Every writer reflects, in varying degrees, the cumulative effect of the various historical, social and intellectual currents and cross-currents that mould his personality and determine his vision. As he is highly sensitive, his experiences in the world acquire an unusual significance, for they play a vital role in shaping his bent of mind, reaction and attitude; this is particularly true of those experiences which come in conflict with his intense urges and aspirations. They are a predominant influence in the formulation of his total vision which he projects through his art. His artistic sensibility too comprehends the spirit and temper of the age and he, even while faithfully reflecting it in his works, interprets its fads, fashions and follies in terms of cultural and historical streams of the nation or projects them in a still wider context of the universal human experience. For such an artist, it is not the historical and social events as such that are of much consequence; he is more concerned with their inherent meaning, its effect on the different generations and its consequential or potential influence in cultural and historical context. All these factors in turn vitally influence his artistic conscience and critical awareness. More than any other writer, Scott Fitzgerald lived and participated in the life of his times, the gorgeous twenties and the depressed thirties of the twentieth century. He
intensely and vigorously participated in the innocent follies and enchanting foibles of his times and, with his penetrating insight, comprehended their moral meaning which he conveyed so brilliantly through his novels. Mizener observes that, like Keats, Fitzgerald too held the conviction that the truth can be known through felt experience rather than through neat concepts. One anonymous reviewer who called Fitzgerald "a silly young man of genius" found that "his genius" vibrated "like a tuning fork to the music of his time." From the very beginning of his career he exhibited remarkable awareness of the characteristic qualities of his times and always showed that he understood ideas, not abstractly, but only in terms of concrete events, persons and places. He had a very natural sense of time and environment and the contemporary atmosphere--of the songs, hotels, clothes, fashions, places and people--came alive through his evocative prose. He has been indicted by many critics for delighting in the juvenile and immature follies of his age and conveying only their superficial meaning through his works. While agreeing with Cowley that Fitzgerald lived in a "room full of clocks and calendars" haunted by the minute particulars that represented any given year and its attitudes, we cannot help

2 "Bigger Than the Ritz", *Time* (October 18, 1963), p. 120.
concluding that he not only represented the glamour and the hysteria of the age but also criticised it most vehemently. His critical detachment and sharp insight penetrated far beneath the superficial gaiety and the giddy and ecstatic outburst of the era, and interpreted the feverish times against the moral and historical background of America. Fitzgerald found it necessary to proceed, suggests Mizener, "like some kind of inpassioned and naive anthropologist, recording with minuteness and affection and at the same time with an alien's remoteness and astonishment." His sense-perceptions always implied deeper understanding, and carried a sharp analysis and profound awareness of men and situations lying underneath their superficial glitter. Almost all his novels, from *This Side of Paradise* to the unfinished *The Last Tycoon*, crystallised the underlying values of the period between the two wars and were aimed at contrasting these values with the traditional values in the cultural and historical context of the American dream. The myopic argument and the untenable charge of certain critics that his novels merely portray the sensational or the sensory aspects of contemporary life have already been sufficiently exploded. Pointing out the peculiar position of Fitzgerald in relation to his age, Mizener, at another place, urges us to have a deeper understanding of this relationship:

That age was not all "Jazz Age", and in spite of Fitzgerald's having, half-jokingly, invented this name for

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the 20's, he was himself far from representing merely this element in the period ... he was, for twenty years, near the heart of the significant life of his times, close to the center of its maximum awareness, living the life that awareness suggested and watching others live it; for at least ten years he was almost the master of what his generation thought to be the great, good place. (5)

No doubt that his "best work in fact grows out of his precise understanding of his time, out of a concentration on the actualities of his world unequalled in the work of any contemporary", his sharp and penetrating vision transcends the narrow bounds of his times and gives his experience a lasting and universal meaning. It should, therefore, be worthwhile to acquire a proper perspective of the age which conditioned his frame of mind and contributed a lot to the formation and maturity of his moral and artistic vision.

Fitzgerald's generation was brought up in the environment of the transitional period in American history (as has been brought out in the earlier chapter) where Victorian morals were still respected as the accepted code of social conduct. Victorian taboos were essentially the rules for the family and the society, and their strict observance was regarded as a fundamental obligation. Relationship between the sexes was well regulated and women, keeping generally to the household duties, still expected chivalrous behaviour from men. Men in America were fed

on the cheap and vulgar success-stories of Horatio Alger and other inferior writers, and everybody was expected to rise in life. Failure in a materialistic sense was looked down upon, and the dream of a higher life had already degenerated into the dream of material success. But the mode and manner of life were completely transformed after the First World War. A turning point in American history, the twenties can be regarded as the beginning of the modern era in the real sense. It has often been described by the historical and literary critics as the most significant and distinctive period in American history. Being the most delightful decade, it has been characterised as the 'age of Wonderful-Nonsense and bathtub gin' or an era of "beautiful irresponsibility." Wescott feels that the twenties were heaven, and in this heaven Fitzgerald was a kind of king of the American youth. Fitzgerald himself recapitulated later that it was "an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire." Everything was in profusion, yet it was not the age of positive thinking; it was an age of revolt, disillusion and cynicism. The whole temper of the age can be precisely defined by one word, 'Disillusionment'. Every accepted moral and rational code lost its meaning and everybody seemed to be cynically rejecting everything, good or bad; it was indeed shocking to find the whole

continent changed so suddenly. Though there were many factors responsible for this temper, the War has generally been regarded as the "real Devil." Since the Civil War, Americans had not had any first-hand experience of war, and only the traditional slogans of patriotism or the bookish version of the heroic death in war were the faint signs passed on to them through the last two generations. The World War stirred and excited their romantic imagination, for it offered them a glamorous opportunity to exhibit their valour corresponding to that of their favourite fictional heroes. The ideals of the War that were supposed to be at stake further fired the adolescent spirits. It was generally propagated that the whole order of the world was in danger and that the War was meant to save the art and religion from the militarism and vulgarity of the fascist Germany. For Americans, France had always been a symbol of culture, art and fine tastes, and if France perished, they thought, the whole Western civilisation would perish with her. It was therefore regarded as a sacred duty of every grateful American to save the cultured France from the German vulgarity. "To the older generation", remarks Hoffman, "the war was fought to sustain their convictions that America's only hope of a tradition lay in the survival of France, of the 'old France', and of England; that here was the culture Americans must imitate." While the

older generation was still debating whether America should enter the War or not, the adolescent boys, thrilled by the possibility of an adventurous and heroic life, left their colleges and offices and went to join the Allied forces in one capacity or the other. They were simply excited to save the world from the German menace by their heroic performance and noble sacrifice. The younger generation wanted to grab, through their enthusiasm and determination, this golden opportunity to put into practice the slogans of the older generation. But the actual participation in the War belied all their romantic expectations and its brutal animality filled them with bitterness and disillusionment. Men, turned into barbarians and killing human beings indiscriminately, presented a very dismal and disgusting picture of man's avowed high professions and ideals. They found the very civilisation for which they were fighting, crumbling to pieces in the battlefields. They were left aghast at the picture of brutality, vulgarity and cruelty in the battlefield which was just opposite to what they had been taught—that man was the most glorious and dignified creature—and consequently their faith in man was completely shaken. Churches and theatres, museums and art-galleries, the symbols of art and religion for which, they thought, they were sacrificing themselves, were being destroyed indiscriminately through bombing or shelling. Death, instead of being heroic, looked ugly and ghastly. They lost all respect for the sacred causes and, in utter disgust, tried to
forget their identity in the satiation of physical senses. Sex-indulgence, except in marriage, was forbidden from the strict American moral code, but in the War, uprooted from their own cultural environment, they confronted entirely a different situation. When they found woman in the most disgraceful position of being used just for sensual pleasures, their Victorian morality was violently shaken, and in an entirely new cultural environment of the continent, their minds were filled with contempt, confusion and conflicts. They saw man "at his lowest" and woman "at her lightest" in the moral chaos of the War, and were no longer in a mood to respect the ingrained hypocrisy and masked prudishness of the older generation after having witnessed the inherent beastliness of the human race in the infernal War. Allen, considering the War as the major cause of the breakdown of all the pre-War values, opines:

A whole generation had been infected by the eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die spirit which accompanied the departure of the soldiers to the training camps and the fighting front. There had been an epidemic not only of abrupt war marriages, but of less conventional liaisons. In France, two million men had found themselves very close to filth and annihilation and very far from the American moral code and its defenders; prostitution had followed the flag and willing mademoiselles from Armentieres had been plentiful; American girls sent over as nurses and war workers had come under the influence of continental manners and standards without being subject to the rigid protections thrown about their continental sisters of the respectable classes; and there had been a very widespread and very natural breakdown of traditional restraints and reticences and taboos. It was impossible
for this generation to return unchanged when the ordeal was over. (10)

After the long awaited armistice, it was supposed that liberty had triumphed, and Americans, in their hilarious madness, expected the dawn of a new era of peace and hope. It was hoped that a millennium, without any repression and persecution, awaited all human beings to live like brothers. But millions of people who were earlier "convinced that they were fighting in a holy cause, for the rights of oppressed nations, for the end of all war forever", now grew apathetic to the cause. To the disappointment of millions others, as time passed, all the tall claims of the arch-idealist, Woodrow Wilson, proved baseless. Idealism was on the ebb throughout the world and as peace returned, the victorious nations, instead of making "the world safe for democracy" or delivering justice to the people of the vanquished nations, started talking of the annexations of huge slices of German territory and her colonies. The Treaty of Versailles was far from the ideal objectives for which the War had been fought. The greedy politicians wiped out the sacrifices of six million human beings who had been butchered in the War by belying all the hopes of a permanent peace and security to the people. Americans were completely disillusioned of the Great Causes, the moral principles and heroic illusions. The War now

seemed to the young men "as a monstrous hoax, an unendurable outrage committed by the elders, who were brutal, insensitive and stupid." It had been "so violent a departure" from the accepted norms, traditional values and customs that it was impossible to recapture the prewar mood or free the current mood from the images of the fighting and the dead. This was true even of those who had been non-combatants. The mood of futility, the shrugging of shoulders over questions of moral imperative, were in large part a consequence of the war. The postwar generation felt honestly that it had been victimised by a gross and stupid deception. Nothing genuine had come out of the war. The elders had made fools of themselves, had involved the young in murderous folly; how could they respect them? Nothing they would do in the future could be one-tenth as absurd as what their elders had done. Why, then, should they consider themselves responsible for the postwar world? They felt their only responsibility was to themselves. (13)

Hemingway's Frederick Henry is the true representative of the feelings of the young men of the post-war America. Fitzgerald makes Amory say at one place: "Well, I'm not sure that the war itself had any great effect on either you or me--but it certainly ruined the old backgrounds, sort of killed individualism out of our generation." The younger generation, restless and disgusted, seemed to be in a rebellious mood to question every accepted moral code, and it alarmed the older one. Allen justifies the post-war mood of the younger generation on the ground that

12 Hoffman, The Twenties, p. 77.
13 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
that they too faced a queer dilemma:

Some of them had acquired under the pressure of wartime conditions a new code which seemed to them quite defensible; millions of them had been provided with an emotional stimulant from which it was not easy to taper off. Their torn nerves craved the anodynes of speed, excitement, and passion. They found themselves expected to settle down into the humdrum routine of American life as if nothing had happened, to accept the moral dicta of elders who seemed to them still to be living in a Pollyanna land of rosy ideals which the war had killed for them. (15)

And when the elders looked in amazement and disapproval at this pleasure-seeking mania that had infested the whole of the United States, young men and women openly blamed them for the social chaos, and thus the gap between the generations widened.

The younger generation candidly denounced the hypocrisy of their elders, condemned the violent outrage committed against the humanity and refused to abide by their pretentious moral code. They refused to follow the footsteps of their elders who had nearly ruined the whole world pretending falsely that they were making it safer for the coming generations. They had discovered their bluff, and now they were free to defy them and denounce their ideals. They justified their negative and whimsical approach by arguing that when all the rosy ideals had been shattered, why not smash everything built up by the pretentious and hypocritical generation? Determined this way, they transformed the whole of America beyond recognition. Defiance and

15 Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 94-95.
revolt against the elders were visible everywhere and almost became fashionable; the youngsters found the post-war era "a free field" in which they could "test their own standards of the good life." Post-war America can easily be regarded as the age when the supremacy passed from the mature people to the adolescent boys and girls who defiantly overthrew every accepted moral and social code that had long been regarded as the basis of a healthy social set-up. In this gayest-ever period in American history, youthful spirits revolted against the Victorian taboos and broke every convention to merit Fitzgerald's remark that "America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history...." Though completely disillusioned by the War and the failed peace, they had not yet been fully exhausted and so "something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War." Having been denied the chance of dying in "the field of honour", they redeemed themselves by plunging "headlong into other ventures", and consequently the post-war era witnessed a total revolution in manners and morals. Cowley points out: "In manners and culture Scott Fitzgerald chose a permanent name for them when he called his second collection of stories Tales of the Jazz Age.

17 Fitzgerald, Crack-Up, p. 37.
18 Ibid., p. 13.
Fitzgerald was also the most perceptive observer of the age,
though within self-imposed limitations." Disillusioned and
disenchanting of all the Great Causes, the young men lost their
faith in the social transformation through concerted efforts
and became apathetic to whatever happened at the political
level. Fitzgerald observed: "It was characteristic of the
Jazz Age that it had no interest in politics at all." But
the youth did plunge into other more exciting ventures and
there ensued a legendary era of gaiety, glitter, recklessness
and 'wonderful nonsense', and Fitzgerald recalled later that
"in those days life was like the race in Alice in Wonderland,
there was a prize for every one." The young men and women
vigorously participated in the gay whirl of the New York life
and young Fitzgerald himself set the pattern. Riding on the
tops of taxis or jumping fully clothed into the Pulitzer
Fountain in front of the Plaza was symbolic of the bright
spirit and youthful emotions. Drinking was regarded as an
extreme form of rebellion by the young men and in those days
of prohibition, Fitzgerald would say, they drank "cocktails
before meals like Americans, wines and brandies like Frenchmen,
beer like Germans, whiskey-and-soda like the English ... this

19 Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction", Fitzgerald and the Jazz
Age, eds. Malcolm Cowley and Robert Cowley (New York:
21 Ibid., p. 21.
preposterous melange that was like some gigantic cocktail in a nightmare." While Fitzgerald considered it "a borrowed time", 22 Zelda found that it was "always tea time or late at night." 23

The revolt of the younger generation manifested itself in various forms. While at the intellectual level it took the form of cynical indifference, at the social level it penetrated every form of protest that young men or women could imagine. Fashions and fads of the post-war America changed so rapidly and alarmingly that even the most radical enthusiasts' predictions went wrong. Throwing all the modest limitations to the winds, the flappers enjoyed displaying their beautiful figures and exquisite cuts to the bewildered eyes of the moralists. Still wilder debutantes deliberately started defying the social and moral taboos. Abandoning the traditional corsets, they were learning new dances which had no respect for propriety between the dancing partners and no "longer did even an inch of space separate them; they danced as if glued together, body to body, cheek to cheek." 24 Everything about them smacked of sensuousness; half-naked, they went on dancing throughout nights at ill-reputed dancing halls. Woman, who had been considered the guardian of morality, was making the whole civilisation topsyturvy. Hitherto prohibited fields were being explored by

22 Quoted in Cowley, "Introduction", *Stories*, p. xii.
23 Quoted in Mizener, "Scott Fitzgerald and the 1920's", 168.
them with a vengeance, and they took to smoking and public drinking right along with their male counterparts. Revolt was in the veins of the girls and they were no longer ready to abide by the taboos which they called worn-out and impositions of the elders. The new practice of petting and necking was indulged in even by the less aggressive girls in the closed cars or dark rooms. Sex was no longer an inhibition; it was regarded as an open subject. Young American girls who were supposed to "look forward in innocence ... to a romantic love match which would lead them to the altar and living-happily-ever-after; and until the 'right man' came along, they must allow no male to kiss them", were making mincemeat of this code. The scandalous petting party became the established indoor game for the young boys and girls and Fitzgerald, one of the active participants in the game, for the first time disclosed this secret to the shocked parents:

None of the Victorian mothers—and most of the mothers were Victorian—had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed.... Amory saw girls doing things that even in his memory would have been impossible: eating three-o'clock, after dance suppers in impossible cafes, talking of every side of life with an air half of earnestness, half of mockery, yet with a furtive excitement that Amory considered stood for a real moral let-down. But he never realised how widespread it was until he saw the cities between New York and Chicago as one vast juvenile intrigue. (26)

25 Ibid., p. 88.
The phenomenal success of *This Side of Paradise*, which amazed and alarmed the shocked Victorian mothers, was mainly attributed to the craze of the young debutantes who found themselves accurately mirrored in the lives of Isabelle, Rosalind and Eleanor. Chastity, instead of being a modest virtue, became the sign of social dullness and a little sexual experience before marriage came in turn to be regarded as a sign of 'fastness' or modernity. Girls came to be proud of the number of men they had kissed as one of the heroines of *This Side of Paradise* arrogantly declares: "I've kissed dozens of men. I suppose I'll kiss dozens more." A kiss no longer signified the expression of human passion, it became an objective art wherein every girl would command perfection. Gloria Gilbert, the beautiful young heroine of *The Beautiful and Damned*, opines: "A woman should be able to kiss a man beautifully and romantically without any desire to be either his wife or his mistress." The casualness and the carelessness that are reflected in this remark had overtaken the women of the post-war era. Moral purity in woman that was regarded as the fountain head of the family life, gave way to promiscuity, and even adultery came to be regarded as a sign of forwardness. Sexual taboos were thrown to the winds and tobacco, gin and all-night automobile rides

27 Ibid., p. 188.
became the instruments of breaking away from the past. Miserable and unhappy parents were openly defied whenever they tried to draw the attention of the children to their abominable depravity; they were retorted back that at least the new generation was not hypocritical as the earlier one had been. It was argued that under the mask of being people of "pristine excellence" and "impeccable propriety", the older people had led prudish and affected lives and done more harm to the world than the younger generation with its unabashed frankness and honesty.

Emulating their younger sisters, married women were also striving for the independence and freedom. They had got tired of the drudgeries of the household duties and wanted to be as free as men. First of all, to achieve this end, they strove for the economic independence and took up all types of odd jobs which earlier only men used to engage themselves in. Housekeeping and child-rearing no longer remained a full-time job and they found out ways and means to minimise the house-keeping. Instead of living in large houses, there came a vogue of small houses or apartments which could be more easily looked after, and canned food replaced cooking at home. The process of woman’s emancipation from the dull routine was made easier by the mechanical gadgets invented during the period. With the growing economic independence and the supposed emancipation of the American woman from the drudgeries of the house-keeping and child-rearing, with the slackening of the conjugal and parental
authority, the home or the family unit which was the basis of America's healthy social structure, broke up and at least in cities the home steadily became "less of a shrine, more of a dormitory—a place of casual shelter where one stopped overnight on the way from the restaurant and the movie theatre to the office."

The War was undoubtedly the primary cause for this perversion in sexual and social attitude, but there were other factors too which were responsible for eroding the faith of men and women in the traditional institutions. Science and psychology, two other most powerful contributing factors, were responsible for the revolt of the younger generation. Science which has since changed the entire concept of man's thoughts and actions, was still in its infancy during the post-war era. Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and other books had already aroused a storm in the nineteenth century but it was only in the post-war era that man's position vis-a-vis the universe, after his beastly exhibition in the War, came to exercise the young minds. The evolutionary theory of Darwin overthrew the accepted Christian and Biblical belief of the Creation, and created skepticism about the validity of the Garden of Eden. While the scientists and other thinkers were busy seeking a rational account of man's development, man in the street stood bewildered and dumbfounded. There was dissention and skepticism all around. Man had been told that the religious faith he

29 Allen, *Only Yesterday*, p. 98.
had long held as an anchor had been shattered to pieces and shown as untenable. He realised that he had all along been fooled by the religious books and priests. Not only was the new thought a challenge to the traditional belief in a fixed and unchanging universe but also it likened man to a beast and suggested his common origin with all other forms of animal life. Still more disturbing was Darwin's principle of "natural selection" which holds that in the struggle for existence the advantage goes to those organisms which deviate from the norm and whose deviation is best adapted to their environment. Religion had been dethroned but there was no alternative wherein man could have the unquestioned faith. All the values by which he had lived and worked had been proved false and sham and there was nothing to replace them. Young boys and girls, baffled by the discovery that they were also merely animals of an intricate variety, gave in to the animal passions and did whatever came their way. Assessing the role of science in creating a moral and intellectual confusion, Horton and Edwards reflect:

It was as though, suddenly, God had died, leaving man with neither divine protection nor methods of salvation. The map of his universe had been torn to bits, the familiar bulwarks of his security shattered. In a world of increasing complexity and confusion, man no longer had any force to pray to, and his traditional morality, based upon precepts of humility and justice, was of small use in a world in which survival was accorded only to the strong and predatory. Even worse, immortality, through the hope of which man was encouraged to bear the misfortunes of this world, was snatched from his grasp; if Darwin was right, then Man's
sole reward for existence was the faint and hollow prospect of passing along some microscopic cellular mutation to future members of his species. It was small wonder, then, that many men—and particularly literary men—became cynical and pessimistic under the shattering impact of Darwinism. (30)

Science had already eaten into the religious faith of the people, when, to make the matters worse, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung presented their theories of psychoanalysis before the people. Though Freud published his first important book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, its impact upon the young minds came to be felt only after the end of the War. Young men, tired of the strict discipline of the War and ready for the headlong ventures and pleasures, proved to be a fertile ground for the seeds of Freudianism. They were fascinated by the Freudian gospel which, as presented to them through popular summaries and distorted versions of Freud's original works, advocated that man's every action, from the crudest to the most refined, was guided by his sexual impulse and that an uninhibited sex life was the first requisite for man's mental and physical health and development. It was emphasised that the moral code regarding sex had no validity and led the observers to neurosis or mental derangement which might manifest itself in various forms. Libido was regarded as the basic motive force of all human action and the censor as "the inhibitory effect" of man's awareness of social and moral taboos. As the repression of

libido was supposed to lead to frustration and mental disorder, the young boys and girls of the post-war era decided to defy the social and moral codes and live a healthy and free sex life, and hence "at its most popular level the Freudian cult resulted in a sexual hedonism that was far from being intended by its founder." As any form of control or suppression of the libidinal urges was thought to be hazardous and disastrous, it led to the other extreme of the sexual obsession, and the "young intellectuals took up Freudianism largely because it seemed to provide a systematic and scientific basis for their revolt against the sexual prudery of the older generation." The tendency led to the immorality being traded in the name of Freud and its effects were disastrous:

one of the strangest perversions of Freudian theory was contained in the new technique of seduction, by which young men urged their companions to forget their inhibitions and so avoid possible neuroses resulting from the unnatural suppression of their desires. This preoccupation with sexual hedonism in the name of Freud became a favourite literary theme with the post-war novelists. (33)

The hysteria of Freudianism and the obsession with sex brought its inevitable results in the form of social and emotional imbalances. The cause of the alarming increase in divorce rate during the post-war era has been perceptively analysed by Allen: "It was one thing to proclaim that married couples should be

31 Ibid., p. 345.
32 Ibid., p. 351.
33 Ibid., pp. 351-62.
free to find sex adventure wherever they pleased and that marriage was something independent of such casual sport; it was quite another thing for a man or woman in whom the ideal of romantic marriage had been ingrained since early childhood to tolerate infidelities when they actually took place." This free play of sex, thus, instead of giving satisfaction and happiness, generated frustration and rootlessness because, with "the old order of things had gone a set of values which had given richness and meaning to life, and substitute values were not easily found." One of the heroines of This Side of Paradise which has been described as "the bible of the Flaming Youth", is found saying to Amory: "Oh, just one person in fifty has any glimmer of what sex is. I'm hipped on Freud and all that, but it's rotten that every bit of real love in the world is ninety-nine per cent passion and one little soupcon of jealousy." The mania for sex and the maladjustment in society, instead of giving a healthy mental life to the people of the post-war era, as was generally supposed, increased the psychological and mental problems resulting in the widespread mental breakdowns. In one of his articles, Fitzgerald wrote:

By 1927 a wide-spread neurosis began to be evident, faintly signalled, like a nervous beating of the feet, by the popularity of cross-word puzzles. I remember a fellow expatriate opening a letter from a mutual friend of ours, urging him to come home and be revitalized by the hardy, bracing qualities of the native soil. It was a strong letter and

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34 Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 121.
35 Fitzgerald, Paradise, p. 255.
it affected us both deeply, until we noticed that it was headed from a nerve sanitarium in Pennsylvania. (36)

We should also remember that Fitzgerald's Tender Is The Night is based on the life of schizophrenic Nicole whose mental disorder is caused by an incestuous act of her father. Frustration, suicides, and the increasing incidence of crime and violence can also mainly be attributed to the psychological imbalances. In this context Fitzgerald observes:

By this time contemporaries of mine had begun to disappear into the dark maw of violence. A classmate killed his wife and himself on Long Island, another tumbled "accidently" from a skyscraper in Philadelphia, another purposely from a skyscraper in New York. One was killed in a speak-easy in Chicago; another was beaten to death in a speak-easy in New York and crawled home to the Princeton Club to die; still another had his skull crushed by a maniac's axe in an insane asylum where he was confined. These are not catastrophes that I went out of my way to look for--these were my friends; moreover, these things happened not during the depression but during the boom. (37)

Such penetrating observations about his age must convince us that looking "back at the period afterwards he could see its weaknesses clearly without forgetting its charm." They also prove that the attitude of some of the hostile critics that Fitzgerald understood and dealt with only the frivolous and shallow aspects of his era, is unfounded and parochial. He was not only a sensitive observer of the decade of the Flaming Youth

36 Fitzgerald, Crack-Up, pp. 19-20.
37 Ibid., p. 20.
38 Arthur Mizener, "The Poet of Borrowed Times", in The Man and His Work, pp. 33-34.
and careless flappers but also a perceptive critic of his times.

Fitzgerald's Gatsby is an epitome of the wide-ranging underworld activities. Gatsby accumulated fabulous riches through illegal means, by the sale of liquor during those days of prohibition. But means were not important those days. Money was the real doer of the things during those days of spiritual barrenness and emotional bankruptcy; Gatsby's emotional and spiritual commitment was a rare quality which hardly found any response. Fitzgerald was commenting upon this vicious power of money when he wrote that "the snow of twenty-nine wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money." 39

Smuggling, gangsterism, crime and violence became the dashing things and persons involved in them, because of their wealth and glamour, became the elite of the society. Never before in the annals of American history were the principles of propriety and justice so flouted as during the post-war era and the American dream became irrecoverable in the din and noise of the rolling wealth and the corruption accompanying it. As business boomed, habits associated with money also changed radically. After the War, Europe had been left impoverished and eventually America became the ruler of the economic world. The production of luxurious goods increased manifold and people became crazy to acquire all the modern facilities of life. The businessmen of the era exploited the mania of the generation—"to be young

and desirable, to be rich, to keep up with the Joneses, to be envied" --and produced all kinds of luxurious goods. Business itself came to be regarded as dignified. The veneration that was earlier accorded to the learned professions, was now reserved only for the successful businessmen and the intrinsic values of man, the universal achievement of which would have been the basis of the realisation of the American dream, were no match for a tangible pile of dollars. Man's position in society came to be judged by the visible manifestation of wealth or how much he spent it in public. It was widely emphasised that production in the big business houses had brought a new and permanent era of widespread and ever-increasing prosperity, and the businessman was pictured "as a builder, a doer of great things, yes, and a dreamer whose imagination was ever seeking out new ways of serving humanity." The most outstanding feature of the era was the association of the business with religion and "so frequent was the use of the Bible to point the lessons of business and of the business to point the lessons of the Bible that it was sometimes difficult to determine which was supposed to gain the most from the association." Signifying the importance of the salesman in this era of mass-production, Christ was described as the Greatest Human-nature Expert and a great business

41 Ibid., p. 178.
42 Ibid., p. 179.
executive. "Under the beneficent influence of Coolidge Prosperity", comments Allen, "business had become almost the national religion of America. Millions of people wanted to be reassured that this religion was altogether right and proper, and that in the rules for making big money lay all the law and the prophets." Above all, President Coolidge went to the extent of saying that the "business of America was business." American civilisation, during the era, became, to the highest degree, a commercial civilisation, and the commercial values came to be accorded the veneration that is usually reserved for the things that are considered of divine origin. Devoid of any higher objective, life became frivolous, and buying and selling became its most momentous task in the post-war era. Unmindful of the impending disaster, everybody supposed that the reckless prosperous era would prevail and the golden age would continue forever laying golden eggs. Money was in such abundance that "the Jazz Age ... raced along under its own power, served by great filling stations full of money." Leaving aside the moral question, Fitzgerald felt that "it was pleasant to be in one's twenties in such a certain and unworried time. Even when you were broke, you didn't worry about money, because it was in such profusion around you." Cowley testifies that in the booming business of the twenties, the national income increased

43 Ibid., pp. 180-81.
44 Fitzgerald, Crack-Up, p. 18.
rapidly but it was unevenly distributed—farmers received none of it, industrial workers getting a modest share with the bigger gains going to investors and speculators. But in spite of the uneven distribution, a casual attitude was shown by the common man who sang in delight:

The rich get richer and the poor get children,
In the meantime,
In between time,
Ain't we got fun? 46

Fun was more enchanting to them than the cold arithmetical calculations and Fitzgerald found a "whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure." But he also noted that "the general decision to be amused that began with the cocktail parties of 1921 had more complicated origins."

This cult of prosperity and the highest regards paid to it altered the basic concept of the American dream. "The old virtues of thrift and saving", reflects Curti, "now largely gave way to the idea that spending is a virtue, even the highest of all economic virtues." In this mass-production and mass-consumption era, there was a basic shift in the economy—from an economy short of capital to one with a surplus of capital. The advancement of science and technology, rapid communication, automobile, urbanisation and above all the gay and wild atmosphere of the post-war era, all these factors led the people to

47 Fitzgerald, Crack-Up, p. 15.
the philosophy of consumption which inevitably resulted in the money acquiring greater significance than the landed property. All through American history, it was considered prestigious to hold land in one's name, and the idea was fundamental to the realisation of the American dream. But in the post-war era the emphasis shifted to hard cash and the evidence of a rich man was how much money he had or even more, how much he spent. As the common people didn't have enough money to buy things, the instalment system was introduced as a sophisticated inducement. People got tied up in loans and payments, but as it was a period of reckless optimism, nobody cared. Business was regarded as a self-regulating mechanism and curiously "the government did nothing to forestall an economic catastrophe." The undirected and unregulated economy, as was inevitable, culminated in one of the greatest depressions in American history in 1929 and people were shocked to find that everything had crashed like glass.

The boom in business was the outcome of, among other important factors, an unprecedented rate of the growth of industrialisation. Undoubtedly industries in America had been developing since the Civil War and steadily changing the basic outlook of the people. But till the War, the industries were instrumental in aiding man in his particular profession and daily

living; their baneful influence was hardly realised as, till then, the industries, instead of making people crazy about certain luxuries, assisted them in harnessing nature. The post-war industrialisation, however, introduced another era wherein the machine and mechanical goods became the craze and it transformed the face of America completely. The automobile industry gave the lead and the closed cars brought a revolutionary change in the attitude of the Americans. The phenomenal growth in the automobile, radio, cosmetic, rayon and certain other industries during this era not only changed the social outlook of the people, but also worked as a catalytic agent to the revolutionary temper of the age. The producers were exhorting the people, through their professional experts, to buy and people were buying, regardless of the necessity or the capacity. The growing dependence of the people on the mechanical and complex industrial units in the post-war period resulted in the monopoly houses and big business magnates. They certainly became symbolic of the highest position man fed on the success-stories of Horatio Alger could aspire to, but in fact their enviable position was far removed from the realities of the common reader. Crazy for more and more material prosperity and worldly achievements, man lost the inner ideal of the American dream and fell an easy victim to the external compulsions. This growing prosperity or the industrial progress in fact further cheapened man's emotional and spiritual hunger, and man grew so used to this calamitous change that he almost lost sight of even the faint light of the
original concept of the American dream. Once man's mind got completely wedded to the sacrilege of worship offered to the unholy power of money which grew rapidly because of the industrial expansion, this evil dragon was in fact made the presiding deity of the American civilisation, and the American dream, which was intended to be the guiding moral force, got corrupted and defiled by the vulgar and vicious power of money.

With the phenomenal growth in industrialisation came the increasing urbanisation and the development of the urban tastes and urban way of living. Big industries needed more men to run them and so discouraged farmers ran to the cities which grew in size and consequential pollution. Dirty suburbs housed the millions who worked at the monstrous machines and there was a complete break with the cultural past of America. As for setting up the giant industries a lot of money was needed, America's economy witnessed a shift from a liberal capitalism of small properties to a corporate system of monopoly capitalism. Small farmers and independent entrepreneurs, who were the backbone of the earlier economy, could not stand the challenge of the big industries, of mass-production and the increasing application of the technological rationality, and consequently America, which had held to the principle of individual self-sufficiency, was transformed from a nation of small entrepreneurs into a nation of salaried employees. The realisation of the American dream depended fundamentally on America being a
classless society, an open-class society where any individual, through perseverance, diligence, frugality and hard work, could aspire to reach the top rung of the social ladder. This economic aspect of the dream, vital as it was to the American social life, became virtually a nightmare with the large-scale industrialisation and thousands of labourers working in monopolistic industrial houses. In the industrial context it had already been losing its validity in the early years of the twentieth century but the post-war era, with its changed environment, ended all hopes of a classless society where there would be an equality of opportunity for every individual worker. Millions of men, turned almost into small cogs of the machines, repeating the routine and dull movements throughout their lives, had no chance of ever moving up the ladder of income, position and prestige. In and after the 1920's, the unlimited hope because of almost unlimited social mobility, an essential and integral ingredient of the American dream, became greatly diminished, and the chances of heroic success, so well known to the Americans through the stories of Horatio Alger, became very narrow and remote. In spite of the hysterical professions of Coolidge and Hoover about the great prosperity in the post-war era, the economic fabric had not been properly woven to benefit all the classes equally. The era, no doubt, was one of rapid economic development but the colossus of the big business was left uncontrolled and it further widened the gulf among the various classes. Most of the gains of this prosperity went to the "upper 10 per cent of the
population", but "the shadows in the picture" were seldom
featured because "almost all the chief avenues to mass opinion
were now controlled by large-scale publishing industries."  

Revolt of the intellectuals or the 'Highbrows' was a
particular feature of the post-war era. Writers and literary
critics ridiculed the American institutions which, they supposed,
were simply the masks to hide the hypocrisy of the hollow civi-
liisation and the impoverished culture. Already tired of "the
frock-coated respectability and decorous formality of American
51 literature", they were completely disenchanted with America's
failed internationalism at Versailles. Evolutionism and Freud-
ianism had already created an uncertainty and the brutal War
and the sordid settlement disillusioned them of the millennium
that had been expected to emerge out of the War. They lost
faith in everything and bitterly criticised the traditional
morality and institutions. Almost all the great writers of the
post-war era, caught by the hysteria of the patriotic slogans
and catchwords, had been through the War, one way or the other,
but they did not have a sense of active participation; it was
rather, as Cowley described, a "spectatorial attitude." The
sordid realities of the War, "an exhibition in violence and
destruction, a gigantic bullfight one was privileged to view

51 Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 229.
from the stands," disillusioned them of the exalted position that had been accorded to man as a civilised creature. With their faith in man broken, they came to believe in 'nothing' and Gertrude Stein called these wandering intellectuals a "lost generation." Aldridge observes: "They were a generation in the purest sense, perhaps, as Malcolm Cowley said, the first real one in the history of American letters, and they had chosen to be a 'lost' generation, the specially damned and forsaken, lost from all others and themselves by the unique conviction of their loss, the conviction by which they lived, wrote, and perceived the life of their time."

Most of the artists, after having experienced this tragic sense of the loss, found it still harder to express themselves in such a machine-made, standardised society and to them "life in America was cheap, tawdry, colorless and given over to the exclusive worship of wealth and machinery; that for a young writer to do his best work in such a society was impossible."

Fed up with the emotional and aesthetic starvation and the American provincialism and mediocrity, they found the intellectual world of America quite naive and inadequate to the challenges of the changed milieu. Not finding anything worthwhile in the American

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53 Ibid., p. 3.

54 Ibid., p. 12.
society, they ridiculed and satirised whatever came their way. They attacked Babbitts and Main Street complacency and represented the whole of the continent as a spiritually bankrupt civilisation inhabited by Toms and Daisies. Hoffman observes that the general "temper" of the twenties was "remarkable for its power of tolerance and encouragement." It was because of this power that all "forms of rebellion, protest, satire, and experiment, however erratic or naive, were admitted. Perhaps it was no accident, therefore, that the finest and most precise literary insights into our special kinds of value, problem, and agony are given us in this decade." They felt released from certain restraints and candidly wrote about the New Man and the American experience, its pettiness and pretensions. H.L. Mencken went to the extent of persistently attacking democracy itself which, according to him, simply encouraged mediocrity. Harold Stearns' symposium, Civilization in the United States (1922) represented the indignation of the young and sensitive writers who found America a waste land for any creative artist. Aldridge, analysing the causes of the expatriation of almost all the great artists during the post-war era, remarks:

From this sense of physical isolation and spiritual emptiness, it was easy for the young men to take the next logical step—active, conscious revolt and self-exile from a country which was neither gay enough nor cultured enough to deserve their presence. The idea of exile, like the

55 Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Temper of the Twenties", The Minnesota Review, 1 (Fall 1960), 36.
idea of the religion of art, grew out of their need to sustain the emotions which the war had aroused in them, to keep up the incessant movement, the incessant search for excitement, and to find another faith to replace the one they had lost in the war. (56)

Disillusioned and exiled, the writers thus produced a literature permeated with the spirit of alienation and rootlessness wherein the young men are all sad and forsaken, the young girls are beautiful but damned, and seem to represent the predicament of the contemporary society. They were confronted with an entirely new definition of the 'self', a new form of individualism where personal identity had lost its meaning:

Most important of all the moral and philosophical structures of the earlier society collapsed in the destructive blasts of the war. We were left, in 1920, with many minds and talents of great promise, who had both the glory and the responsibility of a radical individualism. But this was not the individualism of the Emersonian self, or even of the more cautiously hedged self-definition that Whitman offered at the end of the 19th century. (57)

The conventional values upon which he had been brought up in the pre-war years failed to shield the sensitive individual; he found the grim problems of alienation and the loss of identity insuperable. As the "pressure upon the individual was formidable", he was faced with a dilemma that man in America had not known earlier and consequently most of the "significant protagonists of this literature suffer a comparable distress of misplaced or dislocated affection and drive." Fitzgerald's heroes,

56 Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 12.
57 Hoffman, "The Temper of the Twenties", 40.
Amory Blaine, Gatsby, Dick Diver and Monroe Stahr, all seem to be lost individuals and their vain search for their identity proves disastrous. Hoffman observes that Gatsby "is left alone at the end, as he was ignored throughout his lifetime. The energy of his romantic affirmation has no real or valid context. He becomes, in Nick Carraway's words, a 'son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty." This is equally true of all the major protagonists of Fitzgerald who vainly strive to identify themselves with their dreams and the cultural past of America.

Briefly we can say that the War dealt a shocking blow to the moral and spiritual life of America. The industrialisation which had already been cutting at the root of the American dream brought about a complete transformation in the social structure of America. It increased the disparities among the various social classes and made the mobility from the lower to the higher class far more difficult. The urbanisation resulted in rootlessness, and consequently the sense of belongingness, essential to man's happiness, gave way to alienation. The Standardised Culture altered the concept of the family life and love and affection became outmoded. Revolt against all the accepted codes generated frustration and increased crime and violence. Man, the finest creation of God, was dulled by repeating

58 Ibid., 42.
the monotonous movements at the machines and in 1920 even President Hoover felt that "the vast repetitive operations are dulling the human mind." Man had in fact become meaningless, a pigmy before the giant wheels of the machines which replaced him and became the foundations of the new civilisation. The farmer of Crevecoeur's description lost his supreme position in the American society and his children were forced to run to the dirty and foul cities to become the cogs in the machines. Individualism lost its meaning in the post-war era and talk of spiritual enrichment was considered foolish. Mad pursuit of wealth and its vulgar display became the ruling passion of the people and crazes, instead of a well-regulated and thought-out meaning, drove them to the hysterical actions. Frustrated and frivolous as life became, sensual pleasures and stimulants became the instruments to escape the bitter realities of life. The era, though applauding the supposed material prosperity, witnessed the worst ever depression in American history. Immorality became a sign of rather dashing personality; gangsterism achieved the heroic posture, and the traditional philosophy, religion and culture were overthrown by evolutionism and Freudian psychology. In spite of the Big Red Scare, people were not concerned much with the moral, social or political questions and left them to be decided by time itself. In place

of moral and spiritual upliftment, material prosperity became the ultimate end of man's life and everybody devoted himself whole-heartedly to the pursuit of this goal. But, as has been shown earlier, this dream of success also grew more and more difficult and dubious. The American Dream, in its entirety lay shattered on the holy ground where, three centuries earlier, the Founding Fathers had promised to establish an Eden for the mankind. It had instead become the most horrible nightmare.

Most of the great writers of the era, e.g. Sinclair Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos and others, expressed, through their works, the general feeling of disillusionment of the younger people who "identified themselves with the century; its teens were their teens, its World War was theirs to fight and its reckless twenties were their twenties. As they launched forward on their careers they looked about them for spokesman and the first they found was F. Scott Fitzgerald." Fitzgerald, after the publication of This Side of Paradise, was almost universally regarded as a representative of his generation, and the age, its fads and fashions, its glow and glitter, came alive in his stories which achieved a new zenith in their popularity.

"Yet all the time", observes Mizener, "Fitzgerald was busy being the handsome hero of the Younger Generation, there was a serious

writer inside him struggling to get out." This dual personality of Fitzgerald, his efforts at "being the handsome hero of the Younger Generation" and his craving to delve deep into the moral meaning of the contemporary social environment, his role of a 'spoiled priest', generated most of the critical confusion about him. Most of the contemporary critics, in view of his active participation in the gay and bohemian life of the twenties, associated him with the frivolous writers of the age and revelled more in collecting damaging anecdotes about him than reading deeper meaning into his serious and mature works. Fitzgerald himself came to suspect, as feels Cowley, that he had helped to create the age by setting the patterns of conduct that were followed by the generation younger to himself. In one of his letters to Cowley, he insisted on his role as a creator of the age and claimed credit for naming it. He has been particularly credited with creating the manners of the contemporary American flapper, a character we meet very often in his stories. No doubt, the age "bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did", but it also stood in the way of a proper appreciation of his works. Tate, a close observer of the

64 Fitzgerald, Crack-Up, p. 13.
age, however, warns against associating the era merely with its glamour which has since become a byword for the twenties:

In all the discussion of the 1920's the glamor ... seems to me irrelevant. If you will think for a moment of Fitzgerald and of Hemingway, we had in both these men, as different as they were, a peculiar fusion of great capacity to respond to experience, even a kind of naivete, along with a profound skepticism and certain powers of critical observation which make the great novelist. Fitzgerald had it pre-eminently. (65)

Fitzgerald's penetrating insight went beyond the superficial glitter of the era and more than any other writer, he tried to depict, through his novels, the moral meaning of the times in terms of the cultural and historical perspective of the American dream. He portrayed the era realistically and satirically to reveal that under the cover of outward self-complacency and reckless optimism lay the tragic frustration of the young, innocent men in search of an ideal life. The young protagonist of Fitzgerald, bred in the tradition of the American dream, desperately tries to realise an ideal life in the land of infinite possibilities but, through his bitter experiences in the changed social environment, comes to the hopeless conclusion that the Dream is no longer recoverable. The quest of the protagonist, his agonising experiences and the inevitable failure form the subject of discussion in the following two chapters.

65 Allen Tate, "Random Thoughts on the 1920's", The Minnesota Review, 1 (Fall 1960), 55.