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## THE LIGHTED WINDOW

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# *The Lighted Window*

OLWEN W. CAMPBELL

*There is an ideal standard somewhere and only that matters : and I cannot find it. Hence this aimlessness.*

T. E. LAWRENCE.

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## I

# SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF T. E. LAWRENCE

*“Every man truly lives, so long as he acts his nature, or some way makes good the faculties of himself.”*—SIR THOS. BROWNE.

*“A man’s life of any worth is a continual allegory.”*—KEATS.

A CHIEF part of the allegory of a man’s life is to be found in his philosophy—conscious or unconscious, complex or simple. Our lives are what we see in them—what we allow ourselves to see. The world seems to be becoming increasingly philosophical, but most of its philosophy is too abstract and difficult, or too cynical, to be any aid to living. We need to see a philosophy in action to appreciate its meaning, or learn from it. In a lived philosophy there are no platitudes; it is new, and arresting, persuasive or deterrent, as no merely theoretical philosophy can be.

For these reasons I have chosen to devote the first part of this little book to a consideration of the life and philosophy of a man who has left the world an allegory it is likely to ponder for a long while; of one, moreover, who was to a peculiar degree both the master and the victim of his age. The life and writings of T. E. Lawrence

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continue to exert a great influence, but an influence very variously interpreted, according to the degree of insight and the personal bias of the interpreter. For me they are a profoundly significant illustration of the theme I have at heart in writing this book.

Obviously Lawrence's life has something to teach us about problems of conduct—particularly in relation to the proper use of power, a problem of immense importance to-day. He earned power, used it brilliantly, and abandoned it, choosing instead to make himself a cog in a co-operative power machine. Are we to regard this choice as an expression of principle, or of despair?

Liddell-Hart maintains that Lawrence's message was a message of freedom, and that the message is even greater than the man. Is this or the contrary true; and is the message one we can accept?

In any case his message has a peculiar value for us, not only because he was a great man, but because he was so deeply involved in the intellectual difficulties of this age. Quietism, pacifism, struggling with the desire to achieve; a longing to serve the world conflicting with a deep disgust at its ways; energy agonising in the bonds of self-distrust—these are darkening the minds of many to-day, as they darkened his. His answer to the question: "Is life worth while?"

is one that matters; since he was both brilliant and good. What was his answer?

When we begin to study his life we are filled with admiration for his character, while being baffled by many traits. As for his philosophy, it is not easy to extract it from the maze of apparently paradoxical acts and statements.

If we could think of him purely as a warrior hero who won his war, or as an artist who produced an immortal book, we might feel that his philosophy of life was not so very important. But he was not primarily an artist, nor, as he continually revealed and said, so comparatively simple and straightforward as are most men of action. He said he was a dreamer. His thought mattered more to him than his actions with which it was often in conflict. On the face of it his life is paradoxical and full of inconsistencies. There was often a waywardness and awkwardness in his behaviour, as in his style. He was ill at ease with something—himself, or the world; and this may have caused the freakish and theatrical element in him which jarred on so many people, and led some to underrate his greatness. Yet when we gather together the often extravagant and contradictory thoughts and opinions which strew his writings and give such a curious flavour to his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and compare them with his actions, we see that some of his actions appear strange not because he was less consistent

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than most men, but because, *up to a point*, he was more so.

Probably most people patch up a creed or system of thought out of haphazard experience, and the assimilation of other men's ideas. A few seem to be ready armed with a standard of behaviour and a sense of values of their own. These are the men who should be the leaders and teachers of the rest: and Lawrence was one of these. His attitude to life and to himself was based to an unusual degree on moral principles. What those principles themselves rested on is something of a mystery.

If we begin by considering the more external aspects of his life and philosophy, we must at once look for some explanation of the outstanding paradox of his career—his withdrawal from all power and position into the ranks of the R.A.F. The many explanations usually given do not prevent this from appearing a very strange act. Men have occasionally resigned wealth and power for love, or from religious motives. But these were not Lawrence's motives. He did not care for wealth, but he did care for power, and he gave it up with obvious reluctance; and there are plenty of signs that he never rooted the desire for it out of his nature. Moreover his action seems to need excusing as well as explaining, because it is generally felt that a man with a gift for leadership owes it to the world to use his

gift, in some sphere or other. The mass of men are lost sheep, and the worship accorded to a leader is the measure of a real need. In Lawrence there were many of the attribute; necessary to a genuine philosopher-king; he could *use* power, and see through it.

His own explanations of his action are many and diverse, and it often seems as if he, too, were looking for the true reason and excuse.

An explanation that he gave more than once was that since he could not in his own opinion become a creative artist, he would be nothing—he would choose “the minimum existence, work without thought . . . be a night-watchman in a city warehouse.” There is more to be said about his desire for artistic creation—but on the face of it this explanation seems curiously petulant.

There seems to have been in Lawrence from the first a deep vein of quietism existing strangely along with his romanticism and ambition. It may have been this which kept him so aloof and unclamorous in his youth. It was surely this which felt the spell of the desert. He reveals both these incompatible strains in an early letter, written when he was on a cycle tour in France, and describing his joy on first reaching the shores of the Mediterranean. He begins by recommending the plain in preference to the mountain—tranquillity, peace, contentment rather than striving and ambition. But he passes almost

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at once to a cry for adventure, and for climbing peaks in Darien.

But Lawrence's quietism was not based, as quietism usually is, on simplicity of character or on a mystical outlook. In this he was very unlike another romantic soldier whom in some ways he resembled. Garibaldi is said to have stopped the march of his army to listen to a nightingale; and when victory was accomplished, he went away to grow corn in Caprera. But Garibaldi was as simple as Lawrence was involved. Garibaldi went away because he was no longer wanted: Lawrence went away although—one might almost say *because*—he was.

No doubt it was in part disillusionment which led to his withdrawal; but disillusionment of a contradictory and complicated kind. In the events of his outward life alone the causes of his disillusionment were subtle. It is rare for a man of action to carry a very sensitive conscience: a conscience as merciless as Lawrence's was a strange accompaniment to heroic exploits. He could throw himself ardently into adventure and continue all the while to analyse and criticize what he felt and did: thereby doubling the weight of every responsibility, and the bitterness of every failure. As he worked out his war technique and rushed his Arabs towards Damascus, his mind seems to have been busy accepting the consequences of its judgments, and retreating

from the futility of shaping the destinies of other men.

His first approach to the Revolt was romantic and based on the romantic dreams of his youth. He reveals quite clearly that he began by idealising Feisal, about whom he writes with exquisite delicacy of feeling and admiration. To some extent he idealised also the other Arab chiefs. It is a sign of the richness and variety of his nature that he, who became an object of idolatry, was himself prone to hero-worship; and it was here perhaps that disillusion struck him hardest. Before the end of the Revolt he had realised that Feisal was "a brave weak spirit trying to do work for which only a genius, a prophet or a great criminal was fitted. I served him out of pity." As for the other chiefs, one way or another most of them had failed him: and there was hardly one he could entirely trust. He records these failures without bitterness, but they changed the character of his war of liberation. Moreover he was also up against the political fact that small and weak nations have their portion of liberty doled out to them by the strong ones.

Even a moderately conscientious man must have suffered in deceiving the Arabs about their promised reward—and Lawrence, as we know, suffered about that and about other and less obvious matters. He did not lose hope of being able to insist on proper treatment for the Arabs

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at the end of the war. But he was never mainly concerned with the obvious and concrete: it was the underlying spirit of any act or event that he seemed to care about. He looked far beyond the ordinary ethical considerations, and judged conduct mainly as it revealed or influenced the health of the spirit. He wanted the Arabs to do themselves justice. His main trouble was not so much his failing to liberate them as completely as he wished: he minded more that he could not make them worthier of liberation. He did not shrink from using money to bribe them so much as from having to use spiritual levers—from inflating them with ideals they could not make their own and could only catch at in hectic moments when stirred by his vision. In that queer chapter of *Seven Pillars* where he discusses vicarious sacrifice, he leads us through the maze his self-probings had thrown up around the question of whether a man *can* work out another man's salvation. He does not make his conclusions at all clear, but in a half-sentence near the end of the book he does, I think, disclose it. "Anyone," he says, who has "pushed through to success a rebellion of the weak against their masters must come out of it so stained in estimation that afterwards nothing in the world would make him feel clean." A statement which surely implies a belief that those who are spiritually weak can only be worked up to the heroic pitch

necessary for achieving victory by fraud, and chiefly by deceiving them about themselves and their motives, and about the nature of the goal. And such frauds end sooner or later in failure—as the Arabia of Lawrence's dreams has virtually ended: as ended the Risorgimento of Garibaldi and Mazzini.

What is the use of preaching—of making other men experience “the heave and thrust of notions which ran up beyond their sight,” of prevailing on others to do things it is not really in their hearts to do? He began to think that it might be no use and morally indefensible. He was not prepared under any circumstances to use compulsion and so risk destroying such poor “notions” as the weaker have discovered for themselves: he might have been willing to rule by reason, but he had found, no doubt, that with most men reason simply will not start the machine: they need a different spark. What the spark was very often in his own case he must have known. When he tells us how he tried to persuade the Serahin chiefs to follow him to the Yarmak Bridges, he attributes his success to the peculiar philosophy he preached to them: that what really stirred them was the power of his own personality, he must have suspected—as we do, when we picture him talking to them in the firelight, with his quiet voice and soft movements and terrible tenseness and determination, and

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lack of self-regard. But he was too fine, and too intellectual, to be willing to lead men by personal magnetism alone, to goals, moreover, in which he no longer much believed.

In Arabia he had posed as a prophet for secular gains—he could not take on the rôle of a real prophet after that, so he left Damascus in the hour of his triumph for fear that “the root of authority” might be quickened in him.

The tragic perversity of his fortunes during the next few years undoubtedly drove disillusion deeper. He was tired out from internal and external conflict. He had suffered, in more than his body, in Deraa, and he implies that a great personal sorrow had befallen him before he reached Damascus. Almost at once on his return he was involved in the long wrangle in Paris, which must have been not only disappointing but bitterly humiliating and have tended to undermine his faith in his own influence. The uncrowned king of Arabia found himself powerless against the juggernauts of organised vested interests, national prestige, finance, society. He was confronted for the first time with the post-war world—the world of mass and scale—which was progressively swamping the individual, and destroying the romance and adventure as well as the tranquillity of life. In later years he tried at times to convince himself that what really matters is not the genius but the “common

effort": in so far as he succeeded he was confirmed in his choice of obscurity.

During the time of the peace treaties he wrote, and lost, the first version of *Seven Pillars*, and re-wrote it in a few months—a gruelling experience for a new author, particularly for one who lacked ease. This may have been one cause of the sense of strain in writing from which he afterwards suffered.

As soon as he had achieved a settlement for the Arabs he joined the R.A.F. as a private.

Lawrence's enlistment was, from one point of view, quite natural and consistent in face of a world he condemned; and which refused to use him on his own terms, or to free him by giving him a pension. The problem was one which confronted the best men of his generation—and it is still a present problem to many. It is interesting to see how he approached it. He did not escape into generalities: he dealt with the problem in his own person—the height of consistency. He despised the dishonesty of the social structure, but he did not look for salvation in revolution, as so many of his contemporaries did: he had come to have very little faith in political reforms, but he made himself the comrade of working men. He had seen the futility of war: but he recognised its present necessity. He did not become a pacifist, or lose his patriotism: he devoted himself to improving

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some details of the British war machine. He did not become bitter or cynical: he felt "contempt not for men but for all they do." He did not remain in the world, to profit by satirizing and sampling it, as others did—he chose obscurity, poverty and asceticism.

And yet just because we recognise in all this the stamp of his greatness, we are dissatisfied with his choice; for he deserted a world sorely in need of the very qualities he so abundantly possessed, and in his heart I think he knew this. But he was driven by elements in his own nature more powerful even than disillusionment or principle.

For what man, after all, refrains from action—from functioning, from fulfilling himself, purely out of disappointment with other men? It is clear from Lawrence's life and writings that he abandoned the use of power, not because he condemned it as such on principle, but because he felt unable to use it to his own satisfaction.

His account of his experiences in the R.A.F. shows how deeply organised mass power and the crushing of the individual which it entails, frightened and hurt him, though there were some aspects of community life which he enjoyed and which relieved him of some of his heavy burden of solitude. And there is no doubt that he believed in the value of leadership. He

laments the poverty of the leadership in the R.A.F. as he knew it; and in the Oxford version of *Seven Pillars* he speaks of the fewness of leaders (or, as he puts it, "gods") worthy of worship as "a tragedy of the world."

He abandoned power himself from two causes—a positive and a negative urge, developments, I think, of his romanticism and of his quietism; an urge after an impossibly high ideal, and a passivity encouraged by self-distrust.

And yet here again we are confronted by a paradox—for his self-distrust did not spring from any of the ordinary causes. He did not suffer from an inferiority complex when measuring himself against other men. Nor did he feel what is a main cause of self-distrust, an inadequacy of will power. His will was adequate for anything. Whence, then, the self-distrust? Can we get any clue to it by seeking to understand his inner life and the deeper springs of his philosophy?

In *Seven Pillars* there are three main threads—the events of the Revolt; Lawrence's criticism of the events; and his own experiences, viewed as a form of spiritual exercise, or test. And so too in his life. Along with his unselfish heroism and his interest in and insight into other men, there existed that terrifying self-centredness which seems inseparable from genius, and the inner conflict which it produces. But though Lawrence's

inspired egoism was as intense as that of any other genius, it was very different in its action. There are pages in *Seven Pillars* which lead one to believe that his main object in life was to "try himself out." This was his equivalent to that self-expression which the artist so often pursues rough-shod. But Lawrence pursued nothing rough-shod, and he tested himself not at other people's expense, but at his own. Naturally, perhaps, because he was that rare type of genius, a moral genius, and his pre-occupation was with conduct and what lies beneath it. An artist experiments in various methods of creating beauty because he loves beauty: in just the same way Lawrence experimented in fine conduct because he loved it.

Once we realise that one of the main motives of his life was to test the strength of ideals, or more exactly, to test the toughness of the human spirit, both in himself and in others, some of the most puzzling traits in him become comprehensible. He has seemed to some people to have had a vein of cruelty or sadism in his nature. But cruelty can have had no part in one capable of such deep instinctive pity; who could suffer so for the death of comrades, and even of enemies, and be so profoundly shaken by the necessity of shooting a murderer, while he could put a bullet through the head of the young Arab he loved to save him from the Turks.

Yet there was a certain cold grimness about him; and he was passionately interested in war, though well aware that to "man-rational" war appeared to be "a cheat" and "nothing worth fighting for." But war is a test—physical suffering, and fear, and death are tests, and he was tremendously, even morbidly, interested in ordeals. The Arabs attracted him because they seemed to be a people who had been tested almost to the utmost limit by hard living, which had worn their souls thin but left them bright.

By the same token we are helped to explain his strange inconsistency, when he cared so much for liberty that he could refuse all authority over others for their sakes and his own, deliberately to subject himself to authority of a most unintellectual and dreary kind in the ranks of the Air Force. To do this satisfied his instinct to swim upstream—to win against odds—to achieve his own spiritual liberty in spite of, by means of, poverty and drudgery and subordination.

The pursuit of tests is bound to be a self-centred and at times unfeeling quest, and when the judge is a man's own self it may lead him into very lonely places. Lawrence was afraid of being brought to accept the standards of the rest of the world. He had to test himself on his own standards, and he was constantly re-examining and stiffening his own when theirs weakened. He feared popularity and praise and the possession of

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power, because they might deceive him about himself.

To reconcile his nature and serve his generation may well have seemed an almost insoluble problem. Everywhere he was met by cruel contradictions. He was romantic and a hero-worshipper at heart, and he craved friendship, but his devastating critical faculty and his fastidious standards soon made a heroic or romantic approach to acts or persons impossible. Like Shelley he was a "perfectibilian," but Shelley had the poet's gift for feeding on illusion; Lawrence had the privations and pains of high yearning without the consolations of dreams. His great abilities spurred him to action; his sense of the worthlessness of material conquests and worldly power reined him back. He held by the teaching of that chapter of Proverbs from which he named his book, "He that correcteth a scorner getteth to himself scorn. If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself." But he was too anxious about himself to be happy or confident in his own wisdom. In his quietism there was no peace, as in his victories there had been no true satisfaction. He felt that success held at its very core the ashes of disillusion, and in the centre of himself he found self-distrust. He became steadily more hostile to his body and to physical life generally, and would indulge none of its appetites, so that his splendid physique

brought him the minimum of pleasure: at the same time he seems to have been abnormally sensitive to physical pain, as one would expect from a man who was, from one aspect, a highly-strung intellectual. But he was as little the complete intellectual as he was the complete soldier. In his youth he showed all the signs of being destined for a life of academic research—the pure uncalculating zest for knowledge and for all the details of his subject: but after the war the zest was insufficient to attract him for long to any one course of study. He had ceased to believe in knowledge.

If we take all this into account, we begin to understand very well why he desired so much to be a creative artist: indeed it was almost the only form of action that could have satisfied his powers and yet have been consistent with his philosophy. The artist exercises no tyranny over another man's soul: he only influences where he is understood; he starts no false hares running in inferior minds: he persuades no one into a way of life, but only into a way of looking at life, and if action follows on that it is free action.

But Lawrence's judgment ruled that artistic creation was beyond his reach. He said that his critical power was stronger than his sense of creation and that there was a "core" in him that would not let him be an artist; what it was he did not know. The chief beauty of *Seven Pillars*

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is, as it seems to me, moral rather than artistic (in spite of the fact that Lawrence himself said, and with some truth, that it was "an evil work"). Art aims at some kind of reconciliation, and can only be produced by a person reconciled, at any rate temporarily, to himself. *Seven Pillars* in its style and its matter, external and internal, is an almost continual and an unresolved fight. Its greatness lies in the character of that fight, and in the moral and spiritual penetration that underlay it.

The conclusion of the Arab treaties and of *Seven Pillars* left Lawrence still more weary and at war with himself and life: only a very great theme could have brought him into creative harmony, and none presented itself again. Apart from his unpublished diary of the Air Force, which was the product of great conflict and misery, his scraps of literary work are unimportant. Letter-writing was probably his chief outlet. His letters are stimulating, moving, and enormously interesting; but there is in them, I feel, a certain narrowness of imaginative range and mood, as of a spirit in prison—perhaps voluntarily in prison.

When at thirty-four he chose a hard and obscure life in order to escape from a reputation which hurt him more than it gratified him, and in an attempt to preserve his integrity in a stupid and dishonest world, it might seem that in the long

battle, quietism had conquered. But quietism, like flat country, is justified by tranquillity and happiness. He obviously found some scope and satisfaction in his work with the R.A.F.—in raising its tone, and befriending and educating his fellow privates, and in designing speed-boats; he enjoyed rushing through the country on his motor-cycle, and talking to his many friends—with not one of whom he seems, however, to have been entirely at ease, except on paper. He had a vast sense of humour and fun, but gloomy moods were never far away, and he often felt that such happiness as he found was illusion. His high ideals and restless intellect and unused powers tormented him till the end.

“One of the sorest things in life,” he wrote not long before his death, “is to come to realise that one is just not good enough. Better perhaps than some, than many almost,—but I do not care for relatives, for matching myself against my kind. There is an ideal standard somewhere and only that matters: and I cannot find it. Hence this aimlessness.” When asked if he was happy he answered: “At times. No one who thinks can be really happy.” Looking back on the past he could say, “I have not had much kick out of life”—a reminder to us that two years of dazzling adventure is not food for a lifetime. At forty-six he wrote to a friend, “My heart tells me that I’m finished.” Earlier he had said, “My life

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has been service, and I hate it. . . . We should not be happy, and I think I've dodged that sin successfully!" He alternately longed to escape from the rough communal life of the R.A.F. to the peace and privacy of his "very beloved cottage," and feared the loss of companionship and steady work, and the years of loneliness and futility that might lie ahead of him. From the cottage, when he had first left the R.A.F., he wrote: "Days seem to dawn, suns to shine, evenings to follow, and then I sleep. What I have done, what I am doing, what I am going to do, puzzle me and bewilder me." He felt himself incapable of a close relationship with any other being. "I have never loved anyone," he wrote, "or hardly ever." "I was always hoping for a master whom I could have fought till I dropped at his feet to worship. . . . Mankind hankered after the great in their worship. . . . It was only myself who had nothing higher than the abstract."

All this is profoundly tragic, and we are left with an almost unbearable sense of waste. If he had only been either worthily occupied or happy, but he was neither: he was thwarted and starved. It is a paradoxical tragedy, but not for that any less sad. The lives of geniuses are often tragic, but usually owing to adverse circumstances or internal weaknesses. Lawrence, while still a young man, had opportunity at his feet. He was not like Mozart faced with neglect and ruin,

or like Keats with a physical break-down, or like Coleridge with a moral one. It was not the weakness but the nobility of his character which seemed to stand in his way. He was self-starved because his standards were too high.

And this brings us up against such ultimate problems as whether a man's standards can be *too high*—so high that they must result in self-defeating disillusion and paralysis. Whether the conditions of human society, or the nature of the universe, are such that as men become increasingly informed and critical and sensitive, they must also become more cynical and unhappy. Is that, indeed, the prospect before us?

What Lawrence thought of the world of his day is plain: his life is a devastating condemnation of it. But the manner and speed of its further deterioration since his death, a few short years ago, proves the efficacy of individual effort, for good or ill. A condemnation of the universe is another matter, and produces a different kind of paralysis from worldly disillusionment.

Whether he took an entirely pessimistic view of the ultimate meaning of life is not clear. His few remarks on the subject seem contradictory. And his letters are almost unnaturally devoid of serious or playful or imaginative speculation. He certainly did not behave like a cynic. On the contrary, he behaved like a deeply religious man, and some of his admirers have felt that he

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resembled Christ. He had at least one very Christ-like quality, in that he could steadily pursue the highest ideal standard for himself while extending boundless charity and sympathy to others who did not even see it. But it is quite obvious, from much that he said and wrote and from his moods of intense depression, that he had no steady faith. He was *both* a pessimist and an idealist, and that, I maintain, is a paradoxical thing to be.

Lawrence said once to a friend that he "believed," though he had no religion, that God was "something one feels," and he referred to "an ideal standard somewhere." But his fuller confessions of faith are of a more gloomy kind, and nothing, after all, could be much more fundamentally gloomy than the remark, "No one who thinks can be really happy." In Chapter LXXIV of *Seven Pillars* he describes how he explained his creed to the Serahin chieftains, in order to persuade them to follow him. Hope, he told them, was their enemy and failure "God's freedom to mankind." "There could be no honour in a sure success, but much might be wrested from a sure defeat. Omnipotence and the Infinite were our two worthiest foemen, indeed the only ones for a free man to meet, they being monsters of his own spirit's making." "To the clear-sighted failure was the only goal. We must believe, through and through, that

there was no victory, except to go down into death fighting and crying for failure itself, calling in excess of despair to Omnipotence to strike harder, that by His very striking He might temper our tortured selves into the weapon of His own ruin." His words—or himself—prevailed. But the creed was not merely a weapon tempered to the desperate stoicism of the desert mentality. It was a development of his own philosophy. Of the goal he says later in another place that it consisted "only in unending effort towards unattainable imagined light." The implications—and they are complex—of this lethal faith he worked out in full and followed up. In Chapter C of *Seven Pillars* he writes, "It might have been heroic to have offered up my own life for a cause in which I could not believe: but it was theft of souls to make others die in sincerity for my graven image. Because they accepted our message as truth, they were ready to be killed for it; a condition which made their acts more proper than glorious, a logical bastard fortitude, suitable to a profit and loss balance of conduct. To invent a message, and then with open eye to perish for its self-made image—that was greater." This is the honoured but highly disputable doctrine that virtue is its own reward pushed to its furthest limits. It is the pursuit of tests reaching a pitch where the ordeal must have no values but itself: truth, logic, faith, joy, all are

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felt to detract from the purity of the sacrifice. It is the point at which "no motive" becomes the only honourable movent.

The pessimist philosophy behind this is nothing new. It is the creed of so many intellectuals. It is what Lawrence described when Eric Kennington asked him about his faith; a conception of "process without aim or end, creation followed by dissolution, rebirth and then decay, to wonder at and to love. . . . But not a hint of a God." All that is the password of modern atheism. But what Lawrence built on this dwindling dark uncertainty is, indeed, something to wonder at and to love.

The high-principled pessimist usually takes refuge in an enlightened materialism. His God is the good of the race; and his aim to increase the amenities of brief lives made precious by their multitude. The preoccupation of our age is with conduct, but conduct mainly in relation to the needs of human society. Lawrence, too, was preoccupied with conduct, but with an ideal of it austere and unworldly; and he kept his moral judgment so unspotted, that all the praises of others could not influence his valuation of himself—a triumph, a pillar of wisdom, surely unsurpassed.

A materialist philosophy, however unselfish, produces in most people a certain coarsening of grain: they become—they are almost bound to

become, concentrated on the grosser needs and aspects of life. Lawrence, on the other hand, though he cared for the physical wants of those about him with the tenderness of a woman, for himself sought no physical gratifications. He could be intensely interested in practical jobs, and machinery fascinated him; but he remained deeply and continually sensitive to a world of subtle thought and abstract beauty, and capable of endless effort after an ideal perfection, although believing it to be but an "imagined light." Though he said "there is an ideal standard somewhere" his dominating intellect and his grim pursuit of extreme tests denied him the faith this ideal should have implied. Instead he seems to have tried to create in the absence of a God a moral universe of his own imagining, and to dwell in it alone, supporting it on his own sole effort and love, being, as it were, for himself, the light and the way. One consequence of this was that compromise was shattering and any failure disastrous: hence his despair when physical suffering broke his will at Deraa; hence, too, I think, his general inability to compromise enough with life or himself to use his powers and find any adequate self-fulfilment. Another consequence was his shadowing of self-distrust.

This desperate spiritual paradox was a *tour de force* of an amazing kind. Where most of us find the utmost difficulty in living up to what we

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do believe in, Lawrence could live up to what he did not believe in—his will could exceed his faith. To build the life of a saint and visionary on the view-point of an agnostic needs a fierceness of will and a power to endure mental pain beyond the reach of ordinary human beings.

About the effects on Lawrence, I would not venture to dogmatise. He was a very great man, but he fell foul of life, and in some ways failed the world that needed him so much. But how could he lead others if he denied himself a goal; if his intellect continually destroyed the structure that his spirit raised?

He was afraid, or unable, to probe into the springs of his own nature; and self-distrust was his greatest obstacle. He was afraid of the intimacy he longed to find; and he was so perverse in his approach to love that he could say the truest knowledge of love might lie in "loving what self despised," showing his inability ever to get free from moral and intellectual riddles. He was morbid about the physical aspects of life. He was afraid of his own feelings and instincts, "always at strong war" with his reason. This conflict deprived him of peace, though he was ready to attempt even "mind-suicide" and the "burning out of free-will and self-respect and delicacy," and of his genius, in order to attain peace.

Not here is the "spirit of freedom incarnate." It is true, as Liddell-Hart says, that his message

is one of freedom—from possessiveness, from competition, from ambition, from domination; but all these negative freedoms will not give us, and did not give him, the freedom which matters most, and which comes from wholeness of spirit.

He set an example to this mob-ridden world of freedom from borrowed standards; of loyalty to one's own conscience. But can the conscience rest in mid air? Lawrence was the fine flower of his age—an age of vast machines and social upheavals, a critical, sensitive, intellectual dispirited age. He met it on all these planes, and suffered with and through it. And he pushed his analysis and his criticism to such lengths, that, as he said, he “argued” himself “out of creation.”

Because Lawrence *acted* righteousness which is a still finer thing than believing in it, he inspires us to try to understand his message and to follow him. But the message is incomplete; and direction is lacking. By most people conduct is instinctively regarded as the second step in a process and not the first. The world in general has not the courage—perhaps it has not the sublime folly—to sacrifice itself for an ideal in whose existence as an actual or eventual reality it does not believe. When it ceases to believe, it turns its attention to eating and drinking, to money-making and fighting. Those who are

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oppressed by a sense of the futility of life will not be able to solve their problem as Lawrence solved it, if solve it he did; since for us who are ordinary people the ideal *can* be too high, if it is greater than our faith in it. Plainly we must *believe more*, or *want less*.

## II

### “NO ONE WHO THINKS CAN BE HAPPY”

*“This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darkened and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages.”—KEATS.*

THERE can be no doubt that an increasing number of people are finding tragedy in thought. As Hippocleides danced away his wedding under the influence of drink, so do they think away their joy in life under the influence of Truth. We think about human society and almost despair of the educability of man: we think about the nature of the universe as science reveals it, and we despair of God and the survival of the soul.

Atheism has taken many forms. In the Middle Ages, when practically no one disbelieved in God's existence, it expressed rebellion against him: conscious rebellion, like that of William Rufus who declared: “God shall never have me good for all the harm that he has brought upon me.” It was the rebellion of the spirit and sometimes of the conscience of man against the tyranny of an Omnipotent God. There was still a strong element of this in the intellectual rebellion of later times; the gross superstition and persecutions of the Church had made men

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bitter, and they were consequently capable of that highly satisfying inconsistency of hating God and disbelieving in him at the same time. Finally came the atheism of the Victorians, which was almost in the nature of a religious revival. It was to many people a spiritual renaissance, and it was associated with belief in the power of man to shape his own destiny. From being judged, he became the judge of all things: not subject any longer to the mysteries and vagaries of the supernatural, but only to that stable thing Truth, which required nothing but time to be entirely known.

We have travelled a long way since then. We have no religious persecution of the old kind to fight, so the bracing element of rebellion is lacking. Our atheism is genuine atheism (though some people still like to call it by that clumsy term, agnosticism)—it is literally *being without the sense of God*. Where he was there is now to many people simply a blank.<sup>1</sup> At the same time we have less faith in the power of science to answer our questions or improve our morals: and the world seems more than ever a depressing place to be the only one we can inherit. In fact there is not much pleasure left in atheism, unless we count as a pleasure the glamour that

<sup>1</sup> And almost inevitably there is also a blank where there was once a belief in the immortality of the soul. For convenience I shall use "atheism" to express both these blanks.

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attaches to a desperate attempt to make the best of a universe that has no meaning.

But still atheism spreads, and increasingly affects our politics, art and education. Some of these effects are good: most of them are not.

There is no doubt that a certain kind of atheistical pessimism has contributed a good deal to poetry. “The nothingness of our lives and the length of the sleep out of which we come and the still greater length of the sleep which will fall upon us” seemed to George Moore to be “the source whence all great poetry flows.” But then Moore, in spite of his exquisite sensitiveness and tender sympathy, was after all something of an emotional dilettante. Moods of sadness have perhaps inspired the greatest works of art, but moods of sadness are a different thing from the deep bitterness of sorrow that sooner or later must overtake the believer in nothingness. That kind of bitterness does not easily make itself into poetry. “As soon,” says Moore, “as one puts one’s hopes in another world life becomes dreary and ugly and art makes itself scarce.” It is true that life is apt to seem more beautiful and precious when we think of it as tragic and fleeting. But this tender sense of sadness and fleetingness is really only a mood, a fantasy. It is the kind of poetic inspiration which depends for its effect on its power to create a reaction towards joy, and which we value for that reason.

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Though we may not be able to fathom the nature of this strange joy in sorrow, we cannot attribute it to a sense of nothingness. It is more nearly related to love, which of all our feelings is the most hurt by the thought of death.

Atheism was a direct inspiration to Lucretius, who had a fine cold relish for nothingness; but few other poets have shared this relish: much modern art has become incoherent and frantic in its efforts to find symbols by which the full horror and obscenity of nothingness could be adequately expressed. These modern artists are more honest thinkers than those who affected to find sweet melancholy in doctrines of despair—but so far they are less successful as artists.

A very real atheism inspired A. E. Housman's poetry. He was a man so uncompromisingly truthful that he could find no refuge from the pains of his beliefs. Despair was not a mood in him, but the everyday condition of his life—expressed in his eyes, in the tone of his voice, in the touch of his hand—yet he made great poetry out of it. But the class that contains Housman is a very small class indeed. On the whole, the arts are impoverished by atheism. The Gods have played such an important part in drama and poetry and architecture. And Newman was expressing the feelings of many people when he said that music was like the voice of God. Whether modern art will succeed in building up

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a harmony out of machinery, mobs and blind chance, remains to be seen.

Atheism has had a bad effect on power politics, a good one in several ways on social development. It serves the evil purposes of dictators, where Christianity or any other genuine religious belief opposes them. The religious-minded person has a portion of invincible independence highly distasteful to tyrants: he lays up treasure in Heaven, and prefers Heaven to his native land; and however Hitler keeps on shouting, continues to hear the still small voice. The Christian who believes it wrong to covet his neighbour's goods, and who thinks riches should be of the spirit, is not much use to the followers of Marx and Lenin. That sort of belief, the Communist quite rightly points out, has often been exploited in the past to bolster up the unfair distribution of property. Our Dictators need to convince their people that the treasures of this world are *all they will ever get*, and that to grab from the weaker is not only the best way to get them, but a way there is no divine power to condemn or punish. Atheism makes the individual cheap and the nation or the class can be exalted at his expense: and that leads to an increase of brutality and to callous acceptance of death and suffering.

On the other hand, a more active pity for poverty and ill-health is a natural consequence of the feeling that physical life is all we have; and

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the widest reforms in social conditions have been associated less with Christianity than with the rationalism of the last fifty years. A belief in God may encourage harsh judgments of men. In the world of the atheist man is all in all—the standard and the origin of the standard—the goal and the way, and sweeping *a priori* moral strictures become out of place. But there are drawbacks to the losing of an absolute or external standard.

The support which atheism as a philosophy is giving and can be made to give to brutal tyrannies, is a serious matter. Its direct effect on the minds of individuals is more serious still. Happy atheists may exist, but only I think on three conditions, that they are young, that they do not think deeply, that they believe in the millennium. They are, in fact, usually Marxists.

Atheism used to be a privilege or penalty of the educated. Since the last War it has increased a great deal amongst the poor, who also think more than they did. And the atheism of the poor is a pathetic thing. It is not the result of intellectual adventure, but nearly always of tragic shock, or child-like disillusionment. A great many people in this country after 1914 seem to have believed that their dead sons and husbands would succeed in sending them a message from Beyond. Prayers were found to be useless: more and more God began to appear as,

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in Wells' biting phrase, “an ever absent help in time of trouble.”

How heavily atheism may weigh on the old many of us have reason to know. Old people are emotional, their intellects are less confident: and yet as they necessarily become less active they tend to think more—they have little else to do. In solitude and idleness many have to bear an almost intolerable burden of depression. They may be able to resist the animal fear of death which low vitality makes less intense, but they are afflicted by the fear that death makes nonsense of their lives. They often become fretfully ambitious to leave some monument or landmark. They search tirelessly for a way of escape from their own earlier conclusion, that their portion will be “night for ever.”

In modern education there is a tendency to make children, who think in their own way, think too much in ours. Educationists and psychologists are (very naturally) in great confusion about religious and philosophical instruction. The conventional schools continue to lay waste their pupils' few and precious hours of freedom with morning and evening prayers and chapel twice on Sunday. More advanced schools often serve up a mixed fare—a curious synthetic unappetising luke-warm dish, compounded of a little philosophy, a little history of religions, and a little Christian ethics, poor nourishment for a

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child's imaginative and practical nature. Some very advanced schools, convinced that a religious sense is an entirely morbid development in man, make strenuous efforts to preserve the child's mind from any possible taint of faith. A book published a few years ago by a group of modern educationists on the subject of Civilisation contained no mention of Jesus Christ and only three passing references to Christianity. I have heard the headmaster of a progressive boys' school being heckled by parents at a public meeting because he would not undertake to include the definite teaching of scepticism equally with Christianity in the school curriculum.

All this may show what an open-minded and intelligent society we are. But the sensitive child may be suffering more than we know.

It is difficult to see what the parent or teacher who has no beliefs can do about it. Some parents shun the mention of God as they used once to shun that of sex. They take refuge in a hope that the child will gradually pick up sensible notions about this whole life problem for himself. And they are sometimes so completely emancipated from any religious feelings that it does not even occur to them that there is anything to be troubled about. I know of two very intelligent parents who were entirely taken by surprise when their son of twelve suddenly asked them one day what their beliefs were. He had

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had the ordinary religious teaching of his preparatory school, but they had never supposed he could have taken seriously ideas which seemed to them so unconvincing and unnecessary. But as they saw he was in earnest, they felt they must answer him truthfully. They did not, they said, believe in anything of that kind. “Not in God?” he asked. “Not in immortality?” No. To their surprise and distress he covered his face with his hand in a helpless attempt to hide his tears, and said: “Wouldn’t it be awful if you were right.”

Now, whoever *is* right about the truths of religious beliefs, this child was telling the honest truth. If the Universe is without any guiding spirit, and if men perish utterly with the death of their bodies, then it is idle to deny that misery, however submerged, is at the root of our being, and that no one who thinks can be happy, because in the process of thinking we must discover it.

Nevertheless we continue in increasing numbers to become atheists—Why? The obvious answer is that we cannot help it—but we cannot help it for a variety of different reasons. “Belief,” Shelley said to his father, “is not voluntary: it is not an action but a passion of the mind”: if this is true of belief it might be held to be equally true of unbelief. But actually I think few people are atheists as a result of feeling—because they

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have a sense of mortality at heart. Housman was one of these, he tells us so:—

“I took my question to the shrine that has not ceased from  
speaking

The heart within, that tells the truth and tells it twice as  
plain;

And from the cave of oracles I heard the priestess shrieking  
That she and I should surely die and never live again.”

But Housman, it must be admitted, had tortured and starved his heart during the greater part of his life; so its testimony cannot be regarded as normal. More often it is the imagination that fails us. It is difficult to imagine either an acceptable God or life beyond the grave. But neither can we imagine the movement of electrons, or light, or space measured in light years, or the paradoxes of relativity, but as we stretch our imagination towards these conceptions we grow to a dim comprehension. So the weakness of the imagination is not, I fancy, to most people a determining factor.

Most atheism is of intellectual origin and it acquires a moral hold upon us through our profound modern respect for *truth*. Truth appears to us to point towards atheistical conclusions: and we are determined to have the courage to follow where truth leads, leaving those who lack this fundamental honesty to deceive themselves with the consolations of faith.

No one is likely to deny that this attitude to

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truth is a fine and useful thing in many ways. But not everyone reflects about the nature of the truth we now worship or realises, that there are fashions in truth, and that it has, in fact, a history.

When I was a child I used to spend many happy hours with the family of a Cambridge mathematician who is now a very distinguished idealist philosopher. In those days—the early 1900’s—Truth loomed very large in Cambridge. Once in the course of a childish argument I said that I believed in immortality. The remark caused consternation in the family, and distress to us all. The parents of my young friends lamented that I could be so carried away by my imagination, and a few days later they gave me a copy of Wordsworth (though even Wordsworth was sometimes carried away by his imagination) and inside the book they had written this:—

“With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

It fortifies my soul to know  
That though I perish, Truth is so.  
That howso’er I stray and range,  
Whate’er I do, thou dost not change.  
I steadier step when I recall  
That tho’ I slip, Thou dost not fall.

A. H. CLOUGH.

From this poem one can see that by the middle of the Victorian era Truth had become a God, and people wrote hymns to It: that the scientists of that time had dethroned one God only to

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enthroned another: and that this God was very powerful. I believe It still is.

Long ago, before the domination of science, truth was kinder and more modest. The Greeks seem to have merged their love of truth in the love of wisdom. Daring and intellectual though they were, they differed from the Victorian scientists in doubting their ability to discover the truth exactly. But wisdom was within all men's reach. The great aim of Plato was surely to fit his conception of life not into the framework of ascertained truth, but into the framework of what one might call "ideal suitability." "To think upon wisdom" said the Apocryphal writer "is perfectness of understanding." Wisdom, that is, brings the truth, not the truth wisdom. According to St. John, Jesus often spoke of the Truth, meaning always divine truth: according to Matthew, Mark and Luke he never talked about truth at all. "Rejoiceth not in iniquity," says Paul, "but rejoiceth in the truth." Happy Paul, for whom what was iniquitous was not true. We have been taught to rejoice in all truths *as such*, and in unpalatable ones we find a special sanctity.

Only too soon the truths of vision and understanding were subordinated to those of logical argument and the great paper-chase after The Truth began. It has continued ever since, though the rules of the game change from time to

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time. The philosophers of the Early Church played a peculiar game which started from the winning-post, and ended, after strenuous and honest intellectual efforts, in some horrid *culs de sac*. They began from the assumption that God had already declared the essential truths to men in the Bible, and that in order to get more truth one must simply advance logically from that point. And so it came about that a perceptive and brilliant man like St. Augustine, applying a metaphysical method which wins respect to this day, could arrive at such conclusions as that the happiness of souls in Heaven must be positively *increased* by dwelling on the agonies of souls in Hell; and that God with perfect righteousness condemned to everlasting damnation every pitiable infant not rescued by a special divine intervention. And yet St. Augustine loved God with an absorbing passion—in the circumstances this, not the intellectual feats, seems his most remarkable achievement. There is some excuse for feeling that the Victorian scientists did from a philosophical point of view very much the same sort of thing as the Early Fathers: started, that is, from a great assumption and landed in a waste place, the assumption being that the closest approximation to ultimate truth was to be derived from observed fact in the visible and concrete world.

And now the game is beginning to change its

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form again; for some scientific philosophers are suggesting that in any intellectual pursuit of the truth it is almost impossible to do more than run round in a larger or smaller circle, since the trail that we follow was laid by no Absolute but depends on our own quite haphazard choice of some one or other of the many pieces of paper lying about—that we have, in fact, laid the trail ourselves. With this discovery the game changes into Grandmother's Steps. Truth has turned round on us a new face, and we must go back again to the beginning. But to begin again is a hopeful development, particularly as the face of truth now turned towards us is described by the scientists as *Probability*.

However, for most people the earlier scientific conception of truth survives, and it is this which we need to examine further, for its power and prestige is vast not only as a method, which is natural enough, but as a Goal.

I am aware that about this question of the truth there lurks paradox within paradox, and that metaphysically the ground here falls away beneath profane feet into countless abysses. Down that way I am not going: for I am only concerned with the practical and common-sense paradoxes of this truth-worship which is now the religion of so many thinking persons.

There are three main aspects of the subject—there is the God, or Idol itself: there is the

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foundation or base on which it rests: there is the kind of worship accorded it. The foundation of this cult is obviously the belief that we can discover the truth—or most of it, though obviously many regions of the God, and those the most important, are hidden in mist, or turned away from us. As Jehovah said, “Thou shalt see my back parts, but my front parts thou shalt not see.” No one claims to see metaphysical truth clearly: but we make efforts—efforts always of an intellectual nature, since the bugbear of the intellectual—witness my anecdote of the Clough poem—is an emotional or imaginative approach to truth. The emotional approach particularly is suspect, and held to be cowardly and fraudulent.

The Cambridge philosopher McTaggart, writing to a friend about *In Memoriam*, found fault with Tennyson for “appealing to the heart on questions of truth.” “All that talk about the heart,” he wrote, “only comes to saying ‘it must be true because I want it to be true,’ which is both false and rather cowardly.” So far McTaggart appears to be an honest sceptic. But the philosopher hunting truth often curiously resembles a puppy playing with a boot. The puppy places the boot in the middle of the lawn and then retires to the shrubbery, from which it proceeds to sight, stalk, circumvent, and finally capture, the boot. In Lowes Dickinson’s biography of McTaggart we read: “From the time

of his marriage onward McTaggart's main object was to accomplish the task he had set himself of demonstrating, by reason the truth which he already believed." To me this seems not only a good method but possibly the only one. (Schubert said somewhere that we must first believe a thing before we can understand it.) But where had McTaggart found his belief, if not in his heart? And why should not Tennyson attempt to establish more firmly—though in his case by poetry—the truth his heart desired?

But no. There is no temptation against which the truth worshipper is more on his guard than that of believing what he wants to believe. The base of the idol is hard unyielding stone.

The idol is of stone too, built up though it is of innumerable fragmentary, ephemeral "scientific" truth, it has taken upon itself the character of an absolute, and has acquired enormous power over the conscience and imagination of man—as the ultimate Judge of life, as that of which we are afraid: with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning, before whom man is bound to stand helpless, at once rebellious and adoring. The Victorian conception of a Universe set in a frame of rigid scientific laws, though long modified and even abandoned, has betrayed us into this conception of truth. We do not pause to reflect that science can only observe what is *past*, and, consequently, static. Our stone image of

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Truth belongs to a graveyard: but we erect it between ourselves and our road into the future: almost we give it anthropomorphic life, and think of it as offering us deliberate volitional opposition. At least, we so think of it when we approach those ultimate questions about the value and meaning of our lives: we do not so think of it when we are trying to write a poem, or cure a child's cough, or improve our own manners; not even though we have never yet succeeded in writing a poem, and the cough is very persistent, and our manners atrocious.

Now to this very peculiar God—a God without qualities, and without the variableness of life, we offer love and worship and human sacrifice. So anxious we are to exalt It and establish Its foundations that we not only beat our breasts and tear our raiment and cover our heads with ashes, but we have begun to dissect ourselves to pieces in order to discover those elements in us which are the most unbiassed and trustworthy props of truth. There is no deep human emotion left which some psychologists and their converts are not prepared to offer up in the cause of Truth, which is not suspect as a possible deceiver. And as they circle round and round the pedestal on which is written, “It fortifies my soul to know that though I perish Truth is so,” and make their painful offerings, they encourage themselves by repeating continually, “Desire for the truth is the

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supreme virtue, and the foundation of all others.”

But is it?—or is it not just a bare necessity to anyone who desires something more?

Let us relegate this great stone image to the laboratories and factories where it belongs, and turn our attention to the living truth—the truth which is possibility, the truths of conduct and character. For these are the truths that we may be neglecting when we think ourselves into the unhappiness of seeing no spiritual meaning in the Universe and no hope of human immortality.

### III

## “WHAT IS THE GOOD OF A LIGHTED WINDOW?”

*“Of course the ideal is that of the ‘Lords who are’ still ‘certainly expected,’ but the certainty is not for us I’m afraid. Also for very few would the joy be so perfect as to be silent. Those words peace, silence, rest and the others take on a vividness in the midst of noise and worry and weariness like a lighted window in the dark. Yet what on earth is the good of a lighted window?”—T. E. LAWRENCE TO V. RICHARDS, 15.7.18.*

WHAT is the good of a lighted window if we are not quite sure that the house is inhabited? To answer this question we must consider the consequences of allowing the window to be darkened. When we empower the verdict of reason to extinguish in us any active hope in immortality and in God we are in great danger of sacrificing integrity to truth.

Can the atheist achieve any real harmony within himself? Is he not bound to be always at war with his own heart? You may answer that his aim is to subordinate all other passions and feelings to reason, since to be able to do this is the finest achievement of man: and you might point to the wave of dangerous irrationalism in Germany and say that that is the result of giving free play to feeling. But nothing could be much further from the kind of feeling I am concerned

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with than the elaborately fostered and morbid political passions of the Nazis. We are dealing here with feeling in its primary relation to the spiritual and moral ideas of the individual and not in its derived relation to social and ethical questions; and whether it is a fine thing to subordinate this kind of feeling to reason depends on the nature of the heart's rebellion, and on the effects of any such suppression upon our quality as human beings.

The chief cause of the heart's rebellion against the idea of annihilation is not an ignoble one. It has nothing to do with the animal fear of death which the most disciplined rationalist may experience like anyone else. It is not either a mere desire for the endless prolongation of the pleasure of living. For the desire to live continues after any pleasure has ceased, and only unbearable pain or utter exhaustion reconcile a man even momentarily to the thought of extinction. But while we are raised above the level of the grossest egotism, and are capable of any feelings of pity, love, or admiration, or of conceiving any ideal cause worthy of service, we must fight against the idea of a death which would destroy those feelings and end that service. The heart rebels, in fact, with all that is best in it.

Consequently the rebellion, though often continuing underground, will be desperate and long, and while it continues the atheist will be

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divided against himself: and he will only be able to achieve an appearance of unity by ruling over himself as a tyrant, allowing no free speech to anything but the dictating intellect: and when any great sorrow or ordeal, or when old age comes upon him, his civil war will blaze up with fresh violence. He will live in the constant necessity of reconquering his territory. This fundamental self-distrust, this insecurity and conflict, must produce complexes in him far deeper and more disturbing, one would imagine, than those commonly described by the psychologists. In fact, the fear of death may well be a repression vastly more important than all the others put together. Sir Thomas More thought that a belief in immortality was necessary to the welfare of the citizens in his Utopia and made it a condition of full citizenship.

These internal fights between intellect and feeling, which reach a climax over the question of immortality, always tend to inhibit action—particularly amongst men of creative genius. Augustine, who was destined for a saint, for nearly twenty years fought himself and did little else that is worth while. “I would not,” he says, “allow my heart to climb. I wanted to be as sure of things unseen as that seven and three make ten.” While Shelley was compelling himself by intellectual arguments to accept determinism, materialism, and atheism, against all his idealist

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and poetical instincts, he achieved nothing but misery for himself and those about him, and his creative powers remained dormant. Keats, on the other hand, went straight for his goal, for which we must be thankful, since his time was to be so short. There was no such mental conflict in him. He believed only—but it was enough—“in the truth of imagination and the holiness of the heart’s affections.” Goethe fought this kind of battle till he was thirty, and then finally achieved an unusually perfect truce between his mind and heart and became one of the most astonishingly fertile of artists. And Goethe, like the other three, believed in a lighted window, and on his death-bed his last words were “Light, more light.”

The atheist, if he is a person of sensibility, can only preserve his integrity by embracing despair. If he is honest with himself, and capable of enduring a great deal of pain, he will accept the full consequences of his attitude, and realise all its bitter implications, and fully aware of the protests within him, rule open-eyed over his misery—as Housman did. But so hard is this course that genuinely honest atheists are rare.

Or he may achieve some measure of harmony by bringing his heart to terms, by persuading it to accept new values, or by destroying its confidence in itself. Is it possible to persuade the heart to embrace a philosophy which excludes the

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hope of its own survival? Can it be bought off with new values—the survival of the race—the resurrection of humanity? Can it be lulled to sleep by musical celebrations of the charms of death—the rest, the finality, the blessed dismissal from the exacting job of living?—

And Bahram, that great hunter, the wild Ass  
Stamps o'er his head, and he lies fast asleep.

To-day the Roman and his trouble  
Are ashes under Uricon.

Nox est perpetua una dormienda.

But the heart is never lulled for long: and the charms are apt to vanish with the music. And if you try to persuade it to put aside its clinging to personal value and personal contributions and beg it to be satisfied to know that when it is dust other hearts will live and love and serve—to be content to lose itself in the race—it may reply, “Everything worth-while that I have to give to God or man is the fruit of my very self, and if I lose my sense of the value of my own personality I shall be weaker both in loving and in serving. It is as an individual that I love and individuals are what I love: I can only grieve for a race in which all the individuals are doomed.”

Then, perhaps, determined to humiliate this clamorous member, and have peace, you set to work to discredit even its love. An effective way to do this may be derived from the doctrines of some

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psycho-analysts. Lay your heart upon the table and dissect out its various elements, labelling them with strange names mostly associated with sexual appetites, thus convincing yourself that many of them are either ungentle or undesirable. When you come to that most irrational thing—the love of God—dismiss it as a projection from the infant's worship of its father's sinews or its mother's paps. This process may be successful in shaming the heart into at least a temporary silence.

Will you then have peace? Not at all. The very next time you are in, let us say, the dentist's chair, you will find that so far from having lost your individuality in the race, the whole race seems to have rushed together into one point—and that point, you: and that if you are to put up any show of courage even in such a small matter, you will have to look to your heart for it. As Pascal said: "L'on mourra seul." We cannot suffer pain, or fear or heart-break co-operatively. When faced with any great ordeal, we realise with alarming vividness how exactly and cruelly individual life really is. We see that the problem—the immediate terrible problem—is ours: our very own. And we have got to face it with something equally individual. Reason, which is every man's hack, is no longer sufficiently personal: we have to fall back on the core of our individuality, which is not reason but feeling.

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Frederick Manning, writing in *Her Privates We* of soldiers on the eve of a battle, says, “They had nothing; not even their own bodies which had become mere implements of warfare. They turned from the wreckage and misery of life to an empty heaven, and from an empty heaven to the silence of their own hearts. They had been brought to the last extremity of hope, and yet they put their hands on each others shoulders and said with a passionate conviction that it would be all right, though they had faith in nothing but in themselves and in each other.”

In the last extremity of hope they were left with two resources, trust and love for each other, and faith in themselves. Faith, that is, that they would retain sufficient self-respect, or we may call it conscience or morale or honour—very individual things all these—to behave decently, whatever happened. This is, in Lawrence’s phrase, the citadel of their integrity, which they must at all cost defend. “If a man could not be certain of himself,” Manning says again, “he could be certain of nothing. The problem which confronted them all equally, though some were unable or unwilling to define it, did not concern death so much as the affirmation of their own will in the face of death; and once the nature of the problem was clearly stated they realised that its solution was continuous and could never be final.”

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How can a man affirm his will in the face of death? And what sort of an affirmation is it he is making? He is surely affirming that his ideal standard is superior to any material power whatever—to any “truth” opposed to it: and the strength of the affirmation and his power to express it in conduct will depend on the intensity of his love for this ideal.

But what sort of a defence is the atheist, who has poured discredit on the primary impulses of his heart, going to rely on? In what sense is he “certain of himself”? No intelligent person, you may say, has anything but respect for the fight that the human heart puts up to defend its standards against the blind forces of the Universe: but that is a different matter altogether from believing in a possible victory. From an academic point of view perhaps it is. The intellect can respond to the glamorous abstraction of Lawrence’s “we must believe through and through that there is no victory . . . only unending effort towards unattainable imagined light.” But the heart cannot love pure abstractions, and it is the heart we are concerned with here, particularly in its relation to the will. When a man loves an ideal standard he is loving something that has actuality for him, even sometimes a kind of incarnation, as a saint or hero, or God, who gives sublime and eternal expression to this standard; or else, perhaps, a

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vision of himself as an immortal being crowned with this ideal. The latter was, I think, the form this love took in Lawrence and perhaps that was why he could not bear to be laughed at: he was more to himself than himself. To the heart there is no sincerity in unending effort after unreal and unattainable light. Love is simple and will not consent for the sake of any sublime “tests” or intellectual paradoxes to disbelieve in the existence of what it loves. If it cannot believe, how can it really love? and if it cannot love, what becomes of that affirmation of the will, that last act of self-respect and courage in the face of death? And if it believes and loves, the affirmation is a desperate affirmation of the will to *live*: for the existence of God is the supreme reason why immortality seems desirable.

There is only one way of escape from this circle of conflict. It is to carry Lawrence’s paradox one step further. To conceive that it is possible to love the “unattainable” light with such fervour that the will may set itself to reach the unattainable, and even to give the imagined shape. What this means is to see truth in terms of will-power, not only in relation to life but also in relation to death, and to what lies beyond death.

Granted that the “certainty is not for us.” We must be content with possibility: a lighted window fervently beheld. And surely he is a rash man who puts out the light in his heart for

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any reason at all. By so doing he is weakening those affirmations of the will which not only defend his citadel, but which may forge his own salvation. The atheist may be committing spiritual suicide.

Accept no absolute negative from destiny. True, you may fail. You may be made a fool of with your last breath: you may affirm your will in vain. That is not your business: your business is to make the attempt, under the inspiration of your heart. And you may be sure of this—that if you have not the courage to set out or the steady fire to continue, you are hardly likely to arrive, should such a thing be possible, after all.

## IV

### “I BET THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH”

*“What is faith but a kind of speculation after all? It should be ‘I bet that my Redeemer liveth.’”—SAMUEL BUTLER.*

ONCE we can accept the idea that taking risks, staking on uncertain issues, is as necessary and as much a matter of courage in the life of the spirit as in any other sphere, a wide horizon opens before us. But there are still many obstacles to be overcome before we can establish and use our faith, particularly if we are of those who cannot admit authority, or subscribe to orthodox religious conceptions.

The main purpose of this essay has been to attempt to remove some of the obstacles and prejudices which make faith difficult of attainment, and to stress the tragedy inherent in failing to attain it. The form our faith takes is a very individual matter. It is not my intention in this section to do more than suggest a way of approach which may help to make a living reality of a religion without dogmas.

Our faith must have some kind of shape for the imagination to grasp, if we are to be able to know and savour it, rely upon it, and return to it. The solitary worshipper has to be content with

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images he can hardly define even to himself; but these images acquire vividness and steadiness if they are in harmony with his nature. They must offend none of his faculties and appear seemly to them all. This quality of seemliness—so rare in the religious myths of mankind—we can only give to our faith by testing it upon the *conscience*—that larger conscience which is in effect the common verdict of the heart, the mind and the imagination.

The conception found in almost all religions of an omnipotent and omniscient deity is apt to offend, in one way or another, all three of these judges, and has been a stumbling-block in many a man's path towards faith. If man has free will, it is hard to see how God can be omnipotent. If, in addition, there is reality in time—which experience insists there is—God cannot be omniscient. And our hearts, wrung by the sorrows of the world, are often found protesting, that if God is omnipotent, then surely he is not good. Such conceptions seem to bring us again into that bare region of absolutes, and man, hungering for an ideal being to love and serve may take all the emotional meaning out of his God, by so puffing up his notion of divinity that it bursts and leaves him empty-handed. A relative perfection—yes, but a perfection capable of growth, and of profitable intercourse with imperfection. Absolute Perfection and

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Omnipotence, the Alpha and Omega—the Truth that “is so”—Immutable Law—Determinism—Eternity—they all belong in the same category, and are an escape from the beauty and poignancy and responsibility of life. The mind hides under these precipices out of fear of being let loose into the uncreated future. Just as *here and now* eternity is not born and truth still in the making—so must God, while man sins and suffers, while time and change are real, be not yet omnipotent or complete, even supposing he ever wished to be so.

Men have made desperate efforts to love an omnipotent God: and have succeeded mainly by loving instead the human prophets who have interpreted him. The worship of omnipotence is apt to be a dull and egoistic affair. We have nothing to contribute but contrite hearts—a morbid gift—and the energy of service dies in us, leaving us no higher object than to purchase our own salvation. No wonder atheism commends itself to many people as the finer faith. Yet this idea of fruitless worship has been widely accepted both in religion and philosophy. In Plato's Symposium the wise man is described as reaching the height of bliss only to spend eternity in contemplation of his god. Even eternal hymn-singing would seem to show a more generous and creative mind! Heaven and immortality are nearly always conceived of as

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states of petrification. The author of *Sagittarius Rising* writes: "What merit was in *me*, I asked myself, that *I* should continue. I was an experiment in creation, to be discarded when worked out. A chemist does not repeat an experiment, he tries another. . . . Was the whole majestic unravelling to stagnate in little me? Only a sublime conceit or a monumental cowardice could frame such a hypothesis. . . . Besides . . . often myself bored me." Boredom with ourselves and visions of stagnation are almost inevitable if we have no God; or conceive of him in terms of Absolutes, or as a mathematician or a chemist.

And what has an omnipotent and perfect God to do with this world as honest eyes see it? We know that there is injustice, and blind accident, and senseless suffering that cannot be explained away by any doctrine of "learning by suffering." We find at the root of life a sense of tragedy. This sense of tragedy is one of the causes of atheism, although atheism is a doctrine of futility, and there seems to be more in this feeling of tragedy than nihilism. It is a sense as of a suffering God: immortal aspiring Spirit, crucified.

The "Almighty" does not loom large in the teaching of Christ. His revelation is of a God who suffers because he loves; whose kingdom cannot come without the efforts of the human

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spirit to achieve it. A God in whom—through Christ himself—we perceive, fitfully and partially in our half-awakened souls, the crown and essence of life, which is personality.

What witness we find to God's existence in our own hearts is far removed from all such ponderous and depressing abstractions. The God who has brooded over the human mind for so long, frightening little children and moribund *bon-vivants*, is a God always there; always seeing everything, and condemning most things. But as we find him in moments of imaginative experience, and as the mystic writers reveal him, he is very different: a being whose divine love and loveliness would neither seek nor take omnipotence; infinitely elusive, and tantalising, and mysteriously exciting; like a beloved friend, often absent when needed most, and found again with rapture after a long time; whom we must seek through the mists of our own moods and despondencies, our thoughts of him changing and growing with our natures; who must remain undefined and undefinable, since our conception forever soars higher as we climb after it.

Our search for this God is an adventure of discovery and hope which can keep us at all times from boredom and despair. And however we may conceive of him—as a person, a community of spirits, a moral law, an ideal standard, he is the supreme experience of living.

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Ideas of the "personality" of God may present many difficulties to us, but a God without personality is apt to become meaningless. It hardly seems possible to experience any genuine feeling of love for a God who is not a person, at least to the extent of needing love and service to fulfil his own life. Nor can we attain any sense of being loved by an impersonal God. And without this sense, without at least some confidence that our ideals are valued and upheld by a spirit stronger and wiser than our own, we are exposed to the gradual paralysis of self-distrust.

For just as we build up our faith through a kind of self-confidence—a trust in our *whole* natures, so faith in its turn strengthens our freedom of judgment and self-reliance.

Freedom, it is often claimed, means the right to hold and express opinions freely. But *whose* opinions, and which of our opinions are free opinions? Surely only those which are our *own*—in conformity with our *own* moral judgments, our *own* feelings and reasonings? And how many of us ever succeed in clearly forming and preserving, still less developing and expressing our *own* opinions? Our opinions are in process of being converted into other people's almost before we know we have them. A little child is often capable of quick instinctive moral reactions—of being "shocked," where an older child will

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acquiesce because it has begun to substitute the laws and ideas and compromises of the species for its own instinctive choices, and much of its education has consisted in learning to make this substitution. A four-year old may cry over a dead mouse in a trap, and the same child a few years later may be found exulting at the killing of a fox. Something has happened in the intervening years in the nature of an enslavement: the judgment has lost its individual quality, and adapted not only its actions, but its nature.

Such adaptations are sometimes desirable and usually comfortable. For if we retain undulled our first instincts of pity and horror at cruelty, we shall all our lives be enduring daily pangs of private and vicarious pain and shame. Some hardening of heart and disciplining of compassion is necessary. Yet the extent of the compromise often made even by the strongest natures is surprising and disconcerting, when we come to see it. More or less we all of us bargain away our liberty of judgment for the potage of content and conformity. Under the impact of other men's experiences and opinions we surrender many of our own. We become unable to recognise clearly and to preserve our own ideals and predilections—the assessments and dreams and hopes which are the basis of personality. Thus we lose the first ingredient of self-respect, and are cozened out of the citadel of our integrity; we are no longer free.

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But would we surrender so much if we believed that we had an ally? Would we not rather compromise without surrendering?

If God is an invention of man—and we cannot disprove it—then he was invented chiefly as a repository for those ideals which our own failings, the tribulations of life and other men's ideas make war upon. In our conception of God we rediscover ourselves; give shape to our ideals and strengthen our conscious individuality.

A belief in God—whether as one supreme being, or in the form that appealed to McTaggart, as a community of spirits—not only helps us to defend our own individual standards, it enables us to make, without surrender, the compromises necessary to playing an active part in the life of the world. The idealist can better escape from a narrow and futile fanaticism and become capable of adapting to a makeshift world, if he can feel that while he serves the lesser causes, the greater are elsewhere sustained. And thus he can enter into that twofold life which we all more or less consciously desire and partially attain—a life of willing partnership in the necessarily blundering efforts of men, and of constant secret search for perfection. It is by frankly accepting these two spheres of being and not by suppressing one or the other of them that we achieve the fullest liberty and independence.

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The spirit of man is suffering from claustrophobia, and is seeking escape in every direction but that of the one door always mysteriously ajar. Almost every extension of our intellectual range has seemed to narrow our spiritual horizon. We have become so self-conscious; so terribly aware of the problems and prohibitions of our own psychology, of society, history, biology; we are so well educated in all the forms of death; the planet has become so small and the Universe so senselessly vast; and the human multitude, which we now more clearly apprehend, dwarfs us even more than the stars. The alternatives before us seem so few—communism, tyranny, anarchy—so few and so stale. Longing for freedom, we plunge into various forms of dictatorship: escaping from the Heavenly tyrant to the human tyrant, the subliminal tyrant, or the Absolute Truth. We try to extend our frontiers by mass action, and slake the individual thirst for power in the Power State; in perverse panic we wedge ourselves into the crowd, to be held up and have the common life transfused into us; to get rid of our terrible inferiority complex of mortality in the noise and assertiveness of the herd.

So far from using the individual will to effect an escape, much modern pessimism rejects the will, and seeks freedom in that bitter passivity expressed in much of our art; an assertion of

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freedom through contempt and indifference for the cruel absurdity of existence. This kind of passivity has possibly received some encouragement from an exaggerated idea of the nature of Lawrence's quietism. In the *Ascent of F* 6<sup>1</sup> we are told that "life is evil," and the "human will is of the demon." I cannot think that Lawrence's own despair reached such a pitch—he was too active by nature. He did not yield his will, but, not knowing what to do with his own great store, he turned it upon himself, and with a terrible lack of self-reverence laid waste his own gifts. He refrained from a fuller life, not because he believed in refraining, but because he was waiting for a clearer impulse and for that more certain vision which his moral and intellectual self-torturing denied him. I am doubtful if he thought of death as final: the strength and solitariness of his spirit will have tended to make him conceive more readily of immortality than of God. But without God immortality would perhaps seem worthless to him. He so much needed to believe that somewhere in the scheme of things his standard was upheld and understood.

The claustrophobia and the coma and the growing preoccupation with death which partly causes them are all ultimately due, perhaps, to the great destruction not so much of human life

<sup>1</sup> A work surely inspired by Lawrence's life and philosophy.

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as of morale. The grim misery of trench warfare, the horrible slaughter from the air, Gestapos, and massacres and concentration camps have shaken the nerves of the world, and made it afraid—afraid of fear. The human spirit is not mettled to endure all forms of suffering—that fact has been brought home to us—and we see that our spiritual resources are in some danger. The possibility of a whole world that has lost its nerve can no longer be dismissed as nightmare. And what a condemnation of human intelligence it is, that we have made so little co-operative effort through the ages to increase our spiritual resources. And we have done much worse than to neglect them. The morale of men, which is much less easily destroyed by natural forces than by other men, is the object of deliberate attack in war, and in modern war of attack on a vast scale. So long as we make only casual attempts to eliminate those ills that most often destroy the spirit's resistance—such as grinding poverty and lingering death by painful disease—and while we do not regard it as the utterly unpardonable sin deliberately to break the courage of a single living thing by physical pain; while we make of fear of pain an instrument of policy, there can be no real progress in the world. For the sum total of the morale of the world is now what determines the destinies of each part, and the nation that destroys the spirit of another

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nation will perish at the hands of the savages it has created. 'And there lies the futility of modern warfare, because the conquered are neither converted nor utterly destroyed—generations of them are driven mad.

The human race is sustained by its belief in itself: that belief is being shattered by organised selfishness and cruelty. It can only be rebuilt by action, and chiefly by the act of faith on the part of the individual.

One moral of Lawrence's life for us is surely this: that not even great intellectual power combined with the highest principle and self-devotion will suffice to solve the problems individual and corporate that lie ahead of us. Somehow we have got to draw from a still deeper reservoir of vitality and hope. That the stronger and more gifted the individual, the deeper his faith must be if he is to avoid self-destruction. That fearless intellectual honesty is not enough: we have got to combine with it an emotional honesty which implies reverently acknowledging and pursuing the heart's desire.

Indeed the whole question of whether faith is worth fighting for seems to me to depend on whether life is worth fighting for, and to resolve itself into a matter of taking sides either with life or with death. If we choose life, we need to be able to hope in a possible permanent victory; we must choose life everlasting, and prepare to fight

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death in all its forms, all the time, without respite. Our concern is the “continual affirmation of the will in the face of death,” and the solution of the problem can never be final.

For death constantly attacks us, not only on the one field where it must ultimately conquer—our bodies, with their tendency to inertia and comfort-seeking; it takes toll of us mentally, emotionally, imaginatively, day by day. By abandoning our individual judgments and choices in order to “conform”; by stifling—a different thing from disciplining—the desires of our hearts; by letting our imaginations grow sleepy, and our sympathies be dulled; by making no adequate effort in our thoughts to get down to the living essence of things; by loving timidly or letting our affections degenerate into half-loves; by ceasing to keep ourselves awake to the wonder and beauty of life, though at the cost of feeling also all its tragedy—in all these ways we *die*.

How much better to strive, by any means within our reach, to carry out the grand prescription of Traherne and “to show our infinite . . . love by upholding Heaven and Earth, Time and Eternity, God and all things in our souls, without wavering or intermission, by the perpetual influx of our life.”

Without faith we are all slaves and a ready prey to tyrants. The whole materialistic and atheistic attitude to life is a slavery, from which no increase

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in our incomes will save us. The thought of death makes us all paupers. "I am not so much afraid of death," said Sir Thomas Browne, "as ashamed thereof." The fear of death is the most fundamental of all slaveries; and yet while we think of death as annihilation, we must fear it. Not to fear it, under those circumstances, implies a failure of love.

Faith has been made difficult by an intellectual approach to what is, in fact, both an action and a passion of the mind. The perverse ingenuities of the early theologians, and the obscurities of modern metaphysics; the monstrous corruptions and grafts in the text of the Bible, masquerading as divine wisdom, all such things have helped to make the act of faith appear like an act of mental and moral distortionism. But when we look at life imaginatively and constructively, faith appears both natural and necessary. We see life as the essential condition of service, and God as the eternal motive for desiring to serve. The spirited element in a man is prepared to bet that his Redeemer lives and to stake his life upon it. And his redemption has two aspects; his own vision, and its realisation in God; his own will, and its *manifestation in truth*.

A faith in a living and growing universe, built upon will-power and desire, does not mean an escape from reality—the escape of which the religious are so often accused. On the contrary,

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it involves recognition and acceptance of the challenge of life which men have feared and tried to avoid by casting the responsibility for themselves on Fate, or God, or Truth, or Death. In this living universe a man has no enemy but himself. Adverse circumstances, conflicts with other wills, can delay but cannot destroy him, since his success is measured only by the vitality and resistance of his own spirit. There is no waste here, where all potentialities have time to ripen. And there is no laying up of treasure in a future life to the detriment of the present, since all experience is precious in a journey that is continuous. We voyage storm-tost on a vast sea of Possibility, with the rudder of choice in our hands. Much suffering lies ahead of us, and unending effort, and possible tragedy, but no inescapable despair. We may become weary and allow our love to grow cold, and the lighted window to become dark; and then the will must lose its spring of action, and we may perish. The choice is ours.

“God made not death  
Neither delighteth he when the living perish . . .  
But ungodly men by their hands and their words called  
death unto them . . .  
And they made a covenant with him  
Because they were worthy to be of his portion.”

God made not death. We may conceive of him as setting before us infinite possibilities of good, but not infinite possibilities of evil, because evil

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choices tend to weaken our love for good and thus to destroy at its source our will to live. Therefore we should praise God for every good we attain, and blame ourselves only for the evil.

A creed of this kind demands a constant effort to keep the will and the vision keen and united in action. It is without doctrines and without security, but it is a "truth" which sets us free.

Whoever comes to it finds that fear has very largely gone out of his life: that he has arrived—as Ishmael says in *Moby Dick*—at a "Celestial thought" . . . and thereafter "weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God." He has accepted the hard saying that the wages of sin is death, and with it the one faith that can sustain him through all misfortunes, the belief that "righteousness endureth for ever." And he hazards that so long as he is capable of loving and seeking that heavenly flower, he also shall endure.

## ENVOI

WHEN Lawrence said to a friend, "God is something one feels," he added: "it is silly and dangerous to try to justify natural feelings." But he did not act on this principle within himself where that tragic battle raged between intellect and heart. In an age when natural feelings are subjected to continual scrutiny and subtle attack, those in whom faith is a natural and dominating feeling are driven to try to justify it by argument, if only out of sympathy for others who lack it and are unhappy in consequence. And yet the task is perhaps a hopeless one. As George Moore wrote to his brother: "Whatever may be the ultimate truth, the believer must get the worst of the argument with the agnostic." By philosophy the mind may be convinced, and the heart left unconsolated: by religion we may persuade the heart and leave the mind rebellious. It is only by achieving a greater harmony in ourselves between the intellect and the feelings that we can bring any enduring faith within our reach.







