

The Outlook for Western Civilization

I—The Literature of Despair

BY GLENN FRANK

I AM sitting down to write this paper only a few hours after having accepted the presidency of the University of Wisconsin. As I said in a statement to the press at the time I accepted this post, it was no easy matter to break the ties that bind me to the congenial and challenging field of journalism. But the decision has been made for reasons that seem sound to me, and now for the first time, as I begin the writing of this paper, it fully dawns upon me that for only a few more issues will I have the privilege of talking over with the readers of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE from month to month what seem to me to be the really significant issues of American life and of the Western civilization of which we are part.

I have come to feel an almost personal acquaintanceship with the readers of the magazine, especially with the many readers who have always written to me so frankly their approval or disapproval of the things I have written and of the things that have been printed in the magazine during the years that I, along with my colleagues, have been privileged to edit it. It would be keeping back the truth not to say that I envy the new hands that will direct and the fresh voices that will speak through THE CENTURY

MAGAZINE. They will have the challenging job of ministering to one of the most-alert minded and stimulating bodies of readers in the world. I could not wish for any man or any group of men a happier or more invigorating relationship than the relationship I have sustained to the readers of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE, to the other members of the staff, and to The Century Co., the trustees and president of which have always displayed those qualities of intellectual honesty, tolerance, and courage which have made possible a wholly unhampered editorial freedom in this office during the last four years.

But I do not want to fall into ill advised reminiscence. I cannot, however, resist glancing retrospectively over the seventy-five issues of the magazine in which I have written editorial essays ranging from twenty-five hundred to twelve thousand words each. At no time have these essays been written in carefully planned sequence. Only occasionally has the same topic been pursued for a series of issues. I have been, perhaps, unpardonably casual in the month-to-month selection of topics. But, as I glance over these seventy-five numbers of the magazine, I sense a rather decently sustained attempt to consider

the problems of contemporary society from the point of view of what, for want of a better phrase, I may call scientific humanism, as distinguished from sentimental humanitarianism.

I do not mean that I see in these hastily written essays any body of nicely articulated social doctrines to which I wish to make fixed and final commitment. I have, on the contrary, consistently fought against the plague of premature conclusions, in the bog of which so much of our thinking is sunk. These essays have been little more than a record of the tentative approaches and suspended judgments of one American who has been trying to make himself at home in the modern world, trying to orientate himself among the new forces that are making this time what it is.

On a far smaller scale and in terms of a much shorter adventure, I have something of the feeling H. G. Wells had when recently he read the proofs of the Atlantic edition of his works.

"The total effect of these articles and these books of mine on my mind," he said, "is of a creature trying to find its way out of a prison into which it has fallen. I recall how in my boyhood I made a little prison of paper and cardboard for a beetle, and how I heard the poor perplexed beast incessantly crawling and scratching and fluttering inside. I forget what became of it. Perhaps I gave it its freedom; perhaps it pressed and worried at the corners where the light came through, and made an enlarged hole and worried its own way out. But I remember the dirty scratches and traces of its explorations on the unfolded paper cage. To a larger mind these books and articles of mind will seem very like those markings."

These papers of mine have been, at best, only beetle scratchings. But for me, at least, if not for the readers, the beetle has caught glimpses of light through some of the corners and crevices, and unless I am wrong in thinking that these papers have more coherence than their publication without topical sequence may have suggested, I doubt that I can do better during the few remaining months of my editorship than to pull together and to weave into something of a pattern the scattered threads of thinking that have run through these pages during the last four years.

§ 2

I shall take as the nucleating center of this summary or rehearsal the problem with which so many of these essays have dealt directly or indirectly—*The outlook for Western civilization*. I shall, in the main, restate and clarify, condensing here and amplifying there as occasion may seem to require, but I shall not hesitate to quote literally any statement which I find it impossible to improve at the moment. Unless the run of the material makes other formulations advisable, I shall review this four-year record of observations under three successive headings:

First, I shall review in this issue the observations I have made from time to time upon the dangers and fears that had led many of the most astute and incisive intelligences of our time to believe that Western civilization is doomed, and that a new dark age lies ahead.

Second, I shall review in the August issue the observations I have made from time to time upon the unused assets of Western civilization, the unharnessed forces of health, the raw

materials of renewal that have led a few venturesome minds to believe that the foundations have been largely laid for a new renaissance, and that before long we may see a fresh and fruitful advance of the human spirit.

Third, I shall review in the September issue the observations I have made from time to time upon the leadership of any such renewal of Western civilization, the sources, the problems, and the technic of such leadership.

I turn now to the first of these three reviews—to a review of the literature of despair that has been written by our prophets of doom, reluctant heralds of a new dark ages for Western civilization.

§ 3

Since the war there has been pouring from our presses a plentiful and popular literature of despair. Every age, of course, has had its prophets of doom and its literature of despair, but it is our own that we are studying here, and it has its own specific background which must be sketched, if we are readily to catch its particular meaning for us.

At the risk of over-simplification, I suggest that contemporary pessimism regarding Western civilization should be examined in its relation to three brief, but distinct, periods that have culminated in the present spiritual crisis of the Western world. These three periods are:

First, the immediate pre-war period, which was dominated by a new materialism.

Second, the war period, which was sustained by a new idealism.

Third, the post-war period, which has been chilled and arrested by a new pessimism.

The new materialism of the immediate pre-war period is now so starkly evident that no labored proof or indictment is needed to recall it to our minds. Pre-war politics was dominated by a passion for power at any price; pre-war business was dominated by a passion for profits at any price; pre-war society was dominated by a passion for pleasure at any price. These three passions had produced the perilous trinity of imperialism, industrialism, and hedonism which cast over Western civilization the shadow of a bleak and barren materialism.

The spiritual fires of Western civilization were banked, if not burned out. And, as I said three years ago in these pages, in this reluctant indictment of Western civilization, little, if any, discrimination can be made between allied, enemy, and neutral peoples. We were all in the grip of a sordid materialism. We practised materialism while we professed Christianity. All of Western civilization was thus a sort of corporate hypocrisy. And so it had no inner peace. For a generation before the war it stirred restlessly in its dreams, and pricked by an accusing conscience, it shivered with a sense of impending disaster.

And then the war came. In the light of bursting star shells we saw the nakedness of our souls. The rather sudden realization of our spiritual bankruptcy scared us into a new idealism. In the light of Versailles and after, we now see that it was a rather hastily improvised idealism that had many of the marks of a death-bed repentance. I do not mean to be cynical. Despite the sordid aftermath of the war, there was much of beauty and sincerity in this transient idealism. The ghost of Machiavelli haunted the

corridors of many foreign offices during the war, and sat as an accredited delegate in the peace conference; but for millions of inarticulate men and women throughout America and Europe world politics seemed for the moment to have become the supreme spiritual adventure of mankind. Before the war these millions had felt the chill of materialism, but they had managed to keep reasonably warm under the cloak of an uncritical optimism, a naïve belief in the myth of automatic progress. During the war they kept their spirits alive by an equally uncritical idealism. Hard fighting, victory, and then a new world! They did not stop to ask whether, after all, it is possible to create new worlds by such methods. They were in the grip of the will-to-believe that the most ruthless war of history would result in the spiritual regeneration of Western civilization.

But these mute millions were doomed to disillusionment. They fought hard, victory was achieved, but the new world eluded their grasp. Despite previous commitment to a program dictated by the new idealism, the victors tricked and traded as victors have tricked and traded since human history began. But I have said this so many times in these columns that I need do no more than state it here. The new materialism was temporarily disavowed in the interest of a new idealism only to be succeeded by a new pessimism; for, to use a threadbare phrase, as soon as men realized that we had won the war, but lost the peace, they began speculating upon the possible breakdown of Western civilization. And out of these speculations has come the current literature of despair that I want now to describe and to analyze.

§ 4

Since the war we have been deluged with a literature of forecast. The largest section of this literature of forecast has been written by our prophets of doom, by men who doubt that we shall be able to liquidate the treacherous condition into which an inadequate political, economic, and spiritual leadership has plunged Western civilization. These prophets of doom seem to hold the center of the stage for the moment. The professional optimism of doctrinaires thinking in a vacuum was never so seriously discounted as it is to-day.

This literature of despair has been written from varying levels of disillusionment, ranging from the philosophical acceptance of the situation by Professor George Santayana to the deep gloom of Dean Inge.

In his "Character and Opinion in the United States," Professor Santayana ventures the prophecy that "Civilization is perhaps approaching one of those long winters that overtake it from time to time. A flood of barbarism from below may soon level all the fair works of our Christian ancestors, as another flood two thousand years ago leveled those of the ancients. Romantic Christendom—picturesque, passionate, unhappy episode—may be coming to an end." But even such a black future is, for Professor Santayana, touched with light, even if it be a distant light, reaching us only in fitful and fragile rays. "Such a catastrophe," he bravely asserts, with the calm of a philosopher who can afford to wait, "would be no reason for despair. Nothing lasts forever; but the elasticity of life is wonderful, and even if the world lost its memory it would not lose

its youth. Under the deluge, and watered by it, seeds of all sorts would survive against the time to come, even if what might eventually spring from them, under the new circumstances, should wear a strange aspect."

Professor Santayana feels the warning frost that heralds a spiritual winter which may freeze the fountains of enterprise and aspiration, but he does not doubt that another springtime lies ahead in the human cycle.

Dean Inge is a more nearly unqualified prophet of doom. As I have so often quoted, he frankly asserts his belief that "We are witnessing the suicide of a social order, and our descendants will marvel at our madness."

In another of his essays, Dean Inge says, as I quoted him in these pages in 1922, "I have, I suppose, made it clear that I do not consider myself specially fortunate in having been born in 1860, and that I look forward with great anxiety to the journey through life which my children will have to make."

The net effect, then, of this literature of despair is to say that we are facing a long spiritual winter, a new dark ages. If this literature of despair consisted entirely of such generalizations, even generalizations by such distinguished minds as Professor Santayana and Dean Inge, we might feel justified in taking it with a rather large grain of salt, and attributing it to the special temperament, the faulty digestion, the insomnia, or the post-war weariness of the prophet in question. But this becomes impossible when we realize that the major part of the literature of despair has been written, or at least inspired, not by generalizers, but by specialists, by biologists, psychologists, economists, administrators, statesmen, historians,

moralists, and other men who have given their lives to the intensive study of particular fields of human society.

Dean Inge, for instance, is not a lonely prophet of doom crying his pronouncements in a wilderness of *Polyannas*; he is simply the director of a vast chorus of despair, a chorus of specialists. I think I have followed this literature of despair with a fair faithfulness since the war. I do not pretend to have subjected it to an exhaustive or scholarly research, but I have read it with something more than a casual effort to clarify my own mind regarding the current drift of Western civilization. And I think I am at least within hailing distance of accuracy when I say that this literature has been inspired by at least seven distinct fears that have arisen out of seven distinct fields of research and experience. These fears are:

1. The biological fear.
2. The psychological fear.
3. The political fear.
4. The economic fear.
5. The historical fear.
6. The administrative fear.
7. The moral fear.

Let me briefly review these seven fears in turn, and then inquire into the astounding popularity of the literature they have inspired.

§ 5

First, the *biological* fear. I mean by this the fear that biologically mankind is plunging downward, that we are reproducing from our less and least fit human stocks rather than from our better and best human stocks, that the best blood of the race, particularly of the white race, is turning to water. In simple terms this means that, in

the judgment of many biologists, the best families are having the smallest families, and that the worst families are having the largest families. The fear that haunts the mind of the biologist is the fear that, if this procedure goes on, the race must sooner or later face biologic bankruptcy.

The biologist cannot be divorced from this fear by the gracious gestures of philanthropy. The biologist is delighted, from the sheer human point of view, when he sees the philanthropist feed and clothe the unfit. The study of biology does not, despite certain maudlin commentators, dehumanize the man who pursues its intricate secrets. It is true that he wants the birth-rate of the fit to exceed the birth-rate of the unfit, but that is only because he does not want to see society pursue a policy of coddling the unfit and castigating the fit until a time shall come when there will not be enough fit to take care of the unfit. The biologist does not ask us to let our unfit starve and freeze. He wants the fit to outbreed the unfit, but he does not suggest that we achieve that end by killing the unfit or letting them hang themselves by the noose of their own ignorance or indigence. The biologist is a little alarmed when he sees birth control practised by the fit and passed up by the unfit. He would like to see the procedure reversed. He would like to see the fit fertile and the unfit unfertile. But he sees little hope that society will indulge in such nice discriminations. The biologist wishes that the Roosevelts of each generation would cultivate a more scientific sense of values when they discuss this matter; he would like to see the Roosevelts of each generation work *against* race suicide among the fit and

for race suicide among the unfit. In so advising the Roosevelts of each generation, the biologist knows that he is prosecuting a mission of mercy; he knows that, in the long view of history, he is being tender to the unfit. In the higher ethics of science, no man has a right to bring into the world a son or daughter who will be too weak biologically to stand the strain that our complex modern civilization imposes upon its citizens.

But, as I have said, the biologist has little hope that society will either sense or practise any such nice discriminations. And so the biologist is frankly pessimistic. At least certain outstanding biologists are pessimistic. I have no right to speak for the entire biologic fraternity.

It is this biological fear that gave instant and wide popularity to books like Lothrop Stoddard's "The Rising Tide of Color" and his "The Revolt Against Civilization." It was this preoccupation with racial and hereditary values that inspired Houston Stewart Chamberlain's monumental work on "The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century," and that still earlier led Count Arthur de Gobineau to write his "The Inequality of Human Races," not to mention other volumes that would fill an ample shelf.

That this biological fear is haunting the mind of the reading public as well as the mind of the writing fraternity is attested by the wide-ranging popularity of the thousand and one variants of the Chamberlain, Schemann, Gobineau, McDougall, Grant, and Stoddard contentions that have been pouring from our presses.

§ 6

Second, the *psychological* fear. I mean by this the fear that the crowd-

man and crowd-processes of thinking are shoving to the wall the freedom-loving and creative-minded individual upon whom we have hitherto looked as the necessary initiator of intellectual and social advance. The psychologist fears that we have built a world in which there is no room for the rebel. He fears that the modern mind has walked all too willingly into a strait-jacket. He fears that we are losing that saving insurgency of the independent mind in a subtle surrender to the crowd-mind which Edward Alsworth Ross has characterized as unstable, credulous, irrational, simple, and immoral. As Mr. Ross said years ago, "thronging paralyzes thought" and, taken by and large, crowds "are morally and intellectually below the average of their members."

"The crowd," says Mr. Ross, "ranks as the lowest form of human association." And yet, from the point of view of the psychologist, we are essentially a crowd-civilization. Is it any wonder that the psychologist faces the future with fear?

This fear of the domination of the individual citizen by the crowd is of course most keenly realized in time of war. In time of war the individual citizen is nothing; the crowd is everything. The crowd ultimately dominates presidents, even when the president in question is wedded by temperament and philosophy to the processes of peace. Legislators, with a few startling and refreshing exceptions, bow to presidents. Professors take leaves of absence from their scholarly judgments as well as from their chairs and uncritically press-agent the purposes of their governments. Editors surrender with slight protest the freedom of the press, as if it were only a

fair-weather right, and become rubber stamps of the military arm of the government. Ministers put their gospel into cold storage and hunt with the pack. If it comes to a choice between Jesus and the generals, the majority vote of the clergy goes to the generals. The thought of the nation is cut to a pattern. With striking unanimity, we give up thought as well as sugar for the duration of the war. When war comes, both morals and intelligence are adjourned, and the mob is supreme.

But—and this is a thing we are likely to forget—war only dramatizes in the extreme a thing that is taking place more subtly in peace-time. Nothing is to be gained by beating about the bush: we are citizens of a crowd-civilization that seeks to standardize thought in terms of crowd-judgments. And the honest psychologist, who has not given too many hostages to fortune, fears the crowd-judgments as he fears a plague.

It is this fear that has fallen like a shadow across the writings of Gustav Le Bon, that inspired W. Trotter to write his "Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War," and that led Everett Dean Martin to write his "The Behavior of Crowds," to name only a few popular books that have reached the general reader.

§ 7

Third, the *political* fear. I mean by this the fear that the thing we call democracy is not delivering the goods we expected it to deliver when we began experimenting with it. Most of us believe that the future belongs to democracy. We see nothing in sight to take its place. Aristocracies, in the sense of hereditary ruling castes,

seem sooner or later to go to seed, politically, if not biologically. Dictators seem sooner or later to become poisoned by their own power. But even democracy cannot be turned loose in the pasture to grow up of its own sweet and unhampered will. Like a colt, it needs attention. It must be fed and curried and trained if it is either to draw loads or win ribbons. The political fear I am suggesting has arisen primarily not in the minds of the enemies of democracy, but in the minds of the anxious lovers of democracy.

American democracy is clearly facing a new phase. Since the founding of this republic we have spent most of our political energy in the *extension* of democracy; our next task is the *development* of democracy. We have been pioneers engaged in a task of extensive conquest; now we must be administrators engaged in a task of intensive cultivation. We have reached the end of the quantitative extension of democracy; now we must undertake the qualitative development of democracy. It is upon the threshold of this new epoch in democracy that a great fear chills the hearts of many students of democracy. Will we be able to meet its challenge? Some think not. And these doubting Thomases have been busy drawing up an indictment of democracy. I cannot undertake, in this brief summary, to reproduce all the counts in their indictment, but here are a few things that men in the grip of this political fear are saying.

First, that in the normal run of things democracies do not find and put into power their greatest men, and that when a crisis, like war, arises, democracies invariably abdicate and hand themselves over soul and body to

a strong government either of one man or of an oligarchy.

Second, that democracy is an easy victim of catchwords, that democracy will follow a demagogue's slogan more quickly than it will follow established fact or sound argument.

Third, that democracy is equally susceptible to reckless revolution and to reckless reaction; that democracy when aroused may be dominated by insanity, but when not aroused may be paralyzed by inertia; that democracy is not itself a guaranty of liberalism, but susceptible to use for high ends or low.

Fourth, that democracy may easily become as inquisitorial and as tyrannical as a dictator or monarch; that democracy often exercises its inquisitorial habits by unenlightened interference with the legislature and the executive, and often exercises its tyrannical habits by hounding the minority man who is not content to be a mere phonograph record of the mob either in his ideas or in his actions.

Fifth, that democracy finally makes for anarchy rather than for order; that democracy dissolves a community into individuals and then reassembles them in mobs; that democracy invariably is powerless in the face of the organized demands of its militant groups or sections; that democracy has never been able to control its militant groups except by temporarily stepping aside in the interest of some other and stronger form of social control.

Sixth, that the ethical standards of democracy are distinctly lower than the ethical standards of its enlightened citizens; that democracy puts generosity above justice, sympathy above truth, love above chastity, and a pliant disposition above rigid honesty.

These six counts in the current skepticism regarding political democracy are discussed at length by Dean Inge in his first volume of "Outspoken Essay." They do not, of course, exhaust the skepticism of democracy that is abroad in the modern mind. The biologist and the psychologist could add several questions. But these six suggest what I mean by the political fear.

This political fear seems always to go back to the question of the leadership of democracy. Will free men submit to leadership? Will a democracy based on "the rights of man" give adequate attention to the question of "the right man" in positions of leadership?

§ 8

Fourth, the *economic* fear. I mean by this the fear that an industrial civilization—that is to say, a civilization resting upon minute division of labor, machine production, standardization of product, and quantity output—carries about in its own body and in its own processes the seeds of its own destruction, the fear that such a civilization must in time exalt quantity above quality and kill the soul of the people that accepts it; the fear that, to use a phrase from Walter Rathenau, mechanization has become the spiritual mistress of existence throughout Western civilization.

§ 9

Fifth, the *historical* fear. I mean by this the fear that haunts the minds of men whose study of history has led them to the conclusion that the life of nations and civilizations moves in cycles, just as the lives of men and women move in cycles; that nations run fairly

on schedule time through birth, babyhood, adolescence, radiant youth, middle life, old age, and death. Oswald Spengler's "Der Untergang des Abendlandes" and Flinders Petrie's "The Revolutions of Civilization" are good examples of the sort of literature produced by this historical fear. These men and their like-minded associates tell us that peoples create a "culture" which is a live and growing thing, but that sooner or later this expression of their creative powers begins to crystallize and becomes a "civilization" which is a dying thing. To such men, a civilization is the first stage in the death of a culture. And they have drawn neat charts of the cycle of our Western civilization, showing that we are drawing toward the end of a great adventure.

Despite their conviction that civilizations are under the supremacy of the cycle, such men busy themselves with the elaboration of all sorts of policies for these, to them, twilight hours of Western civilization. The plebeian Spengler offers the aristocratic policy of a strong state, while the aristocratic Keyserling offers the democratic policy of a spiritual renewal of the individual Westerner.

§ 10

Sixth, the *administrative* fear. I mean by this the fear that the institutions of Western civilization have become so big and so complicated that we simply are not equal to the job of managing them effectively any longer; the fear that the bigness and the complexity of the modern world have outstripped the existing administrative capacity of the race.

The men who are haunted by this fear believe that many of our empires,

many of our states, many of our industrial organizations, many of our universities and educational systems, have passed the point at which bigness is an asset; that their present dropsical condition is a menacing liability, for the simple reason that we are not breeding enough men who are big enough to run them wisely and effectively.

This fear has led some students who are none too critical in their thinking to leap to the conclusion that we must smash our machines and return to cottage industries, dissolve all our big political units with the acid of self-determination, disband our great universities and return to small colleges, specialized schools, and isolated laboratories, and generally reorganize the world on the basis of small units. Echoes of this fear may be seen in the current emphasis upon political decentralization. One cannot read the growing literature against bigness and complexity without gaining a disturbing sense that Western civilization is suffering from a bad attack of elephantiasis. This administrative fear has led many students to insist that Western civilization must either breed more great administrators or reorganize its life in terms of smaller and more manageable units.

§ 11

Seventh, the *moral* fear. I mean by this the fear that the present generation has renounced allegiance to all wholesome standards of thought and conduct and is quite definitely on the loose, morally adrift, without rudder or compass. This moral fear has inspired the deluge of discussion regarding the younger generation, with which for several years our magazines have

been filled *ad nauseam*. The views of youth regarding sex and religion and politics and economics have kept many students of Western civilization awake night after night. The whole array of political and economic radicalism, theological modernism, and the new social frankness has produced this fear in many minds.

I have never been able to bring myself to the passing of facile and wholesale judgment upon an entire generation. Judging the younger generation, however, seems to have become a profession all by itself. It has many fluent and eminent practitioners, and they have produced a prodigious literature of despair. That there are legitimate grounds for moral fear regarding the future of our civilization cannot be denied. We must be careful, however, to remember that financiers as well as flappers may pursue shoddy ideals, that statesmen as well as preachers may become heretic to the right, that morals are social as well as personal, public as well as private. It is desirable to keep in mind the fact that this moral fear has to do with both aspects of morals.

§ 12

I have not attempted to suggest the books that these seven fears have obviously inspired. Even the most highly selected bibliography of this literature of despair would fill this issue of the magazine. I have sought only to suggest that most of the pessimistic writing about the future of Western civilization has been inspired by these fears.

I said a few pages back that I would, in addition to reviewing these seven fears, inquire into the astounding popularity of the literature they have

inspired. The reasons for its current popularity seem fairly obvious.

First, the literature of despair is dramatic just because it pronounces a judgment of doom. Optimism may be popular in business bulletins and in certain magazines that have set out deliberately to merchandize cheer, but, by and large, pessimism has a higher journalistic value than optimism. The man who predicts the end of an age or the end of the world is always good for a head-line and several columns of copy. Secretly, we all revel a bit in reading the book that produces intellectual goose-flesh.

Second, the literature of despair, particularly the more popularly written parts of it, is a literature of clear-cut generalizations. It is easy to read. The prophets of doom point a menacing finger and call off the counts in the indictment. Lothrop Stoddard tells us that a rising tide of color is about to swamp the white world, and that the under-man is revolting against the men at the top in Western civilization. It does not take a savant to understand that. The average reader can shiver at such crystal-clear generalizations, as children shiver in the nursery at tales of ghosts and goblins. And so on through the list of the men who have generalized about a dark future for Western civilization.

Third, the literature of despair appealed strongly to the "free-floating

fear" that characterized the post-war period. We came out of the war with a bad case of nerves. Even when we had no specific thing to fear, we had an enormous capacity for fear. We were jumpy. Many of the men who were a bit afraid that popular attention would switch too suddenly to some of their war-time practices played upon this national nervousness with superb adroitness. They just about succeeded in convincing the country for a time that ruin and revolution lurked behind every stone and tree and hedge-row in the nation. The man who displayed even a mild interest in spelling reform or Esperanto was suspected of holding in reserve some disguised Bolshevism. Some day that period in our national history will become the happy hunting-ground of the great American humorist who may arise. Obviously, when a whole nation is vaguely afraid, it will crowd the book-stores for books that promise to show it the specific things it must fear.

I believe, of course, that side by side with this literature of despair is an even more significant literature of hope. And I do not mean a literature of mere trumped-up optimism. I mean a literature that uncovers our sources of health, as this literature of despair has uncovered the causes of our disease. It is this literature of hope that I shall discuss next month.

Some New Books We Have Read

Adventures in Criticism and Reporting

BY THE EDITORS

IN THE LION'S CAGE

Table-Talk of G. B. S. By Archibald Henderson. Harper & Brothers.

Mr. Henderson is courageous. In getting the material for his volume of "conversations on things in general" with Mr. Shaw, he seems to have ventured into the presence disguised as a man of straw. The straw man, who surely cannot be Mr. Henderson in the flesh, asks questions like this: "What is your view of the treatment of sex in the contemporary novel?" And Mr. Shaw answers: "I don't read the contemporary novel. There is no such thing as the contemporary novel. Name your novel; and I may tell you what I think of it—that is, if I have read it, which is in the last degree improbable, as a playwright has no patience with novels. But in the few that I *have* read there is no treatment of sex common to them all and yet peculiar to the present period." Thus the man of straw does what the whole world keeps doing to its most enlightened Briton. It goes to him with large, vague, meaningless questions on some abstract topic, and is sometimes at loss to know why he insists upon speaking so concretely that he answers only a part of the question and throws the rest away. The method of this straw

man, however, is successful, though he is allowed to talk too much. He presents Mr. Shaw one by one with a great many platitudes, and the lion worries them. That is a bad image. Rather, the straw man sets up one by one a great many broad targets, and the marksman rings the bell. What Mr. Shaw has to say about the World War has already appeared in *THE CENTURY MAGAZINE* (January, 1925). His other categories of discussion are literature and science, the contrast between England and America, the drama, the theater, and the films, and things in general. As always, he is on every topic prompt, surprising, lucid, and pungent. As he has obviously written his rejoinders out himself, not leaving them to be diluted by the straw man's reporting, he thus appears in virtually his own person. "Table-Talk" is therefore as good as a Shaw preface, which means that there is nothing better except a Shaw play. C. V. D.

THE COMPLETE SHEPHERD

Brigham Young. By M. R. Werner. Harcourt, Brace and Company.

"The theologian," says Gibbon, "may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity.