

## THE SPARK-GAP OF DECISION

IT is a rare man who habitually and on principle invites the universe to unsettle his mind and disturb his opinions, yet it seems probable that no other sort of man can have a reliable expectation of gaining certainty. Ideally, both scientist and philosopher have in common this attitude of challenge. Thomas Huxley's prayer, "Lord, give me the courage to face a fact, even though it slay me!" is the scientist's version, and while the Lord seems to have neglected Huxley's appeal on several counts, it would be difficult to find a better rule to follow in the search for truth.

But how much, actually, do men really *want* to find the truth? There is good ground for suspecting that the search for truth is very much like the quest for peace—we think that both would be very nice to have, but neither one is quite "practical" at the present time. Tomorrow, maybe, or the day after, but not now.

It seems obvious that peace, whatever else it may be, is a result of human beings wanting it. Ought the same thing to be said of truth? If so, then truth has a kind of *living* reality, and is not simply a collection of extraordinary "secrets" lying somewhere beyond the horizon of our present experience. Tolstoy went further than this, affirming that not only must the truth be felt by each individual, but also, that what a man feels to be true will depend upon the sort of individual he is. Tolstoy's was a disturbing doctrine—disturbing to the individual, disturbing to the State—but if Tolstoy should be right, then philosophical disturbers of the peace are the most valuable members of society. The "peace" we have is nothing to brag about, anyway.

A man's working body of "knowledge" or "truth," one might say, has three broad divisions or aspects. There is, first, the way he *feels* about things, persons, events and ideas. These feelings invariably determine the selection of the facts which he decides are important, and shape what we commonly call his "philosophy of life." Second, there is the region of experience—the world of the senses—from which we obtain our impressions of the external environment. Both our feelings and the so-called "facts" of life are of course modified by the prevailing ideas of our time—

its history, religion, science, and all the social relationships which form the structure of our lives. And, finally, there is the way in which we relate our feelings to our impressions of experience and decide to act in one direction or another.

The first disturbing thought which comes to us in this kind of investigation is the extent to which we float in a sea of preconceptions as to certain ideas which we have never made our own. To select an illustration which may not be very important: every adult who has passed through even grade school will use the term "gravitation" very easily, but not one in a hundred—perhaps not one in a thousand—will be able to state the reasoning, or formulate the equation, on which the law of gravitation is based. Further, not one in ten thousand will be conscious of the fact that, so far as Isaac Newton's theory is concerned, the mathematical formula for gravitational force is purely descriptive, and in no sense "explains" the phenomenon of the attraction of bodies. It is a description which hides a mystery.

One could say that education, as a process of conditioning—and it is seldom more than this—makes us acquainted with the preconceptions of our time. Education in the thirteenth century would have done the same thing for us, except that the preconceptions would have been quite different. Or would they have been different, really? It could be argued that the sort of preconceptions a man has makes little difference, so long as he submits unknowingly to *any* kind of preconception. From this it would follow that the truly educated man is the man who has the power to challenge the preconceptions of his time, and that, from the viewpoint of the ultimate values in human life, he is not really alive unless he is moving in this direction. One man's principles are easily made into other men's preconceptions, a fact which provides the major complaint against organized religion. Churches are by definition institutions which substitute the shell of beliefs for the fire of conviction.

These are fine words, someone may say—words with the force of historical experience behind them—

but what about *us*, who did not build the great cathedrals? We only walk in their shadow and gaze in awe at their heights. Are we to be left with only the cold light of the stars to comfort our loneliness?

To this there is but one reply: No one compels you to listen to Buddha, Jesus, Tolstoy, Emerson and Thoreau. No one has ever claimed that the pursuit of truth would enable a man to meet the right people and advance to a better job. It was confessed at the outset that truth-seeking is not generally approved by "practical" people. The reply, however, has a friendlier version. A man has to send down roots from somewhere, and even if he fears to be alone with the stars, he can at least look up at them, now and then. In time, he may grow stronger.

But what about the things that we think are true? What is the foundation for our certainty? Before talking about ourselves, let us consider some illustrious examples. Aristotle, known to the medieval doctors of theology as the "Master of those who know," and to the modern world as the first practitioner of scientific method, ought to be a man who can teach us something about certainty. But Lange, in his *History of Materialism*, says:

Aristotle everywhere attaches himself to tradition, to popular opinion, to the conceptions contained in language and his ethical demands keep as near as possible to the ordinary customs and laws of Hellenic communities. He has therefore always been the favorite philosopher of conservative schools and tendencies.

On Aristotle's use of the scientific method:

. . . we speedily discover that his proceeding from facts, and his inductive mounting from facts to principles, has remained a mere theory, scarcely anywhere put into practice by Aristotle himself. At the most, what he does is to adduce a few isolated facts and immediately spring from these to the most universal principles, to which he thenceforward dogmatically adheres in purely deductive treatment.

And in philosophical controversy:

Aristotle himself introduces the opponents, makes them expound their opinions—often inaccurately enough—disputes with them on paper, and sits as judge in his own cause. So victory in discussion takes the place of proof, the contest of opinions the place of analysis, and the whole remains

a purely subjective treatment, out of which no true science can be developed.

These are not merely Lange's opinions, but the consensus of historians of thought. It is well known, for example, that Aristotle's first book of the *Metaphysics*, in which he evaluates his predecessors in philosophy, either distorts or caricatures the thinking of nearly everyone he discusses. Further, the universal "truths" which Aristotle pretends to generalize from the facts of experience are all borrowed from Plato, who was his teacher. "It was Plato," one of Aristotle's translators has remarked, "acknowledged or unacknowledged, who inspired all that was best in the thought of his great disciple." But Aristotle turned on his teacher while the latter was still alive, whereat Plato, according to Diogenes Laertius, said: "Aristotle has kicked me, as foals do their mother when they are born."

Aristotle claimed that the Platonic method was fatal to science. It seems more important to understand what Aristotle was fatal to.

Descartes has exerted almost as much fascination over his posterity as Aristotle. He took for his maxim the claim, *Everything must be true which is as clear and distinct as self-consciousness*. Why should this be so? Because in His goodness and perfection, Descartes argued, God could not possibly have created beings so that they should *necessarily* err. Cartesian certainty, in short, rests upon the goodness of God. The reality of God is deduced from the fact that we can conceive of a perfect being, and we would not be able to do this if God had not put this idea in our minds in the first place.

We shall let a Platonic thinker of the seventeenth century—a virtual contemporary of Descartes—discuss the merits of this claim to certainty. Of Descartes' faith in "clear and distinct ideas," Ralph Cudworth wrote:

Now, though there be plausibility of piety in this doctrine, . . . yet does that very supposition that our understanding faculties might possibly be so made as to deceive US in all our clearest perceptions, render it utterly impossible ever to arrive at any certainty concerning the existence of a God essentially good; forasmuch as this cannot be otherwise proved than by the use of our faculties of understanding, reason and discourse. For to say that the truth of our

understanding is put out of all doubt and question as soon as ever we are assured of the existence of a God essentially good, who therefore cannot deceive whilst the existence of a God is in the meantime itself no otherwise proved than by our understanding faculties; that is at once to prove the truth of God's existence from the faculties of reason and understanding, and again to prove the truth of those faculties from the existence of a God essentially good; this, I say, is plainly to move round in a circle, and to prove nothing at all. . . .

Accordingly, it seems not at all remarkable that Descartes became one of the chief founders of modern materialism. Both God and soul, so far as he was concerned, were mere pictures painted on the wall; the soul was denied any real functions in the system of Descartes, who offered an entirely mechanical explanation of all phenomena, and after borrowing from God a justification for the Dignity of Man—the reliability of reason in seeking truth—he leaves God, too, without any practical occupation.

Thus Aristotle "sneaked in" his first principles from Plato, and Descartes made the same use of Christianity. If these "great thinkers" could deceive themselves and the rest of us so successfully, what hope is there for ordinary men!

No hope at all, it seems, unless we can distinguish between the intellectual manipulations at which both Aristotle and Descartes were adept, and the enduring sense of truth with which a man works out his individual destiny. Some years ago, an unusually candid Judge of the Federal Circuit Court, Justice Joseph C. Hutcheson, Jr., described the method by which he came to his decisions:

I set down boldly that I, "even as your other worships do," invoke and employ hunches in decisions.

I, after canvassing all the available material at my command, and duly cogitating upon it, give my imagination play and, brooding over cause, wait for the feeling, the hunch—that intuitive flash of understanding which makes the jump spark connection between question and decision.

And more, "lest I be stoned in the streets" for this admission, let me hasten to say to my brothers of the bench and of the bar, "My practice is the same as your other worships'."

The judge might have added that this is the way

that we all make up our minds. We have our feelings about things, our deep-seated tendencies of character, and therefore of judgment, and these determine our decisions, whether we are conscious of it or not. The "facts" that we survey call the decisions forth and give them their immediate form, but the *values* which are at stake in any decision are measured by inner, not outer, factors. A man may pretend to discover all his important ideas in "facts," as Aristotle did; or he may claim that he is entirely governed by "reason," by "clear and distinct ideas," as Descartes did; but the fact is that in moral decisions—the only decisions of lasting importance—he acts intuitively, according to his intrinsic humanity, or his lack of it—according to his courage or his fears, his self-respect or his self-contempt.

Are there any more basic considerations than these, among the problems of human psychology? Has a man any knowledge of other human beings, or of himself, unless he is ready to recognize this foundation of all "knowing" in human life? The scientific definitions of "man" are worthless unless they start with the essential act of moral decision, for such acts of decision shape the theories which scientists endeavor to prove. Religious definitions, too, as Cudworth made clear in his criticism of Descartes, have no real meaning unless they start with the independent reality of human thought and choice, as the *first fact* in our entire experience.

This idea of man cannot be made into a formula, which probably explains why it forms no part of any system of thought or body of popular doctrine which passes as "knowledge." Is it too much to say that a man does not begin to have knowledge, does not even begin to be "free," until he makes this idea the starting-point of all his reflections?

## Letter from GERMANY

BERLIN—Berlin is still the friction-point of two hostile worlds. These Eastern and Western worlds which could—theoretically—permeate each other with the cultural background of their respective histories, have decided to oppose each other and to damage each other as much as possible. This makes life in our city rather stupid, although sometimes very exciting—as a spectator might find an ordinary bull fight exciting.

But Berlin is not only friction-point; she is herself two worlds inside one city. The Eastern and Western sectors have each their own municipal authorities which lean heavily upon their respective occupational authorities. Berlin is also the outlying post of one world inside the other one—the modern Trojan horse of the West within the Russian occupation zone. The Berliner has opportunity for glimpses into both worlds, although not living with his whole existence in either one or the other. It is a peculiar, ghostlike, schizoid existence.

The problem of the Eastern world consists in exerting control over a host of countries from Moscow. Since the founding of a new state in this Eastern sphere—the so-called German Democratic Republic in the Eastern zone—the problem of control begins to interest the Berliners, too; being partly of the Eastern zone, and partly not, they see their own problem as one of evading this control as much as possible.

There has been much wonderment in the past as to how it was possible for the Communist parties in various European countries to follow exactly the line of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, even when it moved in obvious and diametrical opposition to the interests of the represented social groups—mostly workers of French, Italian, or some other nationality. Perhaps the latter remained united because of their "common interests" in the fight against the "capitalists" of the rest of the world. But today, the so-called "Socialist" countries of the "People's Democracies" stand in the same competitive relation to each other as do the so-called "capitalist" countries. Is there any opportunity for them to free themselves from the control of Moscow—as Yugoslavia did—so that they will come into open opposition to each other, as competitors

usually do? The common political ideology of the different Communist parties does not prevent them from becoming bitter enemies. If one Communist party takes possession of the power and economic apparatus of its state, it becomes unquestionably a competitor of all the other similarly organised countries, without getting a bit more "progressive" or "better" than the others.

Tito's Yugoslavia was the first to obey this modern "law" of relations between the "Socialist" countries of our time. By becoming itself a "sovereign" state, the Eastern zone of Germany has to move in the same direction, and it is probable that the clash of interests between the needs of the Soviet Union and those of Eastern Germany will soon bring a political rift. Possibly, the Soviets will maintain control, as before, with their Military Government; but this is not certain. Meanwhile, discussion of the differences within the Communist Party of this region—called Socialist Unity Party (SED)—becomes increasingly outspoken.

The same general analysis—the expectation of schism between the local Communist Party and Soviet Russia—applies to Communist China. There were several nations outside the Eastern orbit whose diplomats remained calm and untroubled when Mao Tse Tung took power, and it is reasonable to explain this by the fact that they anticipated future differences between China and the Soviet Union. Already there are signs that other satellite countries are feeling similar tensions. Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria will have choices to make. Many observers are now watching for the disintegration of the Balkans fortress, more besieged than held by the Soviets. At present, the struggle is visible only in terms of the sudden death of important persons, in the removal of others from office, in trials, and the flight of new refugees. Behind all this stands the "law" of competition, not made invalid when a State declares itself "socialist." The working of this law of competition emerges clearly enough, however, to reveal the real character of these countries; it tears away the ideological veil lying heavily upon them.

GERMAN CORRESPONDENT

## REVIEW

### TOWARD RACIAL EQUALITY

DURING the past six months, an unprecedented amount of dramatization has been given to what is usually called the "race problem" in the United States. At least four motion pictures, for instance, have featured the injustice of discrimination against Negroes. (*The Home of the Brave*, *Pinky*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *Lost Boundaries*.) Newsstands have been selling paper-bound editions of *Kingsblood Royal* by Sinclair Lewis, *Trouble in July* by Erskine Caldwell, *The Last of the Conquerors* by William Gardner Smith, and William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*—all related to the same subject. In Southern California, at least, all four of these novels have sold remarkably well. Erskine Caldwell and Sinclair Lewis, of course, seem to be able to sell almost anything, but it is probably legitimate to conclude that the reading public is now persistently interested in the various ramifications of the interracial tangle. It is also perhaps significant that *Trouble in July* comes the closest to being a serious educational effort of any of Caldwell's sordid tales, and that something similar might be said of Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal*. Faulkner, too, is inspired to pass beyond a series of episodic involvements for his characters and to establish some creative values. The four motion pictures, incidentally, are without exception worth seeing, and whatever criticisms may be justly levelled at their imperfections or occasional sidestepping of issues cannot outweigh the fact that they are all to some degree provocative of self-searching reflection.

It seems consistent with the MANAS editorial policy to decline to use that catch-all phrase, "the Negro problem," and it is hoped that the millions who will read these books or see the motion pictures referred to may be encouraged to drop an expression which tends to put a static frame around a single phase of the one great Human problem. We don't need to study a

"Negro problem" nearly as much as we need to study ourselves and our conventional social attitudes in the *light* of our failure to safeguard the largest American "minority" from the angry insecurities of the white majority.

With this in mind, we are willing to risk a good deal of scoffing criticism by claiming that *Kingsblood Royal* is the best novel Sinclair Lewis ever wrote. Artistically, it may be careless and far inferior to *Babbitt* or *Main Street*, the early Lewis "classics," but *Kingsblood Royal* tells us much more than that we habitually make a stupid mess of our lives with our small-town provincialisms. It shows us that a man and his wife may be tried and tested by the most vicious and finally violent social pressures, yet emerge with a strength that is probably unknown to those who live the well-ordered, comfortable lives which all Americans are supposed to dream about. The reader of *Kingsblood Royal* can hardly fail to picture himself as the man who accidentally discovers that he has a remote Negro ancestor—and who is drawn by a real—though at first embryonic—sense of justice to play an increasing part in breaking down the prejudiced attitudes which prevent America from being "the land of the free"—or "the home of the brave." A striking accomplishment of this book is its persuasive demonstration that a man who has always thought himself "white" can feel himself *become* a Negro after learning of his tiny fraction of African blood. It obviously wasn't Neill Kingsblood's "blood" at all, but his and other persons' thinking which established, first, his classification as "white," and later, as "Negro."

Above the endless gradations of cowardice and cruelty which manifest in the former friends of the newly discovered "Negro" is the drama of the few who struggle against the influence of deeply ingrained prejudice, and become genuine human beings. So, very good for Mr. Lewis. Whether he meant to or not, he has affirmed what may be regarded as a philosophical truth of great importance: that difficulties and tragedies can be

converted into human achievement, and that, for this reason, there is no need to fear what society may do to us.

Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*, both as a novel and as a motion picture, might be said to operate as an educational influence in one of the subtlest and perhaps most effective ways. The drama is only incidentally "racial," although the story revolves around the attempt to lynch an old Negro who, from apparently conclusive circumstantial evidence, had shot a white man. The Negro's innocence seemed so unlikely to even the most worthy citizens of the town that it remained for a stripling and a persistent old maid to unearth the true story. In *Intruder in the Dust*, we see how easy it is for the best of men to allow their prejudices to focus in such a way as to permit flagrant injustices, of which they will be forever unaware. Faced by almost overwhelming circumstantial evidence, Lucas Beauchamp would likely have faced execution even if he had been "white." As a Negro, he seemed completely doomed.

Faulkner appeals to the South to awaken and to eliminate the conditions which continue to make the "Negro problem" a semi-artificial concern of legislators. For Faulkner, the problem is one to be solved by Southerners, and in the South. There seems to be much of merit in this recommendation, if we stop to reflect that this greatest interracial difficulty of all times has been caused, not because Africans and Anglo-Saxons and Europeans are in social proximity, but simply because the Africans did not come here for their own reasons and when they chose, as was the case with all other immigrants. While Negroes are oppressed throughout the length and breadth of the United States, the *roots* of oppression still flourish most in that Southern soil which saw the first great crime of slave transportation.

*Intruder in the Dust* is Faulkner's testimonial to the real possibility of overcoming psychological failings which make the "Negro problem" what it is. He incidentally falls heir to a great

philosophical tradition by implying that the only way for huge mistakes to be corrected is for each individual whose mind contains any portion of the causal elements behind the original wrong to gradually eliminate them. The point is that the slavery of any time is simply an external expression of the moral, mental, and psychological failings of the dominant group. And slavery, viewed in this light, obviously enslaves the oppressor as well as the oppressed. There is much truth in the idea that the South has no Negro problem, but that there is very definitely a problem for white Southerners.

Little need be said about Erskine Caldwell's *Trouble in July* save that it dramatizes the morbid lengths to which ignorant self-righteousness can go. *Last of the Conquerors* also merits little attention beyond note of the startling impact of its suggestion of definitely *pro*-Negro attitudes in Germany. William Gardner Smith also seems to feel he has made a point of lasting importance when he glories in the fact that it is possible for a Negro to have a satisfactory love affair with a German girl. This love affair, like so many which come to us by courtesy of novels, simply goes on and on.

The motion picture, *Lost Boundaries*, ought to be especially effective in creating understanding and sympathy for all those of mixed Caucasian and African blood. Here we see the three generations of a family confronted with that terrible and difficult choice between "passing" as white and remaining Negro. Near tragedy occurs in *Lost Boundaries*, however, not because of anything intrinsically demoralizing about a Negro's passing for white, but because the parents of two children fail to tell them about their racial admixture. And for this reason the psychology of the picture seems to us sound—more so than that of *Pinky*, which proposes that while girls of Negro blood who are able to "pass" can be very, very noble—nobler, at least, than a white lover—it is impossible for a person to live in both worlds at the same time. The unfolding plot of *Pinky*,

however, provides some satisfaction in dramatizing a Negro girl's decision not to leave her people—although the question of just who are "her people" remains—especially when the Negro girl is played by Jeanne Crain. Certainly, in the motion picture, Pinky appears to be more at home in the efficient, hospital-world of her white doctor lover, and perhaps more humanly useful, too. Yet there is a valid idealism in the sacrifice of an admittedly easier life for the harder one, so it is not necessary to complain too loudly that the producer evaded one of the most important phases of the problem. Pinky's "passing" is romantically successful, but not socially so, while *Lost Boundaries*, moving a step further, makes "passing" socially acceptable as well, although it does not minimize the tremendous difficulties that may have to be overcome.

Both *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Home of the Brave* attracted considerable attention in England, the former receiving extremely favorable comment in the British *New Statesman and Nation*, and *The Home of the Brave* being treated similarly by the *Manchester Guardian*. The shoestring producers of *The Home of the Brave*, however, felt it necessary to tamper drastically with the original plot of the play by substituting a Negro for a Jewish boy. While *The Home of the Brave* hits hard at the many humiliations which both Negroes and Jews continue to suffer, most readers of the book will probably agree that the plot becomes less true to life with this change in the race of the mistreated character. Neurosis-creating pressures are greatest at the margins of social rejection—less felt, for example, by darker colored Negroes than by those with a small proportion of Negro blood, whose slighter "difference" makes it harder for them to adjust to the racial barrier. And the same is true of the Jewish boy, who may awaken suddenly to the fact that there are many who damn him simply because of his parentage. Many Jewish people and some nearly-white Negroes grow up with little awareness of the community feeling about them.

When it does hit them, it may therefore hit them harder.

Of course, there may be so many human beings who are rigidly prejudiced against acquaintances and neighbors of *all* races, and for purely superficial reasons, that it is impossible to expect a rapid solution to any "racial problem." But, along with Faulkner, we would insist that all of the social and psychological maladjustments incident to present racial amalgamation must be met slowly and carefully—and met first by those who learn to recognize the seeds of disorder within their own minds.

## "OBJECTIVITY"

EVER since it became the fashion for supposedly sophisticated persons to borrow the superficial attitudes and vocabulary of science for use in everyday conversation, expressions such as, "What is his *bias*?" or "I have a *bias* about that," have become quite common. The implication is that an opinion of any sort is inevitably some kind of "distortion" of the truth, which amounts to saying that impartial judgment is impossible for human beings.

In a story written about a hundred years ago, the English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, makes one of his characters, Thelwall, press this attitude to the point of being unwilling to teach a child anything of importance until the age of discretion had been reached. In Coleridge's tale, the following incident is reported by a friend of Thelwall's:

I showed him my garden, and told him it was my botanical garden. "How so?" said he, "it is covered with weeds." "Oh," I replied, "that is only because it has not yet come to the age of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair in me to prejudice the soil towards roses and strawberries."

Obviously, "objectivity" has two meanings, a ridiculous one and a sensible one. The ridiculous one, which Coleridge exposed in Thelwall, arises from a mechanical interpretation of scientific method, and has been the most popular meaning for the reason that it relieves a man from the responsibility of having any serious opinions at all. And in scientific thought, the ridiculous meaning has prevailed for many years, eluding similar exposure through the fact that science is supposed to be devoid of the "human" element.

It ought to be evident that the "objectivity" which depends upon having no opinions is entirely worthless to human beings. Even the slightest opinion, to have a value, must be held for some reason, and that reason, in turn, represents a positive conviction.

The real question has to do with the sort of convictions a man holds—are they wise and just, or are they merely prejudices? Objectivity, at this level, is certainly important, but it is not simply a motiveless neutrality: it is objectivity in the light of consciously held ideals. The ideals, in other words, must come first, and the objectivity afterward. To evade this issue, we think, is to abdicate as a human being—which is what science, broadly considered as a field of technology, has very largely done, so far as its "theory of knowledge" is concerned.

## CHILDREN

### ... and Ourselves

IT certainly ought to be clear to any educator and to every parent that no "system" can guarantee the development of effective disciplines in children. By "disciplines" we mean facilities for keeping orderly relationships, either with people, or in any form of enterprise. These seem to have a hard time developing in modern homes. The majority of parents do a fair share of worrying about the unreliability of modern teen-agers—lack of punctuality, forgetfulness about commitments of various sorts, and lack of ability to concentrate upon anything which requires sustained effort. Farm children are usually better "disciplined" than city children—but why?

Parents may save themselves a certain amount of brooding and frustration over the lack of discipline of their children, however, by refreshing their minds on the various alterations of social process which have followed the Industrial Revolution. If you feel that you understand at least some of the causes of any situation, it usually ceases to cause annoyance or foreboding. The children of past eras were better "disciplined," in the usual sense of the term, principally because they understood the necessity of consistency and concentration in productive work in the home, and because their parents were often engaged as individual artisans doing work involving pride of craftsmanship, resulting directly in a finished product. One of the greatest accomplishments of "Gandhian education" in India has been that the children of the school-community are able to understand and feel themselves part of the simple economy of the School. Adults and children at Sevagram really live in the same world; no gulfs of economic complication separate them.

The easiest way for modern children to "grow up" may also be through work of some sort, provided that the work is necessary and not an artificial invention. We cannot expect the adolescent to find in High School attendance the

same focus for development that immediately useful activity once gave. In the first place, preparation for school assignments may easily be slighted or postponed without any obviously serious consequences, and, for students who are sufficiently clever, there are innumerable ways of shirking regular study. Nor are the conditions which encourage self-discipline lacking only in the scholastic world. Bigness in modern industry results in many jobs in which adults—who are also parents—are able to continue the practice of "sliding by" without consistent application.

Just as school children often do not know why they are required to take certain courses, nor why those courses are constructed in the manner defined by the textbook so do few employees in our major industries feel there is a clear necessity for many of the things they do in following office routines. Anyone, of course, is intelligent enough to see that human beings are always better at doing things which they understand, but the increasing division of labor and centralization in industry has made this realization seem uselessly theoretical.

Yet when we come to consider the needs of our children, we either have to do some thinking on this subject or else fail our children. Even if it is to be a child's subsequent destiny to occupy a small desk on the forty-fourth floor of the Standard Oil Building—where actual concentrated work may not seem important or even necessary—there is still opportunity to provide some of the equivalents of a real work-relationship in the conduct of affairs at home. The important things about a work-relationship in the home would include, first, a common objective for all in the family—which *may* be created without tangible cooperative labor, if the parents are sufficiently gifted as educators; and second, a perception of an exact law of cause and effect as the real arbiter of our success—we get what we earn, and nothing but what we earn are we likely to know how to use properly. All integrated disciplines, even those we

call "moral," depend on our recognition that Natural Law, and not chance, governs the conditions of human happiness.

The home is supposed to be a small community; our familiarity with the philosophy of democracy should enable us to see that no real community exists anywhere without the purposeful participation of all the persons involved in any sort of common enterprise. What we call "work" is only the simplest example. House-building days in the old American Frontier were wonderful things for the development of a sense of community responsibility. But the fact that the reliable, self-disciplined man often gained his sense of community and political responsibility through ordinary disciplines incident to daily work, does not mean that we have to build houses or be blacksmiths in order to become disciplined people. The circumstantial environment of pre-industrial, frontier America was simply a help—a great help—in teaching men that they reward or punish themselves according to the quality of their own efforts. When a man sees the need for applying his energy in producing the necessities of life, he automatically provides himself with an awareness of the only successful monitor—the law of Cause and Effect.

Family councils can be like the old Town Meetings, helping children to maturity even if they do not live on farms. We may conclude that no disciplines are successful—that is, productive of a creative dynamic—unless a person has participated, in some way, in the creation of the disciplines. From this it would follow that any of our attempts to reward or punish children will fail to the degree that the child has not himself played a part in the patterns of agreement which are supposedly met or unfulfilled at the time of "reward" or "punishment." When parents trouble themselves sufficiently to let the children play a part in formation of all rules governing the conduct of the home, they draw upon the latent integrity in every child which guarantees that he will be much more concerned with keeping the

rules he helps to make than the rules which are issued as directives from some authority he has never had the opportunity to influence at the level of decision. And he can learn something of the principle of Natural Law in relation to human affairs.

# FRONTIERS

## Among the Psychics

IT is not easy to be sure that Dr. Horace Westwood (D.D.), author of *There Is a Psychic World* (Crown Publishers, 1949), has kept his balance during his investigations of psychic or Spiritualistic phenomena. He certainly tried to, and the fact that Dr. John Haynes Holmes, who writes an Introduction, vouches for his personal integrity will mean much to many readers.

A book such as this one recalls like events which began about a hundred years ago with the mysterious "rappings" of Kate and Margaretta Fox, of Hydesville, New York. But from that day to this, although literally thousands of "successful" séances have been held, and thousands of books and articles written about them, practically nothing important has been learned from the "experimental" approach to Spiritualism and mediumship. A lot of learned terms, to be sure, have been invented, and pretentious institutes and societies have been founded to pursue "psychic research." But no one, so far as we know, has gone any further than the adventurous-minded William James, who was willing to testify to the reality of supernormal phenomena, but could offer nothing in explanation of them. And the melancholy observation of Dr. Joad, that if ghosts have souls, they certainly have no brains, clearly applies to the great mass of psychic "communications."

Anyone who will take the trouble to dig into the vast miscellaneous literature of psychic research is likely to share the conclusion of Prof. Leonard Marsh, classical scholar and good Christian, who wrote in 1854 that the Neoplatonic philosophers were thoroughly acquainted with all the phenomena which the modern "trance medium" can produce, and had better explanations for them than the modern Spiritualists. Irritated by his more gullible contemporaries who imagined that in Spiritualism they had come across something new and strange, he gave his book on ancient psychic lore the title of *Apocatastasis*, or "Progress Backwards," for that summed up his estimate of the Spiritualists' insatiable appetite for psychic miracles.

To do Dr. Westwood justice, however, it should be said that he set himself stern standards of

impartiality. As a "liberal" preacher of Unitarian background, he started out with the idea that belief in the "supernatural" is "inimical to the best interests of mankind." He was drawn into psychic investigations only reluctantly, during the first great war, when many of his parishioners—in "a leading city of the Canadian West"—were losing their sons. For one who knows nothing of the history of Spiritualism, or what may be more generally termed "Psychism," the phenomena he witnessed were undoubtedly impressive. They ranged from Ouija board communications to what the Spiritualists call "direct voice," and actual materializations. Perhaps because of Dr. Westwood's personal attitude of disinterested inquiry, some of the "communications" were considerably superior to the sentimental gibberish that is most frequently obtained through mediums. In one case, a "guide" asked the author to warn a young medium of his acquaintance that she was exposing herself to obsession by too frequent trances and indiscriminate acceptance of "controls."

The best thing about this book, actually, from the point of view of the general reader, is the caution that it recommends. The author tells of the superintendent of a large state mental hospital who was convinced that a number of the patients under his care were literally "obsessed" by disembodied entities. Dr. Westwood also quotes from a writer who describes case after case of mental disorder which "had developed as a consequence of tampering with psychic matters, either in the form of 'Ouija' or of automatic writing." Besides the possibility of obsession, there is the more obvious danger of becoming emotionally involved in some form of Spiritualistic belief. A man may, "almost without knowing it," says Dr. Westwood, "change from a genuine investigator into a convert to a form of 'other-worldism' which undermines the whole structure of life." Finally, there are the dangers in the trance condition itself, which—should the mental hospital doctor be right in his theory—might lead, as Westwood says, "to a genuine obsession in which the medium is invaded. . . ." And how, he asks, except under extraordinary conditions, "can this be regarded as other than essentially evil?" He holds that the trance state ought not to be necessary to psychic phenomena, in view of the fact that certain of the demonstrations which he witnessed occurred with the "medium" in full possession of her faculties; and he believes that

progress in psychic research will remain restricted until the trance condition is dispensed with entirely. It is easy to share in this criticism, on philosophical grounds, for what good can come of experiments which involve the subjection of a human being to a form of hysteria in order to produce "results"?

It is of interest that Dr. Westwood uses the words, "thought and personality," in speaking of what may exist apart from the physical body, with reference to psychic communications. The idea that not beings, but only psychic "fragments" of the dead, communicate, is suggested in one of the most complete theoretical explanations of psychic phenomena ever to appear in the literature of psychic research. (*Proceedings of the London Society for Psychical Research, 1927, XXXVI, pp. 393-413.*) Based upon the metaphysics of the Neoplatonic philosopher, Plotinus, this article suggests that communications from "spirits" through mediums may reflect only the partial intelligence of the psychological "remains" of the deceased, and in no sense prove "the continued activity of the 'higher soul'." Plotinus gives four different categories of communications, the lowest of which may be termed mere "psycho-galvanic reflexes," which would help to explain the vast amount of drivel coming from the alleged "spirits."

Concerning the phenomena he witnessed, Dr. Westwood's conclusions are as follows:

I am scientifically convinced that thought and personality can manifest themselves apart from a brain and body as we now conceive them. This I hold to be true, because the phenomena upon which inference is based can be repeated, whenever the laboratory conditions are such as to render them producible. Therefore, they are verifiable.

Also, such being the case, I hold it to be a scientific inference to conclude that two of the major biological arguments against the possibility of survival after death are nullified. These two arguments being: (1) there can be no thought without a brain and (2) personality is indissolubly bound up with a body of flesh and blood.

However, I reiterate that this does not necessarily demonstrate immortality. It simply demonstrates that consciousness can manifest itself under different modes from those bodily conditions we have always associated with life. However, it does

bring survival within the realm of the possible, since it gives to this hope a basis of natural fact.

But I must also reiterate that the evidence for survival belongs ultimately to the realm of probable truth and rests upon moral foundations. Thus, though the conclusions which seem to me compelling are drawn from the basis of natural fact to which reference has been made, they also proceed from the kind of response we feel and acknowledge in personal relationships.

There can be no doubt that Dr. Westwood has tried to be scientific. Early in his investigations, after noting that a supposed communication from an old friend had left him emotionally disturbed, he formulated a basis for all future study. "Under no circumstances," he said, "would I encourage or seek communication involving my individual affections or concerns, for if I permitted this, it would be impossible to maintain any objectivity." A second proviso took the form of a conviction that no phenomenon, however impressive, was to be regarded as final proof of immortality.

It was inevitable that, with these principles, Dr. Westwood should write a book which is better than most on this subject. It is far better, in fact, than the late Stewart Edward White's rather pretentious offerings under the name of the "Betty Books" and *The Unobstructed Universe*—books which Dr. Westwood, we think, too much admires. One would suppose, however, in reading any of the current books on psychic phenomena, that the writers are engaged in charting an "undiscovered country," when the fact is that Spiritualism is as old as human history, and that the ancient world had not only honesty and an inquiring spirit equal to Dr. Westwood's, but had knowledge, and wisdom, too. This, at least, is what the record will show to the reader who is willing to assume that it was possible for there to be an understanding of psychic phenomena in the centuries before the founding, in 1882, of the London Society for Psychical Research.