

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

THESE are days for sorting out the things that matter from the things that don't. Take the Sputnik affair. Sputnik is a gymnastic achievement of modern physics. It has made the Russians jubilant. In America, it has led to an endless "literary" output of incredible variety—from the Sputnik jokes, some of them funny (the Sputnik cocktail is one part vodka and three parts sour grapes), to instructive homilies on how to make the best of the affair for all. Each week, Sputnik occupies ten or fifteen pages in the news magazines, pages detailing the heavy responsibilities of American rocket experts, who must now meet the Russian "challenge," reporting the world-wide "political implications" of this little metal ball which went spinning about the earth, and exploring the seriousness with which Soviet schools and colleges are training their bright young men in Science.

Now there may be a serious and forward-looking approach to discussion of the Sputnik affair, but we take the view that it would be better to pass it by. In time, we suppose, the rocketeers will pepper the atmosphere with a regular barrage of man-made cosmic hail. They may even be able to send up little moons equipped with broadcasting equipment so that you can listen to a *human voice* coming from outer space! The grim, "weapons" side of the subject will continue to spread an air of crisis with each new development, and a new flock of experts will be hatched to sustain the tensions that Science imposes on our lives.

Quite plainly, this sort of thing can go on forever.

So let us ignore Sputnik. Let us refuse to indulge the egotism that this trick of the engineers (admittedly a thing of technological genius, but what of that?) has in any way made our times

important or worthy of remembering. There may be achievements to our credit of which we may be proud, but Sputnik is not among them. The trouble with making Sputnik the subject of a "thoughtful essay" is that you have to dignify Sputnik to do it. You are defeated, therefore, before you begin.

It is true, of course, that by taking an Elevated Position you can rule out of serious discussion practically everything that most people care about. With the metaphysicians, you can argue that all ordinary human concerns are a brand of illusion when regarded from the stance of Ultimate Reality. But an argument of this sort can be "correct" without being significant. The problem of any age is to sort out the *relative* realities which are important for the people of the age, and to learn to distinguish them from the relative realities which are not important.

Kenneth Rexroth has a passage in the *Nation* for Nov. 23 which illustrates this point. He is discussing a contemporary book about the horrors of World War II:

. . . as many have pointed out before me, horror stories about war defeat their purpose if that purpose is to make war undesirable. The great evil of modern life is *tedium vitae*, the awful boredom that comes with self-alienation and lack of aim. It is precisely the horror of war that makes it attractive—at least to the imagination of the passive reader. Ford Madox Ford's Teitjens series, e.e. cummings' *The Enormous Room* are great books precisely because they show that underneath the blood, sweat and tears war is the humdrum evil of the same old civilian peacetime world, enormously hypertrophied. The real cannibals are in swivel chairs, boudoirs and cocktail bars, just as always. So the war horror novel is dishonest almost in strict proportion to its horror.

Rexroth is saying that what is *really* unacceptable in war is the same as what is *really* unacceptable in peace. Find out what this is,

reject it, and you can let the rest go. The blood, mutilation and agony are bad, but these things ought not to distract us from the deeper evil which permits stern men with tense faces to decide that the time has come to fight and kill for honor, freedom, and the last best hope of a peaceful world.

Rexroth is saying that many pacifist tracts miss the point, that they deal, however earnestly, with the unrealities which are bound to continue so long as they are mistaken for our real troubles.

Books that we remember are always books about man's dream of the good. The novels of John Steinbeck grip the heart because his stories show how life in our time frustrates the longings of little people for the good. In *Grapes of Wrath*, a decent American family finds itself uprooted and thrown on the road. What do these people want? They want a home with a white picket fence, schools in the neighborhood, and happy times at Thanksgiving and Christmas. They want what most other Americans want. *Grapes of Wrath* is the story of how the impersonal forces of industrialized agriculture destroy that dream and break the hearts of an American family. Steinbeck is good because he *feels* this common longing with sympathy and describes its frustration with compassion, and because he doesn't pretend to know what ought to be done to overcome the massive circumstances which squeeze out the life of the people working as migrant laborers on the great farmlands of California. In *Dubious Battle* is perhaps a greater book, since it deals with the same tragedy, but etches more sharply our ignorance and indecision concerning what to do.

How Green Was my Valley is an English story dealing with a similar situation. Here, the Good is conceived at a social level. What do the miners want or need, or what will solve their problems? A Unitarian sort of religion and a proper labor movement seem to make the answer.

Today these stories of the last generation seem a thousand years old. We can remember being touched by them, but the feeling of that time

cannot be renewed. We can't take these versions of the human equation seriously, any more. In fact, we don't seem able to write a human equation for our own times, except at an existentialist level of despair, or an anarchist level which balances the equation only by ruthless oversimplification.

The problem is to find terms for an equation which represents neither alienation nor a superficial solution, yet still has enough relation to the lives of human beings, as presently pursued, to be understood and grasped.

The beginning of a search in this direction, which is difficult enough, seems to mean an almost total rejection of conventional political values. Hence the indifference we propose for Sputnik. What can you do with Sputnik? What can *anybody* do with Sputnik? We have read no heavy treatises on the subject, but it seems obvious that a satellite that can be controlled—controlled as to path and as to descent—has potential uses as an observation post and as an explosive projectile. It could probably be used, also, to gather information about the physical conditions up there, but information about physical conditions is nothing new for the modern world. The primary interest in Sputnik is a military interest.

Our proposition is that things which have only a military interest should be ignored. That we should bring up our children to ignore them. That "military interests," these days, are the most irrelevant interests a man can have in respect to human problems. When the children come home from school, buzzing with talk about Sputnik, let them feel your indifference. If the world is mad, why should you collaborate? The children will have to bear a burden or two, before the world can recover from this madness, and they might as well begin by understanding how their parents feel about such matters. As they grow older, there will be time for appropriate explanations, in answer to puzzled questions.

Often a man is helped to sort out the things that matter by wondering what he really wants for his children. Does he want for them something different from what he wants for himself? Does he want for them something different from what he wants for children, *generally*? He cannot, of course, do for all children what he hopes to do for his own, but this is a question of deciding upon ideal ends.

Then there is the matter of how much of the woes of the world a man can undertake to carry on his shoulders. What, actually, is the problem? It seems quite evident that the difficulties of the world, as symbolized in one way by the atom bomb and Sputnik, are not going to be settled within our lifetime, or, probably, within the lifetime of our children. You have then to ask: Shall I formulate this problem in terms of what circumstances a man or woman may have to meet in the next fifty or sixty years, or in terms of what a man or a woman may do about meeting *any sort* of circumstances in that period of time? In other words, are the important things in life determined by circumstances?

The trouble with making an inventory of the things our lives are involved with, with one column for the things that matter, and another column for the things that don't, is that doing this implies that you plan to have nothing to do with the "bad" or unimportant things, whereas an intelligent life will never work out this way. When you say that certain things don't matter, you need to mean just that—that you can mix with them, if you have to, or even enjoy them now and then, but that you don't get attached to them or become dependent on them. Take lipstick. It isn't very important whether a woman uses lipstick or not. This is not something to make an issue out of, but what a terrible thing it would be to spend your life manufacturing lipstick!

Take the hysterical mood of modern advertising—the breathless way in which you are invited to ride over "sound-conditioned concrete" highways, drink "versatile" rum, deposit your

money in a bank which is so big it has representatives just about *everywhere*, smoke a cigarette that you enjoy more because you are "cutting way down on nicotine and tars." In any issue of any popular magazine, you are promised enough mundane glory to last the rest of your life, with possibly some left over for you to take to heaven. Here is a man who pours coffee all over the table cloth because he is so fascinated by the possibility of getting his life insurance "at a discount" from a certain company that is just dying to help him become a better, more responsible person. If you read the magazines, you are fed an endless supply of this nonsense and corruption, week in, week out. It doesn't matter, of course. You don't take it seriously, or not quite. Nobody, we tell ourselves, is really fooled by this stuff. Everybody discounts advertising and does what he wants to do—we know our own minds! But if we do—and we probably don't—then what an unspeakable waste of human imagination to make up all those ads, and what an immeasurable waste of paper, engravings, and time on printing presses a block long to shovel out the millions of magazines which are filled with this material!

You may be able to take it, or leave it alone, but think of the millions of people whose jobs depend upon something you say you don't have to take seriously. This is not the sort of question you can settle by asking, "Well what else would you want—the *Russian* system? Don't you believe in competition?" The fact of the matter is that people with any sense ought to be willing to put up with an awful lot of second rate soap powder, if they could have as reward some magazines and newspapers and radio stations with no interest in the marketing of goods, which devote their space and time to matters of importance. How can you take seriously *anything* in a paper which will print so much rot? What do they take you for? Why do you put up with it?

The insidious thing about a culture which is so largely composed of things nobody admits to

taking seriously is that it gets people into the habit of not taking anything seriously. "Don't get so excited," they say to you. But let a Sputnik come along and they worry all over the place. A recent *Newsweek* printed a telegram—from, alas, California—in its letter columns, which makes Sputnik the major event of the century:

OUR BRAVE LOYAL PEOPLE READY TO DO THEIR DUTY NO MATTER WHAT THE COST. HAVE SUSTAINED A DEFEAT WITHOUT A WAR. TERRIBLE WORDS HAVE BEEN PRONOUNCED AGAINST THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES TODAY: "THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE AND FOUND WANTING."

We just can't go on.

The trouble with the things that don't matter is that they take the stage away from the things that do. On the other hand, to set about "changing" everything would be a mistake, since we would probably succumb to the siren doctrine that just by changing our circumstances, by making commercialism "impossible," by establishing a system of punishments for the misuse of economic power, we can gain the promised land. What we have to do is develop the capacity to live in the world as it is, but in the way we are determined to live, regardless of what the world does. This is the only way to change the world, instead of changing only the slogans the world is run by. To deny this is to deny the genius of human beings. Most of the worthwhile things accomplished by men have been done by them against the grain of their culture and times—in spite of their environment. It is this *independence* of circumstances that makes the best men. The best environment, then, is the environment that fails to shape human life in any direction at all, or to dictate the terms of success. Such an environment, incidentally, is practically impossible to define.

The first step, then, in assessing the things which are important, is to make plain that they are works of the imagination, of human intelligence.

People who conceive their values in these terms will have the richest environment of all in which to bring up their children. The worship of possessions is the worship of the dead, so far as the imagination is concerned. The things that do not matter are the things you can buy—all the external securities, whether of bonds or bombs. The things that matter are things which are ends in themselves. When a man's life is occupied in getting things which are not ends in themselves, that man has condemned himself to servitude and has darkened the future of his children with an atmosphere of delusion. You can't even list the good things with much success, since the moment you name them, someone will try to have them patented and offer them for sale, so they are better left unlisted. But once a man begins to enjoy the really good things, he cannot be attracted by anything else.

REVIEW

"FRONTIER SCIENCE OF THE MIND"

J. B. RHINE'S latest volume (Thomas, \$4.75) betokens an interesting development in the field of psychic research. In the span of some twenty years "Parapsychology" has made such persistent inroads on the world of academic thinking that Dr. Rhine and his collaborator, J. H. Pratt, are now often asked to suggest suitable textbooks for the study of ESP. The Foreword of *Parapsychology—Frontier Science of the Mind*, begins with the following paragraphs:

There are many indications that the time has come to provide a convenient one-volume summary of present knowledge about parapsychology. Most urgent is the need among busy professional people for a clear, concise statement of the known facts of this new field of science, just how the researches are carried on and what general advance has been made in relating the new findings to older branches of knowledge. Outstanding among the audience we have had in mind are the various professional groups connected with medicine and the psychological and social sciences and practices. This book was undertaken as a result.

There are other professional groups, too, for whom the volume was intended as a handbook of essential information on the subject: The teacher, for example, or minister or field worker in anthropology should, we believe, find it as well suited to his purpose as the psychiatrist or dermatologist or clinical psychologist. In a word, the competent, mature inquirer, whatever his professional field, should consider that the book was written for him.

Finally, these pages have been written, too, with the coming need of a college textbook in mind. Two university requests for such a text have recently been received, and with the present prospects of the growth of parapsychology, others are anticipated.

Parapsychology provides the required "textbook," furnishing numerous graphs, tables and photographs, and detailing the careful manner in which ESP research is pursued at Duke University. For MANAS readers, however, the sections on religion, psychology and philosophy will probably be the most interesting. Discussion of the relationship between parapsychology and

religion is provocative, despite the required academic tone:

Even on the most fundamental question in all religions, that of whether there is a valid basis of spiritual reality, the case from the viewpoint of evidence rests upon individual testimony unconfirmed by experimental study.

The relation of parapsychology to religion, then, is obviously a very close one. The establishment of psi as an extra-physical capacity provides at least a limited experimental confirmation for this elemental claim of all religions. (The relation is not altered by the fact that the need for this experimental confirmation has not been widely recognized by religious leadership; but we may recall that the introduction of experimental methods in other great practices and disciplines was similarly unsolicited.) If it is correct to define parapsychology as the science dealing with non-physical personal agency, it is hard to see what legitimate problem or claim of religion would not, if it were brought to the point of careful investigation, belong to the domain of that science. This would make the relation of parapsychology to religion something like that of physics to engineering or biology to medicine.

This close relation may be seen to be a natural or logical one. Religious beliefs have grown up out of the experiences of the race and especially those commonly regarded as miraculous or supernatural. These more unexplainable occurrences would be expected to include a large portion of psi phenomena and the characteristics of psi would thus tend to dominate the character and coloration of religious thought. It is natural therefore that not only the divinities of the different religions but many of their principal human representatives as well (prophets, priests, and others) have been credited with extraphysical powers both to perceive beyond the sensory range and to influence the world of matter. These are, of course, the very capacities under investigation in parapsychology, these powers that have been characterized as "spiritual" in the language of religion.

In general the history of the convergence of science and religion has been one in which existing doctrines of religion have been compelled to give way to the contrary findings of science. Views of the origin of the earth and of man, conceptions of the nature of disease, and especially of mental disorder, have all been corrected by the more reliable knowledge deriving from scientific inquiry. Now,

however, in its confirmation of the presence of a nonphysical or spiritual element in personality it would seem that science has for the first time made a positive contribution to the ground held by religion. In refuting the counter-claim of the mechanistic theory of man, the results even of the psi investigations already made have undermined religion's most menacing opposition.

The authors comment on the relationship between psi research and formal philosophic investigation, noting that some of the leading philosophers of the Western world have taken an active interest in the problem of psi investigation—as far back as the days of Henry Sidgwick and William James. And unless the philosopher be unduly influenced by theology either by church affiliation or, negatively, as an opponent—we should certainly expect an interest in the possibilities of ESP. After all, the "psychophysical" problem is the central problem of philosophy whenever philosophy is divorced from credal religion.

As John McTaggart pointed out in *Some Dogmas of Religion*, it is really quite childish for philosophers to line themselves up on opposing sides on the question of whether "mind" or "body" is the "really real." For McTaggart—as for his two companion reincarnationists, G. Lowes Dickinson and Macneile Dixon—the most natural conclusion was that mind and body are equally real, and that all psychological phenomena are the result of interaction between them. Today, the authors of *Parapsychology* feel that precisely this kind of *interaction* has been demonstrated, so that it now becomes "necessary to assume interaction of psi and physical processes." Drs. Rhine and Pratt sum up the philosophical portion of their discussion with the following paragraphs:

In a word, science is closing in on a question on which much of the philosophic thought of the western world in recent centuries has been expended. Thus far the results of the psi researches in establishing a nonphysical interaction between subject and object do not confirm any one of the specific philosophical solutions (dualisms and monisms) that have been speculatively proposed. The results indicate, as scientific conclusions do in such cases, a comparative

and complementary rather than an absolute distinction between the areas concerned (mind and matter). The contrast between the physical and non-physical, while very important and full of meaning for psychology and related fields, cannot be regarded as more than a relative one. Some degree of psychophysical unity may at the same time be inferred in view of the evidence of interaction.

But if parapsychology as a science has removed one of the problems of philosophy, it has produced some new ones too. It seems reasonable to say that the philosophical challenge of the evidence for precognition offers as baffling a question as any yet encountered in human thought. It is true many of the questions raised by precognition (e.g., its clash with causality and with volitional freedom) will have to be answered by the expansion of knowledge gained through experimentation. However, in the search for such knowledge a great deal will depend upon the rational analysis of the problem raised and the intellectual adjustments that will have to follow the acceptance of this newly discovered property of the human mind.

It seems safe to say that many formulations of philosophical theory based upon past conceptions of human nature will have to be recast in the light of the new facts on the presence of a non-physical element in the human makeup. There may be many consequences to the ethical, political, and religious thinking of men to follow from the altered picture of the nature of man which the new facts provide. The border, then between parapsychology and philosophy will probably be one involved in active exchange and mutual stimulation for a long and indefinite future.

COMMENTARY

A TRUTH WHICH REMAINS

CHRISTMAS—for this is Christmas Day—means many things to many people, but it means one thing, however dimly, to all men who have grown up in the Christian tradition. It represents an ultimate giving by one man—or god; at any rate, a being of high intelligence and beneficence—of all that he had to give. We say it "means" this, but that, of course, is granting too much. Christmas is "celebrated," as we say, by all manner of men and in all manner of ways—by hypocrites who care nothing for the memory of the Christ, by merchants who live nine months of the year on one month's sales, as well as by those who believe that Jesus Christ was the only Son of God.

You cannot talk about what "Christmas" means without saying many things which are only partly so, or not so at all, since meanings are significant only for individuals. There can be "group" meanings only for "group men," and, after all, "group men" are not really men.

But you can say that Christmas and the observance of Christmas is a cultural sign—a public reference to the idea that, some two thousand years ago, an ultimate happening occurred on earth. Other religions provide similar references to other ultimate happenings, with explanations of their significance. And we are entitled to add that, since the dawn of history, human beings have felt or believed that it is right and good to set apart a day or days to think of ultimate happenings, ultimate meanings.

We may not understand those happenings, those meanings. Indeed, we know that both our Theologies and our Holidays have suffered bitter perversions. But the idea of unifying conceptions of meaning—such as the story of the Christ—is an idea that will not die.

After you have said all the justly critical things you can think of to say about Christmas, this fact remains.

It is a lonely fact, surviving in a lonely world, but it tells us something about human beings that we need to recognize and remember.

MANAS is largely a magazine of protest, these days. There is so much to protest, so little to encourage. Indeed, a subscriber not long ago called us to account for finding so little to be encouraged about.

So let us embrace and make the most of this fact—that there is in human beings an unquenchable desire to discover the meaning of life; that human civilizations are shaped by this desire and gain their monuments and their dreams, their customs and their celebrations from its multiform expression.

We live in a mass society, suffused with mass habits of thinking. The mass society provides no place or role for the hero, the great teacher, the Christ. Heroes, Teachers, and Christs are remembered by the mass society only as shadowy, symbolic images honored by ritual response.

The mass does not tolerate greatness, except as a pallid memory. But every one in the mass, while suffering the confinement which he contributes to as well as submits to, is still a human being. His manhood may be in shadow, but it still exists, and there still exists in him, therefore, the dream of the hero, the teacher, the Christ. Some day, somehow, the seed of a larger manhood in him may swell and burst. Some day, he may insist upon recovery of the ancient meaning of the story of the Christ, or upon forging a new meaning as true as the old. Our times are not without some evidence of this insistence.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

NOTES AND CORRESPONDENCE

WE have just received a "basic information" communication from Mortimer Smith, Executive Secretary for the Council for Basic Education in Washington, D.C., accompanied by pamphlet enclosures. Author of *And Madly Teach* and *The Diminished Mind*, Mr. Smith has since 1954 been endeavoring to make pungent educational criticism assume a constructive role. Though the presence on the council of such writers as Arthur Bestor, author of *Educational Wastelands*, and Howard Whitman, journalist of the extreme right, indicates strong support for old-line methods of teaching, the charter members also include Historian Crane Brinton, Publisher Alfred A. Knopf, Joseph Wood Krutch, Allan Nevins, Malcolm Cowley, and William E. Hocking, suggesting the probability of a different orientation from that provided by *Why Johnny Can't Read*.

The following paragraphs from an introductory brochure give an explanation of intent:

The Council for Basic Education was organized by a group of individuals who had been active in urging, through writings and speeches, an increased emphasis upon the fundamental intellectual disciplines in the public schools. Correspondence among various members of the group resulted in a meeting in New York City in November, 1954, to explore the possibility of forming an organization for the strengthening of basic education. Many different proposals were canvassed at the meeting and in subsequent exchanges of letters. In December, 1955, a second meeting was held in New York, at which a plan was finally crystallized. The draft of a proposal, put into final form by a committee, was printed in March, 1956, with the unanimous approval of the founding group. Letters of invitation to individuals and organizations to join the Council were sent out immediately thereafter. The individuals who accepted are listed at the end of this leaflet. At the same time a request for a financial grant was made,

and this request was granted (as mentioned above) at the beginning of May, 1956. Incorporation proceedings were completed July 3, 1956, and soon thereafter Washington headquarters were opened in the Union Trust Building 15th and H Streets, N.W.

Experience during the winter of 1956-57 has reinforced the sponsors' belief that the Council for Basic Education can become a focus for the various scattered efforts now being made to strengthen the basic disciplines of the public-school curriculum. By facilitating the exchange of information, the Council can help to keep the efforts of groups representing special fields from appearing to compete with one another for school time. By composing such differences as these and presenting a united front of all groups interested in the fundamental subjects, the Council hopes to command the respect of school administrators, and gain their support. Directly, or through its associated organizations, the Council can bring representatives of the scholarly fields into contact with school administrators, citizens' commissions, and others, in practical efforts for the improvement of education. It can also provide constructive guidance to teachers, administrators, and citizens, who have been requesting such assistance from many members of the founding group.

In the present situation of aroused public interest in education, it seems to the sponsors that much can be accomplished during the initial period of three years. If the Council for Basic Education succeeds in bringing about effective co-operation among the various groups in the United States interested in educational improvement, the sponsors believe that it, or its equivalent in perfected form, will become a permanent feature of the educational scene.

So much for the CBE's version of its history—a version we can hardly evaluate. It seems to us that the central issue between the present defendants of the "Progressives" and the devotees of "Fundamental" education arises simply because human beings are human beings. The problem, in educating the young, is to provide the honesty, confidence and intellectual integrity that flows from discipline—and at the same time to encourage the young to a sense of freedom in their thinking and to develop an active sense of self-determination. Intellectual disciplines are not ends in themselves. If they are arbitrarily imposed, the intellectual life can easily be

separated from the thrill of discovery. But all disciplines, unless they lead to destructive ends, assist in the unfoldment of integrity.

An interesting comment bearing on the CBE point of view was provided by UCLA's Chancellor Raymond B. Allen upon his return from Russia. (Los Angeles *Times*, Nov. 20.) So far as we know, Dr. Allen is not aligned with any particular "educationist" camp. Dr. Allen points out that the quality of basic education in Russia, and its obvious connection with scientific development, suggest that "it is time for us to wake up to the fact that education should have something more to do with teaching fundamentals and establishing a sense of values—through discipline—than it has had in the past." From time spent at Moscow University and the Sechenov Institute in Moscow, Dr. Allen concludes that the intellectual discipline provided by the Russian schools is superior to that of our own country. After making it plain that what he says is intended to apply only to "basic" education, he comments:

We've heard it said, and I believe it's true, that our youth are undisciplined. We have extended freedom of choice to an age that should have learned self-discipline first, and this prerequisite has to be learned from parents and other adults who presumably are wiser and more experienced.

There is so much interest, and properly so, in education for life adjustment, good citizenship, getting along with people, that we have sometimes forgotten that these depend on what we are adjusting with—good basic training in language and numbers in a controlled environment for the stimulation to learn what doesn't come easily.

Russia, like the CBE, is convinced of the educative importance of foreign languages. The UCLA Chancellor pointed out that all Russian students learn a second language, one third of them choosing English in early elementary school. To learn one's own language well, and to learn its relationship to other tongues, is simply to provide oneself with tools for expansion of the mind. On this topic we are inclined to agree with CBE's statement, which is unashamedly old-fashioned in arguing that "because a child cannot always see

the 'why' of learning some of these facts and symbols is no argument for soft-peddling or postponing them." Further:

We believe that the early years of formal education is preeminently the time for providing those sets of symbols and sets of facts which are indispensable before understanding can come alive, just as a long preparation in mechanical practice is necessary before the pianist can interpret music.

Readers who have been delighted by Carl Ewald's stories, titled *My Little Boy*, reprinted here from time to time, will be interested to know that the complete collection is available in *The Scribner Treasury*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. We quote from that volume a further biographical note on Mr. Ewald:

Carl Ewald's birthplace was in Danish Schleswig; after the seizure of that province by Prussia, however, his parents moved to Copenhagen and he was brought up in that pleasant capital. He was first a forester, and then a school-master. Even after he gave himself up wholly to literature, his interest in the proper training of children continued as *My Little Boy* will testify.

Ewald's work in literature followed an odd course. He began as a compiler of school textbooks, turned then to write a series of novels analyzing morbid psychological states, was for a while a satirist of society, and finally won fame as author of books for children in which fantasy and instruction were admirably blended.

My Little Boy—wise, kindly and unpretentious—offers an ideal system of education in story form. It was one of the small number of his books to be published in English. The late Alexander Woollcott, with whom it was a favorite book, once described it as "as simple and as modest and as perfect as a Vermeer," and gave high praise to the translation by Alexander Teixcira de Mattos.

FRONTIERS

A Problem of Focus

RECENT letters in response to MANAS articles reflect the uneasiness of readers who feel oppressed by the "closing in" aspect of modern life typified by the epithet, "Conformity,"—yet wonder what is to be done about it, and what *they* can do. One correspondent begins the task of bringing the problem into focus, although in general terms:

"The Narrow Logic of Conformity" (MANAS, Oct. 9) indeed strikes at the problems of the non-conformist in search of peace, freedom, and inner expression. He is faced with the enigmas of individualism and social responsibility, and sometimes may almost be swayed by the propagandized convictions of the masses. But this susceptibility comes only at moments of weakness, when he cannot be certain of the "practicability" of his altruistic ideations.

In the final analysis, the decision must be this—to be or not to be true to one's inner convictions concerning human justice in the light of the highest rational evaluations. . . . The enigmas must be met by every genuine seeker. The Jesus story illustrates this pattern clearly. Always the problems fall to the decisions of individual inner convictions.

The conformity-pattern created for our world by the persuasion and domination of authoritarianism will not change until a sizeable segment of mankind produces the forthright courage to openly challenge its control at every point of contact. But now that mankind faces the real danger of idiotic annihilation, just such an internal revolution may spontaneously arise. What can be lost, when there is only the choice between inalienable rights and life itself?

One trump remains—to defy the oppressive forces wherever they appear, and whatever their national, political, or economic coloring. The fate of our civilization rests on this decision and action. Failing in this, it will go the way of all other lost civilizations of the past.

The difficulty with such a program is that it cannot be "programmatically." That is, conformity is more of a state of mind than it is a pattern of behavior. One who is a nonconformist at heart can easily follow many established ways of doing

things, without compromising his principles, for the reason that, for him, those things do not matter. He saves his energies for larger issues. There are of course great national and international problems in which the dilemmas of conformity come to a head. Nuclear bomb testing is such an issue. War and military training are issues in this class. There are fairly well known groups now active in protesting the requirements of conformity in relation to nuclear weapons and war. A person can join with those groups.

But if the meaning of this correspondent's proposal be sought at a Socratic level (see Book II of Plato's *Republic*), it amounts to a challenge to industrialism. How do you go about opposing industrialism, or is the idea even sensible?

The early works of Ralph Borsodi (*Flight from the City, This Ugly Civilization*) go a long way toward clarifying this question for people in the United States. In India, however, the question seems to have more pertinence, since India is far from industrialized, in the modern sense, as yet. Another correspondent, who is a student of India's problems, discusses the Indian craze for industrialism from a Gandhian point of view:

My own hunch is that one big reason for the Indian drive for industrialism is a mistaken but injured pride. After having been a subject people, they now want to prove to the West that they are as clever and able as Westerners are, and prove it in the language that Westerners appreciate—industrial power. Of course they also want to get rid of their poverty and establish their economic security, but there is the other motive, too.

Industrialism, whether capitalist or communist, creates big pools of wealth in such a form that the powerful ones whether bankers or Party chiefs, can manipulate it for their own purposes, letting enough sift down to *hoi polloi* so that they can efficiently tend the machines. Gandhi's program creates wealth in tiny puddles, so to say, each family and each village acquiring wealth for itself in little amounts which do not have to be transported or get into the hands of middlemen for the profits of others. Gandhi's non-violent economy is a non-exploitative economy, and cuts down on commerce as much as possible. That is

one reason why those who favor industrialism oppose and laugh at Gandhi's ideas.

This might be termed the "social" case against industrialism as practiced in Western countries, and against its introduction in India. There is also the case which grows out of educational psychology:

Just as the members of the ruling group in almost every country teach their children to ride horseback and themselves spend considerable time riding, playing polo and other sports—not just as something expensive to set themselves off from the herd, but in order to develop and maintain self-confidence self-reliance, self-respect, initiative, and a habit of command (all this coming out of bodily and manual exercise)—so Gandhi wanted the common man and woman to develop and maintain self-confidence, self-reliance, initiative, self-respect and hope, also by work with the hands. Such qualities of character are of enormous importance to every single person and to every nation. Learning to drive a car is not as good as learning to manage a living creature. Know-how in relation to people is more important than know-how in relation to machines. These moral qualities are not developed by operating machines and by industrialism nearly so well as by dealing with animals and people. These qualities are of immense importance to a democracy.

Such facts or truths are just as important for Americans as they are for Indians, yet what is simply a platform for opposing or slowing down industrialization in India becomes a project of considerable subtlety for Americans. An American's opposition to industrialism has to be intelligently selective. He will have to make many compromises at the "practical" level, in order to plan a way of personal living or a family life that avoids being ridiculous. (A number of the articles in "Children . . . and Ourselves" have been devoted to this sort of problem.)

But Americans have also to recognize and deal with the second-degree effects of industrialism—as Indians will, too, some day, if they continue to industrialize. These effects are covered by the term, "mass merchandising techniques." An industrial society requires an expanding market to keep pace with the increasing

productiveness made possible by technological advance. The factory which increases its output must also increase its sales. In the United States, this "philosophy" of growth and expansion is united with an ideological enthusiasm for Free Enterprise, which makes mass selling into a patriotic activity as well as an acquisitive drive.

It is at this level that many Americans find the requirements of Conformity peculiarly odious. The zest of manufacturers for mass sales brings a hideous similarity to all reading matter—in the so-called "editorial" columns as well as the advertising pages of the national magazines. The magazines do not deliver worth-while reading matter to people who want it; they deliver *markets* to manufacturers who have goods to sell. This scheme of things so dominates America's economic life that resistance to it seems practically impossible. You have to buy the goods, even if you ignore the advertising. (You can, of course, seek out a co-op store and buy merchandise which is sold and sometimes produced with another motivation, and this may also bring you into a circle of people who are interested in independent thinking.)

But what recent studies of contemporary merchandising techniques have shown is that the prime purpose of these techniques is to manipulate the desires and behavior of consumers (this means "people") in a predetermined direction. Accordingly, there is growing resistance in America to "manipulation."

The complaint against manipulation and the techniques for securing conformity does not come only from libertarians and anarchist-tending thinkers. Former Governor Herbert H. Lehman of New York, in an address early this year, spoke of those influences as growing out of Big Business. Mr. Lehman said:

The big corporations offer good pay, security, and good prospects for advancement. But what is more—and this is not clearly understood—they offer a way of life. In return for the relatively good pay, job security and job opportunity which the big

corporations afford, the employee is expected to give not only his talents and devotion, but also his conformity.

A typical training pamphlet of the General Electric Corporation, which came to my attention recently, advised all professional employees, as part of their basic code of conduct, to avoid taking an interest in "controversial" questions.

And there is some evidence that many college students who aspire to work for these corporations are taking this advice in advance. Some members of some faculties in some colleges and universities have suggested this attitude as the correct one for those who want to "get on" in the great bureaucracies which have grown up in the corporate world.

In these new bureaucracies, there have developed the same faults and failings which usually characterize collectivist bureaucracies—the modeling of thought as well as action on the attitude of the "boss," the pressure for conformity, the red tape, the centralization of authority, and the reluctance to go out on a limb or take a chance. The individual is induced to fuse his identity into that of the corporation. He becomes what William H. Whyte has called "The Organization Man."

I am worried about this. I am concerned that today Big Business is doing just what it used to accuse the New Deal of doing—it is trying to destroy individualism in favor of regimentation and conformity.

As for the link between war and industrialism, not only Big Business reveals this alliance. Recently, after the recent cutback in Government orders for aircraft, a labor union official declared (as reported in the *Nation*) "that the government must not be permitted to cancel weapons contracts purely on the basis of national-defense needs." In recent months, some 25,000 aircraft workers in the Los Angeles area have lost their jobs, with immediate effect upon both small and large business in this region of Southern California. Now the demand is for "a national defense system that guarantees full employment." How will you get such a defense system? Well, if you don't quite want a war in order to get it, you'll probably settle for a promising "war-scare" that can be expected to get those employment figures back up where they ought to be.

There is a lot to be said about the difficulties of nonconformity. Take so simple a thing as jokes—or cartoons. In the *Saturday Review* for Nov. 23, Jerome Beatty, Jr., a *SR* staff writer, tells the mournful story of the "acceptable" cartoon—which is the cartoon which can't possibly offend *anybody*. Mr. Beatty reports on the stern attitude of the cartoon editors of the big magazines (the *New Yorker* excepted) toward almost anything but tired clichés of humor:

The Bend Over Backwards policy exercises such influence that often the editor can find several reasons for his rejection. Take the case of the cartoon showing the driver approaching the entrance to the highspeed thruway. Just before the turn onto the highway [why not *hiway*?] is a church; a sign outside announces in Gothic lettering, "Last Chance to Pray." This gag was turned down by at least one magazine because it ridiculed (1) automobile manufacturers, (2) religion, (3) turnpike interests. In that order of importance, too. . . .

A cartoon in which a father is telling his son: "Of course I believe Washington threw a dollar across the Rappahannock; last year Washington threw 3 billion across the Atlantic," has no chance of appearing anyplace, despite the fact that it is nothing more than a mild political joke. . . . Another cartoon shows a pathetic gentleman at the optometrist's. He came to be fitted for glasses. He says, "I'd like to see things a little less clearly, please." This has been rejected at least twice, not because it isn't funny, but because it is pessimistic!

Terrible, isn't it? But how do you protest? How do you make General Electric feel your disapproval or persuade the *Satevepost* to let down the bars on some of those *verboten* cartoons? The trouble with the protests which are easy to decide to make which ought to be made, nevertheless—is that they represent the end of the line, whereas work needs to be done at the beginning, before you get to the "crisis" stage—preparation for atomic war and such.

The need seems to be to develop a fundamental and intuitive distaste for all things which bear the stamp of the "mass man." You need to be sensitive to the revolting aspects of the morning paper, everytime you look at it; you need

to hate the sight of a supermarket just because nothing you find there is ever different from what every other supermarket offers; likewise with news-stands, and every point of nexus between mass producer and mass consumer. You need to not want to work for people who will ask you not to "think controversially," or for anyone or any bureau that is likely to think a loyalty oath is a good thing. You need to begin to give active support to the groups and individuals and enterprises that, consciously or even unconsciously, represent the preservation of individual thought, individual opinion, individual freedom. (In this connection, the Southern California listener-sponsored radio station, sister station to Berkeley's KPFA, is moving along toward getting on the air, and this will be an enterprise that deserves the full support of the "independents.")

The struggle against manipulation and conformity can hardly become a crusade or a formal movement, for the reason that crusades and movements involve organization, and organizations too easily turn into tools of manipulation and conformity. Resistance to conformity must be non-specific, a state of mind, a matter of mood, both moral and aesthetic, if the virus is not to get past our guard. The challenge of conformity, in the nature of things, is a challenge to *individuals*. It is a challenge to people who can learn to work together without being constrained together, and who can think together without dogma or "line" because they have learned to think independently, by themselves.