RADICAL HISTORY AND POLITICS

ROUTLEDGE

The Years of Anger

The Life of Randall Swingler

Andy Croft

A genuinely ground-breaking biography that restores to view a forgotten world of left culture in twentieth-century Britain.

Ben Harker, *University of Manchester, UK*

Unjustly neglected as a poet, Randall Swingler is one of the most fascinating figures in the cultural history of British communism. Scholarly, empathetic and beautifully written, Andy Croft's biography is a wonderful work of retrieval and one of the best accounts we have of the cultural politics of the popular front and Cold War years.

Kevin Morgan, *University of Manchester, UK*

THE YEARS OF ANGER

Randall Swingler (1909–67) was arguably the most significant and the best-known radical English poet of his generation. A widely published poet, playwright, novelist, editor and critic, his work was set to music by almost all the major British composers of his time. This new biography draws on extensive sources, including the security services files, to present the most detailed account yet of this influential poet, lyricist and activist.

A literary entrepreneur, Swingler was founder of radical paperback publishing company Fore Publications, editor of *Left Review* and *Our Time* and literary editor of the *Daily Worker*, later becoming a staff reporter, until the paper was banned in 1941. In the 1930s, he contributed several plays for Unity Theatre, including the Mass Declamation *Spain*, the Munich play *Crisis* and the revues *Sandbag Follies* and *Get Cracking*. In 1936, MI5 opened a 20-year-long file on him prompted by a song he co-wrote with Alan Bush for a concert organised to mark the arrival of the 1934 Hunger March into London. During the Second World War, Swingler served in North Africa and Italy and was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the battle of Lake Comacchio. His collections *The Years of Anger* (1946) and *The God in the Cave* (1950) contain arguably some of the greatest poems of the Italian campaign. After the war, Swingler was blacklisted by the BBC. Orwell attacked him in *Polemic* and included him in the list of names he offered the security services in 1949. Stephen Spender vilified him in *The God That Failed*.

The book will challenge the Cold War assumptions that have excluded Swingler's life and work from standard histories of the period and should be of great interest to activists, scholars and those with an interest in the history of the literary and radical left.

Andy Croft has published numerous anthologies of poetry as well as several previous studies of Randall Swingler and of political literature including *Randall Swingler: Poet of the Italian Campaign* (2008); *Comrade Heart: A Life of Randall Swingler* (2003); *A Weapon in the Struggle: Essays on the Cultural History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (1998); and *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (1990).

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THE YEARS OF ANGER

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Andy Croft

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You can't but be diminished
Though what you stood for will triumph;
And even your works endure,
Temporarily swamped by the mad
And fashionable. When
We hear of any murder
Or the tuneless and disordered
Surrender to the Zeitgeist
Our thoughts will spring to you,
Seeking your heart-felt marks.

Roy Fuller, 'In Memory of Randall Swingler and Alan Rawsthorne'

And Randall Swingler, that most honest man,
sacrificing to the communist cause
everything he possessed, including an
inherent hate of bullying and wars.

George Barker, 'Elegy'

If ever you should be tempted, comrade heart,
By your own smallness, by your own longing
For quiet rivers, maternal hills,
And the solitary sun along the wrinkled sea,

If you should be drawn into the tragic dream
Of histrionic ruin, and begin to betray
The force of your ancestors unfolding
Their fearlessness like buds within your blood,

If you should be tempted to despair, remember,
Remember at once, and be humbled and quickened . . .

Randall Swingler, 'The Possible'

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

When Edward Thompson came to revise his biography of William Morris, he observed that in the interval between the first and second editions of any book, 'the terrain of scholarship changes, and so do the preoccupations of scholars.' Unfortunately in the thirty years since I began writing this biography, the landscape of thinking about British literary life in the middle years of the twentieth century appears to be still frozen by the assumptions of the Cold War. This is a hard frost, a silent terrain. When this book was first published in 2003 by Manchester University Press, I imagined that it would draw attention to the life of a writer whose work seemed to me to be unjustly and inexplicably neglected. The book received almost no critical attention. Swingler is still barely a footnote in most new academic studies of the period and is conspicuously absent in the biographies of writers and artists with whom he once worked, like Britten, Auden, MacNeice, Barker, Cunard, Berger, Boswell, Henderson and Thompson, or of those with whom he clashed like Spender and Orwell. His poetry remains hard to find, and the arguments he made about culture and society, poetry and democracy remain unheard. This is the kind of critical silence by which British culture defines its limits and defends its interests.[1]

And yet by any measure Swingler was a *central* figure in British cultural life in the middle decades of the twentieth century, a writer whose life and work should be integral to any history of the period that is not disfigured by carelessness or dishonesty.[2]

As an editor, speaker, organiser, journalist, critic, playwright, poet, librettist, novelist and publisher, Randall Swingler was, for over twenty years, one of the leading figures in the cultural activities of the British Communist Party and was responsible for some of the most imaginative interventions of the Popular Front years. No English writer worked harder to mobilise public opinion in the name of peace, fought more bravely to prosecute the war when it could no longer be avoided or wrote so extensively against the Cold War division of its spoils.

His poetry provides an extraordinary and unique record of the middle years of the century, from the romantic Communism of the early thirties to the New Left, from the Popular Front and the People's War to the disappointments and betrayals of the Cold War (Orwell included Swingler in the list of names he offered the Information Research Department (IRD) in 1949, while Stephen Spender denounced him in *The God That Failed*). At the very least, he ought to be a gift for historians, because he appears to conform exactly to the easy stereotype of the 1930s gilded upper-class, ex-vicarage, Communist intellectual – his uncle and godfather was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson.

Swingler's words were set to music by almost all the major British composers of his time, including Benjamin Britten, John Ireland, Alan Bush, Bernard Stevens, Elizabeth Lutyens, Christian Darnton, John Sykes and Alan Rawsthorne. He and Bush wrote *Peace and Prosperity* for the London Choral Union, and a radically rewritten production of Handel's *Belshazzar* for the London Co-operative Movement. He wrote the words of the chorale finale for Bush's first *Piano Concerto*, broadcast by the BBC in 1938. He filled the Albert Hall in 1939 with a historical verse pageant starring Paul Robeson and set to music by several composers, including Vaughan Williams, Arnold Cooke, Victor Yates, Edmund Rubbra, Erik Chisholm, Frederic Austin, Norman Demuth and Elizabeth Maconchy. He and Auden wrote the text of Britten's *Ballad of Heroes*.[3]

Swingler edited the best-selling *Left Review*, one of the key cultural institutions of the Popular Front in Britain and was involved in negotiations with Allen Lane for the relaunch of *Left Review* by Penguin. He published and helped edit Nancy Cunard's famous *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, selling five thousand copies in two weeks. He was active in the Workers Music Association, for whom he and Alan Bush wrote many songs. In 1938 he and Bush edited *The Left Song Book* for the Left Book Club. He founded a radical paperback publishing company, Fore Publications, selling half a million books in the first year. In 1939 he was appointed literary editor of the *Daily Worker*; later he became a staff reporter, reporting on the Blitz until the paper was banned in 1941. He contributed several plays for Unity Theatre, including the Mass Declamation *Spain*, the Munich play *Crisis* and revues like *Sandbag Follies* and *Get Cracking*. He wrote a new version of *Peer Gynt* for Rupert Doone's celebrated Group Theatre (where he was assistant editor of the *Group Theatre* magazine). He and Auden were the only English poets included (with Alberti, Aragon, Guillén, Hughes, Lorca, Neruda and Tzara) in *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol* (1937). In 1938 he took over the editorship of the magazine *Poetry and the People*, relaunching it as *Our Time*.

During the Second World War – when his now more famous contemporaries were working for the BBC or were in the US – Swingler served with the 56th Divisional Signals, mostly with the Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy. He took part in heavy fighting on the Volturno and Garigliano rivers, at Monte Camino, and on the Salerno and Anzio beachheads. For his part in the battle of Lake Comachio, Corporal Swingler was awarded the Military Medal for bravery. Only a few

writers – Alexander Baron, Konstantin Simonov, Ilya Ehrenburg, Boris Slutsky, Vasiliy Grossman, Louis Aragon, Hamish Henderson – wrote about the war as vividly and as memorably as Swingler.

After the war, he edited the magazines *Our Time*, *Arena* and *Circus*. Later he was on the editorial board of *The New Reasoner* and on the founding board of *New Left Review*.

This new, revised, paperback edition is an opportunity to put the facts of Swingler's remarkable life back into print and to present some of his poetry to a new generation of readers. The book has also been substantially expanded to include material from MI5's files on Swingler, which were released to the public in 2006.

Swingler first came to the attention of the Special Branch in 1936 as the author, with Alan Bush, of *Song of the Hunger Marchers* written two years earlier to support the fifth National Hunger March ('Remember, fellow workers,/Who earn a wage today,/ That they'll throw you on the scrapheap,/When they find it doesn't pay'). The words of the song may seem innocuous today, but they were enough to trigger the paranoid responses of the security services and set in train a monstrous surveillance operation that was to last twenty years and effectively destroy Swingler's career as a writer.

There are hundreds of pages and thousands of entries surviving in the files MI5 kept on Swingler from 1936 to 1955 (the first volume, covering the years 1936–7, was destroyed by fire in 1940). And there are dozens of pages *still* 'retained under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958' – presumably to protect the identity of MI5's informers, at least one of whom was a member of the Swinglers' circle.

Most of these files contain nothing but inconsequential trivia – the registration numbers of cars parked outside the Swinglers' house, the pictures on their walls, the concerts they attended, the frequency of their visits to the pub, the names of people they drank with. The files contain poems, bank statements, intercepted letters, reports of dozens of talks and readings, transcripts of telephone conversations to and from Communist Party's King Street headquarters, and a great many conversations recorded inside King Street involving full-timers like Harry Pollitt, Betty Reid, Emile Burns, Dave Springhall, Sam Aaronovitch, Bob Stewart and George Matthews. In December 1941 Special Branch submitted a highly detailed two-page biography of Swingler to MI5, including a list of his publications (and the date and place of the Swinglers' wedding). Every time the Swinglers travelled to the Continent, their suitcases were searched at Newhaven or at London airport on the way out and on the way back ('Nothing of interest to Special Branch was found during the examination of their baggage').

On the other hand, the files contain some rather good summaries of his public lectures, including a two-page précis of a talk Swingler gave in 1947 to Hampstead CP branch on 'Education for All or Culture for the Few.' The confidence with which Special Branch dated Swingler's membership of the CP from November 1935 suggests they had good reason to do so. Before reading these files, I did not know that Swingler worked for Malcolm McEwen in the 1941 Dunbarton by-election, producing a twice-weekly 'by-election special'; or that in 1951 Swingler was elected to the Publications Panel at the foundation meeting of the Authors World Peace Appeal. Or that MI5 considered him so dangerous a figure that they placed at least one informant to report on him, directly to Roger Hollis.

But these files tell us rather less about Randall Swingler than they do about the security services, who seem to have been bizarrely preoccupied with his appearance: 'wears his hair very long and unkempt,' 'Bohemian type,' 'a man of Communist appearance,' 'untidy brown hair,' 'has the appearance of a communist,' 'untidy hair' (his wife Geraldine, by contrast, is described several times as being 'of very smart appearance'). There is a long, paranoid correspondence from 1953 when Swingler got a temporary job fixing motorbikes at an army motorcycle depot ('we should be glad if you would let us know whether this man is likely to come into contact with work of a secret nature'). A letter from Swingler in 1955 to the *Halstead Gazette* protesting against German rearmament turns up in the files. And a report on a meeting of Artists for Peace in early 1956 dismisses Swingler's contribution to the discussion as 'the usual waffle about demonstrating the positive aspects of peace.'

A great many of Swingler's friends were also on MI5's books. His files are endlessly cross-referenced to files on people like the composers Alan Bush, Bernard Stevens and Christian Darnton, the opera singer Martin Lawrence, the actress Ann Davies, the artists Paul Hogarth and John Banting and the novelist John Sommerfield. The Swinglers' friendship with the artist Michael Ayrton seems to have persuaded MI5 to open a file on him too. Swingler's wife Geraldine ('a musician in a London Dance Band') was under surveillance, as was her sister Mary. Even Swingler's father appears in the files because he was a Left Book Club sympathiser. And MI5 were running a file on Swingler's brother Stephen a long time before he was elected to parliament as a Labour MP.

This is the record of a bloated and secret bureaucracy, moving easily and unaccountably between excessive surveillance and a grotesque breach of civil liberties. These were the years in which the security services were allowed to define what was in 'the national interest' and who represented a threat to 'national security.'

When Swingler was in Italy with the Eighth Army, the security services placed an embargo on him applying for a commission. Later they blocked his application to join the Intelligence Corps. After the war, they stopped him getting a teaching job in Army Education. In 1948 they intervened to prevent him being employed as a script-writer at the BBC. And of course MI5 never *found* anything. There are no dead-letter drops or secret rendezvous with heavily built Russians. In fact the security services showed a curious lack of interest in Swingler's visits to Czechoslovakia in 1953 and Romania in 1954 (apart from the usual luggage searches and intercepted letters).

'As wars go,' observes Richard Knott in *The Secret War Against the Arts: How the Security Services Targeted Left-Wing Writers and Artists*, 'the campaign waged by MI5 and Special Branch over the twenty years from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to the Soviet invasion of Hungary was lacking in strategic oversight, clarity of purpose and, thankfully, bloodshed.'

> It rumbled on, buffeted by the changes in political circumstance, and accruing over the two decades a swelling avalanche of paperwork, files and internal memoranda . . . careers were blighted and the probable trajectory of lives

> changed for good. Blacklists were drawn up and potential opportunities closed down. As for the cost of all this secret machination, how can you put a figure on the hours devoted by agents to observing suspects; the typing up of transcribed phone calls; the travel and subsistence claims of men and women in the field; the envelopes of cash passed to 'discreet sources'; the hours of filing and clerking; the meetings, travel costs, phone bills; the costs arising from breaking and entering premises, and bugging the phones of allegedly dubious offices.[4]

Compared to the imprisonment of the Hollywood Ten or Zhdanov's attacks on Akhmatova and Zoshchenko, all this may seem harmless – and pointless – enough. But the long-term consequence was the isolation and expulsion from post-war British intellectual life of those writers who had worked so hard to develop a democratic and participative culture in the 1930s and 1940s. And the lessons of the democratic People's War and the 'cultural upsurge' were lost as 'premature anti-Fascists' like Swingler were systematically excluded, first from public life and then from public memory.

North Yorkshire, 2019

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I wish to record my thanks to the following for their help in preparing this new edition: John Arnold, Nicholas Bell, Kate Bowan, Simon Breden, Joanna Bullivant, Ian Coates, Jeff Cooper, Pamela Coren, Anne Cranny-Francis, Harvey Davies, Ben Harker, John Green, Christopher Hilliard, 'Rupert Jones, Francis King, Richard Knott, Susi Morrow, Jeremy Mortimer, Victor Petherham, Hanna Paulouskaya, Henry Stead, Graham Stevenson, David Temple and Ben Thompson.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

I first came across the name Randall Swingler as an undergraduate at Nottingham University. My tutor, John Lucas, asked me to help carry a display cabinet from the English department over to the library where he was organising an exhibition of work by writers and artists from the 1930s. The cabinet contained drawings by James Boswell and poems by Swingler. The name must have stuck. Twenty years later, I came across one of Swingler's books in a second-hand bookshop in Hawes. I was intrigued and excited by the poems, and wanted to know more about their author. Who was Randall Swingler? In order to answer that question I ended up writing this book. What began as a search for one man's life has somehow turned into a book about the lost world of radical Fitzrovia in the 1930s and 1940s, a study in poetry and music, war and politics, love and revolution.

I was at first puzzled that Swingler appears so rarely in cultural histories of the middle years of the twentieth century. When he does figure in literary memory it is often in disguise. Eric Ambler (1985) remembers someone called *Raymond* Swingler speaking at a meeting during the Spanish Civil War. Among the founders of the New Left there was, according to Michael Kenny (1995), a *Randolph* Swingler. Elsewhere, he turns up as a 'mild mannered desperado' (again called *Raymond* Swingler) in Neal Wood (1959), as one of the 'pet literary alsatians' of the Communist Party in David Caute (1973) and as 'a dashing kind of nomadic chieftain of the left' in Fred Inglis (1995). If he is known at all today, it is as the author of three small and untypical poems in the Penguin *Poetry of the Thirties* (1965), one of those 'minor but exquisitely representative figures' from the 1930s whose obscurity the *TLS* thought might one day be cherished by antiquarian collectors.[5] Reviewing John Betjeman's letters in the *Guardian*, Philip Henscher speculated on the 'hundred other minor, moderately gifted, moderately enjoyable poets' on whom capricious fame might have smiled as easily as she smiled on Betjeman. 'Why not Roy Campbell, or William Plomer?' he asked. 'We might just as well have had national celebrations of

Paul Potts's 70th birthday, or whimsical BBC2 profiles of the poet laureate, Randall Swingler.'[6]

But literary reputations are not made so arbitrarily. There are plenty of reasons why fame eluded Randall Swingler, not least his own fierce repudiation of anything that looked like success. But it will not do to use the term 'minor' as if it were its own explanation. Randall Swingler is a minor figure because his poetry is unknown; his poetry is unknown because he is a minor figure. Auden and Orwell get to play in the Champions League, of course, easily winning a tiny, closed Premiership consisting of MacNeice, Woolf, early Day Lewis and – rather improbably – Stephen Spender, from which relegation is forbidden and to which no other writer can ever win promotion. But supposing Swingler turns out to be rather more interesting than 'minor' poets are supposed to be? What if he was, in fact, a 'major' poet (whatever that may mean)? Why has so significant, widely published and influential a writer been air-brushed out of the picture so thoroughly? I hope this book demonstrates that Swingler was anything but a minor poet; that he was in fact a genuinely heroic figure, whose life and writings deserve an honourable place in the history of his times, and whose poetry was, on occasions, truly great.[7]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This account of Swingler's life is based on three different kinds of sources, for access to each of which I owe a great many thanks to a great many people.

First, the reconstruction of Swingler's writing career draws very heavily on Swingler's surviving papers, including unpublished poems, letters, plays, songs, diaries, novels, stories, radio scripts, journalism and criticism. Randall Swingler was a highly emotional man, and strong feelings were never far from the surface of his reactions. Writing was often the only way he could release them. He did not need to dig very deeply below the surface to find his poetry, and he wrote every day, thousands of poems, millions of lines. I am indebted to Judy Williams for permission to quote from her father's papers and for the unlimited access I was given to them. This book could not have been written without her unfailing support, generosity, patience and kindness.

Second, the portrait of Swingler is largely based on conversations with people who knew him well. I am especially indebted to all those who gave of their time and their patience to answer my questions into a tape-recorder – to John Berger, Gabriel Carritt, Elizabeth Dart, Jean Eisler, James Friell, Nancy Garratt, Jimmy Gibb, Beatrix Hammerling, Charles Hobday, Paul Hogarth, David Holbrook, John Mortimer, Arnold Rattenbury, Deborah Rogers, Anne Swingler, Dan Swingler, Dorothy Swingler, Mabel Swingler, Nick Swingler, Pam Swingler, Dorothy Thompson, Edward Williams, Judy Williams and John Willett. The support and encouragement which they invested in this book were an important incentive to writing it. Alas, several key witnesses died before I could speak to them about their recollections of Swingler. An interview with Roger Woddis had to be postponed because of Roger's ill health. Edward Thompson went back into hospital the day we had arranged to meet. James Holland died the week I wrote to him. By the time I saw Alan Bush, he was too old to remember anything about his twenty-year collaboration with Swingler. It is a matter of great regret that I never really talked to Reggie Smith, Margot Heinemann or Jack Lindsay about their memories of Swingler.

I also wish to record my thanks to those who, simultaneously writing biographies of people who were once close to Swingler, were always willing to share ideas, puzzles and information – Jim Borg (Jack Lindsay), Robert Fraser (George Barker), Bob Fyson (Stephen Swingler), Paul Gillen (Jack Lindsay), Dick Thompson (Peter Burra) and Michael Wolfers (Thomas Hodgkin).

A great many others have helped me over the years with information, advice, contacts and materials. This book has been shaped in many details, large and small, by their courteous and generous help – Walter Allen, John Allen, John Amis, Tony Atienza, Paul Banks, Chris Banks, Elspeth Barker, Sebastian Barker, Nicholas Baumfield, Jack Beeching, Sir Reginald Bennett, Bernard Bergonzi, John Birchall, Reg Bower, David Bradshaw, Una Brandon-Jones, Noreen Branson, Janey Buchan, Jim Burns, Molly Carleton, Barbara Castle, Colin Chambers, Elizabeth Charles, Malcolm Chase, Jack Clark, Robert Conquest, Dave Cope, Michael Copp, James Corbett, JF Cornes, Jeremy Crang, Edgar Criddle, Derek Crossley, Sheila Cutforth, Caroline Dalton, Brian Davidson, Linde Davidson, Winnie Davin, Maureen Duffy, Marsh Dunbar, James Earle, Wally Eager, Stanley Forman, Joyce Fowler, Jim Fyrth, Paddy Garman, John Gardner, Margaret Gardiner, Peter Gathercole, Clive Gehle, John Gibson, Willy Goldman, Manny Goldstein, Dave Goodman, Colin Griffin, Wini Harding, Paddy Heazell, Hamish Henderson, Jocelyn Herbert, Christopher Hill, Charles Hobday, Edward Hodgkin, Diana Hogarth, RAE Holme, Oliver Holt, Michael Horowitz, Joan Horrocks, Anthony Howard, Robert Hunt, Michael Hutchinson, Douglas Hyde, Mary Jameson, Mary Joannou, Mervyn Jones, John Jordan, Yvonne Kapp, Derek Kartun, Margot Kettle, Francis King, Gustav Klaus, Ronnie Landau, James Law, Margaret Leona, Meta Lindsay, John Longden, John Lucas, John McCabe, John McIlroy, Alison Macleod, Corrina MacNeice, Alec Malcolm, George Matthews, Nick Mays, Eric Meader, Bill Moore, Kevin Morgan, Penelope Mortimer, Betty Naylor, Hugh Paterson, Ian Patterson, Dennis Paul, Kathleen Phelan, Andrew Plant, Betty Reid, Sir Patrick Reilly, Dolly Reynolds, Libby Rice, Pete Richards, Peter Riley, Charles Ringrose, Joan Rodker, Lord Roskill, John Saville, Fiona Searle, Bill Shephard, Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, Jon Stallworthy, Derek Stanford, Sir John Stephenson, Bertha Stevens, Norman Sumner, Christopher Todd, Jenny Uglow, Edward Upward, Tony van den Burgh, Ray Watkinson, Gillian Whiteley, Ted Willis, Roger Woddis and Gerald Wooller-Jennings. I am sorry so many of those who encouraged me to write this book did not live to see it in print.

Third, I have made extensive use of contemporary records, publications and documents. I wish to thank to Jane Grubb for permission to quote from Edgell Rickword's papers, to Helen Lindsay for permission to quote from Jack Lindsay's papers, to Liz Hodgkin for permission to quote from Thomas Hodgkin's papers, to Rachel O'Higgins for permission to quote from Alan Bush's letters, and to the British Library for permission to quote from Christian Darnton's papers and Bernard Stevens' papers.

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Communist Party Archive, Derby Local Studies Library, the Eighth Army Veterans Association, the Imperial War Museum, the Italy Star Association, the John Ireland Trust, Liverpool Museum, the Ministry of Defence Army Records Centre, Merton College Library, Morley College Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Sound Archive, the New College Archive, the Northern Poetry Library, the Public Record Office, the Royal Signals Association, the *TLS* Archive, Unity Theatre Archive, University of Leeds Brotherton Library, University of London Extra-Mural Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Wilson Library, University of Nottingham Library, University of Reading Library, Westminster Library, Westminster School Archive and the Workers' Music Association Archive. Thanks are due to Sir John Vassar-Smith for giving me access to copies of *S Ronan's Magazine* and to Dr Custance and Rob Wyke for introducing me to the records (and to some of the mysteries) of Winchester College.

Special thanks are due to the staff of Middlesbrough Central Library for battling with the inter-library loan system, to the Communist Party Archive for the loan of a twenty years' run of the *Daily Worker*, and to the staff of that unique and remarkable survivor from happier times, the Marx Memorial Library. I am grateful to the editors of those publications where earlier versions of parts of this book first appeared. Finally, I wish to record my thanks to John Lucas for kick-starting this book, and to Dick Taylor for giving me the sabbatical during which the first draft was written. This book is for Alick, Charlotte, Joe, Jack, Jon and Britta, for putting up with me Randalling for so long, and to Nikki for just putting up with me.

Middlesbrough, 2002

Notes

1 Writing on the website Angel Exhaust in 2009, the critic Andrew Duncan announced, 'if anything should be consigned to the archive room with no door, it is surely the work of R Swingler.'

2 Provoked by the critical silence into which the book fell after it was published, I found myself writing a series of long verse letters to Swingler's ghost. They were published by Shoestring Press in 2017 as *Letters to Randall Swingler*.

3 *The Winter Journey* (Bush) was premiered in Hanover in 2011, *Advance Democracy* (Britten) was sung by the London Oriana Choir at the Houses of Parliament in 2012 (organised by the Houses of Parliament Education Service on the theme of democracy) and *Ballad of Heroes* was performed at the Proms in 2017 and at the 2018 Armistice Day centenary concert at the Kennedy Center in Washington.

4 Knott (2020: 264).

5 *TLS*, 27 May 1965.

6 *Guardian*, 3 May 1994; compare Henscher in the *Observer*, 29 July 2001, 'The Left in the 1930s wanted, alas, to be remembered by Stephen Spender's *Forward from Liberalism* and, please God, Randall Swingler's poetry.'

7 Readers who wish to judge Swingler's poetry for themselves are directed to Swingler (2000).

1

HOME

This prison and this iron gate
The safety of my class and state

On 28 May 1909, a telegram arrived from Lambeth Palace at Glebe House, Church Lane, Aldershot, congratulating the assistant curate of Aldershot Parish Church and his wife on the birth of their fourth child the previous day.[1] Not every child born to a small-town Anglican curate enjoys the personal attention of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but Randall Carline Swingler always occupied a special place in the affections of Archbishop Randall Davidson, his maternal great-uncle and the godfather after whom he was named.

The boy was, however, heir to more than a name. On his mother's side there was a long and distinguished history of service in the established Church. Her great-great-great-grandfather was the Reverend Thomas Davidson, lecturer in the Tron Church of Edinburgh and, after the Act of Union, Chaplain to Queen Anne. Thomas Davidson's daughter Mary married the Reverend Thomas Randall, a leading figure in the Church of Scotland and author of a famous pamphlet on the more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. One of his sons, William Davidson, settled in Holland where he prospered, becoming 'one of the most considerable and opulent general merchants at Rotterdam' in the mid-eighteenth century; returning from Holland, he lived in Edinburgh and in London where he was considered to be a leader in financial circles, maintained numerous servants dressed in unsilvered white liveries, and was painted by Joshua Reynolds. When his only daughter (also painted by Reynolds) died unmarried at the age of twenty, he arranged for her to be buried in Westminster Abbey. Without an heir, he left his entire fortune to his sister's son on the condition that 'the name Randall should be forever abolished, and that of Davidson substituted,' a stipulation evidently motivated by a desire to found

a dynasty of Scottish landed gentry. This nephew – only son of Mary and Thomas Randall – was also called Thomas Randall, and like his father enjoyed a prominent position in the Scottish Church; Raeburn painted his portrait. His wife Elizabeth was the sister of Lord Cockburn, a founder of the *Edinburgh Review* and of the Edinburgh Academy. When William Davidson died in 1794, Thomas Randall duly changed his name to Thomas Davidson and thus inherited his uncle's fortune and the estates of Muirhouse and Hatton. The youngest of his three sons, Henry Davidson, was a prominent and successful figure in the shipping business of Port Leith. In 1845 he married into the old Berwickshire family of Swinton. His wife Henrietta was a cousin of Sir Walter Scott; Scott read the unpublished *Tales of a Grandfather* to her when she was a girl. Henry and Henrietta Davidson had four children, to the eldest of whom, born in 1848, they gave the lost name Randall.

Bearing the two family names, Randall Davidson combined the two sides of his family's history – a devout sense of vocation and a shrewd grasp of the world of affairs – in a successful and distinguished career in the Anglican Church. After private school and Harrow, he went to Trinity College Oxford, where he became a close friend of Craufurd Tait, son of the Archbishop of Canterbury (himself an old school friend of Henry Davidson). Randall Davidson was ordained in 1874 and served briefly as a curate in Dartford in Kent before being appointed, on his friend's recommendation, as Resident Chaplain to the Archbishop at Lambeth Palace. Thus began a working relationship that was to last until Dr Tait's death, a professional and spiritual intimacy that became closer still when Davidson became engaged to Dr Tait's daughter Edith. A few months later Craufurd Tait died, and the relationship between the two men acquired a father–son character as the Archbishop came increasingly to depend on his Chaplain and future son-in-law. At Tait's death in 1882 the responsibility for communicating to the Queen the Archbishop's last thoughts on the succession fell to his Chaplain, and the way he discharged his responsibilities in this delicate political matter earned him the Queen's personal respect and trust; it was said that 'no modern Bishop was ever so deeply trusted by his Sovereign as Randall Davidson was trusted by her.' His subsequent rise through the Church was spectacular. Victoria made him her advisor on ecclesiastical appointments and, at the age of thirty-five, Dean of Windsor. In 1891 he was consecrated Bishop of Rochester, in 1895 Bishop of Winchester. In 1903 he was enthroned Archbishop of Canterbury.

Randall Davidson had a sister, Mary, who in 1877 married Colonel Charles Elliott CB, late of the Seaforth Highlanders and the Madras Artillery, advisor to the Maharaja of Mysore, tutor to his sons and Keeper of the Maharaja's Jewels. As a Deputy Commissioner in Nagpore, Madras, Elliot had been responsible for the brutal repression of the mutiny in Raipore, ordering the mass hanging of rebellious sepoys and earning the admiration of a grateful Empire.[2] Colonel Elliott had two sons by his first wife, one of whom was Prison Governor in Bombay, the other served in the Royal Navy. Charles and Mary had one daughter, Mabel Henrietta, born in 1878. Her father died when she was only eleven and she grew up a sheltered, lonely child on the edges of the institutions of Queen Victoria's Church, Army and Empire. As a young woman she used to stay for long periods with

her uncle at Farnham Castle (the Bishop of Winchester's residence) and was well known in the district for her singing at sacred concerts. It was there that she met and was courted by a young ordinand called Henry Thomas Carline Swingler, then studying for the priesthood at the Bishop's Hostel. They were married at Farnham Parish Church in 1903 by the Bishop of Kensington (in the unavoidable absence of the Bishop of Winchester, who was recovering from flu). The bride was given away by her stepbrother Major G. R. Elliott, after which bride and groom and their two hundred guests retired to a wedding breakfast at Farnham Castle.[3]

The groom was just twenty-six and had been ordained only the previous month, starting work at St Mary's, Nottingham. But Swingler was hardly an impoverished young curate. He was the eldest son of Henry Swingler JP, Derby iron master, landlord, mine owner and Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire. His grandfather, Thomas Swingler, had been an iron founder making railway points and crossings at the Victoria Foundry in Derby, joining with James Eastwood in 1864 to create the firm of Eastwood and Swingler. When in 1873 Henry Swingler took over the management of the firm, Eastwood and Swingler employed 1,400 hands on a twenty-seven-acre site in Derby, building and exporting steel railway bridges all over the world, notably to South America and Canada. As the business prospered in the last decades of the nineteenth century, so did Henry Swingler. He was elected to Derby council and served as a county magistrate, as a director of the Derby Commercial Bank and the Derby Savings Bank, as chairman of the Derby Gas, Light and Coke Company, as a governor of Derby School and Derby Royal Infirmary, and as president of Derby Children's Hospital and of the Derby Society of Engineers. When Henry Swingler died in 1907, he left over £350,000 in his will. All the older Swingler children received Eastwood and Swingler shares in Argentinian railways when they were twenty-one and £100 every birthday in their post office savings books.[4]

Church, Army, Empire, iron and steel, railways and mines, represented at Westminster and at Court – this was an extraordinary concentration of wealth, power and influence, a remarkable inheritance, even by the standards of the Edwardian upper-middle classes (a cousin on the Swingler side later married an Italian count). In retrospect, the world into which Randall Swingler was born looks rather less stable than it seemed at the time, the quiet before the storms of war, social change and modernity swept over Edwardian England. But in 1909 the peaceful world of the privileged upper-middle classes must have seemed impregnable. Asquith's government appeared to be successfully managing the decline of the landed aristocracy at the same time as accommodating the demands of organised labour. The Trades Board Act was passed in 1909, setting legal minimum wages in certain poorly paid trades; the first Labour Exchanges were established. When the House of Lords blocked the budget that year, the subsequent constitutional crisis was resolved by the introduction of the Parliament Act (during the third reading of which Archbishop Davidson's speech was said to have been crucial in securing a majority for the government). Meanwhile, the Osborne Judgement made it unlawful for trade unions to fund their own members of parliament, thus apparently securing the continued allegiance of the working-class vote to the Liberal Party. The Empire was at peace

and at the height of its authority and prosperity. The British South Africa Act of that year granted Dominion status to the new Union of South Africa, while the India Councils Act allowed for only the smallest measure of local self-government in the country. The poet of Empire, Alfred Austin, was Poet Laureate; Forster had just published that climacteric study of Edwardian England, *Howard's End*; Rupert Brooke had recently moved to Grantchester and D. H. Lawrence was still teaching in Croydon. That year the King's horse even won the Derby.

If this curate's family was exceptionally well connected, it was, like any wealthy Edwardian household, a crowded and a busy one. The servants usually came from orphanages, often still children themselves. One much-loved nursery maid called Izzy joined the family as an under-nurse when she was only nine. There was a cook, a kitchen maid, a parlour maid, a nanny, an under-nanny, a nursery maid, a gardener, a house maid who came in and a governess. There was also a 'monthly nurse' who joined the family for two months after each of the children were born: Arthur in 1904, Elizabeth in 1905, Dorothy in 1907, Randall in 1909, Humphrey in 1912, Stephen in 1915 and Mabel in 1917. It was a source of amusement to the children when they were older that there was exactly one year and ten months between each of them in age. The only break in the sequence occurred when, in late 1911, their father went on a four-month tour of India. While he was away, Mrs Swingler and the children – Elizabeth, Dorothy, Randall and the new baby Humphrey (Arthur was already at prep school) – moved to a house in Nottingham to wait for a vicarage in Long Eaton to be built. This represented a kind of home-coming; the Swingler family home was in Derbyshire, and the Reverend Swingler had worked as a curate in Mansfield when they were first married; Arthur and Elizabeth were born there. When the Reverend Swingler returned to England the family moved into St John's Lodge, a row of converted street houses, with a tiny garden at the back. After Hampshire, the streets of Long Eaton seemed dismal and dull to the older children, a semi-industrial landscape on the edge of the bewildering city. The Reverend Swingler's first job was to build a new church in Long Eaton. Raising the money proved a long and difficult task, and the new church was not finished until 1923.[5]

The Swinglers' was a conventionally strict and remote Edwardian household, and the children saw little of their parents.[6] After family prayers they would spend the day in the nursery or the schoolroom (according to age) and would not reappear until after tea, the girls dressed in Indian muslin dresses and the boys in little sailor suits. The children would sometimes dance round the drawing room while their mother played the piano, but as Mabel recalls, it was 'all frightfully formal. I don't remember Mother as a person much.' The Swingler girls felt that their parents favoured their brothers. According to Dorothy, 'Mother didn't really like the girls, she loved the boys, it was always the boys for everything.' On Sundays the maids had time off and Elizabeth and her mother would put the younger children to bed.

> On Sunday tea-time we all had tea round the dining-room table, and I poured out on Sundays. Mother sat at one end and Father at the other. Mother's end

> was the High Table, where they had intellectual conversations, Mother and Arthur – and I was down with Father.

Their father seemed more approachable, taking the older children on long walks on Saturday afternoons and reading to them from Sir Walter Scott on Saturday evenings. But on the whole the Swingler children grew up on their own, enjoying an independent, self-contained and sometimes wild existence, united against their nannies who made them take a cold bath every morning. Dorothy remembers Randall soon earning a reputation for rebelliousness.

> Nanny kept a stick round the nursery table and if you misbehaved you got your legs whacked. And Randall got his legs whacked more often than I did or Elizabeth did. If you were very brave and felt that Randall had had enough you put your foot out and got it.

Once they hid their governess's coat so she couldn't go out; another time they hid in the nursery toy-cupboard to avoid being kissed by their nanny. Randall was their leader in mischief, calling Nanny Osborne 'never *was* born,' putting a wastepaper basket over the piano teacher's head while he was playing and chasing Elizabeth round the garden with a frog, 'a very lively little boy in the nursery,' remembered by his elder sisters as 'very active, very mischievous, the rebel who got away with murder but was nice.'

With Arthur away at his prep school, Elizabeth, Dorothy and Randall had their lessons in the schoolroom, sitting in three little desks, observing public school terms, and taught by a succession of governesses – Miss Fellows, Miss Rowan and Miss Jameson. When Elizabeth was seven, Dorothy five and Randall just three, a missionary called Miss Lillingstone came to stay on furlough from India. The children were inspired by her stories and decided at once to become missionaries when they were older – Elizabeth in China, Dorothy in India and Randall in Africa. They began collecting pictures and books about their chosen countries, and Dorothy and Elizabeth joined the King's Messengers in Long Eaton. Mr and Mrs Swingler were pleased that the missionary zeal had caught fire in the family so quickly, for this was a deeply religious household, in which prayer, scripture, hymn singing, sacred music and – later – theological debate informed their daily lives. The Reverend Swingler took prayers each morning, removing the telephone from the hook to avoid interruptions, and *ex tempore* translating the Gospel from the Greek. As small children they learned the *Psalms* and the *Magnificat*. It was, according to Dorothy, a childhood 'safe and substantial and narrow and highly religious':

> Not the sort of non-conformist religious, I mean we said grace, but we didn't mention God at meals. On the other had if you did anything wrong, it was Jesus that you had hurt more than Mother or Father. We all trooped into Church, we had all got our hymn-books with tunes in and sang lustily. And

> we did a lot of singing at home. On Sundays we'd all gather round the piano and sing the *Messiah* and Stainer's *Crucifixion*, as well as hymns.

Swingler later described the atmosphere of the vicarage in 'Puritan Childhood':

> The house of childhood was a world of rooms
> Each one a separate virtue. The small back garden
> Sunny with naughtiness our stifled Eden
> Over which always the winged lion of Goodness
> Posed heavy paws above us, and his thunderous
> Mane made lurid all the coloured landscape
> Of pleasure, and the sun's forehead malarial.
> How delicately we trod the fire-breathing grass!
> How cautiously contained our web-like flesh
> In terror of being trapped into happiness!
> While the long cold hands of the black father, Sin,
> Palpably pressed upon our cringing shoulders
> Rooting our knees into the blessed stone,
> Rigid, remote, and utterly benign.[7]

These are highly charged terms with which to invoke any childhood; fond, but recalling an oppressive atmosphere, the children weighed down by abstract Goodness and Virtue, tiptoeing through Paradise, wary of happiness, easy childish pleasures spoiled by the pressure of guilt and the amalgam Father-Church-Authority-Sin-Taboo.

There is a more sympathetic portrait of the Reverend Swingler in Swingler's first published novel, *No Escape*:

> Mr Taverner looked out with one long solemn look over his congregation, like a captain gauging the temper of the sea . . . The battle was about to begin. He was indeed manoeuvring with the unseen antagonist with whom he wrestled here before his people every Sunday . . . Leaning forward with his hands upon the moulded rim of the pulpit, talking as if personally with each member of the congregation, half angrily and half intimately he was unravelling himself into simple sentences, the eyes hot and the face bearing lines of one who has come through his crucial experience and driven by tremendous compulsion over-comes distaste and reluctance to hand on his memoirs and display his stigmata. 'The nature of a fact is its own proof of reality. And this is so with the fact of Jesus Christ. While we worry over the authenticity of the evidence of the gospels, the only evidence we have of His existence, we forget Him, we forget that clear and absolute figure, striding splendidly through the pages, of a nature which, as our understanding grows, becomes so real itself to us that the scholastic problems of textual authenticity become irrelevant.'[8]

The Reverend Swingler was a popular figure among the local farm labourers, miners and workers from the local munitions factory at Chilwell. While his wife's

inclinations lay towards High Church ritual, his were emphatically Low Church (there was no genuflecting in his churches). 'They had a very good working relationship,' according to Dorothy, 'Mother was the intellectual and Father was friendly. Mother helped him a lot with his sermons,' while he liked 'talking Derbyshire and having his long vowels':

> He had to build a new parish from a new industrial area. And he was good at that. It would be the Methodists that you recruited. And he was good at informal things like outdoor services. He had started a war memorial, which was just a little placard in a gap in one of the houses in the village street, but he started services round the war memorial. And he was one of the first people who started an industrial Sunday which was meant for factory workers and railway workers and miners. He concentrated on those people and they brought their banners and they read the lessons.

As Stephen expressed it much later, they 'only had to look out of the vicarage window to find Socialism,' an inspiration to be found not only in the obvious inequality between the life of the vicarage and the lives of their parishioners (he was particularly incensed to discover that the farmers of a later parish were obliged to pay a tithe to maintain the vicarage) but also in the energetic spirit of high-minded Christian service with which his father approached his pastoral duties.[9]

It was also a musically charged atmosphere in which to grow up. Mrs Swingler had a good soprano voice and encouraged the children in singing and making music. All the children had dancing lessons. Arthur, Elizabeth and Randall (at the age of five) began learning to play the piano, and Dorothy and Stephen the violin. Mrs Swingler encouraged the children to form a little choir, teaching them to sing their way through Gilbert and Sullivan (especially the *Mikado*). She taught herself the viola in order to join the children in a family orchestra, whose finest moment was a performance of the Bach Suite in B Minor, Dorothy and little Stephen playing the violin, Mrs Swingler the viola, Humphrey the cello and Randall the flute. At Christmas the vicarage children provided entertainments – songs, sketches, trios, violin and flute solos – for the local workhouse and for the Mothers' Union (Mrs Swingler was on the national committee). The approach of Christmas at St John's Lodge was an exciting time, as the family counted the days until Arthur came home from school and Christmas could begin:

> the great Pow Wow and subsequent shopping, Arthur's plays and that perhaps above all – the tree, the cards and the joyful services in the little iron church, wonderful walks and wonderful meals and sitting round the fire in the evening and father enjoying it all so much.[10]

Every August the Swingler ménage (including nanny, nursery maid and kitchen maid) would move to a furnished house for a month in Hunstanton or West Runton in Norfolk, sometimes to Hexham in Northumberland or to St David's in Pembrokeshire, travelling in the family pony and trap or in the two private railway

carriages to which they were entitled (because of the Eastwood-Swingler connection). Passing through Derby, the children were always shown a little hut in the shunting yard that had 'Eastwood and Swingler' above it and the famous steel bridge at Cromford with 'Swingler' still painted on it.

They had to cut short their holiday in West Runton in 1914 when war was declared, and the vicarage at Long Eaton was soon a focus for the increasingly bad news from France. 'There was nearly always somebody in black weeping,' according to Dorothy, 'and the awful thing with Long Eaton was the Spondon factory. We had all the business of all the people coming to Church all yellow before they realised that TNT was poisoning them; and then they all were dead.' Because of the munitions factory at Chilwell and because the furnaces of the Stanton Iron Works (behind the vicarage) burned all night, Long Eaton suffered a number of Zeppelin raids. The children sometimes slept on the floor of the dining room and baby Mabel was put under the grand piano at night for her safety. The Reverend Swingler took on the chaplaincy of a Red Cross hospital in Long Eaton. For the next four years the children spent much of their holidays without their parents, learning the habit of weekly letter writing, which they would need when they were sent away to school.

The children spent Easter 1918 with Granny Swingler at her house in Edgehill, near Duffield in Derbyshire. So large was the estate that when her doctors advised her to walk a mile each day for the good of her health, her husband had a path laid out so she could walk her mile without leaving the grounds of their estate. That summer Randall and Arthur stayed with Grandma Elliott at Stonestreet in Kent. All the children lionised Arthur. He was a dark, serious and physically frail boy, a hero who reappeared in the holidays to lead them in adventure. On family picnics Arthur would write a poem for the occasion which all the children would sing, and he wrote plays which (as the St John's Dramatic Society) they performed for their parents, friends and neighbours. A surviving programme (also made by the children) for one of these shows gives some idea of the event. The first half opened with a short play written by Arthur, 'The Presbyterian Cat' (in which Arthur played the part of the Minister, Elizabeth, Dorothy and Randall the 'People' and little Humphrey, wrapped in his mother's furs, the cat); Dorothy then performed a violin solo, Randall a recitation and Elizabeth some conjuring tricks and Arthur sang *Clementine*; after a short interval the family orchestra played *The British Grenadiers* as an overture to a comic play in eight scenes called 'Kidnapped,' written by Arthur and performed by the five eldest children. As they grew older the children would entertain themselves and their parents with elaborate games of charades. 'We'd play games in the drawing-room,' recalls Elizabeth,

> dominoes, Happy Families, draughts, various card games, charades, Hide and Seek, lots of singing, Gilbert and Sullivan, the *Messiah*, hymns on Sunday, sea shanties, folk songs etc. I remember somebody coming in one day and saying, 'Oh Mrs Swingler, I'm so sorry, I didn't know you had a party!'

But Arthur was spending more of his holidays with friends from school, and one by one the children left the vicarage to go to their own boarding schools. In 1919 Elizabeth went to Cheltenham Ladies College, Arthur to Rugby, and Randall – now ten – to St Ronan's, the preparatory school to which all the Swingler boys were sent.

Notes

1 The birth was of course announced in the *Times*, Saturday 29 May 1909. Swingler used to claim he was born during a visit of the Archbishop; 'just as lunch was announced, my mother had to ask to be excused but only got as far as the fifth stair before I made my precipitous entrance into this world. Luckily that was before the days of mini-skirts, so she just had to sit there until the nurse appeared to clear up the debris (me)' (RCS to Deborah Rogers, 19 October 1966).
2 'Fortunately there was at Raepore an officer, Lieutenant Charles Elliot, but little known yet, whose stern and lofty determination to support the dignity and authority of Government has not been surpassed by any one during the past eventful year,' *Friend of India*, 4 February 1858; Elliott was listed among those officers whose service during the mutiny deserved thanks in the *Overland Mail*, 19 March 1860; an account of the events at Raipore was given in the *Bombay Telegraph and Courier*, 7 April 1859.
3 *Farnham, Haslemere and Hindhead Herald*, 24 January 1903.
4 Swingler and Eastwood went into liquidation in 1925; the account of Henry Swingler's twenty-first birthday celebrations in the *Derby Mercury*, 26 September 1864, reads like 'The Beano' scene from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.
5 Obituary for the Reverend Swingler, *St John's Church Magazine*, March 1938.
6 This picture of the Swingler family home is based on interviews with Mabel and Dorothy Swingler 13 April 1993 and with Elizabeth Dart 30 July 1993.
7 Swingler (1950: 21).
8 Swingler (1937: 16, 102–104). Swingler told John Willett how his father once preached a sermon 'and was so moved and so filled with passion that he fell out of the pulpit, grabbed the chandelier that was dangling in front and swung to and fro on it' (interview with John Willett, 12 January 1993).
9 Election portrait of Stephen Swingler, *Sentinel* 1 October 1959, quoted in Bob Fyson, 'Stephen Swingler: Radical Socialist MP' unpublished MS.
10 Mrs Swingler to RCS, 14 December 1944.

2

SCHOOL

I who am strong, a naked boy
Against the larch-trees, simple as a clear glass
Shot through with sun, shot through with declaration

St Ronan's was a small preparatory school for boys aged between eight and thirteen, in West Worthing on the Sussex coast. Teaching Latin, but no Greek, it placed a value on sportsmanship as the highest good within the school and promoted notions of selfless public service as the aim of every boy outside it. Its ethos was also characterised by the open encouragement of a love of natural Beauty and of the spiritual. The school scorned religious 'piosity' but took Christ's teachings extremely seriously, aiming to encourage pupils 'to come to the closest possible realisation of the presence of the Spirit in ourselves, and to be conscious of that Spirit as a guiding Force in our life.'[1]

When Swingler arrived at the beginning of February 1919 he had a bad cold and so spent the first few days in bed listening to gramophone records and writing home, asking his mother to send his swap stamps. The headmaster, Stanley Harris, wrote to Mrs Swingler to assure her that 'the little chap has settled down quite all right. He appeared to be a little upset the first evening but next day was in uproarious spirits.' Swingler was soon enjoying the life of the school with all its codes and routines and heroes. Although he was put into class III (the lowest class), he was good at his lessons, especially Latin, which he found rather easier than most. His life that first term was a hectic round of measles, prep, football, Latin, colds and paper chases. They made expeditions to the sea front and to Arundel Park. In the St Ronan's Athletic Sports that summer, Swingler came first in the under-tens' 220 yards and second in the 100 yards ('when I showed my medals to a man he said it was the beginning of a large collection that I should get') although he knew his success was nothing beside the 'Victolue Dorum' ('a big cup much better than any of the rest and is given to the one who does best').

He was extremely happy in his years at St Ronan's, successful in everything he tried to do. A confident little boy whose enthusiasm endeared him to his teachers, he soon grew out of the shadow of Arthur's reputation. By the start of the autumn term 1920, he was fifth in his class, going to 'quior practice,' learning to draw, playing a lot of football and dreaming of playing for the Third XI. That October he sent 'A Dream of a Nightingale' to his mother. It is a remarkable little poem for an eleven-year-old, precocious even in its borrowing of archaic phrases and second-hand feelings:

> A gloomy stillness hangs about the air,
> The night is full of death like drowsiness,
> When through the frosty air there breaks a voice
> A sweet melodious song of happiness.
>
> It thrills me through and through until I seem
> Insensible to all but its sweet sound,
> I seem to take a part in a sweet dream,
> Where everything is beautiful around.
>
> How can I now describe with pen and ink,
> The joy which these sweet dreams to me impart.
> They bring back to my mind sweet thoughts of love
> But then, the disappointment breaks my heart.[2]

After Christmas they played rugby, while every afternoon in the summer term was devoted to cricket. By July 1921 Swingler was captain in the third game. That summer his letters home were full of expeditions in search of butterflies, moths and birds' feathers, of charabanc trips and cricket matches:

> Yesterday there was a match against the fathers, they won by 144–62 1st innings and 2nd innings it was a draw because we only went in, we made 65. One of the fathers hit three balls out of the grounds. One right over the school, another over three gardens near which smashed something and another over the wall. In the interval the school photo and the cricket team photo were taken I am going to get one. I was sixth last week.[3]

That Christmas he played the Duke of Suffolk in the St Ronan's Dramatic Society production of *Henry VIII*, Act III Scene 2, and took the part of the Raconteur for a presentation of Christmas tableaux. In February 1922 the *S Ronan's Magazine* published three poems by RC Swingler. One was a translation into verse of Virgil's *Fourth Georgic*, a measure of the kind of education enjoyed by a boy of Swingler's generation and class:

> Beneath Tarentum's lofty walls,
> Where black Galaesus glides and crawls,

> And swollen by celestial rain
> Moistens the Summer's rip'ning grain,
> A man from Corcyrus I saw,
> Who had a garden by the shore.
> Waste land it was, and ne'er a sign
> Of ground fit for the rip'ning vine.
> Out of the undergrowth and weeds,
> The poppy, with its many seeds,
> With hyacinth, daffodil, and rose,
> With lily and with daisy, grows;
> Cabbage and lettuce green and fair,
> Flourish in plenty here and there.
> When he has gathered in his hoard
> With home grown feasts he loads his board.
> And when the biting frost sets in,
> And winter's snow and ice begin,
> He gathers snowdrops which they bring,
> And chides the ever tardy spring.

Although St Ronan's encouraged Swingler to write (his were the only poems published in the school magazine during his time there), the impulses that stirred beneath the poetry could not easily be contained by the school. Someone told Swingler that his poems were 'unhealthy and unworthy of a clean-minded boy.'[4]

For all their derivative limitations, it is not hard to see how such expressions of yearning pre-adolescent sensuousness might have alarmed the boy's teachers. A pubescent worship of Beauty and a child's interest in Nature were combining with the school's classical curriculum and the stern and earnest spiritual environment of family, home and school to stimulate a hyper-sensitive love of solitude. The result was that Swingler began to resist the confines of school:

> From a school where they hot-housed your emotions only to thwart them and torment them, or so it seems to me now, horribly and with a fearful sinister religious kindness, I used to run away to the Downs behind Worthing as to a paradise of paganism and natural beauty that hurt the heart because apprehended with the senses of an adult too large and too sharp for a child's understanding.[5]

In the spring term of 1922 the Reverend and Mrs Swingler visited the school to see their son being confirmed into the Church by the Bishop of Lewes. Although Swingler took his confirmation seriously, his response to religious authority was sometimes confused. On the one hand, St Ronan's encouraged him to believe that Christianity was a guide to a life of selfless service, to 'doing our job in the world in the noblest and finest way'; on the other hand, the doctrine of sin seemed to blur