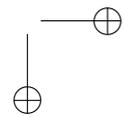
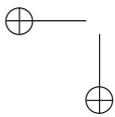
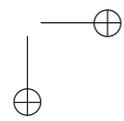
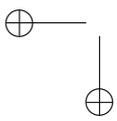
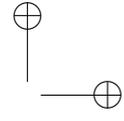
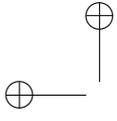
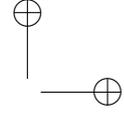
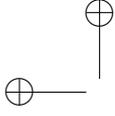


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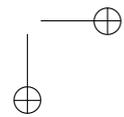
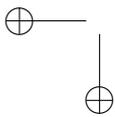


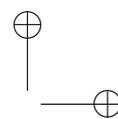
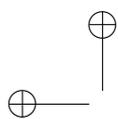


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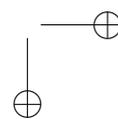
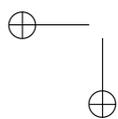
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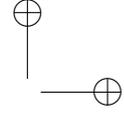
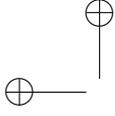




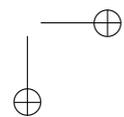
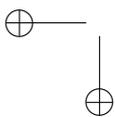
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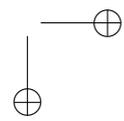
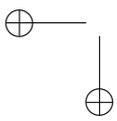
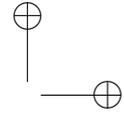
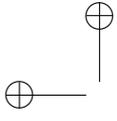
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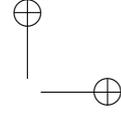
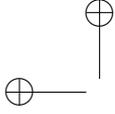




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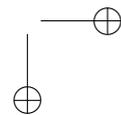
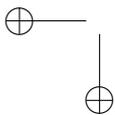


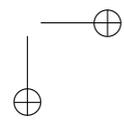
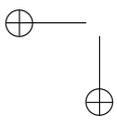
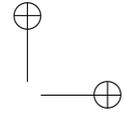
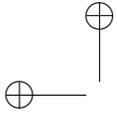


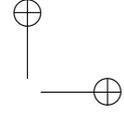
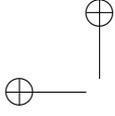


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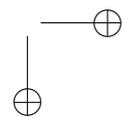
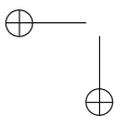
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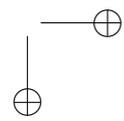
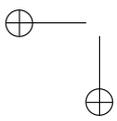
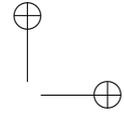
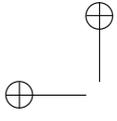


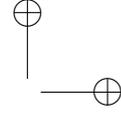
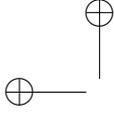




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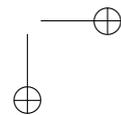
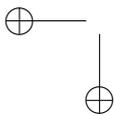


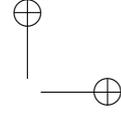
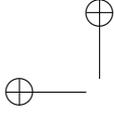


THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER MODERNISM

There is probably no epithet that is more unfashionable in contemporary discourse than the word soul, no theme less congenial to the current imagination than salvation. The newer psychologies have substituted complex inquiries into the mechanisms of behaviour for the traditional notion of a presiding essence or psyche that governs a man's actions or that truly constitutes his essential being. The new moralities, in their concern with how a man may best live in this world, seem remote enough from the mediaeval problem of how he was to save his soul in the next.

Yet there would seem to be little question that, for all the difference in language, the concerns of the contemporary are precisely what those of his ancestor were, his soul and its salvation. Precisely because, as Walter Lippmann observes, "whirl is king," there has been endless brooding speculation, often masquerading as science, on the soul of man and its destiny. Precisely because all those interests, values and aspirations which commonly go by the name of soul, seem threatened by the passing of ancient traditions and



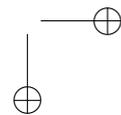
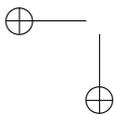


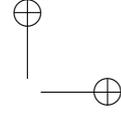
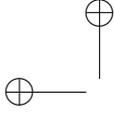
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the rise of unprecedented new circumstances, there has been a perplexed concern over the destiny of that spirit, its hopes, its future or its possible extinction. The whole of the modern temper has been a fretful canvassing of the conditions of the soul of man under mechanism, industry and latter-day worldliness. The question remains now what it always has been, What must we do to be saved? The psychologists have redefined soul and the moralists have recharted salvation, but Watson and Freud have been trying to describe what Thomas Aquinas so differently and less ambiguously defined; Joseph Wood Krutch and Lewis Mumford and Lippmann and Bertrand Russell have been trying in terms of a new world to find a new itinerary by which the confused or tormented contemporary may find his way, if not to bliss, at least to peace.

Now the mediaeval moralist when he spoke of the soul knew definitely, though abstractly, what he meant by it; the mediaeval theologian knew well enough what he meant by salvation. The disembodied principle of intelligence, pure and angelic, was to find peace in the eternal beatitude of beholding that pure and absolute Being which is God. The modern is blinded to the fact that he is concerned for his soul and for its salvation by the fact that he scarcely believes in the first, and because there is such a confusion of tongues and doctrines with regard to the second.

There is, indeed, in the first place, a very considerable current of belief that no soul of man – about



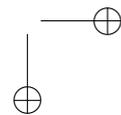
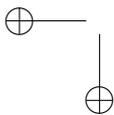


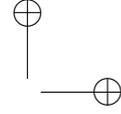
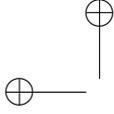
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whose salvation, none the less, the modern man worries so interminably – exists at all. The gradual extension of the mechanistic hypothesis came in time to pass from the stars and atoms to the natural life of man.

Of that tendency the latest, most extreme and – in its extreme instances – absurd form is Behaviourism. The mechanistic hypothesis is simply the hypothesis that all that used, properly speaking, to be characteristic of the soul can be explained – and explained away – by the externals of behaviour. Love and rapture, aspiration and defeat of aspiration, brooding happiness, joy and sorrow, all the awarenesses induced by the friction of the self and the world, of the life of man with the conditions in which that life is furthered or frustrated – all these, we have been now asked to believe, are to be understood in terms of glands and reflexes, of complexes and inhibitions. It is no longer for most people a question whether the soul is immortal or not: they question its very existence. There is a personality about which a man is at once proud and ashamed, that self which seems to survive somehow – self recognized amid so many vicissitudes and transformations. But that self has suffered at the hands of psychologists and sociologists a thousand dissolutions. It is disintegrated into the statistics of the laboratory, into the formulas of the psycho-analysts and the sociologists. In very truth it is difficult these days for a man to call his soul his own.

Yet parallel to this disintegration of the psyche, there has come in contemporary thought an unprece-

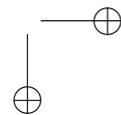
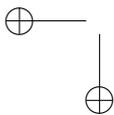


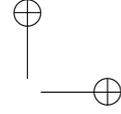
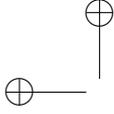


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dented meditation upon the self. No Pauline apostle, awake to the conviction of sin, could be more completely agonized about the self than is the contemporary harassed by his doubts and exasperations. What is the inferiority complex but the traditional sense of sin, what mediaeval ever sensed himself more lost than does the modern awakened to the transience or emptiness of love or life or nature, the shipwreck of a world where there is nothing left to worship or adore? No Augustine, canvassing for three long books of his Confessions the quarrel in him between will and desire, could feel more deeply than do many contemporaries the quarrel in them between love and lust, between the flesh and the spirit. No Christian mystic could be more harassed than Proust over the evanescence of sensations and of memories and the struggle to keep hold of some portion of the self that will survive the flux of time.

But even more exact is the parallel between the modern and the mediaeval in the exacerbated reflection upon the self defeated by worldliness and by the world. St. Paul long ago scolded and implored the Christians at Corinth and at Rome to keep the spirit undefiled by the flesh. The contemporary sees on all sides everything that he has in the past subsumed under the category of the spirit of man being assailed, soiled and frustrated by things, by nature and by society. There is no quiet realm of eternity in which the balance may be rectified. Love defeated in this world is defeated for ever, and it is in *this* world that love and every

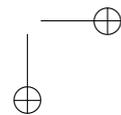
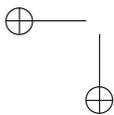


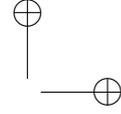
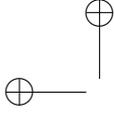


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other idealism is defeated. They are defeated, indeed, not simply by the fact that they are crushed, but by the fact that the conditions of modern industrial and social life generate a mood in which those very higher values come to seem negligible or futile or ridiculous. One begins by doubting the existence of the soul; one ends by doubting whether its interests can be fulfilled, or whether in the long run they matter. The soul becomes lost in the world, and ends by itself becoming worldly.

It is from such worldliness that, as in the past, salvation is being sought. The whole attempt of contemporary reflection may be said to be that of finding some way of life whereby the modern may find integrity or peace. Now peace is precisely what the mediaeval theologian promised the believer. If one's character, one's moral habits should become purified and one's mind should attain clarity, one would have gained integrity in this world and peace in the next. The current moralities are less concerned with integrity than with integration, less with peace than with adult adjustment. But integrity is what they are after and peace is what they want. If, we are promised, one could come to know reality, including the realities of one's own nature, one could face both one's self and the conditions of all mortal existence with equanimity, perhaps with happiness. St. Bonaventura could indicate the itinerary of the mind to God. A hundred current writers, in novels, plays and moral essays, are trying to find the road also to a kind of peace. Or they



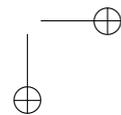
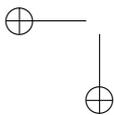


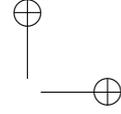
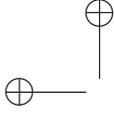
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are, perhaps, obsessed, as is Aldous Huxley, with the novel psychical and material obstacles to salvation.

It were best, perhaps, to canvass briefly those enemies of the soul of man – meaning by that expression the enemies of his moral and aesthetic interests – about which the contemporary is peculiarly distressed. Most serious, beyond question, is the fact that the new psychologies, especially as practised or implied by men of letters, have made man not so much disbelieve in his own spirit as lose his respect for it. The net effect of recent inquiry, and especially of recent literary discussion, has been to make the modern incredibly scornful of his own idealisms. Love is seen to be simply lust on parade. Generosity becomes the assertion, roundabout and polite, of the desire for attention or for praise; and reason itself is found to be mostly arguments superficially good for motives irrefutably bad. It is with such mordant analysis, or illustrations of it, that a hundred recent novels are filled. We are taught to behold and to consider not those elements of human nature which might give us an inkling of potential glory, but rather those aspects or evidences of it that teach us to range ourselves with apes and peacocks rather than with heroes or angels. It is not so much life that is beastly as we that are.

It is a question too complex for consideration here how much we live and are sustained by romantic projections of ourselves, how much what we are or what we hope to be is dependent on the view that we imagine other people to have of us. Certain psychologists,

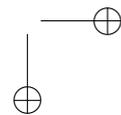
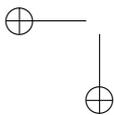


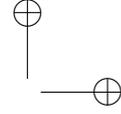
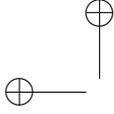


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notably Freud in his recent utterances, would have us account for much unhappiness by a sense of guilt that grows instead of decreases with the civilization of mankind. It remains certainly true, when we can only figure ourselves to ourselves as shoddy little poseurs, cringing, lustful, avaricious and vain, that there comes upon us, as there came upon the early Christians, a sense of unpardonable sin. The salt, our own salt, has lost its savour. We are vessels of corruption; we are bodies of this death; there is nothing in ourselves to save; worse still, there is nothing worth rescue.

Little, one is tempted to say, has more crucified the contemporary meditating upon himself, than this sense of irremediable evil, of something beyond salvage and not deserving it. It is not for nothing that three centuries of modern philosophy have coloured and poisoned with subjectivity our estimates of the nature of things and the goods in nature. How can anything be estimable when we who do the estimating are seen to be suspect and compact of self-deceit and self-fraud, self-loathing and self-destruction? At least, our believing predecessors, if they saw no worth in themselves, knew where else to look for it. If they were obsessed with the yoke of sin, they knew where grace was abounding. We know, too, or make confused gestures toward knowing. Some simple faith tells us that some simple formula will cure us of an inferiority complex. Some innocence makes us believe that a formula of "disinterestedness" or "adult adjustment," of "objectivity" or "socialization," will cure us of the



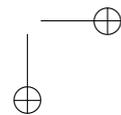
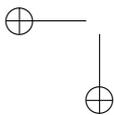


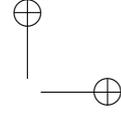
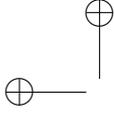
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agony of aimlessness or of despair. There will be occasion later to inquire into some of these new faiths, these reliances at once touching and fantastic. It is sufficient for the present that the fact be noted that the new age still cherishes the ancient tribulation.

It has simply found new reasons for disbelieving in its own essential goodness or in its own power to rescue itself from confounding and distress.

But if the current imagination is troubled by disbelief in its own worth or its own values, it has still other enemies of the soul to reckon with. Traditional Christianity, with a shrewd instinct, saw itself, as all forthright religions have seen themselves, as standing foursquare against worldliness and the world. The current plaint – it is not a new one – is that the world is too much with us. But it is a new realm that impinges upon and oppresses us, an order in which speed, luxury and mechanization play an unprecedented part. Luxury is clearly not a novelty; the satirists of ancient Rome had it as their subject matter. But material comfort and physical indulgence have probably never before been available to so many nor have they been before to so many a predominant obsession. Even in a palace, said Marcus Aurelius, it is possible to live well. But, as the ancient sage pointed out, it required a special effort under the circumstances. And there have been few epochs and few parts of the world where the opportunity to battle against the enticements of material well-being were as open to as many as they are, or until recently have been, in America. The



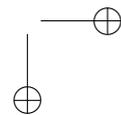
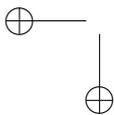


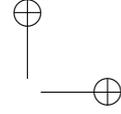
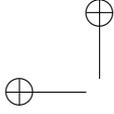
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spiritual life need not be lived in sackcloth, but it can scarcely be led among the engulfing trivialities and distractions of middle-class contemporary society. Much of the criticism of Main Street and the country club is nothing but a reassertion of the traditional criticism of the flesh and the fleshpots by those who stand for something nobler, subtler and serener than the prevailing mores of the society in which they live. A hundred little Savonarolas are asking us to burn a thousand evidences of our corruption. And on a thousand Main Streets and on the verandahs of a thousand country clubs, a sudden pang of emptiness and vanity has assailed the occasional sensitive inhabitants and convicted them of a life void of meaning.

In the eighteenth century Rousseau won a prize by proving that all the arts and sciences had done for civilization was to degrade the spirit and corrupt the hearts and manners of mankind. Some new Rousseau might arise – he is, indeed, in a thousand forms arising – to tell us how much comfort, convenience and material excitement have corrupted the life of the spirit, how they have made at once difficult and suspect the living, if not constantly at least consistently, in the society of beautiful and eternal things.

The obvious defeat that the soul suffers in an age when speed is every man's commonplace, has received enough detailed attention not to need repetition. But the restlessness of the modern temper and its mobility are not disconnected. Where there is nothing to cling to, or lovingly to brood upon, a restlessness of spirit

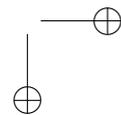
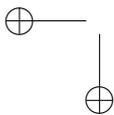


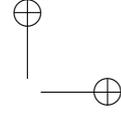
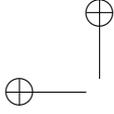


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is induced and a restlessness of body follows. It is not the mere physical exhilaration of speed that has made the automobile and the aeroplane popular. There is an intellectual excitement about motion, at once a stimulant and a narcotic. One derives from it a hurried sense of accomplishment; the sense of being en route, of seeing and doing many things quickly, conceals the emptiness of one's being and the scenes among which one superficially moves.

But most serious of the enemies of the soul of man, in the eyes of reflective observers, is standardization. It is futile to inquire how much the machine age and machine methods have rendered impossible that individuality in which alone any life acquires dignity, interest and character. There is no reason to suppose that the refrigerator and the automobile impede the good life. But there is very good reason for suspecting the subtler forms of mechanization, the regimentation brought about by mass schooling, the standard provision by routine thousands of amusements designed for mediocre millions, the chain stores of culture designed to make available to an innumerable democracy what is in essence possible only to an intellectually aristocratic few. It is not simply that the glitter of false goods is distracting the contemporary from his characteristic intellectual and aesthetic interests, but that the currency of these themselves is being debased. The very essence of intelligence is discrimination, the character of taste is to *have* character and definition, and these are being imperilled by the spread of an

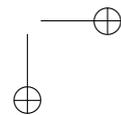
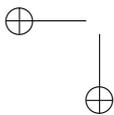


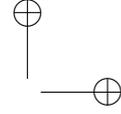
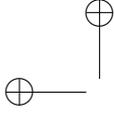


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education whose standards are mediocrity, and whose appeal is merely promiscuous.

In his discovery of a fundamental lack of confidence in his own values, in the threatened extinction of even these by the special, novel conditions of current life, the contemporary has cause enough for confusion and despair. But he is even less comforted when he looks abroad, as it were, to nature itself, or at least to those contemporary versions of it to which his reading and his conversation expose him. The nineteenth century has bequeathed to us a cult of disillusion, a nightmare of an alien world, from which (*vide* as recent a work as Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Modern Temper*) we find it extraordinarily difficult to recover. There are, however, special recent variations of the modern malaise that need examination. It did not require the twentieth century to discover the sorrowful character of time. Poets, beginning with Ecclesiastes, have bewailed the devouring mouth of time which consumes all things, including – and this is the tragedy – all that is most precious and beautiful. Time is merely another name for change, and change, in the imagination of a creature looking for stability and peace, is freighted with the peril of destruction. The Greeks gave expression again and again, but especially in their philosophy, to the terror and the precariousness of a temporal world. What else is Plato's passion for the permanence of the Heaven of Eternal Ideas but the protest of the poet-philosopher erecting a realm that abides for ever to free the mind from the sadness and defeat of one



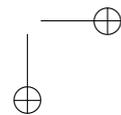
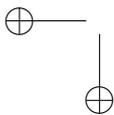


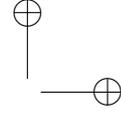
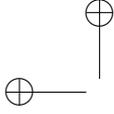
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that is constantly passing away. The Christian theme – Augustine’s *Confessions* are full of it – was again and again the peace of God’s eternity contrasted with the vanishing illusions of time.

But it remained for the modern to explore more exactly into the nature of time itself, and to derive a private sting of melancholy from the explorations. For time cannot any longer be considered simply as the illusory character of a merely shadow world. It seems to be woven into the very character of ultimate existence. Nature is ultimately nothing but the flow of all experience, and all experience is set, as it were, in the moving matrix of time. The permanent is seen to be simply a pause in reflection, a stability which action momentarily achieves. Even space and the physical world have, in the hands of the contemporary physicist, become a pictorial expression, a visual function of time.

There are thinkers (John Dewey is one of them) who find an exhilaration in the discovery of the essentially temporal character of the universe. Only in an unfinished world, they are constantly reminding us, is improvement possible; only where all is genuinely unfinished can something yet be done. In so insisting, they are giving expression to a pioneer and exploratory mood which three centuries of invention and discovery have not sufficed to exhaust. For many, time still remains time to do, to accomplish, to make a difference and to make over a civilization. For many, change means the excitement of novelty, the suspense of a possible unprecedented goodness or beauty, the revela-

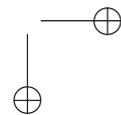
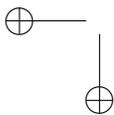


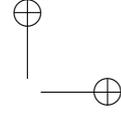
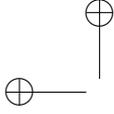


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tion of some as yet undreamed-of good. "There will," William James remarked, "be news in Heaven." For the perpetually young – or the perpetually adolescent – the omnipresence of the fact of time in contemporary thinking holds not terror but encouragement, not a dusk but a dawn.

There is no doubt but the discovery of, the emphasis upon, change has about it a certain glory, at once stalwart and romantic. But the more introspective have found in this consideration that time has forced upon them less occasion for congratulation. For change remains change, and change as often means loss as gain, and once in every life it means extinction. Moreover, if time alone be real, as in certain quarters we are led to believe that it is, then nothing else is really so. This discovery may be the fruit of a subtle metaphysics, as it is in Bergson, but it is an insight that any sensitive person can make for himself, and one to which his life and memory rather than any speculation have led him. For the philosophers have simply confirmed what the sensitive have long known. Mutation is discovered first not among things but in one's self, one's loves, one's friends and one's memories. The appeal, half delicious, half depressing, that the writings of Marcel Proust have for many readers lies in the skilful way he has of evoking past time and its realities, perishing and precarious, of our memories. The instant, so lovely and so living, is qualified by memories of the past that is irrevocably gone. We scarcely live at all, save in the illusions, the distorted perspectives of memory, and





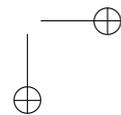
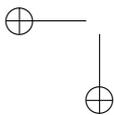
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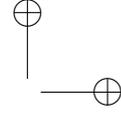
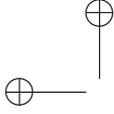
the imaginations of which the materials of memory form a large and illusive part. Our life is a succession of, or rather a river of, indistinguishable instants, each scarcely isolable from its predecessors and each in turn unreal. Time, by whose indeterminate future we were to save ourselves, turns out to be the river in which those constantly vanishing moments we call ourselves must drown.

From these and similar awarenesses the contemporary, though he would shun the expression, is looking about to be saved. Christianity, when it spread with such surprising rapidity over the Graeco-Roman world, was not the only cult that promised the believer repose if not bliss. All these mystery religions had a widespread and intelligible appeal, Christianity itself in its Pauline form being likewise a mystery.

It was a time of general despair, what Gilbert Murray has aptly termed "the failure of nerve." There was no hope in civic righteousness or personal virtue. He who would believe in the Lord and follow His Way – and this was all that was essentially necessary – would be saved. The old life, compact and secure, of the Greek city state had broken up, and personal success was largely on the knees of whatever gods or atoms there were; it was no longer a matter of ordered virtue but of capricious fate.

A not dissimilar situation confronts us at the present time. Just before the war a faith in a Wellsian code of co-operative science captured the imagination of ardent young liberals. The war destroyed that hope

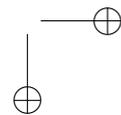
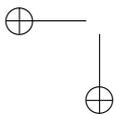


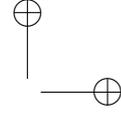
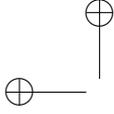


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along with the young men it destroyed. There are still those who trust to cooperative intelligence to produce a clear and freer world. But there is no lack of those, of whom Spengler is merely the most articulate, who see no hope in the future, and a possible complete collapse of that civilization that Athens, Florence and Chartres enshrine. In the fantastic hazard of modern commercial and even professional life, personal success seems largely a gamble, and, when achieved, a delusion. Nor is there any tradition immune to criticism, any fund of religious sanctions, to which one can turn for hope or sustenance or consolation. As in early Christian times, therefore, the social imagination turns to any current mystery, any faith in which by partaking, by becoming a communicant, a man may be saved. All of these traditional religions have this in common, that in the traditional sense they are not religions at all.* But most of the current religions have the guise and the vocabulary, if not the spirit, of science. They resemble the traditional religions in many minor points; they have their rituals, their rites, their formulas, their mystic inspirations and their ecstasies of vision. They resemble them in one major point: they promise the unhappy and the discontented, the confused and the

*Though there are, it must be admitted, those who in a desperate flight from things as they are, are indulging in a flight at once wistful and romantic to religions as they were; of these the Anglo-Catholic movement, or the modernistic mediaevalism of Jacques Maritain are good examples.



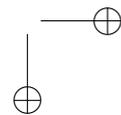
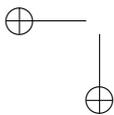


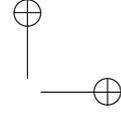
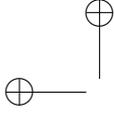
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forlorn (those who would once have been called sinners, or lost souls) happiness, or, as it was once called, salvation.

An examination of these living systems of salvation would reveal how various is the nature of these faiths, and how not unlike mystery religions they are. They are ways of life or of a life beyond life; they have their esoteric language and their prophets or half-legendary heroes; they promise all those who are heavy laden and who come to them that they will give them rest.

There is one embittered or ensoured group who have indeed thought themselves beyond the traps of any new scheme of salvation. The modernists in cynicism, scepticism and despair have thought that by a complete disillusion they could at least save themselves from ever again being taken in. "We prefer" – writes Mr. Joseph Wood Krutch at the conclusion of his *The Modern Temper* – "to die as men rather than to live as animals." To the disillusionist at least one virtue remains, that of intellectual *askesis*. No trapdoor of factitious glory will delude him; no sentimental renaissance of an outmoded culture or religion, no Tolstoyan revival of a simple faith in simple man will hypnotize him from the cool and amused gaze with which he faces himself, his fellows and his world. He has found the salvation in its least luxurious form, the compensation, at most bleak and austere, of seeing things without fantasy, deriving at once the satisfaction of truth and the enjoyment of its ironic recognition. To see the object itself as it really is, so the disillusionist after his fashion follows



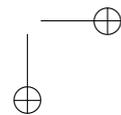
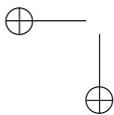


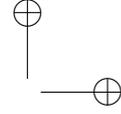
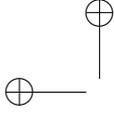
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Matthew Arnold; and seeing it as it is, to smile, if a little wryly – this also is a way of saving the soul that one has ceased to believe in.

Not many can succeed in finding peace in the wry admission of uncharming truths. It is improbable that even the disillusionist finds it thus. There is usually no real gaiety in his laughter, and too rhetorical a courage in his facing of the truth. Most men still wish to be saved, and there are certain characteristics to be observed in current ways to peace.

The first of these that impresses the observer is the faith in intelligence. Francis Bacon first gave publicity to the idea (he was certainly not its discoverer nor, even among his contemporaries, the best illustration) now echoed by every liberal thinker on two continents, that intelligence may save the individual soul and rescue mankind. One must postpone consideration of the history of this notion, or its fallacies. It reduces itself most simply to the belief that that disciplined inquiry which has transformed the face of nature may transform the life of mankind. Not only may mountains be moved, but the soul may be ordered and commonwealths be organized by that same technique of exploration and experiment which has brought the comfort, the speed and the luxury of modern life. How well grounded is this belief is also a question that need not here for the moment be settled. All that matters is that, led by writers as different as H. G. Wells and John Dewey, there has grown up the remarkable faith that what men once left to God they can now attain

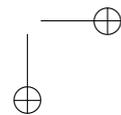
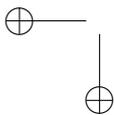


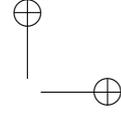
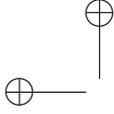


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of their own disciplined and controlled action. Creative intelligence, scientific control, the technique of the laboratory – by whatever name they may be called – the modern man in increasing numbers has believed that by his own intelligence he might be saved. No catastrophe of war, no meeting of personal problems that at once transcend or utterly defeat intelligence counts. The faith remains, and it has its own poets as well as prophets.

The faith has its heretics and its obvious difficulties. Even the most romantic adherents of the possibilities of intelligent control grant that death and unrequited love cannot quite be solved by its efforts. There are those, too, who despairing of the world that the war has left us, bemoaning the change in a civilization that seems ultimately to consist in nothing but change, have tried to retreat to some indefeasible realm, as snug and sure as a protected harbour, as certain and eternal as a traditional Paradise. These have to go back to Plato or to Hindu philosophy for their salvation. Only in the passive beholding of those unchanging essences, of the forms of all being, and the eternal postures and gestures which existence may take, can salvation be found. By giving up all save the irreducible essences, by abnegating all but the eternal, sure and non-existent, these (Santayana is their most eloquent spokesman) count on being saved. Only by giving up the whole world of existence may they save their own souls, become the pure disinterested spectators of what always is and ever has been. They reduce life to the hearing of a

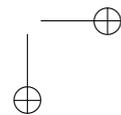
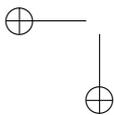


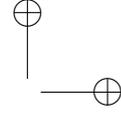
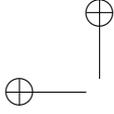


THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER MODERNISM

music, pure and bodiless, in the uncaring hearing of which alone is the bliss of disinterestedness found. It is an austere enough Heaven, and only a metaphysician or a musician of the more metaphysical sort can enjoy himself therein. There are others who will not thus retreat to Platonism, but like the Platonists cannot feel happy in the contemporary world. They are homesick for what is dead, nostalgic for a Heaven of which the cultures, languages and traditions of the past are echoes and memories. They would escape, not by fleeing to eternal timelessness, but by fleeing to the equally changeless – because irrevocable – world of the past. It may be with some the revival of some ancient national culture, its literature, its modes, its language, of which the Gaelic revival in Ireland, or the to-do about Welsh or Basque may be cited. Out of the colourlessness and confusion of a vast promiscuous modern world, these homesick revivalists hope to recover the clear thread, the unconfused light of their own national traditions.

It may again be a retreat to an ancient faith. Much certainly of the modernistic embracing of Catholicism by hitherto sceptical and disillusioned intellectuals is the clutching at some hold, clear and definitive, in an intellectual realm where there is nothing but confusion to cling to. Thus we have the spectacle of Jews long without any belief turning to the code of their fathers and the ethics of their prophets, and Protestants who were scarcely even that, turning with fanaticism to Rome. In these cases, unless one is very much mis-



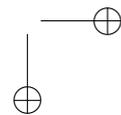
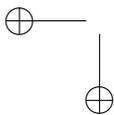


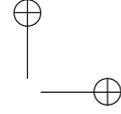
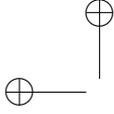
THE CONTEMPORARY AND HIS SOUL

taken, it is not religion in the sense of an experience or a theology by which they as believers are coerced, but some religion in the old Roman sense of something by which one may be bound, a theme in the light of which life gains some order, a tradition which gives it a dignity that cannot be corrupted and a significance that cannot be questioned. For all the parade of intellectuality that accompanies these conversions, it is clear that they are the fruits of sentimental nostalgias. It is homesickness that makes the converted intellectuals call these thin intellectual adoptions of ancient faiths a going home.

Not science, nor an intellectual reviving of religion, nor a nursing into flame of dead cultures, can satisfy some of the disenchanted. Their intellectual scruples will enable them to detect the weakness or the anachronisms of each of them in turn. There are two further characteristic flights to be noted. One of them is the hard-boiled escape into mere action for the sake of avoiding thought; the other may be described as the soft-boiledness of mysticism for the same evasive purpose.

There is a school of writers and of people who are indulging in a new kind of naïveté, so deliberate as to seem almost the last word in sophistication. It consists in avoiding articulateness, in dodging sentiment, in evading thought. The *faux naïfs*, Wyndham Lewis called them; but it is not our purpose here to call them so but simply to call attention to them. Like the heroes in a Hemingway novel, they trust only to the



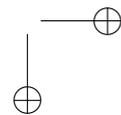
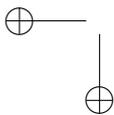


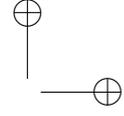
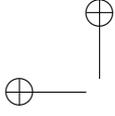
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directness of action and of immediate animal feeling in a world where there is nothing else to be trusted, and where even these are likely to be clouded and impeded by thought or words.

And there are finally those who, sickening of both the futility of mere animal feeling or animal action, retreat, as some few in all ages have retreated, to a mystical absorption, an abandoning of the categories of life and nature and society for a rapture, vast, vague and indiscriminate. By refusing to be bound by compulsions of action or thought or things, these also hope to see the inerrable godhead of delight, to be caught up into a not impossible ecstasy, like St. Catherine or St. John of the Cross, to pass beyond the dark night of the soul to a rapturous alone with the Alone.

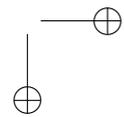
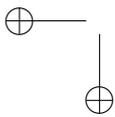
It is not the intention here to question the validity of each or of any of these faiths. That must be left for some other place, possibly for some other critic. They are noted here rather as illustrations of the central theme. Each of these ways of life has become a cult, a promise, a hope and a mystery. Each is a symptom of that still persisting quest by which the soul, in this as in past ages, recites a soliloquy of its own hopes and the obstacles it meets in itself and in things, in society and in nature; the ways, sublime, pitiable or ridiculous, by which it tries to find a home, an anchorage or an escape. The language changes, the quest is still the same. It remains to be investigated, whether the soul's soliloquy can be made relevant to its conditions and whether the theme of salvation can generate a

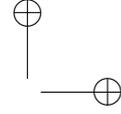
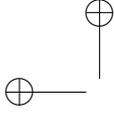




THE CONTEMPORARY AND HIS SOUL

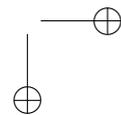
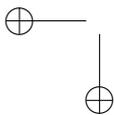
technique for life in this world rather than a fantasy
of life in another, believed or imaginary.

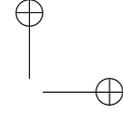
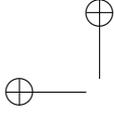




THE CULT OF DISILLUSION

The historian surveying the main currents of educated opinion in the decades immediately following upon the World War, will inevitably be fascinated by a phenomenon regular enough in an epoch made familiar with disaster. This is not the first age that has witnessed a "failure of nerve" nor the first that has had good empirical reasons to falter. Millions of dead whose death accomplished no very clear end, a decay of long standing moral standards without the substitution of any whose operation could show promise of unmistakable happiness, symptoms of disaster in all parts of the civilized world, and even the threat of the extinction of civilization entire – these are not the materials out of which joys are made or out of which hallelujahs are composed. There are – a casual reading of the newspapers is evidence – sufficient incitements to melancholy. Yet these incitements do not quite account for the cult of disillusion which has become both the banner and the plaything of many of our intellectuals, and the religion of many of their followers. That there should be cause for disillusionment is



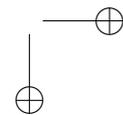
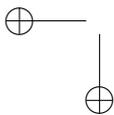


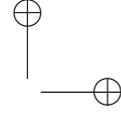
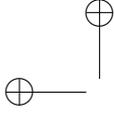
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one thing, that disenchantment should become a cult raises questions of another order.

The explanation of the fashion of sorrow, cynicism or despair in contemporary circles, a fashion beginning, I think, to die, is not very far to seek.

The intellectual class has never been given in any age to unleashed and uncritical exuberance. The character of reflection is to look before and after, the essence of thought is to partake, by insight, in eternity. No amount of animal exuberance or sensuous delight can quell the facts of change, and of mortality. Reflection upon these, in the first shock of their youthful discovery, or of their later rediscovery (when they are perhaps more deeply felt), is paid for. A taint of melancholy is the penalty consciousness undergoes for being at all. Animal awareness is awareness only of present sensation; even pain though it produces momentary agony, does not produce disillusion. When it is over it is over; as present it is perforce noted, but without memory and imagination, things are neither remembered nor forgotten. It is when rational consciousness supervenes, when the past leaves a deposit, and the future qualifies the present by anticipation, that the sense of tragedy is born. One's mind may be to one's self a kingdom, but it has its lost and its desolate provinces – memory, for the honest, is not a simple glaze of beauty, and the imagination does not always perceive beginnings and dawns. But even the most direct analogue of animal sensation, immediate poetic awareness, is not unqualified. Omar, Ecclesiastes, Robert Herrick, Lucretius,





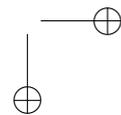
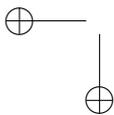
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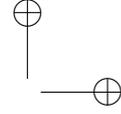
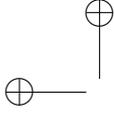
Ronsard, one may take a random collection of poets alive to the shadowed loveliness of this world and the doomed vitality of mere living, all these are poets who had the healthy animal's gift of sensual absorption in the present. But they had also the contemplative's relativistic awareness of how transient these things were, the ruins among which they briefly flowered or the ruinous consequences they sometimes brought in their train.

Philosophical pessimism and poetic wistfulness and regret are themselves no new things under the sun. The current inhabitants of heartbreak house have had generations of tenants as their predecessors.

Yet the current cult has its own particular accents and origins. And there are special reasons for its being a cult. Any historian would, I think, recognize something rather special about contemporary pessimism, and he would distinguish by date some of our practising Ecclesiastes from their predecessors. The generation of present disillusionists in addition to all the usual grounds for pessimism, has its special neuroses and special conditions which it faces.

The first of the external causes, of course, is the World War and its train of consequences, Anyone who had lived through the war and its sequelae and remained an unbridled optimist would have been little less than callow, hard and idiotic. One might describe a good deal of the disillusion rampant as being that of the intellectually demobilized, who have come back to

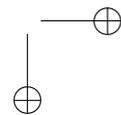
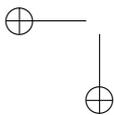


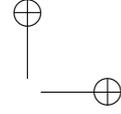
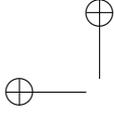


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the aimlessness and loose ends of a post-war world.* The second source of disillusion is an intellectual one, and has to do rather with an intellectual tradition which happens to have a wide vogue among literary men. That is the patrimony of nineteenth-century mechanism and the implications of moral materialism which came in its train. It does not matter very much that the simple outlines of nineteenth-century materialism are themselves being questioned or destroyed by latter-day physics and metaphysics. It does not matter that mechanism in the theory of nature does not necessarily connote or imply materialism as a code of life. The literary men of our generation have heard, till it hurts, of the alien world, the blind march of omnipotent matter on its relentless way, and they will not be comforted. Man is a puny accident in a meaningless machine of a world, and at the very highest he can enjoy the grim business of nursing in his small corner of a careless cosmos a set of ideals which, though generated by that system, that system does not care in the least about. Man can at best warm himself for a brief moment at the fated small fires of his own ideal amidst the cold, gloomy and universal, of the solar system. And what ever little achievement of the beauty that is form, of the insight that is truth, of the harmony of living that is goodness man may achieve and incarnate in matter and in life, all this (this is the chilling guarantee of even the latest astronomers) is

*The despairing titles of Robert Graves's *Good-Bye to All That* and *But It Still Goes On* are instances in point.



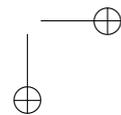
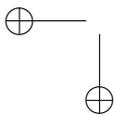


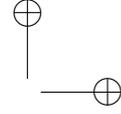
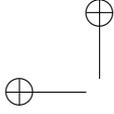
THE CULT OF DISILLUSION

doomed to an ultimate extinction, a final cataclysm of a heatless planet, when the sun's vanished heat will have ceased to warm the race whose achievements these cherished things are.

But it is not the indifference of the world about us, or the threat of its ultimate extinction that most distresses the disillusionists in literature. More distressing still is the fact that there cannot be detected in it a presence, eternal in its duration and always contemporary in its sympathies, that once, for previous generations – and a forgotten large number in the present – went by the name of God. It is clear enough that most sophisticated writers have not much direct concern with God or any remote belief in his existence. But they are, none the less, in an inverted way, concerned with him. They are subterraneously obsessed with the fact of his absence and all that absence implies.

There comes a certain time in the life of a child when he sees an adult cry for the first time, or first perceives that a grown-up can be wrong or helpless or stupid. He discovers, in short and in fact, that there are no adults to be respected or adored, or, what is more to the point, depended upon. Something not dissimilar is the situation of the children of the nineteenth century grown up into the twentieth. They find that this God whom they have read out or presumed to be read out of the universe has carried with him into oblivion any discernible direction of things, any significance of life or any logic of destiny. Along with the incubus

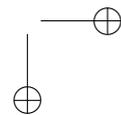
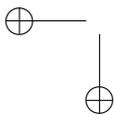


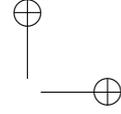
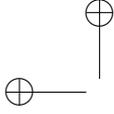


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of religion they have rid themselves of its sanctions and consolations. They do not long for God but they look for something to fill the bleak spaces that his departure has created. They are atheists troubled by the consequences of their atheism, unbelievers wishing there were at least something else to believe. One of the reasons that disillusion has become a cult is that where there is nothing credible left, one can at least vaunt one's own unswerving disillusion. A creed and a finality has been made of what Descartes once took to be merely the beginning of a philosophy, the irreducible validity of doubt.

In the same way, too, the disillusionists feel themselves consciously emancipated from the moral traditions, constraints and injunctions which have gone by the board with the vanishing religious faiths. But precisely the passing of these sanctions constitutes one of the undertones of current unhappiness. A moral code may be wrong or ruinous or absurd, but it is a code. Just as a conception of destiny or providence renders the universe intelligible, so a code of ethics, accepted and established, gives a pattern, a logic, a beauty, hard but stimulating, to living. The same voices that are raised in huzzahs for emancipation are heard bemoaning the emptiness of a career where by no standards – there being none – can anything be said to matter. Only an animal or a genius, monstrous and audacious, could be comfortable in a totally codeless civilization. The reflective modern, like the reflective in any generation, must have some logic to live by,



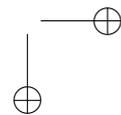
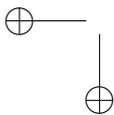


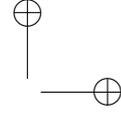
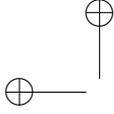
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and by the ruthlessness of his own logic, he has rendered the traditional moralities untenable. He is the unhappy victim of his own rationalistic destructions. He aches in a void that he has himself created.

With respect to these last-named distresses, the situation is, I think, remediable, and time is the remedy. For they are fruits, these pains, of a generation who find themselves doubting – and missing – in the twentieth century, what they were brought up to believe in as children in the late nineteenth. There lingers a home-sickness for a home that a great many latter-day children will never have known. Nor is the unhappiness that comes as the consequences of the post-war years bound to endure. Those who feel it most keenly, “the lost generation,” are growing older and forgetful. They cannot count on their juniors to feel a weariness and frustration that these latter have not met. Further, whatever fears one may have for the future, there are at least certain recovered stabilities in the world a decade after the war. The most horrible of the disasters are receding into the peaceful glow of memory and art, and children are playing, as among ancient monuments, in the trenches on half a dozen late European frontiers.

But some of the crucifixion of spirit shows signs of being exacerbated rather than lessened by time. For it derives not from a theory about contemporary facts so much as from some peculiar facts of which those theories are simply a desperate lyric expression. Disillusion flows partly from the literal detachment of

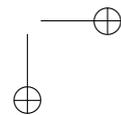
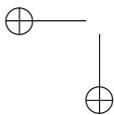


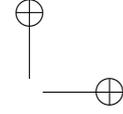
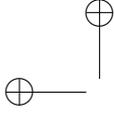


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the reflective modern, his disconnection from any fixed traditions and attachments as well as principles, and his lack of attachments to, or absorption in, ultimate, enduring or simple things. He has lost at once the capacity of either reverence or acceptance, both of which bring peace, and those simple absorptions which bring repeated fragments of happiness.

It has been noted, not without justice, that scepticism has been a peculiarly live tradition among Jews and that irreverence is almost a national habit among Americans. In either case the source is not far to seek and it would seem to lie not in a dialectical talent among the first mentioned or in mere brash childishness among the second. The Jews are by history, if not by nature, cosmopolitan, and force of circumstance frees them from that provincialism which a long environing tradition engenders. It is natural not to accept too uncritically a tradition of which you never have completely become a part. Americans have a habit of irreverence (like the character in Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* who blew out a candle that had been burning a thousand years), because our traditions are at best too young to be quite compulsive and many Americans are new, or their families are new even to those young traditions. But what is, perhaps, peculiarly current among Jews and Americans as a class, is simply symptomatic of what is true of all more or less rootless moderns. It is assumed with, I think, demonstrable falsity, that to be free of traditions, is to be exhilarated. But to be free is to be not simply



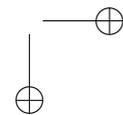
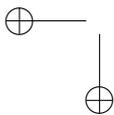


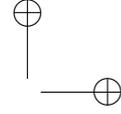
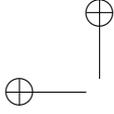
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liberated from bonds but robbed of comforts, and purloined of supports. To have a fixed, though humble place in an established order, to be able to act calmly with reference to one code assumed (because one has never known or dreamed of another) to be reasonable and good, these are the rewards of acceptance. They are rewards which few moderns know. Their despair is that of those who are seasick rather than of those who are dying. If there is no law by which they are justified, they have found no law by which they can justify themselves to themselves. Emancipation has brought them perpetual unrest, not perpetual freedom. Like Wordsworth in the "Ode to Duty," many a contemporary may say:

*I supplicate for thy control;
But in the quietness of thought,
Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance desires.*

It is not so much that the world is now regarded as having no meaning, but that the meanings have been removed from life with the passing of those traditional matrices provided by ceremonial religion, established government, and unquestioned traditions, social and political and domestic. Quarrel as one will with the herd, one needs some herd, however small, for moral warmth. And the small herd of disillusionists have nothing but doubt to offer each other. Everyone in now despised Victorian England, from lord to peasant, knew his precise place in the social order and the logic

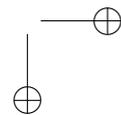
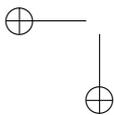


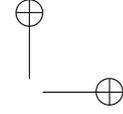
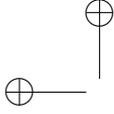


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of life that that indicated for him. No one in present-day America subscribes to any hierarchy of places or believes in any established pattern of life. The net result is what was indicated long ago in Plato's *Republic*. When order disappears in the commonwealth, it disappears in the soul. People buy books of etiquette in a pathetic desire to have it settled as to how they should act, what they should wear, what they should say under given circumstances. The inherited etiquettes of the soul have all been discredited.

The passing of reverence has long been applauded as releasing the contemporary from subjection to an incredible load of chicanery and pretence, and enabling him to look at life frankly and whole. It has proved to be a boomerang. For part of the structure of disillusion has been built up from the following circumstances: Looking over the traditions of the past, over the works of man and nature, and the environment of the present, there is nothing that the sophisticate finds as material for his enthusiasm, respect or adoration. It is lightly supposed that reverence is a paralysing virtue. But the timidity in departing from established canons that too much reverence may induce is nothing to the complete inaction that complete irreverence may provoke. Women in Greece expecting to have children, kept in their rooms the images of beautiful gods, in the expectation that those constant images would operate toward the beautifying of their eventual children. It was a hope as dubious as it is touching. But that images of beauty, goodness and truth do affect action,

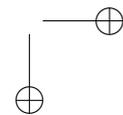
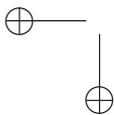


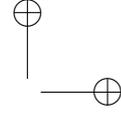
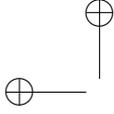


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or put differently, that ideals stimulate behaviour, release energies and incite to enterprise, movement and adventure, is beyond the possibility of doubt. There is nothing in the imagination of the disillusioned to operate in this salutary fashion.

The objects about which the fireworks of irreverence have been playing range from the legends and heroes of the past to the legends and heroes of the present and to the ideals and impulses of the irreverent pyrotechnicians themselves. There is an incalculable value that only those know who have shared it, in sensing that the work one does or the pleasures one pursues are in some small degree the living chapter of a great tradition. That sense, to which in European literature Virgil has given most eloquent expression, has been to a greater or less degree shared by the intellectual classes – and by many others – in Europe down to the present time. One may smile a little at the religiosity with which Germans attend a Wagner festival, or the factitious dignity that attaches to a routine performance at the Comédie Française. But it is less easy to smile at and not very hard to envy those places, crafts and professions in Western Europe, whose inhabitants and members feel their work to be ennobled and dignified by the fact that they have their roots in a splendid or even a continuous past and that whatever small thing be done today is a significant point on a long and significant line. There is sustenance and solace in a tradition, and in having criticized those traditions of religion, of morals and of society

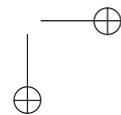
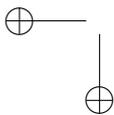


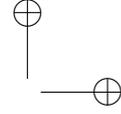
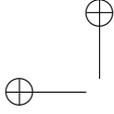


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which are our patrimony, we have lost a birthright for a mess of critical pottage. The imagination has been robbed of images in themselves splendid and in their consequences stimulating. The mind has been focused on what must always seem, so close is it and so contemptibly familiar, the immediate present. "The sense of glory," as Herbert Read, a recent English critic has put it, has vanished, and we have the disillusion of living only in the shabby actual world, and reducing past greatness to the measure of that.

The whole movement in history and biography that approaches the past with a sneer has confirmed this irreverence and the unhappiness that flows from it. For banal as the lines have become, lives of great men did once remind us we might make our lives sublime, and that Alpine air the disillusionist would no longer have us breathe. That urbane leer indeed with which a Lytton Strachey approaches the past becomes even less urbane when it is the present that is regarded. In the revulsion against the high words and low deeds which the aftermath of the war revealed, it has come to be the astringent fashion to see even less in the admirable actions or in the images of contemporaries than in those of our predecessors. It is as if there were a gritting of teeth and a sardonic determination not to be taken in. It need not be argued nor need cases be cited to prove that there are, both among the obscure and the famous, instances of genius, of insight, or suffering, endurance and courage in our time equal to those of any past generation. For it is



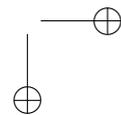
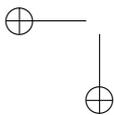


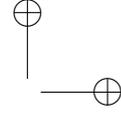
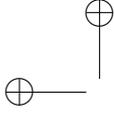
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the ironic belief of a by no means negligible portion of the contemporary intellectual class that the case is rather to be reversed. Did we but have all the facts, we should find that the greatness of the past is but the sentimentalism of distance and the pathos of ignorance. Shaw has shown us what may be thought to have been the actual motives of Christian martyrs, and the seamy side of sainthood has been the special prerogative of a number of investigators at once ghoulish and delighted.

This equal scepticism with regard both to the present and the past has been extended indeed to the soul of the sceptic himself. It is indeed this bedrock of belief in himself that the sophisticated modern has seen destroyed under his feet. It is not a recent invention, this dissolution of the soul of man. Descartes began it several centuries ago, but it was David Hume who reduced the soul to a momentary state of consciousness, an impression or idea, and defied the logician or the psychologist to find any identity or any continuity in the self. It is easy enough as a parlor trick of dialectic to dissolve the human ego into nothingness, a moment of sensation which in itself may be an illusion. It is not that doubt, adroit and aseptic, which has brought disillusion in its train. The psyche may be a myth, but practically speaking one can act as if the self were real, and one does.

There is a subtler scepticism that has risen among the disillusionists with respect to the soul of man; that is, an alleged realism, unhappy and sardonic, as to the

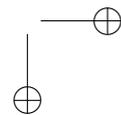
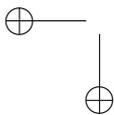


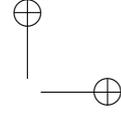
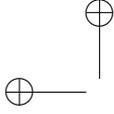


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motives called noble by the naive, and more plausible names by those informed in the latest psychologies.

Some atmosphere of confidence must inspirit the most trivial enterprise, some faith must animate a group or a commonwealth, to justify it to its own eyes. The modern man has lost confidence not simply in his competence but in his warrant; he is no longer justified by faith in the Lord; he can, so runs the credo of the disillusionist, no longer be justified by faith in himself. For the whole incidence of the new analytical psychology (though this is scarcely its whole possible good) is to discredit the soul of man. That discredit has been largely brought about through the translation into terms of animality or childishness of the motives, actions and ideals for which previous generations, especially in their theology and literature found ennobling and angelic alliances. There is a whole school of literary thought that has not yet recovered from comparative animal psychology and the analytic discovery of the persistence of the traits of the child in adult behaviour. Mr. Krutch's *The Modern Temper* in its discussion of "Love, the Life and Death of a Value," is a case in point. He compares, with a certain nostalgia, the false glamour and ideality with which the Victorians surrounded that Love for which they counted a world well lost with the bitter realism of the moderns for whom love is all glandular secretions. The value of love, he argues, has died, when we have thus discovered its animal bases and animal origins.

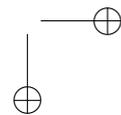
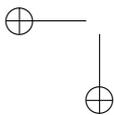


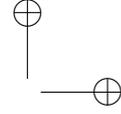
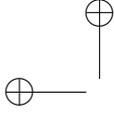


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In the same way those motives and ideals for which men used to have terms of admiration – patriotism, piety to parents and to elders, all the varied hues of and accents humility – are now traced back to the fears, the uncertainties and the dependences of childhood. The mark of the beast and the wilfulness of the child stamp the adult. No matter what rhetoric he parades, his thirst for purity or peace, his eloquent periphrases about love cannot hide his babyishness and the beastliness out of which his noblest actions are derived.

It is useless to point out here the fallacy of origins long popular with current philosophers of life. It does not follow that because (however high into the skies of poetry love may fly), it still has lust as its source, it therefore ceases to be poetry or love. The fact to be noted is that for a large school of educated opinion this is exactly what does follow. It is not to the point to argue that if childish dependences can grow into cosmic devotions, those devotions are none the less genuinely cosmic. The fact again remains that for many the whole self-respect of mankind is destroyed when the operations, so childlike and so animal, of the human soul are revealed. Nothing can be so depressing and so paralysing as the lapse of belief in one's self. In many quarters that lapse in belief is precisely what the comparative psychology of the laboratory and the analytic psychology of the clinic have resulted in. It is impossible to take oneself very seriously if one's most ambitious and generous undertakings are reduced to

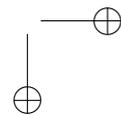
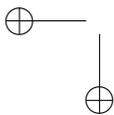


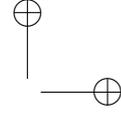
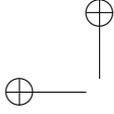


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the lecheries of a monkey or the pulings of a child. The lover, the patriot, the philanthropist and the scholar all become sicklied o'er with the pale cast of psychological self-consciousness. Like Matthew Arnold, they become weary of themselves and sick of asking what they are or what they ought to be. They have been told in too much horrifying detail what they are. What they think they ought to be is, they have come to recognize, also a matter of conventional habit, that has its origins likewise in the automatic behaviour of the animal and the child.

Much of this disillusion is largely a matter of words, which, like the scepticism of David Hume, enables its reader or its writer to go back to his dinner and his games as usual. In so far as it is simply theoretical, its cultivation has the appeal of any obvious sophistication: it answers the hurried desire not to be taken in. It is smarter to be above the sentimentalism and traditionalisms, the glammers of the past. It is the last word in intellectual nonchalance to believe that "not many fine, not many learned, not many noble" exist in the world or ever have existed. The disillusionist by intellectual preference aligns himself with those who are on the safe side. Nobody will ever be able to say to them that they had been fooled by rhetoric, by old wives' tales or by the stereotyped morality of the conventional and the old. If they expect nothing, then nothing can surprise or impress or depress them. If life contains for them no sudden glory, at least it contains also no sudden shock. It is, to cite Hobbes,



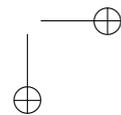
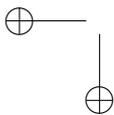


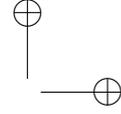
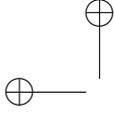
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poor, brutish, nasty and short, and they are content to recognize those qualities of it once and for all.

But the disillusion is more than verbal and has roots deeper than literature. It has been suggested why the habit of reverence has passed away. It remains to be inquired why the capacity for absorption has vanished, a capacity the absence of which is bound to breed despair. The habit of reverence has vanished because we are, on the whole, a rootless generation, and because we tend to be absorbed in our origins rather than in our purposes. The capacity for absorption has vanished, largely because, especially in America, the contemporary lives, to put it briefly, in cities and among words. He has both too little time for that steady contemplation which is an absorption in the world and in things; he has too many odds and ends of time for brooding, for the internal canvassing of his own doubts and insufficiencies.

Absorption, the engagement of the whole mind and body in some form of activity or contemplation itself stimulating, self-justifying and delightful, is not and necessarily cannot be the lot of most contemporaries. The reasons for that are, therefore, not the fault of, nor does the remedy for them lie in, any individual. The activities of most men and many women in this generation are necessarily involved in means whose ends are wealth or social advancement, not means that are themselves ends. If the business and professions of men interested them genuinely, it would not occur to them that they needed justification. A pirate, en-

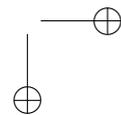
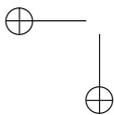


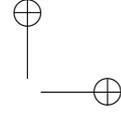
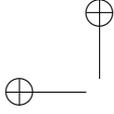


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terprising and dedicated, does not have doubts about piracy. A doctor or a cabinet-maker enjoying medicine or cabinet-making does not have time or inclination to question the value of medicine or cabinet-making. The disillusionist smiles when he is told that if he were properly absorbed he would not be unhappy. He takes that to mean simply that he would be too busy to think, but that thinking would lead him inevitably to his lugubrious conclusions. But the fact remains that lugubrious conclusions do not suggest themselves when the mind and the body are healthily engaged. Disillusion does not occur where there is animal satisfaction, creative absorption or civic fulfilment. The satisfied animal, the working artist and the enterprising citizen are three types of being who have not the capacity for disillusion. But sensuality and enterprise have both become difficult for the modern, and artistic creation in this, as in any age, is possible only to a few.

Walt Whitman in a famous passage suggested that he would like to go and live like the animals not one of whom is unhappy or respectable over the earth. And there have been later Walt Whitmans who have found the cure for sick souls in a renewal of a sensuality, vigorous and unashamed. The whole theme and the chief appeal of D. H. Lawrence's later works was in his protest against the sickliness, the effeminacy, the spinelessness, gutlessness and sexlessness of a generation, pale, timid and respectable. There is a point in the protest, but the point is, perhaps, different than Lawrence or his devotees (largely pale readers in

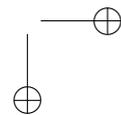
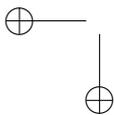


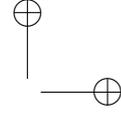
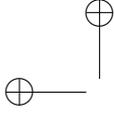


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cities) imagine. When sensuality becomes a cult, it is a symptom that it has ceased to be a spontaneous source of happiness. The reasons may be physiological, they may be the neuroses imposed by a too repressive civilization. But neither Sex nor the Good Brown Earth, neither Maleness nor the touch of the soil can bring happiness, or ward off disillusion to those who live so much in cities and who move so much among words. Perhaps it is time for some new Rousseau to arise and lead a crusade back to Nature, to sex and to the soil, sweeping away the machinery of things and of codes which have robbed us of the birthright of both. That, for the moment, is not the issue. The point to be emphasized is that it is precisely the absence of Sensuality as a sufficient motive for the modern that has removed one of the great absorptions that keep the animal, the peasant and all simply earthly humans from even the suburbs of disillusion.

The second type of not unhappy human is the creative artist, in so far as he is busy with creation. The joy of absorption in some kind of construction, invention or imaginative synthesis was probably not more frequent in previous generations than in our own. But something at least resembling or approximating that absorption was more generally available. To be engaged with joy in some work that taxes one's energy, ingenuity and imagination is a second insurance against disillusion. This again is an insurance that has come for the most part to be beyond the possibilities of contemporaries, and that is beyond the power of the

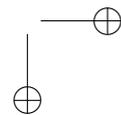
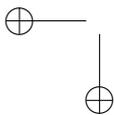


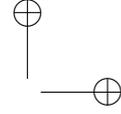
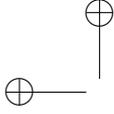


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individual to control. The joy of the craftsman, as has so often been pointed out, is not possible where the machines of the mass are substituted for the technique of individual workers. Most of the men and women in this generation are involved in work which does not interest them for ends they do not see or control. If the business, work of profession of most people engaged them, then it would not occur to them that they needed justification. But the absorption of the craftsman, the artist or the professional, is either unknown or discounted by the prophets or the devotees of disillusion. Even where it is known, as it most certainly is by a gifted writer on disillusion, it is the discounting of the joys of energy and activity themselves that demands explanation. It is partly a want of vitality, which is a matter of hygiene, a question for the physician rather than for the philosopher. It is the presence of a neurosis, a diseased something that gets between the contemporary and his work; before he can say what he is doing or enjoy where he is going, he has already in his heart, if not in his words, denied that it can be worth doing, or that he can enjoy it. That neurosis is again a problem for the psychiatrist rather than for the critic. For there is clearly something pathological in a temperament that poisons in advance its own possible wells of joy.

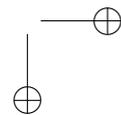
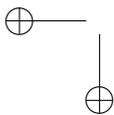
But the soul of man lives, or in the past has lived, on more civic and domestic levels. It has found its decent content, if not its happiness, primarily neither in the excitements of the senses nor in the natural

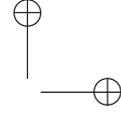
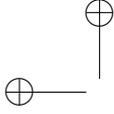




THE CULT OF DISILLUSION

exhilarations of enterprise and creation. The domesticated citizen, that joke of the sophisticated, has been regarded by philosophers as noble and as different as Seneca, Plotinus and Aristotle, as being not only worthy of praise but assured of a quiet minimum of joy. The hearth in some civilizations, the agora and the assembly in others, have given men a sense of activities at once human and meaningful which could call out at once their best energies and their most rewarding and sweetening affections. The Greek freeman, the Roman citizen, the townsman of a nineteenth-century American village, the modern national of the nineteenth century commonwealth felt himself to be playing an interesting part in, to be a part of, a meaningful community. His own actions were involved in a community of actions whose doings he could affect and whose doings mattered to him. In the patriarchal society of the last two thousand years, a man's life was further defined by his place as a son or a father. The family, the city, the country, and in addition, in some form in all Western civilization, the church, helped determine the contours of life and give it continuity, richness and depths. One by one those supports have vanished. Men are still husbands, fathers or sons in biological fact; they are still technically citizens, and may perhaps formally be adherents of some church. But the vital energizing that comes from these relationships when they are at once practical and serious, has vanished. The springs of emotion and of action from these deep traditional sources have dried up. Men have attained

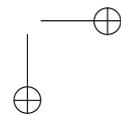
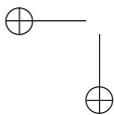


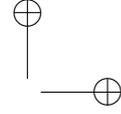
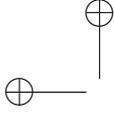


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individuality, they have broken away from the family, the city, the state and the church. Man has grown into an individual, and the individuality has turned out to be meaningless, futile, bare and confused. The modern soul has, as it were, become an old bachelor, uninspired by ties of family, without any country or creed and not even the waning excitement of the senses or of a career to stimulate, encourage and refresh him.

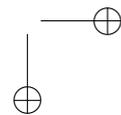
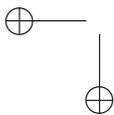
The cure of the cult of disillusion, in so far as it is something more than the plaything of verbal sophisticates, is not by argument but by social transformation. Not a new argument but a new society will cure the soul of man. For the incitements and supports of sensuality, of art and of citizenship are still possible. Social imagination might still contrive a world where a vigorous human animal might find anew the beauties of a quickened nature and a quickened natural life, where the joys of art might be in some measure vouchsafed to all men, and where the natural pleasures of family and civic enterprise might be, as they once were in an ancient and simple world, the privileges, the prerogatives and the blessings of a citizen and a father. Such a task would render disillusion an anachronism. Such a world would require an unprecedented social transformation. It would demand a faith in intelligence, which is the next faith that we have to examine.

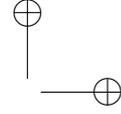
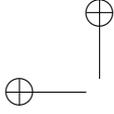




THE FAITH IN INTELLIGENCE

The faith in intelligence is not a novelty; very early in the history of mankind it must have animated the exploits of the individual and the enterprises of the tribe. The first time the rudest savage acted with reference to some end he vaguely imagined, the moment the human animal behaved as if what he did now might possibly make a difference in what happened later, the faith in intelligence was born. It must certainly have been centuries before that reliance became in any sense articulate. There is no cult to celebrate the efficacy of human action, human will and human deliberation upon the course of natural events and upon the incidence, fateful or auspicious, of things. Yet that efficacy was relied upon much sooner than it was recorded. The myth of Prometheus is a famous reminder of how much and how early men realized that the control of fire and the correlative leap of intelligence were things so momentous that the only adequate explanation of them was that they were divine things stolen from divine beings. As far back as Plato, as the most cursory survey of his *Republic* suggests, there was





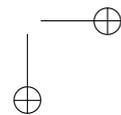
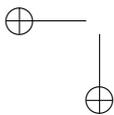
THE CONTEMPORARY AND HIS SOUL

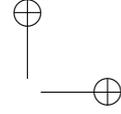
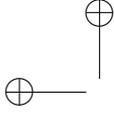
some one to sense the wisdom which might be genuinely and comprehensively operative in the personal and the joint affairs of mankind. That thinking poet, in the magnificent beginning of the end of the Greek world, as everyone knows, set forth the belief that the state of man's soul and the state of the commonwealth of men might be controlled by a group of men wise and disinterested, conversant with, devoted to, an ideal pattern of the good.

But the faith in mind among the reflective Greeks and philosophical mediaeval Christians was not the faith in a practical agent for affairs in this world. Among the Greeks it was a belief in the possibility through mind of knowing reality and envisaging truth; among mediaeval Christians it was a belief that only *through* belief, clarified by reason, could one attain salvation in the hereafter or precocious beatitudes here.

Men continued perforce, to act as if they believed in intelligent action and procedure guided by a disciplined imagination. The necessary business of life could otherwise never have gone on. Whatever the current official faiths may have been, the arts of agriculture and of building alone would have kept that practical faith alive, and without their practice there would have been no longer any race to nurture any other reliance.

It may be said, though in a Pickwickian sense, that no one since the Greeks has really believed in the power of the human mind, or so celebrated its subtlety, its power and its range. But it is too often forgotten

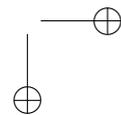
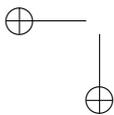


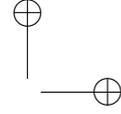
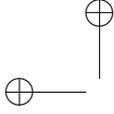


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what mind, to the Greeks, generally speaking meant, what were its refinements, its ambitions or its objects. There was no faith that mind could control the fortunes of men in this world, mind was altogether too Olympianly conceived to permit it to be regarded as an instrument of reorganizing or modifying physical nature. It might save men from disaster and give them a decent content through inculcating the golden mean. It might, by teaching men the pattern of the changeless good, make it possible for them to modify their earthly commonwealths in the light of that ideal vision. But it was primarily not an instrument of action but a faculty of vision. It was not a technique of behaviour but an avenue of insight. Its subtleties were not those of finesse or practical technique, but of refinements of dialectical method. Its objects were not primarily the improvement of man's estate, but the beholding of an eternity of changeless immaterial beauty, incorruptible because bodiless good, eternal because timeless truth. In Plato, in Plotinus, in Philo and in all their Christian followers, there was not faith in intelligence but rather a reverence for the eternal and a belief that a mind disengaged from the distractions of society and the corruptions of the body, might before death briefly experience immortality in beholding immortal things.

So far as this world is concerned, it has not been noticed enough how much Greek thought is haunted by a sense of the inevitably changing, and resigned to the processes of destroying Fate. The body, even for Socrates, appears to have been a prison house, and



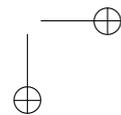
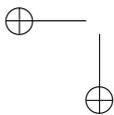


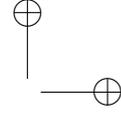
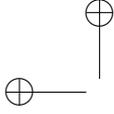
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before Greek thought was to have ended, the world itself was to become a prison from which the ascetic and disciplined mind might be taught by gradual steps to escape.

But broadly speaking it was not until the birth of Christianity, or at least until a time contemporary with its birth, that the faith in intelligence was seriously and almost completely abdicated.

If man is to be saved, either in this world or for the next, there are only two ways by which that salvation may be accomplished: through himself, that is to say, by his own will and intelligence, or through the will and intelligence of a supernatural being. There were many reasons in the Graeco-Roman world why man's confidence in his own efforts and complacency with his own will should have lapsed. It is as unnecessary to rehearse as it is unwise to forget the collapse of the leisure-class city state, the vanishing of the traditional social and religious sanctions, the failure of nerve that Gilbert Murray has so circumspectly portrayed. The Graeco-Roman world was filled with a number of mystery cults in which by a mystical communion with a dying god, the believer felt he might escape the fatalities of this world and share the immortality of the resurrected god. There were a number of philosophies, of which neo-Platonism was only one leading example, which indicated a path of intellectual asceticism by which the soul might escape from this manifold and vanishing world to a unity, mystical and saving, with the One. There was in Palestine and in the Judaism of



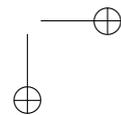
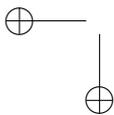


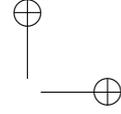
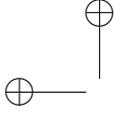
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the Dispersion the repeated alleged appearance or the repeated promise of a Messiah through whose agency and through belief in whom the repentant Israelites might count upon living as resurrected creatures upon a transformed and Paradisial earth.

With the birth of Christianity and throughout more than a thousand years of its history, the faith in intelligence was telescoped into a *faith in faith*. If Paul insisted vehemently that through his own efforts, through the flesh, man could never be saved, until the birth of modern times it was repeatedly insisted that if man was to be saved, it could be only through the grace of God. Nor was that salvation conceived of as being a new life on a new earth. It was an eternal life in the city of God, among the saints, the society of the angels in Heaven, and of those whom faith had added and would add to them.

There was (the history of mediaeval piety and speculation is filled with instances) labour, subtlety and tenderness enough expounded on the technique of salvation, which (one has but to read the mediaeval mystics) took intellectual enough form. No modern psychiatrist could more intensively canvas the perplexities and perils of the soul lost in the world than St. Augustine does in those wonderful and harrowing books of the Confessions where he retells the battle in his own soul between the flesh that was fixed on corruption and the spirit that longed to do God's will and share His peace. No one could prescribe a discipline at once more ascetic and more intellectually exquisite than



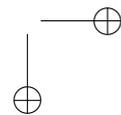
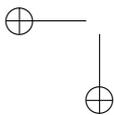


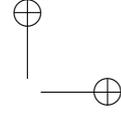
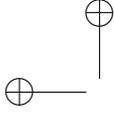
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St. Bonaventura does in his *Itinerary of the Mind to God*. There lingered, nay rather there obtruded and persisted, a faith in mind, but it was faith in mind contemplative that, illuminated and sustained by grace, might eventually behold God and be one with him. The city of man, the City of Satan, with all their secular and evil works, persisted, but it was to the Heavenly City that intelligence was directed and that faith was turned.

But the modern trust in the mind of man as an instrument of bettering his own estate in the perils and the possibilities of the sublunar and actual earth is a comparatively modern discovery. Its most famous early celebrant was Francis Bacon. It does not much matter that his own contributions to science have been reduced, in the light of modern criticism, to much less than was formerly supposed, nor that he has come to seem the journalistic herald rather than the actual initiator of modern scientific method or faith in its possible accomplishments. It remains a fact that he did give extraordinarily eloquent expression to the conception of the empire of man over nature, that he did envisage a House of Solomon, a council of informed wise men who should govern a New Atlantis in the light of scientific knowledge. He passionately tried to turn logic from an instrument of demonstration into a technique of discovery, and to conceive that technique of discovery as auxiliary to human good.

The history of the idea of intelligence as a human instrument and as the instrument of the welfare of

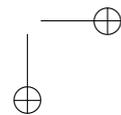
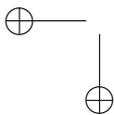


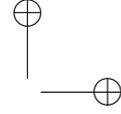
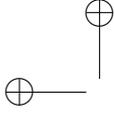


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mankind is a long one whose details need not concern us here. One need only be reminded of that faith in the perfectibility of man through control of himself and of nature, which animated the French *philosophes* in the eighteenth century, and of the vast hopes entertained by Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth, a hope which became for Comte and for Mill, a religion of humanity. The belief in the perfectibility of man and the amelioration of his estate, despite all the setbacks that hope has received, still flourishes in the twentieth century. It is the “open conspiracy” of H. G. Wells. It is the “creative intelligence” of John Dewey.

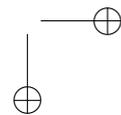
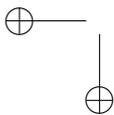
What is here our concern is not the history so much as the constituents, the implications and the alliances of that hope. Like early Christianity, it, too, requires a triple virtue of its participants: faith, hope and love. The faith, perhaps, resembles more the ancient Messianic hope of a transfigured earth and humanity than it does the Christian hope of a spiritual life in a bodiless heaven. The hope is more that of a Messianic kingdom than that of a Christian Paradise. The charity is that of the democratic hypothesis, the infinite worth, the limitless possibilities of each individual in the commonwealth. It is nourished not by the expectation of a Messiah nor on the actuality of mystical association with a saviour, but on the prospects opened up by the achievements, already praised to the point of banality, of physical science. What that faith consists in may be briefly said to be the following: that

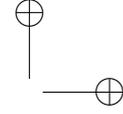
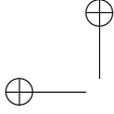




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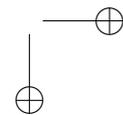
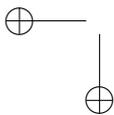
analytic study may give mankind control over Nature even more complete than that which it had had in the past. Indeed the whole faith in intelligence may be said to be based on the transformation, so vast and detailed as to be unimaginable, so rapid and so recent as to seem magical, that physical science has effected in the physical conditions of living, and in the habits of living that these conditions have both made possible and necessitated. If we have any reason to exult with Swinburne, "Glory to Man in the Highest, for Man is the Master of Things," that exultation can certainly be supported by a survey of what the intelligence of man has effected on the surface of the planet. It is not simply that physical science has afforded physical comfort and luxury, facilities of transport and communication that make life in the twentieth century in its daily detail unprecedented in history. The faith in intelligence glows at the prospect of what further marvels of comfort and security, speed and vision, physical science may yet provide us. A technique of laboratory inquiry that has given us instantaneous communication between points halfway round the world, and that has brought places continents apart, within a few hours of each other, has, one knows not what as yet unrevealed and inconceivable accomplishment. A technique that has immensely alleviated pain and reduced mortality may not simply indefinitely lengthen the span of life, but, there are tenors of optimism to assure us, may conquer that last obstacle, death itself.

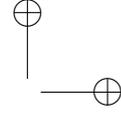
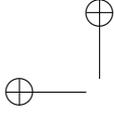




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But it is not with the banalities of triumphs over brute matter that the faith in intelligence has these last decades been concerned. The hope has risen, a hope that upon reflection one would perhaps find less exalting than fantastic, that the methods that have succeeded so well in the world of material things, will succeed equally in the field of human nature and social institutions. It was just before the war, perhaps, that that vision found its most enthusiastic expression, and Graham Wallas' *Great Society*, Walter Lippmann's *Preface to Politics* were, among others, passionate panegyrics of the new gospel of social science. The logic was simple enough and the promise sufficiently plausible. Intelligence directed upon institutions could turn the anarchic chaos of our industrio-democratic international society into something like order and decency. That organized selfishness and mediaevalism, predatory and persisting, which had kept the chief benefits of society for a conscious or unconscious predatory few, could be remodelled scientifically. Physical efficiency could be accomplished by social efficiency, whose moral synonym, sentimental and avoided where possible, was social justice. It was a modest though thrilling enough expectation this, that what man had done to things he could do to the social order that was his own creation. Remove politics and economic activities from the perversion, heat and obscurity of special interest, treat the problems of government and industry as you would treat the problems met in the clinic and the

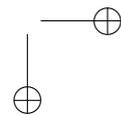
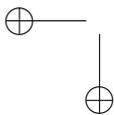


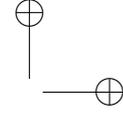
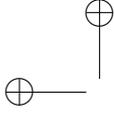


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laboratory, and there was no reason to doubt that the results would be equally astounding and gratifying.

It is the violence of war, not the persuasion of an argument that has made this faith, though still present, much less sure of itself than formerly. It took four years and millions of lives to demonstrate how Elysian was the assumption of a clear analogy between and a possible similar technique in the sphere of physical things and of human institutions and human nature. It might not perhaps require so large scale a demonstration to show that one cannot isolate human situations as one can conditions in the physical laboratory. It should have required something less than slaughter to prove the absurdity of thinking the control of government and industry is like that of chemicals in combination, and to assume that one would begin a clean slate, all special interests, all human surds and unpredictable, all obdurate selfishness removed. It is only fair to say that even before the war the wiser of the liberal Utopians among whom were both Walter Lippmann and Graham Wallas, realized that one could not begin with institutions, one could not even begin with individual adults. The fair and freer field, as John Dewey long ago pointed out (in *Democracy and Education*), was among the young, and the chief and indeed ultimately the sole instrument was education. Institutions were simply the deposits of habit, and if these former were to be changed, habits had to be changed first. The wisdom of the future was to begin in the children of the present. The faith in intelligence reduced itself



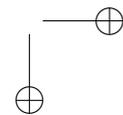
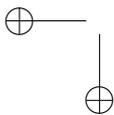


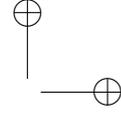
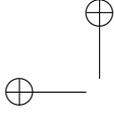
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ultimately to faith in the nursery, the kindergarten and the school.

It was a point Plato discerned long ago, and the whole of his political philosophy may be said to have resolved itself ultimately into a philosophy of education. It is equally the case with John Dewey, with whom the good is social in its origins and in its consequences and for whom the technique and, indeed, the meaning of democracy is shared experience, a sharing which it is the early-begun and life-long business of education to engender.

If patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels, it is no less true that education is the last refuge of idealists. The current generation, any generation, is the slave of its fixed habits and its immobile prejudices. It is with the young that one can begin anew – if only one can free education itself from the habits and prejudices which make it the weapon of the vested interests and the encrusted traditions of a given society. The imitation of the language, the statistics and even the apparatus of social science did not prevent the collapse of Western civilization into a world war, nor has it done much since to restore its stability or to make visible portents of a Utopia. The faith in social science is largely the transformation of the wish of neat minds for a neat society and the touching assumption that the disorders of the human spirit and the obdurances of individual and class interest can be “scientifically” organized away. Even the most optimistic advocates of social science have begun to question its “science” and its promises.

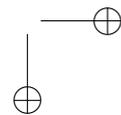
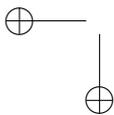


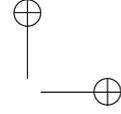
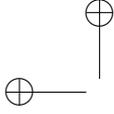


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It has come to be revealed, in a phrase of Clarence Ayres, as a false Messiah, and its own disciples have begun to question its validity and its possible success.

They have retreated to something not very dissimilar to the orthodox Christian insistence that what is needed is not a change of institutions but a change of soul. But the insistence is based not upon the belief in miracles of grace, but on the intelligible technique of intelligence. The illustration of that faith and its expression have been the modernistic and experimental movements in education. It is beyond the range of this discussion or the competence of its author to estimate in detail the successes of the "new education." No one even casually familiar with its workings or its fruits would count as anything but good the ways in which the new schools have released the child from a hundred crusts of ancient pedagogic formulas and helped it to flower into a conversance, natural and free, with the world in which it lives and must necessarily live. The new education has itself in many quarters degenerated into a formula, and the elaborate university schools of education have come to worship the formulas of freedom rather than the thing itself, have become grotesque parodies of the gospel of liberty and intelligence which they were to instil as actual habits rather than drill into the mythical "mind" of the child. And even where there has been success, the success has been qualified. There has of late been a searching of hearts among the most passionate expounders and practitioners of the new education. A decade or two

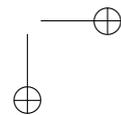
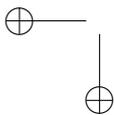


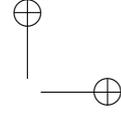
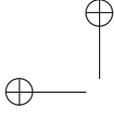


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have given some of these who were to be the clear, free and fearless inhabitants of a Utopia of intelligent democratic citizens, a chance to grow up. Trained in the best schools under the most liberal auspices, they still find the same world, or one perhaps even more confused and sceptical of its own ends than the world of a generation ago. Nor are they, as not only their elders but they themselves have observed, as clear, as free and as fearless as they had been expected, as they had been taught to expect themselves to be. The modern young man and young woman, after ten years of this educational freedom, have come to wonder no less than those who have experimented upon them, whether the extraordinary faith in education, the faith that intelligence itself might become democratized and universal, is justified. The faith in education has suffered a setback, too, from the loss of that faith in democracy upon which it is essentially based. The trust in universal suffrage as the panacea for society was succeeded by a faith in democracy and the democratization of intelligence. Not the vote but the mind behind the vote was what mattered; reliance had shifted from the ballot to the school.

For a variety of reasons, ranging from the revelation of widespread mediocrity or worse by intelligence tests, to the breakdown of political democracy in so many parts of Europe, and, though less patently, in our own country, since the war, the insistence that all things might be made of all men has suffered a disturbing check. That hypothesis, as genial as it is

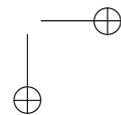
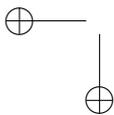


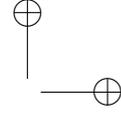
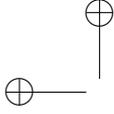


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nonsensical, in its most ardent advocates lives on by insisting that democratic education is still untried. (The good Christian too still insists that Christianity has never been tried.) The exponents of the new education proclaim that it has only barely been begun. They point to the dead weight of political, social and educational tradition. There are, comparatively speaking, very few experimental schools, and higher education in America remains pathetically cramped, formalized and anachronistic. The new education has scarcely had a chance.

But there is a deeper issue that the defence of a faith in intelligence has left untouched. The habits of clarity, freedom and immediacy of behaviour, even in those individuals who have to a certain extent developed them, have not produced that peace of spirit or energy of being which ought to be their consequence. With freedom from old prejudices has risen a crop of new complexes; one has been released simply from old dogmas to new uncertainties. The new education has produced a monster of restlessness in a society increasingly regimented and fixed, and yet a society without any aims or claims comparable in urgency or ultimacy to those of abandoned religions and discredited morals. The soul has escaped into the open sea, and the first result is that it has become sick. This modernistic malaise has led to a still further transformation of the modern faith in intelligence. From the ballot box and the school, reliance has been transferred to the medical laboratory, the consulting room and the clinic.

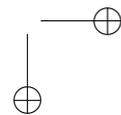
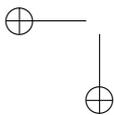


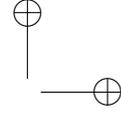
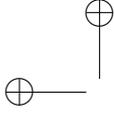


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If we have not been saved by the politician or the teacher, at least the psychiatrist can save us. If we can neither be legislated nor educated nor argued out of our confusions and our despairs, at least we can be cured. There will once more be a laying on of hands, but the hands are to be those of the psychiatrist or the psychoanalyst, and in practice it will be not hands that are laid on but words that are uttered.

Quite apart from the immense importance and the unquestionable therapeutic success that various forms of psychoanalysis and psychiatry have achieved, what demands attention is the faith in them by a wide public who cannot possibly know much about their technique. It is faith in the participation of a mystery almost in the ancient technical sense, of communion with a god whose life or whose ritual contained a secret saving power. It is turning for a cure of, and an escape from, the corruptions and confusions of life under circumstances not dissimilar to those in which the early Christians and pagans of the Graeco-Roman world turned to the mystical salvation by faith in Isis or Mithra or Christ. It is a turning away to some miracle by which the soul may find bliss or at the very least peace, since all else, politics, education, science and statesmanship have failed. To their practitioners, psychiatry and psychoanalysis may be technique as controlled and methodical as any other laboratory method. To innumerable votaries, it is not their young technique that matters, but their message as old as the Orphic mysteries of 600 B.C. Here in the consulting



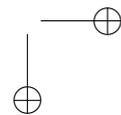
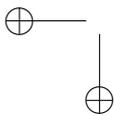


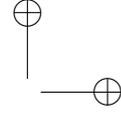
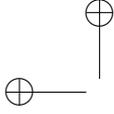
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room salvation is to be found! Speed, comfort and even the relative democratization of luxury have not brought peace, but unprecedented uneasiness or subtle new despondencies. The faith in intelligence has become faith in a new spiritual surgery. From education for the normal child, we have here a hastening to a narrower and more desperate hope, medicine for the perturbed or abnormal adult. Intelligence may still save the wrecks of those whose shattered nerves or disordered psyches have paid the costs of a civilization in which intelligence has not produced up to date any conspicuous success in the way of ecstasy or content.

It quite misses the point to argue that in innumerable and repeated instances the techniques of analytical psychology, for example, have been conspicuous therapeutic triumphs. The point is the fact that so much attention should have been turned in the past decade upon what one might term the purely remedial and salvaging aspects of intelligence.

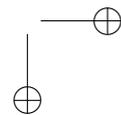
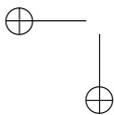
That intelligence which was to make a sound world has now had attention lavished upon it primarily as the remedy for the victims of a diseased civilization. It aims to produce, as it were, monstrosities of well-being in a civilization too sick for the reconstructions that it was so lately assured intelligence might effect in it. The faith in the technique of intelligence has been reduced from the hopeful engineering toward a regenerated earth to a fevered technique for relief from the unbearable strain of an unregenerated one. It is the beginning of the end of the belief in the perfectibility

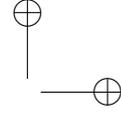
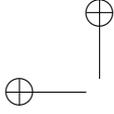




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of mankind. Retrospectively considered, then, each of the great fields in which the faith in intelligence has flourished has successively been found wanting. Its naivest form was the assumption that mastery of things, resulting in comfort, luxury, variety of goods and quick communication, could produce individual and universal happiness. It had been forgotten that long ago Marcus Aurelius desperately remarked that even in a palace it was possible to live well. But further than that, even on the plane of physical control of nature and the human body, intelligence, or scientific technique, has its severe limits. Bergson might conclude a chapter on a high note saying that death itself might be overcome. But the modern romantic faith in the power of man over nature has kept an evasive silence on the subject of death. There have been occasional heroics, as in John Stuart Mill's famous essay on Nature, on the comparative insignificance of a single individual life, even from that individual's point of view, compared with the exaltation that comes with his imaginative participation in the whole future and the enterprise, noble and endless, of mankind. But the corroding awareness of death as the eventual sentence of all hope and all awareness, has not ceased to perturb the modern consciousness. The exacerbation has become rather greater than less. No previous generation has, as previously pointed out, been so aware of time, and the inescapable correlate of time is mortality. The more refined, sensitive and pagan the susceptibility to life, the more must death be an object of uncom-

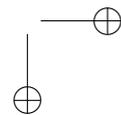
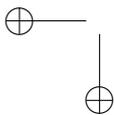


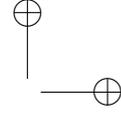
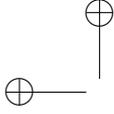


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promising loathing. No one loved life more than the Greeks of the great period nor is there any literature that is so impatient and so sad at the inevitability of death. We, like the Greeks, have no hopes of another life, and there is nothing in the promise of creative intelligence to bring us a victory, other than a Pyrrhic one, over extinction. Any adult philosophy must make its peace with that finality, and the peace has to be found on some other terms than the hope of getting rid of it. Creative intelligence may be a faith for the whole span of life: it can do nothing about the end of it. You can hurry about making the world a better place in which to live; it remains the place in which you die.

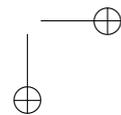
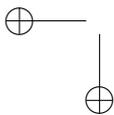
But without reference to the end of life, there have been found even those strongly attracted to the religion of creative intelligence who doubt that it can accomplish salvation within the span of natural life itself. The science of statesmanship has run up against the apparently irreducible mystery of human nature itself. One need not lapse into extreme mysticism – it is the barest realism, as any practical administrator or politician or teacher knows – to recognize an irreducible secret core of personality, an uprush of immeasurable factors in personality which all the methodology, the exact language, the controlled statistics in the world are inadequate to deal with. The idea of statesmanship meets the crude facts of politics, the nobility of social wisdom encounters the brusque and cruel facts of special interests, animal egotisms, the habits, unan-

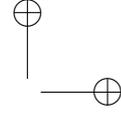
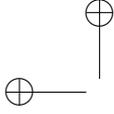




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swerable and unquenchable, of generations. Aristotle long ago pointed out that at best ethics is not an exact science. Nor is it merely the irreducible surd of humanity that qualifies the faith in an architectonic science of statesmanship for the remaking of society. An architectural blueprint of a perfect society might possibly, could it be realized, be at least an improvement over any society hitherto known. But there are thousands of obstacles, certain but unprophesiable, between the blueprint and its realization. Not the least of these lies in the fact that no statesman, not even a dictator, is ever completely in control of his materials, and never so much as a gifted artist – and a free one – is in control of his. Worst of all, there is no guarantee, nor is there much reason for believing, that the objectivity of the scientist will accompany either the vision or the design of the politician. There are no more grounds for supposing that power and wisdom are now nearer being in the same hands than they have been hitherto in the history of mankind. Nor are the ills of the soul clearly within the ambit of politics at all. We are but beginning to realize how complex and variable are the factors that enter into individual and, by so much the more, into associated or communal life, if indeed these two are not inextricably bound up with each other. The conception of intelligence, therefore, as the remoulder of life and society, turns out upon latter-day examination to be not one whit less a romantic faith than the nineteenth century notion of romantic German philosophers that the Ego



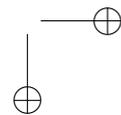
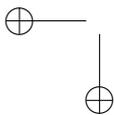


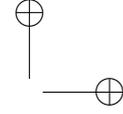
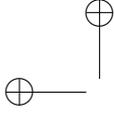
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or the Will could remake, perhaps even make, its own cosmos.

But there are still subtler perplexities and more obdurate enemies of the devotees of intelligence as salvation. It was a fact long since discerned though not admitted by Socrates, that to see the good is not to do it or accomplish it. Intelligence, even in the life of an individual, will not save the soul. And this, as the contemporary often acutely realizes, for many reasons.

If intelligence cannot make the world or its institutions or even its most unspoilt materials, its children, the adult contemporary is equally helpless with its aid to remake his own soul or find his own peace. Not only is a country too complex for the plans or the accomplishments of the most absolute dictator. A dictatorship within one's own personality is an impossible mirage. Even in primitive communities life is far from a soliloquy and it is infinitely further from being one in the highly corporate life of modern communities. It is rarely within the achievement of any individual to attain by himself integrity or clarity or peace in a society all confusion and incipient or actual warfare. No psychological technique could reconstruct a truly integrated individual without reconstructing first the whole world in which and by which his individuality is formed. No Thoreauian individualism or Emersonian self-reliance will have any point for the man or woman involved in the network of the industrial and international world of today. He may flee to a desert island or



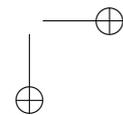
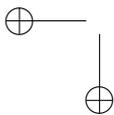


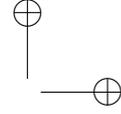
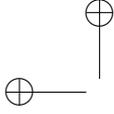
THE FAITH IN INTELLIGENCE

to a desert island of the mind. But that flight will itself be a defeat and a surrender, it is an admission that individuality cannot be attained among the realities of contemporary social experience. And it is admittedly difficult to be an individual, much less to reconstruct one's individuality, where all the conditions of industry, education and politics make for a standard, a pattern or type, moulds too in which it would be surprising were everyone to find his happiness.

One quarrel then is between the individual desiring to be an individual and a society where individuality is increasingly at a discount. But there is a quarrel more ancient and not less alive: that between the flesh and the spirit, or, in the jargon of the day, between impulse and intelligence. That inner tumult which tormented St. Paul and plagued St. Augustine has been rendered no less intense by repressions and restrictions of urban and corporate life. The resources of the whole of modern psychiatry have not been able to cure those neuroses whose sources lie not so much in the biography of an individual as in the history of an era. Where half the neurotic troubles of the present are to be traced to the conditions peculiar to the era of cities, of corporate pressure and of speed, it is not to be expected that an individual simply by determining to be sweet and reasonable can accomplish the miracle of becoming so.

The trouble may indeed be said to lie deeper still. Intelligence, it may be protested, like love, will find a way. Given time and goodwill, who knows what transformations the human mind may not affect in

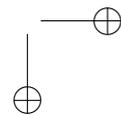
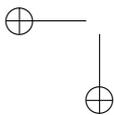


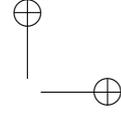
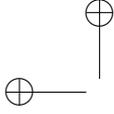


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the human scene! But love at least has its objects set for it; motives are furnished in advance. One of the cruelest consequences of modern self-consciousness lies in the discovery, alleged and apparent, that there are no objects toward which it can work, no motives to provoke intelligence, and to call out energies and marshal them to effective patterns. It has been said endlessly and patiently that the discovery that the universe has no purpose need not prevent a human being from having one, or indeed many, as many as his own life, circumstances and impulses generate. But the fact remains that it is precisely the lack of purposes, either fixed or beckoning, that the overcivilized and sensitive feel most deeply. Enlightened common sense and resourceful technique can do much in indicating what can possibly be done and how to do it. But they cannot provide reasons why the things possible in our civilization should be done, a guarantee that they can be accomplished, or, what is more important, the passions and incitements by which powers can be called out and intelligence enlisted. The peace of fixed and commanded aims has been lost. There have been no glamorous new ones, save that of movement and experiment that the faith in intelligence has provided. Intelligence may be, as John Dewey somewhere remarks, the hope of the other world, and the only one. But many feel that it is not clear what that hope is for or about.

For it is no use insisting to the disenchanting that the only avenues to progress are through science and



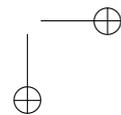
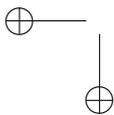


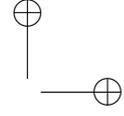
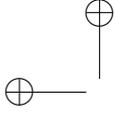
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the machine, if it is precisely the quality and character of an industrial and mechanical civilization that leaves the devotee cold. It is no use telling people to go from where they are and to build with what they have, if it is precisely their present situation and their materials that depress them, and the future indicated by them from which they flee. It does not help to exalt adventure and novelty, if life for most people is regimental, and if the novelties are simply physical devices.

Every faith in the past that has gathered followers has had some vision of salvation which was a light not simply to guide but a fire to animate and inflame the believer. Take thought, the modern cult of pragmatic mind seems to say, and all things will be added unto you. But it has not succeeded in making clear or vivid that those things are good. It has neglected the quality of life in the interest of a vague future. It has celebrated energy at the expense of insight, movement at the expense of peace. So different from Walter Pater in essence, it has yet echoed Walter Pater's "Not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end." And it has conceived experience in terms of the present phase of industry and science, out of which the future is to be made and which it is to resemble.

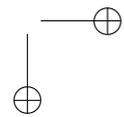
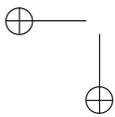
Those who prefer beauties they have espied in eternity to evils they have detected in time, and incitements in the past that they cannot find in the present; those who have found in the senses or the emotions, vitalities they cannot find in the enterprises of intelli-

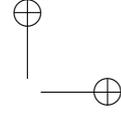
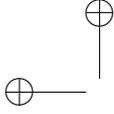




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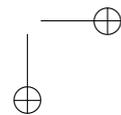
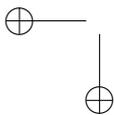
gence, or mechanism – all these have turned away. It is their philosophies of retreat and consolation that we must next examine.

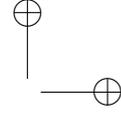
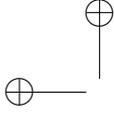




RETREAT TO PLATONISM

The safest refuge from time is eternity. Plato looking upon all things and finding them in flux turned to the Heaven of changeless and perfect Ideas. Platonism in every age and in every place has been a reincarnation of his intuition. Time is the greatest enemy of any given good, because time is the locus of change. To exist is to be doomed first to corruption and ultimately to extinction. The tragedy lies not simply in the fact that the beautiful changes and that the good dies. For time, besides being the destroyer of goods, is the positive source, the inescapable locus, of evil. It is in time that disappointment occurs and that defeat is arrived at. It is time that sees the abdication of hope and the breaking of promises, and the lapsing of those energies which make promises possible and hopes plausible. Only those who are completely absorbed or completely happy or very young, forget time. When the absorption breaks, when happiness vanishes with the sundering of the elements that composed it, when youth is over, these once so absorbed, so happy and



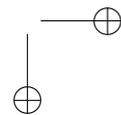
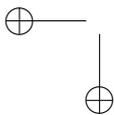


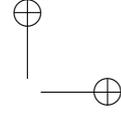
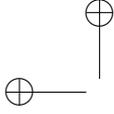
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so young are bitterly reminded of time, in the course of which they themselves are so soon to be forgotten.

It is in some such elegiac way that lovers and philosophers in love with the eternal, have always looked upon the world of temporal existence. There have been repeatedly epochs in the history of mankind when experience seemed to be shot through with exploded faiths and hopes that came belatedly to seem fantastic to the chastened observer. These latter have turned with a piety, at once wistful and metaphysical, to a vision of changeless things and to a constant living among them. The retreat to Platonism that is in many quarters occurring in our own day, is strikingly similar to flights of the same kind in the past. Plato, in the midst of a crumbling Greek commonwealth, turned to his own poetic fiction of the Perfect City in the sky. Paul spoke of a temple not built with hands to converts who were everywhere seeing cities crumble, principalities and powers wrecked and faiths destroyed. And Dante, at the apogee of Christian thought, could make Paradise consist of a vision of timeless essences, an instantaneous and unending oneness with the inerrable Godhead itself.

The appeal of Platonism in our generation has been rendered especially seductive through the exacerbation in recent thought and feeling of the sense of time and the experience of change. Change is certainly not a novel earthly fact nor a new human awareness. Long before Heraclitus over two thousand years ago pointed out the ultimate fact of change and of flux, the common

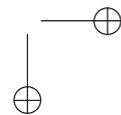
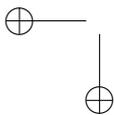


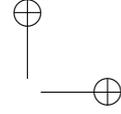
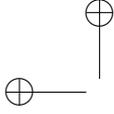


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sense of the common man must have discerned, as it must have deplored, the evanescence of youth, of light, of spring. No creature living in time could fail to have been aware of it or impressed by it. Heraclitus, comparatively late in the history of civilization, must simply have remarked what many before him had remembered, that one could not step in the same river twice, first because that river was not twice the same and secondly because the person who stepped in it had changed in the interval too. It requires indeed considerable sophistication to descry regularity and recurrence below the surface of changes, and it is a leap in the discipline of the primitive's or the child's imagination to realize that spring will return, that roses will bloom again, that there is a rhythm of order amid the chaos of evanescence, and a cycle of rebirth amid destruction.

It has been a great solace, this discovery of regularity and recurrence, so that what seemed a wretched transiency of all things turned out to be self-sustaining and self-renewing. Very early in the history of the human imagination it must have eased the shock of the discovery of time, and offered consolation for the apparent universality of change. Youths and maidens grow old, but, it was found, there were always, there would always be, youths and maidens. Suns set only to rise again; the sun was the source of life and a thousand forms of sun worship are evidence how soon it was believed to be eternal. The wide distribution of cults of the rebirth of a god or of the earth, of





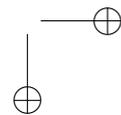
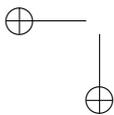
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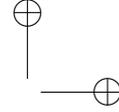
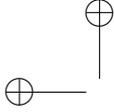
spring festivals of burgeoning and renewed fertility, are testimony to the early recognition that death and destruction are not ends but beginnings, seeds as well as fruits. Matter and all individual things, humanity very early found, may be mortal, but there is an eternity of forms, of type, of ideal goods.

*The splendors of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed but are extinguished not.*

Our generation has come peculiarly to need this species of consolation. For the characteristic spiritual insight – and discouragement – of our time has risen from the rediscovery, acute and self-conscious, of time in the order of nature and in the quality of our own consciousness. Time and all its implications have become so tragic as to be unbearable for many. Where these have commanded the intellectual equipment to make it possible, they have fled, in the dialectical imagination, to that realm of timelessness where there is no possible defeat by change. They have fled in the dialectical imagination, because, practically speaking, while one may flee one's country or one's family, from time, as from the self, there is no way of flight, save through the operations, subtle and delusive, of mind.

Until the twentieth century the urgency and the ultimacy of the temporal were less noticeable or inescapable. There was always possible the consoling reflection that if time was the finality in natural objects and human affections, that finality was always only apparent. In the world of mere appearances, time





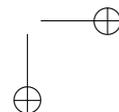
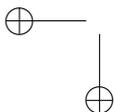
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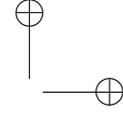
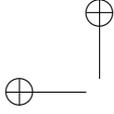
might seem to have the last word. But appearances were the mere devices of vulgar common sense, the mere veils beyond which a limited human vision or intelligence could not penetrate. The real world, which according to some, science, according to others, metaphysics, could reveal, was stable and changeless. It was as eternal as the formulas of mathematics, as substantial as Newtonian space. A materialist like Haeckel at the close of the nineteenth century, or a philosophical idealist like F. H. Bradley, could both rely upon the solidity of physics or of logic to assure them of stability in a changing world. And their readers could borrow comfort from them.

These kinds of comfort have been made suspect in the last quarter century. The billiard-ball physics of the nineteenth century, as everyone now knows (though not exactly how or why), has vanished, thanks to the quantum and relativity. The very stuff of nature has been found to be the character of time.

Even the large stable voluminousness of space has disappeared. Life like a dome of many-coloured glass seems these latter days to have obliterated rather than simply to have stained the white radiance of eternity. It is no good turning to physics any longer for stability, when lines of force and whirling vortices are the nearest to rockbottom it can offer.

Nor is there any longer so easy a reliance, even among intellectually subtle minds, on a dialectic that can prove by some neat tricks of formal demonstration that time contradicts the law of contradiction and that



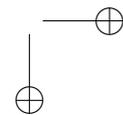
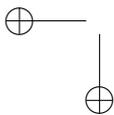


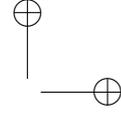
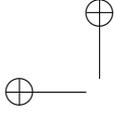
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the most elementary examination of the implication of change would show that change could not possibly be. It is a trick, used, one is not sure now how seriously, by Plato in the *Parmenides*. It is a device that is still used with great seriousness at Oxford today. But not very widely elsewhere. For the faith that by dialectic one can demonstrate one's way out of unpleasant actualities, that experience can be read out of court by formal logic, though it still has its appeal to the gifted playboys or the monastic professors of philosophy, has lost the persuasion it used to have for a wide cultivated public.

Change as an actuality, perhaps as an ultimate, has to be reckoned with. For not only has time come to be a first and final category in physics, but it has come to be the same in the analysis of experience by the psychologists and in its rendition by men of letters.

It would be difficult to lay one's finger on the beginning of the emphasis upon the flux that is experience and the stream that consciousness, when it examines itself, turns out to be. The origins of the mischief, if it be mischief, may be referred back indirectly to Darwin. It was he who brought into biology, hitherto the realm of the fixed and immutable, the notion – and the evidence – of origin and of mutation. But the more serious damage to traditional notions of the self and its world, came with the entrance of psychological conceptions into biology, and most acutely with William James. "The stream of consciousness!" James invented the phrase long before novelists exploited the

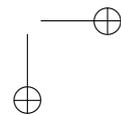
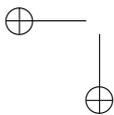


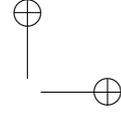
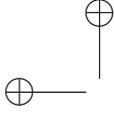


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principle. It was the revealing of the experience of the individual as a river, a flow, here muddier, here clearer, here, as Dewey was later to insist, precarious, here stable. Experience was not the atomic thing – the pun is almost inevitable – that Hume and Berkeley had cracked it up to be. It was a rushing torrent, “a big blooming buzzing confusion” – the phrase is again William James’s – in which all distinctions were secondary and all stabilities illusive. Reality, which had once been sought in a realm as far as possible from the taint of mutation, was now being discovered to lie, or more precisely, to move, in the ceaselessness of time. More than that, time itself, *real time*, as Bergson was to call it, must be distinguished from that post-mortem analysis of it which is measurable by the physicist with his pendulum. *Real time* was the time that one felt passing, the crowded intense apex of the present, the tensions, haunting and qualifying, of memory, the pregnant sense and burden of a future.

Reality was declared to be precisely what the imaginative person feels to be most real, the cutting edge of the passing instant, the obligato of the past, the insistent motif of a future, wished for, dreaded, imagined. Just as if the contemporary had not sufficient incitement of his own to turn inward and brood upon his own pulsebeat, he was given, as far back as Bergson’s early *Matter and Memory*, a respectable philosophical warrant for asserting his own awareness, his own tragic sense of life or more narrowly of time, as the metaphysical ultimate. Truth was no longer to be known



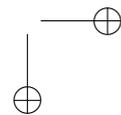
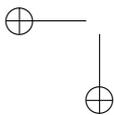


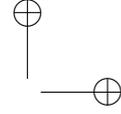
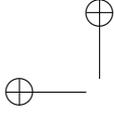
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by surveying it externally or analysing it intellectually, but by “bathing in the full stream of experience itself,” a stream whose vari-coloured surface did not obscure the fact that in its depths it was nothing but evanescent.

When David Hume long ago reduced the self to a dubious momentary impression, he had the healthy intent of releasing the mind from dogma, habit and superstition. The modern exponents of the stream of consciousness, of the reality of time, of pure experience, whatever may have been their objects, have had, upon those directly or indirectly influenced by them, consequences ranging from the pathetic to the tragic.

The imaginative mind of the cultivated but unphilosophical modern has found in these philosophies dominated by time, a warrant at once moral and metaphysical, for that not too cheerful sense of change he was having impressed upon him from more obvious quarters. It is difficult to imagine how acute were the awarenesses of alterations in the current environment in any previous generation. But there is some reason for thinking that no previous era could within the space of thirty years have had a spectacle so rapid and so patent, of transformation taking place before its eyes. The very looks and sound of the physical world have changed radically since the childhood of people less than forty. To be a boy of twelve shortly after the beginning of the century and a man in the forties in the nineteen-thirties is to have lived long enough to have seen the obvious remaking of a cosmos.

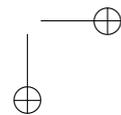
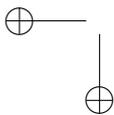


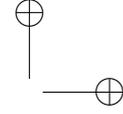
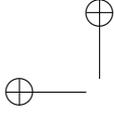


RETREAT TO PLATONISM

But it is not simply the obvious superficial changes, the automobile, the wireless, the aeroplane and the beginnings of television, that have given the contemporary an almost oppressive sense of acceleration and instability. It is the fact that since the beginning of the century, there has been an unprecedented acceleration in political, social and moral changes as well. Many of these, such as changes in moral standards and political institutions, are already clearly seen to have been long in process. The collapse of European monarchies and democracies, the Russian Revolution and the Italian dictatorship, the almost unbelievable shifting of standards in sexual relations, all these were not unprepared-for novelties. But the fact remains that to the young observer, who knows or remembers no previous history, and to the old observer, who cannot forget it, the panorama of change in our generation seems rapid almost to the point of miracle, and is so, certainly, to the point of bewilderment.

For turn where he will, the contemporary is assailed with flux. If he quits in dizziness of despair the field of politics and morals, to find solace, as refugees from reality previously have found it, in the high pure stillness of art, the same situation confronts him. The forms which he has been trained to look upon as beautiful, and in which he once could find rest are present no longer, or if present despised. Within a generation he has had to have a new kind of vision to enjoy or even to understand painting, and a new technique of reading to appreciate or even to follow novels and poetry

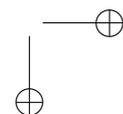
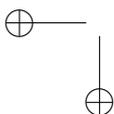


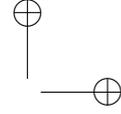
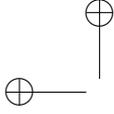


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that have deserted all the traditional patterns – in the latter instances almost to the point of abandoning the established traditions as to the meaning of words. Nor is it in the power of the contemporary to flee to the traditional refuge from a harassing and corruptible world, the realm of divine revelation. It is not simply that he can no longer believe the traditional dogmas. But the whole liberal interpretation of religion changes kaleidoscopically under his very gaze, while he is trying to make up his mind to find beyond the phantasmagoria of change, some divine clarity and peace. Every year, almost every week, he is asked to accept a new version of the meaning of some old truth or some old symbol. It is hardly possible to turn to the churches for peace, where the peace they offer is subject every season to revision.

Finally it has become impossible for the contemporary fed on the novels of Proust or Virginia Woolf or a dozen minor contemporaries, to retreat into himself, and find within his own soul a steadfast citadel. For his own soul, as he finds it recognizably mirrored in these works, completes the spectacle of universal flux. The metaphor, romantic enough under the old psychologies, of being the captain of one's soul, has become impossible now that personality itself seems to be more like a river than a ship. A present continually vanishing, a past never really recoverable save only, and then only partially, in art, a future that is the shifting fabric of as yet unrealized imagination – this is what experience becomes in the hands of a novel-





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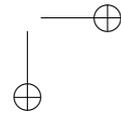
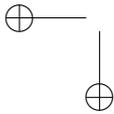
ist, like Proust bred on a Bergson, or a dozen others bred on one philosophy or another of the ultimacy of change.

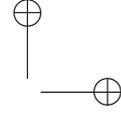
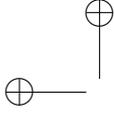
Where, indeed, novelists are now showing us the impermanency of our own souls, they are merely confirming the spectacle our society presents. They marshal evidence to render ridiculous the old reliances, the love that persists bravely where all else has fluttered into collapse, the devotions and loyalties to unshakable things in a shaking social order. The novelists leave us precious little reason for believing that there are any unshakable things, and there is among them an almost fantastic preoccupation with the theme of the transiency of devotions.

There are, as was pointed out in the first of these essays, doubtless any number of persons to whom this bewilderment is a stimulating excitement and to whom the sense of movement and the consciousness of change in the contemporary world are simply the rapidly to be eaten bread of life.

To the very young and to a civilization, like that of America, not very old, novelties quickly succeeding each other are not evils to be avoided but goods to be, though briefly, embraced.

One is not likely to cry very long because a love found only yesterday was lost only today. Nor is it probable that one will bewail the passing of traditions with which, however old they may be, one has only just become acquainted. There may be psychiatrists to point out that the racing from one short-lived object

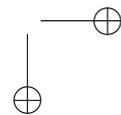
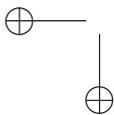


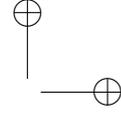
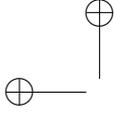


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of enthusiasm to another is itself the symptom of hysteria or at the very least of superficiality. There may be other critics of our civilization to insist that this rushing madly and gladly from idols successively not smashed but forgotten, is a symptom of a fundamental discontent. There is apparently nothing in current life on which the eye can long linger or the mind long contentedly dwell. If these indictments be true, those whom they involve will be too impatient to listen to them, knowing, among other things, that psychiatrists suffer from the same disease as their patients, and that they themselves will soon have another explanation of such love of change as actually does exist.

It is not the succession of novelties, as a matter of fact, so much as the promise of change itself that seduces many contemporaries and leaves them at ease, as it were, in a moving Zion. The discovery of change is tantamount to the discovery of freedom. It is, as William James was so fond, as John Dewey is still fond of reminding us, an unfinished world. There are unprecedented things always happening in it, and who knows what the future may hold of enlightenment and good for men. Fixities are removed not only in morals and politics, but in metaphysics itself. With the categorical imperative and the divine right of kings has vanished the fixed and static universe of traditional materialism and traditional metaphysics. The future is an open book in which – here lies the secret of the exhilaration – we can, within limits, write our own pages. Only the old, the lazy or the conservative will

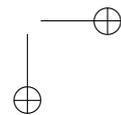
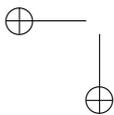


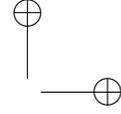
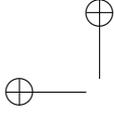


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wish to rest at fixed points, to languish in an ignoble sloth, calling it peace. It is not for nothing that a metaphysical faith in the possibilities of a delight in and a vindication of change, so frequently goes hand in hand with liberal and revolutionary movements. The left wing in politics is the expression of the left wing in metaphysics. The love of change and the opposition to all conservatism and fixities in civilization go naturally together. Nor is the logic of the delight in change unintelligible. There is a great relief in escaping from any regimentation in life, society or nature. For those of animal vitality and flexible imagination a universe in the making, in the case of H. G. Wells even a God in the making, are as genuine sources of exhilaration as any changeless Paradise was to the most ecstatic of mediaeval mystics.

It is not surprising, none the less, that there remain in our society numerous persons insusceptible either to the charm of novelty or the radiant promise implied in change. They are too unrelentingly realistic to find any solid satisfaction in a conception or a description or an experience of life that makes the quality of the present depend on memories that are all ready vanished and futures that do not, save in imagination, exist. They are too good Platonists to be satisfied with anything save those precise essences which they value and whose value lies for them only in the eternity of their form, not in the repeated and the certain deaths of their incarnations in time.

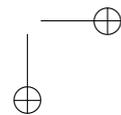
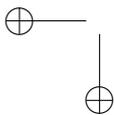


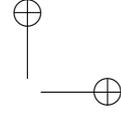
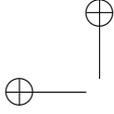


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The Platonist in our time has all the traditional as well as several specially contemporary prejudices against the temporal order. It were best, perhaps, to examine the traditional ones first. To the Platonist, now as in the past, there is no health in temporal things. He knows how quickly they become merely memories and how deceptive those memories quickly become. The experience of any individual is a dream continually shattered and continually vanishing. His prophetic imaginations are shipwrecked upon the rock of any actual present; his memories are the continually dissolving salvage of a past that is dead. He knows, as the Platonist has always known, that only the felt quality of any given object of past love or adoration or absorption can endure, that that form has never existed in the world of time, but has a bodiless eternity of being in the realm of essences or ideas. It may swim a moment into the focus of intuition or contemplation: it may for an instant or for a lifetime be incarnate in some animal form or be the object of some animal passion. But only that is eternal which has never existed; only that can be incorruptible which is too firm, too abstract, too eternal to be subject to time. To be born is to be on the road to dying. To exist is to be stamped with the mark of corruptibility and of doom. To be at all in the sphere of space and time is to be fated to extinction.

The Platonist has a second prejudice against all that is and all that changes. To the lover of beauty, or the Platonic lover of goodness and truth (simply



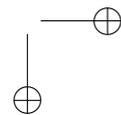
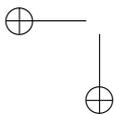


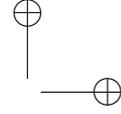
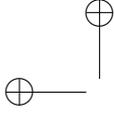
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moral and logical names for what aesthetically apprehended we call beautiful), form is necessarily set, fixed and timeless. Like a mathematical formula, like the relation of the notes in a chord, like the definition of a word, it is what it is, and must be so forever. A changing world is one of blurred outlines where nothing is stable, where nothing stable is discernible, and where nothing is definable, nothing understandable or lovable or beautiful or good. That Platonism originated in Greece is not surprising, since it is the love of form turned into a philosophy of it, the logic of art turned into the logic of reality.

By the same token it is not surprising that the habit of Platonizing or the nostalgia for doing so should occur to the aesthetically sensitive in, and the aesthetically offended by, our civilization. Plato might have looked about on the current world and found it, in his own picturesquely ugly metaphors, “like a leaking pot” or “a man with a running nose.” But even Athens in its decay could hardly show more loose ends and moral and political chaos than our own society. The neat mind, the poetically pure imagination, the classic temper – or the classicist temper – are all offended by a world brazenly intent upon novelty, and if not intent upon it none the less continually producing it and worshipping it – pro tem.

Nor is it only the feverishness of the succession but the miscellany, shabby and impotent, of much in contemporary literature, art, politics and life that offends the Platonist and the poet. He may recognize



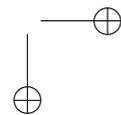
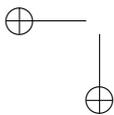


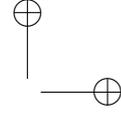
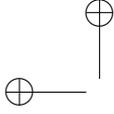
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vitality in the contemporary scene and its aesthetic reflections, but it is the vitality too often to his mind, of the hysterical, the ill or the underbred. In the soot and noise of a modern industrial town, he pines for a marble temple shining on a hill. In the confusion of a democratic, shifting, ragtag and bobtail of modern international mechanistic society, he wishes for the peace, the symmetry, the certainty of form of a Platonic Heaven.

The Platonist is indeed today what he always has been, an Epicurean hugging his selected immediate sensations and intuitions and trying to promote them to eternity. All we are ever given in experience, he reflects, is the sharp cutting edge of the present, and these successive presents always vanish into irrevocable pasts. Then surely he has the temptation, and in his own eyes the logical right, to save of each present what can never be lost, its eternal quality, its indestructible because purely timeless form.

It is upon this realm of essences that the Platonizing imagination in our time has come to brood. What is there is there forever, subject to no vicissitude of change, of history or prophecy. Shining and implacable, each essence is forever what it is. It may never have become incarnate in experience; it may already have vanished from it. But even the time-enslaved mind in a shifting society may behold eternities, and immortality may, for a brief span, be experienced even by mortal man. The great and half melancholy charm of Proust lies for many in that cold immortalization

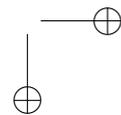
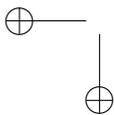


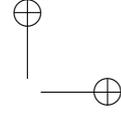
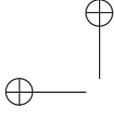


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that he confers upon those intuitions of past moments, that, so far as time and space are concerned, are gone forever. The appeal of a philosopher like Santayana (who has publicly expressed his great admiration for Proust) lies in that realm, still and limpid, of Platonic contemplation in which he rests just, eloquent and serene, alone almost in the restlessness, noise and fever of modernity. It is the appeal of neo-Scholastics in France and elsewhere who invite the modern bred on confusion to a tidy world of fixed and traditional logical forms.

The ancient Platonist knew fairly definitely, however, what forms and essences constituted the Heaven of Ideas. They were varieties of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, or ultimately refractions of the central shining sun of the Idea of the Good. But contemporary Platonism has escaped from even such a noble narrowness in eternity. The realm of essences for the modern Platonist is the realm of all, of infinite, possibility. Not only all that has ever been incarnate or apprehended, but all that may be conceived or imagined has inhabited, will inhabit, eternally inhabits, this timeless domain. This constitutes its glory, its beauty, and, what is from the point of view of these studies in contemporary salvation most important, its consolation. What matter those vicissitudes and transformations which trouble those spirits intent upon the enterprises at once precarious and futile of this confused and hasty age? There is a blessed infinity of possibilities residing still untouched and unspoilt and perhaps never to be

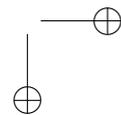
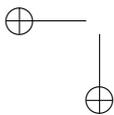


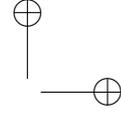
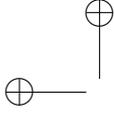


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realized in that calm expanse of the infinitely possible. Here the imagination can travel widely and serenely, for nothing can ever happen in those Elysian fields beyond events. What does it matter how limited and mean appear the changes and chances of the actual present to those who always have recourse to the infinite that mind can explore or poetry imagine? Here there is neither success nor failure, disappointment nor surprise, only a still unravished field of intuition. This mess of contemporaneity, so soiled, so fluttering and vain, is but one of the incarnations, poor and infinitesimal, of those innumerable worlds which might just as well have been realized had the order of nature, the structure of man, the course of history been a little different. Here is at once Nirvana and fulfilment. Here by one device one can attain emancipation and peace. The emancipation is from a slavish submission to things as they happen to be. The peace is that of absorption in forms, lovely, strange or terrible, but immutably and aseptically what they are. Contemporary Platonism yields at once the joy of sight and the resignation of insight. In the realm of essence, the mystic and aesthete are one.

It may indeed be said that this new Platonism is a new and austere kind of aestheticism. Stoicism and Epicureanism become one. Its psychotherapeutic value lies first in that it is, or gives the appearance of being, a complete escape from time. To it a thousand years or a single day are one, and one of the chief stings of contemporaneity, that it is contemporary, vanishes.





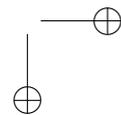
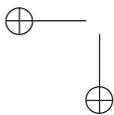
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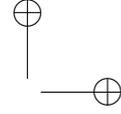
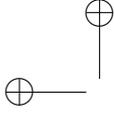
One exists here and now, but the Heaven of Ideas is one's home. The new Platonist lives in the intuition of an essence, or a form; whether it exist or be merely imagined makes no difference. Life becomes for him a listening to an eternal music. His listening may be disturbed by the tawdry noises of the world about him, but he knows the music is always there to be heard or to be played. And while he is listening, he is one with that melodious eternity, and completely oblivious of the discords of the present, the sadness of the past or the ominousness of the future. Life is like a perfect chord perfectly sustained and accurately heard.

It is not quite an accident that the favourite art of many modern Platonists is music, that their favourite composer is Bach, and favoured among his compositions his fugues. Music may still be for many a sweet and nervous outlet for romantic emotions. For these intellectual few it is mathematics become visible, the serenity of a logic overheard. We may be the witnesses of the twilight of a civilization, but here it no *götterdämmerung*, only the clear and calm language of the gods, engraved for everlasting.

Among these half proud, half melancholy Olympians even the pleasures of the senses and the enjoyments of society are valued as instances of immortal essences, as lyric moments in mortal time.

There is about all this a high and pure enjoyment, an Epicureanism singularly fastidious and clean. But there is about it also a Stoicism, not unmingled with irony and pity. Even the best of worlds or the happiest



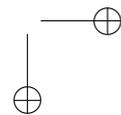
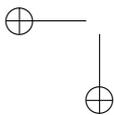


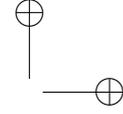
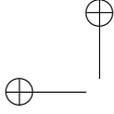
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of lives must vanish, and we are not living in the best of worlds or leading the happiest of lives. But by giving up the love of the actual, always crass, slavish and compromising, and always bound to be disappointing, we become free men, sure at least of a quietistic happiness, and insured against any possible frustration, "loving too much to be ever imprisoned, understanding too much to be ever in love."

Our standpoint is not that of now or even of ourselves, but that of eternity. It is quality, not duration, the essence and not the accidental power or even existence of things by which we are impressed. The present is loved only for what, disappointedly beheld, it reveals, the past for such memorial forms as we may now behold in it, the future for such patterns as it suggests to this given moment of vision. Whether we live briefly or at length, we may live as if we were living forever. And though we are hemmed into this narrow nook of time, we can see with the eyes of all those who in any age saw beyond it, sharing eternity with those who have anywhere or in any century shared it. We are one with Buddha, Plato, Dante, Emerson and Shelley.

Next to this lofty abdication of the actual, there seems, especially to the Platonist, a vulgarity about those preoccupied with the present order of things (which, however urgent and tangible its claims, is necessarily evanescent) and with a future which in its turn, too, must be a present and doubtless a disappointing one. Science and the Machine, Progress, Evolution,





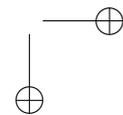
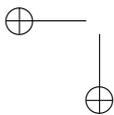
RETREAT TO PLATONISM

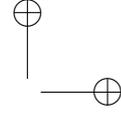
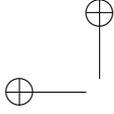
Nature – they are all grand enterprises or grand words, but they are nothing to the realm of infinity, and will vanish to nothing in the realm of eternity.

Half of this flight is the flight of the aesthetic, half of it that of the ascetic. Schopenhauer long ago found in the still Palace of Art a salvation, though a temporary one, from the restless claims of the will. And Art meant for him, too, a realm of eternal forms. It is enough, and, it would appear, true enough, to suggest that the sources of this flight lie where they have always lain in such enterprises, in a discontent with and a contempt for the actual. It is sweet to dream of possible, impossible and indestructible worlds, when the present one is a nightmare, as awful as it is temporary.

It is also easy enough and possibly equally true to suggest that the escape is a Pickwickian one. At least the actual remains actual and still importunate, the future with its tantalizing possibilities and hopes and threats lies as insistently there as ever, the past is not simply a vision to be held but a heritage to be reckoned with, utilized, and modified, but inexorably there.

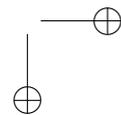
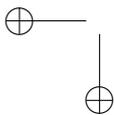
There is hardly any fear that Platonism will become a very widespread philosophy or practice. It demands too great sensitiveness and too great disinterestedness to become a very popular mystery religion, though Christian Science and Mind Cure are ragged versions of it. Its sole danger is that it will delude its own votaries. As long as it is realized that the intuitions of eternal things are the subtle preoccupations

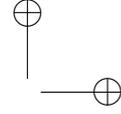
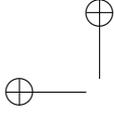




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of an animal and mortal creature in an actual and changing world, the preoccupation has its own austere recompenses and justifications. It is releasing to dwell on that realm of possibility which the mind may ingeniously discover or the imagination glamorously invent. But these possibilities are purely speculative and metaphysical. They do not affect, the Platonist would be first to admit it, the course of the actual, though their contemplation may take away its sting. It is emancipating in a society given over to romanticism and subjectivism to have a philosophy arise once more that asks to behold things not with reference to ourselves or to the future but under the perspective of eternity. But the contemplation and the release have a human origin and a social condition. It may be well to withdraw and see things, however anguished, tempting or exciting, as mere examples of eternity. But that withdrawal is a withdrawal and a momentary soliloquy. The skylark, however high it flies, however heavenly its song, has a mortal body from which its song arises and an earthly home to which it may and must return. Its song occurs, moreover, always in a present moment of time. The Platonist sings of his essences, bodiless, gleaming and eternal, here in the third decade of the twentieth century, and Western civilization as it now is, is his home. He may fly from it, as others have fled in imagination from other civilizations. That flight may constitute his own self-hypnotic salvation. But it will not save many, and if ability to face the actual is a part of salvation, it leaves the Platonist himself unsaved.



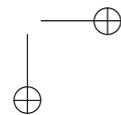
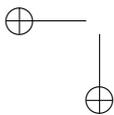


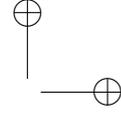
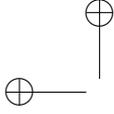
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The safest refuge from the present is the past. It is a harbour to which men must have resorted almost as near to the beginning of things as yesterdays could be remembered or vanished glories longed for or imagined. Memory is an artist both tantalizing and unconscious. It omits the pains it would hurt too much to recover, while it breeds at once a longing for the idealized pictures it reproduces and a regret that such a poetically contrived past no longer exists. The Golden Age is one of the oldest themes in literature; it is half a faith, half a memory. It is put back vaguely somewhere toward the beginning of history, the fabled recollection of the race.

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven!*

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that in essence the turning back nostalgically to the past is simply another name for Platonism and another expression of it. For the past toward which one escapes is a Platonic hypostasis, the purified and shining intuition of

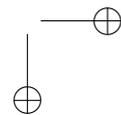
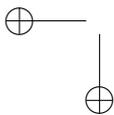


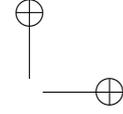
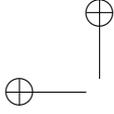


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an age, a “light that never was on land or sea,” the consecration and the poet’s dream. It is myth using the language of history, the imagination trying to give its fantasies the glamour and authority of once having been. It is some such process that the Greeks were indulging in when they imagined heroes and then imagined the ancestors of heroes to be gods. Something like the same motives and mechanism were at work when the romantic neo-classicists of the eighteenth century, Winckelmann and Goethe among others, discovered – or contrived – the white serenity of Greece, where words were always pure, voices always eloquent, where gestures were regularly magnificent and thoughts were forever in the grand manner and on noble themes. The same activity of memory, no less distorting than creative, makes us in our turn sigh for the imagined simplicity, rationality and urbanity of the eighteenth century, a world composed exclusively of the mind of Voltaire, the music of Mozart and the *fêtes champêtres* of Watteau. We are doing the same thing when we turn, homesick, to a stained-glass Gothic North, lingering among campanile sounding eternal vespers upon a cloistered and aureoled day.

That the retreat to and the nostalgia for the past is especially acute in this generation is not surprising. The present has, of course, the defects of any present. It is near, it is contemptible, it is familiar. Its difficulties are our difficulties, and its pains and parturitions, always too much with us, are our own. Each of us finds himself saying at some time what Wordsworth





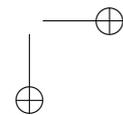
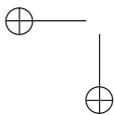
NOSTALGIA FOR TRADITION

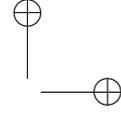
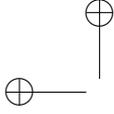
found himself saying in that eighteenth century which has of late become with us a sentimental haven.

*Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.*

Proteus does not rise from the sea any more now than he did in Wordsworth's day. And even less than Wordsworth do we hear stern Duty, daughter of the voice of God, or that cosmic rustle of goodness in stones and brooks, a present that disturbs us with the sense of elevated thoughts, all of which managed to console that poet for the absence of pagan deities. The present seems to many living in it, and culturally acquainted with the past, to be bleaker than it has ever been before in the history of mankind.

It is the brutal inescapability of the present that now, as in the past, haunts the contemporary. Those who flee from it are repeating the history of any group in any generation that has looked to some lost, or to some revived, Paradise, to escape from its crooked generation. Adam before the Fall, the angels before they fell, the Israelites before they went whoring in the eyes of their prophets after strange gods, the Athenians before their minds were corrupted and their manners made effeminate by philosophy, the Romans before they had, in the eyes of their satirists, lost the sterner

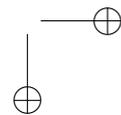
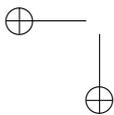


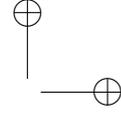
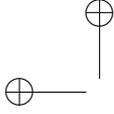


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virtues – history is filled with such harkings back to, and cryings for, some lost felicity.

But the dislike of the present and the retreat to the past in this epoch have several novel features that deserve attention and demand explanation. We are, in the first place, going through the growing pains of industrialism and of a civilization whose basic materials and conditions are exploited by scientific method. Meanwhile, as Whitehead and a dozen others have pointed out, the whole range of our sentimental, religious and literary associations (perhaps all best assumed under the epithet sentimental) are with a world neither democratic, mechanical, industrial nor international. Everything that the eye and the imagination in the Western World has been from childhood trained to regard, has come habitually to regard, as beautiful or worshipful or convincing, in other words, the whole tradition of art, religion and thought, has its roots in a civilization different, unutterably and irrevocably, from that in which, willynilly, we find ourselves. The Parthenon at Athens, the Riccardi Chapel at Florence, the cathedral at Salisbury or at Chartres, came from a civilization and expressed a spirit that has simply nothing to do with that in which we now live and move and have our discontented being. We can put a Gothic church on Fifth Avenue, but by so doing we retrieve the faked shell, not the authentic substance of a vanished epoch. We can go to Europe and walk meditatively in dim religious light, but what we there love and what there moves us has precious little relation

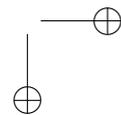
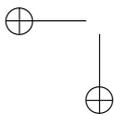


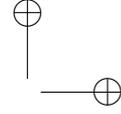
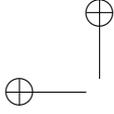


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with the conditions that make the ship that brought us to once sacred and still exalting edifices, just as those edifices are remote in spirit and in structure from the steel citadels in which we live when we are at home. Yet the fact remains that we do love the ancient thing and the spirit that it incarnates, so far from and so foreign to our own. The fact that it is far and foreign, in date as well as place, makes us not only love it for itself but makes it a canon by which we measure the artistic poverty and spiritual impotence of our own age. We cannot see the skyscrapers for the spires. What is true of architecture holds true, though perhaps to a lesser degree, of music, painting and the literary arts. The classics on which our eyes rest and on which our imaginations have been nourished are the indigenous products of a culture that, by any canon of living, is dead.

In the same way our emotions (whose objects are more largely a matter of literary training than we like to admit), from the intimate to the cosmic, have their sources in a dead or a dying past. Even the quality of love, which, romantically, we like to think of as being acutely our own, is, as we know it, largely the deposit of a romantic tradition. And that love of God, which under the stained glass of Chartres we feel surging anew in our sceptical hearts, that, too, is in most of its analysable constituents an inheritance from St. Augustine in the fourth century in Africa and Rome, and from St. Paul in the first century in Palestine and Syria and Greece.

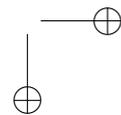
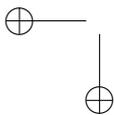


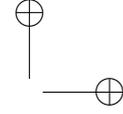
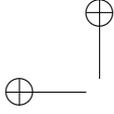


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Our loves are bound up with a past that makes the present seem (by virtue of the fact that we are thus inhibited from living it) even more bleak and unlovely than it might otherwise be found to be. It is no use telling us that we ought to glory in the machine, find a zest in the laboratory and in industry and exult in a godless world, if our hearts by virtue of early training are elsewhere. When indeed we consider the things by which we are still most immediately moved and to which we can give our spontaneous devotions, we become uneasy. There seem a thousand dangers that the dignity, integrity and the graciousness of a whole European civilization are threatened with extinction by those very forces which have made the society, the mores and the instruments by which we live our daily lives. The imagination of many, indeed of most people, is early chiselled into traditional patterns. Small wonder, then, that when, in addition, natural timidities and traditional romanticism operate, these should fly, as their prototypes in all generations have fled, to a Platonic version of the grace of a day that is gone, of those urbanities, graces and profundities that seem to have vanished from the modern scene.

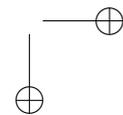
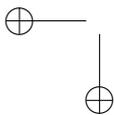
There are special reasons, however, why the scene is more distasteful to its current denizens than any scene has been in the past (though no one could hate the world he lived in more than Swift did, or disdain it more than did Lucian or Lucretius). For the nostalgia for the past manifested widely is more than an envy of the kind of world our forefathers are alleged

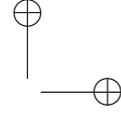
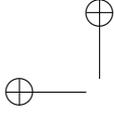




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or imagined to have had. It is a hunger for the dicta, incitements and supports which they apparently had and which we patently have not. It is not the past as a picture, but the past as a continuing force, authority and vivification that innumerable contemporaries are after. They seek not simply the atmosphere of the anachronistic – though they dearly love that – but the teaching and compulsions of the past as well. For the fact is, turn in whatever direction, examine whatever field one will, we are a rootless, a colourless and a sanctionless generation. It is particularly the absence of roots and sanctions by which the homesick are troubled. They hope, however questionable be their hope, to restore these by revival, by the resurrection of traditions, moribund or forgotten, of a nation, a class, an art or a creed. By the restoration of an ancient kingdom or sovereignty, by the reinstatement of some once dominant social group such as the English Public School type, by the restoring of at least the motions of some vanished handicraft or some lapsed aesthetic tradition, by taking the vows or the words of some religion now ancient and outmoded and to all intents defeated, they hope to save us and themselves. Thus, whether it be in the form of pottering handiwork, pompous Anglo-Catholicism, British Imperialism, fanatic nationalism, or neo-Mozartianism in music, the essence of the phenomenon remains the same. We are treated to the odd spectacle of the past itself become a religion, a mystery of salvation. As was the case in the relation of the immediate apostles to Jesus, a



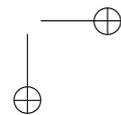
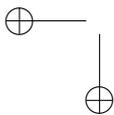


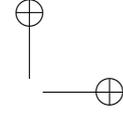
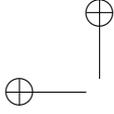
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memory has become a faith; a recollection, even if only a literary one, constitutes a salvation.

Perhaps, as has already been said, the most striking provocation to a retreat to the past is the absence of sanctions, authorities and traditional teachings or compulsions in the present. It is not necessary to embroider on the theme (already admirably canvassed, among others, by Walter Lippmann in his *Preface to Morals*) of the uneasiness of freedom. St. Paul could cry that where there was Christ there was liberty, but liberty becomes a wide and restless burden where there is no Way to follow. "There are many kinds of voices in the world and none is without signification." But the desolating fact is that all are without either compulsion or even persuasion. It requires a degree of maturity not common among the emancipated of any age to find moral sanctions within themselves or within their own society. They know too well and can too well see through both. They feel the need and the absence of something resembling a kind but clear elder brother, the precepts stern but unmistakable, of a father. They weary of having to ask and they clamour to be told.

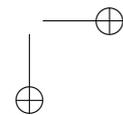
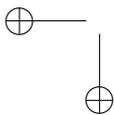
Now ordinarily where there is a discussion of the absence of sanctions, authorities and traditions, reference is made to the lapse of religious canons and moral standards. We are reminded (as if we needed to be) that the Ten Commandments no longer are compelling for even those who choose to observe them, that the idea of a Scripture has become a matter of archaeological curiosity rather than religious awe, and

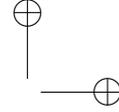
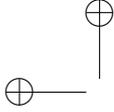




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that what oppresses is not the weight of eternity but the emptiness and transiency of any contemporary moral judgments. There is neither marriage nor giving in marriage without reservation, and such terms once hallowed and genuinely awful as purity and obedience have lost their meaning as well as their finality. All this needs no demonstration to anyone who has watched not only the words but the behaviour of young contemporaries and many no longer young. The subtler and ultimately more unsettling fact is that religion and morals are not the only realms where sanctions have failed. Only yesterday it seems, a yesterday, however, already as remote as pre-history, it was possible for the liberated to appeal breathlessly to Science. That capitalized and impersonal God whose thousand altars were in the laboratory and whose prophets went by the name of chemists, biologists, and physicists, like the Lord, spoke. Science said, or was alleged to say, not only how things were, but by implication, what under the discoverable circumstances it was sensible or expedient to do. If Science did not say specifically, a little more inquiry, a little more discovery and the tablets of rational conduct could be found. But Science, too, has lost its majesty along with its capitalization. It is not the revelation of a mystery but the summary name of a certain kind of procedure. Scientific method, as was observed as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century, can tell us at best simply what occurs. It has not, nor does it pretend to, any commandments. It can simply specify that under given conditions certain



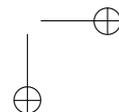
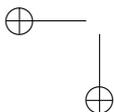


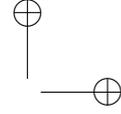
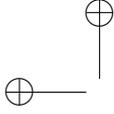
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consequences occur. It can discover the formula for a poison gas but can give no categorical imperative concerning the ends for which it is to be used. The attempt to erect a Moral Science, analogous to, if not dependent upon, Physical Science, has had much less success than it has had discussion.

It remained however a common and a popular assumption until very recently that at least the frame of things, the furniture of Heaven and Earth had been revealed by Science, that the outlines of the structure had been fixed by Newton, Kepler, Galileo, and that all that remained was for the details of the picture to be filled in.

For most people Newtonian science and the astronomy of Copernicus were no less compulsive, and on no more rational grounds, than the universe of Ptolemy and Dante were to an unlettered mediaeval. Gradually the whole universe seemed to be coming under the mechanistic formulas. From the stars to the atom, from dust to man, from vegetation to the most ethereal flights of the human imagination, all appeared to be coming under the sway of universal mathematico-physical law. Those on the inside always knew better, and symptoms of the beginning of the end were apparent late in the nineteenth century. That mechanistic biology and materialistic physics which the cultivated layman was beginning to regard as the last word in truth were revealed to be "truths" both vague and self-contradictory. Within the field of biology itself, the mechanistic hypothesis was being subjected to serious



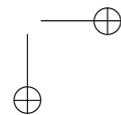
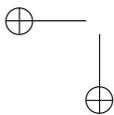


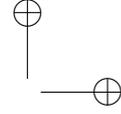
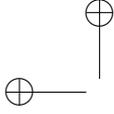
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doubt and scrutiny. Phrases like the “pattern of the environment” were beginning to appear in scientific journals, and the mysteries of apparently purposive behaviour in animals, plants and crystalline formations were being observed. As for the simple billiard-ball physics of nineteenth century materialism, by the beginning of the twentieth century, few scientists were taking it seriously. Now, as everyone knows, no one does. The theory of quantum and relativity have given the *coup de grâce* to the whole structure of Newtonian physics. But long before Einstein, from quite different quarters, those of the logicians and metaphysicians, the cogency and clarity, even the meaning of the system of physics as a vision of truth had been called into question.

Nor is it simply in its larger aspects, in the fundamental metaphysics underlying scientific inquiry that Science has become self-critical and revolutionary. Not only are statistics of operation substituted for universal law, but on matters of fact, such as the actual or observable constituents and movements of the stars, there are quarrels among scientists and what is more to the point, news of those quarrels reach the public ear! Whirl is truly king when dizziness has passed from moral speculation and practice to the very conceptions current of the order of nature itself.

It had been for a time possible to suppose that if there were no longer any sanctions as to what was to be done, at least there were discoverable and simple ultimates as to what things were like. The common

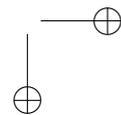
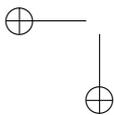


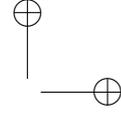
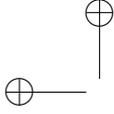


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enlightened citizen was relatively certain what the essentially simple character, however complex its details, of the physical order of the universe was. Thereon he based the kind of Epicureanism that always, however refined, follows upon such a conception, and considered it to be the beginning, possibly the end, of wisdom. That Epicureanism, "not the fruit of experience but experience itself," has been found to be a less than certain guarantee of happiness. Secondly that allegedly so solid system upon which it is based has been with revolutionary rapidity read out of court. There is almost a symbol of our age in the fact that, by common though uninformed consent, Einstein knows more than any living man what the nature of the universe is like. Yet almost no one has the temerity to pretend to understand his reasoning, nor are his mathematical conclusions, upsetting though they be to the old physics, generally regarded as having much or anything to do with the new morals. That science which had in the last three centuries at least in theory considerable to do with the upsetting of traditional sanctions in religion and morals, has become too mysteriously complicated and indecisive to offer anything resembling sanctions to the contemporary.

A certain irony indeed lies in the fact that sanctions and supports have vanished not because of changes in scientific theory but because of changes in the social, industrial and economic situation. We are indeed sanctionless because we are rootless. More important in this connection than the destruction of old theo-



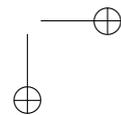
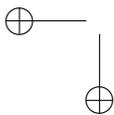


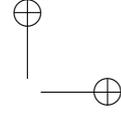
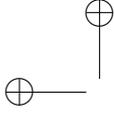
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ries or the rise of new ones, is the vanishing of those channels of life which nourished old and fixed habits. The old code of morals may have been closely associated with the older religious traditions, but both were sustained by the closely knit agricultural society with its long standing fixed feudal, monarchical and family institutions. Much more important than Darwin and nineteenth century physics, were nineteenth century industrial changes in destroying the authority of God and traditional morals.

The suburban subdivision, the bungalow and the five-room flat did more to deracinate the modern world than any amount of intellectual discussion. Evil communications, it was said of old, corrupt good manners. Ease of communications has loosened old morals, faster than any rationalist critic of religion or morals could have dreamed. In a profound sense, morals are a family matter, much more than a church, a doctrinal or a governmental one. Authority has ceased to exist for an essentially homeless generation.

That homelessness is sensed in something more than a lack of authoritative direction. In those catalogues of human instincts that used a decade ago to be the fashion in psychology, the homing instinct was not included. It probably does not exist. Yet a sense of ease in a place and in a tradition that one knows and cherishes is a comfort that most moderns, especially Americans, cannot possibly know. There is for them no spot that is above all other places in the universe home, such as the French peasant or the English squire

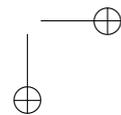
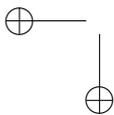


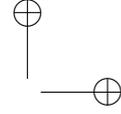
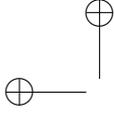


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still knows. Life has become too movable to permit of those long accumulations of sentiment and tradition about a place, a household, or a city. In America, especially, places and cities have become interchangeable. There may be sections of the country, such as parts of the South, where there still persists the flavour, rapidly vanishing, of a world old, mellowed and intimate. But these constitute the sad vanishing exceptions rather than the sadder and more familiar rule. And what Europeans principally protest against in the Americanization of European life is that such colourless, rootless standardization, the distinguishing mark of American life, is rapidly becoming that of the Old World too.

Religion, in its neglected literal sense of something binding, has passed even more profoundly and completely than old theories of the nature of God or the familiar rituals of His Service. Those more intimate and perhaps ultimately more serious forms of religion – filial devotion, attachment to persons, places and customs – have disappeared or are rapidly disappearing. The contemporary feels himself a waif and a wanderer. There is nowhere that he can call home, or if there is a place that he can call his very own, he knows, especially if he is an American, that it is not the same place or the same kind of place that his ancestors knew. Everything that exists and that is done around and by him has the subtly special bleakness, the unimaginative crudeness, of the very new. What else is the pathetic annual migration or the perpetual exile of Americans in Europe but a desire, fumbling

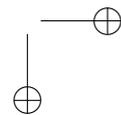
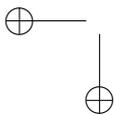


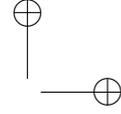
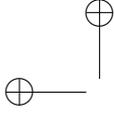


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and unsuccessful enough, to be among storied stones and mellowed habits? What else, where it is not pure snobbishness or artiness, is the antiquarian search for early American furniture, or the exaltation of America's Golden Age but a retreat from the blankness of the present, the attempt to discern some point of memory or attachment, to find one's nourishing roots in a warm and moving past? One must, if necessary, create a tradition, as is time and again attempted on a college campus. Or one must fly to a tradition, as Americans do when they go to live in Oxford or in Rome, aping the traditional manners of the one, wallowing in the antiquity of the other. It is humiliating as well as upsetting to be a foundling in a new found world.

But in addition to the pain of rootlessness, there is the aesthetic insufficiency of the present, the lack of colour and variety in a civilization which, in so far as it is strictly contemporary, is the same in Budapest or San Francisco. That is the protest of the aesthete, the sentimental or the morally imaginative, in an epoch of increasing uniformity. The mind travels back to ages, not long past, when every country, even every province had its own language, manners, dishes, customs, dress, accent and even ideas. These persist still in curiosities of idiom or costume like the Basque béret, worn also by visiting tourists, and the Scotch kilt affected, not a little ridiculously, by visiting Englishmen on summer shootings on the moors. They linger, however, as affectations or anachronisms; even in their native



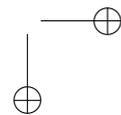
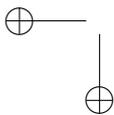


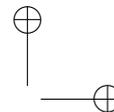
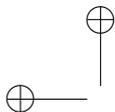
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regions, they live at best as dying parts of life. In their place are fast coming the country-wide, often continent-wide, sometimes world-wide uniformities of wireless, of journalism, of food, of shelter, of all the physical equipment and even fundamental attitudes toward life. The ordinary citizen of the provinces in France or in Sweden is not in essence different nor is his manner of life essentially distinguishable from that of a Babbitt on the prairies or a John Bull in the Home Counties. From this all-deadening and desolate stamp and routine of modern society one can flee, or imagine that one has fled, to Tahiti – or to the past.

A literal flight to the past is, of course, impossible. Only by means of H. G. Wells' fantastic time machine would a factual escape be possible. And the time machine was a figment in a romance. But equally romantic is the device of bringing the past to us rather than attempting the impossible feat of going to it. These escapes take the form of various kinds of revivals and the hopes that these revivals may become endemic. The devotees of these various cultural, national, religious and aesthetic resurrections hope in each case, that by their particular revival, their particular group may find those roots, colours and sanctions now missing from the modern world.

The most serious, because in some ways the most dangerous, illustrations of this retreat to the past are perhaps the strong nationalistic movements that sprang up all over Europe before, and became intensified during and after, the World War. In some cases,



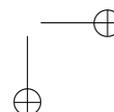
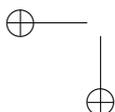


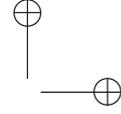
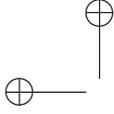
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as in the case of the Irish, it was glamorously mixed up with a poetic resuscitation of ancient literary traditions. Not only was Ireland to be free but Gaelic literature and the Gaelic language were to be restored, and with these the fine faery wit and poetry of the Irish people. On an even larger scale, competent observers assure us, the movement toward Indian freedom is mystically involved with the whole Eastern way of life. It is not simply political India against political Britain but the ways of Gandhi and the mystical East against the brutal mechanism and materialism and materialistic ideals of the western way of life. In one way or another, each of these nationalisms – however bellicose its expressions or, as in the case of Italy or Poland, bloody its eventual consequences – has a nostalgic poetry at its heart.

No one indeed who has lived familiarly in France, Germany or England can fail to sense the seduction of an intensification of a national character and ideal. Chauvinistic German nationalists may talk a deal of nonsense, melodramatic and perilous, about *rein deutsches Blut* and *rein deutsche Kultur*. But the qualities, homely, lyric and lovable, of that Germany which had its voice in Goethe and Schiller are still felt by the visitor to Weimar, and the Germany of romantic nineteenth century philosophy and literature and song, is one of the traditions precious, dying, and defensive, of current Western civilization.

In the same way, whatever one may think or fear from a France whose political nationalism leads to

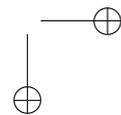
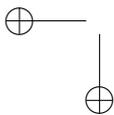


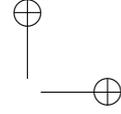
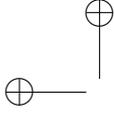


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strange and perturbing military escapades and alliances, one can sympathize, too, with the poetry and justice of that French nationalism which seeks to preserve in contemporary France something of the quality of thought and feeling that are its inheritance from the *grand siècle*. No one, however realistic his outlook and futuristic his interests, would care to see vanish the indigenous character of that peculiar French life revealed in its food, books and institutions, which is the still living incarnation of a tradition compounded of sensibility, delicacy and reason.

By the same token, too, one cannot but feel the persuasion of the Zionist ideal and the symptom it is. For the ideal transcends the politics of the British mandate, or the Arabs' claims to justice. Like any other noble cause, its practice may have less than noble consequences. It is important, for the moment, to see what that ideal appears to itself to be. It is an attempt on the part of imaginative Jews, tenacious of their own traditions, and lost in the mediocre miscellany of modernity, to give their tradition its once local habitation, and to find for the living present authority in the still living prophetic tradition and in a ritual mellowed as well as hallowed by traditions. It is a striking fact that among the supporters of Zionism are some of the most intellectual Jews. These combine, with other moderns, a scepticism of current goods with a sense that life may be ennobled and beautified by a recapture of the qualities of that rich tradition which is the heritage of any group, and which, in the pressure



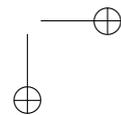
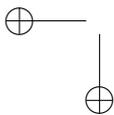


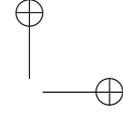
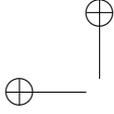
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of the universal forces of modernity, comes to be pallid, crushed or forgotten.

It may well be argued in each of these instances that the revival of national or racial ideals is the revival of narrownesses doomed to “outward fightings and inward fears.” It may truly be protested that these nationalisms cannot be counted upon to remain in the realm of pure spirit, where each may bloom and suffer others to bloom. It may be insisted that these in varying degrees belligerent nationalisms, are contrary to the major forces afoot in the present order of society, and their rivalries and bitternesses with respect to each other, may involve our whole society in destruction. It may finally be said, and perhaps in instances proved, that these nationalisms are used by unscrupulous individuals or classes for their own questionable ends.

Here we are concerned, however, not with studies in politics but with studies in salvation. And whether they be Germanism or Gallicism or Irishism or Zionism, whether the instruments emphasized be the recovery of a homeland or the revival or the cultivation, as among the Flemish or the Welsh, of a homely and cherished language, the ideal and the hope involved are the same. To the ardent individual supporter of such a cause, there is salvation in attaching oneself to one’s roots and blooming as the natural unforced flower of one’s own tradition. The language that the Flemish have fought for in Belgium almost to the point of civil war may be negligible or horrible to

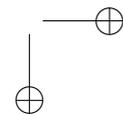
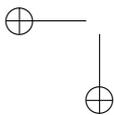


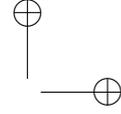
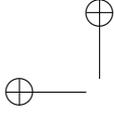


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an outsider, but it gives to the Flemish a poetry and personality that they could never find in some harmless and efficient esperanto. The Zionist, returned from a vain invokement in the flat and universal rationalism of modernity, sees in the symbols, ornaments and ethical frame of life of his fathers a way to colour, to roots and to an authority that are to him at once an incitement and security. From a society out of which all that had quality, character, force and association has departed, he turns to live imaginatively in a spirit and tradition that once clearly had an authentic life and may again give it to those who will mystically participate in the heritage. One may scold the Flemish and the Welsh, the Irish and the Jews, the Fascisti and the French. One may see not a new earth but a new bedlam as the fruit of these fannings into flame of racial and national traditions and obduracies. But if one is to understand the contemporary human heart, one must understand, too, the reality of this variety of thirst for salvation and the belief that it may come to the individual through a participation in and reenactment of the funded recollections of his race or nation or class. Thus even where monarchism is apparently completely a lost cause as in France, it means more than a political form, it means *noblesse oblige*, it means the service of *la patrie* through the exalting inspiration of *le roi*.

But the retreat to the past has other than purely nationalistic and racial forms. There are no small number, of whom William Morris in the nineteenth century was an early and picturesque illustration, who

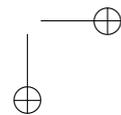
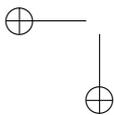


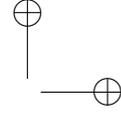
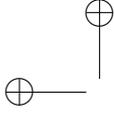


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seek refreshment for the jaded and cramped spirit of man under modernity, in a revival of forms of industry and physical living now anachronistic and increasingly impossible. It is the machine that has enslaved us, we are told, and the mechanization of life that is at the root of our emptinesses and despairs. The contemporary is a hand in an impersonal factory rather than a craftsman in his intimate workshop. He is a routine consumer of regimentally produced mechanical goods. He is not a farmer eating and wearing those individual household products he has seen from their origin as raw materials to their completion under the hands of his own family in his own household. His amusements are not those of the interested participants in a village miracle play, but of the grey and passive international cinema spectator receiving the same standardized entertainment all over the world. He is machine fed, sheltered and amused. His work is meaningless and his leisure trivial. His soul itself has become a machine.

The indictment is familiar and so, too, is the offered solution. Here and there is proposed, here and there is put into practice, a feeble protest of a local handicraft to bring the Middle Ages back into modern times. We are to pretend that the Industrial Revolution has never occurred and to act as if it were possible to feed and clothe the teeming millions of modern urban civilization by the products of a few shops of arts and crafts. The intention is clear enough. Work is once more to have its own signature, and the mechanical anonymity of factory production is to pass away. The

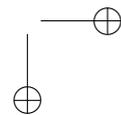
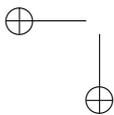


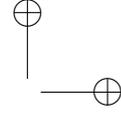
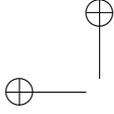


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worker is once more to be an artist and the consumer once more a critic. The canons for industry are to be the standards, the enthusiasms and the skills involved in such arts as fine printing or the making of fine glass.

Nor does it suffice as answer to protest that these are little eddies and backwashes, protests as impotent as they are imaginative against the overpowering urbanization of life. For we are then informed that urban life itself is an obsession, widespread to be sure, but not therefore any the more in the eternal nature of things. So that there are now springing up, not least among intellectuals whose nerves and patience have been shattered by cities, a movement, not novel in the history of the West, towards simplification and rustication of life. The Megalopolis of noise, towers, mechanism and anonymity is to be deserted for the intimate toil, the first hard and self-contained realities of the farm household. We are, as in the ancient fable, to grow strong again by touching the earth. The factory chimney, the cliff-like apartments, the words and paper economy of cities are to be deserted, within a generation the deserted cities themselves to become the reminders of a century that killed itself in the worship of those monstrous instruments to which it had become a slave. Here and there one reads of somebody who has built himself a castle of such rustic and self-contained simplicity almost within earshot of a great city. But there will be very few, one suspects, willing to concede that the back to the farm and back to the craft movement is anything more at best than

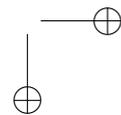
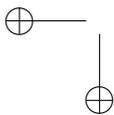


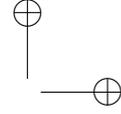
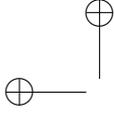


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a restricted triumph of a small cult. It is hardly the possible pattern for the general life. What is even more striking is that for those urban intellectuals who find such a solution, the solution is itself the expression of a homesickness and, where it is successful, the success of a fantasy. They are fleeing to their own kind of ivory tower though they have a garden next to it, even a truck garden, in which they work with a spade. Going back to a farm in Arkansas is less exotic than going to an island in the South Seas. But it is nevertheless exotic, and the soul that lives on that farm takes its language, its ideas, and its persisting crucifixions, as well as its physical apparatus, from that mechanical city civilization which it is trying to forget.

There is, finally, an attempt more profound, because less eternal, to recover the past, and that is the enterprise of retrieving and making current again authority in literature, art and politics, and (for it must ultimately come to that) in religion. For it is as much by confusion as by futility that the soul of man is currently troubled, and if no clarity is to be found in the present, it is not unnatural that groups here and there should look back with longing and with sudden hope to those various pasts which we call traditions, where authority spoke in no uncertain language and where that language was not so much obeyed as taken for granted. Authority even in morals is preferable to the sordid queasiness of doubt. Just as the member of a Jesuit order or college staff finds peace in a regimen of hours and duties, so the modern looks with envy



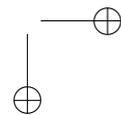
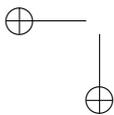


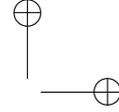
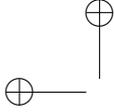
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upon his ancestors who had categorical imperatives in ethics, academic canons in poetry and painting, and revelation in religion. What is one to make of an age or to do in it when there is nothing in the miscellany of schools of art and winds of doctrine to depend on but one's own taste, one's own judgment and, if at all possible, one's own intelligence?

Freedom has a glamorous sound but it is, for confused heads and troubled hearts, a feverish actuality. The sense of sin has not vanished for those who no longer believe in the Ten Commandments. For the new morality has not enabled them to be content with themselves. The passing of academic canons in criticism has simply left most observers with a panorama of art, disturbing, perplexing, almost unintelligible. One may follow – most people do – one fashionable authority or another for the time being. But the peculiar difficulty is that the authorities do not stay fashionable long and even when fashionable may be deliberately equivocal or (what is not more comforting to the confused) obscure. It is not hard to remind oneself how many little dogmas have had their day, often brief and more often clouded, in the last generation. The liberal weeklies, the art journals, as well as the journals of philosophy, medicine and religion are filled every season with a new and, beyond question, transient authority. One ends by being willing to follow any voice, so only it be, beyond peradventure, absolute, definite and clear.

Such absoluteness, definiteness and clarity are obviously nowhere to be found in the present, and they are



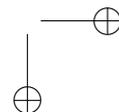
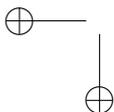


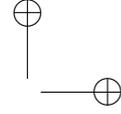
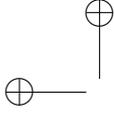
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known, at least by hearsay, to have existed in the past. What wonder then, that an increasing number should be found ready to listen to mediaevalists who tell them of, who indeed demonstrate to them, the unmistakable lineaments of a logic that knows what it means, says what it means, and says what it means seriously. There is relief in Aquinas after the current controversies of schools of philosophy without a metaphysics and without a logic, or at least with a metaphysics and a logic that look like nothing that has ever gone by that name before. It is solacing to return to a system of thinking that has its terms fixed once and for all, and is as lucid as it is convincing, whether it talk about God and salvation or nature and man. The essence of modern thinking has been said to be inquiry. But the modern, like the ancient, has peace not in restless seeking but in finding once and for all.

There is likewise a demand to be told clearly. To both these needs of security and clarity, the revival of mediaevalism, in the form of neo-Scholasticism, as for instance under the leadership of Jacques Maritain in France, is an alleged satisfactory answer.

Precisely such a need, too, was what, one suspects now that all the dust has died down, lay behind the whole short-lived American humanistic movement. Novelties, however exciting, come ultimately to be wearisome, and variety without direction is soon enough a distress. Vitality itself is not enough if it takes the form of hardness or ugliness or disillusion. Sex may be vital but its involvements may be incorri-



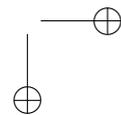
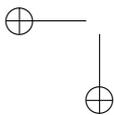


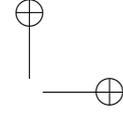
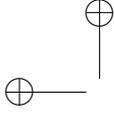
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gibly sordid. A study of the dulness and stupidity of the average sensual man in the average senseless city may be realistic enough and sincere beyond question. Joyce may have plumbed below the superficial soil of the sleek, formal and conscious – but it requires a new organ of apprehension and criticism to appreciate him. The humanists have the same difficulty with contemporary literature that the French classicists had with Shakespeare. He broke all the rules and knew no Aristotle. The firm clean lines of Greek literature, the high necessity of Sophoclean tragedy, the correct form, the noble theme, the grand manner – these are intelligible canons and familiar ones. By their standard contemporary literature, in its most articulate, audacious and symptomatic practitioners, is a failure.

Similarly to those nurtured on the mathematical outlines of Bach or the familiar tonality of Beethoven and – by now – of Wagner, this new music of quarter tone and cacophonies is, if bearable, bewildering. Though in painting the radical has by this time become the fashionable, even the most sophisticated have to invent their canons and authorities as they go along.

The only true finality is one that is genuinely final, that is to say ultimate in that one cannot go behind it, and compulsive in that to go behind or against it is unthinkable. It is impossible in this generation to call upon Aristotle as did the mediaevalists and to say, as if that settled it, that Aristotle said thus and so. It is equally unavailing to call upon the standards of classical literature or even classical English literature



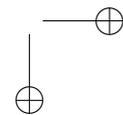
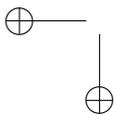


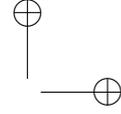
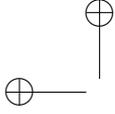
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where the first is increasingly an unknown mystery and the latter always to most readers, however much they love it, relatively remote and irrelevant in its themes. The literature of the past may be resorted to, for enjoyment, for a perspective upon the present, for width of experience, for light, for vision. It can hardly be effectively called upon for authority to a contemporary audience.

Not only is this true of the literature of the past, but of any political, social or industrial tradition. As ever the dead must bury their dead.

But the quest for authority persists in a dizzy society, and those who are not satisfied with Aristotle, Aquinas or Matthew Arnold, retire more profoundly to God, and the ineradicable tablets of the Law. To retire to God is indeed, save for the mystic in his ecstasy, to return to God's law, for it is always what the Lord saith that maketh Him known. Thus indeed the retirement even to religion for authority, is in effect a retirement to the past. For it is – for those contemporaries who seek an authority ultimate, indefeasible, perhaps unfathomable – a retreat to, and a leaning upon, a religious tradition. That is why, in the long run, as T. S. Eliot has by his own example pointed out, the conservative in politics, the classicist in literature becomes ultimately a Catholic, if, like Eliot, he follows scrupulously the logic of his own position. *There* in the Church is a past that has not compromised with the present, an authority that cannot, once it is accepted, be questioned. The road to Rome is, for such as can

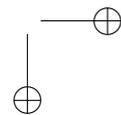
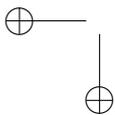


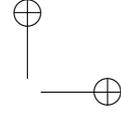
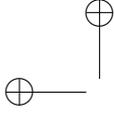


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take it, the road to clarity. It is a way back and a way out.

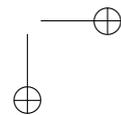
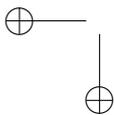
Thus for a very few, the nostalgia for tradition results in a retreat to one past, at once lucid, inflexible and serene. By that past, the doubts of these are resolved, they live again by faith. Perhaps a faith in a past is the only way out of confusion in the present. But it is not really a way out. For the present is always with us. By moving about in that present with intensity and pausing in it in ecstasy some, less blinded and with less benefit of unction, have sought to be saved.

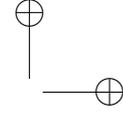
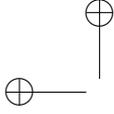




FLIGHTS TO ACTION AND TO ECSTASY

There are, it goes without saying, any number of men and women in our time who have none of the varieties of malaise so far canvassed in these pages, and who need in consequence no way out and no way home. Gifted with physical well-being and with means or, through some happy accident of adjustment, earning enough to live upon comfortably from work that they like to do, they have a decent and very human content. They have found happiness or some mild approach to it where the simple mortal creature in the past has always found it, in simply doing and being. The satisfaction of the senses (in which sex plays an important but not a predominant part) and the doing of some immediate manual labour – these, with the circle of domestic absorptions that they come to involve, still bring content to thousands of obscure country people now, as in the past they have brought it to epicureans, both unknown and inarticulate, all over the world. Writers and thinkers – and those neurotics about and for whom so much of present-day writing and thinking is concerned – forget how many relatively ordered lives



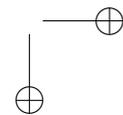
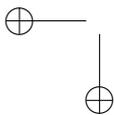


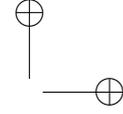
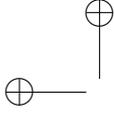
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miraculously persist in a disordered society. The pattern of traditional human impulses fixes the order of life for simple beings, and the persistent earth and sky still make it possible for those impulses to be fulfilled. Among peasants in southern Italy or some other pre-industrial areas of the world, though the conditions of living are not easy, life is seldom a questionable or a questioned good. If there is poverty, it is at least a bearable and even a gay one. If there is tragedy it seems as natural as the wind and sky, and there are no troubles of a self-consciousness full of fantasies and irritations, to add to the actual but not overbearing difficulties of existence.

Nor does one need to go for instances of qualified felicity to peasants tending their vines under a Mediterranean blue. Even in the awareness (exacerbated by noise and chaos) of a modern industrial city, among the solid burghers and even among the ranks of intellectual people, there are still "some born," as William James once put it "with a bottle of champagne to their credit," those blessed with the sky-blue temperament. These manage (indeed they scarcely need to trouble about managing) to find peace in the senses, in their circle of family and friends and in the not unpleasant routine of their daily occupations. Their happiness, like that of a bird or a child, far as their lives be from the ambit of the birds and children, consists in doing and being.

Those who live naturally and normally on the level of sensuality or domesticity or civic concerns find, to

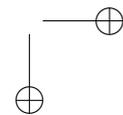
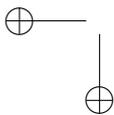


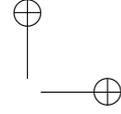
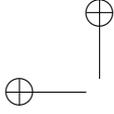


FLIGHTS TO ACTION AND TO ECSTASY

paraphrase Marcus Aurelius, that even in a city and even in a city apartment, it is possible to live well.

Now among the sensitive and cultivated, the troubled – and most of them are troubled – look with envy and admiration upon the contentment of the steady peasant, the good citizen and the gay sensualist. They are reminded by these forgotten modern instances that here is one way of felicity, though limited, that occasionally even provides pauses of positive joy. But for the sophisticated observer there is one additional seduction in the life of the sensualist or the good citizen that the simple sensualist or citizen does not have and certainly does not realize. For the self-conscious observer, simplicity of life, either through action or through the senses, is not simply a good in itself; it is an escape from evil, in so far as it is a release from thought. He discerns something more than “pleasures positive, objective and intrinsic” in seeing and touching, hearing, tasting and smelling. He detects a blessed anodyne. It appears that if one is busy with animal joy one cannot think, or better still there are no provocations to thinking for all problems seem solved, all doubts resolved and all uneasinesses forgotten. For the fact is, that in addition to economic adjustment, there are a whole flood of difficulties that are the consequences more or less direct, of economic well-being and educational progress. Half of the troubles of that portion of our generation that is well fed and well read are those of a society that has learned how to read but not how to be at peace.

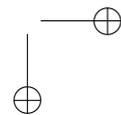
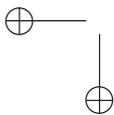


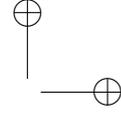
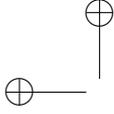


THE CONTEMPORARY AND HIS SOUL

The envy and admiration with which the sophisticated have come to look upon the simple has led to what may be described as research toward the primitive, a straining toward simplicity. The most striking if not the most successful way out is the obvious one experimented with in every generation by the blasé, the tired, the muddled or the desperate – the way of the senses. This varies from the intense and melodramatic ecstasy of sex to the embroidered subtleties of perception of the aesthete. The libertine, the gourmet and the connoisseur in the arts are tarred with the same stick, in so far as they are seeking salvation, and making a cult of what can be touched, seen, tasted, smelled and heard.

The first claim of the senses is their immediacy and their finality. The famous phrase of Pater, “not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end,” has become unfashionable. One is inclined to smile a little at the rhetoric of his insistence that “not to have burned always with a hard gemlike flame” is “in this short day of frost and sun to have slept before evening.” The words have become outmoded, but the ideas for which they stand and the emotions which they represent have not. The day of life seems still short and frosty, and the brief sunlight of the senses still the one indubitable good. Simple people seem still to know that good, and complex people now try to recapture it. For whatever theories about things may be or however much they may change, things remain, to be tasted, touched, seen, heard –

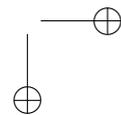
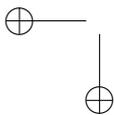


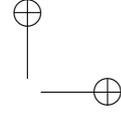
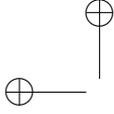


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and enjoyed. Whatever fatalities or futilities current theories or scepticisms or timidities may reveal, in so far as sensuous enjoyments are possible, they are not only immediate, but they are final. Those moments of satisfaction are beyond cavil and beyond question. Indeed they seem not so much to evade the answering of fundamental questions as to be a kind of answer to them. The point may be illustrated by a story told by a Frenchman explaining to an Englishman that the French are profoundly realistic. It might serve as a parable of Epicureanism in all ages. The Frenchman, so runs the myth, arranges a well-chosen dinner on a shaded terrace commanding a beautiful view. Having eaten delicious viands and having drunk delicate wines, with the first puff of the cigarette and the first drop of coffee he begins to discuss the dubious nature of reality. But the viands, the view, the wine, the coffee and the cigarettes are not dubious. They are intransigently present to the senses, and whatever be the nature of reality or the clouded hope of the future, these things at least are so, these lovely presences at least are good. These moments have been snatched from the jaws of time – an immortality of pleasure has been found in the organs and appetites of a mortal creature, delighting in perishable things. Things are what they are or appear to the senses to be, and some of them to the senses are good.

The fashion of wilful absorption in the senses rests on some such assumption, whatever form the sensuous absorption happens to take. It may be the orchid-





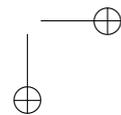
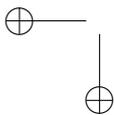
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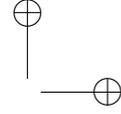
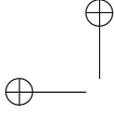
like preoccupation of the aesthete among his etchings and his chamber music. It may be the more solid fulfilments of the burgher at his substantial repasts. It may be the senses on fire in sex. But the end sought is the same: the immediacy and finality of a felt good, and the momentary release from thought and from doubt that such a good makes possible.

Now there is a profound difference between the happy sensualist and the sophisticated searcher for salvation through the senses. The one has genuine satisfaction on a purely animal level. What the second seeks – and seldom finds – is the kindling and the satisfaction of the imagination through the senses, a quest doomed like any other idealism to be at best only moderately successful. “Let us go,” said Walt Whitman, “and live like the animals, not one of whom is respectable or unhappy.”

But it is possible only for an animal to live like one. What the neo-sensualist, if one may so call him, wishes is to have a lyric self-consciousness of the joys, immediate and ultimate, that the senses provide. He wishes to be a sturdy, true child of nature and a poet appreciating the sturdy child of nature. He wishes to combine the pleasures of eating, both those known to the ravenously hungry and those confined to the trained gourmet. He wishes to be the bull breeding and the mystic celebrant of sex.

The cult of sex as salvation is indeed – at least from the point of view of the expositor – the happiest illustration of the complex contemporary research toward

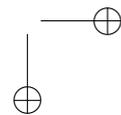
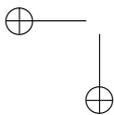


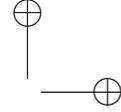
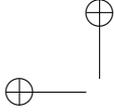


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the primitive. Of that research the most earnest and enthusiastic examples are the novels of D. H. Lawrence. But D. H. Lawrence was simply giving literary expression to what other educated persons in our era have not had the talent or the courage or the fanaticism to say.

The turning to sex on the part of a great many who cannot remotely be accused of vulgarity or indecency has deep roots. Nearly all our troubles and distortions may be summed up, thus runs the accusation, as the absence of joy. The absence of joy is the absence or the frustration of power. Of these sexual impotence is the symbol and possibly the cause. If we are to be happy we must be happy with that lyric abundance, vital radiance, that surging realization and subsequent drowsing peace which characterize the sexual act when it is generous and adjusted, spontaneous and free. If we are not thus joyful, it is because we are repressed by a thousand traditional falsities and by that regimental standard and pattern of life which at once saps our vitality and inhibits us from exercising what still remains of it. It is deliberately that the symbol at once of futility, death and civilization in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* is a sexually impotent English gentleman industrialist. For it is the gentleman-tradition and mechanical civilization that robs us, according to Lawrence and many others, of our vitality. It is also an ideal, not simply a person, that he is presenting in the gamekeeper, firmly rooted in the earth and firmly

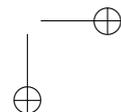
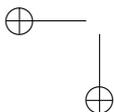


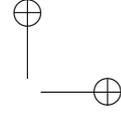
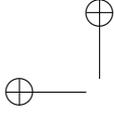


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happy in the assertion of his manhood in the frank ecstasy of sex.

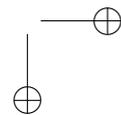
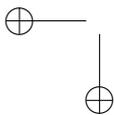
Most of D. H. Lawrence's readers were not gamekeepers, nor was D. H. Lawrence. They and he were tormented spirits, unhappy in the age in which they lived and finding in sex the vision of a glowing peace. But most enunciators of the doctrine of salvation through copulation do not actually find it there: if they reflected a little, they should not really expect to, and it would be surprising if they did. The sexual climax may be the "only bright page in the thin biography of many a human animal." But the human animals that make a cult of it, are something more than animals, or at least they are highly complex ones. They cannot, if they would, separate the physical radiance of sexual satisfaction from the emotional and imaginative complication of their lives. It is for most of them too late in their own histories and too alien to their physique to turn themselves into incarnate gods of physical love, into poetic stallions. Even in the midst of the sexual embrace they must recall bitterly the rapture they have differently envisaged, the ultimate they have not found. The cult of sex is the protest of the complicated trying to be simple, of those made spiritual and delicate by civilization trying to assert that they are simply bodies and that in the body at its most sensuously exultant alone is life. The peak of sexual excitement becomes for them an anagram of felicity as if it were either possible or desirable that a life should be that primitive rapture prolonged.

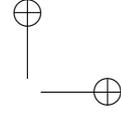
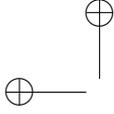




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It is a curious naiveté of the sophisticated to make a mistake that philosophers, stupid with dogmatism, have made before them. They select one phase of life and identify it with saving glory: they regard one organ, to speak plainly, as the instrument of salvation, at once of escape, of ecstasy and peace. It needs only to be recalled that the body itself is a multiplicity of impulses, that life is a variety of interests and enterprises, to see the pathetic futility of this new phallic fanaticism. It is no more reasonable to suppose that the complete absorption of life in sex would be felicity than that complete abstraction of it by metaphysics would render it so. There is no sovereign virtue in any single impulse or interest to guarantee or to generate happiness. There is rather the danger that any single passion thus become an absorption will be an obsession, with the completely disorganizing consequences of any mania to health, to freedom and to clarity. It is something very like arrant nonsense to speak of sex with bated breath as supreme because it is "natural." The word "natural," ever since Rousseau, has become a word to conjure with. It has almost all the sanction that used to be possessed by the words "holy" and "just." No less than those epithets it is a question-begging term. John Stuart Mill in his famous essay on "Nature" was long ago at considerable pains to distinguish the various meanings of "nature." It must suffice here to remind the reader that in one sense anything that does or that can possibly happen is natural. But in the sense in which the celebrants of sex say



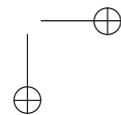
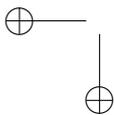


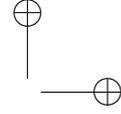
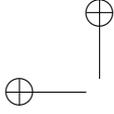
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we must return unashamedly and energetically to sex, “for sex is natural,” they are playing with words – and with fire. For it is not “natural” for a person with the complexity and sensitiveness of an urban modern culture to find or to hope to find salvation by acting as if (or pretending to act as if) the body were his sole preoccupation and sex his only real, legitimate or compulsive theme. Flesh and spirit may still, as in St. Paul’s day, quarrel in the unregenerate man. But he will not be regenerated by letting or trying to force the flesh to triumph and crush the whole range of interests and sensibilities which we may fairly sum up under the name of spirit. We are breathing, eating, sexual animals. But we are laughing and thinking and imaginative animals, too. It is only in desperation that we think we can turn ourselves into exclusively sexual creatures and thereby find a secret glory and saving grace. There is, moreover, it needs to be added, a special lack of perception in making a canon of conduct out of moments of ecstasy, or the poetic allegations of it.

For one curious and important fact to be noted is that the cult of sex, however carnal its language, is the cult of mystical poets, and has many of the distinguishing marks of a mystery religion. The salvation it promises has the vagueness of that of most mystics, the feverish ambiguity of promise of many mystery religions, and the rhetoric of all second rate poets.

It is easy enough to see why poets, wearied of the routine and dulness of a mechanical civilization should



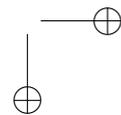
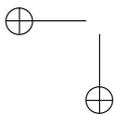


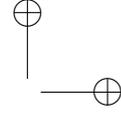
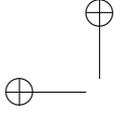
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be tempted to see a light from heaven in sex. For in sex, if anywhere, is the image and pro tem, the experience of vitality. It is glamour, it is exultation, it is forgetfulness, it is peace. It is to life what eloquence is to language. It is to the body what the love of God is to the soul or to the mind. To a generation that takes little stock in being alone with the Alone or gazing in Paradise upon the mystic Rose, the sexual embrace seems the nearest believable thing to it. Indeed there are not wanting those, especially among psychiatrists more cynical than poetic, who insist that the sexual embrace is what the great mediaeval mystics were really talking about.

In a world, moreover, where the individual seems a cog in a machine, or a nonentity in a regiment, there seems at least one glowing realm in which he can assert power with passion. Where the mind has so long been trained to dissection, to "the false power of making secondary distinctions," here still seems something that resembles demonic possession. Whatever the physiology of sex may be, poets walking dully in a godless generation hold sex to be the one remaining chance for enthusiasm, in the old Greek sense of being filled with a god.

It is in this imaginative treatment of sexual indulgence as an avenue to divinity that the cult of sex approaches very near to being a mystery religion. In the ancient Dionysiac mysteries, the way to salvation was to have communion with the vital and eternal life of a god, and the ritual included sexual orgies. The



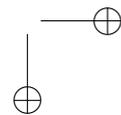
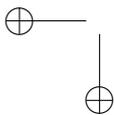


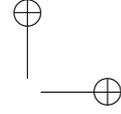
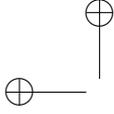
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contemporary mystico-poet of ecstasy has come to believe, too, that somehow in the act of sex he is coming into communion with divinity, that here is not merely physical satisfaction but mystical regeneration, that sex far from being earthy is the heavenly vision itself, the way of the *mysté*, the avenue to absorption with the saving and enveloping all. They are wrong who see in these new Dionysiacs carnal priests of a fleshly religion. They are mystics with a long tradition behind them. They are Platonists who seek (the language is a close paraphrase of Plato's) divinity in the madness of love.

It is not exceptional that like other mystics they are living on the food of their own heated imaginations, that it is their own vision which gives them their ecstasy rather than the object of their vision. And like other mystical poets, they are sustained by the rhetoric of their own eloquence rather than by the facts, as it is indeed their own eloquence and art that chiefly come to interest them. No really carnal person could be quite so lyrical as D. H. Lawrence on the subject of physical love. It would be physical love that would have absorbed or exhausted him, not the poetry of or about it.

But it must be remembered that in the old mystery religions no orgy really saved anybody though the orgy itself may have been an appeasement and a release. In the after calm or exhaustion there was still the same world to be faced. And why should rhetoric about sex be – more than rhetoric about anything else – a way of salvation?

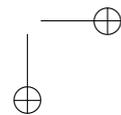
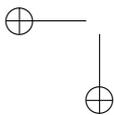


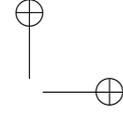
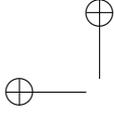


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Even the communicants of the religion of sex have, like other believers, had their doubts. For it is clear that sex carries its own involvements in its train, and it is not notable that those thus most absorbed are the clearest examples of joy, calmness and harmony. If as a religion its main function is that of escape, it does not accomplish its purpose. For not only can sex not be isolated from the other concerns of life or from the emotional if not practical consequences that come in its train, but in so far as it does seem to serve as an escape it is a temporary one, and it remains nothing but an escape. Even more defeating is the fact that in sex itself, its devotees find simply another hectic avenue to disillusion. For it is too much to ask of any good that it be an absolute and ultimate ecstasy. It is sure not to be. The current worshippers of Aphrodite find themselves – they are not the first – deceived by their goddess.

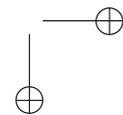
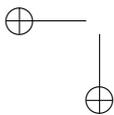
It has already been noticed that the flight to the senses does not always take the form of a resolute and profound plunge into sex. There are milder sensualities, among them the familiar epicureanism of the aesthete. There are no longer such gifted and articulate expounders of the way of salvation through the tutored sensibilities as was Pater in the eighties and nineties. It is a pretty conceit indeed of the current aesthetes to sneer at their immediate predecessors. There is many a gilded salon of the nineteen-thirties that laughs at the drawing-rooms of the nineties, yet echoes their doctrine and that of all epicureans in a

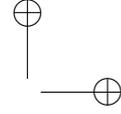
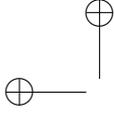




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language slightly disguised (and slightly dishonest). The latter-day aesthetes are rather less precious; there is considerably less mannered conversation about the lilies and orchids of this sublunar scene. Aestheticism has been by way of becoming almost bourgeois, and there is a current pride in aping the solid citizen by eating and drinking well. Where the aestheticism is more obvious, there is an elaborate scorn of pretty surfaces and exquisite decoration. The newer aestheticism prides itself on its masculine tastes: it has turned from sunflowers to metaphysics, and from pastel shades to "significant form." But the theme is the theme of all genteel epicureanisms: the world genially open to the senses. The intent and the hope are the same, by a not too violent deployment of the senses to escape the blind alleys of thought, the vulgarities, insipidities or disillusionments of action, the dangers and involvements of emotion. Aestheticism is an easy way to love, for the objects loved cannot be hurt and, better still, cannot hurt in return. There is about the self-enclosed life of tutored sensibility the innocence and selfishness of abnegation. It is the middle way with a vengeance, or, to vary the metaphor, it hugs a well chosen and lovely shore. The only thought one will permit oneself is purely aesthetic reflection and judgment. One will allow oneself only the relatively superficial and non-corrosive feelings of aesthetic preference and rejection. Instead of being a snob merely toward certain classes of society, one will achieve the higher snobbishness of disdaining action, feeling and thinking. Voltaire



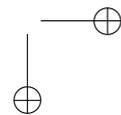
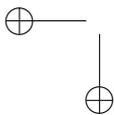


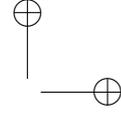
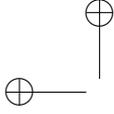
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used to speak of cultivating one's garden. The contemporary prefers, as it were, to regard fastidiously the flowers in other peoples' conservatories, having at once the pleasures of sensuous satisfaction and the ironic salt of critical disdain.

Here doubtless is to be explained part, though only a small part, of the vogue of Proust with the intellectual aesthetes. For what does Proust by implication counsel with his super-refined exploration of sensation after sensation, memory after memory? Is there not implied – Proust almost cries it aloud – a doctrine of exquisite perception with deliberate and saving detachment? One sees and experiences all, but one is not hypnotized or ought not to be hypnotized by anything. Thus only is it possible to be guarded from any emotion more serious than that of a wistful regret for *le temps perdu* which neither memory nor art can ever restore in its exact colours and accents. By turning every event, even one's own love and one's own loves into a spectacle to be intently surveyed rather than intensely pursued, it is possible to attain the observer's calm, a Buddhistic peace. All things become themes of endless interest and exploration, but nothing is compelling or disturbing. One can thus learn to be infinitely and variously entertained. But it is increasingly difficult to be hurt or disappointed or involved.

This way of life has its ancestry in ancient times in the Garden of Epicurus, where moderate pleasures of the senses, and friendly conversation in an urbane garden idyl constituted the felicity, cautious and mild,

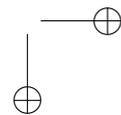
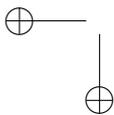


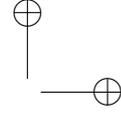
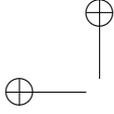


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that was dared or thought possible in the bright and fatal interval of mortality. Its true modern ancestor is not, as one might think, Oscar Wilde or Walter Pater but Arthur Schopenhauer. For it was Schopenhauer who saw the real point and the romantic – though he did not call it that – origin of the flight to the palace of art. The tranquil and disinterested perception of art (of which genius is simply an exceptional illustration) is for him an anodyne, unfortunately transient, from the defeat of the assertive and inevitably disappointed will. When one has learned to *cease* to will, one can learn to see. Or rather the momentary static and disinterested vision induced by works of art is a sedative to the will. When one has learned to see as the artist sees, one has ceased to will as does the egoistic sensualist or the restless Philistine.

It is because the flight to art is really a flight from the complexities of existence that in the new aestheticism the more intransigent qualities of art, its ardours and sorrows, are frowned upon. For to be carried away is a concession to emotion. The important and the safe thing is to be interested but not possessed. It is left, as we shall presently have occasion to note, to the mystic to identify happiness with ecstasy, in a surrender to the absolute accompanied by forgetfulness of the world. It might almost be said that so far from being ecstasy that the later-day aesthete seeks in art, it is not even beauty; it is simply the freedom that comes when observation is at once fastidious and disinterested.

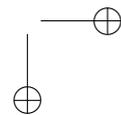
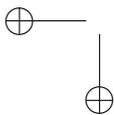


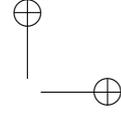
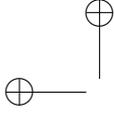


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Sex is too violent and art is too thin to constitute salvation to the robust and the energetic or to those who often pass as energetic, the nervously alert. Particularly, these last are frightened by the chasms revealed by thought and the tentacles with which emotion threatens freedom. There is a long familiar way to escape from these dangers: to be so busy *doing* that one has no time or inclination to think, no energy or leisure to feel, or to feel too much or too deeply. The cult of action – or mere activity – is well enough known in America, and it is mistakenly supposed that it is confined to business men, athletes, polar explorers, aviators and automobile racers. The fact of the matter is that it is among the over-sensitized and intellectual that the escape into action has of late become a religion. The senses provide little material for deep or continuous content, sex proves a delusion, “an expanse of spirit in a waste of shame,” thought turns out to be futile or distressing, emotions wearing, wasteful and expensive. But there remains always the tonic excitement, the facile restoration and release of action. The answer as to what shall we do to be saved turns out to be that of doing anything if only one does not stop to dilute action with words and confuse it with feeling or thought. Hamlet, for those who see or seek peace in action, is the classic example of what not to be.

Here again it is necessary to distinguish between those to whom a life of action is native and spontaneous and those who seek to imitate that spontaneity. The introvert, wearied by the sweet torment of his

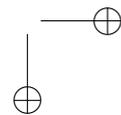
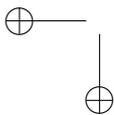


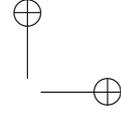
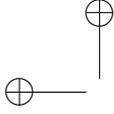


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narcissistic broodings, longs for the obvious bubbling energies of the extrovert. Perhaps, he says to himself, the whole image of peace as static, as an aimless union with the eternal, as quiet contemplation of form, is an illusion, the heritage of a monastic tradition. For the human animal, whose very life is a rhythm, peace may be possible only in movement. Furthermore, what often passes for contemplation is merely uneasy brooding. They do not seem unhappy who are too busy to reflect. Thus the brooding, the neurotic, the sedentary look with longing on the apparently radiant adjustment of the active, whatever the activity of these latter may be, or whatever, if anything, it leads to. These men of action seem in their way to have discovered Nirvana. Only they have found it not like Buddha sitting under the Bo Tree, abstracted from life, but rather by moving with the stream of life itself.

It is clear enough what the pleasures and therapeutic values of action are supposed to be. The strong silent man is a familiar and patently attractive figure in fiction however rare a specimen he be in life. If a smoothly running machine were suddenly to be conscious, its consciousness would not be troubled. The hum of its functioning would be the voice of its happiness. If we too could thus function completely, it is argued that we would be saved. Thought is merely the symptom of derangement, the pearl in the diseased oyster. The introvert forgets, of course, that though thought be to him a sweet torment, it is sweet, and though part of his trouble, is also part of his necessity.



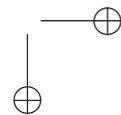
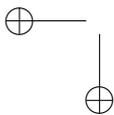


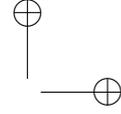
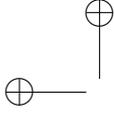
FLIGHTS TO ACTION AND TO ECSTASY

who would lose
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
who would lose
Those thoughts that wander through eternity?

“The philosopher and the ladykiller,” William James remarked, “cannot keep house in the same tenement of clay.” Nor is it more reasonable to believe that the man of thought can transform himself by some miracle into the man of action; it is that very thought which, when turned inward, kills him, that become truly objective and contemplative, keeps him alive, and is indeed his life. Yet because so much of what passes for thinking is thus turned corrosively inward upon the thinker himself, no wonder he longs to escape and that in our age, those many to whom thought is simply a kind of lyric neurosis have made a cult of action and have there sought escape, action itself being for them a neurosis.

The cult of action takes place on various levels. In its most primitive form it is simply the boy’s athletic joy, or the emulation of it. The vogue of sports has had a deeper and subtler recommendation than that it is good exercise or good form. It is part of the philosophy of those who see no health in philosophy, but make a philosophy of youth, of health, of energy. It is difficult to withhold admiration from the traditional figure of the English sportsman, lithe, strong and tranquil. He may be stupid but he is not harassed. He may be inarticulate but he has perfect poise. He is at home with his gun, on his horse, on the field and in

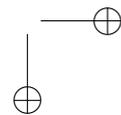
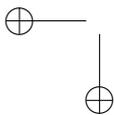


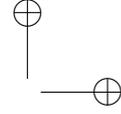
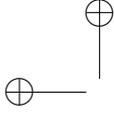


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the woods. He is clean-limbed and sweet-blooded, a modern image of a Greek in the sunlight of animal health and adjustment amid the mists and diseases of modern thought. And it is not for nothing that Lindbergh, a "lone eagle on its free flight," has become for America and the modern world, a romantic symbol of life, clear, abundant and free. Not the fervours of sex but the calm rhythm of athletic action are what seem to many to be indicated for a hectic generation, the fair-haired boy on the green cricket ground. But the athletic ideal is on its very surface too limited, too romantically impossible. It is the tribute of middle age to youth, of the sedentary and frail to the robust and agile. As well might a fish make a cult of flying as the modern intellectual city dweller a religion of simple athleticism. No metaphysician's dream of living in the thin upper air of abstract thought could be more fantastic.

Not much less fantastic is the cult of action as enterprise, upon which even scholars in their studies look with wistful imagination, and of which some have been known to frame a philosophy. To those in academic groves or in the pillowed leisure of wealth, there seems to be both excitement and peace in the lives of those engineers, business men and statesmen whose days are filled with changes and movements, and whose movements and changes make a difference in the looks, the lives and movements of the peoples of the world. It avails not to point to these lusting after worldly involvement that activity may be simply a form of restlessness,



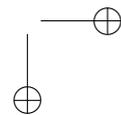
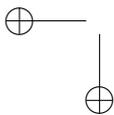


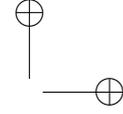
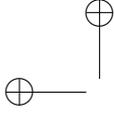
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a desperate and hysterical attempt to still the voices of inner doubt and avoid the dreadful emptiness of guilt because of empty leisure. It is beside the point to remind them that nervousness is not vitality. Action is an intoxicant with all the sanctions of respectability. In America at least there is moral approval, indeed moral enthusiasm for the drunkenness of getting things done. (Nothing else would explain the vast energies expended on the machinery of education whether or not it be educative – of production, whether or not the products are or should be consumed.)

Whatever may be said for or against the metaphysics of the pragmatic philosophy, its power of appeal in America is not very far to seek. It is the rationalization of the hysterical impulse to movement and action current in American society. It turns a social habit into a cosmic philosophy, and identifies American civilization with the nature of things. It reduces thinking to the place where, in the philosophy of action as philosophy, it properly belongs, that of an instrument. It is the philosophy of the going concern.

So pervasive has the hysteric appeal of action become that it has gradually persuaded those who might least be expected to connive at a purely practical and active attitude toward life, the disillusionists and the desperate themselves. The efficiency of business, real or alleged, has become a symbol of moral efficiency. The new terse, clipped novels of Ernest Hemingway and his imitators offer a curious and pointed illustration. The men and women in these novels say nothing

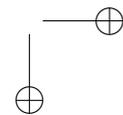
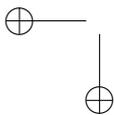


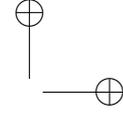
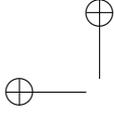


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but the barely and bleakly necessary. They *do* and they *are*, if indeed some of them do nothing but drink, and in the most direct physical sense, love. The important and characteristic thing about them is that they act. It is as if they were saying to themselves, "one must not think, one must not embroider action with sentiment or translate it feebly into talk. All discourse is a form of deceit, all thought an avenue of despair, all feeling, or all of it save such as can be expressed in action, a falsity." Men in action, said Aristotle, were the proper subject matter of poetry. And these new primitives believe with Aristotle, though for different reasons. With these, too, action is a continuous hurrying from despair. It is the simplicities of animal love in the middle of the desolation of war, the excitement of drinking or bull fights in a society of postwar desperation, that these characters illustrate. Like the sexualists, the aesthetes and the activists think that by throwing off the complexities of thought and the sinuosities of feeling, by being simply active, and actively simple, they can find a way out.

Now there is a certain native human shrewdness in this discovery of the curative value of action. For by the same token it is discovered that many of our troubles come from artificiality, and that many of our artificialities are the consequences of words. In a civilization where ink, paper and literacy are plentiful, we have come almost to live by words and to live unhappily as the consequences of theories with which we have strangled ourselves. The craftsman adroitly using his



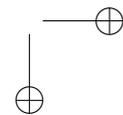
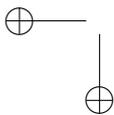


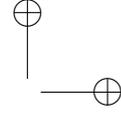
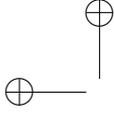
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tools, the animal fulfilling its appetites or exercising its powers are not unhappy. But – perhaps the banality needs repetition – only simple people can lead simple lives. For others simplicity is itself a complex fraud that fools and hurts those who attempt it.

There remain to be noted those, earlier cited in this discussion, who have sought a more radical way to say “good-bye to all that,” “that” including not simply the senses and the arts, emotion and thought, but action as well. There are the mystics, the ecstasies (as distinguished from the intellectual or Platonic mystics), by no means a novelty though perhaps an anachronism in our generation. There are, it goes without saying, genuine – that is to say, congenital – mystics today as always. For mysticism is a temperament without a fixed or specified habitation and can occur among factory chimneys in Pittsburgh or Birmingham in the twentieth century as well as among cloisters in the twelfth. There will always be those with an enveloping sense of some divine being that transcends what can be verified in the senses or analysed by the dissecting processes of thought. In any age and in any social climate there have been a number of persons who could truly testify to Wordsworth’s famous avowal:

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,*



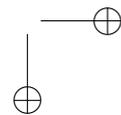
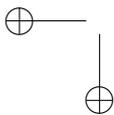


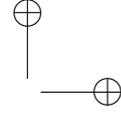
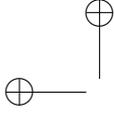
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*And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

There may indeed be said to be a mystical quality at the heart of all human experiences, since no moment in the consciousness of any individual is ultimately translatable, since every individual apprehension is uniquely and intimately and incommunicably what it is.

But it is not these “fugitives from Heaven” with whom we are here directly concerned. Whatever be the origins of the mystical experience, it genuinely exists for a number of people, and though one may explain their ecstasy – and even this, despite the psychologists, is dubious – one cannot explain it away. Our immediate concern is rather with those who make a complex cult of the mystical ecstasy, as they might make a cult of simple sensuality or sexuality or action. They are those who having found all pathways blind alleys, decide to pursue them no longer, but to repose at length upon the bosom of God, to be one with the One, alone with the Alone. True ecstasy is absolute oblivion. It is a loss of self in a large and comforting whole. It is an intense peace, a crowded solitude, all doubts becoming meaningless, all distinctions transcended or forgotten. The child in his mother’s womb could not be more completely satisfied than the mystic lost – and saved – in the absolute.



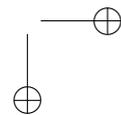
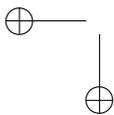


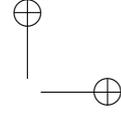
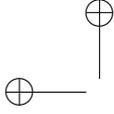
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It should not be an occasion for surprise that true ecstasy, which is and must be a very rare occurrence to very rare persons, should be sought or alleged or imitated. It is specially little to be wondered at in an epoch where even the most intimate of emotions are subjected to self-conscious intellectual sorting by their own possessors, and where the world, through a thousand devices mechanical and social, is always too much with us. Ecstasy is sought not so much for the sake of ecstasy as for the sake of the narcosis it provides. It is desired because, as William James said of alcohol, "it removes man from the chill periphery to the radiant core of things." It breaks down barriers and separations. It annuls or postpones fears and frustrations. It is the joy of passion with the lull of sleep.

Such ecstasy is vouchsafed to the secular intelligence at exceptional moments in the arts, in affection, and to religious geniuses, like the great mediaeval mystics, at the end of long disciplined ardours and endurance of thought. True rapture is not to be had for the asking, nor are cheap and easy theosophical cults led by fashionable Swami, the avenue to it. There are, besides, special disabilities that the modern suffers when he tries to make mysticism his way to bliss. It is as hard for the trained mind living in a critical modern society to be ecstatic as it is for him to be simple or sensual or naively busy.

Most neo-mystics are not approaching the love of God so much as relapsing into the vast and vague con-

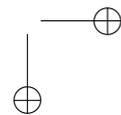
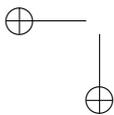


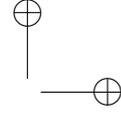
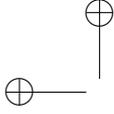


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fusions of infancy. They are not reaching the absolute, so much as they are with very questionable success escaping the world. They are trying to attain salvation by jumping out of their skins and by ignoring the bodies, the habits, the things by which, and in which, if at all, life must be lived. They are the most desperate, one is almost inclined to say dissolute, examples of the search for a salvation "beyond the flaming ramparts of the world."

It remains to be seen whether a less illusory faith can ever be suggested, a wisdom born of the order of nature and persistently and humbly cognizant of it.

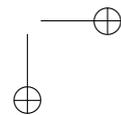
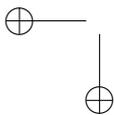


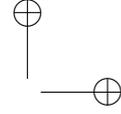
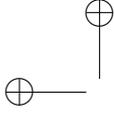


**NOTE CONCERNING SALVATION
FOR THIS WORLD**

These studies have been concerned, as was declared at the outset, with the preoccupation of the contemporary with his soul and its salvation. It was pointed out that, however disguised the language, it is still the soul of man with which current moral thinking is concerned; however extra-theological the surcease it discusses, it is still something closely resembling salvation that in one form or another it offers. There is indeed one special way in which most counsels of salvation in this generation resemble analogous doctrines in the past. These suggested ways of life that we have been studying have been ways of life beyond life. They have been techniques of escape from confusion and disenchantment, alleged avenues such as all healing faiths have been in the past, to peace, to clarity and to joy.

All of these mysteries of salvation have been marked by a hysterical seizing upon one aspect of the world or of the soul of man as the one object of interest that would save him or the one capacity by which

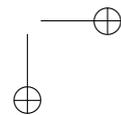
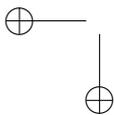


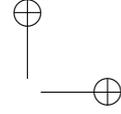
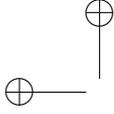


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he might be saved. Even the faith in intelligence, which seems on its surface so much concerned with this world and its improvement, has its face always toward a future. It is the golden possible tomorrow that it is fixed upon. The very most that it can make of today is an instrument toward a remote regenerated earth and a secular future Heaven. The Platonist flees to his austere Paradise of essences eternal, impassible and nonexistent. The aesthete has tried to forget the odours of this vulgar actuality by breathing fastidiously the select perfumes of his own choice. The nostalgic have turned to the past of their race or tradition, the mystic to a regression infantile and sentimental, to an ecstasy as primitive as it is engulfing.

Like most theories of salvation in the past, all these have been concerned with projections of another world, built monotonously of some good envisaged in this, rather than with a frank consideration of the actual scene of mortal action and the relevant conditions of a possible mortal content. They have ignored one or another of those multiform interests, one or another of those major circumstances only by the harmonizing or fulfilment of which it is possible to live, let alone be saved. They have moreover been not so much considerations of experience, as romantic soliloquies or imaginations of experience. They have been promulgated on the tacit assumption that life, like discourse, is a soliloquy, and that the unhappy and the happy alike may spin at will a steady and efficacious dream of their own circumstances, material and social.

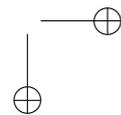
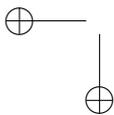


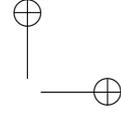
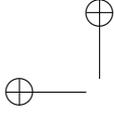


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It would be, of course, not simply a hazardous but an insolent enterprise to offer a therapeutic program after having examined with dismissive criticism those schemes of moral salvation now offered by any number of serious and honest and competent leaders of contemporary reflection. The history of thought upon these issues has indeed made it sufficiently clear that any version of salvation is largely the wishful operation of a fantasy, rather than the responsible functioning of thought. It is a fairy tale told in a crumbling civilization or a disordered life to help the teller of the tale to keep up his courage. It is an imperious whistling in the moral dark. It is a myth turned into a categorical morality, a dream phrased as a commandment. It is all very well to offer such a scheme where one can insist, with the possibility of being heeded as well as believed, that the myth has divine sanction, that the vision is the revelation of an actual Heaven and the commands imposed godlike in their source and eternal in their obligation. On any other assumption programs of salvation are simply competitive propagandas, to be tried and judged as such.

The light of recent psychology as well as that of common human experience should likewise have made it clear that individuals differ too much to have any scheme of good prescribed promiscuously for all of them. There are, it is clear, certain individuals, who even in, or precisely because they are in, a mechanical and industrial civilization, are temperamentally fitted to live if at all only by escaping into the beholding of

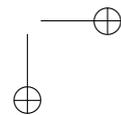
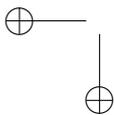


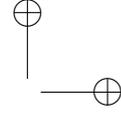
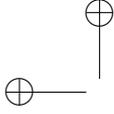


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essences. For the born philosopher indeed in any age, contemplation is the only happiness – which is why philosophers have recommended it so often. In the same way there are those to whom a flight into the past, or a regression to an infantile mysticism, or a violent plunge into the sensuous or the sexual life, may, within the limits and for the time being serve – and for these nothing else may. Like Pirandello's madman who had lived for twenty years in an insane asylum comfortably ensconced as Henry the Fourth, they may prefer to live in the twilight of a fantasy flattering and soothing, rather than in the raucous and distracting daylight. It is no use telling certain dreamers that they are merely living in a dream. They may have known it all along and not regarded it, therefore, as any the less beautiful and preferable.

But while it is possible and indeed necessary for each man to make his own terms with existence as best he may, and while to a few, by some lucky turn of circumstances, those terms may be those of comforting illusion, such an adjustment is possible to very few. It needs no expert psychiatrist to point out the dangers involved in fleeing actuality. As has already been indicated, whatever the ecstasy or the luscious or ascetic heaven to which one may temporarily flee, the world and one's self remain the same, or possibly somewhat the worse, after the crisis or exultation or temporary accession of energy is past. In various ways, the individual pays in digestive or nervous disorders, or the group pays in energies wasted or diverted or

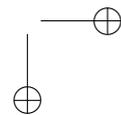
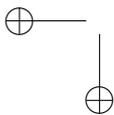


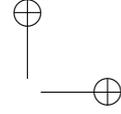
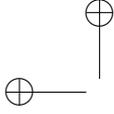


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corrupted, or both individual and group pay in a rigid, cramped and poverty-stricken life, for the attempt to ignore or forget the materials which nourish, the walls which bound, the possibilities which are given to the precarious spirit of man.

It has of late been suggested that it is precisely a recognition of those circumstances and materials, basic and inevitable – the mechanical matrix of life, the animal basis of all feeling and thought, the industrial and mechanical civilization in which for the long present human nature seems to be set – it is precisely the discernment of these, it is argued, that are the grounds for abdication or despair. In the chapter on the cult of disillusion the sources of this latter-day pessimism (which has innumerable historical antecedents) were briefly dealt with. But the melancholia that is supposed to be derived from a realistic facing of the materials and circumstances of life, would appear to be largely gratuitous. Whatever goods there may be in existence, and even the melancholy grudgingly admit a few, it is out of natural soil that they grow and by a human nature, animal in its basis, that they are apprehended and enjoyed. The lowly – or the simple – sources of a good do not destroy its value. No crop was ever disdained because it was manure that helped to produce it. Not only is contempt for the nature of things gratuitous, but equally superfluous and factitious, is the disdain for our age and the attempt to escape it. The latter is a piece of quixotic snobbishness. The time we are living in is as much ours as are our

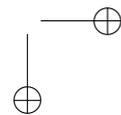
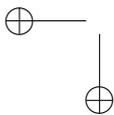


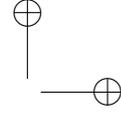
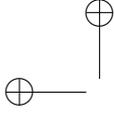


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bodies or our complexions. It is part of what we have and what we are.

It would seem to be the part of wisdom to begin with these inevitabilities, which include the dominant social circumstances of our generation. These may be remediable and indeed may gently need remaking, but they need to be reckoned with, not disdained or – *per impossibile* – fled. It may be of value then to try to frame some summary statement of what our general condition is. No moment of experience is truly isolated. It is qualified by memory and haunted by or made glamorous by anticipation. The present is the moving meeting point of recollected happiness, pain regretted and persisting, and prospective sorrow or joy. Part of the disturbing character of contemporary life, part of its fragmentary quality, part of the soul's uneasiness is the incoherence of its memories and prospects, its hopes and fears. There are no roots in the past, there are no unmistakable symptoms of a future clear and reassuring. A version or a vision of life with even the specious appearance of inconsistency would give the sense of health, and stability to a seasick generation. Such consistency and firmness is as a matter of fact so intensely desired in certain quarters that there are those willing to flee to any absolutism, that of a dying church or an embryonic revolutionary dogma, for a chart that will tell them where they are and what they must do. Perhaps such measures (no less fantastic than heroic) are not necessary.



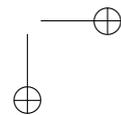
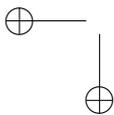


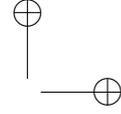
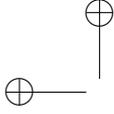
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If some version of experience is demanded, perhaps it is possible to make it upon honest terms, that is on the terms of a nature freely regarded and scrupulously studied for the suggestions toward life that it offers.

What have we then, and where are we, "in the middle of the road of our life," in terms which, granted the general intellectual setting of the twentieth century, we can with some degree of honesty accept? Well, whatever qualifications the new physics may have put into the twentieth-century version of nature, it is a natural world in which we have to conceive ourselves to be living, that is to say, a world with a structure that is, however complex in its details or in its operations, intelligible, a world whose general movement physics can describe and of which even the layman with a paucity of physics can discern the nature. It is a system if not with any purpose at least with an order. There are no miracles in it, unless its wonderful variety, scope, and possibilities, continually mounting, be themselves regarded as miracles. Its stellar infinity may be a theme for cosmic amazement; its complexity artfully studied may yield us marvels of comfort, luxury, swiftness, ease, and control. It is the setting, the theatre, and the material of ourselves; our nature is part of it, though cosmically an accident, geographically and temporally an incident in it.

So far from regarding nature as something hostile or alien or absurd, as was the sentimental fashion of the nineteenth century, or such echoes of it as we find in Bertrand Russell or Aldous Huxley or Joseph Wood

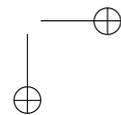
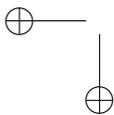


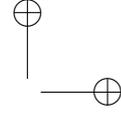
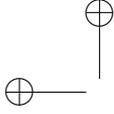


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Krutch's *The Modern Temper* in the twentieth, we are inclined to regard it as being, like Jehovah, *that* that it is. And what it is, is the matrix and material of all our ideals and the locus of all possible destinies. It is what we have, it is where we are. For this, too, is the modest recognition of the naturalist, that the eyes with which he beholds nature are natural eyes, and that the mind with which he observes or condemns or in imagination transfigures nature is itself a movement in and a flowering of it. The spirit which others would have contend against the flesh is in itself simply the expression, luminous and climactic, of animal life, the flesh become radiant and subtle and consciously alive. Not birth but death is a sleep and a forgetting, yet before that somnolent oblivion there is much that may be done, imagined, and remembered. The memory may be extended, through history, to the beginning of the race and before; the imagination may compass more than generations through doing may translate into existence.

The naturalist is aware of the tragic frustration and corruptions of the spirit by the flesh, by society, and by the world. But he knows that spirit is only the flesh articulate; he knows that society nourishes it and that it can find its only employment somehow and somewhere in the world. He is, therefore, less ready than spirits less conscious of the soil which alone nurtures them to disparage the body, to cry down society, to say farewell to the world. He hesitates to set up a dualism between the flesh and the spirit,

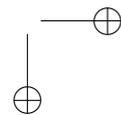
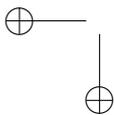


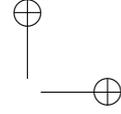
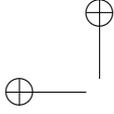


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between man's higher and lower nature, because he knows how deep in the flesh lie the foundations of those altitudes the spirit sometimes touches. He does not flee to an ivory tower of saintliness or aestheticism, since he is too aware of how much the language of his hopes and aspirations comes from his fellows for whom he could develop so easily a dainty or an unctuous contempt. Nor can he come to disdain or to distrust his most unearthly paradise. He knows he is but a nostalgic stranger in heaven; he may be an angel looking homeward, but clay is his body, men and women his companions, and earth his home.

It is because he recognizes himself as thus "umbilical to earth" that the naturalist seeks to discover the morals implicit in, rather than to impose a morality upon, the nature of which his animal body is the expression. He is inclined to feel the pulse-beat of vitality in forces and impulses in him from which a mind debauched by genteel conventions might flee in horror. He cannot see what there is horrible or shameful or disintegrating about sex. He can see rather what horrors, shames, and disintegrations may follow upon the attempt to hide, ignore, or repress that vital energy. He knows how much the golden thread of physical love qualifies much that seems to have a subtler texture. He knows how much that glamorous energy contributes to the beauty of the world and his passion for it. By the same token he respects, as a force to be reckoned with and as a material to be made much of, any impulse or vitality that animates the corporal frame of any human



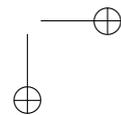
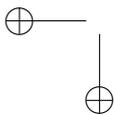


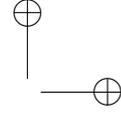
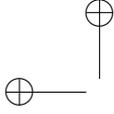
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creature. He will think twice before condemning any of those great natural drives out of the simple homely elements of which the most spiritual enthusiasms are ultimately derived and complicated.

It would be a want of understanding to suppose that the naturalist would therefore counsel anarchy or caprice as the goal of life. Order will be to him, as to any soul at peace or in search of it, a desideratum, but the order will be that of a harmony, not that of a regiment. It will be dictated by the scope of a possible music, by the given elements in his frame and in his world; it will not be an order imposed by authority for its own sake nor restraint for the negative satisfaction of saying "No." The art of life is a possible art, he realizes, though a difficult one, since the elements in it are so mercurial, in an individual so often at war, and since the individual has not only himself to war with.

Toward that harmonizing of himself within himself and of the society of selves, the naturalist will welcome with already justified hope, rather than condemn with traditional dismay, those sciences, young but auspicious, which teach him to recognize and deal with the forces and energies at large in his own psyche and in the society by which his own psyche is conditioned. That a body of knowledge and a technique as young as psychoanalysis should have generated much quackery and much nonsense, he will be well aware. But he will respect its already demonstrated therapeutic value and realize those potentialities of integration which it brings to light. From it he has learned to

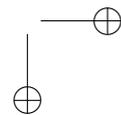
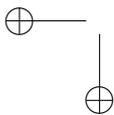


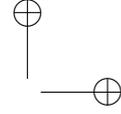
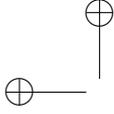


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think twice before hurling about epithets of abnormal and normal, perverse and sane, high and low. He has learned from it not simply to see the seamy side of nobility but the seeds of nobility in what the rough condemnatory language of tradition calls evil. But most of all he will have learned from the newer psychiatric sciences of psychology and psychoanalysis that the business of morals is that of the integrity or, better still, of the integration of character. And a large part of that technique by which a soul is rendered whole is its release from those deviousnesses and evasions, those repressions and shames, which prevent it from facing the realities of its self and its world with candour, generosity, and courage. An order that excludes half and the more urgent half of the energies by which men live and by whose drive they continue to care to live is a fraudulent peace.

It is indeed because, naturalistically regarded, the individual is himself so largely the expression of the society in which he lives that one becomes a little impatient of those who frame a moral code, a theory of criticism or of life, without reference to the social, economic, and educational conditions which make the soul, under any social order, characteristically what it is. The two forces now dominant, as writers as different as John Dewey and Stuart Chase constantly remind us, are science and the technology related to it, the machine. It is possible for a few spirits to flee from these, to live physically at some lovely "Fiesolan" distance and spiritually in some flight to the Middle

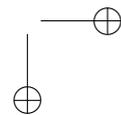
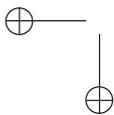


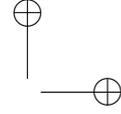
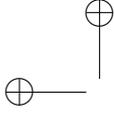


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Ages or to Greece, as if the forces and resources of science and the machine were not the dominant determinants of the character of the age and the lives of its contemporaries. But their peace will be half built on what they half forget, and there will be, inevitably, a tincture of revolt or disdain or despair in their quietistic raptures. Their joy will have the internal poison, moreover, of conscious irrelevance, as will even more profoundly that of those who try to bask in vanished sunlight and live as correctives, scolding, petulant, and doomed, in the midst of the contemporary world.

No. One cannot be at peace even with oneself in a society that is not in its whole organization, so interwoven are contemporary lives, at peace. It is not simply because he feels that some new war might wipe out for all eternity the fragments, lingering and lovely, of a dying civilization that the naturalist feels it necessary to study – that he may help reasonably to control – the economic and scientific and industrial forces afoot in the world. It is because he is so much aware that the ordered (which is to say once more, the harmonized) life is socially conditioned that he wishes to face frankly the facts of science, machinery, industrial democracy, and internationalism to see what may be made of them. He has already had evidence enough of what science and the machine can do to the forms and to the formulas of our lives. The five-room apartment and the suburban bungalow, the radio, the aeroplane, and machine production have given him many goods cheaply, and have without his realizing it changed the



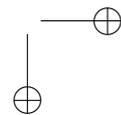
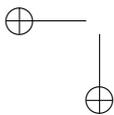


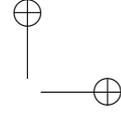
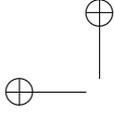
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whole matrix of his and of everyone's life. Part of the disorder in the contemporary soul is that persistent living "between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." A large part of the current disillusion or the endemic retreat into citadels of vanished authority comes from the fact that practically we are compelled, intellectually resigned, to live in the present world of science and the machine. But our imagination from childhood has been nourished on the ancient symbols, the antique creeds, the inherited beauties. We work in the twentieth century and dream in the twelfth; we are neighbours to the dynamo and we escape to a marble temple shining on an ancient Mediterranean hill.

A large part, indeed, of what passes for love of the classics and for the classical temper is simply a timid and uneasy refusal to let the imagination brood or play upon the contemporary scene. That form constitutes half of beauty, and the love of it half the aesthetic experience, there can be no doubt. And it is not surprising that a civilization comparatively simple or relatively stable should have generated forms upon which the eye and the mind are prone to linger. But the challenge to literature and to the other arts, including those of politics and morals, in our generation is precisely that of giving some pattern and coherence to the new world, the new themes and the unprecedented urgencies that have come into our lives with the new order.

Man is a half happy but, historically considered, quite explicable accident. There are moments of the angel in him and he is, as an old naturalist once re-

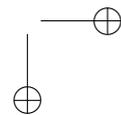
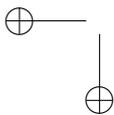


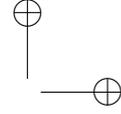
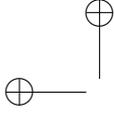


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marked, "in apprehension how like a God." But he is compelled, willynilly, to absent himself from felicity awhile and in this harsh world draw his breath in pain to tell his story. But if it were not for this harsh world there would be no story. If it were not for this world and for his own complex nature in it, there would never be felicity.

To be thus naturalistic is not to blind oneself, or to be blinded, to the limits of a view of life that confines itself to the world in which we discoverably and inescapably live. It is not to be saved in the sense that the precariousness of human fortune can be abolished or escaped, the transiency of natural goods rendered much less transient or the enjoyment of eternal goods, such as that of truth, rendered eternal. Nor does being naturalistic in outlook, or realistic in temper, reduce or promise to reduce the irreducible evils of an existence that has earth as its domain and animal body and human association as its first instruments, and death, in each individual being, as its finality. One thing, at least, a centring of the quest for salvation upon this life and in terms of this world can accomplish: to avert the disappointment of romantic hopes unfulfilled. At the least the sulkiness, the petulance, the whining of children deprived of their unreached moon can be forestalled. And much can be gained in actual felicity by a resolute concern with the conditions of salvation possible on this planet, in this life, and to a human nature that can never expect to be changed in a mystery, in the twinkling of an eye and to the trumpet sound.





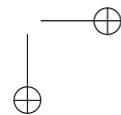
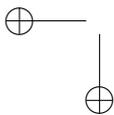
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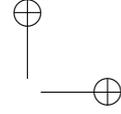
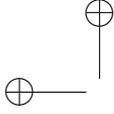
Such a concern with the inevitable terms of felicity would find that the soul of man might still not so much be saved from disaster or corruption, as fulfilled. What the flame is to the candle, that the soul is to the body. In a decently organized society, and in a modestly conceived life, the flame might burn clearly and freely in many. None of the avenues to salvation previously canvassed is altogether an error. It is merely the foolishness of an interest turned into a dogma, a passion into an absolute.

Only one of all those canvassed, the way of disillusion, is a blind alley, and its cure can be effected, if at all, not by argument but by a renewal of the sources of vitality and interest germane to a healthy human nature.

Those sources begin, of course, in the senses, of which aestheticism is simply an over-ripe refinement, of which exaggerated sexuality is simply a dubious tentative toward felicity – dubious, desperate and adolescent.

There is little question that much of the malaise of the contemporary is that of the natural man whom social circumstances have set in the noise, the regimentation and the chaos of cities and the life, relatively ghostly, thin and formal of the mind. The emphasis on the senses in general, on sex in particular, are simply forms of protest against a verbalism, a formalism, an intellectualism that has been felt at once as an oppression and an emptiness. It is high time that the genial life of the sense received its due moral warrant



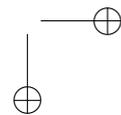
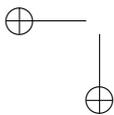


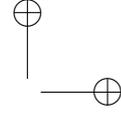
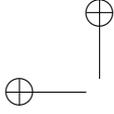
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from the sour prophets of the mind. The beginning, if not the end, of the cure of the soul lies in the senses, as a walk on an English field path in Spring, or an Adirondack Lake on an August day, or a French dinner and a French wine would suggest and possibly prove.

The second source of renewal of interest and vitality is open to any number of persons: the circle of absorptions of family, of friendship, and of the affections. Since it is the philosopher more than most other people who is likely to reflect upon happiness, he is easily led to consider it in terms familiar to his temperament and to his profession. Aristotle and Plato, Plotinus and St. Augustine put the contemplative life as the supreme end and the supreme fulfilment of man. Jacques Maritain does so today.

It may theoretically be so, and it may practically speaking constitute happiness for a relatively few. But it is so for far fewer even than is commonly supposed, and not always for those who think they find in contemplation their rest and their joy. Any examination of the economy of human interests would indicate that for all, save a perhaps archangelic few, in addition to the needs of the senses and the appetites of the intellect, there are the needs and impulses of friendship and affection. For the majority of men and women, despite all the fevered talk of changing morality, that need for an intimate sharing of life is perhaps best found in the institution of marriage and in the sharing not simply of passion but of domestic interests. The good citizen and the good father have sources of vital restoration

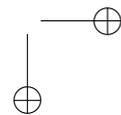
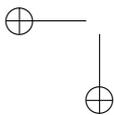


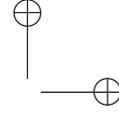
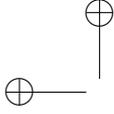


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at which the libertine and the intellectual may both scoff, but which they scoff at in vain. When, with the passage of youth, the senses have lost their tang, and when the mind has discovered the loneliness of those eternities among which it wanders, the father and the citizen will have the inarticulate best of the argument. No lofty Platonism, no cynical or fastidious Epicureanism can rob them of what they have and what they know. They will probably regard as superogatory all discussion of the soul and its salvation. As far as they are concerned they will be right.

Again futile as action can appear to critical reflection, temporary or meaningless as its accomplishments may appear to any transcendental survey, the way of action is not altogether a delusion. For all action is in some way the expression of some impulse or capacity, however distorted impulse or capacity may in action become. The counsel to the sad, to the languid, to the refugees from life to become busy, to become active, to become absorbed in something whatever it may be, is only half naive. However refined or detached reflection becomes, all thought is the expression of a life, and life itself is fundamentally a rhythm, a movement, an activity. There is a character in the once famous Russian novel, *Oblamov*, who at the ripe age of twenty-three lies on a couch bemoaning his wasted life. Much of contemporary *weltschmerz* had the same half pathetic, half ridiculous character. Action need not wait upon an aim assigned from on high; it generates its own aims, as one line suggests the next to a poet.



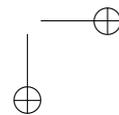
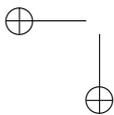


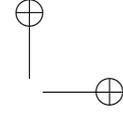
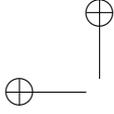
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It goes without saying, however, that mere activity, mere sensuality, mere sexuality, though they are the sources of vitality and interest, are in themselves or separately insufficient materials and inadequate guarantees of happiness. They are simply those natural assertions of life which would lead irrelevantists or impossibilitists out of the brooding blind alley of pessimism which in their sensuality, idle and restless, is their one dismal occupation.

It is possible as occasional instances even in our society would appear to indicate, to find salvation in this world and in this present age of the world. The elements of happiness are precisely what they always have been. They range from the youthful pleasures of the senses to the wide sweep and contemplations of the mind. The chief value of the senses, and particularly of sex, may be said to be the glow they shed on the whole of experience and the stimulation they give to the least sensual of enterprises or absorptions.

A rediscovery of sensuous vitality, in most cases merely a release and a rebound from traditional social and moral restraints, has a specific effect other than the immediate one of freedom and enjoyment. To be aware of the "sensuous surface of experience" is with acute appreciation to have become aware of the present. It is to escape for the moment from the melancholy that haunts the self-conscious realization of time. It is a reminder that a flight to that reconstructed mirage, the past, or that even more mythical perspective, the future, is both a futile and an exhausting illusion.





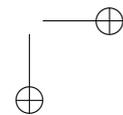
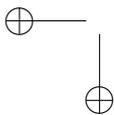
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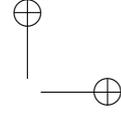
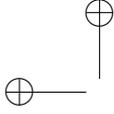
At any moment that moment, however coloured by memory or darkened or aureoled by prophecy, is, in any human sense, alone real. The enjoyment of the senses is the reinstatement of the present to its proper position as the cutting edge of reality. It is an insurance and an antiseptic against a wallowing in sentimental history or wistful prophecy.

Perhaps, it might almost be said, the happy sensualist alone, in any intelligible or indubitable meaning, can be said to be happy. His felicity is not dependent on backward glances upon distorted recollections nor on the suasion of futures dubious and imagined. He is where he is, his joys are what they are. His vitalities are those of the animal, his realizations those of the uncorrupted poet. It is hardly surprising that many should wish to live lyrically upon this simple and sensuous plane. The civilized have a plausible reason for envying the barbarian.

The senses are truly the beginning of wisdom, or at least, they charge wisdom with vitality, and lend colour, lustre and desirability to things. But they are not the end or the whole of wisdom: taken by themselves they are its enemy and its defeat.

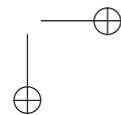
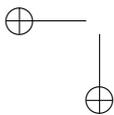
For it is impossible for the reflective to be simply and exclusively sensual. If it were not, they might indeed be well advised to become as directly and completely as possible a fusion of libertine, peasant and poet. But they cannot. It is impossible precisely for the person to whom this soul and its salvation can become an issue, to rest even in that more subtilized

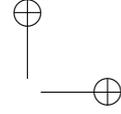
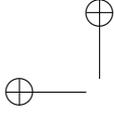




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and refined form of sensation that goes by the name of the love of beauty or the enjoyment of it. It must be remembered, in the first place, that it is still sensation or sensuous vitality that lends colour, momentum, intensity to the most refined of aesthetic enjoyments. It is these latter which, for those capable of them, constitute a by no means negligible element of contemporary happiness. What else is an imagined Paradise but a synthesis of perfections given a status in eternity, a geography beyond the moon? The fine arts and the refinement of sensuous life, of eating and drinking, of houses, gardens and places and ways of work, these introduce fragments of perfection into a life where the coincidence of the soul's desire with its appropriate objects are rare enough. Quite apart from those infrequent heights of mystical union to which the arts may occasionally exalt their devotees, the milder moments, the senses gratefully satisfied and life gracefully lived, are not to be discounted both as anodynes and goods positive (though transient) to the soul at war with itself, with others and with things. It is testimony to the dislocation of contemporary existence, that art in the modern world should have acquired a name and flavour so thin, so effeminate and so remote. In its larger acceptance and its traditional context, art envisaged the whole of experience, and was a lyric cry arising from it. A truly radical revolution would be one that envisaged the whole of life as the material and the procedure and the field of art where the enjoyments and the activities of art were universalized, where work

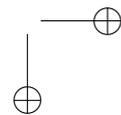
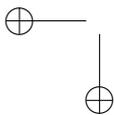


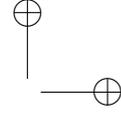
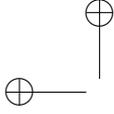


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had meaning and enrichment for those who performed it, where amusements ceased to be trivial and labour ceased to be vain.

But it is the fallacy of the usual sensualist and the routine aesthete – and the source of his disappointments and languors – to think of sensations, barbarous or refined, as detachable and atomic things. Nothing could be more depressing or disconsolate than the disillusioned libertine in his hard-shelled and self-enclosed animality, the aesthete in his rose-watered solitude. The arc of sophistication returns surprisingly upon itself. The nurturing of the soul in its isolation or its insulation has never (or in so few instances as to be as negligible as a pattern of life) brought it peace. For the soul of man, whatever its new instruments or its novel setting, is still at bottom gregarious and lonely. Physical separateness still bothers it and stifles it less than moral isolation. To a few Olympians, a deliberate and a reasonably successful detachment is possible. Most men try to imitate at their peril the career of Aristotle's thinking god to whom his thoughts are his whole sufficiency. To share a good is for the social creature that is man, to enrich the quality of that good and the soul that cherishes and shares it. Mysticism has been too long treated as if it were a hermit's soliloquy, and it may indeed be such for those few who can make their own austere society out of forms and words, just as there are those who need no other company but sensations in their sensuous hermitage, thought without love being enough for the one,

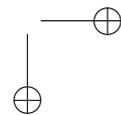
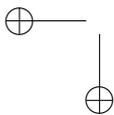


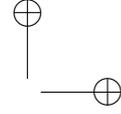
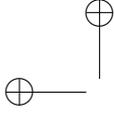


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and lust without love for the other. There is another kind of mysticism that has never received sufficient attention, by philosophers, though Beethoven in the conclusion to the Ninth Symphony gave memorable enough expression to it: the mysticism of the shared good, the mystery of the regeneration that comes with communication. For most men and women, even those who pride themselves on being intellectual, the whole colour of life becomes intensified and the meanings of life become more clear and enriched, when they are shared – with one, as in romantic love, with many, as in the love, perhaps no less romantic, of a group, of a nation, of an ideal humanity. Faith, hope and love, as it was once said, and the greatest of these is love.

Faith in the traditional sense is for so many dead, and the shining hope in intelligence that so preoccupied the nineteenth century turns out to have been a delusion. Perhaps love may still turn out to be if not the greatest, yet the most enduring of these. It is not only the neurotic who need to be restored from feeding narcissistically upon their own vitals. The so-called normal and sane find their lives at once softened, coloured and enriched by love. This, too, perhaps needs to be recalled to the modern sensualist, the modern aesthete and the modern intellectual. Even the hermit lives in some ideal society of his own imagining, recollection or prophecy. It is not so much sheer sentimentalism as sheer realism to insist on charity, in the ancient sense, as a regenerative virtue. For it endows all other things with lustre and with significance. Even the much ex-



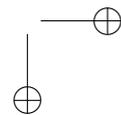
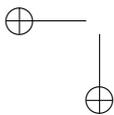


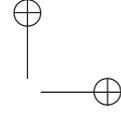
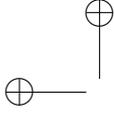
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alted hermitage of contemplation may turn out upon examination to be a futile flight from reality, and the objects which such contemplation comes to behold may be the thin, compensatory mirage of frustrated or sterile affections.

But there is another and important sense in which the soul may be saved only if it lose itself first. For it is not a little absurd to dream in a kind of mooning adolescence that the soul's salvation in the contemporary world is its own soliloquizing possibility or within its own private competence. The hopes of social intelligence may have been exaggerated, there is even sinister and insistent reason enough now to believe the whole of civilization may soon be engulfed in a war more rapid, universal and destroying than the last. The future of Europe and of Western culture may be very short, as indeed, from the point of view of the astronomer, is that of the solar system and the human race. But in so far as the elements of happiness are what they always have been, they are still possible under the domain, not eternal, of science and the machine, and they may be made more universal.

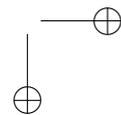
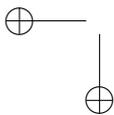
Indeed if they are not more generously distributed, if these materials of felicity are restricted more and more inequitably to a smaller and smaller class, that class itself may find itself in a blind alley of disillusion, or some hideous anarchy may forestall its belated sense of futility. In more senses than one it may become apparent that it is not possible to be happy save in a happy world. Even those spirits the most abstracted,

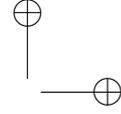
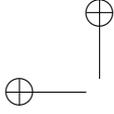




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exquisite and disinterested, may have to come back to the Platonic and Aristotelian concern for the just man in the just state, the good man in the reasonable society. Politics may once more be seen in a recovered and noble sense to be the inevitable concern of the spirit lodged not only in a body but in a world containing other spirits in other bodies. And it will not be very surprising if left-wing politics concern the newer social philosophers, since politics of the right have so long led to, and still so ominously point to, disaster. The good has to be fought for before it can be made incarnate. Again the elements of happiness are what they always have been. It is too late, if one would, to escape science and the machine just as it were silly to make these the canons of living or believe that they are, in their present forms, eternal. But eternal or not, they are current instruments for longstanding human resources toward the good life. The awarenesses of the senses, the furniture of Heaven and earth are present to us as they are present to anybody in any age. If there are certain romantic goods we have had to give up, they are only such as were in any case illusion. The stimulation and the incitements, no less than the anchorage and repose, of friendship, of the domestic affections, the patrimony of the past are still ours, as they have been those of past generations; all that is new are our instruments, all that is lost our illusions. It is a challenge, not an elegy, that should be the theme of our discourse, not the violins on a dying fall, but the trumpet call. One is tempted twenty years later



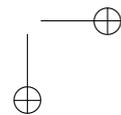
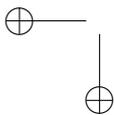


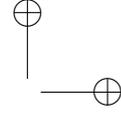
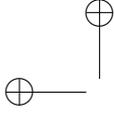
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and with more poignant appositeness to quote, as did William James, that beautiful epigram in the Greek anthology:

*A shipwrecked sailor on this coast bids you set sail,
Full many a gallant ship ere we were lost weathered
the gale.*

Nor does this note of faith demand the unlimited hopes of the unchastened. It is not blind to the limitations of any hope that is founded on the recognition of our animal body and our earthly habitation. It does not blink death nor disease, nor the personal tragedies that must cloud the most admirable and equitably organized society, nor the limitations upon any purely human morality, enterprise or aspiration. Religion, another realm in which the soul may breathe more freely and tranquilly, is perhaps more than ever necessary for us whom the confines of naturalism tend a little to stifle. We need – we have – a way still of passing, if only occasionally, from the politics of time to the politics of eternity. To many contemporaries there is a stuffiness about the naturalistically conceived world, a loss of dignity, and spaciousness and importance to the human scene and to human action. No fragments of enjoyment, no enkindling at the progressive transformation of human life, no co-operative enterprise of mankind can quite make up for the loss of that state of grace to which belief once promised by divine mercy to raise the faithful believer. Religion once provided a spacious realm for the aspiration of man to move



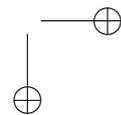
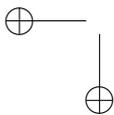


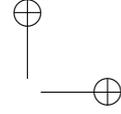
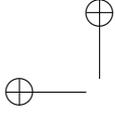
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in. It may provide it still where all other consolations fail. It may provide it now, with equal kindliness and more honesty, for it does not need longer to pretend that the realm of eternity exists in some other space, or that the good hides in an actual Heaven.

The great consolation of religion in the past has been its envisaging of a domain of spiritual and eternal things among which the soul, sick of corruption, physical and social, could move. The soul of man has not lost its franchise to participate in immortal things. The whole atmosphere of infinity is still open to human contemplation or imagining. The soul, weary of the body or cramped by the age, may still browse in the Elysian fields. All that is needed is, as ever, wit and intelligence and disinterestedness. *Interestedness* is salvation in this world, but interests flag. Luckily this world opens the window of the poetic or the philosophical imagination, upon other and possible worlds. One may be, while the mind briefly lives, the sharer or at least the beholder of immortal things.

And a further dignity that religion has hitherto conferred upon the human spirit may in the present age still be present to it. The sense of participation in a comprehensive human enterprise raises life from the trivial or the absurd, just as the sense of a past tradition gives to individual life authority and grandeur. The intuition of immortal things, the sense of participation in an enterprise, infinite and yet very human, are all the religion that one needs in our generation. The first will give us the undisturbed vision of eternity,





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which was in the old dispensation the object of faith. The second will be not very unlike and not very inferior to the awareness of membership in the City of God that St. Augustine envisioned. It will be citizenship in the City of Man, and the virtues chiefly requisite thereto will be Hope and Charity.

