

Saint Tantalus

Benjamin De Casseres

1936

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Saint Tantalus

To
THE DIOSCURI
JOHN COWPER POWYS
and
LLEWELYN POWYS

“And so these two sons of Zeus ascended to the heavens together and became the Constellation Gemini—known to men as Castor and Pollux.”

FOREWORD

“Saint Tantalus” (Book No. 8) is from my unpublished volume of the same name.

This arrangement of chapters is the same arrangement as the larger book.—*Benjamin De-Casseres.*

I write because I wish to make for ideas, which are my ideas, a place in the world. If I could foresee that these ideas must take from you peace of mind and repose, if in these ideas that I sow I should see the germs of bloody wars and even the cause of the ruins of many generations, I would nevertheless continue to spread them. It is neither for the love of you nor even for the love of truth that I express what I think. No—I sing! I sing because I am a singer. If I use you in this way, it is because I have need of your ears!

—*Max Stirner.*

I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shave whether they will or no.—*William Blake.*

Now, Saint Tantalus is the Pope of Hell.

A PRAYER

Give me this day a corroding doubt and deliver me from single-mindedness and all faith that I may scan the Centre from each point on the marvellous Circle and scan each point on the Circle from the illusive Centre, and let not my procreating disbeliefs fall away from me, and defraud me not of pain.

THE VENOM OF IDEALISTS

Boots and saddles, ye dreamers and thinkers, for the great wild-goose chase! Let us hunt the Ultimate; lay our mines beneath the Mansion of Illusions, and ride triumphantly into the Nowhere, with our gay gonfalons, inscribed with their metaphysical, philosophical and poetic nonsense, flying in the chill winds that blow across our ghostly uplands!

To be practical is human; to be superfluous is divine. Yea, we are the superfluous, the salt of the earth—do you not feel this salt in your sores?

Boots and saddles, ghost-hunters and fowlers of the Fugacious!

To write the “book of revenge” (as James Huneker calls Flaubert’s “Bouvard et Pecuchet”)—that is the dream of all great artists. All revolutionary art, like religion, is a kind of revenge. In some men, like Flaubert and Schopenhauer, it is the life-long vendetta of a penned-up ego against the commonplace and the limited.

Wagner was a demi-god, and he dreamed of heroic fornications and Olympian sex-frenzies. Not being able to satisfy this madness in “The Ring” and “Tristan and Isolde,” he wrote “Parsifal,” the apotheosis of venom, spite and unassuaged lust. He spat on women and deified the eunuch.

Wagner should have lived in a harem of Junos; but being only a mortal with the voluptuous dreams of a thousand Joves packed in his skull, he flung at the world his opera of revenge—“Parsifal,” the Epic of Spleen.

The root of Nihilism in philosophy and art is spite. “The Temptation of St. Anthony,” “The World as Will and Idea,” “Thus Spake Zarathustra,” “Les Fleurs du Mai” are spite books. Flaubert should have been God. Schopenhauer should have been Buddha. Nietzsche should have been Satan. Baudelaire should have been the soul of the Innominable Beauty.

But Nature walled up these panting spirits in flesh, and, like a serpent awakening from its coma, as soon as they appeared on earth they thrust their fangs deep into the dugs of Life, spitting their glowing, mirific poisons over everything.

Ibsen has, indeed, confessed that all his plays are nothing but the result of his venom. There have been great geniuses who have never given their spite back to the world; but in these cases it was because they lacked the power, not the will. For really great genius is known by this alone—*its contempt for life*.

All great books are the philosophies of victims. There is one cure for the feeling of vengeance. It is not forgiveness, but war.

The war of the iconoclast on the eternal philistine springs from the “malign joy”—the hatred of those who have not suffered like us, the grim determination of the restless soul to let no species of complacency escape his venom.

We professional destroyers and announcers of spiritual insurrections look on happiness as the supreme evil, the one fatal obstacle to the completion of our own malign joy. So we perform our intellectual revels within sight of this paunchy, wheezy, gmnt-of-delight, the unexpungeable philistine. We seek to universalize our malady. We anoint ourselves with the spittle of jealousy and make ourselves believe it is the holy unguent of our spiritual sanctification.

The absurd has an inexorable logic—there is Life to prove it. The absurd in life is the rule. For example, the giant Christianity that was born of the dwarf Humility!

It is Satan who whispers into the ear of St. Anthony, in Flaubert's great book, "*Suppose the absurd should be true?*" But a still more terrible question often visits the minds of the sceptical rats of the intellect, the satanic lurkers in strange corners: *Suppose all the postulates of mediocrity should be true?* Suppose race-wisdom is the final, the only wisdom? Suppose stupidity—i.e., the "rational"—is the veritable integument of God? Suppose the philistine is elect?

Disdain is the poisoned spittle of pride. "The Ivory Tower" is a tomb where the ghost of Envy refuses to remain buried. "We superior men"—have we really any sense of humor? To be singular, to be eccentric, to be aristocratic, to be the coxcomb of art and intellect: the windy Ultima Thule.

The poetic imagination is a kind of vicarious atonement for the enforced virtues of the flesh. It is a *venomous idealism*.

Most men and women who have surmounted their passions become meddlesome. This is often called "the passage from sin to good works." Their peevishness is styled "humanitarian propaganda." Bernard Shaw and Tolstoy are examples of this nuisance.

There is a sweetness in the thought, to many of us, that we have been greatly wronged by some one. And we defer our vengeance or let it go altogether, so that we may preserve the luxury of revelling in our self-pity. We would rather lick at that honey-pot than go through the fatiguing labor of uncorking our phials of venom.

There is a kind of grief that nourishes, just as there is a pleasure that destroys. There is no sweeter feeling than the feeling of pity because it is compounded of sensuality and self-love. And there is nothing more valid than pity *because* it springs from these two sacred principles. Ideal pain has as great a fascination for some minds as ideal pleasures have for others. The soul, like the body, craves sensations, and, like the body, it fears but one thing—extinction. It would rather suffer than be annihilated.

The perversity of a Poe, a Baudelaire, is the protest of the soul against the numbing power of pleasure and the deadly fascination of joy. When our Genius mocks at us it is then we grow desperate—and do something great. Out of the tombs of despair issue gods.

Why should we dreamers and thinkers of another plane despise this age we live in?—this age of shreds and pasteboard, of superficialities and mass stupidities, of inanities and ideals of material prosperity? Has it not given to us the divine haters, the poets and philosophers of Nihilism, the disequilibrating geniuses of destruction, the great pessimistic analyzers of all the humbug done beneath the moon?

There is a kind of mind that grows more beautiful the closer and the more continued its contact with the ugly. It is the kind of mind that grows in direct contrast with its physical and economic environment. It becomes stronger, through an enkernelled principle of revolt and dissent, as it comes into contact with the things that tend to weaken it. The action of the inimical environment causes an immediate and continuous reaction on the inner life of the being who is enclosed within it. It is the revolt of the cell against the organism. It is the root-principle of genius. The sense of disillusion furnishes us with a vantage-ground to behold our own unconquerable stupidity.

Irony is the December of enthusiasm.

Impotence engenders through the brain. Out of its very sterility it fabricates images and dreams and melodious abstractions, chaste and provoking.

To lose one's mask while acting—that is death to the ironic thinker. The guffaw of the mob is more terrible than its brickbats.

No matter how absolute our individuality, no matter how consistently and inexorably we have enacted our dream, we have still only badly mimicked ourselves.

What Napoleon did was never the realization of the dream of what Napoleon should have been. Jesus had to put on something of an antic disposition to weave himself into the world. There is that within us that will never take on arms and legs and tongue. There is a sulker in the little tent of our being who will not come forth into "real life." He dreams and dreams and sends out ingenuous ghosts and mannikins of itself which are our diurnal selves.

And so our deeds play pantomime to this non-emergent and ourselves are mimic to the Self.

"Spectators of life" are in reality spectators of their own emotions—or lack of emotions—about life. Amiel cried that he was doomed forever to stand motionless on the bank and watch the stream roll by. But Amiel did not see the stream, but millions of Amiels which that stream reflected. The spectator, like the actor in life, foists himself upon things.

The sinister ironies of the eye!

After all illusions have gone the prying intellect still remains—the stealthy ghoul who creeps to the grave after the interment of the corpse.

A man may doubt everything with so much passion that he, too, has hallucinations, like the greatest of devotees. Such was the scepticism and nihilism of Flaubert. Like God, he ejected worlds while he yawned.

Flaubert, the most inexorable ironist of all literature, was himself the great exemplar of the irony that ironic passion conceals—for being the exponent of depersonalization in art, making a lifelong attempt to separate his feelings from his artistic taste, he, above all men, has revealed his contempts and hatreds most completely in his works.

Flaubert of all literary men of the last century, Bourget tells us, put at the head of his sentences the I a less number of times than any other. For that reason it is all the more there. There is nothing quicker to reveal a person than an attempt to hide. A great work of art is not an expression of a man's view, his opinion; it is the man. It is the trumpet of the I, a saga of a special ego.

An exceptional joy—the joy of doubt, a joy of which Anatole France is the chief modern exponent, as behind him stand Renan and Montaigne. Here again is proof-positive that ideals in themselves are neither good nor bad. It is the emotion that they inspire that lends to them what they have of pain or pleasure on their countenance (for an idea is only the countenance of a mood).

Temperament decides everything. The hell of Baudelaire was the heaven of Goethe. Dogmas are without humor; Certitude never smiles. The joy inspired by doubt is the joy inspired by change and motion. Just as the philosophic pessimist or Nihilist would not exchange his living faith in evil and cosmic vacuity for all the splendors of the Church, so the child of doubt would not exchange his scepticism for all the sureties of smaller minds. And it is not doubt as doubt that gives him joy, but it is egotistic satisfaction that wells up from the very springs of his nature. Doubt is his truth. Doubt is his own special attitude. Doubt is his inalienable joy. Doubt is his "will-to-power;" doubt is his "will-to-live." It is his weapon of offence and defence. It is *his* illusion, his North Star, his will-o'-the-wisp. Irony, ridicule, disdain, the smiling, nebulous silence that can uncreate a God or a creed are his darling weapons. His mental slingshot is filled with the pebbles of his corrosive wit, and his eye gleams with a drunken humor when he can whisper into the ear of some St. Anthony, "Suppose the absurd should be true?" He knows the very question is a joke and a quibble, for what can be true except eternal doubt?

And so irony lurks behind irony, doubt impinges on doubt—and this God of Enormous Contradictions, this philosophic Merryandrew, laughingly burrows his way to the “Core of Things”—which is only the rind of another core. And he alone keeps wassail over his own graves.

There are few intellectual joys to be compared to the joys of the congenital pessimist. Wherever he looks he may verify himself. The knowledge of his own inherent perversity adds to his egotistic complacency. He is swollen with the consciousness of his companionship with the most famous men of all times—from Buddha to Thomas Hardy. His disdain and contempt for the puppets of the illusory add yet another instrument in the orchestra of his spiritual felicity.

Lastly, he cares nothing about his *kind* of thought; the only agony he cannot endure is not to be heard. The nihilism of Flaubert, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, the hellish perversity of Baudelaire, the ghastly smile on the mind of Jules Laforgue were the very *sources* of whatever happiness came to them. If they could never have enunciated it in print, if they could never have had a hearing, then, indeed, they would have suffered. For the pessimist and Nihilist know only one Golgotha—tonguelessness. If we write against life with joy or urge our pessimism with passion we raise the tide of well-being; for it is not our opinions that make us happy, but the passion with which we urge them.

The inventor of poisons is oftener a happier man than the cultivator of roses. It is the passionate activity of the ego that brings us joy. The direction of that activity is of no moment.

Nothing calms like the sense of the irremediable. The overwhelming certitude that nothing can be changed for the better leaves us solid ground to walk on—it is the final peace of the congenital pessimist. It makes spleen immortal.

World-pessimism is the Ideal that cries for a body. Flaubert, Hardy, Baudelaire and Schopenhauer had a body for their thoughts, but none for their ideals.

The materialist is, then, the most perfect creature this world can produce, for he never has ideals beyond his capacities; he never aspires to that which he cannot embody.

GOOD AND EVIL: THE GHASTLY JUGGERNAUTS

The thing that I *must* do is always right; my vice consists in overdoing it.
All judgment of whatsoever kind is error. One thing cannot pass on another thing.
How absurd the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” when all growth presupposes death!
Pity is a privilege of power.

The end of evil is not good, but the good of the thing that is evil. Hence Napoleon was a perfect being until Waterloo and Iago perfect until the gyves were put upon him. Evil is that which puts a check upon an evolving passion, a gagging of power, necessity turned awry by a greater necessity. Perfection has nothing to do with ethics. Perfection is an adjustment of means to ends. Individual bias viewed from its own standpoint is always right and good; viewed from the standpoint of another individual bias it is wrong and evil.

“I forgive you” means “I hate you but you can no longer harm me.”

A renunciant is a man who gives up his seat in a car to a pretty woman and then maliciously treads on his neighbor’s corns.

Who shall fathom the venom in the soul of the world-rejector!

It is a question whether the name of Jesus will outlive that of Nero, for Nero was the incarnation of evil and in him we recognize our inmost selves — aspiration to power, ruthlessness, unscrupulousness. Jesus was the incarnation of the world-mythus, the epiphany of a Phantom, unhuman, unreal, a spiritual prestidigitateur. Our admiration goes to Jesus, but our real work is building Neros and Napoleons.

Man’s ethical systems are forever pronouncing judgment on the cosmic processes when in reality it is the cosmic processes that are always pronouncing judgment on our ethical systems. Christian ethics have gone to pieces for this reason; the ethics of Socialism are impossible of application for the same reason. The ethical systems of man are verbal judgments. The cosmic system is Judgment itself.

Condemnation of a fault in others is really a secret admiration of that fault. That which we cannot do we hate or worship, and hate is worship plus fear.

Common-sense is the ability to rise to the small.

We call an evil-doer “bad” not because of his action in the abstract, but because of its concrete effect upon us. We do not oppose evil; we dislike pain. The evil-doer can give us pain; hence he is “bad.” This judgment we pass upon him is rooted in as profound a selfishness as is the “bad” act of the evil-doer. We clap him in jail — that is, we do him harm by rendering him harmless so that he may do us no more harm. That acts in themselves are neither good nor evil is seen in the fact that if we act on a certain line of advice and we fail because of this advice we speak of the “evil influence” of the one who advised. But if exactly the same course of action — the same acts, in fact — redound to our benefit we acclaim the adviser a benefactor.

The law does not punish the crimes of sleepwalkers; and yet the crimes, sins, transgressions of our waking are nothing but the result of hallucinatory acts. We are muscle and flesh leashed to a vision. We are somnambules of the unconscious, egged on to do “virtuous” or “evil” acts by an omnipotent, unseen Suggester, who works through heredity, environment, prenatal determinations and the infinite subconscious flux.

One should always give a “moral” reason for doing what he fears to do. When the legal restraints against doing a thing are removed, when penalties are abrogated by Church or State, watch the moral and the sanctimonious swarm into the Forbidden Country! When fear has been removed watch the Christian “rat” on his Ideal.

Altruism is the vanity of the humble. It is the brittle strength of the weak.

Of all the virtues amiability comes the nearest to being a vice.

Prudence never looks you straight in the eye. It is a form of craft. Beware of a man who takes his bearings every time he utters a word or undertakes an action.

There is not a movement of the body that is not murderous.

Remorse is a phase of fear.

Morality is a clever device for exploiting your darling sin with the minimum of punishment.

My vices are as sacred to me as your virtues. Besides, your virtues are my vices. Be off, thou sleek one, or I shall void a particle of my insight upon thee!

Asceticism is the most splendid of all the vices, for in that state one may eat his cake and always have it.

When I wish to do something very urgently I construct a moral code and do it; when I have a strong natural repugnance to doing something I construct a moral code and jail the man who does it.

We are unselfish not in order that we may alleviate another’s suffering but that we may enjoy the spectacle of another’s torture at close range. We love to humble the unfortunate with our alms.

If I pass judgment on another the mental attitude which I am compelled to assume in passing that judgment is that other’s judgment on me.

Self-sacrifice is perverted rapture, the abandonment of self to another who will call you good, but seldom will call you great. There is always a secret contempt in the heart of mortals for the gods that stoop.

DISSOLVING ZENITHS

In the heavy penalties that Nature has put upon the mind of genius she seems to repent of having created for herself an all-seeing Eye. For in the mind of man she seems to see her possible destroyer, and she gives to the lords of intellect a burden that can hardly be borne.

She did not dream that Eye would pierce to the heart of her secret and could remain calm in the face of infinite change and the knowledge of the inutility of Being.

Nature is in terror, like a modest woman caught undressed by the ironic eye of a satyr.

There is a Spy in the world. It is the mind of the seer, the serene rejector, who suffers more than others, but nevertheless remains serene, like the beatification of the faces of martyrs seen through smoke and flame.

The psychology, the poetry, the philosophy of the ages from Plato and Aristotle to Schopenhauer and De Gaultier have only hinted at the uses of the intellect, the tremendous significance and the dazzling possibilities of Mind, the reality risen out of the illusion we call matter. Only the Hindu sages have crossed the threshold and walked with firm foot through the asphyxiating atmosphere that fills every chamber in the House of the Will out on to the terraces that overlook the universe—the terraces of perception, the high, isolated battlements where even ghosts dare not walk.

Not that on these heights emotion is lost and negated; rather, it is spun into rarer and more ethereal textures. The rapture of instinct transmutes itself into the rapture of prospects; the opaque garment of passion melts into the diaphanous robe of mental ecstasy.

And up there is mirth — philosophic mirth, the twinkle philosophic, for what things are seen from that height, where the mechanism of normality ceases to function for him who stands there!

The intellect is anarchic, Dionysian, epicurean, the tempter, the redeemer, the rebellious principle in nature.

The sum of sentiment is God; the sum of intelligence is Lucifer.

The Cross was made for the Will. On it the emotions are crucified. Every wish of the heart finishes at a Golgotha.

For the intellect there can be no Golgotha, no crucifixion, for it takes pride in discovering and registering its very limitations. Where imagination fails it, it seeks a refuge in mockery, and where there remain no further worlds for it to sack it triumphs in irony.

It finds the God of Serenities in the skull of Spinoza, leers at the world from the brain of Voltaire, shrugs its shoulders at life from the head of Schopenhauer, seethes in stupendous vortices of rhapsody behind the foreheads of Beethoven and Liszt, smiles with pity from the brain-cells of Anatole France, and sups on the souls of Beauty in the adytum of Keats.

Small wonder that priest and puritan have put Intellect on the Index!

Creation, the fundamental instinct, has three stages—animal, intellectual, egoistic. In the sub-human world and among most humans the passion for creation is satisfied in the reproduction of their kind. The artist exhausts his creative passion in the making of something that, unlike a child, cannot change, desire, age, grow ugly and decay.

The tendency of the second stage of creation is to show us the absurdity of the first stage.

The third and highest stage of creation is the creation of Self—self-culture, self-conquest, the fabrication of a super-me with no other material result of one's labor than the accidental influence one may exert on other beings.

This third type reaches its culminating grandeur in *epicurean Yogihood*, where the inutility and absurdity of all creative processes are seen—all except its own, for here creator and destroyer blend, and the irony of its own paradox is redeemed in its eternal self-mockery.

Thus the most terrible moment in intellectual evolution is when a man first sees himself from his own height—the butterfly glancing back on its late slimy envelope.

The free mind must have one policeman—Irony. The free, skeptical spirit—all curiosity, buccaneering, the poacher on forbidden preserves, the winged hound of knowledge—is surrounded by footpads within and without and sandbaggers with the bludgeons called “systems” concealed in their sleeves.

To remain perfectly free one must have the will-to-disbelieve, the instinct to suspect everything. And he must put his friends in irons and straitjackets and listen to them at a safe distance.

His is a religious grin; and when the Ironical Spirit falls asleep at its post, it knows that the velvet-footed spirit of Practical Logic is prowling about its night-fire.

To the eye of the transcendental ironist all are not equal in foolishness, for there are degrees of stupidity and absurdity; but all are equal at last when flung against the Infinite..

The secret of alleviation from pain lies in the conception of a beyond to every object, every passion and every ache; that is, the perception that each thing is transitory and ephemeral and can be dissolved by an act of thought in a larger relation.

The intellect that lives bathed in the constant rays of that ultimate beyond—which is the engulfing Infinite—makes little ado about anything. Its paltry, practical life is swallowed up in the boundless wastes of its consciousness. Desire itself fades like the last thread of smoke from a volcano seen from a bark fleeing to landless horizons.

Intellect is salvation. To widen the rings of consciousness, to recede into vaster and vaster centres of vision, to live with processes instead of things, to swing acrobatically from the trapeze of years to the iron hoop of eternity, to sit and watch the slow drizzle of souls across the ages instead of wriggling around in planetary mud, to burrow for the causes of things rather than to weep over consequences—that is to breathe a smiling defiance at the bronzed face of Oblivion and set up with your own hands the ivory obelisk recording your victory over the corpses of change.

Man can tolerate any thought except that Nature resides in him, and not man in Nature. If he seeks an outlet for his iconoclastic instincts he says he “conforms to a natural law,” deriving from this abstract and anonymous Polytheism the justification of doing what he wishes to do.

The witches that brewed our destinies in cauldrons are no longer accredited, but the brew has been transferred from cauldrons to the receptacles of Nature. Law—“Natural Law” is now the witch.

Man is always seeking for something beyond himself in order to justify or condemn himself. He dare not erect himself into God, mount the Horebs of his own soul and mould the Tables of the Law out of his own feelings, dreams and aspirations. Man is brave except when confronting himself. He believes in all kinds of divinities except the divinity which gives value to all other so-called divinities—that is, himself, the inner, sufficient man, who is the measure of whatever is, even of those mythic measures—devils and gods—that he forever fabricates.

The instinct to perceive the ludicrous is the beginning of freedom. The will-to-mockery—that is the beginning of serenity. After emerging from the drudgery of the emotional sweatshops one gets a view of that minutiae of stupidity—the life of the masses.

The eating, drinking, sexual man, submerged in passion and emotion and clamped in the interminable trivial, can have no notion of the fact that he is only a by-product, an experiment in the hands of some evolving principle the aim of which is yet unguessed.

The billions that come and go across the earth are not, properly speaking, living at all, since they have not super-consciousness; they have no perception of their irrelativity to the eternal mystery that surrounds us, since they are the marionettes of reflex action.

The condition of the vast hordes of men and women that rise from embryo and end in senility, having accomplished exactly what the ape and the bee and crab accomplish with infinitely less noise, is not as pitiful as it is ridiculous.

To the intellect that has kept its head above the waves of the will for any length of time, and so achieved an independent relation to things and a view that differs not in degree but in kind from the view under the waves, *incongruity*—or the genesis of the ridiculous—is the first idea of which it is conscious.

To perceive eternal necessity and its endless repetition of forms, and then to glance below into the world of struggling human animalculae, sets the Intellect a-tittering and touches the mouth to irony and sets in the eyes the twinkle of knowledge and the moisture of pity.

In looking at the world today—its politics, its business, its heavy seriousness in all things—one feels how far we are away from the riant frivolity, the mad vinous goings-on that a certain aspect of the everlasting Greek legend connotes.

The spirit of Aristophanes and Rabelais is nowhere perceptible. Man has civilized himself into stupidity. His gravity is the one source of the comic in brains still susceptible to the influence of the incongruous.

This tiny candidate for oblivion and eternal transmutation sitting in clusters in solemn national and international convocations revising his notion of economic predestination! The Greeks with their streak of *insouciance* had some glimpse of the utter irrelativity of man.

To see humans from the Empire State Tower brings a desire to laugh, but to look at the world from the high mental tower of disinterested perception is the most uproariously grotesque thing in the world.

For the first sees the doer, man, and that is pathetic if one stops there; but from these lookouts of the intellect one sees the Undoer and the ironic sneer on its face. It is then one becomes conscious of the humor of the universal superstition, namely, that there is a difference between being and not-being.

Ages ago our ancestors dreamed of posterity—the “wonder of posterity”, the “joy of newer generations”, the “blessings of the coming civilizations.” Well, here we are, *their posterity*, their future time, the fabled romping-place of their imaginations made real! The iron horror, machinery; the grinding poverty of our great cities; the ghastly deviltries of “enlarged navies;” the flowing world sewers of “international politics;” the Communistic mania smearing and smashing and levelling all that is distinctive, aristocratic, highbred—that is the fetid thing that is today called “modern civilization,” the slaves’ breeding-hole, the immortalizer of mediocrity.

Here in this Black Hole each one battles for his inch of standing-room and his patch of air, while Science sits on the turrets and towers of our prison maundering about the glories of “break-

ing the atom”, “aeronautic progress” and the “scientific organization of the means of consumption and distribution”!

“Progress” is forever a myth of the imagination and the “betterment of mankind” is a drug. Always ghosts, catch-words and the brazen cry of “progress!” Forever and forever this lie of a “golden age,” the posterity-obsession! Since man became a moral being he has been stupid. The simple impulse to pleasure, the law of “seek thy happiness,” express thyself, has undergone every conceivable perversion.

Man’s blasphemy has always been religious. The only blasphemy is denial and postponement of self, the immolation of my instincts on the altar of some fictitious god. That satanic grin on the face of the moon—did not that world once, too, hold her burden of hypocrisy? And the ironic twinkle of the stars in the great free spaces—do they not tell you the story of man’s absurd illusions and his organized cant?

The words “Ideal” and “Idealist” have never been understood. All dreamers, philosophers and poets have been called idealists. They have, in the mind of the practical person, imaginative worlds up their sleeves which they desire to set upon the table when Convention and Conformity turn away their heads.

As a matter of fact, great dreamers are all destroyers. If they were idealists, they would never be tendered the hemlock or bound to the stake or cross. The practical person is the idealist—arch-idealist of all time. He has an ideal of sexual relationship which he calls marriage. Let the “dreamer” dare attack it! Defend “free-love” (the realism of sex-relation) in a crowd of philistines and watch the sudden automatic amalgamation for defensive purposes, for here an ideal (that is, an organized superstition) is to be defended at all costs.

All laws in which the community prescribes the conduct—“betters the morals”—of individuals is enacted on a theory of “world betterment”, i.e., an ideal. All this stupendous and freedom-destroying web of regulation in which the individual finds himself has been woven on the loom of the Ideal. Today the practical, cold-blooded doctrine of self-regulation stands confronted by bayonets in the hands of idealists (that is, the slaves of the superstition called “socialization”, the stupid cringers before an ideal of herd-life). The lure of the Socialistic state attracts more practical people than any other doctrine ever before put forth because it pictures an *ideal* condition.

The man-in-the-street is the red-handed murderer in all times, for from him, with his ignorant dogmatizing and clotted ideals, flows all the cruelties of “progress” and legislative morality. The free soul, the realist, must always fly to the desert to escape this theoretical spew that flows from ideals of conduct, ideals of life, ideals of citizenship, ideals of sex-relation and ideals of what-not (anti-cigarette ideals, anti-beer ideals, anti-adultery ideals).

For the glory of Spinoza and Nietzsche and Thoreau and Whitman is that they came simple and frank and innocent into a world of fetid idealists. They were naked, and behold those with clothes called them impure! They conformed to themselves, and lo! they were stoned for idealists by the thugs of Idealism!

Innocence! Innocence! where is it fled? Where does that ancient child hide itself?—the innocence of the gods, the innocence of the Viking conscience, the innocence of law, the innocence of instinct, the innocence of the unconscious.

We of the historic epoch live in a chamber of horrors, with its racks and wheels of “right” and “wrong” and its ghastly confessional closets of “good-and-evil.” Everything is tainted. Art has lost its effrontery because it has lost its spontaneity; it is brainish and vapid and apologizes in long Shavian prefaces.

Even rebellions seek justifications and challenge on moral grounds. Artistic, spiritual and social nonconformity use the weapons of conformity to justify itself. Nature is paying the penalty for willing an intellect. There is the spot of blood on all we do—the mythic spot of blood that pursued Lady Macbeth; and all about us, in the air, in the heavens, we are menaced by the aerial daggers that none but the over-refined brain of Macbeth saw. Like Lot’s wife, we look back; *look back on every act*, instead of passing gayly on into newer circles of power.

“Why have you broken your toy, child?” the solemn-conscienced parent asks sternly.

“Because it was made to be broken,” responds the soul of the child through its laughing eyes.

And so all that comes to our hands is made to be broken— broken gayly; even as Change uses and breaks us gayly, passing on without memory, without conscience, without apology, as innocent as impulse, as immortal as destruction and resurrection.

“What have you done?” Creation, expression, embodiment in some material frame of the fleeting dreams of the soul have always been held to be the one excuse for being, the ultimate of worth. As though creation or expression had necessarily to embody itself materially!

Creation is in its highest attribute and activity an exfoliation of the inner nature before the glad eye of Perception. The highest expression is increment of knowledge expressed in will, strength, character, aspiration.

Why *must* I make a picture, a book, a palace of my vision? Merely to be conscious to-day of a newer horizon is to have expressed myself. To express one’s self to one’s self, to accouche on the beds of consciousness each day another thought, to forge for one’s self in the night before the earless, eyeless, tongueless Self another dimension wherein the I may pasture on the morrow—is not that finer than to be possessed with the vulgar craze for prehensile embodiment?

And yet I felt the impulse to write this on paper! The very irony of vanity!

Consciousness may be only a prolonged debauch of the Unconscious, but in that long carouse it has begotten a mighty warrior, the buccaneering Individual, a pillager of strange mains, rover of strange seas, a cut-throat.

As a woman who feels herself with child for the first time feels the impulse to retreat, to fly, to secrete herself, so a man with a new, a daring thought, a *new method, another way*, has the instinct of fear awake in him simultaneously with the joy that sings in the heart and brain. The barrier-breakers, the wondermen, the cerebral cliff-dwellers, those on the crow’s nest of this phantom ship of a universe, the horizon-eaters, the space-peerers—they should have a care!

It is Nietzsche who complains that the dream and the opportune moment of execution never come together. They never can because there is an inherent conflict between the spirit of dreams and the spirit of action.

All dreaming, all great mental creation, is the aureole, the fiery winding-sheet, of some physical weakness, the incense from our sepulchres. No person ever freely willed a “life of contemplation.”

It is the compromise fine souls are compelled to make with the spirit of life. It is the inexorable retort of delicacy to vulgarity.

As action is normal, only the normal, mediocre mind can get itself a body that reflects itself. The beyond-man retires to the interior jungles and moon-peaks, where he may breed himself in quiet, where he may eject into those inner dimensions, those infinities of perception and feeling, what there is creative in his ego.

There are “Raphaels without hands;” but every Raphael may claim his rock in the Caucasus, his Alhambra—and his Rosinante.

The paradoxical mind is the mind that sees the irony of its own truth. The aesthetic and intellectual overmen know what has been called “the truth of masks”—also the masks of truths. With alpenstock and iron clutch they dare crawl out to the edge of their moral and intellectual phases and peep *beneath* the thin projections on which they lie, thus discovering the *other side* of their support.

And on the other side of that ledge of gold or ice or moss they may see things that would strike with idiocy the brain that can only feel its way from a premise to a conclusion. But those who can, and do instinctively, reason a way *out of all premises* into the unpremiered—the just perceivable fourth dimension—who by blending opposites create a vacuum which must be filled hypothetically by another kind of activity—for them there is the savage delight of free heights.

For the eagle may behold both sides of the moon and live, but the slugworm must stick to its logical grooves.

The perception of the absurd is the beginning of the lust for the sublime. And the paradox is the key to freedom.

Each man has his secret. We the intellectual aestheticians must despoil each one of his inmost—rob, pillage and loot each being brought to our door. For this were we born.

Like a cat, we must circle softly around the mice that overrun the world—a cat with gleaming eyes and silken-smooth coat. The most commonplace person has thus his value, his angle, his particular, unique perfume. After vivisection he is of no use to us. But until then he is virgin and thrills us with possibilities.

Audacity, “immorality” and the will-to-be-tempted — they are the marks of life. Again and again my thoughts and instinct circle around those torches set in a stupid, smug world of little beings. To rape the sacred Vestals of Convention on the high altar of “Social Necessity”—that is the dream of those who ponder under the walls of the Citadels of Conformity.

The mind of the dreamer and thinker, ravished forever by its quest for ideal delight, bitten by its infinite doubts, living in the day of its own open eye, goes into the world to circulate with the average man under a mask. The spirit of ideal delight must be gently chloroformed, upon the mouth of Doubt a muzzle must be fastened, and the eye whose gaze is clinical must be closed with the copper pennies of politeness.

Life as experience; life as episode; life as incident: there can be no other justification for life that still leaves one free. What is new must be welcomed because it is new, not because it may be true. To die and to find the Truth are the same things. Convictions, creeds, philosophic or otherwise, are tombs. Only the expedient is immortal.

Doubt is dynamic, Olympian. “I think,” “I urge,” “I believe”—these are the stones that one places over the graves of dead things.

An eagle about to take flight from a peak—such should be the attitude of the free, evolving spirit. No thought is final—it should only be the promontory from which we behold other thoughts, unbeheld before. Actions, thoughts and feelings that complete themselves are tombs.

MEN AND WOMEN: NATURE'S FOLLY

The manner in which a person lies about a fact may be more interesting than a fact itself.
Some women possess a modesty that is positively lascivious.

You do not see his faults from a high enough point of view; they may be his virtues.

Most men are proof against the woman who frankly solicits; but what man is proof against the wiles of modesty ?

Religious zeal in unmarried women is a form of concupiscence.

When a person confesses his ignorance on a subject he does it not to be enlightened but to draw attention to his frankness.

The end and aim of the business man, the money-seeker, is to manoeuvre his way, like a rat, into a cage, filch the cheese and get out before the door snaps.

Each person I meet is the extension of my own ego. His traits are my own traits. If I have them not now I had them once, or I will have them.

As base as man—that is the one perfect simile because baseness cannot be found outside of man. The tiger, the hyena, the serpent are cruel, but not base.

What keeps the masses at their drudgeries day after day? Two imaginative seductions—the anticipation of night and its bed-sweets and the Magic To-morrow, the Miraculous Day. So age after age they suck away at Time's dirty dugs, and the few drops of stinking water they feel gurgling in their throats they believe to be milk from the Sacred Teat.

Success has the same effect on us as flattery—it deadens thought, throws us off our guard, stupefies us. The life-failure is the only competent judge of the things of this world; he is alive at every point. Only the foiled are capable of estimating the forces that undo us. For this reason great seers are generally physical defectives. Would you *know*?—then pray for failure.

Marriage is popular because it abrogates the law against rape.

Old maids come to have a sly regard for the harlot.

Never introduce a woman to your best friend, especially if that best friend is your mind.

Education: What will it profit a child to know the States that bound Pennsylvania on the north, east, south and west if it does not know that its life is bounded on the north by Pain, on the east by Illusion, on the south by Seduction, on the west by Ounce?

The intangible, the unspoken, in us have tongues of fire. Not my word makes the profound impression, but the way I utter it. And if I utter nothing, then my silence shall character things for you. I cannot hear what you say because I am watching your reservations. You are blabbing your secrets to me and you do not know it. You tell me your whys and wherefores, but I see other whys and wherefores.

Man is woman awake, the unconscious that has flowered into intellect. Woman is the sarcophagus of the past; man the sprig of edelweiss that has sprung from the depths of that tomb.

Woman is a millinery creature—she loves the decorative and worships the verbal. She has no love of truth; but she likes the *way* truth is expressed. If truth is not expressed well for her she prefers a lie splendidly told. She loves religion for the same reason that she loves a lover, a

novel or a new hat— she gets a sensation, an emotion. She is soulless and an atheist in the worst sense, because to her soullessness she adds hypocrisy. There are women that money, flowers, suppers and dresses cannot buy, but no woman in the world can resist a poet and his passionate verbal millinery, and if she does not fall before a fleshly romancer she worships the author of the parables of the New Testament and she cohabits with him secretly between the scarlet sheets of her imaginings. But it is not Christ she worships, but Christ's white cloak and his "soulful" eyes and the rest of nature's seductive millinery. In the confessional she revels in the lascivious joy of spilling her soul at the feet of an alleged ascetic (how the ascetic appeals to woman! for here again is millinery, more embroidery for her libidinous imagination, more "style"!). In short, woman has but one instinct—to be tickled, with a baby, a lover, or a pretty poem. She understands nothing, but rubs herself lasciviously and passionately against everything. She has the curiosity of the mole, not of the eagle. She is in-capable of telling the truth except to bolster up a lie. Women know their own deadly emptiness, and their every movement is an attempt to pull the rags of appearance over their soullessness. *Millinery! Millinery! Millinery!*

THE SPECIES-GHOST

Man is the rind of the species, the integument of his ancestors, the speaking-tube of the Species-Ghost. Individuality is an hypothesis. All differences in men are merely superficial.

We are the rapidly tossed-off shapes from the syncopated brain-beat of the Species-Ghost, whose aims are extra-individual. Analyze each one of us to the centre and there is universal merger. The intellect, which seems the numbered seal of individual difference, is only a sparrowhawk.

It is the lookout of the Species-Ghost, the far-flung phosphor from its lidless, sleep-glozed eyes.

Leander swims the Hellespont for the Species-Ghost and Abelard remits the cowl for the Species-Ghost; Euclid, Newton and Leonardo are the Species-Ghost at play, and under the helmets of the millions fallen on many battlefields she peeps out and grins, and lapses into her pregnant trance again and dreams those redundant, multi-colored dreams which we are, her buffeted shadows.

All is for her, all is of her, all returns to her. We shadows toddle no farther than the ends of her leash. Our finest act is only a particle of the pulp of her secret intents. She apparels us in a light that seems to gleam with mystic ardors and in a clumsy moment she cancels it, like a giant open hand rammed down suddenly over a lighted candle. We are her multiplex echoes—echoes muted into an immortal stillness when she gestures that she has done with us.

She schemes for us the slow agonies of life and holds our quivering souls over the flaming hollows of our hopes, and dyes our days with the scarlet of illusive imaginings.

Drunk with an ideal called the Type, we are the shambles of the Species-Ghost, the charnel-houses through which she stalks to her unknowable bourne.

The bleak Calvaries of individual life are the feast-places of the Species-Ghost. She multiplies her shadows most where Poverty stalks, and into the houses of little bread she brings the greatest number of mouths that shall be shaped to food-whimper.

She bids Despair yet live if it but hoid a single reproductive germ and blows her withering breath nuer our eyes when the periods of duplication are past- Ur if we still live on, it is that she may mock us with memories.

She sits serenely on the tombs of races, nations and individuals, for her retorts and crucibles are older than illusion and as indestructible as life.

The Spirit of the Species never forgets. She is Memory's monument. She marshals the entire past into each present, weaving link on link, circle within circle, and we humans are nothing but the bonded warehouses of her immemorial gim-cracks; relics of antiquity; cobwebs of potency and tendency spun by the Type-Idea in the spumy brain of the Species-Ghost.

Man transmits himself through a physical act, but he transmits the type through a metaphysical act.

In the formless seed which was my beginning where were the moulds and dies and the incalculable forces that decreed I should be a man, and not a gorilla or a demigod?

I paused as inexorable tendency in the atoms of the seed. Beyond the material atom of scientific hypothesis there lies the super-atom of particular-type; forces that stand behind Force; ghosts-in-waiting; phantoms of the before-world that were shown to Cain by Lucifer in their flight beyond the outposts of relation in Byron's great drama.

The minimum visible, the least mote, is still a wonder-house of unguessable possibilities. The Species-Ghost is housed there, the ghost who works through us, around us, above us and under us, *but never for us*.

We each have our secret pact with the Species-Ghost, some work to be done for her, some trinkets to be tossed into her ^dimensional lap. Each thing we do, no matter how abstract, is done to further the life-instinct, to raise vitality to the begetting mark.

All pictures are painted for her, all philosophies sweated out of the brain for her, all poems written to her. Her subtle indirections are unimaginable. In the land where the denial of life is the cult of the great religion, India, she has multiplied beyond all numbers. She invents priests and monks and ascetics to sharpen the imaginings of the millions and to whet the reproductive appetite.

She smiles in secret at those who keep the covenants of chastity, knowing what gigantic sex forces she is conserving and caging in those worn bodies, forces that will break their dikes elsewhere and do her work. The chaste are Love's apprentices; the bodies of ascetics are reserve storage-houses of the Species-Ghost.

We who are cones of dust draw our significance from her; but what does *she* signify?

Why these multiform vain masks, this sublime fidelity to a sovereign inutility? To what God are we the fleeting orisons? To what Mecca stands the race addressed?

The individual is eclipsed in the species, and the species hangs a frail tatter to uncertain geological and cosmological forces.

Each of us is but the hoary, leafless shoot of a monstrous Idea, a concrete particle in a bloodless abstraction—the Type.

We are the buzzing gnats of a perpetual sundown. The light that gleams in our eyes is not *our* light, but species-light, and the work I do is not my work, but species-work.

Onward and onward, ever hastening, we strew the alleys and boulevards of time with our flesh and blood and bone, the ultimate and the beginning yoked in a fathomless Mystery. Or we lie stretched on the biers of contemplation, the sword of revolt dropped from the puzzled hand.

We are Time's terrible and wonderful evocation, the quick-tumbled, earth-tumbled spawn of the Species-Ghost, who labors and labors and comes not out of us.

THE UNCONSCIOUS: TWENTY-THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE CORPUSCLE

The Unconscious has perception without knowledge, memory without consciousness.

If in sleep we forget our waking lives, may we not in our waking lives forget a far more wonderful life we live in our sleep?

We obey laws we know nothing of; we are crushed by the imponderable, lashed by huge whips of silk which we cannot see. A danger clearly seen only half-exists. It is the unknown fatalities that ambush us.

In the sunken galleons of the Unconscious we find coinage of an incalculably ancient mintage.

The Unconscious in its blind all-knowingness flings a picture into consciousness of what will be. This is a “presentiment,” a “warning,” a prophecy. It is nothing but the working of the law of causality. The Unconscious has experienced 1, 2 and 3. It proceeds to show that 1 plus 1 will bring about 2; 2 plus 2 will bring about 4. All conscious experience is a verification of the predestined.

The Unconscious is the arsenal of causation, the lair of the Furies, the tool-house of the old blind artisan, Fate.

Consciousness is a post-hypnotic awareness of our deeper, unconscious selves. All conscious action is the working out of endless suggestions created in endless past times by the Eternal Suggester—Need. All conscious life is a post-hypnotic revelation.

How can we “fulfil Self” when all our lives are a vicarious atonement, when each one of us is compelled to liquidate the debts contracted by an ancestor?

That which is born must decay, and that which decays must be born again; but that which causes both birth and death knows not mortality. The vitalizing principle not only appears in things newly created but in things that die as well. The Eternal Creative Passion knows no death. Disintegration is one of its methods of recreating. Death (so-called) is a change in the direction of a force, not the annihilation of a force. The Unconscious, the borderless reservoir of all things, knows not life or death.

The “inanimate” is inconceivable. The very highest kind of intelligence may be latent in the rotting beams of old houses. In some “inanimate” things this possibility of life—this universally involved mind—lies nearer to the surface than in others and suspires an atmosphere, an aura or projection of its coming life and gives rise to strange influences that highly sensitive beings feel in certain places. “Haunted houses” are such.

Twenty-thousand leagues under our lightest act, twenty-thousand leagues under the seas of chance, there you may hunt for “free-will.” And if you never return from those depths I shall know what you have found. And if, by some miracle, you return I shall know, too, from your grave silence what you have found.

Instincts are blindfolded ideas. The eye of a powerful instinct will, however, pierce the bandage and seek its end with a greater degree of certainty than the wideawake thought. For the highest

thought is a manifestation of a profound need of sight generated in an anterior existence, a need that was felt there only as an instinct with a fold over its eye.

The idea of free-will is one of the decoys of Unconscious Eternal Necessity.

An odor, a sighing in the trees at night, the rustle of a dress will evoke thoughts and portions of our past that we had forgotten entirely. Where have these thoughts been? In the Unconscious, we say. But they cannot merely rest there inert for years, neither living nor dying. May they not have lives of their own? May not the Unconscious have a consciousness peculiar to its own nature? Why will not the law of procreation, growth and development which we find universal in the narrow domain of our personal consciousness hold as well in the domain of personal unconsciousness? All past acts and thoughts live as modifying influences of our present actions; but modification may be only one of their activities.

We may be living an infinite number of lives at once. The savage who believes that his soul actually leaves his body in sleep and enacts what it dreams may have the truth.

That infinite unconscious world in us—which is to our conscious life as sun-waves to the midge that lives a day in their waves—may be the abode of an intelligence that sees our consciousness as a form of death.

Thought is conscious force. Unconscious force is indestructible, immortal. Why may not the same be true of force that has once attained self-consciousness?

Each mood is a composite of all previous moods, and what you have forgotten is always being remembered.

Oblivion is neither a state nor a thing; it is disappearance, not annihilation. It conveys loss, not extinction. It is the land lost in the fog, but land still.

Sometimes in a roomful of people who have been talking a strange, unaccountable silence will fall on the company. By a curious coincidence all will stop talking at about the same time as though all had sensed some common danger or ghost-form. A strange uneasiness takes possession of all. The five or ten seconds of silence seem measured out to infinity. The soul seems to take a sudden plunge into bottomless abysses. A vague fear is perceptible on all faces, a fear allied to the fear of the supernatural or nightmare-terror. It is as though silence had become material and stood a ghastly Presence before all. In the voice of the first person who breaks the spell is a trace of nervous hysteria, and there come over the faces of the others, at the sound again of the familiar, looks of unutterable relief, something of a sense of deliverance. All are aware, in varying degrees, of having been in the presence of something horribly Real. What is the secret of this fear, of this soul-embarrassment, this momentary terror? Do the subliminal selves of all those present merge and create a Presence, intangible, incorporate, a Thing, shadowy, dumb, all-knowing, malign, inhuman; a being compounded of all the beings present, suddenly evoked by the falling of all volitional masks? Or is it the sudden apparition of endless pasts, a great composite ghost of those beings that each of us were when we, in our ignorance and fear of foes lurking in the dark and in mountain passes, made of night and silence a Thing?

HATE

Philosophic and poetical gentility has prated for thousands of years of the creative and trans-forming power of love.

I write something of the creative and transfiguring power of hate, of the eternity of hate, the morality of hate, the rejuvenating power of hate, the cosmic, social and artistic necessity for hate, the splendor and sublimity of hate.

Repulsion, hatred, opposition—"Room for me or thou diest"—are the conditions of individu-ality.

Universal love would insure universal catalepsy. Passion creates, not love. The spark is struck off at the moment of impact.

All movement is conditioned in hate. All so-called progress, which is merely motion lapsing from ironic goal to ironic goal, is the revolt of the Present against the Past. Eternal insurrection, challenge, hatred and battle are the conditions of the survival of anything.

Hate, dissatisfaction, discontent, contempt are the sacred fires that must be forever kept burn-ing. What man dislikes shall be his God; what man hates shall be his golden Cain-brand.

The mystical blasphemers, the upsetters, the deniers, the sappers, those that seek to lay the rotten rookeries of cosmic and earthly complacency in the dust—it is they who are the Holy Ghosts of Time, our guardians, the night-watch of those who love and sleep.

Prometheus, gnawed by a majestic hate, still parleys with Jove, and Lucifer, now as forever, still hurls his imprecations from his earth-hell and pits his mystic steeds of black against the milk-white geldings of the Lord of Incense.

In nature hate and murder are conditions of survival.

All beauty is a record of hate. Forms, elements and worlds flush space, appealing to the contemplative-aesthetic sense merely as carven images of beauty. But to the clairvoyant intel-lect they are the painted records of an everlasting strife, the gonfalons of triumph raised above the cosmic shambles, the jubilees of hate triumphant.

This opposition, hatred, strife and demonic impulse to arise into being and maintain a foothold there at any cost is a commonplace of existence, but not a commonplace in human apprehension. To live and to prey are to hate.

The Hindu says all life is guilt. All feasts celebrate the death of something. They are the gam-bols of the peoples on corpses, the high wassail of hate, the congratulations of survival.

The Persian invocation says "Give me this day an enemy."

An enemy helps me to create, drives me to my wits' ends, distends my ego and puts a thousand eyes in my brain. An enemy's eye cast on me in hate has fructifying power. Self rushes to the centre of gravity; instinct and intellect arise armed cap-a-pie. From within the penetralia of the soul there issues the primitive being aureoled in his acrid aversions.

Hate is ethical. Hate destroys trammels. It is the moral passion that burns up codes, parch-ments and flays oleaginous optimism that pins paper roses in the hair of the Lord of Things as They Are.

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and Strindberg rowelled the dugs of the Arch-Stupidity that litters us and the worlds we expire on like a field-woman accouches her burden.

“Moral indignation,” which is the name moralists give to hate, is a barometer of mental and spiritual life. Each is known by his aversions, by the things he seeks to destroy.

They who hate life are greater than life; they who love life are still-born; they are ravished only by sex and kitchen-scents.

The life of the individual is like the life of a beast of prey.

The totality of each man’s movements from the cradle to the grave if they could be put into a design, into a kind of composite photograph, would resemble the circular, attentive movement of an animal about its prey.

There is the thing the Will seeks to pounce on and make its own, and we circle around it for years sometimes, drawing closer and closer, crushing with the paw of egotism all that gets into our way.

All great literature is rooted somewhere in an ideal hatred, in a recognition of the eternal *qui vive* of Man; the perception that man is greater in his overcomings than in his resignations.

The revealer must be a good hater. He moves the world because the lever of intellectual perspective rests on the fulcrum of aversions.

Saint Tantalus (Part 2)

By
BENJAMIN DeCASSERES
TO
CARLO DE FORNARO

FOREWORD

Part 2 of “Saint Tantalus” is from the larger book of the same name. Part 1 was Book No. 8. Part 3 will be published some time in the future. The original title of this Book 22 was advertised as “Dionysus and Maya”, but I decided to keep the original title of “Saint Tantalus.”

A few epigrams and paragraphs in this book appeared anonymously in Elbert Hubbard’s “Philistine”, to which I contributed for about ten years.

—*Benjamin DeCasseres.*

I write because I wish to make for ideas, which are my ideas, a place in the world. If I could foresee that these ideas must take from you peace of mind and repose, if in these ideas that I sow I should see the germs of bloody wars and even the cause of the ruins of many generations, I would nevertheless continue to spread them. It is neither for the love of you nor even for the love of truth that I express what I think. No—I sing! I sing because I am a singer. If I use you in this way, it is because I have need of your ears!—*Max Stirner.*

I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no.—*William Blake.*

Now, Saint Tantalus is the Pope of Hell.

A PRAYER

Give me this day a corroding doubt and deliver me from single-mindedness and all faith that I may scan the Centre from each point on the marvellous Circle and scan each point on the Circle from the illusive Centre, and let not my procreating disbeliefs fall away from me, and defraud me not of pain.

PHILOSOPHIC SPLEEN

When we think of philosophers we think of heads, heads magical with dreams, heads poisoned with venom, heads that hold the secret of serenity, heads that are frenzied with the Absolute, heads ironic, heads lascivious, heads anarchic, sad heads that carry about in them withered worlds and the parched and yellowed skins of their youthful ideals.

Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spinoza were the sensual hermits.

Philosophy is the lamentation of intellectual voluptuaries, the recessional of renunciants—the triumphant largo of personal defeat. The thoughts of philosophers are their paramours. They weave their ecstasies of the incorporate. They have taken the Infinite for concubine. Men who write out philosophies differ in no respect from women who keep secret diaries—for philosophy is nothing more than the diary of a bias, the autobiography of a private weakness.

The beginning of intolerance is in a “love of truth,” which is the intellectual aura that surrounds the deep-rooted prejudices of philosophers. Whether a thing is true or false is of no importance. If it yields pleasure it has fulfilled its reason for being. This is as true of a strumpet as of Hegel’s philosophy. Pleasure, not truth, is the unit of all values. And that was the secret of the philosophy of the greatest of all the thinkers of the ancient world: Epicurus.

To the philosophic mind, isolation is the only miracle. Each thing is the shadow of some other thing. A thing without relations would be a monstrous apocalypse in nature—a veritable Peter Schlemihl. Driven from relation to relation, he is at last forced to posit an Absolute, a First Cause, a something that stands unrelated to a past. Then he smiles that lifelong smile, which is nothing more than the fine ironic glint from his vacuity.

Express your deadly thought if you wish to extract the poison in it. Let the artist kill the thinker. Let creation—and there is a creation that is destructive—destroy the destroyer.

Where is the thinker who at the end of his life has called “encore!” in the face of the falling curtain? His books are his bile transfigured.

He who pursues truth must be prepared to *enjoy* the honeymoon after he catches her—the honeymoon, I mean, of disillusion. And if there is no disillusion, you have married the wrong truth.

The supremely tragic figure of all philosophic history is Nietzsche, for the thing he hated most—the Ideal—fell desperately in love with his sublime soul and strangled him in its love-coil.

His “Will-to-Power,” his “realism,” his “Dyonisian” passion, his optimism are the very groundwork of all ideals. He was, *par excellence*, the thing he spurned. He was the supreme idealist of his age, a man drunk on the Impossible, a maker of idols as fragile as any that had gone before.

His spleen was idealism, his superb egotism was idealism. His mind was blasted by the love of the thing he hated.

He was a mental polytheist—a real primitive of the intellectual world. He endowed his Thoughts with life, conceived them to be living things. They frowned at him, laughed at him, dressed and undressed before him. He married them, unmarried them—he, the priest of Mind. He coddled them, raged against them; they lived in communities like men and women; they

functioned before him, like us. He even speaks of their brows, their necks, their legs; some were fleet, others slow, some lame, other were mere slaveys. They lived hierarchically. Some wore purple; others patches. They had their houses, their dungheaps, their bathtubs.

They slew him in the end—as we are all slain at last by the things we give birth to.

NIHILISM: THE FATAL SPITE

All intelligence tends to Nihilism. All impotence ends in venom. Nihilism is the supreme ethic of the baffled.

Irony and paradox are everywhere at the core of things. It is by a rigid logic that we destroy the logicality of existence. It was by mathematical formulas that Henri Poincaré, the great mathematician, destroyed the value of mathematics as an absolute science. Out of Flaubert's thousand-faceted mind, which by affirming and negating every point of view destroyed all points of views, was born the only logical point of view from which to look at existence: the ironic.

The history of so-called "intellectual movements" is the history of the attempts of man to justify his instincts. They are the codes in which he legalizes his inevitable growth, revolts, re-versions, perversions.

Merely to have a feeling about a thing is not enough. There must be a Herbert Spencer to justify the world's feeling about evolution before it is accepted. There must be Voltaires and Rousseaus and Schopenhauers to tell us *why* things merely felt to be wrong are wrong.

This feeling of the necessity for intellectual justification of what is inexorable is the obscure reasoning of the Unconscious itself. It is the everlasting shadowy *Why* that tracks forever through all of its labyrinthine ways the *Must*. I say shadowy *Why*, for the *Must* is the reality. The old proverb "We will always find reasons for doing what we want to do" holds in its profound wisdom the secret of the appearance of thought itself.

Intellect sanctifies, and, like all professional sanctifiers, it is hypocritical and slavish.

Nihilism is the last word in philosophic absurdity. It admits nothing, denies nothing; it has no programme, no metaphysic. It is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. It holds that universal annihilation is to be desired not because the world is necessarily evil, or life insupportable, but because the whole scheme of things is earmarked with stupidity.

Does God exist? Yes. Well, what then? What of it? He is merely the protagonist of all stupidity. But how came the Nihilist with this knowledge—the irretrievable stupidity of all possible life-conditions? Well, that's the irony of it. He himself is the greatest victim of the Monstrous Mockery. Hence, more than ever he sticks to his Nihilism. He is the transcendental idealist. He is *the* transcendental butt of a transcendental inutility.

Nihilism is the only doctrine (?) that challenges the validity of its own feelings. It is the very soul of Irony itself brought to judgment, having even its suspicion of annihilation, suspecting that the Everlasting Nothing is only another trap.

The Nihilist is in love with the absurd. His dreams are the fantasies of doubt. And, after all, provisionally, he stands nearest the truth—for he mirrors cosmic absurdity. His formula is that of Brahma: abracadabra.

Nihilism is a war on relativity. It is the passion for the Absolute, which spurns parts. It is a form of the mania for the infinite. It is a divine madness inspired by the transitory and the phenomenal.

Once in a while there come into the world men who will be stayed by no answer— a Flaubert, a Saltus, a Nietzsche, a Jules de Gaultier. They are the Implacable, dreamers *à rebours*, the tease of God and men. They stand atop the barricades of ancient and modern thought— barricades made up of the sweepings and debris of all systems, of all affirmatives. They affirm nothing, they deny nothing. They menace. They are the night-riders of the intellect, the hangmen of all the safe-housed. With rack and screw and belly-bolt they seek to torture the truth out of that old hussy, Isis. And, like Goya's skeleton, she screams her *Nada!* into the night while the Torquemadas of the intellect—as bloodsmear as their victim—loosen the screws and throw the jade out of the penetralia, *knowing that she lied*.

The nihilistic mind may be a disequibrated product, but Nihilism equilibrates and evens all values. It dissolves everything in its own acid, then dissolves the acid. This last action is the doubling of the ego on itself, the final beatification of pride.

Schopenhauer and Flaubert and Leconte de Lisle represent the last, the highest development of intelligence in the Occident. In them we behold the final cataclysm of thought, the end of the brain-orgy begun in the eighteenth century. Their brains experienced sensations before their flesh and nerves did. Their imaginative intelligences broke down the pillars of the Temple of Life, which is the Lupanar of Chimeras. They were the sick giants of modernity, sick from excess of light, broken by the weight of "truth."

Leconte de Lisle—the Chesterfield of Nihilists—held the individual to be nothing. Law and the spectral Idea behind all concretions alone mattered; yet de Lisle is perpetuated in literary history as an individual. The thing which did not exist for him, the thing which was to him merely a passing grotesque shadow, was the thing that made him immortal.

Thus even the Infinite is capable of irony—for it uses the individual to proclaim the nothingness of the individual. It renders significant the means which it uses to proclaim the insignificance of the transmitter. Is the individual the ironic glint in the eye of Change, or is Change only an illusion of the individual mind?

Answer, you laughing, merry-lipped gods of cosmic hocus-pocus!

The last task of the artist should be to describe to us the immutable, says Nietzsche. Through movement to grasp the immobile; through the fugitive to seize the principle—is that the task?

But the "immutable" can in no manner be the Real. It is the deepest of all illusions, more firmly rooted than anything else because it is the background of motion. Or, should we say that the immutable is the condition of all illusion, the very principle of fugacity, the static Idea in which the particular pullulates like minute organisms in a sheet of still water? And which, like a dormant pool, is bottomed by the slime of expediency.

Away with that, too! shouts the Nihilist.

What the ultimate truth may be is not as important as my desire to know what will be my emotion before it.

Will the ultimate truth be *my* truth? If not, it will leave me cold, even if it be *the* truth. By this I mean to say, We do not seek the truth; there is no "instinct for truth"—it is only another familiar mental lie to say that we have such an instinct. Will *the* truth flatter my ego? Will it satisfy my special metaphysical itch?

That (all philosophers and poets to the contrary notwithstanding) is what the "pursuit of truth" means. "The unselfish seeker of light" wears the mask of nobility, but secretly he seeks his own, and will have no other truth but *his* truth.

At the end of each cycle of pessimism, nihilism and analysis there comes a renaissance of religious faith.

From the ashes of these mighty mental and moral conflagrations there always arises the pale Redeemer, who is no other than Satan in penitential garb. The Satanic principle buried deep in the nature of things nowhere shows its profound subtlety, its capacity for infinite mutability, with greater effect than here.

Back and forth this changeling god rolls the human spirit—back and forth between the abyss that lies at the end of every intellectual debauch and the glorified citadels of faith. Intellectual curiosity and religious rapture: this master necromancer uses both merely to perpetuate the species, to swell its booty, wrought of our immemorial pains, our indestructible illusions.

Ages of theological and political repression are ages of mysticism. When the critical intellect (and all intellect is primarily destructive) is under the ban it seeks the vaults and subterranean passages of the soul and reappears as prophecy and metaphysic. In the psychological trick-cabinet there are many wardrobes, but only one Magician. In the Middle Ages the intellect crawled on its belly and was called mysticism. It will crawl again.

Two of the greatest pleasures: the emotion that comes to us from doing a forbidden thing and the intellectual pleasure that comes to us in analyzing the stupidity of those who dared not do it. Add to this the consciousness of our superiority as possessor of the stolen goods and the disdain for those who have it not—the ego can expand no further than this. It is the final beatification of pride.

Life—the luring principle—is not only a coquette who excites our passions without in the least intending to satisfy them, but, different and more monstrous than any other coquette, she has no organ to assuage the sublime passions she arouses.

The unintelligent has its harmonies. At seventy, a man is conscious of this by glancing backward. He is conscious, too, of a well-regulated and logical whole from bib-and-tucker to crutches. Also he sees at last that nonsense has its infallible mathematics.

“Be in harmony with the cosmos!” cries Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, Taine. Which cosmos? The cosmos of my instincts or the cosmos of my intellect? The cosmos of external nature or the cosmos of the imagination?

The pride of fathering a solution; the pride of inventing a formula, a watchword; the pride of *arriving at some end*—that is the besetting sin of all philosophers, priests and politicians.

The absolute helplessness of man before the Eternal Mystery is never more apparent than when that man is an intellectual giant.

All roads lead to Nihilism; but all must be taken. Each one of the roads, alone, leads to dogmatism. He who leads all lives ends in the same mental state as he who is not yet born.

That is, to experience all things and nothing are exactly the same thing.

THE ROOT OF SPLEEN

All gods and devils whatsoever will gray and pass through the twilight of senescence into the Nothing—except one, who reigns from everlasting; one who is the root of the conception of the Everlasting.

It is *Ennui*. We may drug him; but the Almighty himself cannot kill him without destroying himself.

To discover the spectre *Ennui* it is only necessary to rend a shadow—that is, act. He yawns behind each gesture. Pleasure is the glittering scabbard of *Ennui*. Thoughts are the serious dreams of the sad demon, *Ennui*. Actions are his self-imposed illusions.

Ennui in the greatest minds is caused not by a lack of objects on which they may expend their activity, but by a perception of the utter uselessness of all objects and all activity. It is the gray mantle in which they wrap their haughtiness.

There are two visions—the vision reparative and the vision malefic. One is the fair dream of what might have been; the other is the fascinating dream of our destiny at its worst—the strange consolation of the damned in dreaming of the next horror in their pilgrimage through their hells. It is the difference between the dreams of Don Quixote and Hamlet—between following Dulcinea or Medusa. For there are Utopias of horror as well as Utopias of delight.

To fall in love with our terrors, to finally make of our disbeliefs a god, to erect our latter fanes with the thoughts that have stretched us in youth on beds of agony and set up in those fanes as redeemers our most terrible suspicions—such is the history of certain intellects. It was in this wise that Baudelaire knelt before *Ennui* and Amiel and Leconte de Lisle before Death.

The colossal vanity of him who complains of being bored with life! If humility is Vanity as Tartuffe, as boredom it seeks to be no less than Deity.

The healthy being wallows in the illusions of the life around him. The sick being—he who does not fit into his environment—seeks out the antique or builds Utopias or mortars his crumbling dreams with the white plaster of some religious dogma. The first preys and preys and smiles; the second becomes an archaeologist or a socialist or narcotizes himself with dreams of the impossible. The blond beast and the disease of nervous exhaustion—we stand between the two.

We, I say—we corroders, we breeders of doubt, we Satanic ones—we baffled, splenetic sick men.

GRINNING GOALS

Conscience is the internal psychic conflict of the customary with the new. Conscience is always antique. The new is always subversive.

What we call faults in others are merely our intolerances.

Humility is Pride lying in wait, the bushwhacker in the grass, as stealthy and as subtle as an enforced virtue.

The souls of great men—the lords of the Ego—are like those gigantic mirrors before which a host may stand and contemplate itself. We worship the great Egoists because in them we behold the actualization of our own abrogated dreams. They represent a sort of vicarious apotheosis of the things we never dared. And this canonization of greatness is always a canonization of power—not goodness. Christ and Napoleon are both types idealized. One epitomized other-world lust and the other this-world lust. They are shapes from the brew of dreams. They are the creations, the cunning, subtle idealizations of the starved, the impotent, the “lost”, the damned—this itinerant preacher and barbarian in epaulettes.

“For the common good” is a phrase that has been the motive for every crime perpetrated against the individual. There is no greater enemy of the human soul than an organized ideal.

The Highest Man is not a moral being, but an aesthete. Life to him is a spectacle, not an aspiration.

Schopenhauer says if one knocked on the graves and asked the dead whether they wished to rise again they would shake their heads “no.” That is a mistake. Ninety-nine out of every hundred would rise again, for men would rather will evil than not will at all.

Universal tolerance is an agreement whereby each may tolerate the other’s intolerances.

Those who cannot digest their pasts will be afflicted with a kind of spiritual constipation. This disorder is called remorse.

The “joy of giving” is only a joy when it implies a power to withhold. At the bottom of each kind act there lurks the thought, “I could wound this creature if I would,”—and this adds to the expansive power, the joy which comes over one who gives freely.

What is admirable in great “bad” men is that they survive in spite of the most unfavorable conditions. They are the flower of struggle. Conventional goodness requires the greatest degree of favorable conditions before it affirms itself. Morality shrinks from opposition. Hence most “good” people are characterless.

The universe is beautiful in so far as I am beautiful; it is ugly in so far as I am ugly. There is no universe but my universe; there is no divinity but myself. There is no sanity or rationality apart from my desires.

If man must be grateful to one thing more than to another in this world it should be to the devil within him. Pain and terror and danger deepen perception, and with the deepening of perception we excavate the ground for the erection of the columns of the Temple of Independent Selfhood.

Out of the perception of precisely the same fact—that all life involves a putting to death, that conflict is not only the first function of life but is probably the metaphysical cause of life—there is

born the attitude of Thomas a Kempis and that of Napoleon. The cowl and the sword are attitudes, symbols that are ultimates. Merely to exist is to take. A mind that is subtle enough to perceive the threads of its thefts and murders will turn to Machiavelli or a Kempis, being either stricken with a kind of mirthful diabolism or the progressive paralysis which is known as a keen conscience.

Perfection is a perfect relation between what I desire and what really happens; it is the harmonies of egoism. It is the perfect marriage between Subject and Object; that is, supreme satisfaction. There can thus be only perfections, and never a Perfection, as there are as many perfections as there are individuals or variations. The crime of the dreamer, the idealist, is that he seeks to make an absolute out of a relation, to impose upon others by force his special dream of perfection—whether it be religious, social, economic or aesthetic. My perfection is the only perfection. Your perfection is the only perfection, too. The curse of the world is the “social spirit,” that masked venom which drivels about making me and thee “better through discipline,” that seeks to impose its perfection on me and sends *my* perfection to the shooting-wall.

The moral conscience has to do with “good” and “bad;” the intellectual conscience has only to do with pain and pleasure. It is the former—the moral conscience, “social” conscience—which has formulated, embodied and applied all the hells that man is heir to—the hell of the divine right of majorities, the hell of “responsibility to God”, the hell called the Church. The moral conscience conceives good and bad to be things-in-themselves; independent of circumstance and relation, an absolute. It cannot conceive that a murder may be good and bad at one and the same time or that theft may be right and wrong. The intellectual conscience admits only pleasure and pain as ingredients. What pains me is bad for me; what gives me pleasure is good for me. No notion of “morals” enters into this conscience. Napoleon and St. Francis of Assisi, Paul Verlaine and St. Theresa are all “acquitted” by the intellectual conscience.

The parish beadles of morality never tire us with telling us of the “soul of goodness in things evil.” There is yet a man to come who shall write for us the “Natural History of Irony, Being an Examination of the Will-to-Goodness,” Especially must this include a history of the effect of the do-good-to-others doctrine, that dogma of blood that is now passing from its religious phase into its social phase. Roman Catholicism is reincarnated in Communism.

Hilda Wangel, in “The Master Builder”, tells Halvard Solness that he has a “sickly conscience” and then speaks in glee of a “Viking conscience.” But is not all conscience sickly? Conscience is a knowledge of good and evil and involves remorse, penitence and the whole interior hell that Christianity has sanctified. Wherever there is conscience there is modernity and disease and ditch-diggers and all manner of ecclesiastical buzzards. All pondering on good and evil makes for weakness, impotency and despair of self. As the perfectly healthy man is unaware of the existence of his body and its functions, so the perfectly healthy mind is one free of the knowledge of “right” and “wrong.” It plans and executes and knows only *one evil*—that is, failure.

For what is evil, perverse, wicked, rebellious, morally oblique there is a future, an immortality of growth; but for goodness, perfection, balance, conformity there is no tomorrow; it is confronted with the terror of terrors: extinction, annihilation. Moral perfection—perfection of any sort—I conceive as a stoppage, a decay of force, the one miracle that is not desirable—that is, the transformation of something into nothing. It is the sleep of energy, for in order that energy may exist—nay, in order that it may be conceived—there must be limits to its activity, and all limits are “evils”. Limitation is the mother of tragedy; the barriers of instinct are the things we hate and love. The more complete our individualization the more limits we find to our activity. And the social and intellectual rebels and “sinners” remain immortal in this paradox: that the unlim-

ited, which is the object of their passion, is composed of an infinite number of limits. Perfection is annihilation. Unqualified goodness is the same as unqualified evil: nothing.

The past extracts from us ceaseless toll. It preys upon us from the cradle to the grave. But the great artist, the thinker, the creator, can neutralize matters by himself levying a toll on that past. Like everything free and marauding in nature, he should be “indifferent honest.” All men have up until this moment labored and sweated and dreamed and embodied their dreams for me. I loot and pillage where I please. I take what is necessary to my artistic, mental, moral or physical sustenance. That past that waylays me at each minute shall also serve as my suit of mail; that past to which I am in lifelong pawn shall find no way of guarding her treasures against my plucking instinct. I am a thief of time. I, too, stand at the toll-gate, O Past!

They who are always talking about “justice” secretly desire to be judges, to be the dispensing Popes, the ultimate lawgivers, the definers of justice itself.

The debauches of great men are nature’s method of always keeping them at the centre of gravity. That which weakens the body often strengthens the mind. Genius without vice is unbalanced.

We like to believe that the man who is stronger than us is evil. This is a “moral compensation” we allow our weakness, the compensation of our own holiness.

The momentary or definite well-being of the individual is always procured at the expense of the community. The latter is the meat on which the Caesars of individualism feed. And those who militantly oppose the community as a social organization have to thank that social organization for their happiness.

If the eye of the mind were subtle enough to see all the consequences of our acts and thoughts the doctrine of individual human responsibility would have to be given up in order to prevent universal insanity or universal suicide.

Deliberate crime, deliberate “transgression” should never be punished—would never be if we had the logic of our admirations. Only weakness is unforgivable. There is in a deliberately planned crime something of the heroic—an exhibition of the origin of the ego of the individual in all its starkness. But the crimes that flow from mere weakness of character show us the exact reverse of this picture—the ego of the individual in its last pewling degeneracy.

A moral hero is one who has been chosen by Necessity to do something that he would not have done had he free will.

A thinker’s or poet’s debaucheries are often only necessary counter-irritants against the dangers of a greater poisoning.

To make a profession of judging and punishing—is not that the supreme irony of the Christian era? Judges, lawyers, juries, legislators—are not they the last word in Christian buffoonery? Judging as a trade by the disciples of him who uttered “Judge not lest ye be judged”—it breaks the grimness of Golgotha and I hear—at last!—torrents of laughter from the Holy Sepulchre.

The genius tries to walk the earth with his tremendous wings. And those who have only legs do not understand.

The herd has confounded Epicureanism with sensuality because it cannot understand that the word “pleasure” is the most religious word in use—religious in that it means, summed up, the complete expression of self.

The feeling of guilt is always inextricably bound up with the feeling of shame, and shame is the consciousness of loss of self-respect. More of the tinsel that covers the beast!

There is no pleasure like the pleasure of disobedience. Until you have disobeyed you cannot properly be said to have a soul. Impact, revulsion and denial are not only the bases of consciousness but of self-consciousness as well. Obedience takes us back to the infinite, the One, the static. Disobedience is the root of variety, color and form, with the ironic twinkle of Pyrrhonism as its final evolutionary stage.

I can conceive of no greater love than that inspired by the passion for universal individual liberty; to rejoice in seeing each live after his own nature, irrespective of its likeness to me. "Unless ye follow me!" was uttered by a fanatic and a spiritual tyrant. "Unless ye follow yourselves!" say I

"Is it good or bad?"—we believe this to be an act of reflection in the mind and that we will decide the matter logically. But self-interest—who is both questioner and answerer—has already decided. The ethical epicurean delights in nothing so much as a "moral dilemma." It is a splendid game of mental solitaire, where one person always wins and no one ever really loses anything.

Lying at the very basis of the sentiment of remorse is the longing we have to tread the road of our transgression again—this time imaginatively, with neck bowed and the cross weighing us down. We love to see ourselves in some unusual light. The soul is an inexorable coquette, always attitudinizing before the mirror of the Past or the Future.

In worldly matters the ignoble in us is our greatest surety of success. The way to fail is to have an ideal. It is in this way that nature, reaching through men, puts the eternal stamp, again and again, of her disapproval on anything that savors of "personal morals" as opposed to tribe morals.

TRUTH: THE MOCKER IN THE MIST

A “truth” is a prejudice raised to a principle.

There is no knowledge; there is only belief.

All belief is an error because it excludes another belief.

“The truth shall make you free”. But it is Error that bringeth peace.

What we call the truth is a strong conviction about a prejudice; and a “universal truth” is a universal mental state based on a universal illusion of the senses.

The “longing for truth” is the lust for pleasure in its highest desensualized form.

All life—the “evolutionary process”—tends to dissonance, complexity. Differentiation is estrangement, jangle. We dream more passionately of the Great Harmony the further we get away from it. It is the desire of a thing for its opposite. Harmony is a deadening monotone; differentiation is dramatic discord. Progress is an illusion of motion. All prospects are imaginary. Horizons that are evoked and melt are evoked again in a continuous play of motion that has no beginning, end or purpose. The fatuity of cosmic optimism and the pursuit of truth! Man’s destiny cannot be dis severed from the astronomical destiny of the planet. His dreams and systems and moral cosmologies and mental inventions will last no longer than the planet, on which he stands a dreaming apparition. His dreams of truth—all dreams whatsoever—depend for their longevity on the antics of that inferno of brute flame—the Sun.

After a lie has existed for a thousand years it becomes authoritative. It has then the same importance as a truth.

“Truths” are the mathematics of temperament—never anything more.

Suppose Truth—the ultimate Truth; that is, the Truth that will explain the universe—is no more concerned with man, his destiny, his pains, his pleasures, his hopes, than a shoemaker who fits a heel to a shoe is concerned with the number of ants it will some day grind into the dust?

Each truth is only a half truth because each thing possesses the inherent possibility of becoming its opposite.

“All truths are half truths”—the other half being a lie. Which half? To find which one of the halves is the “other half”—that is the task of the “truth-seeker.”

“A truth is a thought in the mind which tallies with an external fact.” As all matter is a Ghost, the thought about it is the mere shadow of it, or vice versa. The seeming of a seeming, an illusion compounded and formulated—nothing more.

“As dull as a fact”, some day. But there are no facts—there is only dullness. Facts are the nostrils of Mystery, through which are blown the smoke of illusions called the “substantial universe.”

There are two kinds of faith. One is founded on the proposition that “what has been will be”—that is, that nature is uniform in her processes. The other kind of faith believes that what never was will be. The first is an error because no one knows a fraction of Nature’s laws, no one knows what “has been.” No one has an eternity of memory. The second is an error because it denies the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence. Still, both may be right. Proof or disproof of any single proposition would require an eternity for observation.

The “eternal laws” are rope bridges that swing us over the abysmal negations. They have a “practical value,” but they, too, will disappear in Eternity, which is the Time of Oblivion.

The “Freethinker” is tolerated now more than ever he was before because intolerance, which is primal and necessary, has received a slight veneer of curiosity.

Wisdom—what is it? Is it not the term Pride uses when talking of Necessity.

Scepticism is Negation in search of an Affirmation.

Truth is a vanity of the Will. Truth has nothing to do with fact or probability. “My truth” is merely my life-preserver. Self-preservation is the first law of reasoning.

The influence of one positive nature tends to make us more positive; the influence of two positive natures tends to make us sceptical. Too many positives breed their own negatives. When a thing is “beyond question” doubt begins.

There are two orders of perceptions—the perceptions we hold intellectually and the perceptions we feel. All youths of twenty *know* they will some day be sixty, but they smile—it is mere mathematics. Some youths of twenty *feel* they will some day be sixty, but they never smile. Happy is he who is not sixty before he is twenty!

The mass of human effort called history seen from the plane of the Infinite conveys to the mind the idea as nothing else can the grotesquerie of human illusion, especially of the master human illusion, that the actions of men affect life. Human needs are fatalities; the lizard that clammers over the cracked plinths in the Coliseum has a clearer knowledge of his movements than man because they are simpler and more direct. For man to lay out a straight course ahead he would have to know the laws that govern the whimsical, for even Law seen from the plane of the Infinite laughs at its own “inexorableness.” The mathematics of the curve are rotten reeds to lean on. The subconscious at each moment affects the conscious plans of men, but the conscious plans of men never directly affect the subconscious, and that is why the passion for liberty brings forth Napoleons and Robespierres and Christ was parent of Torquemada and Calvin.

There are two ways of loving truth—our truth: robustly and conscientiously. The robustious lover of truth will act out his instincts in public, like Christ or Falstaff, and be well cudgelled for his courage. The conscientious lover of truth will pick his truth apart and finally chase it from him as another illusion on his path to Reality. The truth-seeker is a martyr long before he reaches his Calvary. Merely to have the will-to-truth is to put on the hair-shirt. To love a lie robustly, there is a virtue in that, too; and to be a conscientious self deceiver, who shall say that that, too, is not as worthy as plucking at the veil of Isis or standing beneath the pitiless sun of sincerity in solitudes of sand, waiting for the Sphinx to blab or trace on the air its nonsensical tales?

Nietzsche has a profound saying that there are no contrasts in nature—there are only differences of degree. Yet there must be a clean canvas, a tabula rasa *behind* the mind, against which these vari-colored pictures with their “differences of degree” are projected. It may be true that in the phenomenal world there are no differences or contrasts between which there lie bridgeless abysses but that each thing is its opposite dressed differently. But to arrive at this very conclusion presupposes a substance existent in the interior of man which is not susceptible of “differences in degree” of any kind. Or is this absolute of knowledge only infinite relation’s ultimate relation? In philosophy, as in life, we are snared and confounded whichever way we turn. All roads lead to roads. No one has yet revealed anything about anything for the simple reason that no one has discovered if there is any Thing.

Truth has nothing to do with logical rules, reasoning, retorts or crucibles. Truth is the thing I have found at the end of my desire, the lees or the pearl I have found at the bottom of the

goblet of wine. A truth cannot be proved; it must be experienced. Philosophers, reasoners occupy themselves with laying out roads to the Tavern of Divine Content; but the disciple of Bacchus who squats in the tavern knew his way there, through briars and brambles and over ditches maybe, but there he is. He has found *his* truth, while Intellect still breaks stones on the roads and pushes its way into swamps with its surveying instruments. Truth is Satisfaction.

All intelligence is hearsay, a consciousness built up of a million million echoes of the past, rags that the Will-to-Think has covered itself with in its frenzied fear of remaining a nude abstract nothing. All philosophy, all thought—all action, too—is merely a constant rearrangement and readjustment of the goods in the shop-window; the materials themselves never change. Originality of any kind presupposes the suspension of the law of cause and effect.

To me the world has always seemed to be more of a painted representation of a place than a place itself. Whatever is seems to be only an image of a thought that no human being has ever thought. It is something of a sketch, a plan, a prelude to something, completed here, not touched at all there—at best a daub, put aside many times, taken up many times again, tossed aside impatiently, as though some obstacle had interposed itself between the Artist's dream and its materialization. Reality is not yet.

What is that that will not change and pass away and exist only thereafter as ghostly recollection in the mind of the World-Imp, a sportive memory in the eye of Puck, the hoyden god? Or, the things that were and are now no more do they live as ghost-entities somewhere in the windy hollows of space, those countless windy hollows that are said to make the Infinite? Or is change only a facet of the eternal immobility at the heart of things? This man dies, this planet cracks and founders in space, this spring evanesces into summer; but men and planets and springtime are immortal. So instead of change—a passing of a thing from one place to another place or from one state to another state—there may be only scintillation, the waxing and waning of countless immovable points on a circle.

“Believe me,” said Voltaire, “error, too, has its merits.” As though there were anything else but error! All views are erroneous because all views are partial. Not to be in error one must have all the data, and to have all the data about any particular fact presupposes omniscience. All that has heretofore been thought, imaged, felt and done are errors, and at most their legitimacy has only the value of expedients. We may be logical, but we can never be truthful. Our deductions from the premises given us are rigid and exact, but if the premise is an error of vision all that flows from it will be erroneous. Error has its merits! Voltaire speaks as though there could possibly be truth in a transitory, phantasmal universe such as this. Error is a path which leads to wider errors, and the ecstasies of philosophic abstractions are the joys of living in open, unhorizoned spaces, not the ecstasies of “Truth,” which can only be conceived as inconceivable.

“History repeats itself,” but the facts of history do not—there is merely a recurrence of laws that govern all things. The seasons repeat themselves. Youth, manhood and old age recur perpetually. The individual facts are always different, for a fact is merely a momentary relation. “Little facts, minute facts, facts thoroughly proven!” exclaims Taine. “Let us build the future with these.” But the facts of the past will not be the facts of the future. Each new discovery modifies an old one. Facts are perpetually abolished by facts. The science of a hundred years is nothing but a study in the acrobatics of readjustment. The most general law we know is birth, growth, decay; aside from that all experience is my experience, your experience; my facts, your facts. The experimentalists always forget the law of reaction, the undertow in matter, mind, history. Reaction is the irony of “Law.” It is a perpetual reminder of the omnipresent aimlessness of things. If history repeats itself,

it is aimlessness alone that it repeats. Experience, observation—let us walk in the light of these suns! Whose “experience”? Whose “observation”? The Preacher’s or Herbert Spencer’s? Taine’s or Flaubert’s? Karl Marx’s or Schopenhauer’s?

All history is a cemetery of which the generation in which one lives is merely the uneasiest ghost.

The pagan accepts the world as a legitimate gymnastic for mind and body; the Christian rejects it as the invention of the Evil One to keep him away from Home. The Christian is impatient of Eternity; the pagan says Eternity is here, always will be here, and what he seeks is not God, but the continual revelations of God.

We should learn to face the truth and hate it. For he who has found his truth and loves it has stopped thinking. We must learn to hate all pleasant things and despise all flatterers. And what flatters like the thought that *we* have the truth?

Things separated by the greatest distances are closer to one another than things that cohere and are neighboring. That is why Huysmans, Turner, Verlaine and Hearn loved filth. When Pegasus in his flight reaches zenith he is overcome by a nostalgia for nadir. Love at the moment of extreme rhapsody is careless of death. The passion for the beautiful, as in Rabelais and Shakespeare, swoops back to the mud from its highest attainable heaven. It is the protest of the Absolute. It is the soul’s knowledge of the proximity of the Absolute to annihilation. At the extremest point of hallucinating beauty there is a passage that leads into the ironic and a ground-pipe to the cesspools.

One thing alone is certain—that is, the Absolute. That relations exist at all is a pure hypothesis. Buddha and Spinoza have said the last things that will ever be said by human intellect that still works in three dimensions. What commonsense calls the Real World is simply a conglomerate of wraiths that have detached themselves from the body of Reality. This, in appearance, a monstrous paradox, is the simplest of truths, and seems paradoxical only because all insight negatives “common-sense”—a good gravel road for the old mule, Humanity, to travel.

The Ideal is a woman whose breasts are soft but whose clasp is deadly.

There is a reality about our instincts that our intellect—our thoughts—does not give us. We think one way and act another. We distrust our judgments but obey our intuitions. Still, that reality which we call our instincts is built up of illusions and has ultimately no more value than our formal judgments. Reality is something beyond either instinct or intellect.

The genius is the lexicographer of the race. We go to him for definitions and accents and new nuances for old words. He can give us nothing original.

The Absolute is present from moment to moment, is the spirit of each moment. The secret of uniting one’s self with it is a problem of concentration. Be the spirit of each moment absolutely and you are the Absolute.

Each one reaches his special, final truth by rejecting the truths of others. All other gods but my God are heathen gods. Truth seems to be only a matter of a capital letter—my God against your god.

Wisdom is a runner who runs away from goals.

Taine, Balzac, Bourget have all said that the salvation of society lies in Christianity—meaning by this, of course, Catholicism. This is the most pessimistic confession ever made. Salvation through humbug and ignorance! Rather hell, decadence and death than that! Rather evil with light than “righteousness” with darkness!

Science is the instinct for the novel—not the instinct for truth. Beauty is the instinct for exaltation, which is at bottom also the instinct enkernelled in the instinct for the novel. Thus, at bottom, Science and Poetry are one and the same. Their seeming opposition is an opposition of method.

We mistake habit for knowledge. I am familiar with my voice, but of the origin of sound I know no more after years of listening to my own speech than I knew before my birth.

I desire some great affirmation only to dissect it. I seek the truth in order to destroy it and place in its stead some other truth. One thing I love about God—his everlasting apostasy.

There will never be a truth (that is, an eternal, unmodifiable fact) while there is *temperament*.

HAPPINESS: THE INVENTION OF MOMUS

Pain is the rent the Soul pays for living in the House of Flesh.

“Pain is the incitement to all progress!” exclaims Renan. Progress toward what? More pain?

All sorrow springs from the belief that the impossible is possible. Those who hope for happiness hope for miracles.

Perfection is neither a place nor a state of mind. We habitually speak of it in either one or the other of these senses. Perfection is the negation of desire. So long as desire for anything exists in any heart there cannot be perfection, for where there is desire there is still need, and the state of need is an imperfect state. Perfection carries with it the implication of completion, and universal perfection will mean universal completion—rest, death, sleep, nonentity.

Those who are easily satisfied are either very stupid or great seers. But the difference between them is the difference between those who have not lived and those who have.

An optimist is one who dines off of his own fat.

Humor was born after everything possible had been suffered.

A cynic is an idealist with a critical organ.

A great sudden joy should be received by us suspiciously, for it is like the gift of a golden casket studded with kohinoors in which lies coiled a python.

The “blessings of civilization” are always chanted by the successful.

I have known persons so frightened when about to enter a dentist’s chair that they began to hum a cheerful tune. That is professional optimism when analyzed.

Happiness would be a force that could move on everlastingly without ever meeting an obstacle. But this force could never attain consciousness, which is a spark of light emitted by friction. Antagonism is the mother of life. Absolute happiness would be the absolute of non-being.

States of mind influence Time. Duration dwindles under the influence of pleasure, expands under the influence of pain.

It matters not how well-conditioned we are, we believe there is at least one condition that would be better.- This is an illusion. It matters not how ill-conditioned we are, we believe there are any number of conditions that might be worse. This is no illusion. From this may be deduced the infinite possibilities of evil in an infinitely evil universe and the limits set to good in a universe of limited good.

Above the egg of every Hope there broods Despair.

Happiness can only know itself in the degree that it remembers pain. Happiness without its perspectives of agony is joy without consciousness. Children are happy, but know nothing of happiness. They gambol in a celestial kingdom, but they are as ignorant of their whereabouts as a somnambulist. Pure joy is thus negative. It is the sleep of pain, the swoon of the positive, which is pain, which requires no memory of pleasure to create a poignant consciousness of itself. Pain is pain, but pleasure is not pleasure.

No man sees deeply into life until he begins to grow weary of life. For despair is a kind of power. Courage gives us vast outer perspectives. Despair gives us vast inner perspectives. It

was Nietzsche who sneered at despair-philosophy and despair-morality; yet all his wonderful dreaming was mothered by despair and fathered by a too intensive love of the moral.

Ideals are the courtesans that the jaded Spirit of Life ceaselessly creates to feed its eternally unassuaged sensation-satyriasis.

Nietzsche has a saying that “our defects are the eyes through which we see the ideal.” Rather, he should have said that “the ideal is an eye through which we become conscious of our defects.” The ideal precedes the real; an imaginative standard or eidolon exists in the brain before actual experience. All defects are declensions from ideals; all pain is the pinprick in the fabric of our illusions. It is the ideal that stands between us and final realities. The ideal is symbolized by the ancients as the veil of Isis. We all wear that veil. Nothing “measures up,” all things deceive and are defective because the World-Spirit in order to attain its incomprehensible end has stuck into the eye-sockets of the soul the colored lenses of dreams instead of putting there a naked mathematical recorder. Wise old hidden Witch! Wise with the wisdom of all demons and satirists. Her life depends on those colored lenses.

The immolation of the Real on the bloody altars of the Ideal, the sacrifice of this day’s certainties to that insatiable Moloch, To-morrow: therein lies the very core and secret of all human unhappiness.

The aspiration for perfection is the cause of all the ills of life.

Man believes in happiness and progress—two terms utterly contradictory. “Progress” is not only conditioned in pain, but each movement forward reveals newer obstacles to be overcome, more ills to be faced. Progress has Want as rearguard and Disillusion as advance guard.

Humanity, Progress, Liberty are ideas of the second order. Those who dogmatize on these themes still have a sense of direction. But the mind that has apprehended the Infinite, which is the hub of all spokes (and spooks), has no sense of direction. It tastes at once Nothing and Something. Humanity, Progress and Liberty are for it merely sex-utensils, the little panting, blowing, wheezing tugboats that take the gigantic hulks of humanity out into the open, and leave them there.

There is but one thing needful: doubt. To doubt is to have a soul. Indeed, it is the very condition of a living life. Faith bringeth rest, but doubt bringeth restlessness. He who is a candidate for the ultimate, the last truth, must forever doubt, and when he has found peace, he must deny it.

Disproportion is the law of life; otherwise there would be no unhappiness—hence no wisdom. For wisdom is the harmony born of discords. A life symmetrical and proportioned at every period in its growth will know happiness, but of final wisdom it will know nothing.

All weakness mimics strength; everything apes aristocratic ideals. The secret dream of the oppressed is not liberty so much as it is a dream of pleasure, to put on the weaknesses and vices of the upper classes and shed its own enforced virtues and the pricking haircloth of poverty.

When we despair we renounce, and when we have renounced we begin to hope again. For Pride is a giant whose shadow stretches from nadir to zenith.

The pursuit of happiness is one of the methods of disillusion.

DISENCHANTMENT: BEHIND THE ARRAS

Each moment in our lives is devoted to answering the question how not to be bored.

On the day that you are born somewhere there is born, too, the man that will fashion your coffin.

The great problem is how to live without being conscious of the fact that *we have got to live*; how to divert ourselves without thinking of why we should seek diversion; not only to escape the spectre of *Ennui*, but how to act as though we did not know of its existence. We are all playing near a great fearful Presence, and our object should be to rivet our gaze so completely on our work and busy ourselves so closely with our toys that we shall not have time to look up and see the Thing. The Thing—stark, nude, sleepy-eyed, ghastly Thing—is always right there over our shoulder. The most active beings are those who are trying, unconsciously, the hardest to dodge Its gaze. Man has no mission in life except to escape the “Black Man who will come and get you,” as we tell the children.

There is a great penalty imposed upon those who lack foresight, but a still heavier one for those who possess it.

Man has achieved the most perfect kind of imperfection of which we know: he is all means and no End.

Youth is a brilliant exordium to a discourse never delivered.

Having once decided on a line of action it is well for us to spin around on the heel of our resolution. The grotesque character of our special destiny will appear to us after several pirouettes.

Most of us steer clear of the great vortexes of Destiny; it is the whirlpools of the petty that suck us to destruction.

No action ever achieved its purpose; all physical movement is a satire on Intention.

We seek violent sensations in order to prove that we exist; it is the way we pinch ourselves to find out whether we are awake. Then we run away from sensations to prove the reality of sensation. Thus we test one illusion by another, pit hallucination against hallucination, oscillate between opposing lies that illumine one another; and in the end are filtered through the sieves of Time into a hypothetical Eternity.

The disillusion of possession does not have its genesis in possession—that is, we are not disillusioned *because* we possess, but because we have *desired* to possess. The greatest joy in the world is the joy that comes unexpectedly, just as unexpected pain is the most poignant.

The moment we have decided upon some undertaking is the moment that signals the rise of a host of oppositions. The phantom armies of the contingent, the incalculable undoers of things about to be done, the waylaying, never-sleeping negatives that lie buried as latencies in all affirmatives, are only awaiting that mental gesture known as *decision*. Action is the lightning-rod that draws the death-bolts from the Infinite that surrounds us.

The less we desire the more we have. Every time I grasp an object I lose something. We swap Being for Possession, and are cut up by the fine knives of our desires and apportioned to the things that possess us.

The Spirit of Pursuit and the Spirit of the Thing Pursued are one and the same.

Every disease breeds a remedy, but every remedy also breeds a disease. A “change for the better” will ultimately be a change for the worse. All “progress” is artificial stimulation, a narcotic.

The state of mind called expectancy is an exciting pause between two disillusionings.

What are facts?—the longest persisting optical illusions of the greatest number.

Vigor may be a disease, a disease of motion. Immobility is only achieved through battle. To be sick of this world is a healthy instinct. As a force leaves a body the body shrinks, but this is no proof of that force’s extinction. Indifference is the serenity of despair—it requires a Hercules not to act. Weak men are never indifferent. As we outgrow the impulses of childhood we become more thoughtful. The instinct to participate in the “world’s work” is nothing but the play-instinct of the nursery without its harmlessness. There is a vigor that is negative, a power that stays, a strength that is impassive.

Action is at high tide when reflection is at ebb. Action implies the “going out” of thought. For this reason a pleasurable action is never realized until it is past. Hence the illusion in believing that any line of action will beget pleasure. All pleasure lies in contemplation. Childhood only realizes its happiness in age.

Our past we believe to be irrevocable; but the future we believe to be subject to our will—the will which is the product of our irrevocable past!

We, the pain-gutted; we, the pitiful pariahs; we who are always inopportune or just too late; we, the drivelling, snivelling religious animal that etymologists call man—what must we do? Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Let us seat ourselves on the throne of Indifference, fold the toga of scepticism over our sackcloth and ashes, our motley and bells—and wait! wait! wait!

What is most known is least known. Details multiply details. The new thing I have just discovered about my subject is the centre of an infinite number of other things; but the circumference of my fact I will never find. The more I know about a thing the more lives I need to live to discover all that is to be known about that thing. Suggestion breeds from suggestion; my latest addition to my knowledge is only the beginning of- a new series.

We are always being invited to live, which is to say we are always being invited to die. All action is the dodging of *ennui*—*ennui* that is more feared than death because it is Nothing come to consciousness. We toil from point to point with the knowledge that that undying Thing is in everlasting pursuit. The invitation to life is the invitation of the serpent’s eyes, the enchantment of the horrible.

The salvation of the human being consists in having a work to do and doing it; that is, he must convince himself that his special mania is a healthy mania, that his illusion is the only divine illusion, that his conceit is exceptional.

“Desire to know, desire to love, desire without name”—the philosopher, the lover, the mystic, three stalks from the common root of Desire. Desire to know and desire to love, all experience these in some form, but the *nameless desire*, that innominable, obscure outreaching for what cannot even be imaged in thought—that is the desire that encroaches without being seen, a shadow that submerges in its sombre pits all other desires and leaves its victim a mere wistful hanger-on to life. This craving for the unvisioned what-not is a surplusage of Will, an excess of world-sap; or is it the precursor of our own superhuman destiny, the ill-timed memory of *another kind of experience*?

All action is an illusion because it presupposes free-will and truth.

To scratch your name on the Sphinx and then to be swallowed up in the simoon of the desert like all the rest—that is fame.

Where there is the greatest opportunity for the greatest number of people the competition is keener, and where the competition is keener the struggle for existence tends to become more and more bitter. Hence, ultimately, all freedom tends to the maximum of unhappiness. The modern world is a pessimistic world because we reach the end of our illusions too easily. All roads to unhappiness are thrown open to the people. The modern face reveals the ghastly joke called “Opportunity for all.” There never was a sadder face than this modern face. By throwing open all doors the individual has fallen into all traps. Individualism is paving the way for another “age of faith,” with its anodynes and drugs and Authority. So the pendulum swings eternally from one lie to another; and over all there reigns only the Invincible Mockery, with its monstrous gray wings and shining bullet-eyes.

Illusion is the phenomenon of concentration. All belief is focus, attention—the scenery of pride, the crutch of the human ego. Direction, purpose are the psychological bases of error. Motion, change are the mechanics of illusion. But a purposeless, blind surrender to the “Eternal” is the final paradox because it implies belief, faith. Hence total, irretrievable annihilation is the only remedy for illusion. Deconcentration is ultimate salvation. The Ballet of the Aeons will disappear only with the disappearance of the last spectator.

Human accomplishments of whatsoever kind are only the breathing-places of the Eternal Becoming, pleasant points of observation, little stopping-stations where this tireless Traveller lingers to survey the past and the future.

Wise or ignorant, it is the futile that we follow. We can never escape it. For Futility is the shadow of Pride.

Patience is the time consumed in waiting for an illusion to disrobe.

The value of all we do today can be ascertained by throwing into the mind the belief that tomorrow is the last day of the world.

If the target of the instincts is happiness, the target of the intellect should be quiescence. But this instinct must be absorbed in intellect before quiescence can be attained. And when quiescence has been reached Ennui nudges us at the elbow and we begin again to spin the unmeaning web. And the veil of Isis—which is of our own weaving—covers, not a face, but a hollow circle.

THE CALL OF DIONYSUS

Adventure is the spirit of Curiosity that has got for itself a lusty body. It is the restless eye of Temerity seeking to enclose within its sphere finer and newer circles of experience.

The Imagination is a daredevil. It is a picklock, a break-bolt, the knight-errant of Man. Back of and inciting the spirit of adventure and the spirit of curiosity stands Don Quixote, for the Knight of La Mancha is no other than the personified ironic spirit of the adventurous imagination.

In all ages non-religious adventure has been loved for itself. It has never admitted allegiance to the cant words "right" and "wrong;" it has never muddled its enterprises by yoking itself to morals or the other ogres for which the dull spirits among men drudge. Adventure, like motion and light, is its own excuse for being. It is a primal passion, coeval with the birth of matter and movement. The first movement of the first atom was an adventure in space. The last movement will be an adventure in Nihilism.

The spirit of adventure—whether it be in the material or mental sphere, whether it be embodied in a D'Artagnan or a Zarathustra—chooses for its realm of operations the Unknown. The Unknown is not only that world that lies beyond experience, but it includes as well that more intimate world that can be created by finding new relations with old materials. There is a North Pole at each man's door that invites to the spirit of adventure. The adventures of Edison are as thrilling to him as the adventures of Marco Polo were. The intellect is a born marauder—that is, if it be really intellect, and not merely a medium between the stomach and the objects that the stomach needs for its digestive apparatus.

The spirit of adventure is a rebellious spirit. It is at war with Routine and Respectability. Routine starves body and brain, and in its deadly clutch we begin to measure off the days of life on the walls of consciousness like men condemned to death chalk on the walls of their cells the passing of the days that finally fetch them to rope and trapdoor.

Life itself is the adventure of the soul in matter. The buccaneering spirit of man is the one thing that renders the world sublime. It is better to pluck the forbidden fruit and be everlastingly damned than to accept the safe-conduct of Conformity and drowse away an eternity in a heaven of ennui.

Cerberus guards the door to Hades, but his bark is worse than his bite. He is only firmly entrenched to the cowardly eye. Cerberus is a toy pug and his teeth are papier mache.

Which of us has not dreamed of following some black flag? Which of us who is healthy has not in a figment of the brain, in a fiction of action, stormed some forbidden Gibraltar, laid his Petersburg mine or swum some raging Hellespont of the spirit? Those are marked days in our lives on which we dared something—ivory days, days we would live over again, with their venturesome hours and the sense of danger face to face with that nondescript kingdom, the Unknown.

In literature it is adventure that lives. "Tell me a tale," says the world. The Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, the Divine Comedy, Robinson Crusoe, Don Quixote and the Three Guardsmen are the answers.

What is lawless and awful and novel appeal to all men in all time. Civilization, the arts and peace are only saved from stupidity by the progressive inversion of the adventurous spirit. In politics, science, art and industry the new man, the new idea, the adventurous thought startle and dazzle. We smell an adventure in a man who says "I deny." A Rodin, a Blake, a Nietzsche, an Ibsen, a Shelley glow in the romantic halos with which we crown them. They stand on the firing line of Man's invasion of the country of the enemy, the Unknowable; vicariously, they give relish to the bread-and-water fare of a pointless existence.

Man lives for vivid sensations. Some feed the craving with—alcohol, others with the blasting dreams of religious mysticism. The pirate of the South Seas and the hermit of the Gobi are both moved by the same impulse, the love of adventure. One finds his exquisite moment in the bloody butcheries of hand-to-hand contests and the other in slaying his "animal nature" and in an ecstatic frenzy rising to his last divine adventure—union with the Eternal.

THE CALL OF MAYA

As immortal as error, fairer than vice—being herself the first vice, the omnipresent decoy—squats that painted Jezebel, the Ideal, at the crossroads of thought, of instinct, of action. She has trafficked with our blood and brain and soul—is the malshapen spirit of time and space itself; and she had lured us time out of memory to her painted paradises, her pasteboard Utopias, her mirages set in bubbles.

Tantalus walks in our streets and rubs our elbows. On the faces, of men are the chagrin of a million ancient deceptions, the grief and tease of things lost out of hand. But the newer generations pour out from the ever-fruitful wombs and are swift upon the scents of life before the elder dupes have died. And the ancient Blower of Bubbles has her smile again, for she knows that the newer generations are the dead generations come again.

A history of the evolution of the Ideal would be the history of the evolution of Illusion, a fable of a continuously evoked Image and a chronicle of a persistently recurring disaster.

Every action presupposes an ideal of action; each thought is only a tentacle feeling blindly for another thought which shall be its own perfection. So all action and all thought in this passionate quest are hurried into their own tombs, perpetually erasing themselves, telescoping one another.

Once the attainable becomes the attained Purpose steps into its winding-sheet—only, in perfect amaze, to resurrect as another purpose. And it is so the circular days of Brahma are spun, and it is thus we phantoms play upon his shining films.

If it be defeat that constitutes the tragedy of individual lives, it is the endless deception practised upon us that gives that tragedy meaning. The chagrin of defeat is not so poignant as the mockery of success.

Ah! the mockery of success—that is the sting of victory: the suddenly perceived incongruity—the gap sinister—between the thing I willed and the thing that has come to pass. Can that be it I labored to produce—labored in that sweaty purpose—that poor thing standing just there in front of me, nude, accomplished, out of hand, the gray light of reality pouring upon it, standing there before me with that question in its eye:

“Where are my purple robes?”

There are as many ills as there are souls. Each has its special disease, unique, incommunicable; a special characterization, one may say, of the universal malady: progressive disillusion.

We have all nibbled at some rare bait only to feel the carefully concealed steel hook enter the raw flesh.

We wear about us the beautiful rags of our grief as best we may, some dragging in the mire, others flaunted in a kind of defiance to the stars.

Into our hands, in our heyday, we took so confidently, so buoyantly, and with what an acceleration of the blood!, this heathenish, elfish matter, thinking to mould it to some likeness of the mind’s native dream; to stamp upon it, as one stamps upon a disc of gold, some everlasting memento of ourselves, some souvenir of our too transitory presence here upon the earth.

But youth knows nothing of that eternal flux which makes of all things its own paradox, of that endless flowing away and simultaneous reappearance of all visible things. His too substantial universe does verily thaw and resolve itself into a shadowy monster before his suddenly awakened perceptions, and, agape, he finds himself a hungry speck of dust in that great hurricane of matter which blows steadily from the no-beginning to the never-an-end. How rotten now the underpinnings of his House of Life! How abysmal that fundament of void over which he so lately frolicked!

The myriad trivial disappointments of the year-round are the little nails that cleave the temples of Expectation. In Disappointment the will of man stands face to face with his Mocker, with the sneering, prankish god that has in secret fabricated the arrows of intent and so blunted their heads that they will stick nowhere.

This god of merry deviltries peeps at us in that hour of baffled purpose and asks with a kind of counterfeit grimness:

“How now, Earth whiffet! Where is thy whim?”

Was he not the soul of that laugh of Mephisto, the chuckle of insight, of prevision, hidden in the scented garden when Faust and Margaret decreed in joy their own pain?

All the ills of mankind can be traced to the idealizing instinct, to that ineradicable romanticism that crowns the ass and calls it “My Lord,” that calls a plain latrine a palace, sees in sewage-vents something of “divine purpose,” that labels beautiful those cosmic processes that are in reality the most obvious in their malignity; flower-covered traps that, with exquisite irony, swallow up finally all the petty princelings of Kingdom Come, the idealists themselves.

They are the sickly victims of a psychic glamour, a thaumaturgic light streaming out of endless pasts, the dupes of that endless *becoming* that bears on its crest the mystic ironic phosphors.

THE INTELLECT: ST. ELMO FIRE

My intellect is a hideous juggernaut to whose wheels cling the blood and bone and the flattened flesh of a million dead emotions.

Knowledge is what I know; wisdom is what I see.

“I believe” means I have stopped thinking.

Reason is the arithmetic of the emotions.

What seem to be contradictions are the illusions of angular vision.

The mind proposes; the passions dispose. The things we promise ourselves through our brains are seldom performed. Mind forever misses its mark; passion always overshoots its mark.

Thoughts are the lips of the Will.

The things that we know best were never learned. The things that we know least are the things we study. Observation discovers ultimately nothing but limitation.

It may be that the world is governed by ideas, but the ideas that govern are only reflections from the deeps of the soul—multi-colored rainbows of fire generated by the storms of desire in the heart of man.

The brain of man thinks; the brain of woman merely functions.

How near to me is the nearest thing if I see that thing with another thing—the bodily eye! How far away is the nearest thing if I see that thing with the eye that is not thing—the uncreate eye, the abstract consciousness!

Consciousness probably sprang from Difference, as a spark emitted by friction. This is proved by the fact that monotony tends to deaden, to lessen the degree of consciousness, to make us less aware. Even God if It be conscious, must be subject to this law of Difference; or else It sleeps and dreams through us.

As a pebble dropped into a body of still water will radiate circles until the last one is lost in the imperceptible, so a single fact dropped into a seer’s mind will radiate and blend itself into circles of wider and wider relations until it is finally lost in the ocean it sprang from, the imperceptible Will.

Reasoning is the process that proves the obvious. We explain one thing by another. It is the playful paradox. The “riddle of the universe” will never be unriddled by reason, for we have nothing but a riddle to work with.

There are persons whose griefs are generalizations.

There are distressful feelings but no mental pains. The mind has no griefs. There is not an ill that cannot be thought away. To the mind our griefs are delightful studies, and a man’s measure may be taken by his ability to generalize his heartaches, to depersonalize his special form of pain.

When I look at a thing I see nothing. When I close my eyes and think about that thing it gathers about it the flames of the spirit. In this retort it seeks with the sure instinct of atomic attraction its place in the hierarchy of values, linking itself, mysterious-wise, to a million other things which to the bare eye seem unlikely relationships. A tree is not just a tree; it is a ghost of the unimaginable. Life is not just life; it is something else. Imagination is the key to the Real.

Minds that do not possess the power of abstraction are like fly-paper; they catch with their stickiness every little buzzing fact that hovers around, and when caught the little buzzing fact straightway dies.

Genius is knowing without learning.

There is no tyrant like the reason. If you are dominated by the rational, prepare your shroud.

The first duty of religion is to make the absurd plausible. The first duty of the seer is to make the plausible absurd.

Intuition perceives and possesses the truth immediately. Reason sets out to find the truth that is necessary to it, but on the way generally founders in its own bogs.

Impassioned contemplation—that is poetry; unimpassioned contemplation—that is thought.

Great minds are like tall trees—they stand isolated in the body, but mingle at the top.

What would life be devoid of the intellectual principle but not devoid of consciousness? It would, I think, be most like a dream—panoramic, unsequential, anarchic, fascinating, vivid to rapturousness, grotesque, frightful, aimless, imbecile. Half-waking dreams are such, and in these wild carnivals of color and nonsense in the brain we behold the universe as it really is, or was before the growth—purely adventitious and utilitarian—of the logical faculty, of what we style the rationalizing instinct. Those who live on the impulsive plane have all the characteristics of dream-figures to those whose intellects have gripped life and squeezed it into some kind of logical straitjacket.

Cowardice is the mother of philosophy. The impotent soul plays 'possum in life's battle. This, with sublime effrontery, it calls philosophic indifference.

Most professional psychologists are merely afflicted with a form of satyriasis. To want to observe merely for the sake of observing, to experience for the sake of experiencing, is mental lasciviousness.

Those who are most completely obsessed by the idea of Christ are those who accept him unquestionably and those who reject him utterly, as, for instance, St. Augustine and Nietzsche. Which proves the identity of those apparent contraries, Love and Hate.

All philosophy is the attempt of Consciousness to interpret the will of the Unconscious, and so it must ever fail; but, still, the philosopher is the sublimest of human products because he dares to enter that "pocket" in our souls. He has knocked at prohibited doors and questioned vague shapes in dark passages and dug in damp cellars and swum beneath frozen pools when the world sought only its swill.

Philosophy with all its pretensions is only the attempt of some individual to escape pain—a poultice cut to look like a holy wafer. Philosophy can be nothing but "his philosophy" or "my philosophy."

Metaphysics is said to be "useless, unprofitable." How can this be when it has given pleasure to so many thousands? For pleasure is the highest kind of use. That which is practically useful is still in the domain of the Will. But that which gives the soul pleasure, exalts the mind and intensifies the intellect without any corresponding achievement in the practical world is useful without being utilitarian.

To act is not necessarily to be awake; for action is only the somnambulism of thought, while aesthetic contemplation of the universe is open-eyed consciousness, the greatest degree of *awareness* at which we can arrive.

A natural, normal mental growth compels a constant change of opinions; but there is a kind of pseudo-thinker who changes his opinions to make believe he is growing. This pathetic impotent is an exhibition of movement without growth.

Reverence should be a weakness of the knees, never of the intellect.

All new thoughts must run the ghost-gauntlet.

The dignity of man lies in his dreams, not in his works. The laboratory in the brain is the only workshop that is not ugly, and it is there that man will always come back, heavy-laden and disillusioned, to work anew at the old useless dreams, the old unsolvable problems. The useful, the practical, the realizable are the transitory; dreams are the things that are immortal. The Useful is the executioner of the Beautiful.

The brain of a thinker is a vampire that sucks the blood and breath from every object presented to its gaze; the brain of the poet, on the contrary, informs with blood and breath the spectres of dead matter which we call the material universe.

A catchword—Socialism, Progress, Democracy—has saved many a man from the gutter. A “sublime enthusiasm” differs in no respect from the exaltations of opium and alcohol, though the dreamer is infinitely more dangerous and asinine than the dipsomaniac and drug fiend. The drunkard enslaves himself only; the dogmatic enthusiasts always end by enslaving others. There is no maniac comparable to an active idealist.

A “scientific method” is an instrument for measuring Mystery. Nothing so convinces philosophical scepticism of the rationality of its attitude as the mass of “precise knowledge” which gets palmed off on the world.

The more we analyze the profounder grows our mysticism. Because of this the professional scientist is never a mystic; he is too superficial. He is a snail, not a mole.

The evocation of the “cosmic emotion” is the abridgement and epitomizing of past, present and future, the retreat of space-and-time to its ancestral spiritual molecule. It is the lightning-flash that winds up all horizons on the bobbin of perception.

To tolerate your opposite, then to understand him, then, by an act of the imagination, to pass into his body and literally become him, if only for a minute—these are three stages in the evolution of the protean intellect, the evolution of the soul from granite-imprisoned toad to world-chameleon.

The imagination is a caricaturist, for it remembers first and last only the oddnesses, the whimsies in things. There is nothing harder for the mind than to recall a thing exactly as it is. It exaggerates, attenuates, specializes. That is, it caricatures.

Veneration is the fossil of an extinct enthusiasm.

Wisdom is the net profit from Pain. Joy is heavily taxed.

A superstitious belief is a truth not yet rationalized by the intellect. What was called witchcraft is known today as hypnotism or auto-suggestion. The mental history of man is the rationalization of the incredible.

To furrow the darkness with the light of his thought—such is the dream of the thinker; but his furrow is like the ridge in the sea that a boat makes in its rear, a thing of froth and spray, quickly identified again with the mute, impersonal deeps.

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Saint Tantalus
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