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ALONZO IN ALASKA

THAT was one Congressional investigation I really enjoyed. It didn't do any good, of course; but then it didn't do any bad, either. It was a circus, and I was in the middle of it, all the time. Of course, the middle of it was really Alonzo. They're still trying to figure him out, and the big kick in trying to figure out Alonzo is that you have to get his permission if you want to try it.

The FBI and the Secret Service told the senators they better stay away from Alonzo's place unless he was willing to have them come. They said that they had things pretty well under control, with Alonzo willing to stay out of circulation, up here in Alaska, ninety miles from Anchorage, where nobody ever comes around except maybe an Indian or a prospector. They wanted Alonzo to keep on "cooperating," they said, and they didn't want the senators to do anything to annoy him.

(Of course, the dumb FBI doesn't know that Alonzo never gets annoyed. They don't really know anything about him at all, and it frightens them. When Alonzo said he would like to have a place in Alaska where he could work on problems of mental health, and have a few patients to help him, the National Committee on Security was tickled to death. They even gave him some of their mad tax money to build the place. Anything to keep him happy and out of the way, they said. People will forget about him after a while, they said.)

This investigation thing began with that story in *Wisdom*. Once in a while *Wisdom* runs a story that is meant to keep you guessing. If you ask me, a magazine named *Wisdom* ought to make *all* its stories like that—as if it had Socrates for editor—but that's probably too much to expect. Anyhow, *Wisdom* did this round-up story on Alonzo that gave all the security wheels the jitters—you know, how Alonzo is the man nobody can make do anything, although he'll cooperate if he likes the idea. What frightens people about Alonzo is that you can't hurt him. The bullets just go around him. You can't even get close to him unless he lets you. That's kind of a hard thing to keep quiet, these days. After all, suppose there were a lot of people like Alonzo, and they decided to take things over! Nobody could stop them. Alonzo never has any interest in taking anything over. He's told them that. He's told them that all he wants is to be let alone. He doesn't want to start a revolution or do anything that'll get in anybody's way, so long as he can run a little school or work with people who need help or need it so bad they'll take it. But being the kind of guy he is, whatever he does scares the officials. You see, *you have to trust Alonzo.* You don't have a choice. And those fellows who worry about security aren't able to trust anybody. Alonzo says they're sick, and he guesses that people who are sick in that way have to do some kind of work, and the only job fitted for their talents is to go around distrusting *everybody.* Of course, nearly everyone has got some of that kind of sickness, but the security people have got it bad.

It's hard to explain how public officials feel about Alonzo. Suppose you were a general in the army, and in charge of national defense, or suppose you were just a police commissioner in some big city: here is a man who is some kind of blend of Jesus Christ and Superman. Can you imagine that? What would you do? He doesn't look like anything special, and he doesn't make speeches or anything like that, but you just can't get to him. He'll talk to you, but he won't explain what he's got that the rest of us haven't got. Says he doesn't know, and isn't much interested.

The closest I ever got to worming something out of Alonzo about himself was when he told me he was strictly illegal—that he was kind of walking proof that the great religions are all true, but that if people had to *accept* that proof before they had grown up to the idea, it would drive them crazy. He had to be careful, he said. Things were bad enough, he said, without a lot of premature religious faith. He has the idea that Jesus could have stopped the Romans from crucifying him if he'd wanted to, but that this would have mixed people up even worse than they are. Then they'd try to be good just to be like Jesus, he said, and that's no good. A man ought not to be good to be like somebody else. He's got to think enough of himself to want to be good to be like himself.

When Alonzo told me this, I asked him, "Well, why don't you go away?"

"Maybe I will," he said, "but I want to try a couple of things first."

This place in Alaska is one of the things he wanted to try. That's where I come in. When I met Alonzo I just didn't give a damn. I won't tell you what happened to me. It's happened to a lot of other guys, in different ways, but with me it made me not give a damn about anything. Alonzo looked at me funny when I told him that. "You're pretty nearly grown up," he said. "Nuts," I said. "Okay," he said. "Why don't you stick around?"

So here I am. I stayed, mostly, I guess, because I get a charge out of Alonzo. And I'm still young enough in heart to enjoy seeing what it does to any kind of brass to have to talk nice to Alonzo. He doesn't care how they talk to him; it's something *in them* that makes them talk nice, but they don't like it. I think it's good for what ails them. Alonzo says the trouble with them is they have given part of their life to the system and they've got the system in their blood as a result. Whenever the system slips a cog, they die a little. He feels sorry for them, I guess. I try to feel sorry for them, too, but a lot of the time I don't quite make it.

Well, as I was saying, *Wisdom* ran that story about Alonzo and those three senators decided they had to know more about him. Alonzo said sure they could come, and could bring the Army psychiatrist they wanted to bring, too. Anything at all. But they'd have to come like anybody else. They couldn't walk around like they had ribbons on their chests. And they couldn't bother the patients with a lot of questions. It was like telling a citizens' committee that wanted to investigate a primary school that the members of the committee would have to start in the first grade like everybody else, and not be able to write home for money, either!

Well, the senators felt a little silly after they agreed to all this and came on up. The jeep brought them out from Anchorage and Alonzo met them in the main lobby and showed them their rooms. After dinner, we sat around and talked some. The senators were dressed up in their "disguises"—some brand new "work clothes"—and a couple of the patients made fun of them.

"Those ain't very good work clothes," Casey said, real serious like.

"What's the matter with them?" said Senator Vipson.

"The wrinkles are all in the wrong places," Casey said.

"What do you mean?" the senator said.

"You ain't done any work in them," Casey said.

Vipson laughed a little.

I don't mean that the senators and the doctor were odd or villainous or anything like that. They were all right. They just didn't have rank any more. The senators didn't have any constituents on our place, and the doctor didn't have any nurses or patients.

"Who are these people?" Senator Angel asked Alonzo.

"Just people," Alonzo said.

"I know," said the senator, "but where do they come from?"

"All over," Alonzo said.

Just then our doctor—Dr. Fanto—came in kind of smiling. "Well," he said to Alonzo. "We saved Andy's foot."

"That's good," said Alonzo. Then he explained to the committee how Andy had been out cutting wood pretty far away, had got lost in the dark and been out all night. His foot got frostbitten and for a while we thought we might have to take it off. It's cold in Alaska.

It was a little early in the game for the psychiatrist to get critical, but he had an honest question. "Don't you have supervision when they go so far?" he asked.

Alonzo said, "Sometimes. But Andy needed to go by himself. Andy's been led around too long," he said. "That's why he's here."

"Did you ever want to climb Mt. Everest?" Alonzo asked Senator Rogers. Rogers was a pretty big guy and he looked like an outdoor type.

"I guess I have," Rogers said. "Of course," he said, "you have to have a real yen for mountain climbing to try for a peak like that. Somebody always gets killed on those expeditions."

"Well," said Alonzo, "you don't think it's silly, do you?"

"Oh no," said Rogers.

"I don't either," said Alonzo. Then he went on. "That woodcutting job on the other side of the mountain was Andy's Everest," he said. "There was a hazard, of course. But we didn't really design it that way. It just happened. There wasn't anybody to send with him, and we needed the wood, or will, tomorrow. Andy figured he'd better go. We didn't *send* him."

"Seems to me you need a tractor and some heavy equipment," said Senator Vipson, looking kind of official and benevolent. And there was that ole' U.S. Treasury, right behind him, with all that dough.

The army psychiatrist was pretty smart. He caught on right away. "No, Senator," he said. "That's not the idea. They don't *want* an appropriation. That would spoil Alonzo's idea."

All Alonzo said was dammit. I said Alonzo never gets annoyed. That's true, but he does get a little frustrated, sometimes. He turned to me. "You see, Joe," he said. "Maybe it's never going to work. We can't get far enough away. *They don't know what it's all about."*

Then he started explaining to the army doctor. "The people here mustn't ever get the idea that we—or you—are letting them play in society's nice, big, wild, back yard. I don't believe that's the way it is, and I don't propose to let anybody else give that impression. That's why I didn't want you to come up here very much. But you wanted to come, and I don't have any right to stop you. In the same way, I don't have any right to stop Andy from cutting wood, if he's decided to cut wood. That's what makes this place *real*—as real as anything in the world." Then he said something funny. "Of course, I don't know how real that is. Do you?"

"Hmm," said the doctor. "If you want to go into philosophy . . . ," he began.

"—when did we get out?" Alonzo asked him.

Then Marie came in. Marie is young and pretty, a real Ophelia type. "Hello, Marie," said Alonzo. Marie had just finished her job in the nursery. I guess the kids had all dropped off to sleep. She came and sat down. "Johnny wants to know if he can have a jeep when he's sixteen," she said to Alonzo. "I didn't know what to tell him."

Marie is fine, except that she doesn't seem to understand time. Maybe she's lucky. Of course, I don't understand time, either. Not really. I mean, after some time has gone by, I never know what it's been for. Everything seems the same, or maybe a little worse. I can stand it all right,

because I don't expect anything from anywhere, or anybody, but most people do. So time is kind of a problem. But it's no problem for Marie.

Marie went off to bed and Alonzo tried to explain about her to the visitors. (That's all they were, now—visitors. The whole thing was way over their heads.) Marie, he said, was living outside of time. She wasn't bothered by past, present, and future the way most of us are. The senators looked sympathetic, but Alonzo wasn't having any sympathy for Marie. "This place," he said, "is like Marie. It's a place where we deliberately get out of time, as much as we can. Marie used to be in time, but something snapped. She couldn't keep up, or I don't know what. Anyhow, Marie is free of the compulsions of time. I guess you'd call it an infantile regression, or something like that, wouldn't you, doctor?"

The psychiatrist said, "Uhhm."

"Of course," said Alonzo, "I'm not going to try to tell you that Marie has gained anything by being like this, but think about it a while. Most of the people out in the world are captives of time. That is, they are whip-lashed around by the things which have their only real existence in time. You're worried about another war; the doctor, here, is worried about the next generation of draftees, and how the number of medical rejections will stack up against past figures. You all have a tremendous stake in what happens in time—during the next few months, the next few years. You're bothered about me, and what you imagine I might do. The fact is that nothing I can tell you will stop you from being bothered. It never has. You're just going to be bothered, that's all. You can't help it."

Alonzo got up and started walking around.

"Some day," he said, "Marie will be ready to get back into time—your kind of time. But that will be a sort of insanity for her, compared to the way she is now. You'll make her worry and plan."

Senator Vipson at last felt on firm ground. "But people *have* to worry and plan," he said. "If they didn't, they wouldn't get anything done."

"I know, I know," said Alonzo. "It's a problem."

A few days went by. There wasn't any real hope of us civilizing the senators, but being out in the open did them good. Then they enjoyed the food and the music we have after eating. One of them even sang a hillbilly song for us. "I guess I kind of like being out of time for a while," he told Alonzo, grinning.

Alonzo grinned back. "What are you going to put in your report?" he asked. The senator grinned again. "Well," he said, "it's a confidential report. Nothing much, I guess. We'll say this is a nice place to come for a rest."

Senator Angel said, "Mr. Desiderio, I can't say I understand what is going on here, but there's certainly nothing wrong with what you're doing. Seems to me you're doing what you can to reproduce the conditions of the old American frontier. Very interesting !"

"Yes, Alonzo said. "You could put it that way. But there's something else. Have you noticed that nobody around here is ambitious?"

"I guess you're right," said Vipson.

"That's bad, isn't it?"

Vipson twisted his face a little. "We-e-ell," he said, "these people are sick, aren't they? When you get them back on their feet, that'll be time enough to worry about their being 'ambitious,' won't it?"

Alonzo twisted up his face, too. "Maybe," he said, "but my efforts aren't aimed in that direction."

"You can't turn back the clock!" said Senator Angel.

"Can't I?" said Alonzo.

The senators shrivelled a little, remembering what they had heard about Alonzo. But then, he was such a quiet looking little guy. He wouldn't do *that.* "I mean," said Senator Angel, "all our great achievements depend upon some kind of ambition—I call it the American Drive."

"Yes," said Alonzo, "I can't interfere. That's why I'm up here in Alaska."

"Do you want to say anything, Joe?" When he looked at me, I was a little startled. What could I tell these guys? All I knew was I used to be like them, and I wasn't any more. How could I explain that? It's like chemistry. You just don't want to live that way any more. I felt a little like the first time some patients came in to the place. There they were, and I looked at them but I couldn't see into their minds. Their minds didn't work the way mine did, or they didn't work at all. It was like being out in a jungle, except there was nothing to be afraid of. Now I felt that way about the senators. I couldn't *feel* the way their minds worked.

"No," I said. "I don't want to say anything. It's just that, here, the pressure's gone. There ought to be a way for everybody to live without that pressure, but how do you get rid of it?"

I looked at the psychiatrist. "Do you know, Doctor?"

He didn't say anything. He just shook his head. "I think I know what you're getting at," he said, "but I don't know the answer. Nobody does, unless Alonzo here has found it, and he won't or can't tell."

"Do you think I don't have any pressure in my life?" Alonzo asked him. "Do you think it's any fun to keep on waiting around, wondering, hoping, puzzling over these people here, and you people there?"

"Maybe," the psychiatrist said, "we have to learn how to live with pressure, without letting it push us around."

"That's it," said Alonzo.

"Well," said Senator Vipson, "I always say the American way . . ."

The psychiatrist coughed pretty hard. "It's not as simple as that, Senator," he said.

"Who said it was simple?" the senator said, a little peevishly.

That was when I got teed off. "You're damn right it isn't simple," I said. "The trouble is, you want to climb Mt. Everest, but you think it's subversive when there's any danger of getting frostbitten. You want to be a hero and be all wrapped up in electric blankets at the same time. You want to have peace and good will without really *having* any peace and good will. Dammit," I said, "you don't want to take a chance, but you want to *feel* like you're taking a chance."

"A-men," said the psychiatrist. The senators looked at him kind of funny.

Just then the doors to the mess hall opened and our people trooped in on their way to their jobs. It was morning, a little after breakfast, and we'd been talking in the lobby. They sure were a funny collection—funny, that is, if you don't know them and have never seen them before. They were laughing and kidding around. No worries. Whatever is wrong with them, they have what Alonzo says poetry and art are good for. They have the wonder and delight of the present. They have it the way children have it. The way I'd have it if I didn't have to live in two worlds, theirs and my own. You see, Alonzo can live in two worlds and be like them, or something like them, but I'm no Alonzo. I just think he's a great guy and I stick around.

So the senators went back to Washington. The psychiatrist looked kind of lonesome when he left. He said he might be back. I liked that.

REVIEW

SYMPOSIUM ON "THE AMERICAN NOVEL"

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR for Autumn, 1955, presents the results of a forum on the topic, "What's Wrong with the American Novel?" Both authors and publishers participated, and while much of the talk seemed to revolve in circles, a few points which came out are material for further discussion. Since no one on the forum was sure that there is anything basically "wrong" with the American novel, the real focus shifted to why we are all presently confused about what the novel is and what it ought to be doing. Stephen Becker, an editor of Dell Books, and also author of *The Season of the Stranger,* remarked:

> I think that part of the difficulty lies in the changing functions of the novel, again in terms of the audience. Certain jobs that the novel used to do are now being done for far too many people by the news magazine, by television, by periodical literature in general, rather than by books which could be expected to last and to supply some sort of guidance or entertainment for some time.
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> We are succeeding much more thoroughly in illuminating specific areas of experience, and the only lack that I feel, and it may not be a very serious lack at all [!], is in the step between specific experience and universal experience, so that too many readers may pass by the total significance of the book.
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> I don't know whether too few writers can feel life as a whole and write a book which expresses their vision of the whole, although there are a great many who can do a wonderful job on a small part of that thing.

Simon Michael Bessie, general editor of Harper & Brothers, picked up the thread:

> I think I would try to say these things: In the first place, I think that the very amount of concern with the state of the novel is an indication less of any decline in the novel, or any real problem with the novel, than it is of the sense of expectancy, a sense that the novel and novelists are perhaps about to give us—as we have had now at pretty swift intervals for more than a hundred years—extraordinary achievements in writing.

This, we think, is a worth-while statement. Those who have what MANAS might call a "philosophical" interest in literature look at novels with an air of "expectancy." It is not what one knows he will find in books, but what he hopes he *may* find which keeps a portion of the reading public alive. And here, quite possibly, the sharpest and most erudite critics do readers a disservice by attacking poor workmanship when they might better spend their time in locating new ideas and perspectives.

Another view of the modern novel can be expressed by examining two kinds of conventionalism represented by successful authors. The first sort is obvious, and women's magazines and other genteel publications flood the market yearly with tales of how, for the "hero" and "heroine," all became right with the world. Whatever adjustments are made by these characters—seldom heroic in any real sense—are incidental to the adjustment of circumstances, and what could be more conventional than this? On the other hand, another sector of authors conceive their main function to be that of startling readers with themes, situations and phrases that would have been taboo fifty years ago. So far has this trend carried us that, as Isaac Rosenfeld remarked in a devastating criticism of Herman Wouk's *Majorie Morningstar,* "In this day and age, what more startling yet safer way is there to appear unconventional than by upholding the conventions?"

Rosenfeld defines what he means by conventionality:

> Wouk has used his principles only for prestigious purposes, not even bothering to state, define, or feel them sharply; his object was to sound like a serious writer and make respectability respectable. Nor does he write out of serious preoccupation with Jewish life, or its actual social nature; or out of a genuine religious abhorrence of what he considers evil. He simply chooses white, like a man who plays chess against himself. Assigning the worst possible moves to the other side, he stakes fame and fortune on a game he can't lose.

But if Wouk gets us nowhere, neither, we suspect, does a persistent horror-boy like Norman Mailer. The truth is that the world is neither a merry-go-round nor a misery-go-round, and if anything is worth writing it must contain the element of inspiration. Plato wanted to raise a good crop of philosophers, so that the Republic would always be supplied with worthy kings. If such a project is still feasible, we should like to save a few philosophers for the authorship of popular stories. We do have a sampling of such around, and it may be that they can be most easily recognized by their habit of viewing human character with an air of "attentive expectancy"—half expecting a higher and deeper knowledge to arise at any time in the people they write about.

We come now, by way of this incidental quote-collecting, to a prize series of passages on modern literary art, put together by Charles Bell for the current issue of *Diogenes,* International Review of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies. Here is his account of all future novels worth the writing, and some criteria for their evaluation:

> The time of reversal has come. Our age is certainly not the most placid of history; it has its horror; it has also its challenge, its majesty of vision. Every modern endures an adolescence of lamenting the fashionable world-disease. But if he has the adventure of spirit in any way at heart, he soon learns that there has never been such a time for transcendental building and self-contemplation as in this radiant and tumultuous evening of the liberal West.
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> We have had enough snivelling and retreat and aesthetic elaboration of despair. Is man a beast? Of course. We are habituated to it. That is the field in which spirit labors. Let it labor. Has the Western hope and dream, the flight of freedom, led under mushrooming clouds to its own waste and confusion? The wise knew it long ago. Goethe knew it; Milton knew it; Bruno knew it, and in the image of Icarus welcomed the flame. This too is an element for the life of spirit, antidote to the self-deception that has lain a hundred years upon us. Armageddon has always waited around the corner, whether for the individual of culture, the earth or solar system, or the assumed world of matter crouched before Judgment—what difference? Death is the universal death, spirit the eternal protagonist. The problem is to live in this stress with integrity. Our wars have not altered the situation. The film over the meaningless and void is no thinner than ever, the spectacle of life on that film grander than before. The spiritual malady of our time is mostly of faint heart—a kind of green-sickness in girls.
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> Against currents of pettiness and obstacles of specialized jealousy, the Western mind gropes through the new sciences and organic history toward the philosophic synthesis its destiny requires. Against the incredible meanness of the pulp-literate masses and modish anaemia of the literary reviews, the Western tongue awakes to the splendor of its singing task, the honest expression of this culminant human adventure. Let those who teach and edit and print know this for their charge, the vision they must encourage.
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> Not that it will therefore be a popular thing, or will save Western society or depend on that salvation. Had the achievement of Plato hinged on restoring the Greek city state, we would not know the meaning of the shadows on the wall of the cave. Of course in one sense the spirit of a new poetry is also the spirit of renewed freedom, being the wisdom and will to live affirmatively in the highest drama of mind. But the fruit of this spirit may spring in "a garden enclosed," in the private life, not in the public. And it may be difficult of access, as much so as the fashionable obscurities of today. Its complications, however, will be those of responsible profundity, opening to reason, involving the explicit and affirmative core. Such is the fruit that will appear, and its token and sign will be wholeness.

COMMENTARY

THE ROLE OF THE NOVELIST

THERE is a special reason, these days, for regarding the novel with an attitude of "expectancy." (See Review.) We live in a period when the area of human struggle is without clear definition. While numerous familiar patterns of "struggle" form the basis for popular "escape" fiction, this sort of writing tells how men and women gain their ends within the assumptions of the system. It uses tag-ends of traditional virtues to give pseudo-moral color to the story, and elaborates the victory over traditional obstacles as the fulfillment required for a happy ending—the lean, hardworking cowboy completes the hazardous drive to Abilene, exposes and kills the faithless ramrod of the outfit, and marries the boss's daughter. Or the "creative" individual in business rises to the top of an industrial organization, bringing confusion to mechanistic accountants and financial manipulators. The familiar myths, these books tell us, are true, and we can read them without any sense of being involved.

These are the clichés which endlessly repeat the stereotypes of yesterday's struggles. Books which involve and perhaps lift the reader are books which question the stereotypes and seek new forms of human engagement. Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* is a fine book because it deals with human beings caught in the pattern of the typical social struggle of the 1930's, yet reaches out, wonderingly, for some new alignment of issues. *From Here to Eternity* moves the heart because it results in similar wondering.

Where will be fought the Ragnarok of the age that is dying? How is the destiny of the individual linked with the destiny of his time? These are questions for the novelist to ponder. We do not suggest that the novel of the present should be heavily freighted with "social commentary" or bear a moral related to the agonized question of world peace. But in any age, there are those individuals whose trials and vision are symbolic of the world around them, who are types of the human situation as it exists for all the rest. In reading of their lives, we hunger after knowledge of how they have been made captive and what they are doing to set themselves free.

Many of the good contemporary novels are little more than iconoclastic. They reject the old moralities, which is to say, they reject the struggles which depend for their moral validity upon assumptions whose foundations are already shaken. It is as though the leading character declares, "I will not fight in your battle because I can find no satisfaction in your victory." Sometimes he may add, "I would rather throw myself away than be wasted in an unworthy struggle." Even this, while depressing, seems better than the self-indulgence of hypocrisy. Still better is the decision of the man who resolves to wait, and who tries to reserve his energies until the time for a sure engagement comes.

The ideal protagonist of the novel is a man who tries to live at the height of his times. But what is the "height" of times like these? The individual insight of the novelist may light up this question in a way that social theories and social studies can never do.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

WORK OR SCHOOL

THREE "items" presently on our desk bear an interesting relationship. The first is one of the many discouraging reports on juvenile delinquency statistics, released in December, 1955, by the information office of the "Big Brother Movement," 33 Union Square West, New York City. We quote:

> The number of juveniles brought to court has doubled in 13 years. According to an FBI survey of 200 cities, the crime rate of adults went up only 1.9 per cent in 1953, but among those under 18 the rate rose by an estimated 7.9 per cent. If this keeps up, experts forecast, we have real trouble ahead. Census Bureau estimates show that by 1960 the number of children between 10 and 17 will have increased by 40 per cent over 1952. If the delinquency rate continues to climb at the same pace as it did between 1948 and 1952, this could mean 750,000 children passing through the juvenile courts in 1960.

Next is an extract from the section on education in George Soule's *Time for Living*—concerned with what Americans are likely to be doing, or failing to do, with the increased leisure resulting from automation of both industrial and clerical work. Mr. Soule's statistics indicate that education, in terms of time spent on it, is no longer simply an adjunct to "practical" life, but is a very large part of the life of America:

> The young people of the nation, whether by choice or not, spend much time in school or college which years ago they would have spent on paid jobs. Accounting for both public and private institutions, the Census Bureau estimates that in 1954 there were 1.5 million in kindergarten, 24.4 million in elementary school, 7.7 million in high school, and 2.4 million in college. One-fifth of those who finish high school go on to some form of higher education.
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> Education is not to be assessed by the number of students or the variety of courses. Some of its shortcomings will be suggested on a following page. The relevant fact at this point is that subjection to, or pursuit of, what passes for education is a major unpaid occupation for a great part of the population in the United States. Indeed, the 36 million counted by the Census Bureau constitute a number larger than half the approximately 67 million total labor force—all those engaged in remunerative work, whether as employees, self-employed, or employers. What goes on in educational institutions is even more important, not only to the persons involved but to the whole community, than what goes on in places of employment, since it constitutes the current life of the students and conditions the post-school life of all.

Now, at the adult stage, the education business is booming chiefly because mature "students," as Soule puts it, "are intellectually hungry"; there is no problem, in adult classes, of "selling the subject," or persuasion as to the need for "home work" or development of the discipline of concentrated attention. Most adults who go back to school are both humble and eager—the answer to a teacher's prayer. On the other hand, a large proportion of the youths still matriculating are not in school either by choice, desire or design; they are simply following the conventional way, moved by the bribes of parents or the lures of social life. Of course, very few young children are in this category. They—in this respect like participants in adult education programs—are usually eager to learn. But those whose interest is "in between," who are simply drifting in a tide of boredom, employ only a fraction of their energies.

This brings us to some rather startling passages in an article appearing in the October 1955 issue of *American Magazine*. The writer, William G. Long, a Superior Court judge in Seattle, Washington, believes that our "in between" youngsters need work, not schooling. Speaking of the 78 per cent increase in the number of those brought before his juvenile court since he first took office, 22 years ago, Judge Long remarks:

> The ones who give me the most concern are those who have dissipated their idle time in repeated acts of lawlessness, and in my experience as a judge I have yet to see a youthful serious offender whose trouble was not caused to a large extent by idleness. On the other hand, I have seen many whose lives have been salvaged through plain, old-fashioned work.
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> And there is still another and even more disturbing factor—an antiquated feature of our civilization which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the average youngster under 18 to take a useful job even when he finds one. I refer to the so-called "child labor laws," which tend to force all adolescents into idleness, particularly those who are

not doing well in school and who are eager to get into the world and start making their way.

Our laws have now gone considerably past the point of common sense . . . There must be a happy medium between no child labor laws and unreasonable restrictions of child labor.

I am not advocating or even suggesting the abolition of child labor laws. . . . But necessary protective measures do not need to be unreasonably restrictive—so restrictive that they drive youngsters into idleness, mischief and eventually crime.

. . . .I have come to the conclusion that most youngsters go wrong simply because they have nothing else to do.

Some very fine people believe that youngsters can just "play" themselves into happy and constructive citizenship; and so they go all out for more playfields, more camps, and more recreational facilities. . . . But I worry when we rely too much on the efficacy of play alone. Psychologists and educators agree that the years of youth and adolescence constitute the most significant habit-forming period of one's life. If this is true, it seems to me that, in addition to providing opportunities for developing wholesome habits of fun and play, we must not overlook the virtue of good, old-fashioned toil.

Time and time again my frustrated and discouraged case workers have said to me: "Judge, if we could only find a job for this kid, I believe he would straighten out."

As the result of these reflections, Judge Long advocates intelligent amendment of "child-labor" laws. He proposes:

1. The elimination of all unreasonably restrictive laws which require youngsters in their teens to register with the authorities and obtain working papers before they can take normal jobs.

2. Let boys and girls, with their parents' consent, accept suitable jobs in any appropriate field.

3. Reorganize all state and Federal child labor laws, not only to liberalize their provisions, but to unify them, so that what is legal (job) for a youngster in one state is not illegal m another.

4. Set up state and Federal agencies specifically designed to find and develop job opportunities for ambitious youngsters who want to go to work, instead of devoting so much effort to resolutions on the right of kids to work.

5. Stimulate the formation of local-community committees working continuously on a year-round basis devoted to youth job-finding and the development of job opportunities for kids.

What all this is getting around to is that education without a desire for self-discipline is worthless. More work, on this view, is a good thing for most young people in their formative years. As James L. Hymes, Jr., professor of elementary education at Peabody College for Teachers, says in *Behavior and Misbehavior:* "Children need discipline. Don't be afraid of the word. Don't be ashamed of it. 'Discipline' is a *good* word. There is nothing old-fashioned about it. There is nothing modern, nothing psychological, nothing progressive, nothing good about lack of discipline. When discipline is weak you can be sure that something somewhere, somehow has failed: home, school, church, community. When discipline is weak, you can be sure a child is unhappy. You can feel like a child's best friend while you work for discipline. Children want it every bit as much as you do. Discipline is not a dirty trick you play on youngsters."

Every child has the right to be a rebel. But he is a rebel with a cause only when he has acquired enough of the ordinary disciplines to know what he is rebelling against. Judge Long's advocacy of increased work participation for young people who are not really interested in their own education makes one wonder if our whole psychology of formal instruction does not need revision. Perhaps the young should be doing more of the work, and the parents more of the learning. A 40-year-old adult who has reared a 17-year-old child may be ready to study, and the child, perhaps, is ready in some way he does not even understand to stop being a child and to become a man.

FRONTIERS
On Religious Freedom

THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY is often found doing its best to prevent Christians from doing fuzzy thinking in behalf of their religion. An editorial in the Nov. 23, 1955, issue examines the recent deliberations in St. Louis of the National Conference on Religion and Public Education, and questions some of its conclusions. A spokesman for the Conference told the press: "We want to discuss the question of how far we can go in teaching religion in accordance with the separation of church and state tradition, to which we are committed, and the various state laws." A study group participating in the conference undertook to summarize the answer to this question, and after reviewing the American tradition of freedom of religion, set forth the following:

> The public schools have a responsibility to make the largest possible provision in the schools for nonsectarian religious teaching and influence.
>
> The schools may teach *about* [committee's italics] religion as a fundamental factor in our national life. They may not teach in such a way as to serve the sectarian needs of any ecclesiastical institution individually or collectively.

Regarding the first of the above paragraphs, the *Century* editorial writer, John T. Stewart, pertinently asks: "How is it in accord with the principle of the separation of church and state to hold that 'public schools have a responsibility' to provide any religious teaching whatever? We can't have this principle both ways."

Concerning the second paragraph, he remarks:

> The happy phrase, "We may teach *about* religion," haunted this conference of schoolmen and churchmen from start to finish. The committee on "Religious Viewpoints within the Curriculum" reported that it "spent considerable time discussing what is meant by 'teaching about religion.' There was general agreement that the public school's responsibility as it deals with religion is not concerned with sectarian commitment."
>
> Nobody objects to the principle. But suppose a school board member or a pious parent objects that a teacher's instruction "about" religion is being given from the viewpoint of her own allegiance, which probably will be the only one she knows?
>
> Item: In this same committee's deliberations a Jewish rabbi protested against reading the Ten Commandments on the ground that it would be confusing—"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" means one day to a Jew and the following day to most Christians. . . .
>
> Several church delegates, after they had wrestled for three days with the problem—How much religion can the public schools teach—said to your correspondent that churches must resist all pressures to coerce the schools into taking on responsibilities that, in our way of life, belong to church and home.

Usually, when groups of denominational Christians and Jews get together to discuss this question, they act as though it was their own private argument. If *they* could agree, then the nation ought to be satisfied with what they decide. Fortunately, the *Christian Century* writer exhibits no such parochial attitude, since he points out that a large minority of Americans remain unpersuaded of any conventional version of the "existence of God" and the claim that man is a "creature dependent upon his creator."

But the most interesting question to consider is why teachers—or any of us—should find it so difficult to discuss religion without giving offense to some group. If religious teachings were stripped of all "controversial" points, what would be left? Would it be worth teaching, or could it be called "religion"?

We can imagine a worthy formulation of Humanist convictions which might be expected to qualify, but we must remember that some popular religious groups take the view that ethical or moral teachings which are without reference to God, or man's dependence upon God, are blasphemous because of what they omit! Manifestly, there can be no thoughtful compromise arrived at, although the issue is not so much between various sects of Christians as between Christians and non-Christians.

Is this inability to agree a commentary on certain groups of Christians, who refuse to relax their peculiar specifications of "truth," or does it reflect a

more general judgment of a "religious tradition"

fundamentals is impossible? Of all criticisms of the Christian tradition, the most serious of all lies, not in

failure of Christians to consider that the real fault may be in a religious attitude which cannot survive

accident that a "tolerant" Christianity usually becomes a "weak" Christianity—or, if strong, less

Last December, Frank C. Hughes, a Minnesota "atheist" brought suit against the treasurer of the

military chaplains. Hughes called the support of chaplains by the federal payroll "an open and

was reported in the news section of the *Christian* for Nov. 23, under the heading, "Atheist in New Skirmish against Religion." The account was *Century* reader objected to the

correspondent wrote *(CC,*

Is it not rather a suit against a violation of the Constitution, and not necessarily "against religion"?

a century. Twelve of those years I was a member of the General Commission on Chaplains. And I am

of military chaplains, believing that such chaplains should be paid by their own churches. Why should

Protestant doctrines, or Protestant tax money to support the teaching of Catholic doctrines, or Jewish

doctrines, or vice versa? And why should atheist tax money be used to support the teaching of any

the separation of church and state. Mr. Hughes is right in his opposition to it. I hope he wins. But this

Military chaplaincies also violate the

the Constitution declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of

chaplain is such an "office of public trust." And no chaplain has ever obtained his commission without a

minister of religion, an ordained clergyman, ecclesiastically endorsed. That is plainly un-

to see it go to the Supreme Court.

Let the churches pay their own ministers. The chaplaincy, as now constituted, paid from public tax funds, constitutes a state clergy. The

anomaly in a country where the church is professedly separated from the state.

action against the Government, is a retired mechanical engineer who calls himself "Pope of the

suit. No doubt he is a colorful type, and no doubt his apparent eccentricity will be used against him in the

not an "aggressive" freethinker, and only a man who believes that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights

chaplains, all the forces of prejudice would be marshalled against him. McCollum's book, *One Woman's Fight,*
citizens when they try to obtain impartial administration of Constitutional law in respect to

The sad thing about such actions is that they are obliged to depend upon the issue of what happens to

upon high principles of impartiality in religion. While the defense of religious freedom at this level

such actions are necessary should make us realize how little support there is of religious freedom

understanding, therefore, of what it means.