnen

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[1] Monatshefte, XLVI (January, 1954), p. 11.

die Mächte, die der Staat und die Zivilisation dazu ausersehen haben: die Schule, die Universität, die Kirche, die Gesellschaft, der Heeresdienst!"[2] Against all these "Mächte" the author repeatedly raises his clarion voice and makes his stinging indictment, not only in his autobiography, but also in practically every one of his novels, short stories, essays, and speeches.

Up to this time no great deal of writing has appeared on the social and cultural criticism of Ernst Wiechert. The subject is touched upon in a general way in the monographs of Hans Ebeling, Carol Petersen, and Helmut Ollesch.[3] It is also discussed in an excellent article by Siegfried B. Puknat on "God, Man, and Society in the Recent Fiction of Ernst Wiechert."[4] But nowhere is the analysis particularly detailed and nowhere does it cover the entire range of Wiechert's Kulturkritik.

It is the aim of this study to examine Wiechert's critical position in regard to (1) urban civilization, (2) education, (3) the Fatherland, (4) the war system, (5) Christianity and the Church, (6) National Socialism, and (7) art and science. The examination will be attempted in the light of

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[2] Jahre und Zeiten (Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1951), p. 73.

[3] Hans Ebeling, Ernst Wiechert: Das Werk des Dichters (Wiesbaden: Limes-Verlag, 1947). Carol Petersen, Ernst Wiechert: Mensch der Stille (Hamburg: Hansischer Gildenverlag, 1947). Helmut Ollesch, Ernst Wiechert (Wuppertal-Barmen: Emil Müller Verlag, 1949).

[4] German Life and Letters, New Series, III (1950), pp. 221-230.

Wiechert's total literary production, at least that part of it which was available to the present writer. The examination will no doubt prove more exploratory than exhaustive or definitive. It may be assumed that more will be known about the subject after Wiechert's collected works, currently being prepared in Munich, have made their appearance.[5] No volumes of the collection, with its hitherto unpublished material, have been brought out at this writing.

It has been deemed useful to preface this study with a short sketch of Wiechert's life. In order to make more meaningful and clear all subsequent references and quotations, it has likewise been thought helpful to present a summary of the author's works. Since the literary survey is given only for introductory and background purposes, it has been left sketchy in form. Further analysis of the works, including several minor ones which get scant or no mention, is found in subsequent chapters.

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[5]Publishers: Verlag Kurt Desch.

CHAPTER I

LIFE AND WORKS OF ERNST WIECHERT

1. Life

Ernst Wiechert was born on May 18, 1887, in Kleinort, amid the vast Masurian forest regions of former East Prussia. His father was Emil Martin Wiechert, a large, blond man of Low German stock; his mother, whose maiden name was Henrietta Andreae, was a dark woman of French extraction. Whereas his father was cheerful and optimistic of character, his mother tended to be sad, despondent, and melancholy - a tendency also apparent in her son.

A grandfather on his mother's side had concluded a second marriage with a Polish woman, and "so kann ich," writes Wiechert, "auch mit bescheidener Phantasie, mir denken, dass germanisches, slawisches und romanisches Blut sich in mir vereinigt hat...."[1] Admixture of races is, as a matter of fact, rather common in East Prussia. Ever since its subjugation by the German Ritterorden in the thirteenth century, many people have settled there, coming from the Netherlands, Scotland, and France - in many cases as a result of religious persecution. Wiechert's mother was herself the descendant of a French Huguenot.

The extensive and primeval forest of Masuria, with its animals and birds, and with its mystical silence, set

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[1] Wälder und Menschen (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1952), p. 10.

a stamp upon the young Wiechert. He himself says of his forest homeland: "So beglänzt liegt dieses Land vor meinen Augen, dass mir ist, als kônnte jeder Tag und jede Nacht mich zu dem erweckt haben, was ich einmal werden sollte."[2] It was here that he, as a lad, lived a happy life with his parents and two brothers. The younger of the two, a very gifted and precocious boy, was removed from the family circle at an early age.

Young Wiechert was educated by tutors, some of whom he affectionately describes in the first volume of his autobiography, Wälder und Menschen. Outside of the Bible, which his father read almost exclusively, there were practically no books available in his home; he mentions only Lederstrumpf and Robinson Crusoe. Among the works that first opened up for him the world of literature were Bürger's Lenore, Spielhagen's Platt Land, and above all the Bible. It was especially his Tante Veronika, to whom he pays loving tribute in his autobiographical writings, who told him in her own vivid, colorful, and unforgettable way the great stories of Biblical literature.

These first years of his life, spent in the isolated forest amid a small community of family members, servants, and tutors, were years of utmost happiness. Wiechert later refers to them as the years of his childhood paradise. He describes his own condition during this period in these words:

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[2] Ibid., p. 77.

"Eingebettet in die grenzenlosen Wälder, in den Lauf der Jahreszeiten, in die Liebe einer kleinen Gemeinschaft, früh dem Leid und den Träumen hingegeben, früher Erschütterung fähig, fromm und noch sündenlos."[3]

From this childhood paradise Wiechert was rudely and painfully expelled in 1898, in the eleventh year of his life. It was then that he, together with his brother, was sent to attend the Königliche Oberrealschule in Königsberg, capital of East Prussia. There now followed for him years of disappointment and bitterness. Divorced from his childhood intimacy with nature, he found the "steinerne Stadt" depressing and degrading. School attendance was a torture to him; among neither teachers nor students did he find congeniality or understanding.

Thus it was that in Königsberg the adolescent Wiechert suffered indescribable homesickness. His thoughts constantly wandered with the clouds to his native forests, moors, and lakes. The vacations, which took him back to his beloved Heimat, were both a relief and an inspiration to him. But back at school he always suffered anew. Though he passionately longed to be a forester and ardently begged for permission to become one, his wise father adamantly refused. As a result of this, as he himself says, the forest homeland took on a "schmerzlicheren Glanz" than it would otherwise have had.

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[3]Ibid., p. 33.

At about this time Wiechert's attitude toward Christianity and the Church began to undergo a change. Religious difficulties commenced to arise, difficulties with which he struggled unsuccessfully for the rest of his life. He found the church cold and distant, and the pastors rather poor followers of Christ. He attended the instruction preparatory for Confirmation, but was repelled by the intellectual emphasis and the dry-as-dust methods. The actual day of his Confirmation, he reports, was a very unhappy one.

Of his seven years at Königsberg, Wiechert really enjoyed only the last three. Having reached the Oberstufe, he found a better class of teachers. The death of "der Löwe", a much disliked Direktor, and an acquaintance with Professor Ernst Grohnert, affectionately called "Freundchen", made school life considerably more tolerable, if not actually enjoyable. "Freundchen" meant much to Wiechert in his period of Weltschmerz and iconoclasm, and kept alive in him at least some ideals and standards. It was "Freundchen" who heard his confessions, and to whom he also entrusted some of his first writings. These began with verse, followed soon after by stories and bits of drama.

His last year at the Oberrealschule of Königsberg, Wiechert himself calls one of his "besonderen und stürmischen Jahre." At this time he entered upon his period of storm and stress. Filled with Weltschmerz, he doted on the poetry of Lenau and Heine. He began to read voluminously, taking on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Haeckel, and David Friedrich Strauss.

Nurtured by the ideas of these men, he became a rebel against all authority in church and in state. Upon leaving the Oberrealschule, where he made an excellent record, he was a nihilist in religion and a socialist in politics.

In 1905, at the age of eighteen, Wiechert entered the Albertus-Universität at Königsberg. He had again begged his father to let him stay home as a forester, but the answer had been that he would much rather grant his son a rope for hanging. And so Wiechert reluctantly, and yet always conscientiously, studied Natural Science, English, Geography, Philosophy, and German. The sciences, he hoped, would afford him at least a little further contact with nature.

Life at the university brought Wiechert no happiness. He found the classroom lectures both uninspired and uninspiring. He soon discovered that the courses in the natural sciences killed off rather than fostered a love for nature. His sensitive poetic soul rebelled against the cold analyses, the dry classifications, the cruel dissections. He conceived a deep mistrust of the natural sciences, a mistrust which he never outgrew but which instead became more marked as the years went by. Asking himself at the end of a school day what he had learned and gained, he would admit that it was precious little. "Eine kümmerliche Rechenschaft und ein kümmerliches Tagwerk. Nichts, was in der Hand zu halten war und sie warm und ganz erfüllte. Kein Korn, keine Pflanze, keine duftende Erde. Zeichnungen und Namen, Begriffe und Ideen, Zahlen und Abstraktionen. Eine fremde, leblose Welt,

und ich sass grübelnd davor, mutlos und verlassen...."[4]

The next year, through the kind services of "Freundchen," Wiechert received the opportunity to become a tutor on a baronial estate in Latvia. Baron Grotthuss was a man of high culture and nobility, as well as a man of kindness. Moreover, he was a sincere Christian. While in his household, Wiechert was impressed by the power and the beauty of the Christian faith. For a while he again went to church and listened to the meditations read by the baron. He also gained a lasting respect for true aristocracy. Representatives of this class appear in many of his books, where they are depicted with deep regard and affection.

A telegram at this time informed Wiechert of an accident which had befallen his father. The latter had injured his left knee while hunting. Wiechert hastily left the baronial estate to join his father in a Königsberg hospital. Amputation was judged necessary and his father from then on had to walk on crutches.

Back at the university, somewhat humbled and matured, Wiechert began to work in earnest. "Ich lebte wie ein Mönch," he reports. "Wenn ich auch nicht betete, so arbeitete ich doch, als gelte es, einen Urwald zu roden."[5] Due to lack of money, he left the university in 1910 in order to spend a year at home in preparation for the state teachers' examination.

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[4] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 27.

[5] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

His parents had now moved to a small village near the forest. Here, in an attic room, the returned student adhered religiously to a strict study schedule. For a whole year he worked fourteen hours a day. Only on Saturday afternoons and Sundays did he take off from his studies. That same summer he was engaged to a daughter of a forester in the region. The relationship, begun against the wishes of his parents, "war von Anfang an mit Schmerzen gefüllt, und mit Schmerzen hat es auch geendet."[6]

The state teachers' examination, lasting five days, was successfully passed by Wiechert in 1911. Though his parents were very glad and there was a celebration attended by his fiancée and friends, Wiechert himself still felt his life to be lonesome, empty, and unproductive. He was now twenty-four years of age "und in diesem Alter hatte Goethe schon den 'Urfaust' in seiner Seele getragen, hatte Schubert das Meiste seiner unvergänglichen Melodien geschrieben, besass ein Waldarbeiter schon Frau und Kind und hatte Tausende von Kiefernpflanzen in die lockere Walderde gesteckt."[7]

A few weeks later Wiechert began his teaching career as a Kandidat, or student teacher, at the Friedrichs-Kollegium in Königsberg. This was a fairly large school for those times, and an institution of considerable reputation. Among others, Kant, Herder, and Lachmann had attended it. The building was

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[6]Ibid., p. 89.

[7]Ibid., p. 92.

fairly new at the time, "im Kasernenstil errichtet, wie ja schon damals alles Geistige kaserniert und uniformiert war."[8]

The year at the Friedrichs-Kollegium proved to be one of the most bitter of Wiechert's life. Here, he writes, he observed the "preussische Stil" at close range. The faculty was austere, unfriendly, condescending. "Das Kollegium war überaltert, von Würde durchdrungen, und die meisten Mitglieder betrachteten uns zehn oder zwölf 'Kandidaten des höheren Lehramtes', wie man arme Leute betrachtete, die einen Freitisch bekommen und bei deren Anwesenheit man gut tut, auf silberne Löffel zu achten."[9]

Wiechert's second teaching assignment took him to the Oberrealschule auf der Burg Königsberg, where he himself had once been a student. Here he was a "wissenschaftlicher Hilfslehrer," teaching twenty-one hours a week and earning a salary of 175 marks a month. He now breathed a cleaner, fresher air. There was among the faculty less pretense and arrogance, more understanding and kindness. His former teachers were now his colleagues. "Freundchen," however, was lacking; this favorite among his former teachers had died shortly before of a heart attack. "Der Löwe," as already mentioned, had also died, and the new Direktor looked upon his students not as "material," but as human beings.

In 1912, toward the end of the school year, Wiechert

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[8] Ibid., p. 93.

[9] Ibid., p. 95.

received a telegram informing him that his mother was very sick. Arriving home, he discovered that she had taken poison. Much illness, toil, and sorrow had made her prematurely tired of life. Two nights Wiechert sat at her bed, watching her failing life ebb away. A Lutheran pastor, upon being informed of the suicide, refused to give church burial. "Es gehört zu den wenigen Dingen, die ich nie vergeben habe."[10]

In the summer of 1913, Wiechert was married to Meta Mittelstädt. Though coming from outwardly similar backgrounds and circumstances, Wiechert and his wife nevertheless differed considerably and even fundamentally: she was much less adventurous than he, much more conventional and tradition-bound. He himself says: "Sie kannte nicht die schöne Freiheit eigener Gesetze, die man selbst aufrichtete und denen man gehorsam war. Sie war von Furcht erfüllt, sobald die gebahnten Wege zurückblieben, auf denen alle gingen, und sobald es galt, in das Unbekannte und Gefährliche hinein zu planen. Sie war nicht wie Flügel, die trugen, sondern wie Gewichte, die sich anhängten."[11] The marriage brought Wiechert a new burden of friction and grief, which continued during the next fifteen years. Much of the disharmony, the extravagance, and extremism characteristic of the style and message of many of his earlier works, Wiechert explains in terms of these restless and unhappy years.

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[10] Ibid., p. 116.

[11] Ibid., p. 118.

The first of these books to come from his pen was Die Flucht. It was written in 1913 and 1914, though not published until 1916. Wiechert worked on it in the evenings, when he was alone, more or less as a means of escape.

In the vacations Wiechert continued to visit his Heimat. On his long and lonely walks he would have both a gun and a notebook in his hand. Then again he would sit in the little garden of his father, quietly chatting with the man whom he so highly revered and greatly loved. "Ein einfacher Mann, der nichts als die Bibel liest, aber welche Zartheit des Herzens hinter seiner Schweigsamkeit!"[12] Even when Wiechert was an adult, he kissed his father's hand whenever he greeted or said good-bye to him.

When in the summer of 1914 the First World War broke out, Wiechert volunteered for service in the army. Though he called himself an "unsoldatischer Mensch" who looked on the war with critical and sorrowful eyes, he was conscientiously devoted to duty. He entered combat on the Eastern Front, where he became an officer and was awarded the Iron Cross. While fighting there in November 1917, he received notice of the birth of a son. The child died before Wiechert had an opportunity to see it.

Toward the end of the war, in the spring of 1918, Wiechert was transferred to the Western Front, where he fought in the region of the Somme and was wounded. When,

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[12] Ibid., p. 123.

with the armistice of November 1918, he returned home, he took with him the manuscript of his second book: Die blauen Schwingen. This was begun on the Galician front and finished in the trenches of the Champagne.

After the war, Wiechert resumed his teaching at the Oberrealschule auf der Burg. He soon came out with two more novels: Der Wald in 1920 and Der Totenwolf in 1922. To widen his cultural horizon he traveled in England, France, and Italy. In 1923 he was appointed as teacher at the Hufengymnasium in Königsberg. Here he spent seven of the most fruitful years of his life. He worked under Direktor Postelmann, a man whose humane spiritual example was of utmost influence in his life. Much of Wiechert's subsequent development as artist and thinker can, according to his own testimony, be traced to this figure.[13]

One evening, at a Bruckner concert in the Stadthalle, Wiechert saw in one of the box seats Paula Marie Junker (b. Schlenther). "Ich wusste, dass mein Schicksal dort sass, und ich nahm es auf mich."[14] The subsequent attempt to divorce his wife caused considerable stir and public disapproval. Pressure from superiors finally forced him to resign from his teaching position and to retreat to a self-imposed seclusion. Wiechert's wife would not allow the divorce to go through, and at one time feigned suicide "um mich mit

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[13] Ibid., p. 191.

[14] Ibid., p. 242.

Gewalt zu binden."[15] She actually did end her life in the following year, 1930. In the opinion of her family, as well as of the pastor who conducted the funeral service, Wiechert was accountable for her death. The author by no means absolves himself from blame. He comments: "Sass jemals ein ernsterer Richter über uns zu Gericht als unser eigenes Herz? Und wer vermöchte bis zur Todesstunde zu vergessen, was aus einem ewigen Antlitz, aus solchem ewigen Antlitz zu ihm spricht? ... Ihr letztes aufgezeichnetes Wort war Vergebung für mich...."[16]

In November of the same year, Wiechert broke out of his seclusion to accept a new teaching position at the Kaiserin-Augusta-Gymnasium in Berlin. Toward the end of the year 1931 he married his second wife, who after a long struggle had obtained her divorce decree. His life with her seems to have been very happy. In his autobiography he calls her "ein grosses Herz" and pays tribute to her self-sacrificing spirit, to her purity, integrity, courage, and kindness.[17] The second marriage, he avers, was necessary to save his art and his future life. "Aus einem geretteten Leben kann es gerettete Bücher geben...."[18]

The first of these "gerettete Bücher" was very obviously

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[15] Ibid., p. 249.

[16] Ibid., p. 257.

[17] Ibid., p. 432.

[18] Ibid., p. 269.

Die Magd des Jürgen Doskocil (1932), a book which for the first time breathes a spirit of integration and peace. It gained for Wiechert the Raabe Prize.

The nerve-wrecking crisis brought on by his marital relations and the extensive night-work devoted to writing, had brought on a period of failing health. In 1933 he retired from teaching and was pensioned. He now took up residence in Ambach, Bavaria, where he and his wife rented a little Schloss surrounded by a wooded park and overlooking the Lake of Starnberg. There followed three quiet and productive years, in which he wrote some of the great works which have given him recognition and fame. Among these are Die Majorin (1934), Hirtennovelle (1935), and his first volume of autobiography, Wälder und Menschen (1936).

In December 1936, Wiechert moved into a home of his own, Hof Gagert, situated in a beautiful spot near Wolfratshausen in Upper Bavaria. Not long, however, did he live there in peace. Several of his readings and speeches had already made him a marked man in the eyes of the ever-watchful Nazi chieftains. In 1938 his home was searched by Gestapo agents, an act which was followed by his imprisonment from May 6 to August 30 of that year. First he was kept in Munich, and then in the notorious concentration camp of Buchenwald. Upon his release he told the story of his tragic experiences in a book called Der Totenwald (1945), the manuscript of which he buried in a tin box in his garden. The author continued to be kept under Gestapo surveillance until the collapse of the Nazi regime.

Wiechert did not discontinue his literary activity during the war. Among the things which he wrote were the two large volumes of Märchen and the first volume of Die Jeromin-Kinder. These manuscripts he hid in the earth, together with Der Totenwald.

Immediately upon the close of the war, Wiechert wrote a few pamphlets and delivered a speech or two designed to improve the relationships between the German citizenry and the occupation powers. He also did his best to make his people conscious of their guilt in tolerating and upholding the infamous Nazi regime. As is often the case in such circumstances, his efforts gained him the favor of neither the victors nor the vanquished.

Burdened by this further unrest and disillusioned by post-war developments in his own country, he moved in 1948 to Switzerland to secure peace and quiet, and to find there a "Winkel wo ich mich still zu Tode dichten könnte."[19] The last years of his life, marked by a long and painful sickness, were spent in a small town near Ürikon on the Lake of Zürich. Here, on the Rütihof, he wrote his last great novel, Missa sine nomine. Here, too, he died on August 24, 1950, at the age of sixty-three. He was buried near his last home, in Stäfa, next to the church there, in a spot commanding full view of the beautiful Lake of Zürich and the mountains behind it.

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[19] Ibid., p. 304 and p. 447. The quotation here is the original one by Otto Ludwig.

2. Works

Ernst Wiechert began his career as a writer with the publication, in 1916, of a novel called Die Flucht. It was written a few years earlier (1913-1914) and was brought out under the pseudonym Ernst Barany Bjell, the name of one of the moors in the author's East Prussian Heimat. Replete with autobiographical elements, Die Flucht attempts to depict in fictionalized manner the early stages of the author's adult life. It tells the story of Oberlehrer Peter Holm of Berlin, who finds life in the city and in the teaching profession an intolerable burden. He becomes so disgusted with his work, his colleagues, and most of the people with whom he makes contacts, that in despair he flees to the forests of his native East Prussia. Finding that urban life has made it impossible for him fully to appreciate many of the earlier joys of the country, and finding, too, that his unhappiness has its roots not only in the outside world but also within himself, he seeks escape from the complexities of life by suicide. The book contains many indictments against the school system of the Wilhelminian era, and in its pessimism shows considerable influence of Schopenhauer Its style is unimpressive, with elements reminiscent of Bang, Jacobsen, the Russians, and the Naturalists.

The author completed his second novel, Die Blauen Schwingen, in 1917 (published 1925). The hero of this book is Harro Bruckner, a sensitive musician filled with a great and insatiable longing. The latter is symbolized by

the melancholy theme song of the blue-winged cranes, alluded to in the title. Harro, starting amid the lowly circumstances of the Masurian countryside, in the course of time develops into a competent musician and composer. He seeks fulfillment of his longing in his art, but does not find it. He also seeks to satisfy his yearning in love, but, like Peter Holm, he fails to find it there. In the end he forsakes his career and sets out into the world on foot, realizing that he may be destined always to remain a restless wanderer and seeker.

Der Wald, which followed in 1922, is the story of Henner Wittich, the last descendant of an old East Prussian Junker family, who returns home from the First World War broken in body and soul. He hopes once again to find peace and recovery in his ancestral forest, his "grüne Gott," from which the war has torn him. Ardently he wishes to be its brother and master, but finding that impossible, he is content to become its high priest and guardian. When the new socialistically-minded government wants to take over and exploit the forest for the public good, the fanatic Wittich defiantly sets his wooded sanctuary on fire. The book is critical of urban civilization and post-war socialist tendencies. In the depiction of the superman Wittich one discerns Nietzschean features.

In Der Totenwolf (1924), the hero is once again a defiant and embattled reformer. His name is Wolf Wiedersahl, a boy who has been raised by his grandmother with the special purpose of reforming the world. "Ein Wiedersahl," she reminds

him, "soll die Welt erobern." Paying homage to a Germanic God, Wolf fearfully castigates and berates the teachings of Christianity. He wants to cleanse Germany of its dirty and shameful cities, and to destroy the Christian church, which, he feels, is full of sham and pretense. However, death overtakes him before he can in any meaningful sense carry out his mission. There remains to him only the comfort that his son will fulfill the destiny of the Wiedersahls by a program of further violent reform, based on a dynamic Germanic religion, of which the symbol is the sword.

There is evident the beginning of a new spirit in the novel Der Knecht Gottes Andreas Nyland, which followed in 1926. Though there is still much feverishness, fanaticism, and emphasis on reform by imposition, the first glimmerings of Wiechert's later humanitas are beginning to break through. Andreas Nyland, a theological student who in the course of the story becomes a pastor, wishes to reform the world in a way quite unlike that of Wiechert's previous protaganists. He seeks the redemption of man not by methods of force and violence, but by a life and program of compassion, self-denial, and martyrdom. In his passion for relieving the ills of a suffering creation, he frees the animals from their cages, works with the underprivileged in the mines and factories, and everywhere helps to carry the cross of his toiling fellow-men. But like previous heroes, Andreas too does not succeed in his program of reform and redemption. He does not find God in his life of fanatic self-immolation.

In the end he concludes that he has come closer to imposing than to lifting the cross of humanity. Thinking that the way to God is perhaps not through men but through nature, he sets out to the great solitude of the forest.

Further indications of a gradual change in Wiechert's philosophy and outlook are found in two volumes of Novellen, of which one is called Der silberne Wagen (1928) and the other Die Flöte des Pan (1930). One finds in the stories of these collections considerably more composure and calm, perhaps even a trace of resignation. The difference is apparent not only in the nature and treatment of the themes, but also in the style, which has lost some of its earlier jaggedness and now flows on more smoothly, restfully, and sonorously. A distinguished story of the 1930 collection is "Der Hauptmann von Kapernaum," an artistic and humanitarian piece of work, which gained for its author an international short-story prize. In it a Hauptmann, impressed by a New Testament passage, feels called upon by Christ to save the life of a war prisoner by substituting his own. Another well-known story in the collection is the one entitled "Der Mann von vierzig Jahren," in which are very closely reflected Wiechert's first encounter with his second wife and the ensuing marital friction.

In Die kleine Passion (1929), there are, as in practically all of Wiechert's works, again many autobiographical elements. Johannes Karsten, the central figure of the novel, leaves the seclusion of his native forest to get an education in the city. There he encounters the ugliness of urban

life and the boredom of routine and uninspired teaching. Dutifully trained and ardently loved by his mother Gina, he grows into a consciousness of moral and social responsibility. Returning home after the experience of first love, he determines to study law and thus, as an advocate of the poor and oppressed, to devote his life to the healing of mankind.

A sequel to this work is Jedermann, Geschichte eines Namenlosen, which was written during 1929 and 1930, and published in 1931. The novel depicts the trying experiences of Johannes Karsten during the First World War. In doing this, it affords an insight into Wiechert's views of the institution of war, a subject which gets detailed discussion in a special chapter of this study.

During the year 1932, Wiechert worked on a novel called Der Exote, a work quite different from anything else in his literary production. It was not published until 1952, after the author's death. It is the tragi-comic tale of the student Wolf Wiltangel, who after a ten-year stay on a hazienda in South America, returns to his native Riechenberg to reestablish relations with Barbara, the flame of his youth. He finds her unhappily married to a well-to-do Bürger, from whose legal but immoral power he attempts to set her free. By flaunting all revered conventionalities, even in manners and dress, and by teaching the students of Riechenberg to do the same, Wiltangel causes the authorities of both state and school to stand aghast. The book is entirely devoid of Wiechert's usual brooding seriousness. It is filled with

wit and humor throughout, most of it bitter and at the expense of bigoted educators, Kleinstädter, and Bürger. Not a novel of artistic value and written too obviously in a mood of protest against his own treatment in Königsberg, Wiechert seems to have considered it unfit for publication during his lifetime.

The novel called Die Majorin (1934) belongs to the author's best known works. Its popularity is attested to by the fact that it, along with several other of the author's works, has been translated into several languages. In this book a war veteran by the name of Michael Fahrenholz, mentally and spiritually distraught by the ordeal of war and years of imprisonment, in the course of his aimless wandering returns to his native village. After chiseling his name from the honor roll on the local war monument, he wishes to leave again immediately. However, before he gets an opportunity to do so, he comes under the influence of the Majorin, a noble-minded woman in whom are found all the spiritual qualities which Wiechert associates with motherhood. Through her, Michael is gradually brought back to his work and to a life of close communion with his ancestral soil.

Unhappiness caused by man's being uprooted from the soil and estranged from nature - the recurring theme of the books mentioned so far - is not the subject treated in Die Magd des Jürgen Doskocil (1932). Here the chief character remains on the soil and as a result escapes the spiritual conflict which torments the other Wiechert heroes. Jürgen

Doskocil, depicted almost grotesquely in his animal-like relation to the earth, draws from nature the moral strength which enables him to surmount the hardships and cruel treatment to which he is subjected by his fellow-men. In this he is aided by a Magd who one day strays into his secluded hut and in the course of time becomes his wife. The book marks Wiechert's first in which a man and woman are really happily married. Written during 1930 and 1931, it reflects the peace which has come into the author's own marital relations. Religion of a debased nature comes to the fore in the person of Pastor MacLean, a Mormon, who seeks to wean the girl away from Jürgen. His sordid machinations lead the girl to kill him and renounce Mormonism.

In 1935 there appeared what by common consent is one of the finest productions of Wiechert's craftsmanship and at the same time one of the masterpieces of modern literature. It is the Hirtennovelle, called by Friedrich Bruns an idyll which can safely be ranked with Goethe's Hermann und Dorothea.[20] Here the simple shepherd lad Michael, living in the same vital contact with his native soil as Jürgen, also proves victorious over the onslaughts and false values of civilization. These are partly personified in a girl painter named Tamara. In the end, Michael loses his life in an attempt to save a stray lamb from the hands of some plundering soldiers.

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[20]Friedrich Bruns, "Ernst Wiechert - Das Werk" in the anthology Ernst Wiechert: Der Mensch und sein Werk (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 136.

The more restful and resigned spirit, characteristic of the three works just mentioned, seems to disappear in Das einfache Leben, a novel which Wiechert gave to the world in 1939. The reason for this, no doubt, may be found in the author's Buchenwald experience and in the seeming triumph, subsequently, of National Socialism. As will be pointed out in a special chapter in this study, Wiechert early saw in the Hitler movement a force threatening to undo everything the great spiritual leaders of Germany and the West for centuries had held dear. The prospect of progressive Gleichschaltung, terrorization, and dehumanization gave rise within him to great spiritual tension and agony. This is reflected in much of the moral and religious fatalism to which Thomas von Orla gives expression in this novel. Orla, the chief character, is a retired World War flotilla commander. Unable any longer to tolerate the urban decadence of post-war Berlin, he seeks refreshment of mind and spirit by secluding himself on a small island in the forest and lake country of East Prussia. Here he devotes himself first of all to daily and regular manual labor, but he also finds time for reading, for the study of the natural sciences, and for contemplation. He hopes that the simple life upon which he has entered will give him release and happiness—and to a degree it does. But even on the island he meets with tragedy in several forms, and the dark riddle of the universe remains unsolved.

Perhaps Wiechert's most impressive work is Die Jeromin-Kinder, a novel written during the years 1940 and 1941, but

which was not published until after the collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945. It is an Erziehungs-or Entwicklungsroman of exceptional calibre and has already by some been given a place alongside such classics as Parzival, Simplizissimus, Wilhelm Meister, Der grüne Heinrich, and Der Nachsommer.[21] In distinction from the novels just mentioned, Die Jeromin-Kinder does not depict the life development of one individual but rather of an entire family. Though the chief character is Jons Ehrenreich Jeromin, the novel also deals extensively with Jons' father and mother, and with his brothers and sisters - all of whom differ considerably in character and thus meet a varied fate. In a way, the novel is not even the chronicle of a family, but that of the village Sowirog, in which Jons is "eingebettet" and which also determines the character and destiny of all those who form a true organic unity with it.

In Die Jeromin-Kinder, too, the locale is the Masurian region of Wiechert's native East Prussia. Jons, the son of a quiet, Bible-reading father, is imbued with the passion "Gerechtigkeit auf den Acker zu bringen." Born amid poor circumstances, he can get an education only with the financial support of the village teacher, a noble figure by the name of Stilling. He discards his former plan of becoming a pastor and begins to study medicine and surgery. Guided and helped by his young student-friend Jumbo and particularly by the Jewish Dr. Lawrenz, he foregoes a brilliant career

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[21] Ibid., pp. 148-149.

and returns to his native Sowirog, there to help and heal his suffering fellow-men as Armendoktor.

The first volume takes Jons through his period of childhood and adolescence and World War I. The second volume, called Die Furchen der Armen (1947), deals with the adventures of Jons and his family during the era of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi regime. The third volume, writes Wiechert in a postlude to the second, "hat die Geschichte geschrieben, mit schweren und grauenvollen Buchstaben, und es ist keiner Dichtung das Recht gegeben über dieses Grauen den Schimmer der Verklärung zu legen."[22]

After the German collapse, Wiechert offered his publishers several works written during the war. One of the most important was the volume called Der Totenwald (1946), in which the poet sensitively records the spiritual and physical travail of his stay in Buchenwald. Also worthy of mention are the two volumes of Märchen (1946 and 1947). These are not fairy tales of the "modern" type, such as were written by Rilke, Hesse, Ruth Schaumann, and others. They are entirely in the tradition of the Volksmärchen, though they are a bit less simple, and the magical element in them is more pronounced. A recurring theme is: "Keine Macht der Welt ist stärker als ein reines Herz." Okay oder die Unsterblichen (1946), a play depicting post-war conditions in Germany, marks Wiechert's only - and fairly successful - attempt in the field

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[22] Die Furchen der Armen (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1947), p. 414.

of what he calls "ernsthafte Komödie."

The poet's last great novel, Missa sine nomine, was completed shortly before his death in 1950. It tells the story of three noblemen who have been forced to leave their mansion at the time of the Nazi collapse and see it requisitioned by the American army of occupation. The two older noblemen, beginning life anew in a sheepfold, are joined at the beginning of the novel by their youngest brother Amadeus. He has just returned from a Nazi concentration camp, in which he has spent four indescribable years. It is a devastated and confused world which he reenters, and he is in a bitter mood, looking with contempt upon himself, the world, and the eternal God.

However, living once again amid the solitude and grandeur of nature, Amadeus von Liljecrona gradually finds his way back to a rudimentary faith. On his road to spiritual recovery there are many who lend him a helping hand. Among these are first of all his sympathetic and understanding brothers; then, also, a peat-digging pastor and a Jewish peddler from a displaced persons' camp. Especially helpful is Christoph, the old coachman of the nobleman family, who tells Amadeus legends and tales of rich and deep spiritual significance. It is a book filled with mellow and mature wisdom and has with considerable judtification been called Wiechert's "legacy to mankind," in which "he makes his peace with life and death."[23]

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[23]Marie Heynemann in a review of the book in German Life and Letters, New Series, IV (1951), p. 227.

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There is much in the works of Wiechert which is reminiscent of Heimatdichtung. There is even more that is reminiscent of Romanticism, for instance, love of nature, Weltschmerz, sentimentalism, distrust of civilization, and a strong emphasis on the claims of the heart. Yet it would be difficult to speak of Wiechert as belonging to any particular literary school. He himself, as a matter of fact, definitely says that he belonged to none. Individualist that he was, he did not allow himself to be swept off his feet by naturalism, expressionism, or any other of the movements which waxed and waned during his lifetime. As to influences he says: "Vieles hat mich gefüllt oder erfüllt. Weniges hat mich beeinflusst."[24] Among the few who he admits may have influenced him, at least in matters of style, are Friedrich Huch, Eduard von Keyserling, and later Stifter.[25] In his younger days he admits having shown great regard for Jacobsen and Hermann Bang, also for the great figures of Scandinavian and Russian literature. Later he became interested in such French authors as Flaubert and Balzac, Maupassant and André Gide. Among the English he

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[24] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 395.

[25] Ibid., p. 395. As to the possible impact of still others on Wiechert's style and thinking, see Lydia Baer, "A Study of Ernst Wiechert with Special Reference to Jens Peter Jacobsen and Rilke," Modern Language Quarterly, V (1944), 469-480. Also, by the same author, "Raabe's and Wiechert's Novel Trilogies," Monatshefte, XLVI (1954), pp. 11-24.

liked especially Keats, Dickens, and Conrad. Still later he became acquainted with Slavic, Italian, and American literature. He expressed preference for Faulkner, Melville, and Thomas Wolfe.

Wiechert believed there was little in literature after Goethe that would endure. Even Ibsen, Strindberg, and Wedekind he considered fading figures. He expressed deep respect for Raabe and Hartleben, and particularly for Mörike, whose poetry had his profound admiration. Among contemporary German authors he showed high regard for Hermann Hesse, Ricarda Huch, and Hans Carossa. Toward the end of his life his interest in Hermann Stehr waned. In regard to Hauptmann he was always rather cool. "Es gibt für mich Ergreifendes in seinen Dramen, aber sehr wenig ist fertig und gar vollendet."[26]

Wiechert has come to be recognized as one of Germany's fine stylists. Particularly in such works as Die Majorin, Die Hirtennovelle, and Die Jeromin-Kinder he shows superior literary power and craftsmanship. His prose is lyrical, solemn, and sonorous, rich in metaphors and imagery, and filled with the quiet dignity of Biblical overtones. Except perhaps in Der Exote, his style is never light or humorous. Whenever employed, humorous passages are usually wry, subtly ironical, or bitterly caustic.

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[26]Ibid., p. 396.

CHAPTER II

URBAN CIVILIZATION

To understand Ernst Wiechert's relation to the urban and industrialized civilization of the twentieth century - in fact, to understand Wiechert's relation to anything at all - it is of the utmost importance to have clearly in mind the background from which he came. This background, as has already been intimated, was that of the vast, primeval forests of Masuria. Here, amid the grandeur of an almost mystic silence, Wiechert spent his childhood days. Here he daily imbibed the beauty of the majestic and rustling forest, of the silent lakes and moors, and of the far-stretching plains with their limitless vistas and sky-wide sunsets. Here the young Wiechert learned not simply to appreciate nature, but to live in a mystic and transcendental union with it. Nature, more particularly the forest, became to him the element in which he lived and moved and had his being.

As Berger suggests, a region "so sharply individualized would seem to make for some rudimentary spirituality. Boundlessness of space, foreshowing the infinity of the Universe, must breed fear - in the sense of Existentialism - of being absorbed, feelings of fatalistic helplessness, romantic introversion, along with the possible reaction of a stiffened

self-assertion."[1] However this may be, it can be unqualifiedly affirmed that "der Wald" or, as the author often prefers to say, "die grossen Wälder," had more of a formative influence upon Wiechert's life and outlook than any other single factor.

The forest, which is Wiechert's favorite symbol for nature, appears in practically all of the poet's major works not only as background, but even more as a mystically determinative factor in the destiny of his characters. "Wir würden alle anders sein," says Jons in Die Furchen der Armen, "wenn dieser Wald nicht wäre."[2] The importance of the forest to Wiechert already becomes evident as one simply looks over the list of his titles. These include, for instance, the novel Der Wald, the Novelle "Die Legende vom letzten Wald," and the autobiography Wälder und Menschen. He himself tells us that later in life, when he was a man of the city, no less than ninety percent of his dreams took him back to the forest.[3]

What share the Heimat had in his development as poet, Wiechert sets forth in these words: "Wenn ein Dichter jemand ist, der lange und schweigend sammelt, bevor er seine Ernte beginnt, so mag ich wohl dort und in jenen Zeiten ein Dichter geworden sein. Der Adler hatte daran teil und das Waldhorn,

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[1] Walter Berger, "Ernst Wiechert," German Life and Letters, New Series, IV (1950), pp. 11-12.

[2] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 173.

[3] Wälder und Menschen, p. 224.

die roten Wolken über dem Moor und der bittere Geruch der Wälder. Sie alle erfüllten das Gefäss, aus dem ich später schöpfen sollte, und sie bewahrten sich für mich, zehn, zwanzig, dreissig Jahre lang, mit der schönen Geduld, die nur die Treue gibt."[4]

Wiechert speaks of his separation from his Heimat as an expulsion from paradise and of his stay in the city as a banishment.[5] The expulsion, it will be remembered, occurred in 1898 when, at the age of eleven, he was sent with his brother to attend the Oberrealschule in Königsberg. It is significant to notice how the first confrontation with the city affected Wiechert. Königsberg, as he himself admits, was no noisy, bustling town in those days. From a modern metropolitan viewpoint, this little provincial capital was a sleepy, if not indeed, a dead town. At the time when Wiechert entered it, at night, it was even more quiet than usual and its streets were only poorly lighted. Yet in his autobiography Wiechert records his reaction as follows: "Und so habe ich diese Fahrt durch die abendliche Stadt als ein Ertrinken in einem Meer von Licht, Donner und Lärm im Gedächtnis, als einen Sturz in eine böse Verzauberung, und anders mag auch einem jungen Tier nicht zumute sein, das man aus der Dämmerung des Dickichts auf einen mauerumgebenen Hofplatz schleppt...."[6]

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[4] Ibid., p. 226.

[5] Ibid., p. 15.

[6] Ibid., p. 102.

It might be maintained that this reaction was simply one of a shy and sensitive child, who had lived remote from the world in an almost primitive and archaic simplicity of life, and who was now suddenly thrown into a strange and alien environment. Such it was, of course; yet undoubtedly it was more than that. Wiechert himself looked upon this experience as his first intimation of the sharp antithesis which exists between nature and civilization. The awareness of this antinomy became deeper with him as the years went by. An examination of his works in chronological order will show not only how devastating but also how enduring his indictment of urban civilization is.

There are many aspects of the big city which Wiechert looked upon with profound mistrust and which, in his books, incite him to constant criticism. One of these, as is evident from the passage just quoted, is the city's restlessness and noise. In describing the city here he uses the words "Donner und Lärm"; elsewhere he repeatedly employs such adjectives as "laut," "lärmend," and "unruhig." The city is the place of "jagende Lichtreklamen" and of "lärmende Kameraden"; it is filled day and night with "wildem, rasendem Leben."[7] Its subways are "donnernde Ungeheuer" and its autobusses "feurige Drachen." It is the place where "die Rotationspressen die Worte der Verkündigung auf das Papier hämmern, die Lautsprecher sie über die nächtlichen Ebenen schreien, die

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[7] Der Totenwolf (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1935), p. 114.

Lichtbänder der Reklame, aufschiessend an toten Wänden, sie in die müde Kammer unserer Augen schleudern."[8]

The indictment that the city is noisy takes on full meaning only when one brings it into relation with the author's thinking on the matter of quietude and silence. For Wiechert silence is something sublime, majestic, God-like. All great things are silent, he writes in an essay called "Laut und leise." "Der Baum, der wächst, die Blume, die sich erschliesst, das Tier, das aus abendlichen Wäldern tritt, das Gedicht, das aus dem Schweigen steigt, der Tod, der über eine Stirne fällt."[9] God himself is "stumm wie die Sterne." Chattering gods are suspect. "Die Ärzte heilten nicht mit Worten, der Bauer pflügte schweigend, und stumm war Christus zum Kreuz gegangen."[10] Wiechert strongly affirms the sentiment of Raabe who said: "Das Ewige ist stille, laut die Vergänglichkeit." That which makes death majestic for Wiechert is the fact that it represents "das grosse Schweigen." In fact, silence at times seems to him "der Sinn alles Lebens, aller Ernte, aller Ewigkeit."[11] It is one of the great media through which man intuits the divine. Thus for Wiechert the noise of the city

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[8] "Das Menschengesicht," Es geht ein Pflüger übers Land (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 66. For other typical descriptions see "Heinrich der Städtegründer," Der ewige Stern (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1952), pp. 5-35.

[9] Ibid., p. 101.

[10] Die Jeromin-Kinder I (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1947), p. 42.

[11] "Das ewige Antlitz," Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 37.

is much more than a physical annoyance; it represents modern man's irreverence and his desecration of majesty. In the last analysis it is symbolic of modern man's estrangement from God.

It is to overcome this sense of estrangement and to gain new and enduring values that such men as Holm, Nyland, and Orla escape the noise of the city and seek the solitude of the land and forest. Orla, who has lost practically all faith in God and man, goes to his lonesome island with the avowed purpose "um das Schweigen zu lernen."[12] It is especially the forest, for Wiechert a "Form Gottes," which teaches men silence, awe, and reverence. "Lebt aber ein Zauber in ihm, alt, sehr alt ... lässt uns nicht los ... webt uns im Blut ... bis wir stille sind ... ganz stille..."[13] Michael Fahrenholz, broken in spirit after many years of war and imprisonment, finds the forest "ein guter Platz." "Denn hinter ihm ist das Stille, und vor ihm ist das Schweigende."[14]

The typical urbanite, however, usually resents silence. The son of the Baroness, for instance, when he comes to visit his mother at her estate, begins immediately to break the silence with his "quäkendem Grammophon." When asked not to be so noisy, his blond girl friend simply raises "die Striche ihrer Augenbrauen und der junge Mann nimmt nachlässig die

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[12] Das einfache Leben (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 276.

[13] Der Wald (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), p. 40.

[14] Die Majorin (München: Langen-Müller, 1934), p. 62.

Hand von seinem Whiskyglas und bewegt den Hebel an dem schwarzen Kasten. 'Komisch, dass ihr es nie still genug haben könnt hier draussen, Mama,' sagt er nachsichtig. 'Wie in einem Totenhaus.'"[15]

Silence is not only something which modern man dislikes, it is something which he cannot endure. It gives him a feeling of aloneness, of emptiness, and of helplessness. Lacking the man-made protections of the city, he feels insecure amid the vastness of nature. Dr. Lawrenz, sitting on a boat of returning picnickers, says to Jons as the majestic forest landscape recedes behind them: "Alle grosse Landschaft, Jons, macht das Herz gross und ein bisschen bang. Deshalb lärmen sie hinter uns auch so. Diese Leute aus den grossen Städten haben immer ein bisschen Angst, wenn sie aus ihnen herauskommen. Sie haben keine Polizei mehr, die sie bewacht, keine Strassenbahn, keine Hausnummern. Und dann retten sie sich in die Masse und in den Lärm. Sie können keine Einsamkeit mehr ertragen. Sehen Sie den Kapitän an, er hat sich in den Alkohol gerettet."[16]

Closely related to the indictment of noise and clamor, is that of the city's shallowness and hollowness, of its bluster and boastfulness. Holm in Die Flucht calls the city "falsch und hohl, lärmend, breitspurig, brutal und hässlich."[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 151.

[16] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 201.

[17] Die Flucht (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), p. 87.

City people usually speak "dummes Zeug" for "die Stadtluft macht immer dumm."[18] Jons is warned by Charlemagne with these words: "Werde kein Städter, spotte nicht, prahle nicht."[19]

Wiechert often depicts the city as one huge prison. Of himself he says in the essay "Vom nahen Gott": "Ich bin ein Kind der Wälder.... Und dann bin ich ein Kind der Städte geworden, des versteinten Lebens. Das Lebendige stand hinter den Gittern: die Pflanze, das Tier, der Mensch, Gott."[20] Orla observes of the doors in the city that they opened and shut "wie Fallen, die sich hinter Gefangenen schlossen."[21] Jons, awaking in the city in the morning, also feels like a prisoner. He lies in bed and becomes conscious of the wakening dawn. "Aber es kam nur wie hinter dicken Mauern zu ihm her, aus einer fernen, ihm nicht zugehörigen Welt. Es war nicht, wie ein Feld erwacht, ein Wald, ein Dorf. Nur der Mensch erwachte, der Gefangene, der vom grossen Dasein Abgetrennte, und so mochte das Erwachen in einem Gefängnis sein, das leise Klirren der Ketten, der Riegel, der Laut von vielen Füssen, und darüber ein wildes, aber ganz und gar vergebliches Lied."[22]

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[18] Ibid., p. 156.

[19] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 112.

[20] Es geht ein Pflüger, pp. 59-60.

[21] Das einfache Leben, p. 17.

[22] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 28.

An especially favorite adjective of Wiechert in his description of the city is "steinern." It would be interesting to count the number of times this adjective (and various compounds) is used throughout his works. Sometimes the city is referred to as "die steinerne Welt" or as "eine Steinwüste"; then again as a representation "des versteinten Lebens" and as a place of "Steinhaufen und Eisenstangen" or of "Stein und Masse." When Jons visits the city for the first time he wonders what "diese steinerne Mühle wohl mahlen mochte."[23]

Here again the physical characteristics of the city are only symbolical of its spiritual nature. As nature forms the face and molds the heart of man, so does the city. The latter gives rise to "das stadtgeborne Geschlecht." Those who walk on stone and live amid stone also acquire "eine Seele aus Stein."[24] Wolf, in a violent outburst against the people of the city, says: "Steinern ist euer Haus, steinern eure Strassen, steinern euer Herz...."[25] He is told by the "Afrikaner" to avoid the city: "Die Stadt ist nichts für dich, Kind. Die Häuser sind wie Gräber in einem toten Land. Auf Stein geht dein Fuss, und Gott ist gestorben."[26]

In the legend "Heinrich der Städtegründer," the chief character, taken on a trip through the earth by a guiding

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[23] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 268.

[24] Der Totenwolf, p. 114.

[25] Ibid., p. 194.

[26] Ibid., p. 111.

angel, is made to see that his work has not been a blessing and that there will be happiness on earth only after the birth of his brother: "der Städtezerstörer." On one occasion the angel says to him: "Fühlst du nicht, wie böse und kalt der Stein ist, auf dem du stehst? Sieh, zwischen sich und die Erde haben die Menschen die Steine gelegt, zwischen sich und den Himmel den Fels gewölbt, zwischen Gott und die Seele, zwischen die Erde und ihren Fuss. Fremd sind sie ihrer Mutter geworden. Wie ein Geschwür ist es gewachsen, ihr steinernes Haus."[27]

In characterizing the city, Wiechert makes reference to its ugliness and filth. He finds it lacking in "Reinheit und Schönheit" and therefore "hässlich." Whereas out in nature the wind blows freshness and scent, and drives before it the salt foam of the sea, in the city it whips up only "Staub und Papierfetzen."[28] Says Holm: "Häuser, Schaufenster, Gespräche, Vergnügungen, alles hässlich, aufgedonnert, alles so masslos, roh und niedrig...."[29] It is once more apparent that Wiechert's indictment holds not only for the city itself, but also for its inhabitants. Harro Bruckner, upon visiting the city, states the matter in just so many words. "Wie hässlich die Menschen hier sind!" he exclaims.[30] And

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[27] Der ewige Stern, p. 16.

[28] Das einfache Leben, p. 44.

[29] Die Flucht, p. 87.

[30] Die blauen Schwingen (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1940), p. 119.

Holm finds the city so ugly and dirty "dass man sich beschmutzt fühlt von jedem Blick, dem man begegnet!"[31]

Wiechert indicts the city for its vice and immorality, too. Its slums are dens of iniquity. When Wolf visits them with the cobbler in Der Totenwolf, he stands motionless and aghast, "die Augen in Schauen versunken." To a girl in a café who raises her glass and winks with her eyes and then asks him, "Weisst du auch, wie wir leben, Liebchen?" he answers darkly: "Wie die Leichen. Wie die Leichen."[32] It is the city, Wiechert feels, that cultivates masses rather than human beings. Therefore it is constantly engaged in the exploitation of sex. Mass appeal means sex appeal. "Das Erotische," says Wendling in Der Knecht Gottes, "war immer der billigste Trost der Masse.... Schon deshalb, weil alle dafür empfänglich sind."[33]

Another characteristic which Wiechert attributes to the city and its people is that of hardness, coldness, and unfriendliness. Wolf on his visit to the city meets only faces in which lie "derselbe Ausdruck einer kalten Feindseligkeit, mit der das Tier auf alles blickt, das sich seiner Beute nähert."[34] On the other hand Holm, leaving the city on a vacation trip to his rustic Heimat, everywhere enjoys

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[31] Die Flucht, p. 87.

[32] Der Totenwolf, p. 120.

[33] Der Knecht Gottes Andreas Nyland (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), p. 407.

[34] Der Totenwolf, p. 116.

warm friendliness. Here people have no pretensions and no "front"; they speak to everyone, also to those whom they do not know. The difference is pointed up immediately in the person of the friendly station master, who greets Holm in a courteous manner and begins to speak to him about the opportunities for ice skating in the locality. "Was war der Mann so freundlich? Da sass er nun auf seiner weltverlassenen Stelle. Das Gehalt war klein, die Kinder kosteten, Urlaub gab es fast nie. Die Züge fuhren jeden Tag an ihm vorüber in die Ferne. Und doch war er freundlich zu ihm, hatte ihn nie gesehen, wusste nicht, wer er war. 'Heimatland! Heimatland!' rauschte es in den Wipfeln."[35]

The people of Wiechert's cities are not only unfriendly, but they are unhappy. The former is, of course, related to the latter. Wiechert seems to entertain serious doubts about the possibility of being genuinely happy in the city. "Gehen Sie eine Stunde durch die Strassen! ... Wo ist Glück, Ruhe, Besinnlichkeit, Echtheit...?"[36] asks Holm. Few, if any, of Wiechert's urban characters are actually happy; they therefore almost invariably seek to make their escape to the country. It is only as one lives "im Einklang mit seiner Erde"[37] that life can be full, abundant, and satisfying. "Aber der Mensch brach aus der Natur heraus, und Gott und

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[35] Die Flucht, pp. 72-73.

[36] Ibid., p. 87.

[37] Wälder und Menschen, p. 223.

er hörten auf, eins zu sein."[38] Says Holm: "Wenn Sie glücklich sein wollen, dann werden Sie Bauer! Pflügen und säen Sie, hören Sie die Wälder rauschen, sehen Sie die Wolken ziehen - das ist wohl Glück, was anderes nicht."[39]

Urban people, as Wiechert sees it, are easily identified, particularly by their faces. They have an "Amtsgesicht" or a "Bürogesicht"; they have "die kleinen Linien der Zeitungsleser...die Sorgenfalten eines Berufes...die Zerknitterungen einer Stadt."[40] To the Nature-like man the modern urbanite is fundamentally "different." Gina in Die kleine Passion is curtly warned by her father not to marry the urban Zerrgiebel: "Aus der Stadt, Gina, die sind eben anders. Das machen die vielen Fenster und die Steine."[41]

A typical product of the city is, of course, the Bürger. He is depicted rather good-naturedly in Der Exote in such words as these: "Er stand am Rande des Teppichs, die Hände in den Hosentaschen, klein, rund, behaglich, wohlwollend ... ein Kleinbürger, zu Wohlstand gelangt, der lebt und leben lässt, der den Stammtisch liebt, das Essen, die Frauen, das Bankbuch. Ein bequemer Gefährte, etwas laut, etwas kompakt, aber ohne Konflikte und Probleme."[42] Wiechert describes the

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[38]"Vom nahen Gott," Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 62.

[39]Die Flucht, p. 92.

[40]Die kleine Passion (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939), p.89.

[41]Ibid., p. 15.

[42]Der Exote (München, Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951) p. 42.

Bürger a bit more sardonically in Der Knecht Gottes: "Wer aber weder glaubt noch erkennt, das ist der Mann des Jahrhunderts, die Wanze des Tempels, der Tausendfuss des Erdkellers, das ist der Bürger, mein Freund, verstehst du? Einfach der Bürger! Wozu ein Attribut? Der Teufel hat auch keins."[43]

One of the poet's most serious indictments of urban life is that it dehumanizes. The city is for Wiechert the symbol of Western decadence. It is that which disfigures life, that which "das Menschliche in uns ertötet."[44] Accordingly, in his earlier and more intemperate works, he has his heroes refer to the inhabitants of cities not as human beings, but as beasts. Wolf, upon entering the city for the first time and observing its grave-like character, simply cannot imagine human beings living in such a place. "Gibt es Menschen," he asks incredulously, "die hier geboren werden, leben und sterben?"[45] In answer to this question he is told that there are indeed many people - at least, creatures - who come into being, live, and die there. And, he is assured, there are even many larger cities likewise "voll von bösen, eingesperrten Tieren und voll von Tränen und Mord."[46] Subsequently Wolf himself, in a violent outburst, speaks of the city dwellers as "Tiere im Käfig der

[43] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 299.

[44] Die Flucht, p. 88.

[45] Der Totenwolf, p. 113.

[46] Ibid., p. 114.

Masse" and "Wesen des Sumpfes und der Tiefe."[47]

Even in a much later work, Die Furchen der Armen, Wiechert refers to urban decadence in language which is almost equally forceful. Observing people in a city barroom, Jons exclaims: "Sie sehen wie Verfolgte oder wie Besessene aus. Entkleidete Besessene, die sich selbst die Kleider herunterreissen."[48] As he continues to watch their faces, these seem to him as "Gesichter von verzweifelt und gleichsam rasend Lebenden und Gesichter, die gleich denen von Toten waren, emporgetrieben aus ihren dunklen Wohnungen zwischen Schilf und Schlinggewächsen .... Aber nicht ein einziges stilles Gesicht, nicht ein einziges von Frieden erfüllt ...."[49] Instead, these people appear as those "die in den Abgrund rasen."[50] They have about them something "Eiskaltes, Erbarmungsloses, Tödliches."[51]

The depersonalization of the modern urbanite, Wiechert feels, is tied up with his estrangement from nature. Modern man has broken out of the element in which God has intended him to live. He has created an atomized society without natural cohesion and without the possibility of organic social growth. Jons in a conversation with his sister, says: "Wir müssen etwas zum Sorgen haben, Schwester, für Menschen

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[47] Ibid., p. 194.

[48] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 182.

[49] Ibid., p. 183.

[50] Ibid., p. 126.

[51] Ibid.

oder Tiere oder einen Acker, sonst werden wir unfruchtbar .... Wir bringen es nicht aus dem Blut, und vielleicht rasen deine Bargäste in den Abgrund, weil sie es nicht mehr haben."[52]

Much of the foregoing, it will be realized, can in a way be reduced to the criticism that the city and modern man are fundamentally irreligious. And it is this indictment, too, which Wiechert makes in just so many words. Wolf, when asking his guide if there is a God in the city, gets a prompt and unequivocal reply: "Quatsch doch nicht so dämlich, Mensch! Wie die Tiere lieben sie und sollen an Pfaffenmärchen glauben!"[53] Of Jons, after his trip to the city, it is said: "Dass er [Gott] in den Städten nicht lebte, das wusste er nun..."[54] No, indeed, the God of the cities is dead. They have buried him alive under stone and iron bars and their steps sound hollow over his vault. In the place of the living God, the cities have erected an idol with a golden swollen belly, fingers like a spider, and flashing eyes. "Was sie dort anbeteten, war das Gold und das Wort. Vergängliche und trügerische Dinge, wie die Macht, die sie darauf erbauten."[55]

It is in the cities with their gross materialism and secularism, Wiechert feels, that Christianity will be increasingly threatened. It is for this reason that Pastor Tobias in Die Jeromin-Kinder chooses to serve an urban

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[52] Ibid., p. 127.

[53] Der Totenwolf, p. 119.

[54] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 97.

[55] Ibid., p. 367.

congregation. Such a congregation, he feels, will present him with the greater spiritual challenge. He wishes to go not "wo das Evangelium sich noch am längsten erhalten werde, sondern da, wo man alle Menschenkraft aufbieten werde, um es zu stürzen. Und das werde nicht in den grossen Wäldern, sondern in den grossen Städten sein."[56]

One gets the impression that Wiechert considers the big industrialized cities practically beyond spiritual reach. The soot and dust which settles down upon them not only besmirch the air and kill the flowers, but also stifle all spiritual life. When Pastor Tobias first comes to preach to his urban flock, he finds among them a degree of interest. People look upon his services as a bit of diversion, as they do upon a new movie bill. "Aber dann fiel auch darauf der dunkle Staub," he relates to Jons. "Auf die Predigten, auf die Kanzel, wahrscheinlich auch auf mich."[57] And to himself he says: "Damals dachtest du, dass du dorthin gehen müsstest, wo Gott am meisten gefährdet sei. Aber er ist nicht mehr in Gefahr hier. Er ist Staub geworden für diese Menschen hier, er hat sich aufgelöst..."[58]

Constantly, in contrast to the decadence of the cities, Wiechert sets forth the enduring values of the forest, of the land, and of the small village. For him life amid nature

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[56] Ibid., p. 422.

[57] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 197.

[58] Ibid., p. 198.

is the God-ordained way of living. Here man still lives in the "Urzeit", from which he gains an ennobling and quiet security. Here he is free from the noise and clamor, the confusion and restlessness of modern life. Here there is time and opportunity to sit on a bench before one's humble home and to meditate on things eternal. Here, "in der kindlichen Belebung der Natur",[59] he may acquire a profound wisdom and a true piety. Here he can live in tune with God and His good earth, deeply and mystically.

Those of Wiechert's characters who enjoy this type of intimacy with nature are happy. Some of them enjoy this intimacy primitively and unconsciously. Jürgen Doskocil, Piontek, and Kiewitt (Die Jeromin-Kinder) come to mind. Others, who have become intellectuals, enjoy it more consciously. Jons Jeromin and Dr. Lawrenz are outstanding examples. However, those who have lost it, invariably find themselves unhappy and seek to recapture it. One thinks here especially of Peter Holm, Thomas von Orla, Andreas Nyland, Michael Fahrenholz, and Amadeus von Liljecrona.

Like the people from the city, so, in Wiechert's opinion, also those "aus den grossen Wäldern" have their own unmistakable characteristics. Dr. Lawrenz, who for some time has daily watched Jons pass his city home on the way to school, says to him one day: "Ich dachte mir, dass Sie aus dem Walde kämen. Man geht anders, wenn man aus dem Walde

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[59] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 33.

kommt. Man hat auch andere Augen."[60] Those who live in communion with nature, grow up to be genuine and distinct personalities. God and nature do not work on man as "an einer Serie wie die am laufenden Band einer Maschinenfabrik."[61] It is only in the man-made city that one finds the Massenmensch. There most people are in uniform, though they may be wearing sport clothes. But, says Dr. Lawrenz to the Waldläufer Jons, "Sie haben nie eine Uniform getragen. Gott hat keine Uniformen verliehen, die verleiht nur der Staat."[62]

The high degree of individuality and genuineness which commonly characterizes those who have been reared in the intimacy of nature, often causes resentment on the part of modern urbanites, Wiechert intimates. It is the resentment of the decadent mass-man against the Nature-like man. Those coming from the forest, he points out, remind men of past days, of a better age in the history of mankind. They "show up" the modern man; they reveal to him what he once had but has now lost. They deflate his arrogance and his vaunted security. "Wir sind schon seltsame Leute, wir aus dem Walde," says Gina Jeromin. "Wir sind ihnen unheimlich .... Wir erinnern sie an längst vergangene Zeiten, und das mögen sie nicht.... Es nimmt ihnen etwas von ihrer prahlerischen Sicherheit. Es sind Gespenster für sie, aber Gespenster,

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[60] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 92.

[61] Ibid., p. 274.

[62] Ibid., p. 92.

die eine Hand aufheben.... Sie deutet auf das Sinnlose, in dem sie atmen, auf das Böse, in dem sie zu Hause sind...."[63]

Wiechert furthermore intimates that those who live in a mystic communion with nature become filled with a mellow and mature wisdom. The shepherd Piontek is said to have acquired "eine tiefe Weisheit,"[64] and of the shepherd in Missa sine nomine, living under the simple roof of his sheep-cot, the poet writes: "Das Dach hatte ihn mit Schweigen und mit Weisheit gefüllt ...."[65] Whereas the city tends to make men pretentious, shallow, and boastful, it is nature which tends to create love for the simple and the genuine. Orla, for instance, is determined to get his son away from the city, where he is surrounded by the "Bilder des Verfalls und des Rausches"[66] to join him amid forest and lake "damit er an diesen herben und grossen Linien erführe, dass der Wille der Schöpfung in der Landschaft immer auf das Einfache gehe."[67]

In the works of Wiechert, the city usually has a besmirching influence whereas nature, symbolized by the forest, has a purifying one. To the purging effect of the forest Wiechert testifies clearly in Wälder und Menschen. He

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[63] Ibid., p. 128.

[64] Ibid., p. 136.

[65] Missa, p. 34.

[66] Das einfache Leben, p. 43.

[67] Ibid., p. 395.

speaks there of the privilege of returning home from the city school four times a year for a vacation. It was a privilege, he writes, which meant "dass ich viermal im Jahr mich reinwaschen konnte von dem Schmutz, mit dem das Leben mich nicht verschonte."[68] Though he might escape the eyes of his parents, he could not possibly escape the earnest eyes of the forest. He felt that he either had to flee or to purify his life. "Es ist nicht nur ein von den Pantheisten gebrauchtes Bild, dass der Wald eine Form Gottes sei. Und wenn ich das Gedicht der Kinderzeit vergessen hatte, dass Gottes Augen überall seien, hier war es wieder da. Es gab keine Lüge im Wald, keine Eitelkeit, keinen Lärm."[69] The same idea is also found in Wiechert's fiction. Thus the city bureaucrat Hermann Gieseking in Der silberne Wagen, while revisiting his native forest on a vacation, is told by his former girl friend: "Solange du unter der Erde lebtest, in deiner Stadt, mit deinen Menschen und deinem Beruf, wo alle anderen ebenso tot waren, hast du es nicht gemerkt. Nun aber sollst du in einem Wald stehen, sollst ein Tier anblicken oder die Sterne. Du weisst gar nicht, dass du auf eine Wage getreten bist und dass du fällst wie ein Stein."[70]

For Wiechert the unit of society which is basic and which preserves the great values of humanity is not the city,

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[68] Wälder und Menschen, p. 133.

[69] Ibid., p. 134.

[70] Der silberne Wagen (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1938), pp. 26-27.

but the small village. In the two volumes of Die Jeromin-Kinder, in which he affectionately depicts the common folk of Sowirog, the poet calls the village "der Anfang aller Geschichte"[71] and "der Urgrund der Menschengemeinde."[72] For him, as Puknat puts it, the village is "indispensable for the country's moral and physical survival."[73] It is here that men work faithfully, devotedly, even religiously at the most basic occupation in the world. "Wenn der Kaiser am Morgen aufwacht und nach der Uhr sieht, weiss er, dass um diese Zeit die stillen, fleissigen Leute schon an der Arbeit sind..."[74] And when, after the First World War, people in the cities go on strike or plant freedom-trees, it is in Sowirog and "in allen kleinen Dörfern der Erde" that they continue patiently to provide for the world's food.

The great symbolic figure of the village is the plowman. He has been immortalized in Kiewitt, the humble Anabaptist of Sowirog. "Ein einfacher Mann im Dienst der Erde, der Gesichte gehabt hatte und zweimal getauft worden war, aber der den Acker ohne Gesichte gepflügt hatte..."[75] To plow the earth for the food of man is, for Wiechert, to engage

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[71] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 51.

[72] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 14.

[73] Siegfried B. Puknat, "God, Man, and Society in the Recent Fiction of Ernst Wiechert," German Life and Letters, N.S., III (1950), p. 229.

[74] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 256.

[75] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 386.

in an occupation of matchless dignity and worth. "Der Pflug, der Acker [ist] das Heiligste, was wir haben," says Andreas in Der Knecht Gottes.[76] And Michael Anders in the Novelle "Die Flucht ins Ewige" puts it still more strongly when he says: "Zweierlei hat Gott uns gesandt: Seinen Sohn und den Pflug."[77] The plowing of the soil is that which continues quietly but uninterruptedly throughout the ages. Jons, having returned from the war front, muses on its noble and ageless character in this way: "Aber während sie draussen marschiert waren, von Land zu Land, von Schlachtfeld zu Schlachtfeld, war dieses ohne ihr Wissen immer still vor sich hingegangen, das Erhaltende, Bewahrende und Ewige dieser dunklen Erde. Der Pflug, der durch den Acker ging, das Pferd, das ihn zog, der Mann, der die Erde umbrach, um das Korn zu säen."[78]

For Wiechert there is something eternal about the village. In spite of wars, calamities, and disasters, the village remains. "Sieh, Reiche sind nie ewig, aber Dörfer können ewig sein. Verbrannte Reiche stehen nicht mehr auf, so wie Karthago nicht mehr aufgestanden ist. Aber verbrannte Dörfer können wieder aufstehen."[79] The reason for this is that the village is embedded in the earth, in God, in eternity.

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[76] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 135.

[77] "Die Flucht ins Ewige," Der Silberne Wagen, p. 222.

[78] Die Jeromin-Kinder, I, p. 467.

[79] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 385.

"Der Acker bleibt, die Erde, Gott!"[80] God has a special interest in the village: "Er löscht nicht die Dörfer aus. Sie sind eingeschrieben bei ihm, und er bewahrt das Eingeschriebene."[81]

It is in the city, where the good earth recedes and even disappears from men's sight and mind, that this sense of the permanent and eternal is lost. And without such a sense there can, of course, be no religion. "'Es liegt eine grosse Macht in diesen kleinen Dörfern, Jons,' sagte er. 'Eben dass nicht jeder Tag etwas Neues bringt, sondern dass er nur bringt, was er schon vor hundert Jahren gebracht hat. Wie sollen die Leute in der Stadt ihren Gott mitnehmen, wenn sie jedes Jahr in eine neue Wohnung ziehen? Sie haben soviel mitzuschleppen, dass sie ihn eben vergessen, wie man eine Kiste vergisst.... Jede Wohnung hat ihren neuen Gott. Es ist fast so, als sei er in die Miete eingeschlossen. Nein, Jons, ein Volk, das seine kleinen Dörfer vergisst, hat das Wasser des Lebens verloren.'"[82]

Compared to that in the city, life in the primitive village, Wiechert suggests, is much more secure, hard as it may be sometimes. It is not dependent upon the artificial and unstable devices of man: upon stock market prices, pensions, economic cycles, currency fluctuations. During the

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[80] Der Wald, p. 235.

[81] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 385.

[82] Ibid., p. 328.

post-war depression it seems to Jons in the city "als lebten die Leute von Sowirog ein sichereres Leben trotz ihrer Armut, weil die Kartoffeln am Moorrand für sie wuchsen, der kümmerliche Roggen auf den sandigen Feldern, die kleinen, sauren Birnen an den Ackerrainen."[83] When his urban landlady sees what proportions the post-war inflation is assuming, she becomes considerably worried. "Was soll werden?" she asks Jons in horror. "Was immer war," is his simple and quietly reassuring answer.[84] According to an Old Testament promise there will continue to be seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. It is that which has kept the people of Sowirog going for hundreds and thousands of years, and it is that which will keep all others going too. As long as only the mark falls, he assures her, nothing has been lost. "Erst wenn die Erde fällt, wird es schlimm."[85] Von Balk makes the same point when he says of Sowirog's teacher during the inflation: "Er hat seine Pension und sein Erspartes, aber ich habe Felder und Herden und Wald, und das ist ein gewaltiger Unterschied. Das ist der Lohn der Erde.... Und das andere ist einfach Unsinn."[86]

The village, because of its greater spiritual resources, is more immune to revolution and subversion than the city.

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[83] Ibid., p. 32.

[84] Ibid., p. 30.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., p. 51.

It is embedded in a great spiritual past and has something about it of the timeless and the eternal. For this reason the political fads of time are impotent against it. When the socialist schoolmaster of Sowirog begins to teach the post-war pupils revolutionary songs, some of the villagers become very apprehensive. But the retired old schoolmaster Stilling, in a discussion of this matter with a friend, sagely remarks: "Aber die kleinen Dörfer, weisst du, sind immer stärker als diese neuen kleinen Propheten. Denn ein Dorf besteht nicht nur aus Kindern, denen man Lieder beibringen kann. Ein Dorf besteht aus Alten und Jungen, aus Toten und noch nicht Geborenen, aus Sand und Wasser und Wald, aus Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Ein Dorf ist nämlich in die Ewigkeit eingebettet, wie ein Kind in seine Mutter, und solch ein Lied, Korsanke, macht der Ewigkeit nichts aus."[87]

Years later, when the Nazis come to Sowirog with their new gospel, the villagers again prove immune. The very quietness and simplicity of these people make the loud and boastful Nazis suspect in their eyes. "Auch sind diese jungen Burschen ihnen etwas zu sicher und zu laut, und die Leute von Sowirog sind beides nicht."[88] The villagers look upon the many elections and plebiscites of the Nazis as so much foolishness. They simply ignore them and go their own way. When the Nazi authorities reproach them, the old Daida takes a pinch of

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[87] Ibid., p. 20.

[88] Ibid., p. 275.

snuff from his box and replies on their behalf: "Wir haben das liebe Gottchen gewählt, und das braucht sich nicht jedes Jahr wiederwählen zu lassen. Das hat an einem Mal genug."[89]

It is in the village, rather than in the city, that the dignity of man is preserved. The new Landjäger of Sowirog is described as "einer aus den Städten, wo die Menschen Spreu sind und wo man sie als Spreu behandelt."[90] He expects to treat the villagers in the same way as he has the urbanites. But he discovers that in Sowirog he somehow cannot continue his former habits. He has been lifted out of a comfortable mass situation and he is annoyed by the sense of personal responsibility which the village now devolves upon him. He finds it hard to punish those who offend against Nazi regulations. He muses: "In der Stadt würde es einfacher sein, weil sie immer zu vielen waren, mindestens zu zweit. Aber hier war er allein, mutterseelenallein."[91] In the city his evils somehow seemed anonymous and impersonal, but not here where there is no longer the "schutzgebende Masse, in der [er] untertauchen konnte, geborgen in der Namenlosigkeit."[92] The sense of personal responsibility so oppresses him that he welcomes the rumors of war. "Er würde gern mitgehen. In Reih und Glied war alles leichter."[93]

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[89] Ibid., p. 332.

[90] Ibid., p. 270.

[91] Ibid., pp. 346-347.

[92] Das einfache Leben, p. 17.

[93] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 347.

Orla has a kindred experience when he flees the city and repairs to his lonely island. He, too, feels that man, taken out from among the city masses, is thrown back upon himself and as a result recaptures a sense of personal responsibility and dignity. It seems to him "als ob der Mensch hier mehr auf eigener Kraft und im eignen Inneren beruhen müsse, ohne die gedankenlose Unterstützung der Masse, die ihm woanders, zumal in den Städten, so leicht und so verhängnisvoll zufalle."[94]

Though Wiechert is definitely partisan to the village, it is not because he considers the people there inherently or intrinsically better. The common folk in the villages are sinners as well as the middle-class groups in the cities. Yet, since they know how to stand in awe before a holy God, the poet sees them as suffering less from the fatal spiritual malady of self-righteousness. With them there is less pride, arrogance, and hypocrisy. And there is more humility, meekness, and contrition. This leaves room for the grace of God. Pastor Agricola says of those in his former city congregation: "Sie glaubten nicht und sündigten." But of those in the Sowirog flock he says: "Auch diese sündigten wahrscheinlich, aber sie glaubten. Ihre Sünde war deshalb vielleicht schwerer, aber die Gnade war ihnen näher."[95]

Wiechert admits that the village is conservative and,

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[94] Das einfache Leben, p. 39.

[95] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 94.

from the viewpoint of many moderns, hopelessly behind the times. Sowirog is "ein ganz und gar verlorenes Dorf, abgeneigt dem, was die Zeitungen Fortschritt und Kultur nennen, ein Dorf voller 'Pachulken', wie der junge Regierungsrat bei der Kirchenweihe seine Bewohner genannt hat."[96] To be sure, the village has "eine etwas zurückgebliebene Seele," but, adds Wiechert, "vielleicht ist sie nur in Gott zurückgeblieben..."[97] That being so, he feels he can safely rest his case.

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[96] Die Furchen der Armen, p. 107.

[97] Ibid., p. 368.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATION

When in 1898 Wiechert began his period of "städtische Verbannung," he was simultaneously introduced to the process of schooling or formal education. Previously, it will be remembered, he had been taught by a number of tutors in his parental home. Of the first of these, a woman, Wiechert writes that she was of simple mind and pure heart, and that she, not at all unfortunately, knew little or nothing "vom kategorischen Imperativ noch von den Herbartschen Formalstufen."[1] Of the last tutor he records that he did not always make his pupil walk the prescribed and difficult path of duty but, for a little diversion, at times preferred "aus dem Fenster der Oberstube ein Wettschiessen mit Katapulten nach allem zu veranstalten, was sich im Garten bewegte."[2] In this way, writes Wiechert, the tutor quite wisely failed to distinguish rigorously between "Neigung" and "Pflicht," choosing rather to recognize the merit of both and to honor them as principles of equal value. And thus it was, he concludes, that he could begin his trip in the realm of education "in einer schönen Freiheit."[3]

It was quite a different matter when Wiechert enrolled in the gymnasium at Königsberg. Freedom and consideration

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[1] Wälder und Menschen, p. 35.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] Ibid., p. 36.

for "Neigung," he felt from the start, were utterly lacking here. Though the period in which he began his formal studies was often considered the golden age of German education, it was by no means so considered by him. His schooling became a plague and an intolerable burden to him. In the writings of subsequent years, Wiechert was anything but silent about the weaknesses of the German school system - a system which he learned to know not only as a student at the gymnasium and university, but also as an Oberlehrer of more than twenty years of experience. His criticism is often scathing and caustic, and it concerns itself with the administrators, the teachers, the aims, and the methods rather than with matters of curriculum or school organization.

There is, first of all, considerable criticism in Wiechert's writings, both autobiographical and fictional, of the administrators of the German schools. The Direktor, it seems, comes in for an especially large share of the criticism. The very first Direktor whom Wiechert ever encountered is described in Wälder und Menschen as a man with "einem steineren Gesicht," before whom all tremble, "vom kleinsten Nonaner bis zum ältesten Professor."[4] He wears a ring which has a stone inscribed with the words "Faith, Hope, and Love," and when he is engaged in his favorite pastime of boxing students' ears, he turns the ring inside and thus prudently distributes his blows with faith, hope, and love. "Kein Wunder, dass wir

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[4] Ibid., pp. 104-105.

vor ihm erstarrten, und dass er uns nicht wie der Stellvertreter des lieben Gottes, sondern wie sein Vorgesetzter erschien."[5]

This Direktor, nicknamed "der Löwe," also appears in the novel Die kleine Passion. There he is literally described as a lion who sits in his den and chews up men's bones. He never laughs, not even when he murders. He refers to his students as "Material." For him education is "Beugung," and "Gehorsam."[6] Doubt to him is rebellion, and freedom is poison.

The severity of school officials in the Wilhelminian era is stressed repeatedly. In the first volume of his autobiography Wiechert records: "Die Zucht war streng, und wenn der Schulrat kam, ein Mann mit dem Titel eines Geheimen Oberregierungsrates, so erbebte die Schule bis zu ihren Fundamenten."[7]

The discipline of these officials, Wiechert points out, was not only severe and military, it was also pointless and silly. Oberlehrer Holm in Die Flucht complains of the surveillance which his Direktor forces him to exercise upon students even when these are on the playground. "Er hatte darauf zu achten, dass die Papiere in den Papierkorb gelangten, dass kein Schüler umherlief, dass kein Schüler die Hände in die Hosentaschen steckte, dass keine Prügelei entstand und noch einiges mehr."[8] Darkly and broodingly Holm watches the three

[5] Ibid,, p. 104.

[6] Die kleine Passion, p. 185.

[7] Wälder und Menschen, p. 125.

[8] Die Flucht, p. 40.

hundred students "die da mit den Händen auf dem Rücken frierend über den Hof trotteten, in einem ewigen, nutzlosen, widersinnigen Kreislauf."[9] He is stunned by the ludicrous repression of the officials and the easy acquiescence of the students. "Wenn doch ein paar den Mut gehabt hätten, laut und fröhlich über den Schulhof zu jagen und diese ganze stickige Atmosphäre mit Jubel und Bewegung zu zerreissen!"[10]

It is not only the directors' military discipline which Wiechert repeatedly berates, it is also their habit of suddenly bursting into classes, snooping about, and rudely interrupting the course of the recitation. It was, of course, not so much as student but later as teacher that Wiechert became painfully aware of this discourteous and irritating custom. He calls attention to it several times in Die Flucht. In this novel Direktor Ölmann is depicted as stealthily entering Holm's classroom on "Kontinental-absätzen," snooping about and writing in his notebook. In a discussion of the matter, Hübner says of his Direktor: "Nein, wissen Sie, es schadet ja nichts, wenn er mal in die Klassen kommt, aber das ewige Zwischenschwatzen und Besserwissenwollen, das is doch einfach lächerlich."[11] What made his early education under tutors such a delightful thing, writes Wiechert, was the fact that "hinter der Tür der Oberstube weder die majestätische Gestalt eines Direktors noch

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Die Flucht, p. 36.

gar die gottväterliche eines Schulrates bereit stand, unvermutet einzutreten, um nachzuprüfen, ob die heiligen Gesetze der Pädagogik auch geachtet und bewahrt würden..."[12]

The blind, slavish, and uncritical devotion to the "heiligen Gesetze der Pädagogik" is another matter for which Wiechert takes the officials to task. No teacher, certainly no born teacher, he believes, should ever be held mechanically and rigidly to a set of so-called educational principles. Wiechert's plea is for a system in which there is room for freedom, initiative, and originality on the part of the teacher. A colleague of Holm, commenting on the conferences with their Direktor, complains: "Prinzipien und Prinzipien! Wenn unsre Direktoren sich endlich angewöhnen könnten, aus Prinzip keine Prinzipien zu haben! Frei, individuell, grosszügig!"[13]

There are other habits on the part of officials, petty and bureaucratic, which Wiechert satirizes. In Die Flucht, Holm finds his Direktor waiting for him each morning with his watch in his hand. The latter keeps him under surveillance not only in his classroom, but also on the playground, where he is sent for supervision. "Ja, da stand er nun wieder und wartete auf eine 'Unregelmässigkeit.'" Holm thinks of the Direktor in the school on the Polish frontier, which he himself had once attended. How different things had been there! "'Meine lieben Primaner! Wer will von Ihnen heut' nachmittag

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[12] Wälder und Menschen, p. 36.

[13] Die Flucht, p. 33.

mit mir in den ersten Winterschnee hinaus? Ich lasse die letzte Stunde ausfallen!' Ach, wie viele 'Unregelmässigkeiten' hatte es da gegeben! Und doch sprach man noch heute dort unten von seinem Begräbnis...."[14]

Speaking in Jahre und Zeiten of the school authorities under whom he served, Wiechert remarks that concerning many of them he has "nicht viel Rühmenswertes" to report.[15] Some, he finds, were simply "versteinerte Bürokraten" or "gehobene Tagelöhner" or "Zuchtmeister des Geistes." Others, while they performed creditably as administrators and led respectable lives, added up to nothing more than "Summen von Wissen und Paragraphen," encased in "einer kümmerlichen Hülle."[16]

Much of the same criticism which he directs against administrators and other school officials, Wiechert also directs against teachers. Many of these, too, he accuses of being mere "Zuchtmeister." In Wälder und Menschen he reports that the director at Königsberg, notoriously known as "der Löwe," was not the only one with a stone face; many of the teachers in the Vorschule were actually "vergröberte Abbilder des 'Löwen.'"[17] In the robustness of their bodies, in the dark silence of their natures, and in the half-proscribed loneliness in which they lived within the rest of the faculty, these men seemed to him "wie erstarrte Zeugen aus dem

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[14] Ibid., p. 40.

[15] Jahre und Zeiten, pp. 195-196.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Wälder und Menschen, p. 123.

Mittelalter, einer Zeit also, in der man die ABC-Schützen noch mitunter mit Arm- und Bein-brüchen aus der Schule trug, die der Bakel eines rasenden Schulmeisters ihnen beigebracht hatte."[18] With particular horror he remembers one of them "dessen glattrasiertes und rotes Gesicht von vielen Warzen entstellt war und von dem das sicherlich begründete Gerücht umging, dass er seine Nonaner halb zu Tode prügle. Die denn auch wie früh verdammte kleine Schatten durch die dunklen Korridore zu schleichen oder zu schweben schienen."[19]

Not many of his teachers, Wiechert recollects, were very human. They stand out in his mind as men "mit Brillen ausgerüstet, mit klugen oder flachen Gesichtern, mit komischen oder gefährlichen Angewohnheiten."[20] With none of them can students have normal human relations. They form one world and the students another. Many of them can be characterized by such words as "fremd, gleichgültig, komisch, abstossend."[21]

Wiechert relates of a brother at school who stammered. Some of the teachers, he reports with disgust, in certain moods made fun of him. "Wenig verstand man in damaliger Zeit," he complains, "von den innerlichen Leiden eines Kindes...."[22]

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 125.

[21] Ibid., p. 129.

[22] Ibid., p. 159.

Many of his teachers Wiechert denounces as downright and fearful incompetents. There is, again in Wälder und Menschen, his history and geography teacher who insists on rote memory work and who, as soon as his students diverge only slightly from the words of the text, promptly pulls out his stick. "Er schlägt auf die Hände, zehnmal, fünfzehnmal, aus voller Kraft, und die getroffenen Stellen werden sofort zu geschwollenen Striemen. 'Hascht gelernt?' fragt er brüllend. 'Dummes Luder, hascht nich gelernt!' Und pfeifend fallen die grausamen Hiebe."[23] There is the mathematics teacher, who instructs for only two or three in the class and unconcernedly allows the rest to create bedlam. There is the drawing teacher of whom students ask concerning the principles underlying certain aspects of color and perspective and who gruffly snarls: "Das moss so sein, du schweinsdommes Rend!"[24] There is, furthermore, the botany teacher who is a slave of his appetites, and who reduces the beautiful and living things of nature to a dead mass of names and systems. And there is the teacher of religion who drills in the memory of Bible texts and hymns, who deals out blows when the memorization is not fluent, and who by his clumsy and uninspired stories of Bible characters kills off all interest in things sacred.

What was particularly damaging and tragic about a great many of his teachers, Wiechert feels, was the fact

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[23] Ibid., p. 127.

[24] Ibid.

that they did not themselves live out the ideals which they proclaimed. "Wir hatten keinen Religionslehrer, der, von seinem Katheder fort, Christi Jünger hätte werden können; keinen Historiker, der die Soldaten- und Staatsmannstugenden hätte verwirklichen können, die er mit soviel Begeisterung pries.... Unverkennbar war die Kluft zwischen Lehre und Leben, und die Augen einer Klasse - die schärfsten Augen, die es auf dieser Erde gibt - erkannten sehr bald, was sie doch niemals hätten erkennen dürfen...."[25] Consequently, observes the poet, the eyes of the students grew duller rather than brighter as the educational process continued.

There was, according to Wiechert, little emphasis on the part of his teachers on ethical and humanitarian values. On the other hand, there was much stress on "getting ahead" and climbing socially. He comments in Wälder und Menschen: "Die weisen Verse 'Dein höchstes Ziel, mein Sohn, auf Erden, sei dies: Geheimer Rat zu werden!' drückten aus, was nicht nur die zu Erziehenden, sondern auch die Erzieher und die Erziehung erfüllten."[26] And in "Der Dichter und die Jugend" he observes of his own student generation: "Wir waren die Leute mit der allgemeinen Bildung, denen man anerzog, dass der Akademiker aus Gottes rechter Hand gefallen sei, weit fort von dem, was man das niedere Volk nannte."[27]

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[25] Ibid., p. 177.

[26] Ibid., p. 181.

[27] An die deutsche Jugend (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 37.

Among the teachers who appear in Wiechert's fiction, several are drawn along the lines of those thus far selected from the author's autobiographical writings. In other words, several of them are thoroughly disreputable and even repulsive characters. Especially Mroczek in Der Totenwolf and Knurrhahn in Die kleine Passion come to mind. They stand in marked contrast to such sterling characters as Bonekamp in Die kleine Passion and Stilling in Die Jeromin-Kinder.

Memorable is the passage describing Knurrhahn. It runs, in part, as follows:

> Meinhart Knurrhahn, Hauptlehrer im Dorf hinter der Siedlung, war einer der seltenen Menschen, die zusammen mit ihrem Namen geboren werden. Nicht dass da ein Vater ist und der Name des Vaters geht auf den Sohn über, wie die Ziegel von Hand zu Hand gehen, wenn der Ziegelwagen entladen wird. Sondern dass der Sohn so und nicht anders heissen muss, auch wenn der Vater den Namen einer andren Sprache trüge. Er musste Knurrhahn heissen, und die Erfüllung dieses Naturgesetzes gab seiner Person jene schreckliche Geschlossenheit, mit der er auf seinem Pult thronte wie Jenova auf dem Berge Sinai. Die Luft brannte um ihn, Donner rollten um seine Einsamkeit, während er die Tafeln des Gesetzes schrieb, und mehr als einer der kleinen Mosesse, die mit Tafel, Schwamm und Griffel auf seinen Bänken sassen, war versucht, die Schuhe auszuziehen auf dem heiligen Boden, der ihn umgab.[28]

In the figure of Gollimbeck, the successor of Stilling in Die Jeromin-Kinder I, Wiechert points up the sense of self-importance which often characterizes schoolmasters. This young man is represented as believing "dass sein Beruf dicht neben dem des Kaisers stehe und dass, wenn dem Volke noch einmal ein Zeitalter der Blüte und des Lichtes bestimmt wäre, es von den Trägern dieses Berufes ausgehen werde."[29]

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[28] Die kleine Passion, p. 102.

[29] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 282.

The Unnatur common to so many teachers of Wiechert's day is satirized in such a figure as Dr. Redlich in Der Exote. "Dann steht Dr. Redlich auf dem Podium. In Cut, gestreifter Hose und sehr verbindlich. Alles an ihm ist glatt, Haar, Gesicht, der kleine Bauch, Gebärde, Sprache. Und da er jung ist, erweckt diese Glätte bei den Schülern Unbehagen. Sie erscheint ihnen als ein Stück Unnatur, als ob ein Sextaner zum Frühstück einen Syphon Bier trinken würde. Und deshalb haben sie ihn getauft und damit abgetan. 'Schleimscheisser' ist ihr Urteil...."[30]

In his fiction Wiechert also brings out the fact that teachers are often drab, austere, and lifeless. Of Dr. Boas, a Gymnasiumdirektor in Der Exote, Wiechert writes with characteristic humor: "Boas hob zu diesem Behuf den Blick langsam von unten herauf, bis er Krauthennes Augen erreicht hatte. Alles übrige blieb bewegungslos an ihm. Es sah aus, als ob die Schere eines Hummers sich bewege. Es sah unorganisch aus, als könne er den Kopf auch abnehmen und auf den Tisch stellen. Und auch seine Stimme war unorganisch, eine ferne, mechanische Stimme wie aus einem Grammophon."[31] In the same novel a group of teachers is portrayed in this fashion: "Da sind die Gesichter, wohlbekannt. Feierlich wie beim Begräbnis. Das Licht spiegelt in den Brillen, die ihm zugewendet sind. Die Gesichter dahinter sind gefroren."[32]

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[30] Der Exote, p. 199.

[31] Ibid., p. 106.

[32] Ibid., p. 104.

Jons, when he goes to the city for his education, finds quite a sordid variety of teachers. "Einige waren wie Götter, vor denen man opfern musste.... Es gab einige, die so eitel waren wie Mädchen, und einige, die wie ein Apriltag waren, fröhlich und zornig nach Laune, einige, die unsauber und träge waren, einige, die ungerechte Richter waren, und einen, der trank."[33] Drunkenness on the part of teachers is referred to not only here but also in Die Flucht: "Koske kam durchschnittlich jeden dritten Tag betrunken in die Schule."[34] Such fictional characters as these are no doubt patterned after some of Wiechert's own teachers. In Wälder und Menschen he tells of a botany teacher of his "der zu fast jeder Stunde betrunken erscheint und vergeblich versucht, seinen Hut auf den dazu bestimmten Haken zu hängen. Er schwätzt, singt und lärmt...."[35]

Also represented in Wiechert's fiction are such teachers who, for selfish ends, seek ostentatiously but hypocritically to gain the favor of their superiors. In Die Flucht, for instance, one meets "die Tiger," those apple-polishing enthusiasts "die beim ersten Ton der Glocke aus dem Konferenzzimmer stürmten und ihre Posten an der Treppe einnahmen, um sich durch die letzten hinaufkommenden Schüler wie Raubtiere in die Klassen zu stürzen."[36] From time to time these

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[33] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, pp. 103-104.

[34] Die Flucht, p. 84.

[35] Wälder und Menschen, p. 126.

[36] Die Flucht, p. 39.

teachers take a peek at the office door to see "ob der Herr Direktor ihren Diensteifer bemerkte." Sneeringly Wiechert adds: "Oh, sie wussten wohl, dass die fünfundvierzig Minuten der Kurzstunde dem Unterricht 'voll und ganz' gehörten!"[37]

Members of the teaching profession are described in still other terms in Wiechert's fiction. They are called "seltsame Gestalten" or men who are "gänzlich unnahbar" or who think they have "gottähnliche Würde."[38] Thus, when once asked whether he had himself been a teacher, Wiechert amusingly replied, "Yes, for twenty years I have been in bad company."

In Jahre und Zeiten Wiechert tries to answer the question why, in general, the teaching profession in Germany before 1933 commanded so little respect. Doctors and lawyers, he concedes, were held in much higher esteem. He believes that there were at least three reasons. One is that the teachers lagged behind in culture. This, he feels, was partly due to the fact that doctors and lawyers generally came from homes and families which had a longer and better cultural tradition. Yet that advantage, he is convinced, by no means explains everything. He goes on to say:

> Armut und Einfachheit des Ursprungs brauchen nicht eine Bürde zu sein und sind es in vielen Ländern auch nicht, aber den meisten Lehrern blieb sie als eine Quelle der Unsicherheit, und sie bemühten sich, sie durch eine vorgetäuschte prahlerische Sicherheit und Lautheit zu verdecken. Und je besser die Kinderstube ihrer Schüler war, desto mehr fühlten sie die vergangene Kümmerlichkeit ihrer eigenen. Es gehört

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Jahre und Zeiten, pp. 14-15.

> Sicherheit des Wesens dazu, vor vierzig oder fünfzig unbestechlichen Augen zu bestehen, nicht nur in seinem Wissen, sondern auch in der Wahl der Krawatte. Wir waren nie ein Volk von gentlemen, und die Lehrer waren es am wenigsten.[39]

Another reason why teachers fell into disrespect Wiechert finds in their astounding arrogance. They constituted the class of people who knew everything and were invariably right — not when facing their officials, to be sure, but when facing their students. In answer to the question, "What is the difference between God and a Studienrat?" students in those days would facetiously answer that God knew everything whereas the Studienrat knew everything better. "Kein Arzt und kein Richter hat immer recht, wenigstens nicht vor seinem Gewissen, und aus fortwährendem Rechthaben entwickelt sich eine dauernde Gesamthaltung, die schwer anzusehen und schwerer zu ertragen ist."[40]

As a third reason Wiechert suggests the fact that teachers as a class constitute a very uninspired and routine group of professionals. This, he believes, is in turn due to the fact that they must constantly go over the same material. As for the doctor and lawyer: "fast jede Krankheit und fast jeder Rechtsbruch stellen [sie] vor etwas Neues und fast Erstmaliges, rufen ihre ganze Kunst und ihr ganzes Wesen auf und erfüllen jeden ihrer Tage gleichsam mit einer furchtbaren Gefahr."[41] However, argues Wiechert, outside of the change

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[39] Ibid., p. 198.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

of faces, the teacher is never challenged by anything which is particularly new. As a result, he finds it hard daily to instill new life into his work. Life runs through his fingers like sand "und das Automatische des Handwerks zeigt langsam und unwiderstehlich jene schreckliche Schablone, die uns allen bekannt ist, und die die Schüler mit einem geistvollen Spitznamen bezeichnen, nur um sie von anderen Schablonen unterscheiden zu können."[42]

According to the testimony of students and others, Wiechert himself was an outstandingly interesting and effective teacher.[43] He began his teaching career as a tutor. While still getting his own education, he began tutoring Nachhilfeschüler. These were often students of little ambition and inferior intelligence, and it is significant to observe how he reacted toward them. "Wir kamen gut miteinander aus, da ich Dummheit von früh an als eine Krankheit betrachtet habe, einen Mangel der Schöpfung, und so mit Teilnahme und Mitleid statt mit Hochmut oder Verachtung auf die armen Opfer blickte."[44]

Also significant for a further understanding of Wiechert's

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[42] Ibid., p. 199.

[43] See for example: Hansgeorg Zollenkopf, "Unser Lehrer Ernst Wiechert," Monatshefte, XL (1948), 161-163.
Gerhard Kamin, "Ernst Wiechert: Der Weg des Menschen und Dichters," Ernst Wiechert: Der Mensch und sein Werk (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), pp. 17-18. Also, in the same work: Pedro H. (Peter) Heller, "Der Lehrer und der Dichter," pp. 199-200.
Peter Heller, "Amor Dei," Bekenntnis zu Ernst Wiechert (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1947), pp. 130-131.

[44] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 30.

own aims and attitudes as a teacher are his observations about his first formal teaching experience at the baronial estate in Latvia: "Zum ersten Mal begriff ich, dass in einem Unterricht Takt mehr sein konnte als Wissen, das Schweigen mehr war als Reden, und dass es ebenso wichtig war, junge Herzen zu führen als junge Geister. Zum ersten Mal auch, dass der Lehrende mehr lernt als der Lernende und dass die Pädagogik nicht eine Wissenschaft ist wie bei dem alten Professor, bei dem die Studenten scharrten, wenn er seine 'Formalstufen' dozierte, sondern eine hohe Kunst und vielleicht die höchste von allen Künsten, weil sie um Menschenherzen geht."[45]

Throughout his entire career, Wiechert was very conscious of the fact that teaching was primarily a matter of "Menschenherzen." That being the case, he considered "menschliche Haltung" far more important than knowledge of facts and methods. In this connection it is well to note in what terms Wiechert describes teachers whom he considers competent and successful. Invariably he plays down the value of knowledge and methods and stresses the importance of integrity of personality. Of the **Direktor** who succeeded "der Löwe" at Königsberg, Wiechert writes affectionately: "Vermutlich war der englische Unterricht, den er uns auf den beiden Primen erteilte, nicht ein Muster von Wissenschaft oder Pädagogik. Aber musterhaft war die Liebe, mit der er seine Schüler umfing, die reine Würde, die seine Erscheinung,

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[45] Ibid., p. 47.

seine Haltung, seine Reden erfüllte, und vor allem die Tapferkeit, mit der er als ein aufrechter Mann in seinem Zeitalter stand."[46]

This emphasis is not only defended in Wiechert's autobiographical writings, but it is also exemplified in the "good" teachers of his fiction. Bonekamp, in Die kleine Passion, for instance, is a man who apparently is not too conversant with pedagogical methods. He is described as a man "mit einem vertauschten Hut, der keine Disziplin halten konnte."[47] But he is a real "Mensch," he has spiritual rootage and he manifests a deep love for his students. He is referred to as "ein vergessener Jünger Christi"[48] and as one of those in whom there is found the salt of the earth. There is also Stilling in Die Jeromin-Kinder, no doubt the finest of Wiechert's teacher characters. He, too, is not a slavish devotee of any Formalstufen. But he has a wealth of common sense, of unselfish devotion, and of spiritual insight. Consequently he knows what to do in a given situation even though at the moment he cannot quote Pestalozzi. He not only knows the Scriptures but he lives by their law of love. He never teaches anything which he does not exemplify in his own life. He is a man "an dem sie ahnten, dass es noch eine bessere Welt geben müsse als die ihrige..."[49]

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[46] Wälder und Menschen, p. 176.

[47] Die kleine Passion, p. 130.

[48] Ibid., p. 144.

[49] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 32.

It is never enough, the poet feels, for a teacher simply to dispense knowledge. Intellectualism is for him a fatal sin. "Und was die Saat des Wissens betreffe, so sei sie eine der verfluchtesten Saaten, die jemals ausgestreut worden seien."[50] Man, Wiechert holds, cannot live by bread alone. But neither can he live by knowledge alone. The exemplary teachers in his novels always go beyond the point of mediating Wissen. They breathe a spirit and create an atmosphere which enables their students to develop a sense of values and to catch a vision of the things that are eternal. In tribute to Stilling and his pupils it is recorded in Furchen: "Es war nicht viel, dass [sie] ... schreiben und ... lesen ... konnten .... Aber das war etwas, dass sie wussten, was recht und unrecht war, was Wesen und Unwesen."[51]

The guidance of young people is to Wiechert "eine Gnade."[52] To him, therefore, teaching is something which demands the entire person - not only his thoughts but also his heart. For the teacher the day is not ended when the last bell rings or the last paper is corrected. He himself must continue to make personal progress if he is to stay on the side of those who are to progress -- not only in knowledge, but also in spiritual experience, in purity, in kindness. He must never consider himself as having arrived, as knowing all

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[50] Furchen, p. 264.

[51] Ibid., p. 75.

[52] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 108.

the answers, as being "fertig." He is to be a seeker along with many other seekers and he must have the courage oftentimes to say, "I don't know." He must realize that he is not first of all a servant of the state, but a servant of humanity and a servant of God.

It is exactly at this point, Wiechert believes, that the weakness of the German teacher was revealed in the years which saw the rise of Hitler. Teachers, unfortunately, considered themselves only "Staatsdiener." Consequently when the state became National Socialist, they did too. A tradition in which a teacher was to a large extent only a "Staatsdiener" and a "Zuchtmeister" was bound to prove a pernicious one. "Wer sein ganzes Leben lang ein Zuchtmeister gewesen war, und nichts als dieses, wie sollte der nicht berauscht sein von den grossen Zuchtmeistern, die ein ganzes Volk auf die Bänke der Unterordnung und des sklavischen Gehorsams pressten?"[53]

The spiritual inadequacy of most education is a matter of repeated lament with Wiechert. He complains of it sometimes through his fictional characters who enter the holocaust of war. When, for instance, Jons is at the front, the lectures of many of his teachers strike him as "tinkling brass and clanging symbols." "[Die] Schulen ... hatten nicht ausgereicht .... Nun liess man sie marschieren, schiessen und gehorchen, und für den Exerzierplatz reichte es aus. Aber für den Tod würde es nicht ausreichen. Der Tod schlug nicht

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[53] Ibid., p. 199.

mit Worten zu."[54]

Here and there in Jahre und Zeiten Wiechert throws out some excellent bits of pedagogical advice. A good teacher, he writes, will not assume any dignity which he does not naturally possess; he will never seek to throw about his shoulders a purple mantle. He will never lay claim to any respect, though as a good teacher he will command it automatically. Neither will he take himself too seriously. His irony will be directed at himself as well as at others. Only those who can deride themselves have the right to deride the world about them. Moreover, a good teacher will not become angry. "Zornige Lehrer sind ein Greuel, weil sie Erzieher sind, ohne sich erzogen zu haben."[55]

A good teacher, Wiechert believes, will never be accused of being unapproachable. He will respect youth and its opinions. He will devote himself to the interests of his students not as an Amtner, but as a fellow man. He will cause his students to see that he is not someone apart but rather one of their group. "Dass er noch in denselben Schmerzen, Irrtümern, Verschuldungen und Träumen befangen ist wie sie. Dass er nicht unfehlbar ist und niemals tut, als sei er unfehlbar. Und dass er imstande ist, sich über alle Würde und Feierlichkeit der Tagesgötter ebenso lustig zu machen wie sie."[56]

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[54] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 400.

[55] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 106.

[56] Ibid., p. 207.

Wiechert as a teacher had many young friends who came to him for advice and counsel. His analysis of the reasons for their coming reveals true psychological and spiritual insight. It manifests his broad humanity and understanding sympathy, and explains, at least in part, his great success as a teacher.

The young people that come to him, says Wiechert, do not go to their parents, though they are united to them in love and friendship. They consider their parents too close: they are like a mirror placed so near the face that it cannot reflect an image. Moreover, they consider their parents too old, too experienced, too wise, and too complacent. Neither do they go to their pastor. The pastor is too close to God. He is apt to pick up words from the Bible and cast them as stones. Besides, he is somewhat apart from sin, and they need someone who sins like them. Nor do they go to a friend, for the friend is as much in need of help as they, and it would be like two drowning people embracing each other. "Sie kommen zu mir, weil sie glauben, dass ich ein Dichter sei. Dass heisst, ein Mensch, unähnlich ihren Eltern, weil jung, unklug, unruhig. Unähnlich ihrem Pfarrer, weil weit von Gott, leidenschaftlich nach ihm suchend, aber tief in der Sünde. Unähnlich ihren Freunden, weil er nicht um Hilfe ruft, sondern inmitten der Kreise der Verwirrung auf einem grauen Stein sitzt und zu den Vögeln spricht oder zu den Sternen aufblickt."[57]

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[57] "Vom Umgang des Dichters mit jungen Menschen," Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 54. Also found in An die deutsche Jugend, pp. 45 ff.

The young people, Wiechert goes on, do not so much come for help. They already know "dass es keine Hilfe unter Menschen gibt."[58] They merely come to talk and they know that there is someone who listens, attentively, sympathetically, as one listens to an equal. They are lonely wanderers and even the sound of an echo makes them happier. And they believe

> ... dass mir nichts fremd ist. Da sind Heilige in meinen Büchern und grosse Verworfene.... Ich höre zu. Ich gebe ihnen weder den Stein der Weisen, noch das Wasser des Lebens. Aber ich stütze meine Stirn in die Hand und wende kein Auge von ihrem Gesicht und höre zu .... Und gegen Ende erst, wenn ihre Worte langsamer fallen, müder, sich wiederholen, versuche ich aus unserem gemeinsamen Leben und Irrtum einen Faden zu lösen, eine Art von Gesetz, eine tröstende Einordnung in den grossen Strom der Notwendigkeit. "Sieh, wir beide ...," sage ich, oder "Siehst du, Menschen wie wir, die sich Mühe geben ... vielleicht wartet auf uns schon der Mensch, dessen Tränen zu trocknen uns bestimmt ist, uns ganz allein und niemand ausser uns. Lohnt es nicht, darum zu leben?"[59]

The aims of education, as Wiechert sets them forth in his Reden an die deutsche Jugend are not all positive. There is, he feels, also a negative side to the educative process. A good teacher will not only try to give his students something, but he will also try to take something away. He will try to take away the chains that fetter them to a dead past. He will try to liberate them from the slavery of an unworthy tradition and the dread of an intolerant authoritarianism. It is this side of education which gets considerable emphasis

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

in the "Abschiedsrede an die Abiturienten." Says Wiechert to this graduating class of 1929:

> Töricht zu sagen, dass ich euch etwas gegeben habe, aber nicht töricht zu sagen, dass ich etwas genommen habe, versucht habe, euch etwas zu nehmen, was man in diese dunkle Einsamkeitslandschaft hinaustragen kann: die Angst. Die Angst vor Menschen, vor Begriffen, Konventionen, Autoritäten.... Diese Angst liegt als eine tausendjährige Erbmasse tief in unserer aller Blute. Es ist eine geheiligte Angst und es ist eine verruchte Angst, weil sie die Angst der Sklaven ist. Ihr aber sollt hinausgehen ohne Ketten, mit erhobener Stirn.[60]

One thinks here of Luther, the young, progressive teacher in Die kleine Passion. In depicting him and his influence on Johannes Karsten, Wiechert indicates how necessary and helpful this negative and "revolutionary" phase of education can be.

Though Wiechert feels it is important to cut young people loose from a dead past, it is even more important to link them up with the living past. It is this phase of education which is stressed in the "Rede an die deutsche Jugend" of 1945. It was a phase which needed particular emphasis at the time, since the Nazis had tried to divorce German youth from a rich and centuries-old culture. "In diesen zwölf Jahren war aus den Herzen einer Jugend gerissen worden, was jede Jugend mit dem Schimmer einer neuen Morgenröte umglänzt: das Unbedingte des Strebens nach einer besseren, gerechteren und edleren Welt, die fromme Ehrfurcht vor den Altären der Menschlichkeit, das Ritterliche der Haltung gegen Schwache, Leidende und Besiegte .... In diesen zwölf Jahren waren auch die letzten

[60] An die deutsche Jugend, pp. 21-22.

Fäden durchschnitten worden, die ein Volk an seine Vergangenheit bindet und mit der Umwelt der anderen Völker verknüpft."[61]

Wiechert, not only in this address but also in other writings, is very explicit about the values which he believes must be preserved if mankind is not to perish. They are, in the words of this address: justice, truth, freedom, and humanity. It is these values which any education, worthy of the name, must cherish and pass on to succeeding generations. In them is summed up the goal of education. Or, as Wiechert put it in a conversation which he once had with Seidlin, the aim of education is "junge Menschen dahin zu führen, wo sie zu ihrem eigenen Heil und zum Heile der Menschheit geführt werden müssen."[62]

There can, it seems to Wiechert, be little satisfaction in any teaching which falls short of this inspiring and transcendent goal. "Und es ist doch das, was wir den einzigen Gewinn dieses Lebens nennen: dass wir Menschenherzen bewegt und ergriffen haben ... für lange, bittere Jahre des Lebens, und dass wir sie zum Guten bewegt und ergriffen haben, zur Wahrheit, zur Tapferkeit und zur Liebe."[63] Our books may perish and the fleeting garland of our so-called fame may perish too, "aber dieses wollen wir in den armen und irrenden und schuldigen Händen behalten und bewahren: die Liebe, die wir nicht mit

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[61] Ibid., p. 106.

[62] Oskar Seidlin, "Begegnung mit Ernst Wiechert," German Quarterly, XIX (1946), p. 272.

[63] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 303.

unseren Taten oder Gedanken oder Büchern gewonnen haben, sondern allein mit unserem warmen, hingebenden Herzen."[64]

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[64] Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE FATHERLAND

The love which Wiechert had for his Masurian Heimat is plainly and easily discernible in all of his major writings. It was a love which was deep, meaningful, and enduring. It represents the natural and spontaneous love which men have for their "paradise of youth," a paradise into which Nature has placed them and with which they feel organically integrated. It is a love for the scenes and the haunts of childhood, for the region where nothing is strange and concealed but where everything is intimate and familiar and suffused with memory.

This type of love Wiechert never had for the larger Vaterland. In this, however, he was probably not unlike any other person. It is very questionable whether the Vaterland can ever elicit the same warm affection which the Heimat can. The former never has the intimacy and concreteness of the latter. The fatherland always remains something more or less nebulous, abstract, and undefined.

It was thus, at least, that Wiechert experienced it and it was thus that he expressed it in his writings. In Jedermann, for instance, the soldier Johannes Karsten, called to fight and die for the Vaterland, has considerable difficulty with the concept. He and his comrades have just been examined by an army doctor in a rather undignified way and the author writes of him: "Er versucht, an das Vaterland zu denken, dem Begriff

eine Anschauung zu geben, und sich daran aufzurichten, aber er sieht nur Hände, die an nackten Leibern heruntergleiten ..."[1] The other soldiers, too, find the term Vaterland elusive and unsubstantial and they find it becoming more and more so as the war goes on. "Die andern ... fühlten alle, dass es näherliegende Formeln geben musste, um die Zukunft zu bezeichnen ... Sie empfanden die Veränderung ihres Lebens ... als sei der Begriff des Vaterlandes nicht nähergekommen, nicht herzlicher gleichsam, sondern weit fort in einen stumpfen Nebel gerückt...."[2] In Jahre und Zeiten Wiechert asks rhetorically concerning the soldiers in the First World War: "Was war ihnen das 'Vaterland' ausser ihrem kleinen Haus und Garten, was die Pflicht, ausser für die Ihrigen zu sorgen?"[3]

Furthermore, Wiechert points out, the word Vaterland means little to most people because of its misuse. It is one of those terms which politicians and super-patriots have bandied about glibly and irrelevantly, but into which they have poured no meaningful content. In Die Jeromin-Kinder, Jons and his military comrades become painfully aware of this. "Noch nicht zwei Jahre vergangen, und das Vaterland war ihnen schon eine leere Hülse, ohne Samen oder Frucht. Es war nicht allein ihre Schuld, es musste auch Schuld des

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[1] Jedermann (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 17.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

[3] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 152.

Vaterlandes sein. Sie hatten versäumt, einen Begriff mit Leben zu erfüllen. Sie hatten ihn mit Worten und Gesetzen erfüllt, und im Feuer des Krieges und der Not waren Worte und Begriffe ausgetrocknet und verbrannt."[4] The same idea is expressed by the poet in Die Furchen: "Aber die meisten reichen nur die Hülsen weiter, von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht. So wie sie heute das Wort 'Vaterland' weiterreichen..."[5]

Still another and more important reason why Wiechert and the fictional characters through whom he speaks have no great devotion to the so-called Vaterland, lies in the fact that the term is often used synonymously with Staat. In the mouths of those who use it most frequently and most gladly it stands not for a living community of people bound together by a common history, tradition, and language, but rather for a nationalistic and militaristic state-apparatus. And though Wiechert had a sincere and abiding love for Germany as a cultural and spiritual community, he had serious misgivings about the German state or, for that matter, about the state in general.

Wiechert's attitude toward the state was that of an individualist and idealist. As will become increasingly clear from this study, he was extremely suspicious of every type of organization and institution. For Wiechert the organization usually represents might, not right. The ideal

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[4] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 399.

[5] Die Furchen, p. 256.

of right, when embodied in an institution, goes to seed, he feels; there, at least, the ideal is no longer fresh and unrecognized. An institution for him is generally too closely associated with traditionalism, orthodoxy, conformity, and sterility. Moreover, it tends to be impersonal, heartless, and without conscience. That, for him, is also true of the state. "Der Staat hat kein Gewissen, weisst du," the schoolmaster Stilling says in Die Furchen. "Alle anonymen Mächte, hinter denen nicht ein einzelner Mensch steht, haben kein Gewissen. Schon wo zwei oder drei sich zusammentun, gibt es eine Firma oder einen Verein, aber kein Gewissen. Nur der einzelne hat es, du oder ich..."[6]

In Jahre und Zeiten Wiechert says of himself: "Ich konnte mich ... niemals beugen vor der Mittelmässigkeit oder der leeren Form, niemals auch nur vor der staatlichen Macht, die einen Fronvogt über die Arbeit setzte."[7] The three terms which the author uses here are for him partly synonymous. Officialdom to him means largely mediocrity and empty form. For this reason bureaucratic functionaries are almost invariably placed in an unfavorable, oftentimes ludicrous, light. In Die kleine Passion Wiechert characterizes them as "ein Kleinbürgergeschlecht mit ungelüfteten Seelen aus ungelüfteten Stuben."[8] In Die Jeromin-Kinder I Jons is told

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[6] Die Furchen, p. 19.

[7] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 99.

[8] Die kleine Passion, pp. 21-22.

by Jumbo not to become a judge, but a doctor. "Wenn du Richter bist, bekommst du ein kleines Amtsgesicht ... das ist alles...."[9] Of someone who turned out to be a poor and unprincipled teacher, Wiechert says scornfully in his autobiography: "Er hätte Staatsanwalt werden sollen oder Leichenbeschauer..."[10] Officials of the state are, in Wiechert's works, rarely personalities; instead they are petty servants "an einer ungeheuren Maschine"[11] or "in dem Ungeheuren [einer] papiernen Macht."[12]

A rather merciless description of an official, amounting to a caricature, appears in Der Wald. The passage gives a good idea of Wiechert's caustic humor:

> Er lehnte an der Brüstung wie ein Problem, auch rein körperlich genommen. Das verwirrte. Er hatte zwei linke Füsse und trug den Kopf auf der linken Schulter. Dieser lief von allen Seiten nach oben zusammen, wie in einer schiefen Presse sauber und glatt angefertigt, aber eben etwas schief. Von der niedrigen, ganz schmalen Stirn lief die Nase lang, flach und gehorsam nach unten. Ein dünnes Bärtchen hing in unruhiger Trauer über den etwas aufgeworfenen Lippen, die nach Geist strebten. Unter dem Kinn rann von halber Wangenhöhe das Spitzbärtchen zusammen, wit eine mühsame Pflanzung mit Wildverbiss und Fehlstellen. Hinter den Kneifergläsern blinzelten unruhig, hastig, unsicher die kleinen Augen, blass und kurz bewimpert, als scheine die Sonne zu hell. Der Kopf schien angefertigt, wie man einen kleinen Grabhügel aus feuchter Erde anfertigt, und dann schien der liebe Gott die Seiten mit dem Spaten angeklopft zu haben, damit sie nicht rutschten. Dabei hatte die obere Vorderseite scheinbar einen etwas starken Schlag bekommen, und in die Augen war etwas

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[9] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 117.

[10] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 105.

[11] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 117.

[12] Die kleine Passion, p. 260.

Sand geraten, der nicht mehr hinausging.[13]

Also characteristic of the state, according to Wiechert, is its diffusion of power, which, for the average man, robs it of reality and of a "face." In Die kleine Passion, government is suggested to be "eine Vielheit, namenlos, mit wechselnden Gesichtern."[14] Johannes has trouble with such words as "Magistrat," "Behörde," and the like. "Sie fügten sich keinem konkreten Denken..."[15] For many, Wiechert suggests, especially for those in outlying agrarian areas, the state lacks such a degree of concreteness that it seems to belong to the realm of the invisible. Speaking of the people of the little village of Sowirog, Wiechert remarks: "Ja, der Staat ... was ist der Staat für solche kleinen Dörfer? Ist er etwas wie 'der Wald' ... 'das Wetter'? ... Besteht er aus allen Landräten zusammen ...? Aber auch das ist es nicht.... Nein, er muss etwas anderes sein. Etwas Unsichtbares ... Und am besten ist, man denkt nicht daran."[16]

This last passage, which might seem to suggest that the state is unimportant and perhaps best ignored, has called forth the criticism that Wiechert lacks political insight. In an article entitled "The 'Unpolitical' Outlook of Ernst Wiechert," E. W. Herd comments:

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[13] Der Wald, pp. 132-133.

[14] Die kleine Passion, p. 175.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Die Furchen, p. 332.

> No attitude of mind could be more calculated to invite the growth of a new despotism. But then, even that is not so important: speaking of the inhabitants of Sowirog being called up for war-service, Wiechert says: 'es war ganz gleichgültig, ob der Absolutismus oder die Demokratie sie geschickt natte.' Wiechert's only answer to evil here is resignation and passive acceptance. In this novel Wiechert is dealing in part with the effect of the Nazi regime on a small community, but his attitude would seem to foreshadow the acceptance of any tyranny, the only course being to till one's thirty acres. 'Ja, der Staat ... was ist der Staat für solche kleinen Dörfer? ... Es gibt Wahlen und Volksabstimmungen, aber das Dorf Sowirog wählt nicht und stimmt nicht ab.'[17]

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that for Wiechert the state had no importance or that the type of government under which he lived was a matter of indifference to him. His own heroic and inspiring resistance to the Nazi state testifies eloquently to the contrary. What Wiechert constantly emphasizes, however, is the truth that man's redemption and happiness cannot be worked out in purely political terms. Man's problem, he is convinced, is fundamentally a spiritual and individual one, and it is therefore beyond the ability of any political or social system to solve. He also repeatedly makes the point that even the best political system, if not directed by men of good will, breaks down. It is in this light that the above remark concerning absolutism and democracy must be interpreted. Moreover Wiechert in the passage quoted by Herd does not say that absolutism and democracy are "gleichgültig überhaupt" but,

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[17] German Life and Letters, N.S., VII (1954), p. 270.

as the context unmistakably indicates, only in this respect that they have both taken lightly the sacredness of human life and unqualifiedly given their support to the war system. "In diesen Dingen," Wiechert adds very explicitly, "waren sie einer Meinung gewesen."[18] It can hardly be called fair on the part of Herd to have dropped these words from his quotation.

As for the passage: "Es gibt Wahlen und Volksabstimmungen, aber das Dorf Sowirog wählt nicht und stimmt nicht ab," that is by no means a sign of "resignation and passive acceptance." Here again Mr. Herd quotes without seeming to pay much attention to the context. It is made quite clear in Die Furchen that the refusal to vote is Sowirog's way of offering passive resistance. The Nazis themselves interpret the action in just that way and it embitters them tremendously. It is because of their lamentable lack of success in Sowirog that the Nazis contemptuously snarl: "Drecksvolk! ... Ostische Rasse!"[19] The villagers, to be sure, do not resist because they are politically informed or socially conscious. They resist because of an ethical impulse. And it is just this point which Wiechert wishes to bring into relief, for he considers Sowirog's moral stamina a far more valuable asset than any amount of so-called "political outlook." The morally strong, in Wiechert's estimation, are far better able

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[18] Die Furchen, p. 38.

[19] Ibid., p. 278.

to detect and resist tyranny than the politically wise. It is for this reason that the village of Sowirog throws off the virus of Nazism while the big cities succumb.

The habit of viewing all things from the perspective of a high ethic, caused Wiechert to be a critic of his fatherland in all the historical phases of its twentieth-century development. It made him critical not only of the Empire and the Third Reich, but also of the Weimar Republic and of the recent post-war political developments. What grieved Wiechert at every turn was the fact that, though Germany was going through outward political changes, it was never experiencing a real change of heart.

Since he was born in 1887, Wiechert spent the years of his youth and young manhood during the regime of Kaiser Wilhelm II. To him this era was one characterized by "das Hohle und Fassadenhafte."[20] Though he admits the period had its "bestechende Züge ," he finds it contained so much "Kleines, Verworrenes, Dilettantisches und Verhängnisvolles ... dass wir uns weigern mussten, in ihr das Götterbild zu erblicken, das die Zeitungsschreiber von ihr entwarfen."[21]

As has already been pointed out, Wiechert is very critical of the Wilnelminian educational ideas and practices. On the matter of social justice he is perhaps less vocal. Yet on many occasions he lashes out with a disparaging sentence or paragraph. Thus in Wälder und Menschen, for instance,

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[20] Wälder und Menschen, p. 242.

[21] Ibid., p. 243.

he says: "Wer kein Geld hatte, galt nicht viel im alten Vaterland."[22] When in Jahre und Zeiten he tells of his father's accident and the doctor's refusal to come immediately, he does not fail to append: "Für 'arme Leute' hat man nie viel Zeit gehabt bei uns."[23] Commenting in this same work on his treatment at meals in the university mensa, he observes that everyone was dealt with according to "Rang oder Vermögen"[24] and adds that the ruling class in a colonial country has always been composed of the landed proprietors, the military, and the officials. In regard to his state teachers' examination, at which he was to appear in "Frack und Zylinder" he wryly remarks: "Der Staat hielt auf Würde, und er fragte nicht viel darnach, wieviel Hunger und Tränen es die Armen kostete, diese Würde zu erwerben."[25] In Die kleine Passion one of the underprivileged expresses his dissatisfaction with the Kaiserzeit as follows: "Wir sind hungrig ... aber wir sind nicht nur hungrig nach Brot, wie sie alle sagen und schreiben. Auch nicht nach Macht. Wir sind hungrig nach Luft, verstehen Sie? Wir sehen nicht ein, dass die Reichen mehr Luft brauchen, mehr Schönheit, mehr Essen, mehr Kirchenglocken, einen grösseren Sarg, mehr Platz auf dem Kirchhof und im Himmel."[26]

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[22] Ibid., p. 135.

[23] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 66.

[24] Ibid., p. 24.

[25] Ibid., p. 89.

[26] Die kleine Passion, p. 212.

As for the Kaiser himself, Wiechert has little or no good to say for him. Jons is taught by his father that there is much injustice in the land and that the Kaiser has a good deal to do with that situation. "Vom Grossvater wird besser gesprochen werden als vom Kaiser."[27] Johannes in Die kleine Passion regards him as one who plants a crown of thorns upon the heads of all his citizens.[28] The soldiers in Wiechert's books, too, constantly attack the Kaiser. He is depicted as one who shares most of the responsibility for the war. Concerning the Crown Prince, Wiechert makes these highly uncomplimentary observations in his autobiography: "Dann lag ich im Lazarett von Charleville, das unter der besonderen Obhut des Kronprinzen stand, und mitunter sah ich ihn, wenn er das Haus besuchte oder im Wagen durch die Strassen fuhr. Es hiess, dass er eifrig Tennis spiele, dass er einen Affen neben sich auf dem Wagensitz habe und dass er das Bild eines 'Frontsoldaten' gemalt habe, aufrecht und unerschütterlich, dessen Abzüge den Kampftruppen zu billigem Preise angeboten werde."[29] This drawing is also referred to in the novel Jedermann, where the words are added: "Es war ein Reklamebild von betonter Schneidigkeit, und selbst ein Teil des Offizierkorps wandte sich mit einer bitteren Bemerkung davon ab ..."[30]

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[27] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 356.

[28] Die kleine Passion, p. 204.

[29] Jahre und Zeiten, pp. 162-163.

[30] Jedermann, p. 224.

During the regime of the Kaiser, Wiechert, like many of his fellow students, was a socialist. His socialism, however, had nothing to do with Marxianism and was not in the least related to the problems of actual politics, of which he admits he knew nothing. It was born, as he himself says, of Sehnsucht and idealism.[31] Though he soon forsook socialism, he continued forthrightly to champion the lot of the poor and the downtrodden. He considered it his mission to write "für alle Armen und Bedrängten, für 'Erniedrigte und Beleidigte' ..."[32]

When in 1918 there came an end both to the war and to the Empire, Wiechert hoped for a renewed and more spiritual fatherland. He hoped that Germany, disciplined by the tragedy of war and defeat, might turn from the sham, the superficialism, and the materialism which he had exposed in Die Flucht. He hoped "alles Sinnlose und Blutige" of the past years and decades might be replaced by the "Sinnvolle und Menschliche" of a new order.[33] "Der Krieg," says Captain Orla, "hat uns mehr gekostet als unsere Schiffe, und er muss mit mehr eingeholt werden als nur mit neuen Schiffen."[34]

But the post-war revolution disappointed Wiechert greatly; he found the "Reinheit der Idee" besmirched by "die unreinen Hände der Vollstrecker."[35] He revolted against

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[31] Wälder und Menschen, p. 243.

[32] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 254.

[33] Ibid., p. 167.

[34] Das einfache Leben, p. 250.

[35] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 167.

the crudeness and crass materialism of the undisciplined masses. He found the socialists inordinately aggressive and doctrinaire. Dr. Lawrenz speaks for the author when he says: "'Enteignung! ... Das ist es, Jons .... Dass sie das Heil von Weltanschauungen erwarten. Es ist so, als wenn Sie einen Wald durch Gläser betrachten, einmal rote, einmal blaue, und so weiter.... Und was haben wir schon gewonnen, wenn wir wissen, dass er grün oder blau ist? Ist das sein Geheimnis? Er hat ganz andere Geheimnisse, Jons. Um Weltanschauungen einander totschlagen, ist das Schlimmste, was es auf dieser Erde gibt. Helfen und heilen, Jons, das Rechte tun und nicht hassen.'"[36]

Wiechert's reactions to the new regime find expression, in part, in the novel Der Wald (1922). Here Henner Wittich, a rugged individualist, engages the socialistically-minded authorities in battle for the possession of an ancestral forest. Wittich refuses to give up his "green God" to the masses; rather than do that, he sets the forest afire. Then he escapes to a distant moor, taking with him seeds and saplings for the growth of a new forest elsewhere. "The moral is clear," writes J. D. Workman, "if the individual cannot preserve the structure of his ideals intact in a decaying world, he should at least flee with what he can carry with him, in hope of preserving the seed of his ideals against their future rehabilitation."[37]

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[36] Die Furchen, p. 169.

[37] "Ernst Wiechert's Escapism," Monatshefte, XXXV (1943), p. 26.

Wiechert's disappointment and anger with conditions in the early Republic are also reflected in Der Totenwolf (1924). Here, among other things, he depicts the crudeness, the sensualism, and the materialism of the post-war masses. Toward the end of the novel the hero, Wolf, destroys a dance hall where a drunken and lewd woman, standing on a table amid broken bottles, is hailed with the words: "Die Witwe Germania auf dem Sarge des Vaterlands! Musik! Nationalhymne!"[38] It is all too much for Wolf who has previously confessed that he is "höchstens krank am Vaterland."[39] Hurling a lighted torch and dispelling the merry-makers, he yells out wildly: "Schamloses Gesindel ihr! Wie lange gedenkt ihr, das Antlitz der Erde zu schänden mit eurer Gier? Lauscht zur Erde hinab. Hört ihr nichts? Hört ihr nicht das Blut der Toten tropfen? Hört ihr nicht die verwesten Hände an die Dielen klopfen? Wisst ihr nicht, dass die Keller voll Blut sind? Dass sie umhertreiben auf diesen Blutströmen, mit offenen Augen, und hinauflauschen nach dem Lärm, mit dem ihr Wahnsinnigen über ihren Köpfen tanzt?'"[40]

Das einfache Leben (1939) registers more of Wiechert's post-war feeling of confusion and frustration. The hero, Thomas Orla, finds that after the war people continue to live as always, exactly as if nothing had happened; and his escape to a lonely island is in part an act of protest. "Das tue

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[38] Der Totenwolf, p. 244.

[39] Ibid., p. 225.

[40] Ibid., pp. 244-245.

nichts, erwiderte Thomas, aber ehe er behilflich sei, nichts als die alten Begriffe von neuem in junge Köpfe zu hämmern, als ob die Welt nicht elf Millionen Tote und eine ganze Reihe alter Götter verloren habe, eher wolle er seine Zeit mit nichts anderem zubringen, als Netze zu flicken und Kartoffeln zu graben. Vielleicht würde man doch einmal merken, dass die Weltgeschichte nicht nur anklopfe, um alte Kleider zu kaufen."[41]

Captain Orla notices, among other things, that there is among the German people little abatement of the spirit of militarism. And he observes, too, that the old distinctions to which army officers have always held, continue in vogue. When he meets an Oberst at some war games and hears him use the word "Lumpen," he immediately bristles. He assures him that the salvation of the fatherland, so ardently desired by all, can only come if all stand together, "nicht aber wenn zwischen der Kaste der Herren und der Kaste der Lumpen ein tödlicher Abgrund aufgerissen bleibe."[42] Likewise when invited at these same war games to partici ate in a dinner exclusively for officers, Captain Orla retorts firmly "dass er seit Jahren gewohnt sei, mit seinem früheren Burschen an einem Tisch zu essen"[43] and that he is not in the least minded to set back the clock in regard to this matter.

Thus to Wiechert much of "das Hohle und Fassadenhafte" of the Wilhelminian era seemed to linger after the war. As

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[41] Das einfache Leben, pp. 312-313.

[42] Ibid., pp. 310-311.

[43] Ibid., p. 313.

von Balk puts it in Die Jeromin-Kinder, the same old curtain was being raised over the same old stage. People were mouthing the same platitudes, the same hollow phrases, the same shibboleths. One of them was Vaterland. "Aber haben Sie gesehen," Wiechert has Dr. Lawrenz ask in Die Furchen, "dass ein Vaterland zerbricht? Die Macht und die Grenzen eines Vaterlands können zerbrechen, und dann ist es meistens ein Zeichen, dass es eine falsche Macht und falsche Grenzen waren. Dass das Vaterland neu erfüllt werden muss, die zerbrochene Macht und die zerbrochenen Grenzen. Nicht mit neuen Panzerkreuzern, sondern mit neuen Herzen."[44]

It was the lack of "neue Herzen," the absence of a spiritual rebirth, which troubled Wiechert more than anything else in the post-war period. Having returned home from his tragic war experience, he continued to think - as he had at the front - in terms of life and death. It grieved him to see people at home still thinking almost exclusively in terms of property and gain, and in terms of haves and have-nots. "Sie hatten wieder einen Keil in das Volk getrieben und es in Gute und Böse gespalten, aber nicht alles war gut oder böse, was sie so nannten."[45] His people, Wiechert believed, had not brought the war to a close, but had simply removed its locale from foreign fields to the homeland. They had not made an end to hatred, killing, scorn, and outlawing. The war had not been surmounted as a sickness

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[44] Die Furchen, p. 97.

[45] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 170.

or an intoxication, but its germs were still being carried about and one did not know to what new sickness these might lead.

The new sickness, Wiechert soon realized, was that of National Socialism. Germany, he felt, was unable to throw off these germs because of a lack of spiritual vitality. Her people were preoccupied, in Western fashion, by the things of the mind and intellect, and they neglected the things of the heart. Such preoccupation, he believes, was reflected in the literature and art of this era - an era of unholy experiments and external effects. The Nazis, who depended for their success on terror and violence, could not have succeeded in a nation which was morally sound. Moral men are not cowed by physical violence. "Wer im Sittlichen lebt, wird die Angst vor der Gewalt geringer achten als den Befehl des Gewissens."[46] Violence, after all, can at worst lead only to the destruction of the body but shame before one's own conscience "bedeutet Zerstörung der eigenen Würde, bedeutet den Verlust dessen, was uns über das Kreatürliche erhebt, bedeutet einen Tod, der um vieles schimpflicher ist als der, den die Gewalt unter dem Galgen bereitet."[47]

Wiechert, deeply devoted to the "Idee der humanitas," was hardly an enthusiastic nationalist, and certainly never a state-nationalist or chauvinist of any kind. Truth and

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[46] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 284.

[47] Ibid.

humanity meant more to him than country or state. His high ethic made it impossible for him to say, "My country - right or wrong!" Of his attitude even before World War I he writes: "Die humanitas war mir mehr als der Staat, und auf den Staat blickte ich seit langem mit einem unverhohlenen Misstrauen."[48] After the war his distrust of nationalism and statism deepened. "In frühen und entscheidenden Jahren bin ich der Idee der humanitas so tief verpflichtet worden, dass das Begrenzte und Beengte aller Nationalität mich nach dem ersten Weltkrieg nicht mehr in seinen Bann geschlagen hat."[49]

In the essay "Von der Sendung,"[50] Wiechert asserts that the German people have for years been reminded in schools, in churches, and even at the war-front of the lines of Emanuel Geibel's poem "Deutschlands Beruf":

> Und es mag am deutschen Wesen
> einmal noch die Welt genesen.

He points out that he for one cannot share this highly propagated faith. Nowhere - and least of all in the Bible - can he find any reason for believing that the coming of the Kingdom of God is in any way related to "das deutsche Wesen." The Bible, instead of teaching this type of self-glorification, emphasizes that one should hold his neighbor in equal love and respect with himself, and that not boastfulness but the humility of a little child is necessary for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

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[48] Ibid., p. 105.

[49] Ibid., p. 408.

[50] Es geht ein Pflüger, pp. 188-200.

Moreover, Wiechert expresses his doubt about the actual superiority of the German spirit. "Wir haben auch etwas zuviel von diesem deutschen Wesen kennengelernt in unseren kurzen aber rastlos suchenden Jahren," he says.[51] To be sure, Germany has Meister Eckehard and Albrecht Dürer, Goethe and Kleist, Hölderlin and Nietzsche; she also has the St. Matthew Passion, the Freischütz Overture, the Fifth Symphony "und Schubert, den wir sterben liessen."[52] But outside of Germany there have been Shakespeare and Dickens, Balzac and Dostoevski, Ibsen and Hamsun. At the same time there has been at home, in war and in peace, "eine Reihe dunkler Gestalten ... trübe und laute, leere und eitle, hölzerne und steinerne, die alle einen nicht unbedeutenden Sitz im Reiche des deutschen Geistes gehabt haben, wenige Liebenswerte, sehr wenig Verehrungswürdige, kaum einen Stellvertreter Gottes."[53]

"Das deutsche Wesen" gets not only serious but also humorous and ironical treatment in the works of Wiechert. In Die Furchen, for instance, von Balk jibes as follows concerning the militaristic nature of the Germans: "Merkwürdig, manche Völker wandern, und manche schweifen, und manche sind sesshaft. Aber die Deutschen marschieren, von der Wiege an bis ins Grab. Dachte, sie würden genug marschiert haben mit dem letzten Orlog. Keine Rede davon. Sind schon wieder

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[51] Ibid., p. 192.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

lustig dabei. Gibt einen ewigen Juden und einen ewigen Marschierer."[54] And this same von Balk quips: "Denke, dass der liebe Gott mit seinem Firnis so ziemlich am Ende war, als er das deutsche Volk anstrich. Ist zu dünn geraten ..."[55]

In 1945, after the tragic years of Hitlerism, Wiechert once more hoped for "neue Herzen" and a rebirth of the seemingly incorrigible "deutsches Wesen." If ever, it was certainly now, he believed, that the Fatherland should feel chastened and humbled. In his third Munich speech, delivered right after the collapse, he pleads with his countrymen to acknowledge their heavy guilt and to mend their irresponsible ways. Practically the entire German people, he insists, stands guilty of having stood by and simply watched while the last remnant of a nation's moral possession went to ruin as a gambler goes to ruin. Germany can try to deny - "wie es einem feigen Volk zukommt"[56] - but it is not good to deny and thereby to double the guilt.

Wiechert in this historic speech expresses his amazement at the blindness of the German people. How could they allow a man - a stranger, at that - without knowledge, without culture, without tact or taste, to take over the house of their nation, filled as this was with the treasures of a thousand-year-old culture. How could they follow an upstart

[54] Die Furchen, p. 279.

[55] Ibid.

[56] An die deutsche Jugend, p. 121.

who was gifted only with the talents of a demagogue, oratorical, unprincipled, merciless, practiced in all the gestures with which fools and children are deceived, an amateur in all the sciences and arts except the art of evil! How could they entrust their country to a market crier without shame or moderation, a liar and a breaker of promises, a fanatic hourly growing into a madman and a criminal! And even though they might be beguiled by Hitler himself as by the glamor of a magician, how could they be deceived by the band of thieves and robbers that surrounded him, "Bilder doch so ohne Maske, dass nur Blinde imstande waren, die traurige Nacktheit mit einem fadenscheinigen Purpur zu bekleiden."[57]

In this speech Wiechert brings tribute to those who resolutely fought the Nazi evil. Among such he counts very few of the nobility and not many from the intellectual circles. Many more, he finds, came from the ranks of the churches. He gives special praise to the German worker who has carried the burden, hunger, and pain of many decades, both in war and in peace. Never, says Wiechert, was his role a more honorable one than during the twelve years of Hitlerism "und keine Hand einer dunklen oder hellen Zukunft soll diesen unvergänglichen Glanz von seiner Stirne wischen."[58] It was the German worker, he testifies, that saved his life in the Buchenwald concentration camp. There

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[57] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[58] Ibid., p. 108.

the so-called traitors, the socialists and communists, proved to be the good Samaritans. They, in a comradeship without equal, suppprted him when he was about to collapse; they bowed down and washed the wounds while the others looked aside and passed on.

Among those who paid no attention and passed by on the other side, Wiechert singles out for merciless criticism "die Dichter und Denker, berufen von Gottes Hand, um ein Licht zu sein in der tödlichsten Nacht."[59] These, he testifies, at a time when the nation's cups of tears were already overflowing, stood around the battered anvil of their art and reforged their weapons, the weapons of the word, and in a prostitution of the mind which will ever remain unmatched, they proclaimed the beginning of a new age, not only of history but also of art.

Wiechert applies the sharp lash of his criticism also to the generals, who spinelessly acquiesced when Hitler ordered his criminal war. The outbreak of the war, he asserts, brought new hopes for many who thought that now the hour had come in which whole divisions under their generals would refuse obedience and turn the might of their weapons against wrong and oppression. But, he observes sardonically, these people just did not know much about generals or about divisions! "Sie hatten vergessen, dass wenige Schichten ihres Volkes so bis ins Mark verdorben waren wie die Schicht ihrer Generale."[60]

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 117.

There follows in this speech the further indictment that the Fatherland replaced the eternal Word of God with the word of man "und das Menschenwort war der Fluch eines ganzen Zeitalters."[61] For proof he points to the newspapers of the last twelve years. "Der Aussatz wuchert in ihnen wie ein stinkendes Geschwür, und auf dem Grunde des Geschwürs wuchert das Wort."[62] What is sacred in every language, says Wiechert, was given into the hands of scoundrels, of paid, cowardly, miserable slaves, and in their hands disfigured into the permanent shame of an entire nation. If the word had been sacred to Germany and if her youth had been reared to regard it as sacred, an unparalleled derision would have driven the "superman" back into the cave of his origin. "Nehmt zwei seiner Worte," says Wiechert, "nehmt die Worte 'Vaterland" und 'Ehre', und bedenkt, über welchen Abgrund des Verbrechens sie als eine schillernde Brücke gespannt waren."[63] Take also the word "state" and the word "freedom" and the word "justice," he continues. These are the great words which deceive mankind if they are changed from an end into a means by a mendacious mind and hand.

One can understand that this biting criticism, true and relevant as most of it is, proved very distasteful to many Germans. Wiechert paid for it dearly. It made him very unpopular in many circles and caused him, even after

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[61] Ibid., p. 127.

[62] Ibid., pp. 127-128.

[63] Ibid., p. 128.

his death, to be regarded as a controversial figure. The bitter reaction, according to the author himself, came largely from four sources. First of all, he feels, it came from the incorrigibles and those who, even after the collapse, had remained blind and fanatic. Secondly, it came from those "die nur gehorsam gewesen waren und ihre reinen Hände zu bewahren versucht hatten."[64] Then too, he believes, there was displeasure on the part of those who did not want to admit their guilt. Finally, there was unfavorable reaction from many intelligent and well-meaning people who had mistaken the severity of his judgement for an attitude of hatred.

Wiechert, however, never felt that he should recant the salient points of this speech. He did later, in Jahre und Zeiten, admit that he had been in error on several matters. He confesses, for instance, that his judgment, not of the Nazi criminals, but of the German people at large and of youth should have been less harsh. He had not known at the time, he says, about the extent and strength of the resistance movement.[65]

After the collapse Wiechert indeed saw many wholesome forces at work in Germany, but he felt he could not be blind to the demons still lurking along the road of the future. The impression remained with him that the Germans represent

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[64] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 382.

[65] Ibid., p. 381.

"ein überaltertes Volk,"[66] in its politics, in its officialdom, in its bureaucracy. He continued to feel the heavy hand of a dead past. "Und wir sind, als das Schlimmste von allem, ein durch und durch korruptes Volk geworden ... vielleicht durch die zwölf Jahre der Korruption, aber wir haben diese Korruption nicht ausgeschieden und abgetan."[67] Germany, he feels compelled to say, has become a people of the black market - not in a commercial sense only, but in a spiritual sense as well.

To Wiechert the tragedy that befell Germany in the form of National Socialism is not to be explained in terms of blind chance. "Ich glaube vielmehr, dass das Gefährdete seiner Anlage und damit seiner Geschichte dieses Schicksal gerufen hat, und es darf uns nicht erbittern, dass dieses Schicksal über die Unschuldigen so dahingeht wie über die Schuldigen. Und vielleicht gibt es auch im Metaphysischen keine Unschuldigen neben denen, die gefehlt haben. Ja, vielleicht liegt, wenn wir es im göttlichen Sinne zu Ende zu denken versuchen, schon im Begriff des Unschuldigseinwollens, ja des Unschuldigseins eine Verschuldung."[68]

Wiechert is not particularly optimistic about the future of Germany. He sees little evidence after the war of "Güte, Reinheit und Liebe."[69] The German people, it seems

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[66] Ibid., p. 387.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., p. 409.

[69] Ibid., p. 411.

to him, have even lost their sense of decency and respect; in comparison to the Americans and Swiss whom he meets, he considers his own people coarse, vulgar, and ill-mannered. Perhaps a new youth may bring a new spirit. But Wiechert is not so sure. Germany, he believes, may have had her day. "Und wenn in diesem Volk nicht genug des Guten lebt, um die Herrschaft über das Nichtgute zu erlangen, so sollen wir darin ohne Traurigkeit die Hand des grossen Schicksals erkennen, dass es uns noch leben lassen will, wie es ja alte Völker selten auszulöschen pflegt, aber dass es uns nun langsam in den Schatten stellen will, nachdem wir lange genug in der Sonne gelebt haben."[70]

For Wiechert there is as little sorrow in the decline of Germany as there is in the aging and dying of a person, even a very dear person. It all belongs to the course of things. Germany, to be sure, will not die in a year or two. The process of degeneration may run over centuries. In the meanwhile there may be many noble and worthwhile achievements. But, he fears, they will be deeds of remembrance rather than deeds of the future. They will not give the world and humanity a new face. They will be "Abwandlungen einer tausendjährigen Frucht,"[71] not new seed and not a new harvest. It is likely that for the Fatherland the storms of youth have subsided and that the quiet of old age has set in.

To those who say that these are gloomy prophecies,

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 413.

Wiechert answers that it is always best to be realistic and to state the truth, frightening though it may be. It is better to face the future with fears than to face it with lies. And why should not Germany at length pass from the stage? Her role, after all, cannot be an eternal one. There is one thing, however, that she can do: she can make her departure in kindness and in love.

In 1948 Wiechert left Germany to retire to the seclusion of the Rütihof in Switzerland. This deed heaped upon him new and bitter criticism. There were those who intimated that he was cowardly, since he had received threatening letters. There were those who once again labeled him an "escapist" who was unable to face the hard and disagreeable realities of life. And, as might be expected, there was the angry cry of "Traitor!"

Wiechert himself in Jahre und Zeiten testifies that the threatening letters had very little, if anything, to do with his moving to Switzerland. He makes clear that, already many years before, the thought of living abroad had often occurred to him. "Ich hatte die Gesetze niemals anerkannt, die einen Manschen unlöslich an sein Vaterland binden..."[72] However, he says, he had never wanted to carry out this plan while his country was in danger.[73] Now that the worst danger was passed, he felt he could go. He admits there were

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[72] Ibid., p. 438.

[73] Ibid., p. 345.

things which he found disagreeable and which caused alienation. It troubled him no end, for instance, that his people could not come around to a confession of guilt but instead began criticizing their greatest benefactors, the Americans.[74]

More than all else, however, Wiechert felt that his art was being threatened by the unrest of the post-war period. And it was his art, he believed, that he ought by all means and under all circumstances to safeguard. In addition to all this, he explains, he was dead tired and he wanted a few years of peace before he died. It might be remembered, in this connection, that already many years before, in Die Jeromin-Kinder, he had Jumbo say: "Einmal, viel später, wirst du erkennen, dass man vor seinem Tode eine Weile still sein muss, und ich glaube, das werden deine besten Jahre sein."[75]

This writer has not been able to find a valid reason for taking the position that these considerations were not actually the ones which motivated Wiechert to leave his country. Nor has he been able to find the courage to accuse the emigrant of insincerity when he poetically affirms of Germany:

> Ich kniee heimlich zu dir nieder
> und füll den Becher mir mit Sand,
> ich sehe dich wohl niemals wieder,
> du armes, liebes, dunkles Land.

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[74] Ibid., p. 385 and p. 440.

[75] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 257.

Aus dir bin ich ja doch geboren,
wie meine Mutter mich gebar,
und immer bin ich noch verloren
an das, was mir so teuer war.

Für dich hab alles ich gegeben,
du warst mein Brot und warst mein Wein,
und nun, nach einem Menschenleben,
bin ich doch wieder ganz allein.

Du hast die Hände mir bespieen
und suchten doch dein Schmerzgesicht,
ich habe lange es verziehen,
und doch, die Hand vergisst es nicht.

Ach, will ja deiner nicht vergessen,
wie ich die Mutter nicht vergass,
was dir an Tränen zugemessen
es füllt ja auch mein Tränenmass.

Doch einmal spannt sich wohl der Bogen
von Tränenkrug zu Tränenkrug,
und nur das Herz wird einst gewogen,
das soviel Schmerzen um dich trug.[76]

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[76]Stanzas 5 and 6 of this poem, entitled "Deutschland," have been omitted. The entire poem is found in An die deutsche Jugend, pp. 6-7; also in Meine Gedichte (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1952), pp. 40-41; and in Die letzten Lieder, (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1951), pp. 7-8.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR SYSTEM

Wiechert's experiences as a soldier and officer in the First World War were of significant and enduring influence upon his entire subsequent life. Their impact was such that the war became a theme or sub-theme of several of his major works. Wiechert himself says of the war that it tore through his life like a deep-going plow, of which the furrows remained until old age.[1]

Though Wiechert entered the First World War as a youthful and enthusiastic volunteer who believed that Germany was fighting a righteous cause, he was gradually disillusioned and sobered. "Die Menschen denken immer, dass sie aus dem Krieg wie aus einem Bad steigen werden, aber sie denken nicht richtig. Menschenblut ist kein Bad, Jons. Vielleicht für Tiger und Schakale, aber nicht für Menschen."[2] It was the truth of these words, spoken by Jons' father in Die Jeromin-Kinder, that Wiechert himself came to experience very profoundly. After a course of time he was ready to admit that war was "ein bitteres Handwerk, ohne Glanz,"[3] which deserved to be hated "als das Urböse aller Menschheitsgeschichte."[4]

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[1] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 174.

[2] Die Jeromin-Kinder, p. 315.

[3] Das einfache Leben, p. 86.

[4] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 170.

Sensitive and poetic soul that Wiechert was, this type of reaction was almost inevitable. It did not take long for him to realize that in the army, even in his training as officer, his life was being wasted. He writes that the things he learned there were totally strange to his nature. He learned them as he might have learned chemical formulas, but he carried them in his pack rather than in his heart. "Es war kein Zweifel, dass ich ein 'unsoldatischer' Mensch war," he confesses. "Ich war nicht besessen vom Kriege, sondern ich betrachtete ihn mit kritischen Augen."[5] The fact that he performed all military tasks with a meticulous and exemplary devotion to duty, in no way signified that he was "berauscht." A sickness, he points out, may be borne patiently and obediently, but it can hardly be looked upon as a state of happiness. One longs for health, and in this case only peace is health. If one must be "berauscht" to make a good soldier, it may be said that Wiechert was an exceedingly bad one; he testifies that he hated war as the "little people" have hated it throughout the ages.[6]

A very strange phenomenon is the fact that the first two books which Wiechert wrote after his return to civilian life, glorified war. To both Henner in Der Wald and to Wolf in Der Totenwolf, war is a noble and glorious enterprise. Particularly Wolf, a worshipper of the old Germanic gods,

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[5]Ibid., p. 146.

[6]Ibid., p. 148.

speaks of war in glowing terms. "Etwas anderes wird kommen, grösser und wilder, das Allergrösste... Krieg wird kommen!" he exults on one occasion.[7] And on another occasion he exclaims: "Menschen kann man töten, Herr Erickson. Denn Menschen sind böser als Drachen... Schwert war der Anfang der Welt ... Schwert wird das Ende der Welt."[8] In Der Totenwolf war is something which makes the face "verklärt"; and men return from battle "mit düsterem Lächeln."[9]

Dealing with this phenomenon in Jahre und Zeiten, Wiechert explains it psychologically in terms of some sort of compensatory experience. He writes: "Für mich war es sehr bezeichnend, dass ich nach dem Kriege in zwei Büchern dieses mir Fehlende und gänzlich Unangemessene gleichsam 'literarisch' nachzuholen versuchte, um eine Art von Gleichgewicht herzustellen."[10] In other words, it was in the figures of the warlike Henner and Wolf that the poet sought to project something which he himself lacked. None of his books, he assures his readers, were more untrue to his real self than these two; none were so much "mere fiction."

Though Wiechert later denounced the philosophy and outlook of these books, he never expressed an apology for writing them. In fact, he makes much of the point that it

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[7] Der Totenwolf, p. 136.

[8] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

[9] Ibid., p. 142 and p. 148.

[10] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 148.

was necessary for him to write them. He feels that they served as a catharsis. Not until they were completed, he says, could he write off the war. "Mit ihnen erst liess ich einen dunklen Zeitabschnitt zurück, zog ich eine Grenze, die ich niemals mehr nach rückwärts überschritten habe. Mit ihnen erst wurde ich frei für die reine Menschlichkeit, die ich, als ein unendliches Ziel, nie mehr aus den Augen verloren habe."[11]

Wiechert's genuine and mature reflections on war find expression particularly in the novels Jedermann and Die Furchen der Armen. These are not "blood and guts" novels; they do not play up the horror of war but they portray its corrosive effect on the human personality. The viewpoint, of course, is that of Wiechert himself, therefore that of a sensitive soul and of an individualist.

One of the indictments which Wiechert makes against the institution of war is its "Rohheit," that is, its affront to the dignity of man. This affront the student Johannes Karsten, chief character in Jedermann, experiences at the very start when, as a volunteer, he is examined by an army doctor. It is revolting to him to stand stark naked before doctors who tell coarse jokes and "mit amtlichen Händen" run up and down his body - "gleichgültig, sachlich, einem Befehl gehorchend."[12] Already at this moment Johannes senses the horribly dehumanizing nature of the military

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[11] Ibid., p. 149.

[12] Jedermann, p. 17.

machine, and the war forthwith appears to him "als das Ende des Lebens, eine Gewalttat ohne Massen und Scham, aus der man zerbrochen heimkehren wird, verkrüppelt, geschändet."[13]

Worse than the affront to the human body is the army's affront to the human soul. This comes to a large extent from the side of the military officers. Army superiors, Wiechert finds, are usually not chosen on the basis of any human qualities, but almost exclusively on the basis of military competence. For this reason most of them are insensitive to human values. This is especially true of the non-commissioned officers, he feels. For them he has really nothing but scorn. Though there is occasionally among them a decent and a quiet figure, the majority are actually "ein Haufen Gesindel."[14] Thus, when Wiechert wishes to indicate his contempt for someone, he disdainfully attributes to him an "Unteroffiziersseele."

In Jedermann the author gives a portrayal of the Unteroffizier in the figure of Hasenbein. He is a country school teacher in whom a bit of authority has given rise to repulsive arrogance, hardness, and vanity. Whenever he passes Johannes and his group, the one who first sees him is to bellow out, "Aufstehen." Then eight men, whether they have previously been seated or not, suddenly stand at attention and stare "in die unbewegte Würde seines breiten Gesichts."[15]

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[13] Ibid., p. 15.

[14] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 130.

[15] Jedermann, p. 48.

Hasenbein behaves and speaks only as an officer, never as a fellow-man. He is distant and unapproachable, and combines a maximum of severity and precision with a minimum of human kindness and sympathetic understanding. The men under him "wissen nichts von seiner Welt, ob er Kinder hat oder nicht, was er zu Hause treiben mag, ob er an Gott glaubt oder an Bebel. Er ist von solcher Gemessenheit, dass es schon schwer fällt, ihn anzureden, und sie können sich gar nicht vorstellen, dass er ohne Koppel schläft. Er schikaniert sie nicht, er sorgt für sie, wie es sich gehört. Aber er ist wie ein Vormundschaftsrichter, und sie haben das Gefühl, als werde jedes Wort protokolliert, das sie sprechen."[16]

In this same novel the Unteroffizier is depicted as the man whose words and gestures are "von einer leisen Verachtung durchtränkt"[17] and in whose face there is concentrated "der gesamte Begriff des Vaterlandes."[18] He acts as if he were the "Gott des Krieges"[19] and as if the entire outcome of the war depended on him alone. His commands are often highly arbitrary and irritatingly silly. But Johannes and his group discover that these commands must nevertheless be carried out promptly and strictly, as

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[16] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[17] Ibid., p. 37.

[18] Ibid., p. 8.

[19] Ibid., p. 9 and p. 59.

if they came from the Throne of Heaven. As they ponder these matters, they are overcome by the unreasonableness and incongruity of it all, and a depressing sense of humiliation steals over them. The war system, they conclude, represents an outrage against the human personality.

In Jahre und Zeiten, where it becomes evident that "Hasenbein" was portrayed after an actual character, Wiechert goes into this matter in a little more detail. He expresses amazement at the fact that a little country school teacher, whom the farmers now and then bring a piece of pork, can in the military machine suddenly be a man before whom all the earth trembles. He considers it not only ridiculous but also incomprehensible when well-bred and cultured people, educators and artists, suddenly grow stiff with fright because a slave with a slavish soul comes into view. "Ja, mehr als das: dass dieser ihn über den Kasernenhof jagen kann, wie mann ein Kaninchen jagt. Dass er sich zu Boden werfen muss, wenn jener es befiehlt, und dass es gleich ist, ob er sich nun in den Sand oder in eine Wasserlache werfen muss. Dass ein Mensch und ein Volk sich so aller Würde entkleiden kann, wenn der Staat es befiehlt und dass derselbe Staat seinen unvollkommensten und oft seinen rohesten Söhnen soviel Macht über das Machtlose und oft über das Edle verleihen kann."[20]

The army officer when looked upon as a human being is simply beyond understanding. Unless one looks upon him,

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[20] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 131.

Wiechert suggests, as a part of a monstrous and impersonal system, one becomes utterly confused and frustrated in one's thinking. "Du musst immer denken," says one in Johannes' group, "es sei ein Mittler, unmenschlich, aussermenschlich, ein Mittler der Armee. Wenn du sie als Menschen betrachtest, hört es auf. Dann hört alles auf."[21]

It is often at the fighting front, Wiechert indicates, where danger becomes real and death imminent, that a different attitude and spirit steal over the lives of officers. Even Hasenbein, when he lies on a stretcher fatally wounded, gives evidence of being essentially a decent human being. He begins to show interest in people, even in flowers. "Sie sahen beide in sein Gesicht, das der Würde entkleidete Gesicht, das an den blauen Glockenblumen hing.... Er entkleidete sich wie ein Kind, und wie ein Kind sprach er beim Entkleiden, von allen bunten und heimlichen Dingen .... Von seiner Frau und seinem kleinen Hause, vom Obstgarten und seinen Lieblingsschülern."[22] Having described Hasenbein's death, the author adds: "Und statt des kleinen 'Generals' lag ein Kind auf der schmutzigen Bahre, verwandelt wie in einem Zauber...."[23]

Why, the author seems to ask in this connection, could not this man have evinced some of these human qualities while he was still well and functioning as an officer? The answer for him seems to lie partly in the corrupting influence of power. "Dass doch für jeden, der 'Macht' hat,

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[21] Jedermann, p. 68.

[22] Ibid., p. 147.

[23] Ibid., p. 149.

die Menschen sich in etwas Minderwertiges verwandeln..."[24]

War, as Wiechert sees it, is not only an offense against man's dignity; it is likewise an offense against his individuality. With its nailed boots it seems to grind into the dirt the individual qualities of life and of the spirit. It makes man soulless and nameless, in fact to such a degree that only the designation "Jedermann" seems any longer appropriate. Thus, in the sub-title, the story of Johannes Karsten's war experiences is called "Die Geschichte eines Namenlosen."

Right at the beginning of his military career, Johannes realizes "dass der Krieg eine Angelegenheit der Masse ist, die eine Unterordnung verlangt ... die eine Uniform verlangt, und Uniform bedeutet Gleichheit."[25] It is therefore the attempt to save the individual from the grey and soulless monotony of the mass which Johannes sees as his most significant assignment. "'Man muss das Gesicht aus der Uniform retten,' dachte er. 'Das ist die erste Aufgabe. Das andere wird sich schon finden.'"[26]

Johannes finds this an extremely hard assignment. Everywhere the relentlessly rolling military machine deals with him as with a non-personality, a number. He finds that he is being "eingesetzt,"[27] like a letter of type which takes on value and meaning only in a combination with others.

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[24] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 137.

[25] Jedermann, p. 17.

[26] Ibid., p. 36.

[27] Ibid., p. 134.

Soldiers, he discovers, are not appraised or esteemed according to any human or moral values, but according to sheer physical characteristics, for instance, size. "Der Feldwebel, lang, blond, rasch, schob sie durcheinander wie Holzfiguren der Grösse nach. Es war, als seien die Menschen nur durch ihre Länge verschieden, und die Nichtbeachtung alles andern erzeugte ein Gefühl ohnmächtiger Leere, als könnte man vertauscht werden, einer anderen Familie, ja einem anderen Volke zugeschoben werden, wenn die Körperlänge es erforderte."[28]

It is when Johannes is back home on a furlough that he experiences once more that he is a meaningful individual. "In meiner Mutter Augen bin ich da," he says, "ihr Kind, einmal und nie wieder auf der Welt." But as he is ready to return to his group, he sighs: "Aber nun höre ich auf. Die Kompagnie beginnt, das Bataillon, das Regiment."[29]

Back in the army, amid "Massengesichter" and a "Massengegend," the process of depersonalization and dehumanization continues apace. Even love and sex, Johannes discovers with alarm, tend to become impersonal and nameless in war. It gets to be a matter of indifference to the soldier whom he embraces; he no longer thinks in terms of names. "In dem Strom der Namenlosen, der die Uferlinie zwischen Leben und Tod zerbröckelte,...war auch das Weib und seine Liebe namenlos geworden, eine Funktion des Geschlechts, das am Körperlichen hing, und hinter der Name, Seele, Einzelwesen verschwand."[30]

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[28] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[29] Ibid., p. 201.

[30] Ibid., p. 176.

As the war progresses, Johannes and his group realize "dass ihr Inneres ausgebrannt ist."[31] Only the outside wall of the inner self remains standing as an empty ruin. The only things which keep them going are "Befehl" and "eine stumpfe Gewohnheit."[32] The soldiers begin to call it the "Kolonnengefühl." It is this, they find, which binds soldiers together with hundreds of others, but which nonetheless makes them rootless, nameless, and insecure, inasmuch as it makes each of them only a part, a denominator of which the column is the numerator.

For both Johannes and Jons, as well as for Wiechert himself, war is such a stupid and senseless thing that to survive it one must cease brooding and thinking about it. "Man muss mit dem Denken aufhören.... Wie beim Schwimmen. Wer denkt, ertrinkt."[33] War is best endured when one responds to it like an automaton - and when one sleeps. "'Fix in die Klappe und Augen zu! Dann merkt man es nicht so.'"[34]

Patriotism, Wiechert suggests, makes little or no contribution to the morale of the ordinary soldier. The Vaterland, as was pointed out in another connection, is too nebulous and impersonal a thing to mean much to him. Johannes and his group, in fact, resent patriotic speeches and references to the fatherland. When Klaus poses the question, "Glaubst du nicht ans Vaterland?" it is Oberüber who smilingly replies: "Mein Sohn, zuerst hast du an Hasenbein

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[31] Ibid., p. 116

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 52.

[34] Ibid.

zu glauben und an den Feldwebel, verstehst du? Und wenn du dann meinst, dass noch etwas vom lieben Gott übriggeblieben ist, dann kannst du ja ans Vaterland glauben. Aber morgen wird Hasenbein dein Vaterland sein, da verlass' dich drauf."[35] Likewise, when on one occasion a soldier begins to sing "O Deutschland, hoch in Ehren," he merely elicits disdainful glances from others. "Idiot," is Oberüber's brief comment; and that brings the episode to a close.[36]

As might be expected, Wiechert indicts war for its ruthless and wholesale taking of human life. For him life is something precious, sacred, and God-given. Jons, musing about it during the course of his war experiences, calls it "das grosse, wunderbare Geheimnis der ganzen Welt, das grösste der Schöpfung, das Allerheiligste dieses flüchtigen Planeten. Das so gross war, dass alle Völker seinen Ursprung in die Hände eines Wesens legten, das sie Gott nannten."[37] Already at an early age Wiechert had a profound reverence for life. For this reason is was a horrible experience for him, while still at home with his parents, to see the community butcher come in to slaughter the animals for the family's supply of winter meat. For this reason, too, vivisection as practised in his science classes, seemed to him like murder. When he was being trained as officer, it constantly frightened him to think how much time the state was spending in preparing

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[35] Ibid., p. 51.

[36] Ibid., p. 137.

[37] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 429.

its sons for killing. "Denn dieses war doch das Handwerk, in dem wir ausgebildet wurden, Tag und Nacht, und ein anderes schien es auf dieser Erde nicht mehr zu geben."[38]

For killing without seeing or thinking, that is, for blind killing, Wiechert believes one needs a certain grandiose contempt for life, for one's own as well as for the other person's. Whoever looks upon life as a wonder and a mystery, will never feel comfortable as a soldier and will always go about his tasks with a "zögernde Hand."[39]

Wiechert's attitude toward the act of killing is perhaps best illustrated in Der brennende Dornbusch.[40] In this Novelle, a story of World War I, the sensitive young man Andreas Niederlechner first seeks to avoid fighting by becoming a draft dodger. But he is unsuccessful in this attempt and is forced into military service. As a soldier, however, he refuses to kill. He aims the barrel of his gun above the heads of his enemies and he throws his hand grenades beyond the trenches. His canteen, furthermore, is always empty and his field dressing is always used up. One day, as he stumbles over some barbed wire, his gun accidentally goes off and the bullet hits the forehead of a young enemy soldier. Before he secretly and sorrowfully buries him, he takes from the neck of the dead youth his identification tag and silver cross. After the war Andreas is married

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[38] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 150.

[39] Das einfache Leben, p. 160.

[40] Der brennende Dornbusch (Zürich: Arche-Verlag, 1946).

and has a son whom he significantly calls Jan-Isaak. When some years have elapsed, he takes this son and offers him to the parents of the young man he has killed.

As in "Tobias" and "Der Richter," short stories which deal with political murders, Wiechert here too stresses the element of personal responsibility in the matter of killing. Though Andreas has killed only by accident and in full conformity with the law, he experiences a profound sense of guilt. He feels he can expiate for his deed only through sacrifice. Only after having offered his own son in exchange for a son he has killed, can he experience peace of soul.

Wiechert takes the command, "Thou shalt not kill" not only very seriously but, it would seem, also very literally. In Jahre und Zeiten he relates that when he took his state teachers' examination, he was unable to give the Lutheran interpretation of the fifth commandment. And then he adds: "Ich bin auch heute nicht imstande dazu und betrachte es auch nicht als einen Mangel. Gebote wie 'Du sollst nicht töten' haben bei mir nie einer Erklärung bedurft."[41] Much more necessary, he insists, is an explanation on the part of the state for commanding men to ignore this commandment in war and on the part of the churches for praying for success in transgressing this commandment.

The Lutheran church, which interprets the fifth commandment in the light of other Scriptural passages, holds that the taking of life is not always necessarily a sin.

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[41] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 90.

It teaches that legally established authorities may take life in punishment for murder and that the individual citizen, in an extremity, may do so in self-defense. It also holds that men may be called to take life in a just war, if they are summoned by their government. The latter, as an instrument of God, should be obeyed.[42]

There are elements in this "interpretation" to which Wiechert, had he known them, certainly would have had no objection. The taking of life in punishment for murder is something which he himself advocates in the case of the Nazi criminals. And there is hardly a Biblical text which he quotes with more approbation than the one which runs: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Neither does he oppose the taking of life in self-defense. During the Nazi regime he himself carried guns at least partly for that purpose. Not even with the taking of life in war does Wiechert necessarily find fault. At no time was he a pacifist. He blessed the Allied cause in World War II and prayed for its success.[43]

Apparently what Wiechert objects to in the attitude of the Lutheran church stems from its position that the state is God's representative on earth and should be obeyed. This position quite clearly does violence to his principle of personal responsibility and, in the case of the fifth

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[42] Augsburg Confession, Article XVI.

[43] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 357.

commandment, shifts the emphasis from the sin of killing to the virtue of obeying the God-ordained authorities. It is exactly this matter to which Wiechert calls attention in his autobiography: "Und da Staaten und Kirchen das Uferlose dieses Zustandes wohl erkennen, so versuchen sie mit aller Kraft und Kunst, neue Wegweiser in diesem Niemandsland aufzustellen, die der Ehre oder der Pflicht, des Gehorsams oder der Treue. Sie versuchen mit aller Kunst der Täuschung, diese Wegweiser mit den alten Farben zu bemalen, so dass sie wie die bisherigen erscheinen sollen, die der Sittlichkeit oder der Religion eben, aber es ist ihnen nie gelungen, die stille Mahnung der übermalten Gesetze auszulöschen, wie die des Gesetzes: 'Du sollst nicht töten'."[44]

The Lutheran emphasis on duty and obedience to the state has caused men to go to war "in obedience to God." That, in turn, has given them the idea that they are always fighting for a righteous cause and therefore may also legitimately ask for God's blessing - even though they belong to contending nations and live on opposite sides of the frontier. This sort of praying strikes Wiechert as silly and sacrilegious; it seems to him "als ob viele Kinder in vielen Sprachen um das grösste Kuchenstück bettelten."[45]

It is hard for Wiechert to look upon war as a just means of settling an international dispute. There is not only the element of its carnage and bestiality, but there is also the element of its underlying principle - that of might.

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[44] Ibid., pp. 174-175.

[45] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 311.

And might, as he has Jons say, is only a thin cosmetic over the hard face of terror. Consequently it is also hard for him to see the soldier purely as a hero and a defender of justice. "Hinter dem Idealbild des Soldaten erscheint am dämmernden Horizont des Todes mit unbezwinglicher Notwendigkeit die Gestalt des Henkers, des auf Befehl Tötenden, des dem Staat Gehorsamen, und keine Empörung soldatischer Ehre kann darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass nur eine schmale Grenzlinie diejenigen scheidet, die den Lorbeer des Ruhmes und den Makel des Geächteten um die blutige Stirn tragen."[46]

For Wiechert war desecrates not only the dignity of life, but it also desecrates the majesty of death. The killing of millions by the decree of a few spells neither the purpose of life nor the purpose of death. The purpose of death, as Jons muses on it, is this: "dass er erschien, wenn die volle Scheibe im Gipfel stand und die dunkle schmale Sichel sich leise um ihren Glanz zu legen begann."[47] Death was intended to be a "Vollender," not a "Vernichter."

Men, says Wiechert, were not meant to enter the solemnity of death in masses. Each has the right to his "eigner Tod," that is, to that type of death which is in keeping with his own individuality. "Man ging nicht in der Masse in den Tod, so wie man in ein Theater oder auf den Jahrmarkt ging. Man wurde auch nicht in der Masse geboren, sondern ganz allein. Es gab keine Geburtsartikel, wie es

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[46] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 175.

[47] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 382.

Kriegsartikel gab."[48] God intended death to be an "einfacher Schnitter mit einer einfachen Sense,"[49] but man has made him a wanton reaper of hundreds and thousands. Thus death has been degraded to the position of a slave and as a slave he shows no discretion. "Sie hatten ihn entheiligt, und es war müssig, dass sie ihn priesen und mit Kränzen behängten."[50]

Death in war loses its solemnity and majesty because it becomes far too common a thing. Undue familiarity with it breeds - if not contempt - at least irreverence. "Sein Schritt war so vertraut geworden wie der des Briefträgers auf der Strasse, und sie scherzten über ihn, als sei er ihresgleichen. Aber so wenig es erlaubt war, über Gott oder über das Leben zu scherzen, so wenig war dieses erlaubt."[51] Those who treat death with levity, evince a false heroism, the heroism of a street urchin who, after a bet, takes a prince by the hand and wishes him a good day.

Horrible as mass death on the battlefield may be, it is for Wiechert not the worst thing about war. What is more terrible is the feeling of utter aloneness and forsakenness, of having been extinguished as a light, of having died even before death comes near. "Dies ist der Krieg, Percy," says Johannes in Jedermann. "Nicht der Angriff, die Granaten, der Tod ... aber diese Strasse in Wind und Regen, das Nichtwissen, das Heimatlose ... Alle Mütter Söhne stehen so, im

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[48] Ibid., p. 383.

[49] Ibid., p. 382.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., pp. 382-383.

fremden Land, stumpf und frierend, ohne Herd, ohne Kinder, ohne Glauben ..."[52] And again: "Der Krieg, kleiner Klaus, das ist, dass unser Herz leer ist. Verstehst du das? Dass wir keine Mutter mehr haben und kein Zuhause, keinen Namen und kein Gesicht."[53]

Worse than death, too, is the fact that in war the great cultural and spiritual values of humanity go by the board. Truth, beauty, and goodness become of no consideration; love is destroyed and hate is unchained. "Dass der Tod aufgestanden ist, ist nicht so schlimm," says Jons' father to him at the outbreak of World War I. "Wir beide kennen ihn. Aber der Hass wird aufstehen, und das ist schlimmer."[54] War makes of love a fairy tale, says Wiechert, a soap bubble dangling from a straw reed.

Agonizing to see for the sensitive and thoughtful soul is what war does to the Earth. Jons finds his thoughts "am schwersten" when of an evening he sits behind a few sandbags and looks out upon the smoking front. "Eine leere Erde, auf der alle menschliche Spur erloschen war, ein verwüstetes Feld, über das ein eiserner Hagel gefallen war."[55] For the Majorin, who travels to France to bring back the body of her fallen husband, the sight of the devastated, burned, and poisoned earth is a "Grauen ohnegleichen," since it is she who

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[52] Jedermann, p. 154.

[53] Ibid., p. 157.

[54] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 314.

[55] Ibid., p. 410.

is accustomed to call the Earth a Mother.[56]

Most frightening of all, Wiechert suggests, is what the war reveals about the nature of man. It tears from him his mask and reveals him in all his miserable poverty and depravity. The student Jumbo touches upon this matter in a conversation with Jons: "Das Schlimmste ist, Mönchlein, das Menschliche und ganz und gar Erbärmliche. Die Lüftung der Maske. Die Entblössung bis auf die Knochen..."[57] Later Jons, now himself at the front, darkly broods about the same problem. "Was war der Mensch für ein Wesen, wenn er seine Hände dazu hergab ...?"[58]

As Wiechert sees it, particularly two classes of people hate war. First of all, there is the class of the poor. It is the poor man, the little man, who is always the disillusioned victim of war. "Und immer fängt es mit den Kränzen für die Stirn des kleinen Mannes an, und immer hört es mit den Kreuzen für den kleinen Mann auf."[59] However, those who hate war even more than the poor are the women, the mothers of the earth. "Alle Frauen hassen den Krieg, so wie wir als Kinder den bethlehemitischen Kindermord hassten,"[60] says Margreta in Die Jeromin-Kinder. And Johannes remarks to Agnete in Jedermann: "Du darfst nicht weinen.

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[56] Die Majorin, p. 49.

[57] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 330. (See also Jahre und Zeiten, p. 155.)

[58] Ibid., p. 411.

[59] Die Furchen, p. 403.

[60] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 383.

Nur die Mütter dürfen weinen ... Sie haben über einem Abgrund geboren und knien nun an seinem Rand."[61] To his mother Johannes confesses that when he falls in war, he will not be falling for the fatherland, the Kaiser, or any idea, but only for her. All who die on the battlefields, die for their mothers. And so when his mother writes down in the family Bible the date of his return, together with the words "Kam aus dem Kriege heim," Johannes judges that this brief chronicle of his life is more rightfully and actually hers than his own. He therefore adds the words: "Und gab seiner Mutter ihr Leben zurück."[62]

In view of this, Wiechert in his Munich speech of 1945 suggests that in the future mothers have much more to say about a nation's decision to go to war. He expresses the hope that German youth will consider it its chief task to take care that never and under no circumstances shall there again be a German state in which two or three have the right to send a whole people upon the battlefields without first asking the entire nation, especially the mothers and the sons. It is this point, he emphasizes, which he wishes to enjoin upon his audience solemnly, like a last testament. "Denn auf den Schlachtfeldern verbluten niemals die zwei oder drei, sondern auf ihm verbluten die Mütter und die Söhne, und wenn uns nichts auf dieser Erde gehört, so doch wenigstens das Blut unserer Herzen..."[63] It must therefore

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[61] Jedermann, p. 181.

[62] Ibid., p. 298.

[63] An die deutsche Jugend, pp. 132-133.

be left to the people themselves, he concludes, to decide whether they are to give their blood to a bloody phantom or to the deeds of love and humanity.

As many other writers on war, Wiechert sees the problem of the returning soldier as a very grave one. No one comes out of war, he feels, "ohne das Mal auf der Stirn."[64] The returned soldier has a "Sprung" in his life, a fine and delicate one perhaps, but a real one nevertheless. His return is like that from another planet. "Es gibt keinen Frieden mehr für ihn."[65] The reason for this is that he has become a disintegrated personality. As one who has become a Massenmensch he is again forced to live his life more or less like an individual. But the mass-man continues to accompany him for years as an alter ego. "Sie werden nun immer jemanden haben, der fremd und doch unheimlich vertraut neben ihnen hergeht, der ihnen folgt aus dem Nebel der Vergangenheit, eine graue, allgemeine, namenlose Gestalt."[66]

The problem of the returning soldier is a major theme of Die Majorin. Michael Fahrenholz, who has been gone not for four years but for twenty, consequently finds "keinen Graben wieder zum Überspringen, sondern ein Meer."[67] In war, he finds, each one did his daily tasks and everything

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[64] Die Mutter (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 39.

[65] Der verlorene Sohn (München: Langen-Müller, 1935), p. 41.

[66] Jedermann, p. 276.

[67] Die Majorin, p. 50.

was in its place. "Aber viel schwerer ist der Friede, denn dort ist nichts an seinem Platz. Dort muss erst alles an seinen Platz gestellt werden, und es gibt weder Tagesbefehl noch Aufseher noch Stundenschlag. Da steht nur der Mensch davor, der Mensch in Freiheit, und alles wartet auf seine Hände. Sehr schwer ist es, wenn der Tag auf die Menschenhand wartet und die Menschenhand ist müde und weiss nicht, was sie tun soll."[68]

By far the most serious repercussions of the war, Wiechert feels, are those of a moral and religious nature. Orla in Das einfache Leben finds that the war has worked havoc with his faith. Spiritually he must once more start from scratch. "Ich muss nun von vorn anfangen," he says. "Ich bin wie ein Mann, der mit Pfeil und Bogen aufgewachsen ist, aber plötzlich entdeckt er, dass die Feinde Eisenrüstungen tragen."[69] His old God has died, he confesses, and his new one has not yet ascended the throne.

Orla is here saying in another way what Wiechert relates about himself in his autobiography. War, writes the author in Jahre und Zeiten, "ist etwas, das weder vom Blute noch von der politischen Meinung her allein begriffen werden kann. Er ist wohl insofern ein 'Aufbruch' unserer Existenz, als er uns um Jahrtausende in das Primitive vergangener Zeitalter zurückwirft, in die dumpfen Bezirke der Gefahr, des Ueberwältigens, der Tötung. Aber da er das in Jahrtausenden Erworbene nicht auslöschen, nicht vergessen machen

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[68] Ibid., p. 186.

[69] Das einfache Leben, p. 318.

kann: die Idee der Menschlichkeit, der Sitte, der religiösen Bindungen, so stürzt er uns in einen wahren Abgrund der Verwirrungen und Verwicklungen, über dem die alten und die neuen Sterne richtungslos schwanken."[70]

Perhaps the war, more than any other single thing, raised for Wiechert the age-old problem of theodicy. His fictional characters who are involved in war constantly ask: How can this go on if there is a righteous God in heaven? And, how can God remain aloof and silent while mankind suffers? To Jons it seems as if God at the beginning of a war hangs out a sign "Verreist" and promptly discontinues all consultation hours for the duration.[71] Orla believes that after a war in which two million people have died, one has the right to ask God "was er sich dabei gedacht habe."[72]

In spite of all this, Wiechert admits both in his fictional and autobiographical writings that war, if faced in the right spirit, is not without salutary effect on the human soul. It can have a chastening and disciplinary value; moreover, it can deepen one's love for suffering mankind. "Wer geglüht werden wollte," Jons concludes, "durfte auch dem Krieg nicht ausweichen, und es konnte wohl sein, dass auch die Liebe geglüht werden musste, wenn sie alle diejenigen einmal wärmen sollte, zu denen er einmal gehen würde."[73]

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[70] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 174.

[71] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 389.

[72] Das einfache Leben, p. 316.

[73] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 444.

War, indeed, is a vicious robber, depriving men of some of the most precious things of life. But, as Jons sees it, war is also a great giver. "Ein strenger und schmerzhafter Geber, aber die Geschenke der Strenge und des Schmerzes bewahrte man lange in der Hand."[74]

According to Wiechert's own testimony, it took some time for him to see the contours of the war emerge from among the "glühenden Nebel." Only slowly did he begin to realize what the war had actually meant to him, namely a profound convulsion of his being and a chain of indelible experiences full of sorrow, horror, and wretchedness. Yet from this same perspective of time he came to see war as "auch leise überstrahlt von der Summe dessen, mit dem ich ihn überstanden hatte: mit Gehorsam, mit Güte, mit Menschlichkeit und mit dem grossen Erbarmen, das ich für alles Leidende unverlierbar gewann."[75] Like Jons, Wiechert found that in the war he had been "geglüht" and mysteriously prepared for a life of helping and healing.

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 178.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH

In his autobiography Wiechert relates that in his early youth he was "ein gläubiges Kind ... so fromm, wie nur ein Kind sein kann."[1] This, indeed, might have been expected of a child of God-fearing parents who, according to all indications, were both dutifully and joyously devoted to regular Bible reading and prayer. By both precept and example they seem to have taught their son the basic truths of the Christian religion.

His mother, the poet relates specifically, taught him that he was always in the presence of God and that he should endeavor to keep himself pure in His holy eyes. While she lived, she took great interest in the spiritual development of her children, filled as she was with the premonition that death might come rather early.[2] When Wiechert left to attend school in Königsberg, she did not neglect her spiritual guidance. At various times in her letters she would urge him not to forget God. And whenever her son returned home for a vacation, she would earnestly inquire about his religious status. Not only his mother was interested in his spiritual welfare while he was away at school, but his Tante Veronika was as well.

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[1] Wälder und Menschen, p. 170; see also p. 59.

[2] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

Regularly at New Year's time, he relates, she would send him a letter in which she asked him "wie ich es nun mit dem Heiland hielte."[3]

In spite of this earnest concern and solicitous guidance, Wiechert in Königsberg gradually began to lose his childhood faith. The absence from home and the companionship of irreligious friends may have had something to do with this loss. The study of philosophy and the reading of Nietzsche, Haeckel, and Strauss no doubt had much more to do with it. Philosophically and intellectually his Christian God was destroyed; only in the woods a semi-pantheistic God remained mystically real to him.

For a while, when Wiechert was a tutor at the home of Baron Grotthuss in Latvia, his interest in the Christian religion revived. On the baronial estate he saw something of the power and quiet security of true religious faith. He once more attended church and was impressed by a young pastor "der liebreich und mit schmucklosen Worten über einen der eindringlichen Bibeltexte sprach."[4] But the "revival" was not a genuine one. He soon realized that he was trying to convince himself of feelings which he did not actually possess, but only passionately desired to possess. "Und eine noch tiefere Skepsis folgte der Verzauberung."[5]

It was only after a long time that the poet regained

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[3] Ibid., p. 99.

[4] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 61.

[5] Ibid., p. 62.

some measure of faith, and then it was quite different, he confesses, "als die Kirche sie verlangte."[6] Just how he regained this measure of faith, he does not explain. He merely indicates that there was a "Durchbruch in die Gnade" or "zweite Geburt."[7] This, as Berger rightly indicates, was not a Christian conversion, though the terminology used to describe it might lead one to think so. Berger calls it "an agnostic experience of a mystic-quietist nature"[8] which was vaguely Christian in some of its practical effects. The "Durchbruch," at any rate, is clearly evident in the author's works, which in the beginning show a tendency toward hatred, nihilism, and despair, and in later life toward a religious and social consciousness with positive ethical values.

The change, which occurred in the middle twenties, is no doubt to be associated with the influence of Postelmann, the Direktor under whom Wiechert taught at the Hufengymnasium in Königsberg. Of him the poet writes: "Er war einer der bedeutendsten Menschen, die mir jemals begegnet sind, mit einem makellos reinen Herzen, und von seinem Wesen sind während dieser Jahre entscheidende Einflüsse in mich übergegangen. Ja, ich muss sagen, dass der endgültige Durchbruch zur Humanität, der mir in diesem Zeitraum gelang, zum grössten

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[6] Wälder und Menschen, p. 171.

[7] Foreword to Die Flöte des Pan (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930).

[8] Walter Berger, "Ernst Wiechert," German Life and Letters, N.S., IV (1950), p. 13.

Teil ihm zu verdanken war...."[9] Puknat, however, makes an excellent case for the position that not only Postelmann but also Max Picard had much to do with Wiechert's "Durchbruch" - if not with its initiation then at least with its further development.[10] Picard, a surgeon, philosopher, and writer who for some time lived in Berlin and later in Switzerland, was revered by Wiechert as the "most pious" of all men he had known, a figure who seemed to him a St. John at Patmos, a seer of mysteries, a "cosmic" human being.[11] He was a Jew, converted to Roman Catholicism.

That Wiechert's breakthrough was not one "im Sinn der Kirche," was in the eyes of many pastors and other church people quite evident from the beginning. The poet continued to attack the Church, its representatives, and its doctrines in the same merciless way as before.

Clergymen, for instance, come in for constant criticism in Wiechert's works both before and after the change in the author's life. One important reason for this is the fact that, as the poet sees it, many pastors are not imbued with the spirit of their Lord and Master. They do not look upon their work as a high and sacred mission, but merely as another occupation or profession. They only too frequently accept calls to other congregations not because of a challenge to

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[9] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 191.

[10] Siegfried B. Puknat, "Max Picard and Ernst Wiechert," Monatshefte, XLII (1950), pp. 371-384.

[11] Jahre und Zeiten, pp. 323-330.

greater and more sacrificial service, but because of a better salary, a more comfortable parsonage, or increased opportunities for study. For Wiechert, a pastor is first of all to be a follower of Christ. And that, in the words of Andreas Nyland, means nothing less than to follow Christ in his sacrificial suffering. It means to live a life which renounces personal aggrandizement and seeks its fulfillment in "Helfen und Heilen." It does not mean "ein Examen machen mit 'gut' oder 'sehr gut' and dann hier und da wie ein Schauspieler auftreten und predigen, damit die Leute sagen: 'Diesen wollen wir haben.' Und damn sehen, ob die Stelle gut ist, ob die Tapeten neu gemacht werden, ob viele Trauungen und Begräbnisse sind."[12]

The danger, even for dedicated men, to let their ministry degenerate into a mere Amt or Beruf is insidious and great, as Wiechert views it. Long association with holy things may dull the spirit and conscience. Reimarus in Der Knecht Gottes explains to the youthful and idealistic Nyland how it works: "Da war ich so wie du: ich hatte Gott in mir.... Aber dann kam das Amt, die Frau, die Kinder, Amtsbrüder und so weiter, was man so die gereiften Mannesjahre nennt. Du kennst das noch nicht. Und sie schlagen langsam den Gott in dir tot. Oder vielmehr, sie erwürgen ihn."[13] And thus, continues Reimarus, everything in the ministry becomes commonplace and uninspired, also the preaching. "Ein Amt ist

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[12] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 20.

[13] Ibid., p. 158.

immer wie ein Sarg."[14] In view of this danger, one of Wiechert's characters suggests that it might be well to divorce the Gospel ministry from the Amt. Says Dr. Lawrenz to Jons: "Wir sollten alle umsonst lehren und helfen, Jeromin. Ärzte und Lehrer, Dichter und besonders die Pfarrer. Und daneben ein kleines Handwerk treiben..."[15]

Clergymen, Wiechert finds, are too often people who merely proclaim but do not incarnate the Gospel of Christ. They are filled with God's Word, but not all are filled with God's love. There should be less talking and more doing on their part. It would be better "wenn sie ihre weissen Hände nicht nur zum Segen erhöben."[16] People, says Wittkopp in Missa, do not want preachers with white hands. In two brown hands there is a great power of conviction, in fact "ein kleines Stückchen Evangelium."[17] Rather than stand in their elevated and artistically carved pulpits, clergymen should lay aside their robes to seek out and minister to the poorest among men. They are to be fools for Christ's sake. In order to help and heal with deeds and not simply to dispense "einen billigen Trost"[18] with words, Jons in Die Jeromin-Kinder decides to abandon his plans for the ministry and instead to become a doctor. He wants to help in the struggle

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[14] Ibid., p. 356.

[15] Die Furchen, p. 94.

[16] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 134.

[17] Missa, p. 242.

[18] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 126.

against death and finds it better "ihn in einem weissen Mantel zu besiegen als in einem schwarzen Gewand."[19]

As a class, the poet suggests, preachers have about them a certain cocksureness and a tone of confidence which is irritating. They know all the answers and speak their answers glibly. Some, in fact, act as if they had gone to school with God and had been a class ahead of him. They do not have the humility of little children, so strongly insisted upon by Christ himself. "Sie sind so schrecklich erwachsen, weil nur die Erwachsenen immer wissen, was sie zu sagen und zu tun haben und was recht ist."[20] By this "omniscience," however, they actually show how small their God is. They have reduced Him to the dimensions of their own small intelligence. "Nur die Pfarrer können Gott fassen. Wir leugnen ihn oder er zersprengt uns."[21]

A cold and dead formalism has laid hold on many clergymen, Wiechert fears. They do not stand in awe before a great and majestic Being. They lack the "erschütterte Seele."[22] The Bible declares that no one can live who sees the Lord, but the preachers live on and they live on comfortably. One reason why this is so, the poet suggests, is that pastors are often merely theologians, that is, students of a science. They are spoiled by their learning and their degrees.

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[19] Ibid., p. 438.

[20] Missa, p. 458.

[21] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 312.

[22] Ibid., p. 356.

"Universität und Examen verderben die Leute. Denken, sie seien nun fertig und auserwählt. Fehlt nur der Engel der Verkündigung, der ihnen vorausgeht."[23] Christ himself chose his disciples from among simple fishermen, but the Church insists on choosing them from among the Abiturienten.[24]

Behind the formalism of those in the ministry, Wiechert also sees the fact that many have never been "in der Anfechtung." They have never been assailed by doubt as the despairing and drinking Pastor Agricola in Die Jeromin-Kinder; they know neither the anguish nor the ecstasy of wrestling with God. Hence their glib and cheap words can be of little value to the anguished and storm-tossed Gottsucher. It is Jons who muses about such matters as these while the friendly pastor "mit seinen behaglichen, geröteten Wangen" passes out to him the bread and wine of his first Communion. "Er [der Pastor] war sehr freundlich, und wahrscheinlich trank er auch nicht wie Agricola, aber Jons sah ihm aufmerksam zu, und er hätte gern gewusst, ob das Ganze ihm nun Freude mache, eine tiefe, schwere und verzehrende Freude, wie Christus sie vor dem Abendmahl gefühlt haben mochte. Oder ob er wenigstens durch alle Täler der Finsternis gegangen sein mochte, wie Agricola. Er verlangte gar nicht, dass dieser seine Möbel oder Kleider verkaufe, um die Ärmsten zu wärmen und zu speisen. Er wollte nur wissen, ob dies alles in diesem Raum in jedem

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[23] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, pp. 302-303.

[24] Ibid., p. 117.

Jahr neu war, mit immer neuer Leidenschaft begonnen oder vollendet ..."[25]

As in the case of teachers, Wiechert finds many pastors who function merely as Staatsdiener. Their allegiance is to men rather than to God. Hence they support the state in every dubious issue and follow it into every conceivable war. They are mediocre and unadventurous figures who always play safe and dare not speak out against the state in behalf of social justice. They are like the instructor of Jons' Confirmation class: "kein Ketzer ... kein Empörer, sondern ein treuer Diener des Staates und der Obrigkeit."[26] The refreshing thing about Agricola, Wiechert notes, was the fact that here was "kein Apostel für die Reichen und die Obrigkeit, kein Stellvertreter des Landrats, sondern einer, der 'leiden wollte um Christi Namen willen.'"[27]

Wiechert indicts the ministers of the Church in other ways. Some of them he calls "Eiferer," "Tadler," and "Richter"; others "Ausleger" and "Zureicher."[28] Many, he fears, show no psychology and tact in their approach to religious problems. To those who have fallen in unbelief, for instance, they continue to speak in traditional religious terms - terms which long ago have lost their meaning for those whom they are intended to help. The forester in

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[25] Ibid., pp. 214-215.

[26] Ibid., p. 216.

[27] Ibid., p. 92.

[28] Ibid.

Das einfache Leben complains of this in connection with the therapy attempted by ministers in the case of his distraught, violently anti-religious wife. "'Pfarrer ... arbeiten immer mit den Dingen, die für sie aufgehört haben, wissen Sie. Gott und Pflicht und guter Wille und so weiter.'"[29] Michael Fahrenholz concludes that his pastor has "keine glückliche Hand für solche, die sich nach innen verbluten."[30]

Clergymen as a class have loaded upon themselves a heavy burden of guilt. The pastor in the beginning of Das einfache Leben tells of a visit he made to a murderer in jail. Upon his departure from the prison he heard the condemned man grumble: "Ein Segen, dass es drüben keine Pfarrer geben wird!" Wiechert hereupon has the pastor say: "Was aber muss ein Stand gesündigt haben, Herr von Orla, dass so etwas gesagt werden kann."[31]

The author by no means naively believes, however, that only the ministry falls short of the ideal. To the words just quoted the pastor hastens to add: "Aber es ist nicht der einzige Stand, glauben Sie mir. Keiner von uns weiss, wie er schuldig ist an allem, was geschieht. An allem, hören Sie? Ja, an allem..."[32] And by the mouth of his protagonist Orla, Wiechert warns against the danger "ganze Klassen oder Stände oder Berufe leichthin abzuurteilen, da

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[29] Das einfache Leben, p. 57.

[30] Die Majorin, p. 193.

[31] Das einfache Leben, p. 33.

[32] Ibid.

wir ja doch nie mehr als einzelne Menschen unter ihnen kennten."[33]

Accordingly, in his works Wiechert portrays not only poor pastors, but also very good ones. No doubt his finest ministerial figure is Tobias, a man who first makes his appearance as a soldier in Die Jeromin-Kinder. It is there that he reads aloud from his Bible amid the noise and horror of the front. His impressive and calming words are overheard by others, and the strength and beauty of his faith silences even the scoffers. Subsequently, in Die Furchen, he first becomes a preacher in a large industrial city and then assumes charge of the little congregation in Sowirog. He is described as a man who radiates an inner happiness, who rests in the Lord, and whose face shines. "Er sprach keine grossen Worte, und diejenigen, die er sprach, hallten nicht von den Holzwänden wider wie die eines Mannes, der ein Echo suchte. Und sie fühlten, dass er nur für sie da sein würde, nicht für sich, seinen Glauben, seinen Ehrgeiz, sein Behagen ... Er würde nicht zürnen, oder fluchen oder treiben, wie die Eiferer taten."[34]

Though Wiechert on occasion, in ultra-Protestant fashion, suggests that God's grace is not dependent on the Church and its ministers of the Gospel, he clearly shows on the other hand what an abundant channel of God's grace a true pastor can be. Of Tobias he writes: "Er reichte das Abendmahl, und als

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[33] Ibid., P. 46.

[34] Die Furchen, p. 262.

die Leute aus der Kirche traten und die Lerchen über den Feldern hörten, glänzten ihre Gesichter. Sie hatten vergessen, dass ein junger Pfarrer aus einer fremden Landschaft zu ihnen gesprochen hatte. Sie hatten gemeint, dass Christus zu ihnen gesprochen habe."[35] And perhaps few other words could so tenderly and sublimely characterize the mission of a true servant of God as these, which the author also applies to Tobias: "Er würde still auf der Schwelle seiner Kirche sitzen, und wenn einer käme, der Herzeleid trug oder Armut oder Sünde, so würde er still beiseiterücken und lächelnd sagen: 'Gott hat für uns beide Platz, und für dich wahrscheinlich mehr, denn du hast mehr zu tragen.'"[36]

As for the Church, it too gets its share of criticism in Wiechert's fiction. Often it is viewed as a purely human institution, which is not at all necessary for the consummation of the Kingdom of God. "Es steht nirgends geschrieben, dass Gott eine Kirche will," says Tobias in Die Furchen. "Er will nur sein Reich, das Reich Gottes. Die meisten Pfarrer denken, dass sie eine Kirche brauchen, aber das ist nicht so."[37] Pastor Agricola expresses the same thought in only slightly different words: "Ein kleiner Pfarrer will ich sein, der etwas Brot und etwas Trost verschenkt ... und manchmal weiss ich nicht, ob wir dazu eine Kirche brauchen."[38]

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[35] Ibid., pp. 262-263.

[36] Ibid., p. 262.

[37] Ibid., p. 199.

[38] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 135.

The house of God is nature, says Lenze in Der Wald.[39] And it, the author frequently indicates, is a better avenue to God than the Church. As Dr. Lawrenz and Jons sit at the beach one evening, the latter muses: "Hier könnte der Fuss der Leiter stehen, der aus dem Sande hinauf, an allen Kirchen vorbei, zu dem führte, was die Menschen Gott nannten."[40] If the Church has any value at all, the poet indicates, it is as a scaffold or as a crutch - as a poor means to an end. It is merely what the stage was to Shakespeare: "ein Gerüst, von dem sie die Hand hoben in die Ewigkeit." Or again: "Eine Wand, auf der sie schrieben, wie Gefangene auf die Wand eines Kerkers schreiben; aber wovon sie schreiben, ist hinter der Wand: die Freiheit."[41]

At times the Church and its message strike Wiechert as rather dull and lifeless. When Jons begins to visit the city churches in which known and unknown preachers hold forth, he discovers that he reaps little spiritual gain. "Aus den hohen, gewölbten Hallen war das Leben entflohen, das, was ihm und so vielen anderen auf den Nägeln brannte."[42] The message of the Church is often strangely irrelevant, unsubstantial, and other-worldly. Consequently it has not come to grips with many of man's most urgent problems and has failed to make a contribution to their solution. "Seit fast zweitausend

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[39] Der Wald, p. 182.

[40] Die Furchen, p. 203.

[41] "Moderner Dichterglaube," Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 184.

[42] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 181.

Jahren sagten sie von allen Kanzeln ... die wunderbarsten Dinge, aber die Hungrigen waren nicht satt davon geworden, und ein Krieg nach dem andern ging über die flammende Erde."[43]

In the poet's opinion the Church, like its pastors, has placed too much emphasis on the word and too little on the deed. Stilling, the old schoolmaster in Sowirog, opines "dass die Hand, die einen Durstigen tränkte, mehr war als das Wort, das in tausend Kirchen erscholl. Zu allen Zeiten war das Wort billig gewesen und manchmal mehr ein Fluch als ein Segen."[44] What is worse, Wiechert finds, is that the Church at times actually substitutes the word for the deed. It cheaply dispenses comforting words about the hereafter instead of providing at least some degree of happiness in the here and now. In conformity with the Biblical warning about "faith without works," the author observes: "Nein, das Wort war die Sünde, das Wort, das man über die Tat schob und Glauben nannte. Der Glaube verlangte keine Tat, keinen Augenschein, keinen Beweis. Er liess sich genügen."[45]

Of grave potential danger to the Church, as Wiechert sees it, is its emphasis on theology. In holding this view, the poet once again discloses his distrust of the intellect. If anywhere, he feels, certainly in the Church the heart should come before the mind. The theologians, however,

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[43] Ibid., p. 339.

[44] Ibid., p. 42.

[45] Ibid., p. 128.

have made "eine ganze Wissenschaft von Gott ... einen grossen Bau, in dem sie auf und ab stiegen wie die Maurer auf Leitern und Gerüsten. Aber das einfache Herz fror in diesem Bau und verirrte sich."[46] Times have changed, muses Jons, as he prepares himself for Confirmation. Formerly the disciples - simple fishermen, many of them - sat at the feet of Jesus listening to a Gospel. Today preachers sit at the feet of a theological professor and learn a doctrine. "Eine Lehre war nicht dasselbe wie ein Evangelium,"[47] is his significant conclusion. He fears the Gospel may have been replaced by thousands "von ehrwürdigen Büchern, in denen die Zeugnisse gesammelt, erläutert, bewiesen und ausgelegt waren."[48]

Sad too, in Wiechert's opinion, has been the close alliance between Church and state. The sword of the state has ruled in conjunction with the Cross and this has always been "eine schlechte Bruderschaft."[49] In addition, the message of the Church has often been compromised, since its servants belong half to God and half to the state. Luther, the poet believes, erred in several things. "Und auch in seiner Beugung vor der Obrigkeit, einer sehr verhängnisvollen Beugung."[50]

Wiechert also takes the Church to task for its failure to practice social justice. In this matter, he is convinced,

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[46] Ibid., p. 64.

[47] Ibid., p. 215.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Die Furchen, p. 366.

[50] Ibid., p. 148.

the Church has conformed dangerously to worldly standards. It has catered to the rich and neglected the poor. When Jons attends his Confirmation class he finds, much to his disgust, "der reiche Mann getrennt vom armen Lazarus"[51] - even in the seating arrangement. This discriminatory practice is also referred to in the author's autobiography, where he elaborates: "Wir sitzen in zwei getrennten Abteilungen, Volksschüler und 'höhere' Schüler, denn auch in der Kirch gibt es damals den Unterschied zwischen Gebildeten und Ungebildeten."[52] At the end of the session, he relates, a fee was paid and "auch dieser Lohn war nach Herkunft und Stellung der Eltern abgestuft."[53] These social distinctions left a bitter taste and are no doubt partly responsible for later utterances, such as the one in the essay called "Moderner Dichterglaube." There the author writes: "Und dann wurden die Kirchen gebaut, mit Gestühl für die Reichen und den Bänken für die Armen und wer die Glocken über seinem letzten Weg haben will, muss sie bezahlen."[54]

Thus the spirituality of the Church gives Wiechert no cause for great elation. In view of its barrenness, the poet sometimes seems to wonder whether the Church has not actually been forsaken by God. In the Old Testament dispensation God forsook his chosen people because they bore no spiritual

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[51] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 214.

[52] Wälder und Menschen, p. 170.

[53] Ibid., p. 173.

[54] Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 184.

fruit. Perhaps the same thing, he suggests, has happened to the New Testament Church - and for the same reason. "Wer den alten Bund zerschlagen hatte, weshalb könnte er nicht auch den neuen zerschlagen?" muses Jons. "Nur dass er es nicht verkündigt hätte und die Menschen es gar nicht merkten. Dass sie immer noch in den alten Kirchen predigten, aber Gott war schon längst fortgegangen aus ihnen, ohne es ihnen zu sagen."[55]

In spite of these many bitter indictments against the Church and its ministers, Wiechert cannot fairly be called anti-clerical. In his Munich speech of 1945 he speaks appreciatively of the churches and berates the Nazis for having attacked them. In Die Furchen he does not hesitate to have his protagonist Jons (who, like his creator, is very critical of the ecclesiastical world) propose that a church be built in Sowirog. The village, Jons intimates, needs a better gospel than that which emanates from the Nazi loudspeakers. The author expresses his faith in the Church by mouth of the countess, who adds: "Und in den Zeiten, die nun kommen würden, werde diese kleine Kirche wahrscheinlich das letzte Stückchen Brot bedeuten, das man den Armen in die Hand geben werde."[56]

As far as this writer can determine, Wiechert himself never was an active member of any organized church. The

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[55] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 97.

[56] Die Furchen, p. 264.

reason for this, no doubt, is to be sought partly in his individualism and distrust of organizations. "Gott spricht nicht gern, wenn man zu zweien ist, und ich will doch hören, was er sagt."[57] It is also to be sought in his distrust of dogma. Like Amadeus in Missa, Wiechert undoubtedly felt that he did not "fit" in any church. He considered himself a child in the faith. "Kinder gehören nicht in eine Kirche." The Church is for "Grossen und Erwachsenen" for whom everything is "fest und geordnet und sicher."[58]

It is very obvious from his works that for Wiechert the eternal verities never became "fest und geordnet und sicher." Even after his so-called "Durchbruch in die Gnade," his books are replete with a profound scepticism. The poet is particularly baffled by the problem of evil and human suffering. In common with Herr von Balk and many other of his characters, he cannot understand "weshalb eine ungerechte Welt heilsamer sein soll als eine gerechte."[59] Particularly in Das einfache Leben, Die Jeromin-Kinder, and Die Totenmesse, all written rather soon after the Buchenwald experience, the poet often becomes bitter and converts his role of God-seeker into that of God-assailant. In the first of these three books, Thomas von Orla indicts the Almighty as "ein stummer Gott, eisig vor Gleichgültigkeit, wie ein

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[57] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 175.

[58] Missa, p. 459.

[59] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 16.

furchtbarer Lehrer vor hilflosen, weinenden Kindern."[60] In the second book, Pastor Agricola, violently disturbed by the death of many village children in a plague, cries to God: "Komm her, du Kindermörder, und zeige deine blutigen Hände! Zeige sie her, ganz nahe, damit ich sie dir abtrocknen kann. Es war dir nicht genug an der Erstgeburt in Ägypten und an den Kindern von Bethlehem, nicht wahr? Und auch an deinem eigenen Sohn war es dir nicht genug. Du hast ihn ans Kreuz genagelt, um uns zu erlösen, aber nun erlöst du immer weiter, und immer mit Kreuzen, nicht wahr? Auch diese Kinder fehlten dir noch, einundsiebzig in zehn Dörfern...."[61] In Die Totenmesse, classified as a Hörspiel, the angels taunt God, saying: "Ach, nun sieh Dir Deine arme Erde an und dann sage: 'Es war wohlgetan!'"[62]

Such bitter and seemingly blasphemous attacks on God himself have led some in religious circles to look upon Wiechert as one who has made a complete break with Christianity.[63] But for Agricola and for Wiechert these assaults are obviously a form of "wrestling with God" - a wrestling of the type depicted in the Old Testament between Jacob and the angel. It was in this struggle that the patriarch declared: "I will

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[60] Das einfache Leben, p. 317.

[61] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, pp. 192-193.

[62] Die Totenmesse (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1946), p. 1.

[63] This seems to be the view, for instance, of Heinrich Fries in his Ernst Wiechert: Eine theologische Besinnung (Speyer: Pilger-Verlag, 1949).

not let Thee go, till Thou bless me." Reinhold Schneider, himself a deeply religious character, comments wisely on Wiechert's accusstions against God in these words:

> Auch dieses Rechten liegt - wir wagen es zu behaupten -, diesseits der Religion, im religiösen Bezirk. Wer mit Gott rechtet, für den ist Gott zum mindesten Person. Diese Haltung ist dem Alten Testament nicht so ferne, wie es scheinen könnte. "Erwecke Dich, Herr, warum schläfst Du? Wache auf, und verstosse uns nicht so gar. Warum verbirgst Du Dein Antlitz, vergissest unseres Elends und Dranges?" (Psalm 44, 24-25). Und wie viele ungeheure Worte dieses Klanges könnten wir nennen! Das Alte Testament ist vom Neuen nicht zu lösen, und das bis zur Empörung erfahrene Leid ist es auch gewesen, das die Helden der Griechen in die Nähe des Kreuzes führte.[64]

That Wiechert continued to believe in God as a personal Being, even in the period of his all-time spiritual low, is not only evident, as Schneider suggests, from his wrestling with God, but also from his understanding of "Gesetz" as set forth in Das einfache Leben. When Orla in this novel finds that he must reconstruct his entire notion of God and think of Him no longer in terms of a "Gesicht" but of a "Gesetz", he is not exactly stripping Him of his godly characteristics and equating Him "with the principle of blind, natural necessity," as Chick suggests.[65] The word "Gesetz", he makes clear, represents only an approximate and tentative formulation of what God now means to him, and he does not know, he says, how His face will ultimately appear

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[64]"Melodie des Leids," Ernst Wiechert: der Mensch und sein Werk, pp. 45-46.

[65]Edson M. Chick, "Ernst Wiechert and the Problem of Evil," Monatshefte, XLVI (1954), p. 188.

for "dazu muss man mir Zeit lassen."[66] But he indicates almost immediately that by "Gesetz" he does not understand anything "blind." Reviewing his life "unter das Gesetz" from the beginning to the present, he concludes: "Alles hatte seinen Platz und seine Ordnung, alles war richtig, wie es war und werden würde."[67] Here Orla attributes to his "Gesetz," perhaps unconsciously, the personal characteristics of intelligence and wisdom, if not actually benevolence. For this reason he finds that his new God, as well as his old, deserves man's obedience and respect, his "stille Beugung." Even after all that, however, his new God leaves him quite unhappy and dissatisfied and he sighs: "Lieber Gott ... manchmal wäre es doch schön, an dich zu glauben und an deine allmächtige, schützende Hand."[68]

The contention of J. J. Anstett that Wiechert's work represents a body of agnostic theology[69] is well answered by Chick when, in connection with his discussion of Das einfache Leben, he points out that its author does not doubt the presence or knowability of the divine, but on the contrary strives to uncover its true nature. Chick's own contention that Wiechert conducts "a campaign against God and Church"[70] without in the end coming any nearer to a positive

[66] Das einfache Leben, p. 318.

[67] Ibid., p. 442.

[68] Ibid., p. 435.

[69] J. J. Anstett, "Ernst Wiechert, Théologien," Etudes Germaniques, VIII (1952), pp. 7-24.

[70] Chick, op. cit., p. 191.

faith seems to this writer to lack sufficient evidence. It would be hard to deny that, in spite of many sceptical utterances and various contradictory positions, Die Furchen and Missa represent a considerable advance toward positive values. In fact, Chick admits this but chooses to call the "concluding armistice" in Missa "suspect."[71] Just why this should be the case, is difficult to see. The fact is that almost every position which the author takes in Missa is already adumbrated, and in some cases rather fully stated, in earlier works.

In several important matters, Wiechert holds some very basic Christian convictions. There is, for instance, his view of the nature of man. He very realistically senses that man is not inherently good but is, in the language of the Church, "born in sin and prone to all manner of evil." Of man's depraved nature and his demonic potentialities Wiechert is fully convinced. In the essay "Die Tafeln des Grauens" he says: "Früher, als man vom Reiche Gottes sprach, fanden die grossen Maler auf der Erde kein Ebenbild der Dämonen... Sie wussten nicht, dass die Teufel aller Zeitalter kein Tiergesicht, sondern ein Menschengesicht trugen. Sie wussten noch nicht, wessen der Mensch fähig ist und dass die Teufel der Hölle nach Gott rufen würden, wenn sie dieses Menschengesicht einmal erblicken könnten."[72] Man, he has

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 172.

Wittkopp point out in Missa, is an unhappy and wretched being, driven from Paradise. Many people are aware of this and, remembering man's original rectitude, yearn for restoration. "Und solange wir uns erinnern, ist alles gut. Nur wenn wir darüber lächeln und im Ausgetriebenen so zu Hause sind, als wäre es nie anders gewesen, ist es nicht gut."[73] A confession of human inadequacy is in order "denn Gottes Kind sei nur, wer in der Sünde sei und es wisse."[74]

The need for a rebirth or conversion is also stressed by Wiechert. The formulation, to be sure, is not always "im Sinn der Kirche," but many of the basic Christian elements are there. Wiechert's "Wandlung" is a Schicksal which comes "schweigend meistens und ohne Bewegung. Aber dann kommt ein Augenblick, in dem es die Hand hebt und an unsre Hand rührt. Kaum merklich für uns, aber es genügt, dass wir ... einen anderen Weg gehen, als wir ihn gehen wollten. Das sind die grossen Entscheidungen unseres Lebens, das nach unsrer Meinung so grossartig unter dem sogenannten freien Willen steht."[75] It is clear from these last words that the change is not thought of as coming by the free will of man, but by the grace of God. "Ich habe die Bibel nicht gelesen," says Andreas Nyland in Der Knecht Gottes. "Sonst hätte ich gewusst, dass Gott die Menschen erlöst und nicht der Mensch."[76]

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[73] Missa, p. 493.

[74] Ibid., p. 484.

[75] Ibid., p. 289.

[76] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 382.

The baron in Missa is also convinced that man cannot redeem himself. "Und wenn man das Dunkle der Erde nicht verwandeln konnte, wie sollte man das Dunkle in sich selbst verwandeln, das doch nur ein Teil jener grossen Dunkelheit war?"[77] The rebirth which God works in man turns him from self to God and to his fellow-men. Whereas man by nature insists on running his own life, the reborn man renounces his own will to do God's. "Einmal wolltest du eine Herrin sein, nun willst du eine Magd sein,"[78] the baron says in describing the "Wandlung" of Barbara in Missa.

There are, particularly in the last works, many indications that Wiechert believed in providence. He usually avoids calling it by that name. "Es gab tausend Namen für die gerechte Weltordnung."[79] The concept is often pretty well divorced from its Biblical matrix, especially as it bears upon the problem of evil. Yet what people ordinarily like to call chance, Wiechert prefers to call "eine weise Führung."[80] Nothing, he feels, ever happens "umsonst"; in the fabric of life there is most definitely a design. "Aber es ist wohl doch wie ein Gewebe, in dem die Fäden wirr durcheinander zu laufen scheinen, und erst wenn wir es in den Händen lange hin und her wenden, erkennen wir Sinn und Gang

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[77] Missa, pp. 218-219.

[78] Ibid., p. 513.

[79] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 251.

[80] Die Furchen, p. 287.

des Weberschiffchens."[81] Even evil, which Wiechert finally comes to see as something which entered creation by the will of God, is a necessary complement of the good, "die Potenz der Nacht gleichsam, ohne die der Tag nicht da sein würde."[82]

Wiechert's attitude toward the Bible is one of great reverence and respect. The Bible is for him indeed the Book of Books. Its language and style have set their stamp upon all his literary work. Countless are the quotations from it and the allusions to it. The abundance of Bible references has, in fact, given rise to complaint on the part of some critics.[83] The Nazis turned down Die Furchen partly because of its "Ueberfluss an Altem Testament."[84] Indeed, it is seriously to be doubted whether anyone not thoroughly acquainted with the Bible can appreciate Wiechert's work as he should.

In his autobiography the author writes as follows about the years of his youth: "Alles bezauberte, vieles ergriff, manches erschütterte mich. Aber nichts hat mit solcher Kraft und Innigkeit in jenen Jahren an meiner Seele geformt und gebildet wie das Buch der Bücher."[85] In Missa it is called a book filled with wisdom, kindness, and justice.[86] Amadeus remarks: "Das Buch ist niemals ausgelesen. Es ist wie ein

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[81] Ibid., p. 372.

[82] Missa, p. 218.

[83] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 406.

[84] Ibid., p. 355.

[85] Wälder und Menschen, p. 37.

[86] Missa, p. 418.

Ring, der überall anfängt und nirgends ein Ende hat."[87] It is above all the Book which Wiechert took along to Buchenwald and which he could not deny or forsake in the anguished period of "Anfechtung" which followed. Thomas von Orla in his most sceptical mood says it would be a sad thing for anyone to get beyond the Bible. "Ebenso traurig, wie wenn jemand über seine Mutter hinwegkâme."[88] Wiechert has no respect for the Nazi or other person "der mit mitleidigem Lächeln auf das Buch der Bücher blickt."[89] It is his firm conviction that we shall never become "klüger als die Bibel."[90]

Just what view Wiechert holds in regard to the inspiration of the Bible is not easy to say. In his autobiography he speaks of Scripture as written "in einer Sprache ... die uns noch heute glauben lässt, dass Gott durch den Mund der Sprechenden sich geoffenbart haben müsse."[91] The inspiration referred to here would seem to apply solely to the language of the Bible, not to its message. Whether he considers the latter as "geoffenbart" as well, seems very doubtful. His profound scepticism in regard to such matters as the Incarnation and the Resurrection, both of which are plainly taught in the Scriptures, is of significant comment here. Belief in inspiration in the sense in which it is taught by the

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[87] Ibid., p. 400.

[88] Das einfache Leben, p. 386.

[89] Die Furchen, p. 272.

[90] Ibid., p. 364.

[91] Wälder und Menschen, p. 38.

Church seems out of the question.

One thing in regard to the Bible Wiechert makes completely clear: he does not believe it should be read in terms of creeds, confessions, and theological treatises. "Ich denke nicht daran, was die grossen Kirchenlehrer über die Bibel gesagt oder gedacht haben.... Ich lese die Bibel noch so, wie sie am Anfang war,"[92] says Wittkopp. Creeds and confessions, in Wiechert's opinion, obscure the pristine light of the Bible. In Missa he goes so far as to ask "ob die Konfessionen nicht vielleicht eine Sünde sind?"[93] If men are to have any creeds at all, Wiechert seems to feel, they are not to accept them ready-made but they are to arrive at them only after a good deal of contemplation and living. "Beim Gottsuchen gibt es kein Tempo."[94] He considers it a distinct disadvantage for young people to have a creed or Weltanschauung. In Wälder und Menschen he remarks about his youth: "Wir hatten das Glück, keine Weltanschauung zu haben, was in diesem Alter immer nur eine angelesene oder eine angeredete sein kann, sondern nach einer solchen zu suchen, und es schadet nichts, dass viele von uns sehr spät und manche noch heute nicht damit fertig geworden sind."[95]

It is not only in religion, incidentally, that Wiechert rejects the Weltanschauung. He rejects it in philosophy and

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[92] Missa, p. 458.

[93] Ibid., p. 545.

[94] Das einfache Leben, p. 318.

[95] Wälder und Menschen, p. 242.

politics as well. Philosophic idealism, the ideas of "das Absolute" and "das Unbedingte," the notion that man is on earth to embody ideas - these all are rejected by more than one of his characters. Puknat sums up the situation very well when he writes: "Wiechert escapes the tyranny of ideas both as artist and moralist. Vividly aware of the frequently disastrous consequences of dedicating one's life to an idea, the inevitable sufferings and distortions of human life, he eschews Hegelianism and its variations in German thinking of over a century. In the Goethean tradition, he avoids allegiance to theory and doctrine and cleaves to life as man lives it."[96]

With creedal religion Wiechert associates a certain amount of militancy and aggressiveness. It is this attitude, he fears, which has caused much hatred, bitterness, and bloodshed. "Wer hatte ein Recht, zu sagen: 'Dies ist mein Gott, und ihr müsst wissen, was ich von ihm halte?' Alle Religionen waren so entstanden, aber aus allen war Blut geflossen, weil sie so entstanden waren."[97] God, he believes, should not be preached, no more than life, work, or love should be preached. They should all be lived. "Sie strahlten schon von selbst."[98]

One of the most basic questions of Christianity has always been the one which Jesus himself put to his first disci-

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[96] Siegfried B. Puknat, "Ernst Wiechert: A Modern Moralist," Modern Language Forum, XXXV (1950), pp. 19-20.

[97] Das einfache Leben, p. 339.

[98] Ibid.

ples: "What think ye of the Christ?" It is doubtful whether Wiechert, even in his last years, ever arrived at a definite answer to that question. References to Christ as the Son of God and Savior of men are rare. When they occur they are steeped in scepticism. Thus Pastor Agricola muses to himself: "Dass zwei mal zwei vier sei und dass die Erde rund sei und dass die Arbeit besser sei als Müssiggang, das könne man ruhig lehren, weil es eben so sei. Aber dass Christus um unserer Sünden willen gestorben sei, damit wir das ewige Leben hätten, das könne man vielleicht nicht so ruhig lehren."[99] In "Moderner Dichterglaube," Wiechert plainly declares that for him Christ is not the final revelation of God.[100] Elsewhere he suggests that Christ is simply the founder of another religion, standing on an equal level with Buddha and Mohammed.[101] Ollesch brings out the fact that as the years go by, the name of Christ disappears more and more from the poet's works. The same critic indicates that, beginning with Das einfache Leben, Wiechert's quest is no longer one for Christ but for God.[102]

Though the Cross gets frequent mention in the fiction of Wiechert, it is rarely, if ever, the Cross of Atonement. The poet's Cross is practically always a cross of suffering

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[99] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 93.

[100] Es geht ein Pflüger, pp. 182-183.

[101] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 62.

[102] Ollesch, Ernst Wiechert, p. 74.

which men must carry after Christ. The message which Nyland brings is "dass sie alle, jeder einzelne, den Kreuzestod erleiden müssten."[103] This interpretation of the Cross, Nyland feels, is superior to the traditional "Hinweis auf den erlösenden Kreuzestod des Einen, der für sie alle geblutet hatte."[104] In Wiechert's final testament, the Missa, the author says by mouth of Erasmus: "Es ist mir so, als seien am Kreuz viele Leben mit einem Leben gerettet worden."[105] It is doubtful, however, whether these words, particularly when viewed in their context, represent any significant change of attitude.

The failure of Wiechert to see in Christ the incarnate Son of God and the revealer of the Father's heart of love, necessitated him to fall back on nature as God's supreme revelation. From nature, however, men have never yet conclusively learned that God is a Person and that He is Love. Nature's sublime and majestic spectacle may have revealed to men already believing in a personal God something of His power and greatness. Yet in regard to man's tragic fate it has never exhibited much more than a supreme indifference. Those who have found "peace" in nature have found it, as Wolf suggests, only as "the result of a selection of some specialized data at the expense of the evidence pointing to

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[103] Der Knecht Gottes, p. 202.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Missa, p. 60.

the struggle and wastage in the evolutionary process."[106] Removed from the picture, in their case, is "Nature red in tooth and claw." Wiechert no doubt realized this as well as anyone, and at such times when he completely discards his Christian God, he feels he has left little more than a "Gesetz." But, as has already been noted, this cannot satisfy him and immediately he begins to attribute to his "Gesetz" various personal characteristics.

Wiechert's scepticism in regard to the Incarnation naturally leads him to scepticism in regard to the Resurrection. And this, in turn, gives him profound doubt in regard to that which in the creed of universal Christendom is confessed as "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Wiechert's doubt about immortality finds expression in almost all of his major works. Already Lenze in Der Wald admits: "Ich kenne kein Jenseits."[107] Harro in Die blauen Schwingen confesses no interest in "die Stadt der goldnen Gassen."[108] Wendling in Der Knecht Gottes avers in reference to immortality: "Ja, ich habe es auch gedacht, aber es ist ein Irrtum. Die Menschen haben die schöne Formel von der Unsterblichkeit erfunden, die ihnen durch ihre Kinder verbürgt werde.... Es ist eine unglaubliche Arroganz in meinen Augen."[109] Orla considers belief in immortality a product of

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[106] William J. Wolf, Man's Knowledge of God (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 18.

[107] Der Wald, p. 111.

[108] Die blauen Schwingen, p. 166.

[109] Der Knecht Gottes, pp. 405-406.

man's reason and of his rebellious nature. "Er würde niemals bitten, dass man seine Uhr noch einmal aufziehe, im Jenseits etwa. Er wusste, dass auch die Sternbahnen nicht noch einmal aufgezogen wurden. Er wollte sich unterordnen und gehorsam sein. Er wollte sich nicht empören, und der Glaube war die Empörung. Es sollte nicht aus sein, und Gott war dazu da, dass es nicht aus wäre. Die Vernunft schrie nach ihm, weil sie nicht lernen wollte, sich zu beugen."[110] Even in Missa, Pastor Wittkopp says at the funeral of Christoph: "Sie wüssten nicht, wo er jetzt sei. Trotz allem Wissen und Glauben wüssten sie es nicht."[111]

In view of this avowed scepticism, if not actual disbelief, in regard to immortality, it seems somewhat strange that Wiechert should be so greatly preoccupied with the problem of death. Though sometimes he dismisses death as something which concerns the survivors far more than the person dying,[112] at various other times he deals with it tortuously, stressing its gloom and inexorableness and the necessity for making preparations for it.[113] The manner in which one dies is not a matter of indifference to Wiechert. He himself wishes to die "the death of the righteous." Wistfully, almost enviously, he observes the death of those who have been "Gläubige."

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[110] Das einfache Leben, p. 376.

[111] Missa, p. 533.

[112] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 451.

[113] Cf. John R. Frey, "The 'Grim Reaper' in the Works of Ernst Wiechert," Monatshefte, XLII (1950), pp. 201-213.

Of the Anabaptist plowman in Die Furchen he writes: "Kiewitt hatte einen schweren Tod, aber nur den des Leibes, nicht den der Seele. Seine Seele war gewiss und bedurfte keiner Hilfe."[114] As the old man dies and has a vision of the "Lamb that was slain," Wiechert adds: "Schön ... so in dem zu sterben, in dem man siebzig oder achtzig Jahre gelebt hatte."[115] And: "Aufrecht leben und aufrecht sterben, das ist ein grosses Schicksal."[116]

The question whether Wiechert was a Christian in the historic and classical sense of that term is one which not all people have answered alike. There are those, like Herbert Felden, who tend to give an affirmative answer.[117] There are others, like Ollesch, Greifenstein,[118] and von Heiseler[119] who fear that Wiechert, after once having gone through his period of Verneinung, never again regained a positive Christian faith. If so, it would be in the spirit of the author himself not to sit in condemnation. "Niemand kann sagen, dass ich nicht mehr glaube," protests Pastor Agricola. "Wer weiss das ausser Gott allein? ... Und wenn

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[114] Die Furchen, p. 386.

[115] Ibid., p. 388.

[116] Ibid., p. 391.

[117] Herbert Felden, "Die Bibel in der Anfechtung unserer Zeit," Zeitwende, XIX (1947), pp. 340-353.

[118] Hermann Greifenstein, "Gott auf der Anklagebank," Zeitwende, XVIII (1946-47), pp. 118-124.

[119] Bernt von Heiseler, "Ernst Wiechert," Zeitwende, XXII (1950-51), pp. 372-374.

es so wäre, hättest du dann zu richten? Und ist es überhaupt eine Sache des Richtens, wenn jemand etwas verloren hat?"[120] The loss of faith, Wiechert suggests, is a terrifying thing. "Wer Gott verliert, hat soviel verloren."[121] When Agricola becomes aware of his loss he feels the pain "wie ein Messer in seinem Herzen."[122]

No more fitting words could be applied to Wiechert than those which he himself used in characterizing Agricola: "Keiner von uns hat so mit seinem Gott gerungen wie er .... Der seinem Vater geflucht hat und dessen letzter, nicht gewusster Gedanke doch der gewesen ist: 'Ich will mich aufmachen und zu meinem Vater gehen.'"[123]

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[120] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 95.

[121] Ibid., p. 202.

[122] Ibid., p. 153.

[123] Ibid., p. 301.

CHAPTER VII

NATIONAL SOCIALISM

For a short period of time - during the early and middle 'thirties - the prophets of National Socialism believed they could claim Ernst Wiechert as a partisan. Der Wald (1922) and Der Totenwolf (1924) had both been critical of conditions in the post-war Republic and had evinced a fervent hope for the resurrection of the German Fatherland. They had shown some evidence, in Nazi estimation, of a devotion to Blut und Boden. One of the books, namely Der Totenwolf, had denounced the softness of Christianity and had proclaimed a fighting Germanic deity. Moreover - in spite of the sharp and angry protests of the author - it had appeared with a cover design that featured the swastika. In view of such things as these, some of the fanatics were ready and happy to record another convert.

Hans Cramer in a doctoral thesis, published in 1934, writes concerning Der Totenwolf: "Das, was heute Adolf Hitler als ein politisches Programm verwirklicht, die Erneuerung des deutschen Volkes in seiner ganzen Haltung und Gebärde von der Seele her, das stellte vor einem Jahrzehnt Wiechert vor seinem Helden als Lebensaugabe auf."[1] Though a Catholic, Cramer gives evidence of a distinct Nazi viewpoint and he sees in Wiechert the prophet of Hitler's ultimate triumph.

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[1]Hans Cramer, Das zeitgenössische Romanwerk Ernst Wiecherts (Greven i. Westf.: Theodor Cramer, 1934), p. 24.

In an article on "Die Welt Ernst Wiecherts und seine neuesten Dichtungen," Otto von Taube expresses the opinion that Wiechert is a good example of the race-and-soil school.[2] In the novel Die Majorin the writer finds substantiation of Nazi racial theories. The baroness, a full-blooded German in East Prussia, is to him a representative of the "Herrenschicht" while Michael Fahrenholz, a Lithuanian, is an example of the "tragende Schicht." He is appreciative of the fact that in the novel Michael is depicted as a subservient character, much in need of the help and guidance of the baroness.

A literary history of 1936, published in Berlin as Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart, has some good words to say for Jedermann.[3] Though the novel is commonly regarded as highly anti-militaristic, the Nazi author sees in it an affirmation of war. Moreover, he believes the book inculcates a sense of "völkische" responsibility.

However, the opinions just quoted were not shared by all Nazis who read Wiechert. Already with the appearance of Die Blauen Schwingen (1925) and Der Knecht Gottes (1926), warning voices were heard in regard to a "modern humanistic individualism" and the "pietistic trends of thought." Lydia Ganzer-Gottschewski, writing on "Ernst Wiechert und das Mutterrecht," also in 1936, regrets Wiechert's passive attitude

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[2] Das innere Reich, I (December 1934), pp. 1168-1173.

[3] Pages 70-71.

toward war.[4] She also feels that the East Prussian author places undue stress on the matriarchal or feminine principle. This stress, she fears, might possibly lead to tragic psychic consequences, at least in the case of readers who are rather impressionable.

Dissenting voices began to increase as the years passed and Wiechert offered more books to the reading public. It became clear that the poet had not capitulated and that even when he was using the same words, he was not speaking the same language. When he spoke of the resurrection of Germany, for instance, he spoke not in terms of economics, politics, or world power. His was a dream of a spiritual revival for his fatherland, the "Lazarus" among the nations. In Das Spiel vom deutschen Bettelmann a mystery play written in 1932, the point is made unmistakably clear. Here Job, symbol of a Germany divested of worldly power, gravely warns his son:

> Sollst auferstehen aus mir, mein Kind,
> wenn meine Sünden ich gesühnt.
> Sollst nicht mehr betteln gehen zum Herren der Welt,
> sollst die Hirten suchen auf dunklem Feld.
> Werden dir einen Acker geben ausser der Zeit,
> werden dir einen Acker geben in der Ewigkeit ... [5]

Wiechert, in fact, viewed the growth of National Socialism with great mistrust, even from its very start. When, after the war, he returned to the Oberrealschule in

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[4] Deutsches Volkstum, XVIII (1936), pp. 203-207.

[5] Das Spiel vom deutschen Bettelmann (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 38.

Königsberg, it struck him that in the circle of the faculty the recruits for the Party were not being made from among the "stillen und fleissigen Arbeiter" but from among the "grossen Haufen der Nichtskönner und Nichtstuer, der in keiner amtlichen Gemeinschaft fehlt." He writes: "Gerade unter ihnen, den Unwilligen und Unfähigen, waren die Wegbereiter der neuen 'Bewegung', die das Hakenkreuz verborgen unter dem Rockaufschlag trugen und ihren Hunden beibrachten, ein Stück Brot zu verweigern, wenn es 'von Juden' kam."[6]

No doubt Wiechert was one of the first to realize, at least dimly, what the triumph of National Socialism was destined to mean for Germany and for the world. Of his first years in Berlin, to which he moved in 1930, he writes in Jahre und Zeiten: "Und ich glaube, von mir sagen zu können, dass ich schon damals sehende Augen hatte. Es bedurfte nicht der öffentlichen Klage des mehr als problematischen Oberstudienrates, dass jede Klasse, auf der ich unterrichtete, für den Nationalsozialismus verloren sei (was leider eine Uebertreibung war). Für mich, der ich vom Menschenbild und der Menschensprache herkam, war es genug, die Aufrufe der neuen 'Bewegung' zu lesen und die Gesichter ihrer Führer zu sehen. Stil und Gesicht lagen schon damals so klar vor meinen Augen, dass ich nicht durch den geringsten Zweifel zu gehen hatte."[7] It was at this time that Wiechert was heard calling the secret

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[6] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 193.

[7] Ibid., p. 272.

uniforms of the Nazis "Affenjacken," with the result that party men already then began to discuss and to watch him.

Following the July elections to the Reichstag in 1932, the National Socialists for the first time became the leading party in that body. Hermann Goering became president of the Reichstag. Then followed such demonstrations, such speech-making, and such intense political propaganda as Germany had never seen before. The noisy slogans, the fierce national hymns, the clenched fists, the shouting orators struck terror in the heart of the quiet and sensitive Wiechert. Nevertheless, these media of mass appeal had their effect upon the people and in January, 1933, Hitler became the new German Chancellor.

With the triumph of National Socialism, most of the great and internationally known German writers fled their home country. Wiechert, who in his autobiography says that he felt himself to be the conscience of his people, stayed in Germany, speaking and writing as long as he possibly could. Of those belonging to the so-called "Inner Emigration," he beyond doubt made himself the most courageous and outstanding figure. For his decision to stay and protest, Wiechert paid no little price.

That same year, at the University of Munich, the poet delivered the address "Der Dichter und die Jugend," the first of his famous "Reden an die deutsche Jugend." Cognizant of the perilous trend of education under the National Socialist regime, Wiechert in this historic address seeks

to lead German youth back to its only true and safe source of inspiration: its great poets. In a loud and noisy world, he reminds his student audience, the poets are "die Bewahrer des Unvergänglichen" and "die stillen Mahner."[8] Amid all the change of times and ideas, the changeless reposes in their hands. "In allem Verirrten und Angstvollen der Welt lösen und binden sie die Fäden der grossen Ordnung, machen das Trübe klar, das Verwirrte einfach, das Schmerzliche heilig. Unter ihren Händen hört der Mensch auf, ein Spielball dunkler Gewalten zu sein."[9]

During the course of the speech, Wiechert compares youth of his own time with that of the present. In many ways, he tells his young friends, they are better off than those of a previous generation. And yet, he must admit, he is filled with concern about them. "Ihr seid die erste Jugend, die, seit ich lebe, etwas empfangen hat, was wir niemals empfingen: Macht. Und obwohl ich zeit meines Lebens dafür gekämpft habe, dass die Jugend Raum bekomme, einen grossen und einen ganz selbständigen, ihr eigenen Raum, so erfüllt es mich mit Sorge, dass dieser Raum mit Macht erfüllt wird, weil es mir als eine Gefährdung nicht etwa der Rechte der Älteren erscheint, sondern als die Gefährdung eines biologischen Gesetzes: dass Recht ein Attribut der Reife ist, ein zu erwerbendes und nicht ein Geschenktes."[10]

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[8] An die deutsche Jugend, p. 52.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 54.

He mentions the noise and clamor of the time, the fireworks, the slogans, the speeches. "Von allem diesem ist für mein Gefühl zwar etwas viel da, aber mein Gefühl war immer dafür, die grossen und schweren Dinge schweigend zu tun. Auch der Krieg ist schweigend geschlagen worden, und Aufrufe und Reden waren eine Sache der höheren Stäbe."[11]

Sensing the arrogance of his age and the tendency to use power for oppression and Gleichschaltung, he appeals to the Munich students to be humble. German youth is to be humble not before men, but before God, for he to whom power is entrusted, must use it not only to bend men but also to lift them up. Toward the close of the speech the poet emphasizes once more that he has not come only as a well-wisher of youth but also as a "Mahnender," as "ein Mensch, in dem die Welt sich anders spiegelt."[12] In appearing before them as a "Mahnender," he feels he is performing a task dictated by conscience. "Es ist kein Mangel an denen, die sich Dichter dieser Zeit nennen, die die Welle emporhebt und die von der Höhe dieser Welle zu Ihnen sprechen, laut und viel, bevor die Welle sie wieder begräbt. Aber es ist Mangel an denen, die tapfer genug sind, von der Sorge zu sprechen, die sie erfüllt. Meine Freunde, es wird viel gejubelt in unserer Zeit.... Aber, vergessen Sie nicht, es wird auch viel gelitten in einer Zeit, in der die Jugend auf den Stuhl des Richters gesetzt wird und den Stab zu

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[11] Ibid., p. 55.

[12] Ibid., p. 56.

brechen hat über Leben und Werk."[13]

The speech, though couched in careful language, could not be mistaken by those who heard it. It cut directly at the very roots of Nazism. The students, according to Wiechert's testimony, applauded loudly and demonstratively. The newspapers, however, reacted quite differently, and from this time on began to take a more positive stand against him. Up till then some of them had still shown an uncertain attitude. A man who could write Die Magd des Jürgen Doskocil was not beyond hope, they had speculated. As for Wiechert himself, he realized "dass ich aus einem Umworbenen nun ein Beobachteter geworden war."[14] Nevertheless, he did not change his manner of life. In the elections he voted either "nein" or not at all, and he continued to associate with his Jewish friends. And as for the Propaganda Ministry, its members were given renewed reason for lamenting: "Ja, er ist ein Zauberer, aber leider zaubert er nicht für uns."[15]

Two years later, in 1935, the Munich students invited Wiechert to lecture before them a second time. Though it had become increasingly dangerous to speak out, the poet once more accepted. He writes that the decision caused him no struggle. "Es gab nur die schwere Erkenntnis, wohin

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 307.

[15] Ibid., p. 254.

der Weg führen musste, eine ganz klare, nüchterne und alles voraussehende Erkenntnis."[16] His own fate, he avers, appeared to him of little account in making this dangerous decision. Rather, he felt impelled to think of the many who looked to him for courage, light, and guidance.

Wiechert delivered his second lecture, known as "Der Dichter und seine Zeit," in a highly charged atmosphere. He was told in advance that Himmler might be among his listeners. But he spoke without fear, in fact, with a sense of great security. "Es gibt eine sittliche Gewissheit, die grösser ist als alle anderen Gewissheiten der Welt."[17]

In this second address, Wiechert assures his young friends that he, like others, is interested in the resurrection of Germany. But for poets, he points out, weddings and funerals are quiet things, and the quietest thing of all is a resurrection. When a stone is rolled away from a grave, the children and the birds may be noisy, but the poets cover their eyes with their hands "weil nun erschienen ist, gebunden in Tücher, der Lazarus der Völker."[18] And while others lift the resurrected one on their shoulders and carry him about in triumph, the poets go quietly aside to consider how the "Rausch der Zeit" may be transformed into "ein kleines Werk der Ewigkeit."[19]

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[16] Ibid., p. 313.

[17] Ibid., p. 314.

[18] An die deutsche Jugend, p. 72.

[19] Ibid.

He reminds his student audience that there is one thing which human beings never cease doing, that is, mistaking their own times for eternity. Since men seem to slip farther and farther away from the divine the longer they live, they deify the times, because there is always the apprehension that without the divine the life of man is a fool's comedy. And so, remarks Wiechert, men form their great concepts - those of the hero, the prophet, the poet - not according to the reflection of the divine, but according to the standards of the times in which they live; and that is how they arrive at the conclusion that only he is a poet who is inspired to his work by the times.

In view of this, Wiechert warns against arranging a ceremonial funeral for the living, and acting as if the throne of poetry belonged only to youth and to the present. The contemporary (Nazi) bards, he asserts, are young — between twenty and twenty-five — and they would like to number the older poets among the dead "weil in unseren kümmerlichen Werken nur von Verstorbenen die Rede sei, von Gott etwa, von Recht, von der Liebe oder gar vom grossen Krieg. Und es gibt unter ihnen solche, die mit fünfundzwanzig Jahren durch die Lande ziehen und nicht nur ihre Blutgesänge singen, sondern aus ihrem Leben erzählen."[20]

The poet points out in quiet and stately prose that no individual and no time are spared the experience of

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[20] Ibid., p. 75.

seeing their accomplishments considered foolishness and their gods mocked as idols. He expresses fear that in time of turmoil man wants to put his hand on everything which he thinks movable, and in so doing he shows a lack of reverence before that which is immovable. Sometimes he even thinks a whole people can be formed by his hand exactly as he would like it.

Turning from the would-be poets and their "Blutgesänge," Wiechert next berates the writers of literary criticism. No longer, he courageously asserts, is it a question of whether a poem, a novel, or a drama can stand before the tribunal of art, but whether it can stand before the tribunal of political opinion.

He makes clear that not only art is being prostituted for cheap political purposes, but also education. He mentions an article on the future study of German, written by the headmaster of a school, in which this "Volkserneuerer" demands that hereafter youth must be educated toward a new heroism and taught to view as a matter of indifference whether the actions of the poetical or actual hero are noble or ignoble, good or evil. "Es sei ferner eine Forderung überwundener Zeiten, dass die Jugend zur Ehrfurcht vor sittlicher Grösse geführt werde, weil die Jugend heute auf den Schulen bereits, von den Universitäten ganz zu schweigen, dahin zu führen sei, dass sie - ich zitiere -: 'mit kaltem Blick die Anarchie einer moralischen Welt bejahe.' Nun ist immerhin mit einigem Trost festzustellen, dass dieses Evangelium

eines Kathederübermenschen nicht ganz ohne Widerspruch geblieben ist. Eine grosse westdeutsche Zeitung hat mich gebeten, zu sagen, was ich als Dichter zu diesem Kapitel der Zeit zu sagen vermöchte."[21]

In saying what he feels should be said "zu diesem Kapitel," Wiechert places over against the Nazi gospel the message of the prophets, the seers, and the poets of all ages. These, he says, want to raise before men that which is obscured and often outraged in the world: truth, justice, freedom, goodness, love, and above all the meaning and the law of a great world order. They want to make men better, more trusting, braver, purer.

Wiechert feels it necessary to remind his audience that it probably is the fate of all revolutions that their reformers and hangers-on falsify the meaning of the reform, that they want not only the abolition of the kingship but also the severed head of the king, that they depose not only the preachers but also God. "Dass sie glauben, es müsse jeder Sextaner eine deutsche Eiche in die Faust bekommen, um zu 'handeln.'"[22] In closing he says of his fanatic contemporaries: "Sie wissen nicht, dass die Geschichte eines Volkes schon die ewigen Züge trägt, an denen subalterne Hände nichts mehr ändern können. Sie wissen nicht, dass der Strom jahrtausendalten Blutes nicht mit Phrasen in ein

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[21] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[22] Ibid., p. 83.

anderes Bett zu lenken ist. Sie wissen nicht, wie still das wirklich Heroische über die Erde geht, obwohl sie nur in das Gesicht des Volkes zu blicken brauchen, das seit zwanzig Jahren ein Heldentum schweigend trägt und tut.... Ja, es kann wohl sein, dass ein Volk aufhört, Recht und Unrecht zu unterscheiden und dass jeder Kampf ein 'Recht' ist. Aber dieses Volk steht schon auf einer jäh sich neigenden Ebene und das Gesetz seines Untergangs ist ihm schon geschrieben."[23]

These were unusually brave words to utter in the year 1935 and in the presence of National Socialist fanatics who believed their Reich would survive a thousand years. The words were in fact so courageous that Wiechert himself felt he might never have an opportunity of saying similar things in public again. "Ich weiss nicht," he remarks toward the close of his speech, "ob ich in wieder zwei Jahren zu Ihnen werde sprechen dürfen."[24]

The second Munich speech, like the first, was loudly applauded by the student group. Many demonstrated and shouted hurrah. Unfortunately, after the applause the courageous words were heeded by only a few – too few to stop the onward march of evil. As Wiechert himself later complained, "only the intoxication of the hour heard it, but the intoxication vanished and nothing remained but the beautiful words of a fool."[25]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 85.

[25] Ibid., p. 123.

The quiet poet who for a second time had dared to berate the zealots and hotheads, was from now on not only a watched man but a marked man. A former army officer asked for a copy of the speech so that, supposedly, he might be able to refute attacks in the press, if such should follow. He explicitly promised not to let Wiechert's manuscript get out of his hands. However, the officer promptly broke his promise and turned the speech over to the authorities.

Wiechert's publisher refused to print the speech. But that made little difference. The address had been taken down in shorthand and was circulated clandestinely in numerous copies far outside the borders of Germany. It was first published in a Chilean periodical in 1943 and was, in booklet form, among the earliest of Wiechert's works to reach this country.[26] William Webb Pusey in a review in Monatshefte aptly called it "a quiet, brave reminder of eternal verities among noisy slogans and shibboleths, a light and hope for some, and a remarkable tribute to its author's integrity and prescience."[27]

The autobiographical Wälder und Menschen, which followed in 1936, describes the author's youth, and therefore hardly furnished any occasion for direct reference to or criticism of the National Socialist movement. Yet in it

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[26] William Webb Pusey, "Der Dichter und die Zeit," Monatshefte, XXXIX (1947), p. 200.

[27] Ibid.

Wiechert showed that he was determined to write no differently than before. He makes, for instance, no effort to hide his affection and respect for the Jewish race. He fondly tells of a Jewish fish peddler in his native Masuria. This Jew, he takes pains to point out, was a man who paid well and promptly, and who was kindly thought of by his family. "Ein ordentlicher Mann," Wiechert describes him, 'den wir Kinder gern hatten und dessen tiefen Kehllauten wir mit immer neuer Bewunderung lauschten."[28] In the same work Wiechert unashamedly admits his admiration, in student days, for the Jewish poet Heine.

Earlier, too, in a Novelle called Die Gebärde, written in 1932, Wiechert had come to the defense of the Jews. The story just mentioned sets forth very impressively the spiritual coarseness of anti-semitism. The Jewish young man Eli Kaback is repeatedly turned out of "polite society" with the same unfriendly and menacing "Gebärde." Driven to despair, he finally commits suicide. A friend at this juncture remarks: "Niemand weiss, weshalb Eli es getan hat, aber wir alle waren seine Mörder. Schatten, die hinter ihm herschlichen, jahrelang, und jeder trennte einen Nerv seines Lebens durch. Und bei dem letzten Schnitt stürzte er ins Bodenlose ... Kinder schon haben diese Gebärde, Lehrer, Staatsanwälte, Väter, Präsidenten ... nur das Tier hat sie nicht..."[29]

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[28] Wälder und Menschen, p. 55.

[29] Die Gebärde (Zürich: Arche-Verlag, 1947), pp. 24-25.

The appeal to heed not timely phrases and political slogans, but the eternal truths of which the poets sing, is also made in a small booklet, written in 1937, called Von den treuen Begleitern. Wiechert in this touching essay discusses four poems which throughout his life have been his faithful companions: Matthias Claudius' "Abendlied," Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied," Hölderlin's "Abendphantasie" and Mörike's "Verborgenheit." Probably sensing what lies before him, he writes: "Mühe und Arbeit verheissen sich mir täglich sicherer."[30] But the hard road of the future, as well as the hard road of the past, he wishes to travel in the companionship of the poets, who form the vanguard of humanity, the vanguard against "die Verständigen, die Zweckvollen, die tätig Erfolgreichen."[31] A people, he bravely warns, can dethrone its rulers with impunity or even with gain, but it cannot dethrone its poets without selling its birthright or showing evidence of decay.

In 1937 Wiechert offered his publication firm the manuscript of Der weisse Büffel oder Von der grossen Gerechtigkeit. The allegory is a thinly-veiled attack on Nazi tyranny and it is not surprising that publication was refused. Wiechert subsequently tried to use it for the purposes of a Vortrag, but immediately upon the first public reading it was branded as "Widerstandsliteratur" and as a "Versuch,

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[30] Von den treuen Begleitern (Zürich: Scientia-Verlag, 1945), p. 18.

[31] Ibid., p. 7.

in dichterischer Tarnung politisches Schindluder zu treiben."[32]

Der weisse Büffel is the legend of the boy Vasudeva, born in a little village on the banks of the Ganges. His mother instructs him: "Die Götter, denen du dienst, haben nicht erlaubt, dass wir Blut vergiessen – und nicht immer ist der Pfeil der beste Weg zur Gerechtigkeit."[33] This teaching the boy cannot accept and with a group of comrades he goes out to find for himself other gods, such as will allow violence. In the new life and environment, where he and his friends are a law unto themselves, Vasudeva comes to see that "wer in der Macht sei, auch neben der Sünde sei."[34]

Realizing his error, he goes back to live with his mother for a short time. Then he spends some years with a saint, whereupon he feels compelled to return to his native village to help and heal the poor and sick. One day two strange horsemen come through the village. A white buffalo, the property of a poor man, hinders their progress in a narrow passageway. A man who calls himself "ein Heerführer des Statthalters" kills the buffalo with a lance and then, with his companion, proceeds to ride over its dead body. Vasudeva says he will go to the king to get justice.

In the royal city, Vasudeva finds a golden image of the king, before which all men do reverence. He himself

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[32] Ebeling, Ernst Wiechert, p. 39.

[33] Der weisse Büffel oder Von der grossen Gerechtigkeit (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1951), p. 16.

[34] Ibid., p. 29.

refuses, also when he is arrested and brought before the monarch in person. The king offers him his life and a hundred white buffaloes if he will bow before the image. But Vasudeva, mindful of his mother's moral teachings, does not yield. In explaining his action, he tells the tyrant that life is more than what he believes it is. "Du siehst es, wie die Kinder es sehen .... Sie legen einen Kinderpfeil auf einen Kinderbogen und dünken sich Krieger.... Du trägst das Schwert des Landes und kannst es fallen lassen, und so meinst du, du seist ein Herr des Lebens. Aber du bist nur, was ich damals war: ein Knecht des Lebens. Denn deine Begierden treiben dich, deine Ängste, deine Verzweiflungen."[35]

The king propounds this doctrine: "Nicht das Recht.... Nicht die Liebe.... Nur der Schrecken. Er macht stumm und gehorsam. Er lähmt das Mark, die Hand, die Pläne.... Er ist der beste Wächter um den Thron."[36] Vasudeva in turn reminds him that his methods of terror are signs of weakness. "Die Marter ist immer da, wenn die Macht ohnmächtig wird. Sie ist das Lächeln des Lügners über seiner Angst. Aber alle Marter mündet in den Tod.... Du kannst das Leben auslöschen, Herr, aber nicht den Tod. Immer bleibt den Armen noch etwas, was du ihnen nicht nehmen kannst."[37] In the end Vasudeva is put to death, but the king subsequently

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[35] Ibid., p. 77.

[36] Ibid., p. 80.

[37] Ibid., p. 78.

realizes that justice is of greater value than power, and he abandons his throne to do penance.

How keenly Wiechert began to realize that National Socialism would involve him and his country in spiritual tragedy, seems evident from another essay which he wrote in 1937. This has the title Vom Trost der Welt and, like Von den treuen Begleitern, is written in impeccable prose. Here the poet actually contemplates what he should do in a possible future "wenn alle Menschenrechte aufgehoben wären und das Individuum ein Spielball aller Elemente würde."[38] Having given a list of what he considers the imperishable books (with the Bible in first place and Goethe in second), he recommends that young people not only read these books but also memorize important parts of them. The reason given for memorizing is significant and foreboding: "da es ja leicht sein könnte, dass in den Zeiten mancher Not auch dieser Besitz ihnen geraubt würde."[39]

There are indeed evidences, he points out, that the German people are being turned away from Goethe. He quotes from a recent periodical and notes a "betonte Feindlichkeit" toward the classic culture of the past.[40] It would be a very painful thing, he feels, if Goethe should have to depart "zu anderen Völkern, die ihn noch ehren."[41] Such words in

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[38] Vom bleibenden Gewinn (Zürich: Arche-Verlag, 1951), p. 31.

[39] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[40] Ibid., p. 43.

[41] Ibid., p. 44.

1938 must have caused many to bristle.

In the essay Eine Mauer um uns baue, written in 1937, one also senses a note of impending tragedy. The title is taken from a seventeenth-century Kirchenlied and was suggested to Wiechert after reading Hans Carossa's poem "Ach, unser Stern ist voll Gefahr." The poem tells how, during the troubles of the Thirty Years' War, an old woman prayed "Eine Mauer um uns baue ..." and how, on the next morning, she found her cottage so hidden by walls of snow that it was invisible to the plundering soldiers that passed by.

Amid the confusion and danger of his contemporary world, Wiechert relates, he cannot forget that bit of verse. There are for him evenings "an denen ein zerrissener Himmel über einer fahlen und drohenden Erde hängt. An dem die Krähen heimatlos schreien und der Wind wie über ein Niemandsland geht. Dann kann ich am Gartenzaun stehen, lange Zeit, nicht wie ein verlorener Mensch, aber gleich einem, der 'durch einen Spiegel in einem dunklen Wort' sieht, und dann sage ich leise: 'Eine Mauer um uns baue ...'"[42]

In this essay, Wiechert applies the line particularly to his many unseen friends and supporters who, he hopes, are building this protective wall around him. He thanks them for their many letters, which bring him encouragement. And he asks them not to be concerned about his future. His is the faith expressed in the comforting Kirchenlied. "Mir

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[42] Ibid., p. 76.

aber ist früh geschenkt worden, dass ich dieses Glaubens gewiss sein darf. Und deshalb soll niemand sich um mich sorgen oder kränken."[43]

During the Spring of 1938 there was held the famous plebiscite relative to the Austrian Anschluss. A terrorized people voted overwhelmingly for it. Wiechert refused to vote - a matter which did, of course, not go unnoticed. The kindly, quiet poet felt sick to see the land of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, the silent forests and the plains of Stifter fuse with the noisy provinces of conquerors.

Then came the disturbing news concerning Pastor Niemöller. After a long imprisonment, the courageous anti-Nazi spokesman had at last been brought to trial. The jury had decided on a prison term which, however, it considered as having already been served. But on that same day the man who should have been released, was dropped off into a concentration camp – on highest orders, it was said. Those who knew something about Nazi methods, predicted he would languish there and die.

Wiechert, who as "Johannes" tells the story in the third person in Der Totenwald, discloses that he did not know the pastor. But he respected him highly for having confessed his faith courageously and having been a light in darkness for many. And from the first night after he

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[43] Ibid., p. 84.

heard the news, he repeatedly dreamed he saw this man's face emerging out of the shadows of the intermediate realm. He writes:

> Damals erkannte Johannes, dass es ihm bestimmt sein würde, mit diesem Haupt zusammen zu leiden. Nicht, dass er es erlösen würde, nicht einmal dass er ihm helfen würde. Aber von dem stillen, einsamen Blick würde ihm die Kraft und die Verpflichtung herkommen, aus dem Sicheren in das Unsichere zu treten, aus dem Schweigenden in das Redende, aus dem Geknechteten in die Freiheit, und sei es auch nur die Freiheit des Gewissens. Keinem Menschen würde geholfen werden, aber dem Gesetz würde geholfen werden, das nicht an sich da ist, ein Aussenseiendes, sondern das in den Händen der Menschen ruht, die sich zu ihm bekennen, und das zerbröckelt und zerfällt, wenn die Hände des Tragens und die Lippen des Bekennens müde werden.[44]

In a speech just made on the annexation of Austria, the Führer had said: "Recht muss Recht sein, auch für Deutsche." This sentence Wiechert now quoted in a letter of complaint to the branch office of the Party in his district. He declared his withdrawal from all welfare agencies. He added the remark that from now on he would give his support only to the wife and children of the captive pastor "solange eben, bis dieses Wort auch auf diesen angewendet werde statt auf den nebelhaften und demagogischen Begriff aller Deutschen."[45]

The inevitable now happened. Shortly after, three Gestapo agents entered his home at Hof Gagert and searched through his diaries, letters, and other belongings. After being placed for some weeks under protective custody in

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[44] Der Totenwald (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1948), pp. 7-8.

[45] Ibid., p. 9.

Munich, he was transferred to the infamous camp which the world knew as Buchenwald but which Wiechert and his fellow prisoners called the "Totenwald." Here the poet was first put to work as a stone carrier; subsequently he was joined to the "surface drainage crew" until his hands and feet became so fiercely swollen that he had to be given lighter work. Except for help granted him by his proletarian fellow prisoners, Wiechert might never have survived, for he was weak, tubercular, and now almost fifty years of age. The experience once more convulsed him spiritually. Like Jons during the Nazi period, he saw "die Sterne schwanken, nach denen er aufgeblickt hatte. Unveränderliche Gesetze wurden von Menschenhänden verändert, und vieles, was er auf einen ewigen Thron gestellt hatte, sah er in den Staub gezogen."[46]

The book in which the author subsequently described the physical, mental, and spiritual anguish of those days, namely Der Totenwald, was dedicated "to the dead, in memory; to the living, in shame; to those to come, in warning." It could not be written immediately when, in August 1938, Wiechert emerged from Buchenwald. The author was a sick man; moreover, the horrors of the past months were still too fresh in his mind. He could not write with blood, he explains.

Shortly after his release, Wiechert was summoned to a "Dichtertagung" in Weimar. After some consultation with intimate friends, the poet decided it might be best to attend.

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[46] Die Furchen, p. 288.

The spiritual and cultural quality of the speeches, he notes, was "erbärmlich," and he sat through it all with a stony face. Later he could think of this gathering of "drunken authors" only with a shudder. The invitation, it subsequently appeared, had been extended only by mistake; and he was never again invited to a similar occasion. He was shut out from the Reichsschrifttumskammer and then again taken in. His publishers were forbidden to list his books in their catalogues, and, in the books themselves, they were told not to indicate the number and size of the editions. Furthermore, the book shops were forbidden to display his works in their windows. And the poet's correspondence and telephone calls were carefully watched.

Wiechert now first turned his attention to the novel Das einfache Leben (1939) and then to the first volume of Die Jeromin-Kinder. When the manuscript of the latter was sent to the censor, it was pronounced "staatsfeindlich" and a remarkable product for a man "der schon einmal zur Erziehung durch ein Lager gegangen sei."[47] The book was furthermore criticized for "Ueberfluss an Altem Testament" and "Mangel an Lebensfreude."[48] Consequently it was not published till after the war.

The Second World War, actually already launched in the autumn of 1938 with the invasion of the Sudetenland,

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[47] Jahre und Zeiten, pp. 354-355.

[48] Ibid., p. 355.

did not come as a surprise to Wiechert. He had never had any doubt that the National Socialists would want more than the "Erneuerung" of the German people alone. When once the war had begun, he felt that not much could be done about it except to fill the heart with strength and patience and to await the catastrophe - the catastrophe which he had often foretold. Then would come the time "die Hand an das eingestürzte und verbrannte Haus zu legen."[49]

Wiechert not only waited for the catastrophe, he says that he prayed for it.[50] A victory for Germany, he realized, would have been more than a victory of arms. It would have been a "Sieg der Gewalt, des Bösen und Unmenschlichen."[51] Instead of giving living space to the Germans, it would have meant the enslavement of half the world. "Auf einer solchen Erde zu leben, würde nicht nur für uns unmöglich geworden sein, es würde die Wurzeln aller durchschnitten haben, die im Guten, Rechten und Wahren zu leben gewillt waren und anders nicht leben konnten. Von einer solchen Erde gab es nur die Flucht in einen ihrer unberührten Teile oder in den Tod."[52]

When the collapse came, Wiechert was mightily stirred and inexpressibly grateful. He writes that he did not

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[49] Ibid., p. 351.

[50] Ibid., p. 357.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

think first of himself or of his fatherland. "Ich dachte nur, dass das Beil aufhören würde, zu fallen; dass die Galgen stürzen und vermodern würden; dass in den Kellern der Tod aufhören würde, umzugehen; dass Frauen und Kinder das Grauen und die Tränen aus ihren Augen wischen würden; dass eine neue Erde kommen würde."[53]

To build a new earth, Wiechert felt, it was necessary first of all to build a new Germany. That, in turn, would involve several things. These things the poet sought to outline in his third Munich speech to German youth in 1945.

The first thing which the poet impresses upon his people in this famous and controversial address is the fact that they are guilty and that it may take a whole century for Germany to wash the guilt from her hands. And guilt, he emphasizes, demands atonement, long and hard atonement. Happiness and peace are not for the Germans, since they have made others unhappy, homeless, and without peace. For Germany, he feels, the stern law was written: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, blood for blood!" Too long - for twelve disgraceful years - Germans have judged according to the law of the "superman": "An eye for nothing, a tooth for nothing, blood for nothing!" A juster sentence is being pronounced upon them than they pronounced upon others. Germany's shame can be washed away only with repentance and with the words of the prodigal son: "Father, I have sinned and henceforth will sin no more."

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[53] Ibid., p. 377.

Having repented, Germany is to make a new beginning. The executioners, the charlatans, the false prophets are to be wiped off the earth. But that must be done without hatred, even as the plow turns the weeds without hatred. This, to Wiechert, does not mean that it should be done with mercy, for he who has mercy with leprosy is undone.

In destroying the Nazi state and its criminals, Wiechert does not want the righteous destroyed with the unrighteous. After all, not the whole nation gave its hand without hesitation to murder. Thousands turned away from the demons and slowly they became hundreds of thousands and millions.

Coming to the climax of his address, Wiechert emphasizes that no new world will come into bloom unless it is saturated with love. The supreme sin of the Nazis, in Wiechert's opinion, was their preaching of hatred. Now youth must go out to the poorest of peoples with light and hope and healing. "Und alles, was ihr tut, sollt ihr ja tun, um das Leid zu mindern. Lasst die am Besitz Hängenden ihre Häuser und ihren Hausrat ausgraben aus dem Schutt der Zerstörung. Ihr aber sollt etwas anderes ausgraben, was tiefer begraben liegt als dieses: ihr sollt Gott ausgraben unter den Trümmern des Antichrist, gleichviel, welchen Namen ihr ihm gebt. Und ihr sollt die Liebe ausgraben unter den Trümmern des Hasses. Und ihr sollt die Wahrheit wieder ausgraben und das Recht und die Freiheit...."[54]

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[54] An die deutsche Jugend, pp. 131-132.

CHAPTER VIII

ART AND SCIENCE

In his "Brief an einen jungen Dichter," Wiechert sets forth what he considers to be the role of the artist, more particularly of the poet. That role he conceives to be one of a humble and devoted servant of mankind. Art is never to be looked upon in terms of Herrschaft, but only in terms of Dienst. "Und so," he writes to his youthful correspondent and poet, "ist dieses ... das erste, das ich Ihnen sagen muss: dass ein Dichter nur werden kann, wer zu dienen bereit ist."[1] Now the ministry of a poet must not be like that of an unfaithful servant, who constantly casts furtive glances at his master to see whether he is getting his approval, but rather like that of a faithful servant, who tills the field so that there may be bread for the children of his people. The master, after all, may change, but the field remains and it must be made to bear fruit.

Unfortunately, Wiechert finds, not all those who would like to be considered artists, are interested in this type of service. Not all are concerned about providing food for the hungry and suffering children of men. There are those who, posing as realists or naturalists, hand out filth rather than food. There are those "die um die billige Lust der Menschen wissen, die Lust der Sinne und die von den

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[1] Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 92.

Bordellen der Städte und denen ihrer eigenen Seele erzählen, damit sie viele Genossen fänden bei diesem Gericht ihrer Tafel."[2] So that they may not be shamefully accused, they pretend to be suffering inwardly when they make their obscene disclosures. They say they must hold a mirror in front of men so that these may wake up and be horrified at their own faces. They act as if, like Dante, they must make a pilgrimage through the hell of human immorality in order to tear the mask from the face of civilization. "Doch fühlen sie sich heimlich nicht unwohl bei dieser Wanderung, gleich einer verderbten Sittenpolizei, die aus einem traurigen Amt ein grinsendes Vergnügen macht. Und vergeuden ihre Gabe wie ein schamloser Knecht, der die Mägde herbeiruft, wenn er seine Tiere zur Paarung treibt."[3]

There are also those, observes Wiechert, who sow the seed of hatred. These do not write for God's sake but for the sake of a "Menschenpartei." Such writers the poet compares to depraved old men who furnish intoxicating liquor to young boys in order that these may lift evil hands against each other.

Again, there are those who are too cowardly to hate and who therefore dip their pens not in blood, but in saliva. These, writes Wiechert, stamp through the world like rabble through a mansion, tearing down from the walls what is an affront to their vulgar souls, namely beauty and age, nobility and the past. They are not ready to stop wrecking until

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

the world has become as mean and as low as they themselves, so that in the end they can say: "Now we feel at home."

Among the would-be artists Wiechert also discerns certain youths who believe that the world and wisdom began with them. These do not ask whether there is any need for their contribution, but whether there is any need at all for anything which existed before them: elders, for instance, or animals, or religion, or mercy. At the age of twenty-five they write "die Biographie ihrer Schlafzimmer" and point with both their hands "auf ihre traurige Blösse ..., wie kranke Greise an den offenen Fenstern ihrer Hinterhöfe."[4]

All of these the poet calls "Zuhälter der Kunst" and around them press thousands who are the "Zuhälter der Zuhälter," the "Anreisser ihrer Schande," the "Ausrufer des Baal."[5]

Yet no one, Wiechert insists, has ever set us free from the law that art must minister and serve. And to serve man means not only to provide him with physical bread, for man "shall not live by bread alone," as the Bible has it. Art is to serve man with truth and solace and kindness; it is to bring help and healing to the weary and burdened among men and nations. Those who use art for this purpose serve God, whose will is "dass allen Menschen geholfen werde."[6]

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[4] Ibid., p. 93.

[5] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

[6] Ibid., p. 94.

To be a poet is not to belong to an outward "community of poets" organized in academies, federations, and clubs. It is to belong to an invisible and spiritual community of dedicated men. It is to belong to the "Gemeinde der dienenden Brüder."[7] The true poet is one who has the benediction of God. "Gesegnet, mein Bruder, ist jeder, der dienen darf, wieviel mehr derjenige, dem geschenkt wurde, immer wieder aus dem Chaos eine Welt zu schöpfen."[8]

It is just that which is the privilege of the poet: to help bring some order into the chaos of good and evil, of injustice, of lies, of hate, and of bloody deeds. God has given him the task "das Trübe klar, das Kreisende still, das Verwirrte einfach zu machen."[9] As in medieval days disconsolate and despairing men looked up confidently to the images of the saints in a cathedral, so today they must be able to look up confidently to the images which the poets are erecting above the chaos of the world. The name of a poet is of no importance, since every poet is simply a mediator. What is important is his work, for that is of God. The poet is to be like Rilke, who said: "Ich gehe immer von Tor zu Tor, verregnet und verbrannt." Art which serves an inferior ideal falls short of eternity.

The exalted ministry of art is set forth by Wiechert in other writings. In the essay "Die Tafeln des Grauens," for instance, he points out that art is to serve man by renewing and transforming him. This means that art may have

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 95.

[9] Ibid.

the duty of exposing the ugly, of revealing man to himself, of disclosing the demon in him and in his world. It may have to reveal "den Abgrund, dessen dünne Decke uns alle trägt."[10] Art, therefore, is not to be associated first of all with beauty but rather with revelation. Face to face with such revelation man cannot remain the same. "Hier und da wird einer verwandelt werden. Aus einem Prahlenden in einen Schweigsamen. Aus einem Lobsingenden in einen Gebeugten. Und vielleicht aus einem Schatten des 20. Jahrhunderts in einen Menschen. Denn alle grosse Kunst trachtet nach Verwandlung, weil es vor den Urbildern nur Verwandlung oder Vernichtung gibt."[11] In Missa, Amadeus expresses the belief that an author, after having written a book, should ask himself what it has done for him. If he has written a good book, he should be a better man. Claudius or Mozart, he believes, must have had a beautiful face when he laid aside his pen. "So wie ein Engel, der seine Botschaft ausgerichtet hat und die Flügel wieder auftut."[12]

One of the finest passages which make clear Wiechert's view of art is found in Die Furchen. There Jons says to his crippled brother Christean, who has developed into a sculptor: "Du bist ein sinnvoll Spielender, verstehst du? Wer nur spielt und das Spielzug wieder wegtut, ist ein Kind.

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[10] Ibid., p. 174.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Missa, p. 194.

Aber wer spielt, um aus dem Spielzeug ein Leben zu machen, ja einen Gottesdienst, der ist ein Künstler. Es ist kein grosser Unterschied dazwischen, ein nur fliessender, und manche machen ein Handwerk daraus, ein Geschäft. Aber die wirklichen sind wie Gottes Kinder in meinen Augen. Erfüllte, aus denen die Gnade fliesst."[13]

Holding such ideas as these, it is no wonder that Wiechert should express the view that the quality of a civilization can be best judged by its art. The road of humanity cannot be ascertained first of all from politics or economics, but from the "heimlicheren, aber untrüglicheren Zeichen der Kunst," he maintains in Das zerstörte Menschengesicht.[14] A people's attitude toward Goethe, Stifter, or Keller is a more reliable criterion of its civilization than the number of its jobless. Only those who appraised National Socialism in terms of what it was doing to its poets and seers were able at an early stage to fathom its depravity and to foresee its ultimate consequences.

For Wiechert art is indispensable to a sound civilization. Like religion, it is much closer to the eternal than philosophy or politics. Art is "das Kindliche des Menschen," "das Spiel, das Zwecklose."[15] For that reason art, like a child, is less prone to make serious mistakes or to go far astray. It is concerned with the fundamental, the primitive,

[13] Die Furchen, p. 303.

[14] Das zerstörte Menschengesicht (Olten: Vereinigung Oltener Bücherfreunde, 1948), p. 30.

[15] Ibid., p. 33.

the things still found "auf dem Grunde der Völker."[16] It deals with the childlike threads from which the fabric of eternity is made.

Great art, as Wiechert sees it, is also clarification and transfiguration of life. It is exemplified by Goethe, Shakespeare, Homer, the Psalmists, the prophet Isaiah, who are immortal. He who is a poet by the grace of God writes not for today or for tomorrow, but for the ages. Mankind would do well to listen to him. "Nehmt ihn auf in eure Häuser und Herzen. Einmal greift ihr ja doch zu seinen Versen und seinen Büchern. Wenn die gewohnten Grunde wanken und ihr eure letzte Zuflucht zur Bibel nehmt oder zu den Worten dieser Berauschten. Denn auch die Psalmisten und Propheten, was sind sie anders als die Dichter Gottes?"[17]

With the advancement of what we call civilization, Wiechert feels, many of the fundamental concepts of culture have been changed. They have passed from the sphere of the transcendental to that of the material. As a result we increasingly get politicians instead of statesmen, generals instead of commanders ("Feldherren"), preachers instead of pastors, writers instead of poets. What was formerly a sacred calling has now become a craft, "ja ein ganzer Stand mit 'Interessen-Vertretungen'."[18] We have, as a result of

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 267.

[18] Ibid., p. 282.

our changed ideas and values, stepped out of the "stille Dämmerung der Kultur" into "das harte Licht der Zivilisation."[19]

There are several differences, Wiechert indicates, between the Schriftsteller and the Dichter. The former is a son of his age, a servant of the ratio; his element is that of light and clarity. The poet is timeless, a servant of "das Magische"; his element is the twilight "aus dem die rötlichen Morgen wie eine erste Schöpfung sich erheben."[20] The Schriftsteller presents everything, with nothing further beyond; the poet presents merely the foreground, behind which we can discern "das Ganze und das Letzte."[21] One resembles the photographer who simply gets the Abbild, the other the painter who also gets the Sinnbild. The Schriftsteller is always inadequate to his task, for life has never been so simple that the eye of a lens could catch it.

The modern world, particularly the world of the West, seems to Wiechert to have a much closer affinity to the Schriftsteller than to the Dichter. For that reason, he believes, there is in modern writing so much emphasis on experimentation, technique, and craftsmanship. For a Schriftsteller a brilliant style is almost a necessity; nothing else would show up under the "Lichtreklamen des

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 426.

[21] Ibid.

heutigen Menschengeistes."[22] But it was not a necessity in an earlier age - an age which still listened quietly and reverently to the Word of God. "Die Bibel hat keinen 'glänzenden' Stil."[23]

The modern theater, too, makes much use of elaborate techniques. There is a vast difference between the stage of Reinhardt and the stage of Shakespeare. But Wiechert is sure that the modern stage is in no way better able to reveal the eternal. The Marionetten-Theater proved that no great technique was necessary "um das Schicksal zu zeigen."[24] A human face full of expression still means incomparably more than anything produced by the art of make-up.

Modern emphasis on language and style disconcerts Wiechert. Since language and style change, they do not belong to the absolutes of art. The works of Raabe are replete with mistakes of composition and style, but they are nevertheless the works of a poet, and no one can deny that in reading them he sees the angels of God. "Wo aber sind die Engel des Schriftstellers, wenn wir die letzte Seite umgeschlagen haben?" asks the poet.[25]

Compared to the language of modern lyricism, Wiechert finds the verse of Goethe to be of naive simplicity and

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 428.

poverty. But word artistry and linguistic virtuosity are for him no essential elements of enduring poetry. In fact he sees in this "an die letzten Grenzen gehende Verfeinerung eines Kunstmittels"[26] a sign of decadence. He believes that in much modern poetry the importance is placed where it does not belong. Lasting art has always been more than a mere reflection of its time.

As for the literature of Germany before the last war, Wiechert looks upon it as decadent. The writers of this period, he believes, did not make history, they simply described it. For that they had everything necessary: a cool and sharp intellect, a cold eye, the ability to analyze, the dissecting knife, the steady hand. They saw life as it was, the naked, merciless facts; and they even saw what lay at the roots of this life. They laid it all bare, and when they had done that, they stepped back.

As Wiechert sees it, the writers of the pre-war period had intellect and wit — and with some of them wit became "zu einem kalten Hohn."[27] They saw the wretchedness of the times, suffered from it, and hated it. Especially did they suffer from the dominant type, the Bürger. But they hated him because they themselves were Bürger. As for their hatred, Wiechert traces it back to Nietzsche and Strindberg, and to a few of the French and Russians. He

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[26] Ibid., p. 429.

[27] Ibid., p. 397.

is sure that Freud, Adler, and James Joyce had much to do with their outlook. "Die Auflösung und Zerfaserung der Seele hatte längst vor ihnen begonnen."[28]

What was strange and uncanny about them, Wiechert observes, was the fact that they were through when they laid aside the surgeon's knife. They applied no bandages, no soothing ointments. They plowed open the soil but scattered no seed. "Und während sie noch dastanden vor der nackten, wartenden Erde und sich umsahen, was nun noch gleichzumachen wäre, kam ein anderer über das wartende Feld gestampft und warf seinen Distelsamen in die leeren Furchen. Die Gewalt kam, das Brutale, das Rohe, der totale Staat kam, Hitler kam."[29]

Modern literature, Wiechert fears, has been excessively filled with the biting acids of ridicule and scorn. Such acids serve to destroy the idols of the age, but they remain poisonous, and that which has been seared needs the healing herbs which can close the wound. Contempt and ridicule never presage a new culture; they indicate the decay of an old one. Young nations do not scoff, they venerate.

There is little in modern literature which Wiechert believes will long endure. When, upon leaving Germany, he had to select from his large library of four thousand volumes the modern books which he considered worthy of taking along, he could find only an armful. The others, he says, he left behind without a trace of sadness. "In die letzte

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., pp. 398-399.

Einsamkeit unsres Lebens nehmen wir nicht die Schriftsteller mit, so viele Stunden des Alltags wir auch mit ihnen verbracht haben mögen."[30] Particularly in the dark days of the Nazi regime it became clear to him how painfully inadequate modern literature is for satisfying man's deepest and greatest needs. He writes that he knows of no one who met death with the lines of some modern Schriftsteller, but he knows of many who faced tragedy and death triumphantly with a Gesangbuchvers.

For Wiechert the decadence of modern literature is not an isolated phenomenon. It is all a part of the decline of the West. Among the most revealing signs of that decline he sees Nazism. Unlike some, he is not at all of the opinion that this was a unique German product. Though it arose in Germany, he feels it might have raised its ugly head elsewhere as well. On this point he observes in his Goethe address: "Glauben Sie doch nicht, dass aus dem Urgrund eines einzigen Volkes das Böse aufgestanden ist. Dieses Volk war nichts als der Bote, der bereitwilligste und schnellste Bote, aber die Botschaft lag auf dem Tisch aller Völker, versiegelt und mit Scheu betrachtet, und es könnte die Zeit kommen, in der andere Völker sich zum Botendienst hergeben."[31] For this reason the defeat of the Nazis spells for him no permanent return to better days. In a passage in his autobiography he points out that Nazism "announced and revealed" the age of decline, but by no means concluded it.[32]

In the poet's estimation, Western civilization has been ailing since the time of Goethe and Beethoven. Already

[30] Ibid., p. 427.

[31] Das zerstörte Menschengesicht, p. 30.

[32] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 422.

before the First World War he believed to observe the "leisen Fiebererscheinungen"[33] of a sick continent. One thing which he feels is bringing ruin to the culture of the West is its intellectualism, its preoccupation with the things of the Geist. This trend of modernity he equates with the original sin of man in the Garden. He sees it as man's attempt to arrogate to himself the knowledge of good and evil. It is a demonic pride which vaunts the possibility of being like God. The saving quality of the child, of the poet, of the simple folk of the soil is this: "Sie sind noch nicht vom Geist besessen."[34] It is for this reason, Wiechert implies, that Christ said of the little children: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Wiechert expresses the same idea somewhat differently when he says that the fatal malady of the West is its "Entgötterung." In his autobiography he remarks: "Krisen der Zeit lassen sich in der Dichtung früh erkennen, und ich glaube, dass die tiefste Frage der Zeit heute um die Existenz Gottes geht."[35] Though the process of "Entgötterung" is particularly conspicuous in the field of literature, he believes it is perceptible in other fields of art as well. He sees it in the "Monumentalbauten" of the Third Reich, in the abstract art forms, in the modern dance. God was in the earlier religious and temple dances, but who, he asks, would dare say that God is in American jazz? The restless and horror-stricken

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[33] Ibid., p. 121.

[34] Die Furchen, p. 302.

[35] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 420.

spirit of modernity "macht aus der Melodie in der Musik etwas Ueberwundenes oder gar Verächtliches, ohne sich bewusst zu werden, dass das Melos sich Schritt für Schritt aus einer Menschheit zurückgezogen hat, die seiner nicht mehr fähig ist, weil sie die stillen Pfeiler verloren hat, zwischen denen die Bögen der Melodie ausgespannt werden können. Und sie glaubt, dass die Heiligsprechung des Rhythmus und die Konstruktion statt der lebendigen Fülle ein bewusster Fortschritt in das Zukünftige sei, ohne zu erkennen, dass darin nichts anderes liegt als eine unbewusste Beugung unter die noch nicht bewusst gewordenen Gesetze der Zeit."[36]

To become aware of the disintegration of modern civilization it is not necessary, Wiechert believes, to look at contemporaneous art. One need simply walk through the streets of the big cities, either in the morning or evening, when people go to or from work. From their faces one can read "das so schnell und unheimlich Verfallende der Welt."[37] The face of modern man, he fears, is no longer shaped as nature still fashions a leaf or a blossom. It is a face "hinter dem das Haltende und Bewahrende verschwunden ist, bis nichts als die Maske geblieben ist, aus deren Augen die grosse und letzte Angst blickt. Wie eine verlassene Larvenhülle, die der Wind über das Gras treibt."[38]

Here Wiechert once again shares the views of Max Picard.

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[36] Ibid., p. 423.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., p. 424.

The latter, too, had a theory of physiognomy which led him to believe that the modern human face indicates estrangement from God. It is set forth in such quasi-philosophic works as Das Menschengesicht (1929) and Die Grenzen der Physiognomik (1937). Wiechert in his last works, one of which is dedicated to Max Picard, often refers to the marred nature of the modern human face, and to his Goethe address he actually gave the title: "Das zerstörte Menschengesicht." A passage in Jahre und Zeiten indicates that Wiechert did not owe his ideas about the human face to Picard,[39] but Puknat is no doubt right in saying that Picard often furnished Wiechert further support and rationale for views he already held.[40]

No less critical than his attitude toward modern art is Wiechert's disposition toward modern science. From the first day that he was introduced to the natural sciences he disliked and distrusted them. Writing in his autobiography about the first lectures in a botany room, he complains: "An keiner Stelle der Universität hat die Eiseskälte der Wissenschaft und der vielen, die sie lehrten, mich so angerührt wie dort, und was mir mein junges Leben lang als ein lebendiger Zauber oder ein Gottesspiel erschienen war: Blatt und Blüte und Baum, war hier in eine tote Systematik eingereiht, in Tabellen geordnet, mit Buchstaben und Ziffern, und selbst Entwicklung, Werden und Vergehen waren wie von einem eisigen

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[39] Ibid., pp. 272-273.

[40] Puknat, "Max Picard and Ernst Wiechert", p. 376.

Hauch bedeckt, aus der Schöpfung herausgenommen und aus den Bezirken der Schönheit und des Wunders in die einer froststarrenden Gesetzlichkeit übertragen."[41]

Science, the servant of man's ratio, has helped to destroy reverence for life. It has done this, Wiechert feels, by reducing life to matter and natural law. Modern man has forgotten what Albert Schweitzer has always emphasized, namely that all life is sacred. In Die Furchen Dr. Lawrenz laments: "Das Leben, Jeromin, dass es keine Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben gibt. Vor diesem wunderbarsten Geheimnis aller Weltalle. Und die Wissenschaft ist nicht unschuldig daran. Die Verwandlung in Begriffe, das ist die Sünde des Geistes."[42]

Nowhere perhaps does Wiechert make his criticism of the materialistic trend of science more pointed than in the words of the same Dr. Lawrenz, when he says: "Und ich will dir auch sagen, welche von uns die schlimmsten sind: diejenigen, die glauben, das sei nun alles ein Haufen von Zellen und daraus bestehe das Universum. Der Hunger wie die Liebe, Wachen und Träumen, Gott und der kleinste Wurm.... Die nichts vom Unerforschlichen wissen. Sie haben vielleicht das meiste dazu getan, dass die Erde leer geworden ist ... und dass sie nun erfüllt ist von dem kalten Grinsen, mit dem sie die Träume der Menschen betrachten. Sie sind die grossen Entgötterer, Christean, die Gottesmörder, die ihre Messer

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[41] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 19.

[42] Die Furchen, p. 133.

kochen, bevor sie das Ewige in Stücke zerlegen. Die Wissenschaft hat das meiste dazu getan, dass es nun so gekommen ist."[43] This last reference is to the terror of the Nazi regime.

Life for Wiechert has a quality which he repeatedly calls "das Magische." It is this supernatural quality which eludes the intellect and therefore makes impossible for it to see "das Ganze." The West with its intellectualism is fast losing hold of "das Magische" - "das mit dem Geist nicht zu erfassen ist, ja das ihm feindlich ist, aber das uns davor behütet, die Tempel der Menschheit zu schänden."[44]

Science, Wiechert insists, can lay bare the naked facts of life but it cannot discover its "Geheimnis." It cannot justify the ways of God to man. Only religion can do this. In Die Furchen Jons says that his grandfather knew more about the future than modern man with his telescopes, microscopes, and atomic research. To be sure, he did not know what an atom is. He only knew that he was a child of God "und das war eine grosse Weisheit."[45] It is the fact that the West has begun to look upon science as all-sufficient which alarms Wiechert. It is an illusion which he considers both naive and tragic. Dr. Lawrenz puts it this way: "Eine Ätherspritze kann jeder Pfuscher geben, der etwas gelernt hat. Aber das andere kann er nicht geben,

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[43] Ibid., p. 301.

[44] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 74.

[45] Die Furchen, p. 127.

das, was ein Gesicht friedlich macht nach dem Tode, und das brauchen wir mehr als alle Wissenschaft."[46]

Obviously the poet's quarrel is not so much with science as with the materialistic and mechanistic outlook that often goes with the scientific spirit. It is possible, he believes, to accept the contributions of science as real blessings. Dr. Lawrenz and Jons Jeromin do just that. But these men, Wiechert indicates, can safely do so because, in spite of their scientific training, they have retained reverence for "das Magische." Dr. Lawrenz, for instance, says he cannot see how anyone can ever perform an operation without first offering a prayer. To him an operation is an "Eingriff in das Ebenbild Gottes, eine Entstellung."[47] And every time he gets through, even with a successful operation, he has a feeling of guilt. "Wir nennen das Fortschritt, Jons, was uns von den Vätern unterscheidet. Unsere Technik, unseren Wagemut, die Kühnheit, mit der wir binden und lösen. Aber manchmal denke ich, dass schon diese eine Tatsache eine furchtbare Mahnung für uns ist: dass wir das Opfer zuerst betäuben."[48]

As for progress, Wiechert feels it is discernible only in the things of the mind, not in those of the spirit, and it is therefore simply a matter of what one considers more

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[46] Ibid., pp. 132-133.

[47] Ibid., p. 91.

[48] Ibid., p. 193.

important. Moreover, all human progress has its limits. "Was wir besiegen können, ist nicht der Zahn, sondern der Schmerz, und auch das ist natürlich eine Art von Fortschritt. Nur die Schmerzen der Seele hat noch niemand besiegt."[49]

Like many other serious and thoughtful people, Wiechert sees the chasm that separates this age from previous ages. Modern intellectualized education, technology, industrialization, and urbanization have severed man's relationship not only with the soil, but also with an organic past. In Die Furchen, Gina speaks of this feeling of discontinuity with her brother Jons. In the course of the conversation she says to him: "Früher schloss sich Generation an Generation. Sie blieben im selben Ring. Es gab nur Unterschiede der Individuen. Heute aber ist eine tiefe Kluft zwischen Geschlechterfolgen, manchmal so tief, als wären hundert Jahre vergangen. Der Vater und der Grossvater waren noch eins, wir und der Vater sind zwei Welten."[50] She is not certain as to the cause of it all and she does not care to bother her head about it. But she suggests: "Vielleicht liegt es daran, dass wir Gott verlieren, vielleicht daran, dass wir den 'Geist' gewinnen. Beides ist schlimm und folgenreich."[51]

Modern men, victims of the atomization and discontinuity of twentieth-century life, have to a large extent become

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[49] Ibid., p. 255.

[50] Ibid., p. 126.

[51] Ibid.

mass men. Wiechert describes them as entirely estranged from "das Magische," and living only for goods, career, and money. Thus the West is threatened by a barbarian invasion from within. The Chinese still know something of that quality of life which is reflected in the fairy tale. Not so the masses of the West. "Von den Märchen wissen sie, dass sie für Kinder sind. Sie selbst leben in Zeitungen, über oder unter dem Strich, in Kinos und am Radio. Lemuren auf einem sinkenden Kontinent, und es wird keinen Berg Ararat mehr für sie geben."[52]

The West, as Wiechert sees it, has tragically sacrificed the contemplative to the activistic life. People have been engaged in a mad pursuit of transient and perishable things. "Keinen Feiertag haben sie gehabt," muses Andreas Nyland in Der Knecht Gottes, "keinen Sabbat ihrer Seele.... Wenn sie doch einen Feiertag haben könnten, einen einzigen! Aber sie fürchten, dass ihre Waren verderben, dass ihre Häuser nicht fertig werden, dass der Fortschritt der Menschen zu stocken beginnt. Und feiertaglos leben sie dahin. Sie vergessen, dass Gott selbst die Hände in den Schoss gelegt hat, und sie nennen träge und unnütz, wer es ihm nachtut."[53]

Wiechert is not ready to share modern man's pride in the advancement of technology. Even early in life he was

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[52] Ibid., p. 95.

[53] Der Knecht Gottes, pp. 442-443.

apprehensive of it. When, already before World War I, he saw the famous flyer Abramowitsch navigating the first "Doppeldecker" from Paris to St. Petersburg, he did not look up in pride but in distrust. "Es kam mir als etwas vor, das gegen die natürliche Ordnung der Welt war, eine Gewalttat der Menschheit..."[54] Western man, he adds, hailed these new wings "ohne zu wissen, dass auch sie ins Verderben trügen." Only once, apparently, did Wiechert make use of an airplane. That was in 1949 when he flew to the United States, where for three months he had been offered a guest lectureship at the Stanford University. In answer to the question how he liked travelling with the "grey birds," he repeated that he considered flying "gegen Gottes Ordnung."[55] Most people smiled, he reports. But the great atomic scientist in California did not smile. "We are afraid," this scientist is quoted as saying. "The farther we lift the veil of nature, the greater our fear becomes. Man was not meant to probe these secrets. Neither were these grey birds meant for him. It would be better if he walked barefoot upon the earth."[56]

When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Wiechert was still alive. But he did not live to see many of the subsequent spectacular "advances" in the field of

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[54] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 109.

[55] "Die letzte Reise," Vom bleibenden Gewinn, p. 121.

[56] Ibid., p. 122.

nuclear energy. Reports about the hydrogen bomb and the possible dire effects of radioactive fallout on human, plant, and animal life never reached his ears. If they had, he would no doubt have felt his mistrust of the scientific age dolefully confirmed.

Even the comparatively little that he knew about the atom, caused Wiechert to be filled with the gravest misgivings. As far back as the 'thirties, when he was still a teacher in Berlin, he spoke most ominously of the attempt to split the atom. Should it succeed, he is reported to have said by a student, it would mean the end of civilization.[57] Later pronouncements in regard to the atom have been similarly dire. In Jahre und Zeiten he writes: "Zwischen der Zerfaserung der Seele und der Zertrümmerung der Atome hat es niemals einen anderen Unterschied als den des Grades gegeben. Sie sind die grossen Zeichen, die über unserem Untergang aufgerichtet sind."[58] And again: "Die Diktaturen waren ein Zeichen, die Atombombe war ein Zeichen, und weshalb sollte der Mensch, der reif ist, die Natur zu zertrümmern, nicht reif sein, Gott zu zertrümmern? Wenn die Dämonen aufstehen, geht es niemals um kleine Dinge."[59]

Contemplation of the fact that modern civilization, like a matricide, may sometime come to the point of exploding

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[57] Jahre und Zeiten, p. 276.

[58] Ibid., p. 362.

[59] Ibid., p. 421.

into bits "ihre grosse und dunkle Mutter, die Natur ... aus denen sie selbst gebaut worden ist"[60] staggers the poet. In one of his last speeches, the one on the occasion of the Goethe-Feier in 1947, he stresses this point. "Denn es ist entbunden worden, was Goethe in der Gestalt des Erdgeistes vorausgesehen hat, und es ist nicht eine zufällige Parallele, dass mit der Zerstörung des Menschengesichts auch die Zerstörung der Natur Hand in Hand gegangen ist. Dass die Möglichkeit ihrer Zerstörung in die Menschenhand gelegt worden ist und der erste Schein der Apokalypse sein schreckliches Licht über die Erde geworfen hat."[61]

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[60] Ibid., p. 412.

[61] Das zerstörte Menschengesicht, p. 29.

CONCLUSION

Ernst Wiechert, born in a region which marks a borderline between East and West, has often been called "ein östlicher Mensch." With that appellation has usually gone the judgment that he is a vague dreamer and impractical mystic. Wilhelm Kahle in his Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung is convinced "dass wir nicht in die Stille des Dorfes aus der Aufgabe flüchten dürfen, die uns die Stadt heute stellt." And he adds: "Schliesslich verlangt die Zeit nicht so sehr nach dem dunklen Brausen der Wälder und des Blutes, nicht nach zerfliessender, berauschender Pansmusik als vielmehr nach willenhafter Entscheidung, nach Freiheit, Zucht und Gestalt. Wiechert hat zu wenig 'Abendland' in sich."[1]

Along with this type of criticism has gone the charge of escapism. It has been made by J. D. Workman, among others. He writes concerning Wiechert: "Repeatedly in the course of his career, he came into conflict with what he considered to be the inadequacy of the material and spiritual values by which his contemporaries governed their lives, and to each such encounter he instinctively responded by withdrawing from a pattern of life to which he could not give his approval."[2] As sources of this escapism Workman sees more or less Eastern factors: melancholy, love of solitude, a proudly individualistic attitude towards life, and the tendency to flee from reality into a world of dreams.

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[1] Wilhelm Kahle, Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung (Münster: Regensberg, 1949), p. 482.

[2] J.D. Workman, "Ernst Wiechert's Escapism," p. 23.

A Swiss critic, P. Schmid, accuses Wiechert of offering a complex civilization nothing but Romantic sentimentality: "Und nun wird bei Wiechert geherzelt auf Teufel komm raus; sein Heilmittel für die Fährnisse unserer Zeit ist ganz einfach eine Injektion in die Tränendrüsen. Und er merkt gar nicht, wie nah er damit im Grunde dem dem Brutalen so benachbarten falschen Romantizismus der Nazis steht, trotz Buchenwalde."[3]

E. S. Herd, who quotes these words in his article on "The 'Unpolitical' Outlook of Ernst Wiechert," agrees that the poet's distrust and fear of the intellect is bound up with his affinity with the Slav culture of the East, an affinity both of heredity and of environment. He observes that Wiechert defended his "Neigung zur 'östlichen Welt', zu ihrer Dumpfheit, Ergebenheit und Versunkenheit" and that he scorned "alle Rationalisten des Abendlandes" who cannot comprehend "die magische Welt."[4] Herd has the utmost admiration for Wiechert's valiant resistance to Nazi tyranny, yet, on the basis of a passage already quoted and treated earlier in this study, he expresses fear that the poet's work holds within it the dangerous possibility of creating a state of mind in Germany in which any new tyranny would thrive.

The assumption of most of these critics seems to be that there is a paradox between Wiechert's "Eastern" mysticism

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[3]P. Schmid, "Wiechert's Literaturgeschichte," Die Weltwoche, December 17, 1948.

[4]E. S. Herd, "The 'Unpolitical' Outlook of Ernst Wiechert," p. 268.

and his heroic resistance to Hitlerism. For Kahle, for instance, Wiechert's love of the forest and solitude can lead only to escapism; it cannot produce what is so badly needed in the modern world, namely "willenhafte Entscheidung, Freiheit, Zucht und Gestalt." For Herd there is "the paradox that, as a man, he opposed and defied the Nazis"[5] but that, as writer, his mystical and anti-intellectual attitude tend "to foster a dangerous lethargy and despairing resignation."[6]

The fallacy underlying this criticism would seem to be the belief that mystical natures resign themselves to tyranny and are incapable of overt heroic action. The facts of history, of course, indicate quite the opposite. It has always been the mystics, the prophets, the seers, who have been most sensitive to injustice and tyranny and who have, in a countless number of cases, given their lives as martyrs. There was no paradox in Wiechert's life of the type imagined by Herd and Kahle. Love for the silence of the forest led the poet to reject the clamor of Nazi propaganda, and his predilection for "Pansmusik" led him to despise the "Hitlermusik." If anything is clear, it is that Wiechert's heroic stand was very much related to, in fact rooted in, his "östliche Neigung." It was this same Neigung, the poet himself points out, which led to a resistance of the Nazis in Sowirog. That is why, as was already indicated earlier,

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., P. 270.

the Nazis scorned its population as "Drecksvolk ... Ostische Rasse."[7]

All of this we may accept on the basis of some very clear words of Wiechert himself. He writes in Wälder und Menschen:

> Weil ich in der Stille anfing, konnte ich dem Lauten nie ganz verfallen. Weil ich als Kind die Wälder schweigen und wachsen sah, konnte ich immer ein stilles Lächeln für das aufgeregte Treiben haben, mit dem die Menschen ihre vergänglichen Häuser bauten. Es war, als trüge ich andre Gesetze und Massstäbe in mir, grössere und strengere. Ich konnte nie mehr ganz aus dem Kreis der Natur herausfallen, und immer hielt ein letztes Band mich noch am Willen der Schöpfung fest, wenn auch rings um mich die Menschen schon längst vergessen hatten, dass auch sie Geschöpfe und nicht Schöpfer waren und an ihren babylonischen Türmen bauten, als sei es ihnen und nur ihnen allein vorbehalten, die Achse der Welt in sich zu tragen.[8]

What is dangerous for political action in Wiechert's work is not so much his mysticism as his strong-willed idealism and perfectionism. Attention has already been called earlier to Wiechert's habit of viewing all things from the viewpoint of a perfectionist ethic. This habit, it was pointed out, caused him to be critical not only of the absolutism of the Empire and the Third Reich, but also of the democracy of the Weimar and Bonn republics. What disappointed him at every turn was the spectacle of external changes in government unreenforced by internal changes of heart.

It is at this point, it would seem, that Herd and

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[7] Die Furchen, p. 278.

[8] Wälder und Menschen, p. 140.

others might have attacked Wiechert more successfully. The poet's emphasis upon a change of heart is, of course, a sound one. Yet it is not without peril for political action. The emphasis may be made so strong that men will no longer consider political changes worth making. A change of system, to be sure, represents not an absolute but a relative value. But it must not be forgotten that a relative value may nevertheless be a worthwhile one. And it is this which Wiechert, constantly judging from a more or less absolute perspective, often seems to overlook. It may have been true, as he suggests in Missa, that after the collapse there was no "Sieg der Herzen"[9] and that the "Akrobaten und Gaukler und Taschenspieler"[10] continued to perform on the German political stage. Yet the fact remains that the imperfect and struggling democracy which came into being after World War II represented something immeasurably better than the unspeakable Nazi Reich.

In the foregoing chapters an examination was attempted of Wiechert's critical position in regard to (1) urban civilization, (2) education, (3) the Fatherland, (4) the war system, (5) Christianity and the Church, (6) National Socialism, and (7) art and science. It will have been noticed that the poet's social and cultural criticism was largely in terms of men. This is consonant with his position that our

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[9] Missa, p. 182.

[10] Ibid., p. 185.

troubles stem fundamentally not from bad methods, systems, or techniques, but from bad hearts. Wiechert's message, as Puknat suggests, is not that of a sociologist who would reform man by reforming society. It is rather that of a prophet who proclaims that a renewed society is dependent upon renewed men.

With his profound mystical and religious insights into the nature of man, Wiechert never had any romantic illusions about the proximity of a "renewed society." For him it was never "just around the corner." He was not swept away by the humanistic optimism which characterized so large a part of the age in which he lived. When he was young, it seemed to many as if all problems could be solved by human ingenuity. Man, proud of his apparent success, pretty well considered himself the measure of all things. The great Western nations, except for a few small quarrels, were at peace and had been so for decades. Even World War I hardly seemed a temporary set-back, since this was, after all, a "war to end all wars" and one which was "to make the world safe for democracy." When the war had been fought, democratic institutions were generally considered safe. After all, how could men, themselves products of the evolutionary process, from now on do anything but choose the rational democratic answer? And as for the perfectibility of man, was it not clearly indicated, asked Spencer, by the abandonment of torture?

Not much later, however, the rise of Fascism, National

Socialism, and Communism showed that man by no means always chooses the rational answer. The Second World War painfully belied the belief that its destructive predecessor had been a "war to end all wars." And the pogroms and concentration camps of Hitler's Germany horribly deflated Spencer's proud assertion about modern man's abandonment of torture. All these things took the humanistic optimists by doleful surprise.

Wiechert, however, had never overestimated the power of reason in overcoming man's fundamental egoistic impulse. In the war, as he says, he had seen man unmasked and he had come out "mit einem merkwürdigen Gesicht."[11] The evil of men, he sensed, was not a superficial blemish but something deep-rooted. There was the "Urböse," against which, in the last analysis, education and social reform were impotent. When after the war he saw no rededication to moral and spiritual values, he foresaw and foretold the inevitability of further catastrophes. Reason alone, he seemed to sense, could not corrode the selfishness of men; it might in fact be used - and was actually frequently used - to bolster and rationalize that selfishness and build up pride.

It is the pride, the self-reliance, and complacence of modern man, Wiechert feels, which is his downfall. The original sin of man - "sicut Deus" - which caused him to be driven from Paradise is still keeping him from reentering.

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[11] Das einfache Leben, p. 316.

Man, according to Wiechert's message, must repent of his pride and recognize his limitations. He must admit the chasm between God and himself; only thus can he escape the frustration of perpetual failure. Recognizing his dependence upon a Power above and beyond himself, he must rest "in der Gnade."

There is in the foregoing no ground for labeling Wiechert "anti-intellectual." From the general tenor of the poet's works it becomes abundantly clear that he wishes to give ratio or Geist a legitimate place in life. But he definitely does not want it to usurp and dominate life. His quarrel, in other words, is not with the intellect but with intellectualism. Wherever the intellect is under the control of "das Magische," that is, of religious and moral safeguards, he feels it can render incalculable service to mankind. Thus, in the hands of Dr. Lawrenz and Jons, both deeply religious souls, science and technology are made to serve important humanitarian ends. Wiechert is convinced, however, that any science or technology which is cut loose from spiritual controls, will in the end destroy us.

The intellect, Wiechert feels, has already become too dominant in many fields of culture. It has become so in education. In the schools, colleges, and universities much learning is dispensed, but little spiritual wisdom or religious faith is handed down. What the schools provide may suffice for many of the ordinary experiences of life, but it is pitifully inadequate for its crises: for war, for the

concentration camp, for the deathbed. In religion, too, the intellect has been given more than its rightful share. There it has made "ein Pergament aus Gottes Wort und ein Dogma aus dem Atem seines Mundes."[12] Many modern clergymen are mere theologians instead of "Jünger Christi." For Wiechert the essence of religion is mystical and he is afraid that any intellectual formulation may estrange it from this essence. In the Bible, Wiechert finds, the content of faith has a distinctly non-intellectualistic form; it is the spiritual imagination which is operative in prophetic and evangelistic utterance. Spiritual imagination alone does justice to the mystical roots of Scripture, since religion deals with "das Magische" — the mystical, the inexpressible, the ineffable.

Life itself, the poet constantly insists, is profoundly mysterious in nature. A materialistic science has done much to rob it of its mystical dimensions. This, in turn, has led to a lack of reverence for life and a disregard for man's dignity and individuality. Modern technological civilization, estranged from nature and a product of the Geist, is producing a mass man without a personality and a face of his own. This man is better at home in the big city than in the country; he fears silence and aloneness and seeks to find his security in the noise of the masses.

The many organizations and institutions of modernity,

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[12] "Moderner Dichterglaube," Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 183.

by virtue of their mass nature, represent a potential threat to the individuality of man. Particularly the state, impersonal and conscienceless like all institutions, needs constant and vigilant watching. Schools and churches supported by the state have a tendency to inculcate mere subservience. The modern war machine produces a Jedermann who has neither his own life to live nor his own death to die. From out of all this it is the task of the morally conscious man "das Gesicht aus der Uniform zu retten."[13]

A further and even more important duty of man is "Gerechtigkeit auf den Acker zu bringen."[14] This involves a constant battle with greed, falsehood, hatred and all other forces that would destroy humanity. This battle, Wiechert indicates, is not only a bitter one but often a very lonely one.[15] Those that fight for a better world must expect misunderstanding, enmity, and suffering. "Gerechtigkeit auf den Acker bringen," an expression from the book of Isaiah, is not the same as "die Welt bewegen," as self-confident youth often interprets it. Moving the world is beyond the ability of man. But there remains the task of every man to till and cultivate his modest "dreissig Morgen." Each person can at least move a few of his fellowmen to "Güte, Stille und Weisheit."[16] The salt of the

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[13] Jedermann, p. 36.

[14] Die Jeromin-Kinder I, p. 18.

[15] Ibid., p. 62.

[16] "Selbstbildnis," Vom bleibenden Gewinn, p. 114.

earth and the light of the world will always repose in the few who are "auserwählt," not in the masses. One's hope for the future must not be placed "auf die Völker ... oder ihre Führer, oder das Abendland, oder die Kultur, sondern auf ein paar Menschenherzen"[17] - such hearts as have been "verwandelt" and view life sub specie aeternitatis.

This, in review and summary, is the burden of Wiechert's social and cultural criticism. His message, though in a modern and artistic guise, is therefore essentially a very old one. It is, in its ethical tenor, the message of the Law and the Prophets, of Christ and His apostles. It pronounces a benediction upon the pure and lowly of heart, upon the poor and meek, upon those that are persecuted for righteousness sake. It proclaims that "God resisteth the proud" and sees them "afar off." It is assured that from "the heart are the issues of life," and that "the letter killeth while the spirit maketh alive." It preaches that man must repent and seek the Kingdom of God. It confesses that God's Kingdom is not of this world and that those who travel the road to eternal life are relatively few. It agrees that men "stone the prophets that are sent unto them," and that the voice of one proclaiming a spiritual message is like "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

For Wiechert, too, love is the fulfillment of the law. "Der grösste Besitz ist die Liebe," says Orla.[18]

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[17] Missa, p. 552.

[18] Das einfache Leben, p. 220.

Many matters relating to the "truth" may be debatable, but not those relating to love. Man's troubles can all be traced back to his lack of this supreme virtue. "Wir haben alle an der letzten Macht der Erde es fehlen lassen und gefehlt ... und das Letzte ist immer die Liebe."[19] Man is to lose himself in self-sacrificial service of his fellowman. "Für etwas anderes als sich selbst müsse man da sein," concludes Jonas in Die Majorin.[20] Two of Wiechert's favorite expressions for indicating the duty of man are "helfen und heilen" and "Tränen trocknen." Though that, to be sure, is the task of all men, it is particularly the task of the poet. It is his calling to bring solace and strength to man in a faltering age. It is his privilege "das Trübe klar, das Kreisende still, das Verwirrte einfach zu machen."[21]

This high ethic of love, however, is nowhere in Wiechert's work related to a God of love. Such a God the poet never quite finds, not even in his very last works. The motto of Die Jeromin-Kinder is a text from the book of Job: "Um Gott ist schrecklicher Glanz." The features of this God never essentially change, not even in Missa. To the end God remains unapproachable, awe-inspiring, silent, and enigmatic. He is never discovered as a Father who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Thus men, strangely

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[19] Das zerstörte Menschengesicht, pp. 32-33.

[20] Page 214.

[21] Es geht ein Pflüger, p. 95.

enough, are required to evince a supreme virtue of which there seems to be no trace in God himself. The creature is asked to do that of which the Creator seems to be quite incapable. Love is "das einzige, was wir dem Gesetz entgegenzusetzen haben," concludes Orla. "Wir werden es nie bezwingen, sonst wäre es nicht mehr unsere Welt. Wir werden es auch nicht beschämen, denn es hat keine Scham. Wir werden es erfüllen, aber in der Erfüllung werden wir etwas aufrichten, was es gar nicht kennt, was unsere Schöpfung allein ist und was wie ein fremder Glanz alle Dinge überstrahlen wird, auch sein steineres Gesicht: unsere Liebe."[22]

It is questionable whether such a motivation will ever move many men to genuine love. For pure love toward ungrateful and recalcitrant men comes hard, exceedingly hard. It is, in fact, against human nature. And it cannot be self-induced as Wiechert would here seem to suggest. It is in the nature of human love that it must be elicited and engendered from without. Throughout the ages men have loved God because they believed that God first loved them. They have seen in the Cross of Calvary the conclusive and unforgettable demonstration of that love. And they have loved their fellow-men in the knowledge, that, if Christ died for them, their seemingly unlovable lives must have infinite value in His sight.

For Wiechert the great danger that besets our civilization is its Entgötterung. He is no doubt right. But

[22] Das einfache Leben, p. 320.

one wonders whether his work, which substitutes "ein steinernes Gesicht" for a loving Father, will not be a contributing factor to further Entgötterung. One feels as if Wiechert is handing down the Christian ethic without its ageless dynamic, and therefore the shell without the kernel. At times the poet, speaking through Jons, confesses that his faith shows considerable impoverishment when compared to that of his father and grandfather who "rested in God." At other times, speaking through Dr. Lawrenz, he wonders what this faith will have become in the age of the grandchildren. Thoughtful men will wonder with him.

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