

By Elias Canetti

THE TORCH IN MY EAR

AUTO-DA-FÉ

THE CONSCIENCE OF WORDS

CROWDS AND POWER

EARWITNESS: FIFTY CHARACTERS

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THE AGONY OF FLIES

NOTES FROM HAMPSTEAD

CROWDS AND POWER

by

ELIAS CANETTI

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thus it is easier to see him as a whole; the extraordinary consistency of his nature is patent.

His mind was dominated by four kinds of crowds: his army, his treasure, his corpses and his court (and, with it, his capital). He juggled with them ceaselessly, but only succeeded in increasing one at the expense of another. He raises enormous armies, but in so doing exhausts his treasury. He banishes the entire population of his capital, and suddenly finds himself alone in the vast city, his anger appeased as he surveys the empty metropolis from the roof of his palace. He savoured to the full the exultation of the survivor.

Whatever he did there was always *one* crowd which he managed to preserve. In no circumstances did he ever cease to kill. All his prisoners were brought before him daily: as candidates for execution they were his most precious possessions. During the twenty-six years of his reign, famine and plague helping him, the heaps of corpses piled up in every province of his empire. The consequent loss of revenue certainly vexed him, but, so long as the numbers of his victims increased, nothing could seriously shake his self-confidence.

In order to maintain the force of his commands—which were nothing but death sentences—at its highest pitch, he sought to have his position confirmed by a higher authority. God, in whom as a pious Mohamedan he believed, was not sufficient for him. He also wanted confirmation from God's legal representative.

Muhammad Tughlak has been defended by modern Indian historians. Power has never lacked eulogists, and historians, who are professionally obsessed with it, can explain anything, either by the *times* (disguising their adulation as scholarship), or by *necessity*, which, in their hands, can assume any and every shape.

We must expect the same thing to happen in the case of rulers who are nearer to us than Muhammad Tughlak. It may be useful, therefore, as a preventive measure, to lay bare the inner processes of power, though in a man who, fortunately for the world, only possessed it in his delusions.

The Case of Schreber: I

THERE IS NO richer or more instructive document than the *Memoirs* of Daniel Paul Schreber, sometime *Senatspräsident* at the Court of Appeal in Dresden. He was an educated and intelligent man trained by his profession in the precise use of words. He had spent seven years

in mental asylums as a paranoiac when he decided to write down in full detail what the world must call his delusional system. His *Memoirs of a Nervous Illness* became a whole book. He was so firmly convinced of the truth and importance of his self-created religion that, after he had been released from the asylum, he had the book published. The language at his command might have been made for the description of this singular intellectual structure, enabling him to grasp just enough of his experience for nothing essential to remain obscure. He pleads for his case, but is fortunately no poet, so that one can follow his thoughts without being seduced by them.

I want to consider some of the most striking characteristics of his system, so far as it is possible to do so in a limited space. I believe that this will enable us to come very close to an understanding of paranoia. If others who study the *Memoirs* should arrive at different conclusions this may simply be a proof of the richness of the material.

The magnitude of the claim Schreber puts forward is most obvious when he appears to limit it. "After all," he says, almost at the beginning, "I too am only a human being and therefore bound by the limits of human understanding. But on one point he has no doubts at all, namely that he has come infinitely closer to the truth than any other human beings. Thence he immediately passes on to *eternity*. The thought of it permeates his whole book; it means far more to him than to ordinary men. He feels at home in eternity and regards it not only as something which belongs to him by right, but as something which is part of him. He reckons in enormous spaces of time; his experiences stretch over centuries. It seemed to him "as though single nights had the duration of centuries, so that within that time there could very well have come about the most fundamental changes in the whole of mankind, in the earth itself and in the entire solar system." He is as much at home in universal space as he is in eternity. Certain constellations and individual stars, such as Cassiopeia, Vega, Capella and the Pleiades, are especially close to him; he speaks of them as though they were bus-stops just round the corner. But he is well aware of their real distance from the earth; he has some knowledge of astronomy and does not reduce the size of the universe. On the contrary, it is because they are so distant that the celestial bodies attract him. The immensity of space draws him; he wants himself to be as wide as space, so that he can extend all over it.

One feels that it is not the process of *growth* which matters to him so much as the actual *extension*. He needs space in order to establish

and maintain his position in it. *Position* in itself is the important thing, and for him it can never be eternal and lofty enough. To him the supreme principle is "the Order of the Universe". This he ranks above God and, if God tries to act contrary to it, he runs into difficulties. Of his own human body Schreber often speaks as though it were a celestial body and, as other people are engrossed with the management of their family, so he with the management of the planetary system. He wants to be part of it and anchored there. The changelessness of the constellations over thousands of years may have been what particularly attracted him to them: a place among them was a place for eternity.

This sense of personal place, or position, is of cardinal importance for the paranoiac: there is always an exalted position to defend and make secure. By the very nature of power, the same must be true of the ruler. His sense of his own position is in no way different from that of the paranoiac; he, if he can, surrounds himself with soldiers and shuts himself in fortresses; Schreber, who also feels threatened in many ways, holds fast to the stars. As we shall see, his world is in a state of turmoil. In order to explain the dangers which threaten him it is necessary to say something about the inhabitants of his world.

According to Schreber the human soul is contained in the *nerves* of the body. While man is alive he is both body and soul, but when he dies the nerves remain as the soul. God is never body, but only nerve, and kin therefore to the human soul, but immensely superior to it, for the number of God's nerves is infinite and they are eternal. They have the faculty of transforming themselves into rays, the rays of the sun and of the stars for example. God has pleasure in the world which he created, but as a rule does not interfere directly in its destiny. After the creation he withdrew from it and now abides mostly at a distance. God *must* not come too near men, for the nerves of living human beings have such a power of attraction for him that he would not be able to free himself from them again and so would endanger his own existence. He is thus always on his guard against the living and if it should happen that a particularly fervent prayer or an inspired poet tempts him to approach too close he rapidly withdraws again before it is too late.

"Regular contact between God and human souls took place only after death. There was no danger for God in approaching *corpses* to draw their nerves out of their bodies and up to himself and so awaken them to new heavenly life." But before human nerves could

be raised to a state of blessedness they had to be "sifted and purified". Only pure human nerves were of use to God, because it was their destiny to be attached to him and ultimately to become part of him as "forecourts of heaven". A complicated process of purification was necessary, which even Schreber could not describe exactly. Souls completely cleansed by this process ascended to heaven and there gradually forgot who they had been on earth, though not all equally quickly. The souls of great men such as Goethe or Bismarck retained the knowledge of their identity for centuries perhaps, but none, not even the greatest, for ever. Rather, it was the ultimate destiny of all souls *to merge with other souls and become integrated into higher unities*, conscious of nothing except that they were parts of God ("forecourts of heaven").

The merging of all souls into a single crowd is ordained as the highest form of blessedness, recalling the many Christian representations of angels and saints thronging together like a cloud, or sometimes actually as a cloud, only careful inspection enabling one to distinguish the separate heads. This image is so familiar that we never reflect on its meaning. It means that blessedness consists not only in closeness to God, but also in the close togetherness of equals. The expression "forecourts of heaven" is an attempt to attribute even greater density to this crowd of blessed souls: they are actually integrated into "higher unities".

God has very little knowledge of living human beings. In the later parts of the *Memoirs* Schreber repeatedly reproaches God with his inability to understand the living human being and, in particular, to judge his thinking correctly. He speaks of God's blindness and lack of knowledge of human nature; he is only used to corpses and takes great care not to come too near the living. God's eternal love is basically only for creation as a whole. He is not a being of such absolute perfection as most religions attribute to him, otherwise he would not have allowed himself to be enticed into the conspiracy against innocent human beings which was the real cause of Schreber's illness. For the "miraculous structure of the Universe", as Schreber described it, has suddenly been rent. The crisis which has broken over the "realms of God" is intimately connected with Schreber's personal fate.

What is at issue is nothing less than a case of soul murder. Schreber had been ill once before and had been treated by Professor Flechsig, the Leipzig psychiatrist. After a year he had been dis-

charged as cured and had been able to resume his work. At the time he had been most grateful to the psychiatrist, and his wife even more so. "She worshipped Professor Flechsig as the man who had restored her husband to her; for this reason she kept his portrait on her writing table for many years." Schreber then spent eight healthy, happy and busy years with his wife. During the whole of this period he often had occasion to see the picture of Flechsig on his wife's desk and it must clearly have occupied his mind very much without his being aware of it. For when he fell ill a second time and, as was natural (since he had been successful before), Flechsig was again approached, it became apparent that, in Schreber's mind, he had become a really dangerous figure.

Perhaps Schreber who, as a judge, had himself possessed a certain authority, resented having been in the psychiatrist's power for a whole year. He certainly hated him now, for having him in his power again. He became convinced that Flechsig was practising "soul murder", or "soul theft" on him. He says that the idea that it is possible to take possession of another person's soul is widespread and very old. In this way one secures the intellectual powers of the victim or prolongs one's own life at another soul's expense. Inspired by ambition and the lust for power, Flechsig was plotting with God and was trying to convince him that the soul of one Schreber was of no importance. He adds that there may perhaps have already been rivalry between the two families: a Flechsig may suddenly have felt that some member of the Schreber family had outstripped his own. He therefore entered into "a conspiracy with the elements of the realms of God", working towards excluding the Schrebers from those professions which would lead to closer relations with God, for example, the profession of nerve specialist. Since nerves were the actual substance of which God and all other souls consisted it was obvious how much power a nerve specialist would possess. The result of this was that no Schreber had become a psychiatrist, whilst a Flechsig had. The way to soul theft was open to the conspirators; Schreber was in the power of the murderers of his soul.

At this point one should perhaps stress the importance which plots and conspiracies have for the paranoiac. They are continually with him and anything even remotely resembling one is immediately seized on. The paranoiac feels *surrounded*; his chief enemy is never content to attack him single-handed, but always tries to rouse a spiteful *pack* to set on him at the suitable moment. At first the members of this

pack keep hidden and may be anywhere and everywhere; or else they pretend to be harmless and innocent, as if they were not lying in wait for anything. But the piercing intellect of the paranoiac always unmasks them. He has only to stretch out his hand to drag forth a conspirator. The pack is always there, even if not actually baying at the moment; and its hostility is unchangeable. Once won over to the enemy, they remain his faithful hounds, and he can do what he wants with them. Even at a distance he keeps them in leash to his wickedness and can direct them as it suits him. By preference he selects them so that they can attack the victim from all sides and in greatly superior numbers.

Once the conspiracy against Schreber had come into being, what form did the actual attack on him take? What were the conspirators' aims and what means did they use to attain them? Their real aim, the most important though not the only one, was the destruction of Schreber's reason, and this they persisted in for many years. They wanted to turn him into an imbecile, to push the illness of his nerves to the point where he would appear permanently incurable. Could there be any prospect more terrible for a human being as highly gifted as he thought himself?

His illness began with torturing sleeplessness, for which nothing could be done. Schreber held that, right from the beginning, there was a definite intention to prevent his sleeping and thus to bring about his mental collapse. For this purpose large numbers of rays were directed against him. At first these originated from Professor Flechsig, but later on departed souls who had not yet completed their purification ("tested souls" as Schreber calls them) began to take an increasing interest in him and penetrate him as rays. God himself took part in this operation. All these rays *spoke* to him, but so that they could not be heard by other people. It was like a prayer which one repeats silently, not speaking the words aloud. But the painful difference was that whereas in prayer what one says depends on one's own will, these rays which were forced on him from outside went on and on with what *they* wanted to say.

"I could cite here the names of hundreds if not thousands who, as souls, trafficked with my nerves . . . All these souls talked at me as 'voices', each unaware of the presence of the others. The ensuing tumult in my head can readily be imagined . . .

"My nervousness increased all the time, and with it my power of attraction, so that an ever growing number of departed souls felt

drawn to me, to evaporate on my head or in my body. In a great number of cases the process ended with the souls concerned leading a brief existence on my head as so-called 'little men'—tiny figures in human form but perhaps only a few millimetres high—before they vanished completely . . . I was very often told the names of the stars or constellations from which they had set out, or 'under which they hung' . . . There were nights in which the souls, as 'little men', finished by dripping down onto my head in hundreds if not thousands. I always warned them against approaching me because previous occurrences had made me continually aware of my nerves' immensely increased power of attraction, but at first they found it quite impossible to believe in such a menacing power of attraction.

"In soul-language I was called 'the seer of spirits', that is a man who sees and is in contact with spirits or departed souls . . . Since the world began there can hardly have been a case like mine in which a human being entered into continual contact, not only with single departed souls, but with the totality of all souls and with the very Omnipotence of God."

It is obvious that all these phenomena which Schreber describes have something to do with crowds. As far as the distant stars, space is populated with the souls of the departed. All have their place assigned them, on this or that familiar star. Suddenly, through his illness, Schreber becomes their centre. In spite of his warnings they throng close, irresistibly attracted to him. One could say that he gathers them round him as a crowd and since, as he insists, they are the totality of all souls, they represent the largest crowd that can be imagined. But they do not simply continue to stand round him, like an assembled crowd, a people round its leader; they immediately and instantaneously experience what to a people only happens gradually and over the course of years: by contact with him they grow smaller and smaller. As soon as they reach him they shrink rapidly until they are only a few millimetres high. The true relationship between them comes out very clearly here: the one a giant and the others tiny creatures fussing around him. But that is not the end. The great man swallows the midgets; they literally go inside him and disappear completely. His effect on them is annihilating. He attracts them and gathers them round him, reduces them in size and ends by consuming them. Everything that they were now accrues to his own body. Not that they came intending to benefit him. Their purpose had actually been hostile; originally they were sent to confuse his reason

and thus destroy him. But it was precisely this threat which gave him the strength to grow; and once he knows how to master them, he feels proud of his power of attraction.

At a first glance, Schreber, in his delusion, could be taken for a man of some earlier period, when belief in spirits was universal and the souls of the dead flitted like bats past the ears of the living. It is as though he were a shaman, one who knows the worlds of the spirits inside out, can communicate directly with them and make use of them for all kinds of human purposes; and he likes to be called a "seer of spirits". But the power of a shaman is not nearly as great as that of Schreber. It is true that the shaman does sometimes detain spirits within him, but they never dissolve there; they never lose their separate identity and it is part of the bargain that he always lets them go again. With Schreber, on the other hand, they vanish, disappearing as completely as if they had never existed in their own right. Disguised as one of the old conceptions of the universe which presupposed the existence of spirits, his delusion is in fact a precise model of political power, power which feeds on the crowd and derives its substance from it. An attempt at a conceptual analysis of power can only blur the clarity of Schreber's vision. This contains all the real elements of the situation: the strong and lasting attraction exercised over the individuals who are to form a crowd; the ambiguous attitude of these individuals; their subjection through being reduced in size; the way they are taken into the man who in his own person, in his *body*, represents political power; the fact that his greatness must continually *renew* itself in this way; and finally, a very important point not so far mentioned, the sense of catastrophe which is linked with it, of danger to the world order arising from its sudden and rapid increase and unexpected magnetism.

There is in the *Memoirs* abundant evidence of this sense of catastrophe. There is always a certain magnificence in Schreber's visions of the end of the world, as in the passage I want to quote now, which deals directly with his power of attracting souls. They drip down on him in crowds and thereby endanger the celestial bodies from which they originate. It appears that the stars are actually composed of souls, so that when they leave in large numbers to get to Schreber the whole universe is in danger of dissolution.

"From all sides came tidings of disaster: now that this or that star, or this or that constellation, had had to be abandoned; now that Venus had been 'flooded'; now that soon the entire solar system

would have to be 'uncoupled'; now that soon Cassiopeia—the whole constellation—would have to be pulled together into a single sun; that soon only the Pleiades might perhaps still be saved."

Apprehension about the continued existence of the celestial bodies was, however, only one aspect of Schreber's feelings of impending catastrophe. Much more important was the supposition with which his illness began. This did not refer to the souls of the departed, with whom, as we know, he was in constant communication, but to his fellow-men. These did not exist any more: *the whole of mankind had perished*. The few human figures he still saw, such as his doctor, the attendants at the asylum, or the other patients, he took for appearances: they were "fleeting makeshift men", fabricated solely in order to confuse him. They came and went like shadows, or pictures, and he naturally did not take them seriously. All real people had perished; *he was the only man left alive*. Not only did he have special visions which revealed this fact, but he was at all times firmly convinced of it; he believed it for years. All his visions of the end of the world were coloured by it.

He thought it possible that the whole of Flechsig's asylum, and perhaps the city of Leipzig with it, had been "scooped up" and removed to some other celestial body. The voices which talked to him sometimes asked whether Leipzig were still standing. In one of his visions he was taken in a lift into the depths of the earth, thus reliving all prehistoric and geological periods. In the upper regions there were still forests of leaf-bearing trees. Lower down everything became progressively darker and blacker. When he left the "lift" for a time, he seemed to be wandering through a cemetery. He came to the part where the inhabitants of Leipzig lay buried, and passed the grave of his own wife. His wife, one should add, was alive at this time and frequently visited him in the asylum.

Schreber pictured various different ways in which the destruction of mankind might have come about. He thought of a decrease in the heat of the sun, due to its moving further away from the earth and a consequent general glaciation. He thought of an earthquake: he received news that the great earthquake of 1755 in Lisbon had occurred in connection with a seer of spirits, similar to himself. "I envisaged the further possibility of news having spread that something like a magician—namely Professor Flechsig—had appeared in the modern world, and that I myself, a figure known after all in wider circles, had disappeared. This had spread terror and dismay

amongst men, destroying the foundations of religion and giving rise to universal nervousness and immorality. Epidemics had followed, devastating mankind. There was talk of leprosy and plague, two diseases scarcely known in Europe any more." He noticed signs of the plague on his own body. There were different varieties of plague; there was the blue, the brown, the white and the black plague.

But while everyone else was perishing from these terrible maladies, Schreber himself was cured by beneficent rays. For there was a distinction to be made between two kinds of rays, the "searing" and the "blessing" ones. The former were laden with the poison of corpses or other putrid matter and therefore carried a germ of disease into the body or wrought some other damage in it. The "blessing", or pure rays, healed this damage.

We do not get the impression that these disasters came upon mankind against Schreber's will. On the contrary, he appears to feel a certain satisfaction in the fact that the persecution he was exposed to by Professor Flechsig should have had such appalling consequences. The whole of mankind suffers and is exterminated because Schreber thinks there is someone who is against him. He alone is protected in the epidemics by the agency of the "blessing" rays.

Schreber is left as the sole survivor because this is what he himself wants. He wants to be the only man left alive, standing in an immense field of corpses; and he wants this field of corpses to contain all men but himself. It is not only as a paranoiac that he reveals himself here. To be the last man to remain alive is the deepest urge of every real seeker after power. Such a man sends others to their death; he diverts death on to them in order to be spared it himself. Not only is he totally indifferent to their deaths, but everything within him urges him to bring them about. He is especially likely to resort to this radical expedient of mass death when his dominion over the living is challenged. Once he feels himself threatened his passionate desire to see *everyone* lying dead before him can scarcely be mastered by his reason.

It may be objected that this "political" interpretation of Schreber is implausible; that his apocalyptic visions are inherently religious and that he claims no dominion over the living; that the power of a "seer of spirits" is essentially different from political power; and that, since his delusion starts from the idea that all men are dead, there is no justification for attributing to him any interest in worldly power.

The fallaciousness of this objection will soon become clear. We

shall find in Schreber a political system of a disturbingly familiar kind. But before discussing that we ought to know something about his conception of divine rule.

It must be God himself, he says, "who determined the whole direction of the policy pursued against me". . . . "God would at all times have been able to annihilate any human being who inconvenienced him by sending him a fatal illness or striking him with lightning". . . . "As soon as his interests collide with those individual men, or groups of men, or perhaps even with the entire population of a planet, the instinct of self-preservation will be aroused in God, as in any other living being. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah! . . . It is quite inconceivable that God would deny any single human being his due share of Blessedness, for every addition to the 'forecourts of heaven' serves only to heighten his own power and to strengthen the bulwarks against the dangers which arise from his approaching mankind. As long as men acted in accordance with the Order of the Universe, no collision could occur between their interests and those of God. That such a collision of interests did none the less occur in my case was due to a conjunction of circumstances so far unique in the history of the world and, I hope, never to be repeated." He speaks of the "restoration of God's absolute rule in Heaven" and of a "sort of confederacy between Flechsig's soul and parts of God" directed against himself and bringing about "a change in the relationship of the parties which has remained essentially the same to this day". He mentions the "colossal powers on the side of God's omnipotence" and his own "hopeless resistance". He conjectures that "Professor Flechsig's authority as administrator of one of God's provinces must have reached as far as America". Flechsig also appeared to govern England. He mentions a Viennese nerve specialist "who seemed to be a sort of administrator of God's interests in another of God's provinces, namely the Slavonic parts of Austria". Between him and Professor Flechsig a struggle for supremacy had arisen.

These extracts, taken from many different parts of the *Memoirs*, give us a very distinct picture of God: he is a despot and nothing else. His realm contains provinces and factions. "God's interests", as they are bluntly and summarily designated, demand the increase of his power. This, and this only, is why he would not deny any human being the share of blessedness due to him; human beings who hinder him are done away with. It cannot be denied that this is a God who sits in the web of his policy like a spider. From this it is only a step to Schreber's own policy.

It should perhaps be mentioned at this point that Schreber grew up in the old Protestant tradition of Saxony and was therefore highly suspicious of Catholics and their proselytizing zeal. His first reference to the Germans is in connection with the victorious war against France of 1870-71.

He claimed to have been given fairly definite hints that the bitter winter of 1870-71 was a deliberate move on the part of God to turn the war in the Germans' favour. God also had a weakness for the language of the Germans. "While undergoing purification souls learnt the so-called 'basic language' spoken by God himself, a somewhat archaic but powerful German. . . . This should not be taken to mean that Blessedness was reserved only for Germans. Nevertheless, in more recent times, probably since the Reformation and perhaps even since the Migration of Peoples, the Germans had been God's *Chosen People*, whose language he used by preference. In the course of history God's chosen people in this sense (meaning the most moral at a given time), had been successively the old Jews, the old Persians, the 'Greco-Romans' and, finally, the Germans."

The chosen people of the Germans was naturally threatened with dangers, first among which were the machinations of the Catholics. The reader will remember those hundreds if not thousands of names Schreber could have mentioned, all of souls who were in contact with his nerves and were continually talking to him. "Many of the bearers of these names had special interests in religion; a great many were Catholics who were expecting [from me] the advancement of Catholicism, in particular the Catholicizing of Saxony and Leipzig. Among these were the Priest S. in Leipzig, '14 Leipzig Catholics' (presumably a Catholic club), the Jesuit Father S. in Dresden, the Cardinals Rampolla, Galimberti and Casati, the Pope himself and finally numerous monks and nuns. On one occasion 240 Benedictine monks led by a Father moved as souls into my head to perish there." But there were other souls too, among them a Viennese nerve specialist, a baptized Slavophile Jew who wanted to make Germany Slavonic through Schreber and "at the same time wanted to set up there the rule of Judaism."

Schreber cites a complete cross-section of Catholicism. Not only are there simple believers who join ominous sounding clubs in Leipzig, but the whole Catholic hierarchy is represented. There is a Jesuit Father (conjuring up visions of intrigue and conspiracy) and, for the high dignitaries of the church, three Italian cardinals with euphonious names, and finally the Pope in person. Monks and nuns appear

in large numbers; even in the building in which Schreber is living they swarm like vermin. In a vision from which I have not quoted he sees how the women's department of the University Nerve Clinic is being fitted up as a nunnery and, on another occasion, as a Catholic chapel. In the rooms under the roof of the asylum he sees Sisters of Mercy. But most striking of all is the procession of 240 Benedictine monks under the leadership of a Father. No form of self-expression is better suited to Catholicism than a procession. Here the close group of the monks acts as a crowd crystal for the totality of Catholic believers. The sight of a procession re-activates in the spectators their own latent belief and they suddenly feel a desire to join on behind it. Thus the procession tends to be increased by all those who see it pass; ideally it should be endless. By swallowing the procession he sees, Schreber symbolically does away with the whole of Catholicism.

In the agitated early period of his illness, which he called his holy time, one particular fortnight stands out by reason of the intensity of what he experienced then. This was the time of "the first Divine Judgement". "The first Divine Judgement" was a series of visions, continuous by day and night and all based, as he himself says, on one general idea. The core of this idea is essentially political, even though its urgency is messianic.

"The conflict between Professor Flechsig and myself had led to a crisis which endangered the existence of God's realms. This meant that the German people, particularly Protestant Germany, could no longer be left with the leadership as God's chosen people. They might even have to be excluded from the occupation of other globes (inhabited planets?) unless a champion for the German people came forward to prove their continued worthiness. Sometimes I myself was to be this champion, sometimes another person designated by me. At the insistence of the voices which talked to me in nerve-contact I named a number of outstanding men whom I considered fit for such a contest. Linked with the basic idea of the first Divine Judgement was the advance of Catholicism, Judaism and Slavism which I have mentioned before." He was also considerably influenced at this time by intimations he received of what he would be in future reincarnations. "Several successive roles were allotted to me... 'a Jesuit novice in Osseg', a 'Burgomaster of Klattau', an 'Alsatian girl who had to defend her honour against a victorious French officer', and finally a 'Mongol Prince'. In all these predictions I believed I recognized a connection with the general picture resulting from my other visions.

My designation as a Jesuit novice in Osseg, a Burgomaster of Klattau and an Alsatian girl in the position specified above I took as prophecies that Protestantism either already had been, or shortly would be, worsted in the struggle with Catholicism, and the German people in the struggle with their Latin and Slav neighbours. The final prospect before me, that of becoming a Mongol Prince, seemed to me an indication that all the Aryan peoples had shown themselves unfitted to be pillars of God's realms and that a last refuge must now be found with non-Aryan peoples."

Schreber's "holy time" falls in the year 1894; he had a passion for exactness about time and place and gives precise dates for the period of "the first Divine Judgement." In 1900, six years later, when his delusion had become clarified and established, he started composing the *Memoirs*, using the shorthand notes he had made before. In 1904 they were published. As no-one today is likely to deny, his political system had within a few decades been accorded high honour: though in a rather cruder and less literate form it became the creed of a great nation, leading, under "a Mongol Prince", to the conquest of Europe and coming within a hair's breadth of the conquest of the world. Thus Schreber's claims were posthumously vindicated by his unwitting disciples. We are not likely to accord him the same recognition, but the amazing and incontrovertible likeness between the two systems may serve to justify the time we have devoted to this single case of paranoia; nor have we finished with it yet.

On some points Schreber was even further in advance of his century. The occupation of other inhabited planets is still only a possibility and no chosen people has as yet been worsted in the venture. But we have already seen the "later champion", not named by him, who experienced Catholics, Jews and Slavs as hostile crowds in the same personal manner as he did, hating them for their very existence and ascribing to them the marked urge to increase inherent in all crowds. No-one has a sharper eye for the attributes of the crowd than the paranoiac or the despot who—as will perhaps be more readily admitted now—are one and the same. But the only crowds which he (to indicate both with the same pronoun) is concerned with are those he wants to attack or to rule; these all have the same features.

It is worth noticing the future existence Schreber chooses for himself. Of the five he mentions only the first (which I omitted) has a nonpolitical character. Each of the three following ones is a focus of violent conflict. He insinuates himself among the Jesuits as a novice;

he becomes the burgomaster of a town in Bohemia where there was fighting between the Germans and the Slavs; and as an Alsatian girl he defends his honour against an officer of a victorious French army: this "honour" sounds suspiciously like the "racial honour" of his successor. Most significant of all, however, is his re-incarnation as a "Mongol Prince". He is slightly apologetic about this, as though he were ashamed of this "non-Aryan" existence, and seeks to justify it by the alleged failure of the Aryan people. Actually the Mongol prince he has in mind is none other than Genghis Khan. He is fascinated by the Mongols' pyramids of skulls. (The reader will remember his pre-occupation with accumulations of corpses.) He approves of their straightforward method of dealing with enemies wholesale. The man who exterminates his enemies has none to fear and can gloat over their defenceless corpses. Of all these four re-incarnations envisaged by Schreber it was as the Mongol Prince that he was most successful.

There is one immediate conclusion to be drawn from this close examination of a paranoiac delusion, namely that in it religion and politics are inextricably intermingled; the Saviour of the World and the Ruler of the World are one and the same person. At the core of it all is the lust for power. Paranoia is an *illness of power* in the most literal sense of the words and exploration of this illness uncovers clues to the nature of power clearer and more complete than those which can be obtained in any other way. One should not allow oneself to be confused by the fact that, in a case such as Schreber's, the paranoiac never actually attained the monstrous position he hungered for. Others *have* attained it. Some of them have succeeded in covering the traces of their rise and keeping their perfected system secret. Others have been less fortunate or had too little time. Here, as in other things, success depends entirely on accidents. The attempt to reconstruct these accidents under the illusion that they are governed by laws calls itself history. For every great name in history a hundred others might have been substituted. There is never any dearth of men who are both talented and wicked. Nor can we deny that we all eat and that each of us has grown strong on the bodies of innumerable animals. Here each of us is a king in a field of corpses. A conscientious investigation of power must ignore success. We must look for its attributes and their perversions wherever they appear, and then compare them. A madman, helpless, outcast and despised, who drags out a twilight existence in some asylum, may, through the insights he procures us, prove more important than Hitler or Napoleon, illuminating for mankind its curse and its masters.

The Case of Schreber: II

THE AIM OF the conspiracy against Schreber was not only soul murder and the destruction of his reason. His enemies also wanted to do something else to him, which would make him almost equally contemptible: they proposed to change his body into that of a woman. As a woman he was to be "sexually abused and then simply 'left lying there', in other words, left to rot". The idea of his transformation into a woman occupied him continually during the years of his illness. He felt female nerves being sent into his body as rays and gradually gaining the upper hand.

At the beginning of his illness he tried to take his own life in many different ways in order to escape so terrible a degradation. Every time he took a bath he thought of drowning and he several times demanded poison. But his despair about his proposed transformation into a woman did not last indefinitely. A conviction gradually grew up in him that this would be the best way of guaranteeing the continued existence of mankind. As we know, he thought all human beings had perished in some terrible catastrophe and he was the only one left alive. If he were a woman he would be able to bring forth a new generation. The only possible father for his children was God, so he must win his love. To be united with God was a high honour; to change more and more into a woman for his sake, to dress up so as to attract him and to lure him with feminine wiles no longer seemed a disgrace and degradation to this bearded man, once chief judge of a court of appeal. In addition he thought it would foil Flechsig's plot; God's favour would be won; more and more strongly attracted by the beautiful woman Schreber, the Almighty would come to depend on him. By such means, however obnoxious, as he admits, they may appear to others, Schreber succeeded in "attaching God to his person", though it was not without resistance that the latter surrendered to this somewhat ignominious fate. Time and again God withdrew from Schreber, and he doubtless wanted to free himself completely. But Schreber's attraction had grown too strong.

References to this theme are to be found in many parts of the *Memoirs* and at first the reader may feel tempted to regard the idea of his transformation into a woman as the myth at the core of his delusional system. It is certainly the point which has attracted most attention, including a well-known attempt to find the origin of his particular illness, and of paranoia in general, in repressed homosexuality. There could scarcely, however, be a greater mistake. Paranoia

may be occasioned by anything; the essence of each case is the structure of the delusional world and the way it is *peopled*. Processes of power always play a crucial part in it. Even with Schreber, where certain elements might seem to point to the interpretation I have mentioned, closer examination would cast considerable doubt on it. Even, however, if we were to take Schreber's homosexual disposition as proved, the particular use he makes of it in his system would be much more important than the fact itself. For Schreber the central point of his system was the attack on his reason. Everything he thought and did was a defence against this attack. It was in order to disarm God that he wanted to transform himself into a woman; to become a woman for his sake was to flatter him and submit to him. Just as others kneel before him, Schreber offered himself for God's enjoyment. To win him over to his side and to make sure of him, he lured him to approach and then used every means to keep him there.

"The predicament in question is not only one which has no parallel in human experience, but also one which was never even anticipated in the Order of the Universe. Who in such a situation would want to hazard conjectures about the future? Of one thing only am I certain, namely that God will never succeed in his purpose of destroying my reason. I have been absolutely clear on this point for years, and it removes the chief danger which seemed to threaten me in the first year of my illness."

This statement appears in the last chapter of the *Memoirs*. In writing them Schreber seems largely to have regained his peace of mind. That he had managed to finish them and that those who read them in manuscript were impressed by them finally restored his faith in his reason. All that remained for him to do was to mount a counter-attack by having his book published. By doing so he would make it accessible to the general public and so be able, as he certainly wished, to convert it to his faith.

How was the attack on Schreber's reason actually prosecuted? We know that he was beset by innumerable rays, all talking at him. But which of his intellectual faculties and defences were they trying to destroy? What did they say when they spoke, what was the precise object of their attack? It is worth going into this more closely. Schreber defended himself against his enemies with the utmost tenacity. His description of them and of his defence is as exhaustive as one could wish. We must take it out of the context of his self-created world, his "delusion", as we habitually call such phenomena, and

translate it into our own more ordinary language. Inevitably some of its unique quality will be lost in the process.

The first thing one should mention is his "compulsive thinking"—to use his own term. Only when he talked aloud was there "peace in his head". Then everything else became deathly quiet and he had the impression that he moved among walking corpses. All the people around him, attendants and fellow-patients, seemed to have lost the ability to speak even a single word. As soon as he himself became silent, the voices returned and forced him back to his endless thinking.

Their aim in this was to prevent him sleeping or resting. They talked to him incessantly and it was impossible not to hear them, or to ignore them. He was at their mercy and forced to pay close attention to everything they said. The voices had different methods, which they used in turn. A favourite one was to put a direct question to him: "What are you thinking of now?" He did not want to answer these questions, but, if he kept silent, they would tell him what he should reply, saying for instance, "You should be thinking about the Order of the Universe". This seemed to him to be a system of deliberate "thought-falsification". Not only did the voices question him in an inquisitorial manner, but they also wanted to dictate his thoughts. Even the questions with which they tried to penetrate his secret thoughts aroused his opposition, and still more the answers dictated to him. Both questions and commands were an infringement of his personal freedom. Both are familiar means to power and he, as a judge, had himself made frequent use of them.

The ways in which Schreber was tried were varied and inventive. First he was interrogated; then various thoughts were dictated to him; then, from his own words and sentences, a further catechism was constructed. His every thought was controlled; not one was allowed to pass unnoticed; every word he used was examined to determine exactly what it meant to him. His lack of privacy in relation to the voices was complete; everything was searched, everything brought into the light. He was the objective of a power which insisted on being omniscient. But though he had to submit to all this, he never really surrendered. One of his defences was to rehearse his own knowledge. He learned poems by heart to prove to himself how well his memory functioned, counted aloud in French and repeated the names of all the "Russian Governments" and "French Departments".

By the preservation of his reason Schreber chiefly meant the safe-

guarding of everything he had stored up in his memory; the thing most important to him was the safety of *words*. To him all sounds were voices; the universe was full of words: railways, birds and paddle-steamers *spoke*. When he was not uttering words himself they immediately came from others. *Between* words there was nothing. The peace he spoke of and longed for would have been a *freedom from words*. But this was not to be found. Whatever happened to him was simultaneously communicated to him in words. The harmful as well as the beneficent rays were all endowed with speech, and were compelled to use it, as was he himself. "Do not forget that rays must speak!" It is impossible to overrate the importance of words for the paranoiac. They are everywhere, like vermin, always on the alert. They unite to form a world order which leaves nothing outside itself. Perhaps the most marked trend in paranoia is that towards a complete seizing of the world through words, as though language were a fist and the world lay in it.

It is a fist which never opens again. But how does it come to clench? Here one should point out that the paranoiac exhibits a mania for finding causal relations, which finally becomes an end in itself. Nothing that happens to him is chance or coincidence; there is always a reason, which can be found if searched for. Everything unknown can be traced back to something known. Every strange object which approaches can be unmasked and revealed as something one already possesses. Every fresh mask hides something familiar and all one needs is the courage to see through the mask and tear it off boldly. Finding "reasons" becomes a passion and is let loose on everything. Schreber is completely lucid about this aspect of his compulsive thinking. Whilst he complains bitterly about all the other operations he describes, he sees this mania as a kind of recompense for the wrong done him. Among the unfinished sentences "thrown into his nerves" conjunctions and adverbial phrases expressing causal relations figure prominently: "Why", "Why, since...", "Why, since I..." These, like everything else he hears, he has to complete and so they, too, act on him as compulsions. "But they forced me to ponder many things which most human beings carelessly pass over, and thus contributed to deepening my thought." Thus Schreber on the whole approves of this mania for causality. Indeed it gives him positive pleasure and he finds plausible arguments to justify it. He leaves the original act of creation to God, but everything else to do with the world is drawn into his private net of reasons and made his own.

But the mania is not always so reasonable. Schreber meets a man he has often seen and immediately recognizes him as a Mr. Schneider. Mr. Schneider is a man who does not dissemble, but innocently appears as the person he is generally supposed to be. But the simple process of recognition does not satisfy Schreber. He wants there to be something *behind* "Mr. Schneider" and cannot reconcile himself to the idea that there is nothing. Unmasking has become a habit with him and where there is no-one and nothing to practise it on he feels lost. The process of unmasking is of fundamental importance for the paranoiac, and not only for him, for from it derives the mania for identifying causes; and originally all causes were sought for in *persons*. The process of unmasking has already been mentioned several times in this book and this seems the best place to analyse it in more detail.

We have all on occasion, in a street perhaps, suddenly picked out from among the faces of strangers one face that seems familiar. Very often we turn out to have been wrong; the presumed acquaintance approaches, or we go up to him, and it is someone we have never seen before. No-one gives the mistake much thought. There will have been some incidental resemblance in his walk, his hair or the way he holds his head, which explains it. But there are times when such confusions multiply. We seem to see one particular person everywhere. He stands in front of the restaurant we are about to enter, or at a busy street corner; he will turn up several times in the course of a single day. It is, of course, someone who is on our mind, someone we love or, more often perhaps, hate. We may know that he has moved to another town, or gone abroad, but we think, none the less, that we see him; and we make the mistake repeatedly; we persist in it. It is clear that we *want* to find this one man behind all the faces we see. We think of the others as deceptions, hiding reality. There can be many faces which lend themselves to this process and behind them all we suspect the one that matters to us. There is an urgency in it; a hundred faces are stripped off like masks in order that the one face may appear behind them. If we were asked the main difference between this one and the hundred others we should have to say: the hundred are strange to us, the one is known. It looks as though we could only acknowledge the face which is familiar. But it has hidden itself and we have to search for it among strangers.

With the paranoiac this process is concentrated and heightened. He suffers from the atrophy of transformation; it begins in himself,

in his own person, and is most marked there, but gradually it affects the whole world. Even things which are really different he tends to see as the same. In the most varied figures he finds the same enemy. Whenever he tears off a mask, there is that enemy, hiding behind it. For the sake of the unmasking itself, everything *becomes* a mask for him. But he is not deceived; he sees through everything; to him the many are one.

As the rigidity of his system increases the world grows poorer and poorer in real figures, until only those remain who have a part to play in his delusion. He can get to the bottom of everything and he ends by explaining everything away. Finally he is left only with himself and what he rules. What happens here is the exact opposite of the process of transformation. In unmasking, some creature is driven in on itself, limited to a single position and prescribed one particular attitude, which is then taken to be its only genuine one. One starts as a spectator, watching people transform themselves into different people. One may go on for some time like this, watching the masquerade though without approving of it or enjoying it, but then suddenly one shouts "stop" and the whole thing is brought to a halt. "Masks off" is the next command and there the players stand, each as his real self, never to change again. The play is over. The masks have been revealed for what they are. This process of *undoing* transformations is seldom found in a pure form. Generally it is coloured by the expectation of finding an enemy. The paranoiac assumes that the masks were intended to deceive; that the transformations had a purpose; that the most important thing to the actors was concealment and what they changed into or were meant to represent was of secondary importance to them, their main concern being to make themselves unrecognizable. They are felt as threatening and thus the response to them, the tearing down of the masks, is harsh and spiteful and, in the paranoiac, can be so impressive in its violence that one can easily overlook the transformations which aroused it.

On this point Schreber's *Memoirs* take us very close to the heart of the matter. He remembers the time at the beginning of his illness when everything within him was still in a state of flux. During the first year, in his "holy time", he spent a week or two in a small private asylum which his voices called "The Devil's Kitchen". This, he says, was the time of the "maddest miracle-mischief". His experience of transformation and unmasking during this period, long before his delusions grew clear and rigid, is a perfect illustration of my argument.

"I usually spent the day in the Common Room where there was a constant coming and going of other supposed patients. There seemed to be a special attendant appointed to supervise me, whom, because of a possibly accidental likeness, I thought I recognized as the officer of the High Court who used to bring official papers to my house during the six weeks of my professional activity in Dresden . . . This 'officer of the High Court' had a habit of wearing my clothes now and again. From time to time, generally in the evening, there appeared a gentleman who was supposed to be the Medical Director of the Institution. He, again because of a certain resemblance, reminded me of the Dr O. I had consulted in Dresden . . . I only once went for a walk in the garden of the Institution. On that occasion I saw several ladies, among them Mrs W., the wife of Pastor W. from Fr., and my own mother, as well as several gentlemen, including K., a High Court Judge from Dresden—though now he had a misshapen, enlarged head . . . I could understand such likenesses occurring in two or three cases, but not the fact that *almost all the patients in the Institution*, that is to say at least several dozen people, looked like persons who had been more or less close to me during my life."

As patients he saw "only outlandish figures, among them sooty ruffians in linen overalls . . . One after the other they came noiselessly into the Common Room and, equally noiselessly, went away again, apparently without taking any notice of each other. I repeatedly observed that, during their time in the Common Room, some of them *changed heads*, that is to say, without leaving the room and whilst I was watching them, they suddenly ran around with a different head."

"The number of patients I saw in the 'pen'—Schreber's name for the courtyard where they went for air—"and in the Common Room, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes consecutively, was, as far as I could judge, out of all proportion to the size of the building. I was, and still am, convinced that it was impossible for all the forty to fifty people who were driven into the pen at the same time as myself, and who pressed back towards the door of the house on the signal for return, to have found sleeping accommodation there for the night . . . Most of the time the ground floor *swarmed* with human shapes."

Among the shapes he remembers as being in the pen, he mentions a cousin of his wife, "who had shot himself as early as 1887"; and "B., the senior Public Prosecutor, who always adopted a bowed, devout posture as though praying and remained motionless like that". Other people he recognized were a Privy Councillor, a Chief Judge of a Court of Appeal, another High Court Judge, a lawyer from Leipzig

who had been a friend of his youth, his nephew Fritz and a casual summer acquaintance from Warnemünde." Once he noticed from the window his father-in-law in the drive leading to the Asylum.

"Another thing that happened repeatedly was that I saw a whole group of people(4-5), and once even some ladies, pass through the Common Room and go into the corner rooms, where they must have vanished. At these times I repeatedly heard the peculiar death-rattle connected with the dissolution of the 'fleeting makeshift men'."

"It was not only human forms which were bewitched, but also inanimate objects. However sceptical I try to be now when examining my recollections, I cannot expunge certain impressions from my memory: articles of clothing on the bodies of human beings were *transformed* under my eyes; similarly the food on my plate during meals (for instance pork into veal or vice versa)."

There are several striking things in this account. Schreber sees more people than there can possibly be room for, and they are all driven together into a pen. In common with them he feels (as the word "pen" shows) degraded into an animal. This is the nearest he ever comes to a crowd experience. But even in the "pen" he, of course, never becomes completely merged with the other patients. He watches the play of transformations closely, critically indeed, but without actual hostility. Even food and clothes undergo transformation. What occupies him most, however, are his acts of *recognition*. Everyone turns out to be someone he used to know well; he takes care that there shall be no real strangers there. But his unmaskings are as yet relatively good-tempered; the only person he speaks of with hatred (in a passage not quoted here) is the senior attendant. He recognizes a large number of very different people; his "system" has not yet become tight and exclusive. Instead of taking off their masks people simply change heads—the grandest and most amusing way of unmasking which can be imagined.

But only rarely were Schreber's experiences of this entertaining and liberating kind. During his "holy time" he repeatedly had an entirely different kind of vision and this, I think, leads us directly into the prototypal situation of paranoia.

The paranoiac feels surrounded by a pack of enemies who are all after him. This is his basic experience. It is most clearly expressed in visions of *eyes*; he sees eyes everywhere and all round him; they are interested only in him and their interest is menacing in the extreme. The creatures to whom the eyes belong intend to take their revenge

on him. For a long time he has made them suffer and has gone unpunished; if they are animals they are relentlessly hunted and, threatened with extermination, have now suddenly risen against him. This, the prototypal situation of paranoia, is compellingly portrayed in many people's legends about their great hunters.

But the animals do not always keep the shape in which man knows them as prey. They change into more dangerous creatures which he has always feared, and when they press towards him, fill his room and occupy his bed, his terror becomes overwhelming. Schreber at night was beset by bears.

At this period he frequently got out of bed and sat on the floor of his room, clad only in a shirt. His hands, which he pressed firmly on the floor behind his back, were sometimes perceptibly lifted up by bear-like shapes—*black bears*; other "black bears", both greater and smaller, sat round him with glowing eyes; his bedclothes became "white bears". At times, whilst he was still awake, he saw cats with glowing eyes in the trees of the asylum garden.

But these *animal* packs were not the only ones. Schreber's arch-enemy, the psychiatrist Flechsig, had a particularly treacherous and dangerous habit of forming *celestial* packs to attack him. This was done by a process which Schreber called the *partition of souls*. He maintained that Flechsig's soul split, in order that the whole heavenly vault might be occupied by "soul-parts" and the divine rays meet resistance on all sides; there were nerves strung out all over it, constituting a mechanical obstacle to the divine rays which it was impossible to surmount. They were like a besieged fortress protected by walls and moats against the assault of the enemy. This was why Flechsig's soul had split into a great number of "soul-parts". (For some time there were between forty and sixty, amongst them many tiny ones.)

It seems that other "tested souls", taking Flechsig as a model, then began to split too. The parts became more and more numerous and led, as is the nature of packs, a life of assaults and ambushes. A large proportion of them were occupied almost entirely with "circumventory movements", manoeuvres whose purpose was to attack the innocently approaching divine rays from behind and so force them to surrender. Most of these "tested soul-parts" eventually became a nuisance even to God's Omnipotence. One day, when Schreber had succeeded in attracting a considerable number of them to himself, God's Omnipotence staged a raid on them and destroyed them all.

There may have been a connection in Schreber's mind between this "partition of souls" and the multiplication of cells through division, which, of course, he knew about. The employment as celestial packs of the large numbers originating in this way is one of the most characteristic conceptions of his delusion and it is impossible to find a clearer expression of the importance of *hostile packs* for the structure of paranoia.

The complicated and ambiguous nature of Schreber's relationship with God and with the "soul-policy" whose victim he felt himself to be did not prevent him from experiencing God's omnipotence as *splendour*, from outside, as it were, and as a whole. But in all the years of his illness he only had this experience once, during a few consecutive days and nights; and he was entirely aware of its preciousness and rarity.

Once only, in one single night, did God manifest himself. "As I lay wide awake in bed the shining image of his rays became visible to my spiritual eye. Simultaneously I heard his voice. It was not a soft whisper, but a mighty bass which resounded as though directly outside my bedroom windows."

On the following day he saw God with his "bodily eye". It was the sun, although not the sun in its usual appearance, but surrounded by a silver sea of rays which covered a sixth or eighth part of the sky. The sight was of such overwhelming splendour and magnificence that he did not dare look at it continuously, but tried to avert his gaze from the phenomenon. That radiant sun *spoke* to him.

He experienced this radiance not only as coming from God, but sometimes as coming also from himself—which was not surprising considering his importance and his close connection with God. "Owing to the massive confluence of rays my head was frequently encircled by a shimmer of light, similar to the halo of Christ in pictures, but incomparably richer and brighter: the so called 'crown of rays'."

But Schreber elsewhere describes the sacred aspect of power even more impressively. His experience of it reached its culmination in what he calls his period of *immobility*.

During this period his outward life was extremely monotonous. Apart from daily morning and afternoon walks in the garden, he sat motionless the whole day at his table, never even moving to look out of the window. Even in the garden he preferred to remain seated in one place the whole time. This absolute passivity he considered a kind of religious duty.

The idea was induced by the voices which spoke to him. Over and over again they repeated "Not the slightest movement!" Schreber explained this demand by the fact that God did not know how to treat a living man, being accustomed to dealing only with corpses—hence the monstrous demand that Schreber should behave continuously as though he himself were a corpse.

"I considered this immobility a duty incumbent on me both in the interests of self-preservation and towards God, to free him from the quandary he had got into owing to the 'tested souls'. I had reached the conclusion that the loss of rays would be greater if I moved about much. Being at that time still filled with holy awe towards the divine rays, and being also uncertain whether eternity really existed, or whether the rays might not suddenly come to an end, I considered it my duty to do whatever I could to prevent their being wasted in any way." He added that it was much easier to draw the "tested souls" down and force them to spend themselves in his body if he kept completely still. Only in this way could God's absolute rule in Heaven be restored. He had therefore made the incredible sacrifice of desisting from every movement for weeks and months. Since the arrival of "tested souls" was mostly to be expected during sleep, he did not even dare to change his position in bed at night.

This self-petrification lasting for months is among the most extraordinary things that Schreber recounts. His reason for it is twofold: it is both for God and for himself. That he, for the sake of God, should have kept still as a corpse sounds even odder to our modern European ears than it actually is. This is mainly because of our puritanical attitude to a corpse. Our customs require it to be removed quickly; we do not pay much attention to it in itself and, though we know how soon it will decay, we very seldom do anything to prevent this. We dress it up a little, and may put it on show for a short time, but make subsequent access to it impossible. Whatever the pomp of a funeral, the corpse itself does not appear at all; the funeral is the feast of its concealment and suppression. To understand Schreber we must think of the mummies of the Egyptians, in whom the personality of the corpse was conserved, cherished and admired. It was not really as a corpse that Schreber sought for months to behave for love of God, but as a mummy. In this case the word he uses is not really accurate.

His second motive for remaining motionless was dread of wasting the divine rays. This dread he shared with the many widely separate civilizations which have evolved a conception of power as something

sacred. He experiences himself as a vessel in which the divine essence slowly collects. The smallest movement could lead to his spilling some of it and therefore he must not move at all. Here the man who holds power holds it in the most literal sense and also holds onto it, because he feels, either that it is an actual substance which can be exhausted by use, or because a higher authority expects this parsimony from him as an act of veneration. He slowly petrifies in the posture which seems to him most likely to conserve his precious substance; any change may be dangerous and fills him with anxiety. Only by conscientious avoidance of all movement can it be safeguarded. In some cases these postures of conservation, by virtue of their sameness throughout centuries, have come to determine the shape of society. The core of the political structure of many peoples is the rigid and meticulously ordered behaviour of one individual.

Schreber, also, makes provision for "a people", though he is not their king, but rather their "National Saint". He describes how an attempt was actually made on a distant star to create a new human world out of "the Schreber spirit". These new human beings were of much smaller stature than earthly men. He was told that they had achieved a fairly high level of culture and kept small cattle proportionate to their own size. He was also told that as their 'National Saint' he had become an object of veneration, as if his physical posture were of some significance for their faith.

Here we see very clearly how a particular posture can become significant. These human beings are not only created out of Schreber's substance, but their religion depends on his posture.

It was not only Schreber's reason which, during his illness, was exposed to every refinement of attack. His body was interfered with too, and in ways that beggar description. Scarcely any of it was spared. The rays overlooked nothing, but dealt with every part in turn. The effects of their interference were so sudden and unexpected that he could only regard them as "miracles".

First of all there were the manifestations of his coming transformation into a woman. This he had accepted and ceased to resist. But the other things which happened to him were almost unbelievable. A lung worm was sent into his lungs. His ribs were temporarily smashed. In place of his healthy natural stomach the Viennese nerve specialist mentioned above inserted a very inferior "Jew's stomach". Altogether the vicissitudes of his stomach were amazing. Frequently he had to exist without one and would tell the attendant that he could not eat

because he had no stomach. If he ate in spite of this the food simply poured into the abdominal cavity and thence into the thighs. He became used to this state of affairs, however, and continued to eat unperturbed without a stomach. His gullet and intestines were often lacerated or made to vanish and more than once he swallowed part of his larynx.

"Little men" were planted in his feet to pump out his spinal cord; when he walked in the garden it issued from his mouth as little clouds. He frequently had the sensation that his whole skull had become thinner. When he played the piano or wrote, attempts were made to paralyze his fingers. Some souls took the form of tiny human figures, a few millimetres high, and played havoc with his body, both inside and outside. Some of these busied themselves with opening and shutting his eyes, taking up their positions in his eyebrows and from there pulling the eyelids up and down as they pleased with fine filaments like cobwebs. Almost always there were large numbers of little men assembled on his head. They literally walked about on it, nosing around to see if there was any fresh damage. They even shared his meals, helping themselves to a portion, though naturally only a tiny one, of whatever he ate.

He suffered considerable pain from caries in the region of the heel and the coccyx. This was intended to make walking, standing, sitting and lying equally impossible for him. He was not allowed to remain for long in any one position or at any one occupation. If he walked about attempts were made to force him to lie down and if he lay down to chase him from his bed again. "The rays did not seem to understand that an actual, existing human being *must be somewhere*".

At this point one should notice one thing which all these phenomena have in common: they all have to do with the *penetration* of his body. The principle of the impenetrability of matter no longer applies. Just as he himself wants to extend and penetrate everywhere, even right through the earth, so, in the same way, everything penetrates through him and plays tricks in him as well as on him. He often speaks of himself as though he were a celestial body, but he is not even sure of his ordinary human body. The period of his extension, the very time in which he was asserting his claims, seems also to have been the period of his penetrability. For him *greatness* and *persecution* are intimately connected and both are expressed through his body.

Since, however, he went on living in spite of all the assaults on

him, he came to the conclusion that these same rays also *healed* him. They soaked up all the impure matter in his body, which was why he could afford to eat, although he had no stomach. The rays planted the germs of diseases in him, but also removed them again.

Thus one cannot help suspecting that the real purpose of the attacks on Schreber's body was to prove his invulnerability; they were meant to show him how much he could overcome. The more he was injured and shaken, the more secure he ultimately became.

He began to doubt whether he was mortal at all. What were the strongest poisons compared with the injuries he had surmounted? If he were to fall into water and drown, his circulation and the action of his heart would be re-started and he would revive. If he put a bullet through his head, the inner organs and bones it destroyed would be restored. After all, had he not lived for a long time deprived of various vital organs which had then all grown again? Nor could any common disease endanger him. After much pain and suffering and many doubts the violence of his craving for invulnerability had resulted in his acquiring it.

I have already shown how the craving for invulnerability and the passion for survival merge into each other. In this, too, the paranoiac is the exact image of the ruler. The only difference between them lies in their position in the world. In their inner structure they are identical. One might even think the paranoiac the more impressive of the two because he is sufficient unto himself and cannot be shaken by failure. The opinion of the world is nothing to him. It is his delusion set against the whole of mankind.

"Everything that happens", says Schreber, "is in relation to me. I became for God *the* human being, or the one human being to whom everything that happens must be related and who therefore, from his own standpoint too, must relate all things to himself."

The idea that all other human beings had perished dominated him for years and this of course meant that he thought of himself as being the only one. Gradually, however, this idea was superseded by something less extreme: from being the only man alive he became the only one who mattered.

It is difficult to resist the suspicion that behind paranoia, as behind all power, lies the same profound urge: the desire to get other men out of the way so as to be the only one; or, in the milder, and indeed often admitted, form, to get others to help him *become* the only one.

EPILOGUE

- 402ff General Paralysis. Kräpelin, *Einführung in die Psychiatrische Klinik*, II, Case 26, pp. 93-7.
- 404f Second case of Paralysis. *Ibid.*, Case 28, pp. 101-2.
- 411ff D. Westermann, *Geschichte Afrikas*, Cologne, 1952—a book which draws on a vast quantity of material—was consulted throughout this chapter.
- Death of an old king in Gaboon and the election of his successor. P. Du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa*, London, 1861, pp. 18-20.
- 413ff The King of Jukun. C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, Kegan Paul, London, 1931, pp. 120-77 and 332-53.
- 415f Attributes of African kings. Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-43.
- 416f The imitation of kings. Monomotapa: Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-14; Ethiopia: Diodorus Siculus, III, 7 and Strabo, XVII, 2 and 3; Darfur: *Travels of an Arab Merchant in Soudan*, London, 1854, p. 78; Uganda, Boni, China: J. G. Frazer, *The Dying God*, London, 1913, pp. 39-40.
- 418 The king himself determines the length of his reign. Monteil, *Les Bambara du Ségou*, Paris, 1924, p. 305.
- Beating of the prospective king among the Yoruba. Westermann, *ibid.*, p. 40; in Sierra Leone: *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 419 Lawlessness after the death of a king. Among the Mosi of Wagadugu: Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 185; in Ashanti: *ibid.*, p. 222; in Uganda: J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, London, 1911, pp. 103-4.
- The Hima states originated through the gradual conquest of what is now Uganda and the territory south of it. Warlike pastoralists of Hamitic origin, called Hima, migrated into the country from the north and made the native Bantu agriculturalists their serfs. These Hima kingdoms are among the most interesting in Africa. They are distinguished by a sharp caste-division between masters and serfs.
- Succession in Ankole. K. Oberg, *The Kingdom of Ankole in Uganda*, in *African Political Systems*, edited by M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 121-62 and especially pp. 157-61.
- A much more diffuse work, but nevertheless worth reading, is Roscoe, *The Banyankole*, Cambridge, 1923. There is an excellent study of Ruanda, further to the south, by J. J. Maquet, *The Kingdom of Ruanda*, in *African Worlds*, pp. 1-26.
- 420f Sacrifice of a young prince in Kitara. Roscoe, *The Bakitara*, Cambridge, 1923, pp. 129-30.
- 421 The royal bow of Kitara. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4.
- "I shoot the nations". *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- Uganda: drums. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, London, 1911, p. 188.
- 422 "I am the king to live longer than my ancestors". *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- Two passers-by seized. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- Scapegoat and overseer. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

- 422 Presentation of victims in pairs. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 423 "You are now Ata". Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- "The Lion eats alone". Roscoe, *The Baganda*, p. 207.
- The king of Kitara fed by his cook. Roscoe, *The Bakitara*, p. 103.
- Summary justice. Roscoe, *ibid.*, pp. 61, 63.
- 424ff Ibn Batuta. *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, translated and selected by H. A. R. Gibb, Routledge, London, 1929, ch. VI, pp. 183-213.
- The History of Ziaud-din Barani can be found in Vol. III of *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, 1867-1877. It has also been published separately as *Later Kings of Delhi*, by S. Gupta, Calcutta. The account of Muhammad Tughlak's reign is on pp. 159-192.
- 434 A modern defender of the Sultan is the Indian historian Ishwari Prasad (*L'Inde du VIIe au XVIe siècle*, in the series *Histoire du Monde*, Paris, 1930, pp. 270-300). He calls him an "unfortunate idealist", "without doubt the most able man of the Middle Ages".
- 434ff *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, by Daniel Paul Schreber, Leipzig, 1903. [Additional note to the English translation.] I am of course aware of Freud's paper on the subject and of the conclusions he reached, but my close acquaintance with the *Denkwürdigkeiten* inclines me to believe that these conclusions were too narrow and, indeed, misleading. For this reason, I have made no use of his study. It should, however, be borne in mind that Freud wrote in 1911, before the great wars and revolutions of our century.