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THE CASE FOR PRIVATE INITIATIVE

THIS article will have for its thesis the proposition that no program of human betterment is worth listening to, unless one man, by himself, can begin to put it into effect. While the claim is extreme, we think it can be defended, if by human betterment be understood the actual enrichment of human life—the increase in the opportunities for freedom together with a growth in the capacity to use and share those opportunities for the common good.

Freedom, it must be admitted, contains whole hosts of implications. As we understand freedom, it suggests at the outset a sense of purpose in human life. For a man's freedom to be real to him, he must have at least a tentative answer to the question, "Freedom for what?" His purpose, further, must be of a sort that does not involve a *necessary* encroachment on the freedom of other men. Obviously, in a society as confused as our own, there will be numerous instances when a man's pursuit of what seems a just and worthy purpose will be frustrated by the purpose of men with other views. In another "confused" period of history, Thomas More lost his head because he refused to acknowledge publicly the English king as the supreme religious as well as secular authority in England. More lost his head, also, because most of England's dignitaries of Church and State found it to *their* purpose to support their king. Various freedoms were exercised in this situation. Henry VIII preserved his freedom to marry, to behead his wives and counselors, and to live without the embarrassing presence in his realm of an uncompromising conscience. His courtiers, by conceding Henry's purpose to be just and true, preserved their freedom to stay alive. More preserved his freedom to die an honest man.

So, we may say, they were all "free" men. But More's kind of freedom, obviously, was a kind of freedom that stands for the betterment of man, and that is the sort of freedom in which we are interested. If all Englishmen had wanted the same sort of freedom as More possessed in principle, Henry, being an Englishman, would have been a different sort of king; and his subjects, likewise, would have taken no pleasure in a life insured by fawning hypocrisy.

Freedom, then, is a term which bears all the intuitive connotations of excellence in human life. It means, first, a worthy purpose on the part of those who desire to be free; and second, it means the circumstances which provide a reasonably appropriate field for the working out of that purpose. Freedom does *not* mean an artificially constructed environment in which an abstract man can do whatever he likes without friction or opposition.

One conclusion jumps up for recognition at this point: that all *political* definitions of freedom are of necessity only half-truths. A political definition ignores the variability of human purposes and attitudes of mind and rushes on to describe the conditions which are supposed to be "right" or "just" for society as a whole. A successful political definition of freedom is one that leaves the broadest possible range for the interpretation of the *meaning* of freedom in individual instances. Politics, by itself, can never give content to the meaning of freedom, for that would be to define human attitudes and to declare what they must be.

Only individuals can give content to the meaning of freedom, for only individuals possess attitudes of mind—purposes in life. That is why, we think, no program of human betterment is worth listening to, unless one man, by himself, can begin to put it into effect.

You don't have to pass a law, form an organization, or stay in political office to enrich

human life for others or for yourself. During the middle years of the last century, Denmark needed a national rebirth, and many Danes knew it. But the Danish folkschool was born in 1851 in the home of Kristen Kold, a cobbler, who was just one man, with a couple of students and Kold for teacher. By 1885, the Danish folkschools had an enrollment of 7,000 students, half of them women. In 1930 there were 80 such schools in Denmark, 60 in rural areas, the rest in the larger cities. And in the meantime, they had literally transformed Danish society.

Nicolai Grundvig first, conceived the idea of the folk high school in 1832. He wrote a book about it and tried to start a school, but it failed. Then Kold tried it again. Perhaps Kold was not the best teacher in the world, but the movement lived on after his effort. It has been described as an effort to provide an educational environment in which "personal growth could be stimulated and in which a social life might develop out of individual freedom." Today, about 30 per cent of the adult population of Denmark attends the folkschools *(see Light from the North,* by Joseph K. Hart), and this extraordinary educational reform—which became a mass movement—has overflowed from Danish shores to other parts of the world. Danish immigrants have established folkschools in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota, and even in California.

"I am done," wrote William James, "with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride." There have been, doubtless, many men who thought themselves failures in the big things they undertook, yet whose real contribution to human betterment was in the "invisible, molecular moral forces" which they released. Robert Owen failed in his attempt to transform the economy of England; his New Harmony colony in the United States seemed to condemn him as a foolish visionary without grasp of the first principles of social integration. Yet out of the practical influence of Owen's life grew the Rochdale cooperative movement, of which the beneficiaries, today, are numbered in millions all over the world.

Recently, in one of the "little" magazines, a reviewer took to task an advocate of decentralized, non-political social regeneration. The proposal was for the awakening of individuals to the fact that they are stronger than the repressive social institutions which surround them. The writer had urged the formation of small, "natural" groups. The reviewer said:

> The implications point to the desirability of a "small society," but how the dream-conditions of such **a** state may be fecund of improvement in the dehumanized, big society is by no means shown. "Consider if several million persons, quite apart from any political intention, did only natural work that gave them full joy!" Such merry-hearted evangelism, if quite apart from any "political" intention, is on the same high level of socially constructive thinking as Mr. Truman's Christmas Eve eulogy of the Sermon on the Mount.

Such criticism is not even intelligent defeatism, but represents a blindness to the actual modes of social reconstruction. What are the little magazines themselves, in one of which this reviewer ridicules the efforts of individuals and small groups, except the devoted contribution to human betterment *by* individuals and small groups? Scores of earnest editors and writers have pinched their savings and worked in odd hours to keep the little magazines going as channels of free expression. Theirs may be a merry-hearted evangelism, but without it, modern literature would be far worse, far more confined by convention and dictated by the dollar sign than it is. Practical men may laugh at the "cranks," the altruists, and the people who spend their substance for a dream. Yet all culture exists in virtue of the leaven spread throughout society by

men who believe in worthy dreams and try to make them come true.

America is rich with the fertile remains of idealistic failure. The country everywhere bears the beneficent impress of yesterday's cooperative communities. Many thousands of children grow up amid the memories of their grandparents, dreamers who tell of their struggles to establish on the land a pattern of living in which man and his welfare, his freedom and creative opportunity, come first. The point is, these brave undertakings which enrich the soil of future progress all began with the private initiative of individuals. They paid the asking price of the status quo and built something new with what they had left. In England, William Morris was such an individual. Morris put to work the ideas that Ruskin put on paper. He gave his patrimony to establish a company of craftsmen that would recreate the taste of the English people for the design and decoration of their homes. He was an artist, a craftsman, a printer, a story-teller and a poet “who strove to lead his contemporaries away from the hideousness and materialism of modern life." He was also a socialist—his own particular brand—whose sympathies with the underprivileged classes gave everything he did a universal quality.

Such men as Morris are the regenerators of civilization—of what is enduring and refining in human culture —of the qualities which give depth and mellowness to life in the home, and which keep bright the ideals of unexpecting friendliness, of instinctive generosity, of delicacy and mutual consideration in human relations. One Morris, in touch with thousands through his works, his many friends, and those who, in later generations, read about him, can help to establish in countless men and women the natural habit of being contributors to the general good. "Living for others" can easily become an empty claim, an expression of sectarian or cultist rhetoric, but for men like Morris, it is the natural flow of their life's intention; it never occurs to them that there is any alternative to a life of usefulness and spirited search for means to affect their fellows for good.

Who can say what are the true "resources" of the American people, or any people anywhere, for the betterment of human life? How would you catalogue the social ingenuity of individuals who make their meager incomes do double and triple duty to increase the opportunity of others? What of the young men who go from village to village in India to teach spinning and weaving to the householders and peasants? What of a man like Arthur Morgan, who reclaimed Antioch college from educational desuetude to one of the most impressive educational experiments on the American scene; who all his life has studied the ingredients of the good life, the good environment for children and young people; who, today, is devoting his energies to guiding and inspiring the reconstruction of rural and community America?

The idea of the individual exercise of private initiative for the general good is gradually becoming the key conception of the time. It comes out in the best of modern literature—in Silone's *Seed Beneath the Snow*, in Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. It is the intellectual perception of Arthur Koestler in "The Fraternity of Pessimists" *(The Yogi and the Commissar)*. It is the example set by Ralph Borsodi, and Mildred Jensen Loomis (of the *Interpreter)*, and by many others.

Even if a man supposes that "political means" are necessary for the practical realization of social ends, he should not fail to recognize that a social revolution must have deep cultural foundations. The French Revolution was preceded by fully half a century of deliberate education in invigorating themes which later became the watchwords of the great uprising. Eighteenth-century France was honeycombed with Masonic societies and secret and semi-secret groups devoted to the doctrines of the Enlightenment. Emissaries of Adam Weishaupt's society of the Illuminati spread anti-clerical doctrines and proclaimed the perfectibility of man. After describing the work of these

groups, Una Birch declares in *Secret Societies and the French Revolution:*

> . . . we must conclude that at the lowest estimate a coordinated working basis of ideas had been established through the agency of the lodges of France; that thousands of men, unable to form a political judgment for themselves, had been awakened to a sense of their own responsibility and their own responsibility in furthering the great movement towards a new order of affairs. It remains to the eternal credit of the workers in the great secret service to have elicited a vigorous personal response to the call of great ideals, and to have directed the enthusiasm excited to the welfare, not of individuals, but of society as a whole. . . . The true history of the eighteenth century is the history of the aspiration of the human race. In France it was epitomised. The spiritual life of that nation, which was to lift the weight of material oppression from the shoulders of multitudes, had been cherished through dark years by the preachers of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood.

While the twentieth century calls for no ritual and myth, no clandestine gathering of conspirators in revolutionary cellars, there is need for the same moral qualities and the same independent action. The problem is different. We have not so much to "win" the struggle for human freedom, but to use the freedom gained in the eighteenth century in a way that will enlarge its meaning and preserve its substance. We have prophets enough, for this age, in Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi—men who understood the past and foresaw the fronts of tomorrow's revolution. The eighteenth century gave the West liberation. Can the twentieth century give the world self-regeneration? It is a much more difficult task—a task for private initiative.

BAVARIAN LETTER

AUGSBURG.—There can be no doubt about the fact that in Bavaria, as elsewhere in Germany, a great mental recovery is going on, combined with a religious, political and philosophical transformation as influential as the ideas of Rousseau, Voltaire, the Encyclopaedists and the other forerunners of the French Revolution of I789. The old nationalism, engendered over centuries by the strategic situation of Germany between strong, hostile nations, is breaking down; the philosophical systems from Herder to Nietzsche, preaching an overcharged nationalism, are no longer appreciated and the great Christian churches, entangled in every European war and busy in every international difference, are about to lose a good deal of their standing. This movement is growing stronger from day to day, notwithstanding the efforts and the resistance of the Church organizations and the representatives of obsolete intellectual attitudes. Something new is arising, although we do not yet know what it is. But conforming to the law of equipoise, the pendulum, presently moving to the left, will swing back as soon as normal life is resumed, *i.e.*, as soon as the armies of occupation have left Germany, when a German government is again responsible to the nation, and the unbearable food and labour problem gains a measure of solution. If this could take place in a few years—say, five—then the fight for our inner liberty, for our mental and moral freedom, would be openly initiated. This fight, until now clandestine, will be decisive; it also will be the most difficult of all our history. For it will determine whether we are to fall back into the opinions and methods that made our way, in this century, at least, so terrible, gruesome and bloody, or to join with the other nations in a European or World Federation, peaceful and happy, abjuring all violence and oppression, but able, also, to partake of the riches and treasures of the earth in the same way as other peoples.

Which way will Germany take—that is the question. Will the German regain confidence in men? Will the struggle in his soul against the spirits of evil turn out to be victorious? Or will he, oppressed by despair and driven by sentiments of revenge, finally succumb to hostility against mankind? In this choice, responsibility rests not only on the shoulders of Germany. The occupying powers are immediate witnesses and very often the authors of what is going on in Germany. They know the active forces for good, operating in the open, and the secret, subversive forces in the darkness. We and they are watching the gradual change that in the long run will lead to a revolution, wholesome or pernicious.

In this period of mental unrest, physical distress and political dangers, many Germans are looking for friends, friends in the heart—who wish to help a downcast nation. They now abhor all that is connected with politics; they are deaf to slogans of heroism, battles and victories; they see everywhere, like Hamlet, nothing but sham, cheating and falsehood. They are sick in both heart and soul; they want not politicians, but physicians. They want mental assistance; with one word, they want love. Our human knowledge may be scanty and unreliable, but it is beyond any doubt that love is the best medicine for sick souls and the holiest union between men. Deeds of love unite mankind more than politics and trade and business.

Love cannot be organized like sport, or trade or science. Love is the holy spark coming from eternity. Where it shines, joy and happiness blossom and new confidence in men springs up. Love is a blessing and he is thrice praised who can bestow this blessing on his fellow-men.

The other day I called on a family which I have known these twenty years. The man, a former National-Socialist, is out of work; his first son fell in action; the second is missing in Russia; the only daughter killed herself when her husband fell in Africa. The family is living in the most deplorable circumstances. Both man and wife are in their sixties. They are dwelling in a cellar, their little house having been crushed by a bomb. Usually they are sad, but on this occasion they both seemed so happy and cheerful that I felt something extraordinary had happened. What was it? By the intercession of a friend, who had a brother in Ohio, they received a substantial parcel from America a few hours before. They could hardly master their

feelings while showing me the "wonderful American gift" from people that "never saw us."

"We don't know how to thank them. We shall pray for them every day. To think that they are thousands of miles off, never saw us, and send us such a parcel. They must be really good people. Look here what was in the parcel: Is it not like a fairy tale? Next Tuesday we will celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary. Won't you come? You see, we are able to regale you. You shall have tea or coffee. Whichever you like best, added the woman with shamefaced pride.

On my way home I thought it over. A stream of parcels is constantly flowing from U.S.A. to Germany. They find their way into the poorest lodgings, between ruins and holes, to families which have lost all hope and are longing for death, and they carry with them joy and hope and new energy. Then the emaciated faces begin to brighten again, the embitterment of the wounded hearts starts melting and it is as if the sacred fire has been kindled again. These parcels work miracles. Each parcel is to a certain degree an ambassador, more eloquent and convincing than any politician. We know very well that these parcels are not always signs of felicity and abundance, but that many a family sacrifices to send them. So much greater is the value, the mental value. The American benefactors may be sure that their brotherly assistance, felt not only by the lower classes, but most of all by the so-called "shamefaced poor," formerly well-to-do people, will help the German nation to find the right way out of her misery and her mental confusion. It is a great lesson to us: love is a better leader than law and force, even in politics. And this love comes from overseas.

BAVARIAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

INDIA IN TRANSITION

AN unpretentious little book entitled *Home to India* (Harpers, 1944), may in 1948 be considered as having doubled its educational value for American readers. The author, Santha Rama Rau, records for Western readers her 1939-40 impressions of the land of her birth after a prolonged stay in England. Santha Rau was born of the Brahmin class and, not inconsistently, to wealth. Her entire family received a cosmopolitan education from world travel as well as through schooling abroad. Yet the most important task of "learning" undertaken by this Hindu girl was that of understanding her own country. She was one of many native Indians who, straying far from home, returned somewhat casually to regard all Asia as a kind of curiosity through Western eyes—only to discover that in the meantime the consciousness of Indian destiny had arisen, and that the cultural and political leaders of India were welded together by the feeling of a great work to be undertaken.

Santha Rau's family existed, in 1940, in a curious in-between world. Her grandmother lived entirely according to the caste customs of her girlhood; Santha's mother was burdened with the necessity of reconciling an India anxious to be rid of traditions with her mother's India. The elder lady was concerned only with the correct management of an extensive household, Santha's mother, with Gandhi's cause of Indian independence, and the problem of educating and humanizing the life of the illiterate and impoverished.

Santha, herself, on returning home, first viewed India in terms of its social customs, yet gradually uncovered for herself layer upon layer of complexity in Indian national life. Her observations are for the most part familiar to those who have read Edmond Taylor's *Richer by Asia.* Both Taylor, an American, and this young Hindu writer are critical of the artificial and impossible attempt at mating West and East in a social setting. Santha Rau found that socially prominent Brahmins were engaged in ceaseless entertainment of British officers, affecting many of the latter's mannerisms—and serving cocktails and small-talk in the Western manner. Such Indians, like Taylor's Ram Lal, were cynical about anything indigenous to the Orient. For this reason, perhaps, nothing constructive seemed to come from the mingling of wealthy Englishmen and wealthy Hindus, Both parties were vaguely uncomfortable. Santha discovered that happiness in modern India was reserved for those who found that full freedom of thought and action comes only with the assumption of responsibility for the destiny of the less fortunately endowed classes. Santha was both surprised and enlightened by the activities of many young members of her own caste who had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into Gandhi's movement for national unity, and who were daily risking arrest for their efforts in writing and speaking on behalf of Indian liberation:

> "Often friends whom we had invited to dinner or to a party would call up to change the date to one in the more immediate future because 'I expect to be arrested on the date we had arranged before. I have notified the police that I will be making an anti-war—or rather an anti-imperialistic speech—that evening, so I had better be packed and ready'."

It is time we explained our reason for suggesting that *Home to India* is considerably more important to the Western world today than in 1944. First, we may borrow a thesis of Edmond Taylor's. He holds that India has suddenly become a potential mediator between the "power-giants" of the West. Four hundred million people, now possessed of astute political leadership, are no longer forced to adjust to British-American customs and demands. The gradually intensified struggle between Russia and the Western democracies leaves India free to choose between the two. Nor would the situation have been in any way different if India's freedom had been formally withheld by the British

government for a longer period. The chief advantage of the English-speaking nations in winning the friendship of India is at present only potential; it could become actual through a persistent and consistent implementation of the "One World concept," in non-totalitarian terms. (One worldism has been passed off for several years as America's political doctrine.) The Indians *could understand* the concept of One World, if it were truly held and presented to them, for their pantheistic view of man and nature has allowed them a profound tolerance regarding cultural and national divisions. Of course, if we really wish One World, it will have to be a world which includes Asia—and ultimately Russia as well. Edmond Taylor wrote:

> The ethical values of the East, perhaps the most important in any culture, are generally closer to ours than the Russian ones. Despite the evil political karma generated by European imperialism and Asiatic reactions to it, I think that the political approach to Asia is probably easier than the approach to Russia, that is, it should be easier to win Asiatic support for the One World than Soviet adherence. Once Asia is won, it will be very hard for Russia to hold out. I suspect that we shall hear some startling things from the great new power of southern Asia—India. India will not be a great military power, any more than China is, but the balance of power in the world is so close that India and China, standing together, could probably swing the decisive weight to one side or the other, and it is possible that India alone could come very near to doing so. Poor, unarmed, threatened with grave internal dissensions herself, India is still a vital element of power in a world where she has free choice to give her support to one camp or the other. Unless the diplomatic tensions of the world at large tear open her own precariously healed fissures, India in certain circumstances can play an independent mediating role between the western democracies and Russia, and I think is very likely to follow such a policy in her foreign affairs. *(Richer by Asia,* Houghton, Mifflin.)

A second reason for emphasizing the importance of India today is suggested by the successful joining, in that land, of politics and religious philosophy. Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, is a man whose breadth of mind has perhaps dwarfed that of any other national leader during the past decade. He is a philosopher as well as a social actionist, and, most important of all, he conceives the necessity for his being both. Similarly India's foremost scholar, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, has absented himself from the halls of Oxford and from speaking tours in America to devote himself to the sociopolitical regeneration of India. Perhaps these men understand an obligation to political problems because they have learned to separate the wheat from the chaff, the deep from the superficial, in the philosophical heritage of the East. Incidentally, Nehru and Radhakrishnan have always been temperamentally quite different from India's greatest leader, Gandhi. Their sense of political and intellectual integrity frequently led them to oppose Gandhi's specific policies, yet never did they lose sight of the possibility that they, and not Gandhi, might be wrong, nor did their devotion to Gandhi for arousing and utilizing the "soul force" of India ever falter. If Edmond Taylor's prophecies are correct, the time will come when every statesman of the Western world, in order to escape "political backwardness," can benefit by viewing each step taken by the new India in a manner similar to Nehru's attitude, for instance, toward Gandhi.

Santha Rau's book will probably remain of unique value for years to come—largely because of the rare opportunities she enjoyed as an observer of the Indian scene. Her family was intimate with Nehru and Radhakrishnan, who often visited as dinner guests; at the same time, that peculiar British society which flourished as the retinue of the Viceroy was also available. A final quotation from Santha Rau's book may intimate the observation-post value which her family life provided:

> After the British reply to the July proposals, the Congress appealed to Gandhi to return to leadership of the Party. Now it was rumored that he had accepted. Today we were to find out. We were to know too what conditions he had made for his return.

Above all, we hoped he would reveal the Congress policy for the near future.

The crowd outside quieted suddenly. Watching from the window, I saw Gandhi climb carefully out of the car. Nehru offered to help him, but he waved assistance away. Together, he and Nehru began to walk towards the building. I was astonished, almost shocked, to see that they were laughing—the tiny, dark man, as ugly as a monkey, and his taller handsome companion, the two men who were so largely responsible for India's future. I don't know why their laughter should have surprised me so greatly. I suppose I had always imagined politicians to be tired, solemn men wearing their cares visibly on their shoulders. Gandhi spoke slowly in Hindustani. He agreed to take over the leadership of the Congress Party again, provided the Congress accepted his condition of non-violence. It was not, he added, a passive nonviolence, but an active one. He paused, and after a moment went on to announce *satyagraha*—civil disobedience—for certain selected members of the Congress Party, possibly hundreds, probably thousands. If we did not believe in war, he said, we must spread our belief in peace We knew that under the Defense of India Rules, speeches against imperialist war would mean imprisonment. "But," he smiled his amused toothless grin, "we have all been in prison before."

COMMENTARY

APOLOGY FOR THE BOMB

LATEST excuse for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is that offered by *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, an English annual called "an authoritative publication, which carries weight with the clergy." According to an editorial note in the *New Statesman and Nation* (Aug. 28), the anonymous preface of *Crockford's* for 1948, said to be written by a high church dignitary, asserts that the bombs were dropped because the Japanese had threatened to slaughter their Allied prisoners of war. "The dilemma," the preface declares with extreme unction, "was perhaps the most awful which Christian men have ever had to face." However, "the outcome proved successful."

Impressed by this curious idea of "success," *NS & N* recites a few facts, the first being that both the British Minister of War and the U.S. State Department have denied that any such threat was made by the Japanese. The second fact is that what the Japanese did do was bid for peace—a move which "was rejected at Potsdam by Truman and Churchill, and is interesting to the Christian conscience as showing that, two months before the atom bombs dropped, the Japanese were acknowledging defeat and contemplating surrender."

One wonders if *Crockford's* for 1949 will take notice of its "mistake" in this year's edition, and make appropriate amends.

While on this subject, it might be added that, according to the Chicago *Tribune* for Aug. 18, 1945, President Roosevelt had in his hands two days before he departed for Yalta a peace proposal made by the Japanese, in which all the requirements later exacted by the Potsdam ultimatum were freely offered as the conditions of Japanese surrender. It included the submission of "war criminals to trial" and, as the *Tribune* account phrased it, "abject surrender of everything but the person of the Emperor." The proposal was transmitted to the President by General MacArthur in a 40-page memorandum. Apparently, it got as far as a convenient file.

Another item of "now-it-can-be-told" material is a seldom quoted passage in *Bombing Vindicated*, a book by J. M. Spaight, formerly Principal Assistant Secretary of the British Air Ministry. Mr. Spaight relates that the first instance of strategic bombing in the recent war was accomplished by a British flight of eighteen bombers which attacked railway installations in western Germany on May 11, 1940. Spaight, whose book was published in 1944, explained:

> Because we were doubtful about the psychological effect of propagandistic distortion of the truth that it was we who started the strategic bombing offensive, we have shrunk from giving our great decision of May, 1940, the publicity which it. That, surely, was a mistake. It was a splendid decision. It was as heroic, as self-sacrificing, as Russia's decision to adopt her policy of "scorched earth." It gave Coventry and Birmingham, Sheffield and Southampton, the right to look Kiev and Kharkov, Stalingrad and Sebastopol, in the face. Our Soviet Allies would have been less critical of our inactivity in 1942 if they had understood what we had done.

These "awful dilemmas" of the Christian conscience, the "splendid decisions," and the "heroic self-sacrifice" of "our Soviet Allies" have a crazy ring in 1948. We have no Dante on our staff, but we cannot think of a better purgatorial ordeal for these various Christian gentlemen and their friends and sympathizers than to have to read through their own rhetoric day and night—again and again," one might say—until they promise never to write any more about war: not a mumbling word.

CHILDREN
. . . AND OURSELVES

"ON that island we were talking about—I think the people should put everything together, even the land and all the plants, so that everyone would be equal."

"That sounds fine to me, son, but supposing a few people *wanted* to own things privately; would you give them a right to own some things privately, even if none else would?"

"They would just have to agree with the others or else."

"Or else what?"

"We wouldn't let them eat."

"That's punishing the minority for not agreeing with the majority. Do you believe in that? Maybe there are some advantages in owning things all by yourself. Shouldn't you give such people a chance to prove the value in their idea? Of course, you would have to give people like that more instead of less land, because when you do not cooperate with your neighbors, you have to raise more different kinds of food and do more different types of things to stay independent."

"But it wouldn't be right to give them *more* land!"

"They might think it was right, son, and maybe the rest of the community could learn something from watching them try the idea of private ownership. By the way, son, do you see what has happened in our talk? We started out with having everything exactly the opposite of the way in which things are done in the world today. Only the very few in our society believe in cooperative or socialistic living. They are the 'minority,' and the majority is always telling them that they do not have 'a right' to spread such opinions. . . . Do you think we would need a police force on our island?"

"Sure. Somebody's going to steal something sometime and he ought to be punished."

"Well, maybe people wouldn't steal on our island. The people who hold property in common wouldn't find much point in stealing, because after they had taken whatever was stolen it would be regarded as still belonging to the community. If one of the few who had private property was a thief, he would be stealing from the whole community and not just from one person. Perhaps he would go slow before he made everyone disgusted with him by stealing what everybody had a part in."

"But you'd need somebody *like* a policeman. Some big guy might go around beating everybody else up and you'd have to put him in jail."

"Think what a waste of material a jail is, and how much effort it takes to build and keep it going. What would you make it out of—palm leaves? And if someone does something you think is bad, why do you have to bring in an extra man to help straighten it out? The more people you get mixed up in an argument, the harder it is, finally, to solve the problem."

"But how can I settle anything with anyone who's so big he can beat me up?"

"You can't, son, as long as you are afraid of him or afraid of being beaten up, but if you have enough courage always to say what you really think, and act in the way that you feel inside you should act, you can usually get along even with the biggest ones—even though your nose might possibly get broken a few times before they get the idea that you're not afraid. Stubbornness is a great thing, especially if it happens to be on the side of truth, and it usually wins out if given half a chance."

"Well, do you mean that the only person who should do anything about a bad man is the one that the bad man hurts?"

"Not at all, son. Anyone who feels that a wrong is being done may have the courage to try

to do something about it, whether or not it is being done to him. Perhaps only one person would see the 'wrong,' or perhaps ten, or perhaps the whole community. If men had courage they wouldn't have to have policemen or laws. You see, son, the main thing that keeps people from having a good community is that most of us are afraid of what someone else will do. Today, many people in this country are afraid of the Russians, and many of the Russians fear the people in the United States."

"But, father, if someone acts as if he might drop an atom bomb on you, you're naturally going to be afraid."

"Well, yes, son, it is natural enough to be afraid, but it is also natural to want to live above fear."

"Nobody wants to die."

"Perhaps it depends on what you think life is for. If the main purpose is just to keep someone else from injuring you, so that you will live a longer time, you certainly do have to be afraid. But there are men who believe that the purpose of life is to develop the courage to do what they think is the right thing, whether or not it leads to their being killed. The other night we were talking about how people had to be in agreement if they were ever going to try to have the right kind of socialism. And the first kind of agreement they must have is upon what 'life' is for. There's an old book lying around the house, called *Quo Vadis*, which I think maybe you would like to read. It tells about how they were torturing the early Christians in Rome at the time of Nero and about how the Christians who were dying in a public arena were happier than the rich Romans who were watching from the grandstands. The Christians believed that there would be another life, and that it would be a better life if they continued to have the courage to act on what they believed."

"Are Christians less afraid than other people?"

"No, son, I'm afraid not. The early Christians had a pretty simple idea. Love, they said, was stronger than hate, and they thought there was a possibility of a happier after-life for everyone who deserved it. But then someone added to these beliefs the idea of everyone being sinful and bad in the first place, and invented the idea of a terrible hell for people who wouldn't get over being sinful. So, in time, many Christians seemed to do more fearing than anyone else in the world. They were told, first, to fear themselves as 'sinners,' and then to fear Hell. These two fears kept them very busy."

"You mean people who believe like Christians once had a good idea and now they don't?"

"That's my opinion. But it's not only the Christians. All the big religions started out pretty well, until people finally were led to feel differently by priests and theologians. But all of these religions taught that there would be another life for every man who died—and a good life for the men who were good while they were here. Perhaps, on the island, if people were not so afraid of other things, it would be easier for them to believe this, all together. In any case, it is necessary for us to conquer the fear of death before we can live the way we should like to live, here and now."

FRONTIERS

GUIDES FOR THE HEAVEN-BOUND

BOOKS and similar printed counsels on "spiritual techniques" are becoming increasingly popular these days, so that there may be a value in inquiring into why this sort of religious literature seems to have, for us, at any rate, an unbounded presumptuousness. It is worth wandering through a religious book shoppe some time to see the variety and volume of reading matter devoted to "Prayer"—literature which often explores this subject with as much attention to particular detail as a work on the refinements of golf or bridge-playing. Apparently, matters such as posture, approach and mood in prayer are deemed of some importance—and no doubt they are in some way or other—yet the idea of reading up on what "the experts" have had to say on such matters is like parsing the sentences in one of Shelley's poems or counting the adverbs in a Shakespearean drama.

It seems reasonable to believe that behind all the attitudinizing and ostentatious piety that characterize most discussions of prayer, there is a core of something real—but something, surely, not at all like what these people talk about. We doubt very much that anyone who tries to write or compile a Kinsey Report on the spiritual life has competence to utter even the first few stumbling words on the subject. We think that what they are really trying to do is to by-pass the actual challenge of human existence and to gain the promised land by learning the trick of some theological short-circuit which they imagine was the secret of the "saints" of Christian history.

A generation or two ago, prayer was a relatively simple affair. You wanted something and you asked God for it. If you didn't get what you wanted, then God, in his infinite wisdom, knew better than to give it to you. The old-fashioned, conventional prayer had three parts: Praise, Gratitude, and Petition. The psychology was essentially childish-paternalist. The children had Santa Claus, the grown-ups had God. There was no pretense at "mysticism" or religious philosophy—just a candid, anthropomorphic relationship between man and his Maker.

Today, prayer is more sophisticated. It is getting monkish again, and self-conscious. A slow infiltration of the influence of Eastern "spiritual exercises" has combined with an antiquarian interest in the forms of medieval religious devotion to produce the cult of modern mysticism—a curious blend of metaphysical vagary and studied preoccupation with one's own "spiritual advancement." Of all forms of egotism, there is probably none so unpleasant to contemplate as this glib presumption concerning the spiritual life, involving, as it does, a debasement of both the vocabulary and the psychology of human aspiration. One understands why, today, serious and thoughtful people will go no further in the direction of religion than a wary humanism, and why so many radicals who, weaned of Marxian materialism by contemporary evidences of its brutalizing effects, will nevertheless have nothing to do with the churches or any of the newer versions of the religious approach to life. They sense the escapism in these movements—the social irresponsibility in all private compacts with "God."

The worst of modern mysticism is its tendency to make the average, normal man regard as effeminate or pretentious any recognition at all of the springs of inner inspiration. Emerson, perhaps, gave voice to the kind of mysticism that might become authentic for the Western world; and Whitman, in some of his rambling expressions, touched keys of universal harmony. But we suspect that even these modes are far too literary to represent the flowering of genuine religious perception. In so far as such things can be written about at all, we should rather expect to find clues in some strong, horizon-reaching passage of Thomas Paine, in Edward Bellamy's essay on the Religion of Solidarity, or in the applied compassion of Henry George. If there is a meaning behind the idea of prayer, it will certainly

never be found by giving attention to decadent babble about spiritual techniques, but in addressing one's life to the entire human problem, with whatever light one possesses in the present hour. We felt a greater sense of spiritual validity in the reveries of Admiral Byrd, set down in a lonely outpost at the South Pole, than in any manual of devotion which attempts to chart the progressions of the religious life as though they were something that could be undertaken by pale-handed young gentlemen hiding away from the world in quiet "retreats."

The point of this discussion seems to be that anyone who sets his sights on the goal of personal "spiritual progression" has made the terrible mistake of reducing all the finer human qualities to a calculus of private moral gain. Despite their fine language, their advocacy of gentle kindness for others, of voluntary poverty and other marks of saintliness, we are unable to overcome a strenuous distaste for the books which attempt this sort of instruction in "spirituality." A recent illustration is *The Choice Is Always Ours,* an anthology of extracts synthesizing "psychological and religious insight," published this year by Richard R. Smith. There are, no doubt, jewels of understanding in this book, but their setting, we think, is much as we have tried to suggest, and so the judgment stands.