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The religion of a scientist, 1930.

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THE RELIGION OF A SCIENTIST BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY Nov. 9th, 1930

The great Jewish scientist, Albert Einstein, was recently the guest of honor at a dinner in London inaugurating a campaign of British Jewry or the organization known as the Joint Committee for the Promotion of Eastern Jewry, an organization which devotes itself to the economic condition of Jews in Eastern Europe which has done most valuable work. Jewry has not yet recovered from the ravages of the war.

Albert Einstein made a special trip from Berlin to attend this dinner as the guest of honor. For Einstein besides being a great scientist is one of the great humanitarians of our day. He loves his fellowmen. He gives of himself unstintingly, whenever he can, to the suffering and to help the poor.

At this dinner many of the distinguished Jews of London were present. Among them George Bernard Shaw, who delivered an address at this gathering and offered a toast to Albert Einstein. In so doing he called him "the greatest of our contemporaries." The Greatest of Our Contemporaries!

That is honor enough, to be acclaimed as the greatest man living. But this intellectual Shaw went a step further. He placed Albert Einstein among the eight great men whom he thought to be "builders of the universe."

Since the beginning of time, men have constructed systems, universal systems for mapkind and Shaw named eight of them. And he included Albert Einstein among them. The eight were: Euclid, Ptolemy, Kepler, Copernicus, Aristotle, Galilee, Newton and Einstein. Among these eight of all times, he singled out three, whom he thought were the greatest among these eight. And among these three he placed Albert Einstein. Recently there was dedicated in the city of New York a new and magnificent church edifice. A church whose minister Fosdick. In keeping with an old architectural tradition, statues or Gothic effigies of some of the greatest men who lived were placed in front of the portals of this church. The effigy of only one living man was found worthy enough to be offered a notch in that galaxy of portrature of great men. And that one living man was Albert Einstein. Not a Christian and not what we might call an orthodox religionist.

Evidently there is something about this man that has caught the imagination of mankind. He has drawn up a saga, an Einstein legend, as it were. Something in the man responds to the heart of the world.

It is therefore of great interest to listen to such a man when he speaks on the subject of religion. We would all go a long way to hear what Einstein has to say on the subject of "What I Believe." And recently he made such a confession of faith. He wrote down for his own satisfaction and perhaps to share his ideals with other peoples' what he actually believed.

I want to discuss that creed of Einstein with you this morning. One or two things immediately catch one's eye not only in reading this creed but in surveying the life and personality of the man. First of all, the warm-heartedness of this scientist. One is accustomed to think of scientists, especially of those scientists who deal in cold, abstract, and inter-stellar spaces, in matter and figures that most of us don't even understand, one is accustomed to

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think of them as somehow removed, distant, aloof, living in some ivory tower of isolation, caring not at all about the team and of the world but content to deal in infinites and eternal essence and to ignore the human.

Not so Einstein. Albert Einstein loves his fellow humanbeings with a passionate love. He suffers when they suffer. The weaknesses and sins and the injustices of the world hurt him deeply and he wants to help. He lives in the arena of human life.

Then you are impressed with the profound humility of the man, which by the way, is true of all great men. Einstein is a man of exceeding humility and modesty. You will remember that the one supreme tribute that the people could find for Moses is just that (quote Hebrew)

"This man Moses was the humblestof all men, etc. because the greater the man, the more accurately it is to see himself in relation with the universe and understand his own littleness.

And then again one is impressed with the unreserved, unapologetic, quiet, Jewishness of Albert Einstein. There are some Jews who when they become great and achieve importance in the world want to flee from Judaism. There are some Jews who haven't achieved greatness who want to do just that, especially those who have made a little money. Judaism is not good enough for their children. They become miserable social climbers. They want to assimilate, seek the protective coloration of the majority among which they find themselves.

Not so this "the greatest of our contemporaries." Albert Einstein is a Jew in every fiber of his being and nothing Jewish is alien to him. He has identified himself actively with every cultural Jewish movement

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in Germany and throughout the world. He is one of the leaders today of Zionism. He travels from Berlin to London, from Berlin to Warsaw, from Berlin to Moscow at the behest of some Jewish cause or to help to **inspirit** his people, to guide them. Evidently he finds it not at all difficult to harmonize his German citizenship, his human and

It is only little souls who find it difficult to establish that simple harmony in life, for all that is required to receive that harmony is straight-forwardness and sincerity and simplicity.

And now I come to Albert Einstein's creed - what Albert Einstein believes in.

In the first place Albert Einstein does not belong to that class of rationalists, who believe that everything is so simple that all you need is to know a little arithmetic, a little chemistry and you have the whole riddle solved right there. He doesn't belong to that crowd which wants tremendous credit for a little cash knowledge which they actually have. Albert Einstein knows how much there is in the universe that is unknowable, mysterious, beyond the reach and grasp of the human mind. And so he says: "the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed. This insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense,

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and in this sense only, I belong in the ranks of devoutly religious men."

Strange is it not that the man who has revolutionized the whole concept of the structure of the universe, who knows more about time, space, relationship of the spheres, than any human being alive or than any human being that ever lived, according to the testimony of these people, that he should acknowledge that there is a mysterious, impenetrable Thing in the universe; that even he stands rapt in awe before the manifestations of the unknowable which he can not fathom.

How much that is in consonance with the Jewish tradition. Rashi's "quote" "The beginning of wisdom forever."

And then let it be remembered that when Albert Einstein speaks of the mystery of the world, he doesn't have in mind simply the mystery of nature in the same sense that the materialist thinks of nature, a machine, a mechanism. Einstein is not that naive. Einstein speaks of the manifestation of the highest wisdom in nature. In another connection he speaks of a purpose in nature. In that sense Einstein is a profoundly religious man for the one critical distinction between the religious and non-religious man is just that. The non-religious man thinks that the world is a thing, a machine without thought, without purpose, without intelligence. The religious man believes that the world is a Personality; that the world is the manifestation of a form principally of the mind at work, of a wisdom expressing itself. Einstein belongs most surely on the platform of the religious man when he speaks of the wisdom, the intelligence and purpose of the universe. That is the one sine qua non of religion. All else is secondary. If religion has any

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dogma, that is the dogma of religion. All else is derivative.

Albert Einstein does not believe in a God who rewards and punishes as we conceive of reward and punishment.

"I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own - a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty."

Neither do we believe in that kind of reward and punishment. Neither did Job believe in it. You remember that the whole theme of that great classic is that God does not reward men for their good deeds as we would, nor does He punish them as we would. The reward of the good is the good itself; the punishment for the evil is the evil itself. We must look for the compensations of the good life in the satisfactions which come from doing the good and the true and we must look for the punishments of the evil likewise within, in the devastations which follow the good and the evil.

Therefore the Rabbis declared "Hebrew" "Be not like servants who serve the master for the sake of reward. Be like those who serve the master without of reward." Wirtue has its own reward. But surely no one who believes that there is such a thing as wisdom and intelligence in this world can for a moment grant that good does not yield good and evil does not yield evil. For if you agree to such a principle then there is in the world. Our whole moral and

In that sense there is Providence and in that sense there is reward. In that sense too, I am sure that Albert Einstein will agree with what we call retribution.

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Einstein does not believe in survival of man after death of the body: "Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotism. It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive and to try to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature."

But one may be a profoundly religious man and not believe in personal survival after death. I refer again to the book of Job. You know there is very little about immortality in the Bible. There is a clear repudiation of the whole doctrine in the Book of Job. Says Job:

> "For there is hope of a tree If it be cut down that it will sprout again, And that the tender branch thereof will not cease... Through the scent of water it will bud And put forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and lieth low; Yea, man perisheth and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, And the river is drained dry; So man lieth down and riseth not. Till the heaven be no more, they shall not awake, Nor be roused out of their sleep."

There have been great religious figures in the past who questioned immortality and Einstein in so doing does not put himself in the class with the non-religious necessarily. However, it should be remembered that non-belief in immortality is no more scientific than belief in immortality. It has not been demonstrated scientifically that the vital essence of man ceases with the break-up of his mortal body. It has not at all been demonstrated that the energy known to man, - life energy, mind energy is destroyed while all other forms of energy can not be destroyed. For one of the laws of physics is a confirmation of energy.

Albert Einstein simply expresses an opinion. His opinion is valid for him. It has no objective or universal validity.

And then Albert Einstein questions what we call free will. He says: "I do not believe we can have any freedom at all in the philosophical sense, for we act not only under external compulsion but also by inner necessity. Schopenhauer's saying - "A man cannot determine what he wills" impressed itself upon me in youth and has always consoled me when I have witnessed or suffered life's hardships."

Now the subject of free will is a hard nut to crack. It is not only a theologic problem, it is today a scientific problem. It is one of the oldest problems of mankind and one which will probably never be solved. Like the problem of the hen and the egg, which came first?

Plato and Aristotle and nearly every Jewish prophet wrestled with this problem of freedom of the will. Because theologians are trained that it is difficult to

if God knows before-hand what will happen, what a man will do, then clearly a man has no free will. He has no choice

to reconcile God

No one has solved the problem to the satisfaction of everyone.

Saadia, the Jewish philosopher of the Ninth Century said that while God does know what a man will do, that knowledge is not compulsory. Just as the weather-man's knowledge of what the weather will be tomorrow does not cause that weather.

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Bachya says the problem is too complicated and can not be solved.

Ab D said that God willed that there should be alternatives from which men should choose.

Crescas, who more than anyone else influenced Spinoza, denied like Einstein

He allowed what we call partial freedom, just as Spinoza did. I said a moment ago that the problem is not theologic. It is a scientific problem and not at all one that has been solved.

If we assume that the mind of man is constructed along mechanistic lines and that the only order in the universe is a mechanistic order and that the only force in the universe is mechanical force, then clearly man is not free any more than a machine is free. What right have we to assume that? Where is the proof? There is none. And what right have we on such an assumption to repudiate the facts of our own experience and observation. For if there is anything that we do experience it is just this; that at times we do deliberately make a choice. We weigh, we deliberate and then we feel that are making a choice. At times we are well aware that we are forced to do a certain thing. Again we spend hours and days in thinking over them. We know that we have made a certain decision. These are important tendencies and we can not repudiate that evidence because we have beforehand agreed that there is only one type of energy and one order of the universe - the mechanical.

Psychologists are coming more and more to believe that man has within himself sources of judgment, of action; that man plans, that man projects, that man can will. There are even scientists who believe that the mechanistic interpretation can not apply to such sciences as chemistry.

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So that the problem is not solved by Albert Einstein's statement that he does not believe that there is any freedom at all in the philosophical sense. Here again he is giving voice to an opinion which is not scientifically demonstrable. The old problem still remains.

The Rabbis pronounced years ago "Everything is foreseen and yet free will is here."

Now I come to Albert Einstein's ethics. And here we see the ancient Hebrew prophet in Einstein.

In the first place, Einstein does not believe in the ethics of the trough, the ethics that a man lives to be happy; that his sole concern in life is to have comfort and luxury, - the ethics of Epicureanism. Einstein says: "The ideals which have always shone before me and filled me with the joy of living are goodness, beauty, and truth. To make a goal of comfort or happiness has never appealed to me; a system of ethics built on this basis would be sufficient only for a herd of cattle. Without the sense of collaborating with like-minded beings in the pursuit of the ever unattainable in art and scientific research, my life would have been empty. Every since childhood I have scorned the commonplace limits so often set upon human ambition. Possessions, outward success, publicity, luxury - to me these have always been contemptible. I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone, best both for the body and the mind."

How thoroughly Jewish that is. Man's goal is to reach for the unattainable. That is what lends harmonious beauty to life. That is what lifts a man above the animal

to reach through them for a glimpse of the distant fields of splendor.

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The past month has witnessed most gratifying progress in the boycott movement in this country. After months of agitation practically all the leading department stores of New York have announced that they have ceased buying German merchandise. Also the very import retail chain store organization, the F. W. Woolworth Co., has announced that it has discontinued importing German goods.

This is all very gratifying. From a political point of view it would, of course, have been much more effective if these great mercantile establishments had joined the boycott movement months ago instead of hiding behind speeches and arguments which deceived no one, and yielding only to pressure of the consuming public. Only a few department stores had the courage, the vision and the high sense of human responsibility to clamp down and boycott German products as soon as the atrocities of the Hitler regime began. And It is significant, and our people should bear this fact in mind always, that among these organizations, the non-Jewish stores took the lead. Let this be said in tribute to them.

Much yet remains to be done. In the cities outside of New York with a few possible exceptions, the boycott needs much more organized and aggressive propaganda. They should be reached at once. The stimulation of the boycott work in other countries may now be undertaken.

It is becomming increasingly clear that only relentless economic pressure upon the Hitler regime will ultimately wear it down or compel a complete right-about-face in its policies and practises. Germany has defied the conscience of the world. The conscience of the world has now turned against it. Idealism, that is the basis of Einstein's ethics.

And then Einstein speaks as the prophets of old, of human interdependence. That seems to be the bed-rock upon which he bases his scheme of life. He says: ("From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men - above all, for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received. My peace of mind is often troubled by the depressing sense that I have borrowed too heavily from the work of other men."

I have never read a more superb statement than that. Here is a pathfinder of mankind expressing to the world his complete to others, claiming no credit to himself, no originality to himself, but expressing his to others living and dead who made him. How true that is. What a simple dynamic truth that is and how often we overlook it. How often do we think, my strength and the power of my wealth have gotten me this wealth of wisdom, or often forgetting our parents, our teachers, the books we read, the contacts we made, the present and past have fashioned and molded us and invisible hands put the finishing touches upon our personality.

We are not only our brothers' keepers. Our brothers are our makers and we in turn helped to make them.

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And thus Albert Einstein voices the ancient cry of his people. He speaks of "my passionate interest in social justice and social responsibility." And if there is anything that is characteristic of Jewish teaching, it is just this social justice - "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue." No group of men ever spoke with such courage in championing the rights of the denied and dispossessed and downtrodden of the earth as our prophets from the days of Isaiah to the days of Albert Einstein. We made enemies because of that. In many parts of the world we are hated because we are branded as radicals and destroyers of the peace becase we insist upon the basic of human rights and that is our immortality and Albert Einstein

And Albert Einstein is a democrat. In this age of cynicism, in this age when dictatorships are exploited, in this age when even in our own land when the influentials speak of the institutions of democracy, calling them exposing all their faults and weaknesses, Albert Einstein dares to champion the cause of democracy saying "My My w political ideal is democracy. Everyone should be respected as an individual but no one idealized." Full well do I know that in order to attain any definite goal it is imperative that one person should do the thinking and commanding and carry most of the responsibility. But those who are led should not be driven, and they should be allowed to choose their leader. It seems to me that the distinction separating the social classes are false; in the last analysis they rest on force. I am convinced that degeneracy follows every autocratic system of

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violence, for violence inevitably attracts moral inferiors. Time has proved that illustrious tyrants are succeeded by scoundrels.

For this reason I have always been passionately opposed to such regimes as exist in Russia and Italy today. The thing which has discredited the European forms of democracy is not the basic theory of democracy itself, which some say is at fault, but the instability of our political leadership, as well as the impersonal character of party alignments."

And he goes even further, which would come as a shock to our intellectuals, "I believe that you in the United States have hit upon the right idea. You choose a President for a reasonable length of time and give him enough power to acquit himself properly of his responsibilities."

I must go on to conclude.

Einstein is a great champion of peace. He is the most hated man among the militarists of Germany. Of the military Albert Einstein says in this creed of his: "this subject brings me to that vilest offspring of the herd mind - the odious militia. The man who enjoys marching in line and file to the strains of music falls below my contempt; he received his great brain by mistake - the spinal cord would have been amply sufficient. This heroism at command, this senseless violence, this accursed bombast of patriotism - how intensely I despise them! War is low and despicable, and I had rather be smitten to shreds than participate in such doings."

"Such a stain on humanity should be erased without delay. I think

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well enough of human nature to believe that it would have been wiped out long ago had not the common sense of nations been systematically corrupted through school and press for business and political reasons."

That is Isaiah speaking. That's that vision which was first projected thousands of years ago: "And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares. Nation shall not take up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more."

Isn't it miraculous how a tradition continues unbroken among a people through three thousand years, a people scattered all over the world, living under varying conditions, separated by centuries and countries and somehow the spirit remains the same? The same passion for social justice, the same passion for democracy, the same passion for peace, the same passion for human inter-dependence. That is the heritage of Israel.

If you were to ask me, is Einstein a religious man? I would say, of course he is, of course he is, as religious as those sages of ancient days who lifted up their eyes to heaven and said " who stood before the same vast mysteries, humbled and They too were uncertain of everything. They too questioned. They were troubled by the problem of Providence and immortality and free will. They could not answer things any more than we can today. But they believed as we believe, that there is in the universe a wisdom, a beneficence, a purpose, a goodness. And when all is said and done. that is what men mean when they speak of God.

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sermon 333

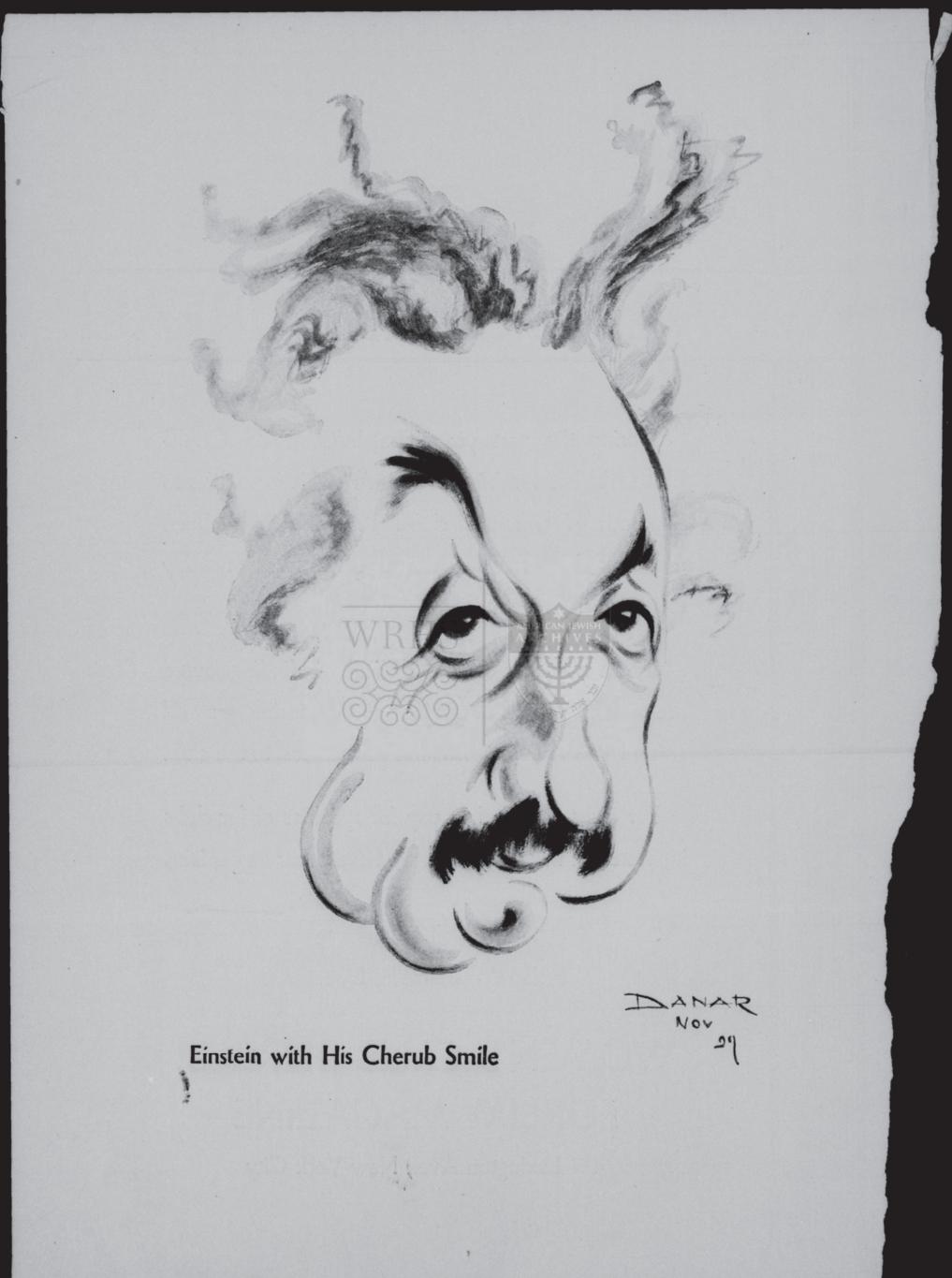
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WOMEN'S CLUB BUREAU FORUM MAGAZINE

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OCTOBER, 1930



VOL. LXXXIV, NO. 4

What I Believe

Living Philosophies XIII

by ALBERT EINSTEIN

TRANGE is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose.

From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men — above all for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received. My peace of mind is often troubled by the depressing sense that I have borrowed too heavily from the work of other men.

I do not believe we can have any freedom at all in the philosophical sense, for we act not only under external compulsion but also by inner necessity. Schopenhauer's saying — "A man can surely do what he wills to do, but he cannot determine what ne wills" — impressed itself upon me in youth and has always consoled me when I have witnessed or suffered life's hardships. This conviction is a perpetual breeder of tolerance, for it does not allow us to take ourselves or others too seriously; it makes rather for a sense of humor.

To ponder interminably over the reason for one's own existence or the meaning of life in general seems to me, from an objective point of view, to be sheer folly. And yet everyone holds certain ideals by which he guides his aspiration and his judgment. The ideals which have always shone before me and filled me with the joy of living are goodness, beauty, and truth. To make a goal of comfort or happiness has never appealed to me; a system of ethics built on this basis would be sufficient only for a herd of cattle.

Without the sense of collaborating with like-minded beings in the pursuit of the ever unattainable in art and scientific research, my life would have been empty. Ever since childhood I have scorned the commonplace limits so often set upon human ambition. Possessions, outward success, publicity, luxury to me these have always been contemptible. I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone, best both for the body and the mind.

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Solitude + Social Justice.

have always been accompanied by a vague aloofness, and the wish to withdraw into myself increases with the years.

Such isolation is sometimes bitter, but I do not regret being cut off from the understanding and sympathy of other men. I lose something by it, to be sure, but I am compensated for it in being rendered independent of the customs, opinions, and prejudices of others, and am not tempted to rest my peace of mind upon such shifting foundations.

My political ideal is democracy. Everyone should be respected as an individual, but no one idolized. It is an irony of fate that I should have been showered with so much uncalledfor and unmerited admiration and esteem. Perhaps this adulation springs from the unfulfilled wish of the multitude to comprehend the few ideas which I, with my weak powers, have advanced.

Full well do I know that in order to attain any definite goal it is imperative that one person should do the thinking and commanding and carry most of the responsibility. But those who are led should not be driven, and they should be allowed to choose their leader. It seems to me that the distinctions separatingthe social classes are false; in the last analysis they rest on force. I am convinced that degeneracy follows every autocratic system of violence, for violence inevitably attracts moral inferiors. Time has proved that illustrious tyrants are succeeded by scoundrels.

For this reason I have always been passionately opposed to such régimes as exist in Russia and Italy to-day. The thing which has discredited the European forms of democracy is not the basic theory of democracy itself, which some say is at fault, but the instability of our political leadership, as well as the impersonal character of party alignments.

I believe that you in the United States have hit upon the right idea. You choose a m vives the death of his body, although feeble President for a reasonable length of time and give him enough power to acquit himself properly of his responsibilities. In the German Government, on the other hand, I like the state's more extensive care of the individual when he is ill or unemployed. What is truly valuable in our bustle of life is not the nation, I should say, but the creative and impressionable individu- the intelligence manifested in nature.

ality, the personality - he who produces the noble and sublime while the common herd remains dull in thought and insensible in feeling.

This subject brings me to that vilest off. spring of the herd mind — the odious militia. The man who enjoys marching in line and file to the strains of music falls below my contempt; he received his great brain by mistake - the spinal cord would have been amply sufficient. This heroism at command, this senseless violence, this accursed bombast of patriotism how intensely I despise them! War is low and despicable, and I had rather be smitten to shreds than participate in such doings.

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Next month, the credo of Lewis Mumford

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sermon 333 Ha was dis that to bet gain burnataly. Job. 14. Be In the is lofe Jake If it he cut down that I will sport again, and that the tendes branch thereof will not clase the the scent of water it will brid, and put faith boyhs like a plant. But wan disth, and beth low; yea, was persheth, and where is he ? latte waters fail from The sea, and the rester is drawed day; To way ligth low Tright ut; Till the barren he wow they thall not awalle, Un to round out of this shep."

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