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AN INNER CIVIL WAR

A GENERATION ago it was appropriate to call attention to the spreading interest in "psychology." Whether Sigmund Freud and the psychoanalytical movement were its cause, or only its leading symptom, does not matter very much, the fact remaining that the study of human motives and behavior had become a primary concern of reflective people. Today, while there has been no reduction of this interest—if anything it is much greater—it is possible to point to a specific development which has broken out of the field of psychology, into the wider or more fundamental area of philosophy. This is the insistent wondering about the nature of man. What *is* man? is today a much-asked question.

There are doubtless many factors which could be assembled to explain this wondering, but the most important consideration, for our purposes, is the fact that an "overall" view of human life is pressing the question to the front.

How have we gained an "over-all" view of the human situation? We have gained it largely from the frustration of human hopes. The present is unquestionably a period marked by universal frustration. People who think in terms of "national aspiration" have obvious reason to be frustrated. *Impasse* is the word for the relationships among the great nations of the world. There is *no* open avenue of any promise, according to the old ways of doing things. There is maneuvering, jockeying for position, tired diplomacy, and, of course, the ever-present armaments race, and very little more.

The conventional ends of individuals are also confronted by frustrating circumstances. As business becomes bigger and bigger, the sluggish mechanisms of bureaucracy become characteristic of commercial and industrial enterprise. Accountants and lawyers are the fair-haired boys of this epoch, not the men who supply the primary drives of production. The needs of the military absorb most of our productive genius, anyhow, so that frustration is bound to be the portion of all those whose idea of a constructive life lies in other directions. The web of government regulation and taxation is forever tightening its threads around the sinews of what we are pleased to call "Free Enterprise," with the result that the most "useful" man, today, is the man who specializes in creating a little elbow-room in which a businessman may hope to exercise free decision.

It is hardly necessary to detail the multiform frustrations experienced by the private citizen. His problems may be summarized by saying that the avenues of personal freedom and personal expression are rapidly being sealed off, both deliberately and by accident, in response to the "necessities" of the age. It does not matter much whether we call those necessities "Peace" or "War" or "Security."

Accordingly, it may be said that when a man is able to look about him and to see that he has very little chance of getting where he would like to go, he has something like what may be called an "over-all view." That is, he is able to see an absolute limit to his endeavors. There is no beckoning future, no promise of hidden possibilities. Only barriers. This means that there are no immediate challenges to the imagination, no great and engrossing projects of which to dream. So men are thrown back upon themselves and begin to wonder about their "selves."

Witness to this tendency is found in the proceedings of a recent convention of the Religious Education Association, in which Jews, Catholics, and Protestants join to consider what they—or some of the participants—hope are the common educational problems of the traditional

religions of the West. The general theme of the convention, which met late last year in Chicago, was "Images of Man in Current Culture," and the contributions of the principal speakers were printed in the *Christian Century* (for Dec. 11, 1957). Lest someone suppose that this interest of a convention of religious educators is cited as evidence of a "pioneering" concern with the nature of man manifested by religious leaders, we hasten to say that just the reverse is meant to be suggested. The religions of our culture and time are *not* pioneering in spirit. On the contrary, the taking up of this interest by organized religious groups suggests rather that the trend of inquiry into the nature of the human self is so well-established and so widespread that it cannot be ignored by religious groups.

It is not our purpose, here, to examine the fruits of the modern quest for the human self, but to look at the various relationships which have brought about the frustration of human hope, and to see, if possible, how they work. This means a study of the relationships between man and the institutions he creates.

Institutions are capable of being defined in various ways. We may say, for example, that an institution is a facility. Government is often thought of in this way. A contract is a facility: it enables people to enter into an agreement to work together for common or related ends. The contract describes how they will work together and how each will be rewarded. It is, therefore, a facility. It makes relatively easy activities which would otherwise be difficult if not impossible.

But institutions may be much more than "facilities." At the other end of the scale from "facilities" is the conception of the institution as providing access to *Meaning*, which is sometimes called "Religious Truth." In this case the institution is an "Authority." The relation of an institution of this sort to Power depends upon whether its authority is rational or irrational. An institution with irrational authority—authority which either does not permit, or limits, rational questioning of its claim to truth—inevitably acquires power through its capacity to define good and evil; or, in modern terms, to define the conditions of security. A church, for example, which claims to possess exclusive religious truth, can—if the claim is accepted—establish an Inquisition with the power to punish unbelievers with imprisonment and death, not to mention all the subordinate powers over the lives of people who accept its authority. Similarly, the military, which exacts absolute obedience from the members of its organization, has no need to explain its decisions. It may, of course, out of reluctant respect for the rational element in human beings, explain that secrecy is necessary in order to safeguard effectively the "national interest," or that immediate and unquestioning obedience to military commands is required for the sake of "discipline," on which the entire order of the military system is based. And when the future and security of the entire population are placed in the hands of the military—as, for example, in time of war or serious expectation of war—then the rule of irrational authority is easily extended to all civilians. In this case the military institution replaces government, and you have what is called the Garrison State.

In addition to the institutions of facility and authority are the more informal institutions of custom and cultural habit. These may have originated in many ways, but are today merely habits which we find convenient to retain, or inconvenient or unnecessary to abandon. The hold they have upon us is largely in the natural human resistance to change and the attachment to the familiar, although we may find all sorts of imposing reasons for justifying and continuing them.

One other sort of institution should be considered—the educational institution. We could of course make a place for educational institutions among institutions bearing Authority, but there is such a great difference between rational and irrational authority that educational

institutions deserve a separate classification. True educational authority is akin to the authority of Euclid. You respect what Euclid says because you have found that he makes you independent of him as an authority. The ultimate purpose of education is independence, which is what we mean, or ought to mean, when we say that education is supposed to fit a man for life. A man who is fit for life is a man who is capable of making all his major decisions for himself. When you go to school, you seek freedom from external authority. This defines the role of the educational institution.

Now it is true that institutions get all mixed up. Dogmatic religions run schools for their believers. People and professors often confuse academic status with educational authority. The institution which starts out being simply a facility may end—as in the case of the Omnipotent State—by being an irrational Authority. There are all degrees of combination of different types of institutions.

What corrupts the natural functioning of institutions?

Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to say what are—or may be—the natural functions of institutions. The roles of the facility-type institution and the educational institution are plain enough. More difficult to isolate is the proper role of the authoritative institution which has an element of the irrational in its function, if such an institution can be justified at all.

An institution which deals wisely in the element of the irrational is an institution *in loco parentis*. This can be a terrible thing. But the fact remains that parents perform just this function in relation to their children, when the children are very little. Every parent, consciously or unconsciously, employs the conditioned reflex so long as the child is responsive to very little else. The spanking is an educational technique which has a place—we will not say how extensive a place—in the rearing of small children. And there are other, less "controversial" examples. The wise parent, of course, is eager to substitute rational for irrational authority as fast as he can.

In the field of public institutions, the rule, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse," is an expression of irrational authority. Men are expected to obey what they do not understand—so long as *some* men, in this case the lawmakers, who represent the people, do understand. The irrational aspect of law is excused by the assumption that the area in which such ignorance prevails is a very small one. We do not admire even such limited irrational authority, but find it almost impossible to eliminate.

Thus public acceptance of a small amount of irrational authority—irrational for the individual who gets into trouble, but quite rational from the viewpoint of the total community—is understandable, and while we may regret its existence, we are willing to put up with it in the field of practical administration where the facility-type institution rules. But in matters of greater concern—matters of religion, for example—we oppose vigorously any irrational authority which seeks coercive power. That is the meaning of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

This amounts to saying that, in our society, no institution can stand *in loco parentis* to human beings unless those human beings pick that institution for themselves. In this connection the governmental institution is expected to guarantee the freedom of human beings to choose their irrational authority—or to ignore them all.

Why do people feel the need of irrational authority? Between the rational authority of the educational institution and the practical facility of the governmental institution lies a great area of mystery and doubt. At least, for great numbers of people, this area of mystery and doubt is a frightening thing. Erich Fromm's book, *Escape from Freedom,* is about the behavior of people for whom the mystery and doubt become too difficult to bear.

The existence of the area of mystery and doubt is the cause of the corruption of institutions. Fearing and feeling insecure, people press the function of their institutions beyond what is natural and good. Longing for certainty and security, they turn institutions which are mere facilities into sources of irrational authority, and they tend to do the same thing with their educational institutions. They shove off their inadequacies on institutions, expecting to be relieved of their anxieties in this way. By this means institutions take on "Sovereignty" and supernatural grandeur, since people fall into the habit of thinking that the institutions (that "they") will deal successfully with the area of mystery and doubt. Now begins the holy tyranny. You do not *like* the growing authority of institutions, but you are horror-struck at the idea of being turned loose in the world without them. (What would we do without the atom-bomb?) And so on.

Are all these institutions evil? They are no more evil than we are. They are only doing the jobs that we have felt unable to do. It is true enough that clever men manipulate institutions to profit by the control of large masses of people, but, on the whole, most people submit to that control voluntarily. Freedom is not half so much taken away from us as it is not really wanted.

The conclusion we are reaching for is this: That, today, we are beginning to see ourselves as almost wholly in the grip of our institutions—institutions which have grown into monsters with facsimiles of minds and with organs of speech which repeat like phonograph records the partisan logic of their power. And if you interrupt the speech or attack the logic, you are likely to be stricken down—not by human intelligence but by the automatic reflex action of the institution, which knows no responsibility or morality. The institution is the vast, collectivized *robot* we have created to shield our lives, and it insists mechanically upon doing its "duty," even if it destroys our humanity in the process.

This is what we are beginning to see, and this is why we are asking ourselves, What, indeed, is man? It is a question which must precede any attempt at a new beginning for our lives.

Letter from the Night

WAKING out of a marginal sleep with lines from poems dominating the thoughts may indicate that one has a tendency toward being an "intellectual," and may, worse yet, signify that one is a "bleeding-heart," which is to say that one may have a concern for others that finds expression in something different from "Right to Work" legislation or corporate "free enterprise." Nevertheless, poets do have the much vaunted and popular virtue of "know-how," even if that "know-how" attaches itself to something as disreputable as immortality. Our culture subsists on the seasonal mortality of consumer goods and "personalities."

The moral to this is, I suppose, that in order to conform one should awaken with the persuader's horrors—an insomnia brought on by worrying about how to sell next year's products this year, and a fear that one doesn't understand the motivations of the milkman in Kansas City. If the straight line of thought isn't toed, there's a chance that the multitude might awaken thinking about fall-out, guided missiles, the mediocrity of our ever-conforming—middle of the road—leadership, and the mockery that until recently has been leveled at the man who expressed any sort of individuality. Perhaps it was the latter that made me stare into the darkness with the light of a poet's lines in my hand. Here are the lines, and in a moment I will give them such explanations as they need:

> To write for my own race
> And the reality;
> The living man that I hate,
> The dead man that I loved,
> The craven man in his seat,
> The Insolent unreproved,
> And no knave brought to book
> Who has won a drunken cheer,
> The witty man and his joke
> Aimed at the commonest ear,
> The clever man who cries
> The catch-cries of the clown
> The beating down of the wise,
> And great Art beaten down. . . .

Excessive lines by an excessive man in a land of excess—William Butler Yeats of Ireland. But certainly—even if with a little more venom than we're used to—he described the state of our nation as the President most surely won't describe it at the opening of the next Congress. In spite of his anger, Yeats was a humble man who could quite wisely say, ". . . triumph can but mar our solitude." And those in danger of making an aggressive cult of nonconformity may find quietness and reason in these words.

Perhaps Yeats was the great poet of the man who could not conform; who finds ecstacy in striking out on his own. He sang for the lonely who were tempted by unique thought, and by action that found its morality in its independence. No lyric in the English language better conveys the spirit of the uniquely fated spirit than "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death":

> I know I shall meet my fate
> Somewhere among the clouds above;
> Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love
> My country is Kiltartan Cross
> My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
> No likely end could bring them loss
> Or leave them happier than before.
> No law, nor duty bade me fight,
> Nor public men, or cheering crowds,
> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove to this tumult in the clouds. . . .

I'm sure that it was the last two lines that awakened me; they epitomize our lack—the lonely impulse of delight that would drive each of us to his tumult in the clouds. Certainly, unified action is needed in a dozen social, spiritual and cultural areas, but these are manacles of the spirit unless the individual can taste the delight of indulging in his own harmless uniqueness. To explore, or meditate; these enable us to partake of a freedom that is our own. Yeats also said, "Why should we honour those that die upon the field of battle, a man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself?" It seems to me that we are in an age that prefers the regimented death on the field of battle to the wilderness area of the self.

I'm sure there are those who will say that through Yeats I'm prescribing an aimless anarchy, but I would say to those that they should sum up the conventions that make this seeming anarchy a threat to them.

Insomnia isn't apt to produce an inspired literary critic; most surely I would deny any such aptitude. Yeats became involved with strange cults and could be silly and momentarily engrossed with folly. That he had an abundance of human frailty and indulged in the artistic tendencies of his nation in no way maimed his major theme. Even in contemplating old age he clung to the "impulse of delight" and said, as no one could have said for him:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter of its mortal dress,
> Nor is there any singing school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence. . . .

In a poem to Yeats, W. H. Auden perhaps summed up the man's genius, and since Yeats died in 1939 he was able to dramatize it. I quote a few stanzas:

> In the nightmares of the dark
> All the dogs of Europe bark,
> And the living nations wait,
> Each sequestered in its hate;
>
> Intellectual disgrace
> Stares from every human face,
> And the seas of pity lie
> Locked and frozen in each eye.
>
> Follow, poet, follow right
> To the bottom of the night
> With your unconstraining voice
> Still persuade us to rejoice:
>
> With the farming of a verse
> Make a vineyard of the curse
> Sing of human unsuccess
> In a rapture of distress;
>
> In the deserts of the heart
> Let the healing fountain start,
> In the prison of his days
> Teach the free man how to praise.

My way of arriving at a Yeats-flavored insomnia was rather indirect. On television,—the instrument upon which the vulgar charade of our conformity is re-enacted at one remove from its initial unreality,—I chanced on a fairly enlightened program on brainwashing in Chinese POW camps. An Englishman who had been a prisoner for five years told of accepting dialectical materialism in an atmosphere in which no other form of thought was allowed to exist, and how, in order to survive, he became a convert. What impressed me was that in closing he said that where the goal of the last century was equality, the goal of this century must be non-conformity if man is to survive at all. I gathered from what he said that the enforced and quite readily accepted conformism of the totalitarian states is much easier to understand than the unenforced yet eagerly sought after conformism of most of the so-called "free world."

Without the solace of Yeats I could have been awakening into a nightmare. What else is the spectacle of so-called "free men," who sell themselves into serfdom, eagerly climb into slave ships owned by superstitious commerce, to be guided by officials with the blind staggers? Self-respect becomes an outlaw, dignity a pariah, and intellectual independence is equated with treason.

Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, *et al*, felt the "impulse of delight" and sought the "tumult in the clouds." That is part of our great tradition and is memorialized on occasion. Sadly enough, Yeats was so right when he said, "Man is in love and loves what vanishes, what more is there to say." Such independence as we have is in the tombs of dead men and we scarcely dare stir their dust. Poets are that dust articulated. As a prophet must, they sing between the tomb and the stars.

Quite blessedly the man who awakens remembering poetry is usually unable to go back to sleep. He has been captivated by an art more free from corruption than any other. There is no more money to be made writing bad poetry than from writing good—in fact no money is to be made by writing either. Lacking material gain, he

is in most cultures an enforced non-conformist. As the physicist of the soul, he is the least understood of literary men. (In America today not 1/100 of 1% of the nation read contemporary poetry.) A man who is alone at night with poetry has indeed established an intimate relationship. If he is alone with a dead genius the natural and the supernatural intersect. To each person the genius may have a different meaning and the author, himself, may know that his work erupted from an unsuspected source. The mysteries of true poetry are never-ending and its truths are superimposed, one upon the other, until new truths, delivered in ancient forms, may become more acceptable than the spoken words of living men.

Only poetry could make insomnia "an impulse of delight." Such sleeplessness makes one deplore sleeping potions and tranquilizers.

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REVIEW
DID THEY REALLY READ THE MANUSCRIPT?

THE most surprising paperback (Pocket Book) of the year is *The Brave Cowboy* by Edward Abbey, a story which kept reminding us of Albert Camus' *Stranger*, but which we read with considerably more enjoyment. (The original hardback edition of *The Brave Cowboy* was published by Dodd, Mead in 1956.)

This is the story of a twenty-eight-year-old cowboy with a twisted nose who rides his "cayuse" into a twentieth-century New Mexico city to help a college friend who has been put in jail. The cowboy, Jack Burns, learns from Jerry Bondi, his friend's wife, that Paul Bondi is in the county jail awaiting transfer to a Federal prison, in which he is to serve a two-year sentence for refusing to register for the draft. As a means of getting into the county jail to see Bondi, Burns involves himself in a tavern brawl. The sheriff's men cooperate by arresting him and the next day he and Bondi are assigned to the same cell.

Burns starts right in working on Bondi to escape with him from the jail. Burns came equipped with two heavy files (hidden in his boots) to cut through the cell bars. Bondi, however, who is a college professor with a wife and child, has another view of his future. He explains that he can't join with Burns in the escape since that would make him a fugitive from justice. He agrees with Burns' disgust for twentieth-century life, but doesn't want total alienation from modern society. As he puts it:

> "I don't see the world getting any better; like you I see it getting worse. I see liberty being strangled like a dog everywhere I look, I see my own country overwhelmed by ugliness and mediocrity and overcrowding, the land smothered under airstrips and superhighways, the natural wealth of a million years squandered on atomic bombs and tin automobiles and television sets and ball-point fountain pens. It's a sorry sight indeed; I can't blame you for wanting no part of it. But I'm not yet ready to withdraw, despite the horror of it. Even if withdrawal is possible, which I doubt."

Burns insists that they can hide out together with little or no difficulty.

"I'm thinking [he says] of a few canyons in Utah, a few mountain lakes in Idaho and Wyoming."

"Maybe so," Bondi said; "maybe so. But I'm not ready for that. It's more convenient for me to stick it out for a while, to try to make an honest living introducing a little philosophy into the heads of engineers, druggists, future politicians. Don't think for a moment that I imagine myself as some sort of anarchist hero. I don't intend to fight against Authority, at least not in the open. (I may do a little underground pioneering.) When they tell us to say 'I recant everything' I'll just mumble something out of the corner of my mouth. When they tell us to stand at attention and salute I'll cross the fingers of my left hand. When they install the dictaphones—by the way, is it true that G-Man Hoover's slogan is 'Two Dictaphones in Every Home'?—and the wire-tapping apparatus and the two-way television I'll install defective fuses in the switchbox. When they ask me if I am now or ever have been an Untouchable I'll tell them that I'm just a plain old easy-going no-account Jeffersonian anarchist. That way I should be able to muddle along for a decade or so, dig out the old irrigation ditch and raise cucumbers and sweetcorn. Does that sound reasonable to you?"

"Sounds fairly easy," Burns said, smiling, "only I don't think you believe a word of it."

Bondi sighed, picked at his nose and sighed again. "Well, never mind. Call it a working hypothesis."

"If that's the way you feel why the hell'd you muddle your way into jail?"

Bondi smiled sadly. "Quite right. I was afraid you'd ask me that. It sure was a piece of muddling. I never intended for it to work out this way at all. Here I had thought that since I was a veteran and a sort of scholar and even a gentleman by birth, my old draft board would let me get away with breaking the written law. And as a matter of fact they tried to help me; did all they possibly could for me. Damned nice people—they didn't want any unseemly dealings with the Government any more than I did. The difficulty was they wanted me to register as a conscientious objector. Conscientious objector to what? I asked them. To war, they said. But I love war, I said; my father got rich off the last one canning dogfood for

> the infantry; all Bondis love war. Then what do you object to? they said. I object to slavery, I said; compulsory military service is a form of slavery. But there is no provision in the law for such an objection, they said. But it's the law itself that I object to, I said. That is illegal, they informed me. The law is unconstitutional, I replied. Then you had better take up the matter with the courts, they said. I'm a busy man, I said. What are you doing? they asked. I'm constructing a metaphysic based on the theory of unipolar planes of reality, I said. Would you mind repeating that? they said. That would be tautologous, I replied."
>
> "Then they put you in jail," Burns said; "can't say I blame them."

Not all the dialogue is like this, but who, having read the above, can doubt that *The Brave Cowboy* is a collector's item among paperbacks, hardbacks, or books with any kind of backs?

Well, Burns escapes, taking a couple of Navajos with him. The balance of the book tells how—as the cover blurb declares—"this cowboy—with only a rifle and a horse outwitted a whole modern police force equipped with machine guns, radios and helicopters, "making *The Brave Cowboy"* one of the most thrilling chase stories in recent literature."

We won't quarrel with that. We won't quibble about anything in this book. The sheriff, incidentally, instead of being a Bad Guy, turns out to be a fairly decent Joe who worries about trigger-happy posses and even works up a little sympathy for the dangerous "anarchist" he is supposed to be chasing. How does he know Burns is an anarchist, too? By efficient modern police work, the Sheriff learns that Burns and Bondi met at the State University, where they were "known to have attended secret meetings of a so-called Anarchist group." Both Burns and Bondi signed a document which was posted on University bulletin boards, advocating "Civil Disobedience to Selective Service and other Federal activities." The report to the Sheriff read as follows:

> "Document in question carried five signatures, to wit: Paul M. Bondi, Jack Burns, H. D. Thoreau, P. B. Shelley, Emiliano Zapata. Last three signatories suspected of being fictitious, as no students bearing such names were then registered at the University."

As a Broadway wit once said, "It can't *all* be a typographical error!"

The Brave Cowboy ends about as you might expect, with Burns getting killed, but not in the way that you might expect. Meanwhile, there are serious and beautiful passages in the book, and descriptions which expose the negligible "essence" of the life which Bondi is sick of and Burns has left behind. For example, telling about the constantly playing juke box in the jail, Abbey says:

> . . . the records with their concentric striations, scratched by a blunt steel needle produced a proximate musical effect: Mexican voices in a kind of vulpine harmony, guitars, loud trumpets, pitched a semitone too sharp, the rhythmic grinding of the machine. No one listened to the music, no one cared, drunk or sober, the noise was not meant for entertainment but for the sustaining of a certain psychological atmosphere, the perversion of space, the dispersal of unseemly silences. So that a man without anything to say and unable to think could still imagine himself at the vortex of an activity, however meaningless.

What a Western!

COMMENTARY
PHILOSOPHIC INSTITUTION?

THE touchy division of the subject of institutions is obviously the religious institution—the institution which functions *in loco parentis.* There are many phases of life which benefit from institutions, but it is a great question whether human beings are benefited by religious institutions.

By definition, religious institutions are concerned, in part, at least, with the irrational—or the "super-rational" would probably be a friendlier term. There can be no doubt about the human need for bridging the gap between what we know and what we must meet in experience. A large part of human decision rests upon no firmer basis than guess-work, hunch, or intuition. We want guidance in such decisions, and religious institutions offer it.

But we can acknowledge the reality and the demands of our religious or philosophical need, and admit the transrational quality of whatever is accepted to meet this need, yet still question the suitability of *any* institutional means of satisfying it. What is transrational can never be met by *formula,* and religious institutions have very little more than formulas to offer.

Is there something wrong, then, in the tendency of human beings to band or associate themselves together in connection with their need for philosophical truth? Can so basic a pattern of human behavior be rejected?

It is at least conceivable that there might be an institution which would offer without prejudice the tools—the facilities—for philosophic or religious search. Such an institution would have no authority, would serve up no dogmas, and would acquire its excellence and repute only from the presence of human beings who make good use of the tools and facilities. A certain *esprit de corps* might pervade its undertakings, just as a great school gains fame from the scholars who seek its libraries and who honor it with their independent minds.

Conceivably, an institution of this sort would be a fine thing, but its function would be limited to the service of *inquiring* intelligence, and it would never attempt to "direct" thinking to any fore-ordained conclusion. The declared attitude and principle of such an institution might be: "Here you will find a record of what other men—the greatest—have thought and taught, but as for Truth, this you must discover and identify yourself."

We have little hope of the Millennium arriving in the world until the churches turn themselves into true institutions of the "higher learning," or die away to make a place for such centers of free investigation.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

TOYS AND TROUBLES

A SUBSCRIBER who is surrounded by children rather than by theories somewhat aggrievedly remarks that we ought to write something about how to keep children constructively amused. Or how to help them to amuse themselves.

Well, toys are the conventional answer, and since most homes inhabited by small children are now overflowing with an excess of toys, some discussion of them may be attempted. A good beginning, at this time, would be for parents to pledge themselves, on each New Year's, to see that the children don't get so many toys next Christmas. Nothing, we think, is less conducive to a sense of responsibility in regard to one's belongings in later life than having too many toys when you are a child. You simply can't take care of them, nor can you exhaust the play potential of any toy where there is always another one to turn to. Perhaps some day a statistically-minded psychologist will prove that the American habit of pampering oneself with countless separate amusements is connected with a superfluity of toys during the childhood years.

Psychologists *are* beginning to point out that "fill-in" picture books tend to destroy artistic imagination. In the same category, probably, belong many of the glistening mechanical toys which bulldoze, haul, shovel, or dump dirt. The complex mechanism is all there, ready-made, and about all the child can do is watch the thing work. But when a child converts an old shoe-box into an imaginative bulldozer, the "working" is supplied by his imagination. The toy airplane made from three pieces of wood at nursery school or kindergarten likewise must receive some investiture of the child's personality.

In the doll department, the child will often feel the greatest affection for some shapeless, bedraggled favorite, to the neglect of one from the upper price ranges which talks, cries, rolls her eyes and has to be "changed." Here, as with the elaborate mechanical toys for boys, the fact that the toy itself does everything leaves the child in the position of an observer. It may be a triumph of technology, but it is not a good toy. Best of all is the doll which a mother, grandmother or older sister makes. For children will have a special feeling for anything anyone makes for them—especially if they themselves are around during the process of creation.

The creative capacity of the child is almost unlimited. He can convert an old packing case into a house, a truck, a ship, or a television set—and the programs he views in playing this imaginary game are guaranteed to be superior to those offered over the regular channels. None of this, of course, is a new discovery. All good nursery schools find that barrels and boxes, sand piles and blocks of wood, are the best equipment to have as well as being the cheapest. Being creative, the children do not really want to be limited by the definite shape and functions of specific toys. A toy house that is really a toy house can hardly become a truck or the cab of a train, because it is, too obviously, a house. If you have never experimented along these lines, just get your child into a backyard full of boxes and observe what happens.

There are a number of excellent compromises with this principle, one being a little wooden train which connects, and the track of which connects, by ordinary clothes snaps. So simple is the construction that the child feels quite equal to making various configurations of track and alignments of cars. He will build trestles, not by carrying out, with adult help, a pre-planned construction, but by inserting wooden blocks under the track when and where he feels like it. With few exceptions, a growing child will spend many times the number of hours with "snap-train" construction than he ever will with an expensive electric train.

With one good wheel toy and lots of boxes and blocks—plus a length of old hose or two and a rag doll—the child is equipped with as much as he really needs. But if there is no way of heading off the Christmas or birthday avalanche, let us at least do what we can to suggest that the toys be kept simple and easily convertible from one phase of play to another. Then, instead of apathy after forty minutes, you have children who are joyfully alert from creating their own patterns of play.

The larger wheel toys, or rather conveyances, are not entirely toys and deserve separate consideration. To learn to control something which moves effectively with oneself in it or on it is to begin to acquire a skill that is as much a part of twentieth-century living as the refrigerator or washing-machine. And, barring the too early possession of a bicycle in a neighborhood where the streets may be dangerous, the tricycle, bicycle, or chain tractor, is much more a focus for the imagination than the toy which is simply an imitation. A trip on a tricycle can become a trip on a motorcycle, a flight in an airplane or motorboat. A trip around the block can become a trip around the world. The tricycle or bicycle is not really a toy. It is a genuine conveyance.

A dog or a cat—or even a rabbit or hamster—is not a toy, and it seems to us regrettable that parents sometimes seem to regard them in this light. The giving of pets on Christmas or on a birthday gets the whole matter off on the wrong foot. You don't tie a ribbon around a living creature, no matter how diminutive or innocuous. A living thing should be regarded as having an existence in its own right. No child should have a pet until he has acquired enough maturity to see that the animal has proper care. Not even mechanical toys can be abused with impunity, for the habits of neglect and careless or destructive handling are hard to erase in later years. But how much more serious is the neglect of anything alive. The child who is allowed to regard an animal as merely a means to his own enjoyment, subject to the moods of its young owner, is receiving very poor preparation for the human relationships of adult life. It may have been all right with God and with Noah for the word to be passed that animals were always to be the slaves of man, to do with what he wished, but it is not all right with anyone who has the slightest appreciation of the naturalist for all creatures which possess life.

All in all, our child's relations to toys, and our relationship to both toys in general and certain toys in particular, are matters of considerable importance. This is part of the child's world, and what we are able to understand of it, how we guide the use of toys, will have a lot to do with how well we are doing with the children themselves.

FRONTIERS

The Bright Side of the Sputnik

As nearly everyone seems to realize, the technical prowess demonstrated by the Sputnik's untroubled ascent indicates that the Russians spend a lot of time studying. And certain of our educators are also aware that more is involved than the State's insistence on technical training. Reports in a recent *UNESCO Courier* on the reading habits of nations suggested that the Russian people, on the whole, are eager to learn about almost everything. Russia produces many times the titles per year offered in the United States, and numerous books are read in English, French and German.

This sort of activity will eventually produce more than satellites, and the Russian claim that they are creating a lively and responsive public mind is to some degree borne out by the increase of criticism of Soviet conditions and policies within Russia itself. As a contributor to the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* remarks: "While no one in Britain or England wants a State-directed culture, it seems worthwhile to think of the possible effect of the very large Russian investment in adult education. It is certainly wrong to suppose it has been aimed merely at ideological conditioning. Indeed, it seems to me to offer great hope for the future since, while it must be limited in many ways, it has given millions of people the instruments of thought and cannot have failed to set them thinking. There is a good deal of evidence that they are getting tired of the ideological trimmings."

In this context, we should like to call attention to two articles appearing in the *Saturday Review* and *The Progressive*, noting the hope of greater freedom of expression within Russia. David Dallin (*Saturday Review*, Aug. 10), reviewing Louis Fisher's *Russia Revisited*, summarizes some of the favorable signs:

> Mr. Fisher inquired of all his Soviet friends and acquaintances and of foreign diplomats and journalists whether they knew of any persons who had been arrested by the secret police. "Not in the past year," they replied (except in Tiflis, in March 1956, after the student riots).
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> "The nightmare is over," a Moscow University professor told him, the nightmare which "was a reality from 1917 to 1954 and even on into 1955." "Conditions have improved," others told him. There is no matter-of-course freedom or democracy; the basic constitution has not changed, the autocratic regime, the one-party press, Marxism-Leninism still dominate the scene. Yet the change is highly significant. As this reviewer was told, "In a nutshell, the effect of the change is that now we can sleep at night." How significant the change is can best be judged by those who formerly were not able to sleep.

Sidney Lens, writing on "The Second Communist Revolution" in the September *Progressive*, finds that the Soviet people are increasingly demanding more enlightened policies, both at home and in terms of foreign relations. Mr. Lens' optimism takes the following form:

> American public opinion continues to resist any significant acceptance of the notion that the widespread convulsions in the Communist world represent the beginning of decisive change. Some, like the editors of *Time*, routinely regard all developments behind the Iron Curtain as mere "tricks" by wily Red strategists designed to deceive the credulous and unwary. Others, who have seen so many of their hopes shattered over the years, shy away from optimistic appraisal lest this be another false-alarm.
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> But sitting in this Polish capital thousands of miles away from Main Street, one gets the feeling that history has reached a turning-point in this part of the world. This is true despite the criminal intervention of the Soviets against the Hungarian people last year and other acts which digress from the new trend. The pronouncements of Nikita Khrushchev on decentralization, the exhortations by Mao Tse-tung on the need for a hundred flowers to bloom, the process of democratization in Poland, and the development of the new economic model in Yugoslavia—from here, all these add to more than empty gestures; they are part of a dual and decisive process going on not only at the top of the social atmosphere, but at the bottom, among the people, as well.
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> The leaders of world Communism are learning at last that they cannot effectively build an industrial

> society with a terrified populace, that a measure of freedom is an essential ingredient in economic development. Nor are they learning this from textbooks, at the lower levels, in the factories and on the farms, among the students and the intelligentsia, there are rumblings even hard-headed Communists can understand and must respond to.

The reference to Mao Tse-tung's "hundred flowers" derives from the Chinese Communist's encouragement of popular criticism, when, last February, he declared, "let a hundred flowers bloom, let diverse schools of thought contend." And while neither in Russia nor China is there encouragement for a ripping apart of Marxian doctrine, there can be no doubt that the price of speaking one's mind is not what it used to be. In China, as well as in Soviet-dominated countries, a progress toward freedom of thought never possible under Stalin, may be clearly observed.

It is always a good idea to try to look sympathetically at the influences which have led men to become Marxists. The lead article in the *Saturday Review* for Nov. 16 contains Howard Fast's discussion of why he joined and why he left the Communist Party. While at last convinced that Russia can no longer be thought of as championing a world revolution, Fast nevertheless invites reflection on the sincerity of many who have served the Marxist cause. In paragraphs recalling the more moving passages of *The God That Failed*, the novelist gives the facts of his own childhood as a case study of how one becomes susceptible to the Marxist appeal:

> I joined the Communist Party in 1943, but I came to it first as a part of my generation, in the 1930s. In 1932, I worked as a messenger in a Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library. It was one of a series of dismal and underpaid jobs that I had held since, at the age of eleven, pressed by the need of our utter poverty, I went to work as a newspaper delivery boy.
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> If we are to seek for understanding, any sort of understanding, then the reader must not only recall the 1930s, but must comprehend the full meaning of the surrender of childhood, a situation that poverty still imposes on millions of children the world over.
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> I came to the left-wing movement out of my own poverty and hunger and despair in the early 1930s, and I came to it out of a working-class background, but I joined the Communist Party in 1943 because I could no longer see any future as a writer unless I was able to wed my principles to action. At that point I did not feel that I was moving away from the traditions that had shaped my thinking, but rather in the direct line of them. Where I had been alone—or at best a partner in a confusion that equaled mine, a frustration as great—I felt that I had now become part of an edifice dedicated singularly and irrevocably to the ending of all war, injustice, hunger, and human suffering—and to the goal of the brotherhood of man.

While Mr. Fast and doubtless many other American Communists may have been extraordinarily naïve, they may have turned in the only direction *they* could find for a theoretical answer to the tremendous disparities in wealth and opportunity to be observed in the democracies. Why not regard in this way many of the leaders of Soviet Russia who are concerned with the welfare of their nation and countrymen? Now that these embattled doctrinaire people have achieved a better standard of living, and have converted Russia into a leading world power, is it not possible to hope that the liberating tendencies of the past year will continue?