

STATE OF THE NATION

TO set the stage for the discussion implied by our title, we have two groups of quotations, one from Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, the other from John W. Aldridge, author and professor of English literature. The expression, "state of the nation," has a political tinge which does not represent our purpose, here. What we are after is some kind of tentative judgment concerning the way people feel about their lives and their future. It hardly needs pointing out that, for a great many people, matters which were once taken for granted are now sources of disturbing question. The assurances which supported conventional attitudes a generation ago are no longer assuring. On the whole, people still believe without question in the traditional values of Western civilization, but the familiar means to serve and defend those values are no longer adequate. These values are declining more by a process of erosion than by the direct opposition of some "enemy." Feeling this, but not understanding it, we do not know what to do.

In the first annual lecture of the Earl Warren Institute of Ethics and Human Relations, given recently at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles (and reported in *Frontier* for August), Justice Douglas pointed out that the press today "gives no true account of forces at work in the world." The preoccupation of the newspapers, radio and TV is with other things—commercial objectives which fill the air and take up the reading time of the American public with trivia and non-essentials. Mr. Douglas said:

Big corporations, like big government and big unions breed non-controversial men and women. At the managerial engineering, or administrative level there may be debate and controversy. But on the larger public issues of the day, the voices of employees are largely mute. The commercialism of television and radio has made like change. Sponsors do not want their products identified with

controversial programs nor with controversial commentators. There has been such a deadening effect of radio and TV on the American mind, that we may have reached a point where men and women who will sponsor unorthodox points of view must be subsidized by foundations.

The dialogue that has characterized the free society has not disappeared from the American scene, though it has declined.

Justice Douglas shows the measure of this decline by comparing the public debates of a century ago with the silence of the present:

We are passing through momentous times where no debate takes place even on crucial issues. Laos is certainly more dangerous to all of us than the Missouri Compromise was to our ancestors. Yet while the Missouri Compromise was thoroughly discussed in and out of Congress and up and down the nation no debate on Laos has been held. Why has silence overtaken us? Why has the pattern of no discussion reached into atomic testing, disarmament, Berlin, and other issues that involve the problems of survival or extinction? Is foreign policy—the key to life and death for all forms of life in this nuclear age—beyond the bounds of debate? If so, how can we, the people, ever free ourselves from military domination and assert our sovereign civilian prerogative over all affairs of state—over war as well as over peace?

A survey of newspapers from coast-to-coast shows the low estate of dialogue on domestic as well as foreign issues. Money-makers have taken over the press. They want readers and advertisers; and so they cater to the low common denominator in the populace. To that fact must be added the further one that the owners are largely conservative. The result is a press which with few exceptions gives no true account of forces at work in the world. Those who live in the average American town have no chance of getting an accurate measure of the world problem. Ignorance alone is tragedy enough. Further tragedy lies in the fact that the people of the United States—the ones who could, if awakened, take up the challenge of the Cold War and win it—are largely immobilized. Fears of communism are subtly transformed into fears of the unorthodox.

Timidity rules at precisely the time when daring is needed:

The civil service that was to save the government from the "spoils" system has produced vast bureaucracies that are heavy-footed and under watchful eyes. The loyalty-security programs governing employees now reach into the private sector. All who do business with the government need security clearance. The engineer who has given his best years to reach a \$15,000 salary loses everything if he is branded a poor security risk—his professional standing and his livelihood as well.

There is also the dulling effect of "prosperity":

The affluent society is also responsible. Those who dive in ease are not the ones to go in search of the Holy Grail. Yet more recruits are needed today for our modern crusade than ever before. Enterprise that is wholly or largely dependent on government contracts is not "free" in the historic sense of the word. Competition that developed resourcefulness and ingenuity, competition that released energies from a thousand little springs the country over has disappeared from large areas of our society. There is competition for government contracts. But spoon-fed business does not have the daring and ingenuity of free enterprise.

What Mr. Douglas is saying, in effect, is that the American people are not facing the problems and decisions which are before them in the modern world and that further they do not even know what the problems are, since they are given no opportunity to define them or even to know they exist. Instead, the people are haunted by the pseudo-problems which have been created by demagogic parasites who exploit our growing insecurity. The ruthless insistence upon "selling goods," he points out, to the exclusion of all other intentions, has displaced most of the signs of intelligence in national communications. The delivery of the nation's sense of direction into the hands of the military, through all the many means by which its \$45 billion annual appropriation can secure conformity to the military idea of "goals," tends to stultify independent civilian thinking. "Through a thousand influences," says Mr. Douglas, "that have reached us since World War

II, we are conditioned to the idea that the Pentagon has the answer to communism; and for far too many years we have rested secure in that belief."

It happens that Justice Douglas has a program which he believes will be a practical and winning answer to the challenge of Communist campaigning in the undeveloped areas of the world. For this program, the reader should go to the August issue of *Frontier*, the West Coast liberal monthly from which our quotations from Mr. Douglas are taken. What seems of greater importance, here, is recognizing and considering the fact that before the program of Mr. Douglas, or any other program of merit, can be undertaken, the American people have to awaken to the needs and obligations his article, which has the title, "The Submerged American," sets forth. What will help the submerged American to come to the surface and see and hear what Mr. Douglas is saying?

Leaving this basic question unanswered, we turn to our second set of quotations. Writing under the title, "What Became of Our Post-War Hopes?", in the *New York Times Book Review* for July 29, Mr. Aldridge looks at the recent books of men who were promising young novelists in the late 1940's, and finds them without fresh inspiration. These writers were good on the war, but they are not so good on what has come after the war. War is a positive event, massive, unmistakable. Now we have a mushy morass of lost meanings. If it is the task of the serious novelist to hold a mirror up to his times, he has to have some kind of feeling about the form of what he is showing. Our contemporary novelists, Mr. Aldridge believes, are not equal to this. He says:

The bleak period since the war has provided these writers with nothing comparable to the experience of the war years. It has been characterized by a curious failure to jell, by a lack of distinctive form and direction, and by an inevitable retreat of the old socially oriented literary mind on all fronts. In place of a tangible and readily usable subject the period has given us the indefinite suspensions and

equivocations of the Cold War against an emotional background of alternating and even at moments co-existing anxiety and apathy. The central experience of the time has had the disconcerting effect of seeming to be shut off from relationship with the individual mind, of seeming to transpire on some plane of almost mythic abstraction far beyond the reach of human understanding.

The point about the Cold War is precisely that it is cold; it is by definition a state of action withheld, of participation avoided, in the face of an endless recurrence of aborted crises followed by stalled negotiations followed by more aborted crises—as if the broken record of our years had become stuck forever in the groove of incipient world catastrophe. In short, there can be no question of *experiencing* the cold war in any of the old vigorous senses of the word. One simply endures it, waits it out, and in the end gives over the mind to the protective custody of its own resources, its own power to enforce sanity and order within the closed precincts of the created work of art. For writers in whom that power is unawakened or who have grown accustomed to having their literary materials served up to them in the form of hot wars, concrete social issues and collective social experience, such a condition of life can be baffling indeed. It can even result in a fatal derangement of sensibility.

There is a direct parallel between these comments and the observation of George P. Elliott (in the *Nation*) a few years ago:

Nothing is harder than to have a clear, steady and sound idea of what society is and what it should be. I must speak for myself: I realize that I could not define the word to anyone's satisfaction; like many, I sometimes in desperation identify society with the state—whence horrors ensue. The word "democratic" has ceased to have any more independent meaning than the word "united" in United States. We have no good analogy by which to comprehend our society.

Here we have justification for repeating, at another level, what we said after quoting from Mr. Douglas. We are not facing the subtler problems of our society because they *escape* us; we live in the smothering clutch of a protean monster of a social organism. As Frederick Karl put it: "We have come to view the world not as a stable place but as a web of overlapping illusions, . . . a manifestation of irrational responses and perverse

desires, and as an obstacle course in which man is forever trapped." We are not facing the problems of our society because we can't really identify them except in terms of the gross compulsions they exercise over our lives. We know, vaguely, what we suffer, but we don't know *why*.

We interrupted the flow of Mr. Aldridge's analysis because what he says next seems so valuable. The confirmation of his diagnosis by quotations from other writers helps to underline the pertinence of his comment:

To deal effectively with the massive complications and ambiguities of the Cold War period, to say nothing of the present amorphous state of American society, a writer would ideally need the equipment of an Orwell, a Kafka, Camus, Celine, or Dostoevsky. But since such equipment is rather hard to come by these days, he ought at the very least to have an artistic orientation sufficiently similar to theirs to enable him to see that the task of the novelist in a time like ours can no longer be confined to a simple exploration of the social appearances and surfaces, but must be expanded and deepened to take into account the chaotic multiplicity of meanings which now confront us both above and beneath the surfaces. He ought, in other words, to be able to recognize that his task is something far different from what it was and needed to be in any previous time, and that he must bring to it far larger resources of mind imagination and technical understanding than have ever been necessary before. If the experience of the present age has failed to define itself in the form of readily usable literary material, then he must be prepared to define it imaginatively and to make of the very difficulty of definition one of the enriching values of his art.

If it is true that ambiguity is of the essence of much of modern art, in literature and in the theatre as well as on canvas and in other mediums, then the arts have already made a beginning in this direction. But meanwhile the common man remains the prisoner of his bewilderments, seduced by pitchmen, reproached and exhorted by moralists, yet seeing nothing that he can do. But not entirely. What a distinguished jurist like Justice Douglas recognizes by his knowledge of history and of current affairs, and what the literary man gains awareness of by well-exercised

sensibility, comes through on another wave-length to the common man—or rather, to those uncommon individuals among the members of the mass society.

Where are the signs of life in American society today? They are in the Peace Movement and in the Civil Rights Movement.

Writing in the *Nation* for May 26, Carey McWilliams details with example after example the overtaking of American politics by ambiguity. There is hysteria, anxiety, anger, and partisan passion on the political scene, but very little sense. How could there be much sense in politics, today, if Justice Douglas is right about what he says of the "Submerged American"?

Mr. McWilliams ends his discussion by speaking, not of a new politics, but of "New forces that conceivably may precipitate the new politics"—"beginning to emerge at the margins—or just outside—of the established organizations and parties." One of these is the campaign for peace. While the peace movement has political implications, it arose from the primary and non-political inspiration of the totally committed pacifists—who have been around and working hard for a long time—and it gained sudden increments of growth from the shock experienced by countless Americans when the United States resumed nuclear testing. Mr. McWilliams quotes from a writer, Allan Temko, who has a good idea of the kind of politics that might grow out of the peace movement:

We need a new politics . . . and possibly the brave and innocent spontaneity of the women who have demonstrated in behalf of peace is one of the first steps toward such a new politics. . . . The new politics must be kind and generous to a degree mankind has not yet had the common sense to contemplate. It must be motivated not only by a respect for people as individuals—a respect I see nowhere among the governments of the major powers—but also by love. The modern world at its best, supposedly so rational in its pursuit of the earthly paradise, has nevertheless been afraid of love, as it has been afraid of philosophical mystery, and afraid of politics. In the end this means that it has

been afraid of men. And man ends by being afraid of his machines.

How different the plans and consultations of the pacifists and peace workers from the schemes and manoeuvres of rebels and political revolutionaries of the past! There is a sense in which theirs are the gatherings of innocents. They do not plot power, but the spread of the idea of justice and harmlessness. Often they are indeed "innocent" of the ruses and strategy of power, but they know one thing that the seekers of power do not understand: *power is no longer a rational instrument and it cannot be used for the good of human beings*. Even a sloppy, dirty beatnik who knows this has more sense and decency in him than the astute and sophisticated leaders who pin their faith on power. None of us, perhaps, are wise enough to understand the social dynamics of the world to come, but the direct moral perception that we shall never get to that world without abandoning war is surely the keynote of the great change that must come first.

REVIEW

"WAY OUT"—SOME REASONS WHY

BEFORE quoting some striking passages from Ross Russell's *The Sound* (Macfadden paperback, 1962), we should like to ask a question. Why, in a society so prideful of being a "democracy," is the Negro disowned even when no longer disenfranchised? While there must be a number of reasons, the most important one grows out of naked and ignorant prejudice sustained by massive socio-economic facts. Background for this view is well put by Wilfred Wellock in *Off the Beaten Track*, published at Tanjore, India (1961). Mr. Wellock says in his Preface:

Current Western civilisation is unique in that it exhibits for the first time in history an affluent proletariat. I almost said democracy, but despite the boasting, its democracy is more superficial than real. . . . Having acquired affluence, the great majority, of all classes, want nothing so much as to increase it by acquiring larger shares of national cakes. Indeed politics is now chiefly concerned with the distribution of the rising tide of goods which automatic machines and automatic humans turn out of the factories, and service which increased sophistication demands. In the process, the big financial corporations and a few tycoons together with a few politicians succeed in diverting ample supplies of the fruits of industry into the coffers of the investing classes, which proclaim their intention to let the workers share the rising prosperity. The relative shares are never disclosed.

The tendency in such a society is for the affluent person—or the affluent organization—to "disown" as many relatives as he can. And since the American Negro can superficially be regarded as a distant cousin, his inheritance is jealously withheld. As Martin Luther King points out in the *Nation*, there is a wide abyss between the 1954 Supreme Court decision on integration and the practice of southern states:

In 1954, the Supreme Court declared school segregation to be unconstitutional. Yet, since then, federal executive agencies and vast federal legislative programs have given millions of dollars yearly to educational institutions which continue to violate the Supreme Court decision.

Further, the federal government collects taxes from all citizens, Negro and white, which it is constitutionally

obligated to use for the benefit of all; yet, billions of these tax dollars have gone to support housing programs and hospital and airport construction in which discrimination is an open and notorious practice. Private firms which either totally exclude Negroes from the work force, or place them in discriminatory status, receive billions of dollars annually in government contracts. The federal government permits elections and seats representatives in its legislative chambers in disregard of the fact that millions of Negro citizens have no vote. It directly employs millions in its various agencies and departments; yet its employment practices, especially in Southern states, are rife with discrimination.

These illustrations can be multiplied many times. The shocking fact is that while the government moves sluggishly and in patchwork fashion, to achieve equal rights for all citizens, in the daily conduct of its own massive economic and social activities it participates directly and indirectly in the denial of these rights. We must *face* the tragic fact that the federal government is the nation's highest investor in segregation.

Writing on "The Captive Society" in *Anarchy* for November, 1961, John Ellerby likens the stratified levels of privilege in our society to the strata found in a prison:

The social structure of the prison, whether we consider its formal or its informal system, is simply a reflection of the social structure of "normal" society. Every social organization of any size has a "formal" and an "informal" structure of social relationships. The more self-contained and authoritarian, the more distinct are the two structures. In terms of Kurt Lewin's topological psychology a prison is defined as "a polar type of authoritarian system that is governed by a bureaucratic hierarchy and entrusted with power over the total life space of the individuals under its jurisdiction." Since it is an extreme type, we may expect to see in it the most extreme differentiation between the formal and informal structures.

Coming, at last, to Ross Russell's *The Sound*, this book is primarily about the music derived from Negro American genius. And here we find some interesting connections between the hipsters' desire to get "way out" and the music which helps to send them there. Norman Mailer maintains that Negro Jive talk is adopted by whites because so many of the younger generation would rather identify with those who are disowned than with those who do the disowning: conventional reasoning about the ends and aims of the world is

unacceptable, and the hipsters seek identification among the alienated members of our society. The most interesting character in Mr. Russell's book is an extraordinarily talented drummer who represents himself as an Arab and goes under the name of Hassan. But "Hassan," we learn, was once a conscientious, idealistic American Negro named Horace Stamps. Although intelligent enough to realize the unlikelihood of his ever "beating the rap" for being a Negro, he has a plan. He tells his new-found "gray" friend his secret—involving the appurtenances and credentials of a newly created Mohammedan. But Hassan has not merely devised a way of crossing the color line; he feels more like a Mohammedan than a Christian:

"I guess I better straighten you on this play. Maybe you heard Red and some of the cats refer to me as the *late* Horace Stamps. That happens to be right. You see I cashed in the Stamps monicker three years ago."

"Legally changed your name?"

"Yep. Old Horace checked into a certain address in upper Harlem and busted out four hours later a new man. Dig—?" Hassan began to display the contents of the carryall, the red fez which Bernie had seen, a pair of soft leather slippers, an outer garment like a burnoose, an English translation of the Koran, a copy of Fitzgerald's translation of *Omar Khayyam*, and a kind of passport identifying the bearer as Hassan El Benna, true believer and follower of the Prophet. A bona fide Mohammedan. The entire package had been, and still could be obtained at the address given on the flyleaf of the Koran. "Quite a few cats swung the same way," Hassan went on. "The way things turned out it wasn't no help with the draft. The only spades to beat that rap was the fags and junkies. But it's real useful down below the Line. Why I taken two trips into the deep South, and I do mean deep. In New Orleans I put up at the best hotels and scoffed in the best restaurants. Once the headwaiter asked me to remove my fez but I explained to the cat how it had a religious meaning, like us Moslems weren't supposed to eat bareheaded, and he was real polite about it. . . . Like, I'd walk up to some big . . . cracker policemen and fold my hands inside my sleeves and bow and ask him directions, like where the A-rab consulate was located. Why, it was just like being a spy behind the enemy lines. Yes, daddy, this rig makes it every time below the Line."

"Hass, it sounds like this all started out as a disguise, or alter personality. Where do you stand with it now?"

The drummer chortled. "Man, the plain truth is—I been with it so long now I clean forgot about that little cat from Detroit, ole Horace Stamps. Like he got swallowed up. X-ed out. I talked with some GI's that got over to Egypt and Cairo and Turkey during the war and that's the first place they was headed back as soon as the Sam action was finished. I'm going to make it, too, dig their scene, and all the sheiks and mullahs, and harems and fine chicks, pick up on their brand of hash, and really lay back and ball, like it tells you to do in the Koran. . . . Yes, Bernie, those Moslems are *real* cats. Them countries over there is *whole nations* of hipsters." And Hassan, to while away the time, opened *The Rubaiyat* and began to read. "The craziest, dad. The original jive! Old Omar really laid down a righteous spiel!"

In a later conversation between Bernie and Hassan, Hassan is undeniably the teacher, the wise man:

"Hass, there's something I've been meaning to ask you. Kind of personal—You know, I've spent a lot of time wondering what it is you spades have and us guys are looking for?"

Hassan chuckled softly. "I dunno, old man, to the colored person the average gray acts like he's in a sweat most of the time. Hung up. Uncool. I'm talking generalities now, dig. But, like, so many grays go around all hassled up with tremendous big worries on their heads. Just as if they was carrying the weight of the world, and blabbing up a storm on what to do about it and what's liable to happen in case they don't. Well, the spade has it figured different. Take this movie loot now. To me it ain't worth while to stick around when my own true mind tells me it's time to head back. The spade figures money for something that comes and goes. Yes, man, I'm wise, we have to scuffle awful hard just to get enough to make out, but still we don't try to hold on to it forever. Maybe on account of we've had to travel second class so long we're used to getting our kicks out of common everyday stuff—food, and music, and sex, and even religion.

"Now, like you, Bernie, you're on a spade kick, trying to learn about life from us. Only, Bernie, you got to learn that not everything can be reasoned out. I know you got a real wig. I dig you the most that way. But there's always bound to be some issues you can't think about, like arithmetic of some kind. Some things you just got to feel."

COMMENTARY BOOKS ON GANDHI

THERE are so many books relating to Gandhi—editions of material written by him, books about him, and about nonviolence—that only specialists who know the complete field of Gandhiana are in a position to make comparisons among such volumes. So, avoiding any such attempt, we call attention to a new collection of Gandhi's writings, *Non-Violent Resistance*, published recently by Schocken Books.

This would be a good book to read in connection with the series of articles by Raghavan Iyer, completed in this issue of MANAS. Mr. Iyer's study of Gandhi's view of man's nature and its relation to his theory of history, or "progress," has seemed to us an especially important contribution, chiefly because it shows how closely Gandhi's thinking about action for peace and freedom followed his thinking about the nature of man. *Non-Violent Resistance* will help the reader to see further applications of Gandhi's philosophy.

Martin Luther King has remarked of Gandhi's movement: "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale." This is indeed the "historical significance" of the work of M. K. Gandhi, and it seems likely that general attention will be paid to Gandhi in the West, first, by those who seek a substitute for military action in the struggle for freedom and justice.

But it is necessary to saturate oneself with Gandhi's thinking in order to recognize that the immediate application of non-violence in the resistance of Gandhi and his countrymen to the British *raj* was but a single if dramatic implication of the Gandhian philosophy. This becomes evident from any protracted reading of Gandhi's writings.

Gandhi evolved and practiced an entire philosophy of life. It was rooted in the ancestral religion of India—Hinduism—but for Gandhi it

was a living philosophy which reached out across the barriers of culture and found enrichment in various philosophies and religions of the world. The vitality of Gandhi's thinking shows that even a far-reaching and comprehensive system of thought need never submit to the narrowing influence of sectarianism, so long as the individual insists upon rendering into the terms of his own understanding whatever he adopts as his articles of faith. It was, one may think, the cosmological aspect of Gandhi's philosophy which gave his ideas their universality and their self-consistent strength. This, at any rate, is the impression we have from Mr. Iyer's study of Gandhi's view of man and history.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

CORRESPONDENCE AND NOTES

ONCE in a great while this department serves as a medium of communication among readers. We have a letter which is a case in point. Those with suggestions are invited to reply direct to the writer of the following:

Dear Friends: This is another of those "will you help me" letters. All I can do is accuse you of bringing them on yourselves, through the provocation of MANAS

One sentence in a recent *Frontiers* piece says that "a man who wants to do something fundamental in education will have to do it himself. . . ." I feel that I have reached the point of *wanting*, at least; now the problem is to find the school, or the "Community." I hardly know where to begin to look or whom to ask. It is so characteristic that mediocre things in America get most of the publicity.

I have been teaching literature in college for the past three years—two at Allegheny in northwestern Pennsylvania and the last at Fisk in Nashville. . . . [and] am not really looking for a "job" so much as for a place to be, where something worth while is going on. I know of Peninsula School here and Walden School in Berkeley, but these are both elementary schools. Can you tell me of any *high schools* that are trying to teach radical criticism? I would be delighted to find a group which is just starting out, full of fire and brimstone. I have almost no restrictions—am thinking about the West, since I am here, but location matters far less than atmosphere. I would prefer a school in which most of the students live at home, as "family" seems to be important up to college age; this probably means the school would have to be in a city but I would hope not in either the San Francisco or Los Angeles metropolitan areas. Also a school which is encouraging integration.

I don't believe it is necessary to say any stirring things here about my philosophy of education—just that my concerns are very close to yours, as shown in MANAS. I will be grateful for any suggestions you may have.

98 Alejandra Avenue
Atherton, California

Sincerely
Patricia Herron

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Again, once in a while—in a *great* while—material appearing in one of the "mass media" seems suitable for reproduction. The Education page in a June issue of *Time* stresses the need to distinguish between labels and ideas. Under the heading "Unfamiliar Quotations" is the following:

Compassionate. Unexceptional. Sort of—resounding. And really expressive of the good teacher's relationship to the student. So seemed the quotation that the editor of the yearbook at Kingsbury High School in Memphis picked to keynote the volume: *From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.*

By the time Memphis noted last week that the quotation came from Karl Marx, the books were all printed and distributed. And how did Marx get into the *Talon*, as the yearbook is called? "I don't know anything about Communism. I'm not a student of history," explained *Talon's* faculty adviser, English Teacher Martha Logan. "Ignorance and oversight," sighed Kingsbury Principal John Crothers. "Ignorance and carelessness," fumed School Board President W. G. Galbreath.

Happily unflustered was the culprit: Senior Jessica Moore, 17, the straight-A student editor of *Talon*, who had simply picked Marx's maxim out of Bartlett's *Familiar* (but not everywhere) *Quotations*. "If anyone other than Marx had said it," she remarked sensibly, "there wouldn't have been any excitement." Then Jessica went off to accept a long-scheduled honor: a citizenship award from the Memphis branch of the D.A.R.

A feature story in the *Chicago Tribune* for April 22 presents impressions of some current "Junior Great Books" discussions (sponsored by the Great Books Foundation). The Junior Great Books experiments invite sixth and seventh graders to find out whether philosophical analysis can be enjoyable. The pupils come on an entirely voluntary basis after class hours, and Ed Moldof of the Great Books Foundation insists that "student interest doesn't depend on I.Q.'s at all." Mary Merryfield, who provides the brief report, quotes Mr. Moldof: "All kinds of pupils go out for these extracurricular discussions like they go out for athletics. They're exercises in thinking. Just

as you give artificial respiration to start breathing, these discussions are planned to start thinking." Miss Merryfield continues:

The youngsters are studying from a list of classics that includes Charles and Mary Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," Faraday's "On Various Forces of Nature," and The Declaration of Independence.

And if you don't believe that 6th and 7th Graders can think or would even enjoy thinking, you should have been with me the day I took my tape recorder and traveled over to the Ray school to listen in on a discussion of Genesis.

Some of the children told me they carry on with their Junior Great Books discussions following their meetings. Parents sometimes come to watch the sessions—which makes me wonder if some day crowds will come to assembly halls for verbal scrimmage as they now attend football or basketball games. And the idea comes to me that this would be a wonderful technique for the Parent Teacher associations and Friends of the Library groups to learn and to teach. Think how such a vital method could expand our teaching force thru the use of after-school hours volunteers coaching children in *thinking*.

It is likely that youngsters who attend such sessions will be able to understand and appreciate the comment of seventeen-year-old Jessica Moore and almost certain that they will be puzzled by the "fear-of-labels" complex of some teachers and administrators. But apart from the manifest need for education which will keep "the spirit of democracy" alive, there is another point which invites consideration. We have many desires, the psychologists tell us, of which we are unaware. Is a longing for abstract thinking perhaps one of them? Is it possible that the child in our culture suffers seriously from a general impoverishment of serious thinking? We often assume that consideration of "values" belongs principally to the adult realm—even though, as adults, we seem to have little time for this pursuit. But after a child has turned off the TV set and, conceivably, has also finished some "juvenile" volume on space travel, it sometimes happens that before-going-to-sleep thinking shifts to abstract and abstruse

questions. In our opinion such ideas are *natural* to the child mind, because the child mind is not yet in tutorial bondage to the intellectual specialists. After all, prior to specialized thought is the power of imagination, and also an inherent disposition to seek out logic. These resources are apparently tapped, at least in some degree, by the Junior Great Books discussions. We might remember, however, that the best kind of encouragement of abstract thinking is continuous and most likely to originate in the home.

FRONTIERS

Gandhi's View of Man and History

IV—ASSESSMENT

APART from the belief in rebirth (or palingenesis), Gandhi's views come closest to those of Godwin. He did not state explicitly that "mind, in a progressive view at least, is infinite,"¹⁰¹ but he would have agreed with Godwin that if we could arrive at perfection at a future date, there would be an end to our improvement.¹⁰² By perfectible is not meant the capability of being brought to final and total perfection on earth, but rather the possibility of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement, in the sense of coming closer to a realization of the oneness of humanity and of all life. Universal benevolence is an ideal towards which we can strive, and which if it can never be reached, can always be brought a little nearer. It is certainly always possible to widen the area of our sympathies, even if we cannot successfully remove all the barriers between men. However, like Kant and Rousseau and unlike Godwin, Gandhi believed that the goodness of man is grounded not in some instinctive inclination of sympathy, but in man's capacity for self-determination. Its real proof lies not in the impulses of spontaneous affection but in the deliberate recognition of an ethical law to which the individual will surrenders voluntarily. What distinguishes man from all other beings is the gift of perfectibility, so that he does not tarry in his actual condition but strives beyond it. Whereas Voltaire's pessimism remained playful, Gandhi's optimism, like Rousseau's, was filled with and sustained by tragic seriousness, despite his abundant fund of humor. He constantly demanded that men, instead of losing themselves in a passive acceptance of the miseries of existence, must understand their destiny and master it themselves. All his political and social ideals grow out of this demand.

The stress on human perfectibility is always related to the demand for a new society and a new

vision of humanity. Gandhi was ever in dead earnest as a radical reformer although he never became an iconoclast. He always assumed that men *would*, simply because they *could*, avail themselves of the capacities that distinguished them from animals. He under-estimated man's powers of self-destruction, as he despairingly realized towards the end of his life. Although Gandhi pleaded for an open view of human nature and stressed its variability and capacity for transformation, he sometimes tended to regard it as a constant, marked by a goodness in which we must not merely believe but which we can take as something ever-present. And yet, Gandhi's conception of human nature was essentially dynamic, and derives its urgency especially from the context of passivity, procrastination and cynicism which he found both in South Africa and in India.

In order to appreciate the full significance of Gandhi's view of human nature and human perfectibility, it is necessary to place it in the context of Indian thought and tradition. The Indian concern has always, in theory, been with transformation rather than reformation, with the radical reconstruction of man's nature, a renovation of his understanding both of the outer world and of his own existence, a transformation as total as possible, amounting to a complete conversion or a "second birth," the state of the true *Brahmana*, the "twice-born." All the classical schools of Indian philosophy include disciplines (*sadhana*), practical means for the attainment of the goal of self-transformation. The aim is not so much the perfection of reason or of virtue as the realization of the essential nature common to oneself and to all men, and also to God or the ultimate Reality. The essence of man is beyond reason and beyond all human relationships—a doctrine that is sometimes misunderstood to mean that the nature of man is wholly beyond all rational inquiry and wholly beyond all ordinary human relationships and ties.

In the *Vedas* we find no questions asked about human nature. It is taken for granted that man is the meeting-point of the gods of the universe, the controlling forces of the cosmos. The world is a world of action, meant for action and sustained by action. Human action, when based upon a comprehension of the cosmic forces, can transform the nature of the universe. In the *Upanishads* man is viewed as being the imperfect or incomplete reproduction of the divine nature; as the seat of desire, which is to be eventually satisfied or destroyed; as controlled by transmigration, which fixes one's condition after death, and one's inherited tendencies in the next life; and lastly as capable of salvation, which he can hope to attain in the end, but also full of ignorance or false knowledge, which hinders that salvation. Each man is the manifestation on a small scale of what is manifested on a large scale in the whole world. The Upanishadic stress is, however, on contemplation rather than on action.

In *Kaushitaki* we have the trial of the soul, corresponding to the Egyptian judgment in the Hall of Osiris, or to the Persian test at the Bridge of the Separator. The myth given here describes the journey of a soul that goes out on the way of the Gods, after having learnt the truth. The *Gita* is less explicitly concerned with cosmology; selfish desire, *kama*, is counted as the enemy of man and the root of all evil. The perfect man is both capable of absolute detachment and of disinterested action.

In the Buddhist tradition, man is considered specifically as a wayfarer, a *margayayin*, and the way is the way of the development of inwardness. "Look inward; thou art Buddha."¹⁰³ Jain metaphysics classifies the world into two categories, *jiva* or spirit and *ajiva* or matter. Man is the *jiva* bound by matter and in his pure state is unconditioned and omniscient. For Buddhists and for Jains the world is a world of *karma* or causality, which must be comprehended and transcended. The perfect man does not seek private salvation but to work for the emancipation

of the whole of humanity. The Indian epics also preach mainly the life of action for imperfect men, but the performance of daily duties is regarded as a more suitable path for ordinary men than the way of contemplation.

In all these different Indian schools men are bound together either by human *karma* (action) or by *prakriti* (matter) or by *purusha* (spirit), or by all three. The descent into matter is involuntary because it is beyond the powers of man, but once he emerges upon the cosmic scene, the ascent back to the primeval spirit depends upon man himself and upon voluntary effort. The universe is not hostile to man's spirit, but he becomes misguided as to his true nature, due to ignorance and passion. Man is a peculiarly privileged creature with the choice between spiritual inwardness and extreme involvement in matter, but he cannot wholly avoid either the cycle of *Pravritti* or outgoing, or the cycle of *Nivritti* or withdrawal. Involvement in the world can only be effective and not destructive if it is based upon the strength that comes through inwardness; inwardness, on the other hand, can be fruitful and not escapist only if it is seen in the context of the world around us and of the true nature of things. Without inwardness, our involvement in the world can never rise to the level of universality in our conception of duty and of service to humanity. Without involvement, our inwardness can never rise to the stature of impersonality that characterizes the divine principle of life. Self-mastery and the service of others are interdependent aspects of moral and spiritual growth.

What Gandhi wished to stress was the potency in society of what he called "soul-force." While brute-force is based on egotism, which creates conflict and misery, soul-force is based on love, trust, and humility which create harmony and true happiness. To live egoistically, whether by pursuing self-conquest for its own sake or by seeking the conquest of power and the consequent control over the lives of others, is simply to fly

against the facts of cosmic and human interdependence and to be finally, if not periodically or even perpetually, frustrated.

I believe in the existence of a beneficent power that overrides and upsets all human plans. It even produces order out of chaos, and redresses wrongs in spite of the tyranny of tyrants.¹⁰⁴

We live in the midst of death. "What is the value of 'working for our own schemes' when they might be reduced to naught . . . ?"¹⁰⁵ But we may feel as strong as a rock, if we could truthfully say we work for schemes that are in accord with the Moral Law and the fundamental fact of universal solidarity. Then nothing perishes.

I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and therefore there must be a higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would a well-ordered society be intelligible and life worth living. And if that is the law of life, we have to work it out in daily life. Whenever there are jars, wherever you are confronted with an opponent conquer him with love. In this crude manner I have worked it out in my life. That does not mean that all my difficulties are solved. Only I have found that this law of love has answered as the law of destruction has never done . . . The more I work at this law, the more I feel the delight in life, the delight in the scheme of the universe. It gives me a peace and a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have not power to describe.¹⁰⁶

Gandhi really re-affirmed the position of the Buddha, who taught that "by rousing himself, by earnestness, by restraint and control, the wise man may make himself an island which no flood can overwhelm."¹⁰⁷ At the same time, he based himself upon the doctrine of action upheld in the *Gita* and also wished to find a new meaning for the heroic ideal of the *Ramayana* in the context of *Kali Yuga*, the age of darkness in which we find ourselves at this stage of cosmic and human evolution.

A life of service must be one of humility . . . True humility means strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed towards the service of humanity.¹⁰⁸

The God of the *Gita* is continuously in action without resting for a single moment. We learn from the God of the *Gita*, as from the angel voices in Goethe's *Faust*, that he who is ever striving in the world wins his salvation in the end, though only with the help which comes from the higher spiritual world—what, in fact, is termed "grace" in the language of Christian "theology" and "divine favour" (*prasad*) in the final chapter of the *Gita*. If we would serve God or become one with the universal life-principle, our activity must be as unwearied as that of Krishna.

This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never-ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable.¹⁰⁹

Gandhi was insistent that men must not be daunted from the path of action by the danger of the contamination of the market-place and the political arena. Like Goethe, he mistrusted everything which might lead men away from activity in the outside world to a false inward contemplation that connotes the self-sufficiency of the recluse. If he invoked the heroic ideal of the Indian epics, it was because he wished those to whom integrity is precious in India and elsewhere to take greater risks than they are usually prepared to take or to regard as safe. There is little value in cloistered virtue or the pursuit of truth in the privacy of personal life. It is necessary for the saint and the revolutionary to abjure all violence and even more to seek and uphold what they regard as the truth in the challenging context of political activity and the complex relationships of society.

The ultimate significance of the Gandhian doctrine of human perfectibility is the preparedness for error in our endeavours and the readiness to take large risks, checked only by a continuous exercise of self-analysis and the willingness to restore amends for mistakes made through good intentions or weakness of will. Such a course of daring involvement in the affairs of the world, combined with the discipline that comes with the cultivation of inwardness, may

even postpone the attainment of individual enlightenment and salvation. And yet, the attempt to merge the ideal of personal fulfillment and salvation with the common ideal of collective salvation and the welfare of all may be seen in the long run to be a worthier way to attain our own spiritual ends. In any case, an alternative course of conduct was unacceptable for Gandhi.

Theoretically when there is perfect love, there must be perfect non-possession. The body is our last possession. So a man can only exercise perfect love and be completely dispossessed if he is prepared to embrace death and renounces his body for the sake of human service. But that is true in theory only . . . So that perfection in love or non-possession will remain an unattainable ideal as long as we are alive, but towards which we must ceaselessly strive.¹¹⁰

To believe in human perfectibility in the context of politics and of society is to invert Hobbes and to discard the fear of death, to accept the risk of political and physical martyrdom, a worthwhile risk for the true revolutionary.

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NOTES

¹⁰¹ *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793, volume 2, p. 866.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, volume 1, p. 93.

¹⁰³ *The Voice of the Silence*, translated by H. P. Blavatsky, p. 29 (Indian edition).

¹⁰⁴ Letter to Carl Heath, October, 1934.

¹⁰⁵ *Young India*, September 1926.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, October 1931.

¹⁰⁷ *The Dhammapada*, ch. 2, Max Muller's translation.

¹⁰⁸ *Yeravda Mandir*, p. 47 (1930).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47-8.

¹¹⁰ *Modern Review*, October 1935.