



DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM

Cl No

011973,6M17,1

66

Ac. No

606372

Date of release of loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below.
An overdue charge of 10 nP will be charged for each day the book is kept
over time

15 OCT 1972

[illegible]

SEVEN YEARS' HARVEST

SEVEN YEARS' HARVEST

Notes on Contemporary Literature

by

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

KENNIKAT PRESS, INC./PORT WASHINGTON, N. Y.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the editor of *Harper's Magazine* for permission to reprint "Fiction Tells All." The other essays in this volume were all published in *The Saturday Review of Literature* while the magazine was under my editorship, and are reprinted with permission.

SEVEN YEARS' HARVEST

Copyright 1936 by Henry Seidel Canby
Copyright (c) 1964 by Marion Ponsonby Gause Canby
Reissued by arrangement with Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 66-25902

Analysed in the ESSAY & GENERAL LITERATURE INDEX

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRIEF PREFACE	ix
I. THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES	3
1. Survey	
2. A Semi-detached Age	
3. Humility	
4. A Humorless Generation	
5. Let the Eagle Scream	
II. ESTIMATES OF THE DEAD	20
1. Rudyard Kipling	
2. John Galsworthy	
3. The Last Great Puritan	
4. Vachel Lindsay	
5. Homespun Philosophers	
6. D. H. Lawrence	
7. Mr. Dooley and Mr. Hennessy . . .	
III. THE LITERATURE OF DISILLUSION	60
1. Mene, Mene, Tekel	
2. Hands Up	
3. Change	
4. Depression Literature	
5. . . . Our Discontent	
6. Better Books, Better Men	
7. The School of Cruelty	
8. "Good-bye to All That!"	
IV. ADDRESSED TO YOUTH	86
1. Farewell to Youth	
2. A Middle-aged World	
3. What Do They Want?	

V. ESSAYS IN CRITICISM	97
1. The Pulse of the Machine	
2. Patterns	
3. Render Therefore unto Caesar	
4. Somewhat Metaphysical	
5. Standards	
6. Fiction Tells All	
 VI. ESTIMATES OF THE LIVING	 133
1. Sex War	
2. Scarlet Becomes Crimson	
3. North of Hollywood	
4. Farewell to the Nineties	
5. The School of Vulgarity	
6. Cheating at Solitaire	
7. The River of Youth	
 VII. ON READING	 171
1. Against Reading	
2. Hard Reading	
3. Reading for Life	
4. Think Before You Read	
5. Emma and Mr. Knightley	
6. Reading for Power	
7. Reading for War	
 VIII. ON STYLE AND ENGLISH	 205
1. A Sermon on Style	
2. Bombing the Paragraph	
3. Words, Words	
4. Broadcasting English	
5. "Her Voice Was . . . Soft"	
 IX. OUT-OF-TOWN ESSAYS	 227
1. Debunking the Nightingale	
2. "Angling . . . is an Art Worthy the Knowledge . . . of a Wise Man"	
3. "Whan that Aprille—"	
4. "And the Rain Descended"	
5. Affections Out of Doors	

CONTENTS

vii

6. Cliff Dwellers	
7. Ominous Towers	
8. "Bare Ruined Choirs"	
9. Mind Erosion	
X. AMERICAN TRAITS	251
1. The Promise of American Life	
2. Mighty Opposites	
3. Acceleritis	
4. Trusting in Brains	
XI. PROPHECIES AND SPECULATIONS	276
1. We Are on Our Way	
2. Towards a New Realism	
3. Proletariat Literature	
4. The Rollo Books	
5. Specifications for a Conservative Literature	
6. Breakfast with Dr. Holmes	
7. A Dragon Wallows Up	
8. Literature in the Planned State	
INDEX	305

BRIEF PREFACE

THE chapters of this seven years' harvest may prove to be retrospect for the reader. They were certainly not retrospect for the writer, but his immediate reactions to ideas as they moved and life as it was being lived. Their material has been selected, arranged, and confined into a continuity intended to represent the rich response of art and letters to the seven long years of the depression, as one man saw and felt it. They are not revised except for minor errors, not corrected by a backward-looking wisdom, which may not be so wise after all, not extended by qualifications. If they have value, it will be because they contain the comment which seemed most worth saving, but still more because they are current intellectual history, immediate, contemporary, and written in the actual climate of their times. Perhaps they should be called opinions rather than criticism, yet the two terms cannot be entirely separated, since truth is quite as likely to settle upon the thought of the moment as upon the analysis of a decade later. If I have looked backward in these chapters it is in literary tradition and at an American past, especially at the immediate past of a fat and unhealthy prosperity. If forward, toward a future which is quite as speculative in 1936 as in 1929 when this book began. If, like Thoreau or Emerson, I had kept a journal, instead of an editor's desk, these essays long and short would have been my intellectual diary. In dignifying them by selection and re-ordering, I have followed the precedent of all diarists who wish to save for themselves, and those willing to read, the record of days when the writer seemed to see an order and significance in the confusion of events, and the mind became articulate.

West Cornwall, Connecticut
July, 1936

H. S. C.

SEVEN YEARS' HARVEST

Chapter I

THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES

I. SURVEY

THE little island in time on which this book was made is large enough to hold the seven lean years of the depression, which were, indeed, not lean in literature. Looking backward from it, the Twenties, that era of the so-called lost generation of American writers, begin to come into perspective, and to the Thirties it belongs.

The Twenties and early Thirties saw Dreiser recognized, Sinclair Lewis come to the peak of his achievement, Robert Frost and Willa Cather round into maturity, Elinor Wylie make her distinguished mark. That decade has to its credit "The Green Pastures" and "Of Thee I Sing," the subtle classic ironies of Thornton Wilder and Robert Nathan, "John Brown's Body," the beginnings of a fiction of the proletariat, and the groundwork of a Marxian critique of American literature. It witnessed the end of prudishness, Eliot and the intellectualists, the creation of *The New Yorker*, our first adequate magazine of satiric humor, a new literature of economics and a new literature of psychology. It saw the revival of biography for popular reading, and history, with science behind it, made again into an art. The American generation that came of age in these fertile years may have been confused but was certainly not lost.

Still more significant in these Twenties and Thirties have been the new forces released and stirring. It has been a period

of equinoctial, the intellectual climate of which has changed from storm to storm; indeed its marked characteristics have been a sense of change in the air, a wide restlessness, and a re-awakening of spiritual energy long drugged by great expectations of profits and an overweening confidence in American materialism.

Any attempt to sum up in advance of history what has most significantly changed in literature, and especially in American literature, can be only a guess. I guess then, that what happened in the Twenties and Thirties was that our writers then prevailingly turned their gaze from a fascinated contemplation of their own emotions, and, startled by the shocks of the war, and the boom, and the depression, began to look out and around and beyond themselves with a nervous resolve to see more clearly. They gave up and indeed forgot those agreeable phantasies of what life should be like which the decades before 1914 had supplied so abundantly, and began to turn a thousand sharp-lensed kodaks on society regarded, really for the first time in America, as a complicated structure governed by scientific laws of cause and effect. They saw discontent where their predecessors (and their softer contemporaries) romanticized, they found disillusion in communities hitherto depicted as quaintly sentimental, they discovered tares in the wheat and bad in pretty much everything. In order to philosophize their revolt, they took to abstractions and formulas. The young novelists worked out their perspectives with the aid of principles acquired from Marx and used or misused to make a pattern. The new poets borrowed the physicists' habit of representing the symbolism of natural objects by a formula, and wrote their poetry accordingly. The new journalists, who in this decade became dramatists, novelists, or critics as easily as caterpillars turn into moths, finding a new mass language

in a new mass world, broke up traditional styles in order to get a diction that would sound like the speech of the multitude which was now their master. The new playwrights turned to the movies, developing there a speed of story-telling which resembled the new tempo of transportation which carried them from New York to Hollywood in the time of reading an old-fashioned novel. The serious-minded (which means, most, even of the flippant) who wished to make social history out of literature, became excitedly conscious of the rise of a new class, and wrote books about their discoveries in a sub-civilization, which the proletariat, obstinately unliterary, never thought of reading. Satire, coming to its own, became an American style, instead of a trick permitted only to irresponsibles like Mark Twain or Mr. Dooley. Since "looking them over" was the literary fashion it was sure to prosper, and so was biography, for when contemporary life began to be more closely scrutinized it was inevitable that we should have to revalue the celebrities of the past. Literature in America became objective at the moment when Proust and Joyce abroad were carrying it inward, yet the difference was chiefly between an interest in the class in contrast to the analysis of an individual. Yet all the while that the new school was thus experimenting, the great craftsmen of the period (now passing middle age) were quietly perfecting a summary of what America had been up to the present, and still largely was, in spite of swift change on the horizon. Booth Tarkington had probably done his best work, but Willa Cather, Robert Frost, Ellen Glasgow, E. A. Robinson, and others, were in their prime.

This last was absolute gain for letters; just as the experimenting of the Hemingways, Faulkners, MacLeishes, *et al.*, was potential gain, especially in their frank realism, their vigorous diction (in which Ezra Pound had a hand), their freedom

from literary convention, and their escape from that part of tradition which had grown stale. Tradition, for the moment, went underground, regretted by the reading public which had a pardonable liking for books that they could understand about lives that appealed to them. But the strong current of tradition keeps its power even when it runs in a conduit instead of on visible wires. It will be tapped again.

So much for gains, but there were losses,—losses in dignity; in sheer interest of reading; in subject matter, for the characters which interested the strongest of the new writers seem to have been limited to the maladjusted, the discordant, and the defeated, of which it is true the first especially had been much neglected before. One loss in particular seems to us to be in its way the distinguishing feature of the negative side of the whole performance.

Something happened in the Twenties and Thirties to the inner life of the younger American writers. Leaving out of the list a few conspicuous exceptions, it would seem that they had none. There is plenty of ego, but no confidence of inner living in the new writers of this decade. They write like sensitive typewriters operated by forces outside themselves. They are sometimes intensely subjective, but find nothing inwards that does not shock, or confuse, or distress them. They have no standards, no faith, no certainties, and this after the war and the depression is natural, but also no faculty of resting upon an inner confidence in their own existence as a soul and mind alive, reflective, philosophical against fate, and capable of pleasure in being and thinking in despite of circumstance. They have a fierce passion for experience, but naturally no joy in life. Is it the vast confusion they discovered when they began to look beneath the forms of established society that thus cancelled their own sense of personality? Or was it a confusion in

their own emotions which led them to drop their "I am" in the attempt to analyze the woes of the classes? One does not know, but the fact is evident, and if this generation was "lost," this is what it was losing—confidence. Not confidence in a social structure, or in a revealed God, or in leadership, each of which has often been lost, and must be lost in order that a new confidence may follow, but confidence in the possibilities of the state of being a man. Certainly that inner life so manifest in the leaders of the last age of intellectual revolt in America—in Thoreau, Emerson, Melville, Whitman—is woefully absent in the new American literature, and this is what makes the daring exploits in new areas of the human consciousness so frequent in these new books seem often harsh and unlovely, brittle and unreasoned. For if it is hard to write regularly and consciously for two million magazine readers without acquiring a standardized imagination, it is even harder to depict truly and sympathetically and prophetically the life of others without a rich, vivid, and confident inner life of your own.

Such a shrinking and such an aridity of the inner life of the imaginative artist in words, such a rich and varied and pugnacious assault in new realms of social experience and human nature, such a crashing down of inhibitions, such a release of active intellects afraid of nothing that happens so long as it is human, it has been my privilege to record in this book, which is really the Journal of a Literary Editor.

2. A SEMI-DETACHED AGE

The Victorians had an abounding personal vigor which was spiritual as well as physical. They were "big"—not in the modern sense of success, possessions, or executive ability, but big in personality, big in endeavor, big in gusto, in earnestness, and in achievement. Arnold and Dickens, Tennyson and

Surtees, even such antithetical observers offer the same testimony. It was an age of giants. And, for a second characteristic, an age of giant labor. They were convinced, pragmatically and every other way, of the gospel of work. Their writers wrote whole sets of volumes; their painters painted in movements; their scientists put a lifetime in a book; their business men made England the bank and workshop of the world, and consolidated an empire as a by-product of hard work.

And yet, Mr. Wingfield-Stratford, in his "Those Earnest Victorians," from which I quote, says that they failed. The exuberance went out of more than just their England in the first decades of the new century. Industrialism, which promised so much, revealed its dangers just when they had raised it to an undreamt of success. The simple moral theme, Be a good worker and you will be happy, no longer sufficed for a generation that liked neither the results of work nor the Victorian conception of happiness. They failed, he thinks, because they would not push their search for truth beyond what seemed to them the prerequisites for success—belief in an all wise providence, concurrence in a legalistic morality, confidence in the rewards of work.

But if they failed, which means, in social history, left no resembling generation behind them, did Victorianism fail with them? The author, so it seems to me, has underestimated the toughness of the Victorianism which he so ably describes. He sees the race of giants losing their abounding vigor, searches in vain for personality in our modern novels, finds the flush of moral earnestness paled in our youth, and marks the end of a philosophy by the passing of a type of men. He neglects, I think, a vital interdependence between the exuberance of the Victorians and their gospel of work which might have come

out clear if he had written of American as well as English Victorianism.

In America, the triumph of work was even greater than in England, and its benefits far more widely distributed. And in America a heroic exuberance produced "characters," especially among the pioneers, which are only now reminiscently finding their way into the showcases of literature. Given opportunity of an extraordinary kind, and the human rises to meet it. Opportunity, the countless opportunities of the industrial revolution, the intoxicating opportunities of free land and unexploited resources in America, the wide and entrancing opportunity which democracy offered to the masses—this was the *élan vital* of the Victorian age, and this the primary cause of its gospel of work. For work paid, and paid richly in the middle four decades of the nineteenth century, and still pays more here than ever before in the history of the world. It made landowners out of hired men, captains of industry out of wage earners, cities out of villages.

We Americans are walking reservoirs of potential enthusiasm, or, if not enthusiasm, energy. And any opportunity sufficiently urgent will release our floods. The psychological history of the United States is essentially an account of this releasing through recurrent plan and accident of an incredible flow of human energy. And such a release, of course, is retroactive; it leads to satisfactions even in hardships, and to a certain personal magnitude, such as one sees in Whitman's "powerful, uneducated people," in mining camps, industrial towns, or new settlements. Never was there a greater release of individual potency than came to the English-speaking peoples in the midst of the dirt and ugliness of the industrial revolution and the chicanery and violence of the opening of the American West.

The gospel of work for the sake of working, which Mr. Wingfield-Stratford uses as his best instance of the Victorian's failure to think things through, is only now beginning to be tested. It has the vast fabric of a comfortable, if ugly, civilization to its credit, it can boast of a distribution of the means of living without precedent in history; it has survived one great war, and the most violent reaction against its methods has in Russia produced a culture even more mechanistic and even less regardful of living for the sake of life. Carlyle, Ruskin, Emerson, Thoreau, Arnold offered qualifications of this gospel which only now begin to stir in men's minds, while the gospel itself continues its march around the earth. One cannot say it has failed, until one sees finally what comes of it.

In industry and statecraft we have been busy with correctives, stabilizers, and distributives, in the attempt to adjust the work-machine to the human factors of which laissez-faire took so little account. We have not really begun the overhauling of the machine itself, although we talk so much of doing so. If living for the sake of doing was the characteristic Victorian ideal, how many of us are not still Victorians? How infinitely closer we are, in spite of our expressed contempt, to the Victorians than to anything in the eighteenth century! We cannot imitate that century without constructing a palpable sham; whereas our universities, churches, politics, labor unions, even our morals differ from those of our fathers only in that where they were confident we speculate, and what they timidly prophesied we somewhat cynically accept as truth, and wish it weren't. New York and London, in the interpretation of what life is for, are still Victorian at the center.

In literature and art the story is different, and that is why we are under the delusion that we are no longer Victorian.

Mr. Wingfield-Stratford aptly notes that the risk the Victorians ran was in the need to adapt themselves to an environment changing beyond precedent. One or two generations only from horseback to steam, from the *ancien régime* to democracy, from the rational Deity of the eighteenth century to the Evangelical Lord! And one generation, for many of us, from agriculture to industrialism! We of today are suffering from the excessive strain too long continued of too rapid adaptation. The fogs of its nervosities fill our literature. The cracks in our moral system are cracks from its stretching. When the hills rise and fall the strata twist, crystallize, crumble. In literature, art, and now in music, and architecture, we are getting *results*, not merely the continuation of a process. They begin to emerge from Victorianism, at least far enough to reflect it as something alien. One kind of modern criticism loses itself in the abstract over issues which have only a mathematical reality and are chosen as a means of escape from a machine age that the critic neither understands nor likes. Another buries itself in the present age and becomes a mere reflection of mechanical processes. The unsatisfactory nature of the humanist controversy was due to the fact that the opponents seldom met (except to abuse each other), because one set had escaped from Victorianism into the ether, and the other group was so deeply engaged in the post-Victorian struggle to lift man up to his machines that it had not sought for a philosophy.

Literature itself, in this semi-detached age, has become a mirror, reflecting realistically the surprising results of giving Johnny a job, an education, and a room in the city, then saying, Run along now and work your eight hours a day, what you do with the other sixteen is not our concern. Here belong all the novels and plays dealing sourly with muddle in everyday life, Dreiserian, and others. Or literature lifts a peg intellectually

and artistically, and voices the growing doubt of Victorian ideals; but since there has been as yet nothing constructive done toward a new kind of living, but only an industrious Victorian piling up of every kind of appliance, psychological, physiological, chemical, for enabling man to survive his self-imposed stresses, it displays, naturally, little vision. This literature is satiric (with Huxley and Lewis), informative, speculative (with Wells and Galsworthy), experimental (with the numerous immoralists), iconoclastic (as with Mencken), but imaginatively weak, since it is still parasitical upon the Victorian structure, nourished, so to speak, by its diseases; and morally feeble since it is based upon negation, or upon dead material supplied by the scientists, whereas the moral earnestness of the great Victorians, even though its truth was qualified, was a felt conviction, as morality must be if it is to be more than a set of rules for life. And, for a third type, literature today in its most charming aspects is dilettante and decorative, —divorced from life altogether and become an exercise in the piquant or the beautiful, sharing therefore the excellence of all competent art, but missing significance and lacking specific gravity. Here belong our difficult intellectual poetry, growing most metaphysical when the living arts like architecture are becoming simpler, our criticism, which concerns itself more and more with technique and less and less with the true emotional colors of the present, our eighteenth century *pastiches* in fiction, and intricate analyses of the refinements of men and women who, having lost step and leadership, now make intellectual refinement an end in itself.

No, we are still in the august presence of a still powerful ghost, which clanks mechanically where the Victorians so confidently ran. Until we lay that ghost, literature will be only an

obligato, or pipes and cymbals in the distance. The presence is greater than we are—yet.

3. HUMILITY

This lost and wayward generation of the Twenties has been called everything but humble, and perhaps the omission is significant. Humility is not always a literary virtue. No one wishes that Milton or Dr. Johnson, or Emerson or Whitman, had been endowed with more. These out-speakers and trumpeters of the word, even such trombonists as Whitman, were the better men because they were sure, because they were too sure. But there is one kind of literary humility which has been of unspeakable advantage to culture, and which was notoriously lacking among the young men of the Twenties who made themselves coteries and who wrote then, and are still writing, as spokesmen for belles-lettres.

It is the humility which gives the people what they want—although, if the writer is worth his salt, what he gives may be infinitely better than any reader would have the wit to imagine. It was the humility of the early Elizabethans who wrote for the vulgar stage instead of for the universities; the humilities of the first novelists who admitted that their art could never be exalted or erudite and wrote for the idle hour and the relaxed brain. Some strength flowed back from satisfied minds into the brains of these men who proposed to do their best for a populace that might be intelligent but was not high-brow. Virtue went into them and came out of them in works which have since become the property of humanity. We had such writers, plenty of them, in the Twenties. They wrote the books that millions read, and were well rewarded for their pains. It was not their humility which kept them from achieving more than one or two authentic masterpieces. One should

remember that the magazines for which they chiefly wrote were certainly not humble. The pretentious cocksureness of editors who presented every ready-made suit as a court costume injected an insincerity which worked back into the creative brain.

But if there was one quality which the generation which called itself *the* literary generation and thought of itself as *the* generation lacked, it was the humility to recognize that "in the beginning was the word" was not written for their guidance. They dealt too much in words for each other and their ideas were too often coterie ideas. They were clairvoyant but not clairvoyant enough to see the processes of minds less sensitive and less thwarted than theirs. Hence the sense of frustration when they failed to make their books seem important. Deeper causes lay behind their perplexities, and behind the equivalent frustration of the academic groups in the United States who also in these Twenties lacked humility, and were warped and wounded by their failure to make their intellectual interests seem important to the students under their charge. There was a certain arrogance in both literary and academic intellectuals which was admirable as courage, but not good for character, or for results. Humbler minds would have accepted the universe first, and then "shot the works."

4. A HUMORLESS GENERATION

Is white America essentially unhumorous? We have never thought so. And yet a comparison between leading American novels by the writers oncoming in the Twenties and Thirties with leading British novels shows a difference almost startling. A difference in elegance, which favors the British, was perhaps to be expected, and not too much regretted. A difference in honesty, in the grip of the writer upon apparent reality, which

very decidedly favors the Americans, was not to be expected, but is there. The British novel, where it has not gone into psychological subtlety with Virginia Woolf, has become hearty, pleasant, picturesque, and a little sentimental, with Priestley, Francis Brett Young, Neil Bell, and the later Galsworthy. It seems a little *vieux jeu*, no matter how agreeable, beside the hard, sharp outlines and new (and usually unsympathetic) characters of the American books of, say, Hemingway, and Faulkner, and Evelyn Scott.

One feels in these new American writers a sense of power, a scope, a conscious skill in the transcription of fresh and unrecorded life, which is much more like the sensation which the nineteenth century Russians gave us than anything in English since Hardy. And yet they write without humor, and see life, so far, almost entirely in two dimensions. The dark depths to which D. H. Lawrence penetrated are meaningless to them. We are attaining, it seems, the continental scope of the Russians, but surface life is still too engrossing to give a Dostoievsky or a Thomas Mann his opportunity. We have had only tentatives, in Sherwood Anderson and others. As for humor—are we losing that valuable sense, or is it only the generation that came to literary consciousness in the Twenties that has never acquired it? Was the climate of uncertainty and disillusion that hung over that decade noxious to humor? The American generation that went to war was still deeply humorous, but the writers who sprang from the Twenties seem to despise it. Those ironists, Robert Nathan and Thornton Wilder, are not really humorous.

It may be that these unhumorous Americans are prophetic, that they speak for the approaching grimness of a mechanical, mass civilization. Whatever else is true of Soviet Russia, it seems to be reasonably certain that it does not cultivate humor.

Or it may be that they are only frightened, and too tense to observe the individual and the personal still vigorously surviving, and upon which humor is built. Certainly they are handicapped as students of the earlier America. Compare Mark Twain, Dickens (in "Martin Chuzzlewit"), and Evelyn Scott in their accounts of substantially the same middle American culture in the same mid century, and see how the English novelist saw wild eccentricity, the American humorist comedy, and the contemporary writer complicated and usually disagreeable fact. And it will be the worse for these Americans in the future if their hard lips never learn to relax. American literature in the past has always fought against American tendencies not to its liking, of which standardization is only the last of a series. Humor is worth fighting for and with. God help us, with the continent we have on our hands, if we lose it! Kipling thought it would save us at the end. But the new school has never heard of him or it.

A brilliant member of this school said recently that humor was always a qualification, a concession, a compromise, and therefore weakness. He cited Falstaff as a menace to society. Well, heart, legs, lungs are concessions, qualifications, compromises upon spiritual perfection! Yet they have to be counted. I query whether this humorlessness of the cohort of the grim is not a qualification of their own excellences, a compromise with narrow experience, a concession to the black theories of the future on which they have been brought up. A literature without the power of humor is a literature wounded or maimed.

5. LET THE EAGLE SCREAM

We seldom stop to look backward in this exciting country except to find a convenient brickbat in history to hurl at our

opponents in politics or economics or criticism. Therefore the task of looking over the last decade in order to make an anthology proved to be illuminating. One change in American literature was striking. There was no boasting. That alleged characteristic of American criticism and comment which used to irritate the other nations that use the English language, seemed rather emphatically absent—its place being taken by a brooding concern for home affairs—and this in the egregious Twenties and the nervous Thirties of our post-war growth. So let the eagle scream—if only once.

For what a vigorous, varied, and outstanding literature we have had in those years! In the drama, where experimentation and novelty have been so utterly lacking in the British area, we can credit our literature with "The Green Pastures" and "Of Thee I Sing," both works of art that indicate new forces and a new age stirring, in addition to a wealth of less original plays that would have done credit to any age since the Elizabethan. In the novel, while older writers like Willa Cather have taken their place among the masters of that tricky art whose values are so difficult to judge when books are still new and untried, there has been such an outburst of vigorous novelty as to indicate the birth of a new age of fiction. The massive Dreiser and the skillful Lewis belong now to the older generation, but Hemingway, Faulkner, Caldwell, Wilder, Wolfe, Nathan—merely to begin a long list—show every indication of that divine (or diabolical) discontent with the old symbols of narrative representation which never stops short of some notable achievement. There is a new literature of fiction—its quality still untested—and it has its birth and home in America. In poetry, we have had the pure lyric of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Elinor Wylie, and, not to reach back to the pre-war writers who are still fecund, the sudden rise of Eliot's

intellectualism, which, like Santayana's marvelous subtlety, has one parent at least in America. We have had "John Brown's Body" and the virile modernism of Archibald MacLeish, with a rising group of young men and women far less specialized than the young poet-communists of England, and closer perhaps to the function of poetry as articulate emotion. In criticism and literary history we have seen in these ten years the extraordinary work of the late Professor Parrington, one of those rare books that change thinking, followed by a brilliant series of interpretations of our own cultural history which can be fitly compared to the reinterpretation of English culture that came at the beginning of the last century. The names of Van Wyck Brooks, Ludwig Lewisohn, Lewis Mumford, Granville Hicks, Charles A. Beard, deserve mention here. A half dozen names of first-rate critics whose comment has been upon literature in general could be added to this list. Nor has literary scholarship for a century produced a more illuminating book than John Livingston Lowes's "The Road to Xanadu." In humor we have scarcely equaled our past, yet there was Ring Lardner, who at his rare best was inimitable, and *The New Yorker*, which as an institution must rank among the real achievements of American literature. In biography, absolute excellence has not been so common, yet the vigor with which leaders of the American settlement from the beginning have been interpreted or reinterpreted and made living figures to a generation who had known little of its past, and much of that wrong, will be noted in future histories.

And in these subdivisions of the literary art, if there are no "Divine Comedies" or "Fausts," that is no cause for humiliation. Great works of world literature are rare, but they come, when they come, always, if not inevitably, from such a ferment of self-realization as this with which America for the past ten

years has been bubbling. One quality we have clearly lacked, which can only be crudely named by the word amenity. There has been little written in the United States of the Twenties and Thirties for the sheer pleasure of the mature and reflective mind. Our books have had more light than sweetness, more of the Hebraic than the Greek, more of the Elizabethan than the Augustan, and little of that appeal to the mind that stays above the conflict, felt in great Elizabethans. Our writers who wrote to give pleasure, as Dickens wrote, have cheapened their art (unnecessarily) to sell it to vast audiences. Our writers with real imagination to sell, have been more concerned to give pain than pleasure. Pope, in spite of the remark above, would have been conceivable in this ten-year period; Thoreau would have been conceivable; Whitman and Machiavelli and Swift and Defoe would have been conceivable; but not Charles Lamb, not Chaucer, not Sir Walter Scott, not Jane Austen, not even the younger Shakespeare.

Chapter II

ESTIMATES OF THE DEAD

I. RUDYARD KIPLING

*M*ANY must remember the days in February of 1899 when, in a New York hotel, Kipling lay desperately ill. There was a tension in the air. We went about our everyday business thinking, "One of the world's great geniuses will soon be dead." There was a sense of imminent personal loss. Even the old and the children felt it.

He did not die. Indeed much of his best work was still to be written. Yet now that he has gone beyond the threshold, no such consciousness of irrevocable tragedy is to be felt in what men say. He has done his work. But that is not the whole answer. His work belongs to another age. Except for his stories of children and animals, youth under thirty has not read him. For them he is a name, like other names—Longfellow, Tennyson, Meredith. For them he died with the nineteenth century, which, like him, lagged spiritually and intellectually into the twentieth. Yet he will return. He reverses Shakespeare's prophecy. Much of him doth fade into something less rich and strange than we thought, but his sea-change will leave an imperishable residue of great writing.

It is difficult to describe to a realist generation of the Thirties the excitement when Kipling first burst upon the Western world in the Eighties and Nineties. His early books of short stories were like staccato hammer blows interrupting

the sophisticated whisperings of such *fin-de-siècle* literature as one can still read in the bound volumes of *The Yellow Book*. They broke through the brittle historical romance of the popular writers we were all reading in America, and exposed what, after their sentimental heroics, seemed reality at last. And what a reality! If in "The Barrack Room Ballads" it was hearty vulgarity coming back, with a touch of Dickens—

As I was spittin' into the Ditch aboard o' the Crocodile,
I seed a man on a man o'-war got up in the Reg'lar's style—

in the stories it was much more unexpected. Here, for Americans whose West was just becoming commonplace, was unfolded the intoxicating panorama of an Orient where the white man ruled, an India rich in the mystery which industrialism was drying up in our home life, yet mapped, subdued, made traversable for our Western imaginations that thrilled with vicarious pride of race and sharpness of aroused and fresh sensation. And a little later the familiar realities of our own new age came under the same spell—machinery, ships, bridges, locomotives, aircrafts. This master of language had all their names and could make what had seemed prose into poetry. Engineers, reading him, turned romantic, and many a young fellow marched off to the Cuban war with Kipling in his ears, expecting adventures somewhere East of Suez and finding only typhoid and bully beef.

Yes, the Large Birds o' Prey
They will carry us away,
And you'll never see your soldiers any more!

Then—and just as the American story-tellers (Richard Harding Davis and his like) were borrowing his whiplike methods and snapping their rather trivial plots into a brilliance

of sensation more transient than his—he shifted. We got the deeply moral apologues of “The Jungle Books,” and the “Just So Stories,” the only modern myth making; we got the exotic love story of “The Brushwood Boy”; the pathetic mysticism of “They”; the deeper character studies of “Kim,” that greatest romance of the essential East and West; and those first vivid movies of the past (for that is what they were) in “Puck of Pook’s Hill.”

I am not attempting a survey of Kipling, but rather retracing my own memory, which retains not titles so much as vivid impressions of scenes, the most vivid, I think, from any literature in my time, and thrillings of the moral nerve, and still more, realizations, the word literally interpreted, of a vast, interesting world into which our patterned Europeanism had thrust itself, thanks to its own power, own code, own will to live adventurously. We grew drunk on Kipling. Kipling was the secret of youth then. The textbooks did not know him, the old men thought he was coarse and brutal, young instructors in the colleges quoted a line or two audaciously as they quote Hemingway now. He was, for us, the dawn of the twentieth century.

Yet when the twentieth century got its place in the sun, he was seen not to be of it. Before the war his spell had slackened, his novelty was stale, his philosophy outmoded. After the war he was a classic, a classic still alive but sterile, still widely read but only in the underworld of readers whose imaginations lived in the nineteenth century. He the portent, the new man, had departed with the captains and the kings of an era that curiously enough had regarded him as a newcomer, an alien. He also was nineteenth century. This is the enigma of Kipling, which only now perhaps can be explained.

We were wrong, of course, about Kipling’s place in the

centuries, wrong in thinking that he belonged to a new era, in believing that he, at least, was not *fin-de-siècle*. We were not wrong in assigning him high importance as an imaginative artist, certainly the greatest artist writing in English at the time when his talent flourished. And in saying this I do not forget Hardy, or Meredith, or Swinburne. We need not compare him with Shaw or Wells or Masfield or Arnold Bennett or Galsworthy. They were not truly of his era. Certainly he was the greatest literary journalist of any modern time, for Wells, who could beat him as a reporter of social phenomena, fell far short of him in imagination, and never attempted poetry or poetry in prose. He was also, I think, the most effective moralist since the seventeenth century. What are his "Jungle Books," with their public-school code, but morality lifted into imagination? What else are his stories of strong silent men who take neither cash nor credit but satisfy their sense of what a man and an Englishman owes to himself and his duty? "Captains Courageous" is a textbook in morality. Two-thirds of his best poetry is moral poetry from "The Recessional" and before, down to and beyond the much finer "For All We Have and Are" of 1914:

Our world has passed away
In wantonness o'erthrown,
There is nothing left
But steel and fire and stone!

Though all we knew depart
The old Commandments stand:—
"In courage keep your heart,
In strength lift up your hand."

It is the morality approved, if not always or often practised, by the English-speaking peoples, and especially the public-

school Englishman:—modesty, tenacity, self-respect, aggressiveness within the code which says that a gentleman must do good to others as well as to himself. As old Baloo taught—don't be a tiger, a red dog, or a bandarlog if you wish to succeed and be respected by all the lesser breeds.

And certainly we were not wrong in thinking him a great magician in words—which after all is the true definition of the great bards, the great story-tellers, the great purgers of the emotions since "'Omer smote his bloomin' lyre." I doubt whether any writer in English since Scott and Dickens has so enthralled his audiences by sheer virtuosity of sensation transferred—and whatever may be said of the scope of Scott and the human material of Dickens, Kipling was very much their superior in that craftsmanship which weights and points and colors a line until it shoots like a dart to the fancy. I suppose I date myself by saying so, for there seems no such communication now except to the very young from his myths and histories, yet today I cannot begin one of Kipling's good short stories, or his long tales like "Kim," or even "The Light That Failed," without reading on to the end in an enjoyment not marred by familiarity nor much troubled by the overemphasis which now begins to appear in his style.

And yet, we were wrong in thinking that Kipling heralded a new era of success for the stout of heart. It is clear now that actually he was the recessionary chant of an old order which only in its decline was made to realize all that it had and was. He is the sharp-visioned Colonial, the empire man, seeing the full implications of that fifty years of Europe whose promise intoxicated the young Tennyson when the great half century was just beginning. He was *fin-de-siècle* to the bone.

It is of the utmost importance in understanding Kipling's place in English literature, to remember that he was born in

India, drilled in the public-school code in England, and then conditioned in his most impressionable years by the newspaper world of India, which means by the society of empire builders and empire organizers, in the midst of a great nation that looked to England for its unity and its peace, if not for its happiness. "What should they know of England who only England know?" came from his heart. But to interpret his tendentious prose and poetry as a message of imperialism is far too narrow. He was an imperialist of course, and his brand of imperialism is still visible in its decadence among such nations as Italy (whom he would have called a lesser breed without the law) who propose to add to the white man's burden backward races now well aware (as the nineteenth century was not) of the cost of supporting European industrialism. His imperialism is dead as a philosophy though by no means at an end as a piratical necessity. The pro-consuls are gone, only the exploiters are left. It is the Russian "bear that walks like a man" who has devised the new way to serve both himself and the

. . . new-caught sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

But some day it will be as easy to forget Kipling's theories of empire building as it has been to forget, in reading, Shakespeare's theory of the indispensable aristocrat. What will remain are all the advantages which his view as of one looking from the seven seas inward gave to him as a writer. Coming late, when Mutinies, Opium Wars, and the sordid business of John Company were all over, seeing in his youth the finest Civil Service the world has ever known at work in a colony which was itself an empire, too humanitarian not to feel that the native was his brother, too nineteenth century to think

sociology or economics at all, it is not surprising that he first among writers realized imaginatively what England had done, and first (and this is the nub of the argument) made England and the world realize it. Not blatantly, not boastfully, not stupidly, for the bandarlogs, and Kaa the snake, and the prideful Bagheera, and the stupid wolves are all part of his empire, he saw, as only an end-of-a-period man could see, what it all meant in terms of character and the imagination. His favorite characters are precisely strong silent men who could not see, who did their duty, lived by their code, thought little, and talked less. He wrote for them, making them articulate. He wrote about them, as Plutarch wrote of his heroes, when at the end of their trail, in the clearing made at last, in the city built by hands, which was soon to know that its history was not made but only beginning.

I do not think that this Colonial, or should we call it Dominion, character of all Kipling's writings has ever been sufficiently emphasized. It accounts for so many things that pleased or puzzled us—and the critics. It accounts for the extraordinary variety of his subject-matter—since the English-speaking world and its dominions was his province. It accounts for the intense patriotism of his later poems and stories, best shown in his fervent adoration of the history of England regarded as a continuum between the world empire of the Romans of which his Sussex fields were part and the world empire of the Victorians and Edwardians. He came home, to the center and cause of it all, a Colonial more American than English in appearance, with that indefinable difference in manners which made him irritable in the presence of "the flanneled fools at the wicket"; and indeed they repaid him with the dislike which the inbred feels for the outbred. He was a "cad" (I have heard them say it), or at best a queer, vulgar, unre-

liable fellow, who wrote things that ought not be written. Kipling the man has never been popular in England. Obviously he was not popular in Downing Street or Buckingham Palace, or why deny the laureateship to the one poet most evidently made for it since Tennyson, and a far better laureate than Tennyson for a Disraelian empire! But he was, nonetheless, a homecomer, a convert to the life of an island that had bred, and suffered from, snobs before. Hence he wrote with the enthusiasm of a convert, with a passion for the land seldom, if ever, equaled since the Elizabethans, never equaled since except by the young English poets who went away to die on alien soils in the first slaughters of the war.

And this Dominionism of Kipling accounts also for his never-failing edginess toward America. It is not necessary to quote either his ill-natured jokes or his grudging praise. More American himself than any island-bred Englishman, far more conscious than most Englishmen of our essential part in and independence of the rest of the English-speaking world, he could not reconcile his ideas and ours, even when we read his books by millions, even when he married and lived here. It is the common story of course that it was his unhappy relations with his brother-in-law, Balestier, which drove him from Vermont and made him anti-American for life. The explanation is far too simple; and the true cause of his anti-Americanism is not hard to discover. In America he encountered the real twentieth century. Here was a country like his own, but the public-school codes did not run there. Here was a country that built bridges, dammed rivers, opened provinces, governed without a ruling class of strong silent men, without (often) the stoic character, without (usually) responsibility. Here was a nation built upon economics instead of a sense of empire, where the public-school class went to dances and sold bonds,

where Tommy Atkins struck for more wages, and privilege was called by its first name, which is Graft. America constantly upset him. It was what his British empire was becoming, but not by his rules. It was, as the war showed, the real twentieth century, come perhaps too late—the realist, democratic, humane, bourgeois twentieth century which pessimists may yet say had only a peep through the decades before the new era of force set in—force that was not Kipling's "strength," but force imposed by peoples without either gentility or democracy. I hope the pessimist is wrong. And I hope that when Kipling did praise the American he was right—

He turns a keen untroubled face
Home to the instant need of things.

For it should be said of the unpredictable quality of this true genius that for everything he characteristically was and did, he could on occasion produce the opposite—thus confounding his critics as a true man of letters should.

And in all this he was *fin-de-siècle*, and especially in his celebration of an empire which was a commonwealth built by men who had sometimes sought "another's profit," sometimes worked "another's gain," but more often had gone out to make their fortune without too much concern for anything but the code of strength with fairness. That is evident now. He was far more *fin-de-siècle* than the Oscar Wildes, the post-pre-Raphaelites, the Aubrey Beardsleys, the Max Beerbohms. They were (except the last) decadent in a precious fashion. They represented the sophistication, the worship of beauty for its own sake, which was the inevitable result of a century of increasing comfort. And they were smart, as the end of a period of intensive education of a class—any class—always tends to be. This smartness America shared, although the short stories

which were its vehicle are mostly forgotten now. But Kipling's *fin-de-siècle* was far greater in scope and deeper in emotional values. He looked at this great age, which belonged to Britain as truly as the eighteenth century to France, at the moment when it had reached its balance. He felt, keenly felt as quotation upon quotation could be assembled to prove, its potential decline, yet could honor it, and, as an outsider, a Colonial, one of its products rather than England itself, exaggerate it, make it articulate, most of all make it self-conscious, as no native Englishman could or would do. And this explains the one note of decadence in Kipling:—an overemphasis of diction, which is more deeply an overemphasis of emotion, that already mars some of the stories we thought were his best, and is present, subtly or overtly, in all but his very finest work.

An overemphasis, an almost sentimental enthusiasm for "the glories of our blood and state," is presumably what has turned youth from him in our so different century. The young view with suspicion an enthusiasm—which must seem to them rhetoric—for lands, peoples, classes, that for them are not opportunities but problems. As the Russians would say, his ideology offends them.

But only for a little while yet. When we have passed out of this area of tension into new tensions so different that the nineteenth century will become truly historical, then the mannerisms of Kipling will seem merely quaint, while his overemphasis will sink out of sight his less happy fictions and the dross among his poems. What will be left is not pure gold—it is better than gold for it is harder and has taken a more durable finish. I should be sorry for any age that could not read "The King's Ankus" with excitement, could not rise to "The Last Chantey," or follow with eyes to turning page the subtle naïveté of that masterpiece of comparative literature, "Kim."

2. JOHN GALSWORTHY

The British Empire, Philip Guedalla said once, is held together by the "Encyclopædia Britannica." It holds together (I suppose that he meant) because the British have imposed their own outline of history upon the English-speaking world, so that the Irish Free State will have to get out an *Encyclopædia Celticana* before it becomes really free! And it may truly be said that England, the essential England, exists chiefly through, and in, men like John Galsworthy and their works.

I have heard Galsworthy called an idealist. I have heard him called a romanticist, and even a sentimentalist. None of these terms exactly fits. Like all great novelists he was a man in search of reality, and reality is not a simple term, like money, or fame, or craftsmanship. Someone said recently that perhaps the current loose talk of hard reality was misleading. It was not the hardships, the material failures, the envies and remorse of this time of trouble which were essential reality. They were only clouds passing over the moon. Reality was deeper. It was not intermittent trouble but human nature's daily food of love, friendship, felt happiness, or felt grief. The speaker cited Robert Frost as a man who had never swerved from the pursuit of such reality, regardless of external circumstance. I say the same of John Galsworthy. His novels and his plays have always dealt with what really mattered to an Englishman in the closing years of a great English period. In this sense John Galsworthy was a realist, a great realist.

I knew him well, not intimately, not from long association, but in circumstances far enough from the casual to let me write of him here with his personality rich and living in my memory. He was a gentleman—one thought of that first, always, with Galsworthy—sensitive, a little hesitant, but with

rushes of strong feeling. He had the unshakable dignity of a man sure of his breeding who respects the rights of others and gets respect himself.

But this was but the surface of the man. More deeply considered, I find in him an English type, as distinctive as a manor house or an English garden. It is not the aggressive type of Englishman, arrogant, energetic, cool, which we call John Bull, but it is a type equally true to race and traceable in English history from long before the emigrations to America. He was the liberal, intellectual aristocrat, spiritual, sensitive, humanitarian, proud. England has always had such men, and they have been of her best. Spenser, I think, was one of them, and that poet-priest George Herbert, who said that his friends had all gone into the world of light, and (with a dose of snobishness) Joseph Addison. Matthew Arnold was the school-master phase of the type, Edward Fitzgerald its esthete, Horace Walpole its gossip. Nor have we lacked its strong racial manifestations here. Jonathan Edwards, in spite of the hysteria of his sermons, was the scholar-aristocrat who loves the human race, Jefferson had many of the attributes, and Emerson was perhaps the supreme example among English-speaking peoples of this liberal and aristocratic intellectualism. Nor do I except Woodrow Wilson, whom Galsworthy himself trusted and admired. These were men conscious of a code of behavior to which as gentlemen they conformed, and this is their weakness in a hard-boiled world, so that in politics it is only the shrewd maneuverers like Jefferson who succeed. They are responsible, humane, and passionately in love with the possibilities of human nature. In literature, they are the great reformers, for they are not moved by jealousy, having been bred inside a tradition; they are our best critics, for they wish to change, not to destroy; and their minds are set on those traits of good will

and spiritual satisfaction which they see still living beneath the frustrations and warpings of the struggle for success.

Fine natures are finely moved. John Galsworthy came toward the end of an age of possessiveness, when, in the words of Tennyson, "propuppy, propuppy, propuppy," thudded all over the English-speaking world. Wealth was on the move from the earliest 1800s onward. Land had been static in the eighteenth century, and property had been felt as a right even more than as an opportunity. With the opening of the colonies and the beginning of industrialism, property became mobile. A continent was exploited, goods were multiplied. To the class that merely owned, succeeded a class that acquired and possessed. A middle class arose in England, conditioned in mind and emotions by the pursuit of property; it was the same class that made America.

In England, the experiment was what the scientists call controlled and pure. The new bourgeois aristocracy took over the code of the aristocrats who had owned by right, and subtly modified it. They assumed responsibility, developed to a high degree the character indispensable to a governing class in a self-governing community, but began to invite the fatal karma which pursues all men and women whose god is material success. England produced old James Forsythe, and the son of his heart and will, Soames, in whose delineation Galsworthy's powers reached their height; and the rebels Jolyon and Irene; the conformist Annette; the by-products, Timothy and the aunts; the wrecks and the frustrations, Val and Fleur.

But something was left behind by this new possessive class and lost, something crumbled, something rose like a heady fume dulling men and women, puzzling their hearts, and frustrating their desires, while their wills remained more powerful than ever. Responsibility to state and class they kept,

and chivalry, and a sense of duty better than chivalry. Nevertheless this possessiveness, this submission to Things, the solid houses, the stocks and bonds, the responsibilities to property of the Forsytes, dimmed the sense of other gods whose altars grow cold only with peril to mankind. They neglected the Cyprian Venus, whose frustration and revenge Ashhurst deplored in that exquisite story, "The Apple Tree"—

For mad is the heart of love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend when he makes his spring.
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream,
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!

They turned their backs upon the gods whose duty it is to see that the human heart stays human. Beauty, spirituality, love, even justice which the new possessive class had once demanded, were the victims of Things. Property had achieved a dulling of sensibility, a warping away from pleasure and the healthy satisfaction of the emotions, which the greed of the old aristocrats, and even the necessities of the poor, had never accomplished. Property made the Forsytes, and property chilled them. And yet these Forsytes in their own way were great. Beside them other racial types seemed lesser breeds without the law. They had the gift of character, the power of strength.

This was the puzzle of the nineteenth century, its challenge to an interpreter, which was like the challenge to the imagination of the young Shakespeare of the brilliant, full-

blooded aristocrats of the Renaissance, with their gusto, their beauty, and their defiance of morality. A poet, a dramatist, a novelist was needed to attack this nineteenth century paradox, most of all a novelist, since the Forsytes were prose and their background all of England. An Englishman in England was at the heart of property; a liberal, a humanitarian, a "tender-minded" artist could sympathize and yet attack; an aristocrat could appreciate code and character; an idealist could discriminate where a satirist might only destroy. John Galsworthy was the man.

And indeed the story of Soames Forsyte is the story of man's spirit in the English nineteenth century, wrestling with property and thrown by it at the moment of apparent victory. It is the story of a defeated spirit (for Soames lost Irene and with Irene the possibility of love and a completed life)—of a defeated spirit rising wiser, stronger, more indomitable in character, making property his servant though he could not make it his friend, until at the conclusion of that extraordinary narrative Soames's very shortcomings have been turned into the steel and fiber of a man who knows what he wants and gets it, and knows what he cannot have and gives it up—a stoic, not to be envied, not to be loved, but certainly to be respected and approved.

This grasp upon the moral theme of England under industrialism is the key to John Galsworthy's superiority as a novelist of character to far cleverer men, such as Arnold Bennett and G. B. Shaw, to more worldly men and more widely experienced, such as H. G. Wells and Sinclair Lewis. Undeviatingly he pursues through this elaborate process of character building the rich results of tradition until Soames, eccentric and individualist that he is, becomes the symbol of whole shadowy generations of the English middle class. Unwaver-

ingly he searches for the effect upon man of beauty neglected, and spirituality scorned by the religion of property. And yet, though the criticism in his novels is always against the tyranny of Things, his liberal mind admits, his aristocratic nature recognizes, a great character emerging, perhaps unexpectedly, from the havoc that accompanies a too material success. No propagandist could have done this. His "Forsyte Saga" is a tragic-comedy with a stoic ending, as was "The Tempest," as was "Candide," as was "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."

Only in England I think could such books have been written. Proust's great study of an aristocracy decaying in the refinements of ultra-cerebration, belongs in a very different category. It is intensely French, and yet has no relationship with France at large in the century, not much indeed with Paris except as a background. The "Forsyte Saga" is intensely English, and quite as intensely upper and middle class, since to Galsworthy, humanitarian though he was, the lower classes were only shadows throwing into relief the responsible reality of his Forsyte world. And yet there is the character of a nation and of a race in the Saga. Narrow as its cross-section, the type is there. It is a national study or it is nothing, whereas Proust has only the universal validity of a Racine—the actual existence of his cerebral Paris is of little importance; the psychology is all. Not so with the Forsytes. They are geological, and have in them the secrets of racial evolution. They are not all England, yet as they go, so goes England. Like Hardy's peasants and Shakespeare's Mercutios, Hotspurs, and Falstoffs, they are so racial that they can afford to be individualists.

All this explains, I think, Galsworthy's great reputation on the continent of Europe, where he was thought to be England's foremost novelist because in him and his were to be found the living explanations of what England was in the

period of her dominating greatness. This explains the award to him of the Nobel prize, which never came to Hardy. His foreign readers also saw, as some of his compatriots have failed to see, that whatever were their faults of sentiment, diffuseness, and a reach beyond the author's grasp, the novels of Galsworthy were epic in their scope and had that broad stretch of significance which, since Balzac and the Russians, we have expected of fiction that deals with mores rather than manners. This explains also, I believe, his great vogue in America, but with a difference. For here unquestionably we, whose culture and training, more than our blood, have owed so much to the English tradition—we read Galsworthy for news on a grand scale of the English character, so subtly like our own while so obviously different from it. The Forsytes are potentially Americans of the age of property who stayed at home, who never sailed for Plymouth and the Hudson and the Delaware and the capes of Virginia, to break up the sense of class in the forests while the struggle for property went on.

He wrote too much. He should have let the Americans alone, for he could understand only the English aspect of them, and his fastidious ear made a jargon of their speech. He should have lived in a world where there were no magazines, with their constant urging of the established writer to write more than he wills, and their subtle molding of his work to the stock emotions of vast audiences. He should have seen his *Saga* early in its length and breadth—and gone to some Walden Pond to write it—and stopped when he had finished. I do not know whether he was a great artist, although there are passages in "The Indian Summer of a Forsyte" and in "The Apple Tree," and "In Chancery" and elsewhere, which only a consummate artist could write. Yet certainly he had that insight which is given to someone in every generation, and

which, if used, explains us to ourselves. He had a message. I use that word with reluctance, for a message means usually a dogmatism, a moral, and designates that part of a book or a lecture which sticks in the memory like a lump of undigested dough. None of this in Galsworthy. Rather he is the moving finger that writes. You see in him, often through clouds of words, what the Greeks saw in Sophocles, the moral meaning of a generation. Sophocles dealt in heroes and in a superb style of heaven-sent rhetoric. Galsworthy treats of stiff old men, hiding, beneath Anglo-Saxon phlegm or a dry humor inappropriate to tragedy, the powerful prejudices, the passions, of a people heart-wrecked by their devotion to property, but become great because they identified property with the welfare of a state. Yet both Sophocles and Galsworthy are concerned with fundamental morality. And this is what gives dramatists and novelists magnitude, precisely as the power to realize, to make their problems live as a Soames, as an Irene, as a Hamlet, is what makes them novelists and dramatists.

I have said little of Galsworthy's plays because this essay is not concerned primarily with literary criticism, and for Galsworthy the stage (so I think) was only an escape for the emotions aroused by those unavoidable contradictions in a society supposedly founded on justice which stirred his humanitarian spirit to a pitch that only drama would assuage. The theater never gave him room. It exaggerated the lesson at the expense of the background in which the true moral lay. He saw best pageant-wise, not drama-wise. His strength, like so much English strength, was in the slow tenacity of descriptive narrative, not in quick symbols or isolated event.

Galsworthy is dead, and America, in which he was as much honored as at home, and perhaps more widely read, may well take stock of what his insight may mean for us. For

ours is a country bred in the English tradition, though intensely changed by circumstance, a country not devoid of character as the English and as Galsworthy understood character, not unaware of the code of duty, for of the Puritans who gave fiber to that code the best came here, not without the desire for order which was so strong in all the Forsytes, nor the sense of fairness, nor the instinct to be humane.

Our problem has been different. We have had to contend with less rigidity of ownership, we have been able to escape many responsibilities in the easy recourse of our oppressed and our turbulent to the spaces of the West, we have been far more fertile in experiment. But to suppose that the karma which pursues all greed for Things, all obsessions with property, is to be spared us, would be unrealistic. Our karma is different. We threw out our Soames Forsytes a generation ago—the selfish individuals, the so-called builders of American prosperity, men not too scrupulous, who believed that in making themselves they were making America, and attained a certain bad eminence of character from their loyalties so energetically if so selfishly pursued. Yet those pirate captains of the last generation of American industrialism in their way were patriots, as Soames Forsyte was a patriot.

Are there any patriots left? In our pressure groups? Among our tariff mongers? In our local interests? Among the veterans? In Congress? Undoubtedly, but it has been long since we have heard from them. One grows skeptical. Is there any character in our new society to take the place of the old character of individualism? Is the humanitarianism which the last generation suppressed in business and exuded upon foundations and universities, more vital now that the strong men who took with the right hand and gave with the left are gone? Is the beauty which they, like Soames, forced out of their lives,

and then sought, like fugitives, in pictures, and bronzes, and opera, and Tudor Gothic, where it took the form of property—is it dealt with more intelligently today? Is religion? Is love? This is what an American thinks, what he must ask, as he reads Galsworthy, seeing in the special English problem a reflection of his own. And we understand the grim sadness of Soames Forsyte at his life's end, self-critical, skeptical of the future; and we realize, as Galsworthy the idealist was forced by his own imagination to realize, that life is a series of defeats and compensations, of values frustrated to the peril of the race, of character that may emerge as a result of frustration—or may not.

The nineteenth century, liberal, progressive, hopeful, intensely possessive, was a laboratory of human nature. The books of John Galsworthy are a report of what happened in the English section, which was so much then the center of the modern world. If the reader reflects upon the story of how Soames Forsyte bought, and how he lost, Irene, who was the symbol of the "life that is wild and young" which belongs to the Cyprian alone, he may sum up the whole matter by saying that love and Irene fell victims to property, yet from their loss stoicism shaped that character which gives to society a backbone if not a heart. Where are our own minds at this end of the age of possessiveness? Have we the self-knowledge of Soames Forsyte in his Thames-side gallery? Can we hope like the couple in Noel Coward's "Cavalcade" for a future for our country of dignity, and greatness, and peace again? Or must we live our own Forsyte Saga to its end, and wait for a John Galsworthy to tell us what it meant?

3. THE LAST GREAT PURITAN

Others will write of Colonel Lawrence and his book in its terms of military triumph. They will describe the Arab revolt, how it smoldered in Mecca, how it was conceived in alien minds as a new weapon in the Great War, how Lawrence nursed it, until his Arab irregulars became the distant wing of an international army conquering Palestine, breaking Turkey, making the end of the war inevitable. This famous victory has already been discussed in lengthy books, and the character of Colonel Lawrence as a military leader has become a text for new schools of military thought. It is not necessary to traverse this well-traveled road again. I wish to study "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" as the record of a mind, not as a war history. And I trust I will not be accused of bad perspective or lack of interest if I pass over the brilliant episodes of guerilla combat, the incisive Arab portraits, the sweep of a difficult war, and the question of the exact historicity of his record, in order to search for the quality that makes "The Seven Pillars" more than a record of adventure, more than first-hand historical evidence, much more than first-rate description and narrative that when it runs clear is also first-rate. "More," not "better" in any absolute sense. Caesar's Gallic Wars is a much shrewder presentation of a campaign than Lawrence's memoir; but it stops there. There is very little Caesar in the Gallic Wars. Lawrence, like Gibbon and Burton and Bunyan, has put himself into his book.

If "The Seven Pillars" seems to me a description and sometimes a manifestation of a genius, it nevertheless is far from being a masterpiece of composition. It is definitely a disorderly book, in which it is like many of those vital books of the seventeenth century which most resemble it. It is a book badly com-

pounded from notes of activity—bombings, charges, strategies, perils in scouting, intrigues, and sometimes most humorous politics—and passages of self-criticism, racial philosophy, and analysis of motives carried far beyond Arabia. Nor is the style satisfactory. Sometimes it is negligent, often tortured, seldom does it run smooth for more than a page. Lawrence was quite right in deprecating his skill as a writer; quite right also in knowing that at his best he was superb, as his toil and sacrifice in thrice writing this book, and seeing it into print at ruinous cost proves, at least to me.

He was an amateur in writing and an amateur in war, and a genius in both. "It was a hard task for me to straddle feeling and action," he says in a key passage.

"I had one craving all my life—for the power of self-expression in some imaginative form—but had been too diffuse ever to acquire a technique. At last accident, with perverted humor, in casting me as a man of action, had given me place in the Arab Revolt, a theme ready and epic to a direct eye and hand, thus offering me an outlet in literature—the technique-less art. Whereupon I became excited only over mechanism. The epic mode was alien to me, as to my generation."

In other words, having been given by accident materials which needed only expression, he could not use them as an epic story because to his skeptic eye neither himself nor the Arab nor the revolt was really heroic. The fallacy in this statement designates the amateur in Lawrence. Literature is the opposite of technique-less. When his opportunity came he had a fiery prose at his hand and a stocked imagination to express in it, but lacked precisely that art of composition which would have made of "The Seven Pillars" a classic book to satisfy all the formalists of literature. But it was just because his life-long need for self-expression found its opportunity in the record of

heroic things that to him were not heroic, not epic, but sham and illusion and moral distress, that "The Seven Pillars," in spite of its many faults, is clearly one of the outstanding English books that invite no comparison even with each other because they are unique. This will need some explaining.

The truth of the matter is that Colonel Lawrence was a Puritan, perhaps the last great English Puritan. It is this that marks him, that makes his genius so intensely English in its violent nonconformity; it is this which gives blood, as it is Arabia that gives flesh and bones, to his book.

I find a curious but natural resemblance between the self-torturings of the triumphant Cromwell as John Buchan reports him and Lawrence's confessions of conscience. Both men were supremely successful in the organizing of energy; both were tormented by self-doubt when success was in their grasp; both were ill content with the judgment of their fellows. Lawrence was a perfectionist. He says that he never gave himself easily in friendship, because talk of trivial things always offended his sense that it was degrading enough to possess a body without thinking too much of its failures. "There was a special attraction" for him "in beginnings" because he hoped always in every fresh contact to satisfy his deep need for the perfect experience in which he could express and realize himself. He was profoundly skeptical of everyone, and most of all of his own great talents, which yawed "rudderless" at the behest of others, because, seeking a leader, he never found one in whom his perfectionist will could entirely trust. "Allenby came nearest to my longings for a master, but I had to avoid him, not daring to bow down for fear lest he show feet of clay." The Arabs he loved and admired, chiefly, I think, because of their religion, which he discusses so brilliantly in the second chapter. They had separated utterly the need of God from the needs of the

body. In the first they were as ruthless as Lawrence, and this made trivial the choice between life or death. But he could not follow them in their dualism. For him the world was "atomic," by which he meant moral. He liked "the things underneath" and took his pleasures and adventures downward, because there was a final safety in the degradation of bodily danger or misery for a man who could not be satisfied by any of the forms of worldly happiness or success. And yet his protestant dependence upon his own fastidious spirit and his Puritan will to govern circumstance gave him a fierce energy. "My brain was sudden and silent as a wild cat. . . . It was a real beast, and this book its mangy skin, dried, stuffed and set up squarely for men to stare at." Not so mangy, and by no means dry—this is but one of a thousand examples of his morbid self-depreciation, also Puritanical. And this fiery energy which is to be compared to the superhuman efforts of a man caught in a blazing house (the fire of his own soul), is the motive force of the immense and incredibly hazardous enterprises recorded in this book.

For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars. We were a self-centered army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man's creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare. . . . Blood was always on our hands: we were licensed to it. Wounding and killing seemed ephemeral pains, so very brief and sore was life with us. . . . We lived for the day and died for it.

And all this, though not in itself moral, was an outpouring from that moral energy which exceeds all others. Skeptic as

he was, Lawrence never lost faith in the supremacy of the moral determinant. He believed it to be behind courage, behind character, behind destiny. If "The Seven Pillars" is, among other things, an extraordinary gallery of portraits of men, this is because its author in addition to his gift for vivid description, saw every Arab, Turk, Englishman in his book, from the tumultuous Auda to the shepherd boy caught by the raiders and knowing only his duty to his sheep, as a mind and body driven by the moral tensivity which lies somewhere in all of us. In particular, he so viewed himself, "this furnace in my brain," which, since he could not approve of his own desire for action, he lent to the ideas of other men.

All this, to readers of seventeenth century English, must seem a familiar picture. Abstract the theology, extend the horizon, of those great Puritans who wrestled with God, and you have fellow minds to Lawrence who wrestled with his conscience. The religion is different, the moral philosophy extraordinarily like, the bursts of intense energy wreaking itself upon words or upon practical achievement, or upon both, almost identical. Lawrence is far closer to Jonathan Edwards, to George Fox, to Roger Williams, to Milton, to Cromwell, than to Beaverbrook, Lloyd George, Robert Cecil, or to Wilson who was the Puritan perfectionist freed from the inhibitions and the safeguards of self-criticism.

It is possible now to see why Lawrence's career and Lawrence's book are both extraordinary. This guarded flame of will, this tool seeking a master, is released by the Arab Revolt, which was a surge toward personal freedom by men whose wills were as ruthless as Lawrence's own. And at the same time it was such a revolution as Cromwell led in England, designed to turn the scales of empire, end a war, bring a world peace, and thus be an enterprise of such scope and difficulty

as alone could satisfy the frustrated perfectionist who dashed his head in vain against the wall of his own personality.

By chance Lawrence was the man for the opportunity. Already deeply experienced in the East, a master of language and custom, he was a passionate student of military history, and as confident of his own genius as he was uncertain of his right to use it.

And so he enters upon a great make-believe, a deception of others, and a self-deception encouraged by fatigue, danger, incessant planning—the man of action leading the man of morbid self-scrutiny against his better judgment. He knows that he is bound to betray the Arabs by the very energy he puts into their cause. He knows that they are being used for alien purposes of victory for nations of the West and will be let down in the end. This is made burningly clear in the omitted first chapter, existing in Colonel Isham's unique copy of "The Seven Pillars," where also Lawrence states that the book is essentially about himself. And even in this victory, which he desires, he has no faith as an absolute good. He knows that his triumph will satisfy neither his Arabs nor his own conscience, which holds as its central tenet that only a moral success is viable for humanity. And the clash and conflict of skepticism, need for self-expression, and the momentum of great opportunity, reverberate in the tireless energy, the exploit after exploit of the book, and most of all in the uncanny insight of this man whose mind is set above the battles, into the military, the political, the executive needs of a wholly practical campaign.

Viewed this way, Lawrence's title is appropriate and significant. Here are the seven pillars hewn out by wisdom for her house, hewn with pain and self-scrutiny; for what is wisdom, and of what shall her house be builded? It should (as he

said) have been an epic of direct action, and for that the materials were abundant, and indeed the best of them are all in this book—the exalted action, the exciting adventure, the characters of an epic, noble, imperfect, tragic, or pitiable, all lifted upon the plane of a great endeavor. But the mood of the writer is not epic, and the book is not epic. It is a Puritan tragedy, a drama of energy scanned and scrutinized by wisdom, and constantly condemned by the hero himself—really a confession like Augustine's, who also lived mightily and found it was nought in the sight of God. Lawrence is too much of a Puritan and a modern to think it was nought. He is proud of his energy, proud of his courage, exulting even in the frightful degradations of his tortures in the Turkish camp, aware that when for moral reasons he shot the Moroccan in cold blood he was revenging upon his own fastidious mind the lust for action which had led him into a leadership morally indefensible. And so with penetrating irony he subtitles his thrice-written book "A Triumph." A triumph in the great war, a triumph for Colonel Lawrence, which Lawrence the Puritan acknowledges by divesting himself of his orders and his rank, refusing all reward, and coming close to starvation within a few years of the climax of his success. But a triumph also for wisdom, who here makes her distracted comment on a tale which, without the self-scrutiny, might have been written like Southey's "Life of Nelson," or Wellington's unreflecting comments on how he saved Europe from the menace of France. "Pray God," says Lawrence, "that men reading this story will not, for love of the glamor of strangeness, go out to prostitute themselves and their talents in serving another race."

4. VACHEL LINDSAY

Vachel Lindsay already takes his place in literary history. He was a bard, if any modern deserved that title. Rapt, enthusiastic, fixed in his loyalties and his inspirations, he was at the opposite spiritual edge from the intellectualism and verbal refinements of the modernists in poetry. Poetry for him was still a chant, and his sonorous, slightly nasal chanting, with upraised face and dropped eyelids, like a blind Illinois Homer, still lingers in our memories. His rhythms sought the rhythms of native speech, but unlike the cool and humorous colloquialisms of Robert Frost, it was an excited speech, like the shouts at camp meetings, or the boasts and boostings of oxmen and boatmen. Listening to him one was carried backward, not forward, back of the American folk history now being so extensively written, back of Walt Whitman, who knew what Lindsay knew, had heard what he had heard, but made over the American saga to fit Emerson's philosophy, back into an authentic minstrelsy springing from a culture not rich but deep, because in it the primitive racial instincts had been re-aroused by pioneering—the culture of the Mississippi valley, that same soil from which grew Huckleberry Finn.

And yet it would be much too simple to call Vachel Lindsay the last and best of American ballad makers. He had, in one sense, no predecessors, for the poetry of the negro, the revivalist, the frontiersman, though spiritually akin to his work, was seldom written down, seldom even formulated, and when it did struggle into print, took the conventional literary forms of its period. Only in the negro spirituals and in a very few ballads did it ever get that finality of utterance (however primitive) which makes literature. Lindsay, for all his closeness to the traditions of the common people, was not a true con-

temporary of the saga periods of Johnny Appleseed or of Lincoln which inspired him. He belongs historically with the re-creators of American history who in the twentieth century have recovered or rewritten the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the continent was won. And just as the skillful historian of our time has approached the saga of Oklahoma or the Santa Fé trail with as much care for its imaginative significance as for the facts, so Lindsay tapped the reservoirs of folk poetry with a modern sense of the value of the primitive and a full realization that both saga and ballad were art. This was not the cause of his success, which was due rather to the beating of his heart in the corn-belt rhythm, but without this modern consciousness he would have been either the Eddie Guest of the ballads or a mere exploiter of folk lore.

He was neither, but, in his limited field, a powerful poet. He was perhaps the only man in those corny regions still a frontiersman in spirit and yet a self-conscious historian in verse. His genius was like one of those rich pockets of ore that are deposited where one stratum ends at the beginning of a different country rock.

And this was his personal tragedy. His vein was rich, but narrow. It was hard to keep to it without divergence, on the one side into banality, on the other into extravagance. When he was not writing "General William Booth Enters Heaven," or "The Congo," or "The Chinese Nightingale," he was trying to make psalms about a modern mid-Western capital, or poetry of people and experiences which were not only simple but flat. The sense of futility, due to the limitations wherein his genius flowered, showed itself in constant attempts to escape. Once he besought his friends in editorial offices to boom his reputation as an art critic, for that was going to be his future. Anything to escape from precarious balladry so difficult to cultivate

sincerely as the saga age to which he belonged in spirit sank further and further into the past! The censers he swung over Springfield in his fantastic drawings were symbols of his attempt to keep the religion of enthusiasm in a Middle West slipping into mechanical mediocrity.

He revolted too against his own showmanship, but never while he was at it. The chanting of his poems held audiences from Oxford to Peoria, because, once launched upon the communal chant, his heart rose up like the Psalmist's, and the coldest of audiences was stirred. But the immense effort of recreating revivalism in a sophisticated scientific world wearied him, and his modern self-consciousness was pricked by a half patronizing enthusiasm to a realization that he was like the priestess of the Delphic Oracle who was authentic only when a little intoxicated and perhaps faintly absurd. He came a little late, and knew in his heart that only one General Booth could enter heaven, and that the Congo could not indefinitely boom. What could he do else—art, criticism, or the movies?

And, indeed, now that he is dead we can say with honor that his best is left behind him. He had the great good fortune to live all of his poetic life within the years allotted to him. As with Poe, there is room in an anthology for the best of his work, but that best is inimitable.

5. HOMESPUN PHILOSOPHERS

Will Rogers was a fellow of infinite jest, a true Shakespearean clown, who used clowning to savor his philosophy. Yet it was not what he said, or did, but what he stood for in the American scene that seems most interesting.

We Americans have had a long tradition of philosophers in homespun, so long considering the little age of the Republic, and so notable in their day and sometimes after it, as

to ask for comment. Homespun in mind they have all been, which means, that whatever the source of their wisdom, its form and pressure were distinctively local to this continent, and many of them have been homely also in speech, self-made in knowledge, and blatantly provincial. Franklin's Poor Richard was our first of note, a small-town sage who repeated the commonplaces of the eighteenth century with a difference that came from shrewd experience in a struggling community. Irving, I have always believed, was satirizing the village wise-acre and know-it-all in his Dutchmen who puffed smoke instead of thinking. But it was Petroleum V. Naseby, Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, and "Hosea Biglow" in which the type finally realized itself, and took on an originality which must be credited to America.

Artemus Ward was certainly the Will Rogers of his day. He had not been a cowboy, was not semi-literate, could not use by nature a dialect so colloquial that the native American recognized in him the fellow who sat every Saturday night on the cracker barrel. And so Artemus hit upon the device of bad spelling to make himself homely. His spellings are often funny, but often absurd, with no possible relation to mispronunciation. Nevertheless they accomplished what he wished, which was to wrap up his quite serious political and social philosophy in wit and humor. If what he said was not funny, the way it was spelled made it seem to be, and so he got readers who never would have been trapped by an English above their own, or ideas that were not offered as a joke.

Mark Twain learned much from him, but did not change the principle, or when he did, lost his audience. "Huckleberry Finn" is a masterpiece of irony in which a ragamuffin says things which the low-brow American audience would never have taken so readily if spoken with authority and by an

educated man. He was addressing a nation with little intellectual self-confidence although a vast certainty in its own judgment. It was a practical nation that had succeeded by rule-of-thumb where every scholar had said that it would fail, and that was terribly shy of abstract ideas except such religious notions as were insulated from direct contact with the ordinary business of living. If you wished to get it, you had to bait your hook with something homely, familiar, and attractive, *that sounded like Saturday-night story telling. And, even more important, you yourself had to be a little homely and a little gun-shy of learning and everything not practical. If in addition you could make a good story out of it, you were on the home trail where thousands of Americans had eased the weary legs of their horses or their own tired feet while they passed on the latest wisecrack from the settlements.*

The type has varied since, although Will Rogers bred true, and was the perfect up-country philosopher who would have been at home in Lincoln's law shop, or Red Gulch, or Down East on a Gloucester wharf. To the last dash and comma his tricks were the same, and his mind was the same,—that combination of a shrewd human philosophy as broad as human nature with a fundamental distrust of everything not made in America which has made us a trial to Europe and sometimes to ourselves. The first great variant was Mr. Dooley. It was not by chance that Dunne chose his spokesman from an immigrant race with a Catholic philosophy. His United States of the 1890s was getting cock-sure on a large scale. Our bhoys were in big cities now and playing big-boy tricks in world politics and economics. No one listened to the anti-Imperialists, but they did listen to the Irish bar-keeper who saw that the winners of the Spanish War of '98 were only a row of thirsty drinkers, a little tipsy with success, a little boastful.

And one should add to this gallery of homespun satirists another variant with a different weapon but of the same steel—Robert Frost, the Yankee poet, whose simple language of New Hampshire farmers is so racy and so deceptive in its homely provincialism. It took the English to see that here was another of the well-known American breed. We laughed at him in the beginning as a vain fellow who tried to make hired men pathetic and stone walls a subject for wit.

Note well that some of these writers have nothing to do with literature, and some have everything to do with literature. Viewed nationally they all belong together, a phenomenon of American self-criticism, historically very important for anyone who would understand Americanism from the pioneers to the comics. But regarded as artists, which means as makers of something that stays good beyond their own lifetime, they live in different wards. The divergence begins with skill. Ward is clumsy and banal, even in his best pieces. Twain never, except in potboilers and seat-fillers. Thoreau, who may be described as always wearing Yankee underclothes under his robe of an Oriental sage, could make a sentence that would last. Will Rogers wrote good paragraphs but did not have that steady power over his mind or his words which makes a book. He was a drug-store talker who never went home to write.

The real difference between the humorous men-of-letters and the humorist wisecrackers was, of course, in their mental furniture. It takes more than a character and a shrewd philosophy to make a writer. Rogers could spot a fool or a foolishness, but when he had turned his joke he was through. Whitman, another homespun philosopher, lacked his wit and his healthy back-country skepticism, but he knew, what Rogers never realized, that the plain man's ribald jesting is good as a purge, but poor stuff to grow on. Yet we shall always need

Will Rogerses. There is something in the American temperament that is sure to produce an Emerson who keeps zooming skyward because there is too little dirt in his ballast, or a Woodrow Wilson whose heroic moralities lack just that indispensable streak of homely cynicism that any cowboy philosopher could give him; and there are always stuffed shirts in office who can be deflated only by a kick on their own level.

The chair—it is really a stool—is vacant. Who comes next?

6. D. H. LAWRENCE

John Bunyan and D. H. Lawrence (to choose apparent opposites) would have respected each other and argued magnificently, neither listening to a word. Both, in a restricted sense, were Puritans. For Bunyan this needs no explaining, and scarcely more for Lawrence, if "Puritan" be taken to mean a state of mind rather than a scheme of morals. Lawrence came from those English industrial classes which in England have always given the bite to Puritanism. He came up from that lower English world where the good form and restraint of the public-school tradition was a gag to be spat out of the mouth once the speaker gained the strength of self-confidence. He rose by his own self-improvement, and as a result could never rest from improving others. He came up when the bourgeois Victorian morality was losing its vigor, and he preached his new gospel of virility just as the Methodists preached revivalism to the Anglicans. "Kangaroo" is a book on how to improve Australia. "The Plumed Serpent" is a book on how to improve Mexico. "Studies in Classic American Literature" is a book on how to improve the United States. All his books were written to improve civilized man who was visibly losing those powers which come from the depths of emotional virility. Lawrence himself was febrile and neurotic,

and for that very reason his genius—for he had genius—felt with such passion the decline of his race.

He knew just what was wrong, and in this again he resembled all the great Puritans. It was our sex that was decaying, infected by the ethics of Victorianism, smothered by hypocrisy, made dull and apathetic by mechanical living. The sexual emotions, as psychologists had recently discovered, and artists always known, were inseparably related to creative activity. Dull them and you dull the man or woman. Warp them into mechanical responses and you turn civilization mechanical and prepare for its death. Our physical and intellectual welfare is, in this respect particularly, tightly linked to the functions of the body.

All his books tell the same story, although one might select "Sons and Lovers," "The Plumed Serpent," and the privately printed "Lady Chatterley's Lover" as especially indicative of what was always his theme. It was a theme of power. His seeming obsession with sex was much better described as a Puritanic determination to get over at all costs this idea which seemed to him so vital. He felt that sex at this moment of time could not be overemphasized. Thus his books became as much propaganda as "Pilgrim's Progress." The somewhat embarrassed reader who had been fascinated by Lawrence's angelic style, yet did not want to be told in detail how to conduct a stud farm for human society, sometimes found these books indecent. But when it was understood that this man was far more of a zealot than the censors who pursued him, the sympathetic could praise his marvelous insight and respond to his passion for making man and woman sound and whole again in their emotional life. Without his gift of style much that he wrote would have seemed rather tiresome, and sometimes scurrilous, preaching. But without Lawrence's intense

devotion to an idea and a faith there would have been no gift of style. Whatever one thinks of him, he was never a small man, never a time-server, never merely a skillful journalist, like so many of his contemporaries. He was always big in his projects and conceptions, though in detail he could be cheap and dirty; in those early passages of "Lady Chatterley's Lover" which would presumably give a censor apoplexy, he reaches a height of imagination, but in the last chapter he is as vulgar as a sparrow on a dung heap.

In literary history, D. H. Lawrence will have a double place, once for his undoubted gifts as a stylist and narrator, once as the fanatic who burst through the gate of Victorian reserve. Like all fanatics, his art suffers from its consecration to a cause other than art. But Puritans, whether direct or inverted, are made like that, and it is probably their passion to make the world think as they do that gives them beauty and strength.

7. MR. DOOLEY AND MR. HENNESSY

I was a Yale undergraduate, with a shoulder sore from carrying a Civil War musket in the old Armory, when I first read Mr. Dooley. We were drilling then with the general idea that Cervera's flying squadron was likely to blow the top off East Rock any day, and that patriotic Americans must rush to the defense of their country. It was an unreal, a romantic patriotism, that felt warm in the heart but queer in the brain. For there was something a little phoney about this war. The eagerness of Spain to give us everything we asked for before we began, did not seem to square with the blazing headlines of the yellow press, warning of death and invasion. And the chaos of amateur soldiers, typhoid camps, heroics, and embalmed beef, the rumors of dynamite cruisers, hay fleets, fat generals with the sun stroke, and troops everywhere except

where they were needed, suggested a football practice for a Harvard game in which all the university but the athletes were sent to Yale field and told to get the ball.

Then came Finley Peter Dunne. Reading over again his "Mr. Dooley in Peace and War" (much the better of his two important books), the stir and the laughter and the uneasiness of those Spanish War months come back vividly; and several ideas suggest themselves which would have been impossible to our naïveté then.

To begin with, some sense of humor, some willingness to take criticism has leaked out of the country since those days. There are a dozen pieces in this little book whose equivalent could not have been published in any year since 1916 without landing the author in court or jail as a pacifist (Mr. Dooley a pacifist!), a pro-something or another, or a Red. Does anyone remember the famous charge of the Tampa mules led by "th' biggest jackass in Tampa today, not exciptun' th' cinsor . . . Says Sampson, . . . 'Form-rm in line iv battle, an' hurl-rl death an' desthruccion at yon Castilyan gin'ral.' 'Wait,' says an officer. 'It may be wan iv our own men. It looks like th' Sicroty iv'—'Hush!' says th' commander. 'It can't be an American jackass, or he'd speak.'" And so on to "What's needed to carry on this war as it goes today is an ar-rmy iv jacks an' mules. . . . Th' ordhers fr'm Washin'ton is perfectly comprehinsible to a jack-ass, but they don't mane annything to a poor, foolish man." . . .

"'I shu'd think,' said Mr. Hennessy, 'now that th' jackasses has begun to be onaisy'—

"'We ought to be afraid th' cabinet an' th' Board of Sthrateejy'll be stampeded,' Mr. Dooley interrupted. 'Niver fear. They're too near th' fodder.'"

Mr. Dooley was the only man who didn't know what to

do with the Philippines, though he prophesied that Mark Hanna would organize the Philippine Islands Jute and Cider Co., "an' th' revoluchinists'll wish they hadn't." Mr. Dooley knew that "war was hell whin 'twas over." Mr. Dooley knew what ought to be done with the "fruits of victory." "If 'twas up to me, I'd eat what was r-ripe an' give what wasn't r-ripe to me inimy." Mr. Dooley thought that the Porto Ricans who became pro-American over night had "nawthin' to larn in th' way iv . . . th' signs in gover'ment, even fr'm th' Supreme Court."

It is a shame to mutilate these marvelous little satires, each perfectly constructed with a twist at the end as incomparable as the last line of a sonnet. Read "On the Victorian Era," where Dooley celebrates the benefits that have fallen to the race since he came to earth. But "ye haven't been as far east as Mitchigan Avnoo in twenty years," Mr. Hennessy objects. "What have ye had to do with all these things?" "Well," said Mr. Dooley, "I had as much to do with thim as th' queen."

This is debunking with a difference. Something has changed in us since this light-hearted rapier play has gone out of use and perhaps of possibility. But something remains, and as one reads on through "Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of His Countrymen," on reformers and prosperity, on making a cabinet, on the Populist convention, and on national expansion ("I know what they'd do with him [Aguinaldo the rebel] in this ward. They'd give that pathrite what he asks, an' thin they'd throw him down an' take it away fr'm him")—the power of these little papers begins to explain itself.

For Mr. Dooley, in spite of his Irish wit and Catholic tolerance, and Mr. Hennessy, in spite of his Celtic truculence, are American to the bone. It is Dunne, a great American humorist—the best since Twain—speaking in the brogue of

Mr. Dooley, choosing the Irish because the Irish then could say anything, because one laughed at the first Irish word. And Mr. Hennessy is the American public. You have only to compare Mr. Dooley with his great contemporary, Kipling's Mulvaney, to see the difference. Mulvaney is witty and Catholic and wise in human nature. But Dooley is all this and more. He has the shrewd skepticism of the Western individualist, the quality of leadership, the power of self-control, though he hates to exercise it against his enemies, the Bohemians and the Dutch. He comes from Missouri. He is the American of whom Kipling wrote while Dooley was still serving beers on Archey Road—

He turns a keen untroubled face
Home to the instant need of things.

Enslaved, illogical, elate,
He greets the embarrassed Gods, nor fears
To shake the iron hand of Fate
Or match with Destiny for beers.

Mr. Dooley is all that. His Irishness is genuine enough (weren't the Irish governing America?), but it is a mask, a dialect, a jester's license. Underneath he is the American who made this country disorderly, self-reliant, shrewdly realistic, and (intermittently) a self-expressive nation able to run itself if not its government. But where are the Dooleys now? In the American Legion? In the D. A. R.? In the Republican old guard? In the Administration? Some blight of unself-confidence has withered them. Maybe they blew off with the dust storms. Maybe immigration swamped them. Or prosperity did them in. Are they all dead?

Mr. Hennessy isn't dead. Mr. Hennessy believed every-

thing he read in the papers. When "day be day th' pitiless exthries come out an' beat down" on Mr. Dooley, Mr. Hennessy followed the headlines just as the Supreme Court followed the election returns. Mr. Hennessy didn't know where the Philippines were, but he knew what to do with them. Mr. Hennessy didn't know what Dreyfus was charged with, but he was sure he was guilty because he was a Jew. Mr. Hennessy was all for William J. O'Brien because he was Irish from the *sixth precinct*, and when it turned out to be William J. Bryan who was nominated he was still for him because he had been before. Mr. Hennessy knows that we are a great people. "An' th' best iv it is, we know we ar-re," says Mr. Dooley. Mr. Hennessy, who makes \$1.25 a day wheeling slag in the steel mill, proves his hatred of capital by quarreling over the price of wheat in the year of the big wind. Mr. Hennessy is all the yes-men and no-men in America. Mr. Hennessy lives by what was said to him last, believes the loudest shouter, can be calmed in a minute by being told he is an Irishman and a Democrat. He is fodder for political cannon, the sawdust stuffing of a dictatorship, the disease of a democracy. Mr. Dooley, who says that anarchists are the sewer gas of a state with bad plumbing, might have described Mr. Hennessy as the ball bearings of a plutocracy. Mr. and Mrs. Hennessy are with us yet, millions strong; but where is Mr. Dooley?

Chapter III

THE LITERATURE OF DISILLUSION

I. MENE, MENE, TEKEL

(February, 1929)

*T*HE vital current of American literature can be seen from many viewpoints, but from all must present to the thoughtful student an eddying stream of opinion which surges against and sometimes over the barriers of selfish individualism. Or, looking more closely, it is not extraneous barriers which cause the back-rush and on-roar of opposition, but a conflict within the stream of American life itself, two currents of energy, each vital, but one a turbid rush toward material prosperity which began with colonization, and the other a tiny powerful current, fighting the main stream, sometimes dominant, always sucking strength from the energy of the river, spreading thin, contracting to the heart of the flow, but always there—idealistic, spiritual—even in the muddy years after the Revolution, or the sordid tumultuous Seventies, or now.

It is not without significance that, among our few really great writers, Emerson, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Cooper, were on the opposition benches always—and Poe, oblivious to politics, disliked the materialism of the crowd.

Since the war, American idealism (to use a broad term for many related phenomena) has been in retreat. It has been easy to be unsentimental, self-seeking, skeptical of reform, indiffer-

ent to the future. The tempo of the nation has been in the stock market, its conscience has been usurped by the Prohibitionists,—as to its future we have been determinists, borrowing from our undigested science a comfortable philosophy, saying “Kismet” with an Oriental’s indifference, but without his stoicism. There has been little passion in American thinking because passion has not seemed worth while.

Those who think this is a permanent psychology are deluded. They have failed to note the strength of moral will in the United States because that will has been involved in the muddle of Prohibition or debased into religious fanaticism. They have not noted the beginnings of the inevitable weariness which follows upon too eager self-regarding in a time of prosperity. Great works of constructive engineering, in finance, in industry, in social service, in education, are under way, and the men who lead them are getting ample satisfaction; but that the millions who are not leaders should be endlessly satisfied with swapping goods and salesmanship, or that American energy should be confined to building things is incredible. We shall have “seekers” soon, and “come outers,” and “abolitionists,” and (one hopes) less violent thousands who at least refuse to live by bread alone. If Thoreau is incredible in a stock-broker’s office, a population hanging upon brokers’ offices and advertisements, as upon some miracle of Moses, may be incredible to a new generation with a stiffening of Thoreaus.

If there are to be new Luthers, Erasmuses, Emersons, it is very probable that they will rise in their dangerous might as a result of war, or the threat of it, which hangs over our culture like a tornado cloud, ominous but little regarded. The blind alley with a cockpit at the end in which society marches today is intolerable for any man willing to venture in thought beyond his own affairs. It is a situation which at the very

moment of our fattest prosperity, in the midst of "this heavy-headed revel east and west," may explode into fanaticism, flame out in clear flames of ineffectual wisdom, or overturn in disaster the whole edifice of smug assumptions in which we have lived so complacently.

The morality with which we Americans have governed our public thinking is the negative morality of a fat animal, that is getting on with its food and drink, and will oppose instinctively whatever threatens change. We do not want war and, conscious of the swirling sub-surface current, will pass resolutions that we do not want it. We do not want excessive armaments because they are expensive, and will hold back—a little—from the old race toward preparedness for the war that is inevitable when it is prepared for long enough. Yet we remember acutely that the last war was profitable—for us, and but dimly that all wars have not been profitable—even for us. We read that science has taken over war and given it a totality of destructiveness that not even the victors escape—and leave our reading, as we leave the movies, with fading pictures of unrealities too sharp for an imagination, engrossed elsewhere, to hold. We have been told that the West is an economic unit, and largely a social one. We have been told that we shall be involved if others are involved when the scale is large enough. We admit (placidly) the frightful results of an Anglo-American struggle over sea power, a European struggle over land power. We are sleepily aware that not even the most convinced optimist can hold out a shred of hope that stronger navies, stronger armies, can ultimately save even the strongest nation from the consequences, social, material, spiritual, political, of armed conflict on the modern plan. And yet, a stolid if apprehensive animal, we look over the fence and then trot back to

complacency. Or point out the approaching catastrophe, and shrug our shoulders.

Yield a point in the supremacy of the national state? But that might lead toward *The* League or *A* League of Nations, and we have agreed that we will not discuss the League of Nations! Pool our sovereignty for the policing of the world under a law of nations? But that might imply an equal validity for the rights of foreigners, shake the Constitution, give too much power to the President, involve our protective tariffs, or entangle us with world politics in a new way, less comprehensible, less easily imagined than war! Trot back into the pasture, and let a few more rails be set on the fence!

This is the very slough and stalemate of conservatism—not the convinced Tory conservatism that has something chivalric and nobly stupid in it, where man, with a contempt for humanity in general, shouts, *Sauve qui peut*, and goes up or down, accepting the results of his combative instincts; not that rather fine conservatism which has saved character even when it has destroyed men and states; but the bourgeois conservatism of property and business that will play safe until safe becomes dangerous and then fly into fanatical panic and heap its own sins upon circumstance.

Our leaders are reading history to little purpose. Let them read literature then, and particularly the literature of American idealism, which was not always called idealism when it was written. Let them note that American writers have for a century and more been describing the beast of property that was born with horns and an appetite, but no eyes for the future. Let them note also that this culture contains elements that will not be content with chaffering on a toboggan slide, with a crash ahead. It seems incredible now that even a million Americans can be found willing to look where our path is leading,

or to protest against the outrageous cynicism of inviting a general war by inaction or ill action. It seems incredible now that even a respectable minority can be gathered to execrate the folly which spends millions in energy upon material development and hundreds upon prevention; incredible that even in a tiny minority the moral passion which has risen before in this country, hot if not clear, powerful if not always just, can break through stupidities into action. It is not incredible. And the longer we delay, the more violent and less reasonable the reaction.

2. HANDS UP

(May, 1932)

What has happened to the brash, self-confident American, who used to snap his fingers at the world? A few years ago he was in every club car reading *The Saturday Evening Post*, on every ocean steamer telling big stories in the smoking rooms, and a hero in most of the novels and short stories about America. Booth Tarkington did him beautifully in "The Plutocrat," crude, noisy, afraid of nothing but the wife, self-assured, with a reserve of power that came from a deep self-confidence. You remember that Tarkington, at the end of the story, compared him to those *nouveau riche* Romans of the powerful, grasping age of Rome, who changed the map of the world.

He was a caricature naturally, in life even more than in fiction. He was so full of race that he made himself a type which was much easier to describe than to understand. He was, indeed, the loud speaker of a continent and seemed much more representative than he was. But not in his self-confidence. That had roots.

And now where is he? Out of a job, or taking more collateral to the bank, or sitting long at a hotel lunch, shaking his head over the rottenness of politics, or over the capitalist sys-

tem, which used to be something that socialists talked about, and now is his business and isn't working. The greatest optimist the world ever knew has become a pessimist over night.

And his constituents, the white-collar classes of America, of which he was the eccentric representative, have likewise lost confidence. How deep their uncertainty goes it is hard to say, probably not very deep yet; but their habit of uneasy speculation is growing. It is dismaying to hear so much questioning of our institutions among the middle-aged, so much cynical denial of anything good to come out of them, among the young. Dismaying and discouraging, because confidence has leaked out and nothing has taken its place. There is none of the happy crusading of the muck-rake days, or the confident idealism of the Wilson period, or the pugnacity of Mencken and the debunkers. This current unrest plays from weakness, not strength. There is no grip in it upon what is coming next.

Who does know what is coming next, but why grunt and whisper, and hold up shocked hands like a parcel of old ladies at a tea party, about a future which is still within reasonable control! Democracy has been a failure at least every decade since we began the experiment. The American nation was said to be degenerate, both politically and socially, before it won the right to be called a nation. Lawlessness, the alien, speculation, and overproduction have threatened our ruin at not infrequent periods ever since the eighteenth century. And of course American business and professional men sat shaking their heads over the end of republican institutions in 1800, in 1840, in 1857, and in 1873, very much as today.

And yet there has never been a more striking decline than from the high point of cockiness in the early Twenties. A single phrase which once was prophetic, then boastful, and now

ironic, measures in its emphasis the change in faith. Say "This is a great country" to your friends, and ask them to repeat it.

Only a part of this moral weakening (for no milder name can describe it) can be assigned to the results of hard times as such. There is trouble in the receiver as well as in the wires to conditions outside. The brash American type is suffering from spiritual indigestion. He has been fed too long on advertising, on promotion, on speculation. He has thought too long and too exclusively (like Tarkington's Romans) upon vast profit-making schemes, and he has had no Greek tutors to warn him against excess. He has stuffed himself with projects, had his way like a spoiled child, and now, having lost his meal ticket, thinks the world at an end. He should note the strangely mild behavior of those who are really hungry, and consider whether their sporadic attacks upon the government are not less dangerous than his panic. For panic this readiness to question everything most certainly is. We hold up our hands whenever our social system, the economic system in which we were bred, our moral and aesthetic ideas, are attacked by anyone anywhere, even as Congress holds up its hands if a veteran crosses Pennsylvania Avenue. There is a time for everything, a time for criticizing error and injustice in our institutions, and a time for defending what is solid, reasonable, familiar, and adaptable in them. Hands up to fate is not a dignified position for the so-called red-blooded American.

3. CHANGE

(January, 1932)

What would those great apostles of progress through change, the Victorians, have said of 1931! Not only economic distress and political turmoil distinguished the dead and unregretted old year, but such change as they scarcely contem-

plated. Perhaps every man or woman above the stage of conscious civilization has somehow between January and December sharply changed those estimates of value which—mental barometers—we carry with us always. The change, indeed, may have been sharper than the barometer recorded, and much more fundamental than such superficial reversals as between spending and saving, or from restless optimism to sullen caution. For the first time in our period, the *rentier* class has lost confidence in the economic system upon which it lives. All but romanticists, fanatics, and politicians have given up Prohibition as a possible means of enforcing sobriety, and with it, and far more important, all confidence in righteousness by legislation, which was the last of the Puritan legacies. The intellectuals have changed most of all. They had seen the romantic idealism of the nineteenth century rise to a peak in the early twentieth, and then dissipate, like flying scud in the war, and post-war, years. They had grasped confidently a new realism, which attacked with ribald enthusiasm the tag ends of faith and loyalties which had frayed into prejudice and obscurantism. But in 1931, they looked, somewhat appalled, at an intellectual anarchy, in which hundreds of realists—political, social, economic—knew what ought to be done, and thousands and millions of the masses had not the slightest inclination to do it. The immense apparatus constructed by science for the abolition of poverty and war stands like a modern factory, improved to the last bolt, able to flood the world with goods—which no multitudes want and which therefore cannot be manufactured. Realism as a method of facing the facts, realism as a means of getting rid of bunk, sham, stuffed shirtism, ignorance, and stale prejudice was a gospel which worked even if it did not warm, but realism as a motive principle, realism as a reconstructive force, seems as

bankrupt as the engineer's plans for ending the depression by spending government money. That is one of the profound, and not yet fully realized, changes of 1931.

In this hurly-burly pure literature has very definitely withdrawn to the side lines. Poetry is there, with its back to the game, and fiction has shown more and more tendencies (especially British fiction) toward marking time with the idyllic and the historical. Great books are not written to make epochs. They come from epochs. A time of energetic reconstruction favors literature, and so, though more narrowly, does a time of iconoclasm. But confused and watchful waiting indicates distress, muddle, and futility, from none of which literature easily comes. The really important books of 1931 have been little read. They have been the books of the realists, though not of the realists in literature. They have been written by psychologists analyzing human nature, by economists surveying world conditions, by political philosophers describing inevitabilities to which the public are blind, by historians and biographers interpreting the present in terms of the past. They have been little read even by the readers who can be reached by books because these readers have been inattentive to sound and realistic writing. They were not inattentive in 1914, and the years following, when the war brought a sharp urgency into history, and they fed eagerly then on much that by no stretch of the term could be called propaganda. If they are inattentive now it is because they are lethargic. They expect nothing of confusion but more confusion. They think that the remedies of the realists are just more of the same medicine that made the world sick of the War to End Wars, and Prosperity.

This skepticism of cures of demonstrable value in such a crisis as this one, is deplorable. Something is weary in the imagination of civilized men which must be invigorated. When

that moment comes, and it may be near at hand, literature will be one of the prime agencies for continuance. But we are not naïve enough to suppose that all the world needs at the moment is some great books. They come when we are ready for them.

And yet it is not irrelevant to point to a truth just now much forgotten, that the records of imaginative literature are among the few manifestations of the human spirit which in a changing age do not change, or change very slowly. The great scenes in the great plays and novels, the great passages in essay and poetry, are valid today because they represent a continuum of life in which past and present exist together. There is an assurance of vital continuity in "Tom Jones" or Virgil or a Chinese novel or Chaucer or Jane Austen which has more medicine for a time like this than prospectuses of Utopia or premature philosophies. The distrust of literature per se which has been growing among realists is due to a sound feeling that the world as we know it must be reorganized on principles laid down already by scientific investigation, of which many are certainly not to be found in literature, although more than the sociologists and the psychologists are willing to admit. But the world at present is not getting reorganized, and one reason is a lack of confidence in itself. We have changed too much, the people seem to say, and it does no good. Why change more? And if we suggest that more reading of Shakespeare, Goethe, Plato, Racine, Voltaire, Dickens, Whitman might be a tonic for such valetudinarianism, we are arguing for no panacea, but only that here (even in Voltaire) is one stimulus to the hopeful life.

4. DEPRESSION LITERATURE

(February, 1932)

I began one day to make a catalogue of the masterpieces of depression literature, but gave up in something like fright. All the crowned works of the past seemed to be moving toward that category! But this, of course, was an exaggeration. The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" and the "Æneid," "The Golden Ass," the plays of Molière, and the comedies of Shakespeare, "Tom Jones" and "Pickwick,"—there were plenty left that owed no inspiration to the pinch of trouble that says to the human spirit, "Up, beast, out of thy stall." But what a solemn and magnificent series of the great works of the human imagination were fathered in times of deep depression! Isaiah and Jeremiah and the "Book of Job"; Boethius and "The Divine Comedy"; "Lear" and "Troilus and Cressida," though here, as perhaps in Plato's "Republic," the depression was personal and the disintegration of society prophetic. "Paradise Lost" is from beginning to end an epic of depression, which is not to say, of course, that it is depressed or depressing. The works of Dostoievsky are unthinkable as springing from prosperity. A Hawthorne and a Melville in 1927 would have had no more to feed upon than did those shrill-voiced Americans who protested so loudly that bathtubs and a rising Wall Street were not enough.

And has our depression no monuments? Is it inarticulate in literature, and to be traced in print only in the warnings of social thinkers and in novels based upon the theory that life is a chaos, and a dirty chaos at that? The truth seems to be that this is not the kind of depression out of which literature is made. It is far more self-consciously economic than those earlier bad times when men put the blame upon kings or mobs

or the Catholics or the Jews or pernicious ideas or the devil or a righteous and indignant God. Great and challenging ideas are afloat but they do not yet touch the emotions. Society is to be reorganized but no one outside of Russia is stirred very deeply about it. We are not yet in the emotional stage, and fortunately, since in a far greater measure than in any earlier epoch there is an immense body of scientific study which, in its statement of ways and means and cures and causes, is at least half a century ahead of social practice anywhere. The instinct of the intelligent man to learn more sociology, more psychology, more economics, is a sound one. This is, above all times, an age when knowledge, much of it already tested, is easily available; when the failure of a course of economic action can often, not just sometimes, be measured in advance,* when the public and its potential leaders are so far apart in what they know and think that contact has been lost.

In Russia alone has the idea of reconstruction become emotional and imaginative as in the early Renaissance and in the Puritan Reformation in England. But the Russian excitement dies when it reaches the West because for all its promise of a new and great society it is too naïve in its confident materialism, even for America. A backward nation throws off the superstitions of a backward church and the ineptitude of a medieval monarchy, and adopts with a passion of optimism the mechanical devices which, in the nineteenth century, made Europe and America also see in the ages one increasing story run of the perfectibility of man through food and comfort and education for all. We shall never in America renew our enthusiasms that way, although applied science will continue to be our guide and we may learn as much from Russia in

* This paragraph indicates that it was possible to be too optimistic even in 1932.

national organization as Russia has learned from us in the conquest of nature.

Our depression literature is likely for some time yet to be "literature" in the broad modern sense—scientific, informative, critical writing. And literature in its narrower sense, literature which stirs the emotions and fires the imagination until a man feels as well as knows, will continue to be fiction and drama, lyric and essay, not epic and tragedy and satire. Western civilization at the moment is, as a mass, inert mentally, although in tiny whirls of feverish activity it supports the most intense scientific cerebration of recorded history. From these fiery particles emotion, and with it a new literature, a real literature resulting from a spiritual conflict, may be born.

5. . . . OUR DISCONTENT

(November, 1932)

The list of American writers who declare themselves ready to support the American Communist party is not unimpressive, but no more impressive than the eagerness of many more American writers in the years since the war to contribute to a literature of discontent far wider than any communist program. Nor is this tendency confined to America. The strong imagination that in other periods has painted for the unliterary pictures of new customs, of new societies, which were often misleading, yet provocative of hope and change, has been noticeably absent. Readers who tried to look forward through literature have seen little to encourage them. The books in which one would willingly live all deal with the past; the present is like a city block in process of demolition; the future is abstract or negative. We are told by the discontented what we must lose, but not in any way that touches the imagination what may be gained. No one writes of a City of God, or a Paradise Regained,

or Utopia, or a state of life that seems worth a revolution or even evolution. Perhaps this is natural in a realistic and disillusioned age, but is it normal, and is it a credit to the literary imagination?

Profit-seeking may have reached the point where only stupidity can keep it going much longer, but who gives us vigorous and beguiling pictures of its opposite? Where are the eidolons, as Whitman would have called them, which stir the imagination? Not in Russia certainly, nor in Italy, nor anywhere on earth. Technology may have so far outreached the control of man by man as to justify the worst fears of those who think that our society is like a too small boy with a too large penknife, but where is Samuel Butler's successor who can distill from all the chatter about the machine as man's best friend or man's worst enemy, some liquor of the imagination to intoxicate us with a vision of a society where the problem is worked out of economics into terms of living? The solution does not have to be correct, no human solutions are entirely correct—Rousseau's was not, nor even Plato's—but banners, or perhaps today we should say billboards and guideposts, have to be lifted somewhere, sometime. The books on recovery and reconstruction and rediscovery and revolution pour from the presses, but their facts do not seem to sink in. No first-rate imaginative writer in our time has a vision of a possible future as clear and as inspiring as Shakespeare's conception of monarchy, yet Shakespeare had far less reason to be concerned with futures, and indeed was far less concerned with them, than any responsible and thoughtful writer today.

It is, to put it mildly, discouraging that the writers of fiction and drama here in America, when not content to study manners as such, should give the last ounce of their energies to an almost sadistic attack upon things as they are, with not the

slightest realization that a diet of pure negations will choke even a pessimist. No wonder that the witty and the frivolous get read by the multitude, while the serious and philosophical are only talked about. And note that there is very little righteous anger in this literature of discontent, very little emotion of any kind. It is cold, because the work of demolition is cold. There is excitement, but no mounting enthusiasm, in the job of tearing down a house. And yet the materials for an imaginative reconstruction of society encumber the ground. There never was so much solid fact, sound knowledge, well-tested theory, instructive analysis, ready to be picked up by any imagination strong enough first to co-ordinate and then to transform it into patterns of life. Science, even the marginal science of psychology, or of sociology, has run far ahead of the emotional perceptions of the races. But science unabsorbed by the imagination is self-destructive; that is proved by the complete failure of popular education to make the masses realize that progress and technological advance are not necessarily identical. Grant us, O Lord, a Butler, a More, a Rousseau, a Whitman, or someone as gifted, yet sounder than any of them, before it is too late!

6. BETTER BOOKS, BETTER MEN

(February, 1935)

Fear, as the psychologists define it, is something you all have. Look for it now, and you may find it: fear in the most unexpected places, fear where you thought you were boldest, fear which is a lurking menace to honesty and self-expression. And groups and societies and eras have their own fears, of which the current one among writers, critics, and readers is the fear of being moral.

The stories of Hemingway are full of fears, of which the

most obvious is the fear of acting like a cowardly conventionalist who accepts the standards of his bourgeois neighbors. The expressionist school of writers, from James Joyce to Sean O'Casey and its ultimate in Gertrude Stein, is obsessed by the fear that its work may become a pattern of how man should act instead of expressing the true behavior of the emotions. On a lower plane, the innumerable writers of books about the decaying, the dismal, and the defeated, are terribly afraid of tenderness, humor, or hope, that trinity which birthed the Victorian novel. And professional reviewers, modernist critics, and even, or especially, the intelligent talkers about books, conceal more or less successfully a gnawing fear of the ethical aspects of the books they talk and write about.

Naturally they dodge the ethical as one dodges the inquiry, What is God?, for merely to raise the question in any work of art, but particularly in poetry, or fiction, or the drama, is to bring down on one's head a mountain of dialectic, with slogans like Art for Art's Sake, or Literature of the Revolution banging about one's ears. Hence, not only literature but also criticism has been essentially descriptive, negative, unmoral, or devoted to the proposition that whatever is true of the human animal is good in art as it is in science.

But we shall have to get rid of some of our hidden fears and shatter many of our dogmatisms. The old question, Does his reading make a better or worse man?, will not down. We no longer mean a better Republican or Democrat, not even a better citizen, and certainly not a better candidate for a Methodist or Catholic heaven. But a better mind, more alive, more self-expressive, more understanding, happier with the happiness which comes from intensity of imaginative experience, we must mean, or reduce the reading of books to the level of a kill-time or an information bureau.

The history of literary criticism is very discouraging. Every age has ridden some obsession to fatigue—moral significance, self-expression, perfection of form, an idea of social revolution, or conformity to a classic model. But the great critics have never been all wrong, and, with very few exceptions, nothing they have urged as the duty of literature can be labeled old stuff and safely forgotten.

Since the era of applied science began we have been as curious as monkeys, and like monkeys we have clambered in and out and over, not only the framework but also the dirty nooks and corners of the social structure. We have stuck our paws into hidden cracks in the psyche, and, perching on the roof-tree, felt the building under us swaying in the winds of doctrine. It has been the age of controlled experiment in literature, and journalism also, with "Tell Me," not "Teach Me" as its motto. But whatever else may hold for poetry and fiction and drama, one test must sooner or later be brought back and applied. It is not the only test. It is not an exclusive test, because in the future as in the past many a writer and many a book will fail to satisfy the requirements and yet be well worth writing and reading. Yet until we do begin to apply it again and rigorously we will stay muddle-minded as most readers and critics are at present, afraid to express final judgments because they are afraid to admit that their pets in literature do not in this respect satisfy the tests for the best, however else they may qualify.

We must ask whether the stories of mean and defeated lives, or squalid circumstance corroding the mind beyond hope of escape, of split and obsessed personalities, of killers, gangsters, homosexuals, brittle cynics, and cruel fanatics, whether the incoherent experimenters in mixed sounds or involuted ideas, whether the vulgarians, and the erotics, and the school

of violence, and the school of horror, and the analysts of the obscene, do make better men of their readers—whether they contribute to wisdom as well as to knowledge, to delight as well as to curiosity, to ethics as well as to general experience, to civilization as much as to self-knowledge, to a hope for a future worth living as often as to a destructive analysis of the past and the present. This is no argument for optimism; it is not even an attack on the literature of defeatism, for it is the duty as well as the necessity of this tormented age to suffer gladly not only fools but also the gadflies and maggots which have destroyed our too easy confidence. But if the books that have the most acclaim just now are not making better men in the sense defined above, then no matter how much of good literature they may have in them, they have not all of it, and certainly not its best part.

7. THE SCHOOL OF CRUELTY

There is a sadist strain in American writing. This is not true for the whole of it, but it is true for a part of it, the urban part particularly, since even those who write cruelly of the farm write after the city has made them over. There is not merely dislike for environment, there is a vein of cruelty in American writing, in some of the strongest and most skillful writing being done here. The current term is "hardness," but this is no gay hardness, and certainly no stoical hardness. It is to be found in the "debunking" biographies of Washington and Lincoln—in Masters's biography of "Lincoln," where the author wields his particular interpretations of too much neglected facts in Lincoln's life with the cruel satisfaction of a torturer. The stories of Hemingway are cruel stories and yet there are American critics who complain of the cushion of sentiment which makes his heroes and heroines pity themselves.

In many less important novels sensation ruthlessly described is allowed to work its will upon the characters, as if they were hard flints to be ground meaninglessly by the harder wheel of chance, while the author sneers his revenge upon an existence which was not to his liking.

The defense is realism, the excuse is novelty. Hardness has come into American life, and one must be hard to write about it. There is a new, and in its present phase, a not very lovable society which breeds its own literature as poverty breeds crime. If authors are cruel it is because life seems to have become more cruel also. But indeed the sadists in American literature seem often to think that no defense is necessary.

Violence in American life is better advertised than formerly, but the new cruelty is in the minds of the writers. They are cruel because they are unhappy, because they do not like the life they live in, and perhaps because they do not like themselves. The biographers have some justification for they are trying to right a balance which had swung too far toward sentimental veneration. But the cruel novelists are men and women incapable of either irony or tragedy. They see the hard flashes from a life grown too materialistic and are dazzled as a walker in New York is dazzled by the metallic glints on the façades of new skyscrapers. He rubs his eyes angrily and so do they. Life is like that, they say, and of course life has always been like that, and like a good many other things too. But authors are hounds that hunt in packs. Let the malicious give cry first, and they will all be after. And indeed there is something trivial in most of this cruel writing, as of angry drivers scraping a passing running board with a curse.

Unfortunately they are skillful, more skillful than many a better-adjusted writer who sees more truly but more dully, and this is especially true in the new generation now coming

on. Having no ideas as to what humanity might, or ought to be, these sadists cannot penetrate beneath the surface glitter to see what it is. They are capable of shrewd realism, but of nothing else. They are cruel only because they are discontented and a little afraid.

The powerful and distressing "Sanctuary" of William Faulkner is a perfect example of this school of cruelty. The plodding naturalism of Dreiser was merely evidence that the world was dingy, which the imaginative could disregard, the harsh staccato of Hemingway had sentiment as an undertone, Lewis's satire was at least based upon idealism. But this Mississippi writer (land of white columns draped in roses!) gives no quarter and leaves no field of the emotions unblighted. Others have written of the underworld and made it sinister, but in this story the underworld is less despicable than the frivolous creatures who descend into it. Others have done, and overdone, the trivial gin-drinking generation and the thin, hysterical debauchery of college youth, but with scorn, pity, or a secret admiration. Mr. Faulkner has come out at the further end of both Puritanism and anti-Puritanism, and in the dry light of complete objectivity weighs his subjects for their pound or ounce of life with no predilection for "ought," with no interest in "why," and no concern for significance. He is cruel with a cool and interested cruelty, he hates his Mississippi and his Memphis and all their works, with a hatred that is neither passionate nor the result of thwarting, but calm, reasoned, and complete.

Unlike his fellow workers in the sadistic school, Mr. Faulkner can make character. His Popeye, the gunman, an impotent defective, without emotions and unaware of morality, is the most convincing of all his lengthening line in fiction. And Mr. Faulkner can write a still and deadly narrative that carries

with it an unrolling series of events as vivid as modern caricature and as accurate as Dutch painting. I say *can*, for in the attempt to tell a story by its points of emphasis, omitting explanation and connectives, he is frequently elliptical and sometimes incoherent.

But the story!—It lies in two planes, an upper and lower, like a Russian ikon. On the upper plane are three important figures, of whom a girl and a boy will be most detested. She is a predatory female, still too young to be fully conscious of the meaning of her desires, technically a virgin, technically a student in the local university, but absorbed in a series of “dates” where sexual escapes from the flesh-hunting town boys who wait with their cars in the darks of the campus are her preoccupation. On her own plane she is nothing but a shallow, pretty flirt, playing with lasciviousness. The boy has been to “Virginia,” and speaks in the stale romantics of the “Southern gentleman,” about hard drinking, hard loving, and chivalry. On his own plane he is an empty-headed fool who lives by words. On their own plane the two are engaged in a mildly romantic escapade—she is to race with him ahead of the football train, drinking on the way. He gets drunk and smashes the car on a side road near a bootlegger’s headquarters.

Thus they slide into the lower plane, the underworld. In a rickety house, with a gunman, a rum runner, a helper at the still, and a bootlegger and his woman, the girl loses her nerve and becomes a whimpering child, fascinated but afraid of the evil around her. The boy gets drunk again, and leaves her to save his own reputation if he can. She is raped under circumstances of fiendish perversion, which she invites by her own depravity that even in her climaxes of terror keeps her hovering like a soiled moth near the danger. Her gunman seducer, himself impotent, shoots the nit-wit helper who tries to protect

her, and puts her in a house of prostitutes in Memphis where she takes to gin and drugs with convincing rapidity. The bootlegger is tried for the murder he did not commit, and she kills him by false testimony, having first out of sheer restless amorousness drawn a new and real lover to the spot where he is neatly and inevitably murdered by the jealous gunman, who had used him in their sexual relations, for purposes better left undescribed. Thus the Judge's daughter and the youth from "Virginia," when drawn down into the unmoral underworld, are shown as trash, a hundred times less valuable even than the drunken mistress of the Memphis house, the brutal rum runners, or the defective, soulless Popeye himself. These have a code. They are nothing.

And around this sordid tragedy hangs a kindhearted, liberal man, fascinated by the injustice of human misery. Moved by instinctive generosity he determines to save the bootlegger from an unjust indictment, because that sturdy criminal's faithful woman with her pathetic child has touched his sympathies, because he cannot stand injustice, because he has fallen in love with his stepdaughter and feels obscurely that her dangerous course in the flippant, sordid world of the upper plane will be safer if by his legal skill he can rescue the college flirt and avert injustice. With what results? The bootlegger has rape added to his charge of murder and is burned alive by the mob. Popeye goes off unscathed, and when hung, is hung for a crime he never committed. The girl is rescued by father and brothers, and is last seen in Paris, restless, vacuous, a menace to society now that she is awake.

Mr. Faulkner's Mississippi is, we trust, a partial portrait, but his vivid narrative style makes it convincing; nor can anyone doubt the force and truth of his characterizations—Popeye, the filthy politician, the bootlegger's woman, the nit-wit. Nor

can any sane reader doubt that somewhere along the path he is following lies the end of all sanity in fiction. Here in this sadistic story is decadence in every sense that criticism has ever given the word, except dilettanteism—there is none of that. The emotions are sharpened to a febrile obsession with cruelty, lust, and pain which exaggerates a potentiality of human nature at the expense of human truth. These debased flappers and hideous mobs in a community which seems incapable of virtue in either the Christian or the Roman sense, are bad dreams of reality which no matter how truly set down are false to everything but accident and the exacerbated sensibilities of the author. To this disease Americans seem peculiarly liable, and there is a direct relationship between the drugged terrors, the unreal sadisms, and the morbid complexes of Poe's stories, and this new realistic decadence of which "Sanctuary" is an outstanding example.

Art is curious. Although it does not have to be representational of human life, when it does become more than design and gives form to human happenings it cannot and never has been able to go far into the abnormal, the unbalanced, the excessive without danger. Poe's more lurid stories are read now as drug phantasies, more interesting to the psychologist than to the man of letters, and so it will be with this new sadism, the novel cruelty by which the American scene with all its infinite shadings is made into something gross, sordid, or, as here, depraved with an ironic depravity in which the trivial by a kind of perversion becomes more horrible than professional evil, while what virtue exists in individuals only throws gasoline upon the lyncher's fire.

I have chosen Mr. Faulkner as a prime example of American sadism because he is so clearly a writer of power, and no mere experimenter with nervous emotion. He is distinguished

above others in the cruel school by a firm grasp upon personality and his ability to enrich the flow of time with pertinent incident. No one who reads his description of the harlot's sob party and the drunken little boy will doubt his skill in prosaic horror. In "Sanctuary" I believe that sadism, if not anti-romance, has reached its American peak.

But the hard-boiled era is headed toward the dust heap where the soft-boiled era of the early 1900s has long preceded it. The post-war bitterness of wounded psyches has already subsided in England. Here it seems to be like an induced electricity where the pressure is higher but the substance less. The war-hurt generation is already too old for poetry, but just ripening for fiction. The candor behind their cruelties when they escape from the hard-boiled convention and grow wiser in life may give to their work a substance and an edge which American fiction has too often lacked. They are not drugged, like Poe, nor have they his abnormal sensitivity which only the rightest of all possible worlds could have kept in bounds and only the most ethereal beauty could lift into the escape of real literature. Yet, hurt themselves, they have so far vented their irritation upon, and transferred, as the psychologists say, their inferiorities to, a country and a personnel which can be hated, as they hate it, and feared as they fear it, only when the imagination is still fevered. That fever, as it subsides, leaves the problem of rediscovering America, for America has to be rediscovered by every generation, the problem of discovering not just the drunkards, gunmen, politicians, near virgins, and futile, will-less youths which have so deeply engaged them, but the American scene in all its complexity. They will never do it while one ounce of sadism, one trace of hysteria remains.

8. "GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT!"

The engaging title of Mr. Robert Graves's book is far too good not to steal for a conclusion.

Good-by to all that! Good-by to long dull stories of morons tangled in their own crude desires, stories proclaimed for their truth, as if the truth about insignificant experience ever really mattered. Good-by to sexy narratives that go just beyond decency and stop just short of wit. Good-by to detective romances written by authors just ingenious enough to invent a plot that having no rational solution must be explained in a chapter of solid lead at the end. Good-by to poetry whose incomprehensibility conceals a vacuum. Good-by to stories of young ladies who thought it right to go wrong. Good-by to *safari* books with pictures of dead animals and badly nourished blacks. Good-by to dull, flat, cheap books precisely like a hundred other dull, flat, cheap books, with publishers' blurbs on the flaps, saying *this* is the book you have been waiting for, this is literature! Good-by to *that*.

Good-by to reviewers who spoil a good book by taking it apart like a corpse on a dissecting table which never can be put together again. "In Chapter One we find—In Chapter Two we see—In Chapter Three the author proposes—" Good-by to *them*.

Good-by to writers who slide like a flattening tenor just a little away from everything they try to say, expressing themselves with just enough inaccuracy to seem to be writing English until you take the trouble to investigate. Good-by to peevish critics with a grievance who knife a book because they have been hurt in their opinions. Good-by to the stupid blunderers among their colleagues who review a book for what isn't in it, and mix up what they find there. A long good-by to them.

THE LITERATURE OF DISILLUSION 85

Good-by to nasty stories of nasty boys and girls who in the imagination of the usually middle-aged author do whatever they do nastily. Good-by to all that, and to him too, for the boys and girls are getting old enough to write about themselves, and their reports may be quite different.

Good-by to books that solve every American problem by prosperity and confuse happiness with cleanliness and success with a full stomach and indigestion afterward. Good-by also to the carpers on the other side who are determined to bite their nails and be gloomy.

Good-by to everything ending with 1st or ic.

Good-by to the fictionized biography, in which truth is made stranger than fiction and not half so convincing. Good-by to a hundred such books written by industrious hacks because the patient public has turned toward biography. Good-by to the ghost writers, a shadowy throng who provide self-expression for inarticulate captains of industry. Good-by to short stories written by formula and guaranteed to knock out your eye with the last paragraph. Good-by to advertisements written like cheap fiction and cheap fiction written like bad advertisements. Good-by to all that!

Good-by to pseudo scientific manuals on how to live from the cradle to the grave, which explain everything except how their authors came to be such astonishing fools as to suppose their books were either science or sense. Good-by to all such quackery. Good-by to books on religion that say what someone else said, platitudinist repeating a platitude. Good-by to privately printed verse. Good-by to trashy best-sellers concocted to fool the public. Good-by to most books and more magazines. Good-by to literacy, judging from the results.

Chapter IV

ADDRESSED TO YOUTH

I. FAREWELL TO YOUTH

WHEN the dust settled over the disasters of 1914-1918 and the predatory conflicts of 1918-1920, youth came into its own. For a while the air was vibrant with attacks on the "wicked old men" who had begun the war and wrecked the peace. Power in the future was to pass to youth; the word was given to youth and youth grabbed at it. Perhaps the emphasis which psychology had been throwing upon the importance of childhood was partly responsible; perhaps the disillusion of the mature with their own maturity was partly responsible; certainly the futile tragedy of the war called upon the next generation for action, and by 1920 youth had the attention of a world audience as perhaps never before in history.

In America the strongholds of literature capitulated. Periodicals in which no one under thirty had ever arrived except by accident sought contributions from undergraduates upon the state of youthful complexes. Publishing houses where the doorman had handled youthful literary aspirants now specialized in books by unknown authors, whose first claim upon attention was that they were just out of their teens. Scott Fitzgerald wrote "This Side of Paradise."

Abroad, the "youth movement" flourished, the avowed intentions of which were to further international friendships and create a world sympathy among a new generation that did not

propose to be ruined by the muddled prejudices and greeds of the world that had made the war. Life was to be healthier, more liberal, less predatory, and suffused with the hope, the friendliness, and the hearty energy of youth. Since the war had failed to end war, youth would do it. Youth of the Balkans fraternized with youth of Germany. Youth from America visited all over Europe. Youth of England preached apocalyptic internationalism throughout the world, except in Russia, where the energy of youth had already been canalized for a great experiment, which was friendly only in one direction.

Now, when friendliness between nations has slackened to the vanishing point, when it is every fellow for himself again and the devil take the hindmost to arm, when autocracy, the regulating of opinion, the negation of personal freedom, are cried up, when everything that youth throughout the ages has traditionally rebelled against is in fashion, and all that youth has traditionally fought for is cried down, it is well to examine the conduct of youth in a decade where it has had the center of the stage.

The result of such a survey is disillusion. In American literature, the youngsters who were acclaimed because they were young and because youth alone knew what was what, are middle-aged and second-rate or sunk altogether. William Faulkner, who was preternaturally old when he was young, is still among the promising. So is Hemingway, who still writes like a youth, with the youth's virtue of candor, youth's defect of monotony, and youth's vice of unrestraint. We have had no successors in poetry to Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, except Stephen Benét and Archibald MacLeish. There are no successors to Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Booth Tarkington, Ellen Glasgow with anything like their volume of sus-

tained achievement. And yet it has been fifteen years since youth took control.

Europe displays the extraordinary and unhappy phenomenon of a debacle of the youth movement as bad as the ending of the most unfortunate crusade. The youths of the early Twenties, who were going to remake Western Europe, have sunk into middle age without a trace. Their immediate successors, the youths of the late Nineteen Twenties and early Nineteen Thirties, have in the wide Teutonic region, gained indeed that authority over their elders which those who hoped to get rid of "the wicked old men" prophesied—but in seizing central Europe they have thrown overboard every other ideal of the flaming, enthusiastic youth of 1920. They have thrown overboard also the great liberal heritage of the nineteenth century which generations of youths before them fought to gain. They have given up the right to opinion, the right to think clearly, the right to protest against mastery by force, the right to call their souls their own. They have swallowed masses of contradictory ideology which would have nauseated the eighteenth century; in order to regain their self-respect after a military defeat and unjust political oppression they have accepted demagogues, and, so far as one can tell from published reports, lent themselves freely to a campaign for another war while naively believing the statements of their leaders that only peace is intended.

The reign of youth in literature in the U. S. A. has undoubtedly accomplished something. It has encouraged frankness, which would probably have come anyway. It has opened areas of life for literary exploitation in fiction and drama to writers of an age best able to make them realistic, though not necessarily or probably best able to interpret them. But the reasoned verdict must be that the decade is an interregnum.

The elders carried on. The future does not belong to the generation that was given an unprecedented opportunity.

As for Europe and its hot spot of politics in Germany, no observer here can view with anything but dismay the spectacle of the easily gained confidence of youth, enlisted, inspired, intoxicated by the most skillful propagandists of our time for the re-creation of a great people by ideals which we had thought safely dead and buried. The situation is really worse than this, for if the Hitler ideals were all bad, if he were merely a Prussian tyrant, escape would come with his first defeat. But unhappily the Nazi philosophy, in so far as it has been exposed, is a melange of socialism, Italian fascism, communist conceptions of education and a minority dictatorship, military autocracy, and a modern Machiavellianism of bunk—and all of this the youth of Germany, and many of the youths of Austria, Switzerland, Holland, and elsewhere, have swallowed in a gulp, like the ideas in a lecture course by a popular professor.

There *were* "wicked old men," and a state or a philosophy or an economic organism dominated by old men and idealized by old women is a menace. But which is preferable, the fossil conventions of the old, their corruptions, their self-seeking, or the raw enthusiasms of youth, their lack of foresight, and their reliance upon noise and brute strength? The answer, of course, is neither, and indeed, when the dust settles again after the present conflict, it will be evident that one of the most dangerous results of the war and of the post-war dislocations was this split between generations which has forced the world to take sides either with age or with youth. The old men began this era of discord. It seems that youth will be responsible for the next. Such is the karma that pursues the attempt to free energy from deliberation, and to make a new world, either in literature or politics, in ignorance or contempt of the past.

2. A MIDDLE-AGED WORLD

Blessed are the middle-aged for they shall inherit the earth. So Mr. Ellsworth Huntington implies in an essay, where he states that in his opinion the popularity of biography is due to the increasing number of the middle-aged in a civilization that has notably lifted the survival average.

If the ratio of the middle-aged to the young has increased perceptibly, in this population change may be found the cause of other curious changes in books and the bookish. What explains, for example, the emphasis upon youth and the problems of youth in books of all kinds since the war? Unrest has been an answer; the revolt of a new generation against the failure of its predecessors, another; the new psychology and its revelation of conditioning, a third. But may not one simple reply be merely that there are more middle-aged readers and writers who, being middle-aged, think in their reading and writing of youth as a special problem? It is with surprise that we of this middle-aged generation discover casually in reading Shakespeare, Stendhal, Jane Austen, whatever you please among earlier classics, that the hero is only twenty-two or -three. We had not thought of him as young, as youth personified, nor did the author. He was, to us and to the writer, merely typical man making his career. His problem was not specifically youth's problem, it was man's. We of thirty or forty or fifty as we followed his story, identified ourselves with him, our career with his, and we saw no incongruity when, after a few years of struggle, his active career ended in a settlement for life unless the fact slipped out by chance that he was still only twenty-seven or twenty-eight!

But no one can write of twenty-two to twenty-eight that way now. In a world going middle-aged this is no longer the

area of typical experience, which comes later. The twenties have been made into a province, the testing ground of youth, with its own problems, its own psychology, and particularly its own point of view, which is tentative, special, privileged, and conditioned by post adolescence; not typical, general, and characteristic of the mature man or woman, the norm of the race.

And furthermore, the extraordinary recent interest in youth's problems, youth's cockiness, youth's experiments, and youth's disasters may have been in some measure due to the fascinated interest with which the man or woman whose pattern of life is established watches the pattern-making of the unformed and uncrystallized. It is, if you please, the romance of the middle-aged, and it is true also that perhaps the majority of successful books about the young have been written by the middle-aged, who set forth a problem not so much of the might-have-been as of the may-well-be. When men and women in their forties and fifties dominate their world, hold the jobs, exceed in the census, *are* the norm of the population, then if they write or read of the twenties, it will be as of one class surveying another. When, a century ago, readers and writers were most of them in their thirties or twenties, these special circumstances of youth did not seem special, were not, in effect, special, and hence were not differentiated for objective analysis.

Is the excess of the middle-aged responsible too for the increased pornography in both fiction and drama—for youth is essentially chaster than middle age? Is the sag of the census toward middle age one cause for the abundance of plans and panaceas for everything from economic distress to birth control which now takes up so much yardage on the shelves for new books? Youth is not speculative, and when dogmatic keeps to the main road. Who writes all the mediocre poetry, so skill-

ful technically, so literary, and so empty? Does it come from poets who a few generations ago would have died young and still inarticulate? What will literature be like when a stationary population, with a low birthrate, has a life expectancy of, say, seventy, and the bulk of the population is over forty? These queries may seek vainly for answers, but they are not idle. The blood, muscle, and nerves of a man of twenty are the same now as in the Renaissance, when instead of years ahead of education and waiting for his chance the youth might already be a conqueror, a tyrant, or a darling of the intellectualists. This has a bearing upon more than literature.

3. WHAT DO THEY WANT?

An overwhelming percentage among our young writers seem to want something definite, positive, constructive in imaginative writing. They are tired of debunking, of "whining, futility, defeatism." They are weary of the sordid. They are bored by exposures. They are fed up with passive pessimism. They are tired of a literature blocked by a series of red lights, like a cross town street in New York with a stop at every corner. They frankly don't know where they are going, but want to go toward a literature that will embrace the problems of modern living, and be genuine and beautiful, not sentimental or ugly. When asked they might reply: "We have been adequately disillusioned. We can be trusted not to be Pollyannas, Walt Whitmans, boobs, or sob sisters. We don't want to be wounded souls, pathological minds, sourbellies, or crabbers. Give us a chance to go ahead! We are realists with a plus sign on our sweaters."

Now all this may be nothing but words. The percentage of young men and women out of college and without a job is so alarmingly high as to explain any kind of pressure of hope

upon will. Keep a young fellow inactive and he will long for anything that is strenuous, including war. Hold back a creative mind, give it no access to the public, force it into idleness or into writing slush, tripe, and sensationalism for a living, and what happens? Either you get satirists and cynics or an overwhelming desire to break through into clearer air. The first result was typical in the Twenties; but who wants any more to belong to a lost generation? That medal has lost its gilding. The new desire is to be builders not wreckers, playwrights not critics, creators not debunkers. Is it just words?

I do not believe for an instant that it is just words. The desire is strong, nor is there any reason why the young writers should not be as positive and constructive as the engineers of America, and the propagandists of individualism in business, and the New Dealers, and the economists of abundance—why they should not lock horns in an equivalent conflict of utterly divergent opinions as to which road leads backward and which ahead. But their job is much more delicate because if they *are* creative minds, and not merely what Mrs. Colum calls tradesmen of letters, they have to build edifices of will and wish and ought and can, in which the imaginations of readers will come to live. For the creative writer only one practical fact about America is of supreme importance. It clearly isn't finished. It is still a country capable of immense surprises, a country that can still escape from the rigidity of circumstance that threatens islands, statelets, and walled-in communities of Europe with petrification, atrophy, or suffocation, only to be escaped by the immense hazards of preventive war. And if he feels that carping is bankrupt and it is time to switch the red light into green, then it is his job to create the attitude of mind suitable to a progressing state. For most of us when we fail to act according to common sense or greed or panic or whatever else is

dictated by circumstance, do so because we have dramatized ourselves as this or that sort of a person, have borrowed a dress for the imagination, and tried to live up to it. And this dress it has always been the function of the creative mind of the artist or writer or philosopher to supply. It is only a dress, easily shed, easily tattered and soiled, but such clothes do in a very real sense at least help to make the man.

If then these pious aspirations of the young writers are not merely words, it is fair to ask them what they mean by constructive, positive, definite. The youth of Russia, Germany, and Italy (in this respect at least all of the same emotional breed) have gone over wholeheartedly to the positive, the constructive, the definite. They have accepted force as their principle and backed it up by a persuasion which has often been only the rubber casing of a blackjack. The business of the creative writer in such a situation is made simple. Only one attitude of mind is allowable and hence he becomes a propagandist, or (as in Germany and Italy) ceases writing at all. The first question our confident young Americans who propose to embrace the problems of modern living must answer is whether by constructive action they mean violence. And if they do mean violence whose violence? The fascists' attempt to discipline a state so that the profits of capitalism may be guaranteed? The communists' attempt to give power to the proletariat so that every man will some day have his chance? Or some different kind of force applied, which will reinvigorate America? That would be positive, and either constructive or destructive? But what does it mean to the imagination? Let them say.

But if they do not believe in violence unrestrained by law, if, like the majority of all creative writers from Plato and the New Testament down, they are skeptical of force as a solution, and aware that the pen that starts a revolution is usually broken

before it is over, then of what can they be confident? Reading the debunking books of the Twenties, and reading the "success stories" of the same period, alike made us all wonder what was worth saving in America. These young writers do not feel that way. They believe apparently that we are in for tumult, for the breakdown of stale institutions, for violence, even if not for a rule by violence. But their still unexpressed imaginations go beyond all this to some idea of a state, of a culture, of an attitude of mind worth having. Well, what is it? We should like to know, both because many of us of an older generation have confidence, too, vague yet strong; but also because we fear that youth on the march, not sure of where it is going, and shouting, "Let's *do* something," is an easy mark for demagogues, dictators, fanatics, and empty-headed idealists.

And, indeed, strong sympathy must go out to youth in this dilemma. For youth in this country, whether left, right, or middle, is clearly suffering from too much triviality in the appeals to its imagination. Our young men and women in vast majority are, presumably, opposed to the mass-enthusiasms, mass-propagandizings, and mass-prejudices of youth under the dictatorships. There is no indication that they long to be voted 99% for a given ideology, or yearn to beat Jewish professors, call their parents bourgeois bacteria, or yield up their freedom of thought in the interest of a militaristic machine. And yet, there must be and there is an intense desire among young men and women whose youth has been spent in the greed and folly of the boom, the anarchy of the depression, the experiments and the recriminations of the New Deal era—there is certainly an intense desire to be part of an upsurge of real patriotism, which rises above caution and profit-making, above war-mongering and Red-chasing, above demagoguery and political incapacity, to some plane of thought and action where the indi-

vidual is swept with his fellows along a road whose terminal is more inspiring than a fortune, a safe job, or the victory of a party whose platform is only stay-in or get-in. To these millions much that is printed, said, and done now must seem trivial. And if their radical left speaks loudest just now in terms that are often absurd and sometimes merely violent, that does not mean that the right and middle have not their own strong feelings, so far largely inarticulate, but likely to be impressive when expressed.

Chapter V

ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

I. THE PULSE OF THE MACHINE

*T*HE standardizing of the modern world is much more superficial than it seems. Auto-busses rattle down the passes where the Spaniards drove the Moor, but the peasants who ride in them are not changed by speed, and an hour later will be swaying donkey-back on the last lap homeward with the same Spanish thoughts, the rhythm of their lives no more speeded than the steps of the ass whose ancestors bore the Phoenician over the same road at the same pace. Black-haired, blue-eyed girls on the quay of Split, and white-robed Arab women from the Atlas in the garden park of Tetuan, listen to the same jazz blared from a loud-speaker in a café, and are so little likened thereby that the vast differences between them are merely emphasized. The scientific mind, classifying, identifying, defining, has missed subtler distinctions in temperament, and in the pressure of emotions, which are prepotent in life—as the uncontrollable illogicalities of nationalism show.

The influences which mold temperament, and therefore social relationships, religion, and art, and especially the art of literature, are still many of them natural. Wind, rain, sun, plain, valley, mountain, in their combinations and permutations, are assuredly the sculptors of habit now as in the past, even in cities. This cannot be proved, but it can be felt, and has been felt by everyone who knows sensitively Chicago, New

York, London, Paris, and Madrid. But it is easy to prove the potency of climate and physical environment beyond the boulevards. No race stays the same in Andalusia, Indiana, and Ireland.

The importance of these regional distinctions in literature has been often discussed but seldom carried beyond an analysis of local peculiarity or a dubious statement of facts of resemblance between torrid heat and torrid expression, or drab horizons and drabness of thought. The real importance of environment does not lie in what of stimulus or depression, or of color or its lack, or even the beauty or the ugliness it contributes, but in a fortunate balance between that which is shaped and the shaper which does not come often and when it comes is decisive. Length of days in a land and the innate capacities of peoples, about which we really know very little, are undoubtedly influential. Yet most important in the history of civilization are those fortunate moments of time and place when with the synchronizing beat of a perfect machine a race becomes at home in its country and the country in its race. For such a statement the truest example is best, which is Greece, since everyone knows Greek architecture and Greek sculpture, and yet no one knows either who has not seen them at home. It is a tribute to the genius of the creators that the streaked and lightless Elgin Marbles in the British Museum should be powerful and the *Iliad* stir the imagination even in English and in the North. But it is no explanation of Grecian art, for that is inseparable from the gray, shimmering light in which, if not for which, it was created. Two columns of the Parthenon were as truly built to enclose an arc of inward-glowing Hymettus or a span of purple sea and violet mountain as to carry the roof which housed Athene. Somehow the balance came true for a century or so between the land and its people, and the art

which expressed it derived its rhythm from this fortunate harmony. For it is not too much to say that the mountains and the seas and the valleys of Greece are composed as the sculptors of Greece if they had been at the making would have arranged them, so that one rubs the eyes to be sure whether one sees the background of peak, vale, and curving inlet through the powerful and transforming vision of the artists, or the art of Greece as a refinement of its background. Both visions are true.

Rarely do such moments endure beyond a fortunate century as in Greece, or in Renaissance England, or in the classic age of France. It is the lucky balance itself—between skies and the man, between the medium of life and the ego—which works miracles when what seem to be miracles occur in art. In America, both Thoreau and Emerson were well aware of this principle and urged it upon the writers of their New England, but there was a fundamental maladjustment between the inbred Puritanism of their age and the dynamic qualities of the American environment which they were too much creatures of their own thinking to realize. Whitman came near to the ideals, impossible for that place, time, and personnel, which they set forth so confidently, but Whitman, that lovable braggart, that slovenly colossus, is a better example of the straining of a new nation to express the surprises of its environment than of the harmony between a land and its people.

These reflections inevitably lead to a local and timely application. For surely the problem of race vs. environment is just as obsessing in the American 1930s as in the New England 1840s. This is what "regional" literature means, at least for us. And how many recent American novels, from such types of the best seller as Stark Young's "So Red the Rose" to the philosophic or economic or psychological or propagandist

stories of Louis Adamic, James Farrell, Erskine Caldwell, etc., etc., are puzzled strugglings with the victims or heroes of circumstance in the American scene!

No one doubts (and British and French critics, for example, are free to admit) the virility and richness of these novels, especially those which deal specifically with regional life and regional problems, whether they be of the plains, of the cotton fields, or of the steel mills. But there is a painful lack of rhythm in the most original of these books, all the way from the old master Dreiser to the young Halpers and O'Haras, a lack not merely of rhythm of style in which our predilections for earlier rhythms may mislead us, but of that rhythm of harmony between subject and expression which is unmistakable to the experienced reader. The garments of the creative mind are ill fitting. They could be taken in, clipped shorter, wrapped together, recut, and still the book would be improved, and still it would not be right. These writers have too much to say to say it well—but that is a rhetorical criticism. They have quantities of experience and no design for a container—but that is a result, not a cause, of their failure. Does not the difficulty lie deeper and may it not be found in the tension between people and environment which is sharper in America than elsewhere? For here we have not only the mixed breeds of a dozen nations still conscious of other homes, but factors even more significant. Here the entrance of mechanics into environment is most pronounced. Here change of base is most frequent. Here the new experiment of a nature put in control where control is possible is most advanced and most disturbing. Thoreau described the Americans as Europeans straining to adjust themselves to new skies. It would be truer today to assert that Americans more than their fellow men elsewhere are straining also to adjust themselves to an environment into

which steel, concrete, gasoline, and electricity have been intruded in a manner simple enough to science, but confusing to art because confusing to life. The question is not that abstraction of woman's club's discussions, When shall we have a great art? but the much more cogent question as to when shall we have a good life which means, among other things, a harmony with environment. For it is probably true that if there is such a thing as racial happiness, it is closely related to a harmony with environment, a harmony to which power, prosperity, wealth, or even comfort, may be either relevant or irrelevant. And of such a harmony, good art seems to be a sure indication, even if it cannot be an inevitable result. The books of the new regionalists lack essential rhythm because time, place, and people have not yet harmoniously met in our America. Perhaps they never will.

It is true that there are a few among the recent novels of local life of which one can say, This, so far as it goes, is perfect. But it would be found that usually their authors have dodged the mechanized environment entirely and have given us as hero either a romantic or more usually a degenerated European gone back to the primitive in the swamps or the cotton fields or the mountains, who is as much a creature of his environment as the woodchuck on the hill, the whip-poor-will in the meadow. They have attempted no such type of truly representative humanity as was the Greek athlete stripped and shining in the shimmering light of the race track above the Delphian gulf, because no such instance of perfect harmony, beautiful not in the crude sense of curve and color, but because it is harmonious, exists in our America. When it comes, if it comes, it will surely not be Greek, and its authentic power will be quite as unmistakable as the dignity of the bronze charioteer at Delphi or the character of Odysseus or Hector.

2. PATTERNS

There is nothing more delicately organized than a habit. Touch blood, touch bone, and recovery quickly follows; but break a habit, or change or confuse it, and a series of nervous shocks follows down the days. The man insensibly alters, and the man's emotions and the man's thinking with him. The pattern of his life may remain the same outwardly, but it quivers like a spider's web, and if he is a writer these vibrations pass into literature.

The anarchy, or more properly the riot, of standards, in which we find ourselves now is due in part to such a cause. Never before, except in periods of national breakdown, have habits been so shaken out of their pattern as in this generation. The habits themselves may have been trivial, but the results have not been proportionately small. From the mid-nineteenth century on the advance of applied science has reached and shaken every familiar custom. Speed, to cite only one example, is a good thing in itself, and sensible people have wondered why the stick-in-the-muds have made such an outcry against stretching man's legs to cover a county instead of the village green. Of course it was not speed in itself but the habits broken by speed which caused the violent changes in human conduct for which Mr. Ford finds himself so surprisingly blamed. Whole peoples, as we can readily see now, began to do pretty much everything differently, and while what they did was frequently better than what they had done before, their habit pattern was shaken. Life lost some of its accountability. Something very deep in human nature, a nerve rhythm perhaps, certainly an accustomed alternation of energy and rest, was upset by the possibility or the growing necessity of speed. Men spoke as before, were moved as before by greed and love, but

they did not feel quite as before. They had broken age-long habits of going just so far, just so often, just so fast, and trivial though that breaking seemed, it had incalculable results. Telephones made communication wider, more frequent, and less personal, radios and cheap magazines kept the outside world present even in privacy. Change, the rapid physical change of a machine age, kept environment in a constant flux, so that no scene for the urban dweller was the same for more than a year at a time. Noise became the background of all other sounds in the ear. The economics of production sharply altered the content of man's imagination from simple wants held in control, to elaborate desires encouraged by every means known to advertising. And so rapidly did all this happen that the children, the parents, and the grandparents came to speak three different languages and to boast of not being able to understand each other.

But how can transportation and communication, said the preachers and philosophers, affect the eternal verities? Does not human nature remain substantially the same? Is God less God because two million cars and a million radio sets are manufactured in a year?

They missed the point. Habits were changed or broken, and you cannot alter the pattern of human habits without altering thinking and the product of the emotions. Socrates would not have been Socrates if he had lived in Montclair and commuted; yet, thanks to industrialism, he would have had to live in Montclair (or Princeton) if he sought quiet, and would have had to commute if he were to know his Athens. Break his habits and to some extent you remake him.

Therefore it may be said with some justice that the restless and diverse literature of this age, which points a dozen ways, and seems to deny Spengler's dictum that all the products of a

given period show an essential kinship, owes its nervous instability and almost hysterical experimenting to unsettled lives and broken habits. Just as the child of divorced parents becomes again and again a school problem, so the book of an author psychologically unsettled in an unstable environment becomes a nervous and unsettled book. Power it may have, but seldom wisdom and peace. If you doubt, talk to the authors. They above all others are flotsam and jetsam on a sea of new experience. They have lost the pattern in their own lives and find none in the life about them. Therefore they depict, and rightly, change. Change is the theme of most American novels, and spiritual upset the theme of most modern poetry, when it has a theme at all. They are right, for it is not tradition, not order, not pattern which is characteristic of the age, but their opposites. They are right, but unfortunate, since it is the breach of habit and the tension which follows that accounts for their nervousness and hysteria, and accounts also for the patent-medicine idealism of the popular magazines which denies what is most true of modern life. We shall get no standards except in the abstract until the life pattern ceases to shake so wildly.

3. RENDER THEREFORE UNTO CAESAR

The blight upon modern literature is its lack of self-confidence. It is increasingly evident that an innate sense of inferiority to the great and tangible achievements of pure and applied science has accounted for some of the ills, many of the extravagances, and most of the impudences or evasions of modernism. This inferiority is conscious only in gentler souls, or in those rare spirits close to the secrets of truth and beauty whose intuitions in happier times would have made of them prophets and leaders of the mind. The less sensitive, the lesser artists, have made money from the inhibitions of art. Never

has the utilitarianism of literature been more loudly asserted, and never, perhaps, has so much scientific fact (often inaccurate) been worked into literature and given to the public in drama and novel. The novelists, particularly, have grasped every kind of information, from the mystic's apprehension of natural beauty to the internal secretions of the glands, and put it into fiction. And the modern novel has become a genre of great variety and power, a hybrid daughter of science and art, with the efficiency of all mixed races, but sterile, like the mule, and leading nowhere ahead toward a great imaginative art, for which it is probable that we shall have to return again to poetry, which has lagged behind in this world-wide attempt to turn literature into enlightened commonsense.

Subconsciously, if not consciously, three generations have been weighed down by a sense of the illusory character of pure art. They have flinched from it, they have overlaid it, they have made compounds and substitutes, they have sometimes denied it altogether, as they have flinched from or denied or socialized religion. The appalling ugliness of the industrial city is only a symbol of the fact that its inhabitants did not believe in the reality of beauty. The freakish devices of the modernist-artist—whether in words or in paint—to force attention upon the difference of his vision from the vision of other men, is a symptom of the desperate eccentricity of a despised minority. Even so the Christian martyr astonished the barbarians by scourging his flesh with thorns and flying from cities to the wilderness. He had a vision which they would not share.

There were no Elizabethan lyrics in this recent age, content to be lovely, no satires brilliant with the certainty of a Pope that the reason could itself make facts as well as interpret them, no passionate transcripts of pure beauty like Keats's odes, as confident and as elemental as a crystal or a mountain,

no dramas like Shakespeare's, where the author goes straight to the heart of character without asking questions of statistics on the way.

Indeed, viewed this way, the best known and widest read in modern literature has been one long excuse. The novels of H. G. Wells are sociology put into narrative, the plays of Shaw (before "Saint Joan") are social ideas dramatized. The poetry of Masfield, at its best, is a transcript of daily life asking credence because it is daily life, though shot through with imagination. The novels of Sinclair Lewis are scientifically exact reporting. The criticism of a Valéry, of a Croce, and, to take a recent instance, of Joseph Wood Krutch, rests upon an implication that since a mechanistic universe is likely to be demonstrated, the artist, to satisfy instincts in himself, probably illusory, must find his sanctions in pure expressiveness, or in the beauty of negation.

And in the books of the experimentalists—Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Dos Passos, the romanticist O'Neill—the devil is beat around the bush and through shadows where queer things happen *en route*. For these efforts to escape by technical devices from the mechanics of a science which seemed to be turning plays, novels, poems into replicas of "case histories," or making of them mere representations of the typical happenings of an industrialized civilization, are really squirmings and twistings which, with O'Neill, never do escape from the central problem of man and his machine, or, with Joyce, present at the most new ways of studying the commonplace of physical reality, which science has made to seem so important simply because it has been so demonstrably real. The drab and bloated hero of "Ulysses" is not unlike that minor character, the humorist Autolycus of Shakespeare, but he is kept in the spotlight in the modern work because, if behaviorism is to be the prime ob-

ject of study, then the minutiae of animalism, best studied in a gross character, become all-important. The mores of Falstaff, and not his humor, would naturally become the subject of modern literature, which in this respect could rival sociology because the novelist is better equipped to study the behavior of man as an individual than is the cloistered scientist.

Science is the great achievement of the modern world. To relapse from its energies, to lose, as Mr. Chase and Mr. Mumford fear, our handful of technicians who control the complex machines by which we live, to desert in a body (and this, of course, is the real danger) a passionate study of science in order to grapple with problems more directly concerned with the moral welfare of mankind, would be to repeat the experience of the Dark Ages. For there is no better explanation of the decline of the last great civilization than to say that men gradually lost interest in the arts and sciences necessary for the upkeep of civilized life.

Such a crisis may come, but a nearer one impends, and those who pass through it may find a new aesthetic, a new religion, a new criticism, and a new interest in living, without forfeiting those "glorious gains" by which Tennyson seemed chiefly to mean the fruits of the industrial revolution. There need be no destruction of science as in the past. It may be that one more war, or one more turn of the screw that is clamping modern life to its bed of materialism, will quench the fire of research into the properties of things, turn inventors into prophets, and send engineers into what little desert they have left us, to study their souls. But this is probably a bad dream of the discouraged idealist. If there is to be a revolution, it will not come because scientists give up their attempt to subdue the universe but from the modern revelation that beauty, religion,

art, are as real as the atom and as the electron. And that could mean, not revolution but renaissance.

Our task is not clear but its terms are evident. We need trust no theorizing of science, but must apparently soon accept a demonstrated fact. There are three realities: a sense world of matter which can be used as food, steam, flesh, and blood, but not understood rationally, since under analysis it dissolves to nothing; a shadow world of mathematics where the reality grasped by our senses curves back upon itself in the hypersphere of the universe; and beyond, another reality, equally valid, if equally intangible, from which the intuition draws perceptions of beauty and the idea of God. With the first reality and the second science deals, and there finds and establishes its limit. Beyond, in realities grasped by the consciousness, in the form of a statue, the composition of a picture, the beauty of music, or the mystical sense of conciliation with spiritual power, science is as helpless as the mystic who would build a steam engine by intuition or analyze salt by gazing upon his navel. We have Fujiyama or Shasta, which eye can see, scales measure, feet climb; we have a direction of ionic movement, measurable, if at all, by speed of light, which is this same mountain shadowed forth in formulas that describe what lies behind the substance our senses grasp; we have the beauty of the mountain; its soaring, its expressive form of which the imagination makes poems and pictures, creating a something meaningful to the intelligence out of a reality which is neither atomic nor mathematical. The atomic mountain remains for us to tread upon. The shadow mountain, a problem for those who by sheer reason may discover why the eye and touch co-ordinate a reality within the insubstantiality of the universe, remains also; but with them, and of equal validity and of as certain (if not more certain) reality, is that entity

of beauty, suggestive in its form, which for a half century we have been regarding, resignedly, reluctantly, or skeptically perhaps, as a function of matter, an illusion, a dream useful to mankind, but not, like the rocks, or light, or a formula, true by any necessity.

Thus there are, for the moment, not one truth, but three: the truth of the senses, the truth of physics, the truth of intuition. This trinity is in all probability a three-in-one, three manifestations of an indissoluble unity. That is for the future to say. Suffice it for us artists, critics, for the religious, for the idealists, for the lovers of beauty and believers in the spirit as an ultimate force, that the way is open to take up the old problems which Plato pondered, which Aquinas solved so neatly, which Kant and Hegel wrote of, with a new confidence that the laboratory is now the ally of those who seek ultimate reality, not the master into whose doors faith and speculation entered to come out as neat formulas such as, environment + heredity = the soul.

We are, philosophically speaking, in the exciting situation of our arboreal ancestors, who came down from the tree, stretched upward, felt the ground solid beneath their feet, and looked about upon a virgin world. The comparison is more picturesque than exact, but it has meaning in it. For the ape man, like the industrial man of the mechanized age, also felt safe only in his tree, where tangible branches were always at hand to grasp when he began to fall through the unreality of mere atmosphere. The long speculative experiment with matter which began with the early Greeks has brought us, not to failure, but to a resounding success. We can control matter if we cannot control ourselves, and we may someday thoroughly understand its cause and all its functions. We know its "statistical probabilities" now, even if we do not know what it is, and

we shall know far more of its interrelations with consciousness before the age of scientific creativeness comes to an end. But most of all (and it seems already safe to assume this) we can point to the limits of scientific inquiry, and say that, alone, it will not and never can explain what poetry is, what pigments and cut stone can do to the imagination, what governs, in the last analysis, morality, what is, or what causes, the deep perception of meaningfulness in a physically meaningless universe, in short (for the old terms are best until one gets new ones) that it cannot explain the nature of the imagination and the soul.

And, what is of more immediate importance for the practitioner of the arts, it seems to be demonstrable that in his imagination and its work he answers questions that science cannot. He is the only guide to whole realms of truth. In a sonnet may be found what lies beyond the possible capacity of all the social sciences to explain.

I have no intention to do more than point the influence that this conviction, once firmly grasped, must have upon the arts, philosophy, metaphysics, religion—most of all upon literature. That it will shift our critical opinions and clarify them is evident. The change will first of all be psychological, for of course the dominance of science as the presumptive solver of all human problems has not made more spiritual inquiries to stand still. But that the strongest minds have spent their energies upon the analysis of natural phenomena because in that direction light was always upon the horizon, will scarcely be disputed. Our Miltons have gone in for mathematics, biology, and atomic research.

The motto in pure literature for the future must be "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." This does not mean that our fiction will disburden itself of the

exactness of science; on the contrary, it is probable that science will be used more intelligently by fiction, drama, and poetry, once it is fully realized that a novel, a poem, or a play must use all science that is relevant but transcend the scientist's search. A slavery will end, a partnership begin.

Let the measurers look to their laurels.

If Shelley writes—

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision—I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud—

the impact of these words, which in their rhythm as well as in their sense carry perceptions of intense reality, must be regarded as of at least equal importance with the reports of the United States Steel Corporation or the investigations into the cause and cure of the hookworm.

There is, indeed, a vast body of critical literature discussing every one of the great problems of aesthetics, religion, and ultimate truth; but little of it that is modern is confident or con-

vincing. When Roger Bacon recorded his experiments in cipher, when the Arabs made their first brilliant researches in the human body, when Democritus and his fellow Greeks first speculated upon the physical nature of the universe, their discoveries had short shrift or brief development, even when known at all, because men fundamentally believed in different realities. It was not until the earth was felt worthy of analysis that science began its great course. And it is because there has been a canker of skepticism at the root of every modern attempt to establish a reality for the moral, the aesthetic, the spiritual worlds, that the best minds in our culture have either given themselves to science, or worked indecisively, leaving speculation upon a doubtful reality to religious cranks, or obsessed upholders of an authority from the past which for them had little meaning. Thanks to the sciences of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and the science in history, we can understand Moses, Plato, Mohammed, Calvin better than ever before. Thanks to the new definitions of reality we are free to go on to a better understanding, and, if the age favors us, have new Platos (one hesitates before new Calvins and Mohammeds) who will use science as a corrective and eliminant, whence wisdom may begin.

This is a job for young men. And if I were directing a university from which creative intellects were expected to emerge, I should insist first of all, and with an emphasis not to be escaped, that every student with speculation in his soul and creation in his power should get that scientific training which our race of critical intellects today conspicuously lacks. And I should insist that he should be grounded for further flights (as our scientists are not) upon all that can be learned from the past, not only of literature, but also of ethics, philosophy, and the practice of metaphysics. For no writer upon criticism who

cannot keep pace with and interpret the results of modern scientific thinking should be listened to in the next decade. Nor should any scientist ignorant of the vast methodology of speculative thinking built up by men who believed in a reality not dependent upon atoms and formulas, dare to adventure upon the mountain path which our thinking must soon begin to follow. If the philosopher without science is an ignoramus, the scientist without philosophy is likely to prove a babe who believes that the world is the arms that support him.

4. SOMEWHAT METAPHYSICAL

Analogies are more interesting than convincing and yet, often, they apply that tiny prick to the imagination that may set the world of thought in a new order. If their bastards are fallacies, their legitimate offspring may be the makers of light.

Reading (somewhat confusedly) of the fields of electrical force which do not float, or emanate, but *are*, in a true relationship to movement and each other, I let my not too mathematical mind sink gratefully upon an analogy in that psychological world of which we who write of things that seem to be as if they were, must prevailingly treat if we are to be intelligible, even to ourselves. For the mind, the consciousness, the psyche—call it what you will—which is the chief subject and only cause of imaginative endeavor, is in every instance itself surrounded by a field of potential energy, and one way of stating the problem of criticism is to ask whether the creative writer has kept a true relation between the mind he writes of and its field.

We move and have our being in the midst of sets of characteristic reactions to our environment and still more characteristic forces exerted by the mind upon that environment. Each age, each culture, each group, each individual has its sur-

rounding field which is intrinsically a part of experience, though by no means necessarily in the consciousness itself. Prejudices belong here, preconceptions of all kinds, the subtle interweavings of the stuff of nature as nature seems at the moment with the stuff of consciousness. Here is to be found the response to the glow of setting suns as well as the homely smells, the noises of the day, the opinions of our time. Here, once, was the sweat of slaves, and now the stench of oil and gasoline; the consciousness of man's pettiness, or the consciousness of man's might; pity or cruelty; the sense of permanence on the soil, or the restlessness of a continual shifting onward propelled by machines.

Some of the great books are convincing because the "field" of the personality is there with all its implications as surely as in life: Homer certainly; Dickens (for the field may be symbolically, even humorously presented); Hardy surely, and Hawthorne, whose rather uncanny power is due far more to his gentle control over auras than to any depth of character insight or skill in interpretive intuition. Milton could project the fields of stark, rebellious spirits, but in the later books of "Paradise Lost" fell into abstractions, which is to say into an isolation of character, as such, apart from its spiritual environment, and so declines into formal description and argument. His Satan was human because he was set in planes of experience and carried, even across chaos, his accompanying "fields" extending through attraction and repulsion into the blankness of space, yet never out of relation to his consciousness. His Christ was a theological concept, logical, but like a symbolic atom isolated in the universe. There is no such atom: there was no such Christ. In life, there is no abstraction, self-contained, intra-logical, and isolated; and there can be none in literature.

To descend from great things to small in the interests of clarity, all this may explain why, for example, the play, "The Age of Innocence," was inferior to Mrs. Wharton's book. The essential drama was to be seen on the stage, the essential character types, but the "field" of that age of innocence in the Seventies, so subtly plotted in by dots and curves in the novel, was by supposed theatric necessity left out. Hence a feeling of disappointment and unreality, a sense that the struggle of the Countess Olenska to reconcile her American ethics with desires that are European, but also very human, is one of those typical dramatic formulas that are always logical, but never convincing when they are torn out of the context of the moment in which they functioned. For literature is never really timeless in the literal sense, though it may be enduring. If it is timeless, it is only because, like Shakespeare or the Greek tragedies, it has once been timely. It carries with it the electrical fields of thought and motion as well as the consciousness that lived in and from and for them.

Perhaps this is only an analogy, but if so, the two parallel lines each lead toward truth, and perhaps in some Einsteinian world meet short of infinity. And whether the comparison is accurate or not, we can draw from it nourishment for the literary mind. Much of the rather unsatisfactory ("unspiritual" some would call it) realism of the last decades suffers from a preoccupation, like the scientists', with "fields" alone, regardless of their significance for the consciousness. Such work may be good experimentation, but unless the field of experience means something in relation to the consciousness, to the ego, that lives and changes within it, then the sterility which inheres in all meaningless phenomena may make these experiments barren. We know so much, for example, of the fields of American

consciousness from, let us say, Dreiser, so little of an ego worth breaking one's heart over!

5. STANDARDS

In the arts, yardsticks have a curious way of lengthening or shortening unless they are carefully watched, and recalibrated occasionally by the aid of new knowledge or a more perfected judgment. Certainly the history of American literary reputations does not indicate that those in authority are always, or even often, right in assessing contemporary merit. The great and enduring names in nineteenth century American literature are, as we should now probably all agree, Irving, Cooper, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James. Others may be added, none of these is likely to be withdrawn. Of this list only Irving, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Henry James got due recognition from the regions of scholarship and criticism in their lifetime. The standards applied were, as was right, taken from precedent literature, but, as was wrong, they were so calibrated as to measure American literature in terms of European, and especially English, expectations. By this measurement, Irving, the romantic conservative with a golden tongue, got more than his due. Cooper, regarded as "the American Scott," was estimated (in spite of his vast popularity) at less than his real worth, for he got little credit among the eminent for his transfusion of a strictly American idealism. Poe, who could not be fitted to the moral inchmarks of the ruler, and whose critical iconoclasm no less than his spurious scholarship had irritated those better educated than he, was ranked as a clever and annoying journalist, and as an elocutionist of morbid verse, both misleading half truths. Emerson had a high seriousness which made his radicalism palatable to the conservatives, and Hawthorne also in-

gratiated the upholders of tradition by dealing with the decay of a civilization about which they had long since made up their minds. Thoreau was fortunate in his friends, but even so made little impact outside of Concord. Melville went down with scarcely a ripple. Whitman and Mark Twain were regarded (as indeed Walt in his first edition described himself) as American roughs. Of them all Henry James, America's culture straining Europeward, got the most just estimation in his lifetime, but that may seem to be true only because we are still so near to his fame.

The moral of all this can scarcely have justice done it in a brief essay, but this at least may be said for current application: We are living among what some regard as inevitable phenomena of the last stages of capitalism, and others as merely the result of selling to the masses the things they can most easily be made to want. Hence commercialized writing that dips lower and lower in the attempt to broaden its market. Hence experimental literature seeking unexploited themes. Hence a dying and ineffective "genteel tradition" that chooses mild reflections of the past for its approbation, and an anarchy outside of it, full of vigor but lacking in ascertainable direction.

In such a time standards were never so needed, but they must be applied after a much closer scrutiny of this civilization than literary critics have been willing to give. Only three courses, it seems, are open and possible for the reader who would form valid opinions upon the imagination operating in America today—or rather, in that North Atlantic culture of which more and more we become a but lightly differentiated part. He can firmly cast out all modernism as of the devil and his works, repudiating his own times entire, and admitting his own weakness in his failure either to dominate or adjust. That is one alternative, and if some of our conservatives would

dare to take it with all its implications they would be more honest and more effective critics, which is not to say that they would be right. Or he can throw down all standards except success in self-expression, and urge art to follow science in a great pragmatic experiment. And this is what has been happening for the past ten years, to the detriment, in my opinion, of art. Or, finally, he can be willing to take counsel from the mistakes as well as the certainties of the past, and regard his own age as just another turn of the kaleidoscope, in which the principles which govern composition must be studied out anew. They are the same principles, but the patterns have changed, and if not to his liking it is his duty, not to curse the box, but to find out the reason for their ugliness, if ugly they really are. This is by far the most difficult choice, for the critic must admit that he is part of the times he criticizes, while keeping if he can his independence of judgment. It is easier to repudiate or to drift.

6. FICTION TELLS ALL

Autobiography—the desire to tell the world all about it—lifts its voice in a wail or a shout once every so often, and usually when the shoe of experience pinches the light foot of the imagination. The Romans had a spell of near-autobiography when the disintegration of the morale of the empire began. A great literature of autobiography accompanied and followed the political and religious tensions of the English seventeenth century. "Pilgrim's Progress" is in its way as autobiographical as the diary of Pepys. The decline of the Italian Renaissance had its Benvenuto Cellini. The stretched and throbbing egos of the romantic movement gave birth to "Childe Harold" and "Wilhelm Meister." And the tense transcendentalism of New England led on to the autobiographical fiction of Melville's "Moby Dick," the autobiographical poetry

of Whitman's "Song of Myself," and four million words in the Journals of Henry Thoreau.

But our 1920s and 1930s were to suffer from a new and virulent form of this impulse to tell it all, this complaint which is sometimes a disease. And until one studies the particular kind of egoism that has been plaguing our contemporaries it is quite impossible to understand why we have been showered with books which our grandfathers would have burned for their indecency, which the pastors of the early nineteenth century would have regarded as written by Satan himself, and which many a wise physician even then might have recognized as the truth at last about many aspects of the sick mind for which not even names had been invented.

Very little of this characteristically modern literature is frankly autobiographical. Some of it is biographical. A little is poetry and drama. It is in fiction that its throbbing waves find their best mouthpiece. Its motive is not that sense of *sin* which has produced so many great autobiographies. Nor is it the *joy*, which, as spiritual exaltation has been the inspiration of the famous autobiographical books of the Catholic mystics. It is not *faith*, which has written great poetry, autobiographical in nature, and some of our noblest prose. This modern literature, and especially the fiction, has been most characteristically (let us say, in Joyce, Hemingway, Proust) confession for the sake of confession—a nudism of the ego, exactly parallel to certain kinds of religious confession, except that it is inspired by the natural not the supernatural, and deals not with God in the mind but with the mind itself.

It is easy to see now that these "frank," revealing books, which try so hard to tell all that "genteel" literature had concealed, were inevitable, although the intensity of the more pathological specimens evidently has been due to special cir-

circumstances deriving from the distress and warpings of the war and the depression. The humanism of the Renaissance was sure before it ran its course to encounter some changed conception of the value of the individual which would bring an equivalent change in its emphasis upon the purely human; and this happened of course when the rise of the middle class and later of the masses into an importance never before known led to that literary realism which is probably the outstanding characteristic of the literature of the last century. But the great change came with the growth of the science of physiology and the pseudo, or part, science of psychology. When the students of abnormal psychology had done their work, and especially after Freud had made his generalizations, it required no genius of criticism to prophesy that fiction would follow the trail. For if the scientist could learn much about normal man from studying abnormality, it was clear that the literary realist would soon begin to put into his imaginative pictures of everyday humanity dark tones and subtle colors drawn from the phantasies of fear or desire which all but the most stolid among us carry somewhere near the heart.

But artists are not scientists. They are sensitive souls who record and express, who use theories, and indeed facts, only when these help them to make sense of what they see and feel. And here was humanity set before them in a new aspect by psychologists, who professed to give new explanations of that human tendency to make a mess of things which is what plots are made of, and at the same time invented a new language with such admirable terms in it as "complex" and "introvert" and "phantasy," so that any hack could write his old stories over again using entirely new words. Here also were interesting and often convincing explanations of the mental wounds which the sensitive writer is always the first to feel in himself

and to see in others. Naturally these writers told the world, rushing into one form or another of autobiography.

I am not writing here a history of recent literature and, therefore, I need only say that the first stirrings of all this began long before the war. But surely it was the intensities of war experience that brought on the flood. One remembers the painful vividness of Barbusse's "Le Feu," written early in the great conflict, which seemed to be the cry of man saying, "Such things as these never happened to me before"; or Wells's "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," which was the detailed account of one man trying to make up his mind; or the passionate autobiography of the first poets of the war, lovers of English soil, and the equally autobiographical disillusion of those that followed.

The real significance, however, is revealed later, and especially in that lengthy story of *un homme moyen sensuel*, Joyce's "Ulysses," and his Mr. Bloom whose reflections take place in lavatories and whose most gross or trivial phantasies are the very thread of the plot, or in the painfully minute and subtle analyses of sophisticated sensation that emanated like radio waves from the darkened room of that sensitive ego, Proust.

And thus the stage was set for the redressing of a great injustice in literature—and for an orgy which celebrated one of the greatest defeats in all time of the Greek principle of measure, balance, not anything too much. The age of reticence ended with a bang.

The plain man—not the primitive peasant, not the poor, not the oppressed—but the very ordinary individual who best represents the unheroic, undistinguished, largely incapable millions who make up most of the modern world, never had a show in literature until the new realism sought him out. Perhaps he never had a show then until minds as unpoetic,

as unheroic, as unaesthetic as his own made him their task, and wrote of him, as Theodore Dreiser did in "The American Tragedy," in a style as undistinguished as the style of the newspapers he read. That job was done, and it seemed that the novelty of being ordinary would soon wear off and that the novelists would seek other material; but now a new vista opened. The class consciousness of Marxism began to give a significance to the masses which they never had before, and if only an undistinguished individual happened to be a "worker," he became valuable for fiction. Unfortunately the so-called proletarian novelists, like Halper, Greenwood, Cantwell, have been photographers not painters, and their books are with few exceptions deadly dull, so that even the "workers" will not read them. Their authors are all bourgeois on slumming expeditions, and that probably explains why even the best of their stories lack the conviction of the great novels of the middle class. The writers have told the world what they saw, not what they were. We shall have to wait for some time before this attempt to right a literary wrong and put the class struggle into fiction becomes more than a worthy experiment.

A far less theoretical and far more intimate problem was waiting just round the corner of the twentieth century, and this is the injustice to which I referred above. The sick mind, sick from war, sick from the speeds of industrialism, sick from too much knowledge and too fevered thinking, sick from those complicated ills which psychology had been studying, never had been given its day in literature. Oh, yes, there were Hamlets, and Iphigenias, and Wilhelm Meisters, and Frankensteins; these, however, were all heroes and their phantasies were heroic phantasies. But psychology had been showing that the abnormal was normal in every man if you only looked deep

enough. The sick mind was common enough in our Twenties and Thirties. Its day had come.

An eminent psychiatrist, Dr. Laurence Kubie, in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, made an elaborate psychoanalysis of a book by one of these writers, Faulkner, and of another book by Erskine Caldwell, who belongs in the same gallery. His findings were unusually specific and intelligible for psychology. He discovered definite phantasies such as are familiar to all psychologists with clinical experience, and showed that upon these phantasies the stories were erected, and that from them they drew their intensity and their symbolism. The horror behind Faulkner's "Sanctuary" was the universal fear of impotence. The fantasy behind Caldwell's book was (to oversimplify) the child's craving for the protection of the womb.

I need not go into these technical aspects of this literature of pathology, for my purpose here differs from that of Dr. Kubie, who made no attempt to evaluate either its artistic worth or the temporal causes. I am interested in the reason why this outbreak of a literature of the underworld of the mind should come now, and what it portends for ourselves and for our reading.

Here is Hemingway with his eruptive, monosyllabic style, from which all the fluent rhythms of the old romanticists have been carefully eliminated. He tells a vivid and painful story, dragged from him it seems by reluctant need. His characters are always afraid, afraid often, as has been suggested, of being afraid. They are usually clearly pathological types, and felt to be so, like his killers, or men and women once normal but warped until their egos can no longer stand the strain of experience, women like Britt in "The Sun Also Rises," men such as the hero of "Farewell to Arms" whose mind is a wound. And Hemingway writes like a man seeking release, the release

of confession. I do not mean to imply that his books are autobiography in a literal sense, although it is obvious that the autobiographical element is strong. But news of what war does to the soul, or fear of one's father, or of impotence, or of the lust to kill,—such news of the ego they all contain. They will out, these secrets the surface normality of society has so well concealed, and they come with a lurid tensivity which is the more vivid because the writing seems to be so restrained.

Little need be added for William Faulkner except to point out again the confessional nature in his stories. This man's tongue has been unleashed to tell of simple, dull people who have the horrors or make them. His Mississippi is a madhouse for the mildly insane, who act so much like poor whites limited merely by education and intelligence that it is only slowly that one realizes why their stories are so poignant. Poverty, drink, frustration have made the phantasies that plague us all dominate them. Faulkner, like many a supersensitive person, has seen the obsessions of cruelty, fear, and blind hate just under the surface of plain men and women, and has not waited to balance them with their opposites, but rushed into the news with his experience, precisely as the tabloid reporter rushes into the news the exploits of a fiend in a sober community. The pained ego must cleanse its bosom of this perilous stuff, and does not take much care to see where and how the mess splashes.

As for Thomas Wolfe, here is autobiographical realism at its peak. Millions of words recording every act, every thought, every opinion in the youth of a character who wears the thinnest of disguises and is clearly most of the time the author himself. Pen portraits of contemporaries, attacks on fads and cults, close analyses of frustrated types, long descriptions of eccentrics, passionate appeals to an America that

keeps rushing on and on without regard for what makes healthy minds and good living—a continuous performance of narrative, description, oratory, satire, poetry, gusto, and complaint, circling endlessly like a drunken genius shouting and reciting as he whirls about on a merry-go-round.

I'll tell the world what it does to a youth, says Wolfe. I'll tell the world what fear can do to man, says Faulkner. I'll tell the world what fear and disillusion can do to the mind, says Hemingway. And they tell it, brilliantly or confusedly, profusely or in terse explosions, crassly or with brutal honesty—and especially those cranks and quidities of the sick mind which psychology plus the responsibilities of realism have made to seem important. Hamlet wanted to tell the world, but Horatio reminded him that it was not so important to describe what way madness lay as to show that one could rise above it. There is less literature but more news in the modern method.

A delusive air of youth blows through all these books. They are usually, not always, about the young, or rather the relatively young, and especially those whose true youth was nipped in the war, and who (as in Hemingway's stories) carry on the abandon, the gaiety, the pursuit of risk, chance, and variety characteristic of youth in a mood of strain and disillusion. But it is a delusive air. These are old souls writing, even though they are Americans, and it does not seem too fanciful to say that in these pseudo-autobiographies one feels the sensitive mind of yesterday's culture trying to adjust itself to a mechanical mass civilization. Note the man-mass that so oppresses Wolfe in Boston and New York, and the facial strain of a nervous life that he speaks of again and again. Remember how Hemingway's sad revelers kept drinking so that they should think little and feel less; how they madly

pursued fatigue as if it were a new law of life. And these old tired souls in youthful bodies run about holding up their arms and telling their stories, or in fierce restraint they create a warped society of sufferers like themselves, and with cold impartiality tell all that happens in phantasy-ridden minds. Hence the note of defeatism, of cruelty, of pity veiled in scorn, which as much as the subtlety, sincerity, and power of this fiction sharply differentiates it from the success stories of the magazines, which are pathological in another sense, since they represent wish-phantasies.

Hence of course the emphasis upon sex which has spread far beyond the limits of these realistic autobiographies of the ego. It was D. H. Lawrence who, long before the war, showed that the sexual faculties suffered more than any other from both the mechanization and the intellectualizing of modern society. The baleful effect of the overworked intellect upon instincts native and vital to man was the hidden villain in all his important stories. But it was not thinking that he attacked. He himself loved to argue and to speculate like other would-be philosophers. What excited his wrath were the ghastly results when too much logic or too cold a reason was applied to the business of living. Men had come to believe that they could think themselves out of all their difficulties, but mere thinking was no good in love, and without love what was man or woman either? He demanded a release of the primitive passions whose home was in the instincts of sex.

Lawrence was a prophet. When once "Lady Chatterley's Lover" had broken the seals of reticence, sex flowed out of the yeasty egos of the age. Two new fictitious characters attained a bad eminence: the frigid woman and the impotent man—the woman frigid by convention and habit more often than by nature, the man relatively impotent for anything except the

production of children, because his mind was set upon keeping busy or getting rich. A curious essay could be written comparing these villains of the novel of the first third of the twentieth century with the chaste heroines and self-restraining heroes of the middle third of the nineteenth.

But it would be a sad error to suppose that the extraordinary wave of sex literature which has just washed over us, and is now rapidly subsiding into the scum of the film magazines, was due entirely to such a philosophy of back-to-nature as Lawrence preached. Nine-tenths of that sex writing which has been ranging all the way from notable frankness to frank obscenity was release-and-protest literature. You can keep the ordinary talk and interests of ordinary men and women, and literature, in separate compartments for just about so long; then back they swing together, both fouling and enriching each other. The talk in Victorian smoking rooms was no more prudish than in clubs and cafés today, and probably more obscene. The facts of life were certainly not omitted from Victorian women's conversations among themselves. The novels of the day omitted both. A reaction was overdue; and if it was the war that set it off in English, and Lawrence who philosophized it, under no circumstances could it have been delayed much longer. Shaw knew this in the early nineteen hundreds, and Kipling must have guessed it in the nineties.

But it takes more than a decade to get the snicker out of sex, nor is it possible to give authors freedom to write of what they like and word it honestly, without ungagging many a foul mouth.

Now of all remembered autobiography sex experience is likely to be the most poignant. Hence when the disturbed egos of the Twenties began to pour forth the confessions of their youth, and to write about their own experiences in the

guise of fiction, sex memories boiled up in them. Here was something that could not be told in English before in our time. Here were incidents, trivial in themselves, that because the elders had not used their like, were still fresh, unminted, saleable. It was often a dishwater soup that resulted, but served as consommé piquant it got a cheap reputation for the writer, and gave the better ones a much-needed release. Freud has made us all sex conscious, but it took no Freud, once the inquiring mind was set in that direction, to see how sex suppression or sex release permeated at least two-thirds of the events suitable for drama or fiction. Indeed, it would have been far better for literature if Freud had not published his researches, for then we should have seen the writers finding their own way into the just opened frontier of sex and making their own language to use in the new freedom of expression, instead of being led by a formula into what often proved to be both bad science and bad art. Freud was worth thousands of dollars in royalties to the novelists of the Twenties, especially the weak ones, but he double-crossed them. The plots they borrowed from him already refuse to stand up alone.

And to those voluble souls whose idea of a novel was a complete confession, this break-down of sex inhibition was a godsend. Without it most of them would never have been able to make their stories interesting enough to be printed. As for those fiercely bitter writers of the mental underworld, who were bound that the warped minds and the maimed minds should get their place in literature, and who, refusing to stop there, went on to the perverted, the subnormal, the hag-ridden by phantasies, the obsessed by fright—to such writers the ban on sex if it had lasted would have been an insuperable obstacle. They could not have written at all.

What then are we to say of this literature which I have

called autobiographical to indicate its intensely egoistic character? It might be called nervous, though the term does not go deep. It might be called morbid, but that word is too narrow. It certainly is not abnormal, for these immense desires for confession, like the egoisms, the perversions, the fears that get expressed, are typical, even though exaggerated, of humanity as psychology knows it and sociology describes it. Jung would call it an introverted literature. I prefer to say that human nature in one of its more rapid moments of adaptation to environment and circumstance (how rapid only the historians who later describe the onset of the age of machines will know) is relieving its hurt ego by voluble and intimate expression. The brakes squeal as the automobile rounds the corner.

Certainly it is an unbalanced literature, unbalanced in both form and content. Its masterpiece in English, Joyce's "Ulysses," would seem, by every literary test that can be applied to it, to have little chance of survival—except in an excerpt or two and in paragraphs of literary history. It is incredible that the next century will take the pains to read "Ulysses," quite as incredible as that we should read all of "Euphues" or "The Faery Queene" or "Clarissa Harlowe" today.

But should it not be said that our balanced literature (especially in fiction), our literature where sanity, proportion, measure, prevail, is too superficial for either great comedy or great tragedy? The "Forsyte Saga" of John Galsworthy represents about the best we could do in English in our time in this way. That is perhaps the only work of this kind in which the creative imagination has portrayed human nature not satirically or symbolically, but straight, in an edifice of real magnitude in this generation. But the "Forsyte Saga" became pitifully weak as it approached these modern years in which not manners but the causes of manners have seemed to be of the greater im-

portance. Why, any tuppenny psychological or proletarian novelist will offer to rewrite you the last volumes of Galsworthy, showing you what all the muddle is about over which the characters skate so sketchily! And he could explain better than Galsworthy, even though his book would prove to be unreadable.

Beneath that sanity which was the subject of the Victorians lies unbalance, and it has been the particular good luck and misfortune of the writers of the last decades to bring this to our attention. It has been their good fortune because, the bars being down for the moment, not only could they write of anything but they were more praised, by the intellectuals at least, than those who wrote of success. And note that by success I do not mean success in terms of the *American Magazine* or *The Saturday Evening Post*, but success as Shakespeare and Sophocles understood it, the persistence of man's potential nobility in the teeth of circumstance and up to tragedy and beyond it. This kind of success has not been popular in our defeatist decade, which if it is to be optimistic at all prefers a cheaper variety. There is a world of difference between the sensualist Antony putting on his antique Roman virtues in disaster and Mr. Salesman marrying his girl with a million in spite of his B.O. and her halitosis. After a little reading of advertisements and the stories written to accompany them, one's sympathies go out to Messrs. Faulkner, Hemingway, *et al.*, who maintain that in spite of cosmetics all is not right with the world.

But it is also a misfortune for these novelists, and with them I include semi-detached poets like T. S. Eliot and Robinson Jeffers, that the unhappy struggle between human nature and the demands of a mechanized world for rapid adaptation gives them poorish material to work with. Mr. Eliot was far

stronger when he wrote destructively of the Waste-Land than when in his essays he endeavors to turn parched intellectuals into Tory humanists. Mr. Jeffers's imagination riots in an incredible California, whose only antidote seems to be blood. And the phantasies which oppress Mr. Hemingway and cause him to create with magnificent technic killers who, like the centaurs, are only half human, set up repulsions among readers who are blessed with the healthy instinct to make the best even of bad men in bad times. It has been good for us to realize imaginatively what sicknesses beset the human spirit; but sick literature, even when its disease is merely a tendency to tell everything to anybody, is a greater contribution to news than to art, or, if the term art seems precious in this context, a better reflection of the unhappier actualities of some human nature than of its potentialities as a whole. I had rather believe with the Quakers that all humanity is potentially good than run with these fellows who are obsessed with its imperfections. One conclusion is quite as scientific as the other.

Therefore, the frequent repulsion which all types of literature that can be called modernistic set up in the populace has some justification. Often it is merely intellectual laziness which makes them refuse to read "unpleasant" books. They do not want to know what lies beneath the surface, and they will not listen to those who write of it unless they are drawn in by inordinate cleverness, crass sensationalism, or a superb technic of narrative. Yet often they have strong right on their side. They are seeking—if the reading instinct of the public can be called by so strong a term—for synthesis, for a building up into revealing character of the life which they vaguely feel and know; and they get autobiography, the analysis of an individual complaining of his defeats. And so, after a brief excursion into "Farewell to Arms" or "Of Time and the River," back

they flock to Southern columns draped with clematis or the adventures of an ice box salesman in the Middle West.

It is highly improbable that this literature of autobiography will ever take its place beside the outstanding books of the past that have been not only an influence upon posterity but masterpieces in themselves. The warped mind, the complaining body, the defeated, the desperate, the neurotic are obligatory subjects for literature; but the literature made of them is itself inhibited. It tends to be analytic rather than synthetic; it clogs instead of purging the imagination. No Plato would choose its authors for his ideal state. Indeed, it may have been the tendency of sensitive writers to tell the world about its neurotics which led him to exclude poets from his republic.

Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain and the cold—
Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told,

said that poet of pity, Masfield. But the mentally maimed and the spiritually halt, in which our modern autobiographers specialize, leave one a little cold at the end—sorry, disturbed, disillusioned, and never with that sense of wings spreading in the imagination which is the effect of great art. And perhaps that is why the moderns are so voluble about themselves and their friends. If they cannot give us what we want, at least they will tell us what we ought to know. To bring Stevenson up to date—

The world is so full of a number of things
I am sure we should all be as nervous as kings.

Great literature is not nervous.

Chapter VI

ESTIMATES OF THE LIVING

I. SEX WAR

A SINCLAIR LEWIS novel is like the atom—that world within a world—as the physicists have been describing it, a nucleus around which the mobile electrons play in their orbits. The nucleus is the theme, with which Lewis has again and again touched the imagination of his multitudinous readers. The electrons are his observations upon American life—an inspired reporting, diffuse, temperamental, passionate, sane, which is so vivid in its realism and so exactly imitative of things seen and heard that it has sometimes usurped the reality until for many readers, and not all of them foreign, “Babbitt” and “Main Street” became interior America. When the theme is deeply imaginative and its charge of interest strong, his novels rise toward greatness. When it is weak, they grow discursive or vituperative. He will change as you read from novelist to reporter, and from reporter back to novelist. Theme and imitation were nicely balanced in “Main Street.” It defined a civilization, and yet was better felt than read. Theme gripped and held “Babbitt” to the end, and that book must be regarded as the highest artistic achievement of its author. In it Lewis created one of those imperishable character types by which periods and cultures are remembered. But in “Arrowsmith” the reporter, hot upon the track of science, ran off with the story; and in “Elmer Gantry,” sheer hate lifted him to that

bad eminence of denunciation where many journalists have stood, but few have been most themselves.

"Dodsworth" is another "Main Street," a "Main Street" sophisticated and matured, with a new problem, but the same broad pages full of the most excellent reporting. The characters, this time, are neither boobs nor hicks, nor Babbitts nor pseudo-intellectuals. The scene is Europe more than America, and if you want a realist's guide-book to the American's Europe here it is. Compare it with Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad" for a view of what has happened to the satirist's spirit and the American point of view in three quarters of a century. "Dodsworth" is thus the "Main Street" type of Lewis novel where the theme never entirely dominates the reporting, where one reads for pages with an interest quite independent of the plot; yet it is a real theme, drawn, as always with Lewis, from something heavily inarticulate in the American imagination; and to call this book, as some reviewers have done, merely a satiric description of the American abroad, is surely to miss "Dodsworth" altogether.

I shall leave the reporting to readers who must know already what Lewis can do in this way, where he has few rivals. Let him cross on a liner, stay at an English country house, haunt the de luxe hotels of the Continent, meet the driftage of expatriated Americans, enter only a little way into the civilized Europe of the cultivated who live, not merely work or visit there, then give him a typewriter and watch the panorama roll with its full backgrounds, its lightning flashes of comment, its dialogue of an incredible verisimilitude, its character types which, if seldom characters, are always symbolic, its vivid note-takings of a restless spirit, uneasy, unrooted, never anywhere quite happy, or at home, and hence always sensitive, mordant, awake, and aware. . . .

Let me rather discuss the theme of this book, which is important. It is the sex war in America, but not sex in the glamorous biological sense popular in so many recent novels, and not war of the physical variety.

Sam Dodsworth is a good citizen and would be welcome in any civilization. He is honest in his intellect as well as in his business. He is educated at least well enough to profit easily by more education, which is one way of saying that he is a college graduate. He is creative—makes things, does not merely trade in them, makes specifically good automobiles; indeed he invented the “stream-line” body. At about fifty he finds himself sufficiently rich and increasingly restless. Unlike the industrial heroes of intellectualists’ books, he is not a passive victim of machinery. He has had a good time with his automobiles, and his back-slapping friends, and his golf, and his poker games. But new tastes and new desires are maturing in him, as so often happens at middle age. He likes good books, good pictures, good scenery, interesting people, and proposes to see more of them before it is too late. Zenith is too narrow for his interests. He has been a faithful servant to the industrial revolution, now he proposes not so much to “live”—he *has* been living—but to live more deeply, more widely, differently, with the whole man and the whole world for his scene.

In short, here is a good man seeking “culture” because he wants it, and likely to get a very sound variety. Part of the story tells of his many defeats on the way to victory; tells particularly of the marks of habit in a regime of business success and social mediocrity, of the agonized parting of flesh from flesh as his links with his old life stretch and he begins to see the tawdriness of much he loved best in it before he can be sure of what was good, before he has anything better ahead. Henry James might have told that story—has told it in fact,

but with a subtlety of which Lewis is not capable, and with characters whose airy unsubstantiality upon any conceivable American soil Lewis would have despised.

Lewis chooses to make Sam Dodsworth's civilizing a subplot only. He is more interested in why he almost failed, than in what he was like when he succeeded, if indeed he knows.

Enter, therefore, Fran. She is the wife—and it may be credited to Lewis that for all his fondness for spreading a complete Sunday newspaper of the doings of the visible world in his novels, he keeps "Dodsworth" strictly to the focus of Sam and Fran. Not children, not friends, not background, not even lovers—of whom there are several on both sides—are allowed to interfere with the drama which here is a drama of husband and wife. Fran, unlike the Disturbing Factor of many Lewis novels, is given nearly all the attributes of a charming woman. I say given; actually they are heaped upon her as armor might be heaped upon an enemy who one knows is to be destroyed. She is beautiful, she is witty, she is intelligent, she has a sense of humor, and Sam, at fifty, with grown-up children, is deeply in love with her. She is triumphant at home, she is triumphant in Europe. She thinks of Sam as her loved, but blundering, elephant, a great industrialist, an intellectual child; and yet she will fly to his rescue and back to his arms with the protective instinct of a mother.

That is the trouble. She is protective, intellectually protective, which is another way of saying that she is unbearably superior. She snubs her husband's reachings for culture as he might put the brake on an unwieldy car. Culture is *her* province—automobiles, money, and attendance his. The two are curiously alike in their typical American histories. He has built up a great industry, got it off his hands, and is ready for new experiences. She has organized (most efficiently) a home, a

social position, and a social education, raised two children and got them off her hands, exhausted Zenith, and also is ready for something new.

But there is this fundamental difference. Culture for her is a means of gratifying her passion for action; it is a playing field for her ego. It is woman's arena where her talents, freed at last from drudgery, can achieve the kind of triumph which can be measured in terms of industrial and financial achievement. . . . It means for her Success. Culture for him is something beyond success, in which blunderingly, stupidly, he can begin to find his soul, relax and examine his self, which has been held so long rigid against the needs of executive achievement.

And hence a drama of very real poignancy. For Lewis leaves no doubt that Fran's brilliant toyings with music, art, conversation, are self-conscious vanities, as fragile as etiquette and as meaningless as ornament without structure behind it. Her culture is facile, unreal, sterile. His is inarticulate, without confidence, naive, and yet groping (as in his stream-line body) toward an authentic expression of art. He is a tortured man, always slipping nearer and nearer toward slavery.

If there is passion in this book, it is not in the love affairs. The passion is a passion of denunciation, not unmeasured as in "Elmer Gantry," yet with a whole heart against the feminizing of America, the unholy bisection of life which men permit by their obsession with business and women love because, relieved of housewifery, freed of excessive childbearing, given economic freedom, they can become aesthetic Amazons with barbarians for husbands, protectors, and slaves.

Lewis has had his say of Babbitt, the industrial robot, mean-minded, small-souled, who sees life in terms of real estate. But Babbitt, one remembers, at the end of his story was

on the eve of reforming. He knew that he had never once done what he wanted. Lewis cannot therefore be accused of unfairness if this time he makes a woman the villain—the woman who will not let Babbitt get up. Fran, for all her efficiency, can create nothing. She can talk and be lovely and have ideas. But they and she mean nothing. She can only borrow a culture she cannot assimilate. And this new Babbitt she dominates, Lewis seems to say, this Babbitt with a man's mind in him, and an education, and a creative ability exercised upon making machines serve their masters—is something of vast potentiality outside industrialism as well as in it. He is the vital force of blind growing things—she the parrot chattering in the treetops.

There is always a sex war everywhere, but this does seem an aspect vital in America today. If there were a million Babbitts, there are at least one hundred thousand Sams and as many Frans, and it is the Frans who set the tone for what we are pleased to call the cultural aspects of civilization. It is the Frans who wish us to be like Europe instead of finding ourselves. It is the Frans who are responsible for the brittleness of standard American culture, its high percentage of the second-hand and of bunk. If when the excitement of exploitation and organization begins to pall, we make here another Byzantine civilization, safe, dull, and doomed, let the woman highbrow as well as the lowbrow male take her share of the blame.

Lewis has often been compared to Dickens. He is more like Howells in this last novel—a Howells less suave, but also less inhibited, and with the same intense interest in the adjustment of the American man to his rapidly changing environment. I have remarked before on the fatuity of those who, not content with attacking his lack of elegance and re-

straint, say that he has no style. The style of his dialogues and of much of his description is admirable; it has the breath of contemporary life in it, and lifts its accent into a representation that will be memorable. Lewis is a social historian, and has the gifts of a great social historian. When he is not angry, nor playing with his powers of mimicry, he can make a record that is sure to be consulted as long as men are interested in the nineteen hundreds. Art, beyond this social art, does not interest him. His spirit is too unquiet for it. The reporter is too much master in his mind. But when he records a Babbitt or a Main Street or a Gantry or a Dodsworth or a Fran we all begin to see with his eyes. American men were not all, or even many of them, Babbitts, but there was a strong tendency toward becoming. American women—cultivated American women—are not all, or many of them, Frans, but when they join culture to the social graces and tell their husbands to go to the office, there is a manifest drift in that direction. They will not, I think, call this book false history.

2. SCARLET BECOMES CRIMSON

King Log and King Stork! We have been distressed by the minor cruelties of American writing, by Faulkner's slick gangsters and vicious school girls, by the ruthless sex-seeking of night-life novels, and all the hate and rancor in current realism. And many have said that these hard young girls, and the muddled idealists, and the spiritual anarchists, and the boobs and sensualists, and the drunkards and sentimentalists, were not worth a tragic catharsis, and have added that nine-tenths of the characters in "advanced" American fiction belong in a psychopathic ward or could be colonized in some new Botany Bay with immense advantage to the state. They have complained of King Log and now Eugene O'Neill has given

them King Stork. Instead of sadism among the vulgar, he gives them the morbid tragedy of large souls, instead of the quarrels of corrupt animals he gives them karma and fate.

What we have in "Mourning Becomes Electra" is a story far grimmer than "The Scarlet Letter," which was a tale of a sin against conscience, where great lovers failing to reconcile their beliefs with their acts were forced into penance as the only resolution of the conflict. But the Mannons, New England shipbuilders, great people in their great house, sinned against their own nature. Scarlet in them became a duller crimson. Love was a guilty passion, and it broke through, was thwarted, was suppressed, according to opportunity, not conscience or even whole-hearted desire. The dead Mannons, Abe and David, had both loved Marie Brantôme, the servant in the house; Abe's wife loved David; David took Marie; Abe, the elder, drove him out and ruined him; Marie was deserted; David hung himself; the very house in which the brothers lived was torn down in a jealous fury; and the passions of this family, first suppressed and then exploding, passed into the family character, where they made a doom which is the subject of this play. The tensivity of this earlier situation accentuated every psychological trait of a family already strongly marked by Puritan tenacity and animal passion, and this tensivity became a trait so heritable that every one of the descendants, Marie's illegitimate child like the rest, shared it in common with an abnormal family resemblance. Lovers and enemies were fused into the Mannon type.

And this doom, which is reasonable only if you suppose that the affair of love and jealousy described above was a crisis of already determined character, became a psychological nightmare. Every Mannon in the play takes a double role, and every Mannon wears a mask-like face which hides a constant

inner conflict. General Ezra, expected back from the war when the curtain rises, looks always like a statue on a memorial monument and yet rages with a purely sensual passion for a wife that he wishes to have as mistress. Lavinia, his daughter, is jealous of her mother and in love with her father. Orin, his son, is jealous of him and in love with his mother. Christine, the mother, is in love with her son, and when he is forced away from her into the war by a jealous father, takes on the mariner, Captain Brant, who is no other than the illegitimate son of Marie Brantôme and David Mannon. Orin, Brant, and Ezra are replicas in appearance. "Vinnie" is her mother over again, but soured and repressed. In this family there are two characters, one raging for love and life but held back and holding back, one freely moving toward desire (are they Abe and Marie Brantôme?), but these are mingled and blended until each individual is drawn and torn by conflicting temperaments.

And for three plays, each an act in a trilogy which is inconclusive except as a whole, O'Neill debates the question as to whether happiness is right. Christine desires it and takes Brant as her lover. Ezra desires it, and humbles himself before Christine. She poisons him, and Vinnie, taking Electra's part and already jealous because of Brant, turns Orin (her Orestes) against his mother, drives him into murdering Brant, and Christine into suicide. Orin desires happiness and will marry the gentle Hazel; but Vinnie fears that he will reveal the family secrets, and when the price of his renunciation is set at the anesthetizing guilt of an incestuous relationship with herself, she helps him to self murder. Vinnie is still determined to escape into love and life, but in the complexity of her guilt finds that she cannot marry her simple lover Peter without poisoning his nature and his happiness. She goes back into the

house of Mannon, the shutters are closed, and she puts on mourning for life.

Thus O'Neill offers three solutions for a life entanglement. First, a ruthless break through into satisfaction, which here is blocked by situations arising from the Mannon character. Second, a drowning of conscience in guilt so complete that character disintegrates. This the weak Orin finds possible, and the strong Vinnie impossible. Third, a return to stoicism, either the stoicism of death, or the stoicism of renunciation, each sterile. The last curtain falls on this solution.

These Mannons and the village dependents who serve as chorus are written up in the low tone and speak in the familiar language of the realistic drama, but all are symbols, and the tragic figures have the shadowy greatness of romantic heroes and heroines capable of anything. The Mannons and the Mannon wives are Byronic figures, each like the spectral troop in Beckford's "Vathek" hiding a burning heart, and masking the character which is the fatal family gift.

And one is forced to the rather astonishing conclusion for this day and generation that to the ultra-modern Mr. O'Neill (who in "Strange Interlude" introduced the populace to Freud), the American Puritan, with his conflicts between duty and desire, is still romantic. Like Hawthorne he veils and adumbrates his characters into shadowy and terrible greatness, like Hawthorne he sees no solution to the conflict and so wrecks his characters upon it as upon the rock of fate. Is this due to some racial compulsion, which we, in our light skepticism have overlooked, or has he wearied of the trivial interludes of modern love affairs and gone back to soul-searching Puritanism for a theme, precisely as the writers of movie scenarios yearn back to a long-vanished Wild West in search of a virile story?

And indeed there are clear indications that Mr. O'Neill is riding his romance too hard in "Mourning Becomes Electra." The old rigors, the old conflicts that inspired Hawthorne are no longer enough, they have no "kick" in them for O'Neill unless they are lifted from imagination into nightmare and lead to situations so sensational that it is horror rather than imaginative sympathy which they inspire. All, all the Mannons must be made incestuous in wish, because the last step in the suppression of desire by a code is a spiritual morbidity where the tortured soul can be satisfied only by what is forbidden in every man's taboo. All, all in their imaginations long for some "happy island" of the South Seas (and Lavinia goes to seek it) where they can lapse into primitivism with their beloveds and doff their karmas with their garments. The Puritan tradition of greed and suppression, duty and accomplishment, is driven into a baleful Purgatory with no way out but a return to savagery, or a final extinction of all that makes it human. This is the kind of alternative that Byron used to offer a shuddering Europe. It was excess then, it is excess now. The dramatist has tortured his situation until it becomes an abnormality, and his tragedy suffers from the law of diminishing returns.

I submit that by every literary and historical test this is decadence, the sensationalism of decadence, the reversals of decadence by which the recessive abnormalities of character become the mainsprings of the plot. It is what Melville attempted in his violent reaction from the happy simplicities of "Typee," but lost himself in a maze of words. I offer this as a definition rather than as a criticism, for there have been masterpieces of decadent literature (such as Poe's tales of the grotesque), although their place is on the fummy downward slope of Parnassus. But whence comes this tension which, when the tragic imagination of Americans reaches a certain pitch,

sends our best minds taut and trembling into the depths of the macabre? Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Bierce, and in our time, Faulkner, Green, O'Neill! If it is the karma of Puritanism, why should that so deeply and so morbidly affect us now? If it is a reaction to the surface optimism of a materialistic country, why should the classic Americans in America's most settled period have been driven also?

It is, I presume, the result of a triple struggle which has lasted longer than the United States:—an unexampled acquisitive energy bred of protestantism and pioneering; an unexampled idealistic optimism, the strain which Emerson and Whitman have lifted into literature; and a violence of reaction against either or both of these native impulses which carries the sensitive and dissatisfied spirit (even a Mark Twain) into a search for something horrid enough to smite this complacent country into attention—a jaw bone of a corpse, or a specter from the Merrymount that has been sacrificed to make Chicago and New York, or the spectacle of the Puritan himself (as here) mangled between the jaws of conscience and lurid desires.

They have all taken refuge in romance, these rebels, and that has been their weakness. Hawthorne was cloudy, Poe hysterical, Melville confused; and O'Neill, with all his power of summoning figures of depth and magnitude, weakens into morbidity. Exasperated (like the others) by bourgeois complacency, and aghast at the possibilities his heated imagination discovers in the Puritan conflict, O'Neill in this play stacks his cards, adds incest to adultery, murder to mental breakdown, and flings the whole pack at his stodgy audiences, determined to make them sit up and see what he sees in their family lives. In the same fashion he underlined and interpolated in "Strange Interlude" until he had planted Freud in the dullest intelli-

gence. It is Byron's, it is Poe's frantic longing to be understood. It is a phase, I think, of decadence, and a real limitation upon the art of one of the very few modern dramatists in English who can lay claim to the high ground of tragedy.

Mr. O'Neill is like his own Emperor Jones. The bogies of his mind pursue him. He has insight and a quite terrific power of masking and unmasking his characters. But the warped mind, the unbalanced imagination, and characters sick from their own complexities, attract him as if he were an interne in a hospital. And then his innate romanticism clothes them in morbid terrors and gives them strange baleful worlds to play in, which are too like our own to be laughed at, yet too strained, too tense, too highly specialized, to be altogether convincing.

If our American society is truly decadent; if its energy is merely the noise of a pack on a trail leading nowhere, and its true story to be found only in its sick and defeated souls, then O'Neill is its prophet. If it is not decadent (and I for one, who have been as free as any to attack the lunacy of contemporary ideals, do not for an instant believe it to be decadent), if, like so many other societies as they approach maturity, it is working out with sweat and infinite variety the karma of Puritanism, the karma of progress, the karma of the machine, then it is O'Neill who is decadent, a fine talent wandering in a nightmare, where truth and sensational exaggeration are strangely mixed, in which art becomes lurid with all the devices of melodrama, and where life is subjected to the arbitrary rules of literary psychology made compulsive by a brilliant dialogue that becomes more articulate with every turn of the screw. His skill, his sincerity, and his lift above the triviality of current drama and fiction, stir the emotions, but they are not purged; his very excess curdles them. Indeed the super-sensational,

super-sentimental, super-everything feature movie, and the high-tension, romantic decadence of the O'Neill tragedies have many points of resemblance. They are both phases of the last stages of nineteenth century American romance.

And indeed, as so often in decadent romance, the great characters are all selfish. Nothing outside of their own will stirs them. The high-tension hate which makes the drama move is sprung not from fate or inevitable human circumstance but of those complexities of incestuous desire which make the Mannon family a thing apart. Without those special passions the family could never have brought about such catastrophes. The Greeks who wrote the Electra tragedies would have drawn back, I think, from such a dependence upon special circumstance. They would have known as well as we, although without our psychological terms to describe them, the perversions of love in every strong family, but they would not have rested a tragic development upon an abnormal instance. They were sounder dramatists than Eugene O'Neill. No one can question his consummate skill as a playwright.

3. NORTH OF HOLLYWOOD

Robinson Jeffers lives on that Pacific Coast which for good and for ill has so powerfully stirred the American imagination; he draws his themes from a territory of the imagination (a region of strong and often morbid sensation) which lies nearer to California than to any other mundane state; indeed he is one of those poets, and they are not the least important, whose work is an emanation from an environment definitely geographical as well as spiritual, and an interpretation of Nature in a way which Wordsworth and Emerson would have understood. His poetry, which is certainly major at its best, stands apart from cults and schools. It is as untroubled by the intel-

lectualisms of the metaphysical school as the mist-wreathed, sun-baked slopes of the California foothills. The passion for perfection of the imagist and also his reticence before the common passions of humanity, are unknown to it; like California, it is made up of masses where fineness of detail is lost in the sensationalism of violent contrast. But it escapes even less than the metaphysics of T. S. Eliot from the current implications of this troubled period. Indeed, like so many of the best novels of our time, its uncritical inclusiveness makes it a better register of the *Zeitgeist* than work more withdrawn into the inner rooms of the scholar's or the aesthete's mind.

Now Jeffers has been known as a poet of cruelty and horror, who has celebrated in dramatic narrative, sensational to the point of melodrama, the harsh incoherences between man's expectancy and his fate. The inhumanity of his monotonously beautiful coast seemed to weigh upon him until, ignoring its cities and bungalows, he peopled the empty cañons of its wildernesses with figures in which perverted passions broke through suppressions into blood and fire. His rather loose verse took on aspects of grandeur as it lifted the mountains and the sea to a plane of wild imagination, then too often broke into sensationalism as the passions and despairs of his homely people were unloosed, like hopeless souls of sinners in some old illuminated manuscript, writhing toward the eternal pit.

His cruelty, his almost brutal pessimism, has been in close accord with the spirit of the newer American novelists, although the difference in style, and especially in subject matter, has obscured the resemblance. The readers who rushed for Hemingway or Faulkner, have hesitated before the poet's lift out of realism into a super-world as heroic as a Wagner drama. But relative neglect does not imply lesser significance.

Jeffers's most important book is "Give Your Heart to the

Hawks, and Other Poems." The poet, he says in "Triad," is one whose affair is "to awake dangerous images and call the hawks." Like science he feeds the future, he serves God,

Who is very beautiful, but hardly a friend of humanity.

How often when writers of our cheerful race (Poe, Melville, O'Neill) look into the depths they find God to be no friend of humanity! The God of Jeffers approves of stoicism. His title poem, a battle of souls in a mist of blood, differs from the relentless poems of his past in that stoicism wins through at the end, when the genial optimism of our progressive period and the laissez-faire of conventional act and orthodox religion have all been defeated. That poem begins on what might be called the 1929 levels of familiar experience. "Under the vast calm vaulting glory of the afterglow," a drunken party is under way on a wild and lovely California beach. It mounts into vulgar horseplay and sexual desire, while undercurrents of finer emotions sweep through the protagonists, hot contraband liquor not sufficing to quench the consciousness of the "enormous peace of the sea," and the cruel beauty of the cliffs overhanging. Then in a release from inhibitions, retarded action breaks out of the subconscious where it has long been willed. There is adultery, murder—a brother kills a brother, and a guilty wife begins a long struggle to save her guilty husband from moral disintegration.

Now, as after the easy self-indulgences of the Twenties, the characters in this story face realities they had ignored. Life drops from the happy commonplace into horrid depths; the old human struggle, familiar in starker eras, begins again.

Give your heart to the hawks, says the young wife caught in casual adultery, to her husband who has killed his brother, the courts will only free your body, conquer your own re-

morses, and trust nature which is beautiful and of which perversions, like you and me, are only a part. The hawks of nature feed the future, thus serving God, and for that you must endure. When deep passions are stirred, the easy compounding with error which serves Hollywood and the bungalows is a way to destroy the soul.

Tortured by inarticulate remorse, driven by her will, the husband tries to rely on a self which in the easy days has never met spiritual emergencies. He fights against nature, he fights literally against the hawks which carry his wife's symbolism. The poem sways between a majestic beauty of encompassing landscape where the décor is a vital part of a human story, and a battle of minds, made morbidly concrete in bloody circumstances, where the brute creature lifted by his wife's will toward self-reliance smashes and kills as he slips back toward superstition, self-pity, and mere despair. She loses him, of course; in the moment of his yielding he kills himself because he cannot "peel off" his humanness, rise to her belief that all human feelings, repentance, and bloodthirst too, are not very important in so vast a world. Her will and the unborn child she has forced from him remain. The poem ends in a stoic triumph for those who can disdain a world that believed God cared for its pleasure—for those "more hawk than human."

And it is recorded here not only for its current moral significance but for the extraordinary beauty of its descriptive verse, its skillful blending of the familiar and exalted, which suits the changed temper of a new day that is repelled by mere heroics yet craves a lift above realism, and for the singularity of sadistic cruelty, revealed and resolved in a culture which has given us gold, oranges, sentimental movies, the open-air life—and now this. But it is recorded particularly for its moral significance, since here is an American poet who, while Holly-

wood danced and Los Angeles sold real estate below him and San Francisco played the market above, like some morbid Hebrew prophet saw visions of blood and disaster on his mountains, and now that the iron has crushed the soul of so many pleasant illusions, seems perversely to have felt the strength of will, the depth of energy, behind the aimless scurry of American life. He has made a woman the symbol of the anti-defeatism of a race that, even if God is no friend of humanity, will accept the rigors of nature, seeing its grandeurs, and fight on toward a future.

Is this too metaphysical an interpretation of a poem of adultery, murder, and the fruits of remorse? Murder has supplied the trivial reading of Americans for a decade now; we murder more freely than other races; violence is in our blood, mixed with benevolence and a restless energy; here is a murder story (like Browning's) intended to hold the mirror up to nature—the inhuman nature of the hills, the too human nature beneath the superficialities of the American scene. Malicious critics will say that Jeffers and O'Neill should sit telling old tales together with a pool of blood between them. But good-natured peoples go to excess when they feel deeply. In spite of its morbidity, and perhaps because of it, here is a poem that troubles the water as if there passed by some angel of judgment.

4. FAREWELL TO THE NINETIES

We have accustomed ourselves to Ernest Hemingway, and therefore it becomes more possible to estimate his values and to place him in the literary show. His staccato style has had the compliment of much imitation. His themes, drawn from the wreckage of war, or from ruthless analysis of youthful memories, or from the upsurge of savagery or brutal egoism in supposedly civilized man, have become as expected and familiar

as the Cinderella plot of the conventional short story. Hemingway, like Ring Lardner, like O. Henry, like Kipling, has created his world and his technique of making it articulate. He is no longer one of the youngsters, and we must praise him now, not for his novelties as such, but for their merit as renderings of life, and for the qualities of that life itself.

And what does one find in a collection of short stories such as "Winner Take Nothing"? On the plus side, an extraordinary power of observation, worthy of comparison with Kipling's, an observation that knows no inhibitions, but is as limited as was that earlier master's—who could do the sensational, but not nuances and subtleties of a matured culture. An observation, however, that, because it is not inhibited, brings a fresh range of subjects into the light. I find nothing in this volume as poignant as certain sketches of trout fishing (a passionate subject for Hemingway) in earlier writing, or as beautifully organized as the retreat from Caparetto in "A Farewell to Arms," unless it be the dangerously macabre descriptions of horrid death in "A Natural History of Death," or the hysterical account of fornication in "Fathers and Sons." Yet no one can read of the brute who looks through his water glass at the sunken steamer, with bodies floating inside the port holes, his rudimentary pity only felt, not realized like the frustration of his greed, without hailing one of the most skillful writers of our generation.

And yet, and yet, the comparison with Kipling persists. Now that the novelty is off these studies of egoism, brutality, cold lust, and pathetic demoralization, it becomes clearer and clearer that we have not changed so much from the Nineties as we supposed. Then it was what somewhere East of Suez had to say to smug Victorianism which excited the younger readers. The lid was on in genteel America and England—

even Mark Twain had not dared to lift it; but under the old Chinese pagoda at Mandalay the Westerner became primitive man again. He fell in love with Dinah Shadd but could not step out to tell her so without worse than philandering on the way. He lived a brute's life and paid for it. He was usually drunk, usually lusting for women, and sadly willing to tell about it. Of course Kipling threw a glamor over it all—removed it by half a world from the complacent West. His Mulvaney's were romantic figures in a cleaner, greener land than ours. The raw shocks to our sensibilities were cushioned by humor and restraint in language, for one remembers that the Soldiers Three told their stories to a gentleman and pruned their language to suit. And unquestionably Hemingway has come a step further along the road. Kipling could never have handled his cold killers, for the war had not yet drained humanitarianism from the imagination. Kipling was incapable of such unadorned brutality of natural speech between men and women who have only their vulgar selves with no overtones of humane possibilities given to them by the writer.

Yet Kipling, with more humor, was far less sentimental than Hemingway. He never is so sorry for himself as this man who records struggle where the winner gets nothing. His norm is still a hearty, courageous world in which brutality or degeneracy is an aberration, romantic because it releases the inhibited in man, but transitory. And Kipling is the better story-teller. When you cannot reread with the old pleasure a story of Kipling's it is because he so gloats upon and overemphasizes the sensations. His style is sometimes all exclamation mark. Yet even then the brilliant plot remains. When you are bored by Hemingway, as I frankly am by a half dozen of these new stories, which are repetitive with the slow pound, pound of a hammer upon a single mood, there is nothing to

revive you except flashes of excellent observation. The younger man is at his best precisely when (if one insists upon regarding him as a novelist) he is at his worst,—when he takes one episode, one phase of a temperament, one mood, one moment, and eliminating all context, all verbiage, cuts a stencil of it and stamps it on the page with unforgettable incisiveness.

And yet I cannot see much difference in the history of art between the two sensationalisms, except that Kipling (like his business contemporaries) had Asia to exploit, and Hemingway, after the breakup of the great war, finds his horrors at home, and makes his romance out of reversions instead of adventures. Neither man is a novelist, both men deal in specialties eminently suitable to the sketch or the short story. Both depend upon overemphasis. Both will suffer heavily from a change in taste, as Kipling has already suffered from the shift in interest away from the romance of imperialism. Kipling, of course, has a far greater endowment as a writer. Yet I do not believe that it is merely the franchise to speak plainly of things not written about in nineteenth century English which has given Hemingway his great success. His dialogue is limited. It is good only for special people—especially for primitive passionates, for wounded sophisticates where the primitive shows through like an exposed bone, for pathetic inarticulates, and for men of abnormal simplicity whose love of wine, of women, or of murder so dominates as to run the whole machine—but for these it is a superb instrument. Whether Kipling's humor and his superb apprehensions of the beauty of heroism, of the fundamental decencies, of patriotism, of love not merely sexual, do not make him the greater man, depends upon whether the brutality in which the world is just now indulging is, in truth, further from the heart of human desire than what other ages have longed for. But the two belong to

the same wave of historical culture. Kipling began what Hemingway, perhaps, is ending. The path seems to lead into a swamp.

5. THE SCHOOL OF VULGARITY

If the younger American novelists wished to profit by tradition, they had four American masters of their trade, all living, all part now of literary history, all traveling by different roads, any one of which they could have chosen to follow. They had Dreiser, the super-reporter, whose massed detail gave at least an illusion of national consciousness; they had Sinclair Lewis, whose mimetic skill was the most powerful instrument of satire developed in our times; they had Willa Cather, a realist of values, creating a society in which every event was significant for character, and every character significant for the quality of culture; they had Joseph Hergesheimer, the craftsman of surfaces, expert in reproducing the sound and appearance of life. To generalize more broadly, they could have chosen the tradition of Zola, the tradition which stems from both Voltaire and Mark Twain, the tradition of Turgeniev, and the tradition of Bulwer Lytton. And they have chosen the modern improvements and scientific exactitudes which Hergesheimer imposed upon the school of Bulwer Lytton.

Not all of them. The proletarian novelists—Cantwell and others—have crossed the reportorial functions of Dreiser with the search for values of Willa Cather, but even their reporting shows the pride in realistic bric-a-brac of Hergesheimer, and their values have been confined by definition to the Marxian ideology. But most of the serious young writers are Hergesheimerians. They have tossed overboard as unsuitable to this age his antiquarianism where his handicraft was most graceful and most appropriate, and escaped from the smug atmosphere

of his small-town life by a frank brutality which he was too much of a connoisseur to use. Yet to his school of description without planned significance, and of incident recorded only because it happens, is sensational, and challenges cleverness in words, they indubitably belong.

John O'Hara, an accomplished short-story writer, is the last recruit, in his first novel called "Appointment in Samarra," which title is an allusion to the old Eastern story of a man who runs from Death to find him waiting elsewhere. It is not a good title, for the Cadillac agent, Julian English, hero of this novel, is not running to or from death but only into complete moral and physical disintegration. The scene is the small town which these novelists have created out of the vices of the age and their own vivid but limited experience—shallow, feverish, greedy, envious, lustful, and superficially good-natured. There is more than one plane:—gangsters, bootleggers, prostitutes, and pimps, live on, and by, and sometimes with the country-club set, which in its turn has its upper plane of secure families to which Julian and his clever, instinctive, and quite rudderless wife Caroline belong. And this rather simple complex is vigorously and sometimes brilliantly described, for O'Hara, like all the Hergesheimerians, can write, and his lack of inhibitions and his still greater lack of interest in values provide opportunities ably taken for conversations of a sensational intimacy and descriptions of things which a few years ago we might have said were "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." Nor has the lesson of the master's antiquarianism been forgotten, though its application is changed. The dialogue is racy and real, as collectible as those dialects which philologists are now recording on the phonograph for the benefit of posterity—and Mr. O'Hara has collected it. No writ runs against his skill here. Such craftsmanship is laudable, however it is used.

Yet it is only craftsmanship. Mr. O'Hara sees his Gibbsville as another Zenith, but there is more of the reporter than of the satirist in his seeing. One characteristic unites all his characters (with one minor exception). They have no values. They are all rudderless, and morally the most satisfactory of them is the gangsters' wop, Al Grecco, who is blissfully unaware of any values but his loins and stomach. He at least rebels when his boss impugns his relations with his mother, but one feels that no one else in this town can really be insulted. They can be stirred to revenge or revengeful profit, but they can't be insulted, not even Caroline whose husband shames her twice in public, because they have no inner life, not even any emotional fixity, and little self-respect. They are all products of behaviorism, and conscious only of their immediate environment. They remember the books they read only when they have heard something about the author.

I am supplying the elementary philosophy in these remarks. There is no evidence that Mr. O'Hara is interested in it, or aware of it. His concern is with the surfaces he does so well. He ranges his characters on their planes as Hergesheimer puts his early American gin bottles on their respective shelves in a collector's study. He watches them drink, fornicate, hears them blab and wisecrack, and sets it all down as it happened, though in a skillful order.

But—and this is the point of this attack upon a well-written and interesting novel—they are all empty gin bottles, there is no meaning to any of them except a sociological importance if and when they can be proved to be accurate studies of the contemporary American and not a sensationalist's half truths. And hence since there are no values (not even bad values on the upper plane) in their lives, but only behavior, the novelist by a logical process which even Bulwer Lytton would have under-

stood, is forced, in order to make these characters interesting, to go the limit (I choose his favorite sexual phrase) in his reporting of their lives, which otherwise would seem and be trivial beyond words. For these people are not witty, not very wicked, not strong, not tragically weak, not interestingly erotic or neurotic, not wise certainly, and therefore not anything but commonplace unless the author can derive a sensationalism from the not generally reported salacities, meannesses, or physical intimacies of their private lives.

Hence there is a thoroughgoing vulgarity in this book, characteristic of its class, which is a symptom of a lack of knowledge of the novelist's real art. I do not refer to indecency, which is often, though of course not always, the salt of a true and strong story. I mean an insufferable vulgarity, which has crept into so many of our supposedly advanced novels that someone not squeamish, nor unread in earlier literatures, must protest against what is cheapening American fiction. If these writers have been unfortunate in growing up in a demoralized age, that is no excuse for making what they call art out of plumbing. Satire, yes; but they are innocent of satire. They write as if manners and hypocrisy were synonymous, as if it were a rare and delectable pleasure after years of suppression to hear a husband, whom they present as a type of the American educated class, call his wife whore and bitch on the way home from a dance, with no more excuse for himself than having been drunk and insulting to a man he did not really believe was her lover. They write (as in this novel) as if the existence of water closets was unknown and must be specified whenever the text gives an opportunity. They collect dirty language as Hergesheimer collects details of an iron forge or ladies' dresses in 1907, and display it with a collector's enthusiasm. But far more offensive than these schoolboy manners

is the essential vulgarity of the people and the scene, where, by a sadistic reversal of social pride, the evidence of any feeling for the sensitivity of others, of any self-respect, makes its tiny appearances only as one moves down the scale to small-time garage assistants and the hard-boiled of the underworld. When Al Grecco is called a double-crosser and "you dirty, lousy mother—bastard," he strikes back. Caroline, hysterical after her husband's suicide, has the news broken to her by her father-in-law, who was certainly not responsible. "God damn all of you!" this first lady of Gibbsville responds. "Ah, go away. . . . You pompous old man. . . . Yaah. Your only son. Well, he never liked you." It is irrelevant to remark that one prefers Al Grecco. The point is that whatever Caroline may have felt, may have been, it is only her essential vulgar commonness that is sensational enough to win a place in the moment of tragedy. She had nothing else.

"She only knew," the author says of Caroline, "that Gibbsville was her home town, but it or the people who lived in it certainly were not worth writing about." They are worth writing about, but not this way, not with all this expenditure of real ability, real skill in reproducing life. They have been debunked sufficiently from the standards of Booth Tarkington, Howells, and even Kathleen Norris. Nothing remains on this line except to satisfy a mean curiosity as to how weak, dirty, abusive, and sexually provocative these drifters can be. That is a job for a satirist, not for a novelist, at least not for a good novelist. Unless, indeed, vulgarity is to be the new social ideal, and the next Bulwer Lyttons, instead of setting fashions in waistcoats, propose to bring into the mode a wit based upon monthly periods and fashions in fornication, and make fashionable a social intercourse in which gentlemen knock out false teeth and ladies tripping down from the lavatory to the ball room

are pursued sexually by gentlemen who do not dare to compete with the gangsters for the real prostitutes, while the conversation is as vapid and as formless ethically as a feeble-minded addict's just escaped from Welfare Island.

What has happened to these young Americans? Do they think that living in a country the most vigorous, the most complex, the most problematical, the most interesting bar none in the world, we are going to be content with sour pap like this? And the tragedy is that they are clever; if they could see, they could write. There is more fresh observation in one of their novels than in a dozen of the English stereotypes. Are they green? Are they sadistic? Are they uneducated? Are they misled? Or is this the last phase of Hergesheimerianism, accurate painting in two dimensions of a society that to them is only skin deep? It makes one long for the good old days of the Restoration when in a literature equally thin, equally without values, equally unrepresentative of what was happening in society at large, and far more wittily erotic, one encountered sometimes a Millimaunt and felt the saving presence of a beauty that certainly never waved its wings over Gibbsville. But it is not only beauty to which the school of smart vulgarity is blind.

6. CHEATING AT SOLITAIRE

I have never before reviewed a book I have not read. I have always tried to read Gertrude Stein since her earliest publications and I have always failed. I have tried to read "Portraits and Prayers," though not so hard as before, because I anticipated failure. My eye goes on over the smooth rhythms, but my brain ceases to function. I hear but do not comprehend; I apprehend without comprehension; I feel without the registering of thought; I am pleased with sonorous variants upon

sound while my rational being coincidentally is first irritated, then outraged, and finally stops all traffic like a dizzy, policeman in a tangle of cars pushing everywhere and nowhere on football day. Something childish in me likes the play with words; the adult in me protests against the writing back of language to the primitive or prehuman. Which is probably what Miss Stein wishes me to do, so that I can go on in this review with an easy conscience.

There may be psychological reasons for Miss Stein's avoidance of rational communication which I do not understand and with which I am not concerned. She is an intelligent and charming person who can state interesting ideas in a language which is loose but nevertheless expressive, as some of her lectures prove. Also there may be some virtue (like Indian herbs) for professional writers, whose words are constantly going stale on them, in an experience with a style in which words become "sounds and sweet airs which give delight and hurt not." Hermit thrushes challenging each other across a dusky glade make such sounds, but they do not use words.

What is clear to me after many years of beginning to read Gertrude Stein, capped by a hearing of the "Four Saints," and now this book, is that her admirers and critics have been on the wrong track. They have taken her both too seriously, and not seriously enough.

Her ideas have been praised. There are none communicated in any of her creative writings. Her success in imitating personality by suggestive words has been praised. There is no such imitation. The effect is purely subjective, read into the sketch which itself is a very simple (often shrewd) statement, built up and turned over and twisted in and out, until what would have passed as a good remark in conversation becomes (to those who can keep their minds on it) impressive because it seems

so difficult. She has been praised for an invigoration of language. She has not invigorated, she has debilitated it, by striking at its essence, what makes it language, by separating denotation from connotation and letting the latter run wild from any definable meaning. She has used only one legitimate rhetorical device, repetition for emphasis. And this she naturally did not invent. It is the method of primitives, or in those writing of primitives, the method of Anita Loos in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," as Wyndham Lewis has said. She uses it in the primitive's manner, but if her art makes it impressive to the overrationalized, who had forgot that true things must be said twice, her whimsy makes it ridiculous when she says her say not twice but twenty times.

Her art can be summed up in a single sentence. She has a good ear. The subtle possibilities of the sounds of prose she understands. The subtle rhythms of the sounds of speech she hears and records. It was this that made the "Four Saints," whose meaning so far as it had any was given it by composer and producer, good singing and good hearing. The sounds of its prose and verse were excellently handled. It made good libretto, better libretto than anything else, because in most opera no one listens to the libretto anyway.

She has a good ear and artfully contrives sounds in a far-away imitation of music, which can do so much better and more richly what she attempts because it is not hampered by a linguistic medium. Miss Stein is hindered by her unfortunate predilection for words. For words are not only restricted to a limited range of sounds, but also they insist on meaning something. Her art is the sophisticated development of the child's "Tiddledy-diddley-fiddley-doo," and she would have been much more truly successful if she also had stuck to nonsense. Once she began to use words as a medium for this primitive

art of vocal sound and rhythm, she violated one of those canons of both art and commonsense whose breaking is punished by artistic suicide. The writer may live on in a halo of notoriety, like the man with the copper stomach, but as artist he is dead. For words, whatever else they do, and there is a great deal else they do, must make sense. If they do not make sense they are no longer being used as words. Dung is as beautiful a word as ding in the couplet ding-dong, but it cannot be used for sheer beauty of sound as long as it means dung which is not beautiful. Or rather it can be made beautiful only by lifting dung to beauty, which is not what Miss Stein tries to do at all. Mark Twain had the right idea:

Punch, brothers, punch with care,
Punch in the presence of the passenjare

is beautiful, but it is also comic, and he presented it as both. So does not Miss Stein. She plays with her words, pretending they are not words, and you would willingly play with her if she would keep on pretending and asked only that you should listen to the ingenious sounds she makes. But you have to be a little childish to pretend that they say something when it is quite evident that they do not. Or to listen to them as sounds merely when it is evident that they continue to mean what mankind has assigned to them. Anyone can win by cheating at solitaire. And that is what Miss Stein is doing. Anyone with a good ear (not a common possession, and Miss Stein's is excellent) can make enchanting successions of sounds if they do not bother with sense. The difficult thing is to make equally persuasive sounds that do make sense, which is precisely what all great stylists have accomplished.

No, this book is not by any definition literature. It is

music of a primitive and rather fascinating kind, vitiated by the drag of meaning.

Needs be needs be needs be near
 Needs be needs be needs be
 This is where they have their land astray.
 Two say.

This is the art of the mockingbird, sounds that mean so little as not to matter.

What is a fact. A fact is alone and display their zeal.

This is an insult to the civilization that with incredible labor united, however imperfectly, sound and sense. In such a sentence, in order to win her game, whatever it was, she has pretended that her cards are not the clubs and hearts which unmistakably and irrevocably, so long as words are words, they are. She has escaped from sense, and however I admire her admirable ear I will not go with her, having troubles of my own in saying all that I wish, but still not prepared to go off the deep end into nonsense in hope that my rhythmic splash will have some meaning.

7. THE RIVER OF YOUTH

There was much laughter when years ago D. H. Lawrence in his "Studies in Classical American Literature" described an Old Indian Devil who was always plaguing the great Americans with sudden flushes of paganism, great resurgences of sex, and obstinate maladjustments between their European souls and their unfenced continent. It is not so funny now, for some devil, Indian, Marxian, or psycho-analytic, has surely been torturing the best American writers of our era. They squirm, they lash, they spit out filth and imprecations, they whine,

they defy. They are not at ease in this Zion of our ancestors.

For Thomas Wolfe in his recent novel, "Of Time and the River," the curse is impotence. There is for him a brooding loneliness in the American landscape which drives the man-mass into a nervous activity of hurrying on trains, motors, subways, airplanes, a restlessness which drives the sensitive writer into an agony of frustration because the towns, the cities, the countryside oppress him with unrealized and inexpressible energy. It is a country that grips the imagination and lets the heart go, a country in which humanity mixed and at the boiling point—black Negro flesh, amber Jewish flesh, dark, light, sanguine—is incited by fierce energies toward no end but movement and frustration, a country where life has sacrificed its mass for its force, and the observer can neither hold on or let go of a rush of experience that always seems to have, yet never quite achieves, a meaning.

The impotence of America is an impotence of expression. When in Wolfe's novel Gene Gant's train shrieks through the night on his first journey northward, he feels the enormous push of continental energy and can rise to it only by drunken hysteria. When in the last chapter he meets the ocean liner sailing from France, he sees that vast organization of speed and change floating above his tender, and knows that it is America again, clutching at his sensitive spirit. In three hundred years the American soul has not made itself a home.

And hence the strange impulse toward autobiography which has carried so many Americans to the verge of incoherence!—Melville in "Moby Dick" wrestling with transcendental interpretations of his restlessness, or Whitman in the "Song of Myself" blatantly proclaiming his identity with the expansiveness of a continent. They cannot write novels, these rebel Americans, there is nothing stable to write of. They can

only proclaim their egos, in defiance of the inhumanity of a continent which the energy of their race has exploited but to which they are not yet assimilated. Hence an impotence which prevents complete expression, and books which are, as the eighteenth century would have said, far more nature than art.

"Of Time and the River," time being the time of youth, the river that mysterious current of life which flows under the perplexing surface of America, is the epitome, after so many books, of the troublous and disintegrating years of the Twenties when Mr. Wolfe was young. And those who wish to get in fullest and most impassioned form the spiritual record of those years, or who would see as in a news-reel the typical scenes of that period as youth saw them, will find, if they are persistent, what they want in this book, which is neither fiction nor autobiography, but both.

For although the scene of Mr. Wolfe's long-expected narrative changes from North Carolina to the biting realities and warped romance of New England, from New England to the aloofness of Oxford, from Oxford to the loneliness of an American's France, yet it is a wholly American book, one of the most American books of our time. It is in the direct tradition of those earlier anguished spirits and great seekers on our soil, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman. It is in the tradition, but with a momentous difference for which the break-up of the Twenties and Mr. Wolfe's own idiosyncrasies are responsible. Yet if I should wish to know what these Twenties meant to an American youth still asking the questions asked by his spiritual ancestors, "Why are we here?", "What does this continent mean to us?", "What are we becoming?" I should go to this book. If I fail to give a clear account of Mr. Wolfe's thousand-page story of how a passion-driven youth tried to tear all

knowledge from the Harvard library, all experience from America, all wisdom from Europe, and to pluck out, in his twenties, the secret of the loneliness and the fascination of America, forgive me. Have you ever tried to review the "Encyclopædia Britannica"?

Mr. Wolfe's odd thousand pages are condensed but not adequately described in the paragraphs above. He calls them fiction, and fiction they are of the kind that he put into "Look Homeward, Angel," but better organized, more poetical where poetical, more sharply realistic when realistic; and they are to be followed by a million words more or less in which the ego which is the *raison d'être* of them all is to conclude the story. But fiction in the strict sense they are not, nor story, nor drama, but rather spiritual autobiography in which the thousand incidents, many of them trivial, and the dozens of characters, many of them extraordinary, have as their excuse for being that a youth met them on his way. Plot there is none. Structure in the ordinary narrative sense, there is none. It is a picaresque novel with the distraught mind of a poet of the Twenties as *picaro*, and the incidents adventures in seeking a spiritual home.

To be more precise, this book is a study of American dualism and it is this which gives it poignancy. Leaf through it and you will see as in a moving picture successive moments of prose and poetry. Here are the fleshy people of an intensely actual Carolina, of a literal Boston, and of a photographic France. No reporter could have done them more vividly as news, and indeed Wolfe is a great reporter. No one of them is usual, indeed for such a passionate student of humanity no man or woman could be merely usual; most of them are eccentrics, half mad from pain, or love, or greed, or vanity, or frustration; or wholly lost in what is really fantasy, like Star-

wick the homosexual, or the pathetic collegiate Weaver, or the gross sensualist Flood who is like some mushroom sprung from, yet alien to, the good earth. And between these flashes of intimate, literal humanity from the man-swarm, the novel leaves the literal entirely and in a poetic prose that owes much to Whitman and a little to Joyce,* but has become Wolfe's own, rises into a chorus of anguish, perplexity, and delight, which chants the loneliness and the impotence and the beauty of this America, and struggles to break through to some solution which will satisfy the seeker, who is the youth Gant, the hero, and the excuse for all this profusion of words.

And linking the two worlds is the decaying but still mighty figure of the Father, the old stone cutter who was the center of "Look Homeward, Angel." Dying (and his death scene is Mr. Wolfe at his best), he still dominates the imagination of the youth, for he in his vast energy and incredible vitality is the old America where man almost became worthy of his continent; and in his cancerous decline, in his frustrated career, and in the immense confusion of his brain, he symbolizes what has happened in a twentieth century in which there seems to be no graspable relation between the prose and the poetry of a continent.

So much for the purpose of this novel. Its achievement is less. With all its richness of detail, its passion, its poetry, and its intense realism of contemporary life, there is an impotence in this book like the impotence Wolfe ascribes to his America.

In America it is an impotence of wandering men at home wherever wheels carry them yet never strong enough to grip the continent and make it serve their happiness. In this America, "so casual and rich and limitless and free," they become

* Joyce was the favorite novelist of Gene Gant, and this novel has been more influenced by "Ulysses" than by any other recent book.

arid or lonely or broken, or have got the "new look" of the machine-ridden masses. With Mr. Wolfe the impotence is exactly equivalent. His imagination has provided him with a great theme and his accurate memory flashes infinite exact detail of the life of which he intends to make his book. But he cannot control the theme or reduce his substance to a medium. He will write neither poetry nor prose, but both. He will not be content with the literal autobiographic description of men and events which his journalistic sense supplies so readily but must intersperse with passages of sheer fantasy or poetical uplift. He will stick neither to fiction nor to fact. Hence the reader never enters into that created world of the real novelist which has its own laws, its own atmosphere, its own people, but goes from here to there in Mr. Wolfe's own life, seeing real people as he saw them, and often recognizing them (as with George Pierce Baker in Professor Hatcher, and many others) not as created characters but as literal transcripts from the life. So that the effect is always of being in two worlds at once, fiction and fact, until curiosity takes the place of that ready acceptance of a homogeneous life in the imagination which a fine novel invariably permits. You are forced to read this book as an autobiography with a poetic accompaniment, and for the first five or six hundred pages the personality of the narrator, this passion-driven youth, is too vague, too unimportant to hold suspense, so that it is for the objective realistic incidents that one reads and these change and succeed one another without relation or real consequence, except that one ego experiences them all. Hence a book that is verbose, and which seems much more verbose, much more repetitive than it is. Not until well past its vast middle is the reader caught up and carried on. Before that he reads either a passage of extravagant but vital poetry (drunken poetry in this quotation)—

Casey Jones! Open the throttle, boy, and let her rip! Boys, I'm a belly-busting bastard from the State of old Catawba—a rootin' tootin' shootin' son-of-a-bitch from Saw Toop Gap in Buncombe—why, God help this lovely bastard of a train—it is the best damned train that ever turned a wheel since Casey Jones's father was a pup—why, you sweet bastard, run! Eat up Virginia!

or he reads a complete realistic episode in which the Pentlands snigger “k, k, k, k, k,” pull at their cleft chins, smolder with their hidden fires. Or an aggressive Jew boy pulls out the stopper of young Gant's wrath, and makes a friend for life. Or an attempted seduction. Or a satire on silly young Harvard intellectuals poohing and pahing and saying “Ace” for “Yes.” Immense power, immense variety, little control, less continuity, and an almost complete failure to make this true epic of longing youth in a lonely, disintegrated America either drama, fiction, poetry, satire, any *one* thing, *one* medium of expression, into which the imagination of the reader can enter and stay, for more than twenty pages, at home.

I think that this novel, like many other fiery and ambitious American books—like Melville's “*Pierre*,” like many of Whitman's poems, like the now forgotten romantic-philosophic extravaganzas so common in the magazines of a century ago—is an artistic failure. And Mr. Wolfe's books, as wholes, will continue to be artistic failures until he finds and controls a medium in which the ego is sublimated into an imagination less involved in the immediate circumstances of his life. Yet it is an important book, and Mr. Wolfe is an important writer. He has more material, more vitality, more originality, more gusto than any two contemporary British novelists put together, even though they may be real novelists and he is not. He stands to them as Whitman stood to the wearied “*Idylls of the King*.” And he entirely escapes the sordid, whining defeatism of so

many of his American contemporaries. I am not fool enough to try to teach him how to write. No one can do that. He can write like his own angel now, he can make speech that is a new speech in fiction and yet unmistakably authentic, he can strike off flashing pictures.

In waning light, in faint shadows, far, far away in a great city of the north, the 40,000 small empetaled faces bend forward breathless, waiting—single and strange and beautiful as all life, all living, and man's destiny. There's a man on base, the last flash of the great right arm, the crack of the bat, the streaking white of a clean-hit ball, the wild, sudden, solid roar, a pair of flashing legs have crossed the rubber, and the game is over!

But he has not yet made his book. He has poured out his heart into a mold, over a mold, spilling through a thousand pages. He has tried to be philosopher, poet, journalist-observer, satirist, story-teller, historian, and dreamer, not all at once which is quite possible, but one after the other, which cannot be done in a book, which, like a man, no matter how complex, should be integrated, harmonious, homogeneous, and unmistakably not many but one.

Chapter VII

ON READING

I. AGAINST READING

IF SOME people do not read enough, many people certainly read too much. Nothing so conduces to tranquillity, Montaigne observed, as getting rid of prejudices. But if the prejudices be against reserve and restraint in reading, the tranquillity that follows is the tranquillity of a goat or an ox. Where reading matter litters the streets and the eye falls upon printed words at every turn of the head, reading may become only a substitute for vacancy. A French critic has remarked that American books and magazines are made up disproportionately of "escape" literature which lifts the reader out of his drab immediacy into something or somewhere interesting. The description is too dignified for most of the reading that goes on, which is better defined as a bromide than as a stimulant. Such readers are not escaping from anything but the vacancy of their own minds. When their hands and feet stop their brains carry on like loose wheels down a highway of words. This makes a verbal civilization, where everyone is articulate and listening is a vice.

One of the curiosities of literature historically speaking is the sporting page (now pages) of the newspapers. Never since the world began has there been such a shower of words. Padding reaches its limit here and excess in narrative and description can go no further. No battle of the past called forth such

minutiae of detail, such prognostications and post mortems, such exploitations of the personal habits of the least of the heroes, as does a third-class basketball team preparing for a game which most of the readers will not see and all of the readers will quickly forget. The same paragraph will be written three times in three ways in the same column, and rumors about nothing in particular will be snatched out of nowhere by a button and turned inside out and back again. Racy language has been developed by these writers, some of it excellent, but an important match of any kind is described at least twice in the first report and a half dozen times more in retrospect. Sports writing is a game itself where tireless writers work out new combinations and permutations of shop-worn counters; or it may be compared to a process by which bats, balls, oars, and fists are disintegrated into their atoms, each atom a word.

Why readers wish to read of sports is obvious. But why millions of readers read these incredibly diffuse millions of pages daily is a question to be answered. It is certain that many, if not most of them, have only a mild and abstract interest in the subject. If we were all such fans for all sports as this reading might imply, the United States would become one vast arena. The true answer is, that of all writing sports writing has (probably with purpose aforethought) the highest percentage of sheer vacuity and repetition, the heaviest charge of current fact that sounds interesting without the nuisance of being important. It is the nation's bromide—and like the popular bromides that chemists make it, it has taste and bubble enough to attract. Such an endless discussion washed back and forth through Constantinople when the reds and blues were contesting in the Hippodrome; but now all the twists and turns and repetitions of idle talk are amplified by journalistic skill and broadcast in print.

If one asks why more good books are not sold and read, here is one answer. Bromide is by no means confined to the sporting pages, or indeed to the newspapers. Even readers with some intellectual and emotional curiosity get flabby after unrestrained reading, which ought to be rationed quantitatively and qualitatively both, especially in middle age when tastes have been formed and free places in the mind begin to grow scarce.

2. HARD READING

When wide reading became popular in the early nineteen hundreds, the optimists of that naive day began to preen themselves. But the edge of the achievement, as so often happens in these plannings and polishings of the democracy, has been a little blunted. It is not so sharp and so shining as we had hoped.

A public already educated to read anything in and out of covers needs to learn how to do some hard reading. Hard, but not dull reading. Some fiction, and some biography, and a good deal of history slip down as smoothly as a custard. You can absorb it easily, and what you get is good; but the supply of such literary nourishment is limited, and only a very limited area of life is transmissible in such a fluent medium. Easy poetry is sometimes good poetry, but not often. Easy biography is often an emulsion of convenient facts turned into fiction. Easy history tells you only what to think.

More wrestling with books is badly needed. The so-called cultivated minority in this country belongs to a generation educated in colleges where the classes expected to have knowledge pumped into them; where the institution was challenged to educate if it could. The reader acquires broad interests from such a system but little intellectual independence. He has never learned the platitude that you get about what you work for in things of the mind, including art, and he has gone on into

adult life asking books to do what his teachers did—cram him with sweet remedies for his boredom or indifference. He has learned to try anything in book form once, and that is a gain, but he has not learned how to read.

If there is one prescription that might be given to a people educated in this way, it is poetry. Modern poetry, with very few exceptions, has not been popularized. It is probably too remote from general interest, too cerebral, often too lacking in the beauties of tone and sound and color. It has grown harder, more complex, more intricate, when the mode of a modern popular art, like architecture, has grown simpler. It is a cult poetry, written chiefly for poets and intellectuals. Our poetry, indeed, is probably not so good as the Victorian, but that is not the point. It is *poetry*, the intense and final expression to which prose only approximates, and it is *ours*, for it is all that we have or can get upon which our rain falls and our sun shines. For the reader who is open as to mind but slipshod in his reading, no exercise could be more profitable than to find out what modern poetry is about, and what it means to him. MacLeish, Jeffers, Robinson, Wylie, Millay, Aiken, Frost—there is no lack, even in America. If he cannot read some of it, if it means nothing to him, that may or may not be the fault of the poetry. Real poetry is seldom predigested, makes no concessions to ignorance, assumes that the reader is intensely interested in the intensities of life. In reading good poetry, the reader must become more than his ordinary self if he is to assimilate what he reads.

This kind of hard reading is the best of all good reading. When we have more of it—and not only in poetry—it will be possible to boast of the new reading habits of the American public.

3. READING FOR LIFE

The truth is that the American public is deprived of something more vital than pleasure or culture by its failure to read books. It is less alive than its books, and it will stay less alive until it reads them. Even the run-of-the-mill volumes, the week-end novels and flashy social studies that differ from the cheap magazines only in being bound, have more resolved and interpreted experience in them, which is to say more conscious life, than ninety out of a hundred of their readers can produce in a year. It is a cheap and shabby life (like how many lives in this republic!), but at least it is analyzed, focused, given some form and meaning. As for the good books, we are still shadows of their imagination, the raw materials of their art. Without some knowledge of the first-rate books based upon American experience, it is improbable that any American will form a pattern of life for himself which will have a true relation to a good and possible future in his inherited environment.

Books are a luxury only in communities where life is a luxury, where experience crawls along such a dull channel of routine trading that any attempt to release the emotions or lift thinking is as useless as a watering cart in a desert. A middle-class civilization like ours tends always to relapse into such a condition. It has relapsed in hundreds of American communities. Many an American city, rich and powerfully organized for production, is dull and lifeless by comparison with Boston of the 1850s, Philadelphia of the 1760s, or Annapolis of the early 1700s. Youth with blood and life in it (as our novels record) tries to escape from such communities, just as the full-blooded escaped from those lifeless settlements that Mark Twain described in "The Gilded Age" into danger and crude excitement in the further West. The parallel is not exact be-

cause books are not needed in primitive societies where man is in the saga stage, too busy keeping alive to make use of reflective and interpretative imagination. But the saga age is ended in America.

We tend to relapse, but there are powerful reactions and able instruments of recovery, of which the most accessible are books. Lifelessness, the enemy of every developed civilization, has curious symptoms. It can result in passivity and dull endurance as in the Roman cities of the later empire, or it can be hid by noise, an aimless energy, and a chase for excitement. The newspaper picture of American civilization today is a picture of lifelessness. The tabloids and the near tabloids are mere explosions of sentiment and excitement, as formless as a whirl of clouds and as incoherent. They pattern after experience as they see it, and American experience tends to pattern after them. Fortunately the American public, which has not caught up with its books, has not caught up with its newspapers either. It is a shadow only of the sensations it reads about, and feeds its lifelessness with a strychnine of heart excitement that scarcely stirs the dull organ in its breast. Look at the faces of tabloid readers if you doubt.

4. THINK BEFORE YOU READ

Yes, some people, many people, read too much. The psychologists think so. They have been discussing the dangerous vicariousness of modern life until even the Sunday supplements are taking it up. Instead of making music for ourselves we listen to it, canned or etherized. Instead of expressing ourselves in paint as children love to do we look at photographs. Instead of playing games we read about sports in endless pages of spiced verbosity. Instead of making love we go to the movies.

Instead of seeking experience or trying to think, we go to books.

No one can step into this vexed question without putting first one foot and then the other into a bog hole of perplexity. It is quite clear that merely listening to music will never do for happiness what making music did for the Englishman of the Renaissance or the Italian of the eighteenth century. It is not quite so certain that the common urge to mold and draw and plan, if encouraged beyond childhood, would be a universal benefit. Human nature being what it is, and egoism so certain an accompaniment of maturity, could you count on a cityful of painters being willing to destroy their work when the creative urge was satisfied?

The question of books is equally perplexing. Suppose that books were not so abundantly made for all of us—suppose that from childhood on we were encouraged to make our own books. That would mean the revival of story-telling and improvisation—good in themselves, but obviously a short-term substitute for books. And as to books themselves, which can be compared to the music given us by composers, the only parallel to the playing of the music would be reading aloud, but that is not an exact equivalent, for there is no sense of creation, no release of personality in reading aloud comparable to rendering a sonata or a caprice. If there is to be an abatement in the vicariousness of reading it must be by reading less.

But here the argument splits. However strongly one may feel that an easy chair and a book of romance, adventure, escape, is a poor substitute for experience, yet one has to admit that experience of the quality that one gets in books is harder to come by now than in the past and brings more trouble with it. When war or any other form of adventure that breaks up the environment, is unleashed in a mechanized society, the ro-

mance rapidly changes to realism, and the non-vicarious experience soon becomes distressing or worse. There is a tenable proposition that without the movies there would be more, not less, gangsterism, rape, lynching, and irresponsible sentimentality. To offer the masses unlimited actual experience is about as sound as offering them cake to live on instead of bread. A violin, a piano, or a singing voice is a safer outlet for the creative emotions than pistols, airplanes, or heroic attitudes.

The answer thus far, is, of course, that while we read too much sloppy adventure, too much maudlin sport news, too much spiced realism, yet if some Hitler should put the lid down on escape literature the United States might become a prize fight instead of going to one.

If there is to be a complaint against too much reading, it will be more useful to concentrate on books of thinking and let books of feeling do their worst, which is probably not so bad as their readers might be without them. The habit of letting the printed word do our thinking is increasing in ratio with the number of people who read, and with the number of periodicals which cater to them; and here the practice grows more dangerous in direct proportion to the increasing complexity of our social problems. Many have noted the decline in commonsense among civilized nations in the past decades, a decline which is probably due to too much reading. Now that the radio takes up the slack where the newspaper and magazine drop it, there is very little incentive for the ordinary man to sit down and think it out. Someone is always at his elbows offering a syndicated piece guaranteed to do his thinking for him. And what an alarming increase there has been lately of the books intended to tell you something about everything, and what to do about it!

5. EMMA AND MR. KNIGHTLEY

It was Mr. Knightley's contention that Emma was jealous of the accomplished Jane Fairfax, not for her beauty, not even for the elegance which Emma valued so highly, but because Jane had acquired those accomplishments which come from the good reading that Emma had so often proposed for herself and so often deferred. With such seriousness did they take reading in those admirable houses where Jane Austen visited.

When Francis Bacon remarked with an emphasis that indicates how often he expected to be quoted: "Reading maketh a full man," the idea was not dissimilar. The elegant Emma had planned to fill her active mind with the thoughts of others from which much conversational merchandise could be made. Mr. Knightley hoped that she would learn sense, but it was sententiousness not sense that she hoped to acquire. It was no great misfortune that she was kept busy with match making and patronizing her subordinates, and had to be content with her elegance, which was indisputable.

If only all the Emmas had been satisfied to be elegant, or cultivate elegance as a virtue compensating for a lack of book knowledge! The delightful eighteenth century was weighed down into a final dullness by getting too full of reading. The bluestockings were endurable when their surplusage of reading was sublimated in brilliant talk, but when they grew moral and sentimental, like the ladies of Llangollen, they seem, to me at least, quite insufferable. No wonder Byron squirmed and took refuge in Turkish harems. When reading becomes an accomplishment, it is dead at the root. The naughty girls who hid in the shrubbery to read romances with hearts afire were a little maudlin, but at least reading had been for them an experience.

With most women today reading is a distraction, or, as with Emma, a part of the social make-up, or both. They are our most copious readers, yet few of them read for the sake of reading. They pick up a book, usually a good one, because they must feed a mind which they do not dare turn out to pasture. They have no pastures, no more than the weary industrialist with his detective story, and so must always keep the nose in a manger when they are not at work. But not even the motive of distraction is pure. Men usually pretend to know less than they really do, and hide warm interests like diseases, unless they are in congenial company. Women, once they have risen above the merely female, wish to seem to know more about things in general than they have acquired. Books are their greatest aid. They will take a tremendous punishing from an erudite text in order to be able to talk about a book. Books with them are still in the dress-goods category—they must have samples of what the well-read man is reading.

Reading for experience is the only reading that justifies excitement. Reading for facts is necessary but the less said about it in public the better. Reading for distraction is like taking medicine. We do it, but it is nothing to be proud of. But reading for experience is transforming. Neither man nor woman is ever quite the same again after the experience of a book that enters deeply into life. Thus women who do read well are probably the best of all readers, because, more readily than men, they give themselves over to experience. Women deeply experienced in books as well as in active life made the great salons of the age of conversation. They were accomplished, of course, but it was their experience with books that made them such happy friends of the intellect. For reading a good book the right way is a kind of love affair (the business of women) intense, brief, yet, in its effects at least, lasting.

Mr. Knightley thought experience with books might leave Emma less egocentric. But a reading list for her was only the next step in elegance. She was not looking for experience.

6. READING FOR POWER

When I was an undergraduate a third of a century ago the study of literature—which has always been my chief concern—was in a curious state. We were just emerging from the text-book era, that true age of the college yes-men, when an education came like patent medicine in a bottle. You read your text-book history of literature, ticked off the examples of fine writing from Beowulf to Wordsworth, and thus were cured of illiteracy. My own professor of English, a radical of those days, had no patience with such bottlings of the Pierian spring. It was he who first introduced the collected editions of the authors we were to study. If it was Chaucer we got all Chaucer, if Dryden, all Dryden. Since few academically minded persons in that era regarded fiction as literature, the problem of a complete Trollope or Scott did not present itself. We labored chiefly in the poets and hence came to class with volumes unselected and unexpurgated, and that was why I read, in lecture and out of lecture, not wisely of the texts assigned, but well and deeply in search of a powerful literature that could intoxicate my virgin mind; and so failed of a high mark even in the subject I loved best.

I have not seen mention for years of De Quincey's famous essay on the literature of knowledge versus the literature of power which then was the text of every introductory lecture on English literature. Indeed, among those of a literary inclination in my day, it was never out of mind. For us the literature of knowledge was what we got in the classroom, the literature of power was what we sought for ourselves. The one we

gleaned for facts and allusions likely to reappear upon examination papers; the other we read at midnight with youth's insatiable craving to be lifted and stirred. This was not precisely the definition that the critic had laid down for us, but thus we understood it for our own uses. In my earliest college memories Carlyle was our man, a Carlyle not yet crucified upon Freshman English. But already Carlyle was becoming too Scotch for the terse American mind. That introspection of our pre-Civil War culture, which had produced a healthier than Carlyle in Thoreau, had subsided by the end of the century into a Yankee practicality susceptible to romance and to mysticism, but repelled by the thumpings and roarings of that genius with the migraine who thought that he could stop the industrial revolution with words.

Those of us who read for power went elsewhere, unfortunately never to the Americans, who then were regarded as mere colonials by the academic world, upstarts who had never been blessed by Oxford, Heidelberg, or the Sorbonne. Whitman was a rowdy, Thoreau a nature writer, Emerson an imitation, Hawthorne a juvenile, Poe a jingle man. We were denied our own tradition in the classroom and few of us found it for ourselves. So we turned to Matthew Arnold and to Keats. Arnold for his moral protests against a society organized, as ours so clearly seemed to be, for profits and for sport; Keats for the intensification of emotion which was so lacking in the wash of sentiment that then flowed from the football field out and over politics and business.

But Arnold, as we grew older, began to miss on more and more cylinders. It was not that he was untrue; no, he dealt in the wrong kind of truth. His was the ethics of a civilization that could produce its Ruskins and its Brownings and its Lowells upon an unearned increment. Unfortunately in our

America on the move, and soon to be on wheels, everyone wanted his share of the increment. Economic opportunity produced a new society here which, a quarter of a century ahead of Europe, was breaking up the old stabilities. The high seriousness of Arnold implied an aristocratic detachment from the struggle which a member of a governing class could readily afford; but there was no governing class in America. We were not a system, but a laboratory. We did not understand ourselves, and for a better understanding could not look back to Greece or feudal England, for, even while we looked, the past became sheer romance. Our equalitarian society, in which a drilled well or a new process in steel created economic inequalities of unprecedented magnitude with no corresponding inequality of responsibility, was unprecedented in history. All that the great Hindus, great Hebrews, and great Greeks had said was still true; but earlier, far earlier than Europe, though by instinct rather than by clear perception, we knew that there was not truth enough in it to solve our immediate problems. It was well enough to talk of Nirvana, but Nirvana was no panacea for the hot-footed multitudes just turning back from a closed frontier. The only conclusion we could have drawn from Arnold for our local problems was a principle of fascism, for nothing short of fascism would have forced our progress by exploitation into his mold of a state governed by character for the welfare of the intellectually best. But against such a pre-fascism we were conditioned by our democratic experience which, if romantic in its premises, was still realistic in its results.

Keats also failed us in our search for power over the heart. To the young men and young women of the 1930s the number of sensitive young Americans who went about their business at the turn of the century with Keats on their lips, or

that diluted Keats shot through with Arnoldian ethics, Tennyson, would surely seem incredible. It must seem incredible to them, because the effect of all that exalted romanticizing, whether upon race or upon the environment it has since shaped for itself, is so palpably nil. And indeed our enthusiasm for Keats was as ill-timed as it was sincere. The eternal values of such romantic poetry remain, but it could mean no more than the exaltation of escape for *fin-de-siècle* America. Keats himself, as is too easily forgotten, was a burst of the ego released from the powerful ordering of an eighteenth century shattered by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the beginnings of industrialism. But we Americans were moving with the inevitability of history toward a new ordering, a revolution which would control instead of release. Our romantic period had gone with the frontier. Whitman not Keats had been its prophet. Our romanticism, as the feeble historical novels we read too clearly proved, was only a longing of the weak for the irrecoverable. Keats was an antidote for the poison of our flabby sentiment. Socially speaking, that was all. It would be a century before we could be ready for another synthesis of beauty, and that beauty would have elements as discordant with the dreams of idyllic Greece or the Middle Ages as the dissonance of modern music with the simple concords of Palestrina. Blake, whom we scarcely knew, was far closer to us than Keats.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land—

Jerusalem, city of equality in the sight of God, to be rebuilt
among dark Satanic mills!

I make no prophecy as to where the literature of power is to be found by the new generation of young Americans, but I do assert that the way is even more difficult for them than for us—nor do the colleges help to smooth the path. The literature of power—if I may be allowed to be paradoxical—now seems to be taught in the colleges for purposes of information, while the seekers for power find it in what in my day would have been called books of fact and argument that lie usually entirely outside the college curriculum.

To the old text-book system, and to the education by the books themselves to which I owe what little first-hand discoveries I made on my own, has succeeded in our best universities a new system (I speak by hearsay rather than direct knowledge) which seems to me almost ideally bad for the purposes of the inquiring and sensitive mind. Power has been capitalized for purposes of forced consumption. Saul slew his thousands, for indeed in my unintellectual generation there were only thousands to slay. But this new David has slain his ten thousands and these of the best, by a system which, however right in origin, makes our feeble wanderings in search of a culture seem to have been a blessing by comparison.

In my day the library was a haunt for recluses, guarded by bookkeepers who fiercely resented any attempt to empty their orderly shelves. Now it has become indeed a university, where work must be done if it is done at all. A good degree may be said to be dependent upon getting the right books at the right time and reading enough of them. A happy reform gave us books to peruse instead of excerpts, but the modern student is presented with a library and told to read that. The principle is sound. Education is not precept but experience. No golden-tongued lecturer can compete in results with the mind's own adventures among the books which record the complexity

of knowledge, the diversity of human opinion, the contradictoriness of beliefs and of tastes. But being Americans and hence democratic and Puritan at heart, the educational progressives were not content with adventure. It was not enough to send the eager and the sluggard alike to the ant hill to work out their salvation. They must needs make the process efficient, which in American terms meant that the average return on the investment must be made satisfactory. The eager would work without prodding. It was the sluggard that troubled them. The text-book was unbluffable if not uncrammable, but a library to report upon!—the possibilities of bluffage and leakage were appalling to all who believed that the first duty of the college was to see that everyone passed. So they thought of the speed-up.

Here again, as so often before, education in the humanities has shown its susceptibility to the triumphant successes of applied science. In the speed-up the calculation is based upon the capabilities of the average man. The gauge is that velocity which keeps him working as hard as he will work. Faster, and you lose him, slower, and he cheats you of energy that you have bought. But why elaborate. We have all seen Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times," and indeed as I watched that parody I found more symbolism in his Panic revolt among the machines than in the class-conscious drama of Broadway.

Now the speed-up is ideally adapted to the acquisition of knowledge. For knowledge is testable, examinable. There is a great deal of it, and every hour missed is an absolute loss, for never, never can we catch up with the grand total which the moving belt carries on constantly to add to the overpowering sum of all we know. But as my old teacher Lounsbury used to say, the undergraduate has an intense and native resistance to the intrusion of knowledge. Take him by squads, with your

eye on the sluggard, and, like the factory manager, you must find the ratio of labor at which his work will produce at least average results. But unfortunately there is a radical difference between history or literature, and the segments of a Ford. If the parts of a Ford are put together they *are* put together; but history speeded up, literature speeded up, becomes just information. The power has dropped out of it.

And the norm of our university speed-up is not the able and eager man. If our plant were designed for him, we would, paradoxically, not have to speed up at all. He could be left to his own devices, given the adjustment wheel into his own hands, and allowed to stand or fall by results. The norm we choose is the average man, and in this statement I think a congress of deans would support me, let the faculty say what they will. And having chosen the average man for norm, certain results inevitably follow. We expect him to read only an average quantity. But how shall we gear the moving belt for an inevitable sluggard's average? Run it slow and he will cheat you. Run it fast and he will play some dog's trick, or escape to summer climes. The American efficiency principle adopted to meet the emergency was characteristically simple and effective—for sluggards. It being well known that an indifferent mind will never do more than an indifferent amount of a given assignment, the obvious device was to stretch the assignment until what would be done became adequate for mass education. My figure begins to crack, but I can use it a little longer. For here is the speed-up, effective with sluggards, but ruinous for the eager searchers for a literature of power. No indifferent percentages for them. To read as they wish to read they must pick up two bolts where the average man picks up one. To cover wholeheartedly and with a passionate interest reading calculated to keep half a mind half busy in reading

half of it, has led to precisely such a race against time as made Charlie Chaplin caper in distraction with wrenches at his ears.

How, under such a system, can the seekers for power in literature attain even that modicum of ease in Zion which is essential for intellectual salvation? And there are so many of them! They pour out of the universities with their honor degrees, crammed but ill read, having covered more pages in a month than we in our unregenerate days in four years. But they have had no time to read, mark, and inwardly digest. They have been geared to the unwilling. Their only recourse is to give up honors, give up scope in information, and trust to self-discipline. A hard task for ambitious youth, hard for any one under fifty.

And this is the reason, I believe, why I, as a literary editor, find so many young men and women graduates passionately seeking for power in information. They will read anything that satisfies curiosity—proletarian novels, the dialectics of John Strachey, arguments for fascism, arguments against fascism, fiction about the lost generation, intellectualist poetry (not often), Hemingway on how to be cruel, Havelock Ellis on sex (though that topic has reached the saturation point), John O'Hara on the country club and lavatory sets, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence on their respective neuroses. Such curiosity is laudable, yet it is singularly deficient in depth, and there is a frightening acceleration in the shifts of fashion. It is economics today, it may be religion tomorrow.

We of the *fin-de-siècle* never found our gods. Our lack of the broad information indispensable for a modern age was not compensated for by any valid conversion to a culture that would stay with us for life. But these crop full birds of which I write impress me as never having been allowed to seek power amidst the speed-up of information. They act like

adepts who have run across a space of hot stones so fast that the foot was never seared. They are the victims of what labor unions call a stretch-out. They have been sacrificed to intellectual democracy.

It is the fashion to put the blame for the lack of standards, the apparent absence of an inner life, the excessive timeliness of this era, upon the transitional, not to say cataclysmic, character of the post-war decades, where civilization has so obviously outrun culture and seems about to fall upon its mechanized nose. Perhaps—and yet it is difficult to discharge the colleges from all responsibility. They have taught scientific method, but have they left time for the really able minds to speculate upon the true uses of science? They have made clear what we never knew, how, for example, histories and literature are made, but have they provided, among so much comparison of texts and sources, for that spiritual leisure in which youth finds and absorbs those books or subjects, which, like Greek for the Renaissance, may bring a change of mind? They have taught literature with an adequacy of apparatus and a range far beyond our earlier day. Yet never has there been a generation of youth like this one, so avid for production (which is all to the good), yet so utterly unmoved by great literature of the past, so easily led into the mere trade of writing, so hazy as to the distinction between art and propaganda, so unwilling (with a few notable exceptions) to spend that intense and focused labor which makes the difference between the good and the best. Some of all this, though not all, I charge against the speed-up, the stretch-out of good minds hurried past wisdom because the sluggard must be made to work. This process should be designated as an educational bastard, out of science by Puritanism, got while culture was asleep.

7. READING FOR WAR

Imagine a chapter of "Gulliver" which described a society that had subdued nature without lessening perceptibly its own essential stupidity. A world that had solved, for the first time in history, the problem of food, the problem of comfort, the problem of cleanliness, the problem of transportation, and a good half of the problem of health and longevity. Imagine the mordant strokes with which Swift would describe a race of giant Brobdingnagians who had nothing to fear now except one another and how they would shrink under his depicting into dwarf Lilliputians, absurd in their vaunts of power, and shrilly jealous, although just this side of millennium, of every Blefuscian around the corner which preferred to open its eggs from the big instead of the little end.

But Swift would be too wise to sneer. In his own century rationalism was even further ahead of the human will than is our scientific thinking. His monarchs quarreling over dynasties were more absurd than our nations on edge over economic and racial rivalries, yet they were far easier to handle, just as a mule with a colic is a simpler problem than an automobile out of order. He would not sneer, no one but a fool would sneer at the difficulties in which progress has involved us, for only a fool would overlook the patent fact that there has been progress, and that progress, where rightly named, is good. But his satire would still snap at the thin skins of our public. A twentieth century uncertain whether to head for Hell or Utopia needs the lash.

Our particular danger need not have been war. If we had let chemistry and popular education alone, the menace that everyone fears might have been something much less destructive, like forced labor or compulsory eugenics. But applied

science has made incredible weapons by which war attains the efficiency in slaughter of a machine, and our policy of general education has raised brutish peasants into feeling, if still foolish, men, whose capacity to suffer has been multiplied with their faculties for living. War has become the dreaded and ten-times deadly plague of the twentieth century. It is our black death. And with the growing complexity of its impacts and its after effects on a complex civilization, the importance of checks, ameliorations, and incitements to war grows also. If we lack a Swift, we certainly do not lack writers, and it is pertinent to ask whether literature as we read it, literature which heightens consciousness and intensifies experience and hence is a main-spring for ideas and emotions, holds back from, or encourages, war.

I believe that imaginative literature, not only what we are creating today but also what we have inherited and read and teach in schools and colleges, is at this moment in the history of culture, an urge not a hindrance to war. And I say this with, I hope, an adequate memory of the innumerable passages of great literature which, from the Sermon on the Mount and the sayings of Buddha down, urge peace on earth, good will toward men. I say it again, with a full realization that the noblest of our literary masterpieces inspire endurance, conciliation, moral courage, love, rather than hate, turmoil, or even aggressiveness. Yet while it is arguable that literature in every past not barbarous has more often held men back from physical conflict than stirred them on, the same argument is not so convincing today. The war books are more dangerous, the peace books less effective.

The recent flood of so-called war books is not responsible for this change. There have always been war books, and the *Iliad*, Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," Shakespeare's "Henry IVth"

and "Henry Vth," "Paradise Lost," "Ivanhoe," and "The Idylls of the King" belong in the same general category with "All Quiet on the Western Front." But the war book in the current sense of the word is worth pausing over because popular opinion believes that it helps to stop war.

I have read most of them, from "Mr. Britling Sees It Through" to the last terrible story of death and misery in Serbia, and I have read them with fascinated attention, for I saw just enough of the western front in 1918, and more than enough of the background of war, to find in these books that heightening of consciousness of things past which is one of the chief functions of literature.

War books like "All Quiet" or the memoirs of Sassoon, or plays like "What Price Glory," are, in one respect, the very opposite of the *Iliads* and the *Chansons de Roland*. They present war as a horrid experience, debasing and miserable. Their authors look at war as helpless men in the trenches see it after every illusion has been shot and cut and starved out of them. These books are, I suppose, the most faithful representations of war from the point of view of the inner and not usually articulate man that have ever been written. For the last war was fought just when scientific naturalism in fiction was reaching its height, and the writers of a whole generation took part and had their own experiences to draw from. Nor are these books in general unfair to the many nobler aspects of even so slaughterous and unhappy a war as the World War of 1914-1918. There is plenty of humor in them (more humor, in fact, than in modern novels about peace), a good deal of heroism, and much hearty enjoyment. Nevertheless the honest war books present an experience that no sane man would willingly repeat. I say repeat, and in this word lies the fallacy in the naive belief of peace lovers who think that if literature

and the screen and the stage will only present modern war in its stupidity, its pain, and its sordidness, no new generation will ever go *en masse* to war.

It is the new generation that will have to fight if there is fighting to be done. And what is the effect upon them, upon youth, of these war books and war films—especially those that are honest and unsparing? The effect upon them is of experience—a vital, searching, intense experience, as far removed from the drift of a routine, profit-seeking life as is a game of football from a loaf in the streets or a walk to business. For them, the writers of these books are neither propagandists nor revealers of truth, they are men who have lived intensely and who are telling youth in accents of woe and remembered misery but still with pride and a consciousness of vivid events deeply lived, that the new generation are still happy children innocent of intensity. And who, at twenty or even at thirty, wants to be a happy child!

For two decades now we have been reading these books, those who would not repeat the experience with an acutely pleasurable intensification of all their memories, but those who have never experienced an intensification of danger and of fear with the same fascination that children find in stories of ghosts and adults in stories of crime, vicariously satisfying the urge to live to the dregs, and yet feeling at the end—vicarious.

I am not attacking these, or any honest, war books, nor joining the foolish ranks of the fanatics who would oppose mention of war in books as the Soviets suppressed literature based upon capitalism. Our war books made articulate what had to be said, and the best of them made it splendidly articulate. But let no one suppose that they are winged with the white feathers of the dove of peace.

It would be as absurd to try to suppress them as to rule

out of our culture those magnificent war books of traditional literature—Homer, Virgil, the Old Testament, the romances of chivalry, the histories of Shakespeare, in which "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war" display some of the finest attributes of humanity. Although congenitally a Quaker I freely admit that, however bad war has been biologically, spiritually it has had its merits. The professional warrior has been, and is often now, a cultural type which other professions may envy, in character if not always in intellect. Brokers are usually more predatory than soldiers.

And yet this longing for fatal experience on the part of the younger generation is intensified rather than abated by such great books as I have mentioned. The great war books are rich in spiritual nourishment. When we no longer read them it will be because courage and energy and rivalry and delight in obstacles overcome have abated in a decadent race. There is nothing to be gained by forgetting the magnificent IVth book of "Paradise Lost," or limiting our Shakespeare to "As You Like It," and "Hamlet," with its little patch of ground that would scarcely hold the bodies slain for it. But they must be sublimated as undue sex stimulus is sublimated. They must meet in the minds of the readers some screen or grill through which their rays filter to become an inspiration and not incitement to an action which may seem like the wars of the past but is not an equivalent. For it is not Falstaff with his 1920 knowledge of what the grinning honor of war really means, but Hotspur's

By Heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon

that in some less romantic form lurks in the consciousness of youth reading the books about war. All I argue here is that the

most spirited books in literature can scarcely be said to be a preventive of conflict.

How can they be? They draw their ideas and their imagery from a world in which war was an unavoidable factor, in which war, for the warrior at least, was not widely different from our sports, and where armed conflict supplied the best symbols for the more virile virtues indispensable to humanity. It requires, to be sure, only that imaginative translation which we apply to every creative effort based on mores different from our own—which we apply to the Greek tragedies for example—to shift these values from a world where war was a social necessity to a new world where war is a social suicide. But in order to make that translation there must be a new language of the imagination into which to translate. And that does not yet exist. Our imaginations still live in the past, and so does our war literature.

The fundamental reason why not merely war books but the greater proportion of the great books of our literature do not incite to peace is that the older order has died and given place to the new. We live in a world where, as every intelligent person knows (although no effective person seems to be doing much about it), economic and social conditions and possibilities have both outrun our political order. Shakespeare, Milton, or even Chaucer would have little difficulty in understanding our politics, but the conception of a world-wide economic interdependence and the conception of a nation-wide racial admixture would leave them dazed and uncomprehending, chiefly because the instruments by which the new order has been made inevitable would be incomprehensible to them. Dante would come nearer (though not very near) to understanding the unmistakable need of solidarity in the modern world than any ancient or the men of the Renaissance or of

the eighteenth century. What we are painfully trying to build is something much more like the Catholic empire of the Middle Ages than the Roman empire of the classic period.

But the classics of literature are without exception based upon many ideas of social and economic relationships which are no longer realities except insofar as they survive in deleterious practice. This does not invalidate these classics as literature, for we do not read Homer or Shakespeare to learn of war and politics, or Milton to learn of the minerology of the pavement of Hell; yet those who ask whether the reading of standard literature discourages war must be answered that the world order of the classic masterpieces is always an archaic world order in which war is inevitable and, like all inevitable things, sometimes salutary when courageously embraced. It is a world order in which war is a local plague, not wild fire, for, of course, the world of the classic writers was not a world order at all, but a system of independent units but slightly correlated. It is not the world which for us must be reality.

If Mr. Pitkin in his "History of Human Stupidity" is right, and the future of society is not international, but lies rather in isolated, small, intensely nationalistic, and self-contained states ringed about with ineffective barbarism, then the influence of our present fund of literature for or against war might strike a balance. But Professor Pitkin's idea seems to me to be the wish psychology of a New Yorker who would be content with New York if only he could see how to feed it! Would such a city state be New York or rather a ruin like Rome in the sixth century, barbarous itself and waiting for a stronger barbarism to swallow it! Anything may happen to the distressed community of the twentieth century, but the trend is all the other way—toward federation or chaos. The isolationist may have his way, and it is quite probable that America may attempt to

secure herself by the same policy of isolation which has been successful in the past, but no one who has thought out the consequences can really *desire* the economic and literary dark ages in sight for an industrialized country that tries to make itself self-contained. And hence in any thinking of the future not determinedly defeatist we are forced to consider a world more, not less, co-operative and co-ordinated, and in such a world the basic political and social ideas of our imaginative literature become more and more outdated. Individualistic, national, militant literature may retain many moral values in addition to its artistic excellence, but in a world community where the term war, like the term money, is changing its meaning, and where the patriotism that saved sixteenth century England is quite capable of ruining the England of the twentieth century, the social ideas of our literary heritage do not incite to peace.

Science is a different story. With a few exceptions to be noted later, scientific writing is all on the side of peace. Scientific books, for one thing, die conveniently when they are read. Their facts are absorbed into the next synthesis, and, with the exception of a few works in the marginal fields of social science, no books live on to confuse the imagination of readers. Science inevitably works for an ordered world, and since it is an amateur handling of social and economic questions which is responsible for most of our disorder, scientific writing, when it touches war at all, is entirely an argument for peace. In a thousand modern books of social science, precautions and adjustments essential for the avoidance of war are laid down with a clarity which unfortunately is no guarantee that they will ever be adopted. The whole case against war as an almost totally destructive agency in the modern state is amply set forth by science. It has proved it biologically deleterious, psychologically dangerous, and socially unwise except in the narrowest of

special instances. If applied science has made war damaging beyond precedent, scientific thinking has offered a compensation for the disasters which it makes possible by an elaborate exposition of what mankind must do to be saved from its own skill. Political science is as aware of the perils of unrestrained nationalism as parliaments and congresses are ignorant. Economical science is as alive to the possibilities of international control and internal adjustment as political parties are blind to the ultimate results of their economic policies. The scientific mind is as clear in its general principles as the popular mind is muddled. If pseudo-scientific books on racial superiorities have done harm, and the twisted science of cheap journalism is damaging, that is not the fault of science but of a human nature which psychologists can analyze but have not begun to control.

And yet if the new generation were fed exclusively upon the best scientific writing it is doubtful whether they would be conditioned against war. For such great impulses as the desire for experience and the urge to live a dangerous, competitive life are, of course, emotional and spring from ancestral regions into which the logic of facts penetrates like a bullet which shoots through the trunk of a tree leaving only a hole which the living tissues quickly close. Scientific writing is all against war, all for the solidarity of some economically federated world in which individualism would survive as a utility not as a menace. But its impact is too slow. It needs a century to work in. It is, I fear, almost powerless with most adults, powerless, that is, to affect action in times of stress; and in the minds of children it must meet emotional drives in a different direction with which, until this science becomes the basis of a new literature, it is quite unable to cope. After the best scientific treatment, emotional cravings are left adrift which are sure to

fasten themselves to opportunities for excitement, escape, or intense experience. Indeed, a sound scientific training makes a man far more useful in war, as war is now fought, and therefore especially susceptible to calls to service. Doctors are emotionally helpless before the fact of war.

Science needs no reforming, but it lacks the direct appeal to the emotions of art. Shall we then ask our poets, novelists, and dramatists to rise to the emergency and produce anti-war propaganda? Is that the literature this new world needs? Did you ever read the imaginative literature of Prohibition, or do you suppose that the ultimate effect of even such a book as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was fortunate? The muse saddled with a moral duty has always been an unhappy spectacle. It is not books of propaganda, or the statements, the arguments, the morals in any literature which awake the imagination and arouse the will, but ideals, archetypes, fictitious courses of action which subtly transform the mind of the reader, until he is able to adopt a new pattern of life because in imagination he is a new man. And hence the opponent of war does not solicit tracts and tirades and dismal tragedies with morals writ in blood, nor realistic studies of the miseries of war, which, like Chaucer's Chariot of Mars, merely arouse the curiosity. He hopes for a new literature which will make intimate and desired an imagined world where war is improbable.

It is easy to prophesy what that world would be like economically, less easy to guess what it would be like socially, and very difficult to imagine it complete now in terms of our human nature. It is the world we already know, in which the combativeness of man has been immensely reduced, his powers of co-operation very much increased, and his self-knowledge raised at least one or two millimeters. It is that world pro-

jected toward a favorable future. And the new literature, which will directly help us toward such a future, must imitate human nature in a stage of transition from the militant to the co-operative, it must take the ideal of world solidarity as naturally as the Iliad takes the fact of Hellenic patriotism. It must base its imaginative edifices upon a social structure where war is an accident, and only thus can it really shape an imaginative ideal of peace.

This is very different from the satiric methods of a Voltaire, the ironic methods of a Swift, the pleading and protests of a Chaucer, a Shakespeare, or a Tolstoy, or the scorn of a Bernard Shaw. All these have their uses, but literature is far too complex in its emotional effects to be a safe refuge against war until it is built on new foundations.

No literature today discharges this high function, for no literature has the world as subject, and nothing else will serve our purpose. The Christian gospel did embrace the world, but a world before economics and applied science had changed the terms of the problem. The "Divine Comedy" of Dante did deal with an organization of the world as he knew it, but the ideals and the archetypes of that great poem are both drawn from a society so radically different from ours that they have only a moral value. We need a new type of humanism to counteract a patriotism out of joint, and for that we have the prose of science but not yet poetry which can arouse the imagination.

Our writers are well aware of the need. Indeed, I suppose that no first-rate writer today anywhere is oblivious to the calamitous results of excessive nationalism. Perhaps they are too aware of the muddle of the world. Many of them are in precipitate flight from catastrophe, taking refuge, like T. S. Eliot,

in tradition, or, like Joyce or Proust, in an intense individualism. Others, like Sinclair Lewis, with teeth set on edge by the growing pains of democratic civilization, are lashing at provincial nationalism. Such a book was "Main Street." Still others, like the new Soviet novelists, are absorbed in what they regard as a world order forming in their own race and land, too absorbed in their own experiment to be humanists in the sense in which I have used the word. Still others, like H. G. Wells, a notable example, have had a glimpse of a world society which might provide a new literature as well as a new life, but are too burdened with the duty of preaching scientific Utopias to let the imagination rise to a great creative effort. Wells is clearly an artist half emerged from the shell of science, his wings still clogged with yolk. Perhaps the most conscious example of a literature of solidarity is Jules Romains's "Men of Good Will," still uncompleted. If literature is not opening the roads to peace it is not because writers have their heads in the sand, but because the new task for them is immensely difficult.

It is difficult because modern literature is bred and born of nationalism and runs back to it whenever the jaws of war threaten it. Where its theme is not nationalistic, its subjects are. Where its subjects are types of men or ideas recognizable everywhere, the figures of speech and the whole associative complex of the work of art are dependent upon nationalistic ideas for their force and validity. And rightly so, for literature cannot be made out of the future, and only with great difficulty out of the present. To write scientifically, prosaically, of the kind of world in which modern war with its modern causes would be improbable, is easy; but to make this world emotionally convincing and appealing requires a medium that has not yet been developed, because the stuff of experience which the medium

will express is still inchoate and new. World solidarity, to use again that vague term, is not now hot and exalted in the imagination because it still exists only as a potential necessity rather than as such a vital reality as Shakespeare's England was to Shakespeare. The deep associations which make the language of literature rich and suggestive do not adhere to such a conception. Inevitably when poets write of it they become rhetorical as Tennyson did, or vague and platitudinous like the weaker passages of Thomas Hardy's "Dynasts," and the cloudier strophes of the political poems of Shelley.

Yet such a heat and exaltation is perfectly possible while the hoped-for state remains only an ideal. It has happened before when a new conception of human order suddenly struck the imagination. It happened when the Greeks conceived of Hellenism as a culture able to lift men forever above barbarism. It happened when Shakespeare (and many with him) turned the high expectancy of the Renaissance into passion. When Marlowe wrote—

And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,

a new language for England was born. A language was born again with Milton. And our own Walt Whitman, struggling against the nationalisms which caused the Civil War, did invent for his conception of an economic democracy free to assert the individualism of everyone, the language for one of the most stirring poems of Utopia ever written. He himself came too early for a world view, since his vision was limited by the possibilities of a unique America, but the "Leaves of Grass," in spirit if not in form, comes nearer to being the prototype of the kind of literature which in this day could open roads to

peace than any other book known to me. For Whitman assumes as the basis of his poetry a new society, not too different from the community of his own day to be unconvincing, and yet already living in a new order. He believed it to be *the* new order, but that does not diminish the importance and the significance for later writers of his attempt. When someone writes a "Leaves of Grass" which has the same relation to world solidarity as a possible economic and social basis of society that its great prototype had to America as America was before the Civil War, the new literature of which I write will have begun.

It is neither the romance of Hotspur, however sublimated, nor the grinning sarcasm of Falstaff that will help to save the world from war, but, if there is to be any help from literary art, a literature reflecting a social order that our age will create because it must. And since war and literature are both symptoms, one bad, one good, of a greed for living, the change cannot come much more rapidly in literature than in life, although one may for a while outrun the other—and both may turn back on the course. It is nonsense to expect literature alone to reform the world. It can help, but it cannot help much until by some process like conversion, or by logic, or by the results of harsh experience—and most probably by all three—peace, the expert, co-operative, and constructive peace which is the only kind of any use in a world like ours, becomes intimate to the imagination. Then, since literature is an intensification of experience and feeds upon what is most intense in its day, it will feed upon the passion for such a peace as it once fed upon war, and now upon love, and the beautiful experience, and death. And just as the statistician's curve indicates the rise and fall of price levels throughout the world, so literature, and especially poetry, will register the turn of the world, if there is to be a turn,

away from war. But unlike the statistician's curve, it will influence as well as indicate. When the books we read begin to be conditioned by a new world order where peace is possible, they will begin to condition a future where war is improbable—even as they are conditioning the future now, but not towards peace.

Chapter VIII

ON STYLE AND ENGLISH

I. A SERMON ON STYLE

*T*HE English Bible is dying. I do not mean its theology, nor its historical or spiritual content. I do not refer to the controversies between Fundamentalists and Rationalists, nor to the interpretation as poetry and legend of what once was regarded as literal fact. Where the Bible is historical at all there is probably more evidence as to its historicity available than ever before. I do not assert that its moral values have declined, although they have certainly been transvalued, nor that as great literature it is one whit less than our ancestors (when they dared to think of it as literature at all) believed it to be.

But all qualifications aside, the English Bible, and specifically the King James version, is losing, or has already lost, a power over the imagination almost unexampled in history. It was couched in a prose so rich with the genius of a great language, and so invariably read with reverence, love, or fear, that there is perhaps no equivalent instance of the style as well as the substance of a single book influencing and sometimes dominating the mold of thought and form of expression of a whole people.

The Bible, for English speakers from the seventeenth century on, was the Word. When they read "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," they thought, or should have thought, of Christ as the Divine Intelligence and Mediator be-

tween God and man. But it was the English phrase, not the Greek meaning, which prevailed. The Logos, for English readers, was neither reason, nor the Divine expression as such, but the Word of a sacred Book, authoritative, irrefutable, magic. And it was a great Word. The most sophisticated megalopolitan cannot read Isaiah today, or Paul, without yielding to the spell. There has been equal eloquence in other tongues, but no such prevailing eloquence. Not all the obscurities, the contradictions, and the absurdities in the Bible can detract from its great power in this respect. Enter to scoff and you remain to be stirred and exalted.

My argument is simple, and must be simply stated. Whatever the spiritual and theological strength of the English Bible, its influence was due in no slight measure to the power of English eloquence, to style in the truest sense of the word. Whatever else it may have been, it was a great Book, a strong Word, an inescapable pressure of great statement, vital, simple, beautiful, upon ordinary man. If he did not read Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Wordsworth, Keats, Emerson, Whitman, he had this. And if the subject matter of the Bible had been the Hindu Gospel or Greek mythology or Buddhism or the philosophy of Confucius, and if the English style had possessed like qualities of excellence, the influence for which I am arguing would still have been immense.

It is as the Word, in the sense which English readers understood, that the English Bible is dying. It is through this Word, whether spoken or written, that we got our strongest moral and spiritual stimulus. The power of a phrase may, and often does, exceed the power of an idea, because the phrase may carry with it a train of emotional suggestion and a stir to reminiscence that moves the whole being.

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.

Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. O let thine ears consider well: the voice of my complaint. If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss: O Lord, who may abide it.

From the Word in this sense our religious life has been quickened and the mind exalted. Not the literal meaning, but the rich suggestiveness of the phrase has been a saving help in time of trouble or the cause of new realization or resolve. The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life, can be very fairly paraphrased into a literary statement of the power of the Word.

At the moment when words have been given wings to speak round the world, when the radio has increased the stature (but unfortunately not the mind) of the orator by a cubit, so that where he spoke to a thousand, now a million hear him; when the press and its reduplications pour words in a torrent over every mind, the Word, as our ancestors knew it, has lost its power, speaks no more with final authority even to the most devout, and as a factor in spiritual and aesthetic education has become quaint and reminiscent rather than vital and awesome. Whatever statistics may show as to the sales and distribution of the English Bible, it is not read as it once was. Our daily conversation, our writing, and our speaking prove this too readily. Ye shall know them by their fruits, applies to books as well as to men. Even Fundamentalists are modern (shall we say, most modern) in their colloquial spoken style, and if the Bible is read weekly in churches, it is clear that neither preacher nor congregation listen as they once listened to the Word.

I belong myself to that Quakerish school that never made a fetish of the Bible, and should be particularly disinclined to argue for a return to the general, indiscriminate, daily reading of the Bible which once was common. Not even the seventeenth century could turn all the Bible into impressive prose. "Revelation" is tedious and hysterical when it is not magnificent. Old Testament ethics are frequently shocking, and the English of certain speeches of Jehovah and Jeremiah is much more admirable than their content or the character of the speakers.

Nor do I hold with the worthy teachers who would have us adopt the English Bible as a model for current English. That is, to speak brusquely, nonsense. The Biblical style is eloquent and almost unequalled in emotional expressiveness. But it is entirely inadequate for exact statement or lucid analysis, as indeed was all English prose before the eighteenth century. The revision of revised versions has made its obscurer passages clearer only by a descent into flat modernism which sacrifices rhythm and emotion to the meaning of the original. This great style rises to its height, as all agree, in the Old Testament, where it is precisely least adapted to the needs of a scientific age, to any age indeed, not content to express itself by poetical indirection.

The rules of logical English Composition are nearly all broken in the Bible. Unity is by no means constant, coherence is casual, only emphasis is invariably maintained. To urge a youth entering any department of modern life to form his style upon the Bible is as foolish as to advise tilting, camel riding, and the study of medicinal herbs as a preparation for engineering or the law. The English style of the Bible is more remote from the practical necessities of modern prose than Pindar from the exposition of Aristotle. It is a magnificent prose, but absolutely unadapted to the expression of nine-

tenths of what we as journalists, scientists, novelists, legalists, scholars, and even ministers, must necessarily express.

It is as a stimulant, a corrective, and a source, that the Biblical style has been so valuable. Lincoln did not learn to write from the Bible. He learned to write from Blackstone and the historians and the essayists. His Gettysburg speech is not Biblical in its style, but eighteenth century at the earliest. It was from the Bible that he learned pitch, and exaltation, and the power of the Word. It was his reading and hearing of the Bible that gave him simplicity and force in his diction. Order, clarity, logic, accuracy—these indispensables of style in a modern civilization—he got elsewhere.

Thus it is not to be deplored that editorial writers in the London or the New York *Times* do not use the style of Jeremiah. If they did, we would not read them; indeed we know too well, from a familiar kind of sermon, the unfortunate results of talking seventeenth century when you have a twentieth (or late nineteenth!) century brain. Yet it is to be regretted that we do not have what Lincoln had, nor are ever likely to possess it in the same measure from the same source. For the attitude of awed reverence for the Bible is gone, and what is more important, the wide and continual and often exclusive reading of the Bible is gone. The Word will always have power, but the power of a Classic not a Scripture. It will never again lift with little effort the style of plain men like John Bunyan or George Fox, because it is no longer in the active consciousness of plain men that read and listen. Norman French, with a great literature behind it, died out in England because the speakers could not count on an understanding. The parallel is inexact, because there are elements of permanence in the English Bible and factors of resemblance in modern English not present in the analogue, but the comparison points my meaning. The Bible

and Biblical English will stay, will enrich our style, will stir our emotions (is it conceivable that the story of Absalom will ever lose its poignancy?), but the Word as an influence of privileged might and universal acceptance is dying. It may put on the immortality of literature, but its moral dominance is gone.

"I come"—to quote from that other great reservoir of English style—"to bury Caesar, not to praise him." My preaching is concerned not so much with holding fast to our inheritance in the English Bible, as with inevitable losses that already may be estimated and are likely to increase. For with the decline of the majestic influence of Jacobean prose a whole department of style seems to be lost to us, and to regard the loss as merely literary is to take a most superficial view.

It may be said that the current age is scientific, utilitarian, practical, and therefore needs only the plain and flexible, simple and accurate prose which it is getting in characteristic specimens from our best writers. But this generalization is not true, and if it were, no one could rest content with what it implies.

We are scientific, utilitarian, practical, and we do need and have got in our modern English an instrument almost as accurate and flexible as French prose, and probably more expressive. To write now like Ruskin or Carlyle or Dr. Johnson or Robert Burton or the makers of the English Bible is a sign of weakness, not strength, and (whatever teachers of English and Tory critics may say) that kind of writing for us is nothing, gets nowhere, and indicates more surely than anything else a spiritual and aesthetic plagiarism. It is well known among teachers of English that one of the surest symptoms of the intellectual parasitism of a second-rate mind is an essay written in the style of Charles Lamb.

But not all of us, and no one of us, is all scientific, utili-

tarian, practical. These are merely the contours which are turned for touch and shaping to this age in which we live. The waters still run deep even though the angel of the Old Testament seldom troubles them. A craving for beauty, a sense of awe, a moral urge, the love of an ideal, the need of worship, the belief in spiritual values, are of course as existent in a machine age as in any other. They have not pressed for expression because other needs in this economic century have been more urgent, and still more perhaps because the expressiveness of our fathers has until recently been sufficient for traits temporarily recessive. But they must find expression somehow, and may need a new expressiveness at any moment more urgently than do the measurements of science. Science, indeed, having come close to metaphysics, needs a new diction now. The physicist falls from very helplessness into the language of the Bible in the attempt to intimate (for he cannot express) his new sense of the nonexistence of mere things. We need a new expressiveness for what is not practical, utilitarian, scientific, and sophisticated.

The King James version was a new medium for expression. I am naturally aware that it was a translation, and also of its partial dependence on earlier versions as far back as Wycliffe. Nevertheless it stands of itself; it dates as of seventeenth century protestant England where the leadership of the new world was being forged. The interpenetration of its language through all serious English literature of the next centuries is proof of what was accomplished. A new eloquence for spiritual and ethical concepts was given to the race. The subject matter was not English, although it deeply concerned the England of the day, but the style was native.

It may be done again, though not in the same way. It may be done, not for an ancient Scripture, but for some new sub-

ject of quest and craving. It must be done. We must translate deep spiritual emotion and strong ethical desires into our vernacular, but first from the vernacular we must make or remake a style.

The psychological effect of reading, as reading goes today, is difficult to estimate, but must be extraordinary. The book, as Spengler says with his customary dogmatism, but at least an aspect of truth, is disappearing. For the masses, who no longer are illiterate, this is the age of reading—of newspaper and magazine reading, and of hearing the same kind of journalism over the radio. Millions of words, flat and soggy most of them, fall like an endless snow upon civilized man. He is drifted in with them, buried; wherever he goes he wades through printed or spoken words. His business is by words said or words read, and in his leisure he opens his mind to them. At the least estimate a city dweller reads or hears fifty thousand words a day.

This circumstance is so new that we can only guess at an outcome. That our thoughts are increasingly formulated in words—words drifted into the mind—is probable. That we use words more and get less from them, seems certain. The commonplaceness of everyday living in modern comfort is in part a mental reaction to the flatness of the words in which we have our being. Tabloid readers will eventually talk and think in tabloid—a soggy sensationalism. The mind overfed on the style so bleached of color and strained of disturbing complexities which is the ideal of good journalism and reaches its perfection of nullity in the English of radio broadcasting, will have no other medium in which to express itself. And the modern prose of literary masters which I, for one, admire, a prose that is adroit, accurate, subtle, scientific in the best sense, is still inadequate for purposes that must even in a prosaic age be im-

portunate. It would be impossible to translate into its skillful commonsense the religious emotions of Job—

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the cornerstone thereof; when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? . . . Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? . . . Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominions thereof in the earth? . . . Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

And who dares to say that our inability to find equivalent organ tones of English is because we have no religious emotion, no spiritual insight, no quests and no cravings as urgent, if less naive, than Job's to express!

Modern English is lacking in eloquence, in its root sense of speaking out, and its acquired meaning of speaking out from the heart. We need a new "grand style," and it is not a sufficient answer to say that first we must acquire grandeur. For grandeur is a constant, relative only in its degree and its mani-

festations, and in literature truly limited by the ability of an age to express its inner self. In this country we were well on the way to attain a prose style with scope and lift, in the creative period of American imagination which ended with the Civil War. Emerson and Thoreau were both eloquent, and Thoreau, at least, wrote with a mind as modern as our own. There has been little real eloquence in American prose since because there has been little felt need. And should a prophet arrive, or, if that is too archaic a term, a great teacher, philosopher, preacher, or writer of Pascal's caliber or Milton's, where is his medium? Can he forge it over night? It was a group of quite undistinguished men, as literature goes, which made the English Bible. But they had a great prose ready at hand.

It is hard to write of a Great Need without falling into the bombast or abstraction of those who speak of Long Felt Wants and Next Steps and Urgent Duties. This sermon on styles raises, of course, more questions than it answers, and indeed that is my purpose. It implies, for example, that literature with a purpose deserves a great style, and this is an idea very distasteful to modern critics who like to see the cool detachment of science extended to art. Description, measurement, analysis, have been at the heart of twentieth century literature. Writers who attempted other modes have been called propagandists, sentimentalists, or accused (often rightly) of stale romantic symbolism.

And yet, though ethics has been run out of poetry and fiction clipped of its morals, the didactic has merely changed its costume for a business suit and sneaked back by the stage door in Shaw's plays or entered as a hard-boiled journalist in H. G. Wells's novels.

The difference between H. G. Wells and the Bible can be measured in style. Both preach morality, and while I am not

comparing subject matters, I am willing to grant to Wells a rather exalted morality. But Wells has no eloquence and needs none for his appeals to commonsense.

There is, indeed, always a moral, and a religious literature too, being written, even in the most immoral societies. But if we insist upon it being unliterary, not eloquent, deny it beauty and the attributes of art, turn it over to the journalists and the satirists and the professional propagandists, we get the kind of style and the kind of literature for which we ask. Even then, a Hardy will take a scientific age on its own terms and make great poetry of its doubts.

But it is not enough to say that we get the style we deserve. I readily grant that a commonplace people, let us say the Dutch of the eighteenth century, are not going to produce masterpieces of literary art. But where are the critics wise enough to estimate the essential greatness or littleness of their own times! It is argued that this is the great and virile age of America. It is argued that we are in the very decadence of true Americanism. Let them argue. All that can safely be said until time has finished with us, is that our literature is more or less expressive of what we are. The Elizabethan literature, it is now clear, was immensely expressive; the writing of the mauve decade of the recent Nineties, when the astonishing twentieth century was in full preparation, was certainly not very expressive, or fully expressive only of imperialism, a fine-drawn febrile aesthetics, and a vague romantic sentimentalism destined to blow away like mist banks within a decade.

Our styles—the adroit sophisticated style of the subtler British novelists and poets, the plain man-to-man style of Wells and Sinclair Lewis, the colorless, but readable and fluent style of American journalism, smart, humorous, and often wise in the columnists, informative, unemotional, but pointed and close

to human needs in *The Saturday Evening Post* or *The New York Times*, the familiar, colloquial style of realistic poetry and modern biographical writing—these styles are all expressive and some of them excellent instruments. No one wants sex novels written in the prose of the Song of Solomon or articles in the accent of 2d Corinthians. Journalists and novelists alike have done well by the English language. They can say what they want and say it as well as it has ever been said. But who shall assert that there are no profounder emotions, neither descriptive nor analytic, demanding a different and nobler style in prose and poetry than any of these? And if they exist, by what tongue shall they speak?

My somewhat ideal thesis therefore is, that we must recapture the Word, with all the content I have tried to give to that term. We are in real danger of losing, in an age of flat prose, an essential and invaluable capacity of the language, fully realized once in the English Bible, but realizable again—the capacity to express by tone and overtone, by rhythm, and by beauty and force of vocabulary, the religious, the spiritual, the ethical cravings of man who would still be obsessed by them even if he were proved—as now seems most unlikely—to be only a biological machine.

And the Word, while secondary if you will, and an instrument only, is indispensable for turning ideas and emotions into communicable force. If, as the eighteenth century naïvely believed, we could find all that we need to say in the classics, if we could rest finally content with the eloquence of Job! But their words are already dim for a generation that does not feel their authority or receive their connotations; and such styles cannot voice the strange vicissitudes of an age that knows the mysteries of the prophets are the commonplaces of science, and yet must face new mysteries more perplexing and less absolute.

2. BOMBING THE PARAGRAPH

Some act of national recovery is needed if the English paragraph is to be saved. Let us recall to the memories of those who once were accustomed to good English what the paragraph was supposed to be before it ran upon the rocks of mass production and was splintered into incoherent sentences.

The paragraph was a trim little vessel in the days when journalists still wrote for minds trained to hold more than one thought at a time. Rhetoricians spoke of it as one full step in the development of an idea, and might have compared it with a fan which spreads without losing its unity, increasing its usefulness without changing its control. An idea stated in a single sentence (topic, they used to call it) is self-sufficient only for the very wise or the very simple. Emerson and Thoreau, among Americans, wrote self-sufficient sentences for the wise, and the race of columnists (who call themselves paragraphers) have carried on this tradition of apothegm all the way into wisecrack—a sentence paragraph which is a nut that a sharp mind can bite into.

But this is specialists' work. The general utility paragraph led off (in the days of coherence) with a sentence that said simply and definitely what the writer thought. But thought is never so simple as that. It must be qualified, developed, explained, if it is to satisfy the sophisticated. Only the naïve will swallow a generalization without chewing on it. The English paragraph in its prime was raw material made fit for eating by a skillful cook. If the writer began "Democracy depends upon intelligence," he could not leave it at that. Simple minds might be content, but in those days readers were not that simple. They asked why and were prepared to reserve judgment until, item after item, the explanation or argument unrolled to a

Q. E. D. at the end of the paragraph. Macaulay, whose diminishing reputation as a historian still leaves him one of the world's great journalists, could fling out a reverberating paragraph as organized and emphatic and lucid as the simplest sentence, which prepared, held, and satisfied the attentive reader by a structure which had all the advantages of a formula without its dangerous simplicity. Frank Cobb of the old *World* could drop his sequent sentences one after another in perfect harmony for a column before the packed theme with which he began had been unpacked and become an organism of thought.

The paragraph, like many other good things, was wrecked by mass production. When newspapers, and then magazines, began to be published for the millions, writers soon found that their readers were short-winded. They would hold their brains together for three or four sentences, not more. News was rewritten for them in short paragraphs, the ramp of the story broken up into little steps; and that was good, especially when the sentences took on the color of contemporary impressionism, for in the reporting of successive incidents, the successive topics are facts which need no logical development. Paragraphs are relatively unimportant in narrative. Not so with editorials and articles. When the writers whose duty it was to exhort or explain discarded the paragraph (the Hearst newspapers began it) and wrote series of short, sharp sentences, each set apart so that it might be easily assimilated by the dumbest readers, they scored at first a great journalistic success. Strong writing, it seemed to be, punches from the shoulder, very persuasive to the man who must have a thought knocked into him, well calculated indeed for a nation of quick readers who seldom read books and lacked the patience (and often the ability) to follow the testing of an idea through a paragraph. And thou-

sands of writers, noting the success with the masses of these disintegrated paragraphs, imitated them, until even when an idea had to be tested, explained, in order to mean anything at all, their paragraphs were still split into groups of pointed sentences, one statement at a time, so that even the feeble-minded could read.

That is where we are today in the bulk of English writing outside of books and the better magazines. Unfortunately, however, the immense majority of readers, even among the masses, are not feeble-minded. They are, one suspects, beginning to react by not reading at all, or by taking the first punch and dodging all the rest. After all, this method of writing was first devised, not for journalism, but for children's reading-books, where not only paragraphs but long words were split for immature minds. Our journalists have treated their readers like children and they are getting a child's reactions, violent, brief, and oversimplified. They have violated the natural order of thinking and, as a result, give no training and get no response in thought. Like the advertisers and the politicians, they have been playing upon the unformed mass mind for profits, consistently making thought easy in the hope of speedier results. It is a phase of exploitation, and will produce its reactions in both reader and writer, like every other attempt to debase the currency of human intercourse.

3. WORDS, WORDS

In childhood words are powerful sounds quivering with magic. They give power over things; bring food, bring comfort, make pain articulate, change anger to love. When the tongue masters them, the little nursery world seems mastered too. In youth, words retain some of their magic, for every new abstraction given a name seems to explain forever some section

of experience. "Democracy," "liberalism," "sophistication," "socialism," "exploitation," "decadence," "communism," "nationalism"—youth has leaped at the words like trout for flies. Each at some time for everyone has seemed a revelation. In middle age the trickery of words should be evident. Then the hardening mind should begin to distrust these approximate and inaccurate symbols of thought. Language, that flowing robe, intricately woven, which both reveals and conceals the infinitely more complex body of sensation, rationalization, wish, and non-wish, should be turned inside out by virtue of an education that enables the critical mind to analyze its own articulation. The civilized intellect should step upon the thin ice of expression with full knowledge that only a slight crystallization of meaning keeps it above no-sense. Before it trusts the weight of an idea it should watch for cracks, and measure the scant fabric that upholds the mind. But we live in a word-confident society, where the delicate ice splits beneath assurance, and our spokesmen wallow in non-logic and non-sense without the slightest perception that words have let them down again. And we wallow after them.

Recently a distinguished elder statesman addressed an audience in New York on the foreign policy of the United States. He spoke of nationalism, which he upheld, and internationalism, which he deplored, of patriotism, entanglements, commitments; and before he had finished his eloquent address, had made Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson, and himself use these vague crystallizations of thought with identical meanings. Even transportation and communication, two other words which, like a lady's bag, hold a different assortment every time one looks into them, were made to mean alike for both the eighteenth century and the twentieth.

He was followed by an ex-ambassador, adroit and skeptical,

who, with a dozen snicks of his knifelike mind, cut the argument to ribbons. The Senator's "nationalism," his "internationalism," his "commitments" were words only, which, so to speak, dripped out their content as they were lifted from one century to another, until in the eloquent structure of that oration they meant precisely everything or nothing. But the operation was too skillful. The speech, though cut to pieces, still stood up, like one of those medieval giants sliced by a knight-errant, but unaware that he was dead. And all such speeches, all such arguing will stand up, will be persuasive (like so many pages of that masterpiece of meaningless meaning, "Mein Kampf") while words do the work of thinking.

Since the human race has always tricked itself with words, there is nothing novel in this complaint; but two considerations suggest themselves. First, no society was ever subjected to such a downpour and upflood of words as ours—words printed by millions and read by more millions, words broadcast by millions, words spoken by machinery for millions. There was time between words in the eighteenth century for the not too few who could think. But if a word like "religion" could slay its thousands in the seventeenth century, a word like "patriotism" undefined can slay its millions in the twentieth. If words have raised us in the past, words in the present can let us down to that level where the instinctive commonsense of the peasant is truer and safer than the word-deluded reasoning of a culture built upon formulas.

And, second, this, that there is clearly something wrong with an education that sends out so many sheep with wool that can be plucked out in handfuls if only the right magic word is shouted over the flock. Our old linguistic education had this advantage at least, that no boy with his mind disciplined by Latin escaped the knowledge that virtue had not

always meant the same thing, or that Cicero's praise of republican institutions could not be used as a defense of the Republican party. I have examined many of the books of English Composition which are supposed to provide in our schools a substitute for that drill in language which the old curriculum, with all its drawbacks, did provide. And in them I have found many exercises in the dictionary meaning of words, and many precepts for guidance in accuracy for those who will say "aggravate" when they mean "irritate." But aside from a few general statements, literally nothing which would rub, pound, grind into the meanest intelligence the infinitely important fact that a word is only a symbol, and that those abstract words with which we do our thinking have to be examined for their content at least as scrupulously as a golf bag or a surgeon's kit. If there is one vast, egregious, and disastrous failure in modern education, palpable, provable, and ominous, it is the failure to teach not only the masses, but economists, scientists, industrialists, and even Senators, to define their terms.

4. BROADCASTING ENGLISH

The broadcaster has become an Olympian. His voice, calm, cool, unhurried, is always waiting just above the check and double check of black-face dialogue, the rush of a symphony, or the syncopation of a dance orchestra. The speeches at the Hardware Dinner all end with him. He prefaces alike the squeaky falsetto of the entertainer and the big bass boom of the uplifter. He is as inevitable as the hour-end chimes and more insistent. Whoever talks, sings, plays, he is the norm to which the waves must always return. Hence if any English is important it is his, if any intonation is prepotent it must be his. As he talks, millions will try to talk, in their moments of

linguistic aspiration. He is the pronouncing handbook of the air.

We have no complaint to make of the broadcaster's grammar. It is usually impeccable. Nor of his articulation, which, in the sharpest contrast to the American habit generally, is clear and intelligible. His English and the speaking of his English are both correct—correct with a deadly formality which makes them scarcely spoken English at all, but a new stereotyped style of toneless expression, accurate, monotonous, stiff, suggesting nothing so much as the Spencerian samples of penmanship in the copy books. His rare mistakes seem glints of humanity breaking through a fog. When through some carelessness, we hear him upstage and away from the transmitter, his sack-suit tones in contrast to his dress-suit manner when he knows he is being heard, are a relief.

For good English, well spoken, is not just correct English. It must express an individual mind in individual words; it either has life or it is dead. Grammar is not enough, accurate pronunciation is not enough, correct word order is not enough. Spoken, it must have style, the style of the individual, which is a flavor personal and distinct, as observable in two or three sentences as in an after dinner speech. Our complaint against the broadcasters—most of the broadcasters—is that they are wooden, sterile, colorless, without savor or variety in their speech, that as models of English, which they perforce become, they seem to wish to teach us all to talk like mechanical dolls or robots. The undeniable fact that Americans at large are incredibly slipshod, nasal, inaccurate in their language makes the speech after which we may model ours doubly important, and what the schools and the homes have failed to do, the constant iteration of the radio may succeed in accomplishing. Radio entertainment cannot be controlled in the interests of

good English. We must take what we can get, and indeed the wide variety of accents and inflections as our language pours over the air from East, West, North, and South is one of the excellences of audition. But the impresario of the air, the prologuist and commentator of all the wave lengths, the voice which always returns, can surely be made a more human instrument of a more natural and effective speech. They have done it in England, not, one fancies, by selecting men of superior intelligence or greater education, but by setting precedents for their broadcasters of that flexible, easy, and expressive speaking, which good minds and likable personalities naturally use when urged to be their best selves, and not just correct.

5. "HER VOICE WAS . . . SOFT"

I have read with a good deal of sympathy the advertisements of various salesmen offering to teach the correct use of English. The institutions they represent are the beauty shops of language. Here the poor aint's and he don't's and we was's and ought of's go in to be stretched and lifted and smoothed until the speaker can open his lips without a toad falling out of them. I am, frankly, a little skeptical of the results often promised, for the idea is too commonly expressed that a little grammar and spelling will accomplish what really needs a mental development. Good English comes from a good mind, and no other. And if the mind is good and the English irregular there may be merit in its irregularity.

But another kind of cultural beauty shop, if it exists, has few customers. The thronging girls on the noon-hour streets of a great city are hysterically aware of the need—

Still to be neat, still to be dressed
As you were going to a feast.

And they patronize, I suspect, the grammar shops occasionally, for an overheard conversation will sometimes have an almost priggish correctness in the selection of words. But, O the voices! And O the enunciation! The Darwinian idea that fine clothes, like fine feathers, are sex appeals and nothing else was much too simple. A good share of this finery has nothing to do with sex. It is an attempt to assert the social position of the wearer in a great anonymous civilization where the individual must assert or be unknown. The hat says, I am not too poor; the dress, I have some taste; the shoes, I know style when I see it. This is what advertisers call, in its inverted form, the snob appeal, but the term is harsh. Put a strange chicken in a chicken yard and watch it after awhile begin to plume and strut a little, as if to say, I myself am somebody, I am one of you and not of the lowliest! In a village everyone is known. Strutting is useless. But in a city, the anonymous he or she must hang out some signal to the crowd, some advertisement of native worth. The female signals the male; but not only the male; she informs her betters in taste, in style, in spending money, that she herself has points which they can appreciate.

How strange then that language, and particularly voice, has been so neglected. For there is no worse advertisement than bad speaking. It is like the scent of the fox; the bearer cannot escape from it, all the neighborhood is aware. Character, temperament, personality are elusive and hard to come at; clothes tell the story quickly, though only a part of it; but the voice, that most characteristic of all human attributes, seems to be the essential person himself, shedding the husk of bought adornments, telling as much of the truth as can be told in a brief contact, saying far more than the words. Let her spend her mornings at the beautifier, her afternoons at the dressmaker, and still one word will betray her. She may have a good heart,

and a sterling character, and a passable mind, and still that rasp and slide over the English vowels, that choke on the consonants, and breath nasally sharpened, will undo all her promises. It takes a more than passable beauty to make up for squawks and shrillings, which is one reason perhaps why so many girls nowadays seem to prefer to do their hugging by daylight.

Indeed, a worldly wise adviser of sensitive youth would certainly urge upon the socially minded more care in speaking and in their choice of books. For if one can tell a little about character and all about looks from the face, it is the book on the table, or the magazine under the arm, or the newspaper being read, that reveals the mental status to a curious observer; it is the voice which denotes, more sharply and on the whole more accurately than anything else, a cultural classification, and distinguishes the golden from the gilded.

Chapter IX

OUT-OF-TOWN ESSAYS

I. DEBUNKING THE NIGHTINGALE

*F*OR years I have sought an opportunity to check up on the nightingale, and found it at last in the elm woods that Wellington planted on the slopes of the Alhambra, and under the plane trees of Greece.

The nightingale of fame is a literary creation. The real bird has been belied. Reputable American poets still describe the lark as soaring and singing above New England pastures, and carry on the false tradition that the nightingale is the spokesman of a broken heart, the nightingale that they have never heard, and which cannot sing as well as native songsters they should have heard. This is enough to make nationalism ruffle its feathers. But it is the English poets who are chiefly guilty.

The nightingale of literature is subjective. In the Greek legend, being Philomela, she sang with her breast against a thorn, and so she has sung in the ears of Greek-read poets ever since.

Hark, from that moonlit cedar what a burst!
What triumph! Hark!—what pain!

Nonsense! Matthew Arnold had been reading Greek poetry with his windows tight shut.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death.

The truth is that Keats would have been equally melancholy if a cuckoo had called while he wrote.

O Philomela fair, O take some gladness.

Sidney's line is beautiful but quite false, as false as Bridges's reference to a "dark nocturnal secret." This is all subjective natural history. Only three English poets, so far as we are aware, have written truth of the nightingale, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. If the nightingale, said Shakespeare, sang when "every goose is cackling" he would rate no higher than a wren, which is true in intention, if an overstatement. Wordsworth recognized the cheerful "tumultuous harmony" of the nightingale's song—

as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine.

And Coleridge, with his occasional perspicuity, punctured the whole delusion—

'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.
But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced . . .
 . . . he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain.
And many a poet echoes the conceit . . .
 . . . 'Tis the merry nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes.

One should add to these poet-naturalists the many song writers, medieval and Renaissance, who make their birds sing "jug, jug." The nightingale is the only bird I have ever heard say "jug, jug" as a matter of habit, but he says it with an umlaut, "jüg, jüg."

The truth is that the nightingale is a merry, careless bird, a free singer delighting in new sequences of phrases, capable of golden notes, seldom (unlike the mockingbird) going in for modern dissonances, and always hearty, always exuberant. In pathos, in range of emotions the mockingbird naturally excels him because, as his name implies, he will drag in any sound of which he is capable, and Whitman was not false to nature in recalling from his song—

the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their sorts,
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing.

There is more taste in the nightingale's song, more restraint, a richer note, though, as Edward Bok's experiment with nightingales in Florida proved, this richness the mockingbird easily imitates and adds to his repertoire. And if the night song of the mockingbird has had no such rewards in poetry as the "liquid notes that close the eye of day" of his rival, it is because "nightingale" is a beautiful word that will put music in any line of verse.

But the special qualities which the closet poets attribute to the nightingale are to be heard in the song of another bird three thousand miles away from the nearest Philomela. Music, truly of eternal passion, eternal pain, but etherealized into sounds of a stellar beauty, an aerial whisper of far-off unhappy things remembered in tranquillity, and a voice which might be from another world since it cannot be imitated, belong to our hermit thrush, who indeed is worthy of the legend that has

befuddled the admirers of the nightingale. Restraint, that Greek virtue, is his, for he sings only three lengthy phrases, one heaven high, one in the golden mean, one low and passionate, but those three phrases are subtly varied, sometimes from moment to moment, and always between thrush and thrush. The quiet forest, dusk which is so much more beautiful than night, solitude which is his *métier*, make a background for a song which would have set poets romancing long before this if his name had been as euphonious as "nightingale." Yet the song itself assuredly equals the most extravagant claims of the poets for the nightingale. If not half in love with easeful death, it bears, in a solution of sounds, of which the purest are silver and gold, those translunary things which it is the business of art to create and if not to create to recapture. If Philomela was made a bird at all, it is the hermit thrush she inhabits, but that is an alien story. Some purest ray serene touching the evolving throat of a primordial bird still vibrates in the triple fall of the thrush's song.

As for the nightingale, we grant it the voice of jocund day, when

Beasts did leap and birds did sing,
Trees did grow and plants spring,

a mellow throat, a hearty jug, jug, a merry tiriddle, soft phrases of affection to which night, for one disposed that way, may give a plaintive cast. We concede a sense of a pattern which the wasteful mockingbird lets go as its pleasure mounts, and a nice care for modulation like the English speech of a London intellectual. But Arnold's "wild, unquenched, deep-sunken, old-world pain" throbbed in the temples of the poet. For him nature was always literary. But what a glorious line would Wordsworth have consecrated to the hermit thrush! There is

too much Yankee in Robert Frost to hear her aright, too little romance in the modern Americans, who are with few exceptions cockneys anyhow when it comes to matter of this sort. Poe was too literary, Emerson too absorbed, Whitman too gross. Perhaps in a decade like ours, when "but to think is to be full of sorrow" the hermit thrush in poetry might quickly lose his ethereal detachment from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret"; so let him sing his own song there in the still unravished forest. The hungry generations, now frightened and greedy, are too busy treading on their own toes to bother about a bird.

2. "ANGLING . . . IS AN ART WORTHY THE KNOWLEDGE . . .
OF A WISE MAN"

The fisherman twists his way through the entangling spicewood and alder of a New England brookside in an expansive May, searching a dark pool with broken water at its head and a swirl of current at its tail, then swings his line clear of overhanging branches and with a sweep in syncopated rhythm drops his flies on the eddy that sucks above a green depth below a sunken rock. And what happens? Only the ovenbird calling perhaps or the jitter of his reel. But if the flies fall gently and true and drift through that crystal under surface world with the right similitude of some living thing which has edible significance to the world of trout, a swish, a splash, a tug, and the trout is hooked.

But as man differs country- and race-wise so do trout. Our native char, the spotted brook trout of the New England poets, is of a curious temperament. His table is set on the gravelly bottom of a transparent stream, where he finds hors d'œuvres of succulent insect kinds, while his meat course darts above it, minnows and the flashing slivers of light which are

the young of his own kind. The gauzy May flies that whirl and drop in dimples upon the surface are not on his diet list, though he may lip them in passing, as a heavy eater will sometimes nip up a bit of French pastry or an olive on the side. But his temper is short. Those trailing wet flies, red, black, brown, that follow one another so determinedly through the crystal heaven of his brook, those fluffy dry flies that sail on and on and never rise but once and then to return like obstinate wooers to the pool's upper door, all of these enrage him. He watches them from under his rocky hiding place or from his bed above the gravel until the tension is too strong. Darting like an arrow from a nymph's bow, he seizes the invader, and for his rage is caught.

But from the West a more tolerant habitant of the waters has been bred into our streams. The rainbow trout is a creature of both the water and the air. If the depths will not feed him then the heavens will, and indifferent to the element, he pursues his food in the watery caverns or springs up and over in the air above a floating insect. The fly for him is food, and so is everything succulent below the surface. He is an opportunist, who if hooked will dive into liquid darkness, or shoot in an arc above the surface toward which way escape is easier, while the furious native takes his barb sullenly to the depths of the stream.

Not so the foreigner, the brown, the European trout. He is a seasoned European, able to endure a low standard of living, which for a trout means warm and dirty water, able like the English sparrow to survive where more delicate creatures die of disgust. His food too is in the air as often as in the waters, but he takes it neither because of irritated nerves, nor with careless confidence. Nor does he risk his judgment so often in the distracting lights of the riffle, but lies in the clear

pool, suspicious, calculating, frightened by the least shadow of a rod, to be taken only by subtlety, and to be eaten with more respect for his wary skill than for his none too delicate flesh.

Do we take color from our environment? Did He who made the trout, as Blake might have said, shape us to our continent? For certainly there is something in the sudden emotionalism of our Eastern brook trout which is curiously American. The Yankee, too, is a bottom feeder, whose idealisms are unexpected and often rash, and sometimes disastrous. And there is a rainbow quality in American tolerance, easy, uncalculating, indiscriminating which makes it possible, for, shall we say the Pacific Coast, to live in two worlds at once, the gross and the aerial, with no clear consciousness as to which element conditions the active mind!

As for Izaak Walton's trout, the brown, the alien variety, who is still a European in our streams, one wishes that some of our critics and more of our statesmen would become fishermen to study the differences between peoples in the lucid oversimplifications of the brook. Let them try to catch the native brook trout with a Marxian net, or make the rainbow take a fly when his opportunity is bottomward, or hook the European by waving fine words above the water! They will find that anglers must be wise.

3. "WHAN THAT APRILLE—"

Spring in MacDougal Street—while the rest of New York said "It's warm today," and went about its business—MacDougal Street before the intellectuals and the speakeasies had reduced the Italian temperature to a northern average, children sprouting like crocuses from the pavements, windows blossoming with plump bosoms swelling like tropic bulbs, street

cries shrilling an octave higher, the sidewalks spilling strollers into the sunny street, the old lilacs in the Charlton street backyards putting out a bud or two, cats and white poodles stretching in the gutters, and little girls in white holding hands on their way to first communion.

Spring in England is too gentle and delaying. The same snowdrop hangs for days in a gentle mist that is neither warm nor cold, and the hedgerows, once they are successfully green, give no more thought to summer but settle into a pale adolescence in which the rush and promise of change is lost.

Spring in New England is too harsh. It hides beneath dead leaves, breaks in dusty gales or untimely freezes, looks always toward the north, and its wind has an edge up to the brink of summer heat. It takes the hardness of a Thoreau to find it, because when Spring emerges from its woollens and the apples bloom, it is no longer really Spring, which must be sought with nipped ears and numbed hands in the skunk cabbage swamp or in the pale dappled sunlight of the hepatica slope. Poets have done much for the New England Spring just because it is so elusive. The hounds of Winter are always on its traces, and one sees it plain just as it disappears down the maw of a blazing June.

Spring in California is a fireworks show—down-dropping rockets of rain followed by a burst of green fire spangled with yellow stars. Spring in the Carolinas is a sun festival. Few wildflowers there on the baking pine needles, but such a change as the rattler makes when he breaks through his old skin and renews his colors; but in the trees above there are wreaths of yellow jasmine and sprays of red bud. It is the trees that are fecund in the Southern Spring and not the sods.

Spring in the deep northern forests is known to few, but you can follow it long after its season by pushing up the steep

slope of an Adirondack peak or a ridge of the Green Mountains until birch and maple give way to spruce, and leaves to moss, in which hepatica is still blooming. Above four thousand feet Spring yields only to Autumn.

Spring is late too in the Southern Appalachians, but this is such a Spring as only an unobservant literature would have left in the primitive innocence of all natural phenomena that have never been touched by a high imagination. Those splendid forests, alas now too widely shorn, respond to the Southern sun with a virginal fire of palest lemon azalea running tiptoe through the woods, and warming to orange, that goes out just as the pink laurel and the rose bay kindle among leaves shining like polished cordovan leather.

But the best Spring of all (so many say) is in the mild interlatitudes of the Brandywine valley. There that lovely stream flows south to meet it between meadows turning blue with Quaker ladies, rippling under red-feathered maples, past promontories nodding with bluebells and jacks-in-pulpit, and into woods where white violets are common and the yellow dog-tooth crowds the borders of trickling contributory streams. Spring there is neither lusty nor indolent, neither Puritan nor mountaineer, creole nor bouncing Bet, but reminiscent of that Spring which in Greek poetry first became timeless, and so an immortal.

4. "AND THE RAIN DESCENDED"

It is an old house which its builders, having no imagination beyond the simple rules of the manuals of that day, erected in severe simplicity, so that even the triple window of the gable-end indulges in but a single curve, and there is no ornament except the moldings of the wall tops and the chimney mantels within. But they tempered the austerity by rows of

maples which dapple the windows with shadow. Beside it they placed a barn with its attendant sheds, corn cribs, and tool houses, grouping their roofs in a harmony like a cathedral with its chapels and oratories. And in the meadows behind that sloped to the brook they left here a hickory on a knoll, there an oak, to grow wide and strong and make shade for the cattle and give dignity to the background of the house. This was in 1796.

By 1935 the maples had become gigantic, their great domes rising above the roof-tree, and in their shadow strange things had been happening. Our father's generation, which it is the fashion now to despise, had been too busy with their inheritance. Around the noble simplicity of the old house they had thrown ragged porches, adorned with scroll work, and jutting here and there in meaningless angles. Within, the paneling had been painted a dirty, utilitarian brown, like the oilcloth of the period, and the entrance hall was redecorated in golden oak. Insensible to form, they had thrown a square box in lieu of a gable out from the slope of the roof, like a beetling brow on an otherwise classic face. A flat-roofed "wing" projected incongruously at one side, like an afterthought, as indeed it was.

When we first saw the house an April gale was tossing the maple limbs above the scroll-saw porches. We went in out of the rain, exulting in the conscious rectitude of the taste of our own generation. We shall tear off those insults to beauty, we said, and make that house honest again. We shall strip the puerile wallpapers, throw out the what-nots, repaint the paneling, and make this house express once more a cold, clear mind which will not sacrifice form to the sprawling ease of a bourgeois nineteenth century life.

"Life"—that was the word, and the house was still rich in its heritage from the pre-war world. Books everywhere,

not always good books, not always cared for, but stacked on shelves, spilled in closets, by readers who would have starved with only the row of new titles on an apartment table. And on the walls certificates for Bible reading, records of service in the militia, membership in the church, the fire brigade, the county committees. And in the capacious attic, enlarged by the beetling brow to take care of the multifarious activities of that family, drawers of type, churns, maps, wood-working instruments, spare parts for everything—all the apparatus for happy work on a rainy day. And in the tool sheds, every implement for gardening and repairing—hoes, pruners, spades, wrenches, lathes, instruments for metal working, old yokes, parts of engines, keys and locks as for every door in Heaven, piled up and spilling over into the chicken yards outside. A life, easy, careless, industrious, weak in taste, strong in variety, the life of a home.

And beneath the maples and within the stone walls were clumps of flowers and shrubs stuck here and there when the family got to it, and all the unaffected decoration of grounds that no whirring automobiles were to pass. And beyond, a brook that no landscape architect had improved and paths that led where they were needed with no regard for symmetry. It was a home molded to the needs of the life within it.

And a house beyond our powers to recreate. We have books upon how to restore the eighteenth century, but the nineteenth we have lost. We have too much taste, too great a contempt for the confident sprawlings of a comfortable easy-going people whose furnishing was as slack as their clothes. To ugly things we are intensely sensitive, but scornful of content. We can order our gardens, compose our roofs, adjust with subtlety the harmony between table and chair, choose the right splatter for the wall, and the (O so right!) scarlet and

black for the bathroom, but when it comes to temperament—and character—we are less fortunate. The children race through our interior-decorated homes between the movies and the automobile. Life radiates outward from our houses, where there is no atmosphere rich enough to subdue its nervous rhythms. We would never, even our youngest, mix periods, walk on the wrong rugs, hang the wrong pictures, reread books with no merit except that they are interesting, insult the proportions of a noble eighteenth century house by stretching it to suit our playtimes—but can we, in this age when everything comes by current or gasoline except peace, mental health, and prosperity, make such a home?

We doubted, but, incorrigible optimists, in spite of America riding for a fall and Europe returning to her vomit, we determined to try.

5. AFFECTIONS OUT OF DOORS

It was Wordsworth who, on the top of golden hours, rejoiced in "All my young affections out of doors." The line belongs to Spring, white dogwood ledges, violets in the meadow, rosy fists of new leaves on the oaks, orioles in the apple blossoms, thrushes and catbirds in the thickets. But Wordsworth's out of doors was not Grasmere or the Hawkshead country. It was London, the London of "The Prelude," that set his young affections tripping, the roaring streets, the theaters, the vaudeville at Sadler's Wells, the taverns, and the Lord Mayor himself—the plenitude of mere living pressed down and bubbling over into the foam of the shows of things.

Those who hate the city and all its works must yet consider the richness that comes by pressure. Add crowd to crowd, link street to street, increase by ten thousand contacts the tiny electric charge which passes between all that is human in

proximity, and something happens in the mind. The heart of the brain beats more quickly. Those quick hypotheses with which we face all experience—What would I do? How shall I act?—are indefinitely multiplied until the intellect grows more flexible, less static. Thought is hurried, but so is intelligence, which becomes a revolving blade. New paths, we may suppose, are channeled in the brain. They may be shallow, but they are numerous.

City literature has always differed from country literature; it differs even more sharply now, but complexly, since it is written so often for country dwellers. There is an undignified haste to urbanize all through the country—indeed all through the civilized world. The congenital cockney is to be respected, but the small town New Yorkized is already a subject for satire, and so are minds glossed with urbanism by reading the guaranteed city-made products that are broadcast throughout the country by the newspapers and the magazines. This high-pressure journalism is first cousin to the snob advertisements which tell the country dweller that the proper cigarette is an entrée to Park Avenue. Both are cynically insincere, but the journalism is more successful than the advertising because it does not patently lie. It gives at least an illusion of a crowded, excited life.

But only a thin illusion. The true city books such as (in very different genres) Arnold Bennett's, John dos Passos's, Jules Romains's, Frank Swinnerton's, and, to name great names, those of Balzac, Dickens, Zola, are not written to titillate the yokel, but come from an inner necessity, this same complex reaction from multiple contacts, this same heightened pressure of living. Charles Lamb is an instance of the genuine in city literature, in contrast to the cheap vivacity of the syndicated New York and London gossip columns or the "Now

it can be told" of the magazines. His young affections were out of doors in Wordsworth's own day, and he points the moral of these remarks, which is that for depth and contemplation the country is best, and perhaps indispensable, but for shrewdness and quick perception, for wit and rich variety, for a merry bubbling over of the mind charged like mineral water with the sparkling elements of its own environment, there is nothing like the city. Character is more deeply handled by country writers, for character is cramped in its development by congestion, but personality is best shaped there. Browning was a city man, and may help the contention, for he was acute, various, shrewd, and sensitive to a million contacts; and it is his types and his character analyses, not his characters that live. His confident philosophy was vigorous not profound, like the bold, confident, and outspoken contentions of journalism. And true to his instinct, it was cities and the life of cities that he sought most eagerly in the past. Cellini, a typical city dweller, was his man rather than St. Francis.

Psychologists like the elder Haldane, who say that the mind cannot be defined, does not really exist, apart from its environment, are credible. Certainly the writer is conditioned by his contacts when he first turns his young affections out of doors. He feeds upon them as a unicellular animal upon water, and by some property in his organism turns his background into art. The query, Where have you lived? is more important in literature than many readers guess. Tell me where you have lived, and I will tell you, not what you are, but what in all probability you can, or cannot do. There are dozens of writers now splashing along in the shallows of mediocrity who need a change in address.

6. CLIFF DWELLERS

The penthouse garden—which is not out of town, but above it—is something new in geography. Whether in high-skied New York or east-winded Boston or lake-margined Chicago or hot and rainy Philadelphia, it is not to be regarded as part of the adjacent soil, but has a climate of its own, and such earth as the owner is able to procure for it. Hazards beset it. A toppling flower pot may turn into shrapnel and puncture the roof of a taxi two hundred feet below; a dropped trowel becomes a projectile likely to bring on a law suit. The playful wind which shakes the hard-won daffodils may land a quart of treasured loam in someone's living room a story below. Dead plants go not to the mold heap but down the elevator to the ash cans. The enthusiastic digger doubles his toil, for he must first dig out upon the tiled floor and then back again into some receptacle, or risk stopping the drains for thirteen stories under him.

And the climate, whatever the longitude, is semi-arid. Even in gently rolling New York, it is the climate of a mountain chain over which the wind sweeps and on which the sun beats with rigor. Lucky the penthouse gardener who does not find his precious plants some morning swept like tumble-weeds into a cleft of his mountain-terrace.

Cypresses hold up their gentle fingers for moisture and die, even with water at their roots. The tough arbor vitae stretches its palms into the too often smoke laden air and slowly withers to bronze. But the little mugho pines, bred in an arid South, shake in the constant winds and keep their dark jade green fast as they have for centuries on the slopes of the Mediterranean mountains.

No ordinary stimulus suffices for the city-dwelling flowers

of these peaks. The primrose yellows even though dosed with plant food. Azaleas, having the adaptability of the Oriental, stand anything but freezing and ask only mulch and water; but to see what can be done with a hardy plant, apply raw ammonia to the morning glory in about the same strength and quantity as the cocktails fed to city brokers, and watch them grow. The chrysanthemum, too, is a tough guy that takes city dirt out of the air and likes it.

There should be a penthouse ornithology. One long chapter should be on pigeons, both wild and tame. The wild ones are not descendants of those famous flocks that once broke down the trees of American forests, but escapes from the numerous cotes that every penthouse dweller looks down upon. What distinguishes them is their capacity for year-long amorousness, another instance of the nervous stimulation of city life. It is a sluggish day indeed when store clerks and male pigeons are not ruffling their wing feathers at their lady friends on the pavements below or the cornices above. Our cities are not all mechanical yet.

The tame pigeons deserve a book in themselves. Beautiful creatures, bred either for squabs or racing, they spend their lives dodging the long pole with a rag on it of their custodian, whose duty it is to keep them on the wing, lest they get too fat for racing or too lazy to lay eggs, one does not know which. But ever again the flock soars upward past the cliff walls and over the penthouses until they flash in the high sun. And once in a blue moon a darker flash follows when like a tiny plane diving from the empyrean a duck hawk falls from his perch on a high roof and bursts the flock asunder.

Or was it a duck hawk? We penthouse dwellers need an ornithology, which would specialize also in female warblers who peck in the mugho pines and look like all the female

warblers, and stray juncos, and the habits of those waterfront bums the starlings, and the tough sparrow, and most of all the strange bird cries heard overhead at night when the weather rushes over our mountain terrace carrying migrants with it to the north.

7. OMINOUS TOWERS

There used to be so much sentiment about nature and nature worship fogging our minds that it was difficult to see a tree or a mountain as a fine upstanding reflex of law and precedent. Some of it lingers, as is proved by the inevitable quotation of Joyce Kilmer's famous line if an unpoetical woman gets as far as the edge of a forest. Nevertheless, when a romantic appreciation of natural beauty failed to appear in the minds of this science-bred, cockney-raised generation something was lost in philosophic understanding.

The modern, craving, without quite knowing that he craves, the magnificence of nature which seems to attain beauty with no effort except obedience to the laws of circumstance, is properly disillusioned by our ravaged forests and road-scarred mountains. If he is city bred or city bound he turns, like the Babylonians of the plains, to his towers, and finds there beauty enough but of a strange frustrated kind which would be tragic if it were understood.

New York, which has taken to its rooftops, looks morning, sunset, and night upon such a scene as no one, it is safe to say, has ever imagined. Above misty gorges glowing at evening, the towers are translucent—at dusk opalescent columns, by night lanterns bursting with light. But there is something pathetic in their efforts at significance. Let them soar never so high, or take the morning on castellated fronts, or hold shapes of beauty that conform to the desires of the imagination, yet they never quite escape the irrelevance of utilitarianism to such high

architectural purposes. The four-square shaft that speaks of exaltation based solidly on earth, serves too evidently oil, insurance, patent medicine, brokerage, and money-lending, all a little uneasy in an altitude which does not correspond to any uplift in their relations to human affairs. The needle-pointed Chrysler building, a pseudomorph of a cathedral, sells automobiles, and does it beautifully, yet lacks any sufficient justification for its exceeding grace.

This is not sentiment; it is commonsense. American business has contributed much to the quantity but little to the quality of contented living, and these giant containers, which suggest a religion, pull away from their useful but commonplace content like dreams unrealized. Compare a tabloid newspaper with the austere rectitude of the tower in which it is made, for there is an incongruity here of the greatest importance. Granted (only for the sake of the argument) that someone has to get rich by feeding the public with the swill it likes, is it not a disease of the soul that covers with the finest lines and curves something shapeless and meaningless except as a satisfaction of crude desire? The medievals made their fortifications beautiful, but war seemed to them a noble occupation. Our architects, in their best and most successful achievements, have been given nothing better to work upon than advertisements of production and consumption. Production and consumption, like eating and sleeping, are indispensables, but to what end beyond staying alive, for what ultimate purpose, to what increase in the quality of the human animal?—these are the questions which the beautiful but frustrated towers seem to bear upon their foreheads.

Trees sometimes are like that. The maple, except in Autumn, is a frustrated tree which never finds its right proportions until old age. The pine, if it suffers any interference with

its natural purposes, becomes a scraggly unbalanced thing always trying to recover a native symmetry. But the elm is like an instinctive response to the conditioning of nature. There is no conflict visible; it is realized form.

Towers and trees are both functions of living. The tree's problem was put in the way of solution in geologic ages long before ours; the tower, being a human attribute, is indicative in every century of new successes or new failures. Therefore to moralize this latest brood of giants, these sequoias of Chicago and Philadelphia and San Francisco and New York, is not merely a literary exercise, though it is a pleasure to describe them. Their beauty and their lack of social significance are both striking. Look at them cold and clear at sunset, ominous at dusk, and ask whether it is absurd to say that they mean more than those who commanded them. It would not be the first time that the artist has groped toward a future which may justify his imagination.

8. "BARE RUINED CHOIRS"

Among the vanishing amenities whose disappearance is responsible for the growing harshness of this brilliant and exciting, but brittle, modern world, is the love of nature. Once we rather boasted of it as a special possession of the English-speaking countries, which differed in intensity and in object from the sentimental enthusiasm of the Germans or the soil-sense of the home-loving French. In America a literature of no mean pretensions was dedicated to its expression, which, in Thoreau at least, emerged toward greatness. It was in America essentially a literature of the forest, if not of the wilderness. Its sources were partly romantic, but still more in the deep associations of every American child with the curiously rhythmic beauty of unaltered nature, a rhythm which the first assaults

upon our woods were too feeble to destroy. And the opportunity to escape from the man-made town into a different organization of life that was both simpler and subtler, was a temptation which never had to be long resisted.

Turning the pages of Audubon or Bartram the imagination warms to a realization of the extraordinary richness of nature in primitive America. Forests of incomparable beauty, whose tiny remnants are now to be found only in the remotest coves of the mountains, then marched across spacious valleys. The wealth of animal life was incredible, and botanists wandered in a kind of ecstasy among new and gorgeous flowers. Nature, unhampered by the conflicting needs of man, had risen to that harmony of the primeval which was the result of millenniums of checks and balances, operating in the cycles of solar influence, and the intelligence of a sensitive observer was played upon by harmonies which he felt without analysis. What ecclesiastical Europe in the thirteenth century meant to the aesthetic Christian, what Versailles was to the eighteenth century, so were the glade and forest of this unspoiled continent to the enraptured European pushing back from Philadelphia into the deep hardwood forests of the Allegheny valleys, or wandering the tulip coves of the Carolinas among azalea, laurel, and rhododendron, or mazed in the drooping moss of sixcentennial live oaks in the low countries. The pioneers advanced upon this woody Eden with ax and flame, seeing only wheat and corn and cotton among its roots, but the chronicles which now are being disinterred from obscure books, and unpublished papers, show many a magicked mind wandering beyond the fringe of settlement and as unwilling to come back as the hunters and traders who found the Indians' life more agreeable than the civilization behind them. They too, be sure,

felt, though they were inarticulate, a rhythm of beauty even though for them it was no more than content.

The uprearing, outstretching surge of boy scouts, children's camps, resorts, hiking clubs, camping trips, and nature study groups of this day, is but the foam and bubble of this primitive impulse, and has but the feeblest resemblance to the original source. These represent, doubtless, a saving element in our civilization, and their outposts reach the Alaskas and Sierras and Rockies where nature is still a harmony. But the poetry has gone out of them, and it is doubtful whether from all their energies we shall ever get one good nature book. Thoreau will be urged in rebuttal, since Thoreau wrote his *Walden* in second-growth forests in a country long dominated by man. But Thoreau was a social philosopher, able to extract a pound of imagination from a scene which could give to simpler nature spirits no more than an ounce, and the Concord of 1840 knew no such engines of destruction as the automobile road and the summer camp.

For there are no more absolute lies than those which in folder and advertisement describe the American wilderness as it exists today. The Maine woods is a desert of spindling growths sprung up on the ravages of forest fires. The pine tree state is stripped of its pines, and nearly stripped of its spruce. The Appalachians, whose steep ascents and dark hemlock gorges held back immigration for a century, have been cut and burned from end to end. The forests of the Rockies are blackened wastes, with the knees of dead trees set in weeds or the feeble green of weak new growth. The forests of the Pacific slope, most magnificent in the world, are melting. For a similitude of the scarred Allegheny country of the mines or the hundreds of thousands of ruined Canadian acres, we must go back in memory to No-man's land in France.

If nature literature and nature love has declined in this country, it is not only the decay of romanticism which accounts for its passing. We have wrecked our own nature, and even when peace from saw and flame, as in southern New England, has restored it to a milder, less intoxicating beauty, profit-making has plastered it with the vulgarity of man the trader. The forest reasserts itself, feebler, but still a palliative for the disorders of a mind too tightly held in an artificial environment—and becomes a background for signboards advertising coffee, oil, and tires.

9. MIND EROSION

The heavens open, the winds blow a million tons of the Panhandle across the Plains, drifting yellow snow on the Alleghenies and dust upon New York. After which the floods descend, washing the looser parts of Connecticut and Pennsylvania into Long Island Sound and the Chesapeake. And soil erosion, despite what the Supreme Court may or may not say, becomes a national emergency.

We who write and read have an interest by no means political or financial in this erosion of a continent. At the moment when regionalism is stronger than ever before in our literature, our regions themselves are losing the soil and its accompaniments which gave them individuality. Erosion is only one of the factors which are changing the American background with frightening rapidity. The spreading chestnut tree under which the village smithy stood now must be explained to the new generation, for the many millions of chestnuts that lifted above our Eastern forests and perfumed June with their sour-sweet blossoms are dead of a fungus brought in from the Orient, probably by some nurseryman eager to enrich our flora and himself. Now the elms are going for a like cause. A New

England without its elms is unthinkable but not improbable. The buttonwoods that Thoreau so loved are hard pressed, the wild cherry is a tent for caterpillars, the gray birch blights by August, the pines are beset by diseases. It begins to seem possible that the New England poetry of the last century will some day need as much annotation as Virgil's "Georgics."

As for erosion, only careful readers of our earliest descriptive literature can know what a vast difference there is between the country which was America in 1776 and our own United States. The magnificent Appalachian forest is substantially all gone, and its rich soil run down hill to supply endless pork for the dredgers of harbors and river channels. Our Eastern mountains are now poor barren things, with a scurf of sandy soil left after repeated burnings, unhealthy trees, and bare washed tops rising more and more abundantly above the still urgent sapling growth. Now the prairies begin to wash seaward, while the plains drift like snow.

Per contra we have added some feeble forest planting, begun a generation too late, some dams, and roads. But these magnificent American roads are a little like the Roman military roads which ran through a country that the Romans had made a desert in the name of peace. With this addition, that our roads tend to drag a slum after them from city to city, so that gasoline billboards and refreshment stands become the national characteristics of the country as we see it.

The effect of all this upon the literary imagination is obvious. Novels and plays about America in the last two or three decades might be divided into two categories: First, the Literature of Industrialism: which includes books and plays about city life based upon industrialism, some flippant, some critical, some satirical, but all aware of the country only as a week-end place or the home of a forgotten youth. Second, the

Literature of Erosion: plays and books dealing with the results of a run-down farm—share-croppers, ruined peach growers, oppressed laborers, Negroes going back toward savagery, women crazy with wind and dust. Third, the Literature of Escape: books and plays about youth running away from farm life to the city, making good there (old style) or (new style) being ruined and flung back to the depleted soil.

Fortunately there is a good deal of America not yet run down the gutters. We shall never get back the Appalachian forest, but there are still Appalachian valleys unwashed and of a delectable loveliness. And in the West, man with his irrigation constructs instead of destroys. Even New England, whose top layer ran off generations ago, has settled into a pinched but authentic charm that seems to be stable in spite of the mill towns in the valleys. We are still as well off as the Chinese of, say, the Ming dynasty, when the art of landscape painting reached a beautiful serenity. And a million tons of loam washed seaward is not too great a price to pay if the public becomes conscious that our "native land" is capital, and not income to be ruthlessly used to make the rich richer in money, but all of us poorer in resources both spiritual and financial.

No living being exists apart from his environment; hence if the country erodes into poor-white gullies, something of the mind erodes with it. The brittle hardness of New York is not a safe background for all the people of a great race; nor are the slums-in-the-country that one finds along the Boston Post Road or on the margins of Los Angeles hopeful substitutes for the environment in which the nation grew to maturity.

Chapter X

AMERICAN TRAITS

I. THE PROMISE OF AMERICAN LIFE

NOTHING is really promised from now on, in American life. We have returned to the pioneer stage, where everything, even what race we are to be, is in doubt. As in the earliest pioneer days, when a continent undeveloped, potential, menacing, loomed above and behind the little settlements of the Atlantic seaboard in vast forests and unmeasured acreage, so now loom about us gigantic potentialities. The industrial development of the United States, its wealth, its still unexploited resources, its widespread education of a sort, its standards of living, even its culture, promise nothing, or at least nothing that we should be wise to take as a promise. There were ages of promise which anyone could believe in—the mid eighteenth century, the late nineteenth century. They ended—in 1900—with the war—tomorrow—certainly they have ended for those willing to face the facts.

The extravagant promises for American life which are so familiar in presidential messages and in feature advertising lose their unity under analysis. They speak of the spread of industrial benefits and dwell with the loving kindness of a miser upon the machines and machine products that make living cleaner, quicker, and more varied. And nothing in this essay is to be construed as deprecating these benefits. They are solid, and they are as good a measure as can be found of what pre-

cisely the United States as a political and economic organization has accomplished in one hundred and fifty years. But without quibble it may be said that they, and all the apparatus of business industrialism, and in a less measure, of agricultural improvement that they represent, are an achievement for America rather than Americans. It is clear that Americans have become more comfortable, it is probable that they live longer, it is certain that knowledge of things in general—foreign countries, mechanical processes, ways and means of living—is more widely distributed among them, but they are not more contented, not probably as happy, and certainly no wiser in either the art of living or in the conduct of their affairs.

It may seem a contradiction to add that social welfare work is the great American promise. It is not a contradiction. When the streets are cloudy with gasoline exhaust, and the electric signs flare, and the papers are full of crude appeals to barbarism, and the memory of yesterday's journey is of a countryside torn up by real estate developments and littered with the broken discards of a mechanical age, the American remembers the immense energies of the movement for social betterment and is comforted. He thinks of universities built and rebuilt in a decade, of incomparable hospitals, of ten thousand organizations for improving the lot of everything and everyone from roadsides to pigs and geniuses. And he is right to be proud, and it is only fools who deprecate this mass progress and praise Europe in comparison where leisure is said still to be possible and beauty to be had for the seeing, willfully ignorant of the plain fact that if they themselves were caught in the European struggle, they might long for a country in the making where will and power were both behind the attempt to make food, health, pleasure, and knowledge available for all.

But the promise of social betterment is at the most a prophecy that the millions may some day live as decently as the thousands have always lived. It is a promise of lifted averages, not a promise of a better life. Where in the wide range of social welfare work, whether in our educational institutions, through religion, philanthropy, hygiene, the arts, or civics, is there any evidence of the production of better men and women, of keener minds, with more power to lead, or a better sense for living, and more potentiality of achievement? Our population knows more because civilization knows more, but can it do more, relatively, with what it knows?

Current American literature is a striking document in support of the proposition that the promises of prosperity, efficiency, and social progress do not satisfy acute and sensitive minds. American literature (regardless of its more or less value as art) is predominantly, and most curiously in so prosperous a country, a literature of protest and discontent.

The literature of discontent which I have in mind is the most American literature we have, and it is bounded by neither class, race, quality, or philosophical creed. I have referred to it earlier in this book. Eight to ten years ago I should have drawn my examples from the novels of the farm and the small town—from Fannie Hurst, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Edna Ferber, and most of all from dozens of minor novels which reflected an active dislike of a rural environment and looked for hope toward Chicago and New York. Today I could get as good instances from the fiction of the great cities—especially from the literature of New York. Its more ironic and sophisticated nature does not hide the inner resemblance to what had gone before. Dreiser, Van Vechten, Elmer Davis, Morley Callaghan, John Dos Passos, are all in their very different fashions slapping at the annoyances of their

American environment. Sometimes it is vulgarity and sometimes it is noise that troubles them, sometimes it is nostalgia for simpler times, sometimes just an oppression by the weight of restless masses. Of course there are many other aspects of these novels, and I do not mean for an instant to say that they are the only American novels, or even the most important in the art of fiction. But there are enough of them. No constant reader can fail to believe that they are significant.

A comparison with English contemporary fiction is illuminating. Where—to put the question squarely—can one find in American fiction with any depth of feeling, that affection for environment which is still common enough in England? J. B. Priestley, for example, is a rather hard-boiled Yorkshireman, with none of the passionate love of the land that one finds in the south of England, and yet I do not know where to look in America today for a book about New York so loving as his London story of "Angel Pavement." Or A. P. Herbert's "Water Gypsies," which is certainly not a cheerful story, but has for background a grimy, wet London to be loved.

Twenty-five and fifty years ago there were plenty of American stories that loved their America. They may have been sentimental, but one remembered them when one traveled in Louisiana or New England or California or Virginia, with a warmth that transferred itself to the landscape. But now the typical American scene is a point of departure for the story, and it is not too much to say that among the novelists that count, the scene is prevailingly used as an irritant for the hero or heroine. An American "Forsyte Saga" in our present mood is unthinkable. Even the cheerful Louis Bromfield is fascinated but not charmed by his Middle West and his New York.

This, mark well, differs from the protestantism of the great Americans spoken of above. They, if one excepts Poe and

Melville, were intense lovers of their native place. Never was soil more lovingly celebrated than Whitman's Paumanok, Irving's Hudson Valley, the Concord of Thoreau and Emerson, even the morbid Massachusetts of Hawthorne. They protested against spiritual trends. So do these moderns perhaps, but their distinction is that they do not *like* their environment. The lyric praise of the cliff-hung beauties of New York will be held against my argument. It will not hold. New York is a drug or a stimulant to these writers. It is not praised as home, but only as a Thalassa which their imagination creates but cannot bring close. They love New York as one loves a play in the theater. It remains always a potential enemy, hard, dangerous, and never home.

I am not concerned with the reasons for this American attitude so much as with the fact itself. Although we are not a young civilization any more, our roots are still torn up more often and more extensively than with others. That is one cause of our discontent, but it does not explain the very definite set against the way of life in the United States which takes out its spite in a dislike of any *here* where our stories are laid.

I do not know how it may be with classes, with the workmen in Mr. Ford's factories, or the Country Club crowd in one of Mr. O'Hara's Pennsylvania cities, or the young brokers of New York—they may be content and satisfied though if they look the second they certainly do not act the first. But assuredly the individual of intelligence and refinement, especially when he is an artist and writer, is not content. He sees the old decorum of life broken, and regrets its lost stability if not its dullness. He knows that his nerves are in the way of his leisure, believes that his social contacts have gained in variety but lost in that tranquillity which means more than clever talk. He feels an increased tempo and at the same time a stiffening of

habit, as if the whole machine were being geared to more rapid profit-making. He feels this in the university as much as in Wall Street. Time bears hard upon him. Illusions have been swept away to leave the prime illusion that keeping up with the procession means that you are going forward. He distrusts the quality of his life and pettishly strikes at the country or town of his birth exactly as the artisan irritably flings a marred mold on the dump heap. These fields that dully bound the once great hopes of the pioneers, these ugly industrial cities that are rich enough for everything except to be livable, this great metropolis that is tingling with life and yet without amenity, there is nothing to love here! And nothing for long stays the same. Our American earth changes faster than we do! That is his mood.

And observe that this attitude of satiric discontent is just another phase of the wish psychology which is so characteristic of popular American fiction, and makes it almost riotously cheerful. The latter blinks reality by inventing farms, cities, successes in its dreams—makes war humorous, industry an epic battle, love definitive, luxury dignified, happiness an absolute existing always in the penthouse above. The discontented refuse this wish world, and instead of escaping reality, stay at home and curse it. There is, after all, a great deal in Spengler's dictum. The most diverse works of art of a given period *do* have an underlying relationship in philosophy, however they may differ in temperament.

This means, I think, that the sense of individualism is still so strong in the United States as to warp and quite throw off their balance a whole generation of writers. For it is nonsense to say that America is unlovable. The travelers who come home from Europe deploring this and that, deplore it, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, not because they want to

live abroad, but because they would add this or that factor—whether café life, cathedrals, or a confident intellectualism—to American life. It is not the American country they dislike, but the dull decline of its inhabitants from pioneer energy, and the hot dog stand in the pine grove. They are annoyed at what has been done to America. They are impatient, as the hopeful have been from the beginning here, to make a Utopia, and see instead industrialism in the ugly phase of its success. But most of all, they feel that their wishes, their ideas of living, can no longer be made to count in this swirl of social forces.

Literature suffers, for it begins in its stronger specimens to be tintured with local satire, so that when we get a book that lifts out of our uproar and grime into the gentle irony of universals, like "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," we rush after it as if it were a portent, whereas it was only a relief. Yet if there is promise in American life, it is to be found in this same disagreeable irritability. It shows that we will not lie down and rest, will not love our hills and have affection even for the smells of our cities, until man—the sensitive, intelligent, civilized man of the minority—begins to get in better adjustment with his environment. Whether it is that man, or the environment, or both that must be changed, is not so clear.

I do not think I place too much importance upon the dogged discontent of Ernest Hemingway, the mystic morbid discontent of William Faulkner, the strong lyric discontent of Willa Cather, the sharp scoffing discontent of Sinclair Lewis, the powerful creative discontent of Robert Frost (who is a phase beyond the others, and writes with, not against, his soil), the burly self-satisfied discontent of H. L. Mencken, the philosophic discontents of the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the wailing discontent of the New York aliens, the good-natured ironical discontent of *The New Yorker* (which comes nearer

loving a great American city intelligently than any other American agency). For literature with any genuineness in it contains some of the future in a kind of electric charge induced from the present by the sensitive imagination. And while it cannot be used for exact prophecy, it is seldom belied by events. It is the imaginative who feel ahead for us, and it is they who write our books.

The revolt of the individual which these books portend will not be a revolt of *littérateurs* and artists. It will not result in anything which you can find described in them. No one knows what it will be or do. But these books, and plenty of other evidence, show to my mind that, whatever happens in economics and government, it is coming. We are not going to be static like France, nor spend all our energies on national welfare, like England, where eccentricity is fortunately still abundant. We shall not always go for our records of progress to the health and literacy records of the Foundations.

What *is* this reassertion of individualism—a term that sounds like an economist's definition? If it were one thing, it would not be enough. I stick at the assertion that there is plenty of energetic individuality, good and bad, alive if not active in America, and that it is for the man, not the movement, to take the next step. To throw off the weight of conventional thinking, to shape a policy and follow it, to mark out a way of life and pursue it—these are very hard to do today. But they are easier when thought of as the individual's concern, not as movements. The first job is to get numbers out of our thinking. And since from Dreiser's "American Tragedy" to "Babbitt" and "The Sun Also Rises," all typical American literature has been vibrant with criticism of failure to stand up and be more than an echo of drifting, it is my guess that the next area

of time may produce a magnificent crop of rebels against running with the crowd.

Indeed, we are back again in a pioneer stage not too absurdly different from the plight of the first settlements. There it was always a minority that could not be what they wanted and risked physical hardship and danger to get their own way of life. Here there is again a restless minority, and the entire question is whether those destined by ideas, temperament, and circumstance to belong to it, will risk mental hardship and economic danger by living and thinking in their own best way. The promise of American life is that they still can do so, in spite of the pressure of plutocracy on one side and standardization on the other. Have they the nerve to live like gentlemen and scholars, honest men and proud, in a society that doesn't put much of a price on any of those virtues? For now that the proletariat in this country is at least as safe from starvation as the intellectuals, and we have approximated the conditions of the old Oriental monarchies where everyone is equal to everyone else except the very rich, I know no test of the country so searching as the question, Is it a place where a cultivated man, willing and able to work, sufficiently intellectual and aesthetic, and more likely to improve the tone and morale of the community just by being born there than to increase its production or his own bank account—is it a place where such a man is going to be able to live decently and with reasonable content? And the answer obviously is—that depends chiefly upon the man. If he throws up his hands, so do we. But why should he?

It is for such a man that the improvements in societies chiefly exist, since they aim, or should aim, to make possible the reduplication of his type. And yet he cannot be manufactured, he must make himself intellectually and spiritually, and his way of life also. The great social welfare machine can in-

cube a billion humans well equipped with all the apparatus of civilization. But he must make himself.

2. MIGHTY OPPOSITES

. . . The high goal of our great endeavor
is spiritual attainment, individual worth,
at all cost to be sought and at all cost pursued,
to be won at all cost and at all cost assured;
not such material ease as might be attain'd for all
by cheap production and distribution of common needs
were all life level'd down to where the lowest can reach.

Robert Bridges has been called a Tory radical, and some kind of a Tory, a poet laureate should fittingly be, yet Jefferson would have subscribed to these lines. And if some of our younger obscurantists and dalliers with the raveled ends where literature and psychopathy meet would thoroughly digest such sound maxims they might still bake a cake or two out of this American dough that they find so sodden.

For that is the choice the writer will have to make in America. Either he will get more stature for his spirit, or he will commit himself, like our most famous magazines, to a policy of the greatest good for the greatest number when compatible with profitable advertising. There is no in-between here. Delicate intellectualisms which are profoundly interesting in Europe are either neglected entirely or crushed by our heavy mechanistic civilization. They cannot get social meaning here, and without social meaning literature usually degenerates into a parlor game. The great writers of the tradition may be roughly divided into those who would and those who would not have been successful in the United States today. And who can doubt that only those of robust spirit—the great mirthful ones like Chaucer and Rabelais, the sharp-sworded ones such

as Pope and Byron and Ben Jonson, the bludgeon carriers, Dr. Johnson and Milton and Swift, the high-souled, Spenser and Wordsworth, and the entrepreneurs of evident genius, like Shakespeare and Dickens, would have been those most likely to make head against the powerful materialism of our herds.

The critical principle involved is, like summons like. It was the singular wickedness of the Renaissance that called out the singular pieties of the Puritans and the Counter Reformation. The crudeness of the imperial Roman challenged an elegance in Horace and Virgil. The corner-store Yankeeness of New England was so magnificently small-minded and pettily shrewd that an Emerson, a Thoreau, and a Hawthorne gave the only possible response.

We look for some ringing answer to the five-and-ten-cent store magazines, to the smugness of syndicated "boiler plate," to the smooth insincerity of a Broadway show, the platitudes of magazine journalism, and the spiritual emptiness of our best moral writings. But such an opposite will never come from clever boys, or ultra aesthetic experimenters. They have their uses, but not in this six ring circus of active American life. Literature in this country, to get on its feet, needs as much scholarship as the best specialists are putting into the realignment of texts. It needs the vigorous emotions of the revivalist who shoots glory like an unstopped oil well. It needs the subtle reason which our lawyers are expending so fatuously on a legal system fifty years out of date. It needs more intellectual honesty than most American cities could assemble to meet a hurry call. And it needs all the imagination we have used in business, admittedly great, multiplied by ten, and lifted above the production stage to the plane where one considers not Where do I eat? but, Why do I live?

I am not anti-feminist, but I follow Havelock Ellis when

it comes to sex difficulties, and therefore unhesitatingly say that more men are needed in literature. To throw a bomb at a triumphant materialism is a man's job, as indeed the great efforts in literature in the past, with the rarest exceptions, have always been. Our women are skillful, and in fiction, and particularly in the novel, they have a genre admirably adapted to their talents. Put too much spirit in a novel and it explodes into something else. But in poetry, in tragedy and comedy, in satire, in the modes which admit greatness easily, they have never been great. As for the men—the best of our men writers have been imperfectly educated and show it by taking the wrong road, or missing the point of it all, half way through life. And most of the rest have been sold at the outset to the ideals of mass production. When quantity comes in at the window, quality goes out at the door.

What is elevation of spirit in literature? Milton knew when he wrote of Fame "that the clear spirit doth raise . . . to scorn delights and live laborious days. . . . But not the praise, Phoebus repli'd, . . . Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil."

3. ACCELERITIS

There is nothing new in hustle and bustle, indeed the best descriptions of the disease are in "Alice in Wonderland," Dickens, and the *Spectator* papers. Perhaps the Americans were the first to make hustle and bustle a religion. Yet even here over-active, thyroidish people, minute chasers that wish always to live an hour ahead of the present, are not any commoner now than in the past. We are seldom born hustlers and bustlers, but no one doubts that we are being hustled and bustled as never before, and this is a fact which our social historians are beginning to make capital of in their attempts to explain what seems to be a nervous degeneration of society.

The Adams brothers, Brooks and Henry, noted it before them.

Once attention is fixed upon the accelerating tempo of sensation today every other cause of unrest and decadence begins to lose some of its dominating importance. Man is the adaptable animal, but can he stand the strain? There is no proof of it, because there is no precedent in history for such an overwhelming and universal assault upon the nerves that register sensation. The generation living in the past thirty years has been subjected to such a speeding-up as the body has never had to endure before—that much seems certain. By comparison, the major trials of war, poverty, loss of fortune are far more terrible but perhaps psychologically less important. Man has been through them again and again, but not all men, everywhere, at once. The increased tempo of sensation is more like a change of climate, which bears gradually but irresistibly upon whole cultures. Indeed, the tempo of life has been raised everywhere, and often because *acceleritis* is profitable.

The new business of speeding-up for profits does not stop with the radio, tabloid, and sensation for the masses. "Neither in the name of Multitude do I onely include the base and minor sort of people," Sir Thomas Browne once wrote; "there is a rabble even amongst the gentry, a sort of Plebeian heads, whose fancy moves with the same wheel as these." A Broadway play, geared for success, runs with a syncopated celerity offensive to anyone really interested in the drama of life, slurring over cause and effect, headlining crises, summarizing conclusions, every value diminished but one and that the forced excitement of the audience. In this way lack of substance is concealed, and an interest aroused that may be hysterical. The tempo of books has been noticeably accelerated. The short story has been speeded up beyond art. Histories, like the "*Marie Antoinette*" of Stefan Zweig, have been rebuilt so that

the electric sparks may shoot from sensation in the cause to sensation in the result. So subtle and all pervading is this pressure of increasing tempo that it would be a bold man who dared to say that his nerves, his actions, his life as a functioning mind, had not been radically influenced, and nearly always for the worse.

Certainly the troubles in Europe are not to be dissociated from this among other causes. The youth movement so-called, which began as an international back-to-simplicity crusade, has apparently broken into fragments, partly because in Central Europe the tempo of revolution and hysterical nationalism has been more attractive than ideals accelerating more slowly. The Nazi movement in Austria, for example, is strengthened, if not caused, by an impatient surge of youngsters in their teens and twenties toward what promises excitement and quick change. The violent distaste of the war generation for North German Kultur cannot persuade a youth who has been conditioned to stimulus changed by turning the knob of a radio, and who dreads a pause for reflection. Italian oratory from the Duce, London evening journalism, the staccato of French news writing, reflect only less sharply the crude and often morbid excitement which in Germany is being used to carry the masses blindly back to wage slavery and peasantry. Where will our own highly efficient (and very profitable) stimulus of every sensation take us in another generation?

Perhaps to reaction—since in America it is beginning to be called folly rather than tragedy to die of heart disease at forty. So many Americans of all classes seem to be realizing the futility of most hustle and bustle, the triviality of life lived in a loud speaker and a screen, and the boredom or breakdown following constant acceleration, that one has a hope of change that sociologists and psychologists will probably question. For

are we free agents? Can this ran-tan-tan, shout, dance, and hurry civilization be altered short of the forcible removal of its toys? The new Utopias like Russia, and the Europeanized cultures of the East and of savagery, rush to them like children after lollypops. But this is the old question of whether we can control our machines, which will not be debated here.

For the triviality of mind which comes from letting the bilge of professional entertainers, moralists, news mongers, magazine "pep" writers, sluice through the organs of sensation, there is no cure but time, and time is just as likely to be an aggravation. Psychiatrists are doing their best for those among the over-jazzed who have personalities distinct (or opulent) enough to be salvaged. But these efforts come late; nor is there any virtue in prohibition. Among antidotes for acceleritis none seems more promising for the developed mind than literature—especially in youth; literature applied as a combined sedative and tonic—not by any means as a counter-irritant or a cultural plaster. A thorough steeping in poetry or good prose will guarantee at the least an enduring skepticism of speeded-up triviality. Four pages of the "Religio Medici," or one real poem per day, is a better dosage than aspirin or bromide, or cigarettes or alcohol taken not for fun but to quiet the racing machine. It is better medicine because there is a transfusion of an unhurried mind, or of an excitement which is not the illusion of a titillated nerve. And there is no better self-heal, and, incidentally, no better encouragement of sound literature, than to seek out among modern books those that are exciting, not excited, moving, not moved by restless neuroticism, reflective, not dull with the flat dullness of triviality.

If acceleration continues at its present tempo we shall soon be unable to read such books. Millions now cannot endure a play on the stage or screen that does not bolt like a rabbit

from beginning to end. Time for them rushes like a drunken auto, then drops out of the four dimensions, leaving them as stockish as a subway turnstile between trains. Unfortunately the arts are only too adaptable, and we are on the brink of recasting all the treasures of literature to suit acceleration.

Every fifth book published is a prophecy of such a doom. The intention of these remarks, however, is not prophecy, but a little amateur psycho-analysis intended to make the reader understand that the hypodermic needle of acceleration has been in his arm more than once. If he knows a better cure than Dr. Shakespeare or bawdy old Nurse Chaucer, let him go to it.

4. TRUSTING IN BRAINS

It is quite unnecessary to say to an intelligent public that Americans have always been distrustful of brains. I wish that we could accept, as an explanation, Benjamin Franklin's statement that the level of intelligence among the American masses was noticeably higher than in Europe, with a resulting self-reliance not to be found abroad. But I fear that a less complimentary thesis is nearer the truth. The American, the historians say, was typically a pioneer, with the pioneer's necessity for tackling any and every job, the pioneer's distrust of theory, and the pioneer's dislike of whatever limited his opportunities to better himself in the nearest and quickest way. So forests were burned, soil eroded, land grabbed, and booms blown up and burst.

And indeed it is well known to us all that, except for what the English in speaking of the weather call bright intervals, the expert, the thinker, the specialist, the planner has been little loved in our expanding country. There were brief, though magnificent, efforts, when the Colonies were organized, when Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Marshall thought for

the nation, and after them such of their successors as were able to draft programs which the public would accept. Yet each even of these men, though such notable examples of executive thinking, was hated and feared by at least a minority of the populace.

Yet I cannot believe that this historical prejudice against thinking and planning is enough to account for the difficulties of the educated American today who tries to use his brains for the welfare and development of his country. There have never in all our history, with the possible exception of the war years, been so many trained experts in the employ of government, so many intellectuals advising or trying to advise the executives in charge of it. And never, so far as my historical reading informs me, has there been such an outcry against experts, against specialists, against planners and promoters of long-range policy as today. "Professor" in the press has become a term to beat a dog with. A Ph.D. is a label on the rear with "Kick Me" printed on it.

There is some psychological cause for this situation more immediate than the much overworked theories of pioneer inheritance. There is some cause both for the resistance to the planner, and for the planner's frequent lacks in both self-confidence and in practical efficiency, a cause that must have its roots in the soil of a history far closer to our own times than the sociology of a frontier experience. The specialist, of whom the university professor may be taken as a type, has by no means always been a success in public affairs, especially when his position has been executive rather than advisory. Yet any reasoning man or woman knows that as government more and more involves economics, sociology, psychology, and the natural sciences, the masters of those who know must be called upon. Of course, we have been accustomed to run to

bankers when in trouble, and no one objected to drafting Robert Morris in the Revolution or Jay Cooke in the Civil War. But to ask economists, sociologists, or political scientists to save us from the results of our own folly requires a different kind of imagination, and a far greater act of faith toward the gentlemen appealed to. Such men, especially among the so-called brain trusters, have met with a fury of opposition which not even Gallatin had to encounter. Whether or not individually some of them may or may not have deserved it, is not the question I am raising here. The striking fact is that this opposition is widespread, indiscriminating, and comes, not from the masses so much as from privileged men and women in whom even the modern psychologist would admit the faculty of reasoning and the power of deliberate judgment.

And the fact of opposition is all the more striking when one considers how many departments of the government are already and inevitably in the hands of experts, and with little complaint. The army engineers go about their increasingly important business without arousing suspicion and antagonism. No one questions the need of trained thinkers in the departments of public health, in forestry, in naval construction, in the Treasury, in the State Department, in the judiciary, and so on through a wide range of important activities. It is only in those areas where either a new science has developed or where old sciences have been subject to rapid reversals of opinion, that distrust and opposition show themselves. The agriculturist who thinks in terms of economics, the sociologist who regards politics as applied sociology, the economist who has discarded the *laissez-faire* of orthodox economics for a new system of planning—these are the centers of suspicion and attack. It would seem that the fact of distrust is more important than its direction. We accept the expert without question, without

thinking of him as a planner or theorist, in regions where our prejudices or self-interests are not aroused. But the instant that he is employed in a controversial field, we tend to fall upon him, not as a man right or wrong, but as a theorist who is disqualified for practical affairs precisely because he has been trained to think in the long terms of logic or the hypotheses and experiments of science.

The clue to the enigma, curiously enough, may I believe be found in the history of literature and the arts in this country, and it is this which gives me courage to generalize so widely and precariously on a subject in which I can profess but little competence. The primary difficulty is a confusion in values which for over half a century, at least, has left the American mind divided and perplexed.

We are still in the post bellum period in the United States, and by post bellum I mean post Civil War. We are still involved in the immense exploitation of a continent by an industrialism stimulated by the circumstances of that war and its aftermath to an unprecedented success. We are the immediate heirs of the ruthless victory of an industrial over an agrarian civilization. Everyone knows that, everyone should be equally aware of the confusion of values which resulted, a confusion which lies behind our best literature, which has vitally affected our education, and which in three generations has made a new American man.

In this carving of a continent the American mind got edge and lost direction. I could give a thousand examples, but choose the simplest because it is the most pertinent—the mental state of the American undergraduate of any decade from the Eighties to the war in a typical American college. This youth, typically considered, went to a liberal arts college because

every privileged boy was going to college, and with no clear ideas as to what he was going to do with his education.

For what did his education prepare him, for what does a liberal education so-called prepare youth now? If anything, for the conduct of life, for a fortunate adjustment of mind to circumstance, for a satisfactory philosophy, for what every civilized age from the Greeks down have agreed to call a good life. I am not speaking of morals, or of culture in any specific sense, or of the satisfactions of greed or vanity. I mean the kind of life in which an intelligent man can hope to satisfy a cultivated mind with fruits of labor and exercise of emotions which maturity will enjoy and approve. We have had such an ideal realized, though imperfectly, in this country. I would cite the rice civilization in the old South, or the James River plantations, which, in spite of the felt curse of slavery, and for a while and for a few, gave values in living rich in the homelier satisfactions. I would cite the New England village in its prime, and the Quaker culture of the Middle States.

But the undergraduate of the last half century came from a community that had lost interest in values in living. This is a strong statement, but I think justified. Whatever the principles of his education, his social environment in college or at home was aware chiefly of the rewards of competition, with power in terms of wealth as a primary objective. It may be that some professions, such as medicine, escaped this urge of the times. If so, they escaped only its direct influence. The typical youth I describe, if he was intelligent, knew from age eighteen on that the notes of his liberal education were not convertible into what was currently regarded as success. He knew, if he was quick-witted, that he would need a different preparation for American life, and sought and got it in extra-curricu-

lum activities, which, as I have suggested elsewhere, were the real vitalities of the American college, and the dynamo from which energy was fed into the industrial world outside the campus. He realized, if he was sensitive, that the America of his time was not thinking beyond the seizure of economic power, that, whatever his elders might say, what they did was conditioned by a naive faith that, granted the means of power and purchase, the conduct and enjoyment of life would take care of themselves. In one respect these elders were right. The instinctive desires of the Americans were such that once economic security was gained, the business and professional men changed in less than a generation from drudges on a ten-hour schedule to sportsmen willing to take recreation. The country club era began. But in nearly every other respect, the conduct of American life by the privileged classes would have seemed deplorable to the most unphilosophic Greek, or English Augustan, or Virginian of the early 1800s. Tasteless, frantic, notorious for breakdowns in health, divorces, problem children, and sudden reversals from wealth to poverty, the America of this age, in spite of its prosperity, supplied innumerable evidences of a demoralization of standards, and a sense of values weakened to a point where no youth could see his way beyond what was called success.

This country (and other countries, too) is full of visible signs of this breakdown in values. It can be argued, as Lewis Mumford argued it in "Sticks and Stones," from the national architecture. The descent from the Virginia manor or Connecticut farmhouse of 1750 to the rococo of the Seventies and Eighties, and the false sumptuousness of the early Nineteen Hundreds, is an index of the demoralized standards of the American will. Those early houses were built for a well-

conducted life; the latter to exhibit success in gaining power, but not control, over living. It can be argued in painting, in decoration, in landscape gardening, in chinaware and silver, even in music.

We lost our sense of values in pursuing the one value which the success of industrialism made generally available as never before—power over resources, power to spend. And unlike the Romans, who had a like accession, we did not carry into this new success the concept of a good life. As a squeezer of profits, as an exploiter, and as a spender, the Roman millionaire of Augustus's time would make any American plutocrat look like thirty cents; but he carried the arts with him, and spent his money on living so skillfully that we still dig up his villas, translate his libraries, and envy the urbanity of his life.

The undergraduate of whom I speak felt all this, even if he did not understand it. He felt a dull resentment against his education, the resentment of a man who has been obscurely fooled or cheated. The ideals of his college education proved not to be viable in the society he was preparing to enter. So far as he understood them they were good, but they did not work. They told him how to live and for what to live—yet no one was living that way, or wanted to, or could. And his professors, who were the experts of his experience, seemed to him voices speaking in a fog, unpractical men, who, if they were wrong as to what the world was like now, were presumably wrong as to what it had been like. He distrusted them. He still distrusts them—and all theorists with them. And he, the typical American undergraduate, is now the typical American public, or at least that part of the American mass that most makes opinion and controls the destiny of a bourgeois civilization.

I could stop here, for this simple analysis contains I believe the best, if by no means the only explanation of the whole matter. But it does not suggest a solution. For an attempted solution we must bring in other evidence, which seems to me striking.

For curiously enough, in one department of our civilization the American has never lost either interest or confidence in values, and has never distrusted the activities of the intellect, even when it has been portrayed in defeat. I mean in literature. The significant American books which have been widely and deeply read, deal to an extraordinary extent with the conduct of life, and, by implication, with the good life. I place here in a scrambled list, "Rip Van Winkle," "Walden," "Huckleberry Finn," "The Scarlet Letter," Emerson's "Essays," the "Leaves of Grass," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Moby Dick," the lyric poetry of Poe, "The Wings of the Dove," "Babbitt," the poems of Robert Frost, the novels of Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow—and on lower levels the moral or humorous romances among the old best sellers.

In all these books, in different ways and measures, the argument is against a confusion of values, against life without principle, to use Thoreau's phrase, against "State Street" in Emerson, against prejudice and self-deluding infatuation in Mark Twain, against the cheapening of experience in Sinclair Lewis, against the central threat to values implicit in industrialism in the text-book of them all, Thoreau's "Walden."

And I repeat that whatever is said, or done, Americans have steadily read such books with admiration for the principles expressed, and with an imaginative response that goes with the author toward a concept of a better conduct of life. Even in the movies, which represent in literature the demorali-

zation which earlier overtook the other arts, this theme of the good life in opposition to a life without values is often presented, and usually with public success.

My conclusion is like the psycho-analyst's. I propose no cure unless by understanding. This disease of distrust of the intellect is acutely perilous in a civilization grown too complex for *laissez-faire*, too susceptible to radio and press appeals to the emotions to be safeguarded against disaster by plain commonsense, a civilization so dangerously armed with its own machines both of destruction and construction, that while the best brains may fail in the attempt to save it, without brains in intelligent leadership it is quite clearly doomed and lost.

It should be helpful here in America if the class with trained minds and imaginations that move toward public affairs, should understand the nature and the cause of the prejudices that oppose them. Human nature and circumstance being what they are, only a few of these trained minds will be willing or able to devote their energies to public affairs, but the rest are the makers-to-come of public opinion. And for both groups it is essential to comprehend the history of the present dislike of leadership in science, philosophy, and logic. Under the best possible conditions such leadership would always have against it the old enemies—vested interests, pork, patronage, demagoguery, and Falstaff's very human feeling that young men must live whatever happens to the public pocketbook. And it would always be subject to the errors and weaknesses of the theorist and experimenter. Discount all this, and still it is true that the country distrusts the brains of the planner and the thinker, because the country was taught in its youth thinking, planning, theorizing for the good life at a time when they did not work, when the nation wanted not a good life but immediate success, when a program for a well-conducted future

not only kept a young man down but also got in the way of every individualist trying to get rich quick by mining our forests, stripping our grass lands, squandering our oil and coal, crowding our slums, and unbalancing production and consumption. We have changed, or are changing our philosophy, but old prejudices die hard.

Chapter XI

PROPHECIES AND SPECULATIONS

I. WE ARE ON OUR WAY

CRITICISM proceeds by simplifications, though it is destroyed by oversimplification. One who studies an age or a tendency must shake the dice again and again, in the hope of rolling out a lucky number which explains what hitherto has been confused. No one set of generalizations serves; each new philosophy of literature must have its own categories, and even the most elementary distinctions in an era of change may be of use.

Thus in American writing of the time that is still the present or the immediate past for readers of middle age, certain broad and interlocking purposes begin to emerge as significant by contrast to the new interests, new purposes, which are so vigorous if so confusing in the Thirties of our century. It may be said with at least sufficient truth that narrative engrossed the Nineties and the first decade of the twentieth century; description the Nineteen Tens and Twenties; and a search for new values the years since the great boom burst.

There must be many not yet old who remember the fascinated pleasure of the best American writers of the Nineties in the neatness, the grace, the agility of narrative. Substance was of little importance so long as it was pleasing, expression was everything, and the short-story writer who could deal his cards to a grand slam with never a hesitancy in the playing felt

that he had attained Art. Short stories were mechanical in their construction then, but it was the mechanics of fresh invention; and if mechanics in the novel were not fresh, at least they were confident. Form was an ideal which promised the highest success. To do it beautifully was the ambition of both journalist and the worshiper of preciosity. When we grow less serious some of those *jeux d'esprits* of fiction (fewer of poetry) will come to their own again. There is more to be said for H. C. Bunner and Richard Harding Davis than the realists will admit.

Then came that subtle change in the American mind which marked the second coming-of-age of our writers (the first was local, in New England). Description of an America which the narrative playboys had only sipped from, like butterflies, became the fashion for writers of real ambition. The short story descended to the popular magazine, the romantic novel headed toward the movies of the future, Dreiser, Lewis, and all that tribe began the painstaking description of the American scene, sometimes photographic, sometimes satiric, but always inspired by the new accuracy required by social science, and the faith in the potency of fact which was an article in materialism. The realism of the Tens, which became the naturalism or the satiric mimicry of the Twenties, was essentially descriptive. The story was no longer important, the characters as personalities were not important, description, supposedly accurate and certainly far closer to behavior than anything we ever had before, was the ideal. And description of this kind is still, though in decadence, the earmark of the serious American novel.

But only an earmark. It is quite clear that for some time now we have been living in a different intellectual climate. The proletarian novels and plays, usually Marxian, are enough

to prove it. Not because they are Marxian; that, since no political compulsion has as yet borne down upon American literature, is merely an evidence that the new writer is no longer content with description. He is searching (in poetry, in the drama, in the essay, in fiction) for a new view of living. He is experimenting with philosophies because, like the community at large, of which he is merely the sensitized disk and voice, he is newly concerned with values in an age when most ways of living, most ideals of living, most conceptions of success, are suspect or condemned. It was Babbitt who in the Twenties said that he had never done anything he really wanted to do in his life. But that was at the end of his book; his lament was the conclusion, not the theme, of that great novel of satiric description. The new American writers (and we hazard a prophecy with more confidence than usual) are already concerned with, and will soon be committed to, values, aesthetic, social, perhaps moral most of all, and will be indifferent to either story or description until new imaginative conceptions of values in living become emotionally powerful and are ripe for a perfected art. Toward this goal the intellectualist poetry of an Eliot, the traditionalist studies of a Cather, the Marxian frameworks (so stiff and unreal) of the proletarianists, the poetry of industrialism of a MacLeish, and even the humors of *The New Yorker*, all are moving. To say nothing of parallel instances of even greater point in the literature of Europe. What form the new literature will take depends upon the talents that go into it. But we are on our way.

2. TOWARDS A NEW REALISM

Naturalism is played out. The masses of documented material, photographic, literal, unashamed, and unabridged, which have been the corpus of so much fiction in the last

decade, grow tiresome. They are neither science nor history nor fine art. As evidence of the wounds and disorganization of society since the war they had their value, but will anyone ever read again the fiction that was made of them? Not for pleasure certainly, not for ideas, not for the sustenance of the imagination. We must have either a new realism, or romance. Romance just now is frankly incredible. Our mood is wrong for it, and every effort in that direction stops short of excellence because it infallibly recalls a romantic tradition which seems to be on its last legs. There is no stimulus any more in Rousseau; the eighteenth century is already beginning to be more powerful in our minds than the nineteenth, except where habit and early training still prevail.

But what will be a new realism? There must be some new ideas of reality, and these can scarcely spring from the physicist's discovery of the insubstantiality of matter. They must concern society rather than atoms and be in opposition to modes of feeling and of thought out of accordance with what is actually happening in the human race. Like many a decade before us, we carry the ill-assorted baggage of the past on our shoulders, and the burden begins to grow intolerable, as burdens will when their usefulness grows doubtful. We must make up our minds about so many things, yet without some fixed principles to go on minds whirl like flywheels. The communists have put on a belt that hitches us to economic materialism. The fascists have another ready. Realism will study the nature and purpose and probable results of the load.

An able critic has suggested that the next popular successes in fiction will deal with the return of the younger generation to the loyalties, the endurances, and the self-denials of their elders. But this would be only a confession of defeat for restless egoism. There will be no new powerful school of fiction

(or drama, or poetry for that matter) until we have coldly and clearly reconsidered, like the eighteenth century, the question of what men live for, and how, and why. To Fielding or Smollett or Dr. Johnson or Jane Austen, our fiction would seem curiously purposeless. Not purposeless because it conveys no moral, but purposeless in the deeper sense of a study of life that has no frame and hence no standards or principles. What to expect of humanity was a consideration which the Greeks made a chief concern of both their philosophy and their humanism, and Seneca's echoing of Socrates's amazement that civilized man should be willing to waste his time on undirected enterprises while tenaciously conserving his goods, is still an impressive document. What to expect of humanity, what men live for, has not been a subject which interested either dramatists or fictionists in our time. The best writers have proceeded on an instinctive basis which has often served them well; the second best have either dodged the problem, or choked us with theories, which is a very different thing from the shrewd insight of a Voltaire, or even the illuminating prejudice of a Stendhal. It is not theories, ideologies, doctrines, but a fresh view of the realities in human cause and effect which will be the *raison d'être* of a new fiction. Muddled techniques, indecisive experiments, propaganda, warped characterization, and a failure in humor and humanity alike, in so much fiction in our day, may all be due to the lack of that poised idea of man as a creature of prejudice, infinitely human, infinitely self-deluded, which Molière had and Fielding and Jane Austen.

3. PROLETARIAT LITERATURE

Either we are headed for a crash in all social values and a return to barbarism, in which case the most useful job for liter-

ary critics would be to stop their talking and prepare vellum copies of what they believe masterpieces to be buried where a returning civilization may have some chance of finding them (for why risk again the loss of a classic culture)—or we are not. In which alternative the fact of high importance is that an immense increase in leisure, resulting from a further and drastic reduction in hours of necessary labor, seems to be inevitable.

And if this is a probability inherent in change, then a resultant shift in the social utility of literature is quite sure to follow. In the past, near and distant, books and magazines have been roughly classifiable as to their social uses into two major and often overlapping divisions. While they have been, books especially, the pursuit and main business of scholars and the bookish, for general man they have been implements of leisure, confined to the leisure hour. And in this leisure they have provided either information, ideas, and the delight of a stirred imagination, or merely a surcease from toil through relaxation and awakened fancy. That is, they have given stimulus to the active intellect, but to the weary, escape.

But if leisure is to increase and toil decrease for the vast majority of civilized mankind, several interesting results will follow. The mind sodden by too many hours of routine work will become as rare among the masses that perform machine labor in factories or offices as it now is common. Nor will routine labor with a machine lathe or a typewriter, in (let us say) a short-hour, five-day week, produce that nervous exhaustion and mental lassitude which leads the business executive, or state official, or lawyer, to the detective story and the pre-digested hash of the labor-saving magazine.

What will be produced it is not impossible now to prophesy, but impossible to analyze. This much, however, may be sug-

gested, that we shall soon be urgently in need of a literature for the proletariat. If the reply is that such a literature already exists in the pulp magazines and tabloid newspapers, the obvious answer is that if upon such texts we are to educate these new masters of leisure it would be better for the machine age to crash quickly and escape the agony of a long decline into barbarism. But only the defeatist and the intellectual snob will believe that the masses with new reading time are incapable of better reading than the slush now offered them and the T. B. M. alike. The history of reading for the workers, here, in England, or in Russia, has indicated over a century of experiment that when new classes begin to get time and opportunity to read they will take the good, if not the subtle, with ease and profit.

And yet it is against all supposition that this new leisure is to be filled by the classics and the best of such new books as now are written for a different audience. A new literature for the proletariat is going to be demanded, and this will not be what is just now being called proletariat literature. For this is not proletariat literature so much as literature about the proletariat. The work in poetry of some of the literary rebels here and abroad, the fiction of Dos Passos or Dreiser, or of the younger writers like Dahlberg, the novels of the revolution coming out of Russia, are decidedly not the kind of books that masses of released workers will read to fill new hours of freedom. This so-called proletariat literature is a record of injustice and thwarting, or of the evil influence of a capitalist society. It is good stuff for revolution perhaps, but poor food for an attained leisure. Its very class consciousness is against it. The books that are going to be written for emancipated workers will be as definitely proletariat in their major interests as Sir Walter Scott's are aristocratic, but will be no more actively

class conscious than Scott, or Dickens, or Cooper. They will take life as life, not as social maladjustment, and it will be the kind of life that a steel worker on a five-day week will find that he can read about with profit and pleasure.

The course of this new proletariat literature is quite unpredictable. It may produce its Macaulays and Dickenss and its Dostoievskys. And it may develop just a new type of competent mediocrity. What happens will depend not so much upon the proletariat as upon the power of artists to create, and especially upon the will and the competence of critics and teachers to make the ideals of the great literary tradition of our eight centuries of culture felt. Certainly the intellectualists of the communist movement are not yet upon its track.

4. THE ROLLO BOOKS

Who is old enough now to have been young when the Rollo books were still administered like castor oil and rock candy to gaping youth? They were propaganda then—rows of little red and brown volumes that edged off imperceptibly from Rollo into Jonas and Lucy—snobbish little books morally, where idle youngsters in the background were always leaving undone what they ought to have done, while Rollo, or Jonas, in the foreground, was asking questions of his priggish uncle or his tight-mouthed father (Jehovah in New England) whose answers justified the ways of God to man, and beat Milton by explaining the ways in the same chapter. That drive into Boston, where the sights of the Athens of the East majestically ranged themselves on either side of the travelers in their buggy (was it a buggy?), and the poor Irish on the pavements were sermons on thriftlessness; the trip on the Erie Canal with the first principles of hydraulics adroitly inserted into a description of tow-path scenery, with side remarks on being helpful, and

a moral about growing up with the country; Jonas and his little sister (was it Jonas?) with how not to bring up children illustrated by the way he tried to manage her; Rollo at work, at play, abroad, in trouble; Rollo spendthrift and Rollo thrifty; Rollo learning that generosity pauperizes the lazy; Rollo being trimmed and twisted into the pattern of an American, industrious, level-headed, self-controlled, energetic—and also dry, pharisaical, narrow, a moral snob, and a believer in work for work's sake.

The Russian films, the Russian primers, arouse a nostalgia for those little red and gray books which were old-fashioned even in the youth of the now middle-aged, but still authoritative, still impregnable in their reasoning. The Russians, too, are teaching manifest destiny for good little boys and girls. With them the morals are just as heavily stressed, and the stories even more naive. There is a difference of course. Their morality is no longer protestant and individualist. Success does not depend with them upon working for one's self while respecting the rights of the neighbors and remembering that God helps those who help themselves. Success for them is not being better off than other men. The wisp of hay they wave before their donkeys' heads is the assurance that all men will share the profits of a united industry. The rainbow above is an exaltation of a common lot and common purpose. But work is glorified in both moralities. The New Englander excelled in a subtle appeal to the moral snobbery which resists the wiles of pleasure in order to exult in spiritual superiority. The Russians somewhat dangerously assume that the less said about pleasure the better. They disregard any necessities in life not summed up in shelter, food, clothes, respect for one's neighbors, and the satisfaction of elemental emotions. The Rollo books add a sense of personal dignity, but leave out the emotions.

Continents to conquer seem to have much the same effect in Europe as in America. Russia is in our pioneer age. The gospel of individualism versus the gospel of collectivism; three acres and a mule, a quarter section and a mowing machine, Pike's Peak or bust, versus the triumph of the proletariat, training to serve the state, the glory of labor. The more things change, the more they stay the same—not quite the same of course, for we are a century further on, with, in Russia, a vast communal peasantry to propagandize, instead of a nation of individualists on the up and up; and a country to be industrialized over night, instead of a continent unconquerable until machines should be invented for it. We are further on here in our experiments—rampant individualism has been tried and reached its term, man must do more than respect his neighbors, he must co-operate or see his complex civilization crash.

Yet the moral drive is surprisingly the same; and therefore it would be well if the Russians and their American sympathizers should study what has happened to the dogmatism of the Rollo books—should discover how short-lived is the romance of work, how dangerous the attempt to force upon a generation of childish minds fixed ideas so fixed that when their admitted usefulness is past, the momentum goes on and on until karma overtakes it.

How Jacob Abbott would have relished the movies and the talkies! How he would have captured them and turned his little red books into reels! The Russians have an advantage there, but it may prove a deadly one. Not by words which may miss their mark but by vivid unforgettable pictures they are teaching their children and their backward adults that to share in the physical development of a nation is the greatest privilege, greatest happiness, indeed the sole end of man. We tried that a century ago, and considering the crudities of the little

red school house and the naïveté of Rollo and Jonas, did an extraordinarily complete job. But what were we heading toward (and what are they?)—a nation of robots or of really civilized men?

5. SPECIFICATIONS FOR A CONSERVATIVE LITERATURE

Suppose the great split comes at last between conservative and radical in the United States, dividing families, uniting factions, crystallizing theories into two generalized and contrasting political principles. The cleavage will run through literature, of course, through belles-lettres as sharply as through the literature of economics and politics and sociology, perhaps, indeed, leaving keener edges behind.

What the radical literature will be we can guess from the present—there are already plenty of books that pretend to speak for a radical future. The great change would come, should come, in conservative literature.

There has been a curious lack of an effective conservative literature in the depression period. The reason, we feel sure, is that the true conservatives have themselves been changing. A conservative is not by necessity a reactionary, or a slave to vested interests. He does not always, or even often, speak for age against youth. The most brilliant conservatives in literary history have been young, sometimes very young. A conservative, by definition, wishes to preserve or restore values that he thinks are being sacrificed or destroyed. And he is right or wrong according to the nature of the values he fights for, and successful or unsuccessful according to the possibility or impossibility of saving them in a civilization whose law of success must always be change.

If, then, there is to be a conservative literature in this country as vigorous and as influential as the radicalism of the books

of this decade, there must be more to its writing than doing it beautifully. There must be a desire to save, as obstinate as the radical will to reconstruct or destroy, and more discriminating. So far recent American conservative writing that deserves the name of art has been distinguished only by a sense of form and style as opposed to journalistic slovenliness, and by a grip upon ideals and character in contrast to an attack upon all stabilities. Robert Frost, Stephen Benét, Thornton Wilder, Robert Nathan, Elinor Wylie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Willa Cather, E. A. Robinson, have been conservative only in their art, which in itself was in many instances at the beginning a radical innovation.

The conservatives, if the great split comes, will be partisans in more than an aesthetics; they will speak, like the Marxists, only let us hope less rigidly and frigidly, for a philosophy. They will have values in living to fight for, and professional quarrels over techniques of verse, types of diction, and methods of story-telling, which have stirred up most of the radical-conservative rows in recent literary criticism, will be forgotten in a struggle in which either side will use any well-forged weapon of expression that comes handy. We shall get then a literature of conservatism, which is something quite different from a literature that in form and taste is conservative.

Speed the day, for whatever the political complexion of the critical reader in this day of increasing controversy, he must be longing for fighting books well written on the conservative side that will shame the radicals into a literature that has more art in its propaganda.

The truth is that up to now the good writers have been out of sympathy with the conservative party in the United States. That party—it is of course not a political party but a fellowship of the like-minded, calling themselves sometimes

Democrats and sometimes Republicans—has been reactionary, selfish, blind to the necessity of economic change, and sold to vested interests to be conserved at any cost to the public. No literature comes from this kind of conservatism; it is not indeed true conservatism but just the old piggishness of human nature with Mammon as its boss. A poet, a novelist, a critic, a dramatist, once he breaks away from the do-it-to-order of party journalism or the commercial manufacture of tripe for the columns next to advertising, finds no foothold in such a social philosophy.

It would be slander to charge the conservatives at large of the United States with this gross and short-sighted materialism, yet they have certainly allowed such interests to represent conservatism. The trouble with conservative literature has been that one had to be a liberal in order to write it! When and if the new alignment comes, and when and if some principle more patriotic, more far-sighted, and more serviceable to an American civilization than a policy of holder-keeps-all, becomes a political philosophy for conservatives, there will be plenty of able pens available, and many a typewriter will be carried across the trenches into what was the enemy's camp.

6. BREAKFAST WITH DR. HOLMES

Among the books forgotten or never known by the snatch-as-snatch-can reader is the most urbane of American volumes, the best book of one of the first and ripest of the columnists—"The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table." To read it again, now that we have all become sophisticated and scientific, is a rather exciting experience. For here are all the old favorites, "The One-Hoss Shay," with its crash of dogmatism, and "The Chambered Nautilus" with its last stanza peeling upward like bells after a benediction in some pleasant mid-century church, and

the general atmosphere of goodness and sentiment which one associates with that far-off period when Romance and Wit went hand in hand instead of scuffling up and down the corridors of print.

All this, and then a rather breath-taking more. For Dr. Holmes, it seems, was not merely quaint and hilarious after all. Beneath the play of his civilized conversation is a psychology quite as modern as modern novelists have got to. He was well aware of the "unconscious"; knew that the automatic was more important than free will in most experience; had thought a good deal more sensibly than the behaviorists on what would be the relation of their theories to the whole of human conduct and human responsibility, supposing that they were true; indeed, was sufficiently "hard-boiled" as a scientist to be able to afford his little excursions into sentiment without danger of stultifying his idea that man was a drop of water enclosed in the walls of a crystal. He knew psychology (without using its name), and yet remained human!

This is the reward of being civilized, of living in a society of questing minds, not specialized out of proportion by obsession with research, or the stock market, or selling automobiles, a society where the emphasis was still, as it must be in all really high civilizations, on desires that only a richer (not wealthier) humanity can satisfy. Indeed, the humiliating conclusion must be reached by any candid reader of "The Autocrat," that Dr. Holmes's breakfast table was probably more civilized than any Boston or New York or San Francisco breakfast table today. For civilization is not knowledge or wealth, but a power of synthesis over the existing elements of living which can make a balanced life where taste, humor, intellect, morality, the enjoyment of the senses, and the amenities of social contact all reach an estimable height. Produce an American book written

after the Civil War in which such a synthesis exists, with so much amenity, so firm a grip upon psychic and biologic reality, so cool and humorous a detachment, such gusto for good living, as "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table"!

It is not impossible to guess at the reason for our conspicuous decline in the practice of living, or at least for the complete inability of modern Boston and New York to create in even reasonable quantity such finely tempered minds as his, aware yet not discouraged, open yet acute, able both to know and to enjoy. For Holmes flourished at the end of one despotism of the mind, and we are immersed in another. He wrote in one of those happy flowering moments of culture when night and winter are just retreating. "The One-Hoss Shay," it is commonly asserted, celebrates the end of Calvinism. And Holmes the scientist, Holmes the humanist, was emancipated man, freed, with the enlightened of his generation, from a dogmatic code which had bound New England to obsessive thoughts on sin, duty, and destiny, which, like all obsessions, chained the free spirit. He could live as he lived because his mind was, not quiet, but at ease. He could talk with the inspired abandon of the Mermaid tavern because, for a while, talk was free. A dismal certainty had been broken, the new chains were only just forging, and looked beautiful and light. Theology (as the Divinity Student was often reminded at the breakfast table) was no longer omnipotent. Science was still a companion and a youth.

It was a brief moment. Within a few years the Civil War was to prove that the anemic undergraduates of Harvard who would not interest themselves in athletics in spite of Dr. Holmes's pleading, could fight in spite of their thin chests and narrow faces. It was to make turbid for many years the clear air in which the descendants of the Puritan intellectuals were

hoping to build a new empire of the mind. And then industrialism, heaving up like a giant overfed on the rich juices of a new continent, hid heaven with smoke, and there were no more breakfast tables but only hurried cups of coffee on the way to more money. And science, unimaginably extending its measurements, became a dogmatism more prevailing, if less rigid, than Puritanism, until even the man in the street was aware that not only his health and his happiness but his morality and his God were being analyzed and experimented with. His judgments were uninformed, his beliefs subject to momentary reversal, he, in all probability, was to be proved a complete automaton. Such apparent facts dominated even the best minds, and there is no urbanity in a state of obsession.

Perhaps we are getting ready for Dr. Holmes again. The least dogmatic of men now are the most advanced scientists. It is the novelists, the essayists, the popularizers who are the dogmatists. Already it is clear that "moral philosophy" is not, as one began to feel, quite synonymous with sociology, and that the economic man is no more the whole man than was the graceless sinner that Dr. Holmes's father was told about weekly from the pulpit.

We may hope some day for another moment when the civilized spirit may find an air to breathe in, a moment not contingent upon prosperity or population or certainty or even happiness, but deeply dependent upon the existence of a society not bound to the wheel of necessitarian thinking, nor so devoid of a sense of proportion as to believe that plunging down rat holes after more facts, more wealth, or more nervous excitement, is the only way to live in a house. They caught their rats in 1858, but apparently could think afterward about dinner, and a glass of wine, and what science, theology, business, and

a smile could mean for a truly civilized mind. Rat-catching was indispensable, but afterwards one washed one's hands!

7. A DRAGON WALLOWS UP

Liberalism, not the dogma of a party nor a formula of economics, but the liberal spirit, tolerant, intelligent, magnanimous, hopeful, has never in our time been in greater danger than at this moment. The violence and persecutions of the Great War were the results of circumstance and against the policy of the majority of civilized men. But the spirit of fear-and-hate, with the violence, the persecutions, the threats against world peace which accompany it, has now been adopted as a policy by men and nations who believe that liberalism has broken down, and demand that its opposite shall become a philosophy of action.

But liberalism has not broken down; it is only liberals that have failed. The distinction between an ideal and its application is important. That the liberal spirit of the last era was one of the great achievements of the human race (hard won and easily lost) will not be denied. That it was blindly optimistic, narrow in its application, unsound in its economic bases, romantic in its belief that we needs must love the highest when we see it, is equally true. The shock of the war destroyed a confidence not firmly grounded. Emphasis shifted from the successes of liberalism to its failures. There was a healthy reaction against optimism. The too sanguine humors of the world were quickly purged.

Reaction went further. Amidst the disillusiones and the futilities of the post-war period, the liberal spirit itself began to seem a mockery. Sensitive spirits, like Feuchtwanger, bent on realism, rewrote historical romance to exhibit the cynicism of politics, analysts like Proust began to study the decay of

culture, the English novelists described the end of an epoch. Significantly, a new brutality came into literature—in Europe a hard transcription of brutal experience, in America, with writers like Hemingway, a fascinated, a romantic, dallying with brutality itself. Realism changed from an impartial formula to a creed; to be realistic began to mean to doubt everything which the liberal mind had willed and hoped. The defeatism of the last weary years of the war became a philosophy. Since they could not have the confidence of pre-war, men and women began not to believe in confidence. And when confidence leaves, fear arrives. All over the western world we have had a literature of fear, sometimes intellectually courageous, sometimes, as in the fiction of cruelty and disorder, distinctly hysterical.

A Matthew Arnold, a Tennyson, an Emerson, a Whitman are of little use in such a crisis. What could Whitman mean to a twenty-year-old Nazi, or Emerson to a convinced communist? We have dropped from the spiritual level where such idealists can persuade the typical intellect; and it may be said with equal truth that their doctrine is too naïve for a world economically and socially far more complex than theirs, and curdled with passions which the complacency of the nineteenth century kept under, in classes which had not yet sought their place in the sun.

What is needed today is a biting literature of social criticism, aware of the beast, the child, and the coward in every breast, yet unwilling to concede defeat or to accept error. We need a Voltaire. We need a "Candide," a book that Jew-baiters and war-mongers can understand. We need a lash for the failures of liberalism (as Voltaire lashed the failures of Christianity) by men who understand (as Voltaire understood) that the purposes of liberalism are indispensable. The stupidities of

force and blind reaction can be fought only by intelligence, disillusioned but not discouraged. The lumbering naturalism of realistic fiction is quite inadequate, and so is the outmoded humanitarianism of the stage. A controlled and intelligent anger, destructive in order to construct, sharp as a knife and aware of its ends and its enemy, is the best weapon against this old dragon of intolerance, distrust, violence, and hate, wallowing up from the mud of history. You cannot kill dinosaurs with sermons or scientific analyses, or turn them back by oratory. Nor do whiffs of grapesettle settle anything except for the moment, as Napoleon learned to his cost.

8. LITERATURE IN THE PLANNED STATE

The question of freedom in literature and the arts has been extensively debated and if there is still anyone who does not know where he stands on the general principle it is because he is either ill-informed as to the issues, or indifferent. The challenge is definite and clear, whether it be the Russianism of Stalin's first phase, now happily liberalizing, which would make literature a vehicle for communistic ideas; or the dictum from Mussolini, carried on the staff of an Italian literary journal, which states that criticism is admirable so long as it furthers the fascist theory of government; or Herr Goebbels's mandate that literature, religion, and science all must be narrowed to the service of the totalitarian state. The watchword is, "Under which king, Bezonian? speak or die."

The question of individualism in literature is by no means so easy to disentangle from its qualifications. Individualism is clearly limited by the demands of the autocratic state; certainly all individualism and every expression of the personality not in accord with the central will would seem to be negatived in such a state. Yet pure literature is so much and so essentially the

endeavor to give the individual a sense of personal reality in his relations to his environment that it is questionable whether loss of freedom of expression (which has often been lost before) is as serious for a writer as loss of his sense of importance as an individual.

This sense is, of course, directly threatened by such desperate endeavors to save capitalism by limiting self-expression to the needs of the capitalist state as one sees in Germany. But it is equally threatened by the growing tendency toward collectivism all over the world—in the democracies as in the autocracies. In a planned state or in a controlled society, self-expression in literature must expect to feel the curb. Those things which concern Caesar it must expect to render unto Caesar or feel Caesar's hand. And if in a collectivized state on a socialistic model Caesar is represented by an ideal of service and utility, that in itself will make an atmosphere in which the value of individual self-expression will be tested by an ideology which necessarily thinks in terms of the collective unit, instead of the rebellious, prophetic, or merely self-expressive soul.

I believe myself that belles-lettres in the next age will be radically altered, but I do not believe that it will be depersonalized, even if a world rage to act and live by communities like ants sweeps us from our laissez-faire traditions. I believe that the role of personality in all literature not mere pamphleteering will increase, not decrease, and assume an importance it has not had since the Renaissance and before the rise of industrialism. My reasons for so thinking are not prophetic, but based upon the nature of literature and the now well-defined character of the revolution through which, in differing tempos and with very different emphases, all civilized societies are passing.

The world today exhibits one of those obsessions which have been so frequent in recorded history, and which, like powerful magnets, reorganize everything within their field of influence. Theology, biology, democracy, for brief or longer moments, have obsessed the leaders of the human race. Today it is economics, and for obvious reasons, since the crash of economic internationalism on a laissez-faire basis, with the war as an accompaniment, has brought such economic dislocation with resulting miseries as by necessity fixes the hope of mankind upon economic cures. And wherever in the Western world the necessity or the desire of change has been strong enough, one sees nation after nation experimenting with vast readjustments of power, in the hope of creating economic security. In this great endeavor, changes in political structure are merely shifts in tools and formulas, the end is economic. Italian fascism, German Hitlerism, Russian communism, and the New Deal in the United States, seem, and are, widely different in their philosophical implications. Yet it is probable that another generation will see in them a resemblance more significant than their violent oppositions. In all of them the effort, whatever may be the motives, or whoever may be those to profit, is toward a planned and controlled economy, directed by a central and all powerful government, with some variant of collectivism as a goal. Whether the Russian ideal of economic well-being for all, or the Hitler purpose of a dominant class supported by a mass of labor on sustenance wages and under strict control, is the end in view, the means are necessarily the subordination of the individual to the machinery of the state. The desire of Hitler to destroy socialism so as to restore and direct profits, the attempt of the Soviets to determine the distribution of wealth, and the wish of the present administration in the United States to preserve capitalism while con-

trolling profits, all are manifestations of a new will to power, proceeding from the theory that if we are to be saved economically the state must organize its members into a unity where each shall serve in a plan made for all, though by no means necessarily for an equal benefit.

To suppose that a revolution of this kind, dependent upon mass psychology, involving the mores in general, and particularly the loyalties and the prejudices by which men live, will pass by literature or, for that matter, religion, would be absurd, even if we had not already potent instances to the contrary both here and abroad. The involvements will be very different in different systems, yet everywhere in the civilized world it seems probable that the question will soon be asked, Where does literature enter into the program of state planning?

Does this mean that as the state becomes more autarchic, and as collectivism overcomes laissez-faire, that literature will become a public utility conditioned to social rather than individual needs? Naturally, a search for new power will use such useful instruments as, say, the novel or the drama, as it will use journalism. But that it will succeed in absorbing literary energy into its purposes is highly improbable. On the contrary, I believe that far from stifling individualism in literature, the new collectivism is more than likely to vitalize it, to give it a new voice and a personality which (by comparison, say, with the early 1700s or 1800s) just now it lacks.

There is a curious antinomy between pure literature and journalism as they have been written in the last half century. Journalism has been steadily gaining in intensely personal expression—or rather, as some may say, disintegrating into personalism and expressing an essentially trivial and scurrilous individualism. American journalism especially needs a dose of social discipline which will sweat out the vicious individualism

which makes it so often irresponsible. But literature, belles-lettres, has been losing personality. This is, of course, a sweeping generalization; nevertheless, I venture to assert that in the important, and especially in the new, modes of literary expression, the individuality of the writer has been more and more controlled and often suppressed in order to satisfy what he (and not the state) regards as a social need. Consider the fiction and drama, for example, which has by common consent been regarded as the most "significant" and usually as the "best"—from Shaw on through Galsworthy, Thomas Mann, Dos Passos, O'Neill, H. G. Wells, Sinclair Lewis, Ernst Toller, Jules Romains, down to the current books of Malraux, Bunin, and the proletarian novelists and Marxian playwrights. There, in varying degrees, the books written belong to social science or psychology as much as to literature, and the personality of the writer has been far more subjected to his need for expressing social ideas than was Milton's to his Puritan theology. Or more potent still, regard the so-called "naturalism" of this period, which is only realism made utilitarian. Novelists particularly (such as Dreiser) have given us pictures of society so painfully objective, so minute and unsparing in detail, that all personal aim seems lost beyond the desire of the writer to sink himself in his subject until all design, all "argument" in the old literary sense of that word, is withdrawn, and we are given nothing but evidence. It is significant that the wish-psychology of the individual, which always strains toward success, if not toward heroism and romance, has had no outlet in this period except in markedly inferior and usually in sentimental work. In its courageous breach of this self-denying ordinance lies the secret perhaps of the triumph of the long-winded "Anthony Adverse."

Nor do the intensely introspective works of James Joyce

and Marcel Proust invalidate my argument. Almost as much as the "Forsyte Saga" they exhibit the creative intellect taking responsibility for society, and making its contribution to a better understanding of the social complex in whose growing complexity we have to live. Nothing could be more different from the intensely individualistic exuberance of Rabelais (who also had social purposes), or the brooding sense of personality in the social satires of Swift. These moderns, perhaps the outstanding individualists in literature of our period, have become, the one sometimes almost unintelligible, the other fine spun to the breaking point, in the attempt to make their books diagnoses of the ills of society. There is a strain toward synthesis and away from the personality of the creator (more, to be sure, in Joyce than in Proust) that one does not feel even in the pure drama of Shakespeare and Racine.

But if we return from these heights to the less extraordinary, and hence more typical, efforts of the realistic novelists, who are the accepted spokesmen of our day, what has happened is obvious. Authors withdraw themselves as far as they are able into the impartiality of observers, who endeavor to let the facts of a changing society speak for themselves. A Dreiser tries to be as impersonal as he supposes God to be.

Nor can one fail to see a retreat of individualism in the intellectualized poetry of the last ten years, a poetry which in effect changes the lyric cry of angel and bird into a mathematical equation worked out in highly charged words. Both may be expressions of personality but the emotional degree differs. The rules of the game here seem to be that the finished poem shall be an abstraction where design carries at least as much meaning as the statement. Individualism, and especially personality, is as much limited in such work as in the writing of history. The parallel with modernist abstract art is obvious.

Indeed it will be found that in all so-called modernism, personality, as we knew it in the nineteenth century, has been subdued by a fierce desire to make art do more than unburden the heart, whether this more is the message of form in design, or of social ideas in the content.

Note, for example, the prevalence of verbal experiment in recent books. Whole books depend for their impact upon a fresh, often upon a perverse, use of words, as in Gertrude Stein. But the object is not to say what oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd; it is not to unpack new emotions of an intensely individualistic author. On the contrary, this play with words more often resembles the expert though speculative labor of an inventor of new tools. By millimetric changes he devises instruments which when put into production may alter and improve the mediums of life. He is an experimenter with his eye on social uses, and so are they. Their inspiration is social, not individual, and when put under analysis their work usually shows no new inspiration (sometimes it reveals nothing whatsoever) but only new adaptations of language to the supposed needs of society.

A proof, if proof is needed, of this contention, is the comparative unimportance of style as a factor in modern literature. We no longer speak of the great stylists of our day—who are they?—although there may be many with style. The most influential writer in English of the last decade, James Joyce, devoted a section of his "Ulysses" to parodying style, while his new work shows style in its decadence, since its qualities of allusiveness, connotation, rhythm, and a controlled choice of words are removed from communication (since only the initiate can understand him) and hence from any effective transfer of personality. As for our younger American authors, such as Hemingway and Faulkner, they have manners, but no

true style at all, since the instrument they use quite clearly fails to attain a harmonious unity representing a homogeneous imagination. And a sentence (not dialogue) taken out of Sinclair Lewis is usually indistinguishable from a sentence by any good journalist. The reason, of course, is that style, being neither rhetoric, nor beauty, nor accuracy, nor rhythm alone, but the perfect result of the transfusion of personality through expression, is naturally unemphasized in a period when the ambition of writers is constantly drawn to reaction against, or analysis of, or comment upon, a changing social environment, and when their objectives are attained if they have described something rigorously kept outside of themselves and usually repugnant to their personality. Style used to be the man; now it is an attempt to make a language adequate to the description of society.

All this was once called the result of a social conscience—much too simple a term for a complex phenomenon. Nevertheless a preoccupation with society and the problems of society, as contrasted with the romantic concern for the individual and the problems of the individual and his soul, is at its root. But now social change to an extent not duplicated since the Age of Enlightenment has become a general concern. Economics, from a science or a private practice, has become a social obsession; morals, religion, the psychology which underlies conduct, all are now areas in which political action is conscious and expected; those very social maladjustments and failures in understanding from which the socially conscious writer took his themes are passing into the hands of brain trusts, directors of propaganda, parties with social programs, dictators with a philosophy of government. The socially conscious government will not experiment with words or take on style as a function, but as increasingly it plans and controls, it will take into its

province what has been so much the business of modern literature—a sense of society, precisely as literature took into its hands in the last century so much that had belonged to theology before.

As this happens, and it is obviously happening now for witness the sharper and sharper distinctions between literature taken over for propaganda and literature that remains creative for its own ends, the results of a shifted load will show themselves. The emphasis in creative literature will begin to shift from the social to the personal, as it is already beginning to do in Russia. There the attempt to make the novel and the drama trip hand in hand with economics, sociology, and politics to found a new Utopia, has clearly failed. And the attempted disciplining of the arts for the strengthening of the government of the Third Reich will fail also to the extent that while Hitlerism or its equivalent lasts we are likely to see the best German literature written outside of Germany. No—despite an inevitable and legitimate tendency, which will extend to the English-speaking countries, to make the typewriter an instrument of collectivization, it is probable that we shall soon have a violent resurgence of the personal and hence the individual in literature. Relieved of its responsibility for reforming the growing ills of *laissez-faire* society, our novel and drama especially, but also poetry, are going to return to their age-long privilege of giving to the individual an intenser sense of his own reality in a society which is always trying to make him a number and a type.

The importance of such a service in communities like ours cannot be exaggerated. For our modern societies require social control, they can subsist only by mass production, can be educated only by mass methods, can become civilized only by a beneficent standardization of the instruments of culture.

Literature and mystical religion, the first for the many, the second for the few who can take their religion that way, will thus become the safeguards of such individualism as is essential if we are to socialize without depersonalizing the world. For it is the tiny flame of self-realization, self-respect, and self-expression kept alight by religion and literature which makes the individual worth collectivizing.

INDEX

- Abbott, Jacob, 285
 Adamic, Louis, 100
 Adams, Brooks, 263
 Adams, Henry, 263
 Addison, Joseph, 31, 206
 "Æneid, The," Virgil, 70
 "Age of Innocence, The," Edith Wharton, 115
 Aiken, Conrad, 174
 "Alice in Wonderland," Lewis Carroll, 262
 "All Quiet on the Western Front," Erich Maria Remarque, 192
American Magazine, 130
 "American Tragedy, The," Theodore Dreiser, 122, 258
 Anderson, Sherwood, 15, 249
 "Angel Pavement," J. B. Priestley, 254
 "Anthony Adverse," Hervey Allen, 298
 "Apple Tree, The," John Galsworthy, 33, 36
 "Appointment in Samarra," John O'Hara, 155-159
 Aquinas, Thomas, 109
 Aristotle, 208
 Arnold, Matthew, 7, 10, 31, 182-184, 227, 230, 293
 "Arrowsmith," Sinclair Lewis, 133
 "As You Like It," William Shakespeare, 194
 Audubon, John James, 246
 Augustine, Saint, 46
 Austen, Jane, 19, 69, 90, 179, 280
 "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, The," Oliver Wendell Holmes, 288-291
 "Babbitt," Sinclair Lewis, 133-139, 258, 273
 Bacon, Francis, 179
 Bacon, Roger, 112
 Baker, George Pierce, 168
 Balestier, Kipling's brother-in-law, 27
 Balzac, Honoré de, 36, 239
 Barbusse, Henri, 121
 "Barrack Room Ballads, The," Rudyard Kipling, 21
 Bartram, John, 246
 Beard, Charles A., 18
 Beardsley, Aubrey, 28
 Beckford, William, 142
 Beerbohm, Max, 28
 Bell, Neil, 15
 Benét, Stephen Vincent, 87, 287
 Bennett, Arnold, 239
 Beowulf, 181
 Beyle, Marie Henri, 90, 280
 Bible, The, 202-214
 Bierce, Ambrose, 144
 Blackstone, Sir William, 209
 Blake, William, 184, 233
 Boethius, 70
 Bok, Edward, 229
 "Bridge of San Luis Rey, The," Thornton Wilder, 257
 Bridges, Robert, 260
 Bromfield, Louis, 254
 Brooks, Van Wyck, 18
 Browne, Sir Thomas, 263
 Browning, Robert, 150, 182, 240
 "Brushwood Boy, The," Rudyard Kipling, 22
 Bryan, William Jennings, 59
 Buchan, John, 40
 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward George Earle Lytton, 154, 156, 158
 Bunin, Ivan, 298
 Bunyan, John, 40, 53, 209
 Bennett, Arnold, 34
 Bunner, H. C., 277
 Burton, Sir Richard, 40
 Burton, Robert, 210
 Butler, Samuel, 73, 74
 Byron, George Gordon, Lord, 179, 261
 Caesar, Julius, 40
 Caldwell, Erskine, 17, 100, 123

- Callaghan, Morley, 253
 Calvin, John, 112
 "Candide," Voltaire, 35, 293
 Cantwell, Robert, 122, 154
 "Captains Courageous," Rudyard Kipling, 23
 Carlyle, Thomas, 10, 182, 210
 Cather, Willa, 3, 5, 17, 87, 154, 257, 273, 278, 287
 "Cavalcade," Noel Coward, 39
 Cecil, Robert, 44
 Cellini, Benvenuto, 118, 240
 "Chanson de Roland," 192
 Chaplin, Charles Spencer, 186-188
 Chase, Stuart, 107
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 19, 69, 181, 195, 199-200, 259, 266
 "Childe Harold," Byron, 118
 "Chinese Nightingale, The," Vachel Lindsay, 48
 Cicero, 222
 Clemens, Samuel L., 5, 16, 50, 60, 116-117, 133, 152, 154, 162, 175, 273
 Cobb, Frank I., 218
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 228
 Confucius, 206
 "Congo, The," Vachel Lindsay, 48
 Cooke, Jay, 268
 Cooper, James Fenimore, 60, 116, 283
 "Corinthians," 216
 Coward, Noel, 39
 Croce, Benedetto, 106
 Cromwell, Oliver, 42, 44

 Dahlberg, Edward, 282
 Dante Alighieri, 195, 200, 206
 Davis, Elmer, 253
 Davis, Richard Harding, 21, 277
 Defoe, Daniel, 19
 Democritus, 112
 De Quincey, Thomas, 181
 Dickens, Charles, 7, 16, 19, 21, 24, 69, 70, 114, 138, 239, 261, 262, 283
 "Divine Comedy, The," Dante Alighieri, 18, 70, 200
 "Dodsworth," Sinclair Lewis, 134-139
 Dos Passos, John, 106, 239, 253, 282, 298
 Dostoevsky, Feodor, 15, 70, 283
 Dreiser, Theodore, 3, 11, 17, 79, 100, 116, 122, 154, 253, 258, 277, 282, 298-299

 Dreyfus, Alfred, 59
 Dryden, John, 181
 Dunne, Finley Peter, 5, 51, 55-59
 "Dynasts, The," Thomas Hardy, 202

 Edwards, Jonathan, 31, 44
 Eliot, T. S., 3, 17, 130-131, 147, 200, 278
 Ellis, Havelock, 188, 261
 "Elmer Gantry," Sinclair Lewis, 133, 137
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 7, 10, 13, 31, 60, 61, 99, 116, 146, 182, 206, 214, 217, 231, 255, 261, 273, 293
 "Encyclopædia Britannica," 30, 166
 Erasmus, Desiderius, 61
 "Essays," Ralph Waldo Emerson, 273
 "Euphues," John Lyly, 129

 "Faery Queene, The," Edmund Spenser, 129
 "Farewell to Arms, A," Ernest Hemingway, 123, 131, 151
 Farrell, James T., 100
 "Fathers and Sons," Ernest Hemingway, 151
 Faulkner, William, 5, 15, 17, 79-83, 87, 123-125, 130, 139, 144, 147, 257, 300
 "Faust," Goethe, 18
 Ferber, Edna, 253
 "Feu, Le," Henri Barbusse, 121
 Feuchtwanger, Lion, 292-293
 Fielding, Henry, 69, 70, 280
 Fitzgerald, Edward, 31
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 86
 "For All We Have and Are," Rudyard Kipling, 23
 Ford, Henry, 102, 255
 "Forsyte Saga, The," John Galsworthy, 32-39, 129-130, 254, 299
 "Four Saints," Gertrude Stein, 160-161
 Fox, George, 44, 209
 Franklin, Benjamin, 50
 Freud, Sigmund, 120, 128
 Frost, Robert, 3, 5, 30, 47, 52, 86, 174, 231, 257, 273, 287

 Gallatin, Albert, 268
 Gallic Wars, Julius Caesar, 40
 Galsworthy, John, 12, 15, 30-39, 129-130, 298

- "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," Anita Loos, 161
 "Georgics," Virgil, 249
 "General William Booth Enters Heaven," Vachel Lindsay, 48
 Gettysburg speech, Abraham Lincoln, 209
 Gibbon, Edward, 40
 "Gilded Age, The," Mark Twain, 175
 "Give Your Heart to the Hawks, and Other Poems," Robinson Jeffers, 147-148
 Glasgow, Ellen, 5, 87, 273
 Goebbels, Paul Joseph, 294
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 69
 "Golden Ass, The," Apuleius, 70
 Green, Julian, 144
 "Green Pastures, The," Marc Connelly, 3, 17
 Greenwood, Walter, 122
 Guedalla, Philip, 30
 "Gulliver," Jonathan Swift, 190
 Haldane, Richard Burdon, Viscount, 240
 Halper, Albert, 100, 122
 Hamilton, Alexander, 266
 "Hamlet," William Shakespeare, 194
 Hanna, Mark, 57
 Hardy, Thomas, 35, 36, 114, 202, 215
 Hatcher, Professor, 168
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 60, 70, 114, 116, 142, 144, 255, 261
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 109
 Hemingway, Ernest, 5, 15, 17, 22, 74-75, 77, 79, 106, 119, 123-125, 130-131, 148, 150-154, 188, 257, 300
 Henry, O, 151
 "Henry IVth," William Shakespeare, 191
 "Henry Vth," William Shakespeare, 192
 Herbert, A. P., 254
 Herbert, George, 31
 Hergesheimer, Joseph, 154, 156, 159
 Hicks, Granville, 18
 "History of Human Stupidity," Walter B. Pitkin, 195
 Hitler, Adolf, 178
 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 288-291
 Homer, 70, 114, 194, 196, 206
 Horace, 261
 Howells, William Dean, 138, 158
 "Huckleberry Finn," Mark Twain, 273
 Huntington, Ellsworth, 90
 Hurst, Fannie, 253
 Huxley, Aldous, 12
 "Idylls of the King," Alfred Lord Tennyson, 169, 192
 "Iliad, The," Homer, 70, 191-192
 "In Chancery," John Galsworthy, 37
 "Indian Summer of a Forsyte, The," John Galsworthy, 36
 "Innocents Abroad," Mark Twain, 134
 Irving, Washington, 50, 116, 255
 Isaiah, 70, 206
 Isham, Colonel, 45
 "Ivanhoe," Sir Walter Scott, 192
 James, Henry, 116, 117, 135
 Jeffers, Robinson, 130-131, 146-150, 174
 Jefferson, Thomas, 31, 220, 259, 266
 Jeremiah, 70, 208-209
 Job, 70, 213
 "John Brown's Body," Stephen Vincent Benét, 3, 18
 Johnson, Samuel, 13, 210, 280
 Jonson, Ben, 261
 Joyce, James, 5, 75, 106-107, 119, 129, 167, 201, 298-300
 Jung, Karl, 129
 "Jungle Books, The," Rudyard Kipling, 22, 23
 "Just So Stories," Rudyard Kipling, 22
 "Kangaroo," D. H. Lawrence, 53
 Kant, Immanuel, 109
 Keats, John, 105, 182-184, 206, 228
 Kilmer, Joyce, 243
 "Kim," Rudyard Kipling, 22, 24, 29
 "King Lear," William Shakespeare, 70
 "King's Ankus, The," Rudyard Kipling, 29
 Kipling, Rudyard, 16, 20-29, 58, 127, 151-154
 "Knight's Tale, The," Geoffrey Chaucer, 191
 Krutch, Joseph Wood, 106
 Kubie, Laurence, 123
 "Lady Chatterley's Lover," D. H. Lawrence, 54, 55, 126
 Lamb, Charles, 19, 210, 239
 Lardner, Ring W., 18, 151
 "Last Chantey, The," Rudyard Kipling, 29

- Lawrence, D. H., 15, 53-55, 126-127, 163, 188
 Lawrence, T. E., 40-46
 "Leaves of Grass," Walt Whitman, 202-203, 273
 Lewis, Sinclair, 3, 11, 17, 34, 79, 106, 133-139, 154, 201, 215, 257, 273, 277, 298, 301
 Lewisohn, Ludwig, 18
 "Life of Nelson," Robert Southey, 46
 "Light That Failed, The," Rudyard Kipling, 24
 Lincoln, Abraham, 77, 209, 220
 "Lincoln," Edgar Lee Masters, 77
 Lindsay, Vachel, 47-49, 86
 Lloyd George, David, 44
 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, 20
 "Look Homeward, Angel," Thomas Wolfe, 166-167
 Loos, Anita, 161
 Lowell, Amy, 87
 Lowell, James Russell, 182
 "Hosea Biglow," 50
 Lowes, John Livingston, 18
 Luther, Martin, 61
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington, Lord, 218, 283
 Machiavelli, Nicolò, 19
 MacLeish, Archibald, 5, 18, 87, 174, 278
 Madison, James, 266
 "Main Street," Sinclair Lewis, 133-134, 201
 Malraux, André, 298
 Mann, Thomas, 15, 298
 "Marie Antoinette," Stefan Zweig, 263
 Marlowe, Christopher, 202
 Marshall, John, 266
 "Martin Chuzzlewit," Charles Dickens, 16
 Marx, Karl, 4
 Masfield, John, 106, 132
 Masters, Edgar Lee, 77
 "Mein Kampf," Adolf Hitler, 221
 Melville, Herman, 7, 60, 116-118, 143-144, 148, 164, 165, 169, 255
 "Men of Good Will," Jules Romans, 201
 Mencken, Henry L., 12, 65, 257
 Meredith, George, 20
- Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 17, 87, 174, 287
 Milton, John, 13, 44, 70, 110, 114, 195-196, 202, 214, 262, 283, 298
 "Mr Britling Sees It Through," Herbert George Wells, 121, 192
 "Mr. Dooley in Peace and War," Finley Peter Dunne, 56
 "Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of His Countrymen," Finley Peter Dunne, 57
 "Moby Dick," Herman Melville, 118, 164, 273
 "Modern Times," Charles Chaplin, 186-188
 Mohammed, 112
 Molière, Jean Baptiste Poquelin, 70, 280
 Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de, 171
 More, Sir Thomas, 74
 Morris, Robert, 268
 Moses, 112
 "Mourning Becomes Electra," Eugene O'Neill, 139-143
 Mumford, Lewis, 18, 107, 271
 Mussolini, Benito, 294
- Naseby, Petroleum V., 50
Nation, The, 257
 "Natural History of Death, A," Ernest Hemingway, 151
 Nathan, Robert, 3, 15, 17, 287
New Republic, The, 257
New Yorker, The, 3, 18, 257, 278
 Norris, Kathleen, 158
- O'Casey, Sean, 75
 "Ode to the West Wind," Percy Bysshe Shelley, 111
 "Odyssey, The," Homer, 70
 "Of Thee I Sing," George S. Kaufmann *et al*, 3, 17
 "Of Time and the River," Thomas Wolfe, 131-132, 163-170
 O'Hara, John, 100, 155-159, 188, 255
 "One-Hoss Shay, The," Oliver Wendell Holmes, 288-291
 O'Neill, Eugene Gladstone, 106, 139-146, 148, 150, 298
 "On the Victorian Era," Finley Peter Dunne, 57
- "Paradise Lost," John Milton, 70, 114, 192, 194

- Parrington, Professor, 18
 Pascal, Blaise, 214
 Paul, St., 206
 Pepys, Samuel, 118
 "Pickwick Papers," Charles Dickens, 70
 "Pierre," Herman Melville, 169
 "Pilgrim's Progress," John Bunyan, 54, 118
 Pindar, 208
 Pitkin, Walter B., 195
 Plato, 69, 70, 73, 94, 107, 112, 132
 "Plumed Serpent, The," D. H. Lawrence, 53, 54
 Plutarch, 26
 "Plutocrat, The," Booth Tarkington, 65
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 48, 60, 82, 116, 143-144, 148, 182, 230, 254, 273
 Pope, Alexander, 19, 105, 261
 Porter, Sydney, 151
 "Portraits and Prayers," Gertrude Stein, 159
 Pound, Ezra, 5
 "Prelude, The," William Wordsworth, 238
 Priestley, J. B., 15, 254
 Proust, Marcel, 5, 35, 119, 201, 292, 299
 "Puck of Pook's Hill," Rudyard Kipling, 22
 Rabelais, François, 260, 299
 Racine, Jean Baptiste, 35, 69, 299
 "Recessional, The," Rudyard Kipling, 23
 "Religio Medici," Sir Thomas Browne, 264
 "Republic," Plato, 70
 "Revelation," 208
 "Rip Van Winkle," Washington Irving, 273
 "Road to Xanadu, The," John Livingston Lowes, 18
 Robinson, Edward Arlington, 5, 174, 287
 Rogers, Will, 49-53
 Romans, Jules, 201, 239, 298
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 73, 74
 Ruskin, John, 10, 182, 210
 "Saint Joan," George Bernard Shaw, 106
 "Sanctuary," William Faulkner, 79-83, 123
 Sandburg, Carl, 87
 Santayana, George, 18
 Sassoon, Siegfried, 192
Saturday Evening Post, The, 64, 130, 216
Saturday Review of Literature, The, 123
 "Scarlet Letter, The," Nathaniel Hawthorne, 140, 273
 Scott, Evelyn, 15, 16
 Scott, Sir Walter, 19, 24, 181, 282, 283
 Seneca, 280
 "Seven Pillars of Wisdom, The," T. E. Lawrence, 40-46
 Shakespeare, William, 19, 20, 25, 33, 35, 69, 70, 73, 90, 106-107, 191-192, 194-196, 200, 201, 206, 210, 228, 261, 266
 Shaw, George Bernard, 34, 106, 127, 200, 214, 298
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 111, 202
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 228
 Smollett, Tobias, 280
 Socrates, 103, 280
 "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman, 119, 164
 "Song of Solomon," 216
 "Sons and Lovers," D. H. Lawrence, 54
 Sophocles, 37
 "So Red the Rose," Stark Young, 99
 Southey, Robert, 46
Spectator, 262
 Spengler, Oswald, 103-104, 212, 256
 Spenser, Edmund, 31, 261
 Stalin, Josef Vissarionovich, 294
 Stein, Gertrude, 75, 159-163, 300
 Stendhal, 90, 280
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 132
 "Sucks and Stones," Lewis Mumford, 271
 Strachey, John, 188
 "Strange Interlude," Eugene O'Neill, 142, 144
 "Studies in Classic American Literature," D. H. Lawrence, 53, 163
 "Sun Also Rises, The," Ernest Hemingway, 123, 258
 Surtees, Laurence, 8
 Swift, Jonathan, 19, 190, 200, 261, 299
 Swinnerton, Frank, 239
 Tarkington, Booth, 5, 64, 66, 87, 158
 "Tempest, The," William Shakespeare, 35

- Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 7, 20, 24, 27,
32, 107, 202, 293
"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Thomas
Hardy, 35
"They," Rudyard Kipling, 22
"This Side of Paradise," F. Scott Fitz-
gerald, 86
Thoreau, Henry David, 7, 10, 19, 52, 60,
61, 99, 100, 116-118, 165, 182, 214,
217, 245-247, 249, 255, 261, 273
"Those Earnest Victorians," Esmé Wing-
field-Stratford, 9
Times, The New York, 209, 216
Toller, Ernst, 298
Tolstoy, Leo, 200
"Tom Jones," Fielding, 69, 70
"Triad," Robinson Jeffers, 148
"Trolus and Cressida," William Shake-
speare, 70
Trollope, Anthony, 181
Turgeniev, Ivan Sergeivitch, 154
Twain, Mark, 5, 16, 50, 60, 116-117,
134, 152, 154, 162, 175, 273
"Typee," Herman Melville, 143
"Ulysses," James Joyce, 106, 121, 129,
167, 300
"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Harriet Beecher
Stowe, 199, 273
Valéry, Paul, 106
Van Vechten, Carl, 253
"Vathek," William Beckford, 142
Virgil, 69, 70, 194, 206, 249, 261
Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de, 69,
154, 200, 293
"Walden," Henry David Thoreau, 273
Walpole, Horace, 31
Walton, Izaak, 232
Ward, Artemus, 50
Washington, George, 77, 220
"Water Gypsies, The," A. P. Herbert,
254
Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of,
47, 227
Wells, Herbert George, 12, 34, 106, 121,
214-215, 298
Wharton, Edith, 87, 115
"What Price Glory," Lawrence Stallings,
192
Whitman, Walt, 7, 9, 13, 19, 47, 60, 69,
73, 92, 99, 116-118, 164, 165, 167,
169, 184, 202-203, 206, 229, 231, 255,
293
Wilde, Oscar, 28
Wilder, Thornton, 3, 15, 17, 287
"Wilhelm Meister," Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe, 118
Williams, Roger, 44
Wilson, Woodrow, 31, 44, 53, 65, 220
Wingfield-Stratford, Esmé, 9-11
"Wings of the Dove, The," Henry James,
273
"Winner Take Nothing," Ernest Hem-
ingway, 151
Wolfe, Thomas, 17, 124-125, 163-170
Woolf, Virginia, 15, 106, 188
Wordsworth, William, 146, 181, 206,
228, 230, 238, 240
World, New York, 218
Wychiffe, John, 211
Wyhe, Elnor, 3, 17, 87, 174, 287
Yellow Book, The, 21
Young, Francis Brett, 15
Young, Stark, 99
Zola, Emile, 154, 239
Zweig, Stefan, 263

