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LAMENT FOR THE BUSINESSMAN

FOR a number of years after 1929, it was fashionable in intellectual and radical circles to jeer at the businessman. There was a little envy, perhaps, behind all this, and a secret fear on the part of some critics that they would probably make very bad businessmen, so that there were special psychological reasons for regarding all practitioners of commerce and industry with condescension and contempt. We had planned to do a little jeering, ourselves, but candor compels the admission that a man who has built a successful business through hard work and—why not say it?—honesty, deserves the respect of his countrymen for what he has done. He has an obvious role, a necessary one, in the community, and until his role is better performed by people who are not businessmen, we see no reason to refuse him full credit.

The jeers we have in mind are directed at another target—the mythology, if not the religion, of "business." This is a cultural attitude which seems to have grown up during the failure of Western religion to hold the attention and respect of a vigorous, aggressive people. Americans—and we speak of American businessmen, for the most part, knowing little of any others—have plenty of common sense and inventiveness. American business is built upon these qualities. But American religion has neither common sense nor imagination. It has met no great problems, left no mark upon history. It is rather a sentimental blur of feelings about goodness which has allowed Americans to suppose that they need not think very deeply about the moral questions which lie behind the facade of conventional religion. Largely because, we think, Western religion has been of this character, the spirited men of the West have made a religion of business. This criticism is by no means new or original—the novels of the past thirty years are full of the emptiness of the religion of business. It may be time, however, for a second look at this form of devotion—even a sympathetic and friendly look.

An observing man, having glanced at a newspaper photograph showing several of the younger members of the New York Stock Exchange, was heard to remark, "They look like Roman centurions." They did indeed. The centurions were in their way religious men. They served and worshipped the Roman State. Rome had a religion of nationalism; her gods existed in the interest of the State. These lean, disciplined young men of business, had they lived in Roman times, would doubtless have become centurions, or risen higher in the ranks. And let us note that a good soldier has much in common with an honest priest. The highest values of his profession are valor and loyalty. You cannot trade with a good soldier. He is incorruptible. What happens, then, when men of this quality enter business and bring their zeal and loyalty to industry and trade—to making things to sell and to buying and selling? Their spirit, we think, is somehow dishonored by the practice of business. It is not that there is anything low or mean about banking or manufacturing or running a store or importing from abroad. It is only that such activities become falsely elevated by men who have great personal strength and ability, when they can think of nothing else to do with their full ardor and devotion.

This brings us to the "caste" idea of Indian cultural tradition. A merchant—a *Vaishya*—is a buyer and seller of goods. He knows that what he does has its place and importance, but the social philosophy to which he is born does not permit him any delusions of grandeur. No Rotary luncheon speaker will be able to convince him that he has brought the grace of life to all his countrymen. He knows that he serves the

economic needs of his community, but that there are higher needs, and more important callings. The defect of the caste system was that it virtually condemned a man to an activity inherited from his father. But its virtue was that it suffused the culture to which it gave pattern with standards of value that are always needed, any time, any place. If a proper member of the Vaishya caste had attended a meeting of department store executives held in New York some years ago, and had heard a famous advertising manager remark that advertising men are really unconscious altruists—that by selling more goods they enrich the lives of their fellow Americans—the Vaishya would have given the speaker a great big bird; and he would have been right. What the speaker said was nonsense—somewhat revolting nonsense because of its ethical pretensions. This is what the Greeks called *hubris*—"wanton arrogance," as Webster puts it—and it is punishable by great humiliation.

Since history is full of such delusions of grandeur, we ought perhaps to notice that there are occasions when they seem to serve a good purpose when, that is, they are linked with heroism. Take for example the appalling self-righteousness of the English Brownists, who became the Pilgrim Fathers. The pilgrims hardly had philosophical distinction, but they had courage. They were fully as dogmatic as the orthodox Christians of England, by whom they were surrounded, and from whom they suffered harassing persecutions. The Pilgrims, however, instead of profiting by conformity, gave up much for what they believed. They sacrificed any hopes for material security in England and set out—after an interval of uncertain refuge in Holland—for a new world filled with unknown hazards. While the modern reader who pores over George F. Willison's *Saints and Strangers* will be considerably disillusioned by this account of the early days of the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth (especially if he reads the book in the light of present-day views of religious tolerance), the courage of the "Saints"—as the Pilgrims styled themselves—is undeniable.

It is when the daring of religious conviction changes into a smug possessiveness of "the Truth" that the story of the Pilgrims becomes an almost wholly unpleasant subject. Reflecting, one is led to wonder if an essential core of validity in the original Pilgrim faith was not responsible for the admirable qualities of these pioneers, but that these qualities died out with the success of the colonizing enterprise, leaving only the dry husks of self-righteousness and intolerance. A similar judgment might be applied to the early "rugged individualism" of American business. So long as the natural difficulties and hazards of an untouched continent remained to be overcome by enterprising Americans, commerce and industry afforded a field where the manly virtues might triumph over odds that frightened away the timid and weak. The economic development of America is marked by romance, not because it made men wealthy, but because the achievement called for fighting qualities and a large measure of imagination. The romance was lost—corrupted, one might say—when Americans accepted their wealth as a reward for virtue, as though there could be a logical or even "moral" relation between the two.

Something like this analysis is provided by the recent novel and motion picture, *Executive Suite*, although in weak and diluted form. Here is a modern attempt to regain for business the romance it once involved, before profit-and-loss statements became so dependent upon the manipulations of bankers, accountants, tax experts, and corporation lawyers. *Executive Suite* is both tract and apology for the times—but *other times*. It exploits the nostalgia of those who remember the romance of business as it existed a generation or two ago, just as, for a more naïve audience, the Western story attempts to keep forever fresh and green the sense of challenge and struggle of the frontier days of the American West and the rise of the cattle industry.

Pity, then, the poor businessman of today, who is invited by the propagandists of the

American Way to reproduce in an age governed by technology and bureaucracy the adventure and the rough and ready virtues of an untrammeled past. He cannot do it, for the times do not permit; yet he is obliged by a sense of loyalty and patriotic obligation to repeat the slogans of the religion of business and to play out his role in the national myth *as if* he were the inheritor of both the opportunities and the capacities of America's economic pioneers.

For this, alas, is the Age of the Administrators and the Technologists, not of the practical pioneers. The problems of business are very largely problems to be solved by sagacious opportunism in relation to government policies, and the future of business lies, for the most part, in the hands of enormous companies which have both the financial resources and the personnel to deal effectively at this level. The romance of business, in the twentieth century, is reserved for the Henry J. Kaisers, not for the John Does and Richard Roes of commercial undertakings. The career of Henry Ford is perhaps a symbol of the transition in American business from what we lovingly call "free enterprise" to the highly institutionalized maneuverings of the present. It may even be that Ford sensed this exhaustion of the moral potentialities of manufacturing, and started the sort of thinking that resulted in the Ford Foundation to express the truth that business should no longer be regarded as an end in itself.

It seems fair to say that the radical movement began to capture the interest of men of ability and imagination during the period when business began to lose its legitimate claim to romance and to be stabilized as respectable acquisitiveness. The first great American radical, in the modern meaning of this term, was Edward Bellamy, who devoted his life to the romance of social reform. Bellamy grew up in the oppressive atmosphere of a New England factory town of the 1830's. There was no romance in the child labor of the textile mills, but only the drive of industry turned against the simple decencies of life. The virtue was gone, the ends become unworthy. Since that time—followed by a period of overlapping cycles in human development—Americans have spent a century or so of bringing the economic exploitation of a great continent to something like maturity. As long as business offered multiple challenges to human initiative, the romance remained, although the field became narrower—especially in the twentieth century—with every decade. Today, the romance is practically gone, and only an emotional void remains, with the system's publicity experts doing their best to conceal the fact by constant repetition of slogans.

The radicals and reformers of politics and economics attempted to channel the creative energies of men into a great movement of revolution, but they made the fatal mistake of gearing their idealism to a democratized model of the capitalist delusion—the delusion that the highest values in life are definable in economic terms. As a result, the heroism—the *virtue*—escaped from its radical container even more rapidly than it fled from the capitalist oversimplification of life. Thus the "cold war," insofar as it is ideological, is little more than a contest between rival theologians of inherited faiths. The communist faith appears to have great and threatening appeal in the so-called "backward areas" of the world, not because of its truth content, but because the people in those areas have not yet had opportunity to witness the decline in virtue which results when an administered economic system is inflated to religious importance.

We come, finally, to the conclusion that business, in the United States, suffers from its own self-devouring fanaticism. It is not, and never was, of sufficient importance to mobilize and employ all the energies of human beings. The extreme exaggeration of business as a way of life inevitably led to excesses which wrought both injustice and moral corruption—the latter arising from the special theories of self-justification which apologists for the religion of business circulated in

order to avoid criticism and to counter the militance of the radical movement. The wars of the twentieth century were a natural expression of the fanaticism, the injustice, and the corruption, and these wars, more than anything else, have served to bring the era of free enterprise to an ignominious finish. By the "bigness" they have imposed upon the economic organization of the country, in response to military necessity, the wars have hastened the elimination of freedom for business and thus closed door after door upon the exercise of the manly virtues within business. This means, in practical terms, that the delusion that business affords a field for the full expression of human life has no longer any real claim to credibility. It continues its influence as a mere echo, a dying tradition that lives on only because men have found no other faith to take its place.

Blame for the fact that no other ideal or faith is available must be laid at the door of Western culture, which does not even hint that there are other areas of life in which a man may try his strength. The problem of earning a living and acquiring comforts and conveniences at least presents obstacles to be overcome, and we have only to realize that, for many millions, no other sort of obstacle exists, to understand the degree of impoverishment afflicting Western civilization. This is the cross borne by the American businessman—that he knows nothing else and, except for dim and inchoate longings, does not believe there is anything else for him to tend to, except business.

REVIEW
MEN AND CIRCUMSTANCES

THE publisher's announcement of the Vintage edition of *The Stranger,* the first novel (1942) of Albert Camus, the French existentialist, says that "it is about an ordinary man living quietly in Algiers who becomes the helpless victim of events. Quietly and inexorably, life stalks him until he finally commits a pointless crime. After his trial, cut off from all possibility of escape, he finds a measure of freedom in complete resignation."

This is a handy description of the story, and we can't think of much of anything to add, except that we wonder why Camus wrote it. We know that the author is intensely concerned with understanding the human situation; we recall his profoundly moving essay, "Neither Victims Nor Executioners," contributed to *Politics* for July-August, 1947, and try to grasp what these two pieces of writing have in common, beyond the fact that both are signed by the same name. Our first impression of *The Stranger* recalled Eric Bentley's comment on the later plays of Eugene O'Neill: "How could one be ennobled by identifying oneself with any of his characters?" But this is perhaps either unfair or irrelevant. Possibly Camus wrote the story to convey his feeling about Europe in 1942—a place where life "stalks" human beings. The young man who is condemned to death for a "pointless" murder is indeed an alien in the world of 1942. He has, so far as we can see, the sole virtue of being incapable of hypocrisy. His disregard for the niceties of convention is what seals his fate although the "murder" was practically an accident he did not intend, the public prosecutor makes him out a monster because he did not exhibit sufficient grief over the death of his mother. The youth moves through ordinary circumstances like a shadowy intruder in a mean and petty world. One waits and waits for some sense of depth and significance, but it does not ever come. The first point seems to be simply that he is *caught.* The second point is that, caught and condemned, he does not cringe or crawl. His independence of popular sentiments, then, is the mark of humanity Camus gives to him; and his rejection of the solace offered by the priest during his last hours confirms that humanity under stress.

That is all. One may argue, we suppose, that a writer ought not to misrepresent his time, that Algiers and the young Frenchman are *typical,* and that what happens to him is what is happening to everyone, in some sense or other. Perhaps Camus is telling us that "little people" can bear with the worst without losing their dignity. But to convince us of this, it is necessary for Camus to get us inside his character, enable us to feel with him and be resigned with him. But we, at least, could not do this. The story seemed too much a mechanistic sequence of events.

One reviewer, quoted by the publisher, says that Camus "will have a universal appeal to some minds, to those who like Kafka and Dostoievsky, who know why they like Gide and Malraux." Well, we like Dostoievsky and don't like Kafka, like Malraux and don't like Gide. In the worlds of Kafka and Gide, the goodness men may show seems to require a special explanation. It is not a natural thing. Their people are more like puppets than human beings. If they are capable of love and compassion, we have not felt it. The cult of Kafka seems to us to be the tired intellectual's version of Original Sin. Ugliness, failure, disappointment, and systematic cruelty, according to Kafka, are in the universal grain of things. He never hints that although we may be lost, surrounded by unintelligible barriers, there is nevertheless a heart of things and there are times when we can feel it throb. To write as though there were no heart in life, as if the very stones in the streets were jeering at us—this is to falsify existence.

But some will say, "Is not Kafka right? Is not the world a place where men are endlessly tried and punished without knowing the charges against

them? Are they not forever reaching after unattainable goals?"

He may be technically right, but the mood it generates in him is surely wrong. Job was tried and punished without succumbing to degradation. And what sort of man is he who has *reached* his goal? The idea of a final resting place is commonly spoken of as the tomb.

The struggle of man to be more than himself, to understand more than himself, makes the drama of existence. The struggle creates a light, even a flame, and in art we see by the light and are warmed by the flame. In great art, the form of the illumination makes a harmonious pattern that we term beauty. Now, to make a parallel about Kafka, it seems that he has drawn a pattern, not of the light, but of the shadows, of the struggle. There is a falling short in all striving, and Kafka has claimed this finite aspect of human life for its ultimate meaning. The pattern may be authentic, and from its faithfulness to a part of experience we gain a kind of confirmation of Kafka's truth about the shadows. And since there are various shadows, with some history of their movements, it is possible to construct a dark theology about them. Hence the Kafka cult, which prefers a melancholiac creed to none at all.

The existentialist, on the other hand, seems to be one who takes the immediate feeling of being *human*, which he has within himself, as the first, last, and only rational fact of life, cherishing it with stoic determination. This is all there is, he seems to say, so let us make the most of it. It is as though the existentialist acknowledges that the nihilism of blind, natural forces invades the region of humanity right up to the citadel of a man's sense of himself, and is withheld there only by an act of last-ditch heroism. We may respect the courage without admitting that the rule of nihilism everywhere else is either natural or necessary. On the other hand, we should concede that the existentialists have had ample provocation for their pessimism. Their mistake, we think, is in turning pessimism into a metaphysic.

It would be a pity to leave the reader with no better impression of Camus than these unhappy reflections. It may even be that existentialism is sound enough as a *political* philosophy for these times, so long as one does not argue that the anti-human circumstances of the first half of the twentieth century represent a destiny that is written in the stars.

In his *Politics* article, Camus sets out by calling the twentieth century the century of fear:

> The most striking feature of the whole world we live in is that most of its inhabitants with the exception of pietists of various kinds are cut off from the future. Life has no validity unless it can project itself toward the future, can ripen and progress. Living against a wall is a dog's life. True—and the men of my generation, those who are going into the factories and the colleges, have lived and are living more and more like dogs. . . .
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> Mankind's long dialogue has just come to an end. And naturally a man with whom one cannot reason is a man to be feared. The result is that—besides those who have not spoken out because they thought it useless—a vast conspiracy of silence has spread all about us, a conspiracy accepted by those who are frightened and who rationalize their fears in order to hide them from themselves, a conspiracy fostered by those whose interest it is to do so. "You shouldn't talk about the Russian culture purge—it helps reaction." "Don't mention the Anglo-American support of Franco—it encourages communism." Fear is certainly a technique. . . . We suffocate among people who think they are absolutely right, whether in their machines or their ideas. And for all who can live only in an atmosphere of human dialogue and sociability, this silence is the end of the world.

In this article, it is Camus' intent to propose a means to restore that atmosphere, to recreate the world of the human dialogue. The article is long, its content lucid, and one wonders what must be done, or what must first happen, if men generally are to come to realize that "survival" in any other world but the one Camus wants to reconstruct is utterly worthless—not worth living or dying for. For only this realization, it seems to us, can bring an end to the century of fear. It is the hope of surviving in *any kind of world*, or the willingness to bring about any kind of world just in order to

survive, that is ruining us all. Camus is himself very convincing:

> To come to terms, one must understand what fear means: what it implies and what it rejects. It implies and rejects the same fact: a world where murder is legitimate, and where human life is considered trifling. This is the great political question of our times, and before dealing with other issues, one must take a position on it. Before anything can be done, two questions must be put: "Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to be killed or assaulted? Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to kill or assault?" All who say no to both these questions are automatically committed to a series of consequences which must modify their way of posing the problem. . . .
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> I once said that, after the experiences of the last two or three years, I could no longer hold to any truth which might oblige me, directly or indirectly, to demand a man's life. Certain friends whom I respected retorted that I was living in Utopia, that there was no political truth which could not one day reduce us to such an extremity, and that we must therefore either run the risk of this extremity or else simply put up with the world as it is.
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> They argued the point most forcefully. But I think they were able to put such force into it only because they were unable to really *imagine* other people's death. It is a freak of the times. We make love by telephones, we work not on matter but on machines, and we kill or are killed by proxy. We gain in cleanliness, but lose in understanding.
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> But the argument has another, indirect meaning: it poses the question of Utopia. People like myself want not a world in which murder no longer exists (we are not so crazy as that!) but rather one in which murder is not legitimate. Here indeed we are Utopian—and contradictory. For we do live, it is true, in a world where murder is legitimate, and we ought to change it if we do not like it. But it appears that we cannot change it without risking murder. Murder thus throws us back on murder, and we will continue to live in terror whether we accept the fact with resignation or wish to abolish it by means which merely replace one terror with another.
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> It seems to me that every one should think this over. . . .

Camus has a program, a simple, and, we think, effective one. But before he gets to his program, he writes at length to convince his readers that this, which he has described, is really the kind of world we live in. Human life is held to be, more or less officially, a trifling thing. If it is a sin to question the use of the H-bomb, since to balance its possible immorality there is the anxiety about national security, then human life *must* be a trifling thing. The issue in the Oppenheimer case was not that the physicist would *ban* its use; he had not that power; it was that he, with some others, wanted to try other methods of "persuasion" first, before beginning the manufacture of H-bombs.

It is difficult, perhaps, to realize fully what this means for all the people who live within such a "protective" atmosphere—what they are committed to, in order to survive, or remain "secure." Only fools would urge that the actual people who would be killed by the H-bomb, were it used, are the "guilty" parties who threaten our future. They are but the tools, the "victims," we might say, of evil men, adding that it is better for them to die than for us to die, or die first. We may conclude this, but Camus would not permit us to suppose that we can conclude this on the basis of right and justice. There is no right or justice in this view, but only fear, and the belief, therefore, that murder is legitimate.

What is Camus' program?

> Let us suppose that certain individuals resolve that they will consistently oppose to power the force of example; to authority, exhortation; to insult, friendly reasoning; to trickery, simple honor. Let us suppose they refuse all the advantages of present-day society and accept only the duties and obligations which bind them to other men. Let us suppose that they devote themselves to orienting education, the press and public opinion toward the principles outlined here. Then I say that such men would be acting not as Utopians but as honest realists. They would be preparing the future and at the same time knocking down a few of the walls which imprison us today. If realism be the art of taking into account both the present and the future, of gaining the most while sacrificing the least, then who can fail to see the positively dazzling realism of such behavior?

> . . . the problem is not how to carry men away; it is essential, on the contrary, that they not be carried away but rather that they be made to understand clearly what they are doing.
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> To save what can be saved so as to open up some kind of future—that is the prime mover, the passion and the sacrifice that is required. It demands only that we reflect and then decide, clearly, whether humanity's lot must be made still more miserable in order to achieve far-off and shadowy ends whether we should accept a world bristling with arms where brother kills brother; or whether, on the contrary, we should avoid bloodshed and misery as much as possible so that we give a chance for survival to later generations better equipped than we are.
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> For my part, I am fairly sure that I have made the choice. And, having chosen, I think that I must speak out, that I must state that I will never again be one of those, whoever they may be, who compromise with murder, and that I must take the consequences of such a decision. . . .
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> . . . all that I ask is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice. After that, we can distinguish between those who accept the consequences of being murderers themselves or the accomplices of murderers, and those who refuse to do so with all their force and being. Since this terrible dividing-line does actually exist, it will be a gain if it be clearly marked. Over the expanse of five continents throughout the coming years an endless struggle is going to be pursued between violence and friendly persuasion, a struggle in which, granted, the former has a thousand times the chances of success of the latter. But I have always held that, if he who bases his hopes on human nature is a fool, he who gives up in the face of circumstances is a coward. And henceforth, the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions.

Well, this has little to do with *The Stranger*. Perhaps we ought to thank Vintage Books for sending us this novel for review, since it brought to mind other of Camus' writings which should not be forgotten.

COMMENTARY
LAND'S END?

READING over the contents of this issue, it is difficult to avoid the impression that history has conducted modern man to a great jumping-off place—so many "ages" seem coming to an end all at once. Camus (see Review), for one, registers his conviction that the present is an "age of fear," in which men can no longer reason with one another. Children . . . and Ourselves reviews a book which chronicles the end of a cycle of confidence in conventional institutions. Whatever may be said of the young Americans now keeping their engagement with adult responsibility, one thing is certain: *they will have to find their own way*, for directions from the past point only to confusion.

Then there is the lead article, concerned with the frustrations of the modern businessman. He too is suffering a kind of disillusionment, although he tends to blame either himself or the government, instead of asking himself what he really expects of his business, and whether he does not hope for something more than any kind of "business" can provide.

Perhaps we should call this period an age of bitter awakenings, instead of an age of fear. The awakenings are bound to be bitter, if only because we have put them off for so long. They are coming in response to a desperation we can no longer avoid, and such awakenings are never pleasant.

Meanwhile, there is the sense of a definite "break" with the past in these articles and reviews. Probably the feeling of "break" varies with the level of analysis. Actual discontinuity never really occurs, although changes may be relatively sudden. The breaks appear to the mind by reason of the intellectual abstraction of "trends" from the continuous context of daily affairs—you get the feeling that something has got to happen, that people can't go on the way they are going, any more. And these feelings are both true and false: true, in the sense that the attitudes of large numbers of people may undergo a climactic kind of polarization, and then you find yourself living, say, in the Renaissance instead of the Middle Ages; and false in the sense that you may not realize what has happened, or that anything special has happened, except that, years later, you find that you look at life quite differently.

For better or for worse we think it is for better—something of this sort seems to be going on right now.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

LAST week's discussion of Gilbert Highet's *The Art of Teaching* provides a natural background for appreciation of a currently available Signet novel, *Trial by Darkness*, by Charles Gorham. This book can be useful to old and young alike, in that it sets off the fading conventions and standards of the pre-World-War-II social and academic scene against a new era that has rocked the halls of learning.

In this story, some of the young men back from the wars are demanding more classroom discussion than their meeker predecessors, and have thus brought a return of vitality to education. At the same time, however, the Government and the Army have set up shop inside the same precincts, while well-paid talent scouts from corporations specializing in commercial science, as well as in government contracts, have placed a premium upon the acquisition of skills in chemistry and physics. The confusion caused in the minds of many young students is illustrated by the mental odyssey of Mr. Gorham's leading character, "Avery Hollister." He parts with the now inadequate world of his father's New England stodginess and unconscious hypocrisy to find "pure truth" in mathematics and allied sciences. The quest, of course, is not quite that simple, and in young Hollister's failure to find the peace of mind he seeks in halls of learning, we have a dramatic portrayal of what has happened to two generations of youth.

When social disorganization occurs on a major scale, when the "tried and true" traditions of home and former school life break down, one may naturally turn to the God of science for reassurance. But since this God does not speak in human terms, the youth ultimately discovers what a truly wise teacher might have told him in the first place—that there is no security save that which grows from inner resources. It is here that we should like to quote again from Gilbert Highet, since there is a passage in *The Art of Teaching* which might easily have supplied an underlying theme of Mr. Gorham's novel. Mr. Highet writes:

> It seems to me very dangerous to apply the aims and methods of science to human beings as individuals, although a statistical principle can often be used to explain their behavior in large groups and a scientific diagnosis of their physical structure is always valuable. But a "scientific" relationship between human beings is bound to be inadequate and perhaps distorted. Of course it is necessary for any teacher to be orderly in planning his work and precise in his dealing with facts. But that does not make his teaching "scientific." Teaching involves emotions, which cannot be systematically appraised and employed, and human values, which are quite outside the grasp of science. A "scientifically" brought-up child would be a pitiable monster. A "scientific" marriage would be only a thin and crippled version of a true marriage. A "scientific" friendship would be as cold as a chess problem. "Scientific" teaching, even of scientific subjects, will be inadequate as long as both teachers and pupils are human beings. Teaching is not like inducing a chemical reaction: it is much more like painting a picture or making a piece of music, or on a lower level like planting a garden or writing a friendly letter. You must throw your heart into it, you must realize that it cannot all be done by formulas, or you will spoil your work, and your pupils, and yourself.

In *Trial by Darkness*, young Hollister confesses to a friendly mathematics professor that what he is really looking for is pure, sublime, reliable "truth." For a time, he thinks that in mathematics he has crossed the threshold. But Gorham, like Highet, sees the pitfalls:

> He was busier than ever before, and happier. He was inspired by awareness of function, and had enormous faith in the truth, the truth for its own sake. It never occurred to him to question the scripture presented to men for centuries: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." He did not consider the possibility that the truth, in some obscene way, had made men not free at all, but enslaved to systems and techniques their own brains had discovered, and though all around him was evidence that scientific truth was neither absolute nor all-saving, but often equivocal and fatal, and though all around him were men and women eager to inform him of this, he refused either to look or listen, either

to heed or observe. The idea that he might be engaged in anything less than pursuit of truth would have been intolerable. It would have torn from his existence whatever meaning it seemed to have. He was still the prisoner of the perfect shapes he had glimpsed in his room at Hull, the summer before he came to college.

So Avery Hollister finally has to face the emptiness within himself—a void that the acquirement of a doctorate in no way filled:

He knew that this university was not really a seat of learning, or Twentieth Century Cloister, but a great educational factory, a kind of shop that stored knowledge and offered it for sale. He had changed since the day he came here, three years ago, but the change had not been accomplished as much by the university as by events and the passage of time. If the function of education was to arm the character, to provide it with resources, as he had been told, then he had not been given education here, but only a supply of information and the use of certain skills. He did not feel educated. He felt ignorant and unsure of himself and frightened. In a few days' time his academic apprenticeship would have ended: but he knew nothing, really, he reflected, beyond the technique of mathematics and the hodgepodge of history, economics and literature served up like academic stew in the required survey courses. He knew nothing of women, nothing of men, nothing of the world of men or of the tragic sense of life that was, as Dennis had informed him, supposed to be communicated by poetry and other art. He was an ignoramus, and the only thing he possessed to his advantage was his intelligence, which now prodded him to suggest that if he stayed here at the university he might merely go on learning more and more about less and less, go on with the process of sharpening his mind by narrowing it. Yet he was afraid to leave.

Trial by Darkness should not, of course, be identified as no more than a discussion of the difficulties encountered in the acquiring of a modern education, although Gorham is here reminiscent of Mitchell Wilson in his *Live With Lightning*. It is a well-told story which has, incidentally, more than a touch of Robert Phillips' *The Second Happiest Day*, a novel dealing with the inevitable cleavage between fathers and sons during the major social and psychological disorganizations of the last twenty years. But while Mr. Phillips' book recorded a different kind of rift, one that separated the rich "playboy" fathers of the 20's from a progeny grown bored with hearing about the irresponsible antics of their parents, in the case of Avery Hollister the immaturity of the father is represented by wooden thinking and unreasoned attachment to the old Puritan virtues. Yet, despite this difference, one senses that the fault of both parents is really the same—neither had discovered the importance of true intellectual honesty, and both lived in a stylized world of conventional habit patterns. Thus, with a new world in the making, neither knew what to do about it nor how to communicate with those who would have to live in it in the future. As Gorham says:

Avery's father was an anachronism, a vestigial Yankee aristocrat. He was a man who believed that he placed his trust in the old virtues. He had faith in England and in New England. He believed in a kind of symbolic austerity, especially for youth.

He was not a Puritan, for along the way the Hollisters had become Episcopalians, but he was the descendant of Puritans and in New England the Puritan conscience is engaged with the air, if one has a certain kind of breathing apparatus. There was, somewhere in his past and faintly in the atmosphere about him, an army of unalterable law that he apprehended and thought he lived by, but was seldom inclined to state in any definite terms. He would not, for example, have called himself an aristocrat or member of the upper class, though he certainly believed he was one or the other or both. He did not necessarily feel that he was better than anyone else, but he thought he had been provided with certain endowments that obliged him to be more responsible in his conduct than most people. Therefore, he felt, he and his family and the people they knew were especially qualified for disinterested political leadership and the scrupulous stewardship of money. He lived, not in reference to a code, but rather to a kind of social and economic compost heap of schools, money, clothes, clubs, social connections. If it had been suggested to him that his values had proven inadequate to the times, or that he did not really live by them at all but only thought he did, he would not have understood what was meant.

FRONTIERS

In God's Name

WHILE the present writer has never been thoroughly convinced that the "return to religion" people talk about is actually taking place, we can hardly fail to note the extent to which pocket book shelves are presently adorned with Fulton J. Sheen's *The Eternal Galilean* and Fulton Oursler's *Why I Know There Is a God.*

Mr. Oursler's rather presumptuous title will put any agnostic in an argumentative mood, although he, like any other author, has an unquestionable right to make all the personal assertions he wishes. One dimension of such writing that should not be overlooked, however, is the tendency to over-simplify matters of history and on this insecure foundation to pile up special arguments for Christian theology. Philosophy and religion have always been at odds, precisely because votaries of the latter incline to resolve the mysteries of life by easy formulas and articles of faith—whereas the philosopher is impressed by the grandeur of complexity itself.

Complexity, one can easily suspect, makes Mr. Oursler nervous. The general outlook presented in *Why I Know There Is a God*—and what we consider an indication of its weakness in relation to some truths of history—is revealed by such paragraphs as the following:

> Can we possibly have a moment's doubt that a resurgence of Christian ardor is the one hope left for mankind?
>
> Once we look at the problem in historical perspective, the issue today becomes hideously clear. As Dr. Elton D. Trueblood, of Earlham University, has pointed out, in his book, *The Predicament of Modern Man*, what we know as Western Culture, and the ideals and realities and achievements of freedom and faith which we cherish, all stem from the Judaeo-Christian culture which was born long ago in the Holy Land. Out of that plan for man's redemption has grown the glory of the modern world. The political, scientific, and artistic flowering of all the centuries since is the product of the Old and the New Testaments, the undying truths of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.
>
> But in spite of that flowering of civilization there appeared in the days of our grandfathers a new heresy, a brash apostasy that stemmed from uncompleted scientific research.

While spluttering along in the wake of "brash" statements like these, we also did some browsing in *The Greek Way*, by Edith Hamilton, being forcibly struck by the fact that Oursler's claims (above) leave the impact of Greek philosophy on Western culture entirely out of account. Neither Pythagoras, Socrates nor Plato are mentioned in *Why I Know*, nor the symbolism of the Greek mystery religions, even though the latter still accompany us in the initiatory rites of nearly every fraternal order. Miss Hamilton presents a careful argument and a more convincing one than any of Mr. Oursler's, to the effect that the roots of democracy—involving the tradition which respects individual judgment and conscience came to us from the Athenians. Moreover, she hails this contribution of the Greeks with words of inspiring ring:

> Five hundred years before Christ in a little town on the far western border of the settled and civilized world, a strange new power was at work. Something had awakened in the minds and spirits of the men there which was so to influence the world that the slow passage of long time, of century upon century and the shattering changes they brought, would be powerless to wear away that deep impress. Athens had entered upon her brief and magnificent flowering of genius which so molded the world of mind and of spirit that our mind and spirit to-day are different. We think and feel differently because of what a little Greek town did during a century or two, twenty-four hundred years ago. What was then produced of art and of thought has never been surpassed and very rarely equalled, and the stamp of it is upon all the art and all the thought of the Western world.
>
> Something new was moving in the world, the most disturbing force there is. "All things are at odds when God lets a thinker loose on this planet." They were let loose in Greece. The Greeks were intellectualists; they had a passion for using their minds. The fact shines through even their use of language. Our word for school comes from the Greek

> word for leisure. Of course, reasoned the Greek, given leisure a man will employ it in thinking and finding out about things. Leisure and the pursuit of knowledge, the connection was inevitable—to a Greek. In our ears Philosophy has an austere if not a dreary sound. The word is Greek but it had not that sound in the original. The Greeks meant by it the endeavor to understand everything there is, and they called it what they felt it to be, the *love* of knowledge.

Other interesting contrasts between these books become apparent. Mr. Oursler insists upon original sin, and feels that without the doctrine of special salvation and redemption through God and Christ, there is no hope for man. Invoking the proverbial "visitor from another planet"—one who takes notice of our endless wars—Oursler reasons that he would "have to conclude that somewhere along the line some terrible tragedy had overtaken the human race":

> At that precise point he would be back in the midst of the first chapters of Genesis. Back to the fall of man; to original sin, from which primal handicap no one of us is exempt. From there it would be a natural step to the four Gospels and man's redemption through Christ, Our Lord.
>
> So first, like Nicodemus, I learned that man must be born again before he is fit to plan a Heaven on earth for his brothers. My first return was to the undisturbed reality of the Holy Bible; to its authority and inspiration and truth through revelation.

In other words, man unaided by a power greater than himself is unable to come to terms with life; not only must he admit the reality of original sin, but he must believe that only the Christian God is worthy of adoration. (Why, indeed, bother to mention the Greeks, whose gods were symbolic of *human* powers raised to heroic proportions?) According to Oursler: "God meant it, too, when He said in the first commandment that He was jealous and would have no others before Him. He wants you—all of you. You have opened the door; He will come in and take possession." . . . We find ourselves unable to avoid the view that this sort of "Christian" creed, taken literally, acts as a separative influence, denying kinship with other men whose terms of faith are different.

Turning again to Miss Hamilton, appropriate commentary is available. For the Greeks were remarkable precisely because they looked beyond the boundaries of any particular religious formulation. They brought vigor, confidence, and dignity to mystical and philosophic study. Miss Hamilton puts it this way:

> Before Greece the domain of the intellect belonged to the priests. They were the intellectual class of Egypt. Their power was tremendous. Kings were subject to it. Great men must have built up that mighty organization, great minds, keen intellects, but what they learned of old truth and what they discovered of new truth was valued as it increased the prestige of the organization. And since Truth is a jealous mistress and will reveal herself not a whit to any but a disinterested seeker, as the power of the priesthood grew and any idea that tended to weaken it met with a cold reception, the priests must fairly soon have become sorry intellectualists, guardians only of what seekers of old had found, never using their own minds with freedom. That is what happens when one course is followed undeviatingly for ages.

Some of Miss Hamilton's finest passages are devoted to defining that "sense of tragedy" with which essayists are forever concerned. The Greeks understood suffering, quailed not before death, but saw within tragedy the dignity of a soul trying to understand all that tragedy makes it possible to see. No "original" sin here, simply because there was suffering, but certainly a goad to the development of patience and wisdom. Thus "the end of a tragedy challenges us. The great soul in pain and in death transforms pain and death. Through it we catch a glimpse of the Stoic Emperor's Dear City of God, of a deeper and more ultimate reality than that in which our lives are lived." The author continues:

> The dignity and the significance of human life—of these, and of these alone, tragedy will never let go. Without them there is no tragedy. To answer the question, what makes a tragedy, is to answer the question wherein lies the essential significance of life, what the dignity of humanity depends upon in the last analysis. Here the tragedians speak to us with no uncertain voice. The great tragedies themselves offer the solution to the problem they propound. It is by

> our power to suffer, above all, that we are of more value than the sparrows.
>
> It is not given to all to suffer alike. We differ in nothing more than in our power to feel. There are souls of little and of great degree, and upon that degree the dignity and significance of each life depend. There is no dignity like the dignity of a soul in agony.
>
> Tragedy is enthroned, and to her realm those alone are admitted who belong to the only true aristocracy, that of all passionate souls. Tragedy's one essential is a soul that can feel greatly. Given such a one and any catastrophe may be tragic. But the earth may be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, and if only the small and shallow are confounded, tragedy is absent.

The Greeks believed that each man must eventually learn to discover the meaning of the mysteries for himself—after developing the courage which makes even death seem less important than the acquisition of wisdom. We therefore continue to pay greater attention to the men of principle than to the men of faith, preferring those who believe that the only force which truly transforms must stem from one's own convictions.

So, despite the pleas of Mr. Oursler and Msgr. Sheen for a return to orthodox Christianity, we join Miss Hamilton in her implicit recommendation that the meaning of Greek thought be re-examined instead. From men like the Athenians come the foundation ideas of the American Republic, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights, Mr. Oursler's claims to the contrary notwithstanding.