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THE PROJECT OF EDUCATION

LOOKING back over the half-century now nearly complete, and asking the question—In what major field of activity has the most constructive thinking gone on?—we are brought without much hesitation to Education. Constructiveness, these days, obviously should have to do with the problem of human attitudes, and will therefore be found in the work of those concerned primarily with psychology. The psychologists themselves, both academic and psychoanalytic, have worked up much raw material, but they have been chiefly interested in system-building—with elaborating theories of human nature—while educators have been confronted with the age-old function of teaching the young. A teacher, like a mother, cannot afford to get lost in a web of abstract theorizing. Doctrines of infant-care come and go, but the feeding of babies goes on, regardless of doctrines, and similarly, the teacher must teach each generation as it comes along, without waiting for final blueprints of human nature from the psychologists.

Teachers, in other words, are obliged to act according to some philosophy of the whole man; they are constrained by the necessities of their profession to accept full responsibility, whether or not all the "facts" are in, and are thus protected from developing excesses of untried utopianism. This tends to apply to all activities in which the human equation is directly involved, as for example in politics, but teaching, unlike politics, is naturally open to the expression of idealism. Politics, as practiced today, is largely devoted to the attainment of power. Ideally, politics ought to be concerned with the establishment of justice, of which power is an instrument, but in most cases the order is reversed and the power is sought as a goal prior to justice. This subordination of justice to power is the form, if not the substance, of corruption, and it might be taken as one explanation of why, with the exception of a man like Gandhi and possibly one or two others, the first half of the twentieth century has passed without the appearance of any great statesman in the world.

This sort of criticism, we think, cannot be made to apply to the educational world. If education be defined as the pursuit, the discovery, the preservation and the transmission of the truth about life, these objectives have not been essentially compromised or wilfully betrayed by the teachers of the period. It could even be affirmed that leading educators have displayed more resourcefulness, moral probity and intellectual candor than are evident in any other field. We are thinking of men like John Dewey, Alexander Meiklejohn, Arthur Morgan, and Robert M. Hutchins; and others, of course, could be added to the list. We are thinking of the high quality of professional periodicals such as *School and Society* and the *NEA Journal.* We are thinking of courageous experiments in education such as Lincoln School in New York City, and the Dalton School and Plan established by the vision and initiative of Helen Parkhurst. At the college level are Antioch, St. John's, Black Mountain, and the University of Chicago.

It seems fair to say that so long as a country's teachers have integrity of purpose, inventive capacity, the courage to break with custom and the strength to carry through, there is hope for the country. On this basis alone, there is much hope for the United States.

It is of some importance, too, that educational integrity has not meant alienation from the main currents of American life for the teachers who possess it. This is another way of arguing that the educational world and in degree the supporting community have been open to

change. The record is far from perfect, of course. Harold Rugg's *That Men May Understand* (1941) tells the story of one man's struggle against prejudice and convention; even if Mr. Rugg was "wrong," and his critics "right"—a view we do not share—the methods used in attacking his work were a betrayal of education. But despite such cases, we think it may be said that educators and teachers have done more to keep pace with the mounting problems of the age than any other class of citizens—perhaps because this happens to be the job of educators and teachers, and they have tried honestly to do their job.

John Dewey, for example, early in the century, felt that the teaching of children was being suffocated under a blanket of traditionalism. His contribution, as a philosopher, was iconoclastic, but as a teacher he was a builder—he re-established actual communication between the teacher and the child. When all is said, pro and con, about Progressive Education, it remains a fact that for the Progressive teacher, children are people, not targets at which the educational system takes aim. We do not say that Dr. Dewey is a "great" man. We think that "great" is an adjective to be used sparingly and with precise intent. Dr. Dewey, however, did not let his generation down. A great task had to be accomplished for American education, and he and those who worked with him were equal to the task.

Dr. Hutchins, who comes later in the half-century period, has also captured the imagination of the educational world, but from the other pole of educational thinking. It might be argued that Hutchins could not have preceded Dewey and have been understood. It was necessary for Hutchins to follow the iconoclast, in order to point out that an interest in human experience is not the same as wise judgment of the values in experience. It is natural, perhaps, that to Dewey, Hutchins seems to be the unwelcome if streamlined ghost of all that Dewey has written against in education, failing—so it seems to us—to realize that without the emphasis on judgment and philosophical values which Hutchins stands for, his own (Dewey's) great contribution would soon collapse into triviality and ineffectual imitation of scientific method. It has been this tendency in Progressive education of which Dr. Hutchins has been most critical, offering the discipline of the Great Books to fill the void left by Dewey's iconoclasm toward tradition.

While the Great Books are doubtless not a universal panacea, it seems undeniable that no one can pursue this course of study seriously without gaining a clarified mind and being fortified anew against the sectarianisms of both religion and science. The Great Books, if nothing else, are the products of independent minds. One reads them, not to adopt their conclusions, but to learn the spirit and value of self-reliant thinking. It sometimes appears that the critics of the Great Books program are in the curiously contradictory position of using against the program arguments which derive their validity from the content of the Great Books themselves—the liberal principles, that is, upon which the ideals of Western civilization are founded. The Great Books, in short, provide the materials out of which a man may construct for himself an affirmative faith to live by.

It seems to us that the most important judgment to be made of education dominated by Progressive theory is that which points out the aimlessness of an education depending upon enormous accumulations of facts for its content, and relying upon critical techniques for its concepts of value. Primary values are not critical, but affirmative. Yet ideas of value, in modern education, are carefully developed only in connection with criticism. For illustration we take the following questions from a psychology text presently in use in a large state university, listed under the heading, "Attitudes which aid clear thinking":

> Is your thinking conditioned by what you want to believe, or by what is rational?

Are you more concerned with winning your point than with thinking clearly even at the cost of your first opinion?

Do you consider a heated emotional discussion real thinking, particularly one in which each individual defends a strong preconception?

Are you willing to go anywhere and accept any conclusion to which clear thinking leads you?

Are you critical of your own thinking, and continually asking if it will stand attack?

When you reach a conclusion are you willing to look for errors, and on finding them begin solving the problem all over again?

Do you consider problems objectively rather than take them personally and become emotional over them?

Do you admit your prejudices and biases and make allowance for them in thinking?

Are you just as searching for fallacies in your own thinking as in that of others?

Are you wary of any conclusion that gives you too much comfort?

Do you accept formulated beliefs rather than work them out for yourself?

Do your answers to these questions indicate that you have the *truth-seeking* attitude rather than the attitude of accepting the beliefs of the mob?

(From J. J. B. Morgan's *Keeping a Sound Mind*, quoted in *Psychology of Personal Adjustment* by Fred McKinney, 1941, p. 143.)

We have only praise for this list of questions, taken by themselves, but it is pertinent to ask: Why, in a civilization where such ideas are taught to the young, is there so much confusion—so few genuinely educated people? The answer may be that these questions deal with only part of the human problem, and the lesser part at that. The questions assume too much. They assume, for example, that the reader is already convinced that the pursuit of truth is the highest good. Why should he be so convinced? What facts, beliefs, traditions or theories have led him to this position?

Genuine education, it seems to us, cannot afford to slide over this problem easily and then moralize in great detail concerning the ethics of argument in personal relations. Unless the larger metaphysical questions are dealt with, first, the ethics of criticism and discussion will never receive more than superficial interest. Ethical ideas, if they are to operate with force at the intellectual level, have first to saturate the deeper processes of human decision. Men have to believe in the virtues with the whole of their nature, and for some reason that is more important than virtuosity. There is some sound instinct which tells us that virtues are not ends in themselves. To be good is not the purpose of life, although it may be one of life's best qualities.

Another light on this problem is afforded by the fact that great things are accomplished only by men with great affirmative convictions—men in whom intellectual honesty is an effect rather than a cause of what they believe and do with their lives. For a man or a culture to be great, he or it has to possess a sense of historic destiny and to seek its fulfillment. This need not be boisterous or rhetorical; it may be only the quality that is sometimes recognizable in the faces of certain men. It may be a Korean patriot in whose eyes shines a light accumulated over generations of men who have sworn to be free of political oppression. It may be a Jew whose resilience of spirit has surmounted the misery of a thousand ghettos, and whose largehearted pity has grown to include even the clod-like anti-Semites who cut themselves off from humanity far more ruinously than any of those whom they persecute. It may be the vision of a Lincoln, who looked toward some far-off horizon which ordinary men came to accept as real because a Lincoln could see it in the distance and move through life according to the inspiration it gave him.

The questions quoted above describe the techniques of impartiality, but they cannot intimate anything of the driving moral force which some men have possessed, in the presence of which petty prejudice shrivels up and blows away. Education should take account of this translating energy, lest even its possibility be forgotten and the rules made up to help men to get along with one another in an age of criticism and analysis be

mistaken for the principles upon which all human progress depends.

But these questions have unmistakable value in that they help to define the present as a period of extraordinary self-consciousness in education. They indicate the attainment of a certain apex in personal honesty and a remarkable sophistication concerning the arts of self-deception. Nor could they be formulated at all in an atmosphere of tyranny and dogmatic assertion. It may be said, also, that they cry out for a positive philosophy of life, even by their silence respecting this great problem. To fill this emptiness at the center of educational philosophy is the task of the future. Dr. Hutchins has called attention to the task and has helped many to see the importance of first principles—which is indeed the lesson of the Great Books. The next step will be to discuss first principles themselves, and to begin to use to some high purpose the critical methods which modern educational psychology has provided.

Letter from **FRANCE**

A COLLEGE TOWN.—The UN Assembly has finished several months of deliberation in the newly-renovated palace in Paris. Though much was said during the session, little or nothing was accomplished toward achieving the durable peace and international stability which many in France had hoped would be forthcoming. Industrial production in France is still increasing, but a glance at the papers, with their accounts of strikes, budgetary crises, and a spreading crime wave shows that there is no increase in security. The disillusionment of many with the UN was confirmed by the recent statement of its President that the UN is not an organization to establish world peace, but to maintain peace once the nations have agreed to establish it.

This statement was made in answer to a letter from Garry Davis, who recently posed the problem of worldism in dramatic fashion when he renounced American citizenship and declared himself a citizen of the world. Sitting on the steps of the UN building, he personified the curious modern paradox that a citizen of all countries has difficulty finding a place in any one. His action attracted widespread attention from people who for long had been awaiting a concrete step towards world unity, as our sole chance of escape from another cataclysmic war. Albert Camus has written, "By his gesture . . . [Davis] showed to every international organization, present or future, what the true goals of a Society of Nations should be." Some twenty thousand persons attended a Davis meeting in Paris on December 9, and affirmed their desire to exist as citizens, not only of France, but of the world. (Davis has assured numerous correspondents that renunciation of one's original citizenship is not necessary, his own action being extreme in order to call attention to a pressing problem.)

Of course, there have been attacks—by those who still find it difficult, if not impossible, to think in global terms. The Communists accuse Davis of setting up a "fifth column" for the Anglo-American bloc, and others (such as Francois Mauriac) accuse him of undermining the military strength necessary to stop a Russian attack. Since a number of artists and writers have expressed support, world citizenship is also denounced as a movement for "intellectuals," without practical value for the "ordinary" person. This final objection is answered by Davis' invitation to all interested persons to sign a declaration of world citizenship, entitling them to participate in elections for a world representative assembly in 1950. All of which brings the problem of world government right down to where it must eventually come anyway—individual conscience, decision, and action.

Previous attempts at world government have been theoretical or organizational—a cart-before-horse program of setting up machinery and then getting people into it. That this procedure can be fallacious is all too well demonstrated, it seems to me, by the League of Nations and the UN. Those who are disillusioned with the UN are brought now to the realization that they can count on no one but themselves to work for peace, along with all others who feel as they do.

Recently, the Paris newspaper *Combat*, non-partisan, but strongly pro-Davis, devoted two pages to comment by and about "Citizens of the World." This is intended to be the beginning of a series devoted to free discussion and comment on "problems common to all men."

FRENCH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE FIVE BROTHERS

IN a journal of daily reflections, a late contemporary wrote that he felt himself to be a much diminished man after long separation from his books. This could be interpreted as weakness, for what sort of person would need continual bolstering from literature? Yet this writer paid tribute to a source of strength that many men have not even tasted, and so never feel its lack.

If a man has not greatness in himself, he can still long for the company of the great. This yearning to sit in the presence of nobility, to fill one's mind with the quality of what one knows in his heart is the best in life—this, we think, is the essence of culture. It is the loss of culture, in this sense, which Ortega y Gasset lamented in his *Revolt of the Masses.* Fundamentally, it is a mood, an inclination of the spirit. Those who have read and admired the meditations of Marcus Aurelius know its intangible quality, which evades precise definition. It will not be confined by words, although some words—the words of great literature—seem capable of evoking the essence of culture, when read for the living movement that lies behind them.

These observations are the product of reading Elizabeth Seeger's adaptation of the *Mahabharata,* the great Indian epic which is thousands of years old. Called *The Five Brothers* for the five Pandava princes who are the principal heroes of the story, the book ought to mark an enlargement of Western understanding of the meaning of culture, such as took place, years ago, with the publication of Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia.* It will not, perhaps, be so important an event, but it should be the same kind. The publisher undertaking this civilizing venture is John Day (the price is $3.75).

It is not our purpose to be verbally extravagant in praise over *The Five Brothers,* but simply to relate, without much attention to formality, the reasons why we think its publication important. Passing by, then, the usual tributes to the length (three times that of the Bible) of the epic of India, and neglecting the scholarly arguments concerning its antiquity, we turn to the immediate psychological impact of Miss Seeger's skillfully contracted version—to 300 pages—upon the modern reader.

The story is simply told for readers of twelve years and over. The framework of human attitudes typified by the *Mahabharata* is in terms of a number of accepted principles of human relations. Kings are kings and servants are servants. The warrior must fight and the spouse must serve. The laws of duty and of destiny are as fixed in the nature of things as the stars in heaven. The natural and the supernatural mingle like members of the same family and as casually. Manners, custom and tradition rule the tide of the story like oriental despots. The good people are good, the bad, bad, and the vacillating vacillate. Every splendor is superlative, but one infinitude of beauty, courage, sacrifice and strength always manages to overshadow another by means of some additional supernatural grandeur. The literal sense of reality of the reader soon falls away, but another kind of reality takes over and supports credibility. These people are both human and divine and behave according to an irrational logic of their own. They are stylized figures and they are mortals with whom our sympathies are joined. The righteous are victorious, but they pay the asking price of victory. The unrighteous get their reward, too, for though they were loyal to wrongdoing, at least they were loyal to something.

The *Mahabharata* is a study in allegiances and alliances and the moral conflicts which arise from the attempts of human beings to be true to their commitments. These commitments are at different levels of human nature, and as human nature is not a harmonious unity, but an unstable complex of irreconcilable energies, the *Mahabharata* is the story of a decimating and fratricidal war.

The five Pandava princes are tricked into leaving their hereditary kingdom for thirteen years. Their blind uncle, called Kuru, is persuaded by his son, Duryodana, to sanction the exile of the princes, against his better judgment. Duryodana, the cousin of the princes, hates them with an undying jealousy, for they are his superiors as men. The Pandavas are repeatedly wronged by guile, but their godlike nature preserves them from serious harm. Finally, they return and engage the Kuru forces in a great battle which lasts eighteen days. The Kurus are conquered; Duryodana is at last killed; and the old king, his wife, and Kunti, mother of the Pandava princes, seek spiritual enlightenment in the forest solitude.

The final triumph of the Pandava princes, however, is no Roman holiday. Their sons have all been slain and the battlefield is strewn with the bodies of men whom they have loved and respected. They seem to have been involved, half-consciously, in the play of destiny, going through motions foreordained from an ancient past. Throughout the great drama, sages, men with an unearthly fire of wisdom burning in their eyes, move across the scene, untouched by the struggle, counseling, prophesying, comforting and imparting serenity to the more human participants. And paradoxically, while making the gravest mistakes, the leaders in the war often speak with superhuman wisdom, and in the next moment, advise treachery and craft with curiously sophistical justification.

Truthfulness and fair dealing are sometimes made to seem the highest good, then victory at any cost. Paradox mounts upon paradox in the *Mahabharata*, and only the thread of the narrative survives the search of reason for some continuous strain of meaning. Right and wrong shift with the motives of the warriors, like the turn of a kaleidoscope. Even Krishna, the wise teacher and friend of Arjuna, counsels a foul blow at a critical moment in the final duel between Duryodana and Birna, strongest of the five princes.

At last, one realizes that something wondrous is taking place above the battle. It is not anywhere on the battlefield, nor confined to any warrior, but it is felt—felt rather than heard—like a far-off chorus intoning a celestial chant. It is the grand summation of human heroism, not embodied in any one act, careless of sins or virtues, beyond good and evil, beyond agony or bliss. Perhaps it is in the strivings of all those men and women, from sudras to saints—just that they press and work on. Perhaps it is in the panorama stretching from heaven to earth, in the upward movement of men, the downward movement of gods. Perhaps the grave institutes of the Law, acknowledged by all, repeated by all, make the story a bridge to unite time and the eternal, the quivering hearts of fighting and dying men with the motionless heart of all.

Perhaps, indeed, we only dream these meanings, and they are not there any more. But of one thing we are sure—they *have been* there. For India has been the mother of a great culture, and the *Mahabbarata* is the milk which has nourished her sons, and nourishes many of them still. As Olympus watched over the ancient Greeks, as Odin and the mighty of Valhalla cherished the Norse, so have the gods and heroes of the *Mahabharata* ensouled the great civilization of the Orient. And we are sure of one thing more—that there can be no greatness, any time, anywhere, without *some* gods and heroes to dream about.

COMMENTARY
INTANGIBLES

HAVING noted the strenuous if unsuccessful attempt of this week's lead article to convey in words the quality of life which is sometimes called "aspiration," it is again borne in upon us that this quality, like love, or happiness, or peace, is something which rarely submits to intellectual capture.

It takes a poet, and a great one, probably, to understand this law of transcendental cognition. In any event, the highest literary art must be involved in intimations of the reality of the intangible—and a like subtle perception required to expose the vulgarity of all definitions which would reduce ideal conceptions to quantitative rule.

There is similar vulgarity in the belief that organizations are necessary to the service of high purposes. This is not a matter of saying that organizations are of no use at all, but of observing that organizations established to further some great end such as the attainment of World Peace, or the increase of Higher Learning, sooner or later come to be mistaken for the ideals themselves. Like the Christian churches, or most of them, eventually are discovered praising the Lord and passing the ammunition, and singing while they work.

Organizations are useful, up to a point, but people with organizations, like people who make definitions, never seem to know when that point is reached. It is easy to lose a good idea in an organization. Usually, man who forms an organization around an idea does so because he is afraid that not enough people understand his idea without an organization to "explain" it. But if the idea can't be trusted by itself, and if people can't be trusted to make use of it, then neither the idea nor the people are much good. A man can stifle the original thinking of others with too much explanation. A really good idea has to have elbow room in the mind in order to go to work.

In this matter of definitions and organizations, there is value in remembering that the "great" universities of modern times, with their emphasis on authority and degree, their impressive "system" and organization, are in no sense a heritage from the ancient Greeks, the authors of educational idealism, but stem from the Middle Ages. The Greeks had no "universities" as we know them, but were the masters of informal discourse. They dealt, not in authority and graded honors, but in living ideas. Perhaps, some day, we shall be able to get back to the spirit of the Greeks in education.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

[We have long wished to bring our readers three parent-and-child dialogues which we consider among the finest ever written. It is now many years since the death of Carl Ewald, the Danish writer who composed them, and his "little boy" has grown up to become an author in his own right. But these stories will always serve as a fountain of gentle inspiration to parents seeking constructive communion with their children. Permission to reprint comes from Charles Scribner's Sons. A collection of the Ewald stories may be found in the *Woollcott Reader*. This week we present the first of our three selections.]

OUR courtyard is full of children and my little boy has picked a bosom-friend out of the band: his name is Einar and he can be as good as another.

My little boy admires him and Einar allows himself to be admired, so that the friendship is established on the only proper basis.

"Einar says .... Einar thinks .... Einar does," is the daily refrain; and we arrange our little life accordingly.

"I can't see anything out of the way in Einar," says the mother of my little boy.

"Nor can I," say I. "But our little boy can and that is enough. I once had a friend who could see nothing at all charming in you. And you yourself, if I remember right, had three friends who thought *your* taste inexcusable. Luckily for our little boy.....

"Luckily!"

"It is the feeling that counts," I go on lecturing, "and not the object."

"Thanks!" she says.

Now something big and unusual takes place in our courtyard and makes an extraordinary impression on the children and gives their small brains heaps to struggle with for many a long day.

The scarlatina comes.

And scarlatina is not like a pain in your stomach, when you have eaten too many pears, or like a cold, when you have forgotten to put on your jacket. Scarlatina is something quite different, something powerful and terrible. It comes at night and takes a little boy who was playing quite happily that same evening. And then the little boy is gone.

Perhaps a funny carriage comes driving in through the gate, with two horses and a coachman and two men with bright brass buttons on their coats. The two men take out of the carriage a basket, with a red blanket and white sheets, and carry it up to where the boy lives. Presently, they carry the basket down again and then the boy is inside. But nobody can see him, because the sheet is over his face. The basket is shoved into the carriage, which is shut with a bang, and away goes the carriage with the boy, while his mother dries her eyes and goes up to the others.

Perhaps no carriage comes. But then the sick boy is shut up in his room and no one may go to him for a long time, because he is infectious. And anyone can understand that this must be terribly sad.

The children in the courtyard talk of nothing else.

They talk with soft voices and faces full of mystery, because they know nothing for certain. They hear that one of them, who rode away in the carriage, is dead; but that makes no more impression on them than when one of them falls ill and disappears.

Day by day, the little band is being thinned out and not one of them has yet come back.

I stand at my open window and look at my little boy, who is sitting on the steps below with his friend. They have their arms around each other's necks and see no one except each other; that is to say, Einar sees himself and my little boy sees Einar.

"If you fall ill, I will come and see you," says my little boy.

"No, you won't!"

"I will come and see you."

His eyes beam at this important promise. Einar cries as though he were already ill. And the next day he is ill.

He lies in a little room all by himself. No one is allowed to go to him. A red curtain hangs before the window.

My little boy sits alone on the steps outside and stares up at the curtain. His hands are thrust deep into his pockets. He does not play and he speaks to nobody.

And I walk up and down the room, uneasy as to what will come next.

"You are anxious about our little boy," says his mother. "And it will be a miracle if he escapes."

"It's not that. We've all had a touch of scarlatina."

But just as I want to talk to her about it, I hear a fumbling with the door-handle which there is no mistaking and then he stands before us in the room.

I know you so well, my little boy, when you come in sideways like that, with a long face, and go and sit in a corner and look at the two people who owe so much happiness to you—look from one to the other. Your eyes are greener than usual. You can't find your words and you sit huddled up and you are ever so good.

"Mother, is Einar ill?"

"Yes. But he will soon be better again. The doctor says that he is not so bad."

"Is he infectious, Mother?"

"Yes, he is. His little sister has been sent to the country, so that she may not fall ill too. No one is allowed to go to him except his mother, who gives him his milk and his medicine and makes his bed."

A silence.

The mother of my little boy looks down at her book and suspects nothing. The father of my little boy looks in great suspense from the window.

"Mother, I want to go to Einar."

"You can't go there, my little man. You hear, he's infectious. Just think, if you should fall ill yourself! Einar isn't bothering at all about chatting with you. He sleeps the whole day long."

"But when he wakes, Mother?"

"You can't go up there."

This tells upon him and he is nearly crying. I see that the time has come for me to come to his rescue: "Have you promised Einar to go and see him?" I ask. "Yes, Father.. .."

He is over his trouble. His eyes beam. He stands erect and glad beside me and puts his little hand in mine.

"Then of course you must do so," I say, calmly. "So soon as he wakes."

Our mother closes her book with a bang:

"Go down to the courtyard and play, while Father and I have a talk."

The boy runs away.

And she comes up to me and lays her hand on my shoulder and says, earnestly:

"I *daren't* do that, do you hear?"

And I take her hand and kiss it and say, quite as earnestly:

"And I *daren't refuse!"*

We look at each other, we two, who share the empire, the power and the glory.

"I heard our little boy make his promise," I say, "I saw him. Sir Galahad himself was not more in earnest when swearing his knightly oath.

You see, we have no choice here. He can catch the scarlatina in any case and it is not even certain that he will catch it. . . ."

"If it was diphtheria, you wouldn't talk like that!"

"You may be right. But am I to become a thief for the sake of a nickel, because I am not sure that I could resist the temptation to steal a kingdom?"

"You would not find a living being to agree with you."

"Except yourself. And that is all I want. The infection is really only a side matter. It can come this way or that way. We can't safeguard him, come what may . . . .

"But are we to send him straight to where it is?"

"We're not doing that; it's not we who are doing that."

She is very much excited. I put my arm round her waist and we walk up and down the room together:

"Darling, today our little boy may meet with a great misfortune. He may receive a shock from which he will never recover . . . .

"That is true," she says.

"If he doesn't keep his promise, the misfortune has occurred. It would already be a misfortune if he could ever think that it was possible for him to break it, if it appeared to him that there was anything great or remarkable about keeping it."

"Yes, but. . . ."

"Darling, the world is full of careful persons. One step more and they become mere paltry people. Shall we turn that into a likely thing, into a virtue, for our little boy? His promise was stupid: let that pass. . . .

"He is so little."

"Yes, that he is; and God be praised for it! Think what good luck it is that he did not know the danger, when he made his promise, that he does not understand it now, when he is keeping it. What a lucky beggar! He is learning to keep his word, just as he has learnt to be clean. By the time that he is big enough to know his danger, it will be an indispensable habit with him. And he gains all that at the risk of a little scarlatina."

She lays her head on my shoulder and says nothing more.

That afternoon, she takes our little boy by the hand and goes up with him to Einar. They stand on the threshold of his room, bid him good-day and ask how he is.

Einar is not at all well and does not look up and does not answer.

But that does not matter in the least.

FRONTIERS

Is History "Organic"?

HAS a "civilization" a life-history of its own?—a great cycle which may be recognized and studied, more or less as the life of a man may be studied? This question sounds innocent enough, and yet, only a little investigation makes it apparent that some care—or "tact," at least—is advisable in expressing an opinion on the subject.

It seems necessary to admit that, true or false, the idea of civilization or society as an "organism" or super "being" is a dangerous idea, for the reason that the implication of a living unity for society is so easily transferred to the political entity of the State. Hegel, who must be counted among the really great thinkers of Western civilization, affords a good illustration of the way in which the idea of the social "organism" can be misapplied to support the psychology of political reaction. In his *Philosophy of Law,* he wrote:

> The people without its monarch and without that whole organization necessarily and directly connected with him is a formless mass, which is no longer a State. In a people, not conceived in a lawless and unorganized condition, but as a self-developed and truly organic totality—in such a people, sovereignty is the personality of the whole, and this is represented in reality by the person of the monarch.

Some such argument, it will be remembered, was used by Hitler in support of the *Führer* principle, and, granting the old idea of hierarchy, the argument has obvious appeal. Both Hitler and Gandhi were said to express the "souls" of their respective peoples, although this was a claim which Hitler made for himself; Gandhi, on the other hand, while undeniably possessing a strong sense of mission, never, so far as we know, made any such declaration. The idea that the Indian leader represented the soul of the toiling Indian masses was implied by such men as Nehru and others of a similar stature. As a matter of fact, Hitler and Gandhi may be the best possible illustrations of the two extremes which result from the organic theory of society, Hitler standing for its perversion to the purposes of authoritarian statecraft, Gandhi, for the individual aspirations of countless Indian villagers whose yearnings he endeavored to articulate.

The tendency to individualize and personify whole peoples seems almost inescapable in thought. Patriotism, of course, is largely dependent upon the dramatization of this tendency, in terms of glory, "honor," and national destiny. History, as enjoyable romance, tells the story of the rise of a people toward national fulfillment, and without some feeling of the inner connectedness of the successive generations which participate in the struggle, all national histories would lose their meaning entirely.

Opponents of the organic idea have obvious reasons for condemning it as the instrument of tyranny, nationalist war, and imperialistic excesses. Quite evidently, it is a powerful emotional lever which may be converted into incendiary political propaganda and used as Hitler used it. This has been enough to discredit the organic idea among liberal political thinkers, who are inclined to judge all philosophical conceptions according to their current political applications. But is the organic conception of human society only a political idea which can be adopted if we think it is a "good" idea, or rejected if we decide it is a bad one? Its persistence in human thought, with both good and bad historical effects, suggests that the organic idea may itself be "organic" to social processes and human evolution. If this be admitted, the problem is then recast in other terms: What are the realities of the social organism, and what is the relation of the individual human being to the organic social whole?

Hegel's version, while exerting a fascination upon nationalist metaphysicians, involved a tragic neglect of the individual. As John McTaggart remarks in his *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology,* Hegel was simply not interested in the role of the individual. He was concerned with the grand scale of being, the movement of the totality of spirit. *Nations,* according to Hegel, are the

ultimate embodiments of the Spirit—they are "steps in the development of the one universal Spirit, which through them elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending *totality."* Hegel, doubtless, should be read in connection with this general problem (for succinct statements of his view, see Sibree's translation of the *Philosophy of History* [Cooperative Publication Society edition, 1900] pp. 25-26, 78-79), but until the development of a vigorous body of thought in which the individual is conceived as the decisive unit of society, it would be foolish to take Hegel as a guide.

The safer if less pretentious course would be to consider the conclusions of anthropological research, which are now much more extensive than in Hegel's time. A recent paper by Alfred L. Kroeber, for example, summarized in *Science* for Nov. 26, 1948, draws the distinction between nations and "civilization." This distinction is fully as important as the distinction between *government* and the State, or between *society* and the State. The State is a political concept, similar to "nation," whereas government is a natural function of human association, just as "society" refers simply to people cooperating and living together for common ends. The Nation and the State are entities in ideological warfare, having come to embody numerous institutional perversions of normal social activity.

Most civilizations, Kroeber maintains, are "super-national." Their cultural development begins with shadowy gropings toward some distinctive pattern, and the emergence of a civilization is marked by the growing control of particular forms of human expression, continuing "until they are achieved and their potentialities realized." This process seems "basic in the history of civilizations." The summary continues:

> A corollary of the foregoing findings concerns genius. Great men notoriously cluster in time and space. The pattern and master-pattern interpretation explains this clustering. Great men can appear only while great patterns are in the shaping during the life-history of a civilization. At other times native genius is wasted—it has nothing to take hold of, it leaves no achievement that permanently means something. It must be civilization that is the cause of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the men whom we unanimously recognize as great have lived in the great periods of great civilizations.

Whether the great men are "caused" by civilization, or whether the civilization becomes great in virtue of their presence, we shall not attempt to settle, here. The significant fact, we think, is in the apparently cyclic character of the emergence of civilization, and the concentration in time, during a certain stage of development, of men whom everyone recognizes as "great." This would imply a definite organic structure, with only its faint outlines evident to us, so far, yet quite possibly representing the superphysical but none the less "real" pattern of collective evolution. Should this structure seem to be a fact in nature, the first obligation of men of intelligence will be to study the fact, and to refuse to be drawn into any movement or campaign attempting to make totalitarian capital of what fragmentary knowledge about it we presently possess. The idealistic Hegelian theory, as everyone knows, was made over into the materialistic interpretation of history by Karl Marx, and this, when transformed into a revolutionary political ideology, continued Hegel's disregard for the individual, with terrible consequences to the personal lives of many millions.

Another line of research into the history of civilizations is that of Prof. Raymond H. Wheeler of the University of Kansas, a Gestalt psychologist. Years ago, Prof. Wheeler became impressed by the apparent correlation between world climate and world history. A long-term investigation of climatic changes led him to formulate a definite theory of the climatic causation of historical events. Less certain than Prof. Wheeler of what "causes" what in history, we are impressed, instead, with the fact of the association, through many centuries, of certain types of historical changes with certain types of climate. This is an enormous subject, and we can

report only one sort of discovery by the workers at Kansas. It appears that a change from a warm-wet climate to a cold-dry climate is marked by general social disintegration. Nations fall into civil wars, thought turns atheistic, "empirical" and destructively critical. In contrast, the transition from a cold-dry to a warm-wet period—which, according to Prof. Wheeler, on the basis of his study of climatic cycles may be expected in the 1980's—is a time of energetic building, of social vision and creativity.

Dr. Kroeber's "great men," Prof. Wheeler would tell us, are most likely to flourish during an ascending cycle of warm-wet weather. The life of the earth and the life of man, it seems, are closely linked, and the time may come when we shall once again speak of "Mother Nature," giving the phrase a more than metaphorical meaning.