

■ An internationally famous writer tells us why he is not a pessimist.

## CONFESSION OF AN OPTIMIST

My wife, my children, my friends tell me that I am an optimist. "Too much of an optimist" is what they say. "If you fell off a cliff," one of them told me, "you'd be thinking that the bottom was cushioned, and until you landed you'd be quite serene."

I am, I admit, an optimist; but I do not believe, like Voltaire's Pangloss, that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. I know the horrors and difficulties of life: I have had my share of them. But I refuse to regard humanity's condition as terrible. True, we are spinning on a lump of dirt in ilimitable space, without being too sure why; true, we will surely die. To me this is a set of facts, a situation to be accepted courageously. The only problem is: What can we do, and what ought we to do, while we are here?

I am optimistic in the sense that I believe it is possible

to better our own lives and, in a general way, humanity's life. I believe that tremendous progress has been made in this direction. Man has, to a large extent, overcome nature. His command of things is far greater than it used to be. The Pessimist replies: "Yes, but these marvelous inventions are used only for war, and humanity is on the road to self destruction."

I do not believe that this is necessarily so. It depends upon ourselves, and my optimism is largely a product of my faith in human nature. I know that human nature also has its greatnesses.

My natural reaction to a circumstance is to seek what good there may be in it rather than what evil it may bring. For example, let us say that I am ill and condemned to a month in bed. The Pessimist would think: "What a disaster!" I am more likely to think, "What

luck! Of course it's a nuisance, interfering with my work, and it may be painful; but 30 days of peace! At last I'm going to have time to think as much as I like."

That is the nature of my optimism. I believe that it has its origin in a happy childhood. I had the finest parents a boy could have; they always treated me with love and justice; and that gave me, in those first formative years, a robust confidence in human nature. School might have marred my innocent faith, because children are only too willing to give one another a foretaste of harshness. But it was there, in my philosophy class, that I had the good fortune of meeting Alain, the greatest of my teachers. He too was reproached by some, as I am, for his "blind confidence."

Alain and I after him pledged ourselves to be optimists because if one does not adopt invincible optimism as a standard, pessimism will be justified. For despair engenders misfortune and failure. If I believe that I am going to fall, I will fall. If I believe that there is nothing I can

do about my country's affairs, then there is nothing I can do. In the human tribe I make the fair weather and the tempest, primarily within myself. Pessimism is contagious. If I believe my neighbor to be dishonest and show my distrust, I make him distrustful and dishonest.

"Look here," says the Pessimist. "Do you really believe that this confidence in mankind, in life, is wisdom? Hasn't it brought you some frightful disappointments?" Yes, I confess that I have had some great disappointments. These past ten years — particularly with the horrors of Nazism, with exile, my family arrested, my home pillaged, with the dangerous defection of certain friends — have given me strong reason for doubting the perfection of this universe and the people in it.

But after all, I have always known that wicked people existed; I have always known that in times of disaster crowds can become stupid and bestial. My optimism consisted, and still consists, solely in this: I believe that we can have a certain influence upon events, and that

even if we must suffer misfortune we can overcome it by our manner of enduring it.

To love the fine people about me, to avoid the wick-

ed, to rejoice in good, endure evil — and to remember to forget: this is my optimism. It has helped me to live. — *Condensed from Your Life by Andre Maurois.*

### LIE DETECTOR TELLS ALL

Along towards the end of the war, workers in a big war plant were submitted to routine detector examinations.

One of the crucial questions was: "Have you taken anything that doesn't belong to you out of the plant?"

Almost to a man, the employees answered "no." But the lie detector said otherwise. It showed that about two out of three were lying.

A little further questioning showed why. There was a shortage of toilet paper and Kleenex at the time, and workers were making up their home deficiencies in those products by pilfering from the plant supply.

When the lie detector experts explained that the question was aimed at thefts of secret government items, the lines on the lie detector charts straightened out and there was no more difficulty about answering.

But during the following month, consumption of Kleenex and toilet paper in the plant fell off so sharply that the saving in cost almost equaled the expense of the security tests. — *Des Moines Register and Tribune.*