

a shawl reading her Bible, kept a house of ill repute. Even Oliver Twist's workhouse (or Fagin's gang, for that matter) must be preferable to such a life.

"Root, hog, or die." Some of the men, as many white as black, undoubtedly will, but death by gunfire or a drug overdose is hardly preferable to death by starvation. Those who want work will find it, so long as there is no minimum wage, and if they must work 60 or 70 hours a week in order to earn subsistence, so much the better, if the alternative is a life of vice and crime. It is Adam's curse on all his descendants, including Cain.

Some of the neoconservative sociologists and their ghostwriters are coming round to arguing for welfare reform and even for the abolition of certain programs. That is all well and good, but it is too little too late. So long as there are public schools, housing projects, minimum wage laws, affirmative action requirements, and a war on drugs, there is no tinkering that can really help. The only cure for idleness is work, and the only cure for the pathologies of urban poverty is to be found in rural poverty, and it is no accident that many urban black families are sending their children and grandchildren to their relatives in the South. When the great crunch comes, this trickle of emigrants will become a mass exodus. No one who can plant turnips, hoe beans, or poach deer will starve in the rural South.

A hundred years ago Illinois Republicans, looking for cheap domestic labor and a source of votes, imported trainloads of Southern blacks into Chicago. The lives and manners that had been formed on country life were inevitably distorted and corrupted in the city, where the networks of kin and neighborhood

were broken down. Their descendants have been addicted to a far more poisonous drug than heroin or cocaine, and that is the moral servitude that comes from a life lived in dependency on strangers. All the social policies since the New Deal have been inspired, in some measure, by the conviction that such problems—including the problem of Southern white poverty, the problem of juvenile delinquency, the problem of unassimilated immigrants—all can and must be solved by preventative programs such as civics education, Head Start, Social Security, or child protection laws. But these programs turn out to be, if not smoke and mirrors, then lasers and missiles.

Life hurts, reality hurts, and if we try to prevent crime or avoid pain, we succeed only in making ourselves less human, less capable of living. The tragedy of the welfare state is that it infects us all. The lowest classes are becoming indolent, vicious, and criminal, while the rest of us have become soft, irresponsible, and luxurious. So long as we refuse to accept responsibility for ourselves and our families—so long as we vote for Social Security and the vast apparatus of middle class welfare—we are morally incapable of dismantling that part of the welfare state that is corrupting the lower classes. Perhaps, as our own lives become so frail and insubstantial, so dependent on the state for support and protection, we are even beginning to envy the life of lower-class gangsters. In that case, instead of "doing something" about crime, we should sit back and enjoy the evening news like the indolent and effete spectators at gladiatorial games. If popular films are any indication, the comfortable classes have developed a taste for blood, and instead of dismantling the welfare state, we should insist upon front row seats that would give us all value for our money. ©

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## Depth Charge

*by Charles Edward Eaton*

It may be simply an olive tasted,  
A glass of wine lining the tongue with red,  
A rose looked at without scabs on the eyes,  
A drop of ice-cold water on the glans.  
It does not have to be shot from a ship,  
A decisive hit on a submarine,  
Nor an avalanche falling on the road  
Just as you drive around the dangerous curve.

The smallest inoculations will serve:  
The furled iris as you bend down to smell  
Before the flower gives up everything  
And the air is saturated with fragrance—  
Or when you pick up the serviceable cane  
And find that it speaks back, flipping its sword,  
The incised mind making its incisions,  
Awakened, the great insinuator.

Thus you will cure and calm deficiency,  
Making and receiving innuendos,  
Inured to the huge rock mass on the road  
And the banging and shuddering overhead—  
Not that the head lies easy in the air  
Or water, but that we live for insight—  
The pencil purls as well as the sword-tip  
Once shields of isinglass drop from the sky.

I do insist upon that fresh olive,  
The thrilling glass of wine, that unscabbed rose,  
The heat around the hatband when you thrust  
The cane—the received, wanting intaglio.  
It will add up to depth charge, dazzlement,  
I assure you, the kind that does not kill—  
After the long, keen, indicative stroll,  
In the hall, light keeps fencing with the cane.

## All Things Considered

*by Charles Edward Eaton*

If you aim at a target you may not  
Hit the thing in mind but something else:  
Consider the color of that dahlia fed on apricot.

You have the flower but you do not have the fruit,  
The thing you wanted, the luscious filling in the mouth,  
The orange going down into the depths, the chute.

Night comes and fireflies light their fire—  
You wanted lanterns strung along the garden  
To send you on your latest ego trip as dauphin of desire.

You sit on the porch and think you hear a dulcet fountain giving voice:  
The gulping gone—all suave and silvered aftermath.  
The sound, it seems, is some late swimmer dripping in the house.

Take the little drama then, giving up the fruit, the trip, the fountain blest—  
The wet intruder looks exquisite in the moonlight,  
And cool is the comfort in your hand when you caress her breast,

Caress and hold, caress and hold, here in the present tense—  
*Exeunt omnes* all things wanted otherwise:  
Life is more adept than you at setting terms and switching evidence.