

THE FAILING DREAMS

TO live a fruitful, constructive life, a man needs, first, a "dream" which connects his thinking about what is with what he believes ought to be. Second, he needs a field of action in which he can engage in work that gives him a sense of making progress. When large numbers of people hold a dream in common, and understand each other when they speak of its values, their society has cultural coherence and on-going momentum.

There are of course competing and conflicting cultural dreams, with successive involvements of people in one dream after another, and the resulting historical changes often have a casualty rate that seems too heavy to be borne. We know far more about the painful symptoms of these changes, since we experience them ourselves, than we know about their underlying causes. No man finds it easy to look critically at his dreams. You could say that his dreams are what hold him together, and it takes a rare man to dream a dream which submits to constant revision while he works towards its fulfillment. Least of all is this possible in political undertakings which require the techniques of mass persuasion and oversimplifications of both the ends and the means of a popularly conceived dream. In any event, a viable dream must have the quality of emotional wholeness—the motivating energy which comes from a *mythic* explanation of meaning.

What we are beginning to learn, in the present, is that a simple "objectivity" toward this aspect of the human situation is not good enough as a way of getting at either the individual or social problems of life. Purely objective criticism or analysis appears to be positionless, ostensibly motiveless—but criticism *cannot* be this and reveal anything important. Either it smuggles in the assumptions of a new dream, or it remains a barren survey of elements that can only add to the preoccupations of people who try to live without

any dream—*outside* of life. Of course, the cult of "objectivity" is itself one of the dreams of Western civilization—the epistemological stance of the scientific ideology. You could call it a dream which tries to ignore the necessity of dreaming. Dreams are flawed by the reaction of essential life-processes which they ignore or leave out.

But these are only generalizations. We need to look at some of the failing dreams of twentieth-century man. For a beginning, there is the dream of what C. Wright Mills calls "the white-collar people," more or less synonymous with the great middle class. "Internally," he says, "they are split, fragmented; externally, they are dependent on larger forces." A passage in the first chapter in Mills's *White Collar* (Galaxy, 1956) describes their growing sense of failure and frustration, as reflected in Western literature:

Images of white-collar types are now part of the literature of every major industrial nation: Hans Fallada presented the Pinnebergs to pre-Hitler Germany. Johannes Pinneberg, a bookkeeper trapped by inflation, depression, and wife with child ends up in the economic gutter, with no answer to the question, "Little Man, What Now?"—except support by a genuinely proletarian wife. J. B. Priestley created a gallery of tortured and insecure creatures from the white-collar world of London in *Angel Pavement*. Here are people who have been stood up by life: what they most desire is forbidden them by reason of what they are. . . .

Kitty Foyle is perhaps the closest American counterpart of these European novels. But how different its heroine is! In America, unlike Europe, the fate of the white-collar types is not yet clear. A modernized Horatio Alger heroine, Kitty Foyle (like Alice Adams before her) has aspirations up the Main Line. The book ends, in a depression year, with Kitty earning \$3000 a year, about to buy stock in her firm, and hesitating marrying a doctor who happens to be a Jew. . . . But twenty-five years later, during the American postwar boom Willy Loman appears, the hero of *Death of a Salesman*, the white-collar man

who by the very virtue of his moderate success in business turns out to be a total failure in life. Frederic Wertham has written of Willy Loman's dream: "He succeeds with it; he fails with it; he dies with it. But why did he have this dream? Isn't it true that he had to have a false dream in our society?"

There is irony in the timing. Willy Loman's personal destruction—you can't call it a real suicide; he was killed by the break-up of his false dream—was Arthur Miller's way of showing, in the midst of an economic *boom*, what can happen to a true believer, and the complete acceptance of this chronicle of human failure by the American public, with revivals and radio performances to this day, is evidence that the play embodies a verdict that is understood.

What was Willy's dream? To recognize its unperverted beginnings, you have to dip deep into American culture, starting, say, with the vision of the Founding Fathers. It would help to read Arthur M. Schlesinger's answer to Crèvecoeur's question, "What then is the American, this New Man?" published in the January, 1943, issue of the *American Historical Review*. Constance's Rourke's remarkable book, *The Roots of American Culture* (Harcourt, Brace, 1942), brings colorful insight into the lift and drive that was once behind the American Dream. The sustaining power of the thought of the men who conceived and fought the American Revolution becomes manifest in Allen O. Hansen's *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1926). With this should be read Lyman Bryson's *The Next America* for a generously optimistic view of the American spirit and a discussion of paths into the future, showing what Willy and many like him have missed.

This reading is suggested mainly to avoid over-simplified, cynical interpretations of the tragedy of Willy Loman and glib explanations of his betrayal by the cheap, sloganized echoes of what was once a richly diverse outlook. Something of this part of the American past is conveyed by Prof. Schlesinger:

It has often been observed that the plants and animals of foreign lands undergo change when removed to America. These mutations arise from differences in climate and geography. But other influences also affected the transplanted European man. One was the temperament of the settler, the fact that he was more adventurous, or more ambitious, or more rebellious against conditions at home than his fellows who stayed put. It is not necessary to believe with William Stoughton that "God sifted a whole Nation that he might send Choice Grain over into this Wilderness," but undoubtedly the act of quitting a familiar life for a strange and perilous one demanded uncommon qualities of hardihood, self-reliance and imagination. Once the ocean was crossed, sheer distance and the impact of novel experiences further weakened the bonds of custom, evoked unsuspected capacities and awakened the settler to possibilities of improvement which his forebears had never known.

The revision of the intuitive longings of the American dream into a body of doctrine supported by the moral emotions was accomplished by Calvin's rationalization of "productive" activity. As Tawney has put it, Calvinism was "perhaps the first systematic body of religious teaching which can be said to recognize and applaud the economic virtues." Puritan religion, Schlesinger comments, "neatly fitted the glove of divine sanction to the hand of prudential conduct, thus giving a sense of personal rectitude to the business of getting ahead in the world." Tawney also understood the deep emotional security Americans found in the traditional attitudes loosely represented by the expression, the "American way of life." He wrote:

Whatever the future may contain, the past has shown no more excellent social order than that in which the mass of the people were the masters of the holdings which they plowed and of the tools with which they worked, and could boast . . . "it is a quietness to a man's mind to live upon his own and to know his heir is certain."

You do not put an end to such feelings nor convert them to another allegiance simply by pointing out in intellectual terms the vast changes in the economic circumstances and arrangements of the United States. The dream was a century or more in the making, and, reinforced by the

intoxications of countless personal "success stories," it became the vulgarized dogma of mass culture in the United States.

In the early chapters of *White Collar*, C. Wright Mills sets out to show that the transformation of the American economy from a rural, agrarian enterprise to the complicated technological structure of the present has removed the foundations of the traditional understanding of the American Dream. In a chapter headed, "The Transformation of Property," he says:

What happened to the world of the small entrepreneur is best seen by looking at what happened to its heroes: the independent farmers and the small businessmen. These men, the leading actors of the middle-class economy of the nineteenth century, are no longer at the center of the American scene; they are merely two layers between other more powerful or more populous strata. Above them are the men of large property, who through money and organization wield much power over other men, alongside and below them are the rank and file of propertyless employees and workers, who work for wages and salaries. Many former entrepreneurs and their children have joined these lower ranks, but only a few have become big entrepreneurs and not much like their nineteenth-century prototypes, and must now operate in a world no longer organized in their image.

Two other processes of change, of great psychological importance, must be added to this impersonal recital. First is the endless exploitation of the doctrine of conspicuous consumption by the agencies of advertising and sales promotion. A carefully cultivated acquisitiveness has been made to take the place of the morale-building psychology of individual productiveness. The other change results from the tremendous acceleration of centralized control through the organization of the entire economy to service the modern military machine. There are plenty of critics who saw how the American Dream was being shattered by the concentration of economic power, and they might have gained a sympathetic audience and exerted decisive influence on the course of growth in the United States, had it not been for the imperative economic requirements of

two great world wars. Thus the Dream was altered, even inverted, by virtually irresistible forces—typified in *The Death of a Salesman* by Willy's mentor, "Uncle Ben," the wheeler-dealer who personifies Willy's idea of "success" and, in the end, causes his self-condemnation as a failure not worthy to survive.

The agony of Willy's plight is ignored by the mainstream champions of Western civilization, while its most articulate critics address a public that is increasingly alienated and without power. Practical reformers, meanwhile, overlook the fact that you can't repair *dreams* with the logic of statistical support for new economic theories. You don't replace the inspiration growing out of a socio-economic process which gave men a feeling of the good for some hundred and fifty years without feeling what they felt, yourself, and showing a personal understanding of the old dream, before you unfold for them what you believe to be a new dream capable of carrying them forward into the future.

Another dream that has been shaken and challenged by the moral failure of the present is the promise of traditional Protestant theology. In the *Nation* for April 19, William Hamilton describes the change in religious thinking typified by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's revolutionary theology. A Protestant German pastor, Bonhoeffer was executed by the Gestapo on April 9, 1945. Mr. Hamilton describes the world in which Bonhoeffer's influence is being felt:

What is this new era? It is not the world of the ecumenical movement, nor of dialogue with art, nor psychoanalysis, nor of the politics of sin. It is the world of radically accelerating pace of secularization, of the increasing unimportance and powerlessness of religion, of the end of special privilege for religious men and religious institutions. It is the world of new forms of technology, of the mass media, of great danger and great experiment—what Kenneth Boulding calls the post-civilized world.

The poignant if intellectually oblique communications of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* are responsible for a deep

ferment in the thinking of modern Christians, an instance of which came with publication in England of *Honest to God* by the Bishop of Woolwich two or three years ago. Bonhoeffer strikes directly at the idea that man ought to think of himself as "dependent" on God. The religious man who accepts the responsibilities laid upon him by the age is a man with the courage to stand alone—as if there were no God. Religion, he says, ought not to be taken as a source of "self-assurance." Mr. Hamilton's explanatory account of this theological subtlety is helpful:

There is also, in Bonhoeffer's vision of the world come of age, a rejection of religion as salvation either by transmitting the individual to some protected religious realm, or even as protection from something that, without religion, a man might fall into, like despair or self-righteousness. Bonhoeffer states that in the world come of age, we can no longer be religious, if you define religion as that system that treats God or the gods as need-fulfillers and problem-solvers.

There are thus no places in the self or the world, Protestants who listen to Bonhoeffer go on to say, where problems emerge that only God can solve. There are problems and needs, to be sure, but the world itself is the source of the solutions, not God. God must not be asked to do what the world is fully capable of doing: offer forgiveness, overcome loneliness, provide a way out of despair, break pride, assuage the fear of death.

The revolutionary import of Bonhoeffer's thinking is that the idea of God must not be permitted to subtract from the manliness of human beings—from, some might say, the possibilities of the godlike *in* man. There is a brave fellowship, here, with the courage of the Existentialist thinkers, and a readiness for the kind of heroism that is implicit in the profound psychological discoveries of Viktor Frankl—a fruit, as with Bonhoeffer, of the ordeal of life in a Nazi death-camp. What is involved, at the very least, are the premonitory symptoms of the final break-up of the Medieval dream—the idea of a Heavenly Father who watches over the faithful and has promised to lift them out of their misery, if not in this world, in the next.

It may be thought that this *coup de grace* to the suppliant stance of traditional Western religion has little historical significance, in contrast to the massive changes which lie behind the disillusionments described by C. Wright Mills and other social thinkers, but the very powerlessness of institutional religion to be more than a passive witness to twentieth-century man's inhumanity to man is openly acknowledged in the work of Bonhoeffer and his followers. Their declarations cry out for a new religious inspiration, putting an end to familiar claims to exclusive religious truth. This is really an extraordinary event in the religious history of the West, with deep implications for the possibility of world brotherhood unmarred by sectarian claims. As Mr. Hamilton says:

Christianity—as would be true of any religion and any irreligion—is not necessary. It is merely one of the possibilities available to man in a competitive and pluralistic spiritual situation today. Christians are perfectly free to offer their wares to the world come of age, the religionless world. But they have no head starts, ontological or psychological. This in turn implies no clergy deductions, no tax exemptions and no preferential treatment of any kind. . . .

We can see what Bonhoeffer is doing and persuading us to do. He is undermining the traditional Christian confidence in language, argument, debate; in short, our assurance that we can persuade an indifferent world that it really needs God. He is forcing us to shift our center of attention from theology, apologetics, criticism of culture, the problem of communication, and even from hermeneutics, to the shape and quality of our lives. . . . The communication of the Christian in our world is likely to be, at least for a time, essentially ethical and non-verbal.

To the breakdown of the materialized version of the American Dream and the radical questioning of the Protestant Christian Dream must be added the decline and final collapse of the Western dream of progress through revolutionary Socialism. For many staunch supporters of the socialist vision, the pain of disillusionment began with publication of the reports on the Moscow Trials and the final monolithic triumph of

Stalinism in Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, the ideological hardening process brought by World War II and its cold-war aftermath has virtually ended intelligent dialogue about social order, transforming it into a sterile exchange of epithets. For almost a generation, men of vision have been moving into anarcho-pacifist ranks and into the decentralist and communitarian movements, as the only remaining hope. For a careful analysis of the uselessness of revolutionary violence, Everett Dean Martin's *Farewell to Revolution* (Norton, 1935) is an indispensable text. Then, Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man* (especially the section, "We Need a New Political Vocabulary") documents the breakdown of the Western radical's dream, returning to a basic Humanism that may be taken as a preface to any future social thinking meant to serve human beings instead of furthering the ruthless claims of ideological abstractions. In more recent years, the leaven of Gandhian thinking and of humanistic psychology has produced such effective criticism of conventional socialist doctrine that this source of high-hoping utopian feeling has dried up almost entirely.

What about Science? The old, Enlightenment confidence in the revolutionary power of science to change the world is now almost completely gone. Ortega noted its decline as long ago as 1930, in his *Revolt of the Masses*, and the horrors of nuclear warfare now make it plain that science, as Western man has come to apply it, is at best no more than a morally neutral technique. The idea of science as a kind of Natural Revelation that would replace with objective certainties man's blundering efforts to find "the truth" is no longer taken seriously. Likewise, the hope that by the application of science to social questions the blueprints of a just social order could be devised, was lost on both practical and theoretical grounds. Terror became the chief means of control in societies claiming to be "scientific" in design, while the exposure of the Positivist fallacy in social science has been well known for many years. Positivism, as John H. Hallowell remarked in the August 1944 *American Political Science*

Review, was a nineteenth-century idea based on a naïve faith in the methods of the physical sciences. The Positivists' denial of the role of speculation and metaphysics meant simply that they were unconscious of their own unexamined metaphysical assumptions. In a moving passage, Prof. Hallowell wrote:

The positivist who, in the cloister of his laboratory or den, exercises such noble and "scientific" restraint as to deny the faith that has overturned dynasties and bathed nations in the blood of revolution may some day awake (upon the coming of a very different sort of revolution) to find his own essential quality challenged by barbarians who may insist, to his own chagrin, that he was, indeed, right. And, lest the possibility seem remote, let us simply recall that such things have come to pass in nations whose cultural traditions would have seemed a few decades ago to belie just such a possibility. As political scientists, we can refuse to make ethical judgments only by denying our responsibilities as human beings . . . and if we are persuaded by some false loyalty to science, or by some false conception of its nature, to forsake our human obligations, we may end by denying not only our humanity but our science.

What about Education? Well, if one is inclined to penetrate beneath the frothy and often distracting surface of recent events at the University of California at Berkeley, and to go considerably further than Lewis Feuer's Dec. 21 article in the *New Leader* (and subsequent installments and debate), he may turn to Dorothy T. Samuel's depth analysis of some of the participants in the Civil Rights movement in the Spring *Contemporary Issues* (50 cents, P.O. Box 2357, Church Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10008). Miss Samuels calls these young people the "prodigals"—students who have had more than enough of the material pleasures of the Acquisitive Society.

They spring [she writes] from that group . . . for whom this has long been an affluent society. Among these young people, qualified by background, birth and brains to become the new leaders, are a considerable number who already . . . have tasted deep of the fleshpots of conspicuous consumption and they have found them bitter and unsatisfying. They

have been overdosed with pleasures and inoculated with the vaccine of affluence. They represent the faint foreshadowings of the Age of Satiety. . . . It is among those who know that "you can't go home again," but who have found no new solutions, that the trend of the future appears to be taking hazy form.

On every college campus will be found unfashionably clad students lolling in cheap rooms, reading inexpensive paperbacks or second-hand editions of great books. . . . They browse among the courses and the disciplines. If a book speaks to their condition, they may skip a few weeks' required work to peruse everything the author wrote. When the grade card reflects what they did not learn rather than what they did learn, they couldn't care less. Top grades are meaningful only to employers; these students have not seen any jobs worth doing. . . . And so, the exodus has begun. In ones and twos, undramatically, thoughtful lads and lasses are dropping out of college, at least off and on, so they will have time to think. . . .

They are, in short, philosophic in an age which seems to offer no forum for discussion of principles and values and verities. . . . They would be Emersons and Thoreaus in a day when journals and podiums seem open only to statisticians and reporters.

Now comes this tragic note:

Even among the active, dedicated ones—SNCC workers and CORE demonstrators—there is little sense of hope. Obviously, not all of the students in civil rights work are prodigals, which is fortunate for the morale of these movements. Over coffee, in the wee hours of the night, the prodigals on furlough from foreign service in Mississippi reveal how small they consider the area in which they can "overcome."

"I know I'm not really changing the world any out there," one said to me in emotionless tones. "But at least I'm doing *something*; I am working with living human beings whose needs are clear and obvious. But whatever I accomplish, it won't change the greed and cruelty and lying and exploitation that run through our whole bomb-happy civilization." And another pointed out, "It's easy to bleed for the Negroes now. But I have the horrible certainty that, once they get a square deal in our society, most of them are going to play the game just as the whites have been playing it for years."

Is ours, then, a world without hope? If history is any guide, the answer must be that never have there been so many promising signs. The power of a new inspiration cannot begin its

regenerating activity until patches of ground are cleared and new seeds are planted on clean places. The terrible contradictions of the time are not between the fresh visions which are beginning to be seen and felt in so many areas, but between the dying forms of old dreams which have lost their utility. There is searing trial in these struggles, but the very ruthlessness of events may itself be a needed warning that no worthy future can be constructed with broken tools out of the failed dreams of the past. Those who make the future will have to find, instead, the seminal essences of past inspiration, and develop new dreams with the daring of timeless longings, toward those more universal ideals which stand at the end of the only paths which still remain open for modern man.

REVIEW

"THE BEHAVIOR OF NATIONS"

LOUIS J. HALLE'S brief discussion of collective guilt in relation to war crimes—involving the still-debated idea of "deeply inbred national traits"—calls attention to one of the most important issues of this or any other time (Encounter, April). Mr. Halle begins with a contemporary incident:

It is not every day that debate in the United Nations touches on an issue in the realm of philosophy. This is what happened, however, last December 11th, in the course of debate on the controversial operation whereby Belgian paratroopers had, some two weeks earlier, rescued foreign hostages held at Stanleyville and Paulis by the Congolese rebels under Mr. Christophe Gbenye.

For two days before December 11th, agitated African representatives in the Security Council had been denouncing Belgium and the United States (which had supplied the airplanes for the operation) in such terms, that, for the honour of the United Nations and of the countries involved, one wishes that their remarks could be expunged from the record. In the competitive violence of language that had developed among the speakers, racial hatred had at last been invoked and one among the races of mankind had, at least by implication, been collectively indicted for something like moral turpitude.

After two days of this, Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak of Belgium made his response in a long and moving address that had a quality almost unknown to political oratory since the days of Woodrow Wilson. He said that, so as not to aggravate the radical antagonisms already aroused, he would refrain from detailing the atrocities committed against those whom Mr. Gbenye had held as hostages. Having, however, made even so light a reference to atrocities committed in Africa, he had the grace to follow with a reference to Buchenwald and Auschwitz, the scene of atrocities committed by white men in Europe. Then he went on to say: "My sincere belief is that there is no such thing as a guilty race. My sincere belief is that there is no such thing as a guilty people. My sincere belief is that there are only misguided men and contemptible men. Hitler was a contemptible man. I am sorry to say that Gbenye is a contemptible man."

Mr. Halle regards this statement as a long stride toward full rejection of the doctrine of collective guilt—a claim that has been used throughout history to justify massacres and wars on the ground that the citizens or subjects of a state are fatally tainted by the moral turpitude of their leaders. The population of Sodom, Mr. Halle recalls, was exterminated in retribution for offenses committed by the few. He continues:

The question whether a race or a nation is guilty of crimes committed by some of its members is a philosophical question, but one with the greatest practical implications. Although I have referred to Sodom, our own time is rich in examples. It happens not infrequently among us that bewildered Jewish school-children find themselves accused of having crucified Jesus. Under Hitler this kind of thinking led to the slaughter of some six million Jews.

The earlier reference to Woodrow Wilson is a reminder that the point of view of this statesman-idealist was far too sophisticated for popular acceptance during World War I.

In order to mobilize the emotions and materiel of war, an abstraction was foisted upon the people of the United States—the "Germans" were presented as a kind of Hydraheaded monster bent on conquering the entire world. When, after the defeat of the Germans, the Weimar Republic had replaced the Kaiser's regime, the same misguided public opinion required that republic to sign an admission of collective guilt and to accept the punitive consequences at Versailles. During World War II, the leaders of America and England held the Hitler regime to be representative of the general German character. "Consequently," points out Mr. Halle, "the Atlantic allies gave no encouragement to the movements inside Germany for the overthrow of Hitler's regime; they insisted on the unconditional surrender of the German nation under whatever kind of régime; and they adopted the impracticable post-war objective of keeping Germany prostrate and helpless, under whatever kind of regime, for an indefinite future."

In *The Behavior of Nations*, published in 1941, Morley Roberts explicitly charged the Germans with collective guilt:

We are being told that if Germany discards Hitler all will go well, that the Germans will cease to be Germans, and may safely be admitted as citizens. They are, however, cunning enough in defeat to discard him, while attributing to him tribal acts long meditated.

This was a conception of the Germans that corresponded closely to Hitler's conception of the Jews, and with a further consistency Mr. Roberts remarks that "if the Germans are again overcome, it must be held that the massacre of a whole population is justifiable if no other means can secure an inoffensive nation or nationality."

Mr. Halle now comes to what he calls a philosophical as well as a psychological problem:

We see all around us, today as in the past, how the philosophical question of collective guilt has the most impressive practical consequences. Nevertheless, any attempt to open a debate on it produces a sort of embarrassed silence. One reason for this, I think, is simply that we live in an anti-philosophical age, that we are in our time averse to philosophical inquiry. We don't understand it, or it seems to us out of place in the world of practical affairs. Another reason is that, while all of us object to particular applications of the doctrine of collective guilt, we find other applications of it plausible if not congenial. There are those among us, for example, who object to the collective condemnation of all Jews but not to the collective condemnation of all Germans.

A more important reason for silence, perhaps, is that our evolving civilisation has its origin in a conceptual world dominated by the doctrine of collective guilt, so that to question it touches all of us in the very roots of our cultural being. According to what is by far the most widespread interpretation of the doctrine of Original Sin, we are all guilty of the disobedience of a man called Adam, who lived long before our time, and we deserve to be punished by eternal hellfire. For all who accept this interpretation, the very foundations of Christianity are threatened by calling the possibility of collective guilt into question.

Then there are the Sanctified examples from the Old Testament. The primitive Jehovah of the Pentateuch was wholly dominated by the concept of collective guilt.

My own belief is that, in the long evolution of human civilisation from primitive to sophisticated conceptions, the doctrine of collective guilt, which has caused such widespread death and suffering in the 20th century, will fall into discredit and come to be regarded, by future anthropologists, as a property of primitive man. When that time comes it may at last be possible to conduct relations among human societies on a humane and intelligent basis that the cultural immaturity of our present still forbids.

The most perceptive and complete treatment of this subject remains, for us, Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man* (Cunningham Press, 1953). The first section of this book is titled "The Responsibility of Peoples," in which, summarizing as "Political Animism" the dangerous absurdities of collective guilt, Macdonald writes:

As primitive man endowed natural forces with human animus, so modern man attributes to a nation or a people qualities of will and choice that belong in reality only to individuals. The reasons are the same in both cases: to reduce mysterious and uncontrollable forces to a level where they may be dealt with. The cave dweller feels much more comfortable about the thunderstorm if he can explain it as the rage of some one like himself only bigger, and the urban cave dwellers of our time feel much better about war if they can think of the enemy nation as a person like themselves only bigger, which can be collectively punched in the nose for the evil actions it collectively chooses to do. If the German people are not "responsible" for "their" nation's war crimes, the world becomes a complicated and terrifying place, in which un-understood social forces move men puppet-like to perform terrible acts, and in which guilt is at once universal and meaningless. Unhappily, the world is in fact such a place.

This animistic confusion marks the common man's thinking (with plenty of help from his political rulers) not only on relations between nations but also on the relation between the State and the individual citizen. Precisely because in this sphere the individual is most powerless in reality, do his rulers make their greatest efforts to present the State not only as an instrument for hid purposes but as an extension of his personality. They have to try to do this because of the emphasis on the free individual which the bourgeois revolution has made part of our political assumptions (for how long?).

COMMENTARY

THE CRUX OF THE SOCIAL QUESTION

IT is practically impossible to dip into a book by C. Wright Mills without becoming interested in everything the man has done. For example, the quotations from *White Collar* in this week's lead led us to purchase the Evergreen paperback, *The Sociological Imagination* (first issued by Oxford University Press in 1959), and to still greater appreciation of Mills's capacity to set off in clear definition many of the major problems of the time.

You could call him the most penetrating of the "transition" thinkers in the Social Sciences (a classification he disliked, but was obliged to use). The great question, so far as the "transition" is concerned, is how to formulate primary causation: is it in the individual or in the psycho-social conditions surrounding the individual? On this point, Mills wrote:

Many great public issues as well as many private troubles are described in terms of "the psychiatric"—often, it seems, in a pathetic attempt to avoid large issues and problems of modern society. Often this statement seems to rest on a provincial narrowing of interest to the Western societies, or even to the United States—thus ignoring two thirds of mankind; often, too, it arbitrarily divides the individual life from the larger institutions within which that life is enacted, and which on occasion bear upon it more grievously than do the intimate environments of childhood.

The crux of the question is put in this paragraph:

It is true, as psychoanalysts continually point out, that people do often have "increasing sense of being moved by obscure forces within themselves which they are unable to define." But it is *not* true, as Ernest Jones asserted, that "man's chief enemy and danger is his own unruly nature and the dark forces pent up within him." On the contrary: "Man's chief danger" today lies in the unruly forces of contemporary society itself, with its alienating methods of production, its enveloping techniques of political domination, its international anarchy—in a word, its pervasive transformations of the very "nature" of man and the conditions and aims of his life.

Thus the real problem is to find out more about *how* "the dark forces" in the individual *turn into* "the unruly forces of contemporary society." This would enable us to make intelligible and workable division between what we must do as individuals, to improve the quality of our lives, and what we must do in concert—socially and politically—to improve the life of all. Mills's rejection of the statement by Dr. Jones ought not to be so flatly decisive. While the externalities of the human situation may support the sociological diagnosis, Jones's view may point more fundamentally to the area in which the initial forces of change must be generated.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

NOTES ON A TEACHER'S LIFE

VARIOUS favorable reviews have called attention to *Up the Down Staircase*, by Bel Kaufman (Prentice Hall, 1964). This is an unusual presentation of a high school teacher's spectrum of experiences as she strives to enlighten young minds amidst administrative directives, student indifference and illiteracy—but also a recital of heart-warming responses, indicating that *some* education can proceed no matter what the handicaps. This is not a book with a thesis. It simply allows students, teachers, and administrators to speak for themselves in letters, notes, directives, classroom quotations, etc. As Robert Kirsch, of the LOS Angeles *Times* (March 2) puts it: "There is a sense of life, or character, of laughter and even of sadness. Miss Sylvia Barrett is a memorable character. *Up the Down Staircase* is a brilliant work, and the two combine to provide a rare and delightful reading experience." A paragraph from Mr. Kirsch supplies a good introduction for a book which does not provide its own:

If Miss Barrett is young, attractive, well-trained and ready to do her best, the job isn't that simple. English is practically a foreign language. And between the instructions (Please ignore previous instructions in circular No. 3, Paragraphs 5 and 6. . .) and the paperwork (Make out Delaney cards and seating plan, Take attendance, Fill out attendance sheets. Send out absentee cards and so on for 25 other steps), there are such matters as hall patrol, personality profiles, guidance reports, communications from the assistant principal, reminders from the school nurse, faculty conferences and the drive to cut out smoking in the lavatories.

We have selected a few passages as particularly appealing. The first, from a letter to a college friend, shows humor and tolerance as well as mild exasperation in the frequent mismating of the objectives of a teacher with the "duties" of an administrator:

Dear Ellen:

You ask what I am teaching. Hard to say. Professor Winters advised teaching "not the subject but the whole child." The English Syllabus urges "individualization and enrichment"—which means giving individual attention to each student to bring out the best in him and enlarge his scope beyond the prescribed work. Bester says to "motivate and distribute" books—that is, to get students ready and eager to read. All this is easier said than done. In fact, all this is plain impossible.

Many of our kids—though physically mature—can't read beyond 4th or 5th grade level. Their background consists of the simplest comics and thrillers. They've been exposed to some ten years of schooling, yet they don't know what a sentence is.

I have "let it be a challenge" to me: I've been trying to teach without books. There was one heady moment when I was able to excite the class by an idea: I had put on the blackboard Browning's "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's heaven for?" and we got involved in a spirited discussion of aspiration vs. reality. Is it wise, I asked, to aim higher than one's capacity? Does it not doom one to failure? No, no, some said, that is ambition and progress! No, no, others cried, that's frustration and defeat! What about hope? What about despair?—You've got to be practical!—You've got to have a dream! They said this in their own words, you understand, startled into discovery. To the young, clichés seem freshly minted. Hitch your wagon to a star! Shoemaker, stick to your last! And when the dismissal bell rang, they paid me the highest compliment: they groaned! They crowded in the doorway, chirping like agitated sparrows, pecking at the seeds I had strewn—when who should materialize but Admiral Ass. ["Adm. Asst."—Administrative Assistant.]

"What is the meaning of this noise?"

"It's the sound of thinking, Mr. McHabe," I said.

In my letter-box that afternoon was a note from him, with copies to my principal and chairman (and—who knows?—perhaps a sealed indictment dispatched to the Board?) which read (sic): "I have observed that in your class the class entering your room is held up because the pupils exiting from your room are exiting in a disorganized fashion, blocking the doorway unnecessarily and *talking*. An orderly flow of traffic is the responsibility of the teacher whose class is exiting from the room."

The cardinal sin, strange as it may seem in an institution of learning, is talking.

A humorous interchange on a problem of central importance appears in an intra-mural communication with another teacher:

INTRASCHOOL COMMUNICATION

From: Room 304

To: Room 508

. . . What do I do if a kid is *not* covering with his left arm a paper which is *not* at right angles to his desk?

Syl.

INTRASCHOOL COMMUNICATION

From: 508

To: 304

Dear Syl,

You either kill the kid or yourself.

Honor System would never work here—too great a premium on the Mighty Mark, which determines whether or not a kid gets into college and causes parental pressures and senior breakdowns. This is true of academic youngsters; non-academic ones cheat *pour le sport*, as a matter of bravado, ingenuity or class status. Not to try to cheat is square.

Trend is changing, though, from person-to-person cheating to cooperative cheating and teamwork. Some of the excuses they offer, when detected, are: altruism, good sportsmanship, and "I'm not cheating, I'm left-handed!"

The kids put the burden on teacher: "What's the difference to you if you add another 10 points?" "Why did you fail me? I didn't do nothing!" The reply, of course, is: "That's just it."

I'd like to know if you get any insights from their own comments on marks.

Finally, there is the unquenchable optimism of a teacher who shrugs off complaints and increases her often unrewarded ardor:

Look at the cherub who is delivering this note. Look closely. Did you ever see a lovelier smile? A prouder bearing? She has just made the Honor Society. Last year she was ready to quit school.

Walk through the halls. Listen at the classroom doors. In one—a lesson on the nature of Greek tragedy. In another—a drill on *who* and *whom*. In

another—committee reports on slum clearance. In another—silence: a math quiz.

Whatever the waste, stupidity, ineptitude, whatever the problems and frustrations of teachers and pupils, something very exciting is going on. In each of the classrooms, on each of the floors, all at the same time, education is going on. In some form or other, for all its abuses, young people are exposed to education.

That's how I manage to stand up.

And that's why you're standing, too.

FRONTIERS

In Search of African Writers

[Ezekiel Mphahlele, the African writer whose work has been reviewed in these pages, is now the Director of the Chemchemi Cultural Centre, P.O. Box 30471 Jeevanjee Street, Nairobi, Kenya. The work of the Centre is in the fields of art, creative writing, theatre, music, with seminars on cultural questions. The article printed below, from the September 1964 Newsletter of the Centre, gives insight into the thinking of modern Africans concerning literature and education.]

THE desire in people to plan their own education, their cultural institutions and so on—in short, the desire for self-determination—has become an obvious corollary to political independence. This is why, so soon after "Uhuru," the Kenya Government has become sharply aware of the irrelevancies in the educational system the country has inherited, and has instituted a commission to find out how the system can be made relevant to the needs of Kenya.

No doubt a great number of changes are being recommended. These will certainly be found to reflect a new over-all outlook among our people. One direction in this new thinking will indicate the place African culture should take in the curriculum of the future, and vice versa. For, while education is the vehicle of culture, and makes its continuity possible, the character of a culture in turn nourishes the content and techniques of education.

There is a good deal of foggy thinking in people who like to talk of the "African Personality" as something that can only be understood in terms of those traditional elements in our cultures they are eager to see "preserved" or "conserved." This notion not only conjures up the uninspiring image of canned peaches or pickled mangoes or stuffed exhibits in a glass cage, but also dangerously suggests that the impact of an aggressive Western culture on us does not help define African culture. For instance, some of the new elements that the African has

absorbed from outside are painting (as the expression of an individual rather than a group attitude), creative writing and the techniques of theatre. These media are no less part of our culture simply because they are not part of our tradition. The fact that the idioms of our music have been popularised by new instruments and stage performance does not make such music less African.

We now have a growing volume of African writing in English and French. We have also seen the emergence of school "readers" in various vernacular languages, such as have been published by the Literature Bureaus of East and Central Africa and the missionary presses of South Africa. The latter have been even more enterprising because they have published novels and poetry in Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu which have become classics in their own right and are for a general readership. What requires a conscious drive in East Africa at this stage is the production of English literature—novels, short stories, poetry, one-act plays—for use in secondary school.

It is pathetic to watch African children plough through the novels of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and so on, before they have acquired the tools of language to help them project their minds into an alien culture: it is difficult enough with a good knowledge of English to do this. It means that the African child is being initiated into English literature virtually with a whip; and the spectre of exams is the main spur, rather than the desire to reach out to such wider horizons and deeper depths of human experience as make the great literature of the world.

We are now generally agreed that African literature in English is part of English literature, and that in French, part of French literature, inasmuch as American or Indian or Australian writing is part of English literature. Each of these rivers, as it were, sweeps its ores and debris and mud into the rich and large pool of English literature. So why should African writing in the

metropolitan languages not be taught in our schools? Our children can only grasp the assumptions by which literature in general operates in its social function when they have, in the first tender years at least of secondary school, been made to begin on home ground—with literature that has been created out of an African experience.

Last year, the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris (which promoted the birth of three centres in Nigeria and Chemchemi) organized a conference in Dakar (Senegal) and subsequently another in Freetown (Sierra Leone) to discuss the introduction of African literature in French and English into the secondary school and university curricula. The Freetown get-together set up an *African Literature Association* (Secretariat at Fourah Bay College, Freetown) which would watch and report on progress in teaching of African literature in school and university. The conference deemed this a matter of great urgency. Universities and secondary schools, Ministries of Education and examination councils in Africa were to be acquainted with the conference's recommendations and asked to assist in popularising the works of African writers.

Now another flank to this campaign consists of the overseas publishers who have, happily, become alive to the importance of existing African literature and are now willing to seek out potential African writers to publish them. Three years ago we would not have said to the African literary apprentice as we do in 1964: "Write, there are publishers at your doorstep waiting to consider your work."

Furthermore, Africans no longer need to sweat over a piece of writing in the dim flickering light of the candle somewhere in the towns and villages producing a manuscript that will never be looked at by someone who could help with criticism. We may burn with the urge to find the tongue to express our thoughts and feelings, but we need no longer pour these out just for the sake of wallowing in the puddles of our own vanity

because we know they will never be looked at by anybody else. Chemchemi, through its writers' workshop, receives manuscripts from members and gives critical remarks and guidance on them. We offer for publication any that we find good enough.

There are several anthologies of African writing being published these days, and more are being planned, for use in secondary school and for the general readership:

In print: *Commonwealth Short Stories* by Brownlee and Rose (Nelsons, for schools); *West African Narrative* by Paul Edwards (Nelsons, for schools); *Reflections* by Frances Ademola (African Universities Press, Lagos, for schools); *African Verse*, by John Reed and Clive Wake (Heinemanns, for schools); *Modern Poetry from Africa* by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (Penguin, for schools and general readership).