MAN: THE LETHAL FACTOR*

By LOREN EISELEY

THE great Olduvai Gorge in East Africa has been appropriately called the Grand Canyon of human evolution. Here a million, perhaps two million years of human history are recorded in the shape of successive skulls and deposits of stone tools. The elusive story of the long road man has traveled is glimpsed momentarily in eroded strata and faded bone. Olduvai is now famous all over the world. Only to those who have the habit of searching beyond the obvious, however, may it have occurred that this precipitous rift through time parallels and emphasizes a similar rift in ourselves—a rift that lies like a defacing crack across our minds and consequently many of our institutions. From its depths we can hear the rumble of the torrent from which we have ascended, and sense the disastrous ease with which both individual men and civilizations can topple backwards and be lost.

Brooding upon the mysteries of time and change, a great and thoughtful scholar, Alfred North Whitehead, many years ago recorded his thoughts in a cryptic yet profound observation. He said, in brief, "We are. . .of infinite importance, because as we perish we are immortal." Whitehead was not speaking in ordinary theological terms. He was not concerned in this passage with the survival of the human personality after death—at least as a religious conception. He was, instead, struggling with that difficult idea which he describes as the "prehension of the past," the fact that the world we know, even as it perishes, remains an elusive unfixed element in the oncoming future.

The organic world, as well as that superorganic state which exists in the realm of thought is, in truth, prehensile in a way that the inorganic world is not. The individual animal or plant in the course of its development moves always in relation to an unseen future toward which its forces are directed: the egg is broken and a snake writhes away into the grass; the acorn seedling, through many seasons, contorts itself slowly into a gnarled, gigantic oak. Similarly, life moves against the future in another sense—an evolutionary one. The creature existing now—this serpent, this bird, this man—has only to leave progeny in order to stretch out a gray, invisible hand into the evolutionary future, into the nonexistent.

With time, the bony fin is transformed into a paw, a round, insectivore eye into the nearsighted gaze of a scholar. Moreover, all along this curious animal extension into time, parts of ourselves are flaking off, breaking away into unexpected and unforeseen adventures. One insectivore fragment has taken to the air and become a vampire bat, while another fragment draws pictures in a cave and creates a new prehensile

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realm where the shadowy fingers of lost ideas reach forward into time to affect our world view, and with it, our future destinies and happiness.

Thus, since the dawn of life on the planet, the past has been figuratively fingering the present. There is, in reality, no clearly separable past and future either in the case of nerve and bone or within the less tangible but equally real world of history. Even the extinct dead have plucked the great web of life in such a manner that the future still vibrates to their presence. The mammalian world was, for a long time, constricted and impoverished by the dominance of the now vanished reptiles. Similarly, who knows today what beautiful creature remains potential only because of our continued existence; or what renewed manifestations of creative energy our own presence inhibits or has indeed destroyed forever.

As the history of the past unrolls itself before the eye of both paleontologist and archaeologist, however, it becomes evident, so far as the biological realm is concerned, that by far the greater proportion of once living branches on the tree of life are dead, and to this the archaeologist and historian must add dead stone, dead letters, dead ideas, and dead civilizations. As one gropes amid all this attic dust it becomes ever more apparent that some lethal factor, some arsenical poison seems to lurk behind the pleasant show of the natural order or even the most enticing cultural edifices that man has been able to erect.

In the organic world of evolution three facts, so far as we can perceive, today seem to determine the death of species: (1) the irreversibility of the organic process in time; (2) high specialization which, in the end, limits new adaptive possibilities; (3) the sudden emergence of spectacular enemies or other environmental circumstances which overwhelm or ambush a living form so suddenly that the slow adjustive process of natural selection cannot be made to function. This third principle, one could say, is the factor which, given the other two limitations upon all forms of life, will result in extinction. As a drastic example one could point to the destruction of many of the larger creatures as man has abruptly extended his sway over both hemispheres and into many different environmental zones.

The past century has seen such great accessions of knowledge in relation to these natural events, as well as a growing consciousness of man's exposure to similar dangers, that there is an increasing tendency to speculate upon our own possibilities for survival. The great life web which man has increasingly plucked with an abruptness unusual in nature shows signs of "violence in the return" to use a phrase of Francis Bacon's. The juvenile optimism about progress which characterized our first scientific years was beginning to be replaced early in this century by doubts which the widely circulated *Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler documents only too well. As the poet, J. C. Squire, says, we can turn:

"the great wheel backward until Troy unburn,
. . . and seven Troys below
Rise out of death and dwindle. . ."

We can go down through the layers of dead cities until the gold becomes stone, until the jewels become shells, until the palace is a hovel, until the hovel becomes a heap of gnawed bones.

Are the comparisons valid? The historians differ. Is there hope? A babble of conflicting voices confuses us. Are we safe? On this point I am sure that every person of cultivation and intelligence would answer with a resounding "No!" Spengler, and not the optimists, was right when he prophesied that this century would be one marked by the rise of dictators, great wars, and augmented racial troubles. Whether he was also right in foreseeing our century as the onsetting winter of western civilization is a more difficult problem.

Faustian, space-loving man still hurls his missiles skyward. His tentacular space-probes seem destined to palpate the farthest rim of the solar system. Yet honesty forces us to confess that this effort is primarily the product of conflict, that millions are now employed in the institutions erected to serve that conflict, that government and taxes are increasingly geared to it, that in another generation, if not now, it will have become traditional. Men who have spent their lives in the service of these institutions will be reluctant to dissolve them. A vested interest will exist on both sides of the iron curtain. The growing involution of this aspect of western culture may well come to resemble the ingrowth and fantasies of that ritualized belief in *mana* which characterized late Polynesian society.

It is upon this anthropological note that I should like to examine the nature of the human species—the creature who at first glance appears to have escaped from the specialized *cul de sac* which has left his late existing primate relative, the gorilla, peering sullenly from the little patch of sheltered bush which yet remains to him. I have said that some lethal factor seems to linger in man's endeavors. It is for this reason that I venture to speak to you from a discipline which has long concerned itself with the origins, the illusions, the symbols, the folly as well as the grandeur of civilizations whose records are lost and whose temples are fallen. Yet the way is not easy. As Herman Melville has written in one great perceptive passage:

"By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by
horrible gropings we come to the central room;
with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift
the lid—and no body is there—appallingly
vacant, as vast, is the soul of man"

I have spent a sizable number of my adult years among the crude stones of man's Ice Age adventurings. The hard, clean flint in the mountain spring defines and immortalizes the race that preceded us better than

our own erratic fabrications distinguish our time. There is as yet no sharp edge to our image. Will it be, in the end, the twisted gantrys on the rocket bases, or telephone wires winding voiceless through the high Sierras, or will it be the glass from space-searching observatories pounded into moonstones in the surf on a sinking coast?

What makes the symbol, finally, for another age as the pyramids for theirs—writing for five thousand years man's hope against the sky? Before we pass, it is well to think of what our final image as a race may be—the image that will give us a kind of earthly immortality, or represent, perhaps, our final collective visage in eternity. But it is to the seeds of death within us that we must address ourselves before we dare ask this other final question of what may stand for us when all else is fallen and gone down. We shall not begin with western society, we shall begin with man. We shall open that symbolic sepulchre of which Melville speaks. We shall grope in the roiling, tumultuous darkness, for that unplumbed vacancy which Melville termed so ironically the soul of man.

II

Since the days of Lyell and Hutton who perceived, beneath the romantic geological catastrophism of their age, that the prosaic and unnoticed works of wind and sun and water were the real shapers of the planet, science has been averse to the recognition of discontinuity in natural events.[1] Nevertheless, the rise of modern physics with its emphasis on quantum theory in the realm of particles, and even certain aspects of Mendelian genetics serve to remind us that there are still abroad in nature hidden powers which, on occasion, manifest themselves in an unpredictable fashion. Even on a more dramatic scale no one to date has been quite able satisfactorily to account for that series of rhythmic and overwhelming catastrophes which we call the Ice Age. It is true that we no longer cloak such mysteries in an aura of supernaturalism, but they continue to remind us, nevertheless, of the latent forces still lurking within nature.

Another of these episodes is reflected in the origins of the human mind. It represents, in a sense, a quantum step: the emergence of genuine novelty. It does so because the brain brought into being what would have been, up until the time of its appearance, an inconceivable event: the world of culture. The *mundus alter*—this other intangible, faery world of dreams, fantasies, invention, has been flowing through the heads of men since the first ape-man succeeded in cutting out a portion of his environment and delineating it in a transmissible word. With that word

[1] It should be said in justice to Sir Charles Lyell that in combating the paroxysmal theories which preoccupied his contemporaries he maintained, nevertheless, that "minor convulsions and changes are . . . a *vera causa*, a force and mode of operation which we know to be true."

a world arose which will die only when the last man utters the last meaningful sound.

It is a world that lurks, real enough, behind the foreheads of men; it has transformed their natural environment. It has produced history, the unique act out of the natural world about us. "The foxes have their holes," the words are recorded of the apostle Matthew, "the wild birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Two thousand years ago in the Judean desert men recognized that the instinctive world of the animals had been lost to man. Henceforward he would pass across the landscape as a wanderer who, in a sense, was outside of nature. His shadow would grow large in the night beside the glare of his red furnaces. Fickle, erratic, dangerous, he would wrest from stone and deep-veined metal, powers hitherto denied to living things. His restless mind would try all paths, all horrors, all betrayals. In the strange individual talents nourished in his metropolises, great music would lift him momentarily into some pure domain of peace. Art would ennoble him, temptation and terror pluck his sleeve. He would believe all things and believe nothing. He would kill for shadowy ideas more ferociously than other creatures kill for food, then, in a generation or less, forget what bloody dream had so oppressed him.

Man stands, in other words, between the two most disparate kingdoms upon earth: the flesh and the spirit. He is lost between an instinctive mental domain he has largely abandoned and a realm of thought through which still drift ghostly shadows of his primordial past. Like all else that lingers along the borders of one world while gazing into another we are imperfectly adapted. It is not only the sea lion from the deep waters that inches himself painfully up the shore into the unfamiliar sunlight. So does man in the deep interior of his mind occasionally clamber far up into sunlit meadows where his world is changed and where, in the case of some few—for such is the way of evolution—there is no return to lower earth. It has taken us far longer to discover the scars of evolution in our brains than to interpret the vestigial organs tucked into odd crannies of our bodies, or the wounds and aches that reveal to us that we have not always walked upon two feet.

Alfred Russel Wallace, Darwin's great contemporary, perceived in 1864 that in man the rise of the most remarkable specialization in the organic world—the human brain—had, to a considerable degree, outmoded the evolution of specialized organs. The creature who could clothe himself in fur or take it off at will, who could by extension of himself into machines, fly, swim, or roll at incredible speeds, had simultaneously mastered all of earth's environments with the same physical body. Paradoxically, this profound biological specialization appeared to have produced an organ devoted to the sole purpose of escaping specialization. No longer could man be trapped in a single skin, a single climate,

a single continent, or even a single culture. He had become ubiquitous. The wind wafted his little craft to the ends of the earth, seeds changed their substance under his hands, the plague hesitated and drew back before his cities. Even his body appeared destined to remain relatively stable since he had become the supremely generalized animal whose only mutability lay in his intelligence as expressed upon his instruments and weapons.

A creature who sets out upon a new road in the wilderness, however, is apt to encounter unexpected dangers—particularly if he ventures into that invisible and mysterious environmental zone, that "other world" which has been conjured up by the sheer power of thought. Man, when he moved from the animal threshold into dawning intellectual consciousness, no longer could depend upon the instinctive promptings which carry a bird upon the wing.

Although it is difficult to penetrate into that half world of the past, it is evident that order, simple order, must have rapidly become a necessity for survival in human groups across whose members the inchoate thoughts and impulses of the freed mind must have run as alarming vagaries. Man must, in fact, have walked the knife-edge of extinction for untold years. As he defined his world he also fell victim to the shadows that lay behind it. He did not accept it like the animal, as a thing given. He bowed to stone, and heard sprites in running water. The entire universe was talking about him and his destiny. He knew the powers and heard the voices. He formulated their wishes for himself. He shaped out of his own drives and timidities the rules and regulations which re-introduced into his world a kind of facsimile of his lost instinctive animal order and simplicity.

By means of custom, strengthened by supernatural enforcement, the violent and impulsive were forced into conformity. There was a way, the way of the tribe. The individual conformed or perished. There was only one way and one people, the tribe. That there were many tribes and many ways into the future no one knew, and at first in the wide emptiness of the world it scarcely mattered. It was enough that there was some kind of way or path. Even the Neanderthals had known this and had provided meat and tools that the dead might need upon their journey.

If we pause and comtemplate this dim and unhistorical age for a moment, it is, as we have intimated, with the thought that it reveals a rift or schism in man's endeavors that runs through his life in many aspects and throughout his history. The great historians, like Lord Acton, have spoken of universal history as "an illumination of the soul." They have ventured to foresee the eventual unification of man and the meeting of many little histories, ultimately, in the great history of man's final unification. It may be so. Yet whether we peer backward into the cloudy mirror of the past, or look 'round us at the moment, it appears that be-

hind every unifying effort in the life of man there is an opposite tendency to disruption, as if the force symbolized in the story of the Tower of Babel had been felt by man since the beginning. Eternally he builds, and across the smooth facade of his institutional structures there runs this ancient crack, this primordial flaw out of old time. We of this age have not escaped it.

Scarcely had man begun dimly and uncertainly to shape his new found world of culture than it split into many facets. Its serenity of expression, its "universal" laws were unfortunately less than those of the nature out of which he had emerged. The customs were, in reality, confined to this island, that hill fort, or the little tribe by the river bank. The people's conception of themselves was similarly circumscribed. *They* were the people. Those who made strange sounds in a different tongue or believed in other gods were queer, and at best tolerated for trading purposes if they did not encroach upon tribal territory.

In some parts of the world this remote life, untouched by self-questioning of any sort, this ancient way of small magical dealings with animals and wood spirits and man has persisted into modern times. It is a comparatively harmless but ensorcelled world in which man's innate capacities are shut up in a very tiny ring and held latent through the long passage of millennia. There are times when one wonders whether it is only a very rare accident that releases man from the ancient, hypnotic sleep into which he so promptly settled after triumphing in his first human endeavor—that of organizing a way of life, controlling the seasons and, in general, setting up his own microscopic order in the vast shadow of the natural world. It is worth a passing thought upon primitive capacities that perhaps no existing society has built so much upon so little.

Nevertheless the rift persisted and ran on. The great neolithic empires arose and extended across the old tribal boundaries. The little peoples were becoming the great people. The individual inventor and artist, released from the restrictions of a low-energy society, enriched the whole culture. The arts of government increased. As wealth arose, however, so war, in a modern sense, also arose. Conquest empires—neolithic and classic—largely erased the old tribalism, but a long train of miseries followed in their wake. Slavery, merciless exploitation such as our paleolithic ancestors never imagined in their wildest dreams, disrupted the society and in the end destroyed both the individual and the state.

There began to show across the face of these new empires not alone the symptoms of a bottomless greed, but what, in the light of times to come was more alarming: the very evident fact that, as human rule passed from the village to the empire, the number of men who could successfully wield power for long-term social purposes grew less. Moreover, the long chain of bureaucracy from the ruler to the ruled made for greater inefficiency and graft. Man was beginning to be afflicted with bigness

in his affairs, and with bigness there often emerges a dogmatic rigidity. The system, if bad, may defy individual strength to change it and simply run its inefficient way until it collapses. It is here that what we may call involution in the human drama becomes most apparent.

There tend to arise in human civilization institutions which monopolize, in one direction or another, the wealth and attention of the society, frequently to its eventual detriment and increasing rigidity. These are, in a sense, cultural overgrowths, excessively ornate societal excrescences as exaggerated as some of the armor plate which adorned the gigantic bodies of the last dinosaurs. Such complications may be as relatively harmless as a hyperdeveloped caste system in which no social fluidity exists, or, on the contrary, as dangerous as military institutions which employ increasingly a disproportionate amount of the capital and attention of the state and its citizens.

III

In one of those profound morality plays which C. S. Lewis is capable of tossing off lightly in the guise of science fiction, one of his characters remarks that in the modern era the good appears to be getting better and the evil more terrifying. It is as though two antipathetic elements in the universe were slowly widening the gap between them. Man, in some manner stands at the heart of this growing rift. Perhaps he contains it within himself. Perhaps, as we have remarked, he feels the crack slowly widening in his mind and his institutions. He sees the finest intellects which, in the previous century, concerned themselves with electric light and telephonic communication devote themselves as wholeheartedly to missiles and supersonic bombers. He finds that the civilization which once assumed that only barbarians would think of attacking helpless civilian populations from the air has, by degree, come to accept the inevitability of such barbarism.

Hope, if it is expressed by the potential candidates for mass extermination in this age of advanced destruction, is expressed, not in terms of living, but in those of survival, such hope being largely premised on the confidence in one's own specialists to provide a nuclear blanket capable of exceeding that of the enemy. All else gives way before the technician and the computer specialist running his estimates as to how many million deaths it takes, and in how many minutes, before the surviving fragment of a nation—if any—sues for peace. Nor, in the scores of books analyzing these facts, is it easy to find a word spared to indicate concern for the falling sparrow, the ruined forest, the contaminated spring—all, in short, that spells a life in nature still to man.

As one of these technicians wrote in another connection involving the mere use of insecticides, and which I here shorten and paraphrase: "Balance of nature? An outmoded biological concept. There is no room for

sentiment in modern science. We shall learn to get along without birds if necessary. After all, the dinosaurs disappeared. Man merely makes the process go faster. Everything changes with time." And so it does. But let us be as realistic as the gentleman would wish. It may be we who go. I am just primitive enough to hope that somehow, somewhere, a cardinal may still be whistling on a green bush when the last man goes blind before his man-made sun. If it should turn out that we have mishandled our own lives as several civilizations before us have done, it seems a pity that we should involve the violet and the tree frog in our departure.

To perpetrate this final act of malice seems somehow disproportionate, beyond endurance. It is like tampering with the secret purposes of the universe itself and involving not just man but life in the final holocaust—an act of petulant, deliberate blasphemy.

It is for this reason that Lewis' remark about the widening gap between good and evil takes on such horrifying significance in our time. The evil man may do has just this added significance about it—it is not merely the evil of one tribe seeking to exterminate another. It is, instead, the thought-out willingness to make the air unbreathable to neighboring innocent nations, and to poison, in one's death throes, the very springs of life itself. No greater hypertrophy of the institution of war has ever been observed in the West. To make the situation more ironic, the sole desire of every fifth-rate nascent nationalism is to emulate Russia and America—to rattle rockets, and if these are too expensive, then at least to possess planes and a parade of tanks. For the first time in history a divisive nationalism, spread like a contagion from the West, has increased in virulence and blown around the world.

A multitude of states are now swept along in a passionate hunger for arms as the only important symbol of prestige. Yearly their number increases. For the first time in human history the involutional disease of a single, modern civilization, that of the West, shows signs of becoming the disease of all contemporary societies. Such, it would appear, is one of the less beneficial aspects of the communications network which we have flung around the world. The universal understanding which has been the ultimate goal sought by the communications people, that shining Telstar through which we were to promote the transmission of wisdom, bids fair, instead, to promote unsatisfied hunger and the enthusiastic reception of irrationalities that embed themselves all too readily in the minds of the illiterate.

Man may have ceased to teeter uncertainly upon his hind legs, his strange physical history may be almost over. But within his mind he is still hedged about by the shadows of his own fear and uncertainty; he still lingers at the borders of his dark and tree-filled world. He fears the sunlight, he fears truth, he fears himself. In the words of Thomas Beddoes who looked long into that world of shadows:

"Nature's polluted,
There's man in every secret corner of her
Doing damned wicked deeds. Thou art, old world
A hoary, atheistic, murdering star."

This is the dark murmur that rises from the abyss beneath us, and that draws us with uncanny fascination.

If one were to attempt to spell out in a sentence the single lethal factor at the root of declining or lost civilizations up to the present, I would be forced to say adaptability. I would have to remark, paradoxically, that the magnificent specialization of gray matter which has opened to us all the climates of the earth, which has given us music, surrounded us with luxury, entranced us with great poetry, has this one flaw: it is too adaptable. In breaking free of instinct and venturing naked into a universe which demanded constant trial and experiment, a world whose possibilities were unexplored and unlimited, man's hunger for experience became unlimited also. He has the capacity to veer with every wind, or, stubbornly, to insert himself into some fantastically elaborated and irrational social institution only to perish with it.

It may well be that some will not call this last piece of behavior adaptation. Yet it is to be noted that only extreme, if unwise, adaptability would have allowed man to contrive and inhabit such strange structures. When men in the mass have once attached themselves to a cultural excrescence which grows until it threatens the life of the society, it is almost impossible to modify their behavior without violence. Yet along with this, as I have remarked, fervid waves of religious or military enthusiasm may sweep through a society and then vanish with scarcely a trace.

It would take volumes to chronicle the many facets of this problem. It is almost as though man had at heart no image, but only images, that his soul was truly as vacant and vast as Melville intimated in the passage I have earlier quoted. Man is mercurial and shifting. He can look down briefly into the abyss and say, smiling, "We are beasts from the dark wood. We will never be anything else. We are not to be trusted. Never on this earth. We have come from down there." This view is popular in our time. We speak of the fossil ape encrusted in our hearts.

This is one image of many that man entertains of himself. There is another left by a man who died a long time ago. I have spoken earlier of the collective symbol a civilization sometimes leaves to posterity and the difficulty one has with our own because of the rapidity with which our technology has altered, and the restless flickering of our movement from one domain of life to another.

A few months ago I read casually in my evening newspaper that our galaxy is dying. That great wheel of fire of which our planetary system is an infinitesimal part was, so the report ran, proceeding to its end. The detailed evidence was impressive. Probably, though I have not at-

tempted to verify the figures, the spiral arm on which we drift is so vast that it has not made one full circle of the wheel since the first man-ape picked up and used a stone.

Now I saw no use in whispering behind my hand at the Club, next morning, "They say the galaxy is dying." I knew well enough that man, being more perishable than stars, would be gone billions of years before the edge of the Milky Way grew dark. It was not that aspect of the human episode that moved me. Instead it was the sudden realization of what man could do on so gigantic a scale even if, as yet, his personal fate eluded him. Out there millions of light years away from earth, man's hands were already fumbling in the coal-scuttle darkness of a future universe. The astronomer was foreshortening time—just as on a shorter scale eclipses can be foretold, or an apparently empty point in space can be shown as destined to receive an invisibly moving body. So man, the short-lived midge, is reaching into and observing events he will never witness in the flesh. In a psychological second, on this elusive point we call the present, we can watch the galaxy drift into darkness.

The materiality of the universe, Whitehead somewhere remarks, is measured "in proportion to the restriction of memory and anticipation." With consciousness, memory, extended through the written word and the contributions of science, penetrates farther and farther into both aspects of time's unknown domain, that is, the past and the future. Though individual men do not live longer, we might say that the reach of mind in the universe and its potential control of the natural order is enormously magnified.

Material substance no longer dominates the spiritual life. There is not time here to explore all aspects of this fascinating subject, nor the paradoxes with which our burgeoning technology have presented us. This strange capacity of the mind upon which we exercise so little thought, however, means that man both remains within the historical order and, at the same time, passes beyond it.

We are present in history, we may see history as meaningless or purposeful, but as the heightened consciousness of time invades our thinking, our ability to free our intellects from a narrow and self-centered immediacy should be intensified. It is this toward which Whitehead was directing his thought: that all responsible decisions are acts of compassion and disinterest; they exist within time and history but they are also outside of it—unique and individual and, because individual, spiritually free. In the words of Erich Frank, "History and the world do not change, but man's attitude to the world changes."

I wonder if we understand this point, for it is the crux of all my efforts in this lecture, and though I have mentioned modern thinkers, it leads straight back to the New Testament. A number of years ago in a troubled period of my life I chanced to take a cab from an airport outside a large

eastern city. The way to the address I gave lay through the back streets of a run-down area of dilapidated buildings. I remember we passed a pathetic little cemetery whose smudged crosses, dating from another era, were now being encroached upon and overshadowed by the huge gray tanks of an oil refinery. The shadow of giant machines now fell daily across the hill of the dead. It was almost a visible struggle of the symbols to which I have earlier referred—the cross that marks two thousand years of western culture, shrinking, yet still holding its little acre in the midst of hulking beams and shadows where now no sunlight ever fell.

I felt an unreasoned distaste as we jounced deeper into these narrow alleyways, or roared beneath giant bridges toward a distant throughway. Finally, as we cut hastily through a slightly more open section, I caught a glimpse of a neighborhood church—a church of evident poverty, of a sect unknown, and destined surely to vanish from that unsavory spot. It was an anachronism as doomed as the cemetery. We passed, and a moment later, as though the sign had been hanging all that time in the cab before me, instead of standing neatly in the yard outside the church, my conscious mind unwillingly registered the words:

> "Christ died to save mankind.
> Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

I looked at that invisible hanging sign with surprise, if not annoyance. By some I have been castigated because I am an evolutionist. In one church where I had attended as the guest of a member not long before, I had been made the covert object of a sermon in which I had recognizably played the role of a sinning scientist. I cannot deny that the role may have fitted me, but I could not feel that the hospitality, under the circumstances, was Christian. I had seen fanatical sectarian signs of ignorant and contentious sects painted on rocks all over America, particularly in desert places. I had gazed unmoved on them all.

But here on a plain white board that would not remove itself from my eyes, an unknown man in the shadow of one of the ugliest neighborhoods in America had in some manner lifted that falling symbol from the shadow of the refinery tanks and thrust it relentlessly before my eyes. There was no evading it. "Is it nothing to you?" I was being asked—I who passed by, who had indeed already passed, and would again ignore, much more sophisticated approaches to religion.

But the symbol, one symbol of many in the wilderness of modern America, still exerted its power over me—a dozen lines of thinking, past and present drew in upon me. Nothing eventful happened in the outside world. Whatever took place happened within myself. The cab sped on down the throughway.

But before my mind's eye, like an ineradicable mote, persisted the vision of that lost receding figure on the dreadful hill of Calvary who

whispered with his last breath, "It is finished." It was not for Himself he cried—it was for man against eternity—for us of every human generation who perform against the future, the acts which justify creation or annul it. This is the power in the mind of man—a mind print, if you will—an insubstantial symbol which holds like a strained cable the present from falling into the black abyss of nothingness. This is why, if we possess great fortitude each one of us can say against the future he has not seen, "It is finished."

At that moment we will have passed beyond the reach of time into a still and hidden place where it was said, "He who loses his life will find it." And in that place we will have found an ancient and an undistorted way.