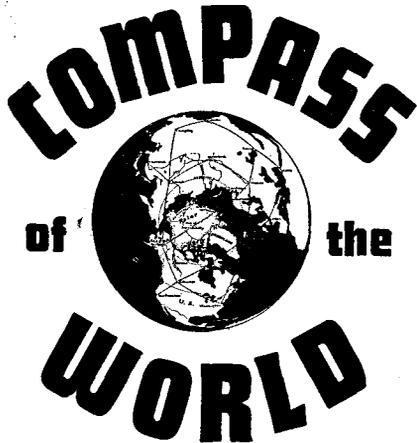


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Salvation for the West?

THE ANNIHILATION OF MAN: A Study of the Crisis in the West. By Leslie Paul. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1945. 214 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM S. LYNCH

THAT happy day for thinking people when social crises could be explained in a single word seems to have disappeared. It was so easy in the twenties and thirties to subscribe to the personal devil theories of capitalism, Bolshevism, warmongering, "merchants of death," or what have you. The answers to all problems were at hand, neatly packaged and with the return address labeled Marx, Freud, Darwin, or Pavlov. But recent events have made us wonder, have made us think that these answers were only partial ones, that valid realizations can be reached only by much more groping through a darkness only partially illuminated by these beacons. This book with its terrifying title reflects the current questing that is going on in the minds of men, and in this case it is doubly significant since it comes from a man at war.

Leslie Paul is an officer in the British Army. In civilian life he was poet, editor, novelist, writer on social and economic affairs, and founder of a youth movement. By his own testimony this book is the result of a tremendous compulsion "to think out afresh my view of society and my duty to it." To this thinking-out he brings an informed mind and a humanist's sense of values. The data with which he deals are the historical ideas and happenings that have characterized the thirty-odd years since the beginning of the First World War.

He examines in particular the political actions of Britain, Russia, and Germany and comes to the conclusion that much more important than the political and economic issues at stake were the moral conflicts. Moral forces are as real as economic forces "even though they may not appear to give birth to bales of cotton or forests of bayonets." He dissects the isms of the day—capitalism, fascism, Marxism—and finds in them a common rot of materialism. Fascism, he finds, is essentially the result of materialistic concepts of our day. To the long but by now familiar list of German ideas and personages responsible for the madness of Nazi-ism—the Hegels, the Wagners, the militarists, and the romantics, the Wandervogel, and the guilt of Versailles—he would add the Marxists who by their doctrinaire attitudes were hoist on their own petard before the war broke out, and the scientists who insist that only in their canon can truth

be found. Mr. Paul is dealing with the basic conflicts that plague our century. His thesis is the ancient truth that man cannot live by bread alone. It is, too, the observation so frequently made that a socially and individually effective ethos must be buttressed by an intense belief or faith.

Briefly and scathingly he examines the extravagant claims of modern science and dispatches them neatly—a little too neatly—by reducing them to absurdity. On the heads of the men of science, physicists, psychologists, and economists he heaps his scorn for their arrogance and his contempt for their annihilation of the uniqueness and individuality of man. It would be unfair to give the impression that Mr. Paul is an anti-intellectual who refuses to accept the truth of the sciences. Rather he would deny any suggestion that science is the sole custodian of truth. For he insists that poetry and religion have claims that must be recognized and that to eliminate these for the purely mechanistic explanations of man's behavior is neither valid nor safe. A strictly materialistic interpretation, be it economic, behavioristic, or any other that sees man as not much more than a bundle of reflexes is intolerable. From such an exclusive interpretation of self, people, and nations will turn in horror. The Germans reached for a paganism to protect them and mixing it with current materialism destroyed themselves and mangled the world.

Salvation for the West, in Mr. Paul's estimation, can only be found in a return to the values of the Christian tradition and that tradition in turn must strip itself of literalism—its own concession to the materialism against which it is the West's strongest bulwark.

Whether this solution to our ills will be accepted remains to be seen. In any event, Mr. Paul will make his reader conscious of the most grievous problem facing us, the reconciliation of material progress and that vital but nebulous thing called the spirit. He will not be the first, of course, and we certainly hope not the last to wrestle in print with this age-old dualism. Perhaps he exaggerates some of the evils he sees. Perhaps, too, some of his interpretations are a little too pressed. But they are closely reasoned and forcefully stated. They probably will be attacked by Marxist and positivist.

If so, his attackers had better be ready with convincing moral equivalents. For Mr. Paul cannot be dismissed as certain novelists have been recently with the sneer words, "Hollywood Buddhism."

The Saturday Review

Angels and Demons in London

MR. ALLENBY LOSES THE WAY.
By Frank Baker. New York: Coward-McCann, 1945. 262 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

LIKE Mr. Baker's previous novels and like some of the works of Anatole France, "Mr. Allenby Loses the Way" is difficult to classify. It begins as a fairy-tale for adults, but soon turns into a novel of ideas. Admirers of "Miss Hargreaves" and "Sweet Chariot" will find here the same daring inventiveness; however, since the story is laid in London during the year 1943, they will also detect a soberer note, as if some of the author's former gaiety had been bombed in the blitz. Nevertheless, his peculiar wit, even when bitter rather than humorous, decorates every page, and the reader is constantly titillated by graceful writing, provocative suggestions, and an audacious juxtaposition of improbables.

The *deus ex machina* of "Sweet Chariot" was an angel. Mr. Allenby's *daimon* masquerades as a fairy, though actually he is a practising psychologist, a cross between Havelock Ellis and Mephistopheles. The relations between Mr. Allenby, a simple Hampstead newsagent, and this odd old man, Humphrey Nanson, are mysterious and complex. Since Allenby's identity cannot be clearly established—he knows little more than that he was a foundling entrusted for a time to a kindly guardian and that he ran away from Scotland after the death of his protector—it is quite natural that he should wish to learn the details of his birth and family; and since Nanson's profession involves bringing to light the subconscious memories and desires of men who are queer or unhappy, his role as Allenby's fairy godfather is not as extraordinary as it may at first appear.

But there is much more to all this than any reader could possibly guess, and the threads of the plot, deftly unravelled here and there throughout the book, are knotted together to form a consistent pattern only at the end. Meanwhile one is kept in exhilarating suspense.

Along the way we repeatedly encounter the idea that no power exerted by one man or one nation over another can bring abiding peace, that coöperation is a menace, and that a man must work out his own salvation alone. There is also a certain preoccupation with the thought that every warring nation considers its own cause righteous and that the line between war and murder is a tenuous one.

The difficulties of persons holding such views during the last few years are obvious. Allenby, the typical "little man," rushes out of doors during an air-raid shouting "Stop this beastly slaughter," is promptly buried under a mass of debris, and from that time on his opinions are charitably ascribed to shock. He finally reaches the conclusion that he must lose himself completely in order to discover Truth and that if everyone followed his example and went off alone for a long time, anywhere, anyhow, making a clean break with our cruel and stupid civilization, there would be hope. Nanson too distrusts "the vultures" who sat

"on a magic carpet at Teheran" and believes there is no way of using power except to an evil end. Yet Nanson, although he fears the possibility of immortality as others fear the possibility of its absence, also walks out on life. Indeed the very personal solutions of the world's problems offered by Allenby and Nanson may seem to many readers no solutions at all.

However, even if one dislikes a novel of ideas that pretends temporarily to be a fairy-tale, even if one finds none of the characters in this book wholly credible, even if one disagrees with some of the judgments bubbling from the author's inexhaustible spring, these pages will none the less offer the mature reader mental refreshment of a superior quality.

I'm 52, She's 21. The red-headed girl, the dancer. She attracts everyone on shipboard — I've watched it — the waiters and the captain, all the men. And yet I have the manic conviction that she loves me better than anyone else in the world, and that she will only express this love by killing me. Surely an obsession. Yet... There's no use pretending. I quite simply fear for my life.

So writes the narrator of Farewell, My Heart, the new love story by Ferenc Molnar, distinguished author of "The Guardsman" and "Liliom." Price: \$2.00. SIMON AND SCHUSTER.