Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION
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Literature sometimes shapes and determines the life of people, profoundly always it is a reflection of that life. The writer can produce nothing which has not come from his own experience and his experience is largely determined by the life around him. He uses the media, conventions and techniques. Sometime he creates imaginative experiences. Hence, the literary records and merely informative records of the patterns of outward behaviour and inward reactions of people in an age are mutually supporting. By placing them side by side one can understand both kinds of records themselves and the age much better than by taking one kind of record alone.

The record of life and thought in the period of the early republic deals with a number of different kinds of people and their ways. There are regional types, city, seafaring, rural and frontier people. As the patterns of their outward lives are different, so are the covert patterns of idea, religion, and value judgement. This variety gives rise to an equal diversity of content in their writing.

The alternate patterns of warfare and reconciliation between science and theology were troubling religious people in this era. To see the religious picture one needs to turn to the writers affected by deism as well as to the more evangelical ones. Franklin, Paine and
Jefferson became unchurched after being exposed to the deistic thinking which was focused on the achievements of Sir Issac Newton.

Since the 1920’s America was characterized by broad and drastic changes. The study of American literature demands a careful consideration of the history and politics of the time. This is especially needful because the literature of a period often furnishes historians with data by which the authors make their evaluations of an era. Literature as an index to an age is vividly seen in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. As the spokesman of Jazz Age particularly from fashion to sociology, Fitzgerald’s fiction and short stories are taken as a basis for scrutinizing American history of the third decade of the twentieth century. But to discover the degree which the history of Jazz Age and the picture of life presented in his writings requires cumulative evidence.

The purpose of this research is to furnish such evidences by examining and evaluating the accuracy with which Fitzgerald’s work reflects his age, that is the degree of reality and illusion of history in his works. Firstly, consideration of the history of the time is limited to the cultural history of the period and secondly to those facets of the period which are related to the themes of Fitzgerald’s fiction.

Fitzgerald declares that the duty of a sincere writer is to set down life as he observes it. If he successfully performs this task, we should readily accept the confirmation of the press obituaries that he was the historian of the Jazz Age.
There was a time when one could doubt about the existence of American literature. “Who reads American books? The British critic scornfully asked in *The Edinburg Review* in 1820. “Literature the Americans have none .... it is all imported.” But such a question could not be asked today. American nation has become rich in all the fields – science, agriculture, wealth, civilization and also in literature. Today a stage has been reached where one can say that in different universities English literature is replaced by American literature. Everyone reads American books. These books attract the attention of the world. Many American authors and poets were awarded Nobel Prizes. American novels are translated into many other languages of the world. There is something different in its literature, and what it says has meaning for the remainder of the world. It is no longer looked upon as a country that inhaled and exhaled European literary ideas. It is not thought of as a frontier of Europe, as it once was.

American literature has a long period of apprenticeship. It fumbled and made errors like all other literature of the world. There was a time when American authors imitated the style and subject matter of European writers. This was the sign of European influence on America. The American literature had honesty and frankness. It reflected the rich life of the new world. At last it was accepted by Europe as American literature.

American literature begins with the first English colonies at Plymouth and Boston. The colonists had come to New World to find religious freedom and to search more prosperous way of living. But at
this time, they had not spirit of revolution. They came as Englishmen, bearing with them the wealth of English legend, ballad, and poem as well as the richness of the English language. They were loyal to the English crown and were hoping to live in the English manner. They had not called themselves as Americans for several generations.

The American people from colonial times until now have written countless essays and songs, poems and plays, novels and short-stories. The early settlers who first came from Europe to America had no time to write books. They brought copies of the Bible and the prayer book with them. That was enough for their literary thrust. Books other than the Bible had little influence on the thinking of the puritans. New volumes that arrived from England were read if there was leisure. When these people composed something, it was usually concerned with the relationship between themselves and their God.

Even today American literary traditions are not very old. Until 1900, there were not specific features of American literature. But a literary tradition was rising. Mingling of different foreign elements had its effect.

Like other national literatures, American literature was shaped by the history of the country. For almost a century and a half, America was nothing but a group of colonies scattered along the eastern seaboard of the North American continent. After a successful rebellion against the motherland, America became the United States, a
nation. By the end of the 19th century this nation extended southward to the Gulf of Mexico northward to the 49th parallel and westward to the Pacific. By the end of the 19th century, it had taken its place among the powers of the world and soon became a superpower. It also played a major role in two World Wars. Meanwhile, the rise of science and industry, as well as changes in ways of thinking and feeling brought many modifications in men’s lives. All these factors caused the development in the United States and also moulded the literature of the country.

The growth of American literature is bound up with the growth of America as a nation. The early settlers in America went there for various reasons: to escape religious persecution in their own country or lured by promise of quick wealth from the country’s gold and tobacco. In the 19th century further emigrant went, driven by poverty and hardship from their own overpopulated countries - Irish, Italians, Poles, Scandinavian and others.

These historical factors influenced the growth of American literature in various ways. Firstly, the early settlements were separate, that is they were many colonies or settlements rather than one nation. Secondly, all these people had their roots in European traditions. Thirdly, there was no wide American public reading. There were not even the means of printing books in the country. Thus, the earliest American writers were really European writers living in America. Even though, they might have left Europe for some long time, their writing was clearly influenced by and for the most part merely an
imitation of European, and in particular English literature. Even this sort of literature was confined to those parts of America where a civilized society existed. There were many parts where settlers were too isolated or too fully engaged in the struggle for survival to concern themselves with putting down their impressions or thoughts in writing. American writing in the 18th and early 19th century wholly reflected these conditions. The writers were gathered chiefly around New York or in Massachusetts.

Americans are naturally curious. They are constantly looking for information on all kinds of subjects. They want to know what is happening in the world, why things are the way they are, and what makes them so. Their interest in how to do and make things has built up a whole new “do-it-yourself” industry. Their desire to understand science, history and world affairs has resulted in fascinating documentary, and entertaining, informative television and radio programmes. This same urge to find out all they can about the world they live in has led the American people to turn more and more to reading material. There they not only find information but also the stimulation and satisfaction that come from contact with the thoughts and ideas of interesting people.

America is not deficient in anything. Nature has been very kind to this land. The colonists came to this world as Englishmen only 300 years ago. They had never been able to establish deep roots in the country.
America is a new world having a very short history. In this short period America has developed so much that it has become the first among the nations of the world. Even in this short period also the settlers were too isolated or too fully engaged in the struggle for survival to concern themselves with any cultural activities. These cultural activities provide literature and this lack of any cultural activity in the early period of the history of America shows the poverty of literature in this period. Americans, by nature, are pre-occupied with facts. Facts have some magic qualities so far as the Americans are concerned. Know the facts and the problems will get solved – that is the American credo. Americans are the world’s best fact-finders. The worship of facts has produced the factual novels.

Americans never look towards the past. They have always their eyes towards the future. They are mostly scientific-minded and lack sentimentalism and emotions. This may not be true of some of the great and good writers.

The period from 1607-1765 is known as colonial period of American literature. During this period a number of other colonies were founded all through the continent and they continued to flourish in isolation and with little contact with each other. Then these colonists had the consciousness that all of them were the members of the same great English family. They had certain religious sympathies that led them to inter-colonial acquaintance. In this inter-change of commodities between the several colonies, commerce played its usual part. There were in all colonies certain problems common to all,
growing out of their relation to the supreme authority of England, and the method of dealing with these problems in any one colony was of interest to all others. There was little feeling of nationalism. It was only about the middle of the 18th century, that these separate people became aware of each other. They gradually began to come close together, and the upshot was the rise of nationalism and the birth of America as a nation.

During this colonial period of one hundred and fifty years, the literary output was rather scanty. These early settlers had to wage a relentless war against nature as well as against the red Indians. They were too busy taming nature, and dodging the arrows of the Indians to have much time for the reading or wiring of literature. Literature is a peace-time activity. The people from the colonies had little leisure or peace during these early days in their new home. Moreover, they had their cultural roots in Europe; they still regarded it as their home, and turned for inspiration to the Europe. In these early days even there was no wide American reading public and not even the means of printing books in the country.

Thus, the earliest American writers were really European writers living in America. Though they might have left Europe a long time ago, their writing was clearly influenced by European writers and for the most part was merely an imitation of European, and in particular English literature. The spirit of nationalism was totally lacking, but the literature of people springs from this feeling of nationalism. They had not felt the urge to create. This urge was felt
only after the declaration of Independence. Then literature in America took rapid strides forward and came to its own by the turn of the 18th century. These early settlers were largely puritans, who regarded imaginative literature – poetry, novel and drama. In these early days, reading was confined to the Bible and the Prayer Book and the few books that were brought from England. Facilities for printing were negligible and there was scant inducement for the writers to write.

In spite of all this, American literature may be said to have its humble beginning in 1493, when Columbus wrote his famous letters to the King Ferdinand of Spain. Other explorers and adventurers also wrote letters to their friends and relatives at home and these ‘letters home’ mark the beginning of the written record of the American adventure.

In these letters, they speak of their difficulties, of the dangers they had to face, but also of the wonders that were to be seen everywhere. Through these letters, they told their countrymen of very fertile land with huge forests and mountains, yet unexplored. Here was God’s plenty to be exploited and put to use; nature seemed to be bountiful with none to enjoy its bounty except some savages referred to as Indians. These letters were responsible for exciting curiosity at home, and despite the dangers and difficulties more and more people were tempted to sail for the New World or to settle there, to cultivate its virgin soil and so grow rich and prosperous. Such heroic souls came not from England alone, but also from most other countries of Europe – Spain, Portugal, France, Holland and many others. In this
way the foundations of the unity in diversity where laid which is a prominent feature of American culture.

The first successful English colony in North America was founded in Jamestown in 1607. Then came the ‘Pilgrim Fathers’ in the ship called the Mayflower, and founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. Soon there was a string of such colonies all along the Atlantic sea-board. These colonies or settlements grew in isolation. These early English colonists came and settled in America for various reasons. They were mostly Puritans, and they came either to escape religious persecution at home or to practise their religion in a free atmosphere. They also hoped to convey God’s message to the ignorant and wild natives on the new continent. There were still others who came lured by the hopes of getting rich quickly. They were heroic souls, who were undeterred by danger and difficulties. They had to adopt themselves to unfamiliar climate and crops, to deal with the Indians, to chart and survey, clear and plant and build and improvise.

However, all this does not meant that there was no literature in colonial period. It is difficult to say that the study of American literature should begin with the 18th century, and the literature of the colonial period should be ignored. On the contrary, this early literature is of great importance through historical perspective. The writings of the early colonies gave an account of not only their hardship and suffering but also of their joy and pride in the greatness and the glory of their new environment.
Their accounts of travel, the descriptions of the land, and faithful reports of colonial life throb with pride in what they were doing. It reflected the aspirations and hopes, the trials and set-backs of those who were fighting against the wilderness. It is in these early writings, the growth of American nation is found. These books discover the basic ingredients of American character, courage, industry and optimism.

The early colonisers were largely puritans and Puritanism exercised great influence on the growth of American literature. They regarded imaginative literature as lies, and hence the growth of poetry, drama and novel was inhibited. So the early American literature was God-centred and inspiration for it came from the Bible. They considered themselves as agents of God, and wrote to celebrate the greatness and glory of God.

This urge to write for the greatness and glory of God produced sermons, diaries, and biographies and poems of religious nature. The assumption that literature should concern with religious and spiritual values caused the sermon to be the most highly developed form of literature in the colonial period. The religious zeal also lead to the production of a large body of theological writing. Writers like Cotton Mather, John Cotton, Jonathan Edward, wrote to expound their own views, ideals and beliefs and to convert the views which appeared to them to be false and incorrect. They dealt with issues such as original sin, freedom of will, mystical experiences etc. All these considerably influenced American religious thoughts.
While the process of establishing colonies and settlement in this new continent went on. The whole of the Western America has been colonised in the early years of the 17th century. The Spanish and the French were spread from the Northern ice fields to the equator. The British confined themselves to the narrow strip of the fertile land on the Atlantic seaboard. The peoples from Europe settles in this part of the new continent were absorbed into the dominant British group and acquired their culture and thoughts. These Atlantic colonies became a homogenous group by the early years of the 17th century.

This coming together as well as the feeling of oneness was further strengthened by common education. The new generation received this education in universities and colleges. The first American university, the Harvard University, was founded by the early Puritan Settlers. More and more universities and colleges sprang up with the passing of time. Young men from the different colonies were attracted to these centres of learning and the youth from one colony mixed and exchanged views with those from the other colonies. It brought them closer together and revealed that they had much in common. They had to face similar problems, dangers and difficulties and they had similar aspirations, ideals and beliefs. In short, this was the dawn of national consciousness, though as it was only a vague, simmering feeling of discontent with the British government which ruled over them from across the Atlantic. This British government failed to understand their problems and their difficulties.
This feeling of national consciousness was further accelerated by the increasing prosperity of the different colonies. The strain of colonising was over. The settlers had no longer to wage a war against the Red Indians or Nature. The land was fertile and the harvests were easily reaped. Increased leisure and financial well-being were conductive both to the growth of literature and nationalism. Increase in facilities for communication with the growth of the postal system was conductive to the down of national consciousness. The demand for books and reading material was increased. There was a spurt in the publication of newspapers, journals, magazines and periodicals. Literary, economic, cultural and religious and political issues were discussed in these journals. In this way the public opinion on the matters of public interest was formed.

Still, there were loyalists who continued to be loyal to the British. Also, there were the patriots and the Federalists who clamoured for freedom from the British tyranny, Mercantilism against free trade. Imperialism against Home Rule, Federalist against Republican and individual against the state were the various matters discussed in the press. Thus, the way for great American Revolution was paved. It was a period of great complexity with the colonies clamouring for freedom from the British rule. The common man in each colony was also struggling for freedom from the oppressive rule of the aristocracy.

A number of writers, orators voiced forcefully the colonial aspiration for self-rule and freedom from the shackles of the
imperialist Britain. There was a spurt of writings which were mostly controversial and polemical. Thomas Pain’s brilliant pamphlets Common Sense and The American crisis were among the most enduring specimens of prose literature of the period. The Declaration of Independence composed by Jefferson remains a classic document of the struggle for independence.

The century witnessed the Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution and the English Reform Bill. It is generally called the Age of Revolution and it is especially remarkable for the establishment of democracy in the government. The period is further marked with increasing tension with England, the Revolutionary war, rise of political parties, the beginning, of American nationalism and the expansion with the Ohio Valley.

The period also marks the transition from colonial status to independence and successful federation. The colonies, squeezed by the mercantile system had taken steps towards resistance. While independence was being own with foreign aid, an internal revolution against the aristocracy was going on. The conflict halted when the constitution again put the conservatives in the saddle. There was the emergence of two major political parties as the Federalists and the Republicans. Jefferson led the latter into office. Threats of war with England darkened the early nineteenth century.

Four historical movements are crowded into the latter half of the eighteenth century. All these movements are having profound
influence on literature. The first is social and industrial. It is concerned with the rapid increase of trade and wealth as America’s natural resources are discovered. There is also spread of education in this period. For America is no longer an experiment, a ‘trade venture’ as England first regarded. It is beyond all expectation a success. It has an ambition of becoming nation, where once the forest stood, dark and silent; the sun now shines on prosperous farms. The frontier hamlet of log cabins in now a bustling town and with the town come inevitably the newspaper, the high school, the theatre, the beginning of music, poetry and all the fine arts.

The second great movement was leading toward the climax of union and nationality. It was followed by the Stamp Act of 1765. The most noteworthy thing in this fateful movement is its unexpectedness. Only two years earlier the whole country had rejoiced with England over the Treaty of Paris. It meant two mercies to the colonies; that the raids, massacres and general barbarism of the French and Indian War were all things of the past and that English rather than French ideals had finally prevailed in America, leaving man free here to work out his salvation, not in the shadow of military despotism. To make such peace and opportunity possible, the colonies had given twenty thousand of their young men and a sum equal to forty millions. They were content with their sacrifice.

The first effect of the Stamp Act and of the uproar which followed it, was to unite the colonies for nationality. They contained at this time only a million and half of widely scattered people. There
was no particular grouping of interests. Each colony stood firm by itself, zealously guarding its own rights. There was no little excuse for dividing them into South and North parts of America. Certain colonies had more frequent and intimate connection with England than they had with each other. When the first American or Continental Congress meets in the year 1774 at Philadelphia, the attention is focused not on divisions and difference among the members, but rather on their unity, their concord and their amazing resemblances. Fifty five delegates were gathered from the different parts of the vast territory. Here are Cavaliers and Puritans, Catholics and Protestants, teachers, merchants, and artisans. All these men speak the same speech, cherish the same ideals, and are instantly ready to elect and follow the same leader.

The third act of these stirring dreams is the Revolutionary war. It was that epic struggle against odds, which makes the blood of an American tingle every time. Americans are so accustomed to think of it, and of their independence, as to the result of a supreme effort of the whole people. It was an occasion of shock of surprise to learn that the Revolution was fought and won by only a part, perhaps the smaller and, in the matter of this world’s goods, probably the poorer part of the colonial ancestors. The heroism of the war consists partly in this: that the continental army had to fight front and guard and rear at the same time. While it faced a superior force of open enemies, behind it was a larger body of American Tories, Foes of its own household who were ready at any moment to give secret or open aid to the British. So also the prose and poetry reflected the spirit of 1776 is only Whig portion of the Revolution. And the wedge which spilt life and
literature into two sections was the famous Declaration of Independence, the symbol of national unity.

The year 1774, when the first continental congress assembled, found the American colonies singularly united in spirit. Up to that time and ever later, they were splendidly loyal to England. Only a few hold and visionary spirits like Henry and Samuel Adams, had dreaded of a separate national existence. Then sudden and startling as a thunderbolt to a great part of the country, the declaration of Independence was seen. Every man was called upon to make an instant decision between the new and the old. It meant not only separation of nation from nation: it divided a man from his neighbours and friends, and sometimes a father from his own sons and daughters.

Somewhere, in the midst of all this mighty struggle of the national life began. But as a nation the Americans have no national festival, for the simple reason that no one can tell when the America was born. Some date it at the first continental congress; some at the Declaration of Independence; some at the inauguration of Washington, whose noble personality held the discordant states together until the new government was established and organized.

As a result, American literature flowered into an unprecedented grandeur. There was a kind of literary debate between the Tories and the Whigs. Pamphlets, speeches, sermons and state papers appeared in profusion. Samuel Adams, James Ots, John Dickenson, Hamilton, and Jefferson represent the Whig side where as the Tory position was
expounded by Jonathan Bondur, Martin Howard, Samuel Seabury, etc. The impassioned speech of Patrick Henry concluding with, ‘Give me liberty or give me death’ was meant to appeal to the reluctant colonies to come forward and fight. The patriots made their position clear by a well-worked out political philosophy based on the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Sir Robert Filmer, John Locke and many other English and European thinkers.

Matters came to the British Parliament and certain acts were passed. These acts were oppressive and tyrannical to the colonist such as “The Sugar Act” and “The Currency Act” 1765, “Townsend Act”, 1767, etc. All became symbols of British exploitation and tyranny. These acts brought the colonies together, and united them all in their fight against the common enemy. The first American continental congress met in Philadelphia in 1774. The words of Otes and Samuel Adams fired the delegates with revolutionary zeal. Declaration of Independence drafted by Thomas Jefferson, was adopted unanimously amidst thunderous applause. It was later adopted in 1776 by the Virginia convention, and the second continental congress, the same year. This document is of great historical significance for its statement of the principles of human liberty: “that men are created free and equal, that they inherit inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The revolutionary fire was further fed and fanned by the revolutionary ideas from Europe. The makers of French Revolution had already given their clarion call for “liberty, fraternity and brotherhood”, and America echoed, read and listened with rapt
attention to such ideas. The fall of Bastille was near at hand. There was revolution in the field of literature also.

The Revolutionary War or the American War of Independence commenced in 1776, and ended victoriously with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781. Events followed quickly and swift succession. America was recognised as an independent nation by the Peace of Paris, 1783. The federal constitution was ratified in the year 1787 and George Washington became the first President of the U.S.A. in 1787. It was an epic, heroic struggle against heavy odds. It was fought and won by only a part. The heroism of the war consists partly in this: that the continental army had to fight front and guard rear at the same time while it faced a superior force of open enemies, behind it was a larger body of American Tories, foes of its own household, ready at any moment of give secret or open aid to the British.

So also the prose and poetry that Americans cherish, as reflecting the spirit of 76 is only a portion, the Whig portion, of Revolutionary letters. And the wedge which spilt American life and literature into two sections was the Declaration of Independence, which is also doubtlessly, the symbol of national unity. It meant not only the separation of nation from nation: it divided a man from his neighbours and friends and sometimes a father from his own sons and daughters. Histories are eloquent on Franklin’s patriotism; but they are silent concerning Franklin’s son, who accepted British office and a British bride, and was a Tory, a secret enemy of the cause for which his father laboured there is a fine stirring story of Edmund Randolph,
and of the other young patriots, whose hearts ran ever ahead of the Virginia thoroughbreds as they hastened at the first call to join the army of Washington. But at this time John Randolph followed the English governor, and remained a Tory exile during the Revolution. These are the types of thousands of such family divisions.

The war of Independence was over by 1781. The Independence of the American colonies was recognised by the world. The federal constitution was ratified. By 1707, George Washington became the first President of America. The various colonies had come together to fight British tyranny and unjust laws made in Great Britain. The war brought political independence, but literary and cultural independence was yet to come. With the end of the war, the new Republic was torn with numerous strains, centre-state conflict regarding their respective rights and privileges, the conflict between the rulers and the ruled in each colony, were the various factors which delayed the rise of the genuine national spirit.

The first half of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of the American nation, proud of its newness, of its own culture and way of life. This emergence of the new nation was proud and self confident. National consciousness was fostered by the notable victories that the new republic won in the early years of the new century. The war with the Barbary state made the American flag respected. The naval victories of 1812 vastly increased American confidence and solidarity as a nation. Thereafter, the Americans were not a mere confederation of states, as in the Revolution, but united people animated by a
national spirit. There was expansion all around. The population was increasing, new territories were acquired and more and more colonies were brought to the fold within the Federation. The Louisiana Purchase and the acquisition of Florida doubled the American territory, and the population increased from five to seventeen millions. The vast Louisiana territory was cleared of hostile savages and settled with almost bewildering rapidity. It can be considered as the second era of colonisation. It differs in some important respects from that of first. The earlier colonists were all foreigners. These were the men who knew nothing about America. They had to win their slow way by experiment and failure. The neo-colonists were mostly Americans, men who were born and bred in the spirit of the New World. They carried their ideals of democracy.

The middle years of the 19th century constitute a period of great civil turmoil and unrest. There was Civil War on the question of slavery from 1861-65. It ended with the defeat of the south under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln. The first literary renaissance was the result of the spirit of nationalism. The result of the American War of Independence and the hatred of England had practically exhausted by 1850. Most of the writers of the national period were either dead or had already done their life-work and contributed their best. The decline of the first literary renaissance is seen in the fact that Bryant turned almost wholly to journalism after 1840. Cooper and Irving died in the fifties. Poe died in 1849, Thoreau in 1862, and Hawthorne in 1864.
There was a corresponding increase in the means of communication. Construction of roads had already been taken up in an early period. By the middle of the century, there was a network of roads linking one part of the country with the other. Travel on the National Highways now became safe and comfortable. In this way, the different parts of the vast continent were brought closer together. The network of roads went hand-in-hand with the establishment of a network of railways. In 1869, an impressive group of government and railroad officials met at Promontory Point, Utah, to drive in the golden spike that completed the first transcontinental railroad.

The population of the new continental nation was also increasing rapidly. During the first half century after independence, it climbed steadily from four to seventeen millions. It jumped to sixty-three million in the second half-century. By 1950, it had passed the 150 million mark. Much of this increase was the result of a wave of fresh immigration which came, during the period of greatest territorial expansion and settlement, mainly from Ireland, Germany and other parts of the continent. Toward the end of the century the influx from southern and Central Europe and increased rapidly but it was slowed almost immediately through legislation which fixed quotas for different countries. Gradually the language that they spoke no longer remained British. In idiom, pronunciation and vocabulary it had acquired so many new characteristics that it became American in a strict and definable sense. Other cultural characteristics, like habits of living, fashions and folkways, created similarly new patterns from old
materials, out of the Westward migration and the orientation of the American people to continent developed a new civilization.

This Westward expansion brought for reaching changes in the character and culture of the New Nation, now maturing rapidly. The British farmers had cleared the wilderness in preparation for planting the garden of the world. The Mexican War opened up vast new lands in 1845 and by 1849 the discovery of gold in California further accelerated the process, but rich lands still provided the main incentive. The valley of California was the garden of the West with its wheat and then with its fruit. By 1870, the fertile Western slope had its own towns and the typical way of life was established in them.

The social and cultural impact of this Westward movement was profound and far-reaching. The Republic founded on the Atlantic seashore in an earlier period, had a distinctive culture of its own, and now this culture spread to the West, as waves after waves of Eastern immigrants moved to West. Just as earlier the nation was divided between the Agricultural South and the Industrial north so now it came to be divided between the culturally mature East and a now expanding West, the geographically dividing line being the Allegheny Mountain range. “As the civilization of the seashore Republic expanded into the mid-continental river valleys and onward to the Pacific coast it took with it the spirit of the old explorers and settlers, leaving the Eastern coastline to play the role which Western Europe had played in an earlier day: the seal of culture was left behind. At the same time, those Easterners who did not migrate turned with even
more fervour to the culture of Europe and sought to strengthen their ties with tradition, clinging to forms and habits inherited from colonial times. Eastern writers, whether Northern or Southern, thus developed a genteel conservatism which was reflected in literary propriety and sentimentality.

The result was an American folk tradition that was native in the end because it borrowed from everyone. Partly racial, partly occupational in origin, the ballads and the tales of the West started as echoes of older memories. The English country dance, with its jig tunes and its singing games, took on a bolder and simpler character in the Western granges; Irish, Norse, and Welsh giants became heroes of the lumber rack and the riverboat; cowboys sang deep-sea chants and country love songs to their herds as they rounded them up on the Prairie.

This culture was further enriched by the chivalric ideals of the South i.e. the myth of Southern Cavalier. This myth soon became a part of literary tradition, and was given expression by a host of writers of the mid nineteenth century. “There chivalric ideals, borrowed from a feudal past, became more glamorous as they were pushed out of life and into literature. By 1860 the myth of the South was clearly defined in romantic poetry and fiction as an ideal of beauty and harmony. The roots of this myth were dug into the soil of the early settlements when the adherents of the Stuart Kings sought refuge in Virginia. The wars of the Cavalier and Roundheads that tore England apart in the seventeenth century were transferred to the new continent. Cavalier
ideals throve in the fertile plantations of Virginia and the Carolinas, where vast properties were held for generations. An agrarian economy fostered a wide distribution of the literate population, delayed the growth of cities, libraries and colleges, and prevented any real breaks with British cultural and literary influences.

There was also a corresponding expansion of educational institutions and literary organisations and societies. Harvard and Cambridge, among others, were centres of learning and the names of a number of prominent writers like Lowell, Longfellow and Howels are associated with them. A network of colleges was established, and the courses of study were modernised. American history, and modern languages and literatures took the place of the out-dated classical curriculum. “While the Concord group was dreaming its transcendental dreams, ‘the Cambridge Brahmins’ were more practically entrenching themselves in the achieved dignity of a matured culture. When Lowell succeeded Longfellow in the Smith Chair at Harvard in 1855, and when two years later the Atlantic Monthly was added to the journalistic empire long ruled by the North American Review, the literary dictatorship of New England gentility was assured for many years in spite of war and westward expansion.” Study and travel in Europe were emphasised and formed an essential part of a youngman’s education.

The common man was eager enough to be lectured to and instructed. Not only were the colleges thriving and expanding, but every town of any size from Maine to Georgia and westward into the
Ohio Valley had its local lyceum. “The Lyceum Movement, founded by Josiah Holbrook in 1826, in ten years made lectures on natural history, popular sermons on morality, readings of contemporary literature, exhibitions of the wonders of science, together with less intellectual forms of entertainment, the regular offering of three thousand centres throughout the United States.” Pulpit and form alike were caught up in the vogue of popular oratory. Daniel Webster thundered at a crowd of five thousand on a Vermont mountain top while Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, and Theodore Parker filled the New England meeting houses with spellbound listeners.

The Westward movement went hand in hand with a profound spiritual and political unrest. This spiritual unrest is reflected in the religious movements initiated by leaders like Channing and Bushnell. It was widely believed that the old order was changing, and that a new one must be established. There was an intense quest for a new way of life and it took the form of numerous societies or groups of people who tried to live together in brotherhood, and thus provide the model for a new way of life. The most famous of these societies was Brook Farm. It was founded in 1841 by George Ripley, and it included Hawthorne, Curtis and Dana among its hundred and fifty members, Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Channing, Greeley and many other notable persons were interested in the community and sent frequent contributions to The Dial, which was the famous literary organ of the Brook Farmers. Its members worked intermittently on their large farm in Roxbury (now a part of Boston) and their object was, in their own words, “to live in all the faculties of soul.”
aimed at living close to nature, to dignify manual labour, to cultivate the spiritual side of life and to help every member to be free, fearless and upright – an individual in the best sense of the word. However, a fire which consumed the main building in 1846 practically ended the community but not until it had made a deep impression on American life and thought. Thousands of visitors came every year to visit Brook Farm; countless references to it are found in the records of the period; and a considerable body of literature has since appeared in memory of the heroic experiment”.

The political unrest of the middle decades is seen in the emergence of a large number of political parties both in the North and South. In a single generation there appeared in the South eight or ten political parties most of which were divided into two factions, one advocating compromise and the other force in the pursuit of its immediate object. Meanwhile, in the North there were Old Whigs and New Whigs, Republicans and Black Republican Democrats and Union Democrats, Freesoilers, Libertyites, Know-nothings, Abolitionists, etc. “As these reformers met to listen to the fiery denunciations of their orators, and to demand the immediate freedom for the slaves at any cost, presently a riotous mob would burst in upon them to smash the furniture, burn the building, and carry off the leader with a warning halter round his neck.” Only as we remember this political babel, with its attendant emotional disturbance, can we understand the general uproar occasioned by the fanatic raid of John Brown, or the mighty wave of indignation which followed the melodramatic story of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. It was as if a patient,
suffering from fever had suddenly developed a new symptom which alarmed the watchers beyond all reason, but which would hardly have produced a tremor, if its psychological causes had been understood.

There was much heated discussion about the respective rights of the states and the centre, of the respective merits of industrialisation and the agricultural way of life, about the right of secession of the individual states. Writers could not escape being influenced by the turmoil of the times. “Some of the poets, notably Whittier and Lowell, threw themselves into the strife of tongues; and in consequence a portion of their work is partisan in spirit that it cannot be classed with national literature. Other young poets of brilliant talents turned from poetry to politics, as Trumbull and Freneau had turned aside in ‘76 and never fulfilled their early promise to literature.

The minor works of the period reveal how armed conflict arose, not from inevitable necessity but from misunderstanding, between those who were born under the same flag, who worshipped the same God, and who honoured the same virtues in man or woman. The country was swept by wave after wave to stop emotional excitement: the voice of reason was lost in the louder cry of passion. The tumult reached its climax during the feeble administration of President Buchanan at a time when, if ever in its history, the ship of state needed a strong man at the helm; and then America, a pace-loving country, was suddenly confronted by a terrible war which no same person had ever desired or expected.
These heated discussions broke out into open conflict in 1860 and the conflict assumed the historic form of Civil War between the North and the South. The nation was sharply divided into the South, which advocated the right to hold slaves and the right to secession, and the North, which stood for the Abolition of slavery and the unity and integrity of the nation. The nation was lucky in having at the time as its President, a statesman of the calibre of Abraham Lincoln. The war was won by Lincoln and the nation was saved from disintegration, though at the end of it Lincoln fall a victim to the bullet of a fanatic. His martyrdom has been commemorated in Whitman’s famous elegy “My Captain! My Captain.”

All other issues were swept aside by the Civil War. Few writers could escape being influenced by the upheaval, and few could avoid taking a partisan attitude. Literature of the period fully reflects the emotional involvement of the American people in the most serious crisis which the New Nation had ever faced. Even Emerson and Thoreau dropped philosophy and became partisans; Lowell, Whitter, and Harriet Beecher too, had long since made their views militantly heard. “It was a time literature turned from its larger concerns to the crisis of the moment.” Slowly the prominent scholars, poets, historians, and religious leaders of New England were drawn into the cause. By 1846, Lowell was asserting that the Mexican War was fought in the interest of the slave-holder in his Biglow Papers, and by 1850 Calnoun had identified the Southern nation, finally and irrevocably with the right to hold slaves.
A new American literature grew out of this political and economic upheaval. There was the rise of regionalism and of American humour particularly in the West. Europe laughed again at Mark Twain as it had at Washington Irving’s Knickerbocker; Bret Harte squeezed out the sad sweet melancholy of life from the mingling camp, as Irving had from the simple countryside. Sentiment and humour were unabashed together on the frontier.

Local colour, sentimental memories, and the relief of laughter – a new American literature was growing once again from the roots of the new settlements. The travelling minstrel shows picked it up and mixed the lore of the Negro with that of the prairie to make a strong and sometimes unpalatable brew. Slowly it reached the stage of writing. By 1870 Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and W. D. Howells were publishing their observations in the form of tales and sketches in the Overland Monthly of California, the Atlantic Monthly of Boston, and Harper’s Monthly of New York. They were welcomed because the realism, the sentiment, the novelty, and the laughter in what they wrote were traditionally American. Youthful and crude in their exuberance, they were renewing the childhood of a people and reasserting the pioneer spirit of independence each in his own way.

Regionalism and realism took the place of imagination and idealism, the particular and the local was stressed in place of the general and universal. Regional characteristics began to assert themselves in 1871, when William Dean Howells of Jefferson, Ohio, took the key post of editor-in-chief of the BrahminAtlantic Monthly;
there suddenly and appeared regional sketches and verses in Indiana, Missouri, California, Maine, and New Orleans. “The man who was to define realism in American fiction was also the principal sponsor of the regional awareness that seemed to spring up in widely scattered areas obviously the product of a common impulse, using local lore and characteristics in the first phase of a literary movement that was national on a continental scale”. Before the close of the century, there was hardly a section of the country that had not furnished its supply of quaint local characters and heroic bygone incidents to create a regional movement that was to shape American fiction until well into the next century.

On one point many of these regionalists were not clear; the distinction between fact and fiction, reality and romance. Writers like Eggleston and Jewett had a strong impulse to write only of life as they knew it at first-hand, but mixed with this interest was the reader’s demand for the conventional love-story plot and characters and for the glamorous history of many of the regions. “A further complication was the sense of social injustice that writers like Harris and Cable felt for such special groups as former slaves and Creoles. Glamour had an ugly side as well. Perhaps the reason that the regionalist movement failed to produce a masterpiece before the middle nineties was its lack of a critical guide to work out some of these difficulties.”

The major literature of the second half of the 19th century is national in its outlook and it shows five common characteristics;
The harmony with nature which appeared in the poetry of the first national period is now deepened and spiritualized. It becomes mystic, especially in the verse of Emerson and Whitman, showing the influence of oriental literature.

Nationalism and an intense loyalty to national flag are everywhere in evidence, strengthened by war, and though historians continue to divide American writers into eastern, southern and western, books worth considering are those which ignore such divisions and appeal to the whole American people.

A strong moral tendency, which manifested itself in the first Colonial writers, again makes its appearance. Almost every important book of this period, whether a novel of Hawthorne or an idyl of Longfellow, aims not simply to give pleasure but to bring a message to men; and the interest of a story or poem generally centres about a moral problem and its solution. With the exception of Whitman, the major poets of this period are like the Victorian poets in England, essentially teachers and the moral purity of their lives emphasize their doctrine.

Poetry predominates after the middle decades. This is remarkable in view of the fact that the genius of America is practical and prosaic. Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Lanier, Whitman are only a few names cited at random to suggest how far the poets exceeded the novelists.
The group of comic writers which now rose to prominence is different in important ways from the older group. Appealing to a national audience, these authors forsook the sectional characterization of earlier humourists and assumed the roles of literary comedians. This meant that the characters they pretended to be, became blurred or unlocalized – that instead of writing in the roles, say of Yankee farmers, Georgian planters or Tennessee mountaineers, they wrote in clemens’s words as “genial idiots” whose characteristics were not particularized. In such guises they could often comment amusingly upon current affairs. In such guises, too, they could use all sorts of verbal devices – slang, bad spelling, poor grammar and anti-climatic sentences, incongruously combined with learned allusions and Latinate words for humorous effects. The nature of the humour thus shifted from that of character portrayal to that of diction. The common reader found these authors vastly amusing.

The American social, cultural and economic scene at the turn of the century is one of great complexity and diversity. This complexity and diversity is fully mirrored in the literature of the age, more so as it is the era of the common man and the aspirations of the masses find increasing expression in literature. With the passing of time this complexity and intricacy continues to increase owing to various causes, which include influences from the other side of the Atlantic, chief of such influences being the teaching of the new psychology of Freud, Jung and Bergson and teachings of Karl Marx and his followers. Rapid industrialisation and urbanization bring with them their own problems and difficulties which colour the literature of the
new century. The anxiety, ennui, boredom, the sense of loneliness and neurosis, caused by these developments find their own place in literature. The two world wars prove to be nerve shattering experiences for the Americans and generate a loss of faith in traditional values and the result is frustration and pessimism. There is an abundance of literary output, but also a steep fall in literary standards. The literary, cultural and social life of the nation is further modified by the advent of swift means of locomotion, the radio, the motion picture, and the rapid electrification even of the countryside. The currents and cross currents in the social and cultural life of the nation could not but modify the literature of the new age.

America is a vast continent and from the very beginning its literature was characterised by immense diversity. It developed along regional lines and expressed regional and local diversities. As E. S. Oliver rightly points out, “we have had Southern writers, New England writers, Western and Mid-Western writers. We have had urban writers and writers of prairie or mountain life. The hybrid nature of our racial heritage has been a pronounced factor in our cultural life and in our literature. We have had a literature of the American Indian, the Negro, and the Jew. We have had the problem of racial assimilation as a basis for literature and we have had opposition to assimilation in our literature.”

However, as the century advances such local and regional diversities tend to give place to greater and greater uniformity with the growth of transcontinental railroads and highways, the mobility given
by the automobile, national coverage by radio, television, press associations, magazines and advertising campaigns. But local and regional diversities continue to persist, more particularly in isolated pockets. Thus, unity in diversity is a marked characteristic both of American literature and American social life. Numerous writers exploit diversities as well as the racial and ethical peculiarities of the various peoples that constitute the American nation. An understanding of such regional and racial peculiarities is essential for a proper understanding of much of the literature of the period.

The process of social change is accelerated with the coming of the swift means of communication and older concepts are modified or re-interpreted with bewildering rapidly. *It is an era of doubts and questionings and the old rapidly gives place to the new.* “The meaning of conservatism, liberalism, radicalism and the quality of their respective values; the meaning of regionalism, nationalism, internationalism and the extent of their respective values, the values of life in the huge anonymous city apartment as contrasted with the more social life of suburbia with its tendency to conformity and uniformity; the opportunity for individual initiative and self-reliance in an individualistic society as against insured security and the certainty which attends the known and the anticipated – these are some of the multifarious factors making up the social and cultural milieu of American life and literature over this three-quarters of a century. The modifications of such concepts go hand in hand with an increase in population and with the emergence of America as a powerful nation to be reckoned with in world affairs. There is soon a network of colleges
and universities from one end of the continent to the other and millions of young Americans flock to these centres of learning every year.

There is rapid industrialisation of the country, leading to a change in the occupational life of the people. There is less of leisure and practically no time for the enjoyment of the pleasures of family life. Industrialisation also means urbanisation, dirty and crowded city slums, environmental pollution and ugliness of man’s physical surroundings. There is a corresponding increase in tension, stress and strain. New areas of conflict soon emerge as all-important factors in the social life of the nation. These conflicts are reflected in political and economic life as well as in literature. Soon business became the order of the day. The United States Steel Corporation, organized in 1900, was only the biggest of the many developing giant corporations. But the government in counter-activity enacted laws to control the business combines with various regulatory and supervisory agencies and the restrictions upon monopolistic development.

Meanwhile, the people strove to insure the democratic and popular control of the government through greater participation in political parties, the secret ballot and other means. Theodore Roosevelt, a popular heroic figure, called for an active strenuous life for the individual and society. As the President of the nation, he stressed the importance of free commerce and free political activity and thus did his best to counter the monopolistic trends in the economic field. The conflicts and tensions in the social life found a
place in literature and imparted to it a fresh vigour and vitality. Merits and demerits of romanticism, naturalism and realism, of individual freedom and state control, were hotly discussed and just on the eve of World War I, there was a kind of national debate over these issues. Writers centring round Howard University and the University of Chicago vigorously participated in this debate; no work of outstanding merit could result from such critical analysis and assessment. However, there was much experimentation both in fiction and poetry and this in itself is a healthy sign and points to the “renaissance of literature” which was in the offing.

There was rapid advance in the field of science and technology and this in its turn influenced and modified literature and literary concepts. The moderate realism of the 19th century gave place to naturalism which was fed and nourished by continental influences as of the French writers, Balzac and Zola. The merits and demerits of naturalism as a literary creed were hotly debated. As a literary method, it attempted scientific objectivity in the treatment of the natural man and emphasized the overpowering aspects of his environment, of his passions and instincts. While Crane is the principal figure in the early naturalistic work, Dreiser’s name looms the largest in the long range, and the debates of the critics over naturalism often centred on the works of this plodding, determined writer. Although the more thoroughly naturalistic work was slow in becoming widely read in America, naturalism remains throughout the literature of the modern age an influential force. It gave rise to much vulgarity and obscenity as the writers tended to concentrate more and
more on the see my side of life. They believed in seeing human life as a whole and in expressing the whole of it, even at the cost of traditional moral and social values. The realism of the earlier age was entirely free from the vulgarity and obscenity of naturalism which remained a dominant force in American literature for practically three decades.

The two world wars resulted in far reaching cultural and social changes which influenced both individual and social life. Idealism gave place to disillusionment, and frustration and pessimism were wide-spread. That is why terms like ‘waste land’ and “the Lost generation” were recurrently used for the era of disillusionment which set in and which was further accentuated by the de-mobilisation of the army after World War I. But war also fostered growth and development and a change in cultural and social patterns.

The war brought industrial expansion, increased employment higher wages, greater mechanization. The developments in medicine and public health increased the life span; home equipment increased the physical comport of families; concern for diet improved the eating habits of the nation. The relationship of the individual to group life and to society speeded up in directions already indicated by earlier social change. Parental authority weakened and the Victorian concept of the paternal family was no longer tenable. Young people could gain employment on their own – and they did. Woman entered industry and various employments outside the home in large numbers. The millions of young men in the armed services were seeking new places,
learning new ways. “How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they have seen Paris?” became the burden of a popular song; and the question was more pertinent than most lyrical melodies are. The changing attitudes and questioning of faith in the traditional lodestones was expressed by Archibald MacLeish and other poets and writers.

It was in the decades between the two Wars that American drama also came to its own. During this period, ‘O Neill was undoubtedly established as the most able young playwright of the time. His dominance of the American theatre for a generation is without question, but his success only tends to overshadow the work of many good dramatists, writing in realistic and expressionistic veins with considerable success. The Adding Machine (1923) introduced the work of Elmer Rice, whose later Street Scene won the Pulitzer Prize in 1929. What Price Glory (1924) by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson became for a decade a kind of yardstick measurement for all war plays. It brought Anderson to the beginning of a successful theatre career. He had many prose realistic dramas, before he turned to such verse dramas as Mary of Scotland (1933) Winterset (1935) and High Tor (1937). They Knew what They Wanted (1924) by Sidney Howard won the Pulitzer Prize and also much attention. Howard went on to other successful dramas in the realistic vein most notably The Silver Cord (1926).

The novel too was beginning to show signs of new vitality during the second decade of the century though it was not until the
twenties that its real resurgence came. Dreiser, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Dorothy Canfield, Willa Cather are all leading luminaries in the field. Sherwood Anderson, influenced by the New Psychology, focussed on the inner life of man in the machine age. His work marks the beginning of the ‘inwardness’ of the American novel. Indeed, America was most prolific in this genre. Sinclair Lewis soon became the dominant figure in the field. “The award of the Noble Prize for literature to Lewis, the first American ever to receive that world-wide recognition, was hailed as recognition of American literature in the world scene. In another sense, the twenties was the Hemingway decade, though he did not receive the Noble Prize until 1954. *In Our Time* (1924), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *Men Without Women* (1927) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) gave Hemingway an increasingly important stature as a writer with individuality and power. His work won followers and his style and mood had an influence among young writers. Mention may also be made of William Faulkner whose *The Sound and the Fury* is a classic of the American novel. Thomas Wolfe is another able practitioner of this form.

It was also during these decades that there was an upsurge of literary criticism. A group or literary critics called ‘The Fugitives’ – for they contributed their articles and essays to the Magazine of that name – became the founder of what has come to be known as the New Criticism. The group includes such prominent critics as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, the most distinguished critic of the group. They were young, Southern and serious in their
literary pursuits, poets all and all actively at work. They produced much criticism and various kinds of literature in interpretation or defence of the South. Some of them even took their stand for an agricultural society as opposed to an industrial one in the volume *I'll Take My Stand* (1930). The most influential of the group was John Crowe Ransom who had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and who was Professor of English at Vanderbilt University. Ransom has seen his small body of poems retain critical consideration even while his own reputation as critic and editor developed at Kenyon College and on the *Kenyon Review*.

The American Negro also came to its own during this period. A number of Negro-writers of considerable merit soon emerged on the literary scene. The Negro found his best representation in the work of Roark Bradford. While some writers found fulfilment through their treatment of the Negro and his life, there were others who made much of the Red Indian and the folk-lore associated with his primitive culture. Writers like *Walla Cather*, retreated from the contemporary scene into a more attractive past finding beauty and meaning apart from the world of naturalism or the various avenues writers were using to counteract the spirit of naturalism abroad in land”. There were others who satisfied their romantic longings through their scathing attacks on the materialistic craze of the lady.

America was marching ahead and was well-set on the road to literary supremacy in the world, but all was not well with American economy. The evils and dangers of the capitalist system of economy
were highlighted by the stock market crash of October 1929, and the Great Depression which followed. The nation suffered unemployment, reduced incomes, business failures, home foreclosures, lower prices for agricultural yield. It was the decade of the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He and his programme, his speeches and his plans to bring assistance to the underprivileged, helped to usher in his concept of the common man, the rise into political influence of the masses of the world. Changes of a sociological economic and political nature, as were modifying the traditional American individualism, naturally brought great changes to the literature being produced. The stresses of the depression and widespread unemployment furthered a literature of proletarian protest. The literary Left or a literature allied with Marxian doctrine became for the first time a self-conscious and active part of the American literary scene.

A number of writers with Marxist leanings, John Steinbeck, for example, during the mid-thirties began to present the little people, the common man, with sympathy. Sometimes his work was bathed in a pleasant humour, a friendly familiarity, as in _Tortilla Flat_ (1935); sometimes it had a clinched fist of anger as in _In Dubious Battle_ (1936). This novel set among migrant fruit pickers on strike in a California valley leans heavily upon the traditional Marxian dialectic. _Of Mice and Men_ (1937) turns more toward the symbolic, while still using the realistic details and objective pictures of genuine conditions. _The Grapes of Wrath_ (1939) became the Pulitzer Prize novel and a national sensation. It marks, a culmination of the decade in the work
of American writers concerned with the plight of the helpless individual caught up in a great social movement grinding the individuality and spirit to impotency. The fact that American citizens, once land-owners and reliant yeomen could be reduced to landless, homeless wanderers of the road is presented in this novel with compassionate power. A number of literary critics also wrote under Marxist influence chief of them being Edmund Wilson. “In 1931, with the publication of *Axel’s Castle*, he achieved distinction as a critic of considerable stature, a recognition which he has ably held over the years since that early successful study of the Symbolist movement in literature.”

The great economic crisis seemed to focus attention on the many ills of the economic, social and political life of the country. In Pursuance of the New Deal programme of President Roosevelt comprehensive social and economic reforms were taken in hand. The responsibility of the government for the social and economic welfare of the citizens was accepted, although the question was still debated of how the public welfare could best be served. There was no longer any question but that America had firmly embarked upon a society merging governmental controls and governmental responsibility with private enterprise and individual capitalism. Before the thirties were over America had become also more firmly involved in international complications. Fascism and Communism as totalitarian concepts of government, both aggressively on the march, were alien to the idea of democracy and America with other democracies of the world faced the threat of another world war.
The outbreak of World War II brought not so much technical change as a reorientation of ideas and concepts. Three of these large areas of modified thinking have been of importance to American literature; the changing nature of science and the changing attitude toward science accompanying that change; the changing concept of the nature of the political state; the re-evaluation of the individual himself. The general acceptance of science as the ally and benefactor of Man, even the avenue to Man’s bliss and welfare, was rarely seriously questioned. Science had brought man the means of health, long life and relief from drudgery and excessive toil, pleasure for his leisure and comfort in his environment. With the war and its means of destruction mankind was shown irrevocably that science could develop almost unlimited means of destruction. For the first time in the history of human life upon the planet, man had developed the means of destroying mankind. Thus, came into question the motives of science itself.

All this had far reaching impact on post-war literature. The old values and systems had collapsed and man felt orphaned and defrauded. Faith in religion had already been shaken, and now science and its values were also subject to questioning. The result was a loss of identity, a feeling of alienation, and a search for meaning and stability, both in individual and social life. One of the questions most persistently asked in literature was “Who am I?” Many of the “post-war writers concern themselves with this search of the alienated individual for an identity, for a meaning. This is the central quest of the Beat Generation, the writers who were early associated with San
Francisco and who responded to Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”. This wailing protest against man’s condition struck a responsive chord and has been subjected to considerable critical discussion. Dissatisfaction with the conventional, the traditional, the accepted, has been widely pervasive in the literature of the post-war period. The new age has challenged the old ways and the older ideas, so that the writers of literature have often become involved in a confusion of indirection.”

The two dramatists who have emerged into prominence since 1940, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, both indicate that they are children of the bewildered and protesting age. Miller has a more hopeful view of man than Williams does. Williams is saturated with a feeling that something is lost; that in place of whatever might have been of value from some lost past is now a nagging emptiness. No longer in his work is there a social protest which is in itself a seeking for the justice which is understood implicitly in the present. Rather his plays present an inner probing within a small group, a stirring of the embers of a burned out fire.” He has built The Glass Menagerie (1944) out of the small family circle where the mother is so dominated by her lost past gentility that her invented goodness becomes in the chaotic present an unendurable cruelty. William’s characters are victims alienated from the world, branded with some indelible mark of separation and isolation. A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955) both present their own individual brand of losing which is yet the common malady. Both plays were awarded the Pulitzer Prize as well as the Drama Critics Award.
These social changes and frustrations are reflected in post-war poetry and novel as well. The idea of the hero is abandoned and the neurotic, un-heroic individual becomes the hero of the new novel. This is seen more particularly in the novels of John Updike. He is a noteworthy writer of the new generation. Rober Penn Warren and Saul Bellow are other able practitioners of the novel-form. Warren in his serious quest of the nature of the self represents the more thoughtful currents of the novel in recent American literature. Warren recognises that the self is in society, that society is based on moral values that search for understanding is part of man’s nature and an integral part of the self.

To quote E. S. Oliver, at some length, “American literature began in the seventeenth century in search for the ideal, a search lighted and directed by hope and expectation. This search has been persistently a part of the entire history of the literature growing out of the impact of European civilization upon the developing American frontier. This literature has never been removed from involvement in the human situation. It has indicated concern and compassion, even in its analysis and its evaluation. Intolerable injustice, social blindness, or brutalizing conditions, have been brought before the bar of public conscience by writers feeling a responsibility to brotherhood and the integrity of the self. Though some writers of the post World War period have seemed to falter, the American literary tradition has held confidently to a vision of man based on a conception of justice and the value and unlimited potential of the individual whose essential dignity is not betrayed. A trust in man is apparent in the social and political
fabric of the America of the sixties and it is also apparent in the literature of the new generation. In no other quality is this trust in Man more apparent than in the depth of involvement and identity which is everywhere revealed. The American writer of this day is not aloof from the wishes, the visions and the frustrations of the human being looking for stars in a world where clouds form on the horizon. Thomas Wolfe was not out of key with the coming generation when he wrote near the end of his life, “The essence of all faith for people of my belief is that man’s life can be, and will be better.” This belief in the creative power of the human spirit to endure and prevail whatever the obstacles or the foibles of the individual is still central and fundamental in the literature of the United States.

Such is the panorama of the American literary and social scene in the first half of the 20th century. The vastness and vitality of American literature has been fully demonstrated in this rapid survey of American scene. The chapters, which follow, will be devoted to a detailed consideration of a few of the more important writers and their works, writers who have already carved out a place for themselves among the great classics of the world.

When F. Scott Fitzgerald’s collection of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers*, was published in 1920 the Jazz Age and the decade of the twenties had already begun. Fitzgerald’s *Flappers and Philosophers*, and Scott and Zelda themselves are documents which speak for urban sophistication and nicely represent the age of wonderful nonsense which superficially coloured the twenties and its
history. Looking under the fourth, we see that they reflected an onrushing modernism. America was being rapidly transformed from a rural-agrarian country to an urban technological nation with its implication of lowered agrarian status.

Fitzgerald displayed an inviting good-time life style that was urban in its expensive frivolity, relaxed moral standards, irreverence, and pleasure-bent, “flapperish” purpose. He coined the phrase, “Jazz Age.” His twilight fell over cocktails at the Biltmore. Fitzgerald and his fellow philosophers were at odds with the older, rural side of America. Life was detaching itself from its agrarian foundation. Along with the publication of Flappers and Philosophers, the year 1920, as does any year, turned up a cluster of events showing changes under way and changes ahead. The Census Bureau released statistics from the 1920 census confirming what was evident—that the rural population (on farms and in towns under 2500 population) was no longer a majority. Prohibition went into effect in January immediately driving a wedge between urban scofflaws and the rest of the country.

Sinclair Lewis’s Main Street jarred the sensibilities of rural small-town America and aroused defensiveness. Lewis allows partly urbanized Main Street conformity to win out, but the book nudged small towns toward modern standards.

Warren Harding’s landslide election inaugurated a paradox of “normalcy” coupled with rapid change, and it forecast a more blatant industrial-political complex. Pittsburgh radio station KDKA broadcast the 1920 election returns signalling the arrival of commercial radio.
The American Farm Bureau Federation was formally launched as the most powerful farm organization in history. The movement was surrounded by farmer sensitivity in the face of hostile urban-industrial forces and an ambition to claim for agriculture a place in the business world. It came along just in time to face a collapse of agricultural prices which, within a year, had dropped by half. Farm family expectations for a middle-class-level good life were dashed. These events are some of the markers for an accelerating modernization that made the twenties an especially changeful time for rural America.

America’s alteration from a rural-agrarian nation to an urban-industrial one was a ponderous and long-drawn-out tilting. The continuing transformation had been obscured by rural progress of the pre-war and wartime years, and then reached another climax during the twenties, a time of speedy down-turnings for agriculture and a time of tension.

Early in the period, Lewis Mumford, a “philosopher” of the city, noted that a “breach ... has begun to widen between the metropolis and the countryside in America. The countryman, who cannot enjoy the advantages of the metropolis ... resents the privileges that the metropolitan enjoys. Hence the periodical crusades of our State Legislatures, largely packed with rural representatives, against the vices, corruptions, and follies which the countryman enviously looks upon as the peculiar property of the big city.”

The 1920 census classified 54 percent of the population as urban. Statistically, the agrarian world had some time since lost its
majority position by measurements such as rural-farm population (in 1920 less than one-third), value of farm products, and capital and labour employed. Agriculture was no longer the largest category of employer, manufacturing having moved ahead. By 1930, the urban proportion had risen to 56 percent, the rural-farm had declined to 24 percent, there were 159000 fewer farms, and the large metropolis held 48 percent of the total population.

During that decade, the two worlds, city and country reached a turbulent historic intersection, a final angry confrontation. The twenties were a time when distinctions were sharpest. It was a time of cultural conflict, of polarization not merely interesting, but portentous, a time that determined succeeding developments and still claims our curiosity.

The decade ends with the urban-industrial world in a state of momentary disarray, but the transformation had become fixed and America was finally committed to urbanization, industrialization, corporatism, never-ending economic growth, and proliferation of material goods. W. W. Rostow’s stage of high mass production and consumption was achieved. The gulf between the two worlds was narrowed, and the city and business were the controlling forces.

Making an unhistorical aside, there was an element of tragedy in rural-urban collision in the twenties because the victory and defeat were too total. Much that was good in American country life was lost and much that was trashy and life-diminishing and hazardous won out. The course of the twenties is one of the last large steps toward a
point of no return for a heedless, exploitative culture with its attendant dilemmas and maladjustments.

The rural world failed to find persuasive leaders, or to make those alliances reflecting a far-sighted national interest, or to exercise restraint and command those compromises that would keep the nation from a dangerously materialistic course. More eloquent philosophers were required to enunciate historic values than William Jennings Bryan, or Bill Lemke, or Arthur Capper. But this is putting the matter too narrowly. Where in the twenties were the national leaders who might have steered a more affirmative movement.

Young Henry A. Wallace at least appreciated this deficiency: “The men of vision must arise soon if the United States is to be saved from the fate of becoming a preponderantly industrial nation …. They must act in the faith that it will be good for the entire Nation [if the vision is realized] of a well-rounded, self-sustaining national life.”

Liberty Hyde Bailey was doing his best to redirect American thought. In his *Holy Earth*, which merits rereading these days, he said: “The greater the population, the greater will be the demands on the planet; and … every new man will make more demands than his father made, for he will want more to satisfy him…. We are not to look for our permanent civilization to rest on any species of robber-economy…. There are more fundamental satisfactions that ‘thrills.’ There is more heart-ease in frugality than in surfeit…. We are now provided with all sorts of things that nobody ever should want.”
Instead, agriculture hardened its business side, as Richard Hofstadter and Grant McConnell have maintained, and was successful as a special-interest group in prying loose advantages and privileges for a limited class of farmers. The soft side of agrarianism, concerned with rebuilding a noble society, and conceiving the national interest to be the same as its own, lapsed into grotesque expressions of prejudice.

In 1920 the slow-moving world of farms and farmers, of rural small towns and open spaces, was vulnerable to change. The rural way of life amounted to much more than mere remnants of formerly established ways. Farm families lived in the midst of their enterprise, and, as the average-sized farm now approximated 160 acres, the distance between farm homes averaged one-half mile. That is dispersed settlement with many consequences. Scattered family farm operators passionately possessing small properties cherished their individuality and the integrity of close-knit patriarchal family units. At the same time, like-minded rural folk maintained a sense of community or neighbourhood and adhered to a rigid set of customary opinions.

Rural people were conservative and tradition-minded and heirs to the peasant inertia of their old-world ancestors. They rested patiently on a conventional certainty about good and evil, with staunch adherence to the values of hard work, thrift, and self-denial.

Farming was an earthy, slow-paced biological production occupation close to the forces of nature and locked into seasonal cycles of gestation and germination. Farming required a diversity of
tasks to which were applied an arcane lore and resourcefulness as the farmer himself decided. Farmers still gained confidence from conviction that their products were not mere commodities—good goods, food and fibre to feed and clothe people. In the words of an Iowa author writing in 1923 of an Iowa setting, a crop “was the perfect symbol of rewarded, lavished labour, … of creating power, of wifely faithfulness, of the flower and fruit of life, its beauty, its ecstasy.”

Even before the twenties the rural world had been penetrated by new technology and business methods. In 1919, Sherwood Anderson deplored the coming of industrialism, attended by all the roar and rattle of affairs…. The farmer … is brother to the men of the cities, and if you listen you will find him talking as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all.

Progress had come to the country improving rural life but not yet disrupting it. Almost all of those involved were favourably disposed toward the progress represented by Rural Free Delivery, mail-order houses, country telephones, extensions services, and the automobile.

Within the rural world small towns were embraced, sometimes congenially by the farming community. Before the dominance of the city the small town was a special institution organizing and protecting the bucolic moral and social order and serving farmers’ needs.

Though the small town continued to grow during the twenties, its vitality was economic and its outlook shifted from farm to
metropolis. The social and moral rigidity of Prairie commercialism in vulgar imitation of the city was producing the parasitical object.

Tension between the urban world and the rural was nothing new to twentieth-century America. It reached back to the recesses of history when distinctions first appeared. What was the new was the sharpness of the contrast and the inequality of the contest. Progress had its home in the city. The urban-industrial world praised change rather than tradition. That was where the energetic social, intellectual, and economic action was. The city stood for innovation, experiment, and creativity. It was fluid, profane, impersonal, and permissive.

During the twenties the big city became especially the predatory instrument of modernization, prizing costly bigness and gaudy proliferation of material goods to be sold, enjoyed, and discarded. The “philosophers” of the urban world were exciting cosmopolitan people like Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby, like George Gershwin, Al Smith, and Jimmy Walker whose philosophy was “Sometimes the politician must rise above principle.”

For all its outward magnificence and vitality, life in the city carried costs. The sense of community deteriorated. Success was measured by money, power, and status symbols. The city encouraged a rapacious struggle for advantage, exploitation, and manipulation. Fragmented, rootless, conscienceless individuals counted for less.

Metropolitan social disorganization was too evident to be without its critics like Reinhold Niebuhr: “Perhaps the real reason that we live such chaotic lives in urban communities is because a city is
not a society at all…. It is a mass of individuals, held together by a productive process. Its people are spiritually isolated even though they are mechanically dependent upon one another. In such a situation, it is difficult to create and preserve the moral and cultural traditions which each individual needs to save his life from anarchy.”

Ralph Borsodi urged a flight back-to-the-beauty-of-the-land from the factory’s “joyless” and “soul-deadening repetitive labour,” from “too much excitement, too much artificial food … and too much of the smoke and dust of the city.” Lewis Mumford thought that “we have had the alternatives of humanizing the industrial city or de-humanizing the population. So far we have de-humanized the population.” He also flatly declared: “Our metropolitan civilization is not a success” and if the “feral rather than the humane quality” continued, then metropolitanism was “probably destined to fall by its weight.” Walter Lippmann found that the judgments of urban society were “often flat and foolish [because] the sovereign people determine life and death and happiness under conditions where … thought [is] most difficult….How cluttered, how capricious, how superfluous and glamorous, is the ordinary urban life of our time.”

Willa Cather, writing *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in the twenties, has an Indian character saying, “Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things.” Much later, she looked back and recalled that “the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts.” Speaking for yet another disenchanted group, Harold Stearns wrote that the young intellectuals disliked “almost to the point of hatred and
certainly to the point of contempt, the type of people dominant in our present civilization.”

As prescient as were these critics of urban-industrial growth, they were of scant help in bridging the gulf between city and country. When city folk took notice of the rural world it was a dull foreign country. They regarded it as an exploitable colony, or as an anachronistic brake upon progress whenever agriculture exercised power, or as a source of amusement. A well-worn vocabulary of condescension reflected urban superiority. H. L. Mencken’s essay, “The Husbandman” was an arrogant urban tirade against cultural lag. It scorned farmers as a rabble army of defectives holding under siege in a “few walled towns” beleaguered clusters of civilized intellectuals: “There, where the cows low through the still night, … and bathing begins … with the vernal equinox—there is the reservoir of all the nonsensical legislation that makes the United States a buffoon among the great nations. It was among country Methodists, practitioners of a theology degraded, that Prohibition was invented…. What lay under it, and under all the other crazy enactments of its category, was no more and no less than the yokel’s congenital and incurable hatred of the city man—his simian rage against everyone who, as he sees it, is having a better time than he is.”

In the competitions between polarized rural and urban worlds, the rural was fated to lose because it was disadvantaged economically and socially. Power had shifted to the city and for farmers the new world was passing them by. Some years before the twenties, this was known to Mr. Dooley who chatted across the bar with his friend
Hogan. Hogan, who commuted from the country, mentioned: “We ought to live where all the good things of life comes from.” Dooley’s urban response was: “No, the place to live in is where all the good things of life go to.”

Following a brief period of good times during the war, post-war deflation reduced farm product prices (and incomes) to levels far below their pre-war normal purchasing power. The parity ratio as newly conceived in the Department of Agriculture was a symbol of unfavourable exchange relationships and the very concept of parity expressed rural-urban tension.

Per capita, farm people had between a quarter and a half as much money as urban people to spend for the material things that measured the twentieth-century American standard of living.

The good things of life were no longer simply food, clothing, shelter, serene security, independence, and righteousness; they had become the command of mechanical power, style, variety, mobility, novelty, and things all had to be bought.

Income disparity plus dispersed settlement and the restraints of custom put rural life behind urban by standards increasingly determined in the city. For example; Improvement of urban health conditions early in the century had put cities ahead of the country by such measures as purity of domestic water and milk supplies, waste disposal, and available health services (numbers of doctors and dentists, nurses and hospital beds, drug stores, attended births, etc.). The quality of housing was superior in the cities, including hot and
cold running water in the house, flush toilets, central heating, electricity, and space per person. Rural education standards lagged in number of days in the school term, school plant and equipment, teacher training, pupils per teacher, teacher pay, and years of schooling attained by children.

Rural-urban disparities were the principal forces driving ever larger numbers of people to transfer from country to city locations. Throughout history cities have grown by such migration from the hinterland.

Until the twenties American agriculture shared its human fertility with the city while continuing to grow itself. Then, the out-migration from the farm swelled to such proportions as to begin a historic decline in numbers of people living on farms. In the ten years after 1920 the rural-farm population dropper 1.4 million; there was a net migration of about 6 million, but births cut the loss.

Significant differentials in birth rates between farm and city people made a prime social distinction separating two kinds of people. In 1980 about six times as many rural families as urban (Chicago) had three or more children. Rural Storey Country, Iowa, (including Ames), had a birth rate about 15 to 20 percent greater than urban Polk County (including Des Moines). This was a curious phenomenon, as yet subject only to speculative inquiry. Perhaps the bare biological nature of farming is sufficient explanation for a high birth rate as a distinctive rural folkway. Eventually this difference diminished and
ultimately vanished as urban values and sophistication penetrated the countryside, and as rural people and masses moved to the city.

The leaving of farm was a matter of concern and apprehension to rural sociologist. The farm spokesmen who believed the city was skimming the cream of country youth and leadership. A New England farmer was quoted: “This old farming community is like the fish pond with the game fish all fished out; all we’ve got left now is the bullheads and suckers.”

The farm-to-city movement drew most heavily from young people, more so from young farm women, one saying: “In the city you meet so many interesting people,” and from those who had attained the higher levels of schooling. The agricultural colleges, especially, were way-stations in the migration. Hence, there operated a “brain drain” of immeasurable dimensions and a transfer of wealth as migrants carried with them investments in nurture and education, some capital, and claims to inheritance.

Until the end of the twenties this farm-to-city uprooting made no new problems for either the city or the country, whatever individual anguish may have been involved. The cities gained human resources and the country transferred its extra manpower. The population surplus of the country had not yet become also surplus in the cities.

Looking ahead again, between 1920 and 1970 nearly 40 million people moved out of rural areas to cities. That is an exodus. By 1970 the farm population made up only about 4 percent of the total, and the
decline was not yet finished. It is just about now that college students have come to outnumber those who live on farms.

Sweeping modernization at the hands of the city and industry was too rapid and unsettling, leaving countrymen jangled. It was a sustained tremor, forecasting the “future shock” of half a century later. Consciousness of differences and sensitivity to disadvantages produced tension and resentment. Extravagant rhetoric defended agriculture as a superior way of life fundamental to national economic, political, and social stability. Agricultural fundamentalism was both a self-generated source of confidence and a salve administered by sympathizers. Its volume and stridency was a phenomenon of the twenties.

Traditional agrarians regarded the city as alien and threatening. Expression of condemnation repeated customary stereotypes: the city was a concentration of vice and scoundrels. It was artificial, mannered and fast. In the twenties city was readily seen as the lair of gunmen, bootleggers, killers like Leopold and Loeb, jazz bands, aimless wastrels like Fitzgerald’s characters, and gum-chewing flapper stenographers of easy virtue. A Baptist minister in Fort Worth cried out against “this present godless, commercialized, pleasure-gone-mad, idol-worshipping, hell-bound age.”

Rural spokesmen feared the restless urban masses, heavily foreign in make-up and strangers to responsible citizenship. Farmers were hostile toward labour unions which they thought violated their
own ingrained attitudes about individualism, devotion to hard work, and pay commensurate with labour performed.

Henry A. Wallace warned that “the outstanding danger” of the future is “the complete dominance of our economic and political life by the industrial and commercial point of view.” He predicted that when cheap food was no longer available there would be “an ever-growing city unrest which may result in a greatly increased number of strikes and possibly either war or revolution.” On the social side, rural sociologist Wilson Gee declared: “Without a doubt, we shall be losers when our nation becomes … predominately urban and industrial.”

At the end of the decade twelve philosophers of Southern agrarianism published *I’ll Take My Stand*, an early intellectual rejection of industrialized civilization which was a tract calling for national redirection. On the one hand it was a lyrical recollection of agrarian virtues, especially Southern ones, such as security of tradition, colourful regional distinctions, simplicity, individual independence, and harmony with nature. On the other hand, it attacked industrialism and urbanism as leading America astray. The collectivized industrial system, it maintained, was engaged in economic and cultural imperialism which produced rootlessness, brutalization, and alienation. *I’ll Take My Stand* was addressed to the twenties to encourage a national agrarian resistance movement. Published too late, it was circulated in the early thirties when industry did not appear so formidable.
Agrarian influence in small-town governments and state legislatures gave power to resist, even punish, encroaching urbanism. Chain stores were widely attacked as anonymous agents of big business and were subjected to harassing restrictions. When the family grocery store was replaced by a Piggy Wiggly or Kroger market something was gained, but something was lost. Legislators from rural constituencies stood in the way of effective metropolitan governments and redistricting.

But it was not possible to overcome the deficiencies of agriculture by the means at hand in the twenties. Farm Bloc gains did not amount to much as farm relief; cooperative marketing proved not to be the panacea and modernization of farming operations did not reach problems of surpluses and prices. Something more combative was required than exaggerated rhetoric of agrarian defence, and shreds of influence.

Certain aberrations of the twenties have been assessed by historians as expressions of panicky retreat or rural revenge. Traditional ways of thinking and doing were eroding. Prohibition enforcement, immigration restriction, antievolution laws vented frustrations and resentments. These movements did not have support only among rural folk, nor was opposition exclusively urban. Yet, historians have reasonably interpreted these overlapping phenomena within a frame of rural-urban tension.

The prohibition enforcement issue involved a spectacular cultural clash that was rural versus urban rather than good versus evil.
The countryside had a share of moonshiners and their customers; Prohibition was a dismal dead-end reform. Throughout the twenties it diverted attention from more important issues, and wasted immense activity. Fated to fail, it was a weak prop for maintaining a socially healthy nation.

Before the twenties immigration added to cultural differences between city and country. Immigration-restriction debates could not avoid reflecting rural-urban tension and ethnocentric superstitions about race quality. However, immigration restriction came too late to prevent swollen urban pluralism from acquiring votes that could at first balance conservation rural voting power and then overcome it.

A symptom of social tensions that spread beyond the rural world was strong in some urban centers. The members were often former rural folk. But it was an anachronistic movement so contrary to the main currents of the time that it could not win except locally and briefly in an increasingly tolerant urban society.

Rural-urban religious differences were perceived by Walter Lippmann: “The deep and abiding traditions of religion belong to the countryside…. The city is an acid that dissolves this piety…. The omnipotence of God means something to men who submit daily to the cycles of weather and the mysterious power of nature. But the city man puts his faith in furnaces to keep out the cold.” Rural religion was mainly Protestant, evangelical, and fundamentalist. Newly militant fundamentalism was a reactionary response to modernism in the churches and urban paganism that found expression in the twenties
with state laws prohibiting the teaching of Darwinian evolution in the schools.

At the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, William Jennings Bryan, hero of the countryside locked into combat with Clarence Darrow, embodiment of urban irreverence. The Scopes trial was a juxtaposition of rural and urban worlds. Court was opened with fervent prayer. The old-fashioned country judge’s daughters visited court wearing short skirts and stockings rolled to the knee. Motion-picture cameras and a hundred city reporters recorded the proceedings.

Those reassuring folk-drama fantasies of the wholesome God-fearing country boy confounding the slick lawyer from the city were now turned upside down.

Putting them all together, prohibition enforcement and the other aberrations, insofar as they expressed rural resistance to modernization, were backward-looking rather than reformist. When the nation needed all the resources it could muster for restraint upon the excess of growth-development-exploitation-uglification, the large agrarian contingent only invited defeats.

These distractions concealed another and possibly more important change: urbanization of the rural world. The farm journals clearly show new pressures to mechanize and commercialize agriculture, modernize the farm home, and bring farm people up to date—even to leave the farm for another job. A farm journal advertisement counselled: “Trade your Mortgage for a Garage ... Get
into a Profitable Business.” The farm journals themselves were becoming merely a part of the mass media.

With scarcely a murmur of caution, the message of material progress poured over agriculture. Business efficiency was enthusiastically promoted by an array of agencies: state and federal departments of agriculture, bankers and farm equipment salesmen, agricultural colleges and experiment stations, and the farm organizations. By 1924 the Extension Service was reaching an estimated five million people through a corps of eager county agents preaching modernization. The propaganda for cooperative associations rested upon farmer emulation of big business price manipulation. His ironclad contract was in conformity with commercial standardization.

Henry Ford, still something of a rural folk hero, had advice for the farmers: “Farming ought to be something more than a rural occupation. It ought to be the business of raising food.” He pointed with pride to his Dearborn farms: “We do everything by machinery…. We are not farmers—we are industrialists on the farm.”

The new literature of the twenties worked away at undercutting traditions. We have no way of knowing how many rural people read Fitzgerald or Dreiser or O’Neill, or how much they were impressed. But rural women were not far behind their flapper city sisters in bobbing their hair and shortening skirts. Farm-journal advertisements pictured farm families against urban-type backgrounds in mail-order clothes cut in the latest styles that in 1973 would be called the
“Gatsby Look.” An older farmer observed: “Country people used to be scared when they came to town—the children especially. And the town people used to laugh at them, but now you can hardly tell any difference.”

Urban social services penetrated the country in response to rural needs, using urban models. Rural educational quality leaped forward with school consolidations and application to country schools of state-wide standards by centralized authority. Commercial courses in the high schools, regulations for teacher credentials, and mobile libraries were steps away from rural educational disadvantage.

Commercial radio, new to the twenties, quickly reached a powerful position as a mass medium of communication, diffusing into the country cultural innovations originating in the city. By 1930 thirty percent of farm homes had radios. Popular music and radio were born for each other. Graham McNamee, radio sports reporter, recalled a strange mixture of the old and new.

The automobile was the most forceful machine for creating a new social and economic geography. Farms with autos increased from 30.7 percent in 1920 to 58 percent in 1930, with trucks from 2 percent to 13.4 percent, with tractors from 3.6 percent to 13.5 percent. The auto and the tractor ended a horse-powered age in which horsepower was real horses with their demands for time, patience, and acreage for feed.

Autos and improved roads brought the city to the country and the country to city pleasures and services. They multiplied many times
the effectiveness of the county agent and farm bureau. They killed those distinctive institutions supporting conservatism and traditional values: the general store, the open-country church and the one-room school. They weakened social controls, especially among the young. And autos swelled the farm family’s need for cash money and raised taxes.

The movies also came of age in the twenties, possessing gross power to shape American life. They reached nearly everyone with their message of consumption, pleasure seeking, and urban styles of dress and behaviour. Once-isolated farm families, at least the not-so-badly-off ones, could read about movies in magazines and newspapers, hear about them on their radios, climb into autos and go to town on all-weather roads to see them. It is no wonder that the old with its stress on uplift declined suddenly in the twenties.

By the end of the decade conflict between country and city was subsiding. The great crash and depression lessened rural-urban contrasts; all were in deep trouble then. Urbanization of the countryside had diminished distinctions. Though the process was not yet completed, rural conformity to collectivized standards of urban mass society had been decided.

“‘Rural’ and ‘urban’ are becoming ... relative terms,” announced a contemporary social study; “society cannot be adequately described or analyzed in terms of the old and arbitrary bifocal divisions.” Walter Lippmann saw much the same thing: “Even the American farmers, though they live in the country, tend to be
suburban rather than rural…. It is in the large cities that the tempo of our civilization is determined.”

Belligerent rural traditionalists faced the failure of their energetic work to enforce sobriety, anti-intellectualism, and prejudice. Their work could no longer give an illusion of protection or even solace to rural folk. Agrarian resistance to urbanization was now left to the cranks.

By 1930 it was plain that rural-agrarian America was a small and weak minority. Rural values, like farm crops, were at a discount. Grange leader T. C. Atkeson said sadly, “Agriculture is not what it once was. It has come to take second place in the minds of the people, even on the farms.”

To paraphrase Hofstadter, the United States, having been born in the country, now finished its move to the city. But the change was not all progress, involving as it did a collectivized disengagement from historic roots, and a society shaped appropriately to the ends of economic growth and standardization. Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby had begun as James Gatz a boy from the farm, and he was led to ultimate disaster by the American success goal.

Liberty Hyde Bailey perceived that “our dominion has been mostly destructive…. Man has dominion, but he has no commission to devastate.” However, Bailey anticipated that someday Americans would learn” “In that day we shall take down the wonderful towers and cliffs in the cities, in which people work and live, shelf on shelf, but in which they have no home…. We shall… learn how to distribute
the satisfactions in life rather than merely to assemble them…. We shall have passed the present insistence on so-called commercial efficiency, as if it were the sole measure of civilization.”
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