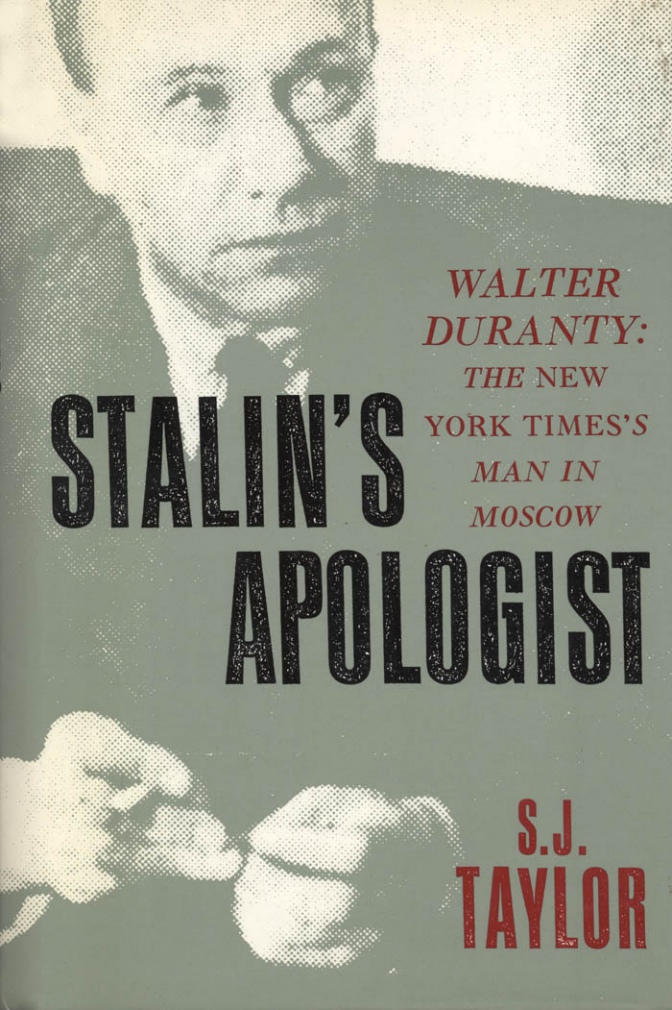

STALIN'S APOLOGIST

WALTER DURANTY: THE NEW YORK TIMES'S MAN IN MOSCOW

S.J. TAYLOR

STALIN'S APOLOGIST

Walter Duranty:
The New York Times's
Man in Moscow

Short, unattractive, hobbling about Stalin's Moscow on a wooden leg, Walter Duranty was an unlikely candidate for the world's most famous foreign correspondent. Yet for almost twenty years his articles filled the front page of *The New York Times* with gripping coverage of the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. A witty, engaging, impish character with a flamboyant life-style, he was a Pulitzer Prize winner, the individual most credited with helping to win U.S. recognition for the Soviet regime, and the reporter who had predicted the success of the Bolshevik state when all others claimed it was doomed. But, as S.J. Taylor reveals in this provocative biography, Walter Duranty played a key role in perpetrating some of the greatest lies history has ever known.

Stalin's Apologist deftly unfolds the story of this accomplished but sordid and tragic life. Drawing on sources ranging from newspapers to private letters and journals to interviews with such figures as William Shirer and W. Averell Harriman, Taylor's vivid narrative unveils a figure driven by ambition, whose early success reporting on Bolshevik Russia—he was foremost in predicting Stalin's rise to power—established his international reputation, fed his overconfident contempt for his colleagues, and indeed led him to identify with the Soviet dictator. Thus during the great Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s, which Stalin engineered to crush millions of peasants who resisted his policies, Duranty dismissed other correspondents' reports of mass starvation and, though secretly aware of the full scale of the horror, effectively reinforced the official cover-up of one of history's greatest man-made disasters. Later, he

took the rigged show trials of Stalin's Great Purges at face value, blithely accepting the guilt of the victims. He believed himself the leading expert on the Soviet Union, and his faith in his own insight drew him into a downward spiral of distortions and untruths, typified by his memorable excuse for Stalin's crimes, "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."

Taylor brilliantly captures the full range of Duranty's astonishing life, from his participation in the Satanic orgies of Aleister ("the Beast") Crowley, to his dramatic front-line reporting during World War I, to his epic womanizing and heavy drug and alcohol abuse. It is the bitter, ironic story of a man who had the rare opportunity to bring to light the suffering of the millions of Stalin's victims, but remained a prisoner of vanity, self-indulgence, and success.

Karin Leuthy

About the Author

S.J. Taylor is a writer living in London.

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Stalin's Apologist

Walter Duranty
The New York Times's Man in Moscow

S. J. TAYLOR

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For Herbert L. Fink, graphic artist

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Acknowledgments

The research for this book and my fascination with Walter Duranty began more than a decade ago, when I jotted down a short note to myself that he would make an interesting subject for a full-scale biography. Recently, I came across that note and paused to reflect how far I have traveled since writing it—to New York, Florida, and California; to London and Liverpool; and finally to Moscow and the Ukraine—in search of this complicated man, who attracted so many admirers and detractors alike.

My early reflections on Duranty's character and on the accusations leveled against him might have remained inconsequential had it not been for Robert Conquest's study of the Ukrainian famine of 1932–33, *The Harvest of Sorrow.* Conquest brought into the public domain a detailed and scholarly record of this monstrous crime, which had been so successfully concealed and for all intents and purposes consigned to oblivion. Fully aware of the heavy personal toll such a topic inevitably exacts, I remain deeply indebted to Conquest for his work.

An invaluable aid to my book was the study grant provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C. This allowed me to conduct extensive research, particularly at the Public Record Office in Kew, England, and at the British Newspaper Library in North London, without which it would have been impossible to

establish which of the journalists who claimed to have covered the famine did in fact do so and where the truth of the matter lay.

Harrison E. Salisbury, former Moscow correspondent and associate editor of the *New York Times,* provided access to critical materials I would otherwise not have been able to view, as well as sustained encouragement for my project. He read an early draft of the manuscript and made many useful suggestions for amplification.

I am no less indebted to Jane Perry Gunther, the widow of John Gunther, for painstakingly collecting from her husband's voluminous personal papers entries relating to Duranty, as well as giving me her own candid impressions of Duranty in his later years.

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The late W. Averell Harriman, who was U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Ambassador at Large, and Governor of New York, knew Duranty in the mid-Twenties in Russia, and I found his precise recollections of Duranty extremely helpful.

Of the American journalists who knew Duranty personally and who shared their recollections with me in interviews, I am particularly grateful to author William Shirer, who frequently used Duranty as a commentator in his early broadcasts from Europe for CBS; and to Henry Shapiro, retired United Press Moscow Bureau Chief and honorary fellow at Harvard Institute for Russian Studies. My thanks go also to the late Robin Kinkead, formerly of Reuters; to the late Joseph Alsop, syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post–Los Angeles Times* Press Service; to Drew Middleton, former Moscow correspondent and retired military correspondent for the *New York Times;* to C. L. Sultzberger, author and retired correspondent of the *New York Times;* and to the late William Stoneman, reporter for the Chicago *Daily News.* In addition, Walter Kerr, former editor of the Paris *Herald Tribune,* and Robert St. John, retired correspondent for the Associated Press, both shared their time generously with me. The incisive and often witty remembrances of George Seldes, author and former correspondent for the Chicago *Tribune,* were extremely valuable and always amusing.

The lively accounts of Duranty in Hollywood given to me by

author and screenwriter Mary Loos were of great help, and her patience in "putting me into the picture" is much appreciated. Mrs. Sylvan Hoffman, sister of writer Marjorie Worthington, shared her remembrance of Duranty and gave me access to the correspondence between Worthington and him during the 1940s and early 1950s. Mrs. Agnes Walker, the widow of journalist H. R. Knickerbocker, and his brother, Dr. Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, retired Chairman and Academic Vice-President of the University of Tennessee, both gave extensive interviews. And although he did not wish to be interviewed, George F. Kennan, of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, sent me highly informative accounts of Duranty in Moscow in the 1930s.

I must also thank Richard Edes Harrison, retired free-lance cartographer and member of the Coffee House, for his impressions of Duranty in New York in the 1940s, as well as W. Colston Leigh, retired owner of Colston Leigh, Inc., booking agency for lecturers, and former agent of Walter Duranty and H. R. Knickerbocker.

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Clare Hollingworth, former war correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express,* now defense correspondent for the *Sunday Telegraph,* spent an afternoon with me recounting her memories of Duranty in Bucharest in 1940, for which I am grateful. I have benefited likewise from a most interesting discussion with the late Professor Colonel Gerald Draper, former Senior War Crimes Prosecutor of the British Military Courts at Nuremberg, and recently a member of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33. By the same token, I am indebted to James E. Mace, Staff Director of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine in Washington,

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Finally, I must thank Dr. George Brown, retired Director of the Honors Program and Chairman of the Journalism Department at Southern Illinois University. It was he who, a dozen years ago, said, with characteristic enthusiasm, "Wouldn't it be *great* if you could find some of the guys who knew Duranty in his heyday, and talk to *them*?" I did, and this book is the result.

February 1989 S. J. Taylor

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MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

Prologue

When he wasn't in Berlin having his wooden leg readjusted, or in St. Tropez basking in the sun, or in Paris at the races in the Bois de Boulogne, the *New York Times* man in Moscow could usually be found among the throngs at the bar of the Metropol Hotel. A veteran correspondent of World War I and a Pulitzer Prize winner, Walter Duranty was widely recognized as the top authority on the Soviet Union. His shrewd assessments of Bolshevik power struggles were front-page news for at least a dozen years.

On the 7th of November 1933, the Soviets began celebrating the sixteenth anniversary of their October Revolution with a 101-gun salute, followed by a display of military might that proclaimed their stubborn perseverance in a world divided by economic disparities and international rivalries. For two-and-a-half hours, Joseph Stalin reviewed waves of resolute Russian troops in Red Square, the "Internationale" echoing through loudspeakers. Seasoned reporters from the West, wearied by all the saber rattling, stood in the bitter cold, trying to figure out a fresh angle for the stories they would send to the readers back home. When at last the parades ended, the journalists retired to the warmth of the nearby Metropol and a rehash of the day's events.

On an occasion such as this, Duranty would usually be at the center of the discussion, pounding his cane against the floor to emphasize a

point, mowing down his less-gifted colleagues with a turn of phrase, often witty, not always kind, not always truthful. But tonight, Duranty's spot at the bar was conspicuously empty.

Two weeks before, he had cabled his editors in New York, asking their permission to accompany Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov to Washington, D.C., where, it was suspected, Litvinov might bring about what the Soviets had been seeking for seventeen years—diplomatic recognition of the world's first Communist state by the United States of America.

A reporter who had scooped some of the best newsmen in the business, Duranty was an old hand at doping out a story ahead of his competitors. At about the time his colleagues stood in the Moscow hotel listening to the strains of American jazz, played Soviet-style, Duranty was standing in the Oval Office of the White House, covering what he would consider to be the single most important story of his career. Paraphrasing the title of John Reed's famous account of the October Revolution, Duranty described the event as "the ten days that steadied the world."

Later in life, Duranty would remember the press conference as the single moment of greatest satisfaction he had ever experienced. As the other reporters were filing out after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's announcement of recognition of the Soviets, the President held Duranty back for a moment, asking him confidentially, "Well, don't you think it's a good job?"

A few days later, at the dinner held to celebrate the event in New York's Waldorf-Astoria, Duranty was introduced to the fifteen hundred dignitaries in attendance as "one of the great foreign correspondents of modern times," and as the little Englishman with the cane stood to acknowledge the introduction, the crowd "rose for the first time and cheered." For Duranty, it was the crowning glory of an already brilliant career—a personal triumph for the man who had predicted that the Bolshevik regime, against all odds, was here to stay.

Duranty seemed an unlikely candidate for such heroic stuff. Short, balding, and unprepossessing in appearance, his one outstanding characteristic was a limp, which resulted from the loss of his left leg in a train accident in France some years before. That and his keen gray eyes were what saved him from the commonplace. No one, though, who had ever seen him animated, his eyes glittering, could forget the engag-

ing and provocative style of his conversation, even if they did somehow forget exactly what it was he had said.

Perhaps it was the way he talked that made him such a hit with the ladies, for Duranty possessed this extraordinary attraction for women. His sexual escapades were legion, despite the loss of the leg—or, as some believed, because of it. The rumors were fed by his keeping a Russian mistress discreetly at home in Moscow and a French wife, even more discreetly, in a villa in St. Tropez.

Coeds from Eastern schools, departing from European tours to witness the building of Paradise, adored the *Times* correspondent and his titillating banter. He told them tales about the dangers of opium, to which he had briefly become addicted, so went the story, in the painful days following the loss of his leg. He chain-smoked Camels and sipped Scotch as he talked, making no apologies for his admiration of V. I. Lenin and his successor Joseph Stalin, whose methods, he believed, would ultimately prove successful in the backward Russian state.

For them, and for his readership in America, Duranty created the leaders of the Soviet Union, much as a novelist creates a set of memorable characters. In his own unmistakable, personalized style, he vividly recounted the conflicts among them, the dramatic ebbs and flows of their struggles for power. Lenin: cold, logical, and wise. Trotsky: brilliant, but erratic; fatally flawed. Stalin: man of steel; "a Frankenstein monster."

Two exclusive interviews with the reclusive dictator gave the impression that Duranty was Stalin's Western confidant. The first was in 1930 at Duranty's request; the second, at Stalin's, on Christmas Day 1933—a seeming reward for Duranty's part in helping to achieve U.S. recognition.

As Fascism rose in Europe and Japanese Imperialism threatened the East, Western powers sank deeper into the quagmire of the Great Depression, unable, it seemed at the time, to protect themselves from these forces. Against this background, Duranty touted the accomplishments of Stalin's Five-Year Plan, ushering in what would come to be called "the Red Decade." His stubborn chronicle of Soviet achievements made him the doyen of left-leaning Westerners who believed that what happened inside Soviet Russia held the key to the future for the rest of the world.

The brutality of Stalin's policy of collectivization that displaced millions, his establishing of the Gulag Archipelago that sent untold numbers of Soviet citizens to work and to die in unimaginable degradation and squalor—these were lightly glossed over by the Soviet Press Office, in a policy of propaganda that succeeded even beyond the expectations of government officials. The bloody purges that would expunge Stalin's opponents from every sphere of Soviet life were but a dark shadow against the future.

But in 1933, the watershed year, when Stalin finally achieved U.S. recognition, disquieting rumors had begun to surface. There was a growing number of reports about a famine, purported to have taken place in the grain-growing districts of the Ukraine, the Northern Caucausus, and across the nomadic cattle country of Kazakhstan: a disaster that cost the lives of millions of peasants, a calamity of incalculable dimensions.

For later generations, as the sheer magnitude of that event began slowly to emerge, questions would arise as to why nobody knew, why the American public hadn't been told. How did Stalin manage to conceal the greatest man-made disaster in modern history, when perhaps as many as ten million men, women, and children were allowed to die by slow starvation as a result of their refusal to conform to Stalin's plan to collectivize agriculture?

Had this been a deliberate act of genocide against the Soviet peasantry, or, as Duranty characterized it, an example of anti-Communist propaganda promulgated in "an eleventh-hour attempt to avert American recognition by picturing the Soviet Union as a land of ruin and despair"?

Throughout his career Duranty would claim his only object as a journalist was "to find the truth and write it as best I could." Yet despite this high-minded goal, by 1957, the year of his death, Duranty would be labeled "the No. 1 Soviet apologist in the United States"; and in the years that followed, he would become the prototype for the dishonest reporter: "a fashionable liar," some would call him, "a journalistic shill," others would say.

What were the loyalties of this complicated man? What motivated the line of action he adopted?

"What I want to know is whether a policy or a political line or regime will work or not," Duranty once said; and he refused "to be

sidetracked by moral issues or to sit in judgment of the acts of individuals or of states."

It was a tough-minded stance, clear-headed and uncompromising: a philosophy that carried Duranty from anonymity to celebrity. Whether it brought him any closer to the truth than others in the profession was another matter—one still worth considering.

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CHAPTER I

Liars Go to Hell

Walter Duranty fancied himself a Citizen of the World, a man of knowledge and influence, culture and wit, born, symbolically, on the Isle of Man,[1] and this particular bit of fluff he obligingly spun out for anyone who cared to listen. It sounded good and enhanced his image. But it wasn't true.

It was less a lie, perhaps, than the smokescreen of an imaginative talker who invented a public self for the amusement of his listeners, even as he buried his past from any real scrutiny for reasons he kept to himself. Duranty was actually born, a fact more symbolically apt than anything he could have invented, in Liverpool, the "Cradle of Socialism," as it came to be known, a city "with as high a proportion of paupers as could be found in any town in England."[2]

Duranty's family was not among them. Instead, he came from the affluent middle class, merchants for some hundred years before his birth, perhaps of slaves. There was always that shadow of a suggestion—as with all "the gentlemen of Liverpool"—that taint, so ostentatiously flung at the city early in the nineteenth century by the hotheaded actor George Frederick Cooke. Encountering some offense during a performance, Cooke rounded on his audience and cried out that Liverpool was "a place accursed of Heaven and abhorrent to nature," its wealth, "the price of human misery," and there was not a

brick in their houses that was "not cemented with human blood."[3] Until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, it flourished, nurtured by the city's connection with the West Indies, the number of Liverpool ships engaged in the traffic approaching two hundred with a cargo of nearly 50,000 Africans in that last year alone.

Alexander Duranty, Walter Duranty's paternal grandfather, was born in the West Indies and immigrated to Liverpool either in 1842 or 1843, accompanied by his wife Jane.[4] A vigorous and substantial man in his early thirties, he established a household in Hamilton Square in Birkenhead, a respectable suburb of the city, first at Number 7 and then at Number 60, each of them fine houses, especially for a young couple just starting out. Almost immediately they began their family. In 1844 a daughter, Catherine Emily, was born; within a year, their first son Charles, within two, William Steel Duranty, named after a close family friend. It was this youngest boy who would eventually become the father of Walter Duranty. Later on, there would be a last addition to the family, Selina Jane, born ten years after her elder brother. The family was eminently respectable, prosperous, and genteel, at least at this stage, and staunchly Protestant, pillars of the Presbyterian Church.

In the next decade Alexander Duranty would advance from employment in W. Rose and Company to be the proprietor of his own firm, Alexander Duranty and Company. As his sons grew to manhood, they would join the business along with Duranty's German-born son-in-law Theodore Ruete, husband to Catherine: a growing family concern then, alternately described as merchants of oil, of cotton, of commodities, and finally as commissioning agents for the Red D. Steamer Line. For a time during the mid-1860s, Alexander Duranty held the post of Vice Consul of Venezuela, while retaining full control of the business.

As Britain's second largest port, Liverpool accounted for at least a third of the country's commerce, with more foreign or overseas trading than any other city in the world. It became a world market for cotton and grain, and controlled the world manufacture and trade in sugar, soap, salt, and oxygen.[5] Iron, steel, machinery, pottery, and textiles passed through the port daily. At the Queen's and Coburg docks, the tall masts stretched upwards against the horizon, the steamers' smokestacks belching out black clouds of smoke. During the nineteenth century the crude and makeshift warehouses were replaced by magnificent

commercial and industrial buildings—the India Building, the Cotton and Corn Exchanges.[6] Taxes on income and property were higher in Liverpool than in any other city in the English provinces.[7]

The high level of prosperity permitted a singularly decorous lifestyle, one envied by other northern cities. The traditional contrast was between industrial Manchester and the seaport Liverpool, the former hamstrung by the latter's privileges. These resulted, in large part, from a charter granted by King John in 1207, which allowed Liverpool to collect port dues on the products of Manchester and other industrial outposts in the north of England. The inequity resulted in a bitterness that found its way into the popular culture of the age. What would happen, a music-hall song asked, if the charter were withdrawn?

> Alas then for poor Liverpool, she'd surely go to pot, Sir. . . . They might come down to Manchester, and we could find them work to do, Sir.[8]

The contrast between industry and commerce, celebrated by these lyrics, has since become blurred, but the advantages enjoyed by men like Alexander Duranty were very real indeed.

By 1871, five years before his death, the elder Duranty owned two impressive houses, one on Princes Road, another, "Melbreck House," on Allerton Road in Birkenhead. His daughter Catherine and his stolid, dependable son-in-law lived next door, their household only slightly less imposing than the patriarch's. There were in Duranty's house on Princes Road his wife Jane, his two sons, now grown to manhood and active members in the family business, and his remaining daughter, the baby of the family. Duranty also supported his sister-in-law, who had accompanied him and his wife from the West Indies. In his employ were almost as many servants as family members—a Scottish nurse who had been with the family for years, a cook, a butler, two scullery maids. It was a prosperous household, where the Victorian values of hard work and moral rectitude were reflected not only in the age's obsessive commitment to money making but also in the certain belief that prosperity rewarded the righteous.

By the time of his death at the age of sixty-four, Alexander Duranty had amassed an impressive fortune, at least the equivalent of a modern-day millionaire, with an estate valued at just under £30,000, including his real estate, his insurance policies, and his stocks, shares, and securities. His scrupulous attention to business matters was exem-

plified by his Last Will and Testament, a document no fewer than nine pages in length. Its guiding principle was the preservation of all that he had accumulated during his lifetime for the use of his wife and many progeny. To his dear Jane, he left £500 in cash as well as the income from his rents, stocks, shares and securities, and the major portion of his "household furniture plate linen china glass books works of art . . . all my Carriages and Horses and the Stock of Wines liquors provisions and consumable Stores."[9] The rest was parceled out—in income from trusts, to his two spinster sisters-in-law, Mary and Jeanette Greenshields, and not forgetting "my old Servant Julie Campbell," an outright gift of £100. To his children, he left equal portions in trust, £10,000 each; and finally, for his children's children on their twenty-first birthdays, equal portions of his residuary estate.

Thus, whatever the excess or failures of his father, the future of the unborn Walter Duranty was to some extent secured, with sufficient funds to allow him to fritter away the first nine years of his adult life in a manner unanticipated, and undoubtedly abhorrent, to the elder patriarch who had paved his way—if not in perfect comfort, well then, with enough money to patch together the fly-by-night lifestyle the young man was to elect.

Within a year of her husband's death, Mrs. Jane Duranty had changed the name of the family firm from "Alexander Duranty and Company" to "Widow Duranty and Sons," thus establishing herself in a tradition of strong women that was at odds with the prevailing Victorian stereotype of fawning dependency, yet not all that uncommon in the days of Empire. It was too much for her son-in-law. A short time later, he deserted to another firm. The family disintegration had begun.

In 1881, the Widow Duranty's youngest son William moved out of her home in order to marry, but he remained in the family business, along with his elder brother Charles.

William Steel Duranty's wife came from a household less impressive and certainly more beleaguered than that of her husband, yet perfectly respectable. Emmeline Hutchins's father, Charles Hutchins, had been a craftsman, an engraver by trade. Born in Stirling, Scotland, in 1816, he lived for a time in Seacomb, Cheshire, before setting up shop in Liverpool. At the age of thirty-five, he was the sole support of five children, all under eight years of age. Emmeline was his youngest. When she married William Steel Duranty in 1881, her father had

already died, perhaps worn out from the effort. The bride was fully thirty-three years old, hardly girlish, her escape from spinsterhood remarkable in a city where she had already outlived by one year the average life expectancy.

The couple moved into 10 Falkner Square, taking their place as members of the Establishment. It was a graceful, multi-story town house in a tree-lined square, located in Mount Pleasant, known for its rolling green lawns, its gardens, its secluded and leisurely way of life, easily the most fashionable area within the city's boundaries. In the streets stood handsome carriages with their attendant grooms; in the drawing rooms, impressive works of art and opulent furnishings reflected the good taste of their owners. The houses surrounding that of the newlyweds were inhabited by brokers and high-level civil servants, accountants, and merchants of tea, carpets, timber, cotton, and wine. Thus, William Steel Duranty and his wife Emmeline joined the city's elite, no doubt supporting, as did the majority of their neighbors, the theater, the literary clubs, and the debating societies of the city.[10]

Those living in the fine hilltop avenues around Falkner Square seldom acknowledged another segment of society, one that could be glimpsed out their carriage windows as they swept past the infamous areas around Scotland or Vauxhall Roads, or other unsightly spots along the waterfront—wretched and barefoot children, begging mothers, vagrants, unsavory prostitutes who had long since ceased to be ashamed of the way they earned their living. The poor were everywhere. Altogether, the neighboring slums shared "some 2,000 public houses and grog shops—'drunk for a penny, blind for twopence'—many of these the scene of nightly disorder comparable with the riotous behavior of privateersmen a century before."[11]

The day Walter Duranty was born, the 25th of May 1884, the weather was unseasonably cool, about 42 degrees Fahrenheit, with strong southwesterly winds.[12] Usually there would be some letup in the cloud cover that depressed northeast England throughout the winter, but this year the clouds were sticking even into the last days of spring.

The year was shaping up ominously in terms of the world economic outlook. A scant ten days before Duranty's birth, the New York Stock Exchange had dwindled downward, creating a full-fledged panic, "the worst since Black Friday in 1873."[13] Banks were closing all over New

York, the doors locking shut. The worst was the suspension of the Metropolitan National Bank. At a loss for what else to do, milling crowds gathered on the streets of the city.

In England, in the industrial North, iron production was falling,[14] the result of prolonged depression, and the panic in distant New York was viewed only as the latest crisis in a long string of economic woes. Under the continuing strain, "shipyards lay idle, factories closed their doors, farmers could not pay their rents, and agricultural laborers flocked to the cities to swell the ranks of those already without work."[15] In Liverpool itself, there had been a recent fall, though slight, in the price of cotton, described in the newspapers as a mere "loss of tone, though demand has been holding up."[16]

With the state of the world markets irrelevant, it seemed then, to his security, Duranty's early childhood was one of privilege. He took his place in that bourgeois, peculiarly Victorian middle-class matrix out of which evolved a commitment to cultural achievement, to individual attainment. His was a family of "doers," of rigid conformity; there was that contempt for the drones of both the upper and lower classes alike. In later life, Duranty would openly flaunt his low regard for the aristocracy: "nincompoop anachronisms" who thought they were "the reincarnation of allegedly able ancestors."[17] And when a prominent socialite once asked whether he was from the landed gentry or aristocracy, he couldn't resist snarling that he was from the lower middle class.[18] That was stretching it a bit—downwards—but it illustrated the full distance he was prepared to put between himself and a class his family evidently despised.

He was of that segment of British manhood upon which fell the full responsibility, as he would later write, "of Empire and Kipling and the White Man's Burden." His earliest memories reflected the typical Victorian horror show.

> When I was a child in England secular books were not considered suitable reading for the young on the Sabbath Day, and their place was taken by improving works, like *Pilgrim's Progress* or, as in my home, by Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, profusely illustrated. There was one picture which always puzzled me. A nude saint (or martyr) was stretched upon the ground, his middle covered by a tin basin from which protruded the tail of a cat, all fluffed and bushy, as cats' tails are in moments of stress. Two hard-faced men were piling red-hot coals on the top of the

> basin, but what this meant I could not understand. As time passed and my knowledge grew, I worried out the letter-press and learned that the cat also had to worry out its way from the impromptu oven, through the poor martyr's living flesh. I cannot believe that such things are "good" for children, but . . . no child who has absorbed Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* with his morning porridge—and survived it—need blench at anything he saw in the jungles of Africa.'[19]

These early years helped to condition the young Duranty to find, between himself and the inhabitants of wherever he might be, a chasm, as deep and wide as can exist between a backward people and the British Ruling Class. His responsibility would be to define, to describe, to delimit—a foregone fact of his upbringing. There could be no identification with the masses, any more than he saw anything of himself in the plight of the poor children of Liverpool.

Despite the distancing, however, he must have been aware of the queer little creatures—they could hardly be called children—running wild in the city. At one time there were as many as 23,000 of them in the dockland area alone; one of every two children born in the city died before reaching the age of eleven.[20] It was in Liverpool that Dickens had observed the street life for some of his novels: barefoot girls atop tables, reciting jingles for pennies in public houses; street urchins huddled together on steps, puzzling out the pictures on a handbill; naked boys bathing in the Leeds and Liverpool canal beside the Burlington Street bridge; the shoe blacks; the chimney sweeps; all of them so different from the young Duranty. His was a world of nannies and French maids, of long, slow Sunday afternoons in Sefton Park, near his Uncle Charles's house, where young boys in dark suits with stiffly starched collars stood beside their fathers in their cravats and bowler hats as they watched fine toy replicas of sailing yachts skim the glassy surface of the lake.

The contrasts at work in Liverpool were singularly representative of the extremes of poverty and wealth resulting from industrialization, or, as it is more euphemistically known, "modernization"—the sometimes bitter fruit of the revolution that had its beginning a century before.

In Liverpool it was the Irish who first crossed the sea in order to find work on "the Manchester-Liverpool railway line across the treacherous marshlands of Chat Moss." Later, they came to escape the potato

famines, hundreds of thousands of them, crowded onto the decks of the "coffin ships." Fully a quarter of these refugees from starvation would stay in the port city to make a life in the back alleys and doorways, finding lodgings in cellars that were as often as not flooded with stagnant sewage.[21] City officials routinely ordered the cellars filled with sand to prevent their use as shelters by the poor.[22]

Those who could made their passage to America to try for the good life. Those who couldn't joined the throngs of unemployed who peopled the streets. By the year of Duranty's birth, Liverpool had become a city whose population exceeded 600,000, at least a tenth of them in a state of destitution.

Despite the general attitude of the middle class into which Duranty was born—whose response to the growing ills was distinctly anti-Catholic and anti-Irish—various societies sprang up to help the poor, to try to prevent the cruel neglect of children and violent acts against them, which were the inevitable result of fathers out of work and on the streets while their wives labored in the grim factories. These early charitable societies laid the foundation for the modern welfare state, and thus Liverpool became, in its attempt at dealing with the ravages of the Industrial Revolution, "the cradle of Socialism."

The year before Duranty was born, the Utopian society of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw—the original Fabian Society—was organized, and began its advance from crackpot status to political viability after the full effects of virtual manhood suffrage, granted in 1884, were realized. The parties needed the laboring man's vote, and the laboring man was joining "the tide against laissez faire." When the Fabian Society joined forces in 1900 with the Independent Labour Party, the trade unions, the Marxist Socialists, and rival and more radical Marxist groups, the Labour Party became an important new force.[23]

These were the events of Duranty's youth, events that would shape his life and, to some extent, color his interpretation of what was to follow.

Duranty first became aware of Russia, he was fond of recounting, at an English country fair at a show entitled *Herr Parizer's Penny Novelties*, where he was taken by his nurse at the age of four. "There were three principal items," he remembered.

First, a stout woman in a white night-gown wore a golden crown slightly askew and sang *Rock of Ages Cleft for Me*, while the screen bore a colored picture of another woman—or was it, I wonder, the same woman—clinging to a black rock surmounted by a white cross in the midst of raging waters.

The second scene was acted. We saw the Squire and his Lady at dinner, attended by a minion in a red waistcoat. Its climax was the hasty consumption by the minion of a mass of broken bread behind his master's back. The Squire turned and caught him, whereupon, in confusion, he regurgitated everything upon a silver tray. This repulsive playlet roused the audience to roars of enthusiasm, fully shared by me.

Having thus purged our souls, as Aristotle said, by religion and laughter, the Parizer genius next produced tragedy, a grim picture—or rather a series of colored "stills," entitled, with appalling subtlety, *A Russian Ride*. . . .

The first picture showed the Russian family—father, mother and five babies of tender years—going off for a sleigh ride across the snowbound steppe. In the second appeared a wolf-pack, hundreds of hungry beasts with slavering jaws and fiery eyes. In the third picture, captioned "Pursuit," the wolves were gaining. The fourth picture was shocking. The wolf-pack leaders were abreast of the foam-flecked horses, which the driver, erect, was lashing with all his strength. In the fifth, which froze our blood, the father tossed a baby to the wolves. Sixth, ditto; seventh, ditto; eighth, ditto. In each the driver stood erect and flogged his foaming horses, while the wolf-pack surged around them. The ninth and last picture let us breathe again. "Saved" was the title in large black letters. The sleigh was at rest before a wooden building, and the breath of the panting team smoked in the frosty air. The driver sat huddled on his seat, and behind him the distracted parents embraced their surviving child. In the background a squad of soldiers fired a volley at the wolf-pack.[24]

The show, Duranty said, marked his mind "with error and prejudice about Russia." It implied that Russia was a "wild and barbarous country where savage animals could still menace man" and that "Russians, through callousness or necessity do not hesitate to sacrifice lives of others, however dear to them, to save their own. . . ."[25]

The other event of his youth that made a significant impact on him was typical Victorian Gothic, the kind of sin and guilt dispensed to youngsters as a matter of course, almost like tonic. In Duranty's case,

it seems to have remained the central memory of a man who didn't remember much about his early days.

Once as a young boy, when he lied to his grandmother—"a woman of rigid virtue and a pillar of the Presbyterian Church, and generous withal"—she pressed his finger against a hot bar in the fire grate, and when the young Duranty cried out, she said, "Liars go to hell, and in hell it burns like that forever."[26]

Is it surprising that Duranty chose to reject the theological baggage of John Knox, the hell-fire tradition of guilt and sin and fierce retribution that ruled and motivated the older generation?

As for his grandmother, he never really loved her after that.

The movement was outward, away from the city, middle-class flight to suburbia, and William Steel Duranty took his wife, son, and infant daughter, along with his household of servants, and left the town, although he continued the commute to the firm. They set up housekeeping in Westraydun, Blundell Sands, Waterloo, in a temporary move that stretched out into six years; it was pleasant, bucolic, but not exactly what they were after. At last, in 1893, a further commute, to Belford Freshfield, Formby, some ways distant from the center of the city, in a countrified environment: here they bought a dwelling more a mansion than a house, with a drawing room for entertaining, multiple bedrooms, servants' quarters, and a long sweeping drive that curved around to the back. William Steel Duranty took the new railway line into the city while his son Walter was groomed for Harrow.

Something about the mature Walter Duranty belied an exclusive upper-class education, and there was that suspicion among his colleagues that Duranty had never, in fact, attended the well known public school. The Harrow-Eton thing seemed somehow "above his station,"[27] his detractors would say.

But Duranty was indeed a Harrow boy, complete with top hat on Sunday, straw hat during the week; ample Latin, more Greek, and the "steady drill in accidence and syntax, the acquisition of vocabulary, and the accurate if painful translation of simple sentences from one language to another."[28] Along with French, this was where Walter Duranty would excel. He had that facility for language.

Later, his fellow correspondents would be impressed by the fact that Duranty could pick up any local newspaper and rattle it off, translating rapidly into perfect French, Latin, Greek, or eventually, after a

few years in Moscow, Russian.[29] "Walter Duranty was the most cultivated, brilliant, civilized, best-educated reporter in all Europe, except for perhaps his friend William Bolitho, from South Africa,"[30] a colleague would say, one of Duranty's supporters.

It was only in mathematics that the young Duranty fell down, turning in a mediocre performance.

Life at Harrow "was primarily a toughening or hardening process in which children learnt to conceal or repress their more tender emotions, and to create for themselves a fairly cheerful and self-controlled existence away from their homes."[31] Duranty disliked it. As an adult he complained that the British "treat their ruling class far rougher and more harshly than they treat the proletariat."[32]

The boys were up early, in chapel by seven, with only a cup of coffee in their stomachs. They had an hour's lesson before breakfast, another four hours of steady work before lunch. Then, there were three more grueling lessons to be got through before tea, still more study time afterwards. Sunday brought little relief, with as many as three compulsory chapel services, one before breakfast.[33]

Sports were mandatory. The boys were required to participate in the "games"—cricket, of course, and two codes of football—learning, above all, good sportsmanship, teamwork, and discipline. Always there was that unstated Victorian fear that boys left idle would get into trouble: free time was regarded as *suspicio sexualis.*[34]

The subject of sex was taboo, and the only information the boys could glean came from illicit sources, full of misinformation, or through the Bible or the classics. And then, regardless of all the attempts to prevent it, there was the early "buggery." Some said the public school system engendered the tendency among British males. But Duranty sensibly pooh-poohed such nonsense. He was, as an adult, frank, open, cosmopolitan in speaking about sexual matters, much more so than his newspaper colleagues from the United States, who were unaccustomed to such frankness. They were quite honestly shocked at Duranty's declaration that homosexuality was part of a young person's development and that public school experimentation was little more than "mutual masturbation," nothing at all to worry about.[35] All his life, Walter Duranty would take up controversial points of view, showing, as the years increased, less and less patience with the insular and the provincial. He would become opinionated, outspoken, cocksure—he was a public school boy, all right.

Then, suddenly, in 1899, when Duranty was fifteen, it came to an end. He was pulled out of Harrow, without explanation, and the family vacated the house in Formby. For reasons never made clear, his father dropped from sight entirely, leaving his mother to take up modest lodgings on her own, with only her fourteen-year-old daughter, for company. "Widow Duranty and Sons" disappeared without trace, victim to the uncertain times.

Duranty found himself hastily shuttled from Harrow to Bedford Grammar School. He was registered there as Number 4161, his mother's name written out in full, the space reserved for his father's name left blank.[36] William Steel Duranty would not rejoin his wife for several years, and when he did, it would be a pinched existence, in a modest home owned by his daughter.

When Walter Duranty was transferred from the prestigious Harrow to the respectable Bedford, he was the only boy of his year to suffer such a come-down. Most of the others were listed as "taught at home." Many were substantially subsidized by the Harpur Foundation, a charitable trust that helped some of the needier boys with their school fees which were, in any case, attractively lower than those in other schools of like quality. Duranty joined the ranks of the more heavily sponsored boys, easily soaring through the highly selective admission requirements. Undaunted, it seemed then, by his family's reversal, Duranty quickly took his place as one of the better students, his record at school something of a model.

The bow on the school rowing team, he was one of "Our Eight," described at one time as much improved "in the use of his slide, but he tumbles badly over the stretcher."[37] He went in for rugby, avoiding cricket, but never distinguished himself much on the team. He "was rather light," but made up for it "by always playing well."[38] Despite his mediocre record, he would later identify "the day he got his 'colors'" as the happiest moment in his life, in one of the few references he ever made to his childhood.

His best physical skill was speed, and he distinguished himself only once in his sporting career at the school, in the House Steeplechase. The annual event took place on March 25th 1903, "in very favourable weather. The Seniors was won by Duranty . . . who thus takes the Steeplechase Prize."[39] The first sixty in the race had their names listed in the school magazine, *The Ousel.* Walter Duranty's stood at the top.

Then, too, he was senior monitor. There were six of them who

headed the various boarding houses, taking the collection to the altar on a Sunday, maintaining discipline, and generally "running everything." Part of it, of course, was expected to include the infamous activity of "fagging." At school, corporal punishment resulted from serious infringements of discipline, like intentional damage of school property, but in the boarding houses like Mr. Barnes's, where Duranty was a monitor, there was a higher degree of discipline, the slipper giving way, more often than not, to the cane.

The system included a series of fines for minor infractions, which were kept account of. When he got too many, a boy was liable to be beaten. It was a ritualistic affair: the caning was recorded in a book by a "referee" who stayed to witness the punishment, just to be sure things didn't get out of hand. The boys thought of it as "a game of forfeit." None would have thought of complaining. As senior monitor Duranty was in charge of such punishment. In exchange, he was accorded special privileges.

It was easy to spot the senior monitors on a Sunday, decked out in special clothes, fancy waistcoats, blue ties, bowler hats. If they liked, they could carry a silver-tipped cane.

Otherwise, on weekdays, they were indistinguishable from the other boys, in navy blue jacket, black tie, starched stiff collar, and white shirt. Bedford boys wore the school cap on the back of their heads, the badge a dark navy blue with a gold eagle crest.[40]

In the young Duranty, now growing to manhood, there suddenly appeared this flair for the dramatic, this love for the theatrical. In his last year at Bedford, he appeared in the school production of *The Grand Duchess.* His "utterance," according to the school magazine, was "exceptionally clear and sonorous" as he made "his flying visits to the scene, [giving] individuality to the minor role of Aide-de-Camp."[41]

But comedy was Duranty's forte. On "Speech Day," the final ceremony of his last year at Bedford, Duranty appeared in two skits, the first "the French Scene," where he took part in a short duologue by Verconsin, *Infanterie et Cavalerie,* as Mathias, the old infantry sergeant. Along with his partner, he was, the magazine said, "capitally got up," maintaining "very creditably the tone and motions of senility."[42]

In "the Greek scene," an episode "very freely adapted" from *The Birds* by Aristophanes, "Special praise [was] due to *Prometheus* (W. Duranty) for the clearness of his enunciation. . . . He inflected his voice

as though speaking in his mother tongue; this very ease occasionally resulted in a rapidity which may have baffled all but alert 'Grecians.' His get-up, too, was remarkably good."[43] Again, then, this unusual aptitude for language—it would place him far in the lead once he started his journalistic career.

But that "clear and sonorous" enunciation—a characteristic of his rather high-pitched voice—would later disqualify him from a career in broadcasting. It simply wasn't thought appropriate for serious work as a radio commentator, especially in those early days of primitive transmission.[44]

The special responsibilities his intellect imposed upon him were defined for Duranty and the other boys at that ceremony on "Speech Day," held on the 23rd of July 1903, when he was leaving Bedford. The headmaster of the school emphasized the necessity for self-reliance and concentration in his final address:

> In a school like this which draws boys from all corners of the British Empire, and sends them out again to make their way to every corner of the globe, these are the most valuable lessons which can be learnt (hear, hear).
>
> [Each boy] should feel that he is a member of a great society to which he owes duties, for which he has to do something, and whose welfare depends upon his conduct and his character . . . and feel he is a part of a larger whole to which he owes the sacrifice of some convenience and some liberty.[45]

This was the burden the boys were expected to assume as the new generation of rulers of the British Empire.

In the class lists for May 1903, Walter Duranty was rated third overall in a form of fourteen. In Classics, he finished second; third in French, fourth in History and Divinity. He took the Top Award in Classics, and his teacher, T. P. Gordon Robinson, helped Duranty proceed to an open Classical Scholarship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

And so, in the autumn of 1903, despite his family's reversal in fortune, Duranty arrived at Cambridge more as a result of ability than of social connections, which once having been respectable, perhaps even formidable, were now of the sort that the less was said about them, the

better. He formed the habit of saying less and proceeded in good form. But there must have been some feelings of resentment, even of shame for the young man, now entering manhood.

The university town of Cambridge was built primarily of gray stone and red brick enclosing colleges of impressive architectural design. In the marketplace, the bells of Great Mary's chimed out the hour in that lonely way of small towns where time seems to pass more slowly than in the hectic cities. The streets in those days were often thin of people, except for a few townsfolk and, of course, the inevitable students. These were mainly men, generally of privileged backgrounds, who affected a "somewhat dowdy appearance, it not being quite the thing to look smart."

> Cloth caps in winter, straw boaters in summer, would be in evidence, and bowler hats on a Sunday; walking-sticks and gloves being essential appendages for visits to Newmarket or Lords.[46]

The young men favored gray flannel trousers, "stiff collars pitched rather high under the chin and Norfolk jackets."[47] In Duranty's case, any pretensions to dress would have been an affectation. He wasn't good looking, so why bother?

He had a mug face, his hairline high, receding a bit already. He wore his hair cropped short in an abbreviated Roman style. His thick-lipped, sensual mouth seemed to have a slightly cynical twist around the corners. The nose was fine-chiseled but a shade too large, that bit too flat. The only relief in this none-too-handsome face was a pair of clear, gray eyes, slightly hooded, twinkling, letting it be known somehow that one was in the presence of a keen intellect, a man with an unusual sense of mischief and of humor. At full height, Duranty was no taller than five feet six inches; this as well as the look of youthful idealism he conveyed in his more serious moments made him look a good deal younger than he was. And his lively manner, his outrageous talk, added to the impression.

Duranty matriculated at Emmanuel College on the 21st of October 1903, "having already, earlier in the same month passed the second part of the Previous Examination."[48] During that first year, he paid for his own room, board, and tuition. But during his second year and

again in his third, he received financial assistance, the sort generally reserved for students in need.[49]

Emmanuel had been founded as the result of a Charter of Queen Elizabeth I, sealed on 11 January 1584. The grounds of the College had been acquired from the Cambridge priory of the Dominicans, and its "half-ruined buildings" had been converted into "the hall, the buttery, and the Fellows' parlour, with the Master's Lodge above."[50] Later Sir Christopher Wren designed the chapel, its cloister, and the surrounding gallery, which was the most striking architectural feature of the court. The interior of the first-floor gallery was handsomely wainscoted and later furnished with a couple of dozen chairs and two settees of walnut in the Chippendale style. Behind the chapel were prospects of open grass, flowers, and an ornamental pond with mallards and moorhens paddling in the gray waters. In the Fellows' Garden a gigantic and ancient Oriental plane tree dominated rolled lawns trimmed by flower beds and hedgerows.

The original purpose of the college is clear from the statutes. It was intended to be a "school of prophets," and "[f]rom the first the College was reputed a Puritan establishment."[51] Indeed, of the first one hundred settlers with a university education in New England, fully one-third were Emmanuel men; the best known, John Harvard, is credited with the founding of the first university in the New World. Throughout the years, Emmanuel College maintained a reputation for excellence, its distinguished graduates including such men as Thomas Young, known for his work in areas as diverse as the wave theory of light and the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Sir William Gell, the classical archaeologist, "whose work on Pompeii was standard throughout the nineteenth century."[52] Generally speaking, the College remained primarily a center for religious studies, with many of its young men destined for the church.

In those days, just after the turn of the century, the young men still addressed each other by their surnames. It was the fashion to smoke pipes and stay up talking into the early hours of morning, especially since they weren't allowed to be out past midnight, Dean's rules. At Emmanuel the talk centered on theological questions, always a bore to Duranty whose interest in the classics stemmed from a love of drama and narrative and whose commitment to religion had been from the start perfunctory. He fancied himself a literary type, a poet, or perhaps

a novelist. He wouldn't have minded writing short stories in the style of Saki (H. H. Munro), whom he admired and who had preceded him at Bedford. One of Duranty's classmates at Emmanuel, Hugh Walpole, would also succeed at writing fiction, a craft that somehow remained out of reach for Duranty, despite his considerable rhetorical skills.

Until his last year at Emmanuel, Duranty continued with his rowing. The team practiced on the Cam, the lingering river that winds its way through the city with hardly a ripple, the bent branches of the willow trees that line its banks drifting atop the calm water. Surprisingly, the Cam was "in a state of flood" during Duranty's first year, and the crew's poor start was blamed on the unusual circumstance.[53] The bad luck continued, however, and the crew never amounted to anything, at least not while Duranty was at Emmanuel.

He continued to excel in his studies, perfecting the classical grounding that would later show in many of his dispatches. He would use many of the stories he learned at Emmanuel to give substance to his newspaper writing, making literary allusions a hallmark of his personal style. His Cambridge education also, as he liked to recall in later years, "trained [his] mind," taught him how to "meet people without embarrassment" and to "get up on [his] feet and talk" in debating societies, as well as to play bridge and poker.[54]

In the only anecdote of his student years that Duranty ever published, he credited his education as the means by which he acquired a bit of business acumen. When he was twenty, he got a lucrative job during the Christmas vacation giving lessons in Latin and Greek to the son of a wealthy lace manufacturer in Nottingham. While there, he chanced to get into an argument with a rich and obnoxious friend of his employer—in Duranty's words, "a fat-faced, purse-proud, arrogant son of Satan"—who dismissed the practical value of a college education out of hand. The young Duranty impulsively bet that he could double an investment of five pounds within twenty-four hours. Once having put himself on the spot, he came up with the bright idea of selling 160 bottles of "cheap but violent perfume" at a stall in the marketplace at Leicester. But by five o'clock in the afternoon he had managed to sell only seven bottles. He was saved when "a thick-set ugly fellow" running a neighboring stall showed him how to do it. Duranty had the right product, he was told, but not the right selling manner.

> So he began yellin' and yippin' and taking out the atomizer and squirting it at couples and saying how good it was, and you might be surprised to hear that he sold two dozen bottles in five minutes.[55]

With the help of a little urchin, who also joined the act, Duranty had sold, by half past eight, his full stock, bringing him a profit of 120 percent and enabling him to win his bet, after all.

Despite his quick wit, however, and undeniable brilliance, beneath the impressive academic record and promise of a fine career, there was in the young Duranty a character flaw. It was isolated early by one of his instructors, recognized even by Duranty himself as a threat to his future. He saw, he himself admitted, "too many sides of a question to be sure which one of them was quite true," and in his "heart of hearts" he was "rather inclined to pity single-minded people as being somehow deficient in unbiased judgment."

> I once said something of the kind to a master or teacher . . . and he replied severely, "You, Duranty, are afflicted by the curse of Reuben—instability. You may flatter yourself that you are seeking for truth, but the fact is that you cannot make up your own mind. Remember the curse of Reuben, "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." I was much cast down by this reproof until one day I thought to myself that I did not particularly want to excel. What I wanted, I thought, and what I still want, I know, is to see and hear new things, and to find out—to find out the great things of world affairs and the small things in people's minds, not for any profound purpose, good, bad, or indifferent, but for my own interest, entertainment and, in latter years, amusement. It is perhaps a selfish philosophy and somewhat negative, but it is neither greedy nor cruel; nor is it foolish or frightened.[56]

So quite early on, and quite cheerfully, Walter Duranty opted out. He would observe events and people as a source of interest and entertainment, following a philosophy of detachment somewhat at odds with the customary idealism of youth.

And then there was the family thing. Those years when the young Duranty was testing his mettle, first at Bedford, then at Cambridge, learning the boundaries of his intellect and his academic ability, his father had simply disappeared, while his mother scraped by alone. Reunited after a lengthy interval in the modest house in Golders Green, a suburb of London, they would recede further and further

from Duranty's consciousness. He learned he could leave the complicated past behind if he went forward fast enough.

When his mother died in 1916, there was no word from Duranty. Fourteen years later, his sister died at forty-five, a spinster. Her life had been devoted to her father, who outlived her by three years. And when in 1933, plagued by senility and the diseases of old age, William Steel Duranty died, he left a personal estate valued at merely £430, besides the house his daughter had left him—a pathetic come-down from his early days of opulence and plenty. Walter Duranty's only acknowledgment of his family in all of these years was a curt document notarized in Moscow, authorizing his father's solicitors to sell the house, take their fee, and send him the proceeds.

Publicly, he solved his problem once and for all in his autobiography, *Search for a Key,* by killing off his parents in a railway accident and orphaning himself at the age of ten, an only child.

It put an end to any unwelcome questions.

CHAPTER II

Maggots upon an Apple

Whenever Aleister Crowley stepped out of line, and somehow that turned out to be fairly often, his mother fell into the habit of calling him "the Beast," based upon the text from Revelation: "And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns, ten diadems. . . . And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God. . . ."

She and her husband, until his premature death from cancer of the tongue when "the Beast" was only eleven years old, were active members of the exclusive sect known as the Plymouth Brethren—a group of strict fundamentalists, whose tenets included more than a passing preoccupation with the nature of sin and death,[1] good stuff for the training of their boy.

For a while the young Crowley followed in the path of the Brethren, but sometime after the death of his father and about the time of the onset of his own puberty, Crowley made a signal discovery: that the mention of torture or blood aroused him sexually. The young Crowley "even liked to imagine himself in agony and in particular, degraded by and suffering at the hands of a woman whom he described as 'wicked, independent, courageous, ambitious.'"[2] He became fascinated by the Book of Revelation, dwelling morbidly on the False Prophet, the Scarlet Woman, and the Beast, with whom he now identified. There were

other early signs of an unusual sensibility, coupled perhaps with an abnormal imagination, which led him to test beliefs others were satisfied to accept at face value. Told a cat had nine lives, for example, the young Crowley

> caught a cat, and having administered a large dose of arsenic . . . chloroformed it, hanged it above the gas jet, stabbed it, cut its throat, smashed its skull, and, when it had been pretty thoroughly burnt, drowned it and threw it out the window that the fall might remove the ninth life. The operation was successful.[3]

In 1896, when he was twenty, Crowley went up to Trinity College, Cambridge. There, he occupied his time with reading and the writing of verse. It was not in the common style:

> All degradation, all sheer infamy,
> That shalt endure. Thy head beneath the mire
> And dung of worthless women shall desire
> As in some hateful dream, at last to lie;
> Woman must trample thee till thou respire that deadliest fume;
> The Vilest of worms must crawl, the loathliest vampire's gloom.[4]

Although Crowley never fully lost his interest in female defecatory functions, later in his life his focus changed abruptly to the expulsion of semen—or "elixir," as he called it—often in novel or bizarre situations. The poem "With Dog and Dame," a celebration of bestiality, remains perhaps the outstanding example of his preoccupations. By the time he came to write his poetic anthology White Stains, Crowley had begun signing his name in a large, childish scrawl, the capital "A" being so enscribed as to represent a thick penis with curlicues at the base resembling large testicles. He also formally adopted his mother's pet name, commonly referring to himself as "Beast 666," the great Anti-Christ predicted in the Book of Revelation.

His powers had resulted, Crowley believed, from a mystical revelation that had come to him on the last day of the year 1896, when, waking from a particularly troubling nightmare in the afternoon, he came to the realization that he could in fact control reality with magic.[5] The discovery inspired him. And at once he accepted in himself the desire to become "an Adept in the Secret Arts, a Magus." It was not