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HENRY DAVID THOREAU

[The material by Henry Miller which forms this article first appeared as a preface to *Life without Principle*, a book of three essays by Thoreau, published in 1946 by James Ladd Delkin. It is here taken from Henry Miller's latest book, *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird*, international copyright by Henry Miller, reprinted by permission of the author and New Directions, publishers.]

THERE are barely a half-dozen names in the history of America which have meaning for me. Thoreau's is one of them. I think of him as a true representative of America, a type, alas, which we have ceased to coin. He is what Lawrence would call "an aristocrat of the spirit," which is to say, that rarest thing on earth: an individual. He is nearer to being an anarchist than a democrat, socialist or communist. However, he was not interested in politics; he was the sort of person who, if there were more of his kind, would soon cause government to become nonexistent. This, to my mind, is the highest type of man a community can produce. And that is why I have an unbounded respect and admiration for Thoreau.

The secret of his influence, which is still alive, still active, is a very simple one. He was a man of principle whose thought and behavior were in complete agreement. He assumed responsibility for his deeds as well as his utterances. Compromise was not in his vocabulary. America, for all her advantages, has produced only a handful of men of this caliber. The reason for it is obvious: men like Thoreau were never in agreement with the trend of the times. They symbolized that America which is as far from being born today as it was in 1776 or before. They took the hard road instead of the easy one. They believed in themselves first and foremost, they did not worry about what their neighbors thought of them, nor did they hesitate to defy the government when justice was at stake. There was never anything supine about their acquiescence: They could be wooed or seduced but not intimidated.

The essays gathered together in this little volume were all speeches, a fact of some importance if one reflects how impossible it would be today to give public utterance to such sentiments. The very notion of "civil disobedience," for example, is now unthinkable. (Except in India, perhaps, where in his campaign of passive resistance Gandhi used this speech as a textbook.) In our country a man who dared to imitate Thoreau's behavior with regard to any crucial issue of the day would undoubtedly be sent to prison for life: Moreover, there would be none to defend him—as Thoreau once defended the name and reputation of John Brown. As always happens with bold, original utterances, these essays have now become classic. Which means that, though they still have the power to mold character, they no longer influence the men who govern our destiny. They are prescribed reading for students and a perpetual source of inspiration to the thinker and the rebel, but as for the reading public in general they carry no weight, no message any longer. The image of Thoreau has been fixed for the public by educators and "men of taste": it is that of a hermit, a crank, a nature faker. It is the caricature which has been preserved, as is usually the case with our eminent men.

The important thing about Thoreau, in my mind, is that he appeared at a time when we had, so to speak, a choice as to the direction we, the American people, would take. Like Emerson and Whitman, he pointed out the right road—the hard road, as I said before. As a people we chose differently. And we are now reaping the fruits of our choice. Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson—these men are now vindicated. In the gloom of current events these names stand out like beacons. We

pay eloquent lip service to their memory, but we continue to flout their wisdom. We have become victims of the times, we look backward with longing and regret. It is too late now to change, we think. But it is not. As individuals, as *men*, it is never too late to change. That is precisely what these sturdy forerunners of ours were emphasizing all their lives.

With the creation of the atom bomb, the whole world suddenly realizes that man is faced with a dilemma whose gravity is incommensurable. In the essay called "Life without Principle," Thoreau anticipated that very possibility which shook the world when it received the news of the atom bomb. "Of what consequence," says Thoreau, "though our planet explode, if there is no character involved in the explosion? . . . I would not run around a corner to see the world blow up."

I feel certain Thoreau would have kept his word, had the planet suddenly exploded of its own accord. But I also feel certain that, had he been told of the atom bomb, of the good and bad that it was capable of producing, he would have had something memorable to say about its use. And he would have said it in defiance of the prevalent attitude. He would not have rejoiced that the secret of its manufacture was in the hands of the righteous ones. He would have asked immediately: "Who is righteous enough to employ such a diabolical instrument destructively?" He would have had no more faith in the wisdom and sanctity of this present government of the United States than he had of our government in the days of slavery. He died, let us not forget, in the midst of the Civil War, when the issue which should have been decided instantly by the conscience of every good citizen was at last being resolved in blood. No, Thoreau would have been the first to say that no government on earth is good enough or wise enough to be entrusted with such powers for good and evil. He would have predicted that we would use this new force in the same manner that we have used other natural forces, that the peace and security of the world lie not in inventions but in men's hearts, men's souls. His whole life bore testimony to the obvious fact which men are constantly overlooking, that to sustain life we need less rather than more, that to protect life we need courage and integrity, not weapons, not coalitions. In everything he said and did he was at the farthest remove from the man of today. I said earlier that his influence is still alive and active. It is, but only because truth and wisdom are incontrovertible and must eventually prevail. Consciously and unconsciously we are doing the very opposite of all that he advocated. But we are not happy about it, nor are we at all convinced that we are right. We are, in fact, more bewildered, more despairing than we ever were in the course of our brief history. And that is most curious, most disturbing, since we are now acknowledged to be the most powerful, the most wealthy, the most secure of all the nations of the earth. We are at the top, but have we the vision to maintain this vantage point? We have a vague suspicion that we have been saddled with a responsibility which is too great for us. We know that we are not superior, in any real sense, to the other peoples of this earth. We are just waking up to the fact that morally we are far behind ourselves, so to speak. Some blissfully imagine that the threat of extinction—cosmic suicide—will rout us out of our lethargy. I am afraid that such dreams are doomed to be smashed even more effectively than the atom itself. Great things are not accomplished through fear of extinction. The deeds which move the world, which sustain life and give life, have a different motivation entirely.

The problem of power, an obsessive one with Americans, is now at the crux. Instead of *working* for peace, men ought to be urged to relax, to stop work, to take it easy, to dream and idle away their time for a change. Retire to the woods! if you can find any nearby. Think your own thoughts for a while! Examine your conscience, but only after you have thoroughly enjoyed yourself. What is your job worth, after all, if tomorrow you and yours can all be blown to smithereens by some

reckless fool? Do you suppose that a government can be depended on any more than the separate individuals who compose it? Who are these individuals to whom the destiny of the planet itself now seems to be entrusted? Do you believe in them utterly, every one of them? What would *you* do if you had the control of this unheard-of power. Would you use it for the benefit of all mankind, or just for your own people, or your own little group? Do you think that men can keep such a weighty secret to themselves? Do you think it *ought* to be kept secret?

These are the sort of questions I can imagine a Thoreau firing away. They are questions which, if one has just a bit of common sense, answer themselves. But governments never seem to possess this modicum of common sense. Nor do they trust those who are in possession of it.

> This American government—what is it but a tradition though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man, for a single man can bend it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this, for the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not settle the West. *It* does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. . . .

That is the way Thoreau spoke a hundred years ago. He would speak still more unflatteringly if he were alive now. In these last hundred years the State has come to be a Frankenstein. We have never had less need of the State than now when we are most tyrannized by it. The ordinary citizen everywhere has a code of ethics far above that of the government to which he owes allegiance. The fiction that the State exists for our protection has been exploded a thousand times. However, as long as men lack self-assurance and self-reliance, the State will thrive; it depends for its existence on the fear and uncertainty of its individual members.

By living his own life in his own "eccentric" way Thoreau demonstrated the futility and absurdity of the life of the (so-called) masses. It was a deep, rich life which yielded him the maximum of contentment. In the bare necessities he found adequate means for the enjoyment of life. "The opportunities of living," he pointed out, "are diminished in proportion as what are called the 'means' are increased." He was at home in Nature, where man belongs. He held communion with bird and beast, with plant and flower, with star and stream. He was not an unsocial being, far from it. He had friends among women as well as men. No American has written more eloquently and truthfully of friendship than he. If his life seems a restricted one, it was a thousand times wider and deeper than the life of the ordinary American today. He lost nothing by not mingling with the crowd, by not devouring the newspapers, by not enjoying the radio or the movies, by not having an automobile, a refrigerator, a vacuum cleaner. He not only did not lose anything through the lack of these things, but he actually enriched himself in a way far beyond the ability of the man of today who is glutted with these dubious comforts and conveniences. Thoreau lived, whereas we may be said to barely exist. In power and depth his thought not only matches that of our contemporaries, but usually surpasses it. In courage and virtue there are none among our leading spirits today to match him. As a writer, he is among the first three or four we can boast of. Viewed now from the heights of our decadence, he seems almost like an early Roman. The word *virtue* has meaning again, when connected with his name.

It is the young people of America who may profit from his homely wisdom, from his example

even more. They need to be reassured that what was possible then is still possible today. America is still a vastly unpopulated country, a land abounding in forests, streams, lakes, deserts, mountains, prairies, rivers, where a man of good-will with a little effort and belief in his own powers can enjoy a deep tranquil, rich life—provided he go his own way. He need not and should not think of making a good living, but rather of creating a good life for himself. The wise men always return to the soil; one has only to think of the great men of India, China and France, their poets, sages, artists, to realize how deep is this need in every man. I am thinking, naturally, of creative types, for the others will gravitate to their own unimaginative levels, never suspecting that life holds any better promise. I think of the budding American poets, sages and artists because they appear so appallingly helpless in this present-day American world. They all wonder so naively how they will live if they do not hire themselves out to some taskmaster; they wonder still more how, after doing that, they will ever find time to do what they were called to do. They never think any more of going into the desert or the wilderness, of wresting a living from the soil, of doing odd jobs, of living on as little as possible. They remain in the towns and cities, flitting from one thing to another, restless, miserable, frustrated, searching in vain for a way out. They ought to be told at the outset that society, as it is now constituted, provides no way out, that the solution is in their own hands and that it can be won only by the use of their own two hands. One has to hack his way out with the ax. The real wilderness is not out there somewhere, but in the towns and cities, in that complicated web which we have made of life and which serves no purpose but to thwart, cramp and inhibit the free spirits. Let a man believe in himself and he will find a way to exist despite the barriers and traditions which hem him in. The America of Thoreau's day was just as contemptuous of, just as hostile to, his experiment as we are today to anyone who essays it. Undeveloped as the country was then, men were lured from all regions, all walks of life, by the discovery of gold in California. Thoreau stayed at home, where he cultivated his own mine. He had only to go a few miles to be deep in the heart of Nature. For most of us, no matter where we live in this great country, it is still possible to travel but a few miles and find oneself in Nature. I have traveled the length and breadth of the land, and if I was impressed by one thing it was by this—that America is empty. It is also true, to be sure, that nearly all this empty space is owned by someone or other—banks, railroads, insurance companies and so on. It is almost impossible to wander off the beaten path without "trespassing" on private property. But that nonsense would soon cease if people began to get up on their hind legs and desert the towns and cities. John Brown and a bare handful of men virtually defeated the entire population of America. It was the Abolitionists who freed the slaves, not the armies of Grant and Sherman, not Abraham Lincoln. There is no ideal condition of life to step into anywhere at any time. Everything is difficult, and everything becomes more difficult still when you choose to live your own life. But, to live one's own life is still the best way of life, always was, and always will be. The greatest snare and delusion is to postpone living your own life until an ideal form of government is created which will permit everyone to lead the good life. Lead the good life now, this instant, every instant, to the best of your ability and you will bring about indirectly and unconsciously a form of government nearer to the ideal.

Because Thoreau laid such emphasis on conscience and on active resistance, one is apt to think of his life as bare and grim. One forgets that he was a man who shunned work as much as possible, who knew how to idle his time away. Stern moralist that he was, he had nothing in common with the professional moralists. He was too deeply religious to have anything to do with the Church, just as he was too much the man of action to bother with politics. Similarly he was too rich in spirit to think o£ amassing wealth, too

courageous, too self-reliant, to worry about security and protection. He found, by opening his eyes, that life provides everything necessary for man's peace and enjoyment—one has only to make use of what is there, ready to hand, as it were. "Life is bountiful," he seems to be saying all the time. "Relax! Life is here, all about you, not there, not over the hill."

He found Walden. But Walden is everywhere, if the man himself is there. Walden has become a symbol. It should become a reality. Thoreau himself has become a symbol. But he was only a man, let us not forget that. By making him a symbol, by raising memorials to him, we defeat the very purpose of his life. Only by living our own lives to the full can we honor his memory. We should not try to imitate him but to surpass him. Each one of us has a totally different life to lead. We should not strive to become like Thoreau, or even like Jesus Christ, but to become what we are in truth and in essence. That is the message of every great individual and the whole meaning of being an individual. To be anything less is to move nearer to nullity.

HENRY MILLER

Big Sur, California

Letter from **AFRICA**

YAOUNDE (Cameroun).—One of the attractive modern buildings up the hill above the hotel bears the label "Palais de Justice." Backing up to it, and across a grassy court—one imagines a well-worn path between—is a smaller building bearing the label *"Cour d'Appel"* (Court of Appeal). Not so many people get there.

Four who will not reach the second building were convicted last week of offenses against the State, and sentenced to not inconsiderable prison terms. One was the first Prime Minister of the country, one the immediately preceding Foreign Minister. With two others they constituted the "opposition." There is now none. Thus ended the last French West African experiment in the sort of parliamentary government we are likely to recognize as democratic.

Does this mean that the men who govern are or want to be dictators? I don't think so. They are, however, faced with problems too massive to be handled by alien governmental methods, developed in European society under different conditions to meet different problems.

Yet the circumstances are puzzling. A Western representative, reporting recent events to me, told of his visit to the President upon the occasion of the arrest of the four. I expressed my hope, he said, that the trials would be open. In the event, the trials were announced by a telephone call which said, in direct translation, "You may come, but you are advised not to" (*"deconseiller,"* was the verb).

Walking about, yesterday evening, I happened upon the beautifully lighted hillside square in front of the floodlit Presidential Palace. Noticing the usual European sign meaning "No Thoroughfare," I desisted, turned about the park, away from the palace. The guard in his fancy red and green uniform stood rigidly, rifle at rest. This morning I was told that the driver of a car, violating that no-traffic sign, was last month shot and killed without challenge at that very spot. And yet this is not a police-state, as we think of it. I sense no fear, no tension, and neither police no Army are obtrusive. There is, of course, a curfew, which I am told is apt to vary without adequate warning from 9 to 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. It has been each of these within the pas ten days. The curfew comes from problems which are no less than fantastic.

The Republic of Cameroun (the Cameroons, in the English version, or Kamerun, as it was known when a German colony until World War I) has a population of about 3.5 million, who represent 3 per cent of the population of South-of-the-Sahara Africa. These people speak 150 African dialects, not all of the same language-group, not Basil, intelligible to each other, not all written. The Republic's "official" languages are two others, French and English, native speech to none of its citizens, acquired by the estimated 10 per cent said to be literate. I was in a fascinating family gathering, night before last, in which one member spoke good English and no French (she was in fact an English teacher); one was totally bilingual as a result of having lived fourteen years in France and England, and one spoke good and one poor French. Their only effective common tongue was Douala, from the area where they were born, the only language in which these evoluées can communicate with the mass of their families, who still live there. Can you make a modern, complicated nation-state with this kind of communication?

Until a few months ago there was no night train from Douala to Yaoundé, because of the guerrillas infesting the country. These had been partisans of a certain Dr. Moumié, about whom I know little, but they were openly harbored in Ghana and Guinea, openly financed by the Russians. Now there is a new Pullman car on the night train, the guerrillas have been driven back to one isolated corner of the country, and there has recently been a Ghanian goodwill mission in

Yaoundé. I arrived a few days ago on the same plane with a special plenipotentiary from Guinea, seeking a basis for the re-establisbment of relations. One hopes that the breaches will be healed between African states so they can turn their attention to development problems.

This is essentially the case now being put for the one-party state: to permit all attention to be turned to problems of development. An African earnestly assured me, just the other day: "Look at America and Europe! You have everything. We can't afford the luxury, the waste, of an opposition." Repeatedly the argument reaches this point and bogs down. I never seem able to get it on to firm ground, or into understandable terms.

Just last night I listened to a group of European officials, more or less long-time residents of Yaoundé, wrestling with the question of the sources and nature of local authoritarianism. They credit it with a sort of stop-and-go character, a quality of uncertainty and tentativeness. "It is almost," said one, "as though the Government were conscience-stricken each time it carries out one of its sudden acts of violence." This would support the thought that here is not by any means professional or purposeful dictatorship, but rather the sort of feeling-about for effectiveness in Government which might characterize a new State, from which, one hopes, those new forms of democracy fit for this continent and its people will be born.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
WHERE ARE YOU, DIOGENES?

A WHILE back we quoted from the introduction to *The Nonconformers,* by David Evanier and Stanley Silverzweig. Four sentences from that introduction seem worth repeating:

> Young people trying to find out exactly what is going on in the world, find that the most serious obstacle in their path is the American press. . . . Most journalists, if they tackle subjects of real importance, are likely to find that they are writing for *The Nation, The Progressive,* or any one of the other highly stimulating journals having limited circulation. That is the problem that writers are confronted with. The problem readers are confronted with is to *find* the periodicals that count, that really have something to offer.

Certainly neither the "younger" generation nor the "older" generation gets much that is either informative or provocative from the commercial press. But, as Alan Barth points out ("Freedom and the Press," in the June *Progressive),* this is not the effect of direct government censorship of the editorial page. Rather, the explanation seems to lie in the fact that the majority of people in our time accept the pretense that all the "real" issues are related to the Free World's struggle against Communism. Issues on the domestic scene are blurred to avoid any appearance of discord. Mr. Barth describes some of the consequences:

> The aspect of the relationship between government and the press which concerns me most of all and seems to me the most significant is the role of the editorial page. It is this department of the newspaper for which the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom has most meaning. And it is pre-eminently this department which is supposed to discharge the newspaper's function of censoring the government.
>
> The editorial page, once the heart and soul of the American newspaper, has fallen in many instances into disuse. A1most every newspaper continues to publish an editorial page. Too often, however, it has become a vestigial appendage—an adornment perpetuated long after its purpose has been forgotten, as men continue to wear on the sleeves of their jackets buttons which have become altogether devoid of utility. Too often the editorial page is a newspaper's least-read feature—perhaps because too often it has ceased to be censor and has instead become a part of the official establishment.
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> This is especially true today, it seems to me, in foreign affairs. The most remarkable thing about American editorial comment on the U-2 incident, on the Cuban invasion, on the impasse at Berlin, on Laos and Viet Nam and the Congo is its essential uniformity. There are, to be sure, a few discordant, strident voices; every profession has its reprobates, of course. But nowadays criticism of the government seems, like politics, to stop at the water's edge. There is no real debate on the matters that mean life or death to the nation.

One of the most interesting articles in the recent "Adventures of the Mind" series in the *Saturday Evening Post* was contributed by Gerald Sykes, a former State Department public-affairs officer for North Africa. Writing on "America's Second Revolution" *(Post,* March 10), Mr. Sykes comments on the fear of intelligent controversy:

> Political scientists tell us that the political psychology of most people is traditional and emotional. On the whole they vote as their fathers did, and they take considerable satisfaction in doing so. Rather than choosing the candidate who will do most for them—or, preferentially, the most for the community—they indulge the reexpression of our passions. Political scientists hold that such behavior constitutes a serious threat to democracy, which depends for its survival upon the intelligence of the electorate. If burdened with too many emotionally directed citizens, democracy cannot compete with dictatorship, which can mobilize its people without regard to their prejudices or their feelings. The hope of democracy is obviously education in terms of enlightened self-interest.
>
> As the depth psychologists point out, that kind of education is the hardest of all to achieve. It is far easier to teach people to read than to think about what they read.

But just how courageously free can a man be in his utterances on touchy subjects without losing his audience? It depends on who is reading him. Anything remotely critical of the *status quo* of the democratic "order" is likely to be regarded with suspicion by the majority. But there is also a

growing minority, Mr. Sykes thinks, who have a preference for the truth at any price. Sykes puts it this way:

> Man is more complex than we have imagined, he has awesome capacities for evil, but he also has tremendous capacities for good. These we should never overlook. We are exploring the true character of this man by testing whether he can, of his own volition, retain his birthright of freedom. We are also testing our people to see how many can acquire freedom in its more personal forms—psychological or philosophical freedom.
>
> We know that man is more apt to become a fearful robot than a courageous individual. But we have also discovered that the courageous individual, even in a mass-dominated society finally wins the most respect—though he must struggle, he ultimately wields the most influence.
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> In consequence of this, the land of "the lonely crowd" is producing a Remnant, a self-reliant minority such as that which saved ancient Israel and that which created Greek philosophy. The growth of a Remnant among us, though slow and unpublicized, is one of the most important developments of our second revolution. The determined struggle of a few individuals to achieve clarity amid prevailing confusion has both a cultural and a political significance. It means that a new kind of American leadership is being produced.

This conception of a "new minority" is basic to Mr. Sykes' thinking. A man carrying the responsibilities of leadership may draw on hidden potentialities in himself, and this may be happening with the "new minority," and being sensed, however dimly, by others. He continues:

> Let us imagine a President of the United States who wished to avail himself of the political lessons of the depth psychologists, however disconcerting they may be. Let us assume he became interested in their kind of insight and decided to put one of their recommendations to a pragmatic test. Let us further assume that test would involve the value of absolute truthfulness in a realistic appraisal of our present situation.
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> If such a spokesman were to tell the truth in a way acceptable to the depth psychologists, what would he say and how would it be received by the rest of the world? Though the answer must be purely hypothetical, I believe the statement which follows is in the spirit of the general conclusions of depth psychology and illustrates how they could contribute, in a most practical way, to the survival of our national ideals:
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> We are known as a nation of pioneers. Even today, generations after we settled our land, we continue to be pioneers—but pioneers of a new kind. Our present pioneering involves both the benefits and the vice of technology. Our technical skills have not only made us powerful, they have confronted us with entirely new problems concerning the relationship of man and the machine. Even our public posture as a people—a mixture of brashness, complacence and extreme sensitivity to criticism—reveals the stresses of a continuing interior or moral revolution which often strains our national fiber to the utmost. Despite our comparative youth, the spiritual and emotional demands of this revolution sometimes make us feel like the oldest nation on earth.
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> We have been exposed more fully than any other people to the effects of technology. We have experienced its advantages and its disadvantages. We know that large-scale industrialization cannot only make a land powerful, it can also bring it trouble. We have learned that man is not the simple economic unit that Marx describes—that he does not conform to any given set of ideological descriptives.
>
> In America the individual has fewer traditional aids than in any other culture. He is on his own. If he survives as an individual, it is because he has found the wellsprings of survival in his own mind. America is the most nakedly psychological country in the world, in the sense that our pragmatic break with past methods has left us with fewer preconceptions and fewer ancestral habits than any other people. We started with an empty land, and each day we obliterate more of the few landmarks we have erected there. Critics say that our literature is the most abstract of all. We are still contending with some of the unexpected problems of making the New World livable, both physically and spiritually. If America fails as Freud predicted, it will be because the mind of man has failed.

Although there is nothing extraordinary about this language—which Mr. Sykes puts in the mouth of a philosophically inclined president—the emphasis is clearly "para-political." If we ever have a president who thinks naturally at this level, we will have to have earned his presence by a

growth of the "new minority" of which Mr. Sykes speaks.

COMMENTARY
MILLER'S SAY

STAND STILL LIKE THE HUMMINGBIRD (New Directions) is as good a book as any with which to become acquainted with Henry Miller. The material in this volume—essays, prefaces, reviews—covers a span of twenty-five years in Miller's life. The author himself wonders what holds these miscellaneous contributions together, yet the unity of the volume is plain. It comes from a temper of the human spirit. Henry Miller, you might argue, has but one thing to say, but he says it with endless variety. In the preface to this book, the communication takes an explicit form:

> The language of society is conformity, the language of the creative individual is freedom. Life will continue to be a hell as long as the people who make up the world shut their eyes to reality. Switching from one ideology to another is a useless game. Each and every one of us is unique, and must be recognized as such. The least we can say about ourselves is that we are American, or French, or whatever the case may be. We are first of all human beings, different from one another, and obliged to live together, to stew in the same pot. The creative spirits are the fecundators: they are the *lamed vov* who keep the world from falling apart. Ignore them, suppress them, and society becomes a collection of automatons.
>
> What we don't want to face, what we don't want to hear or listen to, whether it be nonsense, treason or sacrilege, are precisely the things we must give heed to. Even the idiot may have a message for us. Maybe I am one of those idiots. But I will have my say.

In this book the thing that bears down upon the reader—or lifts him up—is the unconstrained freedom of the writer's mind. Without mistaking Miller for something he is not, you keep on saying to yourself, "How wonderful that such a man is alive and active, in these depressed and depressing times!" He has the same kind of fascination that Rousseau's Natural Man had in the eighteenth century.

Miller, some say complainingly, always writes about himself. This is quite true, but you might try it some time, to see if you can do it as successfully, which is to say, as impersonally. For his writing, Miller is an observation post, not an egocentric focus. A man with vision can write about almost anything and make what he says profitable to the reader. The business of the artist is to choose a form and then to burst out of its limitations—to transfigure it. That way he does his miracle. Miller, most of the time, brings off his miracle.

This week's lead article, kindly made available to MANAS by author and publisher, hardly needs comment. It has the living, contemporary quality that any appreciation of Thoreau ought to possess. .There is an excusable exaggeration here and there. For one thing, Thoreau's emulators, today—the non-violent civil disobedients—are not sent to prison for life, but for months and years (seldom more than five); and there *are* people who defend them: MANAS defends them; *Liberation* defends them; Lewis Mumford defends them, and Henry Miller defends them. Actually, there is a sense in which what Henry Miller says about the present becomes less true, simply because of the way in which he says it. Every time something like this appears in print in the United States, Thoreau becomes a brighter ideal, a stronger influence, in American life.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

NEW DIRECTIONS ON THE CAMPUS

READERS of this Department may find the Spring (1962) issue of *Dissent* especially interesting. One feature is a symposium, "The Young Radicals," based upon questions by Michael Walzer. Another important article, "The American Campus: 1962," by Michael Harrington, looks at contemporary "radicals."

Mr. Harrington has for years been speaking to small college groups throughout the country. In this paper he gives his account of the transitions which have taken place in the outlook of intellectually active students. He notes, for example, that "one of the characteristics of the reawakening on campus is a sort of frenzy of introspection and self-consciousness, with groups spending almost as much time in front of a mirror as on the picket line." He continues:

> This experience has convinced me that it is next to useless to propose some general theory of the campus. The generations succeed one another with a rapidity almost like that of the tsetse fly; the departure of a few key students can change the look of a college within the span of a summer vacation.
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> So let me set down a few impressions. The change on the campus began around 1956 or 1957, it was enormously accelerated by the sit-ins and the sympathy demonstrations they evoked, and it is still moving forward. Its mood has been more radical than liberal, oriented toward single "issues" rather than finished ideologies (but conscious politicals have often played a decisive organization role). Its tone is moral, focusing on questions like peace, capital punishment and human equality, ignoring economic conflict and social planning.
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> The most striking recent development has been the growth of the Student Peace Union. The Washington peace demonstrations were probably the most spontaneous expression of student feeling since the thirties. At Earlham College in Indiana not too long ago, students told me that some of those who went from small, mid-Western schools were under heavy administration pressure to stay home. The very fact that these schools, so long out of the student mainstream, were involved at all is a sign of how powerful is the emotion produced by the Bomb and the issue of testing.
>
> One finds students motivated by religious considerations, students from small schools, students who have never belonged to any group, working together. In Berkeley last November, I went down to the "Veterans' Day" demonstration. Several hundred pickets demonstrated silently as the legionnaires marched past (the dignitaries in open automobiles didn't know what to do when they saw us: some waved, some froze; and one beauty queen took an SPU button). The young people there were not the seasoned pickets of the "Berkeley Zengakuren," that informal group which had developed out of the Chessman walks, the House Committee demonstrations and Civil Rights projects. They were youngsters, less sophisticated, new to political life.

Roger Hagan, one of the contributors to Mr. Walzer's symposium, discusses the meaning of the word "radical":

> What makes me identify as a radical is the conviction that something new must be added to the American calculus of goods and bads, rights and wrongs. I have an uneasy sense of a whole nation skating lightly over a cracking shell of rationalization and denial, even when there really is a firmer ground to stand on. To the extent that Americans have achieved a good society, they have done so in a curiously inarticulate fashion celebrating what is trivial and even negative, and missing what really makes this country more livable than any other on earth. America is like the inarticulate, bumbling hero of its modern drama, tragically unable to discover its own saving qualities in time to avoid a meaningless and wasteful end. As a student of history I look for the sources of the hopeful developments, trying to figure out what became of them and why practically no one undertook to give them a place in the American self-image. As an actor in the present I try to cut through the fraud and locate the authentically life-giving dimensions of this society. In this I feel myself to be racing not only against hot war but against the Cold War as well, for the latter drives the country to a retrenchment which will close off all experimentation in humane liberalism.
>
> The purpose of both activities—the purpose of any new radicalism with which I can identify—is to revive hope. A secondary purpose is to make genuine liberalism possible in American politics.

> My political goals themselves are very long range and concern the alteration of social character and social structure in order to make possible for all people freedom in its broadest sense (*i.e.*, both "negative" and "positive," in Isaiah Berlin's distinction; or in the fourfold definition of freedom in Erich Fromm's *May Man Prevail?*).

A generation ago the "campus radicals" were regarded as a breed apart—as indeed they were. The rest of the students fraternized, footballed, prommed and went dutifully to ROTC. But today there is evidence that, aside from the posturing right-wingers, more and more young people feel something in common with the radicals on their campuses. Some observations in the *Stanford Review* for last April, under the title, "Shock-proof Generation," may help to explain why. The students, according to this piece, have an "infinite capacity to be exasperating." And "They are sophisticated where you expect naïve innocence." The article continues:

> They themselves are shock-proof—or try to be—and consider that their measure of "shock-proofness" is the measure of their maturity and sophistication.
>
> They are utterly unafraid of ideas—even bad ideas—because of all the ideas floating around, they reject far more than they embrace. They think that practice in finding flaws in ideas is essential to the capacity to recognize truth. In short, the suggestion that their minds might possibly be corrupted by exposure to ideas—even evil ones—is to them too ridiculous to deserve comment.

No special insight is needed to explain why intelligent undergraduates cannot and do not wish to "clue in" on a world where the "responsible" authorities are all exhausting their "moral" resources in justifying preparation for nuclear war. On this situation, Lewis Mumford has said what needs to be said:

> Under what canon of sanity, then, can any government, or any generation, with its limited perspectives, its fallible judgment, its obvious proneness to self-deception, delusion, and error, make a decision for all future ages about the very existence of even a single country? Still more, how can any nation treat as a purely private right its decision on a matter that will affect the life and health and continued existence of the rest of mankind?
>
> There are no words to describe the magnitude of such insolence in thought or the magnitude of criminality involved in carrying it out. Those who believe that any country has the right to make such a decision share the madness of Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick.* For them Russia is the White Whale that must be hunted down and grappled with. Like Ahab in that mad pursuit, they will listen to no reminders of love, home, family obligation; in order to kill the object of their fear and hate they are ready to throw away the sextant and compass that might give them back their moral direction, and in the end they will sink their own ship and drown their crew. To such unbalanced men, to such demoralized efforts, to such dehumanized purposes, our government has entrusted, in an easily conceivable extremity, our lives. Even an accident, these men have confessed, might produce the dire results they have planned, and more than once has almost done so. To accept their plans and ensuing decisions, we have deliberately anesthetized the normal feelings, emotions, anxieties, and hopes that could alone bring us to our senses.

FRONTIERS

The Celestial Summit

[Midnight, Feb. 4-5, 1962, was the climactic moment of a planetary conjunction so rare and, according to astrologers, so foreboding as to generate excitement and almost hysteria among believers in astrology in various parts of the world. All the planets known to the ancients that is, the visible planets plus the Sun and the Moon—appeared at that time in one zodiacal constellation, Capricorn. Months before the conjunction occurred, some Indian astrologers were saying that there had not been a configuration in the heavens of so malefic a nature since the one which attended the fighting of the *Mahabharata*, India's epic war upon the plain of Kurukshetra thousands of years ago. Our contributor Mr. Noshir Bilpodiwala, a translator of the writings of Vinoba Bhave, pays his respects to this "summit meeting of the planets.]

"YOU have caused a good deal of panic on Earth," said I to my host, Capricorn, as he received me at the celestial gates on the third of February, 1962. I was deputed to witness the octuple planetary conjunction, as special correspondent from Astrological Press Service of India. "There is no need to be afraid any more," he assured me, "for by now we have been amply propitiated by the several *Yagnas* performed in India." At 5:30 p.m. all the planets took their seats in the grand hall of the heavenly house of Capricorn. Sun who was in the chair, called the meeting to order. Saturn read out the minutes of the last meeting (held 5,000 years ago), recalling the causation of the great war, Mahabharata.

With the minutes unanimously accepted, the first item on the agenda, "Politics on Earth," was opened for discussion. Mars offered a motion that Mr. Khrushchev should take charge of the whole world, on the ground that if he did not appoint himself the Saviour, scheming imperialists would overrun the whole of Europe, Africa and Asia. Mars argued further that if Mr. Khrushchev could bring paradise to Russia in twenty years, he could surely be trusted to make heaven on Earth in about forty! Mercury objected. This, he said, would mean too many astronauts encircling the earth, thereby causing nuisance to all planets. Instead, Mercury proposed, it would be better to let Mr. Kennedy gradually encroach upon the U.S.S.R. by Peaceful Negotiations, nuclear tests and super-statesmanship, thereby saving the people behind the iron curtain from dictatorship and terrorism.

Passing to the European scene, Venus proposed that De Gaulle be made to shift his capital from Paris to Algiers, since Algeria has belonged to France as much as Goa belonged to Portugal. De Gaulle would then be in a position to infuse adequate patriotism into the Algerian Nationalists, who were creating unnecessary trouble. Venus was also of the opinion that Mr. MacMillan should be made to send Mr. Gaitskell as Viceroy to Katanga to keep an eye on the Congo, as this was the only way of protecting the "free world." Jupiter, however, felt that this was too weak a plan. The best way of arranging disaster on Earth, he said, would be to restore Goa to Portugal and simultaneously let China "liberate" New Delhi, in general bringing about a revival of imperialism. Fortunately, Sun advised the assemblage to abandon its scheme for destroying the Earth and convinced the members that nuclear war on Earth would mean disaster for the entire universe. The meeting grasped the significance of this solar advice and resolved to leave the political situation unchanged.

The second item on the agenda was Socio-Economic Reforms. Saturn suggested that Vinoba Bhave be given more power so that his influence could spread throughout the world. Jupiter felt that such a step would put the cinema magnates out of business and bankrupt Hollywood. This, he said, might upset the entire North American economy, so that America would not be able to aid underdeveloped countries. Mars then advocated that the doctrines of Karl Marx be spread far and wide on other planets, but Jupiter urged that Marx was now out of date. A better course, he thought, would be to use the methods proposed by Bertrand Russell in *Roads*

to Freedom. Venus asked the adoption of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as planetary text. Finally, after a heated discussion, the meeting decided that the only way of bringing about any worthwhile reforms would be by a rapid industrial revolution as worked out by Mr. Nehru in India.

The third and final item on the agenda concerned the "Future of the World." Moon asserted that nothing good came out of disturbing the Earth by causing fire, flood, cold waves or earthquakes thereon. If the planets could not help the Earth, they should at least keep out of its way and not hamper its progress toward peace and prosperity. Moon was the most "propitiated" of all the planets. Mars said that he was in favour of achieving the socialistic pattern of society now being aimed at in India, suggesting that India's methods ought to be copied by several other countries. Mercury was not very enthusiastic about family planning on Earth, feeling that this was sure to spread immorality. He saw no danger whatsoever in allowing the world to increase its population. Jupiter supported this view and said he would personally be responsible for any food shortages in the future. After a general discussion on some minor matters, the meeting adjourned to the year 7005 A.D.

"Your astrologers and Pandits have saved the situation," whispered the Moon to me as I was about to leave for Earth. "Had they not performed *'Yagnas'* to pacify us," Moon said, "you would all be no more." I was grateful to our astrologers for their timely action and returned home quite happy, musing with satisfaction on the thought that astrology is not, after all, a superstition.

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