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A QUESTION OF MANNERS

A CURIOUS after-effect of the war was the apparent "good manners," lasting a year or two, in some of the young men who had been in the Army. It is somewhat surprising to be addressed repeatedly with the honorific, "sir," and to observe a characteristic personal restraint in someone met in chance encounter on the street or the highway. One realized, after a few moments, that the "manners" resulted from military training, which is too high a price to pay for them, even if they are the genuine article. But there was something about these incidents which gave cause for reflection.

What are manners good for, anyway? Army manners, of course, are taught (required) with the ulterior motive of adding morale to military discipline. The ritual of a private's formal respect for his officers is intended to support the rule of unquestioning obedience to an order—any order. Military courtesy relates the human side of the soldier to his function in the army, which is to be a frictionless moving part in a fighting machine.

We know what the purpose of an army is and can see how military manners serve that purpose, but the part "ordinary" manners are supposed to play is not so clear. Why, for example, is it pleasant to be treated courteously by someone else? The cynical explanation is that courtesy gives recognition of status, and when a man is accorded deferent behavior by another, it is evidence of his personal importance. But there is more to courtesy than this.

Genuine courtesy, we think, is not a matter of forms of behavior but of human attitudes. When a man speaks to you, if you listen with attention, you are showing him that you respect the ideas of another human being. If your attention is only casual, you give evidence of thinking him not worth listening to—which is a form of contempt. But you may not *mean* to be contemptuous toward anybody; you may simply have been preoccupied—filled with your own ideas or thinking about something else. Manners, then, may be defined as a habit, deliberately acquired, for conforming one's personal behavior to some standard of human relationships. In the best sense, that standard is the recognition of the essential worth of human individuality. The fact that manners may also be used to deny or deprecate the worth of others shows simply that they are a *form* of behavior, once removed from primary motive—which helps to clarify our definition.

Manners sometimes involve control of impulsive egotism. Ordinarily, a well-mannered individual will not suddenly interrupt another person who is speaking. In this case manners represent self-consciousness in human relations, exercising a formal limitation on egocentricity. One who respects impersonality as a virtue of principle will enjoy genuine courtesy in another, not because it seems flattering, but with a feeling of appreciation for efficiency in intelligent human intercourse. Courtesy reduces irrational intrusions to a minimum.

There are, then, two sorts of "manners." There are the manners which develop from respect for human dignity and the desire to practice that respect in all situations, and there are the manners which indicate respect for external status. In present-day society, these two sorts of manners are seriously confused.

Many of the customs of Europe and America could be dropped without the slightest loss to manners. Shaking hands, for example, is supposed to be a symbol of friendship and trust. Yet the origin of this custom has been traced to the age of swashbuckling swordsmanship and

treachery. You gave your right hand to a man, and he gave you his, both being thereby unable to draw and stab the other when he came within range. To be familiar with such barbarous beginnings might make us less tenacious of our ideas of what "good manners" really are. These things are worth considering for the reason that we are living in a period when conventional “manners" are rapidly dying out. We may decide that we are well rid of some of them.

Manners are often a mask and protection for timidity. They will also serve as a technique for evading direct communication and simple honesty. They are standard equipment of the social parasite. These are probably the reasons why, in some circles, any display of formal manners may evoke a deliberate manifestation of crudity as a violent antidote to what is judged to be hypocritical pretense.

One region where manners show a noticeable decline is in the family life. The formal side of family relationships derives from a somewhat medieval conception of the family. The father is never to be contradicted, not because he is wise, but because he is the Father, the head of the family. By custom and tradition, the position of father is accorded a legitimate egotism: the Father is right; he has the Last Word.

The child who grew up under the influence of nineteenth and early twentieth-century standards of manners was subjected to several more or less independent codes of courtesy. There was the courtesy to his parents because of their status; another kind of courtesy was owing to the status of his schoolteachers; then, out in the world, still another respect was due the "boss." In all these cases, the courtesy applied to the "position," without much thought about why the position merited respect. Manners, so far as the cultural tradition was concerned, amounted to an irrational patronage system, uncritically transmitted from one generation to the next.

All this, of course, is a severely one-sided analysis; the other side will presently receive some attention, but the test of the truth in the foregoing is in the number of apple-polishers who have reached a high place in our society. While respect for the conventional in human .relations, like adoration of the status quo in social relations may not of itself bring a man wealth and prosperity, it certainly helps. And when learned treatises are written on the use of good manners for practical business success *(How to Win Friends and Influence People),* the case for the iconoclast seems to have drawn itself up without any effort on our part. It is clear, at any rate, that no effective challenge to the conventions, in manners or anything else, will appear in any of the big-circulation newspapers or magazines which operate on the principle of not troubling the minds of their leaders with a serious idea or criticism. Even a story must reflect conventional attitudes. The psychological reasons for this will become clear by reading a book like Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik* (Penguin), and then deciding why it or some similar story will never be serialized by the *Saturday Evening Post.* Underneath Schweik's sloppy and ludicrous revolt against Austrian militarism was a core of ironic commentary—a devastating attack on the "respectability" of the people who thought the Austrian army tradition was a fine thing. A criticism of convention and manners can never get a mass audience unless it is either obviously eccentric or zany and self-defeating. A man who intelligently challenges the conventional way of doing things is always put in the position of the English conscientious objector who, at the hearing before a Tribunal charged to determine his "sincerity" as a religious objector to war, was asked by one of the judges, "Are you sure you haven't *reasoned* about your position?"

Manners, morals, status, special privilege, money values, military authoritarianism, religious authoritarianism, timidity, personal and social—these things are all closely related and interdependent in our society. They form the psychological web of reaction, the smug mood and the dislike of questioning which stifles honest

thinking—which helps to prevent revolt against tradition from being anything but angry, personal and merely rebellious. This web of reaction, which infects all but the extraordinary individual, turned the idealistic Bolshevist into the cruel brute of institutionalized communism. It made Eugene O'Neill write a play about the Hairy Ape, suggesting that an honest revolution is possible only at the level of biological instincts. It produced the wave of deliberate vulgarity which condemns any delicacy as a symbol of pretense and personal weakness.

Manners, then, at root, are a result of basic philosophy, and the corruption of manners is indicative of another corruption far more fundamental. The tirades of oldsters against the decline of manners miss the point entirely. The failure of people to observe accustomed forms represents a rejection of the status quo at a level which is merely symptomatic of other, deeper revolts in the making. It represents an instinctive denial of the element of status in our society, and because it is instinctive, and not rational, it lacks a compensating return to a more genuine foundation for interpersonal behavior.

In view of the subtleties connected with all questions of manners, there would be particular advantage in an effort, on any occasion when "bad manners" seem objectionable, to give deliberate attention to the reason why a particular act or form of behavior gives offense. Is the "offense" to a personal sense of status, or does it reflect actual disregard of the feelings of others? In what moral attitude, or lack of moral attitude, is it rooted? In an epoch when all cultural forms are either dying out or undergoing radical transformations, a consideration of this sort is of more than ordinary importance.

Of course, through all such changes and transitions in human relations, an elemental quality of consideration for others remains as the basis for a natural courtesy. This quality runs through and informs all the habits of custom, giving them the moral vitality which sometimes makes us suppose that it is the customs themselves which are of value. And it is this quality, also, which suffers misdirection when artificial and external standards of human value arise, leading, finally, to all the major and minor hypocrisies of a decadent civilization. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether the hypocrisy in a custom overbalances its usefulness, or whether the question is of any real importance. For example, take a business letter in which one man announces to another man that he is going to begin a suit that will drive that other into bankruptcy and ruin. He starts the letter. *"Dear* Mr.---," which is a completely false sentiment, under the circumstances. It is like saying, "Honorable sir, you are a liar."

How far should such conventions be carried? Do they make for "gracious living"? It seems to us that when these questions can be asked—and we note, today, a tendency to drop the "Dear" in ordinary correspondence—the time has come to make manners more consistent with actual states of mind. Conceivably, this is a part of human evolution, psychologically speaking: to rely less and less on traditionally approved forms in human relations, and to render the contacts between people a more direct and genuine meeting of minds.

If this be the case, then manners, as such, are doomed to a dwindling importance. Their place should be taken, naturally, by an unmediated recognition of human dignity; what was once the form—the *manner*—of that recognition changing into its substance, which would finally make the conscious acquirement of "manners" an unnecessary thing. But haste in the discharge of manners could easily become mere vulgarity in action, if not in intent. One aspect of manners is their contribution to impersonality. Manners are a two-way process; they give expression and disciplined form to the natural sympathy of human beings for one another, and they also provide at least an initial restraint to spontaneous and intruding egotism. They shape enthusiasm into an attractive and communicable form and tend to

push to the background the merely physical elements of human relations. The ideal of manners in eating, for example, is not daintiness, but accomplishing the business of consuming food with the least possible messiness and distraction. Different cultures get this result by different means. A strong case is made by the Chinese for chopsticks, while the Indians offer a persuasive argument on behalf of the palm leaf versus the china plate. Ideally, manners should naturally serve the purpose of the occasion, whatever it is, so that the standard for manners will be a constantly shifting one, while the basic reason for practicing them will be forever the same—to effect the best possible adjustment of human personality to the given situation.

A man can get along without manners, but he has to be a remarkable man to do it successfully. He has to have perfect control of himself in all situations, and the kind of self-consciousness which no longer needs the discipline of good habits to remind him of his personal responsibilities. No "code" will fit such a man, because he finds new elements in each situation and acts accordingly. He has outgrown "manners" entirely. But he has something which takes their place.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

[The editors have the good fortune to be acquainted with a couple who, two or three years ago, decided to leave Calif6rnia for a life in a rural farming community in another state. A recent letter (not written for publication) from the woman partner in this enterprise is suggestive of the attitudes that are possible to people who venture in this direction, and contains, also, comment related to some of the themes MANAS has been pursuing—ideas such as those of which Mr. Borsodi is the principal exponent, and the place of artistic expression in American life. It seems appropriate to call this informal communication "Letter from America"—the America of the future, perhaps, in terms of concrete realization, but also the America of today, in terms of the hopes of an increasing number of individuals and families. Other "Letters from America" will be welcomed by the editors.]

NEBRASKA. —We do have a good set-up here—a cooperative up to a point. We also have friends experimenting along those lines, too. It seems to a few of us that to escape the drudgery which seems to go along with farming, here, there must be development along lines of cooperative living. We feel that the fellowship, the "good life," is more important than the purely economic co-ops.

To give a few general observations:

1. A man is "accepted" by the community if he's a good worker.

2. This emphasis on work leads many farmers to take on all they can possibly handle, buying up farm after farm (their homes seldom show evidence of better living).

3. There is no particular aid given to young folks who would like to own their places; they must *work* as the old folks did. And when the "old folks" and the "town folks" won't let go of any farms, it's just too bad. (We are lucky in that respect to be able to farm the home place.)

4. Rural people must feel inferior; they are certainly more city-minded than many city people I know. I really think many people here may consider me unfortunate to have given up the city (and California) in exchange for a place where the sky is so beautiful, the seasons as I've never known them—so wonderful—the cream, the eggs, the butter, and the vegetable garden simply "out-of-this-world" to an ex-city dweller.

5. The garden is an advantage the "natives" seem not to appreciate. Being a Californian and having an eating acquaintance with so many vegetables, I find that very few have ever heard of broccoli, zucchini, Chinese cabbage, green peppers, edible pod peas, etc., etc. Green beans and tomatoes are about the most imaginative plants in any garden in the region. Our garden is a great source of pleasure. We buy scarcely any vegetables from May to October, and not many during the winter' months. We like to think that we could raise all our food except for luxury items. We have ground our own flour for whole wheat bread, and meal for corn bread.

I'm still searching for any spiritual values which may be found in the dishpan. The best conclusion I have come to so far is to try not to give it the importance of being hated. Then there is the debate on whether it is really worth-while to pursue the task of housekeeping to the utmost (hoping I'll learn to find joy in it) or to let the dust settle and follow other things. I find gardening gives me a sense of accomplishment that is rarely found indoors (in the house anything accomplished is a always, much too soon, to do over again). Reading is a necessity, although I don't do a great deal of it. Creative work comes in cooking or sewing, the latter including some designing and textile decoration.

A feeling is developing that I would like to teach some form of applied art or design. Something happens to the average person with the average education to convince him or her that anything like art either isn't worth fooling with or that he or she absolutely cannot do any creative work. In other cultures art is a daily expression through weaving, embroidery, ceramics, metal work, woodwork—the daily tasks. I am

beginning to think that art could well be defined as the visible expression of the love of one's work. But in our mechanized society, such expression is denied us.

Should one emphasize the need of more work with the hands and with natural materials, or will it be enough to study design as related to function, etc.? Perhaps it isn't important, but I feel that it is. The ability to express ourselves in design, form and color is surely part of our heritage as humans and worth developing. And I feel, also, that it should be worth developing for the average person in his or her adventure in living.

Two of the obvious things that are often overlooked are the relativity of designs and the endless sources for design and decoration to be found everywhere in nature. Extremely few designs stand apart from their surroundings—greeting cards do—but almost every design is part of another greater pattern—to infinity. Everyone knows, of course, that artists take designs from flowers, leaves, etc. But the fresh designs are there for everyone, and not only from the accepted beautiful flowers, but in the vegetable garden and roadside weeds—the list would be endless. The average person simply doesn't see them at all . . . .

REVIEW

PERIODICAL REVIEW

THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY for Oct. 6, reporting the Amsterdam World Assembly of Churches, contains two items worth noting. The first deals with the rebuke administered by Miss Saroe Chakko, a Christian from India, to Dr. Karl Barth, the famous Swiss theologian. Dr. Barth delivered the first address to the Assembly and later visited some of the special groups, among them the section concerned with the "life and work of women in the churches." It seems that here he got himself into some trouble with the feminists for supporting Saint Paul on this subject. While he admitted that women might be ordained as ministers, Barth thought they should be restricted to "suitable" duties. They should not, he felt, be permitted to administer the Lord's Supper, arguing that serving bread and wine is the customary duty of the head of the family who is, of course, a man. Miss Chakko thereupon replied—with some spirit, we trust—that if that were the case, women should always serve the Lord's Supper in India, since they not only prepare but also serve whatever is eaten. It is not known what Dr. Barth said in return.

The Section devoted to "The Church and the International Disorder" had the difficult task of formulating a statement on war. The Report of this section affirms that "War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ," and suggests that the idea of a "just war" must now be questioned, since modern war means indiscriminate destruction. There is this excellent sentence: "Law may require the sanction of force, but when war breaks out, force is used on a scale which tends to destroy the basis on which law exists."

No general agreement, however, was obtained on the question of what individual Christians ought to do about the problem. The Report gives "three broad positions" reflecting the differing views of the conferees. The first view holds that "even though entering a war may be a Christian's duty in particular circumstances, modern warfare, with its mass destruction, can never be an act of justice." The second maintains that so long as world government is lacking, "military action is the ultimate sanction of the rule of law, and that citizens must be distinctly taught that it is their duty to defend the law by force if necessary." Those taking the third position advocate refusing military service of all kinds, “convinced that an absolute witness against war and for peace is for them the will of God, and they desire that the church should speak to the same effect." Unfortunately, an effort to determine the final vote on these three positions was unsuccessful.

Harold Fey's account in the *Christian Century* of this first meeting of a world council of Protestant Churches (151 denominations sent delegates with only the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, and the Southern Baptist Churches not officially represented) is moderately interesting reading, but Milton Mayer's remarks on the religious conclave should not be missed. We have failed to enjoy a good part of Mr. Mayer's recent writings, but in the *Progressive* for October he considers the World Council and other official Christian doings in a way that reminds the reader of the Mayer of four or five years ago. After naming two of the Big Wheels among Christian laymen, John Foster Dulles and Charles P. Taft, both present at Amsterdam, he says:

> The point here is that neither of them, nice fellows as they are, is a Christian, for Christianity involves the renunciation of capitalism and war and segregation and slums, and these two distinguished Christians have made no sign, by way of sacrifice or suffering, that they intend to turn Christian before the thief cometh. Like Roosevelt and Willkie, they hate woah, but, as Dulles put it at Amsterdam, "the free societies should be resolute and strong." In case you don't know who the free societies are, you will find, upon close inspection, that the United States apotheosizes them *provided* Dewey is elected.

We freely forgive Mr. Mayer his usual breast-beating at the end, and even quote it with admiration:

> And I, as I sneer in my blue serge suit, unwilling to make the Jewish commitment, or the Christian commitment—I am not entirely unaware that in judging I shall be judged. But I get so doggone mad.

Other articles in the October *Progressive* call for special mention; in fact, the *Progressive* itself calls for special mention as a paper of social and political commentary which has no equal in the monthly field. Besides Milton Mayer on the Churches, three articles in this issue make the paper unique for editorial coverage in diverse directions. It is easy to be courageous in one or two directions—all you need is an ideology and some money. But the *Progressive* seems to look in a number of important directions, which means that it has honesty and vision besides courage—and, of course, little money.

In the October issue you can read an excellent discussion of the Federal Government's loyalty program by a man who defended many of the accused persons in court. It seems that, according to the loyalty board's procedure, if you once knew somebody who once knew somebody who once knew a communist, you can be asked such questions as the following:

> *How many copies of Howard Fast's novels have you read?*
>
> *Did you see X soliciting funds for strikers?*
>
> *Are you in favor of the Marshall Plan?*
>
> *Have you a book by John Reed?*
>
> *Did the books in X's house appear to have been purchased from book clubs or individually from bookstores?* [Apparently, a person who picks his own books may be a dangerous character who Thinks.]
>
> *There is a suspicion in the record that you are in sympathy with the underprivileged. Is this true?*

Lewis Coser's analysis of the after-effects of the Morgenthau Plan in Germany, another *Progressive* article, is a nightmare of ghastly facts. Finally, there is Oswald Garrison Villard's tribute to the great American historian, the late Charles A. Beard. It was Beard's habit to exclaim against actions, personal or political, which he deeply disapproved, and among the last of the scholar's blows for justice and truth was—in Mr. Villard's words—

> his ringing protest against the ventures now underway to write the recent history of the United States in accordance with purely official views. Especially was he rightly stirred by the voting of $139,000 by the Rockefeller Foundation to enable Prof. William L. Langer of Harvard to write an officially favored history of World War II in order to head off another "debunking journalistic campaign" such as "followed World War I." Dr. Beard pointed out that Prof. Langer had been given "exceptional access to materials bearing on foreign relations" as the Carnegie Foundation boasted, "access," Dr. Beard stressed, "to secret records withheld from other scholars and inquirers."

Throughout his life, Beard gave more than verbal support to the principle of free expression. In 1917, he resigned his professorship at Columbia University when "an insincere president and a war-mad board dismissed from the faculty two men whose sole offense was the exercise of the free-born American's right to oppose our entry into World War I." Beard had himself supported entry into that war, but he could not tolerate this attack against academic freedom. Later, when he learned how we had been led into that war, "his honest and critical mind revolted."

This article alone would make the *Progressive* worthwhile reading, for there is hardly another journal in the country, today, in which the viewpoints of men like Beard and Villard are presented with impartiality. Editorial notes in the October number give the impression that the paper is having difficulty making ends meet, which is one reason why we take this occasion to suggest its support as a vital organ of public opinion in the United States.

COMMENTARY

THAT YUGOSLAVIAN RAILROAD

THE lead article in MANAS for May 19, "They Built a Railroad," dealt with the enthusiasm of Yugoslavian youth for their new social reforms, telling of the volunteer project in which young Yugoslavians engaged, building a mountain railroad for their country. The account of this achievement was based on a book, *The Silent People Speak*, by Robert St. John.

Mr. St. John's book has the ring of honest reporting. He said he went to Yugoslavia as a friendly observer and that he wrote the book without political intentions. We believed him—and we still believe him. But knowing that in any controversial question, there are not merely "two" sides, but several, we suggested in our article: "For an adequate impression of the situation, Mr. St. John's book must be carefully read and compared with the accounts of other observers."

We have, now, sent to us by an English friend, an account by another observer of the railroad building projects in Yugoslavia, in the form of a report in the London *Daily Telegraph* for Sept. 1. Apparently, the English communists organized a "British Brigade" to go to Yugoslavia during the past summer to work on the new Zagreb-Belgrade road. A London schoolteacher who went with the British Brigade, upon his return to England immediately resigned from the Communist Party. He described the experience as a "nightmare" of broken promises and being spied upon. For a week, the 100 members of the Brigade had nothing but bread and watermelon to eat, and they lived crowded together in a single hut. They called their quarters "Belsen," to characterize the treatment they received.

We have no doubt that conditions were harsh, the food bad and scarce; yet we suspect that many thousands of the Balkan peoples have known little that is better for a large part of their natural lives. It is rather the bureaucratic espionage which seems really ominous, causing us to take note of this report. Authoritarian government is peculiarly afflicted with distrust as a basic attitude of mind, and distrust, we think, creates the systematic brutality which has characterized both the nazi and communist versions of "national security."

Last May, when we read Mr. St. John's book, numerous passages in it reminded us of the enthusiasm of Russian youth during the first decade after the revolution—reported by Maurice Hindus in *Humanity Uprooted.* This book is still worth reading, whatever Mr. Hindus has since written; likewise the volume, *Youth in Soviet Russia,* by Klaus Mehnert, published by Harcourt, Brace in 1933. These works deal with the human side of a revolutionary epoch.

Today, for most Westerners, the Russian people are just a big abstraction, getting bigger and more menacing as the days go by. Reading books such as these will not foster any communist illusions among us, but they may help us to realize that behind that big abstraction are millions of human beings with hopes and enthusiasms not too unlike our own. There is also the extraordinary release of energy which follows any great revolution, and this needs to be understood. That bureaucracy ultimately confined, regimented and formalized the original enthusiasm, destroying it, in effect, is a further lesson to be learned, although it must be from other books, since we cannot observe these changes at first hand.

We do not mean to suggest that institutional abstractions such as that with which the Western peoples have come to identify Soviet Russia are merely harmless fictions. They are the principal source of fear at the present time, and are therefore of peculiar danger. Their greatest danger, however, is in what these delusions cause us to do to ourselves, as illustrated, for instance, by the procedures in the federal loyalty investigations, described in this week's Review.

CHILDREN

. . . AND OURSELVES

A SUBSCRIBER in San Francisco recently commended this column for its discussion, months and weeks ago, of how certain forms of social ostracism are related to juvenile delinquency (MANAS, June 9 and Sept. 1). One of our suggestions was that "every parent may consider the needs of his child's playmates as well as the needs of his own child and seek to establish a relationship of confidence with the neighbor's child in the interests of all the young people in the environs."

Our correspondent furnishes a characteristic example of the type of ostracism which not only increases juvenile delinquency but also encourages every form of racial and social prejudice:

> "There has been a dire need for a home for the J.D.'s for years and some four or five years ago a campaign was started to raise funds for such a home. The people of San Francisco were very liberal and soon a sufficient fund was raised and the search begun for a suitable site. Several good locations were found, but as soon as negotiations were begun the people raised objections to having a J.D. home in their neighborhood. They objected to having their children attend the same school as these children; they objected that such a home would detract from the value of their property, would lessen their social standing with other neighborhoods, and so on. The search has been going on for a long time, but now the home is being built in a fine location but away from other subdivisions—in other words, it is segregated."

What we should like to have, of course, to contrast with such attitudes, is a multitude of examples of ways in which men and women have successfully become—"our brother's children's keepers." One example, which we think is excellent, comes to us at first hand: A year or so ago a young man who periodically sought employment in odd jobs to replenish capital needed for developing a mine, became acquainted with a number of "underprivileged" youngsters in the neighborhood where he used a garage to store the scrap paper he collected and sold. Since these children appeared to desire friendship with an older person, perhaps being somewhat shortchanged of affection at home, and since the youngsters were at loose ends in respect to time and energy, the man wondered if it would be possible for him to give them an opportunity to work with him. He found that the idea of a share in the remuneration from the collecting of old newspapers was appealing to them. By providing these potentially industrious youths with a chance to make some money of their own, he quickly became their friend, and to some degree their advisor. Finally, on a free day, he offered to take them with him into the mountains, an excursion much appreciated by youngsters whose familiar scenery consisted chiefly of crowded houses, back alleys, and rubble-strewn lots. Finally, he proposed that the boys form a club, combining their money-making talents with a program that would enable them to visit the mountains more often. He offered to act as the advisor of the group. The club was formed; more children were attracted, and eventually this young man had more applicants than he could conveniently handle. Two girls were also included.

A simple statement of the purposes of the club included the following:

> The general endeavor shall be:
>
> To stimulate thought about ourselves, about Nature, and about our relation to Nature.
>
> To stimulate initiative in thought and action.
>
> To be open-minded and to look at all questions from as many sides as we can see.
>
> To observe everything, no matter how unimportant it may seem, like a blade of grass, a grain of sand, or a raindrop, and try to learn the lesson it has to teach us.

The club required no dues, each member being invited to contribute whatever he or she wished to the club fund. Enthusiasm for the mountain environment, following additional holiday excursions, led to the adoption of a plan to purchase materials for a cabin clubhouse in

some accessible unspoiled area. The advisor's proposal that each member give what he wanted to this fund met, of course, with considerable disagreement, the more hard-working of his charges fearing that they would always be contributing more than those who worked less hard. "Capitalism" and "free enterprise" and "private property" were being defended on the grounds that "each man for himself" was the only way. The young man announced his firm belief that inequality of contribution would gradually diminish if the ones who gave the most would not allow themselves to be bothered by the discrepancy, and so it has proved. Some sort of a sense of moral obligation began to manifest in those who were reaping the benefits of the club trips and activities while contributing only a meager share of the money. That problem has been eliminated—and, with its passing, much of the prevailing tendency to regard economic and social associates as competitors, rather than as potential cooperators, disappeared from the minds of the children.

The advocates of Cooperatives, we feel, are constantly setting a good "social" example, yet nowhere is cooperative effort so important as in the education of children. Whatever is learned of cooperation at an early age depends less upon intellectual persuasion than upon direct knowledge of the effectiveness of the cooperative system. (Boys' clubs, incidentally, which have never attempted a cooperative money-making plan have yet a worthwhile goal to reach.)

Finally, the club began to be receptive to some sort of educational goal. The motto of the club became: "I will try to see something of myself in every person I meet"—a focal point for the extending of mental and psychological horizons. This motto is also, we are reminded, representative of the fundamental attitude encouraged by a considerable number of inspired religious teachers, including Buddha, Jesus and Gandhi. Here in a single experiment we see what might be called the natural evolution of the good society, and one which may lead its participants to form an unshakable faith in the superiority of trust and understanding over suspicions and provincial dogmatisms. This club, it might be added, contained members whose parents professed different religions and were of different races.

After considering this small case history, we hope it will seem logical to our readers to expect all of those who speak widely and rhetorically about "democracy" to consider the possible obligation to create a sample democracy among the young people of their acquaintance, whether or not they be their own progeny. This means refusal to countenance any sense of social, economic, religious or racial superiority. Delinquency will never disappear until the majority of Americans join the "club" we have described, by learning to see "something of themselves in every other person."

FRONTIERS

SOME ANCIENT DEBTS

WE wanted to read Dr. Shirley Jackson Case's *Origins of Christian Supernaturalism* for two reasons. First, we remembered going through his *Historicity of Jesus,* published in 1928**,** and ending with the feeling that here was a man who wanted to get at the facts. Second, we wondered how a theologian, both eminent and modern, would handle a subject like Supernaturalism. You would think that this would be a touchy subject for an honest Christian thinker to deal with. To discuss ancient supernaturalism, Christian or otherwise, presents no difficulty to one who is merely a scholar—a man, that is, who engages professionally in examining and repeating, critically or otherwise, the opinions of other men. A scholar doesn't have to say what *he* thinks about miracles, or whether prayers are answered or not. He just arranges a picture for you to look at.

But a professing Christian, one who headed the Divinity School of the University of Chicago for a number of years—such a man ought to make up his mind and tell you in so many words what he thinks. This is just what Dr. Case doesn't do. Nevertheless, he has produced an interesting book from the scholarly point of view. And he whispers a kind of conclusion in his last chapter, suggesting that he is a pragmatist in religion.

According to Dr. Case, Christianity won its position as the dominant religion which took over the ruins of belief in the ancient world by claiming bigger and better supernaturalism than any of the other religions of the time. Every Christian miracle has its pagan counterpart. All the Gods were interventionists. Jehovah and Jesus gained converts because they intervened more than the others; at least, that is what the Christians believed and what they taught their converts. The pages of this book are generously sprinkled with footnotes citing classical authorities on ancient supernaturalism, and the author leaves no possible doubt that if the early Christians had failed to appeal to the populace in the same terms, they would have made little or no progress at all. His chapters deal successively with apparitions, divine revelations, "saviors," various approaches to the gods, and supernatural influence benefiting both society and the individual, showing that so far as supernaturalism is concerned, Christianity has not the slightest claim to uniqueness.

The general tendency of the book is to suggest that the argument of supernaturalism on behalf of Christianity is neither sensible nor timely. It is not sensible because the same argument can be used to support, say, the cult of Dionysus or Orpheus. Every ancient savior—and there were more than a few—is surrounded by an aura of miraculous events. It is not timely because supernaturalism has little meaning for modern man. In Dr. Case's carefully stated conclusion:

> To maintain rigid adhesion to an outworn type of interpretation might prove in reality detrimental to Christianity in a day when newer forms of thinking had become more efficient in supporting the ideals and aims of Christian living in a modern world.

The implication of this is that Christians should stop talking about Christian miracles and speak more of Christian ethics. Dr. Case is gently chiding the Fundamentalists. He is telling them that they won't get anywhere with their "outworn interpretation" which, many hundreds of years ago, "rendered valuable service" in advancing the Christian cause, but which today does more harm than good.

But supposing the miracles really happened—what then? We don't for a moment suppose they did; at least, not in the way nor for the reasons people have believed they happened; but the question is still a good one to consider in relation to any religious system. It is a question which forces attention to the difference between genuine religion and speculative morals, and we think that no serious theologian can afford to ignore this difference. Genuine religion says: "This is the way, the truth, and the life," while morals tell you how to be good people. The way, the truth and

the life involve something more than goodness. They point to a transcendental process in human life; they entertain mysteries, initiations, spiritual rebirth and immortality. Something of this sort, we think, is hidden under the overgrowths of superstition surrounding all supernaturalism, whether Christian or some other brand. But Dr. Case has not a hint to offer us in these directions. He is tiresomely "modern," while we—we are ready to go looking for the Holy Grail.

The Partisan Review for September contains a definition of decadence which seems to us to characterize exactly the weakness of Dr. Case's book. Decadence, according to V. I. Ivanov, "is a benumbed memory, which has lost its power of initiative, no longer enabling us to partake in the initiations of our forefathers and no longer releasing impulses of essential initiative—it is the knowledge that prophecies are no more. . . ." Dr. Case tells us much about prophecy in ancient times, but, as Ivanov says of another writer, "only the soul of bygone epochs speaks to him; in his spiritual impoverishment he turns exclusively to the psyche, he becomes wholly a psychologist and sees everything in psychological terms. . . . At least, he suspects everything spiritual and objective of being psychological and subjective."

We can think of no better judgment of the temper of *Origins of Christian Supernaturalism* than that afforded in this passage by a Russian intellectual of the 1920'S. The excuse may be made that Dr. Case gives no pretense of being an expert in ESP or other contemporary expressions of the "supernatural." But that is just the point: real religion is a living thing, not a departmentalized academic study. How can there be any serious religion unless the questions presented by prophecy, by apparitions, by theories of salvation, be taken seriously, as possibly representing, in some manner, "spiritual and objective" reality, instead of merely a certain psychology of belief ?

Dr. Case has no intention of winning admiration for the early Christian apologists for the Faith, and, with us, he completely succeeds in missing this objective. When he tells how the Greek Fathers borrowed "items of Greek wisdom . . . too valuable to be discarded," endowing them with "supernatural validity by ascribing them to the shadowy activities of the divine Logos in the gentile world at large prior to the rise of Christianity," we wonder why stealing the profundities of pagan thought for Christianity is less reprehensible than any other kind of stealing. Of course, if Christianity had laid no claim to uniqueness, the borrowing would have been quite natural—every great thinker shares a community of wisdom with every other—but the Christians were *at war* with other religions and philosophies. This stealing from their ideological enemies made them pretenders and plagiarizers to boot. In short, Dr. Case has written an informing, if not inspiring, book. It is published by the University of Chicago and is priced at $3.00.