Volume II, No. 12
March 23, 1949

CREDIBLE RELIGION

WHAT is credible religion, today? A question of this sort assumes that human beings have need for religion, or, at least, that the ideas commonly called "religious" play a natural and necessary part in human life. Discussions on behalf of particular religions often start out rhetorically by declaring that man is a "religious" being, in much the same way as Aristotle declared that he is a "political animal," and proceed from this assumption to a sectarian conclusion.

But what, actually, are the forms taken by this "religious need"? If we let the rhetorical arguments go and look at actual human experience, it soon becomes evident that there are enormous differences among the religious wants of men. What sort of religion, then, is "best" ? Were statistics to decide this question, the only possible answer would be that the best religion provides simple dogmatic explanations of the meaning of human life, giving its believers emotional security and supporting and encouraging their reluctance to "reason" about the things they do not understand. At any rate, the great majority of churchgoing people seem satisfied with a religious faith of this description.

Reasoning by analogy, we might suppose that the faith which nourishes the majority ought to be appropriate for everyone. We all breathe the same air; studies of nutrition show that certain fundamental food-products are required by all human bodies; and the psychologists urge from their clinical experience that the emotional needs of human beings are basically uniform. Why not, then, arrive at a definition of the best possible religion from a study of the beliefs of the majority of human beings? The difficulty, here, is that in every society and every historical epoch there is always a minority with intense convictions that are virtually the opposite of prevailing religious ideas. This minority is made up of individuals who are determined to reason about the things they do not understand and who resist with varying energies any attempt to confine their investigation within the limits of orthodox religious opinion. They seek, it may be said, either a rational or a spiritual *fulfillment* of their being, rather than an emotional security. Instead of an object of "worship," they strive after an understanding or sense of "fellowship" with the primary forces of the universe. This latter sort of religion—which in many cases is not regarded as "religion" at all—rejects on principle the kind of certainty which needs institutional interpreters of the truth. As a man of the eighteenth century put it: "Is it simple, is it natural that God should go in search of Moses to speak to jean Jacques Rousseau?"

Another sort of criticism of revealed religion, embodying the objections of modern skepticism, was expressed by Irwin Edman in a debate on the necessity of theology for morals, in the *American Scholar (Winter,* 1948-49). Arguing against theology, he remarked that a large number of people, regardless of nominal adherence to some established orthodoxy, find it "very difficult to entertain seriously views which conflict with habits of mind engendered by modern science."

> To such persons [he continues], there is a danger of a very real despair, of an aching sense of futility, if they are forced into the position of believing that without a theology (in which they cannot believe), without a church (to which they cannot adhere), their moral standards, their spiritual values, their ideals are vanity and illusion, and their pretended moralities a shambles.

The persons Mr. Edman is here describing should not, however, be regarded as pioneers of independent thinking in morals or religion. No one resolved upon finding his own religious certainty could ever be "forced" into any position

at all—either for or against theology—but would choose his convictions freely, by whatever standards of judgment he knows. Rather, Mr. Edman seems to refer to those who are living under the influence of two opposing orthodoxies, the religious and the scientific, and who have failed to face the contradictions inherent in their position. Just here, in the indifference to this contradiction of two "habits of mind," is the real religious weakness of the modern world. Mr. Edman, arguing for a "scientific," non-theological basis for moral values, assumes a somewhat proprietary air when he urges that such a system of morals ought to be worked out to spare those who can believe in nothing else the pain of disillusionment. He seems to move in the direction of becoming a kind of scientific "priest"—a development somewhat surprising in a thinker so urbane and cosmopolitan as this modern philosopher.

The problem is not one of tailoring a system of morals to answer to the needs of the millions of people whose opinions are in a vague flux between inherited religion and scientific this-worldism. There is no particular virtue in any "system" of religious or scientific interpretation, or in any careful compromise between the two. A man's attitude toward life ought not to depend upon "systems" at all, however much he accepts or rejects from those which are available, but upon his own acts of conscious choice and his taking of full responsibility for each decision.

Religion, then, according to this point of view, is a temper of the human spirit. It requires an ultimate act of the whole individual in regard to the ultimate questions of life. Applying it to human experience, we are at once confronted with the basic problem of "beginnings," of "origins," or the source of all and of ourselves. Generally speaking, people await some desperate crisis in their lives before thinking seriously about such questions. Then, beset by fears or emotional tensions arising from external circumstances—the death of someone close, a disappointment in love, or a threat to one's personal security—the questions of who or what is the cause of all this and how the circumstances may be changed present themselves insistently. The individual senses his own unpreparedness to meet such questions. Remembering his childhood and the prayers taught him by his mother, he may murmur, "Oh God!" and reach out beseechingly into the darkness that surrounds him.

This is the moment, we are told by preachers, when the individual has opportunity to be born again. His "sin" of religious apathy is now plain to him. He has erred, but now extreme need has recalled him to the faith of his fathers. He may yet be saved, for if his eagerness to be helped by a compassionate and loving Father is followed by a sincere attitude of contrition, and this by faithful acceptance of a creed and the prescribed acts of religious devotion, the Father will come to his rescue and solace his sufferings. So, for many persons, this religious transaction becomes complete. They gain the psychological security which protects them from desperation, and in return they give the currency of feeling which blots out the questions of the rational mind.

But there are other approaches to the nature of ultimate reality, leading to quite different personal solutions. Some men begin their quest for meaning with reflection upon the grandeur of the natural world. These are philosophers, philosopher-scientists, and often great social reformers. The thinking of such individuals is not determined by the impact of circumstances upon their lives, but by the impact of their minds upon circumstances. Historically, they have been the apostles of freedom and discovery. They look upon the forces of nature and the wonders of the universe with something of the attitude of "colleagues" in a great adventure. They do not cringe with disaster nor become intoxicated with material success. They find the same reality in the world that they find deep within themselves. They belong to no tradition, but rather embody in their lives the attitudes toward experience which are

crystallized and made into rigid traditions by the lesser and more fearful men who come after them. They accept responsibility to their fellows, regarding them, not as sheep who need leading, but as potential creators of a better life, and they endeavor to transmit the charge of moral integrity, of spiritual independence, from one generation to another. They carry in their hearts the secret of true science and true religion, although its practical expression may vary according to the time in which they live. Who are such men? Giordano Bruno, of the sixteenth century, was one. Richard Byrd, in the twentieth, is another. We do not, here, attempt to "classify" individual human beings on any scale of personal greatness, but simply take the mark of what they are as found in what they have done. Bruno's life and works are his testament of religion, and the quality of Byrd's thought is revealed in his book, *Alone*. The same quality occurs also in the writings of nearly all lovers of nature. Peattie, to name another contemporary, put something of this deep recognition in his *Flowering Earth*, and Schroedinger's *What Is Life?* and the writings of Albert Einstein sound the same harmonious chord of understanding.

But what, someone may ask, has all this to do with religion? Everything, we are inclined to think. Religion is not made up of categorical "answers," but is a mood of inquiry—a mood of indifference to the formal, the trivial, the customary and the expected, and a mood of—shall we say, self-reverence, rather than self-confidence?—in the use of powers of the mind, and in that in man which is more than mind. This attitude is itself already a postulate or first principle of religion. It declares for pantheism—a Deity both immanent and transcendent, to which the ancients would give no name at all, excepting, perhaps, the One Self, or simply, THAT—the universal spiritual ground of all existence, separate from nothing, the root of all life and consciousness.

There seems to be a clear line of distinction between those religions which have taught an essential difference between man and God, and those which have taught an identity. Faiths that make this separation are religions with priests and special religious authorities—intermediaries between man and spiritual truth. The religions which preach an element of divinity within the individual tend to be the least sectarian—the Quakers are an example in the West—and least subject to authoritarian rule. There is of course another sort of priesthood than that which seeks to interpret and explain and to rule the moral lives of other human beings—the priesthood of example. The monastic orders of Buddhism belong in this category, although Buddhism, like every other "organized" religion, has allowed its primary philosophical content to become overgrown with speculative and allegorical extravagances. Buddha, however, set the keynote for his followers in the adjuration, recorded in the *Kalama Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya:* "For this I taught you—not to believe merely because you have heard, but when you believed of your own consciousness, then to act accordingly and abundantly." A Buddhist priest acquires no special authority in Buddhism simply by wearing the orange robe, but takes on a particular responsibility to practice the highest morality in his personal life and to become versed in the scriptures which are regarded by Buddhists as embodying statements of the laws of nature. Buddhism, in fact, among all existing faiths, comes closer to what is now termed the "scientific spirit" than any other religion.

The story of Buddha, incidentally, adds another kind of approach to the question of religious.truth. Neither fear nor even a hunger after knowledge started him on his quest, according to Buddhist tradition. It was his discovery of human suffering and the sympathy it excited in his heart that determined his career. Only after witnessing the ravages of disease, old age and death was there born in him an unquenchable thirst for knowledge of the cause of

sorrow. The result was the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths of Buddha's teaching, which became a way of life for countless millions.

So, there are at least three great highroads to religion—fear, intellectual valor, and human compassion—which, followed to their ends, produce results consistent with the quality of the original inspiration. In our own time, the motive of fear is dominant, yet those religions which cater to human timidity and the tendency—to self-abasement have for so many years suffered the onslaughts of an aggressive intellectual criticism that they now are things of shreds and patches for all except those still untouched in their minds by the modern critical and agnostic temper. There is irony, too, in the fact that, today, while contemporary scholarship is executing the *coup de grace* upon the claims of miracle and heavenly apparitions of traditional Western religion—as, for example, in Alfred Loisy's just published *Birth of the Christian Religion*—there is at the same time a notable revival of interest in supernaturalism, growing out of scientific investigations in the field of psychic research. Psychic wonders, of course, have no necessary connection with spiritual thought, but the Christian revelation has depended so much on claims of miraculous happenings, that now, when "miracles" begin to enjoy the possibility of a scientific explanation, this movement of scientific thought works against a revival of Christianity rather than for it. As L. P. Jacks, Loisy's translator, observes in the British journal, *Enquiry:*

> What, then, would the verdict of our experts [in psychic research] be on the story of Peter's miraculous dream of a great sheet, "knit at the four corners" into a bag, containing (rather uncomfortably one would think) a collection of all the animals, birds and reptiles which men are now permitted to kill and eat, thrice let down from the sky and taken up again? What would they say to the evidence that this dream really came to Peter in the circumstances described? . . .
>
> Or what again would be the verdict of our experts on the evidence for the miraculous execution of'Ananias and Sapphira, or for the miraculous cures effected by Peter's shadow and by Paul's aprons?

Fortunately, these matters have nothing to do with genuine religion, although, unfortunately, the religions now believed in by many of the world's millions are made up of but little else. It is pertinent, therefore, to inquire, What is credible religion, today?

The only simple definition that occurs is the negative one which says, "Religion which teaches no higher moral authority than individual conscience," with the added proviso that conscience ought in this case to be thought of as having unlimited potentialities for development in moral perception. This is another way of saying that the moral decision which rests upon some other authority than the intelligence of the choosing individual is a blind act of spiritual abdication. Mr. Edman's account of the meaning of "spiritual" will suit this definition and amplify its meaning. He suggests that the term "spiritual values" denotes "the ends which justify life, the ultimates, which give it unassailable and unexpungable meaning."

In the nature of things, it would seem impossible for any man to acquire at second hand a real conviction about such "ultimates." Similarly, a discussion like the present one suffers from the extreme handicap of dealing in the terms of intellectuality with conceptions that acquire their full meaning only with the intensity of feeling that comes with genuine moral discovery. Writing *about* religion can never do more than clear away the debris of dead and dying systems of belief. But there are works—we have referred to one or two—which speak in the authentic accents of religious inspiration. Short of knowing—or trying to become—a Buddha- or Christ-like individual, such books, often called scriptures, are the best approach we know of to the meanings we have been trying to convey.

Letter from GERMANY

BERLIN.—This big city, which was the focus of world politics during the second half of 1948, is now reduced—despite all efforts of its leading inhabitants—to the rank of a provincial town. The change is in consequence of the present situation, which has been *consolidated* both by the blockade established by the Russian occupation authorities and by the "airlift" of their Western opponents. Compared with the years 1946-47, when the Allied Kommandantura and Control Council still ruled and the streets of Berlin seethed with activity and excitement, the present situation offers only a rather tedious life for both German civilians and Allied personnel and visitors. A glance at the newspapers of Berlin is enough to confirm this statement.

In walking through the streets and looking at the ruins, most of which still remain untouched except by human hands, one wonders how the city will be rebuilt again—by whom and by what power and investment. So far, only repairing on a small scale has taken place, and only a few buildings, mostly for the use of the occupation authorities, have been erected, although almost four years have passed since the end of the war.

As a place to live, Berlin is mentioned for the first time in a historical document in 1237. The number of inhabitants in those days is unknown, but in 1640 there were only 6,000. At the beginning of the last war (1939), the number was 4,354,000—the largest in the history of the city. The greatest growth took place between 1841 and 1920, when the population soared from 333,000 to 3,804,000. This century of industrial growth in Germany was accompanied by a corresponding growth of population. Newcomers were attracted to Berlin from the surrounding flat country by the numerous workshops. Huge living quarters had to be erected, usually composed of rows and rows of drab apartment buildings four to five floors high, cheaply built, with low rents. Private initiative brought capital to finance this building activity, which promised steady income from rentals.

The problem, today, is to attract new initiative and capital to again rebuild the city, which has been more than 50 per cent destroyed. The present inhabitants total about 3,300,000, all crowded into the remaining living quarters. While an obvious lack of construction materials impedes the rebuilding of the city, more important seems to be the failure of private initiative and capital. The public organizations—the municipal authorities or the "State"—cannot take over this huge task of rebuilding, because they are already involved in too many social and financial obligations. Public works are therefore restricted to repairs and the clearance of ruined districts. The middle class, as usual, finds its way of meeting the problem—in this case by organizing mutual building associations. But this is no remedy for the working population of Berlin, which is now poorer and more numerous in relation to other social strata than ever before. Scanty wages go for food, with no money left to form building associations. The workers and their families, however, form from 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the total population—the great majority.

Rebuilding on a large scale would require huge quantities of machines and completely new building methods—it would in fact require the rebuilding of German industry. Industrial growth and lively building activity would therefore be closely connected, a result hardly desired by the conquerors of Germany. Individual foreign capital might be interested, but foreign capital as a whole is much too aware of the implications of a strong revival in German building activity. (Notice, also, that the Marshall Plan does not include large amounts for building material, etc.)

Conclusion: continuation of Berlin's present socioeconomic system will damn Berliners to modern cave dwelling, affording only bare satisfaction of the crudest necessities, for many more years. Actual reconstruction of Berlin and the rest of the destroyed German cities and towns will require an international relationship between the great industrial Powers—a relationship characterized by the willingness to help each other instead of fighting each other through ruthless competition, and which

excludes war fears based on steady industrial growth and a high productive level in one country.

GERMAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
POWER

WHILE James Forrestal is no longer Secretary of Defense in the President's Cabinet, the article, "The Forrestal Enigma," in *United Nations World* for March is nonetheless worth reading. In fact, the entire March issue might be studied as a many-sided reflection of the problem of Power. Another article, "Politically Christian," deals with the influence of the Vatican in world politics, emphasizing the growing importance of Christian Democratic parties in five European countries. (With this latter article, however, should be read Avro Manhattan's *The Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century,* for background.) A third article describes the both geographically- and self-imposed isolation of the people of Tibet from the modern world, and the policy of watchful waiting followed by Tibetan leaders. The Tibetans have sent no representatives to the conclaves of the United Nations. According to the writer of this article, the makers of Tibetan policy interpret the psychological and international ordeals of our civilization as a struggle between two extreme tendencies—one, the over-emphasis of the importance of the individual, the other, his suppression. They see no possibility of compromise between these tendencies, as now manifested, but believe that the solution lies in a new spirit:

> The Tibetan still feels that any effort to "organize peace" should be supplemented by a change in the hearts of men. *Why* men do a thing, he says, matters more than *what* they do. Are men opposed to war, he asks, because they really are against war—or because they are merely afraid of it?

The sophisticated Westerner, reading this, may say to himself—"Ah, yes; the Tibetan version of the Lutheran Reform. Not works, but faith and grace will save us." He will say this with the tired boredom of one who has seen and "understood" everything—forgetting, or not realizing at all, that every truth of importance has been mouthed in the West for centuries, and has, therefore, a familiar ring, even though it has never been applied with any consistency.

Simplifying Luther and the Tibetans, their religious analysis may be repeated by saying that motives are more important than methods. This is the moralist's idea of human action, and to complete its wisdom, we need the further contribution of John Dewey and Aldous Huxley—that means (or methods) must be appropriate to ends (motives). How would these propositions apply to the problem of power, as formulated by Mr. Forrestal?

According to Rear Admiral E. M. Zacharias, USN (Ret.), the former Secretary of Defense adorned his office in the Pentagon with a card proclaiming his "policy and philosophy" in the determined words of C. H. Van Tyne: *"We will never have universal peace until the strongest army and the strongest navy are in the hands of the most peaceful nation."* The rest of the Zacharias article deals with the studies and experiences which led Mr. Forrestal to adopt this view—from academic courses in the Haushofer tradition of geopolitics to the emotional impact of watching the slaughter of American troops on Iwo Jima. Mr. Forrestal has in consequence matured a theory of power which has long been implicit in the behavior of industrial nations, but which has been slow to gain clear expression. President Roosevelt, Zacharias states, had during his last days reached the conclusion that the United States would be forced to fulfill its international obligations in the terms of *power politics,* and Forrestal's ideas, he adds, are a key to understanding the present American policies and commitments. They are largely devoted to the project of supreme military power. Mr. Forrestal borrowed from Carl Becker the dictum that although great political power is "inherently dangerous," it must nevertheless be sought because "a 'new and better world' cannot be made without it." Believing this, and being a man of action, Forrestal organized classes for top-ranking officers in the Navy to instruct them in the "theoretical foundations of power."

This conclusion, more and more openly expressed as time goes by, raises other questions. What, for example, is a "reactionary" government or social system, under these definitions of the good political life for modern nations? Twenty-five years

ago, a country like Tibet would have been chosen to illustrate the extreme of political immaturity. And yet, today, some reading about the life of the Tibetans—of many of them, at least—conveys the impression that the Tibetan population is one of the happiest, freest, and most prosperous peoples in the world. A fugitive from the political malaise of Europe might be puzzled by an opportunity to compare, say, the daily life of a Parisian with that of an inhabitant of Ladak in Tibet. Ladak may not be a Shangri-La, but it has more of the elements of serene living than are found in most other parts of the globe. Yet Tibet fits neatly into all the customary definitions of reaction. The country is ruled by a sacerdotal caste of priests. Tibetans are incredibly ignorant of the outside world, and their living standards, according to European rule, would be called primitive or uncivilized. "Tibet has no railroads, no highways, no automobiles—indeed, no wheeled vehicles." There are further differences:

> For example, Tibetans have no equivalents for such words as "god" and "spirit." Instead a Tibetan may discuss these spiritual concepts with such delicacy of nuance that for one Western word he may require a whole series of Tibetan words.
>
> On the material plane, conversely, Tibet may have a single word where we boast a dozen or more. . . . If you tried to describe a Western factory in Tibetan, you would have to work with a handful of such schoolboy words as "machine," "fire," "storm," iron." The same difficulty, in reverse, confronts the translator of spiritual Tibetan thought into English.

Tibetan religion, of course, has its excesses in ritual and superstition. Tibet is not populated solely by Buddhist scholars trained in metaphysical subtlety. And periodically, readers of Western periodicals are intrigued and amused by the quaint method of the Tibetans in choosing their temporal and spiritual rulers—both the Dalai and the Tashi Lamas are supposed to reincarnate and to identify themselves while yet infants by demonstrating their familiarity with the possessions of their predecessors in high office. This method, however, may have virtues which are lacking in both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

In any event, the question of where to look on earth today for the "superior" civilization remains an open one. We strongly recommend a reading of *Peaks and Lamas* by Marco Pallis (published by Knopf in the United States), for an informed and sympathetic appreciation of Tibetan civilization. It seems to us that the present leaders of Tibet display a better understanding of ends and means than leaders almost anywhere else.

As a qualifying afterthought, it should be noted that Tibet has not had to undergo the impact of Western technology and "progress." What will happen, if and when these influences reach the tableland of Central Asia, remains to be seen. Mr. Pallis admits that an injudicious enthusiasm for Western ways might ruin Tibet in a very short time. The psychological and moral stability of Tibetans, he thinks, may depend very largely on their isolated life, and he adds:

> Even in the Athens of the Periclean age, if suddenly one cinema, one chain-store and one radio station had been opened, I wonder whether the whole edifice of Hellenic civilization would not have come toppling about the ears of its creators, as surely as one machine-gun would have mown down the victorious hoplites of Marathon. Even a Phidias might have been momentarily taken in and a Zeuxis have exchanged his brush for a camera. One somehow suspects that Socrates would have seen through it all, and stood firm; but he could always have been given his overdose of hemlock a few years earlier.

But succumbing or not to Western fascinations, the truth of the Tibetan "wise men" would stand—as, for that matter, the truth of Martin Luther stands today, regardless of whether Christians since his time have profited by it or not.

COMMENTARY

RELIGION IN POLITICS

THIS week's Review deals with the decline of libertarian idealism and the emergence of power politics as the new "dynamic" in international affairs. It also refers to the rise of political religion in Europe. A similar trend is noticeable in the United States, in the attempts of various religious denominations to wear away the wall of separation between Church and State. The post-war Italian constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the State religion, and in the East, while India has formed a secular State, Pakistan is definitely a Moslem Power.

Little has been heard about the status of religion in the new nation of Israel. Some months ago, the *Christian Century* deplored the fact that no mention of the Hebrew God occurs in the Israeli Constitution. It now appears that if the powerful Mizrachi (political Zionist Orthodox party) has its way, the Jewish dietary laws and Sabbath observance will be enforced by law, and "that all matters pertaining to family life in Israel, such as marriages and divorces," will be under "the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Rabbis of the Religious Courts."

This report appears in the *Jewish Newsletter (Feb.* 25), a weekly digest of Jewish news and opinion. According to the *Newsletter,* the extreme clericalist party in Israel takes the view that "the Jewish religion puts a collective responsibility upon the individual Jew and therefore *it has to be enforced collectively by the State."* Recounting an interview with leading Rabbis, the report continues:

> Asked whether banning of mixed marriages by the State does not smack somewhat of the Nazi principle of the "pure" racial marriages and would it not lead to the same tragic results as in Nazi Germany, Rabbi Shragai vehemently repudiated the charge. The difference between the Nazi and Mizrachi conception, he said, was that the Nazis based their theory on *racial superiority,* while the Mizrachi claim only *spiritual superiority* for the Jews.

The Rabbi spokesmen for the Israeli clericalist movement are confident of gaining public consent for such laws, because of the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jews in Israel, although they admit that obstacles await them. An unmentioned obstacle will be the strong opposition of liberal Jews in the United States, to whom the new nation owes so much of its financial and moral support. Nevertheless, this development in Israel is typical of the resurgence of sacerdotalism in all parts

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

COLLECTION agencies flourish in every city of the United States. Breach of promise suits enliven the reading of each daily paper, and many of these legal actions reveal that not one, but a considerable number of broken words, are involved in the past history of the litigants. Very few men expect their neighbors or their business associates to fulfill strictly their agreements, nor do they really expect to fulfill their own. Our legal methods of assuring "'commercial" honesty are continually being revised to close neglected breaches through which ingenious and enterprising citizens have wriggled. Every criminal who leaves a "corrective" institution is expected by society to express sentiments that may be taken as a promise that he will never do anything illegal again. And the bad boy who picks oranges from a neighbor's tree is *made* to promise never to repeat his pilfering.

There seem to be two things wrong with contemporary attitudes in regard to all these matters: first, we don't offer genuine trust to others—for example, to parolees or men who have completed prison sentences, when they seek employment, nor to the boy who samples someone else's fruit; and, second, we are determined to exact promises of good behavior from those we suspect, even though the assurances be but the empty fulfillment of ritual. The court-martialling of deserters from the armed forces is usually accompanied by the expression of a certain tongue-in-cheek surprise that the recalcitrant does not long to "serve his country" as a conscript, though everyone present knows that the majority of young men are extremely undesirous of being drafted.

The result of all these related patterns of social reaction is that we have ceased to believe that there is or can be any such thing as inviolable commitment. And our children are automatically encouraged to accept a world where a man's word depreciates in value with the passage of every day which follows a pledge or promise. Lincoln Steffens' experiences in his autobiographical *Boy on Horseback* included the shattering disillusionment caused when one of his father's business partners, after expansively promising young Steffens a pony, finally was driven to the point where he admitted he had no intention of backing up his offer. "What," writes Steffens, "makes grown-ups promise things to children and fail them? My regret was a brooding sorrow, speechless, tearless, and that liar laughed."

It is very easy to lie to children in order to keep them quiet, but very dangerous if we have hopes that they will some day grow into full integrity and unshakable honor. No more important obligation to youth can be fulfilled by educators than in reclaiming and sharing the original meanings of "'commitment" and "integrity." This, of course, is not really difficult. One has himself to make no promises which are not fulfilled to the letter, and to refrain from exacting from youths any promises which are not, at the time, fully understood and fully felt. An extreme caution may be advisable in allowing a child to make extravagant promises. Perhaps we should suggest to him a score of reasons why he should enter into *no* commitment lightly or in ignorance.

How simple and how enjoyable a world this would be if everyone tried to cultivate the habit of stating his real intentions, instead of the intentions he feels will gain him social approval! What about criminals? With every frontal attack on hypocrisy, the number of criminals automatically diminishes, for it is often only because they accept hypocrisy as an inevitable condition of life that they adopt "criminal" ways so easily.

A child will find no orientation for the expanding energies of youth comparable to the idea of commitment. If he sets off in many different directions, aping his elders in making promises whenever most convenient and to whomever holds the keys to potential material

advantages, there will be no peace, no quiet, and no abiding sense of purpose in his mind. He becomes not only a "schemer," which is sometimes not necessarily bad, but he also becomes a dishonest schemer, which is always bad. No human accomplishment is more rewarding than the complete fulfillment of an agreement or a pledge.

As a society, we seem to have forgotten this long ago. Perhaps here, as in many other instances, we may be justified in laying considerable blame upon the psychology of Western religion. Binding us still, from the netherland of medievalism, is the expectation of "sinfulness"—and the corresponding over-emphasis of ritual. Sin once in a while, we say, because you cannot help it, but make up for it by the elegance of your protestations of unshakable virtue in the future. The more promises to the officials of the church, the greater the hold exercised by it upon your dwindling moral conscience, since each impossible promise broken becomes plausible evidence of man's great need for supernatural intervention to save him from sinning *continually*.

The child should never promise to love his parents for all time, any more than he should promise to love God. He should never promise to be a good boy "forever," although this would be far superior to the even more commonly extracted commitment: "I promise never to be a bad boy again." He should give his word only to those things which he thoroughly understands and which represent something to which he can maintain a genuine allegiance during the course of successive days and weeks. It may seem too "prudent" to recommend that a parent whittle down the extravagances of a child's promises, yet it is quite obviously best to make definite *minimum* commitments, while allowing both the child and oneself the privilege of *hoping that* such commitments will be exceeded by actual performance. In such manner, the child may come to have a feeling that he must always perform the necessary—that is, the promised—and then be free, otherwise, to do as he wills, and *perhaps* exceed his definitive word as an "extra" bit of beneficence. Such "extra" giving is free and full giving, and it can come only to those who have practiced the self-discipline of integrity. Only such are sufficiently free of inner disquietude to feel the subtle tones of compassion, duty, and responsibility as inspirations rather than encumbrances upon daily living.

FRONTIERS

Science and Human Attitudes

THERE are two well defined and familiar approaches to the results of scientific inquiry—the viewpoint of the ordinary person, and the viewpoint of the scientist himself. The "layman," as the ordinary person is often termed, has the natural habit of regarding scientific discoveries according to the way in which they affect his personal life and ideas, while the scientist prides himself on ignoring all "human" considerations. Both, no doubt, are partially justified, and yet it should be evident that unless a ground of common interest for both the scientist and the rest of us can be found, there is little hope of making available to the general public the great advantages that have been claimed for the scientific method.

In theory, at least, scientific courses at school should help students to be more rational in their attitude toward personal and social problems. Scientific knowledge should bring them basic orientation—balance in their emotional lives, impartiality in mind, and consciously selected values in personal philosophy. We doubt very much that training in science produces these desirable results. A sort of discipline is gained, it is true, by those who are naturally inclined toward scientific or semiscientific careers, but such individual students cannot be taken to represent the "average" person with no special interest in science, and who is typical of the great majority of the population.

It is easy to illustrate this point by considering the various controversies which have dominated scientific thought over the past hundred years. The most important, of course, has been the question of evolution. Here was a controversy which did touch the life of the average person, and to the degree that he thought at all, he recognized the significance of the claim, made by the evolutionists, that neither man nor animal was "created" by Divine Power within a period of seven days, but that both developed over hundreds of thousands or millions of years, by exceedingly slow processes of organic change. This was a doctrine that could and ultimately did transform the meaning of religion for countless people.

In a similar way, although at a different level of "practicality," the enormous potency of science in the field of technology has had a revolutionary effect which still continues. The youth of the Orient, for example, are as eager for scientific training today as the youth of America were a generation or more ago, when the promise of scientific miracles in industry and agriculture became fully evident.

Science, then, has been recognized and popularly identified as the iconoclast of religion, and as a veritable creator in technology, but its direct influence has gone little further than this. So far as the general public is concerned, science is a bludgeon for atheists, a magician for industry, an icon for advertisers, and an arsenal for the State. It has not, on the whole, had a refining or elevating effect on human thought. It has not increased the philosophical temper of the people by directing attention to the *problems* which serious scientific thought encounters, and its demoralized vocabulary almost guarantees, a lack of curiosity concerning such questions on the part of the average person.

It remains a fact, however, that the destructive criticism aimed at religion by the spokesmen of science has imposed peculiar obligations upon them. They ought at least to develop clear explanations of the general problems on which scientists are now working, with suggestions as to the philosophical implications that are involved. There is no reason to think that the technical researcher has any more competence to determine the *meaning* of scientific discoveries than the man in the street; actually, the researcher may have less, because of his preoccupation with the abstractions of scientific method.

To take another illustration, there is the dispute between the Vitalists and the Mechanists

in biological theory. The average person knows little or nothing about this controversy, nor will the usual terms of the debate arouse his interest, and yet matters of the highest importance are at stake. Fundamentally, the Mechanist maintains that in the universe contemplated by Science, there is no place for spiritual, moral or intellectual intelligence which operates as a cause in material and organic events. On the contrary, he holds that these expressions of "intelligence"—to the extent that they have a "real" existence at all—are themselves effects or results of physical activity, produced by the laws of matter and motion, known or unknown. The mechanist view may be put in the words of Chapman Cohen:

> The one thing that would be fatal to materialism would be the necessity for assuming a controlling and directing intelligence at any part of the cosmic process. . . . The essential issue is whether it is possible, or is ever likely to be possible, to account for the whole range of natural phenomena in terms of the composition of forces. That is the principle for which Materialism has always stood. By that principle it stands or falls. *(Materialism Restated,* pp. 34-35.)

Here is the mechanist's position, in the abstract, but how does it work out in practice? Take the human experience of intense, concentrated thinking. It is natural for a man to explain this by saying simply that he *wills* to think, and then carries out his determination. But the mechanist, who denies any integral intelligence or independent "self" in man, will look for a physical or physiological explanation, as, for example, that offered by Dr. Margaret Floy Washburn some years ago. This Vassar psychologist urged that intense, purposive thinking results from the tenseness of the trunk muscles of the body. When the trunk relaxes, we stop thinking, she argues, and concludes:

> In explaining, then, the persistent character of purposive action, the mechanist may substitute for the vitalist's mysterious, emergent entelechy. involving something over and above the ordinary physico-chemical laws, the *drive* as a state of unstable physico-chemical equilibrium, underlying allpurposive action, and an attitude of steady contraction the trunk muscles, into which the energy of the drive may discharge and which accompanies the higher forms of purposive action. *(Science,* Jan. 13, 1928.)

The Vitalist's view is more like that of the man-in-thestreet. He takes the position—capable of a religious interpretation—that some force, power or intelligence manifests itself in the phenomena of life which is beyond the reach of a purely physical explanation. Too often, however, the Vitalist is one "who revels in the fallibility of the human mind" and resorts to mysticism and undisciplined speculation whenever confronted by a knotty technical problem. Vitalists are often quite willing to let in metaphysical or transcendental causes to the material universe, and the Mechanist fears that they may also welcome back the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and possibly a few angels and minor demons, these soon to be followed by the Holy Inquisition and a new religious "party line."

From about 1925 to 1940, the scientific journals were filled with debates between the Vitalists and the Mechanists. Then, as the controversy appeared unfruitful, it was gradually replaced with more technical studies of the origin of form. Instead of the question, "What is Life?" more and more scientists began to ask, "What produces living forms?" —and so the argument between the Vitalists and Mechanists has been forgotten for a while.

The real issue, of course, is whether or not individual human beings have effective control over their own lives. The Vitalist-Mechanist controversy ultimately resolves itself into this question, and it seems a little ridiculous that scientists, however learned and experienced in "research techniques," should imagine that academic debates of this sort are able to decide anything at all. What actually happens is that each side presents a little "data" and then sets off on the wings of fancy to the most speculative of conclusions. Such discussions are almost always full of hidden assumptions, undefined postulates and occupational prejudices. Today, looking back

over the literature of the controversy, even the cleverest of the arguments seem to move in an atmosphere of unreality. To really affect the course of human thought, therefore, scientific philosophising will have to undergo a number of basic reforms, the most important of which will be to accept the sense of individuality and moral freedom that is given in the consciousness of every human being. This done, there will be some possibility that science will cease to be merely an amoral force behind technology, and that education in scientific theory will become something more than the powerful influence of the sect of materialism.