

THOREAU AND THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

[This is the first of a series of four articles on Henry David Thoreau. The author is Richard Groff, of Ambler, Pennsylvania. Later on this year the series will be published as a booklet.—Editors.]

THAT remarkable man, Henry David Thoreau, may be seen from many viewpoints. He is significant as an astute social critic, an advocate of civil disobedience, a figure in the Transcendental movement, a nature writer, an observant traveler. Here we shall consider him as a man of wisdom with important things to say to all who feel an inward call to the search for values. This is not to imply that the man was without psychological quirks and personal shortcomings, nor is it to deny his influence in any other field. But with these matters, as with his doubts and struggles and periods of development, we are not here concerned, though they would surely have their place in any full telling of his story. We leave these tasks to others. It is the ripe fruits of his genius which compel our attention. Let us gather gems.

One hears a good deal about Thoreau in certain circles these days, but seldom, it seems, does anyone trouble to seek out the roots of his genius, that firm underpinning which enables a man physically dead nearly a century ago to speak pointedly and eloquently to so many weighty issues facing man today. Measured by the size of his attentive audience, he is more alive now than ever. What did Thoreau say and what did he stand for? Many things, it is true. But has he a central message relevant to our present instruction and enlightenment? I submit that he has, and that this is why he exerts his singular appeal upon the seeker for excellence. Thoreau's achievements stand as milestones for all who would undertake this journey.

These are reflections upon the life and writings of one who has seemed to me to embody

so much of what is best in man. This paper pretends to no scholarly exactitude or exhaustiveness. It is rather an appreciation and an interpretation. It will have served its purpose if it inclines the receptive reader toward the study of Thoreau's works themselves and prompts further consideration of some of the questions raised there.

* * *

That Thoreau is not more widely recognized as a spiritual genius is perhaps owing not so much to any inadequacy of his powers as to the fact that he was not by disposition a public person. He was anything but an evangelist with a group of followers at his heels. No one acquainted with the man can infer that his prescriptions for man's ills featured group activity. Though Thoreau's friend Sanborn tells us that "no one laughed more or better," he cannot have possessed even the limited warmth of Emerson. He lectured from time to time, but was not particularly successful at it. Intellectually, then, Thoreau distrusted reform movements, while temperamentally he was unfitted for leadership. But his legacy to future generations is not lessened by these qualifications. The testimony of his remarkable life remains. Thoreau shows us how one man found direction and meaning for his life, not by conforming to any of the ready-made sets of rules and values which the institutions of society offer, but by steady attention to cultivating the powers with which nature had endowed him. He bids us follow not him, but what he followed. For no one can imitate the wisdom of the wise.

Did Thoreau foresee the failure of industrialization to increase human well-being merely because he was a luckier guesser than his optimistic contemporaries? Is his celebrated resistance to civil government to be charged to his

prickly perversity? Was his simplicity in personal habits traceable to ascetic self-denial? Is the source of his pure style to be found in his Classical studies?

A superficial acquaintance with the man might lead one to make such judgments; but an intimate study will show, I believe, that these attributes and insights rest upon a solid basis of character and his saner attitude toward life. It was Thoreau's knowledge of the basic nature of man that enabled him to predict the inability of modern industrial society to secure the good life, generations before this became apparent to others. Examining the seed and sprout, he could envision the tree and its fruits. A finely sensitized conscience prompted him to go to jail rather than pay a tax to a government which defended Negro slavery and conducted a war of imperialism. What seemed to others this man's austere way of life was for him a succession of sensuous enjoyments, for he could extract from the necessities of life more genuine pleasure than ever they found in the luxuries: His clean, measured sentences could scarcely have proceeded from a slovenly life. "Every sentence," he once remarked, "is the result of a long probation."¹ With the extraordinary man, circumstances are secondary, and we are misled when we dwell upon them. It is as if one were to seek out the origin and wonder of a bird's song by vivisectioning the creature.

To be sure, circumstances of time and place and temperament do have their influence. Thoreau uses the terminology of a New England Transcendentalist, not that of a Medieval monk; he objects to slavery, not to nuclear warfare; and his instincts are solitary, not gregarious. But these are matters of mere form, not quality of content. Imagine how Thoreau would bristle at hearing a critic of today evaluate him as a "product of his time." Product indeed! It was he that did the producing.

If his character is New Englander and Yankee to the core in its individualism, terseness, frugality, and honor, his spiritual roots draw their

nourishment from even richer sources. He was heir to the wisdom of many ages and traditions, recasting it in terms of our own culture and incarnating his version of it. He was a great American because he was first a great man, our native counterpart of the wisest Oriental sage or Classical philosopher.

Before attempting a closer examination of Thoreau's life and work to see why he deserves to rank among the great, let us pause to remind ourselves of the nature of the prophet and the importance of his tradition. It is against this background that the man of wisdom can perhaps best be sketched.

CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET

Occasionally there are born into the world men who transcend the limitations of their earthly environment with lives of such insight and spiritual vigor that even ordinary men can discern in them something noble. Denying that they possess supernatural powers, however, the prophets teach that whosoever wills it and has fulfilled certain conditions can partake of the same spirit that breathes through them, can drink at the same well of inner strength, and thus himself rise above being a creature of circumstance, a mere marionette reacting mechanically to unseen forces. We search society in vain for the element which makes the prophets great. Who, pray, taught Socrates? It is not too much to say that the prophets become what they are *in spite of* their surroundings; for what they teach upsets the very bases of their respective cultures. Clearly the origin of their unique power must be sought elsewhere. Where? Perhaps in an inward principle, anciently planted in the depths of their being.

Of all the varieties of human genius none speaks more directly to what is most basic in man than does the prophet. For the prophet or wise man addresses not what is fragmented or transitory in man but what is integral and enduring. He speaks not to economic man or political man, not to scientific man or esthetic

man, but to man *as he is in essence*, after all qualifications and disguises have been torn off, and all that remains is that integration center of man, his legitimate Ego as distinguished from his vain ego, the Self which alone enables him to deny self.

Ordinarily separating one human being from another are the barriers of time, space, culture, social status. Only when these artificial obstacles are transcended can the eternal questions be considered. Then we see that such questions as—"What is a man to do with his life?", "Are there laws which govern the moral universe as well as the physical world?", "In what does human excellence consist?", "Can I find a basis for value judgments in a world of conflicting standards?"—must surely come to receptive men in every age and nation: to the Chinese peasant living before the Christian era as soon as to an American of the present day. Nor is it by any means clear that, other things being equal, the former has either more or less than the latter to aid him in his search for valid answers. Beneath the multitude of labels which men delight in pasting upon one another and upon themselves, man remains man, and his contents as mysterious—or as obvious—as ever.

A conscious dedication to the search for pure wisdom is the true meeting-ground of all men and the only basis for significant communication between them. Through the ages resound the voices of the prophets, the *authentic* men. We may not know the tongue of the wise man, but we always recognize his voice. When he speaks, we sense that though the words fall from his lips they are not his words; for in them we listen to a loftier voice speaking through them, seeking the ears which can hear. When words of wisdom strike the receptive ear, they reverberate with a heartening sound—the unmistakable ring of authenticity.

Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Socrates, Fox, Emerson—worked at the tasks they felt were laid upon them by a higher authority, tasks which they were not at liberty to set aside. For countless

generations those seeking to find their way in darkness have found lamps in the lives of men like these. As long as tradition and the written word shall stand, their lamps will continue to burn. Prophet, saint, sage, savior—the differences among them are lost amid their similarities. Forget the labels. Wisdom is where you find it.

We sell short the prophet by regarding him as a mere predictor. In the Greek original he is the "proclaimer of a revelation," as the ancient Hebrew sages were believed to be the mouthpieces of God. As primitive man prized the gift of fire, guarding it carefully against extinction, so are the prophets guardians of the spirit with its warmth and light, tasked to pass it on undiminished to future generations.

Central to the secret of the prophets' wisdom is their confirmed faith in the mystical approach, which holds that man is capable of direct, valid knowledge of values by which he may think truly and live rightly. Mystic knowledge is at last self-validating. Attempts to justify it by the techniques of reason alone are as idle as rational "proofs" of the existence of God, for, as has been observed, those who believe in God already do not need them, while those who do not are not convinced by them. No matter how the skeptics may scorn his certainty, the mystic knows when he is in the spirit of truth.

He who knows not and knows not that he knows
not

Is a fool: shun him.

He who knows not and knows that he knows not

Is a child: teach him.

He who knows and knows not that he knows

Is asleep: wake him.

He who knows and knows that he knows

Is a prophet: follow Him!

—Anonymous

Prophets are mapmakers for the journey of the human spirit. Much as the pioneer wagon trains rolled Westward, guided by their alert, unencumbered scouts who from high vantage points scanned the way ahead, counseling the best route and warning of dangers, so mankind plods

on its eternal pilgrimage, guided safely, when it heeds them, by the visions of its prophets. The only regret is that such needed guidance is secondary. It is through the default of their fellows that the prophets have become custodians of a thin but enduring thread, our one precious tie with Meaning.

Wisdom concerns itself with intrinsic values, those qualities which are prized not in terms of something else but chiefly for their own sake. Wherever one's intelligent interest in a problem is concerned not with gaining an advantage, material or psychological, but solely in solving it with justice, his actions become universally good. He longs to see order prevail in life, which was orderly until man's ego came to corrupt it. The loyalty of such a man will not be to men, or institutions, or nations, or society, but only to truth itself. He has taken to heart William Blake's counsel: "Learn to love without the help of anything on earth." There are a thousand ways to cheat, but only one way to be honest; and being honest is what interests him, not because someone taught him to be fair, and not because he might get caught cheating, but simply because it is the right thing to be honest. He acts purely out of the love of order over chaos, conservation over waste, quality over quantity. He has a sense of fitness about things which he perceives intuitively. He has made it so much a part of his nature that he cannot avoid it. Loneliness is often his lot, though he has fellowship with all other men in all lands and ages who share his concern. William Penn said, "They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it."

Had we sufficient vision, seeing the particular we would be reminded of the universal, and dealing with the finite would perceive the infinite. We would behold the ruling of life by the inexorable laws of moral cause and effect in all their majesty. We would consciously keep close to the Source. Seeing deeply, we would be living witnesses to that which we had seen. He is the wise man who, alert to the Protean nature of the

world's illusions, yet aware of the power by which they can be overcome, can look all of life's multitudinous evil full in the face without flinching, while with his own energies embodying a cheerful, ringing affirmation of man's creative possibilities.

The prophet is an articulate mystic proclaiming his discovery that each man carries within himself a great glory, the power to transcend himself; that a man is measured at last by his efforts to embody his own highest vision. So steadily does he draw his nourishment from the Source that he is in a primary relationship with everything his life touches. Not content with enlightening himself alone, he is impelled to reach out and communicate his insights and revelations to others less favored, yet still receptive, against whose higher nature some inscrutable conspiracy between *can not* and *will not* seems forever plotting.

Although in a sense true, it is no criticism of the prophet to charge that he tells us nothing new. Men would still flout the moral law. What use to take on new challenges while we have not yet met the old? There will be time enough to colonize the moon once we have exhausted the possibilities of the earth. Where the prophet is original is in his point of view, the certain scenes in the panorama upon which he has focussed. "Truth is one: the sages call it by different names." Each colors his vision of it with his unique gifts. And what varied richness in the reservoir of wisdom! What hues and patterns and textures in the tapestry of human genius! God may get along very well without one, but to a man a personality seems quite becoming.

Meditating upon the eternal questions, the prophet brings to bear upon them all his experiences and inner resources. His approach is in one sense intensely personal but in a higher sense impersonal. He strives to get out of the way and let what *is* flow through him. He lives, he speaks, as it were, at God's direction. From his peculiar vantage point he will forge a point of

view, detecting patterns in the apparent chaos of life, seeing how and where principle still rules, though anarchy pretends to the throne. The wisdom of his words is forever stamped with his genius. Yet he feels no pride in his accomplishments but rather humility that he has proved no worthier a midwife assisting at the birth of Truth, has not rendered more faithfully his vision of the many-splendored pageant which is life, has not understood more fully man's responsible role in it. It is not that the prophets have all the answers, but that they raise the pertinent questions and call us to cultivate that state of heart and mind and will in which true answers may be found. They ask that we offer them not our worship but our attention. They would have us not stare at their finger but look in the direction it points. Lao Tse has caught the paradox: "Careless of greatness, the sage becomes great."

Of course it is foolish to imagine the prophet as a flawless, other-worldly creature whose head is always in the clouds. If he sometimes catches glimpses of heaven, he catches colds, too, and may make a mistake in arithmetic. Shaw wonders what Jesus said when he stepped on a nail in his father's carpenter shop. Surely no human being dwells permanently on a high spiritual plateau. When the spirit is with him and he is obedient to it, a man—any man—may become a vehicle of prophecy. When the spirit leaves, his authority departs with it. Status is a dangerous concept in the realm of the spirit, whether anyone claims status himself or has it imputed to him by others. Beware the card-carrying prophet. His credentials can only prove him a fraud.

A spiritual genius needs no medium save his own mind. But lesser men attempt to make the genius their medium, sometimes even founding a religion or an institution over his dead body, while bypassing his living spirit. Used articles are sometimes a sound purchase, but it is always a poor bargain to take one's faith at second hand. For it will still be another's, not our own, and

hence worthless. With solemn ceremony we officially elevate the wise to the status of saint and savior, deck them out with the trappings of their position, and imagine thereby to have discharged our obligation to the spiritual life. We bask in the comfortable feeling that comes from praising others, instead of striving to be worthy ourselves.

If there is a legitimate way for us to profit from the teachings of wise men, perhaps each of us must seek it out for himself; of the myriad subtle ways in which one may unwittingly abuse such an opportunity, no list could be complete, and the most glaring omission would likely be that point on which the cataloger himself is most vulnerable.

"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." (Matt. 10:41.) Accepting the reproofs of the prophets in the spirit in which they are given, a man affirms his capacity for growth, for he knows that where the prophets are impatient with the shortcomings of man as he is, it is only because they love him even more as he could be. Rejecting the reproofs of the prophets and ignoring or attacking them reveals a man's spiritual deafness and his miserable state of soul, confirming the prophets' severest strictures on human nature. "If you see a man who shows you what is to be avoided, who administers reproofs, and is intelligent, follow that wise man as you would one who reveals hidden treasures; it will be better, not worse, for one who follows him. Let him admonish, let him teach, let him forbid what is improper! He will be beloved by the good; by the bad he will be hated." (*Dhammapada.*)

What attracts us in extraordinary men is that of the extraordinary in ourselves. As Emerson has said, "The great teacher is not the man who supplies the most facts, but the one in whose presence we become different people." Any man may live in thought and inspiration with the most sublime spiritual geniuses of the ages if he so desires; but character, like water, seeks its own level, and insofar as we have not cultivated our

higher natures we turn down this golden opportunity to associate with the mediocre instead. *Each of us knows who his companions must be.*

The prophet is man as man sees himself in his most sublime conceptions. Yet lacking the fortitude to follow their example, the mass of men honor prophets in the breach, and then only verbally, and not until they are far enough removed to pretend that the challenge of their words and lives is softened.

In following his own precept the man who holds to an inflexible standard of right will at length come into conflict not only with public opinion but with civil and ecclesiastical authority—with all those whose vested interests lie elsewhere than in pure truth. These, not honoring man's duty to obey the higher laws, brand the prophet lunatic, traitor, criminal, or heretic, and punish him accordingly. It has been said, "The way of the world is to praise dead saints and persecute living ones."

How curious it is that if one sets out eagerly to become the best surgeon, the best pianist, or the best cook, his perfectionist standards are everywhere applauded; yet if one aspire to be a superior *man* and win through to perfect understanding, perfect behavior, he is accounted a fool, or called hard names such as "perfectionist" and "idealist"! And if he persist in these pursuits and counsel others to do so, becoming a living witness to his faith, the wrath of society may fall upon him at any moment. Jesus was tortured and killed, Socrates executed, Boehme banished, Fox beaten with clubs, Gandhi thrown in prison. Why? Because truth is the last thing in the world most persons want to hear, and they will take elaborate precautions to keep it at a safe distance, lest it expose their devious ways. The one challenge a man is least likely to meet with honor is a threat to his vanity. For that would compel him to admit that, lacking a spiritual rebirth, his life is empty. The life of the saint silently dares all other lives. A world of accomplished

perfectionists in every other realm could still be a world of hatred and strife. Saintliness is total wisdom. Only the saint dares to carry the nobility of perfectionism to its fulfillment in the moral life.

It is at last in their capacity to touch our hearts with nobleness, however, that the gift of the wise consists. It is with the great prophet as with the great artist: when he shares his vision with us, opening new faculties of perception, new dimensions of our being, he is saying, "Have not you, also, felt this?" In that moment, if we are ready to receive it, it may be revealed to us that the gap between his spirit and ours is not so wide nor so unbridgeable as we had at first supposed.

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(To Be Continued)

NOTES

The complete *Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, 20 vols., Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1906, have long been out of print, but numerous selections of his representative writings are available. For a full length biography see H. S. Canby's *Thoreau*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co. 1939, recently re-issued as a Beacon Press Paperback (BP 65). An excellent critical biography is J. W. Krutch's *Henry David Thoreau*, New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948.

1. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* (hereinafter referred to as "*Week*"), "Sunday."

REVIEW

SOVIET-AMERICAN HARMONY!

A GOOD many men are at their best when pitted against difficult odds. In bygone times the admiration accorded the chivalrous knight or the revolutionary minute-man was in part a recognition of this psychological fact. Some thousands of years ago, we find the Indian sage, Krishna, explaining why the "warrior quality" is necessary to fulfillment of human destiny. In our own time, when war is not only inhumane but inhuman—*i.e.*, mechanized and remote—the calls to courage of a physical sort are few, yet those few opportunities still elicit some instances of nobility. Russians and Americans in the Olympic games and in other sporting events have, in the midst of ultimate strife, evolved mutual liking and respect.

In this context, one may read about the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 with special appreciation. The entire issue of *International Conciliation* for January (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) is devoted to a discussion of this remarkable agreement. Titled "A Treaty for Antarctica," this 80-page analysis by Professor Howard J. Taubenfeld emphasizes the practically unique hopefulness of this chapter of Soviet-American negotiations. A preface by Anne Winslow, editor-in-Chief of *International Conciliation*, suggests the significance of the agreement which has already been reached:

For two hundred years, men have been irresistibly drawn to the "highest, windiest, coldest, most inaccessible of continents." A new era in the long history of Antarctic exploration opened in 1957: twelve nations banded together under the International Geophysical Year for concerted investigation of scientific phenomena. In the words of Dr. Gould, Chairman of the Committee on Polar Research of the United States National Academy of Sciences: "It was in the coldest of all the continents that there was the first memorable thaw in the cold war."

Taking advantage of this propitious situation, the United States invited the other cooperating

countries to conclude a treaty designed to keep the Antarctic "open to all nations to conduct scientific or other peaceful activities." The resulting Treaty of 1959 has been acclaimed as removing a massive area of the world from the cold war and as offering a precedent for similar agreements on outer space and disarmament.

Prof. Taubenfeld writes:

While most of the world reverberates to the shouted insults and sporadic clashes of a vigorously waged cold war, it is pleasant and somewhat euphoric to contemplate a continent, an area of some five to six million square miles, the size of the United States and Europe combined, from which military activities and nuclear explosions have been banned and where official observers are free to come and go without regard to lines of national sovereignty. All this and more is the promise of an international agreement signed on 1 December 1959 by representatives of twelve nations, including the two great competitors for world leadership, the Soviet Union and the United States. The treaty has already been hailed in the United States Senate, for example, as "a precedent in the field of disarmament, prohibition of nuclear explosions, and the law of space." It has also been damned in the same hall as a "setback for United States interests," as "morally politically, and economically unsupportable," and "unconstitutional" as well. As is usual in such cases, dispassionate analysis of the physical facts of the area and of the historical and political setting of the proposed settlement lends justification neither to unrepressed hosannahs and great hopes nor to neurotic, hand-wringing fears. The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 emerges as a modest, limited, and probably relatively costless attempt at international controls.

The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 was accomplished because *both* Russia and the United States insisted upon an international control of Antarctica which would delimit defined sovereignty according to "closed sectors." As a result, scientific expeditions and all other enterprises conducted in the Antarctic are to be governed, not by formal claims of national sovereignty in certain areas, but according to the general usefulness of the work undertaken in all areas. This decision is on the same sort of basis as that which would prevail if a World Government were actually in existence. Although the treaty is

no complete guarantee between the nations, it is nevertheless a rather amazing step in a direction which most nationalists (or pessimists) consider entirely unfeasible. Prof. Taubenfeld concludes:

For the student of international organization, the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 is an interesting new hybrid. It is an attempt at still another alternative device to direct international administration, another attempt at assuring the neutralization of and free access to an undeveloped, potentially valuable area without setting any dangerous precedents for world government. Past devices for doing this (1) by unilateral colonial overlordship with vague self-policed international commitments as in nineteenth-century Africa, and (2) by international mandates under a single powerful overlord are not a guarantee of free access or of protection of the area and the interests of the world as well. In this latest alternative an administrative vacuum is attempted. No one will grant or deny or organize or administer and all will have considerable autonomy. The technique is therefore not "colonial" at all in the traditional sense. The area is demilitarized and national claims are to be ignored by scientists and observers, who will perform as if the area were permanently non-national.

Well, perhaps this is to some degree a reflection of what the *Bhagavad-Gita* might call the "karma" of the Arctic and Antarctica—scenes of incredible feats of bravery and persistence unrelated to competition or war. Certainly, such a *mystique* is justified in David Howarth's *Sledge Patrol*, which describes the inability of Greenlanders and Germans to fight and kill each other during World War II, even when they thought they ought to. In our review of *Sledge Patrol* (MANAS, June 28), one may note these interesting sentences:

The fact is that in the arctic men have a higher standard of morality than they have in civilized surroundings. . . . There is nothing to struggle for there, except to keep alive in difficult surroundings, and in this all men are in co-operation, never in competition; and so mutual distrust has almost died away. . . . Political and social quarrels seem infinitely far away and quite absurd, and nobody takes much account of nationality. Besides this, the arctic scene has qualities which bring out the best in every man. Nobody who has ever lived there for long has remained unmoved by its harmony and beauty. . . .

According to Prof. Taubenfeld, the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 stands in need of considerable improvement. The main point, however, is that improvement is not only possible but likely. If even stronger cooperative agreements are adopted, a truly international legal system, language, currency, police force, etc., may come into being. And what better place for such a potentially momentous inauguration—a land where men have struggled mightily, but not fought!

COMMENTARY

UNCIVIL DEFENSE

AT a civil defense meeting held last month at Las Vegas, Nevada, plans were disclosed for repelling an invasion of Nevada by frantic Californians fleeing from the destruction of a thermonuclear bomb. J. Carlton Adair, plans and programs officer for the civil defense of Las Vegas, told a gathering of nearly 400 business and industrial leaders that Nevada's anticipated defense against California would require a 5,000-man militia, which would be under the command of the sheriff's department. As reported in the Los Angeles *Times*:

Adair said that if Nevada is not hit by heavy radiation or a thermonuclear bomb at the same time as California, a million or more persons might stream into this area from Southern California.

"They could come in like a swarm of human locusts," Adair said, "and pick the valley clean of food, medical supplies and other goods. Our law enforcement agencies are not numerically equipped to handle such an influx of humanity so we have drawn up plans for a militia."

Mr. Adair is obviously a practical man. If California suffers nuclear attack, the chips, as they say in Las Vegas, will be down, and the day of locusts will be at hand. Maybe the *Times* reporter didn't do a thorough job, and failed to speak of occasional sentimental murmurs from the Las Vegas four hundred about putting in a little extra food and medicine to take care of the California locusts. You can overlook that, though, since strong unanimity always makes a better story, and the Los Angeles *Times* has for many years had charge of both public morals and morale on the West Coast.

But what is really impressive is the way the Spirit of the Cold War has come to pervade even civilian relationships. You begin by refusing to be soft on the Communists, and you end with a vigorous hardness toward California. Anyone can see that we know how to build character in this country. The way we look at things now, in Thoreau's words, "is the result of a long probation."

A later report in the Los Angeles *Times* reveals that the citizens of Beaumont, California, aroused by

the manly foresight of the citizens of Las Vegas, are planning a similar program of resistance to the citizens of Los Angeles, who are expected to stream toward Beaumont in fearful flight in the event of a nuclear attack. First it was Nevadans against Californians, but with this latest step of progress in Cold War Morale, we have gained the decided advantage of making Californians fear Californians. *Now* Khrushchev will see how really tough we are! Given time, we can probably figure out solid reasons for fearing and preparing to resist the people who live next door. After all, they may run out of food and water before we do—and you know how people are. . . .

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESS

Editor and Publisher for July 8 summarizes a speech by Robert H. Sollen, wire-news editor of the Oxnard (Calif.) *Press-Courier*, in which the following appears:

How many "surprises" such as uprisings in China, Laos, Cuba, the Congo, Guatemala, Japan and Turkey can we experience before someone, traumatically unstrung, demands war on the Soviet Union . . . ?

This leads us, I think, to the real responsibility of the press in an explosive world. It must provide an understanding of the unprecedented social upheavals which will alert Americans to the real needs and make the public demand an effective policy to promote freedom, peace and human welfare. Mere anti-communist reporting in stereotyped cold-war terms explains nothing and tends only to induce readers to demand anti-communist measures. But anti-Communism is not a policy. It is merely a negative reaction to the initiative of the adversary. It is a holding action only, and can gain no ground for freedom.

Will the American people support a press which goes beyond tripe, glibness, and self-righteous nationalism? It is now the solemn responsibility of American newspapers to persuade the American people they must not only support such a press—they must demand it.

Mr. Sollen, it seems to us, should be helped to have a newspaper of his own.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

IF ONLY MARRIAGE—WHY COLLEGE?

WE have frequently quoted from Mills College President Lynn White's *Educating our Daughters*. Written in 1950, this book is a lucid attempt to show why modern education is confused, if not actually destructive, when it revolves around the "careers" of males. In the first place, a woman does not need a career to derive benefit from higher education; in the second place, if she has a creative field of interest there is no reason why it cannot find expression after raising a family has been completed. Dr. White repeatedly calls attention to the reluctance of the minds of male educators to focus on women's needs, as in the following:

Gradually, haltingly and often unconsciously, we in America have been fumbling our way toward a type of higher education which is related to the comparative unpredictability of the life-pattern of women, which lends prestige to the family and which gives free scope to the development of the infinitely varied interests and capacities of individual women not merely when they coincide with those of men but also when they diverge from the masculine tradition. But the pace is much too slow. It will not be greatly hastened until the leaders among American women engage in a new feminist crusade to free women from subservience to masculine value judgments.

An article in the June *Good Housekeeping*, "In Defense of the Wise Housewife," by Jeanne Keller Beaty, deserves as much attention as it can get. In an especially effective protest against the conventional dictum that a one- or two-year course in college is ample for girls who intend to "merely get married," Mrs. Beaty says:

If a man needs four years of college to design a chrome bar outlining the tail fin of a Cadillac and create jingles for advertising commercials, I should have no difficulty in justifying my four years of college as a preparation for marriage. However, I prefer to defend my college education on another level.

I feel the need for as much education as a teacher, or a forest ranger, or a musician, or a

journalist. In the course of my responsibilities as a mother, I am called upon daily to play the role of philosopher, botanist, biologist and zoologist, climatologist, historian, dramatist, and artist. It is not always practical for me to consult an encyclopedia. Could the encyclopedia tell me, "What is God?" Could it tell me, "What is purple?" Not knowing my child, the encyclopedia wouldn't understand the question. If we wish to teach our children that knowledge increases one's capacity for life and one's enjoyment of every moment alive, we must demonstrate this ourselves.

While Mrs. Beaty herself had a full college education, she wishes she had had a great deal more; she is convinced that she must go on studying and learning if she is to be of much use to her children. She is not satisfied with what she calls a "Walt Disney version of the folklore and history of this country," and so must know that history and know it well, for herself. Concerning philosophy and psychology, ethics and religion, she says:

What visions do I set before my children if I am not articulate enough to explain my personal goals in life, the sources of my happiness? To what idols may they turn if I am not sufficiently introspective to know the faith that sustains me and to communicate it to them in terms of their own comprehension?

I want to apply the principles by which, and for which, I live, to the lives of my youngsters—until they are old enough to exercise their own judgment. There is a danger in allowing society—through the community, state, church, or school, or any willing group—to apply its own standard, for this is to sacrifice the individuality that is the precious distinction of the human being. I am willing to allow my children their own experiences with these groups. But I refuse to concede that they are without flaw or above criticism and that I must subordinate my judgment to theirs.

There is infinitely more to motherhood than darning socks, wiping noses, and bearing pain. The concept of Mother as a placid, bovine, consuming creature is tragically inaccurate.

This excellent article concludes:

We need our best brainpower; not in the laboratory, not in the theater, not in the office, but here at home. This is the battlefield.

If a woman wants a stimulating challenge to her creative intellect, there is no wider field. We are in daily competition with the brightest minds in the country. They tell us what to wear, what to feed our families, how to handle our children, how often to have intercourse with our husbands, whom to elect to public office, how to serve the community, what books to read, what books to read to our children, what music to hear, how to decorate our homes—in short, not only how to live but also how to justify our lives in terms our fellow men will recognize.

I need all the knowledge and experience I can accumulate if I am to remain myself and not become an image of the rest of society, thus assisting in its extinction. Even in my daily relationships, I need wisdom and the assurance of wisdom, understanding, and discernment. I need to realize, in consulting a doctor, that the field of medicine has its uncertainties; I must understand that my beliefs need not be those of my minister; I must accept, and make provision for, the fact that scholars are not infallible or teachers necessarily wise. Wisdom, understanding, discernment, are not inherent gifts; they are the fruits of cultivated intelligence.

As a citizen, I need courage to form convictions and a conscience that refuses me sanctuary in the anonymity of my vote. Courage and conscience are not born with a person; they are similarly, products of a lifetime of applied intelligence.

It is the field of the humanities that needs our intellectual power today and, at the risk of being epigrammatic, humanity beams at home.

As every good teacher knows, one of the greatest problems facing educators in elementary and high schools is the lack of communication with parents. Frequent Parent-Teacher meetings doubtless help some in this direction, but the sort of communication Mrs. Beaty wants with her children, and the sort a teacher wants with both parent and child, must come from evaluative conversation, from a kind of continuous "dialogue." We know no other way of discovering what "education" is really all about. Mrs. Beaty's article has made evaluative discourse between parents and teachers at least more feasible, by showing why it is so important.

It is difficult for us to consider any important discussion of education without recalling

Francisco Ferrer's principle that a child's education must begin with his grandfather. The point is that the family and cultural atmosphere Mrs. Beaty recognizes as so important *takes time* to produce. A hurry-up course in mathematical physics is a lot easier to arrange for. On the other hand, humanity, as Mrs. Beaty says, begins *at home*; it begins, we may add, with the present generation of grandmothers and grandfathers.

FRONTIERS

Scale of Human Attitudes

AN essay by Charles E. Osgood, "How We might Win the Hot War and Lose the Cold," which appeared in *Midway 4*, a journal published by the University of Chicago, has in it a useful brief analysis of suggested stages of "social thinking." Dr. Osgood writes:

"Man is the measure of all things," it has been said—but this is true, I think, only to the extent that his science is primitive. One can trace in the development of science a progressive freeing of man's measurements from the arbitrary "platform" of his own senses. Copernicus removed our planet from the center of the conceptual universe; Darwin removed our species from the center of God's creative intentions, Freud removed man's reason from an exclusive role in determining his behavior. Our social measurements are also made relative to our own "position" as an observer. The frame of reference within which we make judgments, the "zero points" of our scales of judgment, are determined by a sort of averaging over our own individual ranges of experience. What is "big" for the child may be "little" for an adult.

I think that one can describe at least three stages in clear social thinking—or in "becoming civilized," if you will. At the simplest, most primitive stage *we unconsciously project our own frame of reference onto others*. Since ego assumes alter to be using the same reference points as he is, it follows that when alter sees as straight what to ego is obviously crooked, when he judges to be tasteless what to ego is obviously tasty, and so on, he must be deliberately "malingering," must be "evil" in some sense, or perhaps "sick" or "abnormal."

The second stage is where *we recognize the relativistic nature of alter's frame of reference, but not our own*. This produces a more humanitarian approach to social problems, a "Forgive them for they know not what they do" attitude. This is the level of understanding at which we account for disapproved behavior in others as being due to the conditions under which they happened to develop. Thus members of minority groups are "pushy," "aggressive," or "immoral" because they grew up in an atmosphere of prejudice or without as much education as we have had.

The third stage, and one that is arrived at with great difficulty and maintained with even greater difficulty, is where we *realize the equally relativistic nature of our own frame of reference*. Here ego seeks to understand the nature and location of his own "platform" as well as that of alter. This is the parent who is able to see that maybe his own idea of how high up the trousers "look right" is essentially arbitrary. This is the visitor to a foreign country who realizes that his own neutral points on the clean-dirty scale, or the tasty-distasteful scale, or the moral-immoral scale are no more "natural" than anyone else's. And this is also the student of international affairs who sees our own strategies and policies to be as relative to our experience as the enemy's are to his.

The common-sense importance of this analysis is obvious enough, but the reader is bound to wonder whether its pertinence could be recognized if illustrations were taken from current events. What *is* evident is the extraordinary sense of community among all human beings that will have to prevail before the third stage is reached. When a few people begin to think "universally" in this way, and their thoughts get printed, a mood of dreadful anxiety begins to show itself in their critics. Such thinking is a mortal threat to the stereotypes which permit people to insist that they are right and those others—the "enemy"—are wrong. For the man who relies upon stereotypes, to question their validity is to threaten his identity. As Bruno Bettelheim relates in *The Informed Heart*, the stereotype of the SS guards in the Nazi death camps as representing absolute evil gave the victims of the camps a strange kind of orientation in conduct:

Prisoners seemed to derive some security and emotional relief from their preconceived, more or less elaborate, fixed plans. But these plans were based on the assumption that one SS reacted like another. Any attitude throwing their stereotyped picture of *the SS* into question aroused fears that their plans might not succeed. Without plans they would have had to face a dangerous situation without armor, with only miserable anxiety about the unknown. They were neither willing nor able to suffer such anxiety, so they assured themselves they could predict the SS man's reaction and hence plan accordingly. My insistence upon approaching the SS as an individual threatened their delusional security, and their violent anger

against me becomes understandable as the reaction to the threat.

This illustration is a good one to take because it is so extreme that it would be practically impossible to invent it. Here is a man caught in the most vicious and even insanely inhuman situation that is recorded in all human history, yet he refuses to deny the at least potentially human qualities of the active agents of this insanity and viciousness. How was Dr. Bettelheim able to preserve his balance in such a situation? If we had the answer to this question, we could probably offer Dr. Osgood a program for raising the general level of "social thinking" to his third level, thereby doing away with the causes of war.

Surely, something more than a sagaciously impartial relativism is involved in the balance so achieved. Actually, you can find something like this calm relativism in the discussion of military experts. These specialists are realistic enough to admit to themselves and to take for granted that the reactions of the enemy are more or less like our own reactions, and they plan their strategy accordingly. A kind of unholy impersonality pervades these discussions, unhampered by agonizing questions of right and wrong.

So it is more than a well-instructed relativism that is required to lift the peoples of the world out of the swamp of the egocentric predicament. What is wanted is a profound conviction of the common potentialities for good of all men, regardless of depressing evidence to the contrary. Negatively, there must be an attack on the stereotypes, which means, in positive terms, a force for mutual understanding which is as powerful as all the propaganda favoring the use of terror for defense and all the cultural delusions which are fed by ignorance and fear. Whether this force can be born from any other matrix than universal suffering is a grave question. When you consider the situation in these terms, it is not so difficult to understand the motivations of the young people who are demonstrating against Polaris submarines, and of those who are walking

all the way to Moscow bearing evidence of their absolute rejection of violence.

Science, you might say—the sciences of psychology and sociology—can conduct us to the antechamber of peace, using brilliantly logical demonstrations of the utter madness of war, but some deeper resolve than intellectual formulations can provide is needed to bring about the 180-degree turn in human behavior that will move the world to *become* peaceful. Where shall we look for this inspiration?