

**FOR WHAT  
DO WE LIVE?**

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For what Do We Live? by Edward Howard Griggs

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"The unexamined life is not worth living."  
— PLATO.

ORCHARD HILL PRESS  
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NEW YORK  
1922

A far-visionsed woman's face  
Rising above the brute paws,  
The vast lion's body stretching backward,  
Seeming to sink in the sand:  
    Out of the brute, the human,  
    Out of the earth—God.

O Sphinx riddle!  
What know we of the mystery?  
    Only the endless climbing,  
    Only that flesh breeds spirit,  
    Only that Love and Wisdom  
    Are somehow born of the dust.

**T**HROUGH all our life in the present age runs the same conflict: high dreams, sordid actuality; lofty aspirations, unworthy achievement; deep idealism at the heart, coarse materialism in conduct. Everything is estimated in money standards—not only our economic, industrial and business affairs, but education, art, love and religion; yet all the time we are aware, underneath, that these standards are false. We dig in the dirt for gold—spend our lives for it; and then squander it with an exultant laugh, when some high call comes, as we did in the war. Materialists on the surface, we are idealists at the heart: often how sordid is the conduct, how high the aspiration!

What makes the conflict? Is it our



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haste, our youth, our carelessness, our lack of thinking? Certainly few have even made the effort to think the problem through, to come to terms with the universe, to formulate a reasoned philosophy of life; yet without such a philosophy, life is heterogeneous, fragmentary, lacking unity, rationality, consistent purpose. Conduct results from chance and passing influences: now an old instinct coming to consciousness, now an accident of environment, now the molding touch of some other person.

Plato said, "the unexamined life is not worth living": a startling statement, yet, as the years go by, increasingly I believe Plato was right. Without a thoroughgoing examination of life, how is it possible to distinguish the eternal from the transient, to recognize what is in itself worth while, to center life in the great realities and give it rationality and a uni-

## MORAL SKEPTICISM

fyng aim? Thus consistent right and wise conduct requires, as a basis, a carefully thought out philosophy of life.

The wide-spread moral skepticism of the present age accentuates the need for such a philosophy. Do we realize how far-ramifying that moral skepticism is? How often one hears the statement, "Ideals have no place in politics and business." Where have ideals a place, if not in politics and business: the one, the sphere of the political and social relations of men; the other, the field of their industrial and economic activities? To say that ideals have no place in politics and business, is equivalent to saying that they have no place in life, but only in speculative theory.

Standards of mere expediency are thus current in our society. Men who have won wealth by non-social, that is, immoral conduct, are given general respect, with

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no questioning of the source of the wealth or the purpose for which it is used. Men profiting shamelessly in the necessities of life, manipulating food stuffs, juggling swindles in stocks and bonds—O, of course, managing to keep their conduct within the law—are given place and honor everywhere in our communities, until they come almost to regard themselves as pillars of society.

See what this does to youth: it tends to spoil young people beforehand, to cut the roots of life off below the soil, before they have had time to bear flower and fruit. Many young persons thus start out in life with the notion that the prizes are to the shrewdly deceptive, the unscrupulously selfish, that the path of hard, honest work is for the ignorant and stupid, who are not enlightened and skillful enough to choose the easier and better-rewarded way.

Thus the hypocrisy of keeping up ap-