JAMES BRANCH CABELL - AN INTERPRETATION.

by

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INTRODUCTION.

"James Branch Cabell (April 14, 1879 -) American novelist, was born in Richmond, Virginia, the son of Robert Gamble Cabell and Anne (Branch) Cabell. He has written a number of genealogica works bearing on his ancestry and that of other Virginia families He was graduated at William and Mary College (B.A. 1898), and while he was still a student there was also instructor in Greek and French. Then, after a short experience in the press room of the Richmond Times he went to New York, where he was a reporter on the Herald for two years. In 1901 he held a similar position on the Richmond News. For ten years thereafter he was a free lance writer; then he was appointed Genealogist of the Virginia Chapter of the Sons of the Revolution, and subsequently has held similar posts for several other societies. In 1913 he married Priscilla Bradley, also of an old Virginia family; they have one son."[1.]

The following study has been undertaken as a result of the bewilderment engendered by widely varying critical verdicts as to Mr. Cabell's place in American literature as well as to the nature and purpose of his writings. It need not be emphasized that an awareness of the disagreement evident in such conflicting interpretation must inevitably lead to the conclusion that much of it is misinterpretation. Because of the remarkable variety of critical judgments, an attempt has been made in the following

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1. Twentieth Century Authors, eds.Kunitz and Haycroft, p. 233.

pages to present, as nearly as possible in his own words, Mr. Cabell's intention. For the same reason certain passages in the chapter on Mr. Cabell's books have been directly quoted rather than paraphrased. In other words, in this attempt to analyse and evaluate Mr. Cabell's writings it has been considered necessary to present, wherever possible, the original passages from which the conclusions of the present study were derived. The method appears justified for two reasons. It emphasizes the fact that the interpretation which follows is based on the author's works and remains unbiased by the opinions of former critics. It provides, too, for the reader of the following paper, first hand material for use in the formation of a judgment as to whether or not the conclusions of this study are valid.

MR. CABELL AND THE CRITICS.

The writings of James Branch Cabell have received, of late, little notice from the general reading public. Many of the critics nowadays dismiss him summarily as an outmoded figure whose brief pretension to any eminence in the world of American letters was merely the result of the notoriety that came in the wake of the legal suspension of Jurgen and the ensuing trial.[2] Some critical works contain an outline

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2. A complete account of the trial and acquittal of Jurgen's publishers may be found in a booklet entitled Jurgen and the Law, N.Y. : R.M. McBride and Co., 1923.
Some time after the publication of Jurgen, Mr. Walter J. Kingsley, a press agent connected with the theatre, sent a letter to the editor of a New York paper directing attention to the book as a source of lewd pleasure. As a result of this letter Mr. John Sumner, secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, hailed the publishers into court on January 14th, 1920. Because of the number of more serious cases to be tried a hearing was not given until October 16th, 1922. Mr. Gerrard Glen, defending council, succeeded in obtaining a dismissal of the indictment, and his defence, which is presented in full in Jurgen and the Law, will be of interest to all readers of Mr. Cabell's books.
Judge Charles C. Nott's decision, which is to be found on page 73ff. of the booklet, is as follows:
"The defendants herein, at the close of the people's case, have moved for a direction of acquittal and the dismissal of the indictment on the grounds that the book Jurgen, on the possession of which the indictment is based, is not an 'obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent or disgusting book' within the meaning and intent of section 1141 of the Penal Law, for the alleged violation of which the indictment has been found.
I have read and examined the book carefully. .....
The most that can be said against the book is that certain passages therein may be considered suggestive in a veiled and subtle way of immorality, but such suggestions are delicately conveyed and the whole atmosphere of the story is of such an unreal and supernatural nature that even

of the system by which Cabell has collected his important works into the single unit of the "Biography", a brief commentary, laudatory or otherwise, on his prose style, and in some cases the admission that Jurgen is, possibly, a classic.

An examination of the critical dicta produced during the years between 1915 and 1935 on the subject of Mr. Cabell and his works provides the student with an excellent illustration of the confusion which prevailed in the criticism of the period mentioned. Dissatisfied thinkers and writers were seeking new philosophical explanations of the vital problems which eternally confront mankind, and mankind generally was not, at the moment, entirely satisfied with any of the many and various explanations which had been offered. This condition applied in life, in literature, and also, to proceed one step further, in literary criticism.

There was no set of accepted rules to be applied as yardsticks for the measurement and evaluation of literary productions and, consequently, the approaches to criticism were

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these suggestions are free from the evils accompanying suggestiveness in more realistic works. In fact, it is doubtful if the book could be read or understood at all by more than a very limited number of readers.

In my opinion the book is one of unusual literary merit and contains nothing 'obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent or disgusting' within the meaning of the statute and the decisions of the courts of this state in similar cases.

The motion therefore is granted and the jury is advised to acquit the defendants."

many and varied. We find literature criticized from the point of view of the "new humanists", (Babbitt, More and their younger disciples), and from that of their opponents, (the outspoken Mencken for example). Some critics attempted to approach writing by studying the social, economic and political factors in the history of the nation on the grounds that the national life is reflected in the works of authors. Others enlisted the aid of modern psychology and subjected authors to Freudian psycho-analyses as a preliminary to interpretation of their literary products. The student, then, in attempting to discover the validity, or otherwise, of his own conclusions concerning an author's merit, encounters a great variety of material. An author's work, he reads, may, or may not, be acclaimed if it conforms to, or is at variance with a "classical ideal" which is defined at length with approval or condemnation. Those who seek for what is "vital and real" in an author's work are apt to look with disapproval upon elements that are "merely romantic"; while their opponents tend to reverse the decision. If the books were written during a depression, the student may find himself reading much more about that social calamity than about the works he is desirous of understanding. Then, too, the author concerned might be suspected of an acute mother fixation or some sexual perversion and therefore the critic may have considered it necessary to quote extensively from the passages in his books which give evidence of this all-important fact.

The majority of the factors considered by the American critics of the time are important and certainly worthy of consideration when the value of literary products is to be determined. The complaint is that there are few of these critics who did not overemphasize one or another of the factors mentioned, neglecting the remainder to such an extent that it is difficult to accept individual verdicts as satisfactory. This emphasis on one particular criterion necessarily results in a prejudicial approach to criticism in spite of the fact that critics claim the virtue of objectivity for their judgments.

This point is very clearly illustrated by the criticism of Mr. Cabell's work, since he has written books which defy pigeon-holing into any particular category. The romantic background he has provided for his protagonists places him in disrepute with the "realists". The sombre conclusions arrived at in the majority of his novels repel the "romantics". The economics of Poictesme and Branlon have no relation to those of America, and the Freudian critics, as such, have not yet been heard from. In one way or another his literary productions seem to have resisted conformity with the particular bias swaying the separate verdicts of many American critics, whose judgments regarding his work range from highest praise to vilification.

The critical writings concerning Mr. Cabell having been discovered unsatisfactory when viewed as a whole, the purpose

of this study is an attempt at an interpretation of the author's contribution to American literature based on a reading of his works. The business of criticism should be to discover an author's intention, to consider whether or not that intention tends toward the production of work that will have literary value, and finally to determine how far the author has realized his intention. In attempting to carry out these principles in relation to Mr. Cabell's writings this student will attempt to keep out of his mind such prejudicial statements as the following:- "Mr. Cabell is creating great literature. A self-reliant intellectual, rich in the spoils of all literature, one of the great masters of English prose, the supreme ironic spirit thus far granted us,- he stands apart from the throng of lesser American novelists, as Mark Twain stood apart, individual and incomparable."[3.]

Or, conversely, "Cabell offers us the daydreams of a romantic adolescent,--hawking expensive and soon cloying sweets;--it becomes clear that even the grace of his style is often falsely arch and knowing or effeminate and teasing."[4.]

Although these and the estimates which lie between the extremes will be considered, the conclusions of this study will depend entirely upon the actual contents of Mr. Cabell's books.

3.Vernon L.Parrington,Main Currents in American Thought,Vol.3,p.34

4.Ludwig Lewisohn, Expression in America, p. 360.

II.

MR. CABELL'S LITERARY CREED.

An author's works should be studied in the light of their intention -- James Branch Cabell has grouped his writings so that each book is a chapter of the "Biography" of Dom Manuel and his descendants. This arrangement has been made to emphasize Mr. Cabell's contention, at least for literary purposes, that human life is re-incarnated over and over again in such a way that a man and his descendants endlessly perform the same role in what is, at bottom, the same comedy. For this "Biography" has been written a prologue, Beyond Life, and an epilogue, Straws and Prayer Books. In the former Mr. Cabell has developed a theory concerning the nature of man's position in the universe and the function therein of art. In the epilogue he has endeavor- to discover and explain, for his own satisfaction, his reasons for writing his books. From these two volumes, if from anywhere, one may discover Mr. Cabell's intention, if one read carefully and selectively. It would be wise, too, to ignore faint critical echoes of phrases concerning sour grapes and causes invented after contemplation of effects.

Beyond Life was published in 1919, and immediately gave rise to several bitter controversies which need not be considered here. No apology is given for the rather extensive quotation from this book which follows. No summary can indicate the nature of its contents satisfactorily and, indeed, even extracts are inadequate. The whole represents such close-knit logical development that no fragment torn from the complete work is as explicit as would be desirable. It must be remembered

that the work is here being considered in an effort to understand Cabell's literary productions rather than in the search for a philosophy of life.

A quotation from one of John Charteris's supposed novels prefaces the book. "I intend to lecture to bare benches; granted. Indeed, it would be base to deceive you. But, is it not apparent - even, as one might say uncivilly, to you - that the lack of an audience breeds edifying candour in the speaker? and leads him presently to overhear a discovery of his actual opinion."[5] The unidentified author seeks the company of John Charteris, one of Cabell's well known protagonists, at his home in fictitious Fairhaven. Eventually the conversation arrives at this statement by Charteris, "It seemed to me, this afternoon at least, that even I was very like a character being carried over from one short story to another, and then to yet another. And I could not but suspect that, so as to make me fit into my new surroundings more exactly, at every transfer I was altered a bit, not always for the better. In fine, there seems to be an author who coarsens and cheapens and will some day obliterate me, in order to serve the trend of some big serial he has in course of publication. For as set against that I am of minor importance. Indeed, it was perhaps simply to further this purpose that he created me... The riddle of the Author and his puppets, and of their true relations, stands forever unanswered. And no matter from what standpoint you look at it, there seems an element of unfairness."[6]

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5. James B. Cabell, Beyond Life, p.2.
6. Ibid., p.8.

"The Author works according to his creed-," counters his visitor.[7]

"But", resumes Charteris, "we do not know what it is. We cannot even guess. Ah, I dare say you wonder quite as often as I do what the Author is up to."[8]

A discussion of books ensues and the possibility of forming a satisfactory aesthetic creed considered. Mr.Wilson Follett is quoted in this wise, "Reduced to baldness, the argument is this. Since first-class art has never produced its own contemporary background and since the novel of things-as-they-are calls for no constructive imagination whatever in author or reader, the present supply of "realism" is nothing but the publishers' answer to a cheap and fickle demand; and since the imaginative element in art is all but everything, the only artist who has a chance of longevity is he who shuns the 'vital' and'gripping', and the 'contemporary'." Over and against this creed is set the criticism of The Independent and the New York Times that this exposition of romantic ideals is 'fatuous' and should have been suppressed.[9]

Whereupon Charteris undertakes to state his own creed. He is, he states, an Economist whose creed is founded upon laws of 'that life beyond life' which Milton attributes to good books and he begins by stating that "books are best insured against oblivion through the auctorial virtues of distinction and clarity, of beauty and symmetry, of tenderness and truth and urbanity."[10]

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7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9, Ibid,p.15.
10. Ibid, p.17.

Charteris then mentions the 'lazy contempt of America as a whole toward art matters' but is convinced that his listener is interested in such matters because that listener feels that he ought to be interested. And this feeling is evidence of an important principle, a principle which, Charteris thinks, "shapes too the minds of men, by this universal tendency to imagine - and to think of as in reality existent - all the tenants of earth and all the affairs of earth, not as they are, but 'as they ought to be'...And so it comes about that Romance has invariably been the demiurgic and beneficent force, not merely in letters, but in every matter which concerns mankind; and that 'realism' with its teaching that the mile-posts along the road are as worthy of consideration as the goal, has always figured as man's chief enemy."[11]

The Greeks, Charteris argues, recognized that "gracefully to prevaricate about mankind and human existence was art's signal function."[12] Homer, the dramatists, the sculptors, all presented men as 'they ought to be' doing such things as it would be gratifying for men to do if these feats were humanly possible. And in the Middle Ages too literature avoided deviation into the credible with its legends and romances. Chaucer, Charteris admits, "was so injudicious as to dabble in that muddy stream of contemporaneous happenings which time alone may clarify."[13] However, Charteris insists that the parts of Chaucer which endure are based on more substantial ground

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11. Ibid., p.25.
12. Ibid., p.26.
13. Ibid., p. 29.

and are much more valuable than the material he obtained from his contemporaries. The Miller's tale of a clerk's misadventure in osculation is cited as an example of the latter.

With the invention of printing, thoughts spread so expeditiously that, "it became possible to acquire quite serviceable ideas without the trouble of thinking: and very few of us since then have cared to risk impairment of our minds by using them. A consequence was that, with inaction, man's imagination in general grew more sluggish, and demurred, just as mental indolence continues to balk, over the exertion of conceiving an unfamiliar locale, in any form of art."[14] The deterioration, Charteris points out, was gradual. Marlowe gave little indication in his plays that he had ever encountered human beings. However, "complaisant dramatists out of a normal preference for butter with their daily bread, soon began to romance about contemporary life."[15] The Elizabethans did not concern themselves overmuch with their immediate surroundings, dealing rather with events against a reassuringly remote Italian background. The Jacobean drama tended spasmodically toward untruths about its audience's workaday life with questionable success. The Restoration dramatists protested and commenced to write of contemporary life in much the spirit of modern musical comedy. Charteris condemns as nonsense the assertions of some writers who would claim that the dramas of gallantry reproduce the actual life of the time.

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14. Ibid., p.30.
15. Ibid., p.31.

The development of the novel provided authorship with a superior method of presenting men and their affairs 'as they ought to be' since, Charteris continues, "there came no commonplace flesh-and-blood to give the lie to the artists' pretensions...When the novel succeeded the drama it was no longer necessary for the artist to represent human beings with even partial veracity: and this new style of writing at once became emblematic."[16] This occurs because, "the truth about ourselves is the one truth, above all others, which we are adamantine not to face. And this determination springs, not wholly from vanity, but from a profound race-sense that by such denial we have little to lose, and a great deal to gain."[17]

In support of his assertions Charteris considers the beginnings of fiction everywhere, pointing out that they take, among all races, the same form. "It is always the history of the unlooked-for achievements and the ultimate very public triumph of the ill-used youngest son. From the myth of Zeus, third son of Chronos, to the third prince of the fairy-tale, there is no exception. Everywhere it is to the despised weakling that romance accords the final and very public victory. For in the life-battle for existence it was of course the men of puniest build who first developed mental ability,...and the weakling, quite naturally, afforded himself in imagination what the force of circumstance denied him in fact...

By and bye a staggering stroke of genius improved the tale by adding the handicap of sex-weakness: and Cinderella (whom romance begot and deified as Psyche) straightway led

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16. Ibid., p.35.
17. Ibid.. p.36.

captive every dreamer's hitherto unvoiced desire...

An inevitable very public triumph of the downtrodden-with all imaginable pomp and fanfare - is of necessity a tenet generally acceptable to a world of ineffectual inhabitants, each one of whom is a monarch of dreams incarcerated in a prison of flesh; and each of whom is hourly fretted, no less by the indifference of nature to his plight than by the irrelevancy of those social orderings he dazedly ballots into existence...Christianity, with its teaching that the oppressed shall be exalted, and the unhappy made free of eternal bliss, thus came in the nick of the occasion, to promise what the run of men were eager to believe."[18.]

"In similar fashion", Charteris continues, "humanity would seem at an early period to have wrenched comfort from prefiguring man as the hero of the cosmic romance."[19.] Early man was at a disadvantage as set against the stronger, swifter, and better protected animals, surpassing them only in the power to reason. Using this power, he ignored his other failings and probably began very early to regale himself with flattering narratives as to his nature and destiny. "Among the countless internecine animals that roamed the earth, puissant with claw and fang and sinew, an ape reft of his tail, and grown rusty at climbing, was the most formidable, and in the end would triumph... So the prophetic portrait of man treading among cringing pleosauri to browbeat a frightened dinosaur was duly scratched upon the cave's wall, and art began forthwith to accredit human beings

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18. Ibid.,pp.40 ff.
19. Ibid., p.42.

with every trait and destiny which they desiderated."[20] This tendency, Charteris claims, is still existent, and "we have come very firmly to believe in the existence of men everywhere, not as in fact they are, but 'as they ought to be'."[21]

"When a trait is held up as desirable, for a convincingly long while, the average person, out of self-respect, pretends to possess it: with time, he acts letter-perfect as one endowed therewith, and comes unshakably to believe that it has guided him from infancy...All is vanity, quoth the son of David, inverting the truth for popular consumption, as became a wise preacher who knew that vanity is all. For man alone of all the animals plays the ape to his dreams...So has man's indomitable vanity made a harem of his instincts, and walled off a seraglio wherein to beget the virtues and refinements and all ennobling factors in man's long progress from gorillaship."[22]

Charteris then traces some of the most important elements in literature and life back to their supposed beginnings. "As has been suggested", he says, "creative literature would seem to have sprung from the instinct of any hurt animal to seek revenge,- and to 'get even',- as the phrase runs, in the field of imagination when such revenge was not feasible in any other arena... Then too, it is an instinct common to brute creatures that the breeding or even the potential mother must not be bitten,- upon which modest basis, a little by little, mankind builded the fair code of "domnei", or woman-worship...From the shuddering dread that beasts manifest toward uncomprehended forces, such as wind and thunder and tall waves, man developed religion, and a con-

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20. Ibid., p.43
21. Ibid., p.44.
22. Ibid., p.45.

soling assurance of divine paternity. And when you come to judge what he made of sexual desire, appraising the deed in view as against the wondrous overture of courtship and that infinity of high achievements which time has seen performed as grace-notes, words fail before his egregious thaumaturgy."[23.]

"And these aspiring notions", the speaker suavely observes, "blended a great while since, into what may be termed the Chivalrous attitude toward life...The cornerstone of Chivalry I take to be the idea of vicarship: for the chivalrous person is, in his own eyes at least, the child of God, and goes about this world as his father's representative in an alien country. Throughout, of course, the Chivalrous attitude was an intelligent attitude, in which one spun romances and accorded no meticulous attention to mere facts...For thus to spin romances is to bring about, in every sense, man's recreation, since man alone of animals can, actually, acquire a trait by assuming, in defiance of reason, that he already possesses it...For man alone of animals plays the ape to his dreams. So he fares onward chivalrously, led by ignes fatui no doubt, yet moving onward..."[24.]

Charteris concludes his observations on the nature of the demiurge, romance, in the following passage which I quote in full:

> Indeed, when I consider the race to which I have the honour to belong, I am filled with respectful wonder...All about us flows and gyrates unceasingly the material universe,- an endless inconceivable jumble of rotatory blazing gas and frozen spheres and detonating comets, wherethrough Earth spins like a frail midge. And to this blown molecule adhere what millions and millions and millions of parasites just such as I am,

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23. Ibid., p.46.
24. Ibid., p.47.

> begetting and dreaming and slaying and abnegating and toiling and making mirth, just as did aforetime those countless generations of our forebears, every one of whom was likewise a creature just such as I am! Were the human beings that have been subject to confinement in flesh each numbered, as is customary in other penal institutes, with what interminable row of digits might one set forth your number, say, or mine?
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> Nor is this everything. For my reason, such as it is, perceives this race, in its entirety, in the outcome of its achievement, to be beyond all wording petty and ineffectual: and no more than thought can estimate the relative proportion to the universe of our poor Earth, can thought conceive with what quintillionths to express that fractional part which I, as an individual parasite, add to Earth's negligible fretting by ephemerae.
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> And still - behold the miracle!- still I believe life to be a personal transaction between myself and Omnipotence: I believe that what I do is somehow of importance; and I believe that I am on a journey toward some very public triumph not unlike that of the third prince in the fairy-tale...Even to-day I believe in this dynamic illusion...For that creed was the first great inspiration of the demiurge,- man's big romantic idea of Chivalry, of himself as his Father's representative in an alien country;- and it is a notion at which mere fact and reason yelp denial unavailingly. For every one of us is so constituted that he knows the romance to be true, and corporal fact and human reason in this matter, as in divers others, to be suborned and perjured witnesses of 'realism'." [25]

The next chapter finds Charteris continuing his monologue. He discourses humorously at some length on witchcraft and sorcery before returning to the more serious topic of man and his dreams. The mention of Circe, "the fair-haired and delicate-voiced witch, who is a bane to men, and yet sometimes takes mortal lovers"[26], rouses him out of his levity. "The dreams of man", he observes, "arise from deeper requirements than prompt his

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25. Ibid., pp.50 & 51.
26. Ibid., p.68.

deeds. In dreams man has shown no aversion to the witch-woman, whom in his dreams he has never really confounded with those broom-stick riding, squint-eyed and gobber-toothed wives of the Goat that were conscientiously hunted down and murdered; but, to the contrary, man has always clung, with curious tenacity, to the notion of some day attaining the good graces of that fair-haired and delicate-voiced witch who is a bane to men, and yet sometimes takes mortal lovers".[27] Charteris backs this statement by reference to stories from the mythology of many lands in which man has encountered this fabulous witch-woman in many disguises and with varying results. This belief in the witch-woman was fostered by man in answer to a pressing need. "For all men had loved; and most of them wooed not unsuccessfully, at one time or another, and saw what came of it: and they simply did not choose to accept the result as being anything but an exceptional and probably unique instance of something having gone wrong. With other husbands, they doggedly reflected, the case was in all likelihood quite different."[28]

Charteris mentions the adverse criticism directed against the institution of marriage and accounts for it by contending that, "love too is a dynamic illusion which romance induces in order to further the labour of the demiurge, and marriage is an estate wherein illusion quite inevitably perishes."[29] This statement is amplified and defended. "Yet even now", the speaker finds, "this once dynamic illusion of chivalrous love quite inevitably invades the life of every innocent boy and works transient havoc; but is by ordinary so restrained and thwarted

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27. Ibid., p.69.
28. Ibid., p.73.
29. Ibid., p.74.

by our man-made social laws as to be evicted without leaving any lasting monument of the tyrant's stay in material form. The boy's beliefs, though, are not always left conformable to his estate. For at this time romance tricks each of us so cunningly, in conscienceless endeavor that the man be brought, somehow and anyhow, to the maid's bed, that we are persuaded what romance then promises, in the role of Pandarus, can really be come by: and so firm-set is the impression that with some of us it remains ineffaceable, even by marriage."[30] "For such an one the mother of his children, that rather likeable well-meani creature, proves assuredly to be not at all the person for whom, so long ago, his heart was set aburning: and for that very reason her short-comings can never dim the fire, since with its thin and vaulting ardors she is in no wise concerned. So it glows fed with hope and memory. For such-an-one the maid waits somewhere of whose embraces one can never tire, as in an unforgotten vision was once revealed to him, once for all time...If but in honor, his heart stays bound to his first and only real love, that woman of whom one never tires... And there seems to be no beauty in the world save those stray hints of her, whose ultimate revealment is not yet... And it is very often through desire to express his faith in this withheld perfection, of which he has been conscious in broken glimpses from afar, that he himself turns artist, and the dynamic illusion finds secondary employment... For there is that in every human being which demands communion with something more fine and potent than himself. Perhaps, indeed, this is only another way of saying

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30.Ibid., p. 78.

that every man is innately religious...So it befalls that to-day, as did a many in times overpast, a few of us yet dream of the witch-woman, and of our meeting by and bye."[31.]

Having thus roughly handled the dynamic illusion of love and the institution of marriage, Charteris proceeds to a discussion of yet another dynamic illusion, at least in one of its aspects, that of common-sense. In this chapter the 'economy' of the disreputable poets Marlowe and Villon is set against the conventional common-sense economy of the average man. These poets, in spite of having lived lives that by normal, that is to say average, standards, are to be condemned, have nevertheless left behind them a legacy which we value highly. Charteris goes so far as to say that it was because they lived as they did that they were able to produce their masterworks. Those who view life 'sensibly' - "aim otherwhither and gravely weave ropes of sand...They live temperately, display edifying virtues, put money in the bank, rise at need to heroism and abnegation, serve on committees, dispense a rational benevolence in which there is in reality something divine, discourse very wisely over flat-topped desks, and eventually die to the honest regret of their associates. And for such-an-one that forthwith begins to end his achievement here...For all this code of common-sense, and this belief in the value of doing 'practical' things, would seem to be but another dynamic illusion, through which romance retains the person of average intelligence in physical employment and, as a by-product, in an augmenting continuance of creature comforts."[32.] The artist views the practical life as futile body wasting and strives to make something

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31. Ibid., p.79. ff.
32. Ibid., p.112.

more permanent. "The dream once written down, once snared with comely and fit words, may be perpetuated: its creator may usurp the brain-cells and prompt the flesh of generations born long after his own carnal loans are dust: and possibly he may do this - here is the lure - forever."[33] In pursuit of this ideal the creative artist must necessarily withdraw from the plane of common life and may even require the assistance of drugs or alcohol to induce the required isolation.[34] "For in his sober senses, of course, the economist dare not ever be entirely himself, but must pretend to be, like everybody else, admiringly respectful of bankers and archbishops and brigadier-generals and presidents, as the highliest developed form of humanity." "So it is that the verbal artist and the 'practical' person must always pity each other: and when it comes to deciding which is in reality the wastrel, there seems a great deal to be said for both sides."[35]

And so Charteris continues blandly talking through the spring night. He discusses Restoration drama as an exemplification of the "Gallant" attitude toward life. Gallantry is defined as follows: "I have read that the secret of Gallantry is to accept the pleasures of life leisurely, and its inconveniences with a shrug; as well as that, among other requisites, the gallant person will always consider the world with a smile of toleration, and his own doings with a smile of honest amusement, and Heaven with a smile that is not distrustful,- being thoroughly persuaded that God is kindlier than the genteel would regard as rational."[36] The works of Wycherley and Congreve are

33.Ibid., p.115.
34.Ibid., p.119.
35.Ibid., p.124.
36.Ibid., p.130.

examined and used as a background for many curious fancies which need not be reproduced here. One conclusion may be mentioned. Beginning with a quotation from Wycherley's letters, Charteris speaks of the dispiriting doubt experienced by most writers at some time or another as to whether the game be worth the candle.[37] The quotation, for which no reference is given, is this:- "There was a time when I too was foolishly intent to divert the leisure hours of posterity. But reflection assured me that posterity had, thus far, done very little to place me under that or any other obligation. Ah, no! Youth, health and a modicum of intelligence are loaned to most of us for a while, and for a terribly brief while. They are but loans, and Time is waiting greedily to snatch them from us. For the perturbed usurer knows that he is lending us, perforce, three priceless possessions, andthat till our lease runs out we are free to dispose of them as we elect. Now, had I more jealously devoted my allotment toward securing for my impressions of the universe a place in yet unprinted libraries, I would have made an investment from which I could not possibly have derived any pleasure, and which would have been to other people of rather dubious benefit." So Charteris concludes that any writers who believe that the game is worth the candle are undoubtedly in the grip of yet another dynamic illusion.

The influence of romance in the development of Christianity, mentioned earlier, is further developed here. Charteris discusses the teaching itself as opposed to the doctrine developed from it by the church.

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37. Ibid., p. 188.

As an illustration of his earlier contention that life plagiarizes literature, Charteris points out that the Gallant attitude adopted by the characters in Restoration drama came to life in the eighteenth century. During this century too men were reading much of that depressing literature for which the unborn Victorians were to furnish illustrations. The life of Sheridan and his political career provides Charteris with an example for his contention that we are all "mountebanks" and our success in the eyes of the world depends on our "pretending to be what seems expected." Sheridan was often too drunk to walk, but as a secretary of foreign affairs he guided a nation acceptably. He was never in sight of paying his debts, or even of guessing what they might amount to, yet acted as secretary of the treasury. Although ignorant of maritime matters, he served as treasurer of the navy. Though he seemed unqualified to fill the offices given him, he discharged his duties perfectly by pretending to be what seemed expected. Charteris proceeds to examine the curious nature of some of the things that are expected of us.

Although our lecturer has maintained it to be, "infinitely safer to adhere to the Hellenic method of evoking protagonists worth noble handling from the bright mists of antiquity", he admits that fine literature can deal with the contemporaneous.[38] The works of Charles Dickens are cited as an example. However Charteris points out that Dickens certainly did not attempt to paint a 'real' picture of English life and defends him on those grounds.[39] "Few persons not already under restraint would care

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38. Ibid., p. 243.
39. Ibid., p. 247.

to deny that Dickens unfailingly mispresented the life he pretended to portray. To do this was, as I have shown, alike a requisite of art and of altruism: so the wise praise him therefor, knowing his merits to hinge far less on whether or no he has falsified the truth than on the delectable manner in which he has prevaricated." Thackeray is also brought into the argument in support of the same contention.

These statements open the way for a discussion of 'realism'.[40] "Book after book I find in the department stores narrating how this or that particular person lived, wooed, married, labored, reared children, got into the divorce courts, made a fortune, acquired new opinions, or died. Often it is so convincingly set forth that the illusion of reality is produced: and for the instant the reader does believe that this actually happened. But do you not see that to produce this illusion amounts to nothing aesthetically? I read of marriages and divorces and deaths and business-ventures by the dozen in the morning paper: and I believe too that these actually happened. Well the realistic school of fiction, at its most ambitious reach of tedium, aims to convey the same impression, and nothing more...And yet, none the less, this novel of contemporary life may be informed by art if, through some occult magic, the tale becomes a symbol: and if, however dimly, we comprehend that we are not reading merely about" John Jones, aged 26, who gave his address as 187 West Avenue, "but about humanity,- and about the strivings of that ape reft of his tail, and grown rusty at climbing, who yet, however dimly, feels himself to be a symbol, and the frail representative of Omnipotence in a place that is not home; and so strives blunderingly, from mystery to mystery,

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40. Ibid., p. 264.

with pathetic makeshifts, not understanding anything, greedy in all desires, and honeycombed with poltroonery, and yet ready to give all and to die fighting, for the sake of that undemonstrable idea... If, in short, the chronicle becomes a symbol of that which is really integral to human existence,...why, then and then only, this tale of our contemporaries shifts incommunicabl to fine art... Art, I repeat must deal with contemporary life by means of symbols... Facts must be kept in their proper place, outside of which they lose veracity." For "the trouble with facts seems to be that if one treats them out of relation to the rest of life they become lies...There in brief you have the damnatory frailty of 'realistic' novels, which endeavor to show our actual existence from a viewpoint wherefrom no human being ever saw it... We... fritter through existence without ever encountering any facts as they actually are: for in life no fact is received as truth until the percipient has conformed and coloured it to suit his preferences: and in this also literature should be true to life... Then, too, to make a complete and fair-minded analysis of any human being as 'realists' affect to do, is forthwith to avoid any conceivable viewpoint: since our acquaintances, to whom alone we are impartial, we do not take the trouble to analyze, and to our intimates, with whom alone we are familiar, we can by no possibility remain impartial... And all the...'realistic' writers, who thus set forth to present intelligently the facts of contemporaneous existence, are introducing facts to the reader's perception after a fashion for which life affords no parallel. So their facts become lies, because such 'realism' as a literary method is fundamentally

untrue to life; and by attempting to exhibit our contemporaries as being precisely what they are, does but very ill compare with actual life, which is far more charitable."[41] And so does Charteris oppose this pessimistic creed of 'realism' as dangerous. "For always the ever-present danger exists that, in treating of the life immediately about him, even the unobservant literary genius may notice that this life for the most part consists of ugly and stupid persons doing foolish things, and will take a despondent view of the probable outcome.." Shakespeare is reputed to have said, "I never knew a wicked person. I question if anybody ever did. Undoubtedly, short-sighted people exist who have floundered into ill-doing: but it proves always to have been on account of either cowardice or folly, and never because of malevolence; and in consequence, their sorry pickle should demand commiseration far more loudly than our blame. In short, I find humanity to be both a weaker and a better-meaning race than I suspected...I grant the world to be composed of muck and sunshine intermingled: but, upon the whole, I find the sunshine more pleasant to look at...And I hold that all human imbroglios, in some irrational and quite incomprehensible fashion, will be straightened to our satisfaction...Meanwhile this universe of ours, and, reverently speaking, the Maker of this universe as well, is under no actual bond to be intelligible in dealing with us."[42] "That, too," says Charteris, "is the verdict of a person who knows what he is talking about. It is the anodyne, however variously labeled, of every candid philosopher in putting up with those innumerable, continuous, small, nagging and inescapable annoyances which compound his life as a human

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41. Ibid., p. 268.
42. Ibid., p. 271 ff.

being...Equally it is a creed to which the literary artist, also, must cling fast, yet not too desperately, in dealing with his contemporaries...Thus it is alone that, in defiance of the perturbing spectacle of man's futility and insignificance, as the passing skin-trouble of an unimportant planet, he can still foster hope and urbanity and all the other gallant virtues, serenely knowing all the while that if he builds without any firm foundation his feat is but the more creditable."[43.]

In the last chapter but one Charteris discusses the arbiters, as to the popular appeal and the ultimate survival of any book, and these he concludes to be dullness and vanity, the identical factors which exert so much influence in other departments of life.[44.] "As literature goes, the verdict, or rather the aversion, of the general reading public may be disregarded. For literature is a cult kept alive by the 'literary'. And the fact that the general public no longer reads time-hallowed books has really no more to do with literature than have the books it actually does read." In spite of the traditional reverence accorded to classics, " by each of us whatever he reads must be appraised independently. The general reading public, without knowing it, has grasped, and practices, this great fundamental principle of criticism; which yet remains unapprehended by far more cultured persons, to their not inconsiderable annoyance.."

In summing up this chapter, Charteris reaches conclusions applicable to the whole book as follows:

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43. Ibid., p. 273.
44. Ibid., p. 288.

"So we attain the reassuring conclusion that the arbiters, both as to the popular appeal and as to the ultimate survival of any book, are general human inadequacy and our general human resolution never to acknowledge this inadequacy. For our dullness and our vanity - as you perceive, I trust, by this? - are the dependable arbiters of every affair in human life. And luckily for us, they bid fair, too, to be the arbiters of life's final outcome.

Through a merciful dispensation, we are one and all of us created very vain and very dull: and by utilizing these invaluable qualities the demiurgic spirit of romance will yet contrive a world 'as it ought to be'. Vanity it is that pricks us indefatigably to play the ape to every dream romance induces; yet vanity is but the stirrup-cup: and urgent need arises that human dullness retain us(as it does) securely blinded, lest we observe the wayside horrors of our journey and go mad. One moment of clear vision as to man's plightin the universe would be quite sufficient to set the most philosophic gibbering. Meanwhile with bandaged eyes we advance: and human sanity is guarded by the brave and pitiable and tireless dullness of mankind...Yet note how varied are the amiable activities of human dullness, which tend alike to protect and enliven human progress.'Dullness it is, of course, that brews and quaffs Dutch courage in the form of popular novels, and hoards its 'literary classics', as sentimental persons treasure old letters (because this faded writing once was necromancy), in a very rarely visited attic...But dullness, too, it is that fosters salutary optimism as to the destiny of mankind, in flat defiance of everything mankind can do, and does unblushingly. And dullness likewise nurtures all our general faith in the peculiar sanctity of anything which one has seen done often enough, and our reverence for whatever is sufficiently hackneyed; since dullness, naturally, ascribes no slight importance to itself...Then, too, how magnanimously does dullness, in you and me and our moonstruck compeers, dispose of its one fervent scudding moment of ability to do anything at all, by devoting it to the creation of 'art'; so that some erroneous impression, based upon the talebearing of five perfidious senses (and painfully worked out to a non sequiter, by the rattle-trap mechanism of an artist's lopsided brain), may be preserved for posterity's misguidance and well-being. In graver circles,

dullness - sometimes mitred, sometimes eruptive with forensic platitudes, and at its most terrible with a black cap adorning its inertia,- invents and codifies religion, and makes euphonious noises about 'right' and 'wrong', as an ornate and stately method of imposing the local by-laws. Equally among those favored mortals whom the income tax annoys does a kindred form of dullness become axiomatic about common-sense and 'being practical', as the impedimenta peculiarly requisite to wingless bipeds when left to their own devices among such non-committal stardrift...Dullness it is that, signally, esteems itself well worthy of perpetuation; and in the action seeks to love, in the quite staggering faith that presently by some human being of the opposite sex love will be merited. And finally dullness it is that lifts up heart and voice alike, to view a parasite infesting the epidermis of a midge among the planets, and cries, Behold this is the child of God All-mighty and All-worshipful, made in the likeness of his Father!... These and how many other wholesome miracles are brought about by our dullness, by our brave and pitiable and tireless dullness, by our really majestic dullness, in firm alliance with the demiurgic spirit of romance...But upon these amiable activities I shall dilate no further, lest you declare my encomiums somewhat less adequately to praise the dullness of mankind than to illustrate it: yet you perceive, I trust, that our dullness is our one quite priceless possession.

And so it is dullness alone which enables us to hurl defiance at 'realism': for these illusions that are born of romance, and are nursed by dullness, serve as our curveting and prancing escort, and keep at bay all interference, as we pass in a straggling caravan, with death already hot upon the trail, and human nature clogging every step with gyves. And thus protected, to-day as always, our caravan accepts romance for guide; and strains and flounders toward goals which stay remote, and yet are fairly discernable. For that to which romance conducts, in all the affairs of life (concluded John Charteris), is plain enough,- distinction and clarity, and beauty and symmetry, and tenderness and truth and urbanity." 45.

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45. Ibid., p. 315.

In the final chapter of this amazing book, the visitor who has listened all night long to the monologue from which the foregoing extracts have been taken, finally gets in a word. He brings up some of the objections which have undoubtedly occurred to most readers during their perusal of this "tissue of wild errors, deceitfully glossed with the unreasonableness of a person who is really in earnest." The unfairness to 'realism' is condemned, the cowardly pessimism of the speaker's views pointed out. The visitor attempts to formulate a modest credo of his own. "I do agree with you", he states, "when you say all enduring literature in the past has been of the romantic quality you describe, from whatever standpoints this quality has been apprehended. And it is true that surface faithfulness alone, such as many modern novelists seek to achieve, is the emptiest of artistic aims. I even grant you it is better to lie pleasingly...Indeed, despite your wilful blindness as to the true value of 'realism', your slurs upon the practised methods of producing 'realistic' art compose a valuable recipe. It is merely because I think you have ignored some essentials that I venture, upon this subject also, to be banal...I too believe it is more important that literature should be true to life than that it should inventory life's mannerisms. I believe we can never be concerned by any man or woman in a book if we do not - at least while the book's spell is upon us - put very cordial faith in that person's existence, and share in the emotional atmosphere of the scene. But I likewise believe that the illusion of reality can be produced by the romantic or 'realistic' method,

either one, or even by the two commingled, provided always that the artist, given insight, is sincerely striving to show fundamental things as he sees them, and thereby, perhaps, to hint at their true and unknowable nature...To only a few of us is it given, or desirable to see within. The majority must for practical purposes dissever dreams from the business of existence: dreams are not our metier, and that is all there is to it. Yet since it is our nature to learn by parables, we turn to the artist who is also a seer, in search of entertainment, and more or less consciously hoping to acquire understanding...We merely ask that our story treat of such a man as captures our attention: and that through the lights and shadows of his fortunes may glimmer something like an answer to the great question which I can only word as "What is it all up to?" Yes that is really the one thing we need to know about the universe, nowadays: and our need is heavy and quenchless."[46] Charteris replies, "Thus you affirm that art is an important form of religion; while I have pointed out that religion is one of the loveliest forms of art. Our final difference is, let us say, but one of terms - So let us leave them, then, agreeing simply that art and religion are kindred."[47] And then John Charteris considers what he demands of art in the while that he awaits the eventual arrival of that experience which we call death. "I ask of literature precisely those things of which I feel a lack in my own life." These things include distinction and clarity, beauty and symmetry, and tenderness and truth and urbanity.

> "And it is that which romance affords her postulants. The philtres of romance are brewed

46. Ibid., p. 334.
47. Ibid., p. 339.

to free us from this unsatisfying life that is calendared by fiscal years and to contrive a less disastrous elusion of our own personalties than many seek dispersedly in drink and drugs and lust and fanaticism, and sometimes in death... And romance tricks him, but not to his harm. For, be it remembered, that man alone of all the animals plays the ape to his dreams. Romance it is undoubtedly who whispers to every man that life is not a blind and aimless business, not all a hopeless waste and confusion; and that his existence is a pageant (appreciatively observed by divine spectators), and that he is strong and excellent and wise: and to romance he listens, willing and thrice willing to be cheated by the honeyed fiction. The things of which romance assures him are very far from true; yet it is solely by believing himself a creature but little lower than the cherubim that man has by interminable small degrees become, upon the whole, distinctly superior to the chimpanzee...And all the while man plays the ape to fairer and fairer dreams, and practice strengthens him at mimickry...

To what does the whole business tend?- why, how in heaven's name should I know? We can but be content to note that all goes forward, toward something...It may be that we are nocturnal creatures perturbed by rumours of a dawn which comes inevitably, as prologue to a day wherein we and our children have no part whatever. It may be that when our arboreal propositus descended from his palm tree to walk upright about the earth, his progeny were forthwith committed to a journey in which to-day is only a way-station. Yet I prefer to take it that we are components of an unfinished world, and that we are but as seething atoms which ferment toward its making, if merely because man as he now exists can hardly be the finished product of any creator whom one could very heartily revere. We are being made into something quite unpredictable, I imagine: and through the purging and the smelting, we are sustained by an instinctive knowledge that we are being made into something better. For this we know, quite incommunicably, and yet as surely as we know that we will have it thus.

And it is this will that stirs in us to have the creatures of earth and the affairs of earth, not as they are, but 'as they ought to be', which we call romance. But when we note how visibly it sways all life we perceive that we are talking about God." 48.

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48. Ibid., p. 355 ff.

The period of five years which intervened between the publication of Beyond Life and Straws and Prayer Books saw the works of Mr. Cabell achieve, if not fame, at least notoriety as a result of the suspension of Jurgen at the instigation of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. All Cabell's earlier works were painstakingly revised and republished as a result of the new demand for them by the public. This, however, had no effect whatsoever on the author's philosophy as further elaborated in Straws and Prayer Books of which a brief examination follows.

As has been noted before, the author is trying to explain to himself why, in the light of his contention that life is not especially worth while, he persisted in writing the Biography. The first conclusion drawn by him is that the literary artist "labors primarily to divert himself." And in this aim the artist is at one with all of us who weave fictions concerning our own lives with the aid of that great editor, memory and that creative spirit, human optimism. Their expurgated editions of yesterday and most brilliant romances of tomorrow prevent us from noticing our approach toward death through gray and monotonous corridors. It may be true that lies have short legs, but civilization advances upon them. We are advancing toward death through "gray and monotonous corridors" yet man may find, on the way, various "alcoves" in which to divert himself. The artist, for his diversion plays with common-sense and piety and death.

The treasure house of the world's literature abounds in stories whereby men have travelled in strange lands, real

or compounded of the elements of faerie, and so escaped from the obligations and restraints and, above all, the tediousness, of workaday life. The artists who fashioned these stories made sport with the first of the three adversaries, common-sense. "For common-sense tempts men to be contented with their lot, to get the most from what is theirs, and not to hanker nonsensically after the unattainable. At the elbow of each of us lurks always this enchantress, with luring rhapsodies, more treacherous than ever any siren lilted, in praise of the firm worth of money and conformity. 'Let us be rational,' she whispers; 'and let us remember that, whatever we might prefer, in this world two and two make four.' And with many gaudy enticements does she prompt the unwary to yield homage to her insensate paramour, the doltish and vain idol of mathematics... Thus tirelessly, thus unabashedly, does common-sense urge every man to obtain in this world, such as it is, the permitted uttermost from that life which stays peculiarly his own: and to the wheedling solicitings of common-sense the literary artist can answer but one word. That word is "Bosh!" And having uttered it, the artist proceeds to divert himself by living dozens upon dozens of lives which in nothing resemble the starveling and inadequate existence allotted him by the mere accident of birth."[49]

The literary artist plays with piety by imagining characters who are not bound by the laws which control the actions of men. "Everywhere through the shadowland of legend canter and gallop - with the gleaming eyes of nocturnal creatures, with a multitudinous tossed shining of steel,- 'these squires of the night's body, Diana's foresters, these minions of the moon,'

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49. J. B. Cabell, Straws and Prayer Books, p. 70.

whom the prosaic call thieves and highwaymen: and everywhere men have admired and cherished some cunning strong unconquerable rogue."[50] The one feature common to the great mythic figures"was that each was a divine and unrepentant outcast, that each one of them was a rebel who had gained famousness by warring, in one way or another, against Heaven...Here well might lurk...another more lurid instance of art's need to make sport with piety; here revealed in art's unfaltering endeavor to glorify not merely the rogue but the rebel."[51]

The literary artist plays with death through his part in the development of religious beliefs. Men have been assured that when the door at the far end of the corridor of life opened, all would have been satisfactorily arranged. Men have, out of so many thousand years of speculation, contrived no surer creed than Coignard's creed, that "in matters of faith it is necessary to believe blindly." "Men have discovered no firmer hope than that, in defiance of all logic and of all human experience, something very pleasant may still be impending in... bright lands which are in nothing familiar."[52]

The literary artist attempts to cheat death, too, by lending to his personal notions a life which will survive the life of his body. These notions are compounded of ideas which he personally finds diverting. The case of Joseph Hergesheimer is cited. This artist laboured for fourteen years over the ideas which he personally found diverting in the face of refusal by editors or readers to be equally pleased

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50. Ibid., p. 90.
51. Ibid., p. 113.
52. Ibid., p. 167.

by them. Indeed not one of his works was published during that period.

Whether the literary artist really "believes" in these ideas with which he plays is beside the point. Indeed the ideal of womanhood found in the works of writers is often distinctly "unbelievable" in the usual sense of the term. "The women born of a man's brain bear to their lovers no issue save dissatisfaction. Their ways are lovely, but contentment does not abide in these ways: and he that follows after the women who are born of a man's brain is wounded subtilely with wounds which may not ever be healed."[53.]

Not only does the artist play with the notion of perpetuating his personal notions, but also his own personality...This never occurs as no artist can find diversion in facing the truth about himself. Accordingly he presents a considerably edited version in his works as does Cabell himself in the few places he appears undisguised in the Biography, where he finds that he has enacted one who is rather wiser and more amiable, and rather more clever and more sophisticatedly broadminded and more freakish, than he can on any terms believe himself.

An examination of the fate accorded literary productions of the past and the readers of the present day convinces Cabell that those artists who hope to achieve fame for themselves through their writings are engaging in a lottery where the awards are extremely doubtful and very much chance-guided.

Cabell himself summarizes his deductions after two hundred and eighty odd pages of playing with ideas ranging from legend to literary criticism. "Man lived, for the major part of his

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53. Ibid., p. 234.

conceded time, a meagre and monotonous and unsatisfying existence: this he alleviated by endlessly concocting fictions which bedrugged and diverted him. The artist, and in particular the literary artist, like every person animate, attempted to bedrug and divert primarily himself; which end the literary artist gained, as a rule, by picturing himself as figuring enviably in unfamiliar surroundings, and as making sport with the three martinets that he, in common with all men at bottom, most genuinely abhorred,- that is, with common-sense and piety and death. Moreover, he diverted himself by playing with such human ideas as he found entertaining: and he played, too, with the notion of hoodwinking posterity into accepting and treasuring his highly imaginative portrait of himself. And the outcome of his manifold playing - of that interminable self-diversion which he, quite unsmilingly, called his "work",- was always unpredictable, always chance-guided, and, in any case, was of no benefit or hurt to him by and by, and was never of importance to anybody else. That seemed to be the whole truth about the literary artist.'[54] This seems to be entirely negation but Cabell finds that in the same moment that he had discredited the aim of every valid author, he had found, even there, some interesting ideas to play with.

For there comes to him out of the year 1902, the young man who was the James Branch Cabell of those days and who had just sold three of his first five stories. And this young man asks his advice as to whether or not he should become a regular writer.[55] "To that", writes Cabell, "I gave my customary, sage and carefully considered reply. 'Of course,' I informed him,

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54. Ibid., p. 288.
55. Ibid., p. 290.

'there is a great deal to be said upon both sides.' On asking the boy what he thinks of the elder Cabell's books, the Cabell of 1924 receives the reply that his former self doesn't entirely care for them."Why do you do it, sir?" the boy asked, "You get plenty of pleasure out of life, don't you? and what did you want, anyhow, that you never got?"[56] The writer answers that he does get plenty of pleasure out of life and he does not know what it is that he wanted from life and didn't get. He realizes that, in the boy's eyes, he has been entirely successful in achieving the objects which that boy desires. The lad outlines his ambitions.[57] "I would like to write the very nicest sort of books,- like Henry Harland's and Justin Miles Forman's and Anthony Hope's. They would be about beautiful fine girls and really splendid young men, and everything would come out all right in the end, so they could get married, and not be sort of bitter and smart-alecky and depress people the way.. some people do." And Cabell does not advise him to refrain from being a writer because he knows that the boy will get what he wants from writing although he may not later place so much value on his achievements. But he warns the lad that he will get these things by the process of not ever writing any of the "mush" that he was then planning to write. "From the start," he warns, "will be tugging at your pen a pig-headed imp that will be guiding it his way instead of the way you intended. And with each book he will be growing stronger and more importunate and more cunning and he will be stealing the pen away from you for longer and longer intervals. And by and by

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56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.

that imp, full grown now and the very devil of a taskmaster, will be dictating your books from beginning to end,- not to speak here of his making you sweat blood when you revise, at his orders, all the earlier ones...You will call him the desire to write perfectly of beautiful happenings."[58.]

And the author refrains from advising the boy not to become a writer because his visit has brought home to him the fact that he had, in the end,got what he really wanted. For in spite of the adverse criticism his works had received and the abuse that had been hurled at him by press and public, he had wanted to make the Biography and had made it in the way which seemed good to him. He says,"To do that had been, no doubt, my play and diversion, in the corridors where men must find diversion, whether in trifling with bank notes or women, whether in clutching at straws or prayer books, or else go mad:...it seemed to me, too, that I had somehow fulfilled, without unduly shirking, an obligation which had been laid upon me to make the Biography...The ability and the body and the life which transiently were at my disposal had been really used: with these lent implements which were not very properly speaking mine, and which presently would be taken away from me, I had made something that was actually mine. That something was the Biography...

Here then, upon this shelf, in these brown volumes which make up the Biography, I can lay hand and eye upon just what precisely my life has amounted to: the upshot of my existence is here before me, a tangible and visible and entirely complete summing up, within humiliatingly few inches. And yet, as I consider these inadequate brown volumes, I suspect that the word I am looking for is 'gratitude'. It most certainly is not 'pride':

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58. Ibid., 291.

and, as I hastily admit, nobody else is called on to share in my suspicion.

But I, at least, who have found human living and this world not wholly admirable and who have here and there made formal admission of the fact, feel that in honor one ought to acknowledge all courtesies too. With life, then, I upon the whole, have no personal quarrel: she has mauled, scratched and banged, she has in all ways damaged me: but she has permitted me to do that which I most wanted. So that I must be, I suppose, grateful."[59.]

A brief examination of the underlying premises from which the conclusions of Beyond Life are derived will show that Mr. Cabell's theories are based on material which is already a part of literary history. There are many writers who have considered the vanity of human life. Then, too, the phrase, "as they ought to be", which plays so important a rôle in the book, is ~~written in~~ quoted. Many years have passed since Aristotle noted:- "The poet, being an imitator, like the painter or any other artist of that kind, must necessarily, when he imitates, have in view one of these three objects: he must represen things such as they were or are; or such as they are said to be and believed to be; or such as they should be (ought to be)."[60] He also wrote, "Further, if it be objected to the poet that he has not represented things conformably to truth, he may answer that he has represented them as they should be. This was the answer of Sophocles, that 'he drew mankind such as they should be; Euripides, such as they are.' And this is the proper answer."[61.]

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59. Ibid., p. 293.
60. Poetics, Aristotle, p. 51.
61. Ibid., p. 52.

Sir Philip Sidney, in his Defense of Poesy, makes use of these statements and also foreshadows Mr. Cabell's thesis that mankind "plays the ape to his dreams." Sidney questioned whether nature ever made so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus and discussed the question of a poet's right to deliver forth characters better than those produced by nature. He also wrote, "Which delivering forth, also, is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him."[62.]

It is a far cry from the moral conclusions of the Puritan Sidney to the pronouncements of that clever poseur of the 1890's, Oscar Wilde, but we shall find in the latter's works the germs of many of the statements in Beyond Life. In the dialogue, The Critic as Artist the following statement is made. "It may, indeed, be that life is a chaos; that its martyrdoms are mean and its heroisms ignoble; and that it is the function of literature to create, from the rough material of actual existence, a new world that will be more marvelous, more enduring, and more true than the world that common eyes look upon, and through which common natures seek to realize their perfection."[63.] The same dialogue notes also that "The

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62. Defense of Poesy, Sir Philip Sidney, p. 8.

63. Best Known Works of Wilde, p. 563.

great artists, from Homer to Aeschylus down to Shakespeare and Keats did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale."[64] The Decay of Lying, which concludes that the aim of Art is the telling of beautiful untrue things, condemns realism, speaks of the mask worn by each person in society, and enlarges on the contention that life imitates art. The conclusions of the dialogue as summarized by the chief speaker are as follows:- "Briefly, then, they (the doctrines of the new aesthetics) are these. Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritualistic in an age of faith. So far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that it preserves for us is the history of its own progress. Sometimes it returns upon its footsteps, and revives some antique form, as it happened in the archaistic movement of the late Greek Art, and in the pre-Raphaelite movement of our own day. At other times it entirely anticipates its age, and produces in one century work that it takes another century to understand, to appreciate, and to enjoy. In no case does it reproduce its age. To pass from the art of a time to the time itself is the great mistake that all historians commit.

The second doctrine is this. All bad art comes from returning

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64. Ibid., p. 561.

to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as a part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method, Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. It is, to have the pleasure of quoting myself, exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are so suitable a motive for a tragedy. Besides, it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned. M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? It is out of date. Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life.

The third doctrine is that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy. It is a theory that has never been put forward before, but it is extremely fruitful, and throws an entirely new light upon the

history of Art.

It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also imitates Art. The only effects that she can show us are effects that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings. This is the secret of Nature's charm, as well as the explanation of Nature's weakness.

The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art...."[65.] No reader of the dialogue can fail to observe that many of Mr. Cabell's arguments are somewhat similar.

One of the fundamental points to be considered in an attempt to discover Mr. Cabell's intention as a literary artist is the apparent contradiction of two statements put into the mouth of John Charteris in Beyond Life. The first deals with his conception of the insignificance of the individual, the human race, and of the world they inhabit.[66] This opinion is bound to colour everything a man holding such a view would write, and one is therefore not surprised to find that Charteris "shifted from irony to earnestness, and back again, so irresponsibly that (one was) not always sure of his actual belief". In the face of this point of view it is somewhat surprising to consider the statement which directly follows it in Charteris's monologue, wherein he states his belief that life is a personal transaction between himself and Omnipotence, and somehow of importance.[67]

65.Ibid., p. 619.

66.See above, p. 14 f.

67.See above, p. 15.

Beyond Life is an attempt to reconcile the latter conclusion and other "beliefs" with the former outlook on human life and its unimportance. And this reconciliation is brought about through a consideration of the factors governing human life as the products of demiurgic romance, as dynamic illusions, as dreams wherein man surveys things not as they are, but as they "ought to be". And since man is the only animal who "plays the ape to his dreams" - he continues to advance towards that goal, however slowly, as he "plays the ape to fairer and yet fairer dreams, and practice strengthens him at mimickry..."[68]

So John Charteris discusses these factors as illusions in the light of his fundamental conception. He considers love and marriage, the poetic belief in the witch-woman, literary production, religion, real and doctrinal, gallant preoccupation with mundicidious affairs, "common-sense", "doing what seems expected", and so on, as beneficent fictions by which men live and advance, blinded by a majestic dullness and vanity which ignores the facts outlined in his original analysis. So when Mr. Cabell speaks of romance he does not mean the romance which is sold in books but that spirit, that "will that stirs in us to have the creatures of earth and the affairs of earth, not as they are but 'as they ought to be'",[69] and he adds, not irreverently, "When we note how visibly it sways all life we perceive that we are talking about God."[70] We might then accept Mr. Parrington's definition of Mr. Cabell's idea of romance as "idealism", but his definition of the author's idea of realism as "conventionalism"

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68. Ibid., p. 357.
69. Ibid., p.358
70. Ibid.

is way off the mark.[71] By realism he means that view of life which accepts the rationally educed facts outlined in what we have been considering here as John Charteris's fundamental conception of the unimportance, the pettiness and ineffectuality of human living.

There are two fair questions which may be asked at this point. The first concerns the oft quoted phrase, "things as they ought to be". Precisely what does this phrase mean when applied to the contents of Mr. Cabell's books? He has himself characterized his works as comedies, and this fact should lead us, remembering Aristotle's definition, to inquire whether a presentation of things as Mr. Cabell would have them tends toward the production of "dreams" to which mankind may "play the ape" with profit. This is a question which will be answered after a consideration of the books themselves.

The second question concerns Mr. Cabell's conception of reality. Does the idea of reality necessarily disclude all elements of illusion? Eastern mystics would have us believe that all is illusion. It would appear extremely difficult to establish a definite line of demarcation between the two ideas, and this is so not merely because of our"vanity and dullness" but as a result of the very nature of human existence.

Other conclusions of Beyond Life might be questioned but it must be remembered that the book has been examined in an attempt to discover Mr. Cabell's intention and therefore to provide a basis for an interpretation of his writings.

71.V.L.Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol.3, p.337.

Mr. Cabell has claimed that in order to escape the madness which a contemplation of reality, as he has defined it, would bring about, mankind requires diversion in his journey down the passage with the black door at its nether end. Most critics have used this statement as a justification for classifying Mr. Cabell as an escapist and discourse learnedly concerning "ivory towers", and question superciliously the outcome of the adoption of such principles. This mistaken classification is dealt with in the chapter entitled "Mr. Cabell and The Ivory Tower". The author has pointed out that there is in life the "practical person" as well as the literary artist, each of whom has his own dream or illusion for diversion. The illusion of common-sense induces the practical person to engage in money-making or politics or some one of the other activities which that particular illusion persuades him is of importance. The literary artist, on the other hand, ignores common-sense and often destroys that body which is briefly loaned him with drugs and stimulants, as did Marlowe and Villon, in an effort to find release from inhibitions which obstruct his art. "So it is that the verbal artist and the practical person must always pity each other: and when it comes to deciding which is in reality the wastrel, there seems a great deal to be said for both sides."[72]

Mr. Cabell, being a literary artist, seeks diversion from the contemplation of that terrible "reality" which must be ignored at all costs, in quite other ways than those followed by the "practical" person. His diversion he finds in avoiding

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72. Beyond Life, p. 124.

these "practical" rules for ignoring reality and playing with ideas which intrigue him, in playing with common-sense, and piety, and death. In pursuit of his ideal virtues of "distinction and clarity, of beauty and symmetry, of tenderness and truth and urbanity"[73], he attempts to "write perfectly of beautiful happenings."[74] Much has been written about the prose style used by Mr. Cabell in the furtherance of his aim to write perfectly, but the following passage written by the author himself[75] tells its own story:- "It is my foible, one among a great many, to be a devotee of the niceties, of the overtones, and of the precision of very often re-written and suitably coloured prose. I believe it well for an author to make sport with rhetorical devices, to play with vowel sounds and scansions, to build refrains, to dispose his cadences, to contrast the length of his clauses, to turn amorously to a run of liquids, to carve, as it were, his verbal cherry-stones under a magnifying glass of repeated re-inspection,- and to practice by the score yet other allied legerdemain, all quite seriously. It is but a series of microscopic parlor games, perhaps: but it will entertain him. It will lull him into the pleasure-giving illusion that the writing of prose may be an art - terse, magical, complex, fiery-hearted, and gaudy, at need, with the naïveté of a June sunset,- an art wherein, by and by, toward his later nineties, he may attain competence."

Mr. Cabell has emphasized the fact that the author need

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73. Ibid., p. 17.
74. Straws and Prayer Books, p. 293.
75. Branch Cabell, Special Delivery, p. 103.

not "believe" in the ideas with which he plays, citing the works of Anatole France and Joseph Hergesheimer as examples. "Well! the author of of Mountain Blood and The Lay Anthony is, I consider, as rational as most of us about atoning for his misdeeds or about preserving one's physical chastity: ...and it is equally gratifying to record that the man who wrote The Three Black Pennys and Linda Condon is neither the dazed slave of carnal passion nor of any continual high evaluation of his own physical loveliness. The"ideas" of these novels are not his idols but his playthings."

The black "reality" by which Mr. Cabell is obsessed makes understandable the "troublingly nebulous" creed which controls his writing.[76]

> Imprimis, I play, when all is said, with common-sense and piety, as my fellows appraise these matters, and with death also. I have embarked in a gaming in which to win is not possible: and every sensible person of course thinks this extremely foolish. Yet I know that, for my purpose, the opinions of all other persons are negligible. My own opinions, if indeed I have the patience and the temerity to unearth them, are, as I know also, erroneous; they are unstable: but they remain, none the less, the only reliable guides to my intended goal, diversion...And my rational standards can be adhered to, I consider, with more safety if they are kept concealed.
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> Item, I must find out what are, in reality, my real beliefs: and I must set these forth to the best possible advantage; and I must be zealous, above all, not ever to regard my beliefs quite seriously. Human ideas are of positive worth in that they make fine playthings

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76. Ibid., pp. 42 ff.

for the less obtuse of mankind. That seems to be the ultimate lean value of all human ideas, even of my ideas. I must carefully conceal my knowledge of this humiliating fact.

Item, I must cherish my ideas as I do my children, with a great love commingled with admitted inability to foresee what they may be like to-morrow. For my ideas and my impressions, in the moment that these visit and pass away from the consciousness which is I, from the fragment of consciousness which insecurely lurks inside this skull, are the only realities known to me in the brief while wherein I am, as yet, permitted to play with common-sense and piety and death. I will to enjoy and play with and, it may be, to perpetuate after my flickering from this skull, these true realities: if I succeed in perpetuating them, that is well; if I fail, I shall not at all worry about this failure once I am dead, and I am fairly certain to be dead by and by. At worst, the ability and the body and the life which transiently were at my disposal will have been really used, both to make something and to divert me... And at best, it would be foolhardy not to keep such intentions concealed.

Item, with human life as a whole I have no grave concern, and I am beguiled by no notion of "depicting" it....I have no theory of what we call "life's cause or object; nor can I detect in material existence any general trend. The stars and the continents, the mountains and these flustering hordes of men, every mole-hill and the diligent dancing of gnat-swarms,- all appears to blend in a vagrant and very prettily tinted and generally amusing stream by which I too am swept onward. If but for my dignity's sake, I prefer to conceal my knowledge of this fact.

Item, there is upon me a resistless hunger to escape from use and wont: I seem more utterly resolved than are my fellows, not to be bored: and it is in my endeavour to evade the tediousness of familiar things that I am playing - playing, as I know quite futilely,- with common-sense and piety and death. Such levity tends, it well may be, to no applaudable outcome: meanwhile this playing diverts me...And meanwhile, my fellows being what they are, my amusement is a matter very profitably concealed.

> Item, I really must, in the teeth of all solicitation, refuse to plagiarize anything from what people call "nature" and "real life". My playing, which I term my "art", has no concern with things which, in any case, are too ill-managed to merit imitation. For, still adhering to that simile of the prettily tinted stream, I am persuaded my art need not pretend to be a treatise upon hydrodynamics: my art is well content to be the autobiography of an unvalued straw adrift in this sparkling and babbling stream that hastens toward an unguessable ocean. Let us avoid guesswork, since it is profitless. Let us avoid, too, no reasonable pains to conceal this fact.
>
> Item, let us avoid also the narcotizing perils of reverence,- even for our juniors, who are in all aesthetic matters invariably in the right,- or of being quite as serious about ourselves and our doings in collusion with printers and publishers as if mankind and the books of men were of grave and demonstrable importance. And let us, above all, avoid disastrous candors, and say boldly none of these things. Let us who "write" protest that we have no concealments, that we expose ourselves entire, and that our unselfish aim is to benefit and entertain other persons, the while that we play ceaselessly with commonsense and piety and death.

This"creed", taken by itself, is apt to cause the reader to be mindful of Plato's warning concerning art. Taken in conjunction with the aims expressed in Beyond Life, however, it provides us with a background, a knowledge of which is absolutely essential for an appreciation or interpretation of Mr. Cabell's books. The majority of those critics who have considered the author's work of importance were familiar with that background. One of them, Mr. V. L. Parrington, has paid rather dearly for his interpretation. Many discussions of his critical work in the field of economic determinism contain references similar to the following:- "His aesthetic errors of judgment were many, but time is taking care of them. They are being forgotten.

No one will be harmed by his frantic overpraise of Cabell."[77]

It may be true that "theories are for critics", as Carl and Mar Van Doren claim, and that "the bold and deft-handed genius which invented Poictesme and keeps on peopling it" is the important element in a consideration of Mr. Cabell's work.[78] We cannot, however, appreciate the full meaning of the activities of Manuel and his descendants without a more careful consideration of the author's theories, as expressed in Beyond Life and Straws and Prayer Books, than many critics have seen fit to employ.

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77. Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism, p. 335

78. American and British Literature Since 1890, p. 76.

III.

MR. CABELL'S WORKS.

In Beyond Life three distinct approaches to life have been examined. The Chivalrous, the Gallant, and the Poetic attitudes are noted and defined.

The "cornerstone" of Chivalry has been described as the idea of vicarship, the chivalrous person being, in his own eyes, the child of God who goes about this world as his Father's representative in an alien country.[77] To the chivalrous person his "lady in domnei" was the living, the signal and unflawed symbol of all divine loveliness and perfection.

"The secret of gallantry", Cabell affirms through Charteris, "is to accept the pleasures of life leisurely, and its inconveniences with a shrug; as well as that, among other requisites, the gallant person will always consider the world with a smile of toleration, and his own doings with a smile of honest amusement and heaven with a smile that is not distrustful,- being thoroughly persuaded that God is kindlier than the genteel would regard as rational.[78] The gallant attitude toward womanhood differs markedly from that of the chivalrous person.

The poet "the poetes", the maker, views the practical life as futile body wasting and strives to make something more permanent in the hope that the dream once written down, once snared with comely and fit words may be perpetuated. And the successful poet realizes that "love must look toward something not quite understood", and so remains enamoured of the witch-woman."

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77. See above, p. 14.

78. See above, p. 19.

We shall find one or another of these varying attitudes adopted by the main characters in the several chapters of the "Biography", wherein each approach has been considered from several standpoints. Whether or not the author only succeeds in presenting James Branch Cabell in different costumes, as some critics say,[79] is irrelevant. He himself has said, as we have noted, that his art is "well content to be the autobiography of an unvalued straw adrift in this sparkling and babbling stream that hastens toward an unguessable ocean." He has been accused of didacticism,[80] but any reader of his "creed" as outlined in Straws and Prayer Books will smile at the critic who seriously attempts to formulate the imagined curriculum which Cabell presents for study. He has been discussed as a philosophic writer,[81] but can hardly be classed as a "lover" of wisdom when the utmost he has been able to retain through a rational approach toward wisdom is that appalling conception of "reality" from which he turns with horror and attempts to divert himself by playing with ideas, with common-sense and piety and death.

In the following pages the various books of the Biography will be considered neither in the chronological order of their composition nor in the order in which they have been placed as chapters in the life of Manuel and his descendants. Instead they will be divided into three groups each dealing with one of the solutions of life discussed in Beyond Life, the Chivalrous, the Gallant and the Poetic attitudes.

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79. e.g. Ed. John Farrar, The Literary Spotlight, p. 183 ff.
80. Horace Livewright, American Writers on American Literature, pp. 498,49
81. Fred L. Pattee, New American Literature, p. 354.

A. THE CHIVALROUS ATTITUDE.

In Figures of Earth and The Silver Stallion the career of Manuel the Redeemer, Count of Poictesme, is presented to Mr. Cabell's readers. The writer himself maintains that it is difficult to know whether or not Manuel may be classed among those who adopted the chivalrous attitude. "Yet Manuel himself, I would have you note remains an enigma. I find, throughout the two volumes which deal with the Redeemer of Poictesme, merely what other people saw and thought of this man who - living among chivalrous conditions,- appeared to some persons most brilliantly to exemplify the theory of divine vicarship, and yet to other persons seemed to be the creation of his fellows' stupidity;I take no sides--"[82].

We meet Manuel tending swine by the pool of Haranton. He is summoned to a quest wherein he finds himself accompanied by Niafer;and the two of them fight their way through the dreams sent to oppose them by Miramon Lluagor, lord of the nine sleeps and the seven madnesses. The quest is accomplished quite otherwise than originally planned and Manuel marries Niafer whom he later surrenders to Grandfather Death rather than accompany the old gentleman himself. Then begins a series of great adventures. Armed with a feather obtained from the poultry yard to replace a magic feather, from the Robe of Apsarasas, which Manuel had found and which had been destroyed, he goes a'travelling to follow his own thinking and his own desires, to see the ends of the world and to judge them. He remains mindful of the 'geas' which his mother laid upon him to make a fine figure

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82. The Line of Love, P. X.

in the world and continues his dabbling with clay, making images. By the might of his quite ordinary feather he brings wisdom to a stupid king, Helmas, because a legend foretold that a young man bearing a feather would bring such wisdom to the king. And Manuel was puzzled "to see a foolish person made wise in all his deeds and speeches by this wisdom being expected of him."[83] Similarly he brings holiness to wicked King Ferdinand who makes him Count of Poictesme. Manuel changes the motto of Poictesme from "Mundus decipit," to "Mundus vult decipi." Love too is brought to Manuel through the might of another quite worthless feather when it brings him Alianora, possessor of the original robe of the Apsarasas. Eventually Alianora leaves him to become queen of England and Manuel seeks to bring to life one of the figures of earth which he has made. In the course of his attempt he encounters the Zhar-Ptitza bird who is the oldest and wisest of birds but who has learned nothing assuredly except that appearances have to be kept up. Manuel denies the truth of the Zhar-Ptitza bird's saying, but receives the reply, "So it may seem to you now, my lad, but time is a transforming fairy. Therefore do you wait until you are older and you will know better than to doubt my cry or to repeat it."[84] Through the wisdom of Helmas he captures Freydis the Fire Queen from her kingdom of Audela beyond the fire who gives life to Manuel's figure. He is somewhat disappointed. "But as I now perceive too late, I fashioned the legs of this figure unevenly and the joy I have

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83. Figures of Earth, p. 51.
84. Ibid., p. 80.

in its life is less than the shame I take from its limping." (The name of the image is Sesphra (Phrases) and the disappointment of Manuel has probably been shared by all creative writers.)

Manuel dwells with Misery a month and a day, each day being in reality a year and his reward is that Niafer is returned to him. While attending Misery he has the following conversation which might be described as religious.

> Manuel:- "I cannot but wonder why the world of men should thus be given over to Misery if Koschei the Deathless, who made things as they are, has any care for men."
>
> Misery:- "Probably the cows and sheep and chickens in your barnyards, and the partridges and rabbits in your snares, and even the gaping fish upon your hook, find time to wonder in the same way about you, Dom Manuel."
>
> "Ah, but man is the higher form of life-"
>
> "Granting that remarkable assumption, and is any man above Misery? So you see it is logical I should feed on you."
>
> "Still I believe that the Misery of earth was devised as a trial and a testing to fit us for some noble and eternal life hereafter."
>
> "Why in this world should you think that?"
>
> "Because I have an immortal spirit, sir, and--"
>
> "Dear me, but all this is very remarkable. Where is it, Manuel?"
>
> "It is inside me somewhere, sir."
>
> "Come, then, let us have it out, for I am curious to see it."
>
> "No, it cannot get out exactly, sir, until I am dead."
>
> "But what use will it be to you then?" said Misery, "and how can you, who have not ever been dead, be certain as to what happens when one is dead?"
>
> "Well I have always heard so, sir."
>
> "Now from whom of the Leshy, I wonder, can you have been hearing such fantastic stories? I am afraid someone has been making fun of you, Manuel."
>
> "Oh no, sir, this is a tenet held by the wisest and most admirable of men."

"I see, it was some other man who told you all these drolleries about the eternal importance of mankind. I see: and again, you may notice that the cows and the sheep and the chickens, also, resent extinction strenuously."

"But these are creatures of the earth, sir, whereas there is about at any rate some persons a whiff of divinity. Come now, do you not find it so?"

"Yes, Manuel, most young people have in them a spark which is divine, but it is living that snuffs this out of all of you, by and large, without bothering Grandfather Death to unpeel spirits like bananas. No, the most of you go with very little spirit, if any, into the grave, and assuredly with not enough spirit to last you forever. No, Manuel, I never quarrel with religion, because it is almost the strongest ally I have, but these religious notions rather disgust me sometimes, for if men were immortal then Misery would be immortal, and I could never survive that."

"Now you are talking nonsense," said Manuel stoutly, "and of all sorts of nonsense cynical nonsense is the worst."

"By no means," replied Misery, "since plainly, it is far worse nonsense to assert that Omnipotence would insanely elect to pass eternity with you humans. No, Manuel, I am afraid that your queer theory about your being stuffed inside with permanent material, and so on, does not very plausibly account for either your existence or mine, and that we both stay riddles without answers."

"Still sir," said Manuel, "insomuch as there is one thing only which death's ravishings have never taken from life, and that thing is the Misery of earth--"

"Your premise is indisputable, but what do you deduce from this?"

Manuel smiled slowly and sleepily. "I deduce, sir, that you also, who have not ever been dead, cannot possibly be certain as to what happens when one is dead. And so I shall stick to my own opinion about the life to come."

"But your opinion is absurd, on the face of it."

"That may very well be, sir, but it is much more comfortable to live with than your opinion, and living is my occupation just now. Dying I shall attend to in its due turn, and of the two, my opinion is the more pleasant to die with. Thereafter, if your opinion be right, I shall never even know that my opinion was wrong: so that I have everything to gain in the way of pleasurable anticipations anyhow, and I have

> nothing whatever to lose by clinging to the foolish fond old faith which my fathers had before me," said Manuel as steadily as ever.
>
> "Yes, but how in the world--?"
>
> "Ah sir, in this world men are nourished by their beliefs; and it may well be that yonder also, their sustenance is the same." [85].

As a reward for his service to Misery, Niafer is returned to Manuel but Misery warns him their association has not entirely been terminated.

> "I shall return to you in the appearance of a light formless cloud, and I shall rise about you, not suddenly but a little by a little. So shall you see through me the woman for love of whom your living was once made high-hearted and fearless, and for whose sake death was derided, and paradise was ransacked: and you will ask forlornly, 'Was it for this?' Throughout the orderly, busied, unimportant hours that stretch between your dressing for the day and your undressing for the night, you will be asking this question secretly in your heart, while I pass everywhither with you in the appearance of a light formless cloud, and whisper to you secretly."
>
> "And what will you whisper to me?"
>
> "Not anything which you will care to repeat to anybody anywhere. Oh, you will be able to endure it, and you will be content, as human contentment goes, and my triumph will not be public. But, none the less, I shall have overthrown my present conqueror, and I shall have brought low the love which terror and death did not affright, and which the laws of earth could not control: and I whom some call Beda, and others Kruchina, will very terribly attest that the ghost of outlived and conquered misery is common-sense." 86.

Manuel marries Niafer and they have dealings with the stork in Philistia where children are procured in that fashion. He is summoned by Alianora to England and later meets Freydis once again with the result that the stork's gifts are somewhat distributed.

Miramon Lluagor discovers in Manuel's parentage and adventures various factors similar to those which distinguished

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85. Ibid., pp. 145 ff.
86. Ibid., p. 152.

the beginnings of Mithras and Huitzilopochtli and of Tammouz, and of Heracles, and Gautama, and Dionysos and Krishna and all other reputable redeemers. So Manuel conformed to a certain ritual wherein he suffered and spent three days underground arising on the third day. In order to help Manuel conquer his own fief, Poictesme, Miramon calls from the past ten ancient gods. He addresses them thus, "Such as remember deride you saying: 'The brawling old lords that our grandfathers honoured have perished, if they indeed were ever more than some curious notions bred of our grandfathers' questing, that looked to find God in each rainstorm coming to nourish their barley, and God in the heat-bringing sun, and God in the earth which gave life. Even so was each hour of their living touched with odd notions of God and with lunacies as to God's kindness. We are more sensible people, for we understand all about the freaks of the wind and the weather, and find them in no way astounding. As for whatever gods may exist, they are civil, in that they let us alone in their lifetime, and so we return their politeness, knowing that what we are doing on earth is important enough to need undivided attention.'"[87.]

Don Manuel advances in age and in the esteem of his people, for he wins to control of Poictesme and is successful in his warring with surrounding enemies. With his wife and children he seems content enough, though he often wonders, in his association with this woman who is his wife, what has become of the Niafer whom he once loved. Finally one day he looks through a window in the room of Ageus(Usage) and sees

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87. Ibid., p. 229.

nothing through it but a sweet-scented mist. He comes eventually to reflect in this wise:

> "Certainly, I think there is no escape for me upon this side of the window of Ageus. A bond was put upon me to make a figure in this world, and I discharged that obligation. Then came another and yet another obligation to be discharged. And now has come upon me a geas which is not to be lifted either by toils or by miracles. It is the geas which is laid upon every person, and the life of every man is as my life, with no moments free from some bond or other. Heh, youth vaunts windily, but in the end nobody can follow after his own thinking and his own desire. At every turn he is confronted by that which is expected, and obligation follows obligation, and in the long run no champion can be stronger than everybody. So we succumb to this world's terrible unreason, willy-nilly, and Helmas has been made wise, and Ferdinand has been made saintly, and I have been made successful, by that which was expected of us, and by that which none of us had ever any real chance to resist in a world wherein all men are nourished by their beliefs." 88.

Manuel adventures through the window of Ageus for the sake of his daughter Melicent who is threatened by the influences inhabiting the sweet-scented misty land beyond. He puts to death that Suskind whom he had loved of old time and who possibly symbolizes that first dream of youth which looks at life with a point of view that is not to be found on this side of the window of Ageus. Then Grandfather Death comes to take him on a journey, and Manuel accompanies him not too unwillingly. And as they ride along Manuel says,

> "Yet, looking back - now that this famed Count of Poictesme means less to me,- why, I seem to see only the strivings of an ape reft of his tail, and grown rusty at climbing, who has reeled blunderingly from mystery to mystery, with pathetic makeshifts, not understanding anything, greedy in all desires, and always honeycombed with poltroonery.

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88. Ibid., p. 268.

> So in a secret place his youth was put away in exchange for a prize that was barely worth the having; and the fine geas which his mother laid upon him was exchanged for the common geas of what seems expected." 89.

Grandfather Death alludes to the notions which Manuel had once held. "Such notions are entertained by many of you humans in the light-headed time of youth. Then common-sense arises like a light formless cloud about your goings and you half forget these notions. Then I bring darkness." 90. Grandfather Death returns Manuel once more to the pool of Haranton where all his adventuring started, and the book ends as it began.

The Silver Stallion relates the growth of the legends concerning Manuel, but "the hero of The Silver Stallion is no person but an idea; an idea presented at the moment of its conception, and thence passing through its infancy and its little regarded youth---to come gradually to full growth and vigour; until at the end of the book this idea which stays always the book's hero, is, dismissed to live happily ever afterward in the mind of Donander Veratyr. I mean, of course, the idea that Manuel, who was yesterday the physical Redeemer of Poictesme will by and by return as his people's spiritual Redeemer." 91. Many redeemers are mentioned by the author who notes that "each in his day and within a howsoever limited circle of adherents, awakened that sustaining faith which appears vitally necessary to men's contentment, in the legend

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89. Ibid.,p.287.
90. Ibid., p.288.
91. The Silver Stallion, p. XIII.

of the all powerful Redeemer who will come again to-morrow--- The theme of this book then is how that legend came to attach itself to Dom Manuel; how in particular, that legend afterwards affected, or did not affect, those persons who had known Dom Manuel almost intimately; and how in the end nobody believed in it any longer except Donander Veratyr. But Donander Veratyr was God."[92.]

Manuel had been seen riding away with Grandfather Death by a young lad, Jurgen, who subsequently told a much-embroidered tale which was one of the factors in the growth of the Redeemer legend. The ten champions who were Manuel's followers resolved to ride in search of him and their directions were assigned by Horvendile.

Gonfal of Naimes rides to the south. He does not find Manuel but discovers love and meets his death. His attitude is poetic rather than chivalrous for he had learned through Manuel the worthlessness of power and wisdom and so sought for beauty.

Miramon Lluagor, the maker of dreams, dwells in the north. His wife criticizes the type of dreams he sends among mankind. She feels that they ought to make the dreamers think that the world is a pretty good place after all, but Miramon defends himself by saying that he is not sure that it is. Subsequently he is faced with the choice of saving his own life and his art or saving his wife and he chooses the latter alternative.

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92. Ibid., p. XVI.

The adventure of Coth of the Rocks is the most important from the point of view of the theme of the book. He has no patience with the legend that has been built up around Manuel through the influence of Niafer and Holy Holmendis. He hopes to find the bluff, rough, wholly human champion whom he knew in the flesh. He eventually succeeds in speaking with Manuel in the mirror of the god Yaotl. He wants Manuel to return but receives the following reply,

> "Coth, I repeat to you, the others are wise. I have gone, forever. But another Manuel abides in Poictesme, and he is nourished by these fictions. Yearly he grows in stature, this Manuel who redeemed Poictesme from the harsh Northmen's oppression and lewd savagery. Already this Manuel the Redeemer has become a most notable hero, without fear or guile or any other blemish!, and with each generation he will increase in virtue. It is this dear Redeemer whom Poictesme will love and emulate: men will be braver because this Manuel was so very brave; and men, in one or another moment of temptation, will refrain from folly because his wisdom was so well rewarded; and at least now and then, a few men will refrain from baseness too, because all his living was stainless." 93.

And Manuel refuses to come back, "for Poictesme has now, as every land must have, its faith and its legend, to lead men more nobly and valorously than ever any living man may do. I, who was strong, had not the strength to beget this legend: but it has been created, Coth, it has been created by the folly of a woman and the wild babble of a frightened child; and it will endure." 94. Coth remonstrated, "But, Master, we are men of this world, a world made of dirt. Oh, my dear

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93. Ibid., p. 108.
94. Ibid., p. 109.

Master, we pick our way about that dirt as best we can! The results need surprise nobody. The results are often in a pathetic fashion, very admirable. Should this truth be disregarded for a vain-glorious dream?"[95.]

Manuel answers, "The dream is better. For man of all the animals plays the ape to his dreams."

Coth concludes that he has been foolish to follow after the truth across this windy planet upon which every person is nourished by one or another lie. His mind tells him that creeds mean very little. "The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds and the pessimist fears this to be true. So I elect for neither label."[96.] He returns disappointed to his castles and settles down to comfortable living, to fat ease and high thinking, though he would have preferred the truth. He observes the life of the people around him. "This damnable new generation was, because of its insane aspiring, happier than its fathers had been under the reign of candour and common-sense. This moon-struck legend of Manuel was bringing, not, to be sure, any omnipresent and unendurable perfection, but an undeniable increase of tranquility and contentment to all Poictesme.

Coth saw that too.

He remembered what his true liege-lord had said to him in the Place of the Dead: and Coth admitted that, say what you might as to the Manuel who had really lived, the squinting rascal did as a rule know what he was talking about."[97.]

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95. Ibid.
96. Ibid., p. 111.
97. Ibid., p. 124.

So Coth grows old and dies in bewilderment.

Guivric the Sage journeys to the East and during the course of his adventuring he comes upon a naked mitred man whom he asks what man should believe. Immediately "upon the arms and upon the chest and upon the belly, and everywhere upon the naked body of the mitred man, opened red and precise-looking mouths, and each mouth answered Guivric's question differently, and in the while that they all spoke together no one of these answers was clear. The utmost which Guivric could distinguish in the confusion was some piping babblement about Manuel the Redeemer. Then the mouths ended their speaking, and closed, and became invisible."[98]

Guivric does not know which mouth to put faith in but is told, "that does not matter at all, my son, you have but to believe in whatsoever divine revealment you prefer." The bewildered champion feels that each mouth answers with equal authority and he can hear none of them.[99]

Kerin of Nointel seeks truth at the bottom of the well of Ogde into which his wife pushed him. He reads for years and years in all the books written by men which he finds there. And all the while he reads a gander sings to him. And the gander's refrain ran something like this, "Nothing in the universe is of importance, or is authentic in any serious sense, except the illusions of romance. For man alone of animals plays the ape to his dreams."[100]

After many years Kerin returns to his wife with the

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98. Ibid., p. 158.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid., p. 200.

following report, "No man I find, has ever known to what purpose life was given him, nor what ends he may help or hinder in any of his flounderings about earth and water."

And his wife Seraide gives him the results of her experiences in life which he has been reading about.

> "Life is a pageant that passes very quickly, going hastily from one darkness to another darkness with only ignes fatui to guide, and there is no sense in it. I learned that, Kerin, without moiling over books. But life is a fine ardent spectacle; and I have loved the actors in it: and I have loved their youth and their high-heartedness, and their ungrounded faiths, and their queer dreams, my Kerin, about their own importance and about the greatness of the destiny that awaited them... Well, I say now that I have loved too utterly these irrational fine things to have the heart, even now, to disbelieve in them, entirely: and I am content." 101.

Ninzian who works with Niafer and Holy Holmendis in the development of the redeemer legend is discovered to be an agent of Lucifer.

Donander Veratyr was killed in a fight with a pagan and taken by mistake to the pagan paradise. There he amused himself by making worlds and so it came about that he was the creator of earth. And though the legend of Manuel eventually died out on earth, and earth became a dead planet, yet did the legend of Manuel live eternally in the mind of Donander Veratyr who created Earth.

The stories of Holden and Anavalt are to be found in Straws and Prayer Books, and their experiences in the Delta of Radegonde and with the thin Queen of Elfhame respectively

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101. Ibid., p. 203.

do not concern the Manuel legend.

The story ends at the empty tomb of the Redeemer with the reflections of that same Jurgen who as a boy had helped to create the faith in Manuel. The legend had grown, had experienced change and differences of interpretation, but it had been a good influence on the generation which believed in it whether or not all persons could concede its truth.

In Chivalry and in Domnei the perpetuated life of Manuel is concerned with the two main tenets of the chivalrous attitude - with the notion of one's direct responsibility to a divine Father and with woman-worship. Chivalry contains the story of moments in the lives of ten queens and of the men to whom they represented all that was worthwhile in a world wherein one's lady in domnei was the reflection of Heaven's goodness. The ten stories relate of moments in which Destiny has thrust her sceptre into the hands of a human being with the injunction, "Now prove thyself!" and Chance appends: "Now prove thyself to be at bottom a god or else a beast, and now eternally abide that choice."[102]

So Osmund Heleigh goes, frightened yet grateful, to his death for the sake of Alianora, and Lady Ellinor gives up the Prince de Gatinais for Sire Edward. Edward the First of England relinquishes Guienne for love of Meregrett. Queen Ysabeau approves the alternative chosen by Gregory Darrel who gives up a kingdom for love of Rosamund. (In this "Story of the Choices" written early in Mr. Cabell's career we may find the keystone

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102. Chivalry, p. 5.

of one of the arches in the completed structure of his theories concerning the illusions of romance. Gregory says, "And what is this man, this Gregory Darrel, that his welfare be considered? an ape who chatters to himself of kinship with the archangels while filthily he digs for groundnuts! This much I know, at bottom, durst I but be honest.

Yet more clearly do I perceive that this man, like all his fellows is a maimed god...He is under penalty condemned to compute eternity with false weights and to estimate infinity with a yardstick: and he very often does it...

There lies the choice which every man must make - or rationally, as his reason goes, to accept his own limitations..? or stupendously to play the fool and swear even to himself (while his own judgment shrieks and proves a flat denial) that he is at will omnipotent?"[103.]

These words preface the chapter "Which Deals With the Demiurge" in Beyond Life.[104.])

The love of John Copeland for Philippa brings about a happy ending. Edward Maudelaine gives up a kingdom for Anne who also makes a sacrifice. More lately that same Edward Maudelaine dies valiantly in his brother's stead. Richard, thus saved, gives up a kingdom in his turn for love of Branwen of Wales. Jehane makes a similar sacrifice for Antoine Riczi and the love business of Henry of England and Katharine of Valois likewise involves a kingdom.

Throughout the book the actions described are those

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103. Ibid., p. 93.
104. Beyond Life, p. 21.

of which the preface spoke, actions wherein the player has usurped the place of Destiny. But the motivating force behind the sacrifices and magnanimous doings is high hearted chivalrous love. When that Richard who was supposed to have been killed in prison discoursed to Owain Glyndwyr of the vanity of human living he was told, "You are as yet the empty scabbard, powerless alike for help or hurt. Ey, hate or love must be the sword, sire, that informs us here, and then, if only for a little while, we are as gods."[105] And these ten queens and their lovers found it so.

Domnei, as has been mentioned, deals with woman worship. It tells ofthe great love between Perion and Melicent, Manuel's daughter, which endured through many years of suffering and separation. Perhaps, however, the most important character in the story is Demetrios who also loved Melicent in his own fashion, though he could not understand the love that existed between Melicent and Perion. On his death bed Demetrios says, "Eh, Melicent, I still consider you and Perion fools. We have a not intolerable world to live in, and common-sense demands we make the most of every tit-bit this world affords.

I do not understand this mania; I would I might have known it none the less. Always I envied you more than I loved you. Always my desire was less to win the love of Melicent than to love Melicent as Melicent loved Perion."[106]

In an epilogue, Baalzebub is talking with a wise old king. "There may be other persons who can inform you why such blatant

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105. Chivalry, p. 158.
106. Domnei, p. 220.

folly should thus be the master-word of all common-sense, but for my own part I confess to ignorance.'

'Nay, that folly, as you term it, is alike the riddle and the master-word of the universe,' the old king replies."[107.] The author appends, "And Nicholas whole-heartedly believed that this was true. We do not believe this, quite, but it may be that we are none the happier for our dubiety."[108.]

The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck deals with the chivalrous attitude in modern conditions, with Col. Rudolph Musgrave and his life in the Virginia of the late nineteenth century. The subtitle, A Comedy of Limitations, sounds the keynote of the story, for to Col. Musgrave, "all his well-meant actions appeared to him, for a self-conceded child of God, a bit self-consciously inadequate." The author contends that Rudolph remained true to his lady in domnei, Anne Charteris, despite the ending of the book which may induce the reader to believe otherwise.

At this point may be mentioned that James Branch Cabell has not represented any of the above mentioned books as coming directly from his own mind. For literary purposes he has pretended that the older stories are translations from the works of Nicholas de Caen or other invented authorities and that The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck is an edited manuscript composed by Charles Fentnor Harrowby. This will be found true of nearly all of the books of the Biography and one supposes that this is the case because the author, believing that the ultimate lean value of all human ideas is that they are of positive worth only in that

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107. Ibid., p. 235.
108. Ibid.

they make fine playthings, does not want to be suspected of seriously regarding any of the ideas with which he plays.

After reading these stories one concludes that Mr. Cabell's own reaction to the chivalrous attitude may be summed up in the words of one of his characters. Jurgen had spent some time in Glathion where chivalry was regnant and, as he left, he mused thusly:"

> "No one of my honest opinions, in fact, is adapted to further my popularity in Glathion, because I am a monstrous clever fellow who does justice to things as they are. Therefore I must remember always, in justice to myself, that I very probably hold traffic with madmen. Yet Rome was a fine town and it was geese who saved it. These people may be right; and certainly I cannot go so far as to say they are wrong: but still, at the same time -! Yes, that is how I feel about it."...
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> And all the while he fretted because he could just dimly perceive that ideal which was served in Glathion, and the beauty of that ideal, but could not possibly believe in it. [109]

B. THE GALLANT ATTITUDE.

The much discussed book Jurgen introduces gallantry upon the scene. It is generally attested to be the best of Mr. Cabell's books. The author has ironically expressed some irritation at having been considered "the author of Jurgen and some other books," [110] but most readers will conclude that his attitude toward life is most completely summed up in Jurgen. Considering the Biography as a whole one looks back at the conclusion of "The Silver Stallion, at the latter part of

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109. Jurgen, p. 98.
110. Straws and Prayer Books, p. 4.

Something about Eve, at The Cream of the Jest, and at selected passages from the other books as significant, but Jurgen remains outstanding.

The chivalrous attitude is analyzed in it. Jurgen's poetic vision of Helen prevents us from quite conceding that his approach to life is entirely gallant until his renunciation at the end of the book when he returns to that common-sense middle way of life bereft of faith, desire and vision, yet gallantly attempting to convince himself, with a shrug, that not any of the events described in the book really took place. The following summary outlines his adventures and the conclusions derived therefrom.

Jurgen, an aging and respectable pawnbroker in the land of Poictesme, has occasion to rebuke a fellow countryman for speaking unkindly of the devil. As a reward Koschei, who made things as they are, spirits away Jurgen's disagreeable wife, Liza. When the ghost of Liza is seen walking on Morven, Jurgen decides to do the manly thing and see if he can get her back and so begins a series of amazing adventures. He is conveyed by the centaur Nessus to the Garden between Dawn and Sunrise where he meets the girl he once loved as Dorothy Desirée, daughter of Count Emmerick. Mother Sereda gives back to Jurgen one of the Wednesdays out of his lost youth and he uses it without much success. However, he finds that he emerges from the adventure still a young man in appearance and powers if not in actuality. A resumption of his search for Liza leads him eventually to the city of Glathion where he enjoys the love of that Guinevere who is the personification of that faith in God and belief in man's vicarship which is summed up in the ideal

of Chivalry. When Guinevere is taken away for her marriage with Arthur, Jurgen turns his back upon Glathion with the words which have been quoted above:[111] "These people may be right; and I certainly cannot go so far as to say they are wrong: but still, at the same time--! Yes, that is how I feel about it."

His monstrous cleverness and attempts to do justice to things as they are make it impossible for Jurgen to accept unquestionably the tenets of that faith which controls the thoughts and actions of the people of Glathion. Yet he is not happy as he leaves, for he is vaguely conscious of that ideal which was served in Glathion and the beauty of that ideal. His inability to believe disturbs him but he shrugs off this feeling and looks about for further fields to conquer.

So Jurgen continues his adventures. In their course he meets a brown man who shows him certain mysteries the nature of which we are left to guess...Jurgen is frightened but surprises the brown man with the following typical commentary, typical of Jurgen and typical of humanity in the face of many mysteries: "None the less, I think there is something in me which will endure. I am fettered by cowardice, I am enfeebled by disastrous memories; and I am maimed by old follies. Still, I seem to detect in myself something which is permanent and rather fine. Underneath everything, and in spite of everything, I really do seem to detect that something. What rôle that something is to enact after the death of my body, and upon what stage, I cannot guess. When fortune knocks I shall open the door. Meanwhile

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111. See above, page 70.

I tell you candidly, you brown man, there is something in Jurgen too admirable for any intelligent arbiter ever to fling into the dustheap. I am, if nothing else, a monstrous clever fellow: and I think I shall endure, somehow. Yes, cap in hand goes through the land, as the saying is: and I believe I can contrive some trick to cheat oblivion when the need arises," says Jurgen trembling and gulping, and with his eyes shut tight, but even so, with his mind quite made up about it."[112.]

Jurgen enjoys the love of Anaitis, personification of fleshly desire, whose creed is:- "All men that live have but a little while to live and none knows his fate thereafter. So a man possesses nothing certainly save a brief loan of his own body; and yet the body of a man is capable of much curious pleasure."[113.] But Jurgen eventually decides that life in Cocaigne does not entirely suit him. "Yes, I feel that something is expected of me," says Jurgen: "and without knowing what it is, I am tolerably sure, somehow, that it is not an indulgence in endless pleasure. Besides, I do not think that death is going to end all for me...As it is, plain reasoning assures me I am not indispensable to the universe: but with this reasoning, somehow, does not travel my belief."

"For the pleasures of Cocaigne do not satisfy me... and gallantly to make the most of life is not enough. No, it is something else that I desire."[114.]

So Jurgen sojourns awhile in the country of Pseudopolis where he marries a little hamadryad. While there he comes once

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112. Ibid., p. 135.
113. Ibid., p. 145.
114. Ibid., p. 167.

more into the presence of the vision inspired by the Dorothy he had loved but he is wise enough not to attempt possession of her beauty lest he be disappointed. The war between Pseudopolous and Philistia produces satirical comment on the attitude of the Philistines toward art matters. The real attack on the book Jurgen is symbolically and ironically presented here. The Philistines bearing the standards of their Gods, Ageus (Usage), Sesphra (Phrases), and Vel-Tyno ("continual slight novelty"), overcome the cohorts of Pseudopolis. Jurgen listens to the views of the Tumble-bug who represents Philistia's readers and critics. "He saw that the tumble-bug was malodorous, certainly, but at bottom honest and well meaning; and this seemed to Jurgen the saddest thing he had found among the Philistines. For the tumble-bug was sincere in his insane doings, and all Philistia honored him sincerely, so that there was nowhere any hope for this people."[115]

So Jurgen is banished to the hell of his fathers which he finds to have been created by Koschei because of the persistent demands of humans who believed implicitly in such a place. He lives quite pleasantly there as the husband of a vampire in the "enlightened democracy"under which hell is governed. Becoming restless once again, he tricks his way into heaven in the guise of a Pope and finds that heaven is a notion of his own grandmother brought into being by Koschei at the old lady's insistence. Here Jurgen confronts the God of his grandmother. "I fear You", Jurgen said, at last, "and, yes, I love you: and yet I cannot believe. Why could You not let me believe, where so many believed? Or else, why could You not let me deride,

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115. Ibid., p. 241.

as the remainder derided so noisily? O, God, why could You not let me have faith? for you, You gave me no faith in anything, not even in nothingness. It was not fair."[116]

And Jurgen ascends even to the throne of the God of his grandmother, and sitting thus terribly enthroned, the heart of Jurgen was as lead within him, and he felt very old and very tired. "For I do not know. Oh, nothing can help me, for I do not know what thing it is that I desire! And this book, and this sceptre, and this throne avail me nothing at all, and nothing can ever avail me: for I am Jurgen who seeks he knows not what."[117]

And finally Jurgen comes once again to Mother Sereda who is also known as Aesred and by many other names as well and who symbolizes that middle way of life that bleaches the colour out of all things, including dreams. And Jurgen talks with Mother Sereda. "It may be that I am vain, but it is certain that I am clever. And even more certain is the fact that I am weary. For, look you, in the tinsel of my borrowed youth I have gone romancing through the world: and into lands unvisited by other men have I ventured, playing at spillikins with women and gear and with the welfare of kingdoms; and into Hell have I fallen, and into Heaven have I climbed, and into the place of the Lord God Himself I have ascended; and nowhere have I found what I desired. Nor do I know what my desire is even now. But I know that it is not possible for me to become young again, whatever I may appear to others."[118]

The following dialogue takes place between Jurgen and

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116. Ibid., p. 298.
117. Ibid., p. 306.
118. Ibid., p. 215 f.

Mother Sereda:-

"It may be that there is no meaning anywhere. Could you face that interpretation, Jurgen?

"No," said Jurgen: "I have faced god and devil, but that I will not face."

"No more would I who have so many names face that. You jested with me, so I jest with you. Probably Koschei jests with all of us. And he, no doubt,- even Koschei who made things as they are,- is in turn the butt of some yet larger jest."

"He may be, certainly," said Jurgen, "still, on the other hand-"

"About these matters I do not know. How should I. But I think that all of us take part in a moving and a shifting and a reasoned using of the things that are Koschei's, a using such as we do not comprehend, and are not fit to comprehend."

"That is possible," said Jurgen, "but none the less-"

"It is a chess-board whereon the pieces move diversely: the knight leaping sidewise, the bishops darting obliquely, and the rooks charging straight-forward, and the pawns laboriously hobbling from square to square, each at the player's will. there is no discernible order, all to the on-looker is manifestly in confusion: but to the player there is everywhere a plan in the moving, and in each advancement and sacrifice of these pieces."

"I do not deny it: still you must grant-"

"And I think it is as though each one of these pieces, even the pawns, had each a chess-board of his own which moves as he is moved, and whereupon he moves the pieces to suit his will, in the very moment wherein he himself is moved willy-nilly."

"You may be right, but even so-"

"And Koschei who directs this infinite moving of puppets may well be the futile harried king in some yet larger game.

"Now, certainly, I cannot contradict you: but, at the same time-"

"So goes this criss-cross multitudinous moving as far as thought can reach: and beyond that the moving goes. All moves. All moves uncomprehendingly, and to the sound of laughter. For all moves in consonance with a higher power that understands the meaning of every movement. And each moves the pieces that are before him in consonance with his own taste. So the game is endless and ruthless: and there is merriment overhead - but is very far away."

"Nobody is more willing to concede that these are handsome fancies, Mother Sereda. But

> they make my head ache. Morever, two people are needed to play chess, and your hypothesis does not provide anybody with an antagonist. Lastly, and above all, how do I know there is a word of truth in your high-sounding fancies?"
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> "How can any of us know anything? And what is Jurgen, that his knowing or not knowing should matter to anybody?"
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> "Jurgen slapped his hands together. "Hah, mother Sereda!", says he, "but now I have you! It is that, precisely that damnable question, which your shadow has been whispering to me from the beginning of our companionship. And I am through with you. I will have no more of your gifts, which are purchased at the cost of hearing that whisper. I am resolved henceforward to be as other persons, and to believe implicitly in my own importance." 119.

So Jurgen tricks Mother Sereda into restoring him to his rightful age and once more takes up the search for Liza. He meets Koschei once again and he who made things as they are offers Jurgen Guinevere for a wife. Jurgen refuses, saying,

> "Ah no, Madame, desire and knowledge are pressing me so sorely that I dare not love you, and still I cannot help it...Madame and Queen," says Jurgen, "once long ago there was a lad who worshiped all women... Then a Count's tow-headed daughter whom he loved, with such love as it puzzles me to think of now, was shown to him just as she was, as not even worthy of hatred. The Goddess stood revealed and unveiled, and displaying in all things such mediocrity as he fretted to find in himself. That was unfortunate. For he began to suspect that women, also, are akin to their parents; and are no wiser, and no more subtle, and no more immaculate, than the father who begot them. Madame and Queen, it is not good for any young boy to suspect this."
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> "It is certainly not the conduct of a chivalrous person, nor of an authentic poet," says Guinevere. "And yet your eyes are big with tears."
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> "Hah, Madame," he replied, "but it amuses me to weep for a dead boy with eyes that once were his. For he was a dear lad before he went rampaging through the world, in the pride of his youth and in the armor of his hurt. And songs he made for the pleasure of kings, and sword-play he made for the pleasure of men, and a whispering he made for the pleasure of women, in

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119. Ibid., pp. 317 ff.

> places where renown was, and where he trod boldly, giving pleasure to everybody in those fine days. But for all his laughter, he could not understand his fellows, nor could he love them, nor could he detect anything in aught they said or did save their exceeding folly."
>
> "Why man's folly is indeed exceeding great, Messire Jurgen, and the doings of this world are often inexplicable: and so does it come about that man can be saved by faith alone."
>
> "Ah, but this boy had lost his fellows' cordial common faith in the importance of what use they made of half-hours and months and years; and because a jill-flirt had opened his eyes so that they saw too much, he had lost faith in the importance of his own actions too. There was a little time of which the passing might be made not unendurable; beyond gaped unpredictable darkness and that was all there was of certainty anywhere. Meanwhile, he had the loan of a brain which played with ideas, and a body that went delicately down pleasant ways. And so he never was the mate for you, dear Guinevere, because he had not sufficient faith in anything at all, not even in his own unavoidable deductions." 120.

So Jurgen bids farewell to Guinevere. Koschei then offers him Anaitis,"and the refrain of all the talking of Anaitis was not changed. For we have but a little while to live, and none knows his fate thereafter. So a man possesses nothing certainly save a brief loan of his own body: and yet the body of man is capable of much curious pleasure." But Jurgen replies,

> "Sweetheart, there was - why, not a half hour since! - a youth who sought quite zealously for the over-mastering frenzies you prattle about. But, candidly, he could not find the flesh whose touch would rouse insanity. The lad had opportunities, too, let me tell you! Hah, I recall with tenderness the glitter of eyes and hair, and the gay laughter, and the soft voices of those fond foolish women, even now. But he went from one pair of lips to another, with an ardor that was always half feigned, and with protestations which were conscious echoes of some romance or other. Such escapades were pleasant enough: but they were not very serious after all. For these things concerned his body alone: and I am more than an edifice of viands reared by my teeth. To pretend that what my body does or endures is of importance seems rather silly nowadays. I prefer to regard it as a necessary beast of burden which I maintain, at considerable expense and

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120. Ibid., pp. 336 ff.

> trouble. So I shall make no pother about it... My ears are beset by eloquent grey hairs which plead at closer quarters than does that fibbing little tongue of yours. And so be off with you!" 121.

Finally Koschei conjures forth that Helen who is the personification of Jurgen's vision of perfection. "To-night", says Jurgen, "as once through the gray art of Phobetor, now through the will of Koschei, it appears that you stand within arm's reach. Hae, Lady, were that possible - and I know very well it is not possible, whatever my senses my report,- I am not fit to mate with your perfection. At the bottom of my heart I no longer desire perfection. For we who are taxpayers as well as immortal souls, must live by politic evasions and formulae and catchwords that fret away our lives as moths waste a garment: we fall insensibly to common-sense as to a drug; and it dulls and kills whatever in us is rebellious and fine and unreasonable: and so you will find no man of my years with whom living is not a mechanism which gnaws away time unprompted. For within this hour I have become again a creature of use and wont; I am the lackey of prudence and half-measures; and I have put my dreams upon an allowance. Yet, even now, I love you more than I love books and indolence and flattery and the charitable wine which cheats me into a favorable opinion of myself. What more can an old poet say? For that reason, lady, I pray you now be gone, because your loveliness is a taunt which I find unendurable." Thus and thus does Jurgan lament. "Oh, I have failed my vision!", cries Jurgen. "I have failed, and I know very well that every man must fail: and yet my shame is no less bitter. For I am transmuted by time's handling! I shudder

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121. Ibid., p. 333 f.

at the thought of living day in and day out with my vision! And so I will have none of you for my wife...And so farewell to you Queen Helen! Your beauty has been to me as a robber that stripped my life of joy and sorrow, and I desire not ever to dream of your beauty any more. For I have been able to love nobody. And I know that it has been you who has prevented this, Queen Helen, at every moment of my life since that disastrous moment when I first seemed to see your loveliness in the face of Madame Dorothy. It is the memory of your beauty, as I then saw it in the face of a jill-flirt, which has enfeebled me for such honest love as other men give women; and I envy these other men. For Jurgen has loved nothing - not even you, not even Jurgen!- quite whole-heartedly...So it is necessary that I now cry farewell to you, Queen Helen, for I have failed in the service of my vision, and I deny you utterly!"[122]

Jurgen continues his talk with Koschei and it is finally arranged that his wife Liza will be returned to him. Having lost the faith, the desire, and the vision which might have lifted his living above the level of his fellows, he goes homeward to that common-sense middle way of life which is the lot of most men.* Thus Jurgen reflected indignantly; and then he laughed. "Why, but of course! I may have talked face to face with Koschei, who made things as they are; and again, I may not have. That is the whole point of it,- the cream, as one might say, of the jest,- that I cannot ever be sure. Well!" - and Jurgen shrugged here,- "Well, and what could I be expected to do about it?"[123] He decides that Koschei, if it really was Koschei, had dealt with him very justly. But he adds the

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122. Ibid., pp. 346 ff.
123. Ibid., 363.

characteristic phrase, "Probably his methods are everything they should be; certainly I cannot go so far as to say that they are wrong: but still, at the same time-!" Then Jurgen sighed and entered his snug home.[124]

The Line of Love is a collection of short stories in which all three of the attitudes under discussion are represented. The stories of Adhelmar, Fulke D'Arnaye, and Will Somers are similar to those found in Chivalry. Villon and Marlowe are the poets concerned, whereas gallantry is represented by Florian de Puysange, Falstaff, Raymond d'Arnaye and the Marquis of Falmouth.

The High Place, which is subtitled A Comedy of Disenchantment, is a story in which the author has "endeavored, as a needed part of the complete Biography to illustrate the alternative of Jurgen's choice in the delicate matter of leaving untouched the barriers between the material and the ideal."[125] It is a story wherein Florian de Puysange learns through bitter experience what Jurgen seemed to realize instinctively. It may be classed as an example of the failure of the gallant attitude as a way of life, for the really gallant person accepts the plane of daily life and makes the best of it, which is what Florian did not do, at least not at first.

His father had told him that the great law of living was this, "Thou shalt not offend against the notions of thy neighbor."[126] Florian did not quite believe this, being very young, but followed after beauty and holiness. These were

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124. Ibid., p. 368.
125. The High Place,- Intro.
126. Ibid., 21.

represented by the sleeping beauty Melior and by Saint Hoprig whose legend Florian revered. He bargains with Janicot winning Melior to wife and bringing to life Holy Hoprig who, it seems, had been canonized by mistake. In the course of his bargain's fulfillment he is spoken to by Philippe D'Orleans in this wise:- "No, my friend, I candidly voice my opinion that there is nothing in life which possession does not discover to be inadequate: we are cursed with a tyrannical need for what life does not afford: and we strive for various prizes, saying 'Happiness is there': when in point of fact it is nowhere." 127. But Florian did not believe this at that time. However he finds in his living with Melior that she is just like any other wife and discovers that there is little holiness about Hoprig. His bargain with Janicot had stipulated that the first born child of Florian and Melior should be delivered up to him. Florian, discontented at home, goes journeying until the baby should be born. He talks, in the forest, to Horvendile who speaks of life as a comedy.

> "It is not ever a merry comedy," replied Horvendile, "though, for one, I find it amusing. For I forewarn you that the comedy does not vary. The first act is the imagining of the place where contentment exists and may be come to; and the second act reveals the striving toward, and the third act the falling short of, that shining goal,- or, else, the attaining of it, to discover that happiness, after all, abides a thought farther down the bogged, clogged, befogged, heart-breaking road." 128.

Florian eventually comes to believe in the law of living expounded by his father. He hears the song of that gander which had formerly sung to Kerin in the Well of Ogde concerning the

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127. Ibid., p. 124.
128. Ibid., p. 153.

illusory nature of all that man prizes. "For the song of this gander was immortal, and it leaves untroubled, at one time or another time, the common-sense of no man who has lived on earth."[12] The crowning disillusionment comes when Florian discovers that Melior's child has been fathered by Hoprig to foil Janicot. So beauty and holiness had combined to prevent the offending of neighbours' notions. Florian appeals to Janicot who turns time back so that it seems to Florian that all has been a bad dream. He then relives his life gallantly making no attempt to win Melior or to know Hoprig. Before the transformation took place he addressed Melior and Hoprig:-

> "Now that you two," said Florian, "become again a legend and a symbol, I can believe in and love and worship you once more. It is in vain, it is with pitiable folly, that any man aspires to be bringing beauty and holiness into his daily living. These things are excellent for dilettanti to admire from afar. But they are not attainable, in any quantity that suffices. We needs believe in beauty: and there needs always flourish the notion that beauty exists in human living, so long as memory transfigures what is past, and optimism what is to come. And sometimes one finds beauty even in the hour which is passing, here and there, at wide intervals: but it is mixed - as inextricably as is mixed your speaking, bright coloured enemy of all romance,- with what is silly and common-place and trivial.---And I would like to believe," continued Florian, "that there is holiness in human living; but I have found this also mixed with, I do not say, hypocrisy, but with some ambiguity." 130.

Janicot speaks of men, and of Florian in particular observes, "He dreams of aspiring and joy and color and suffering and unreason, and of those quaint taboos which you and he call sin, as being separate things, not seeing how all blends in one

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129.Ibid., p. 240.
130. Ibid., p.268.

vast cup. Nor does he see, as yet, that this blending is very beautiful when properly regarded, and very holy when approached without human self-conceit."[131]

Florian, as has been mentioned, wakened as a boy again to hear his father saying:- "To submit is the great lesson. I too was once a dreamer: and in dreams there are lessons. But to submit, without dreaming any more is the great lesson: to submit, without either understanding or opining, and without demanding of life too much of beauty or of holiness, and without shirking the fact that this universe is under no least bond ever to grant us upon either side of the grave, our desires. To do that, my son, does not satisfy and probably will not ever satisfy a Puysange. But to do that is wisdom."[132]

Gallantry. This is another collection of short stories. The characters, "half in masquerade, playing the drawing-room or garden comedy of life, have upon them not less than the landscape among the accidents of which they group themselves with fittingness, a certain light that we should seek for in vain upon anything real."[133] One thinks inevitably of Congreve or Wycherley while reading these tales of gallantry which deal with "transient superficies behind which moves perceptibly the unseen and the inapprehensible."[134] Ormskirk who is perhaps the chief character expresses in the story "April's Message", a view of life which is held by many of the persons in the book though they do their best to live in such a way as to place this view as far in the background as possible. "You will presently

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131. Ibid., p. 282.
132. Ibid., p. 299.
133. Gallantry, Fly leaf.
134. Ibid., p. XVI.

discover that youth is only an ingenious prologue to whet one's appetite for a rather dull play. Eh, I am no pessimist,- one may still find satisfaction in the exercise of mind and body, in the pleasures of thought and taste and in other titillations of one's faculties. Dinner is good and sleep too, is excellent. But we men and women tend, upon too close inspection, to appear rather pretty flies that buzz and bustle aimlessly about, and breed, perhaps, and eventually die, and rot, and are swept away from this fragile windowpane of time that opens on eternity."[135]

In an epilogue to the volume Louis de Soyecourt visits Ormskirk, the Duc de Puysange, Audaine and their wives whose stories we have been reading, and he is puzzled by their apparent contentment.

> "Yet in the little man awoke a vague suspicion, as he sat among these contented folk, that, after all, they had perhaps attained to something very precious of which his own life had been void, to a something of which he could not even form a conception. Love, of course, he understood, with thoroughness; no man alive had loved more ardently and variously than Louis de Soyecourt. But what the devil! love was a transient delusion, an ingenious device of Nature to bring about the perpetuation of her fauna...
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> It was all quite inexplicable. Yet Louis de Soyecourt could see that not one of these folk was blind to his or her yokefellow's frailty, but that, beside this something very precious to which they had attained, and he had never attained, a man's foible, or a woman's defect, dwindled into insignificance. Here, then, were people who, after five years' consortment,- consciously defiant of time's corrosion, of the guttering - out of desire, of the gross and daily disillusions of a life in common, and even of the daily fret of all trivialities shared and diversely viewed,- who could yet smile and say: "No my companion is not quite the

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135. Ibid., p. 148.

> perfect being that I had imagined my companion would be. What does it matter? I am content. I would have nothing changed."----
> These people here at Ingilby, by example, made no pretensions to immaculateness; instead, they kept their gallant compromise with imperfection; and they seemed happy enough --- There might be a moral somewhere: but he could not find it." 136.

The Cords of Vanity. This is a story of the failure of the gallant attitude as practiced by Robert Townsend under 137.
modern conditions. As a boy Robert's outlook on life is expressed in the following words:- "We're sort of like the rats in the trap at home in our stable. We can bite the wires and go crazy, like lots of them do, if we want to, or we can eat the cheese and kind of try not to think about it. Either way there's no getting out till they come to kill us in the morning." 13
He travels about going from one love affair to another, "eating the cheese", so to speak. The subtitle, "A Comedy of Shirking", describes his life. But he is not entirely unadmirable as a person and the reader often feels pity for, rather than dislike of, him.

If one seeks to discover Mr. Cabell's attitude toward the gallant way of life, one once more reaches an indefinite conclusion. The maxim of the elder Duc de Puysange comes to mind. We hear Louis de Soyecourt's expression of bewilderment, "There might be a moral somewhere"- but he could not find it. We remember too that Jurgen sighed as he entered his snug home.

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136. Ibid., p. 338 f.
137. See The Line of Love, p. X.
138. The Cords of Vanity, p. 20.

C. THE POETIC ATTITUDE.

The Music from Behind the Moon. Mr. Cabell's first poet is Madoc who is troubled by a music which tells of a beauty above and beyond anything that may be found on this earth. This beauty is symbolized by Ettarre who dwells in the moon. The songs which Madoc composes with the black feather pen from the wings of Lucifer, the Father of All Lies, do not content him. He eventually is able to trick the Norns and obtain Ettarre as his wife. He lives contentedly enough but misses the music which had formerly troubled him. Madoc is genuinely grief stricken by Ettarre's death but hears once again the old music and takes up his quest once more.

Something About Eve is the story of Gerald Musgrave whose body is preempted by a Sylan while Gerald goes off on strange adventurings in the land of Dersam(Dreams). He travels through countries where two truths are worshipped and the teaching of these countries is that man copulates and dies and that is all. But Gerald seeks for some third truth. He refuses to give up his religion. On looking into the Mirror of the Two Truths he says, "I had far rather play with a beautiful idea than with one utterly lacking in seductiveness. I very much prefer to believe that I at least am, in one way or another, reserved to take part in some enduring and rather superb performance,- and somewhere, by and by,- in a performance concerned with some third truth, more august and aesthetically more pleasing than are the only ever-enduring truths apparent to us here. We copulate and die, and that is all? - Well, perhaps! But, then

again, perhaps not.[139] One must, you see, be broadminded about the matter."

Gerald continues his journey toward Antan, the goal of all the gods of men, resisting the temptations of the various Eves along the way. When in sight of Antan he pauses on Mispec Moor where he marries Maya of the Fair Breasts. The years go by and Gerald keeps putting off the completion of his journey, content with his wife and their son and the view afforded through the rose coloured glasses he wears. He asks various questions of the many gods and myths journeying to Antan but does not obtain any tidings of that third truth which he expects to find himself to-morrow or perhaps the day after. Eventually he gives to his son the silver stallion which was to carry him to Antan. He discovers that both his wife and son are only illusions and that Antan has been destroyed. "And I who willed to be lord of the Third Truth have found no third truth anywhere. I have found only comfortably coloured illusions. But I am content with that which I have found on Mispec Moor."[140] Gerald finally gives up his quest and arranges with Horvendile for his return to his natural body.

(The clerk Horvendile appears in many of the books of the Biography and his actions indicate that he represents the author. In the earlier written books we find his place supplied by Ahasuerus and Vanringham but in the later works the character of Horvendile as the author is clearly developed. He even appears briefly as Orven Deal in the revised version of The Eagle's Shadow.)

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139. Something About Eve, p.130.
140. Ibid., p. 285.

Gerald addresses Horvendile in a hog wallow and is answered,

> "Now I abandon a race whose needs are insatiable. For tall Manuel lived always wanting what he had not ever found, and never, quite, knowing what thing it was which he wanted, and without which he might not ever be contented. And Jurgen also, after Heaven's very best had been done to grant him what he sought for, could reply only that he was Jurgen who sought he knew not what. And all their descendants have been like these maddening two in this at least, all seeking after they could not say what. Nobody can do anything for such a race! For their needs have stayed insatiable: their journeying has been, in every land and in every time, a foiled journeying: and in the end, in the inevitable unvarying end, each one of you treads that grey quiet way of ruins which leads hither and to no other place." 141.

Gerald consoles himself with the fact that since he didn't go to Antan, it still remains, in his mind at least, a lovely place and he can retain hope concerning a third truth. He adds, "But more often, Horvendile, I shall think of yet another woman and a boy child, who were not wonderful in anything, but who for a while seemed mine. And I shall believe that these two wait for me in a much more prosaic Antan; and I shall know that no magic, howsoever mightier than the less aspiring dreams of my manhood, can afford to me anything more dear." 142. So Gerald returns to his aging body. Mr. Cabell has pointed out in the introduction that Gerald failed as a poet, but "no man is entirely a poet. A part of him is a husband, a part is a father for example ---- I would point out that to fail as a poet may very well be to succeed as a human being." 143. He adds in characteristic vein, "none of which may be true, to

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141. Ibid., 92.
142. Ibid., 298.
143. Ibid., P. XIII.

be sure: I would but suggest that now and then this also seems, in Gerald's favourite phrase, a rather beautiful idea to play with."[144]

The Eagle's Shadow introduces Felix Kennaston into the Biography.

The Cream of the Jest, a purported edition of another manuscript by Harrowby, outlines the poetic solution of life as exemplified by the life of Kennaston. He is a writer, and as the story opens he imagines himself to be a character in one of his tales of a mythical land. Horvendile the clerk controls the action of the story and tells his fellow characters that he is in reality an author who lives in a different land, though he says,"

> "It may be the very cream of the jest that my country is no more real than Storisende. How could I judge if I, too, were a puppet? It is a thought which often troubles me --- Oh, many persons live there happily enough! or, at worst, they seem to find the prizes and the applause of my country worth striving for whole-heartedly. But there is that in some of us that gets no exercise there; and we struggle blindly, with impotent yearning to gain outlet for great powers which we know that we possess, even though we do not know their names,---we dreamers know that life in my country does not content us. So we struggle,

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144. Ibid., p. XIV.

The Certain Hour. I have been unable to procure a copy of this volume of short stories. In the preface to The Line of Love, Mr. Cabell cites the book as an example of the success of the poetic attitude from the standpoint of an economist, which leads to the conclusion that perhaps the stories deal with men who have given up contentment as the average man knows it in order to produce works of art.

John Gunther, in the November, 1920 number of The Bookman, mentions that the book contains "love stories of ten poets - including Herrick, Pope and Shakespeare, each of which presents that certain hour in the poet's life wherein he was required to choose between his existence as a poet and his existence as a lover, the two, with Cabell, being always incompatible."

> for a tiny dear--bought while, into other and fairer-seeming lands in search of, we know not what! And after a little---we must go back to my country and live there as best we may." 145.

In Kennaston's musings the characters in the story pitied and despised Horvendile, thinking him insane. "A world's creator was able to wring only contempt and pity from his puppets since he had not endowed them with any faculties wherewith to comprehend their creator's nature and intent." 146.

Kennaston discovers a broken piece of metal curiously inscribed which he eventually believes to be the sigil of Scoteia. By gazing at this piece of metal before retiring he finds that he assumes the character of Horvendile in many strange dreams. In these dreams he loves Ettarre whose beauty is beyond that of any mortal. Whenever Kennaston, or rather Horvendile, touches Ettarre the dream ends suddenly. Many lands are visited by Kennaston through the supposed magic of the sigil and many different periods of history represented. And always he loves Ettarre but can never hope to win her, for the dream vanishes at her touch. Kennaston eventually comes to believe that he recognizes Ettarre in the face of his wife. She dies soon afterwards and he resolves to dream no longer, but to sleep dreamlessly at night and spend his days as an American citizen with two cars and accounts at four banks. He tell his friend Harrowby who is supposed to be an authority on magic about the sigil. Harrowby knows that it is merely the broken top from a jar of facial cream but prefers not to disillusion Kennaston.

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145. The Cream of the Jest, pp. 28 ff.
146. Ibid., p. 42.

In the course of an earlier discussion Kennaston had propounded an artistic interpretation of religion. "Perhaps," he said, "it is here necessary to the author's scheme that man must simply go on striving to gain a little money, food and sleep, a trinket or two, some moments of laughter, and at last a decent bed to die in. For it may well be that man's allotted part calls for just these actions, to round out the drama artistically."[147.] Harrowby's interpretation was somewhat different. "But I quite fixedly believe the Wardens of Earth sometimes unbar strange windows, that face on other worlds than ours. And some of us, I think, once in a while get a peep through these windows. But we are not permitted to get a long peep, nor an unobstructed peep, nor, very certainly, are we permitted to see all there is-out yonder. The fatal fault, sir, of your theorizing is that it is too complete. It aims to throw light upon the universe, and therefore is self-evidently moonshine. The Wardens of Earth do not desire that we should understand the Universe, Mr. Kennaston, it is part of their appointed task to insure that we never do; because of their efficiency every notion that any man, dead, living, or unborn, might form as to the universe will necessarily prove wrong. So, if for no other reason, I must decline to think of you and me as characters in a romance."[148.]

Harrowby reflects concerning Felix Kennaston and his illusions at the conclusion of the book, "It occurred to me that his history was in essentials, the history of our race thus far. All I advanced for or against him, equally, was true of all men that have ever lived...For it is in this inadequate flesh that each of us must serve his dream, and so must fail in the dream's

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147. Ibid., p. 170.
148. Ibid.

service, and must parody that which he holds dearest. To this we seem condemned, being what we are. Thus, one and all, we play false to the dream, and it evades us, and we dwindle into responsible citizens. And yet always thereafter - because of many abiding memories - we know, assuredly, that the way of flesh is not a futile scurrying through dining-rooms and offices and shops and parlours, and thronged streets and restaurants, 'and so to bed'---

It was in appropriate silence, therefore, that I regarded Felix Kennaston as a parable. The man was not merely human, he was humanity. And I reflected that it was only by preserving faith in human dreams that we may, after all, perhaps some day make them come true."[149.]

Mr. Cabell's treatment of the poetic attitude is also indicative of indecision. The "Biography" attests that he is at one with those poets who, because of a perception of a beauty above and beyond that found in everyday life, can never be content with that life; but his sympathetic handling of Gerald's Musgrave's failure as a poet and enlargement as a human being brings home, once again, the fact that the author is objectively "playing with ideas."

D. Branch Cabell.

The Way of Ecben, published in 1929, is the story of yet another poet, Alfgar, enamoured of Ettarre. After the characteristic conclusion of Alfgar's story, Mr. Cabell announced that, since the "Biography" had been concluded, there

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149. Ibid., p. 249.

would be no further books from the pen of James Branch Cabell who was taking his leave of the younger generation in art and in life. The introduction to These Restless Heads, published in 1932 under the name of Branch Cabell, gives further reasons for the change of name. Mr. Cabell wished to emphasize that his previous books were chapters of a complete work, the "Biography", and also, he writes, "for yet another affair I am minded to render the literary career of my predecessor unique, in that his Collected Works must now stand, and so perish by and by, in the exact form he designed and completed,- without any guesswork as to his final plans and with no blunders save his own, with no inclusions untitivated by him, with no lackwit replevinings from his waste-paper basket conducted by his heirs and creditors. If any other writer has escaped all these provokers of discursive parody after death (except of course through a worthlessness so patent as to defy re-publication) I do not know him."[150] Needless to say, the author has continued to play as of yore with common-sense and piety and death in this and succeeding volumes which will not be considered in this paper. In spite of the explicitness of Mr. Cabell's reasons for the name change we find critical misinterpretations of it, possibly because literal minded critics are often blind to subtly ironical statements characteristically employed by the author.[151]

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150. Branch Cabell, These Restless Heads, P. XII.

151. e.g. V.F. Calverton, The Liberation of American Literature, (1932) p. 469.

"Cabell's recent change of name from J.B. Cabell to Branch Cabell signifying, as he states, his reversion from romanticism to realism, from Poictesme to reality, promises little that is significant in this new vein, that is if his new book is indicative of the nature of the change that has come over him."

The "Biography" has been considered in this paper, for the most part, in its final form, the Storisend Edition. The author's works were extensively revised for this edition so that the purpose, the ideas and the mood of the complete work may be said to be products of the author's maturity. Mr. Cabell's mode of expression is admittedly unique but it will be found that other writers of the period have, in their own fashion, expressed opinions markedly similar to some of those ideas with which he plays in the "Biography". The following chapter deals briefly with some such writers as well as yet other authors whose work indicates a change of attitude from that illustrated by Mr. Cabell and by those whose views resemble his.

IV. MR. CABELL AND THE "IVORY TOWER."

Joseph Wood Krutch, writing in 1933, presents the following analysis of the faith in science which had overthrown established religion:- "What we have come to realize, then, is that the scientific optimism of which Huxley may be taken as a typical exponent was merely a new variety of faith, resting upon certain premises which are no more unassailable than those which have supported other vanished religions of the past."[152] The result of this realization, according to Mr. Krutch, is that we have begun to doubt that rationality and knowledge have any promised land to which they may lead us. We are left stranded unable to achieve either religious belief or exultant atheism. Even our literature has declined; "we can no longer believe that noble men exist. The best that we can achieve is pathos and the most we can do is feel sorry for ourselves."[153] He considers some of the factors which formerly motivated great literature and notes the downfall of these factors. Love, for example, has been reduced from the highest to its lowest terms by scientific study and now retains little of its former incentive to creative art. The hope which he holds out to mankind is slim. "Modern psychology has strongly emphasized the fact that under certain conditions desire produces belief, and having discovered also that the more primitive a given mentality the more completely are its opinions determined by its wishes, modern psychology has determined that the best mind is that which most resists the tendency to believe a thing simply because it would be pleasant

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152. J.W. Krutch, The Modern Temper, p. 75.
153. Ibid., p. 137.

or advantageous to do so. But justified as this conclusion may be from the intellectual point of view, it fails to take into account the fact that in a universe as badly adapted as this one to human as distinguished from animal needs this ability to will a belief may bestow an enormous vital advantage."[154] And so Krutch predicts that the only way out of the despair engendered in "the best type of minds" is the rejuvenation of the nation by barbarian conquerors who believe in the illusions which they have developed through desire to believe in them. This is his story of the development of a civilization.The will to live results in the development of a faith which eventually becomes a philosophy. The philosophy, as man's reason's sharpens, degenerates into a kind of game which finally reduces the beliefs of that civilization to the level of being considered as beneficent fictions. At that point the only hope is for the barbarian conqueror to come along and re-start the process.[155] His sorry conclusion about the state of civilization is this:-"Ours is a lost cause and there is no place for us in the natural universe, but we are not, for all that, sorry to be human. We should rather die as men than live as animals."[156]

William Harlan Hale, writing in 1932, is not so willing to accept defeat as was Mr. Krutch, but the tone of his book, Challenge to Defeat, which compares the attitude of Goethe with that of Spengler, indicates that he fears it. He writes, "Only a rich man is conscious of his legs, and only a suspicious civilization stops to test the signposts on its highroads. We do less, we question more. The artists and creators are swamped

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154.Ibid., p. 140.
155.Ibid.p.235
156.Ibid., p. 249.

by multitudes of publicists and prophets. Enigmas, problems, and panics are a major food to the intellect. Every listener in every magazine detects that the tempo of modern life has advanced from the 'andante grazioso' of Voltairean culture and the 'allegro con brio' of Bismarkian politics to a frenzied 'prestissimo'; that doubt and alarm now seize the musicians, as to where the piece will end. Thousands of 'thinkers' have told us that we are in an Age of Change; but the statement is tautological, since every age, to be an age, must be one of change...We know only that the whole visage of reality has changed, that a population's depression passes into despair; we know that clarity and the sense of confidence seem to have all but vanished."[157.]

The book continues with a study of Goethe and the following quotation is given to sum up an attitude of life:

> "Streams from all things love of living,
> Grandest star and humblest clod.
> All the straining, all the striving
> Is eternal peace in God." 158.

Some of the developments in art and religion since those lines were written are considered. Mr. Hale notes the isolation of the artist from society and the fin de siécle decadence. The criticism of orthodox religion which began in the eighteenth century is mentioned and its results noted as follows, "While the lower classes were still being drugged by the hell-fire methods of Methodism, and the evangelicals still hung upon the doctrine of 'good works', the faith of intelligent men was dissolving itself into dilettante humanism and aesthetic appreciation... The result of the secularizing tendencies of the

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157. William Harlan Hale, Challenge to Defeat, p. 3.
158. Ibid., p. 70.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the collapse of belief in something outside ourselves, or God. The result of the secularizing tendency of the newest century is the collapse of belief in ourselves."[159.]

Mr. Hale writes of the tendency, characteristic of much modern art of the period, toward unintelligibility. "In Matthew Arnold and his fellows we saw the confusion between art and religion; in Pater and his school the confusion between art and life. Now we get the personal confusion of eye, ear and spoken word. All limits have been transcended; all boundaries broken. We reach the climax of the last act of modern culture."[160.]

Here the philosophy of Spengler is introduced and the following quotation made from that writer's Decline of the Western World.:-

> I see, in place of that empty figment of one linear history which can only be kept up by shutting one's eyes to the overwhelming multitude of facts, the drama of a number of mighty cultures, each springing with primeval strength from the soil of a mother-region to which it remains firmly bound throughout the whole of its life cycle; each stamping its material, its mankind, in its own image; each leaving its own ideas, its own passions, its own life, its own death...Each Culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return...These cultures, sublimated life essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field. 161.

The implications of this quotation are discussed by Mr. Hale:- "Mankind as such has no meaning; it has meaning only when related to a particular time and area. What inevitably follows is this: there is no universal meaning or lasting truth.

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159. Ibid., p.114.
160. Ibid., p. 127.
161. Ibid., p. 140.

Each culture is built upon some deep idea; 'The aim once attained - the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities fulfilled and made externally actual - the Culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its fire breaks down, and it becomes civilization'."[162.]

The challenge thrown out by Mr. Hale is that, if we are not to accept such theories, we must somehow return to the attitude expressed in the quotation from Goethe. He mentions some of the prescribed 'tonics' and finds many of them wanting. "T. S. Eliot's return to the safe seventeenth century is no solution. Irving Babbitt's retreat to the fourth century B.C., to the bosom of Aristotle, is no solution. The attempt to retreat to the primitive or unconscious realms of instinct and solitude is less than ever a solution."[163.]

His conclusion is reminiscent of Krutch's, "We may be the clowns in a comedy for the Gods but we shall play our parts to the finish, and know that our acting is the veriest reality; and when the play is played out, it may not have been so poor a show."[164.]

This attitude of mind had been developing for a number of years. Social discontent and criticism of religious doctrine brought about the beginnings of a "realistic" movement in American literature in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The "gentle" realism of W.D. Howells, the works of Crane, Norris, Garland, Adams and others indicated not only dissatisfaction with social conditions but also a tendency toward philosophic pessimism which became intensified in the works of Dreiser.

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162. Ibid., p. 140.
163. Ibid., p. 193.
164. Ibid., p. 202.

After a shortlived wave of romanticism which lasted from approximately 1898 to 1903, the so called "muckraking" movement held established institutions up to destructive criticism. After the Great War bitter and disillusioned writers armed with the "new psychology" continued the production of pessimistic books. Robert Herrick, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Edith Wharton, John Passos, Ernest Hemingway and others bitterly castigated every phase of American life. And the pessimistic attitude reflected in the novels found its counterpart in other literary forms, in the dramas of Eugene O'Neill, for example, and in the works of such poets as Frost and E.A. Robinson. The depression which followed the stock market crash of 1929 seemed to intensify the pessimism of many writers until we find the profound despair expressed by Joseph Wood Krutch. James Branch Cabell, then, although unique in his form of expression, was not the only author who"found human living and this world not wholly admirable and here and there made formal admission of the fact."[165.]

It is not to be supposed, however, that this attitude was that of the nation at large. Erwin Edman, examining the works of the despair-ridden philosophers pointed out in 1931 that thousands of people were content with the pleasures of the senses and work and ordered lives in a disordered society.[166.] He felt that the reason for despair was that though man was working in the twentieth century his dreams were based upon the twelfth. It was the work of literature to help clarify and modernize our thinking. "Literature must give pattern and coherence to the new world."[167.]

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165. Straws and Prayer Books, p. 300.
166. Erwin Edman, The Contemporary and His Soul, p. 177.
167. Ibid., p. 178.

A sentence from Mr. Hale's book is significant. In speaking of science he said, "Today all knowledge lies in chaos or hovers in suspension, have it as you will." Mr. Krutch sees only chaos. Other writers seek salvation in the alternative suggestion. Max Eastman, for example, developed the thesis that science was advancing "into fields heretofore occupied by literary eloquence."[169] Science was bringing to present problems something greater than the writers who were dealing pessimistically with such factors as the decline of religion, the disintegration of the ego, romantic love, the development of machines, war, and capitalism. "Neo-classic criticism and the New Humanism are both, in their essence, a grandiose effort of the literary mind to resist science."[170] Modernism, too, with its development of the cult of unintelligibility is also a retreat from the invasion. Eastman feels that the producers of literature have misunderstood the implications of scientific discoveries, citing Conrad Aiken's Melody of Chaos as an example of the bewilderment of a modern literary artist who has read science and tried unsuccessfully to get it back into poetry without a plan. His answer to Mr. Krutch and other apostles of despair is that they are talking not of life but of literature.

The champions of science do not claim that they have a complete answer to all present day problems. They severely criticize the present state of science. C.H. Waddington in a recent publication upholds the thesis that science can lift mankind from its present ebb of despair. He admits though that

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168. William Harlan Hale, op. cit. p. 120.
169. Max Eastman, The Literary Mind, p. VII.
170. Ibid.

science itself needs some overhauling. "For as civilization has lost its unity and become a collection of individuals with innumerably different sets of beliefs and ideals, science in general has tended to become an enormous collection of details."[171] He points out, however, that the application of the scientific attitude toward social problems has resulted in the beginnings of an advance toward a rational economic system. He contends that science can supply man's need for religious belief. The conclusion which he draws concerning literature and culture generally follows:- "The rational economic system, at whose birth pangs we are already assisting, can only be fully utilized if it is infused by a culture whose method of approach is also rational, intelligent and empirical. Prim science has so far neglected to confess to the world that he has begotten such an offspring on the harlot Humanities; but the infant culture is beginning to peep already - in its bastard vigour lies the only hope for an heir worthy of the civilizations of the past."[172]

Professor A.N. Whitehead writes in a similar encouraging vein. He points out that the evils which concern modern man are not novelties but have been experienced at various times in the world's history[173] and claims that "the middle class pessimism over the future of the world comes from a confusion between civilization and security."[174] The disillusionment felt by many who endeavored to espouse science as a faith came about through a faulty scientific attitude. "A self-satisfied rationalism is in

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171. C.H. Waddington, The Scientific Attitude, p. 62.
172. Ibid. p. 125.
173. A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 238.
174. Ibid., p. 240.

effect a form of anti-rationalism. It means an arbitrary halt at a particular set of abstractions. This was the case with science."[175] But science is changing, Religion, the reaction of human nature to its search for God, is of great importance but it "will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science."[176] Religion is defined as "the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things, something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest...Apart from it (the religious vision) human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient existence."[177].

Mr. Whitehead feels that we should not seek rules of safety from religion or science but should consider life as the adventure which it is and go forward modifying our rules of living as we see the need for change rather than giving in to pessimism when we discover their inadequacy.[178]

In some of these later works may be noted a trend which leads away from the attitude represented here by the work of Krutch. They remain critical certainly, but the tendency is toward constructive rather than destructive criticism. I have

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175. Ibid.,p 223.
176. Ibid.,p 219.
177. Ibid., p.222.
178. Ibid.

emphasized that the attitude of despair was not general. It is significant that the Bible and such books as those of Harold Bell Wright were best sellers while Cabell went unread. The present Great War with its requirements from all departments of American activity leaves little time for pessimistic reflection and the hope for a better post-war world is nation wide. But the pessimistic attitude did at one time affect, and to a lesser extent still continues to influence, literature.

The central ideas with which Mr. Cabell is concerned in his books, despite the form of their presentation, are similar to those of other authors. The conception of reality set forth in Beyond Life, the destructive criticism of dogmatic religion and romantic love in the light of reason and the saving principle of dynamic illusion are not, as we have seen, unique with Mr. Cabell. The inhabitants of his mythical lands do not escape confrontation with the problems of existence. Dom Manuel's progress from swineherd to successful ruler and his estimation of the worth of his attainments finds its counterpart in 'realistic' novels where young men spring from the physical and spiritual degradation of slum conditions to become masters of industry only to conclude that their success is empty and fruitless. Jurgen's conclusion that gallant dalliance in the land of Cocaigne was no solution to the problems of existence is akin to the impression left by a reading of, for instance, Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises and other 'lost generation' novels. Established religious practices come in for examination throughout the "Biography", notably in The Silver Stallion, in Jurgen, and

in The High Place, while artistic theories of Christianity are met with in Beyond Life and The Cream of the Jest. Love, too, as a theme, is omnipresent but variously interpreted. In spite of the romantic setting of the "Biography" it is difficult to understand how anyone who had read it through could, without qualification, class it as escape literature. The term escape should include not only release from that monotonous round of use and wont, which Cabell admittedly avoids, but also freedom for a while from the necessity of contemplating the fundamental problems of human existence. Mr. Cabell has pointed out our "heavy and quenchless need" to discover the answer to the question, "What is it all up to?" Mr. A.R. Marble classified Mr. Cabell as a fantasist rather than an escapist and he defined fantasy as realism mingled with mysteries.[179]

We have seen evidence of other ways of thinking than those described by Mr. Krutch. Indeed Mr. Cabell himself, in his 'playing', came across the idea that the writings of his generation might soon be replaced.

> It was the first generation which said flatly, 'All is not well with this civilization'. And it was pre-eminently, the generation which destroyed taboos - not all taboos, of course, but a great many of those fetishes which the preceding generations had all left in unmolested honor. To the other side, it is a generation of which the present day survivors appear, to my finding, a bit ludicously to go on fighting battles that were won long ago....
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> So is it that, speaking always under the correction of time, I would say that this is a generation quite quickly to be huddled away, by man's common-sense, into oblivion. For this generation has said, 'All is not well.' To say that is permitted; to say that is indeed a conventional gambit in every known branch of writing.

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179. A.R. Marble, A Study of the Modern Novel, p. 272.

> But this generation thereafter preferred no panacea: and that special form of reticence is not long permissible.
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> To the contrary it is most plain here that just as Manuel told Coth, the dream is better. it is man's nature to seek the dream; he requires an everpresent recipe for the millenium; and he vitally needs faith in some panacea which by and by will correct all ills. This generation has preferred no such recipe; and that queer omission has suggested, howsoever obliquely, that just possibly no panacea may exist anywhere. This is a truth which man's intelligence can confront for no long while. He very much prefers that equivalent of hashish which I have seen described, in the better thought of and more tedious periodicals, as constructive criticism. Most properly, therefore, have those junior writers who were not even harried by taboos, or by the draft laws, begun to suggest a tasteful variety of panaceas: and all persons blest with common-sense, will eventually select, if but at random, some one or another of these recipes, wherein to invest faith, and wherefrom to extract comfort.
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> Meanwhile all intelligent persons will, moreover, put out of mind, as soon as may be possible, that unique and bothersome generation of writers who suggested no panacea whatever. 180

The April, 1930, number of Books contains an article by Mr. Cabell entitled "Dizain of the Doomed" in which the conclusion reached in the foregoing quotation is reiterated. He speaks of writers, including himself, whose work is doomed to extinction because they worked without foundations, they took away hope, they merely destroyed. The lack of a panacea is emphasized.

> Really that lack of a panacea is quite fatal to all literary pretensions. Man, breathing so precariously in the close shadow of death, and noting always the approach of the unknowable, needs vitally some strong belief in one or another cureall, very much as a child fretting in the night needs paregoric. And almost any panacea will do - even our new humanism will do, we fondly think, at a pinch -

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180. The Way of Ecben, p. 195.

> so long as the more happily obtuse of men can be hoodwinked into believing that tomorrow this talked about panacea will begin to work, and everything will be put in apple-pie order everywhere. For it is the belief which matters: it is the belief which drugs. But these writers of the twenties have offered us nothing in especial to believe in - and that too, when almost any sort of polite lie would have served our despairing need. 181.

As has been said, it is impossible to consider the "Biography" as entirely escape literature. Critics have been led astray by Mr. Cabell's frequent assertion that it is his diversion, his escape from a contemplation of his real worth in the universe, just as industry and politics, and other varied activities provide a similar escape for other men. But the "Biography" affords no escape in the accepted literary sense of the word. The perennial problems of human existence are the background of the tapestry which depicts the romantic figures of Don Manuel and his descendants. That no definite conclusions are drawn is to be expected after a study of the author's creed. The charge of propounding an adolescent philosophy is often brought against Mr. Cabell and conclusions drawn from his popularity with college students.[182.] It may be added that he is also popular with college professors. Perhaps it is that these young men and older men who buy and sell ideas are less disturbed by the playing with such commodities than other men who object more strongly to having their rules of life toyed with in this inconclusive fashion. Consider such passages in the "Biography" as Manuel's conversation with

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181. Quoted by Fred L. Pattee, New American Literature, p. 476.
182. e.g. Kunitz & Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 234.

Misery,[183] Jurgen's talks with the Brown Man[184] and Mother Sereda,[185] Gerald Musgrave's reflection before the Mirror of the Two Truths,[186] and the words of Seraide, Kerin of Nointel's wife,[187] against the background of the author's conception of reality. In these passages, and here and there in the works of more 'realistic' writers of the period, one discovers the reason why mankind will not give in to despair. There come to mind the lines of a little poem by J.C. Squire entitled "A Fresh Morning,"

> Now am I a tin whistle
> Through which God blows.
> And I wish to God I were a trumpet
> But why, God only knows!

and the implications of those lines, though subtle, are far reaching. In spite of the cynicism, the irony and the apparent pessimism of these "doomed" writers incapacitated by circumstances for belief, the thoughtless accusations of unsympathetic critics mouthing sarcastic abuse in the form of references to "village" atheists" and "sophomoric stages" fill one with distaste. In any case one sees the fallacy of this description of Mr. Cabell: "He is the untouchable resident of the ivory tower, the dauntless champion of pure romance and roseate dream, the indefatigable spokesman of art for art's sake."[188]

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183. See above pp. 55ff.
184. See above p. 72 f.
185. See above p. 76 f.
186. See above p. 87
187. See above p. 65.
188. Kunitz & Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 234.

V. MR. CABELL'S IDEAS.

A chapter might have been written referring to passages from famous writers who have, in one way or another, been concerned with the ideas that have been Mr. Cabell's playthings. It has been considered unnecessary here since any attempt at an inclusive effort would be impossible. As Mr. Cabell points out in Straws and Prayer Books, common-sense and piety and death have concerned most writers throughout the history of literature. A conception of the variety of human life and man's insignificance has obsessed thousands of authors from Marcus Aurelius[189] to Mark Twain[190] and beyond. A consideration of Cabell's idea concerning man's wisdom in doing what seems expected immediately brings to mind several passages, notably one from Swift's Tale of a Tub. This work also contains reflections on man's need of illusion in the admirable digression on madness which leads to the conclusion that happiness is the "perpetual possession of being well deceived."[191] The more disillusioned passages on romantic love remind one of, among many others, Schopenhauer, while the ideas of its sublimination bring to mind passages from Santayana's Life of Reason. Where religion is concerned we think again of Santayana, and some aspects of Mr. Cabell's treatment of religion also call to mind many critics of dogma since Voltaire wrote so splendidly on the subject in the eighteenth century.[192]

The ideas with which Mr. Cabell has been preoccupied

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189. To Himself, passim.
190. The Mysterious Stranger. What is Man? passim.
191. Tale of a Tub in English Prose of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Cecil A. Moore, pp 115 ff.
192. Candide etc.

are those which have concerned man, and in particular authors, since man developed the ability to reason, although he has dealt with them in his own particular fashion. This fact is important and is mentioned here to assist in the formation of a conclusion as to whether or not Mr. Cabell's books may be classed as literature.

VI. CONCLUSION.

It has been said that the business of criticism should be to discover an author's intention, to decide whether or not his intention tends toward the production of works that will have literary value and to determine how far the intention has been realized. Because of the widely varying critical verdicts as to the purpose of Mr. Cabell's books, it has been considered necessary to present that purpose here as nearly as possible in the writer's own words. An examination of the "Biography" leads to the decision that the surface aspects of his intention have been realized. He has certainly "toyed amorously with ideas", and his careful craftsmanship indicates the seriousness of the avowal that he has tried to write "perfectly". If one accepts the definition of the adjective "beautiful" as "intellectually satisfying", there are many who will agree that he has written of "beautiful happenings" in his attempt at self-diversion.

We are left with the question as to whether or not his intention has led to writing which possesses literary value. It has been noted that Mr. Cabell has employed, throughout the "Biography", ideas which infuse all literature. The critics, with few exceptions, agree that the manner of his writing is worthy of classification as fine literary style, however much they cavil at his matter. Mr. Cabell, then, has produced literature. The appreciation of any type of literature, however, depends on the individual reader. There are many for whom that

special kind created by Mr. Cabell has little appeal. Fred L. Pattee, for instance, prefaces his attempt at an interpretation of Mr. Cabell's philosophy with the following words, "If one has the time to plough through this wilderness of eccentricities and idioms, this maze of innuendo and ironic criticism...."[193] Mr. Cabell has been criticized for his obscurities, his veiled references, his use of archaic terms, and his mythological allusions. To some readers, however, this wilderness provides interesting matter for enjoyment and speculation. Much pleasure may be found in tracing allusions, deciphering anagrams, and studying the sources of the actual and mythical history required for an appreciation of various chapters in the life of Manuel and his descendants.

Indeed, Clifton Fadiman maintains that this pleasure is one of the main sources of any popularity that Cabell's works may have enjoyed. He claims that the intellectual satisfaction of those, (usually college students), who have succeeded in interpreing some vague passage in one of Mr. Cabell's books impairs their critical judgment.[194] In the same article Fadiman writes "Here is a graceful and cynical avoidance of those contemporary problems which to the sensitive young undergraduate are only disturbing until he is assured by Mr. Cabell that they are ephemeral."[195] Other critics have written in similar fashion.[196] If the term "contemporary problems" refers to the social and economic upheavals evident at the time of the Biography's composition, it

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193. F.L. Pattee, New American Literature, p. 354
194. C. Fadiman, (James) Branch Cabell, The Nation, vol. 136, p.309, (April 12, 1933)
195. Ibid.
196. e.g. L. Lewisohn, op. cit. p.560.
"The fields of earth are on fire under our feet and Cabell offers us the daydreams of a romantic adolescent. There is a famine and he goes about hawking expensive and soon cloying sweets."

must be admitted that Mr. Cabell has ignored them. What is more, he stated explicitly that it was his intention to ignore them. Member of a generation in which thinking men had lost faith in their outmoded standards and were shocked into inability to form new ones, Mr. Cabell evidently felt the necessity of seeking beyond the factors of daily life for some explanation of his own existence and that of mankind in general. His chief objection to realism was that the majority of its exponents merely attempted to foster the illusion that the events which they were describing actually happened. Mr. Cabell did not consider this illusion alone, however successfully attained, sufficient warrant for the classification of such work as literature.[197] This attitude towards realism has been seized upon by those critics who have described Mr. Cabell as an escapist. They forget his admission that the novel of contemporary life may become literature if the tale becomes a symbol of what is really integral to human existence, rather than a realistic account of an individual life history.[198]

What is to be found in the "comedies" comprising the "Biography", which will be of assistance in answering the vital question, "What is it all up to?"? Careless readers of Mr. Cabell's books have found but little help therein. Apparently no definite conclusions are drawn. One is decidedly conscious of that conception of reality which views man as the midge briefly inhabiting a tiny speck in the universe. But there

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197. See above p. 22.
198. Ibid.

gradually comes to the careful reader of the "biography" an awareness of Mr. Cabell's meaning when he writes of the power exerted by the will that stirs in us to have the creatures of earth and the affairs of earth not as they are, but"as they ought to be," which visibly sways all life and which was John Charteris's definition of God. To many of Mr. Cabell's generation "things as they are" meant a world devoid of authority, in which monstrous clever persons had turned from religion to science, and from science to sociological experiment, without finding any satisfactory substitute for the faiths which they had lost. In the face of this disillusionment, Mr. Cabell, in his own person professes nothing definite. But through the mouths of the fictitious authors who are credited with the various chapters relating the adventures of Manuel and his descendants, words have passed, as we have seen, which stem from the evolutionary concept of human existence set forth in Beyond Life. "We are being made into something quite unpredictable, I imagine: and through the purging and the smelting, we are sustained by an instinctive knowledge that we are being made into something better."[199] In spite of the irony, the apparent cynicism, and the frequent overemphasis of sensuality, which form the background for the actions of his characters, there is in Mr. Cabell's concept of "things as they ought to be" much more of the Aristotelian sense than most critics have been able to discern. The doctrine that man "plays the ape to his dreams", that life follows art, which may have been borrowed from Wilde, is elevated from its position as an argument for "ars gratia

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199. See above, p.30.

artis" to that for art as a factor in man's evolution.

One of the reasons for Mr. Cabell's dissatisfaction with life is expressed in many places by various characters in the "Biography." In a book signed Branch Cabell, Roland expresses it this way:- "I would not dispraise our human life here nor the brave earth which is its theatre. I have found life very good. I praise life. It is only that a boy creates in his day-dreams a life which is better. We foreplan in our youth a life which we do not live in our maturity if only because every young person must design, with a high heart, the impossible." [200] Human life may at all times be regarded as a tragedy. There are periods of its history which seem more tragical than others, periods such as that of which Mr. Cabell is a representative where man seems left to face life on his own resources and finds himself almost unequal to the task. But mankind has passed such crises before and there is apparent in the "Biography", as well as in passages from some of Mr. Cabell's disillusioned realist contemporaries and predecessors, evidence of a belief that mankind would rise above the present one. Stephen Crane, whose Red Badge of Courage, Maggie, A Girl of the Streets, and The Monster, grew out of bitterness, could yet write the following lines:

> Once I saw mountains angry,
> And ranged in battle-front.
> Against them stood a little man;
> Ay, he was no bigger than my finger.
> I laughed, and spoke to one near me,
> "Will he prevail?"
> "Surely," replied this other;
> "His grandfathers beat them many times."
> Then did I see much virtue in grandfathers,-
> At least, for the little man
> Who stood against the mountains. [201]

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200. Branch Cabell's Smith, p. 12.
201. Quoted by William Lyon Phelps, What I Like in Poetry, p.204.

At the present time, in spite of the world's struggle in the throes of the greatest war of all time, and the indecision with regard to a solution of post-war problems, our thinkers have begun to appreciate Voltaire's contention that "doubt is a disagreeable state but certainty a ridiculous one", and to re-evaluate their concepts of religion and science. In other words, we are beginning to look upon the life of the mind as the adventure described by Professor Whitehead. We have overpassed, then, the need for what may be considered Mr. Cabell's chief contribution to the thinking of his generation. This contribution, concealed as it was within the romantic fabric of the "Biography" and often presented through the medium of rogues as gay as any to be found in literature since Petronius wrote in Nero's time, has been almost entirely overlooked. This is not a contention that all of Mr. Cabell's work reaches the high level referred to above, for there is much in his books that brings dissatisfaction. The contribution is perhaps lessened by the author's apparent lack of social consciousness. The problems faced in the novels are those of individuals apart from corporate society, and this in an age which cries out for concerted effort by peoples and nations. Much of the adverse criticism Cabell has received has been merited, but justice demands that credit be given where it is due.

It may be said in extenuation of critical misinterpretation that a clear picture of Mr. Cabell's actual position is only possible after a study of the "Biography" as a unit, and it is apparent that the majority of critics have not so considered it.

An analysis of Mr. Cabell's works leads to the conclusion that he should not be looked upon as "the untouchable resident of the ivory tower, the dauntless champion of pure romance and roseate dream, the indefatigable spokesman of art for art's sake", as the majority of critics describe him. He is at one with a certain group of writers of his generation who, by various methods, reflected a mood which affected the thinking of a large number of that generation. We have observed the transient nature of that mood. As to the chances of survival of such writers, one may disagree with Mr. Cabell's verdict that all are doomed to be quickly "huddled away into oblivion" because they suggested no "panacea" for their troubles. There is an underlying seriousness and sincerity in their very doubting, though some of them are, in the phrase of Anatole France, "disappointed idealists who laugh in order not to weep". Many of these writers, perhaps the majority, have failed to produce enduring work because they have used the "realistic" method in terms of Mr. Cabell's first definition, achieving only that surface appearance of reality which "amounts to nothing aesthetically." There are some realists, however, who have used the method in such a way that it leads to the symbolic interpretation of life approved by Mr. Cabell, through which tales of our contemporaries "shift incommunicably to fine art." In defiance of a majority critical verdict, it has been maintained here that Mr. Cabell also has employed his unique "romantic" method in a manner whereby we are sometimes conscious of "humanity, and the strivings of an ape reft of his tail, and grown rusty at climbing, who yet, however dimly, feels himself to be a symbol, and the frail

representative of Omnipotence in a place that is not home; and so strives blunderingly, from mystery to mystery---ready to give all and to die fighting for the sake of that undemonstrable idea." It must be recognized, too, that in Mr. Cabell's books may be found some evidence of "those auctorial virtues of distinction and clarity, of beauty and symmetry, of tenderness and truth and urbanity" by which books are best insured against oblivion. They will at least remain in the memory of those who, in a dark period of man's evolution, were able to find in them some assurance that mankind would not give in to despair but continue to move forward toward the goal of "things as they ought to be".

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The works of H.L. Mencken and Hugh Walpole on James Branch Cabell were unprocurable. Mencken's opinion is reflected, however, in the various volumes of the "Prejudices" series.

There follows a list of Mr. Cabell's works in the chronological order of their publication, as well as a list of the books which comprise the "Biography" in the order of their position as Chapters in the complete story of Manuel and his descendants.

The Eagle's Shadow, 1904.

The Line of Love, 1905.

Gallantry, 1907.

The Cords of Vanity, 1907.

Chivalry, 1909.

The Soul of Melicent, 1913.
(The title of this book was changed to Domnei on republication in 1920.)

The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck, 1915.

From the Hidden Way, 1916.
(A volume of verse supposedly translations from ancient French poets.)

The Certain Hour, 1916.

The Cream of the Jest, 1917.

Beyond Life, 1919.

Jurgen
Figures of Earth, 1921.

The Jewel Merchants, 1921.
(This was a short play written for performance in one of the Richmond schools.)

The Lineage of Lichfield, 1922.

The High Place, 1923.

Straws and Prayer Books, 1924.

The Silver Stallion, 1926.

Something About Eve, 1927.

The White Robe, 1928.

The Way of Ecben, 1929.

Townsend of Lichfield, 1930.

Some of Us, 1930.

(The following volumes are signed Branch Cabell.)

These Restless Heads, 1932.

Special Delivery, 1933.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 1934.

Smirt, 1934.

Smith, 1935.

Smire, 1937.

The King Was in His Counting House, 1938.

Hamlet Had an Uncle, 1940.

The First Gentleman of America, 1942.

THE BIOGRAPHY.

Beyond Life.(The prologue)

Figures of Earth.

The Silver Stallion.

Domnei.

Chivalry.

The Music From Behind the Moon.

Jurgen.

The Line of Love.

The High Place.

Gallantry.

Something About Eve.

The Certain Hour.

The Cords of Vanity.

From the Hidden Way.

The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck.

The Eagle's Shadow.

The Cream of the Jest.

Straws and Prayer Books. (The epilogue)