

Had we but world enough and time . . .

—ANDREW MARVELL

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SICHARIUS AND CHRAMNESINDUS

THE following story is found in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* (7, 47 and 9, 19):

Gravia tunc inter Toronicos cives bella civilia surrexerunt. Nam Sicharius, Johannis quondam filius, dum ad natalis dominici solemnia apud Montalomagensem vicum cum Austrighysilo reliquosque pagensis celebraret, presbiter loci misit puerum ad aliquorum hominum invitationem, ut ad domum eius bibendi gracia venire deberint. Veniente vero puero, unus ex his qui invitabantur, extracto gladio, eum ferire non metuit. Qui statim cecidit et mortuus est. Quod cum Sicharius audisset, qui amicitias cum presbitero retinebat, quod scilicet puer eius fuerit interfectus, arrepta arma ad ecclesiam petit, Austrighyselum opperiens. Ille autem hec audiens, adprehenso armorum apparatus, contra eum diregit. Mixtisque omnibus, cum se pars utraque conliderit, Sicharius inter clericos ereptus ad villam suam effugit, relictis in domo presbiteri cum argento et vestimentis quatuor pueris sauciatis. Quo fugiente, Austrighiselus iterum intruens, interfectis pueris aurum argentumque cum reliquis rebus abstulit. Dehinc cum in iudicio civium convenissent, et preceptum esset ut Austrighiselus, qui homicida erat et, interfectis pueris, res sine audienciam diripuerat, censura legali condempnaretur. Inito placito, paucis infra diebus Sicharius audiens quod res, quas Austrighiselus deripuerat, cum Aunone et filio adque eius fratre Eberulfo retinerentur, postposito placito, coniunctus Audino, mota sedicione, cum armatis viris inruit super eos nocte, elisumque hospicium, in quo dormiebant, patrem cum fratre et filio interemit, resque eorum cum pecoribus, interfectisque servis, abduxit. Quod nos audientes, vehementer ex hoc molesti, adiuncto iudice, legacionem ad eos mittimus, ut in nostra presencia venientes, accepta racione, cum pace discederent, ne iurgium in amplius pulularet. Quibus venientibus coniunctisque civibus, ego aio: "Nolite, o viri, in sceleribus proficere, ne malum longius extendatur. Perdedimus enim ecclesie filius; metuemus nunc, ne et alius in hac intencione careamus.

Estote, queso, pacifici; et qui malum gessit, stante caritate, componat, ut sitis filii pacifici, qui digni sitis regno Dei, ipso Domino tribuente, percipere. Sic enim ipse ait: Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur. Ecce enim, etsi illi, qui noxe subditur, minor est facultas, argento ecclesie redemitur; interim anima viri non pereat." Et hec dicens, optuli argentum ecclesie; sed pars Chramnesindi, qui mortem patris fratresque et patruum requirebat, accipere noluit. His discedentibus, Sicharius iter, ut ad regem ambularet, preparat, et ob hoc Pectavum ad uxorem cernendam proficiscitur. Cumque servum, ut exerceret opera, commoneret elevatamque virgam ictibus verberaret, ille, extracto baltei gladio, dominum sauciare non metuit. Quo in terram ruente, currentes amici adprehensum servum crudeliter cesum, truncatis manibus et pedibus, patibulo damnaverunt. Interim sonus in Toronicum exiit, Sicharium fuisse defunctum. Cum autem hec Chramnesindus audisset, communitis parentibus et amicis, ad domum eius properat. Quibus spoliatis, interemptis nonnullis servorum, domus omnes tam Sicharii quam reliquorum, qui participes huius ville erant, incendio concremavit, abducens secum pecora vel quecumque movere potuit. Tunc partes a iudice ad civitatem deducte, causas proprias prolocuntur; inventumque est a iudicibus, ut, qui nollens accipere prius compositionem domus incendiis tradedit, medietatem precii, quod ei fuerat iudicatum, amitteret—et hoc contra legis actum, ut tantum pacifici redderentur—alia vero medietatem compositiones Sicharius redderet. Tunc datum ab ecclesia argentum, que iudicaverunt accepta securitate composuit, datis sibi partes invicem sacramentis, ut nullo umquam tempore contra alteram pars alia musitaret. Et sic altercacio terminum fecit.

(9, 19) Bellum vero illud, quod inter cives Toronicus superius diximus terminatum, in rediviva rursum insania surgit. Nam Sicharius, cum post interfectionem parentum Cramsindi magnam cum eo amicitiam patravisset, et in tantum se caritate mutua diligenter, ut plerumque simul cibum caperent, ac in uno pariter stratu recumberent, quandam die cenam sub nocturno tempore preparat Chramsindus, invitans Sicharium ad epulum suum. Quo veniente, resident pariter ad convivium. Cumque Sicharius crapulatus a vino multa iactaret in Cramsindo, ad extremum dixisse fertur: "Magnas mihi debes referre grates, o dulcissime frater, eo quod interficerem parentes tuos, de quibus accepta compositione, aurum argentumque superabundat in domum tuam, et nudus

essis et egens, nisi hec te causa paululum roborassit." Hec ille audiens, amare suscepit animo dicta Sichari, dixitque in corde suo: "Nisi ulciscar interitum parentum meorum, amitteri nomen viri debeo et mulier infirma vocare." Et statim extinctis luminariibus, caput Sichari seca dividit. Qui parvolam in ipso vitae terminum vocem emittens, cecidit et mortuus est. Pueri vero, qui cum eo venerant, dilabuntur. Cramsindus exanimum corpus nudatum vestibus adpendit in sepis stipite, ascensisque aequitibus eius, ad regem petiit. . . .

(Serious local fighting arose at that time between inhabitants of the region of Tours. For Sicharius, son of the late John, celebrated the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord at the village of Manthelan with Austrighiselus and the other neighbors. And the priest of the place sent a boy over to invite some of the men to come to his house for a drink. When the boy got there, one of those he invited drew his sword and did not refrain from striking at him. He fell down and was dead. Sicharius was friendly with the priest, and when he heard that one of his boys had been murdered, he took his arms and went to the church to wait for Austrighiselus. The latter heard about this and armed himself also and went to meet him. When they had all mingled in fighting and both parties suffered harm, Sicharius got away unnoticed under the protection of the clergy and made for his homestead leaving behind at the priest's place his silver, his clothes, and four of his servants who had been wounded. After he had fled, Austrighiselus broke into the building, killed the servants, and took away with him the gold, silver, and other things. When they appeared later before the people's court, the decision was that Austrighiselus was to be sentenced to the legal penalty for manslaughter and because, after killing the servants, he had taken the things without waiting for a hearing. Having accepted these arrangements, Sicharius heard a few days later that the things Austrighiselus had taken from him were stored at the place of Auno and his son and brother Eberulf, and forgetting about the arrangements, he joined with Audinus, broke the peace, and surprised them at night with armed men. He invaded the house where they were asleep, killed father, brother, and son, and having done away with the servants took all their belongings and their cattle. When we heard this, we grew greatly perturbed; we took

up the matter with the judge and sent out a message to them: they should appear before us, present their case, and separate in peace so that the feud would not spread farther. When they came and the citizenry had assembled, I spoke to them saying: "Desist, you men, from committing such offenses and let not the evil extend farther. Already have we lost sons of the Church and are concerned lest we might lose more in this contention. Be peaceable, I beg you; and he who has committed evil, let him atone for it for charity's sake, that you may be children of peace, worthy to receive the Kingdom of God through the Lord's grace. For he says: Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. And if he who is the guilty one should be too poor he shall be redeemed by money of the Church so that the soul of that man may not perish." Thus speaking I offered them money of the Church. But Chramnesindus' party, wishing to avenge the death of his father, brother, and uncle, did not want to accept. Thus they departed, and Sicharius got ready for a journey to go to see the king. He therefore turned toward the region of Poitiers in order to visit his wife. When he urged on a servant to do his work and raised his cane and beat him, the latter drew his sword which he carried in his belt and had no qualms about wounding his master. As Sicharius fell to the ground, his friends came running, seized the servant, treated him cruelly, cut off his hands and feet and strung him up on the gallows. Meanwhile the rumor spread at Tours that Sicharius was dead. When Chramnesindus heard this he summoned his relatives and friends and rushed to Sicharius' house. When he had plundered it, killing a few servants in the process, he set all the houses on fire, both those which belonged to Sicharius and all the others, which belonged to men who made part of that village, and took with him the cattle and everything that could be moved. Then the parties were summoned before the judge in the city and pleaded their causes, and the judges found that he who had previously refused to accept the indemnity and had set the houses on fire should lose half the wergild previously adjudged to him—this was really against the law and was done only in order to calm them—while Sicharius was to pay the other half. Then the Church paid out the money. The indemnity was settled in accordance with the verdict, the parties were reconciled and swore each to the

other that they would never again rise in arms against one another. Thus the quarrel came to an end.

The fighting among the citizens of Tours, which was ended as we have related above, broke out again with renewed fury. After slaying Chramnesindus' kinsmen, Sicharius had become very friendly with him, and they loved each other so dearly that they often ate together and slept together in one bed. Once Chramnesindus made ready a dinner towards night and invited Sicharius. He came and they sat down together for dinner. Sicharius got drunk with wine and made many boasts to Chramnesindus, and at last he is supposed to have said: "O brother, you are greatly indebted to me for killing your kinsmen, for you were paid for them, and now there is gold and silver in your house a-plenty. You would be poor and living a life of misery if I had not set you up a little." Chramnesindus heard Sicharius' words with bitterness in his soul and he spoke within his heart: "If I do not avenge the death of my kinsmen, I shall not be worthy of the name of man and ought to be called a weak woman." And immediately he put out the lights and split Sicharius' head with his blade. Sicharius uttered in the last moment of his life a little cry, fell down, and was dead. The servants that had come with him escaped. Chramnesindus stripped the garments from the dead body and hung it on a picket of the fence; then he mounted his horse and hastened to the king. . . .)

I imagine that the first impression this passage makes on a reader is that here an occurrence sufficiently confused in itself is very obscurely narrated. Even if one is not put off by the irregular orthography and inflections, one will still have some difficulty in getting a really clear idea of the facts involved. "At that time grave civil disturbances broke out among the inhabitants of Tours. For . . ." The cause of the disturbances should now follow; but what follows—dependent on *nam*—is some account of earlier events; in a village where many people had gathered to celebrate Christmas, the village priest sent out a servant to invite some of them to come and drink with him. But that is certainly not the cause of the disturbances at Tours. We are reminded of the narrative method which is frequent in spoken conversation, especially among uneducated or hasty or careless speakers. Something like: "Last night I was late getting away from the office. Because Smith had come to see the boss, and they were inside talking about

the X business. And just before five, the boss comes and says: 'Say, Jones, couldn't you get these things itemized in a hurry, so we can give Mr. Smith all the material right now?' " And so on. Neither the priest's invitation nor Smith's presence in the boss's office represents the immediate cause for the outbreak of disturbances or Jones's being late leaving the office; they represent merely the first part of a complex of facts which the speaker is unable to organize syntactically. He intends now to state the cause of the result anticipated in the first independent sentence, but the amount of data requisite for the purpose confuses him. He has neither the energy to dispose all of it in a single construction through the aid of a system of dependent clauses, nor the foresight to recognize the difficulty and get around it by a synoptic introductory statement, as for instance, "It happened like this." As it stands, the *nam* is neither exact nor justified—precisely as in the similarly conceived sentence which comes later: *nam Sicharius cum post interfectionem*, etc., for there again the value of *nam* is not that it introduces the cause of the renewed outbreak of disturbances, it only brings in the first part of a complex of facts. And in both cases the impression of disorder is considerably increased by a change in the grammatical subject. In both cases the sentence starts out with Sicharius as the subject (both times Gregory evidently thinks of him as the chief character), and in both cases he is later forced to insert the subject of that portion of the complex of facts which represents all that he is capable of getting into a single construction. As a result, the sentences turn out to be grammatical monsters. True enough, the commentators (Bonnet; and Löfsted in his commentary on the *Peregrinatio Aetheriae*) have informed us that *nam* in Vulgar Latin, like many of the once extremely clear and precise connectives of Latin, has lost its original value, that it is no longer causal but merely indicates a colorless continuation or transition. But this state of affairs has by no means been reached in our two passages from Gregory. On the contrary, Gregory still senses the causal value; he employs it, but in a confused and imprecise manner. It may be that such instances can show us how *nam* came to be weakened as a causal particle by being so often used laxly—here the weakening process is still going on, it is not yet complete. It is remarkable that such procedures, which would seem to occur at all times in the spoken language, here make their way into the literary language of a man like Gregory of Tours, the scion of a high-ranking family and a noteworthy character in his time and his country.

Let us proceed. The servant presenting the invitation is killed "by one of those who were invited." Why? We are not told. That the killer must have been Austrighiselus or one of his group, we can only infer from what follows, for Sicharius wants to take revenge on him for the deed; but it is not stated. Further, the abrupt introduction of the various buildings—the church, the priest's house—and the words *inter clericos ereptus* give only a very confused notion of the events. We miss the aid of clarifying connectives. In exchange, other things seem exaggeratedly detailed. Why does not Gregory say simply: one of the guests killed the servant? He says: . . . *extracto gladio, eum ferire non metuit. Qui statim cecidit et mortuos est.* What a detailed treatment of an incident which, after all, is important only through its consequences! To motivate it would seem to have been more important than to tell us that the servant fell before he died! In the very next sentence, he is afraid that the reader may already have lost the connection, for he considers it necessary to add, *quod scilicet puer eius fuerit interfectus*—which only a reader of very limited capacity can have so soon forgotten! On the other hand, with his *Austrighiselum opperiens* he expects the same reader to have a considerable power of combination, for he has failed to tell us that Austrighiselus is in any way related to the killing—or for that matter that the entire party is not assembled in one place, as one could hardly fail to suppose. So the text goes on. The sentence which deals with first legal proceedings has no principal verb at all (*Dehinc cum in iudicio*); the following sentence is made a monster by its superimposed participial constructions, which follow no grammatical system whatever: *inito placito, postposito placito, coniunctus Audino, mota sedicione, elisumque hospicium.* Both the translation and the historical and legal interpretation of the two sentences are extremely difficult (as a matter of fact, the entire juridical procedure was the occasion for a much-discussed controversy between Gabriel Monod and Fustel de Coulanges, *Revue historique*, 31, 1886, and *Revue des questions historiques*, 41, 1887); this is due not merely to the ambiguity of the word *placitum* but also to the general lack of orderly arrangement in the rhetorical structure. And this again reveals that Gregory is not capable of arranging the occurrences themselves in an orderly fashion.

Austrighiselus disappears without the reader's being told what became of him; new characters are unexpectedly introduced, and it is only occasionally and incompletely that we learn how they are related to the events; the speech which Gregory makes to calm the excitement

is also incomprehensible without some power of combination in the reader, for who is *illi qui noxe subditur*, and who the *vir* whose soul must not perish? On the other hand, a story like that of Sicharius' trip to Poitiers and of his being wounded by a servant—an incident whose bearing on the whole action is at best that it is the basis for the false rumor of his death—is presented in great detail. When we come to the second legal action or settlement procedure, we have once again to make a special effort to understand what party and what money are being referred to. And through the whole first part (which is from book 7), though there are numerous and often extremely clumsy subordinate constructions (the effort to write periodically is unmistakable), there is not a single clearly causal or concessive conjunction with the exception of *quoniam* in the Bible quotation, and *etsi*, the meaning of which is not quite clear to me, but it would seem to be rather conditional (= *si*) than causal or concessive. The second part (from book 9) does not make quite the same impression, because it very soon concentrates upon a single scene, so that the problem is less one of order than of visual directness. But here again the sentence *Nam Sicharius* which contains the exposition and which we discussed above, is a veritable monstrosity.

It goes without saying that a classical author would have arranged the material much more clearly—provided that he had treated it at all. For if we ask ourselves how Caesar or Livy or Tacitus or even Ammianus would have told this story, it immediately becomes obvious that they would never have told it. For them and their public, such a story would not have had the slightest interest. Who are Austrighiselus, Sicharius, and Chramnesindus? Not even tribal princes, and during the heyday of the Empire their bloody brawls would probably not even have elicited a special report to Rome from the provincial governor. This observation shows how narrow Gregory's horizon really is, how little perspective he has with which to view a large, coherent whole, how little he is in a position to organize his subject matter in accordance with the points of view which had once obtained. The Empire is no longer in existence. Gregory is no longer situated in a place where all the news from the *orbis terrarum* is received, sorted, and arranged according to its significance for the state. He has neither the news sources which were once available nor the attitude which once determined the manner in which the news was reported. He hardly surveys all of Gaul. A large part of his work, doubtless the most valuable, consists of what he himself witnessed

in his own diocese or of what was reported to him from the neighboring territory. His material is essentially limited to what has been brought before his eyes. He has no political point of view in the old sense; if he may be said to have any at all, it is the interest of the Church; but there again his perspective is restricted; he does not conceive of the Church as a whole in such a way that his work forcibly conveys that whole; everything is locally restricted, both in substance and in thought. On the other hand, in contrast to his antique predecessors, whose work was often based on indirect and previously processed reports, most of the things Gregory relates in his *History of the Franks* he either saw himself or learned at first-hand from people involved in them. This is in keeping with his natural bent. For he is directly interested in what people are doing. They interest him as they move about him, irrespective of political considerations in a wider context. So far as it is present, he treats even politics anecdotally and humanly. Thus his work assumes a character much closer to personal memoirs than the work of any Roman historian. (We need hardly point out that Caesar's case is completely different.)

An earlier antique author, then, would not have treated this story at all. If it had been indispensable for the understanding of a more general political complex, he would have disposed of it in three lines. In cases where a series of acts of violence assume political importance in themselves—Jugurtha and his cousins in Sallust might serve as an example—the whole system of political motives, rationalized to the last detail and heightened by rhetoric, is set forth beforehand. Dramatic incidents without political interest are at best briefly alluded to, as for example in the case of the words *occultans sese tugurio muliebris ancillae* in connection with the murder of Hiempsal (*Jugurtha* 12). Gregory, on the other hand, tries hard, sometimes clumsily and prolixly but often with great success, to make the proceedings vividly visible. “. . . the priest of the village sent a servant to invite certain people to come to his house and drink. When the servant arrived, one of those who were invited drew his sword and had no qualms about wounding him. He fell to the ground and was dead.” That is visually vivid narration, even though of a very simple sort. There could be no other reason for mentioning that the servant arrived or that he fell to the ground. It is the same with the vengeful attack upon Austrighiselus. Topographically the report is not very clear, but we sense the author's endeavor to give visual vividness to the successive phases of the occurrence. The same thing is true of Sicharius' argument with his servant,

which has no bearing whatever upon the progress of the action. But in our text the most peculiar and striking illustration of Gregory's concern for visual vividness is the murder of Sicharius. How the two, of whom one had killed the other's next of kin not very long before, made friends and became so intimate and inseparable that they ate and slept together, how once again Chramnesindus invites Sicharius to feast with him, how Sicharius, talking wildly in his drunkenness, provokes the other to take vengeance for everything at once, and finally the murder itself—all this has such a visual vividness, and testifies to such an endeavor to imitate the occurrence directly, as Roman historiography never sought to achieve (even Ammianus' showy pictorial style is not imitative) and as can hardly be found anywhere in all the serious literature of antiquity. Furthermore, it is magnificent psychologically, an extremely arresting scene between two individuals, and filled with the strange atmosphere of the Merovingian period: the sudden and undisguised brutality which blots out every memory of the past and every thought of the future, and, on the other hand, the slight effect of Christian morality which, even though presented in its most primitive form, cannot penetrate these brutish souls—all this comes out in sharp relief in the scene. The plausible hypothesis that Chramnesindus had consciously lured Sicharius into a trap—that on his side the friendship was sheer hypocrisy designed to lull his enemy into security—Gregory does not even take into consideration. And he is probably right, for he knew the people among whom he lived. Besides, we read of equally unthinking acts everywhere in his work. It seems indeed that the two had honestly become such close friends that, their consciousness being alive only to the passing moment, it never occurred to them how unnatural and dangerous such a friendship really was. A few tactless drunken words seem to have brought the memory back to the surface, to have rekindled the forgotten hatred, so that the murder was the decision of a moment. This is all the more probable since Chramnesindus—as we learn from the following passage—found himself in a difficult situation in consequence of his act, for Sicharius had a powerful protectress in Queen Fredegunde; if Chramnesindus had taken time to think matters through, he might have acted differently. Gregory relates the whole incident without personal commentary, purely dramatically, shifting the tense and writing in the present as soon as he nears the decisive moment. Then he gives us direct discourse, not only for the bullying of the drunken Sicharius but also for what goes on inside Chramne-

sindus. Both these pieces of direct discourse are direct imitations of what was actually spoken and felt, free from all rhetorical editing. Sicharius' words sound as though they had been translated into Gregory's clumsy Latin from the vernacular in which they were spoken ("so they say," *dixisse fertur*). One might reconstruct the speech in current vernacular roughly as follows: "Brother, you ought to be grateful to me for killing your people. You pocketed the indemnity, and now you're a rich man. You wouldn't have a shirt to your back if this little business hadn't helped you out." And Chramnesindus' reaction is expressed in an unvoiced monologue which, for all its awkwardness, is sufficiently striking: "I ought to renounce the name of a man and be called a helpless woman, if I do not take revenge for the death of my people." And immediately the lights go out, Sicharius is killed, his death rattle is not forgotten, and once again we read *cecidit et mortuus est*; Gregory refuses to do without the falling body.

A scene, then, which no antique historian would have considered worth representing, Gregory relates in the most graphic manner; and it would seem to have been its very graphicness which made him want to represent it. If, for example, we read the story of the flight of the hostage Attalus (3, 15; it furnished the subject of Grillparzer's *Weh dem der lügt*), we come upon the scene where the fugitives hide from their mounted pursuers behind a bramble. The horsemen halt just in front of it: *dixitque unus, dum equi urinam proiecerint . . .* (and one of them said, while the horses staled . . .). What classical author would have given such a detail! We see how Gregory, to make his report come alive, invents such things spontaneously, out of the compulsion of his own imagination—after all, he was not present! What he related he tried to make visual, palpable, perceptible through all the senses. In this he is also served by the most distinctive characteristic of his style: the numerous brief pieces of direct discourse, which he uses wherever he has an opportunity. Any story that he can, he thus makes into a scene. We have already referred to the role which direct discourse plays in classical historiography (pp. 39 and 46). It is used there almost exclusively for set speeches in a rhetorical vein. The emotion and drama in them is purely rhetorical. They organize and regulate the facts but do not make them concrete. Gregory on the other hand gives us dialogues and similar brief utterances by his personages—words which break out in a moment and change the moment into a scene. I cannot here enumerate the long series of scenes in which he has one or two people speak in his clumsy Latin, which

often gets in the way, which seems too eager to sound literary, but through which time and again the concrete vigor of the vernacular penetrates. But let me mention at least a few examples (of which the murder scene just mentioned already furnishes one). In the story of Attalus the conversation between the cook and his master (*rogo ut facias mihi prandium quod admirentur et dicant quia in domu regia melius non aspeximus*, 3, 15—I want you to fix up a dinner for me that will really surprise them and make them say they never saw a better, not even at the King's house; *ibid.*, the conversation at night between the cook and his son-in-law); in the struggle over the bishopric of Clermont, the threats with which the presbyter Cato assails the archdeacon Cautinus (*Ego te removebo, ego te humiliabo, ego tibi multas neces impendi praecipiam*, 4, 7—I'll kick you out, I'll make you eat dirt, I'll have you put to death by inches); the argument between King Chilperic and Gregory over the Trinity (anger and scorn in the King's answers, for instance, *manifestum est mihi in hac causa Hilarium Eusebiumque validos inimicos habere*—I obviously have some very powerful opponents in this matter, like Hilary and Eusebius—or *sapientioribus a te hoc pandam qui mihi consentiant*, 5, 44—I'll put this matter to wiser men than you and they will agree with me); Fredegundis at Bishop Praetextatus' sickbed, with the entire preceding and following scene (8, 31); Bishop Bertramnus of Bordeaux's answer concerning his sister (*requirat nunc eam revocetque quo voluerit, me obvium non habebit*, 9, 33—Let him look for her and take her wherever he wants to; I won't object); the violent argument between Princess Rigundis and her mother (9, 34); Guntchram Boso and the Bishop of Trier (9, 10); and as a particularly arresting example, the downfall of Mundericus, when, toward the end, where Mundericus is led through the gates of his castle by the traitor Aregyselus, the moment of suspense before the murder is set in sharp dramatic relief by a few words in direct discourse: *Quid adspicitis tam intenti, populi? An numquid non vidistis prius Mundericum?*—Why are you staring at us like that, you people? Haven't you ever seen Mundericus before? (3, 14).

In all these conversations and exclamations, brief, spontaneous passages between human beings are dramatized in a most concrete fashion: eye to eye, statement answering statement, the actors face one another breathing and alive—a procedure which can hardly be found in antique historiography; even the dialogue of the classical stage is shaped more rationally and more rhetorically. The spontaneous

and brief dialogue does, however, occur in the Bible—compare what we said on the subject above, p. 45. Undoubtedly the rhythm and the atmosphere of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, are always present in Gregory's mind and help to determine his style. And they release forces which are already present in Gregory and his epoch. For everywhere in his History the spoken language of the people unmistakably makes its presence felt; though the time when it can be written is still far away, it keeps echoing through Gregory's consciousness. Gregory's literary Latin not only is decadent grammatically and syntactically, it is used in his work to an end for which, originally or at least in its heyday, it seemed little suited—that is, to imitate concrete reality. For the literary Latin, and especially the literary prose, of the golden age is an almost excessively organizing language, in which the material and sensory side of the facts is rather viewed and ordered from above than vividly presented in its materiality and sensoriness. Together with the rhetorical tradition, the legal and administrative genius of the Romans contributes to this. In the Roman prose of the golden age there is a predominant tendency simply to report matters of fact, if possible only to suggest them in very general terms, to allude to them, to keep aloof from them—and, on the other hand, to put all the precision and vigor of expression into syntactical connections, with the result that the style acquires as it were a strategic character, with extremely clear articulations, whereas the subject matter, the stuff of reality, which lies between them, though it is mastered, is not exploited in its sensory potentialities. (This is so even in Cicero's letters, and at times most emphatically; as an example one might read the famous apologia in the letter to P. Lentulus Spinther, *ad fam.* 1, 9, especially §21.) The tools of syntactical connection thus reach the height of subtlety, exactness, and diversity—an observation which applies not only to conjunctions and other devices of subordination, but also to the use of tenses, word order, antithesis, and numerous other rhetorical devices, which are likewise made to serve the same end of exact, subtle, yet pliable and richly shaded disposition. This wealth of articulations and dispositional devices makes possible a great variety of subjective exposition, amazingly facilitates reasoning on the facts, and leaves the writer a freedom—not again attained in such a measure until long afterward—to suppress certain facts and to suggest doubtful details without assuming explicit responsibility.

Gregory's language, on the other hand, is but imperfectly equipped to organize facts; as soon as a complex of events ceases to be very

simple, he is no longer able to present it as a coherent whole. His language organizes badly or not at all. But it lives in the concrete side of events, it speaks with and in the people who figure in them. And it can give forceful and varied expression to their pleasure, their pain, their scorn and anger, or whatever other passions may chance to be raging in them (whereas the judgments Gregory occasionally passes on his characters are on the whole summary and devoid of finesse; for example 9, 19, toward the end, concerning Sicharius). How much more direct his sensory participation in events is than that of any classical author, we can learn from a comparison with the most realistic of them all, Petronius. Petronius copies the language of his parvenu freedmen, he makes them speak their corrupt and repugnant jargon as a much more conscious and exact imitator than Gregory; but it is obvious that he applies this style as a rhetorical device and that he would write a report or a history quite differently. He is a gentleman of rank and culture, presenting a farce to his equals, with every *raffinement*. He is consciously dealing in a comic art form, and if he so chooses he can write in many other veins as well. But Gregory has nothing to hand except his grammatically confused, syntactically impoverished, and almost sophomoric Latin; he has no stops to pull, as he has no public he might impress with an unfamiliar excitant, a new variant of style. But he does have the concrete events which take place around him; he witnesses them or he hears them "hot from the oven," and in a vernacular which, though we may be unable to form a completely clear idea of it, is obviously always present to his ear as the raw material of his story while he labors to translate it back into his semi-literary Latin. What he relates is his own and his only world. He has no other, and he lives in it.

Furthermore, the pattern of the events he has to report meets his style halfway. Compared with what earlier Roman historians had to report, they are all local events and they take place among people whose instincts and passions were violent and whose rational deliberations were crude and primitive. True enough, Gregory's work gives us a very imperfect idea of the connections of political events; but, reading it, we almost smell the atmosphere of the first century of Frankish rule in Gaul. There is a progressive and terrible brutalization. The point is not simply that unqualified force comes to the fore in every local district, so that the central governments are no longer alone in its possession, but also that intrigue and policy have lost all formality, have become wholly primitive and coarse. Such concealment and

circumlocution in human intercourse as are characteristic of every higher culture—politeness, rhetorical euphemism, indirect approach, social appearances, legal formalities even in the pursuit of a political or commercial robbery, and so on—fall into abeyance, or, where some vestiges of them remain, survive at best as crude caricatures. Lusts and passions lose every concealing form; they show themselves in the raw and with palpable immediacy. This brutal life becomes a sensible object; to him who would describe it, it presents itself as devoid of order and difficult to order, but tangible, earthy, alive. Gregory was a bishop—it was his duty to develop Christian ethical attitudes; his office was a practical and demanding one, in which the cure of souls might at any moment be combined with political and economic questions. In the preceding epoch the center of gravity of the Church's activity had still been the consolidation of Christian dogma, a task in which subtlety and intellectuality had often been displayed to excess. In the sixth century that activity, at least in the West, was concentrated upon practical and organizational matters. This shift is vividly exemplified by Gregory. He lays no claim to rhetorical training; he has no interest in dogmatic controversies; for him the decisions of the Church Councils are fixed and beyond dispute. But there is room in his heart for everything that can impress the people—legends of the saints, relics, and miracles to feed the imagination, protection against violence and oppression, simple moral lessons made palatable by promises of future rewards. The people among whom he lived understood nothing about dogma and had but a very crude idea of the mysteries of the faith. They had lusts and material interests, mitigated by fear of one another and of supernatural forces.

Gregory seems to have been just the right man for these conditions. He was little more than thirty years old when he became Bishop of Tours. If we may judge the man by the writer, he must have been spirited and courageous, and certainly he was not easily disconcerted by anything he saw. He is one of the first examples of that actively practical sense of reality which we so often have occasion to admire in the Catholic church and which, developing early, made Christian dogma into something that would function in the realm of life on earth. Nothing human is foreign to Gregory. His lights search every depth. He calls things by their right names, yet manages to preserve his dignity and a certain unctuousness of tone. Nor does he in any sense refuse to employ secular in conjunction with spiritual means. He understands that the Church must be rich and powerful if she is to

achieve lasting moral ends in this world, and that he who would make a lasting conquest of men's hearts must bind them to himself by practical interests too. Furthermore, the Church was forced into the domain of practical activity in many ways—by the giving and receiving of alms, by her role in mediating disputes, by the administration of her rapidly increasing land-holdings, and by all sorts of political involvements. In a higher and less immediately practical sense, Christianity had been realistic from the beginning. We have already discussed how Christ's life among the lower classes and the simultaneous sublimity and shamefulness of his Passion shattered the classical conception of the tragic and the sublime. But the Church's realism, as it appears, perhaps for the first time, in literary form in Gregory, goes still further, into practical activity in the practical world, is nourished by everyday experience, and has its feet on the ground. Gregory is professionally in contact with all the people and conditions he writes about; he is professionally interested in individual ethical phenomena; they are the ever-present field of his activity. From his activity in the pursuit of his duties he acquires his ability to observe and the desire to write down what he observes; and his very personal gift for the concrete evolved naturally from his office. In his case any aesthetic separation of the realms of the sublime and tragic on the one hand and of the everyday and real on the other is of course out of the question. A churchman, practically concerned with the life of men, cannot separate these realms. He encounters human tragedy every day in the mixed, random material of life.

To be sure, his talent and his temperament take this Bishop Gregory far beyond the realm of what is strictly concerned with his cure of souls and the practical problems of the Church. Half unconsciously he becomes a writer, a molder of things, laying hold of what is alive. Not every priest could have done that; yet at that period no one could have done it who was not a priest. Here lies the difference between the Christian and the original Roman conquest: the agents of Christianity do not simply organize an administration from above, leaving everything else to its natural development; they are duty bound to take an interest in the specific detail of everyday incidents; Christianization is directly concerned with and concerns the individual person and the individual event. It seems, furthermore, that Gregory was conscious of the significance and even of the specific character of his writings. For although he often apologizes for having the temerity to write

despite his inadequate literary training (which is, by the way, a traditional rhetorical formula), he yet in one instance (9, 31) adds a solemn request to posterity not to alter his text in any way: *ut numquam libros hos aboleri faciatis aut rescribi, quasi quaedam eligentes et quaedam praetermittentes, sed ita omnia vobiscum integra inlibataque permaneant sicut a nobis relictas sunt*. And he makes the same point still more clearly in the following lines, which are an allusion to the rhetoric of the schools, whose further development in medieval Latin they seem to anticipate: "If you, priest of God, whoever you may be [so he addresses posterity] are so learned [here he enumerates every discipline and every branch of literary knowledge] that you find my style boorish [*ut tibi stilus noster sit rusticus*], I yet implore you, do not destroy what I have written." Today when Gregory, even as a stylist, seems to many of us more valuable than the majority of the most polished humanists, one cannot read such an apostrophe without emotion. In another passage he makes his mother appear to him in a dream and urge him to write, and then, when he objects that he is lacking in literary culture, answer him: *Et nescis, quia nobiscum propter intelligentiam populorum magis, sicut tu loqui potens es, habetur praeclarum?* (Do you not know that we hold the way you are able to write in higher esteem, because the people can understand it?) And so he falls to work courageously, to quench the thirst of the people: *sed quid timeo rusticitatem meam, cum dominus Redemptor et deus noster ad destruendam mundanae sapientiae vanitatem non oratores sed piscatores, nec philosophos sed rusticos praelegit?* (But why should I be ashamed of my lack of culture, if our Lord and Redeemer, to destroy the vanity of worldly wisdom, chose not orators but fishermen, not philosophers but peasants?) This entire passage, with the vision of his mother in a dream, does not occur in the *History of the Franks* but in the preface to the *Life of Saint Martin* and is directly related to the saint's miracles. But it can be applied without hesitation to everything Gregory ever wrote: in all his work he writes for general, immediate, sensory-concrete comprehension, in keeping with his talent, his temperament, and his office: *sicut tu loqui potens es*.

His style is wholly different from that of the authors of late antiquity, even the Christians among them. A complete change has taken place since the days of Ammianus and Augustine. Of course, as has often been observed, it is a decadence, a decline in culture and

verbal disposition; but it is not only that. It is a reawakening of the directly sensible. Both style and treatment of content had become rigid in late antiquity. An excess of rhetorical devices, and the somber atmosphere which enveloped the events of the time, give the authors of late antiquity, from Tacitus and Seneca to Ammianus, a something that is labored, artificial, overstrained. With Gregory the rigidity is dissolved. He has many horrible things to relate; treason, violence, manslaughter are everyday occurrences; but the simple and practical vivacity with which he reports them prevents the formation of that oppressive atmosphere which we find in the late Roman writers and which even the Christian writers can hardly escape. When Gregory writes, the catastrophe has occurred, the Empire has fallen, its organization has collapsed, the culture of antiquity has been destroyed. But the tension is over. And it is more freely and directly, no longer haunted by insoluble tasks, no longer burdened by unrealizable pretensions, that Gregory's soul faces living reality, ready to apprehend it as such and to work in it practically. Let us look once again at the sentence with which Ammianus begins the narrative which we discussed in the preceding chapter: *Dum has exitiorum communium clades*, etc. Such a sentence surveys and masters a many-faceted situation, as well as supplying in addition a clear connection between what came first and what followed. But how labored it is and how rigid! Is it not a relief to turn from it to Gregory's beginning: *Gravia tunc inter Toronicos bella civilia surrexerunt . . . ?* To be sure, his *tunc* is only a loose and vague connective, and the language as a whole is unpolished, for *bella civilia* is certainly not the proper term for the disorderly brawls and thefts and killings which he has in mind. But things come to Gregory directly; he no longer needs to force them into the straitjacket of the elevated style; they grow or even run wild, no longer laced into the apparatus of the Diocletian-Constantinian reform, which brought only a new rule, being too late to bring a new life. Sensory reality, which, in Ammianus, where it was burdened by the fetters of tyrannical rules and the periodic style, could show itself only spectrally and metaphorically, can unfold freely in Gregory. A vestige of the old tyranny remains in his ambition to write literary Latin at all costs. The vernacular is not yet a usable literary vehicle; it obviously cannot yet satisfy the most modest requirements of literary expression. But it exists as a language which is spoken, which is used to deal with everyday reality, and as such it can be sensed through Gregory's Latin.

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His style reveals to us a first early trace of the reawakening sensory apprehension of things and events, and this trace is all the more valuable to us because so few texts that can be used for our investigation have survived from his period and indeed from the entire second half of the first millennium.