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BACKING INTO RELIGION

WE hear quite frequently, these days, about the dangers of backing into socialism. These apprehensions come for the most part from the conservative political Right, but it is possible to agree with them on grounds which have little in common with familiar "conservative" arguments. The trouble with backing into socialism is not in socialism, but in the "backing" process. To get the Welfare State, not because we want it, but because we want those things which make a Welfare State inevitable, is not social progress but social retrogression. Progress exists only when men recognize the long-term consequences of their choices and act accordingly. To allow ourselves to be "dragged" into the pattern of omnipotent State control will not be a triumph of anything except human weakness and indecision. To *choose* socialism would be a morally opposite process, and it *might* have opposite effects.

But the question of what sort of government or "State" we shall have in the future seems relatively unimportant alongside the larger problem of the sort of religion we are going to have. There are many signs that great numbers of people are now backing—or being backed—into religion: enough, perhaps, to justify saying that "we" are backing into religion. This may be far worse than backing into socialism, for religion affects human beings at a deeper level of thought and feeling than politics affects them. The consequences of mistakes in religion, therefore, are less easily perceived, much more far-reaching, and are corrected only by exceptional determination.

What, actually, is "religion"? This question is seldom asked, the more familiar inquiry being, "Do you think religion is important?" or "Is a society without religion desirable or possible?" These questions, however, are virtually meaningless in the form that they are usually put and discussed. How can anyone decide about the value of religion unless he has first determined what religion itself is about?

Religion, it seems to us, should have two sorts of definitions. First, there is the abstract approach, providing a minimum definition, such as: "Religion is a view of the meaning of life which offers a basis for distinguishing right from wrong." At once we are in trouble, for numerous critics will rise up to say, "You don't have to be 'religious' in order to do *that!"*

Well, was Socrates "religious"? Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." It seems fair to insist that this idea is the essence of religion. It also seems evident that an examined life is a *compared* life—a life that is lived contrasted with the life that *might* be lived. With what shall we compare our lives?

This brings us to the second sort of definition: "Religion is a more or less *developed* theory of the good life with which, at many points, we may compare our own."

Again, there may be objections. It will be argued that a standard for human behavior can be supplied without any reference to supernatural beings or relationships. And from this it will be claimed that, without supernatural relationships, there is no religion.

So the argument about religion changes its character. If we assent to a definition of religion which makes no mention of the supernatural, a lot of people who have opposed religion will admit to being "religious." On the other hand, a lot more people will feel that such a definition deprives them of the essentials of religious faith. They *want* an element of the supernatural in their religion. The problem, then, is to determine why some people instinctively resist anything involving super-naturalism, and why others will be satisfied with nothing else. If we can settle this problem, we may be able to come to some conclusion about what religion is and whether or not it is "important."

The opponents of supernaturalism fall into various classifications—atheists, materialists,

naturalists, rationalists, humanists, freethinkers, agnostics. On the whole, the persons in these groups dislike mystification. They reject creeds, revelations, dogmas. They rely upon the resources of reason for their conscious moral choices and upon science for their expectations of human progress. They incline to condemn religion—religion as a historical or social phenomenon—and they usually subscribe to the view that an unchurched world would represent a great step of human progress.

The believers of supernaturalism—greatly in the majority so far as passive adherents are concerned, although hardly more numerous than the skeptics when it comes to actual advocates—take the position that a merely physical explanation of things is not enough. Materialism, they say, as a philosophy, has only a rule-of-thumb basis for determining what is right and what is wrong; it has no evocative power over the human mind; it neither moves nor inspires. Mankind, even if it is only to remain merely human, needs a more-than-human ideal to look up to.

To what extent can we agree with both these positions? If we reason from historical evidence as well as from a basic sense of the fitness of things, it seems just to say that both are right as critics. A man cannot suppress his reason without losing his manhood, and what good is religion, or anything else, to an unmanned human being? But it is just as true, apparently, that the suppression of the intuition of a larger whole, of immortal meanings, of the promise of a spiritual life, debases the human being as much as blind belief unmans him.

Is there, then, a religion which does no violence to reason, and at the same time will nourish the yearnings of the heart?

This question requires us to distribute the term, "supernaturalism," for here, obviously, is the key to all controversies over religion which are more than sectarian rivalries. Is super-nature *against* the nature we know, or is it simply an extension of the natural into supersensible regions? We know what the rationalist—or most rationalists—will say. They will claim that *all* ideas of the supernatural are anti-natural. And, strangely enough, a certain proportion of the supporters of supernatural religion will agree. The latter are the people who want an anti-rational, anti-natural religious faith, for, having declared their belief, they are relieved from any responsibility of thinking about it—and they are the people who have given religion a bad name.

The life of Peter Abelard, who was pursued from one end of Europe to the other by the defenders of orthodoxy, is a good illustration of how these people behaved in the twelfth century. The life of Thomas Paine shows that, six hundred years later, they were still behaving in the same way.

From Plato to Emerson, great thinkers in the Western tradition have shown that a reasoned faith in transcendental reality—philosophical religion—is entirely possible. The representatives of philosophical religion in the Orient are almost too numerous to mention. Buddha at once comes to mind, and Sankaracharya. Their "supernatural" ideas do not lead to blind belief and anti-rationalism, but to a "reason" of the spirit.

The importance of these thinkers and teachers, however, rests with the fact that it is quite impossible to "back" into their kind of religion. So the question of whether religion is "a good thing" must be determined by the way in which it is obtained. Men can build cathedrals and temples to the spirit in their hearts, or they can be frightened into them with their hearts in their throats. Their religions will not be the same.

But suppose one has not yet reached Buddhahood: does that mean that the bes. he can do is to choose between the Methodists and the Baptists? Lacking the inward fire, should he ally himself with Youth-for-Christ, or, if more sophisticated, enter a Vedantin monastery?

The first requirement of an intelligent approach to religion, one may say, is to examine very closely all the forms of routine conformity as well as the forms of routine nonconformity. Both Luther and Erasmus were great men. One conformed, the other did not, but neither was a routine thinker in the dominant work of his life. The acts of religion, in other words, are not imitative acts. They are not even, in the final analysis, group acts, although men may help one another in the pursuit of religious truth.

If real religion is unmediated religion, then why do we need churches, preachers, bishops, monks, and religious organizations? Perhaps we don't need them, and it would certainly be better to do without them if there is any danger that people will be unable to overcome the idea that religion *depends* upon them. Thomas Jefferson, who was not an irreligious man, gave this counsel to a nephew at school:

> Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve the homage of reason than of blindfolded fear. . . . Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of consequences. If it end in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise and in the love of others it will procure for you.

What about positive convictions of a religious nature? "The human race, my intuition tells me," wrote Richard Byrd, "is not outside the cosmos and is not an accident. It is as much a part of the universe as the trees, the mountains, the aurora and the stars." A conviction of this sort is the foundation for living religion—a religion which flows in and out of the heart with the current of life's experience, which is first felt, then formulated. Byrd found in this intuition the basis for a moral life, for he recognized that human consciousness is as much an expression of "natural law" as the workings of external nature:

> Therefore [he continued], it seems to me that the convictions of right and wrong, being, as they are, the products of the consciousness, must also be formed in accordance with these laws. I look upon the conscience as the mechanism which makes us directly aware of them and their significance and serves as a link with the universal intelligence which gives them form and harmoniousness.

Albert Einstein affords another illustration of religion that is founded on independent experience. He has written:

> The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the sower of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness. . . .
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> The cosmic religious experience is the strongest and the noblest, deriving from behind scientific research. No one who does not appreciate the terrific exertions, the devotion, without which pioneer creation in scientific thought cannot come into being can judge the strength of the feeling out of which alone such work, turned away as it is from immediate practical life, can grow.
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> What deep faith in the rationality of the structure of the world, what a longing to understand even a small glimpse of the reason revealed in the world, there must have been in Kepler and Newton!

It seems important to suggest that while explorers and physicists have their own peculiar opportunities for religious inspiration, no man need feel himself denied or cut off from the sort of experience through which these realities impinge upon human consciousness. Thoreau found it by the shores of Walden Pond. Mothers have seen it in their children's eyes, and Tolstoy discovered it in the Russian peasants who lived all around him. It seems as though each man carries about within himself a "measure" of the Infinite, and that, if he seeks them, ultimate moments of union with the larger life of nature and of man may be felt and known.

If we were obliged to offer some sort of definition of a genuine religious teacher, we might attempt it by saying that he is a man who has been able to clarify his intuitions, has worked them into metaphysical certainties, and has given them structure, hierarchy, and educational form. And these, accepted by the multitude without reflection, without questioning and independent searching, become in time the dogmas of religion, the emotional ramparts of unreasoned belief and the high walls of sectaiian exclusiveness. Finally, religion is petrified in custom, law and ritual, remaining thus until a generation of atheists arises in reaction, after whom the slow and painful process of religious self-education must begin all over again.

Letter from
CENTRAL EUROPE

INNSBRUCK.—A person who has suffered a decisive disappointment often tries to forget it by blocking out remembrance of the associated circumstances. Nations behave in the same way.

At the end of World War II, Austrians did not want to hear any more about war, nor about the political philosophies which were responsible for its outbreak. There was no possibility for the average citizen to occupy himself with recent literature—political, scientific or fictional—as the Allies had summoned the population, under the threat of severe punishment, to collect all printed material in question and deliver it to the nearest office of the Military Government. During the early days of the occupation, newspapers and magazines were prohibited altogether, while later on only a few could be published because of the scarcity of paper. More lately, since the production of paper has grown, and since the Military Government has returned certain civil powers to an Austrian Government, the number of editions has increased.

Figures compiled by a society of librarians and bookstore owners show that the shock of the political and military breakdown in 1945 has not yet faded away. A large proportion of readers still prefer books which lead their fancy into fairyland, while publications which deal with the history of the last ten years—their point of view makes no difference—are in little demand.

Books which lead away from the present and recent past include more than fantasies, of course. Some who once preferred serious publications now read stories of crime, while others have returned to the Greek, Roman and German Classics, to biographies, animal stories and natural history. The present is probably the first time, however, when not only intellectuals, but also simply educated people, show a great desire to inform themselves about the non-materialistic circuits of life about problems like the power behind the creative potencies of nature, the true sense of existence, reincarnation, religion and similar subjects. And there is no wonder that a number of writers and editors have taken advantage of this situation, hoping for a solid material profit from writing along "metaphysical" lines.

Among the volumes which have appeared since the war and which do not belong to this superficial class, *Metaphysik der Wirklichkeit (Metaphysics of Reality)* by Prof. Robert Reininger (Wilhelm Braumüller, Vienna, 1948) deserves to be mentioned. Critics have called this essay the best contemporary presentation in German of ideal metaphysics. The book declares metaphysics to be a science in the academic sense. The abundance and fullness of its thought invites the reflective reader—there is no evasive gliding or sliding when the twist of thought-chains seems to pile up difficulties; no flatness, when problems ask for a decisive answer. The writer speaks of physics as a science which grows out of the perceptions of our senses, and he regards metaphysics as one which has the task of "correcting these conceptions."

A publication looking at such problems from quite another standpoint, written by Alois Wiesinger, bears the title *Okkulte Phaenomene im Lichte der Theologie (Occult Phenomena in the Light of Theology,* Graz, 1948). The author is a Roman Catholic priest, abbot of the monastery at Schlierbach, and his book seems to be the first attempt of a confessionally bound thinker to approach the problem of occultism and occultism itself, not as a superstitious anomaly, but from the viewpoint of the teachings of Christ. His idea seems to be to explain and to declare that all occult happenings are "miracles" based on the manifestations of Jesus, and thus to dig away the ground from under the various sects, societies and orders which do not belong to or have withdrawn from the Roman Church. Admitting that he has not been able to study all aspects of the problem

thoroughly, "as that would suppose a knowledge of nearly all the spiritual disciplines," he incites young theologians to carry on and collect all the material in reach, so as to prove his assertions.

Many other books of current publication are distinguished by the fact that they deal with problems of spirit and soul. Has the interest in these subjects to be valued only as a consequence of the downfall of former ideologies, to pass after a while, and, probably, leave few traces? If the interest is maintained, however, it may be regarded as a first and timid attempt to try to develop serious thought in the realm of ethics and morals.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

CLIMATE OF CRITICISM

MAN, KNOW THYSELF, is an ancient counsel, usually attributed to the Delphic Oracle of ancient Greece, and it is customary for journals of uplifting habits and lofty purposes to remark how little, through the centuries since, the advice has been heeded. There is a sense, however, in which the twentieth century may claim a special interest in self-knowledge. Ours is above all an age of criticism and self-consciousness. It is an age when thoughtful men are far more curious about how and why we believe what we do, than about the beliefs themselves. Our scholars are concerned with critical perspectives, not dynamic convictions. The wisest historians among us—perhaps it would be better to call them, instead, the most sophisticated—are the relativists: men who compare the beliefs of one age with those of another, hut who shy away from any implication that the business of the thinker is to select the beliefs which are most likely to be "true."

The most skillful and sagacious of the relativist historians of our time was undoubtedly the late Carl L. Becker, author of *Every Man his own Historian,* and *The Heavenlv City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers,* to name works which are certain to delight almost any reader. Becker is at his best when comparing, another epoch with our own. His touch is light but his aim is accurate. If he wishes us to understand a little of the time of Thomas Aquinas, he sets the stage for a conversation between the Learned Doctor and ourselves— with the practical consequence that we soon see that conversation is almost impossible. Both he and we might use the same words, but their meanings would be poles apart. The same thing happens in an imagined conversation with Dante, who speaks to us with clarity and certainty out of the matured synthesis of the Middle Ages, the only difficulty being that his clarity relates to abstractions in which we have no faith, and his certainty applies to a conception of social order which is anathema to persons persuaded that social democracy is the highest political good.

Becker comments:

> Nevertheless, what troubles me is that I cannot dismiss Dante or St. Thomas as unintelligent men. The judgment of posterity has placed them among the lordly ones of the earth; and if their arguments are unintelligible to us the fact cannot be attributed to lack of intelligence in them. They were at least as intelligent and learned as many who in our time have argued for or against the League of Nations—as intelligent perhaps as Clemenceau, as learned as Wilson.

In a few pages, Becker converts the unsuspecting reader to a basically critical attitude toward the beliefs, the unexamined assumptions, of his own time. And this, while not the highest good, is certainly a good worth pursuing. The highest good would be to help the reader to compare both Dante's and his own assumptions with some absolute standard of truth. But Prof. Becker would rather be a good critic and relativist than an assured dogmatist. As a relativist, he is convinced that the likelihood of finding a standard for "absolute truth" is so small as to be practically nonexistent. Searching for it, therefore, would be a most dangerous project, and he prefers the safer, less-likely-to-be-mistaken course of critical scholarship.

But even if the relativist were to admit that absolute truth is a discovery both possible and desirable, he might still maintain that until comparison of a number of alternatives has been completed, there is small chance of our being able to recognize truth, should we be lucky enough to find it. And in this contention, so far as the exercise of reason is concerned, the relativist would probably be right. The relativist, then, does not presume to tell us who has the truth and who has not, but offers us comparisons, allowing us to decide for ourselves.

About when, in the history of Western thought, did consciousness of the influence of "epoch" begin? The extreme historical-mindedness of the present is typified by the expression "climate of opinion," which is used by historians of ideas to indicate the more or less coherent pattern of assumptions about the nature of things which prevailed during a certain epoch. In the eighteenth century, for example, the key idea of the then prevailing climate of opinion was Natural Law. In *The Heavenly* City, Becker exclaims:

> Nature and natural law—what magic these words held for the philosophical century! Enter that country by any door you like, you are at once aware of its pervasive power. . . . Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau, Volney: in each of them nature takes without question the position customarily reserved for the guest of honor. To find a proper title for this lecture [the chapter in Becker's book] I had only to think of the Declaration of Independence—"to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station, to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them." Turn to the French counterpart of the Declaration, and you will find that "the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man." Search the writings of the new economists and you will find them demanding the abolition of artificial restrictions on trade and industry in order that men may be free to follow the natural law of self-interest. Look into the wilderness of forgotten books and pamphlets dealing with religion and morality; interminable arguments, clashing opinions, different and seemingly irreconcilable conclusions you will find, and yet strangely enough controversialists of every party unite in calling upon nature as the sovereign arbiter of all their quarrels. . . .

In the Middle Ages, the climate of opinion centered upon theological issues—Salvation, Divine Grace, the Will of God; today, the magic words are "operation," "function," "process," "atoms" and "atomic power." The concept of "climate" in ideas is an illuminating one. It is peculiarly the instrument of self-consciousness, and the fact that almost no historian can write a book without using this phrase a number of times—either "climate of opinion" or its various synonyms such as "intellectual frame of reference" or "mind-set"—is good evidence of the exceptional striving after self-consciousness of present-day thinkers.

The phrase itself, however, instead of being a contemporary invention, was unearthed by Prof. Alfred North Whitehead in the writings of an obscure seventeenth-century philosopher, Joseph Glanvill, whose works, being outside the "climate of opinion" of his own time, exerted little influence and are now more or less forgotten. Glanvill lived at a time when the spirit of modern science—"Natural Philosophy," it was called in those days —was rising to a peak of enthusiasm. Glanvill was a member of the Royal Society, chartered by Charles II in 1662, and while he was not unappreciative of the value of science, he felt that the new enthusiasm for physical research contained the seeds of a new form of dogmatism. His books are pervaded by a questioning mood. He was a learned defender of the fact of psychical phenomena, and so noticeable was the quality of impartiality in his writing that he was quoted at length by the eminent nineteenth-century believer in Spiritualism, Alfred Russel Wallace, as illustrating a proper scientific attitude toward supernaturalist claims. The passage we are interested in, however, occurs in Glanvill's book, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, where he is arguing for intellectual disinterestedness. He writes:

> . . . they that never peep'd beyond the common beliefin which their easie understandings were at first indoctrinated, are indubitably assur'd of the Truth, and comparative excellency of their receptions . . . the larger *Souls*, that have travail'd the divers *Climates of Opinions*, are more cautious in their *resolves*, and more sparing to determine.

But while Glanvill supplied the relativists with their most useful intellectual tool for the practice of criticism, he was himself no relativist. He belonged to that small band of Platonizing Christians, the Cambridge Platonists (although he was of Oxford), who attempted to stem the swelling tide of the mechanical interpretation of nature. With Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, John Smith and Thomas Traherne, he endeavored to keep alive a sense of the subtleties in human life, of the reality of the psychic and spiritual worlds. That the stream of Cartesian materialism, later turned into a torrent by Newtonian mechanism, swept away the gentle reasoning of the Cambridge Platonists, only shows how important it is to learn to "peep beyond the common belief."

The modern age learned well from Glanvill the lesson of historical relativism. Will it now learn from him, also, the lesson of the importance of positive conviction? To be able to criticize and compare with skill and sophistication soon becomes a fruitless exercise unless it is followed by an unashamed search for philosophic truth.

ROOTS OF "DRIFT'

BACK in 1944, John T. Flynn wrote a closely argued but explosive book, As *We Go Marching,* describing the blind descent into statism of warmaking governments. In those days, Mr. Flynn was generally acknowledged to be the Isolationists' Angry Man. Practically nobody would read what he wrote except the people who already agreed with him: and as for his running comment on the war, practically no newspaper would publish him except the Chicago *Tribune*—and it was widely conceded that the Chicago *Tribune* would undoubtedly publish anything at all that cast unfavorable reflections on the Roosevelt Administration.

As a result, Mr. Flynn's various discussions of the meaning of war for a democratic society have been widely neglected. Reading this week's lead article, particularly the first paragraph, it seemed to us that *As We Go Marching* (Doubleday, Doran, 1944) ought to be read by everyone who seeks a basic understanding of what it may mean to "back" into any kind of a social order, militarist, socialist or otherwise. It happens that his logic has not been adversely affected by the appearance of his writings in the Chicago *Tribune,* even though guilt by association is regarded as a form of ultimate damnation in these nervous times.

It is quite possible, too, that Mr. Flynn's latest volume, *The Road Ahead, America's Creeping Revolution,* dealing with the unlabeled "socialist" trend of the present, just published by Devin-Adair, has similar critical virtues. The difficulty, of course, with such books is that they can do little more than create more Angry Men. It would be much more to the point to try to discover the roots of the habit of "drift" in whatever level of human nature they gain their principal nourishment, and to get to work in the formation of other and better tendencies. The view implied in "Backing into Religion" is that the habits formed in relation to religious ideas are crucial for every other form of human behavior—if a man, or a people, is willing to drift in or out of religion, the habit of drift is bound to appear in other phases of our common life. The religious level, then, is the level of basic correction, whereas studies like Mr. Flynn's books can only show us how far the effects of drifting can take us in the wrong direction, in politics, economics and government.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

On several occasions, "Children—and Ourselves" has emphasized the detrimental effect of using the words "should" and "ought" in suggesting that a child take a certain course of action. Aren't there occasions when these words are essential—occasions when the child inclines toward thoughtlessness very strongly? The child who races out into the cold air without proper clothing, catches cold and then makes it necessary for the parent to care for him in his illness, "should" be told to put on a wrap. Or the child who sits listening to radio programs instead of doing his homework needs to be told that he "ought" to be fulfilling his duty. The natural rebelliousness of some children seems to make it necessary for parents to become very emphatic at times.

OUR primary objective in deriding use of the words "should" and "ought" as instruments of child guidance has been to point out the negative psychological associations which these words have gained in conventional usage. We have felt, and still feel, that these terms are typically used as vehicles of a parent's desire to have his child feel tremendously and perpetually obligated to him. "You really ought," in a parent-child context, is often regarded by both the parent and the child to be an abbreviated reminder of all that "gratitude" children are supposed to feel for being brought into the world and subsequently fed.

In a certain sense, of course, there *are* things which all human beings, including children, "ought to do." That is, at all times a person is capable of feeling a greater sense of responsibility. This is the legitimate realm of the "shoulds" and "oughts," which a man may apply to himself to his heart's content and his soul's benefit. Human beings must constantly pass moral judgment *upon themselves*, if they are to increase their sense of responsibility—which is, after all, the foundation of morality. But when we call attention to another person's obligations in such a way as to indicate our right to pass moral judgment upon his character, we may expect two detrimental results. First, we obviously can't concentrate our energies on our own moral responsibilities if we allow ourselves to unqualifiedly decide about another's conduct; and second, we adopt the attitude of superiority, however unconsciously, by using such words as "should," indicating our belief that we *can* judge another's responsibility. If we feel that we have a right to expect something very specific from another human being, and are able to state the reasons which we feel support that right, then we also have the "right" to tell him our frank opinion. But "should" and "ought," while often directed at specific and even petty things, convey an atmosphere entirely different from that which might surround the adjudication of specific differences of opinion. They falsely imply *that we understand another's total moral situation.*

We cannot criticize parents for *feeling* that their children "ought" to do certain things, however. All parents will have an urge to communicate to the child about those things which they believe are genuinely good for the child to do. It is in the method chosen for communicating such convictions to the child that we encounter the problems being discovered.

Our present questioner asserts, with reason, that the child "who races out into the cold air without proper clothing . . . should be told to put on a wrap." But we still have to consider the best way in which the "telling" may be accomplished. For instance, after asking the child to listen to all of the various factors which seem to the parent to be involved in failure to take precautions against illness, he might say: "Therefore, I strongly recommend that you take all reasonable precautions, and I think that doing so will make things better and happier for both yourself and myself." A parent certainly has a right to "strongly recommend" things to his child, just as he may have a similar right with other people. It is natural for the parent, furthermore, to be freer and more constant in his recommendations to the child, since the child will first look for guidance in the home—unless he becomes dissatisfied with the

nature of the guidance and with the method chosen for providing it.

A parent who feels a special concern for developing a child's critical mental faculties and his power of choice can elaborate further: "Whenever it is at all possible, I shall leave you to make up your own mind, although I shall expect you to take the full consequences of your actions if your choices do not work out well when they are contrary to my 'recommendations.' If you catch a cold from failure to observe the precautions suggested, I may not feel that I should use my time in taking care of you or sympathizing with you in any way. Moreover, since colds are very easily passed from one person to another, you will have to stay away from the rest of the family, prepare your own meals and eat them in your room until the cold reaches a stage where it no longer seems possible for others to be infected by it."

We here return, obviously, to the supposedly "hardhearted" contract theory of education, which so often has been proposed, here. To the child who doesn't take advantage of his opportunities for gaining the most out of his required school attendance, we might find ourselves saying: "I am furnishing you with equipment and buying you attractive clothing while you attend school because I want you to be able to enjoy a constructive period in your life, and I have also made it possible for you to have a certain amount of recreation—all of which costs money—because a student who works hard needs some kind of diversion and physical exercise in order to do his best work with his books. But if I do not believe that the money I furnish for these things is being used well, I may feel it my duty to find other and better uses for it. I don't like to make arbitrary standards, but unless you either improve four of your grades next year or average one-half hour's study for each subject every evening except Friday or Saturday, I will not furnish you an allowance for recreation, nor furnish you anything during your school period except the bare minimum which the compulsory education system obligates parents to provide."

Does this sound very formal, or too "mercenary"? It might be both in some respects, but the child will certainly know that such stipulations do not accurately represent the whole of his parent's feeling for him. Also, such rather detached and impersonal contracts may provide a child with a very precious gift—enable him to feel less reminded of obligation and more of a moral equal. There is nothing particularly constructive about encouraging children—or even allowing them—to feel obligated to us, while all manner of fine things may flow from letting the child know how much we appreciate the things they do for us and with us *on their own volition*—and beyond the area of contracts, agreements, *et cetera.*

The questioner states that the "natural rebelliousness" of a child make it "necessary" for parents to become very emphatic at times. We entirely agree on the need for being emphatic with children at times, but we have been discussing the many ways in which human beings *can* become emphatic without insisting that the child feel ashamed of failure to "appreciate his parents" every time he considers doing something in a way that differs from the one which his parents would prefer. If this plan is followed, then "rebelliousness" will perhaps disappear, to be replaced by the sense of integrity and moral independence for which rebelliousness is but an unnatural substitute.

FRONTIERS

Humanized Science

NOT even counting the productions of the food faddists, the books about diet that have appeared during the past ten years probably run into several hundreds, perhaps thousands. There is usually at least one member of every family who is a practicing amateur on the subject of vitamins, amino acids, and the various competing theories about starch-protein-acid-fruit combinations. Meanwhile, the average, more-or-less healthy individual is generally bored by food-fanaticism, or what he thinks is fanaticism being content to eat what is put before him without thinking more about it. Sometimes, there is sound instinct in this feeling, based upon the fact that, quite frequently, the zeal displayed by persons interested in "food" is a special form of materialism. They think so much about what they ought to eat that they seldom think of anything else. A contrasting if somewhat Spartan outlook in this respect would be that it is better to get sick and die than to stay alive by means of an obsessive pursuit of mere "health." Or, to state the case more graciously, health sought as an end in itself is not true health at all.

A sick man, however, or a sick society, may *need* to think about diet. This fact is borne in upon the reader of *Nutrition and the Soil* by Dr. Lionel James Picton, published this year in the United States by Devin-Adair, with an Introduction for American readers by Dr. Jonathan Forman, editor of the *Ohio State Medical Journal.* Dr. Picton is an Englishman who writes from a lifetime of activity in his held. In addition, he is obviously a colorful individual who imparts to his book the flavor of numerous personal experiences. He might be called a family doctor for communities both on and off the land. Best of all, *Nutrition and the Soil* may be read by the normal, anti-diet-fad individual with growing interest, if not excitement, for food, in this volume, is related to broad problems of human welfare.

Dr. Picton associates facts which specialists always leave separate. For example, our Letter from England last week presented a few of the conclusions of the British Royal Commission on Population. The usual fears and speculations concerning the decline in the birth rate are repeated, but nothing is said about the change in the British diet which occurred as a result of use of refined white flour. Vitamin E, sometimes called the "fertility" vitamin, contained in the germ of wheat, is largely eliminated by the steel-roller milling of flour. Dr. Picton illustrates in a graph how the decline in the British birth rate paralleled the introduction of steel-roller milling. He writes:

> The shortage of Vitamin E in the bread of the nation has steadily increased since 1872. From then, and prior to 1882, extraction was 80 per cent, which means that out of 100 tons of wheat, the public got 80 tons. Twenty tons were removed, about two tons of germ and something like eighteen of semolina, bran, and other offal. As the years went by and the milling machinery became more cunning, the extraction figure changed in the same direction. In 1882 it was 79 per cent; in 1883, 78 per cent; in 1884, 77 per cent; in 1885, 76 per cent; in 1886, 75 per cent; in 1887, 74 per cent; in 1888, 73 per cent; in 1889, 72 per cent; and from 1890 to 1939 it remained at 72 per cent. Meanwhile, the birth-rate fell concurrently; step by step they went down together. . . . The descent, as will be seen [by the graph], is checked by a flicker of a rise after the first Great War and another during this last. From 1890 to the Great War there was little change in the extraction rate of 72 per cent, but between the wars the birth-rate continued to drop. I am only too aware that in this descent many other factors played a weighty part.

In his introduction to the American edition, Dr. Forman refers to this dramatic evidence of the relationship between milling methods and the decline in fertility in England, and adds further information:

> Our birth-rate in the United States began to fall in 1826 long before effective contraceptive devices were in use. This date coincides almost exactly with the rise of the machine and the consequent 'improvements' in the milling of our flour. The rate has continued to fall in inverse proportion to our mechanization. There is no doubt in my mind that Picton is correct in ascribing much of this decrease to the fact that a once virile people has been denied its vitamin E.

Nutrition and the Soil, however, is much more than a statistical survey big with generalized conclusions. Dr. Picton's story really starts with

the Cheshire County Medical Committee's decision, some ten years ago, to take more seriously its appointed duty "to prevent sickness." Led by Dr. Picton, the Committee began a serious study of the factors of health. The members called upon specialists for advice—Sir Robert McCarrison, a pioneering authority on nutrition, and Sir Albert Howard, the founder of the now world-wide organic gardening movement. The Committee hired a theater, gathered an audience of six hundred people and invited the experts to speak. Sir Albert Howard related the story of his discovery of the secret of healthy, pest-immune plants in India. "My best teachers," he told the audience, "were the peasants of India themselves." Dr. Picton describes the meeting:

> He was holding his audience [many present were farmers] in the Crewe Theatre spellbound, and at the next sentence they "rose at him" with excitement and laughter. It was this: "By 1910 I had learnt a great deal from my new instructors—how to grow healthy crops practically free from disease without any help from mycologists entomologists, bacteriologists, agricultural chemists, statisticians, clearing-houses of information, artificial manures, spraying machines, insecticides, fungicides, germicides, and all the other expensive paraphernalia of the modern experiment station." This was welcome doctrine with a vengeance, but how was he going to justify it? He had "posed to himself" two principles which underlay disease: . . . Insects and fungi are not the cause of the diseases. What they do is attack plants of unsuitable varieties or improperly grown. "Their true role is that of censors for pointing out the crops which are imperfectly nourished and so keeping our agriculture up to the mark. . . ."
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> Sir Albert Howard was an iconoclast. And that night, in the minds of his audience, the images of chemical agriculture and pest control, to whose shrines three generations of farmers have been assiduously directed, lay shattered to fragments.

The next step of the Cheshire Medical Committee was to draft a "Medical Testament"—Dr. Picton wrote it—setting forth the facts of malnutrition in twentieth-century England, and describing its consequences in bad teeth, rickets, nutritional anemia, and constipation. This report presents the evidence collected by Sir Robert McCarrison—also in India—that food and health are directly correlated. From the study of healthy populations in contrast to sickly and puny peoples, the discussion passes to the causes of ill-health as found in adulterated foods and depleted soils. The principle or quality of health-giving foods was found, not in any one diet, but in natural soils enriched by organic wastes, and in natural foods unchanged by elaborate processing techniques

Dr. Picton now launches into a discussion of *why* the compost method of fertilizing the soil produces health-giving food. The explanation seems to lie in the relationship which is established between certain fungus growths and the roots of the plants. The fungus, a mycorrhiza, contributes vitally to the health of the plant. The fungi break down and "digest" the organic material of the surrounding humus, and the fungus threads are in turn "digested" by the plant. As Picton says: "It seems an irresistible conclusion that here we are in the presence of the secret of the entry of complex organic substances, derived from the residues of one generation of living things, into the plants which form the first series of the next generation." He calls this cycle, appropriately, the "Wheel of Life."

This book contains science for human beings, not for specialists. It has the rich variety which a man of wide experience can contribute to the subject he is most interested in; not only the chemistry of soils is discussed, but the good taste of foods is an important consideration for Dr. Picton. He is not above supplying a recipe or two, and gives cooks numerous practical hints gleaned from the customs of many peoples. One gets the impression that this book will some day be looked upon as representing a milestone of progress in agriculture and health.