

WYNDHAM LEWIS' FIRST PRINCIPLES

By RUSSELL KIRK

SOME months ago, in the course of a criticism of American liberalism published in "Partisan Review," Mr. Irving Howe made the following curious remark: "This prevalence of liberalism yields, to be sure, some substantial benefits. It makes us properly skeptical of the excessive claims and fanaticisms that accompany ideologies. It makes implausible those 'aristocratic' rantings against democracy which were fashionable in some literary circles a few years ago. (So that when a charlatan like Wyndham Lewis is revived and praised for his wisdom, it is done, predictably, by a Hugh Kenner in the 'Hudson Review.')

I read these sentences three or four times. What did Mr. Howe mean? I share with him his dislike of ideology, which old John Adams called "the science of Idiocy"; I agree with Mr. Howe's subsequent observation that American liberalism today is itself become an ideology, and in proportion has lost the appetite for freedom. But however does Mr. Wyndham Lewis come into all this? Mr. Lewis, true enough, has been a severe critic of American life and of "democracy," if by "democracy" is meant the modern mass-age, in which vague sense too many people use the word. Yet how anyone who has read Lewis' books attentively (particularly "The Apes of God," "The Art of Being Ruled," "America and Cosmic Man," and "The Writer and the Absolute") can think of Mr. Lewis as a writer of "aristocratic" proclivities, passes my understanding. (I should not object in the least to his being aristocratic; I am merely stating a fact.) And why Mr. Howe should have referred to him as a charlatan puzzled me considerably. A charlatan, surely, is a person who deals in shams: Mr. Lewis has spent his life denouncing shams. Could it be that Mr. Howe thought of him as a charlatan because he writes upon serious subjects without being a professor, or even a doctor of philoso-

phy? But Mr. Lewis' learning is genuine, whether or not one agrees with his deductions from premise and fact. (I myself, probably, disagree with Mr. Lewis' conclusions as often as Mr. Howe does, though not always for the same reasons.) And as Mr. Robert Hutchins, who enjoys an extensive acquaintance among professors, wrote recently, "One of the most striking things about the works that have made the minds of various ages is that almost none of them were written by professors." I am inclined to think, then, that Mr. Irving Howe, like many other people with some pretensions to a knowledge of twentieth-century letters, has misunderstood the character of Mr. Lewis' work and the character of Mr. Lewis himself.

Now Mr. Lewis is a man of mark and a writer of power; he is one of the few English men of letters in our time whose books probably will be remembered, if books are remembered at all, a century from now. Therefore I think it worthwhile to examine here his four most recent books ("Self Condemned," "Rotting Hill," "The Writer and the Absolute," and "Rude Assignment") and his best novel ("The Revenge for Love," recently republished in England, and published for the first time in America) with the aim of describing Mr. Lewis' significance as a novelist and as a critic of society.

Wyndham Lewis lives today almost wholly in the realm of the mind, for he is blind, and can paint no more; he sits sardonically among his books and papers in his Notting Hill flat, contemptuous of the dreary sprawling city and the mechanized sprawling society round about him. Unlike old Coleridge, at Highgate, he cannot gaze prophetically over "London and its smoke-tumult, . . . attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there." (These are Carlyle's words.) "A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days, had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialisms and revolutionary deluges, with 'God, Freedom, and Immortality' still his; a king of men." No, the rising generation will not rally round Wyndham Lewis, even though, like Coleridge, the constant gist of his discourse is lamentation over the sunk condition of the world. The dark days lie as heavy on Wyndham Lewis as upon any of us, and

far heavier than they lie upon most. God, Freedom, and Immortality are not his; yet there in Notting Hill, for all his faults, still sits (in this time of buckram masks and literary phantasms) a man.

Now Mr. Lewis (though he confesses to having poured the molten iron of satire but once, and that in "The Apes of God") stands out as a man and a writer because he is a satirist. Unlike Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley, he rarely employs exaggeration to bring his satire to perfection; in his later books, especially, in "The Revenge for Love" and "Rotting Hill" and "Self Condemned," he prefers to scourge the naked follies of the time by the method of relentless naturalism. Percy Hard-caster, the professional Communist revolutionary, is real and drawn to scale, in every part; the socialist parson called "The Bishop's Fool," in "Rotting Hill," in his pathos and his futility, is taken from the life; the very minor and evanescent characters, like Dr. Gratton-Brock in "Self Condemned," are perfect reproductions, executed with a loathing fascination, of twentieth-century sham and pomposity. And the art of satire, as Lewis argues in "Rude Assignment," can endure only while the satirist stands firm upon a ground of moral principle, from which he can assail his victims with confidence: satire will be written, and read, and applauded, only when writers and the public acknowledge the existence of abiding moral standards. If no values exist, then follies and crimes are not follies and crimes at all, but merely phenomena of meaningless life; and no one will appreciate satire because no one will believe that the satirist is attacking anything of importance.

Under precisely this terrible difficulty the satirist labors in our time; satire commonly is regarded as mere malice, or bad form, because "everything is relative," and it is cruel to reproach people for doing no more than following their humor. How, for instance, could one write a satire on adulterers calculated to move the disciples of Dr. Alfred Kinsey? In an age when men and women do not perceive the purpose of satire, the satirist will be detested, as a spoil-sport—and, if possible, suppressed. Mr. Lewis has had to contend against the spirit of the age in this, as in much else. "Where there is truth to life

there is satire," Lewis writes; in this sense, he has always been a satirist, though not in the narrower sense (approved by himself) of a writer who describes "not people such as ourselves, but a symbolic company." W. B. Yeats told the young Lewis that, as a satirist, he would be *stopped*—for that is what always happens in England to satirists. People have been trying to stop Wyndham Lewis for some decades now. They have denounced him at times, and ignored his books at other times, but they have never quite succeeded in stopping him; and I think that soon he is going to be heard by the people who need him, and who will not forget him.

If Mr. Lewis has been a genuine satirist, and not a charlatan, by his own definition he must have adhered to certain articles of faith, certain enduring values, certitudes from which, secure, he could strike out at folly and vice in his time. What, precisely, are Mr. Lewis' first principles? From what philosophical redoubt can he defy cant and popular passion, and fire his volleys at the sophister and the calculator, the art-fraud, the mawkish sentimentalist, the devotee of violence, the public-school collectivist, the counterfeiting cosmopolitan, the Welwyn Garden City snob, the envious proletarian university-student, the art-tart county-family girl, the logical positivist from Cambridge who had "whittled himself away to a colourless abstraction which hardly constituted even a target," the ruined and lying doctor of medicine, the malignant and godless vicar? Swift, for all his loathing of fallen human nature, was a Christian and a Tory, and so stood for certain things very old and high; Flaubert, as Lewis observes, indulged in "the satire of nihilism," since for him "human life in its entirety is composed of folly and crime in one degree or another," and stood for nothing whatsoever. Now Wyndham Lewis is neither Swift nor Flaubert; he is neither a Christian nor a nihilist. Though he shares Swift's disgust with the flesh, he has been cudgelling the nihilists for half a century. Lewis stands for something.

Like Tarr, however, the central character in his first novel (1918), Lewis has always rather tried to stand for nothing but a Stoic apathy, an almost Olympian indifference, a detachment

from life, an ironical and disconcerting reasonableness. From such a position, Tarr regards the mad German Kreisler and his own fiancée Bertha with an impersonal, if not uncharitable, self-sufficiency; from such a position, Mr. Park, in Lewis' latest short story, "The Rebellious Patient" ("Shenandoah," Summer–Autumn, 1953), regards Dr. Musgrave with a brooding contempt. When Lewis' characters descend from this detachment into the contests of humanity (as Tarr does with Anastasya, "swagger sex"), ordinarily the consequences are unpleasant. That has been true of Lewis' own career. Lewis' detestation of cant, and his half-reluctant concern for the future of the human race, have drawn him repeatedly into the arena of controversy, where he has been as hacked and battered as any old gladiator, though he has given as good as he got. To be theoretically in favor of apathy, and yet congenitally drawn to the defense of forlorn causes, does not sweeten a man's temper. Mr. Wyndham Lewis, at seventy, is a very crusty customer, and a very courageous one. I repeat that he stands for something.

Mr. T. S. Eliot wrote in 1937 that Lewis, in "The Lion and the Fox," is defending the detached observer, which makes him unpopular with majorities: "The detached observer, by the way, is likely to be anything but a dispassionate observer; he probably suffers more acutely than the various apostles of immediate action. The detached observers are in theory the philosophers, the scientists, the artists, and the Christians. But most of the people who profess to represent one or another of these categories, are more or less implicated in the politics of their time and place. Philosophy has long since been suspect; and the kind that makes the most voluble pretensions to impartiality may be the most dangerous. The future of the detached observer does not seem to be very bright."

Wyndham Lewis certainly does not expect his own future to be bright, or anyone else's. We dwell in an age of ideologies, so that detachment is denounced as treason. For many people, it has become impossible to conceive that anyone should not be an ideologist. Mr. Lewis, not being a Marxist, was attacked as a Fascist; his critics did not admit the possibility of his de-

testing all forms of collectivism and fanaticism. Because he never conformed to any ideology, Wyndham Lewis never enjoyed the praise of any influential coterie; just so Professor Harding, in "Self Condemned," is driven first out of the universities and then into a life-in-death because he will not teach ideology. In his chapter "Absolute Utopias," in "The Writer and the Absolute," Lewis quotes Burke at length, approving Burke's denunciation of "doctrine and theoretic dogma." Mr. Howe's juxtaposition of "the excessive claims and fanaticisms that accompany ideologies" with the name of Wyndham Lewis therefore perplexes me. Does he really think that Mr. Lewis is given to "excessive claims and fanaticisms"? Just what ideology is Mr. Lewis supposed to have espoused, and in what literary circles is he supposed to have been fashionable? He seems to me to have fought against the current the whole of his life; the impulse to contradict cant is in the man's nature; and if the Benthamite ideology, say, had been popular between 1909 and 1949, Wyndham Lewis would have exerted himself as strongly against Benthamism as he has against Communism, impressionism, existentialism, and three or four other popular notions in the world of politics and the world of art. Mr. Hugh Kenner's perceptive little critical study ("Wyndham Lewis," *New Directions*) gives us a glimpse of a proud, cross-grained, subtle man, as obsessed with ideas as he is scornful of ideology, standing quite alone in the midst of all the winds of doctrine.

Mr. Lewis, in fine, has always been detached, never dispassionate; and though never an ideologist, he has always subscribed to a set of principles, some of which he frankly acknowledges, others of which he himself may not even recognize as the foundation for his satirical intrepidity. Principle, as Burke declared, is a very different thing from abstraction. Principle ordinarily comes to a man from the wisdom of his ancestors; abstraction is the product of a man's own puny little private stock of reason. And Mr. Lewis—although true human reason has few better defenders than he in our time—derives his principles, in considerable part, from prescription. He speaks, however eccentrically at times, for the wisdom of

our ancestors. More specifically, however, he speaks for a set of principles which are not particularly ancient. These are the principles of liberalism: not twentieth-century liberalism, which has become an ideology, but the confident and robust liberalism of nineteenth-century England, with all its virtues and all its faults. Wyndham Lewis, private character and artistic talents aside, is the possessor of a mind rather like John Morley's. Such a mind detests cant and slices through humbug and sentimentality; such a mind also suffers, sometimes, from an excessive desire for self-reliance and an excessive confidence in rationality.

The older Mr. Lewis grows, the more clearly apparent do his liberal proclivities become, and the more nearly certain does it seem that he lives in the tradition of English liberal thought and letters since Locke. I do not mean that Mr. Lewis is a Manchesterian economist, or a Benthamite reformer of laws, or a Gladstonian opponent of empire. I do mean that he believes in the highest degree of private liberty, as opposed to the claims of the group; that he has a profound trust in the powers of the private judgment, if only men would consent to be reasonable; that he dislikes the centralized political authority of the state; that he (as Leslie Stephen said of the Whigs) is "invincibly suspicious of parsons"; that he distrusts both the aristocracy and the masses; that he defends the great English middle classes, of which he is a member; that he has an aversion to ideology, whether the sentimental sympathy of Rousseau or the corrosive envy of Marx; that he adheres, at least practically, to the theory of free will, abjuring historical determinism; that he has very little taste for mystery or flights of pure imagination. I do not say that he has never deviated in the slightest from this set of principles; not one of the great Victorian liberals, after all, consistently kept every article in this catechism, at all times. At present, for instance, Mr. Lewis believes that we must establish a Leviathan world-state, if we are to save ourselves from catastrophe, which is not a liberal idea in the sense that Lord Acton understood liberalism; but the same idea is espoused with greater enthusiasm by one of

the present chief representatives of the American school of liberalism, Mr. Robert Hutchins.

I believe, then, that Mr. Lewis is rather an old-fashioned man, Vorticism and "The Caliph's Design" notwithstanding. Old-fashioned ideas very frequently are sound and true ideas. In some ways, however, he may not be old-fashioned enough: liberalism is a fresh and tender growth in comparison with certain older systems of thought that still live among us. I think that the error of judgment which led Mr. Lewis to hope, in 1931, that some good might come out of Adolf Hitler's projects (an error which he quickly recognized and acknowledged, the following year) was in considerable part a product of Lewis' liberal optimism and liberal individualism, impatient at the cant and the muddling of those years. The liberal, throughout modern history, has tended to forget that a regime of feeble reason may give way not to sweetness and light, but to a regime of unreason.

Free human rationality is the principal end in life, in Mr. Lewis' opinion. He makes this point in his chapter "Intuition versus the Intellect," in "Rude Assignment":

The subtitle of this chapter reads: 'Is there such a thing as an Intellectual?' So let me, in concluding, summarize my answer to that question.—If you, for the purpose of belittling him, affix the term 'intellectual' (or more familiarly 'highbrow') to any man of conspicuous intelligence, or whose standards notoriously are not those of the market-place, then there is such a thing only in your stupid mind, or on your foolish lips. But there is another and more serious sense, in which such a term may be admitted, and even serve a useful purpose.

The definition of 'intellectual' would be no easy task, as this chapter has proved. Julien Benda—deliberately ignoring all who did not fit in—would have defined it as a learned man prostituting his high function and inciting others to violence. His polemical opposites would say (scowling at Benda) that it denoted a democrat in an Ivory Tower, preaching peace and plenty—in contrast to war and want. All I need say, as my final word on this subject, is that few intellectuals are to be found who are prepared to oppose the Zeitgeist. The latter is committed to courses which, if pursued to

their logical ends, will wipe out all that the human intellect has contrived, distinguishing us from cattle and pigs, and still more from bees and centipedes.

This treason of the intellectuals, submitting tamely to a process of social alteration which would make an end of intellect, submerging individuality in a collective dreariness, is the principal theme of Lewis' fiction since 1937. "The Revenge for Love," for which Spain on the eve of explosion is the backdrop, has most of its principal scenes in the Communist and literary-radical circles of London, exposed with a fierce energy and accuracy by Lewis as repellent combinations of inverted snobbery, appetite for power, muddled humanitarianism, private interest, and conspiratorial malice; I know of no other novel which touches on such matters and such people with equal discernment except Conrad's "Under Western Eyes." The only decent people in the book are dupes, Victor and Margot Stamp, a poverty-stricken painter of small talents and his dreamy wife; they are used as bait by the London Communists, and go over a cliff in the Pyrenees. Margot, who reads Ruskin, sees the whole set for what they are—though, in the end, this does not save her; she senses the inhumanity of these reformers, sufficiently represented by Gillian Phipps, the young woman with the boarding-school accent who likes to be kissed by men of the lower orders:

Margot understood that no bridge existed across which she could pass to commune as an equal with this Communist 'lady'—living in a rat-infested cellar out of swank (as it appeared to her from her painfully constructed gimcrack pagoda of gentility). Nor did she wish to very much, because—for Victor's sake—she dreaded and disliked all these false politics, of the sham underdogs (as she felt them to be), politics which made such a lavish use of the poor and the unfortunate, of the 'proletariat'—as they called her class—to advertise injustice to the profit of a predatory Party, of sham underdogs athirst for power: whose doctrine was a universal Sicilian Vespers, and which yet treated the real poor, when they were encountered, with such overweening contempt, and even derision.

This betrayal of reason by its guardians does not always take so active and conscious a form as that committed by the "intellectuals" of these left-wing conspiratorial circles; commonly,

indeed, the betrayers remain unaware of the grand tendency of their notions, and sometimes they may act with the greatest good will. The vicar in "The Bishop's Fool," the most powerful story in "Rotting Hill" and one of the most memorable and terrible short stories of this century, is a truly good man, a Christian socialist, an Anglo-Catholic, bearing up under an oppressive poverty that is crushing the Church of England, wearing patched clothes so that he may buy books and an occasional picture, generous, humble, open-minded; his only trouble is that, though an educated man, he is a fool. His ritualism so alienates his parishioners that no one comes to church; but he does not complain, for he is sure that praying at home does them quite as much good. (They do not pray at home, of course.) His amorphous social radicalism alienates the principal farmer of the parish, a brute who has replaced the absentee squire as the man of influence in the country round—and who presently will be replaced by a commissar, Lewis suggests. When attacked physically by the drunken farmer in a pub, the parson is too charitable even to defend himself—and so is beaten and fearfully injured while his parishioners mock him. This is the new order of things, giving the quietus to the shadow of the old; and the old is kicked and broken because of a failure of reason.

Mr. Lewis' latest novel, "Self Condemned" (Regnery)—his first long work of fiction since 1941—is a story of personal and social disintegration, coming very close in its implications to Flaubert's satirical nihilism, and yet redeemed from that catastrophe by Wyndham Lewis' sense of what has been in the world of reason, and of what ought to be. Professor René Harding—who has a great deal in common with his creator—resigns his chair of history at the University of London because he cannot endure cant and hypocrisy: his influential book, "The Secret History of World War II," has been the product of his growing conviction that conventional history is a mischievous sham. A friendly review summarizes his opinions:

The wars, civil massacres which should be treated as police court news, provide the basis for the story of mankind we encounter in history books. The explanation of this terrible paradox, that the

state should always be in the hands of ruffians or of feeble-minded persons, is that the enormous majority of men are barbarians, philistines, and mentally inhabit an "heroic" age, if not a peculiarly violent Stone Age. And upon that popular plane the political world has its being. A number of creative "sports" are born into every successive generation of uncreative gang-rule. Though frowned on or even hated by the majority, these individuals nevertheless introduce into the dull and sodden stream of the average a series of startling innovations. They compel that strange couple, the "man in white" with his knife, and beneath him the prostrate patient whose lung he is about to remove, to behave differently. After much angry argument, they persuade the man in white to permit the etherization of his patient. This spares the surgeon the agonized convulsions and piercing screams of his victim, and spares the latter the agony and shock probably resulting in death. But the man who confers this benefit is violently abused by everybody. . . .

The history of our century would not be one mainly of personalities (though, alas, they are there as ever). What we should see would be big, ideologic currents, gaudily coloured, converging, dissolving, combining or contending. It would look like a chart of the ocean rather than a Madame Tussaud's Waxworks; though there would be faces (one with a tooth-brush moustache), like labels of one or other of the big currents of ideas. Then there would be the mountainous blocks of all kinds, as though raised up by an earthquake: there would be the piling up of tremendous inventions, their instant conversion to highly unsuitable uses: the criminality of man rioting in the midst of these unnumbered gadgets. Then there would be the growth, in every society, of the huge canker of Debt. In more and more insane proportions, the Credit System would be apparent, developing its destructive bulk. One would sense nebulous spiders, at the heart of wider and wider webs of abstract simulacras of wealth, suspended over everything: hordes of men engaged for years in meaningless homicide: and vast social revolutions as the culmination of a century of plots, and propaganda of brotherly love at the point of a pistol, and *la haine créatrice*. So there would be arabesques of creation and of destruction, the personal factor unimportant, the incarnations of ideas, the gigantic coloured effigies of a Hitler or a Stalin, no more than the remains of monster advertisement.

Convinced that no university could long tolerate the teaching of history upon this pattern, Harding, just before the out-

break of war, goes to Canada with his wife, leaving behind him a London sinking into the soddenness of Rotting Hill. But Canada, for the Hardings, turns out to be no better than a debased and exaggerated caricature of European decay. They subsist through the winter in dismaying poverty, living in one room in a disreputable hotel; Harding is beaten in the beverage-room by a criminal pugilist from the United States who dislikes Harding's English accent. The only friend of letters whom they meet is an owl-like pathic named Furber, on whose advances of cash Harding comes to depend. Hester Harding, longing for the England of her youth, is driven to desperation by this life; and when, presently, Harding gives way to necessity and accepts a professorship at Momaco University, she throws herself under a truck. Her suicide drives Harding to the verge of madness: he is nursed back to a kind of health at a Catholic retreat, and contemplates becoming a Catholic; but when his powers have returned to him, his overweening rationality makes him despise such an act of faith. Thus he languishes on at Momaco, his abilities as thinker and writer deteriorating, until an invitation comes from an American university, and he accepts, and goes to the United States to linger out his life without purpose and without hope. An impulse toward self-destruction, a defiance of the whole humdrum world of dreary facts, had been mingled with his philosophical repudiation of modern ideology, from the first, and he knew it. That character-dissolving influence now triumphs, leaving Harding to a life in death: "and the Faculty had no idea that it was a glacial shell of a man who had come to live among them, mainly because they were themselves unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing."

Harding is beaten down by the insensate forces of social disintegration which he had himself described in his book; and even his inner will to disaster, probably, is the reaction of a high and austere nature to an age of sensuality and unreason. His dislike of existence extends to the act of procreation, for which he despises himself even while he indulges his lust. Hester Harding is described by Mr. Kenner as "vacuously libidinous," but this is unfair. It is Harding who is libidinous,

and we are allowed to see his wife only through Harding's eyes. Hester has love in her, and Harding has none. René Harding, indeed, is defecated rationality; and so, in his writings, with very few exceptions—the devotion of Margot to Victor Stamp, in "The Revenge for Love," is the chief one—Wyndham Lewis himself seems. It was one of the cardinal faults of the old liberalism that the heart was denied its claims.

"Self Condemned" is a description of a world that unreason has mastered, even in its sanctuaries of learning. Almost nowhere does Harding find understanding of his principles and scruples—the malice and stupidity of his associates enrage him. The one man who feels sympathy, his friend Rotter, is a specimen of a dying breed, the scholar of modest private means, whom taxation and inflation soon will annihilate. Not in England, or in Canada, or the United States, in times to come, will there be any place for Harding or for Rotter; the critics of thought and society will be crushed into the mould of an unreasoning conformity; and man will be even as the bee and the centipede, if he does not destroy himself. The higher natures, like Harding's, will be the first to perish.

Now what redeems this fierce indictment of modern life from the satire of nihilism is Lewis' staunch liberal prejudice. The triumph of unreason and brutality is not an inevitable consequence of irresistible historical forces, but the result of a betrayal of human reason, a deliberate repudiation of the works of the mind. Man has within him the power to be something better than a Hardcaster or a Furber. The instrument for his salvation is his reason; yet, engulfed in a confusion of humanitarianism that really is inhumane, of collectivism that masquerades as sympathy, of fallacious notions concerning human nature and the state, of uniformity under the name of justice, modern man is denying his reason. The nineteenth-century world, whatever it lacked, was a world of energy, variety, a considerable degree of justice, private security, and free expression. Those inestimable benefits of modern civilization, the work of Professor Harding's creative men, are now

being undone by the destructive men. Lewis himself, speaking through Rotter, recognizes the vanity of expecting that these gains would continue or even endure:

In the nineteenth century in England and America, and even elsewhere, it was universally thought that a new age of tolerance and intelligence, of "decency" and humaneness, had begun; and just as a great number of practices belonging to the bad old times of the unenlightened past, such as slavery, duelling, hanging and quartering, public executions, imprisonment for debt, child-labour, cruel sports, ill-treatment of animals and so forth, had been discountenanced and abolished (for ever, it was supposed), so gradually all such odious survivals would disappear, and "The world's great age begin anew, the golden years return." The time when nations would recognize the wickedness and wastefulness of war was near at hand. This belief was unchallenged in the English-speaking countries at the beginning of the century, and such feeling lingered even as late as Woodrow Wilson's Paris peace-making, or the Kellogg Pact. But actually the world-war gave the death-blow to this belief, and the happenings of the last two decades have done nothing to reinstate it. The optimistic idealism of the Nineteenth Century, although it is not identical with, inherited something from the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century. The outlook of Professor René Harding may perhaps more usefully be compared with the anti-past views of the Eighteenth Century, than with the more sentimental aspirations of the Nineteenth Century.

Human reason, in fine, was not enough to persuade men to safeguard even their own material advantages. Wyndham Lewis' own first principles, liberal in origin, founded upon the assumption that an unflinching rationality might suffice to master the evil and the stupidity in human nature, have carried their author only to Rotting Hill and to the cliff in Spain and to the hotel-room in Momaco. The violence of Europe at war has its microcosm in the Hotel Blundell, where the janitor is a lascivious imbecile and the proprietor is a dapper murderer. The London house where the Hardings had lived goes downhill during the war: "... the cellar was full of dead leaves and a wild cat had established its home there, a brood of wild

kittens sprang about among the leaves. This wild cat so terrorized the tenants that they dared not go down to their trash bins just outside the cellar-door."

Wyndham Lewis is a true satirist, and no charlatan; he is also a man of powerful mind. From his set of liberal principles of a vanished age, he has every justification for scourging the vices and crimes and follies of an age of reason. Yet upon principles of pure rationality, I think, there is no more hope of reviving the liberal world of stability and variety and private rights than there was hope for Harding after his pure rationality returned to him and he rejected religious consolation. Enlightened self-interest, the slogan of nineteenth-century liberalism, leaves love and faith out of its calculations. Love lacking, the inner life of Lewis' characters is dry and sardonic; faith lacking, the civil social order which Lewis describes with such a ruthless precision dissolves into its constituent atoms.

The rising generation will not look to Wyndham Lewis at Notting Hill as once they looked to Coleridge at Highgate, for Notting Hill is much further down toward the river, and the dry rot works there nowadays with a malignant cunning. It would do them no harm to go to Mr. Wyndham Lewis: he would tell them some hard truths, of which we all stand in need. I think that a good many of them are going to read Lewis, these next few years, but that they will have to look elsewhere for some consolation or guidance. Lewis points the way to nothing; yet he stands for something manly and free, and for the cold scorn of the real satirist. As Harding found Momaco only a debased Notting Hill, so we in our generation have nowhere to take refuge from the Hardcasters and the Furburs, the symbols of conspiratorial violence and heartless degeneracy. Plato and Euclid could shelter within the walls of Megara; no Megaras are left to us. We shall be driven at last, I suspect, to aspire once more to love and faith, if only out of dread of the wild cat in the cellar.

CHARLES E. IVES: 1874-1954

By LEO SCHRADE

ALTHOUGH Charles E. Ives had brought his work to completion long before his death in the spring of 1954, it is still largely unknown to the American musical public. Some do not even know his name; others have heard of him as a composer remote from professional musicianship; still others have gained a fleeting impression on those rare occasions when one work or another has had a public performance. Even those who make contemporary music an active concern have but a limited knowledge of Ives' accomplishment. For all of this obscurity and neglect, however, it is the present conclusion that Charles E. Ives is the most remarkable, the boldest, and the most original composer this country has ever had.

Admittedly Ives is also an enigmatic composer, difficult to understand or at least difficult to explain. For more than one reason it is hard to comprehend what brought about his uncommon kind of musicianship, what prompted his radical novelties at a time when modern music in Europe was as yet scarcely in ferment. Without a prelude of accumulative revolutionary developments, without the slightest forewarning in the past, Ives' novelties came with the suddenness of an explosion. Many influences inherent in time and tradition pushed a Schoenberg, a Bartók, a Stravinsky along the road they traveled, but there does not seem to be any reason inherent in earlier American music that can be taken to account for Ives' novelty. It may well be that the explosive suddenness of his appearance added to the bewilderment of the public. At all events, in Europe modern music grew as a new branch, or, as some would say, as a symptom of morbidness, of an organism that had steadily been shaped throughout the centuries. With Ives it burst forth as though it had never been a part of any organism.