

## DIALOGUE ON FAITH

THE nineteenth-century argument between Science and Religion was a dramatic affair, filled with the rhetoric of both heaven and earth, even though it failed to reach any important conclusion. Science won, for the reason that the argument was not about religion at all, but about a miscellaneous collection of pseudo-facts for which religionists had made the mistake of claiming a divine authority. The Christian participants in this debate started out with a weak position, in the first place, for they made their religion depend too much upon the authenticity of certain historical events, and not enough upon the realities of human psychology. Successful religion is always psychological religion, and a useful argument about religion must always relate to the great psychological problems of human life. So, the nineteenth-century argument, while making "good copy" for the writers of books and articles, settled no great question, and deepened no one's understanding. All that it accomplished was a weakening of the hold of the churches on the educated portion of mankind.

What may be regarded as a much more important argument is now going on among the believers in Christianity themselves—between the "liberal" Christians and those who accept "classical" Christianity. For the purposes of this discussion, the "liberals" are those who would be called simply "humanists," save for their habitual use of the Christian vocabulary. They honor and reverence Jesus, the Great Exemplar of the Christian way of life. They regard the Sermon on the Mount as the highest possible ethical expression. They try to practice the Christian virtues. They will not discuss theology; they dislike theology as a dull and needless discipline which is too often used as an excuse for failing to *practice* Christianity. They "believe in God"—who doesn't? they say to themselves—but the quality of this belief is very similar to the secular

philanthropist's belief in political "liberalism"—a pious mental habit. They're not at all sure about Jesus being the "Son of God," and very sure that this touchy question need not be settled in order to be a good Christian. Many of them are inclined to think that belief in a *personal* God is an antiquated form of faith which might best be forgotten. In short, the liberal Christian's credo is a religion which has come to terms of compromise and adjustment with the modern world of progress and scientific knowledge. To do it justice, it is also a credo which advocates social responsibility. Liberal Christians of this description are often found at the forefront of the battle for racial equality and for economic justice. Many of them have been vigorous campaigners for morality in international affairs, as well as active workers for peace, in or out of the pacifist movement.

Probably the clearest and most serious recent criticism of "liberal Christianity" is to be found in Theodore O. Wedel's *The Christianity of Main Street* (Macmillan, 1950). Basically, Dr. Wedel's thesis is that Humanism, Christian or otherwise, is not enough. Classical Christianity, he says, maintains that Jesus was more than a "good man"—more, even, than the best of men. Jesus, as the Christ, is God in action. The coming to earth of the Son of God is the one great fact which the Christian revelation has to disclose. As Dr. Wedel puts it:

The Bible . . . can be read in two ways. It is story. It is drama. All depends upon who is identified as chief actor. Read the story with one identification in mind and it becomes a history of religious man, Jesus its final master and hero. But another identification is possible. The Bible—and again the biography of Jesus will be at its center—may be a drama with God and not man as the chief actor. This is what traditional Christian faith, both Catholic and Protestant, has seen in the Bible for eighteen hundred years. The clue to an understanding of the Christianity of faith and creed is

the reading of the story on which Christianity is founded as a drama about God.

Dr. Wedel is not really arguing about whether "classical" Christianity is "true" or not. He is interested in showing what religion must be about in order to have a genuine effect in and upon the lives of human beings. Religion, he is saying, has to concern itself with *primary reality*. The drama of the crucifixion—through which atonement is accomplished and salvation offered for all mankind—is either an ultimate reality for the life of every human being, or it is only a fragment of dubious historical tradition. If Jesus was in fact God, and if the Nicene Creed speaks truly in saying that he, "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven," then the belief declared by the follower of Christianity is a declaration of his constant touch with the very heart of all that is real in existence. He may be a creature of God in Christ, but he is no longer a creature of history, as the secularist gospel teaches.

Interestingly enough, the central point of Dr. Wedel's criticism of the "liberal" Christian outlook—and this use of the term "liberal" is ours, not his—is practically identical with Dwight Macdonald's indictment of the "progressive" in politics: Both are utopians whose grandiose schemes for the betterment of mankind are to obtain realization, not now, but tomorrow, after great *new* reforms are inaugurated, or after the *next* war or revolution. In the Christianity of Main Street, utopian ideals have *become God*. Dr. Wedel writes lucidly on this point:

A Christianity of "ideals in place of God" is no longer a Christianity with a right to its once hallowed name. The honesty of the secularist is to his credit. Only when Christianity can step forth again as a clear rival will the secularist regain respect for it. He will at least cease to think of it as a mere sentimental version of his own more mature and more realistic faith.

The dilemma which radical secularism poses to Christianity is inescapable. We shall either have to accept the result of the secularist's logic or rebuild our foundations. Christianity without God is a contradiction in terms.

What happens when ideals become God? . . . A religion of ideals looks alluring. Banished now is the two-storied universe of the older faiths of mankind. There is no hell no bar to heaven, no eternal realm standing in judgment over earthly life. Man now lives in a one-story universe. And in this universe man has become his own god. . . .

A worship of the future is a logical consequence of a worship of ideals. The present is plainly not yet a garden of Eden. Hence perfection must lie somewhere along the road ahead. This idealized future even assumes aspects of deity—a deity who demands blood sacrifice. A thousand mortal generations may be required to produce a coming mortal generation of social perfection! Those who yield to the lure of the gospel of human progress seem to blind themselves to the astounding cruelty of such a faith. Yet, despite atom bombs, it still wins converts in our modern world.

There is pith and substance in Dr. Wedel's argument. It has the confirmation of history as well as an appeal to the intuition—to that sense of the immediacy of individual human need. A philosophy which finds fulfillment only in history—future history, and of some other people who are not ourselves, is no philosophy at all, but merely a justification for some sort of glorified eugenics program, in which the intermediate stages are always written off as mere preparations for the future. But *we* are involved in those "preparations," and *we* don't want to be thrown back into the button-moulder's pot. We, too, are human beings with lives to live, hopes to cherish, and souls in anguish. Why should we submit to being used to fertilize the soil of tomorrow's progress—a tomorrow, moreover, which never seems to dawn?

Here lies the force of the classical Christian's argument, but here, also, its force is spent. For what is the price of this orthodoxy Dr. Wedel would have us adopt? He writes:

Classical Christianity is meaningless except as a religion of salvation for those of broken pride. It is for sinners, and not for the self-righteous. It makes no sense to autonomous man. Hence, from its beginnings until now, its first task has always been that of smashing man's self-trust and turning him into a seeker for salvation outside himself. Its first gift is

the gift of bad conscience.... No view of man . . . will make sense of history or of man's own experience of himself unless even autonomous man at his best surrenders his autonomy to God. To woo him to such surrender is the purpose behind the majestic drama of God's self-revelation recorded in the Bible.

. . . contemporary history, with all its technological triumphs, is discovering that a very thin crust protects civilization from barbarism. Godlike man turned into a beast? We have seen it happen within our generation.

*The Christianity of Main Street* has the virtue of being a forthrightly honest book. It also has a certain psychological acuteness in its appreciation of the enormous difference between religion which professes to solve the ultimate problems and religion which is simply warmhearted naturalism. But, in positive terms, Dr. Wedel conducts us only to the pre-Renaissance faith of the Middle Ages, a faith to which both the philosophical and the pragmatic criticisms of the humanists and philosopher-scientists still apply.

Because we have not yet found salvation within ourselves, need we conclude that it exists only *outside* ourselves? Must a man who suffers from broken pride also become a broken man, in order to know the truth?

It is possible to accept Dr. Wedel's psychological argument, while rejecting altogether his theological position. Why not pantheism, instead of theism? Why not a dual moral nature inside man, instead of the twin Manichean deities of God and Devil outside him? A man can lose his false pride and at the same time gain true dignity as himself a creative being.

The classical Christian calls the present epoch of history to witness to the truths of revealed religion. See what happens, he urges, when these truths are abandoned. But he says nothing about what caused men to abandon them. We have also been through a long epoch of acceptance of revealed religion, and when the modern historian needs analogies to characterize the tyranny and cruelty of totalitarianism, he finds what he is looking for in that epoch of unquestioning faith—

in the crimes of the Inquisition, and in the tortures, executions and "purges" of both Catholic and Protestant Christianity.

It is knowledge of ourselves that we need, not theological revelations from the past, nor political revolutions for the future. *Which* Revelation coming from outside ourselves should we accept? They are many. And if we employ our best judgment in finding the true teachings of religion, we at once become our own "revealers"—and the truth is no longer something from outside, but our own. It is our own in the sense that humanity, throughout its long history, is *one*, and the heritage of religious philosophy which belongs to the race belongs to us all, to rediscover and to make our own, as we pursue truth. And this finding of the truth must be also a way of becoming the truth, becoming even in some sense a Christ. The story of the Christ is indeed a drama, but a drama in which every man, for his own salvation, is cast in the leading role. We are not only spectators to life: we are in it. There is a potential Christ, a potential Buddha, a potential savior in every man. To say less than this is to belie the dignity of man; and it is only to say what we know to be true—that we are living, responsible beings in a world of our own making, and a world that must be of our own saving, as well.

## *Letter from* **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—With Britain proposing to spend approximately £1,400,000,000 on rearmament in the next three years, not to mention the prodigious sums of money allocated to the same purpose by other countries, it is inevitable that questions should arise as to the efficiency of the United Nations in preventing the drift towards another world war. Apart from the joint action of the democratic countries in resisting declared aggression in Korea, can it be said that there is any fundamental ideal other than commercial advantage or political prestige actuating any nation in its relationship to other countries? How can a lasting union of nations be secured, so long as a single country, or group of Powers, bases its international relationships upon self-interest within the larger framework of armed security?

The amazing thing about present public discussions is the persistent belief that war settles a dispute, and that peace is merely a state of affairs in which we can satisfy our material desires without danger of interruption by military attack. Nothing in the history of mankind justifies the entertainment of these illusions. The wars of the preceding centuries in the Occident and Orient have only added two new battlefields to those already made familiar, namely, the sky and the ether. And the "peaceful" pursuit of science and art has ended in a philosophy such as that enunciated by Professor Nicholas J. Spykman in *America's Strategy in World Politics*: "The search for power is not made for the achievement of moral values; moral values are used to facilitate the attainment of power." Meanwhile, there are plenty of warnings as to the new destructive agencies, free of all "moral taint," whether in discovery or possible use. Lord Boyd Orr FRS has suggested that atomic bombs are out-of-date, and Professor E. S. Shire (Reader in Nuclear Physics at Cambridge University) told a Liberal Party summer school about the possibility of radio-active substances laid in an invisible film on the ground, which would make it impossible for people to live in the affected area for several months. A still more dangerous possibility

was the circulation of radio-active poison in the air in the form of dust. Why make these things at all, if our professions are peaceful?

Having eliminated the human element, both physically and morally, in this age of technological warfare, we are left only with man's intellectual ingenuity, most often bent upon the satisfaction of destructive appetites, with no basis for an idealistic approach. Because man has not understood his own nature, he has failed to realize the perversions of idealistic thought of which he is capable. Prometheus brought him the gift of fire, and it has made him lord of the world. But all that he has demonstrated so far in this particular field of discussion is indicated by Major-General J. F. C. Fuller in *Armaments and History* (1946): "It is possible to have all manner of societies—theocratic, atheistic, plutocratic, communistic, democratic, autocratic, etc., but, so far, it has not been found possible to have a warless society."

Let us be clear about one thing at least. There is no moral equivalent for war, as William James so fondly supposed. "War is not a nursery of morals," wrote Canon W. L. Grane in *War: its Curse and Care* (1935), "but rather of violence and deceit. The soldier gifted with nobleness will doubtless show it on the field of battle, but had he waited for war to make him noble he would not have achieved it."

The truth, perhaps, is that, as in the case of the old Gods, we have made both war and peace (as we understand these words) in our own intellectual images. We argue about these idols of our own creation, and when dire disaster overtakes us, we blame the new reflections of our ignorance, instead of ourselves. Manifestly, a mental and moral revolution is needed, one that will disclose the law of our own being.

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## REVIEW

### "THE PROUD AND THE FREE"

HOWARD FAST has long held a fiery regard for heroism, digging for it in all manner of unlikely places, as well as in those locations suggested by our traditional lore of American patriotism. The period of the American revolution has been his special field, but whatever the men and epoch selected—he has written also of the earliest Biblical revolt, and of the rebellious flight of reservation Cheyennes, as portrayed in *The Last Frontier*—he is always searching for and finding the hearts of men who lived enough beyond fears and purely personal ambitions to become legendary.

Fast has done a series of children's stories on famous American Revolution characters, raising from obscurity such characters as Haym Salomon, who kept the starving Continentals alive at Valley Forge by financial wizardry and the sacrifice of his own wealth. One gradually comes to see the manner of man one has to be to earn Fast's regard, and his heroes are usually worthy ones. It may be that he often simply repeats historic shibboleths in an arresting manner, when writing "juveniles," but he seems to bring a special understanding to patriotic fervor—helping us understand why our hearts keep on approving many of our hero legends. And this may be better for us than hypercriticism of personal foibles in famous historical characters.

*The Proud and the Free* is Fast's latest book (Little Brown & Co., 1950). In this volume we may observe the maturation of another central trend in Fast's behind-the-scenes accounts of triumphant historical events. This latter theme we might entitle "The Work Undone," for while many revolutionary heroes are given a triumphant salute, Fast never lets us forget that the American revolution was imperfect and incomplete. This insistence, perhaps, has added to the rumor of Fast's identification with Marxism and Communism, and *The Proud and the Free* is a good example of how he becomes vulnerable to the charge. It is the story of the men of the Pennsylvania Line, who revolted against the "officer-gentry" in the hope of turning the revolution against class distinctions as well as against the British. (Fast has

now apparently weathered storms of communist-sympathy attacks and emerged with a sufficiently respectable reputation to secure prominent library displays of his books, which are also on high school supplementary reading lists.)

For our own part, Fast's biographical novel on George Washington has always seemed sufficient clearance of the charge that orthodox communist doctrine was dictating each motion of the author's pen. Fast's Washington (*The Unvanquished*, Duell, Sloan & Pearce), is as much a hero as anyone else's Washington, despite his "political conservatism," and is not denounced because of his break with Thomas Paine. So far as this book is concerned, Fast might more logically be accused of letting the "great man theory" of history run away with him than of developing doctrines of economic determinism and necessary class warfare. A concluding passage in *The Unvanquished* illustrates this point and is also a sample of the tone of inspiring admiration so characteristic of his children's books. At times Fast has seemed frightened at the wild beating of his own heart when heroism is the topic, and insists, therefore, on making his characters "earthy"; the earthiness was almost done to death in *Citizen Tom Paine*, yet in the story of Washington, beginning similarly, there is a final transcendence of all petty faults and weaknesses. And somehow this has been more impressive to many readers than conventional encomiums on The Father of Our Country. Fast's heroes always *become*:

The man who had set out across the Delaware as a Virginia farmer, as a foxhunter, became on the other shore something else, a man of incredible stature, a human being in some ways more godly and more wonderful than any other who has walked on this earth. For he became, as no other man in history, the father of a nation that was to be peopled by the wretched and the oppressed of every land on earth. As simple, as burnished as this sounds, it is no use to plead otherwise; the stamp of George Washington is indelibly and forever set upon America—and for the good. All the debunking in the world cannot change the facts of his wonderful simplicity, his complete unselfishness, his humble respect for those who had asked him to leave his home and fight a revolution. Given power, he spurned it, thereby giving to America for all time the ideal of leaders who serve a

people but do not rule them. And whether this ideal is forgotten at times or not, it is there, stamped in the soul of a nation.

*The Proud and the Free* may be taken as a reminder of the extent to which the American dream has so far escaped fulfillment. Jamie Stuart fought to free his country from the British, but he also fought against the injustices and arrogance of an officer-gentleman caste still too close to its roots in the old-world privilege system.

Stuart returns from his years in the tattered foreign brigade of Pennsylvania. He and the Committee of Sergeants who overturned the staff of General Anthony Wayne had won the right to revolt against injustice. But once home, Stuart became a philosopher. Despite his joy at an end to the suffering of soldiering, that hope of the new life which the revolution engendered in men kept creeping back into his mind. At first, he thought that he was simply against all those who exercise the tyranny of wealth and position. But eventually he saw that a crucial point in an epic struggle had been reached in the war for independence. His own struggle and that of his almost-hated-generals became identified in an Odyssey of momentous import. So back Stuart went, finally, to fight for the imperfect revolution which was better than none, because he knew that those who had placed their lives on this particular historical altar had somehow been ennobled, whatever their original motivations or weaknesses. These are the reflections which brought him back from security to re-enlistment:

What are you doing here, Jamie Stuart? What are you doing here with this fat shopkeeper, in this fat and contented town, living with a pastor who will patiently convert you to God again? What are you doing here, Jamie Stuart? I asked myself, remembering the worst of times I had known—and the worst of them were not like this, not like this in this place, where the Roman was hated and the Jew maligned and the black man considered an ape from dark Africa. Yes, standing there in the cobbler's house, I felt that my soul was shriveling up within me, and all the goodness and greatness that had been mine once when I marched in the companionship of Revolution was plain to me now and made plain too late; and as my heart had never hungered for

anything, so did it hunger for the ugly little men of the brigades who were my comrades.

We have used these few lines to indicate that Fast has a subtle talent for finding some real strength and courage in the midst of frailties and discouragements. (*Freedom Road*, a story of the carpet-bag South, and *The American*, the story of Governor Altgeld of Illinois, are similar examples.) If it is true that we need more heroes, it is also true that we need others to recognize them when they live and when they die, and to show us that all such represent some indomitable part of ourselves which will never mind how many obstacles are encountered so long as integrity and freedom can still be recognized as ultimate goals.

"The Work Undone," of which Fast continually writes—like the failure to abolish slavery, for which Tom Paine pleaded at the time of the Constitutional Convention, and the gross injustices to the American Indians—is still with us. It haunted us after Versailles, just as it haunted us after the Civil War. It haunts us now in Germany and Japan. Fast's "message," so far as we are concerned, is that there are always some men to carry the task of creating freedom a little further, and that it might be worthwhile to be among them. This, however, is not a political struggle, but a moral one. To the extent Fast senses this, we honor him.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **PUTTY AND PAINT**

THE putty-and-paint method of hiding defects described by Grace Clements (Frontiers) is by no means limited to the building trades. We have a putty-and-paint treatment to cover over the blemishes in nearly every department of modern life. When we allow conscientious scholars to be discharged from educational posts they have filled for years, we varnish this decision by invoking "national security." When we prolong the Selective Service Act until it amounts to adopting the European system of universal and permanent conscription, we say that this is the only "democratic" way to build an army. And when school libraries suppress publications which dare to discuss the sociological content of a powerful religious institution, we try to hide this attack on the freedom of the press by claiming that the sacred beliefs of the young must be shielded.

Our piety and righteousness are truly amazing—no mere paint, but a shining enamel. One wonders why a people so thoroughly committed to virtue, regardless of the discomforts and inconveniences it may involve, can nevertheless be burdened with so many unwieldy problems and exasperating difficulties.

It is a question of responsibility, of course. The carpenter of Miss Clements' analysis will have to go against the prevailing definition of responsibility if he starts to think more about building a good house than he does about the rules of his union and his "rights" as a craftsman. What happens, in fact, to anyone in our society who declares that his primary loyalty is to his *work*? The teacher who tries to be impartial, the doctor who disapproves certain orthodox measures, the civil servant who rejects political tests, the farmer who will not join the producer's "co-op"—what happens to these who buck their "system" for conscientious reasons?

All these inequities represent the misuse of power, gained on behalf of the Right, and

exercised in the name of the Right. Yet the Right is not in them, probably never was, and the time will come when paint and putty can no longer cover them up. And then we shall have to decide, once again, the relationship between coercive Power and Righteousness. That will be a time of revolution, but the revolution will be successful only if we determine that Righteousness can neither be served nor compelled by any outside power. Meanwhile, the evidence of power's corruption of responsibility lies all about.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

IT would be more than a slight irresponsibility to evade discussion of the proposed military draft for eighteen-year-olds, for this is a subject which penetrates the lives of millions of young men. Lowering the draft-age, moreover, will profoundly affect the relationship of all high school students to their homes, potential occupations, and their schooling.

An AP dispatch from Washington in the Los Angeles *Times* (Jan. 25) features the sharp opposition offered to the defense department's proposal by the National Education Association. The NEA spokesman, Ralph McDonald, told the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee that "the plan, if carried into effect, would strike at the very heart of our system of education." It is, he said "perhaps the most profound and revolutionary proposal respecting higher education in the United States that has been presented since the birth of the nation."

The AP dispatch also reports Mr. McDonald as saying that an extension for drafted service from twenty-one to twenty-seven months "would force many colleges and universities to close their doors." But this, as we see it, is not the issue, and it seems a good idea to protest discussion of the problem on this basis. Whether or not numerous colleges and universities actually would be "forced to close their doors" is not a matter of great concern, but the tremendous upsurge of war psychology fostered by this proposal guarantees that fewer and fewer youths will have the opportunity to think through any of the social or political issues involved in the present Theory of Unavoidable Warfare. We have in mind, too, the percipient comment of a seventeen-year-old recalcitrant to "atom bomb drills," to the effect that if *he* were running the army, he would certainly want to draft kids too young to learn how to do any thinking for themselves. Army routines and policies would then function more

smoothly. Here, it seems, we are getting close to the heart of the matter, so far as its all-important psychological elements are concerned. It is one thing to decide, in some semblance of democratic manner, that a universal process of war-conditioning of the young should be engendered by the adult population, and quite another to deny youngsters even some slight opportunity to form critical opinions before that system of conditioning is made to engulf them.

The Los Angeles city school system recently instituted frequent "bomb drills," during which each student is required to fall upon the floor with arms locked over his face and head. Almost any candid psychiatrist, we should think, could tell school-board officials a great deal about the lasting effects of such an intrusion into the impressionable consciousness of the young. It is a means, whether designedly or not, to make nearly everyone in high school think war, feel war, and believe in war. Apparently, all-out psychological mobilization has already begun, and gathers momentum with each day and each new proposal for action in response to "the seriousness of our present emergency."

There are interesting signs of resistance, though these are not likely to make any of the papers. Some of the youngsters in Los Angeles, we understand, have refused to capitulate to the ritualistic motions of bomb-drill, and have tried to organize a protest to the requirement. How sixteen-, seventeen-, and eighteen-year-olds manage to do it we cannot say, yet some instinct for preservation of the integrity of independent thought can apparently arise even at these tender years. We have seen two letters of protest against the A-bomb drills, one of which remarks that "the very word 'drop' is a fear slogan, suggesting alarm and creating hysteria. This caused me to wonder if such drills are really doing more harm by building up fear." The other letter strikes a different note: "It appears that students actually begin to look forward to the drills. They naturally increase the desire for a time to put the drills into



use. . . ." Somebody, at any rate, is *thinking* about the implications of regular bomb drills.

Other signs are less encouraging. Some students report a slackening of interest in school work, accompanied by the repressed excitement which is somewhat natural to young persons who feel they may as well start moving in the direction they will have to go some day soon. What is the use of planning vocations or choosing courses for college study when the potent machinery of the National Will is getting itself ready to pick you off a conveyor belt? It might give potential draftees a fairer chance for thoughtful probing, incidentally, if the "drop" system of preparedness for bombing raids were instituted only in our universities, and younger students left free from such psychological manipulations. However, it is unlikely that universities will follow such a procedure, since it is difficult to picture veterans of World War II responding with the proper attitude.

Take a look at nearly any page of nearly any newspaper and you will feel the breath of war propaganda blowing in your face from multitudinous directions. The *Times* item, for instance, is accompanied by a layout giving considerable space to conferences of the Mayor with the newly appointed Director of Civil Defense, while a smaller article admires the streamlined approach to getting inductees into camp.

There is one sort of fault to be found with every tendency in this direction, regardless of political or international convictions. The thing that can and must be opposed is the movement to obliterate the area of decision in individual lives by the din of deliberately repeated propaganda. War is made inevitable precisely when there are enough people in the world who think it to be so. Peace is impossible unless there are enough people who think it possible, who believe that others want it, too. When we take away the natural hopefulness men may feel—that the world can yet avert fratricide—we have insured war's coming.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **The Lost Art of Artisanship**

WHAT is a house? Among the term's several usages, the one most familiar to us is a place of human habitation—a home. What is a home? Is it not the dwelling place of that most pivotal and vital institution, the family? A house, then, is a very important thing. Properly speaking, it should be regarded as a sacred thing; for just as the body houses the spirit of man, so the home houses the family body and hence the subtle nuances which result from the relationship of its members. It is logical, therefore, and humanly normal, for man to dream dreams of the home he feels suitable for this function, and to seek realization of the dream. To be sure, this basic instinct has been atrophied in modern times, due to the economy in which we live, wherein only a small percentage of individuals can ever hope to own their own homes. A majority are doomed to flats, apartments or rentals of some sort.

But what of those who have the means to build? How near can they come to realizing their dreams? Until recently, personal knowledge of this question had been confined to observation and hearsay. It seemed that scarcely any one of whom I knew, who either built or remodeled a home, was ultimately satisfied with the end product. At the very least there was endless agony experienced during the procedure itself. Somehow the grief and disappointments came to be regarded as a necessary and inescapable evil of building. But to understand why this was so remained in the realm of conjecture until I myself became one of the active dreamers. I bought a house, with the intention of altering it to suit my conception of the home I wanted. The ensuing heartaches came with such insistent rapidity that it took a while to penetrate the surface of individual catastrophes and find the common denominator which linked me with all who have similarly faced this relationship with members of the building trades.

It is certain that my experience is not unique. How many have accepted blueprints which, when put into wood and concrete, end up by being something unexpected? How many compromises along the way; how many mistakes which cannot be undone, how many errors to be covered up? Helplessly, we stand by while the idea and the ideal is mutilated. Unquestionably this is the highest cost of building: the murder of the idea.

On the material level there is also an exorbitant price. The basis of this cost is labor and material (plus a percentage for the profit of the contractor or builder). Labor is merely an aggregate of individual workers. Who are these men who move in with hammers, saws and trowels, to fabricate our dreams? Are they concerned with those dreams, or only with their jobs which net a paycheck each Friday? Have they any kinship with our ancestor-craftsmen (whose product is often found in our museums as art)? Do they know the love of materials and the proper use of tools which yielded such high reward in past ages? Rather, does not the result of their work indicate, in most instances, a grievous lack of these basic requisites of the artisan? This is America, streamlined and efficient, operating on an economy of waste. There is no time to pick up a nail; there is even no reason not to let a whole keg of nails stand in the rain and rust. There are more nails where those came from. What is lumber, beautiful wood taken from the forests? Before it has left the lumber yard it is already marred by careless handling. By the time the carpenters get through walking on it, throwing it in piles, sawing off a bit of this and leaving the rest lie, a good percentage is lost to everything but firewood.

This devil-may-care attitude extends to every detail in the multiple steps of building procedure. Surely it is proven over and over that "haste makes waste." The gaps are to be filled in by the next fellow. Putty and plastic wood cover a multitude of sins. Ultimately it is the painter who

is expected to conceal the blemishes and the ignorances of those who have come before him.

There is, then, no real sense of responsibility for what these builders do, since "passing the buck" has come into such wide usage.

The building trades are well known for their conservatism, but there is a grotesque distortion of its meaning which has robbed most of the fraternity of self-reliance. Lost is the art of confronting a problem with fresh eyes and an alert mind. If it can't be done "the way it's always been done" (that is, "the way I learned it"), then only the most insistent prodding by the home-building dreamer can hope to overcome this slothfulness. Is it not paradoxical that conservation of materials is a forgotten concept, while a tradition of methods, the whys and wherefores of which are often lost or were never known, is blindly conserved?

The carpenter, the bricklayer, the plasterer, the electrician, the plumber—who among them knows real responsibility today? Like the factory worker, like most other artisans, responsibility for the end-product has been taken away from him. In the building trades, where individual action is still possible, no one can be sure, when starting a job, that he will also help finish it. For one reason or another he may be laid off, but he has merely to check in at the hiring hall and sooner or later get called for another job. The exception is the individual sub-contractor, for often he is self-employed. But alas, he too is caught in the system. It is a rare exception when he is able to perform his part unhampered by what has gone before; perhaps more rare, that he desires to do it better than average.

Wherein lies the blame for all this? Myriad explanations can be put forward, but it is evading the issue to excuse the individual's omissions on the ground that he is a victim of a vast and anonymous System. Who else but the individual is ultimately responsible? When we have forgotten to *love* that which we do, when we have forgotten that the artist is not a special kind of

man, but that every man is a special kind of artist, we have forgotten *who we are*. Meanwhile, whether it be peace, or a house, or a good life, we who dream of building will continue to be thwarted and disillusioned so long as those in whose hands lies the task of fabrication suppose that accounts need be kept only with the system, and not with themselves. For all of us who have forgotten our arts, life gives in return for what is given. There are no shortcuts.

Richmond, California

GRACE CLEMENTS

## *Has it Occurred to Us?*

AMONG our solemn, frightened, giddy, sad, and futile contemporaries, how often do we meet that simple yet miraculous thing—a sense of humor? And where is the laughter of childhood gone? Today's children are accustomed to terrors that reduce Red Riding Hood's wolf to a playful pussy. They deal with mechanical horrors of a magnitude utterly remarkable for sheer cruelty of imagination and diabolic inventiveness. But their gaiety, like that of their elders, is forced, fast, and almost uncomfortable. Is there nothing genuinely amusing any more? Have all of life's situations become merely material for radio quips?

Has it occurred to us to miss that engaging commoner, that familiar rarity—the sense of humor? How long since we have been struck by merriment, touched to the roots of our being by a delicious example of man's wholly unconscious role in a comedy of errors? How long since we have been moved to laughter, or at least permitted ourselves an inner smile, at some ridiculous over-seriousness of our own? A sense of humor is the one sure armor against all attacks upon our presence of mind. It is the impregnable defense, because it never attacks.

Think of all the daily assaults upon our dignity, our pride, our self-esteem. Think of how our plans are thwarted, hopes dashed, our fondest dreams collapsed by circumstances. Not alone our own disappointments, but similar unhappy encounters with perversity suffered by other members of the family, to which we are duly treated at the day's weary end. Has an impalpable blight, unbeknownst to us all, spread itself between us and some other sun of happiness, peace, and goodwill?

There seems to be no substitute for a sense of humor, but have we lost it? Where are we going to look for it? To whom shall we turn? Who has it, and may we borrow it? Who lost it, and how? But it may be that *other people's* sense of humor only annoys us, mystifies us, or makes us envious.

Shall we begin, then, by trying to rediscover or restore our own? What strikes us as funny? Anything unnatural, uncalled-for, unexpected—so long as the matter is not, as we say, serious—is likely to tickle our funny bone. But if someone else's discomfiture amuses us more than our own, we know that our sense of humor is "missing" on most of its cylinders. Besides, the important uses of a sense of humor are, precisely, for serious matters. Minor misfortunes may suffice to keep the faculty in good working order, but unless we can depend upon it in actual emergencies, we are left with but meagre engine power.

Nothing is funny about tragedy or bitterness or intense disappointment, but there is something uncalled-for in the attitude that this or another tragedy or disappointment is the end and finish of all and every hope. Fear is not amusing, in the nature of things, yet to be completely walled in by fear is basically alien to human nature. Are we ever so utterly terror-struck as not to be conscious that although we live for the moment in fear, we have also known courage? Which is to say, actually, that something in us is dissociated from the fear possessing all our senses and members, and that that something is able to stand aside and compute the problem of how much "we" are now afraid! And the ever-present frustrations—a cliché expert would point out that even our word for them is humorless. Suppose we called them bafflements, or discumbobulations. Would those terms serve to remind us that, after all, we are not omnipotent deities whose merest wish must instantly be granted, nor yet dread entities whose commands Nature dare not disobey?

We are inescapably aware that our fellows have perforce to endure all manner of setbacks and thwartings. Have we ever known any person completely exempt from the reverses of fate? Is not a sense of humor provided for the express purpose of persuading us that we, too, must expect to be subject to the common lot of alternate sun and shadow? We generally observe that to get "on" one's dignity is an invitation to be

knocked "off" it: when it happens to us, can we honestly be surprised? We know the duration of a fool's paradise: if we forget, and imagine that *this* paradise is inviolate, are we not doubly the fool? We might as well laugh at ourselves, as often as possible, and with others—when they remind us of ourselves.

Assaults on our self-esteem—what would we do without them? Blows to our pride—is it not the pride, rather than ourselves, that is "hurt"? Must it not be a kind fate which exposes rickety hopes and thin dreams? Hope itself we need never despair of. Adversity simply winnows the fruitless wishes from the fully-matured gram.

Has it occurred to us that a sense of humor will tend to make us expect the unexpected, and that somewhere inside we can smile at all external Contraries which try to outwit the irresistible ingenuity of the human mind? Obstacles do not immobilize us in any real sense, else we would not have enough independence of spirit to recognize them as interruptions. We who experience setbacks have a magnificent power of recovery—do we not immediately re-scheme, re-plan, re-organize? A sense of humor, which may seem at first glance to be a consciousness of our own minority as compared with the universe as a whole, is also—and more significantly—a sense of our inherent dignity and resourcefulness. With a sense of humor we can maintain a proper pride. We can depend upon it that no spurious self-esteem can survive the deep currents of life, but the rapids are the very place in which to realize—with the "sixth sense" of humor—that we are indestructible, that our foibles (and if they are *ours*, they are only foibles!) are not ourselves, and so, good riddance to them. It takes courage to regard ourselves with the wise smile we customarily display at the expense of others. Yet in the Olympian game of human life, courage may be the only crown worth striving for, and who knows if courage may not be simply an ever-present twinkle in the eye?