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ALAN W. WATTS, who held both a master's degree in theology and a doctorate of divinity, is best known as an interpreter of Zen Buddhism in particular, and of Indian and Chinese philosophy in general. Standing apart, however, from sectarian membership, he has earned the reputation of being one of the most original and "unrutted" philosophers of the century. He was the author of some twenty books on the philosophy and psychology of religion, including (in Vintage Books) The Way of Zen; The Joyous Cosmology; Nature, Man, and Woman; Behold the Spirit; The Book; Does It Matter?; This Is It; The Supreme Identity; Beyond Theology; and Cloud Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown. He died in 1973.

The Wisdom of Insecurity

by ALAN W. WATTS



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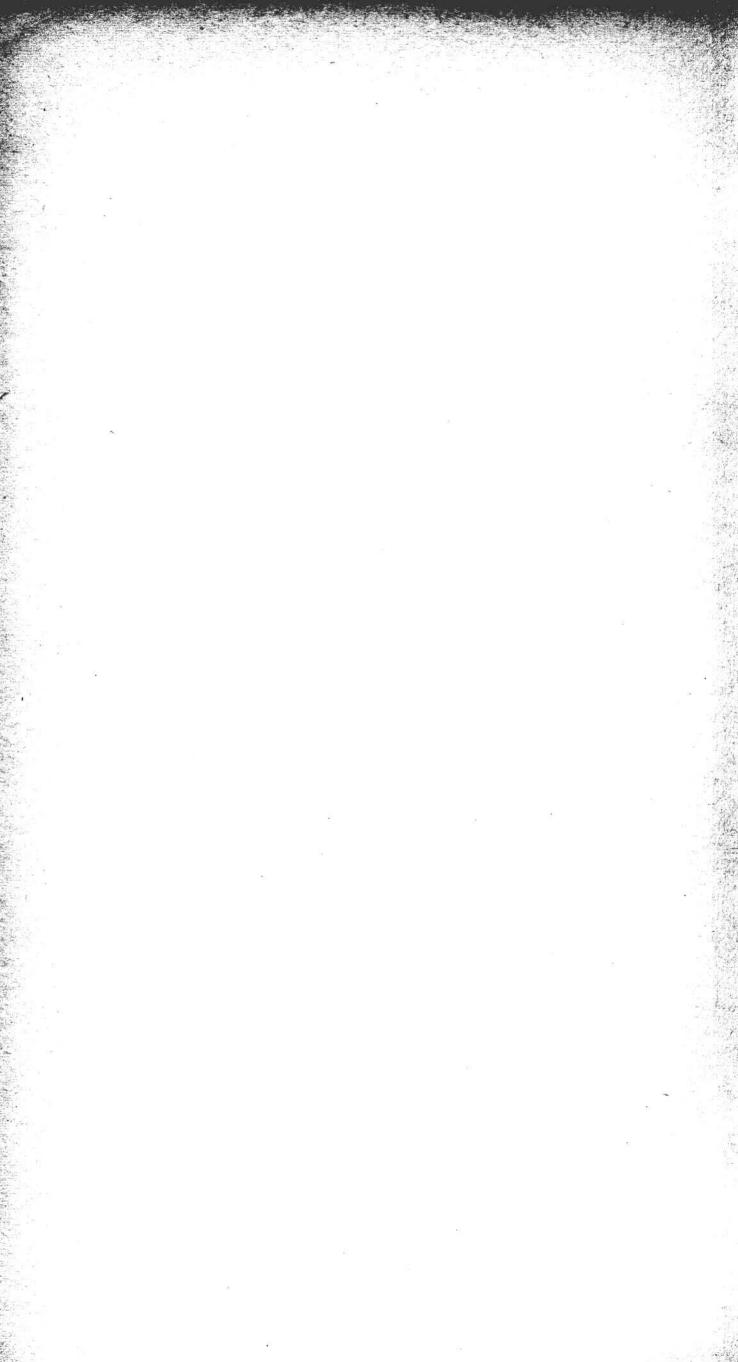
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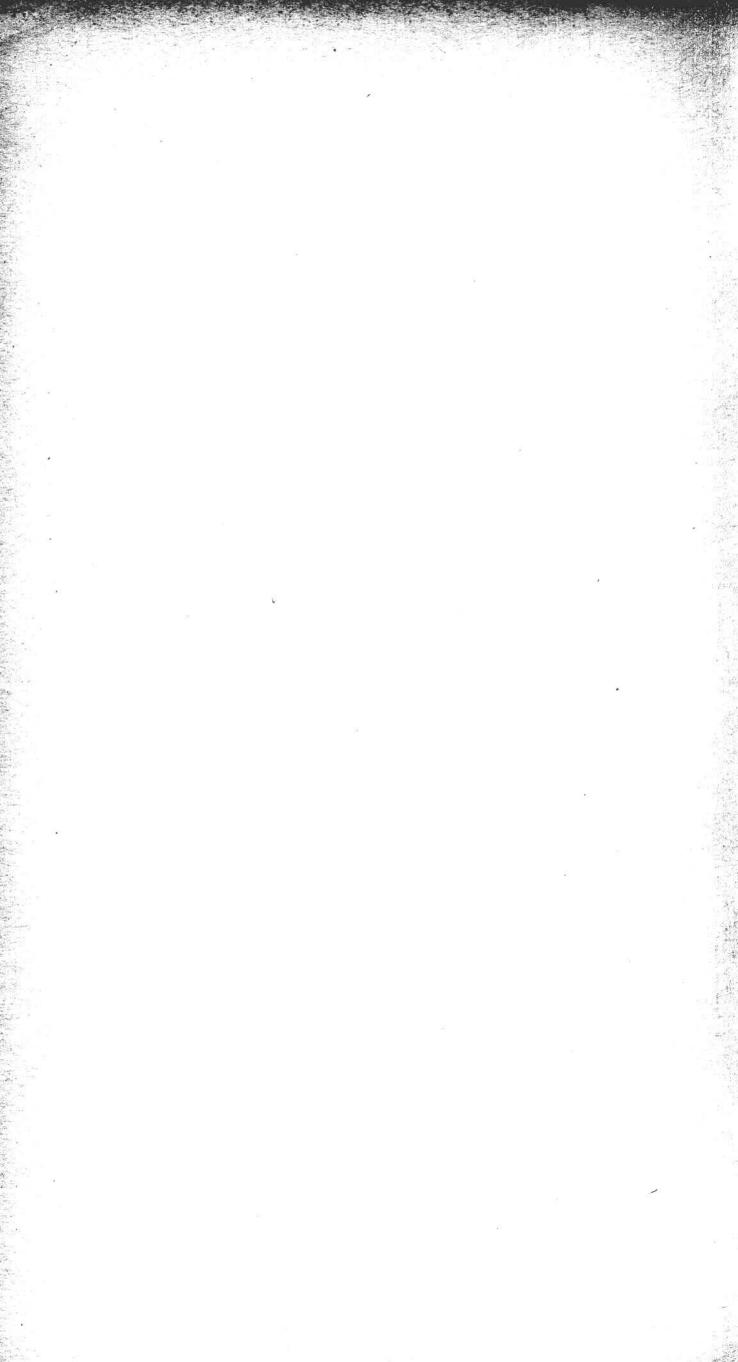
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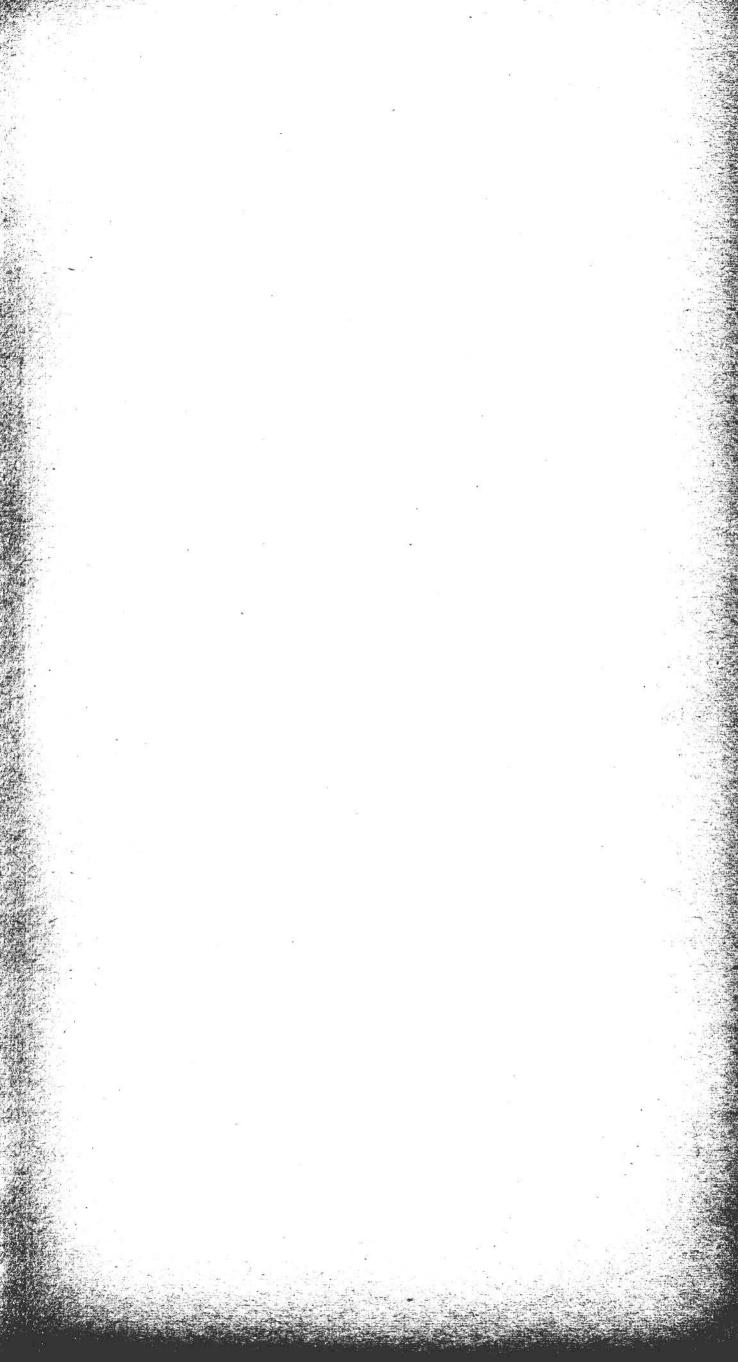
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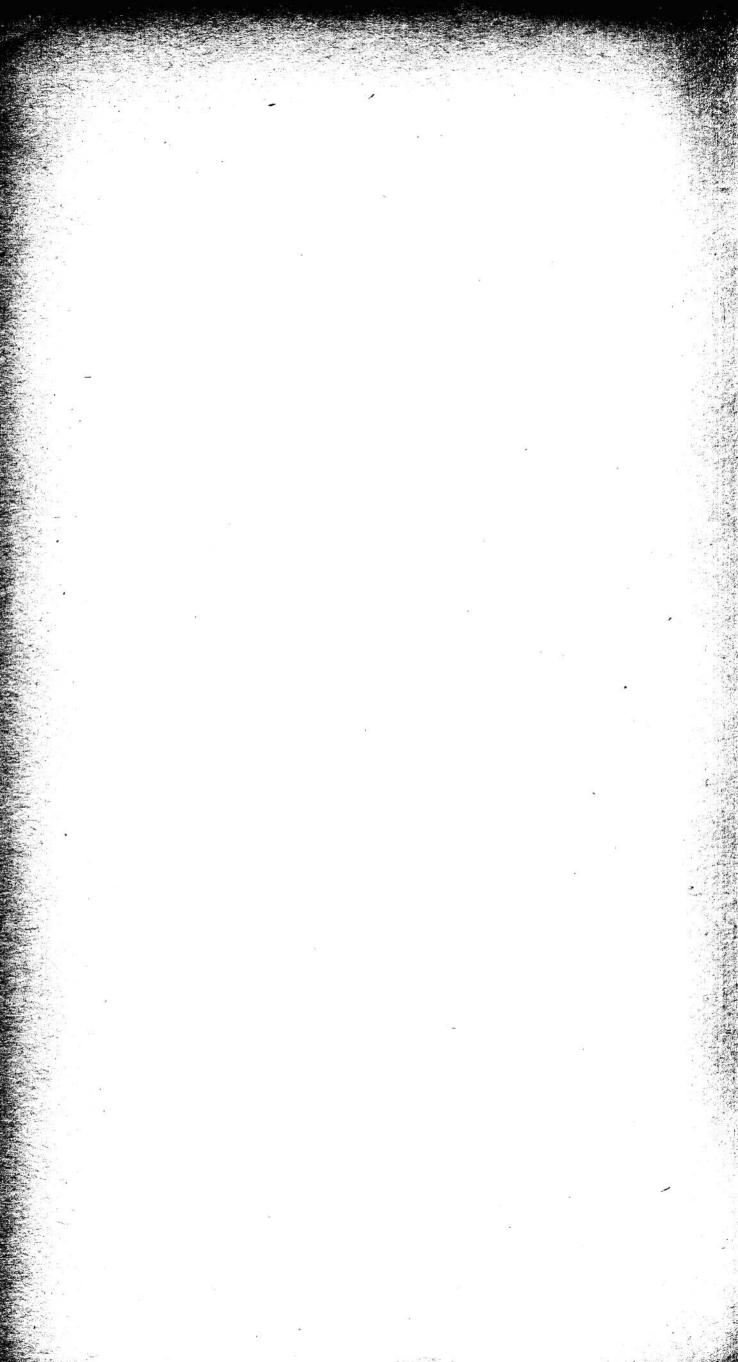
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TO DOROTHY







PREFACE

I have always been fascinated by the law of reversed effort. Sometimes I call it the "backwards law." When you try to stay on the surface of the water, you sink; but when you try to sink you float. When you hold your breath you lose it—which immediately calls to mind an ancient and much neglected saying, "Whosoever would save his soul shall lose it."

This book is an exploration of this law in relation to man's quest for psychological security, and to his efforts to find spiritual and intellectual certainty in religion and philosophy. It is written in the conviction that no theme could be more appropriate in a time when human life seems to be so peculiarly insecure and uncertain. It maintains that this insecurity is the result of trying to be secure, and that, contrariwise, salvation and sanity consist in the most radical recognition that we have no way of saving ourselves.

This begins to sound like something from Alice Through the Looking Glass, of which this book is a sort of philosophical equivalent. For the reader will frequently find himself in a topsy-turvy world in which the normal order of things seems to be completely reversed, and common sense turned inside out and upside down. Those who have read some of my former books, such as Behold the Spirit and The Supreme Identity, will find things that seem to be total contradictions of much that I have said before. This, however, is true only in some