

Oh, well, there was nothing else it could do. It had been lying for so long, it had been making promises for so long, and promising much too much. Always it had taken and taken, and now for a change when it was its turn to give, there was nothing it had to offer. It drew back cringing like a swindler who has named a false address and now is being taken there where no one will know him, where he will have to be silent, where he will be unmasked.

That was its death blow.

But vampires survive many death blows and revive again, come back and demand to eat again, to feed once more on living blood. This one too is still alive, still has tricks and devices. But now I know it for my enemy.

I have known this since the day I had my final insight.

It came like all insights, in a familiar, oft-encountered guise. It was a saying I came upon by accident in a book, an old saying, a quotation from the Bible, and one with which I had been acquainted for many years and knew by rote. But today it was new, today it was full of significance.

/ The kingdom of God is within you. /

Now I have something again to strive for, something that guides me, to which I sacrifice blood. It is no wish or dream, it is a goal.

This goal is once more—a refuge, but not a cave or a ship. I seek and long for a refuge within myself, a place where only I am, whither the world cannot reach and where I alone dwell, safer than mountain or cave, safer and more hidden than coffin or tomb. That is my goal, there nothing shall be able to intrude unless it become completely I.

Then let there be storms, let there be pains, let blood flow.

I am still far from that place, I am still on the first stage of the way, but it is now my way, no longer a dream.

O deep refuge! No storm reaches you, no fire burns you, no war destroys you. Little room within, little coffin, little cradle, you are my goal.

Concerning the Soul

1917

THE EYE OF DESIRE dirties and distorts. Only when we desire nothing, only when our gaze becomes pure contemplation, does the soul of things (which is beauty) open itself to us. [If I inspect a forest with the intention of buying it, renting it, cutting it down, going hunting in it, or mortgaging it, then I do not see the forest but only its relation to my desires, plans, and concerns, to my purse.] Then it consists of wood, it is young or old, healthy or diseased. But if I want nothing from it but to gaze, "thoughtlessly," into its green depths, then it becomes a forest, nature, a growing thing; only then is it beautiful.

[So it is with people, and with people's faces too. The man whom I look at with dread or hope, with greed, designs, or demands, is not a man but a cloudy mirror of my own desire.] Whether I am aware of it or not, I regard him in the light of questions that limit and falsify: Is he approachable, or arrogant? Does he respect me? Is he a good prospect for a loan? Does he understand anything about art? A thousand such questions are in our minds as we look at most people we have to deal with, and we are considered expert psychologists if we succeed in detecting in their appearance, manner, and behavior whatever it is that will abet or hinder our plans. But this attitude is a shabby one, and in this kind of psychology the peasant, the peddler, the shyster lawyer are superior to most politicians and scholars.

At the moment when desire ceases and contemplation, pure seeing, and self-surrender begin, everything changes. Man ceases to be useful or dangerous, interesting or boring, genial or rude, strong or weak. He becomes nature, he becomes beautiful and remarkable as does everything that is

an object of clear contemplation. For indeed contemplation is not scrutiny or criticism, it is nothing but love. It is the highest and most desirable state of our souls: undemanding love.

If we have once achieved this state, be it for minutes, hours, or days (to sustain it permanently would be perfect bliss), then people no longer appear as they used to. They are not mirrors or caricatures of our desire, they become nature once more. Beautiful and ugly, old and young, cordial and offensive, open and taciturn, harsh and mild are no longer opposites, nor are they standards of judgment. All are beautiful, all are remarkable, no one can any longer be despised, hated, misunderstood.

Just as, from the standpoint of quiet contemplation, all nature is nothing but the changing manifestation of eternally creative immortal life, so man's special role and duty is to represent soul. Pointless to argue whether "soul" is something specifically human, whether it does not reside in animals and plants as well! Certainly soul is everywhere, is possible everywhere, is prepared for everywhere, is surmised and longed for everywhere. But just as we think of the animal and not the stone as representative of motion (though stones too move, live, grow, decay, vibrate) so we look for soul principally among men. We look for it in the place where it is most visible, where it suffers and acts. And man seems to us to be that corner of the universe, that particular province whose present duty it is to develop soul—as it was once his duty to walk upright, discard his animal fur, invent tools, make fire.

Thus collective mankind becomes for us a representation of the soul. Just as in mountain and rock I see and love the primal force of gravity, in animals motion and essays at freedom, so in the human being (who represents all these things too) I see first of all that form and promise of life which we call "soul" and which seems to us human beings not just a random beam of vitality among a thousand others but a deliberately selected, highly evolved goal in itself. For no matter whether our thought is materialistic,

idealistic, or whatever, or whether we consider the "soul" as something divine or as the oxidizing of matter, we nevertheless all know it and value it highly; for each of us, the inspired eye of man, his art, the formation of his soul constitute the highest, newest, most precious stage and high-water mark of all organic life.

And so our fellow man comes to be for us the noblest, grandest, most precious object of contemplation. Not everyone makes this obvious evaluation at once or without difficulty—this I know from my own experience. In my youth I had closer and more intimate relations with landscapes and works of art than with human beings; indeed, I dreamed for years of a poem in which only air, earth, water, trees, mountains, and animals would appear, no human beings. I saw man so far astray from the path of the soul, so enslaved by desire, so crude and wild in his pursuit of animal, apelike, prehistoric goals, so intent upon rubbish and gimcracks, that temporarily I fell into the serious error of believing that perhaps man had already been discarded as the pathway to the soul and was in process of retrogression, that this fountain must make its way out of nature by some other course.

When one observes the behavior of two average men of today who have just met by chance and really want nothing of each other, one can sense almost palpably how thick and oppressive is the atmosphere surrounding each one, how defensive his protective crust, how he is swathed in a net woven of distractions from the spiritual, of intentions, anxieties, and wishes that are all directed toward the nonessential and that separate him from everyone else. It is as though the soul could not be allowed to speak, as though it had to be walled off by high fences, fences of fear and shame. Only undemanding love can break through this net. And wherever the net is penetrated, soul stares us in the face.

Sit in a railroad car and observe two young gentlemen, who speak to each other because chance has thrown them together for an hour. Their conversation is extremely odd,

it is almost tragic. These inoffensive folk seem to be hailing each other from enormous, icy distances of alienation, as though poles apart—naturally I am not thinking of Malaysians or Chinese but of modern Europeans—they seem each to live in a fortress of pride, of threatened pride, of suspicion and wariness. What they say, objectively considered, is utter nonsense; it is the calcified hieroglyphics of that soulless world which we are constantly outgrowing but whose icy fragments continue to cling to us. Rare, rare indeed, are the individuals whose souls find expression in daily talk. They are even more than poets, they are almost holy men. No doubt the "simple folk" have a soul, the Malayan and the Negro, and in their salutations and manner of address show more soul than most of the rest of us. But their soul is not the one we strive for and desire, although it is precious to us and closely related. The soul of the primitive, which has not yet encountered any alienation, any of the misery of a profane and mechanized world, is a collective simple, childlike soul, a beautiful and lovable thing, but not our goal. Our two young Europeans in the railroad car have got beyond that. They show little soul or none at all, they seem to be composed exclusively of organized will, or intellect, and plans and schemes. They have left their souls in the world of money, of machines, of suspicion. They must find them again; they will sicken and suffer if they neglect this task. But what they will then have will no longer be the lost soul of childhood but a much finer, more personal, richer, and more responsible soul. Our path does not lead backward to the child, to the primitive, but forward, to personality, to responsibility, to freedom.

With our two young men there is no hint of those goals or any intuition of them. Neither primitives nor saints, they speak the language of every day, a language that fits as little the goals of the soul as does the hide of the gorilla, which we are only now painfully discarding after a hundred tentative tries.

Their prehistoric, crude, stammering speech runs something like this:

Concerning the Soul

"Morning," says one.

"Day," says the other.

"May I?"

"Certainly."

And so what needs to be said has been said. Meaning is completely lacking in the words, they are simply the ritual of primitive man, their point and value being the same as those of the ring that the African wears in his nose.

Extremely odd, however, is the tone in which these ritualistic words are uttered. They are courteous words, but they sound abrupt, terse, grudging, cool, not to say angry. There is no cause for strife here, quite the contrary, and neither of the two men harbors any offensive thought. But in manner and tone they are cold, formal, stiff, almost as though insulted. As he says, "Certainly," the blond man arches his eyebrows in an expression bordering on contempt. He does not feel contemptuous. He is simply using a ritual that through decades of soulless association among men has become a device for self-protection. He thinks he has to hide his inner feelings, his soul; he does not know that the soul thrives only on being shown and being surrendered. He is proud, he is a personality, he is no longer a naïve savage. But his pride is pathetically unsure, it has to fortify itself, has to throw up cold, defensive walls around itself. This pride would be wiped out if one were to win a smile from him. And all this coldness, all this angry, nervous, proud, and at the same time insecure conversational tone between the "educated" is symptomatic of sickness, a necessary and therefore hopeful sickness of the soul, which knows of no other way to protect itself from being overpowered except by such behavior. How timid and weak this soul is, how young and unrecognized it feels itself on earth! How it retreats, how terrified it is!

Now if one of these two men were to behave as he would like to and as he really feels, he would offer the other his hand or clap him on the shoulder and say something like this: "God, what a fine morning, everything's like gold, and I'm on vacation! How do you like my new tie, beautiful,

phatic speech

isn't it? And by the way, I have some apples in my bag, will you have one?"

If he actually spoke like this, the other would experience something uncommonly cheering and touching, something like a laugh and a sob, for he would realize that now the soul of the other was speaking, that the subject was neither apples nor ties but simply the fact that here a breakthrough had occurred, something had rightfully come to light that we repress on the strength of a convention—a convention, alas, still strongly compelling even though we already feel intimations of its eventual demise!

That's what he would feel, but he would not acknowledge it. He would take recourse in some mechanical, defensive action, would toss off some meaningless fragment of speech, one of our thousand substitutes for communication: "Yes . . . very nice," or something of the sort; he would glance away with a jerk of the head indicative of offense and overtried patience. He would play with his watch chain, stare out the window, and by twenty such hieroglyphs show that he had no intention of revealing his inner joy, that he would express nothing at all or at the very most a certain amount of pity for this intrusive gentleman.

However none of this happens. The dark-haired man actually has apples in his bag and he really feels an immense boyish joy over the beautiful day, his vacation, his tie, and his yellow shoes. But if the other now chances to say, "Miserable business, this exchange rate," then the dark-haired man will not act as his soul urges him to, he will not shout, "Oh, nonsense, let's forget that, what does the exchange rate matter to us!" Instead, he will look anguished and say with a sigh, "Tch, tch, it's horrible, isn't it?"

It is a remarkable sight: these two gentlemen (like all of us) apparently have no trouble at all in behaving this way, in subjecting themselves to a monstrous compulsion of this sort. They can act glum with a laughing heart, can pretend coldness and repulsion when their souls cry out to communicate.

But you go on watching. If the soul does not lie in the

words, the demeanor, the tone of voice, it must exist somewhere, after all. And then you see that the blond man has forgotten himself; feeling unobserved, he is gazing through the car window at the pointed fir trees, and his glance is free and untroubled, full of youth, yearning, and naïve, ardent dreams. He looks entirely different, younger, less complicated, more innocent, above all handsomer. The other, however, the equally irreproachable and unapproachable gentleman, stands up and stretches out his hand to his suitcase in the net above his head. He does this as though he wanted to make sure of its being steady and in no danger of falling, but the bag is perfectly all right and in no need of steadying. In fact, this is not the young man's desire at all, he simply wants to touch it, to assure himself that it is there, to stroke it affectionately. For in that impeccably businesslike leather case there is, in addition to the apples and his linen, something important, something holy, a gift for his darling back home, a porcelain dachshund or the Cologne cathedral in marzipan, no matter what, but it is of utmost importance to this young man at this time, something to build dreams on, to love and idolize, something that he would really like to hold constantly in his hands and stroke and admire.

During an hour's train trip you have now observed two young, moderately well educated, average men of today; they have uttered words, exchanged greetings and opinions, nodded and shaken their heads, done a thousand little things, talked shop, performed actions—and in none of all this have their souls taken part, in no word, no glance; everything was masked, mechanical, everything with the exception of the one self-forgetful glance through the window at the distant bluish woods and the brief, awkward reaching out for the leather suitcase.

And you think: O timorous souls! Will you someday break forth? Perhaps beautifully and intensely in a liberating experience, united with a bride, in battle for a belief, in act and in sacrifice—perhaps suddenly and desperately in a frantic release of the oppressed, concealed, and dark-

ened impulse of the heart, in a wild denunciation, in a crime, in a deed of violence! And I and all of us: how will we guide our souls through this world, will we succeed in helping them in the right course, in giving them a share in our gestures and our words? Will we resign ourselves to the crowd and submit to inertia, again and again caging the bird, again and again putting rings in our noses?

And the realization comes to you: whenever nose rings and gorilla hides are discarded, soul is at work. If it were untrammelled we would converse together like Goethe's characters and feel every breath as a song. Poor splendid soul, where you are, there is revolution, there is an end to decay, there is new life, and God. Soul is love, soul is the future; all else is only stuff, only matter, only a hindrance on which our divine power can exercise itself, shaping and destroying.

Further thoughts arise: Do you not live in an age when the new loudly proclaims itself, when the bonds of humanity are being rudely shaken, when violence strikes in monstrous fashion, death rages, despair cries aloud? And is not soul behind all these things as well?

Ask your soul! Ask her who means freedom, whose name is love! Do not inquire of your intellect, do not search backwards through world history! Your soul will not blame you for having cared too little about politics, for having exerted yourself too little, hated your enemies too little, or too little fortified your frontiers. But she will perhaps blame you for so often having feared and fled from her demands, for never having had time to give her, your youngest and fairest child, no time to play with her, no time to listen to her song, for often having sold her for money, betrayed her for advancement. Thus it has happened with millions, and wherever you look people wear nervous, tormented, angry faces, they have had no time except for the nonessential, for stock exchanges and sanitariums, and this painful state is nothing but a warning sign, an admonition in the blood. You will be neurotic and a foe to life—so says your soul—if you neglect me, and you will be destroyed if you do not turn to me with a wholly new love and concern. Nor is it by

any means the weak and worthless who nowadays become sick and lose their capacity for happiness. Rather it is the good, who are the seed of the future; these are the ones whose souls are not at peace, who still withdraw simply out of timidity from this battle against a false world order but who tomorrow perhaps will take part in earnest.

From this vantage point Europe resembles a sleeper in a nightmare, striking out and injuring himself.

Yes, then you remember that once a professor said something like this to you, that the world was suffering from materialism and intellectualism. He was quite right, but he cannot be your physician any more than he can be his own. With him intelligence goes on discoursing to the point of self-annihilation. He will perish.

Let the world's course be what it may, you will always find a physician and helper, a new energy and future within yourself, in your poor, ill-used, tractable, indestructible soul. The soul has no knowledge, no judgment, no program. It has simply impetus, feeling, the future. The great saints and preachers followed it, the heroes and sufferers, the great generals and conquerors; the great magicians and artists followed it, and all those whose way began in the commonplace and ended on the holy heights. The way of millionaires is a different way and ends in the sanitarium.

Ants too wage war, bees have societies, pack rats collect treasures. Your soul seeks other paths, and when it is cheated, when you win success at its expense, no happiness blossoms for you. For "happiness" can be felt only by the soul, not by the intellect, the belly, the head, or the purse.

However, one cannot ponder and discuss this subject for long without hitting upon the saying that long since illuminated and expressed it definitively. It was spoken in ancient times and belongs among the few human utterances that are ageless and always new: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" — *Bilde*.