

TOWARD INDIVIDUALITY

THERE are not very many of them—the people who are under some inner compulsion to live their own lives—but you meet or hear about them from time to time. Usually they are artists, but other men, also, are found to have this stubborn, uncalculating individuality. Our last encounter with the type was at second-hand, but none the less impressive. According to the story, two conscientious objectors were walking on a street in San Francisco. They saw a man with a full beard coming from the other direction, and one of them went up to him and said, "Are you a C.O.?" This was the accoster's way of proving that he could recognize a non-conformist on sight, in which he perhaps took a slightly mischievous pleasure. The man with the beard said yes, and gave his name, which also identified him as an eminent contemporary painter.

The painter was indeed a conscientious objector, but not of the routine sort. He had been drafted into the army and was subjected to basic training. After the passage of a few weeks or months, he one day decided the army was no place for him. As he left the camp, he said to the sentry, "I'm sorry, but I can't live here any more." And that was that.

Probably there were inquiries and official decisions, perhaps punishment. We don't know that part of the story. The important thing is that there are men who behave in this way—who are simply and natively unable to do things which are alien to their nature. You can say that the world would be a very confused place if everybody was like that, but we doubt if a world peopled by such persons would be half as confused as the world we have, largely populated by obedient conformists of one sort or another.

Short of the palingenetic hypothesis, there is not much point in trying to explain the people who go through life unaffected by social pressures of any sort. They exist, and their independence is something to marvel at. They may not be philosophers, but they have something which no

philosopher can do without. And there is an ingredient in their lives which no culture can do without entirely, and survive as a genuine *culture*.

Such individuals will doubtless stand out as exceptions in almost any conceivable society, but what is disturbing about the present is the widespread trend, powered by modern technology, in the opposite direction. To read about this trend in the serious magazines is to contemplate a force as resistless as an ocean tide—or would be, were it not that tides, once having risen, always recede according to schedule, while one cannot have the same high confidence that the tide of conformity will also recede as inexorably as it rose.

An article in the *Nation* for July 28 examines modern conformity in religion—not conformity *to* religion but conformity *in* religion. Stanley Rowland, Jr., who reports religious news for the *New York Times*, titles his discussion, "Suburbia Buys Religion," and his observations confirm the judgment of the title. The scene is the modern suburban community:

With today's mass-produced houses and easy budget terms, younger couples are moving automatically into the "thrilling ranch-type estates." Pleasant, decent, friendly people, insulated in conformity, they wish to be undisturbed in enjoying their gray flannel houses. Homogenized personality is most obvious in fast-growing communities where hundreds are moving into homes for the same economic bracket.

And numerous areas which were quietly suburban for many years have recently become overlain with acres of bright houses for apple-cheeked families complete with their pop-up toasters and blow-out-proof tires—and the inevitable shaggy dog. One clergyman recently declared that ours is a shaggydog civilization—rambling on and on in meaningless plenty, with the hydrogen bomb as the punch line. . . .

The main mood of a suburban church on Sundays is that of a fashionable shopping center.

This is cultural identification on a wide, superficial and generally unacknowledged level. On weekdays one shops for food, on Saturdays one shops for recreation and on Sundays one shops for the Holy Ghost.

But the Holy Ghost had better stay ghostly and the preacher platitudinous, for the homogenized suburbanite likes his religion, unlike his martinis, diluted. He wants sermons to console him, to comfort him and to inspire him to more pleasant living, but never to challenge him with the rude realities of today's revolutionary world. He has paid handsomely for his suburban isolation against these realities, and he doesn't want them to come crashing into his conscience via the pulpit.

When the preacher perchance deals with such problems as segregation or the desperate needs of underdeveloped lands, the suburbanite has the remarkable facility of rolling up the mental counterpart of the automobile window. He weatherproofs himself against any knowledge of the rising storm from the two-thirds of the world's peoples who live as second-class citizens plagued by disease, ignorance and starvation. . . .

Dedicated to a heaven scrubbed in detergent, adjusted by psychologists, serviced by your friendly Esso dealer and brimming with baby food and pre-digested opinion, the suburbanite turns to the church and demands more of the same. In this society the churches are cultivated like hot-house flowers, flourishing because they are not unpleasant, exuding mink and memoranda on righteousness. . . . the whole pressure is to make the church conform to popular culture, and this pressure is most often succeeding in the suburbs. The house of the Lord is being reduced to a comfort station.

We are told that all men are brothers, and we want very much to believe it, yet how are we to get the nonconforming painter and these comfort-narcotized suburbanites together in the same family? The painter would probably find life in a typical suburban community as hard—or harder, because more hypocritical—than life in the army. This is the sort of problem which rescues us from the temptations of "community planning" or any of the more salvation-minded forms of utopian thinking. There are such incredible differences among people.

Another chapter in this story is found in *Harper's* for August. Elinor Goulding Smith, an

agnostic housewife and mother, details the difficulties of bringing up her children in the cloying atmosphere of conforming belief. Asking, "Won't Somebody *Tolerate Me?*", she reports the insidious pressures exerted by believers—not believers in this or that, but just believers. The one thing that is somehow wrong, these days, is not to believe in any religion. Mrs. Smith objects:

This, . . . I submit, is an infringement of our great American concept of the freedom of religion—which I do *not* interpret as meaning, "freedom of religion for everyone but agnostics. You can have any you like, but you gotta pick one."

My children played occasionally with a child whose father is a minister. They don't go there any more because every time they did, he told them they should believe in God and go to church. When his little girl came to our house, the subject of religion never came up. Why would it? I assume that her parents try to teach her what's right. Why can't her parents make the same assumption about us? The point is, if we had a religion that had a *name* to it, Jewish, Mohammedan, anything, they *would* make that assumption.

The pressure is omnipresent. There is the Bible reading in the public schools—in many of the schools, at any rate—and now come the compulsive instructions of television:

The television programs tell them [the children] to go to church on Sunday ("and take Dad and Mom, too"). I don't think television programs should teach our children about religion. I think *we* are the *only* ones who should teach them about our beliefs. The day I need a television puppet or clown to tell my children what's right and what's wrong, I'll bow out as a mother. In the same breath with the plea to go to church, these same television programs are preaching the most blatant materialism—"Ask your mother to buy you. . . ." "Ask your mother to get . . ." "All the kids have . . ." "Don't you wish you had . . ."

There are already "drive-in" churches, according to Stanley Rowland, and hypodermic religion, if not yet available, is surely a possibility, to go with the chemical euphoria of a civilization which has benzedrine, sleeping pills and tranquilizers as near as the corner drug store. And the end is not yet.

All this is a long way from the militance of the traditional Protestantism of America which, if

narrow, angry, and preoccupied with Sin, at least made some demands upon its believers. But belief, alas, doesn't seem to play much part in modern religion. As Rowland says, "When organized religion is completely accepted as no more than a pleasing and fashionable facet of culture, then it falls prey to the mass-produced platitude." How different the view of the responsible agnostic! Of her children, Mrs. Smith says:

Our failure to go to temple or to send our children to any sort of religious school is not a *failure*. It is not a negative thing that happens out of carelessness or laziness. It is a positive thing, arising out of deep and serious conviction, and it is as important to us as any religion could be to a religious person. . . .

But I will not teach them anything I cannot believe, and I will not teach them any ritual which seems to me as senseless as knocking on wood when you say you haven't had a cold in a long time.

There are at least two degrees of radical difference between the man who is determined to live his own life and the people who consume "mass-produced platitudes" on Sunday morning. The first degree of difference may be characterized by something Mr. Rowland says about religion:

A religion is best when it exists in tension with society. In this situation it can not only fill its spiritual role but also its role of prophecy, conscience, and moral leadership.

This may be true of "a" religion, in the sense of an embattled sect, but there is another step that may be taken. This step we happily find described in the same issue of the *Nation*, in an article on Bernard Shaw's views of Christianity (the hundredth anniversary of Shaw's birth occurred on July 26). Shaw is quoted as having declared:

Now of Separation [of the Church] there is no end until every human being is a Separate Church, for which there is much to be said.

It is clear enough that if every man could be a "separate church," Mrs. Smith would be not only tolerated, but respected, as author of her own religion, and that no one who did not make similar origination of his religious or moral convictions could enjoy the same respect, although he would

certainly be "tolerated," as we tolerate the immaturities of children. In fact, we doubt if words like "agnostic" or "atheist," which have served principally as labels for rebels against insistent dogma and coercive religious authority, would have any meaning at all in a society where every man was his own church.

A great deal of sentimentality is wasted on the separatism and exclusiveness of "belonging" to a particular sect or cult. "Belonging," we suspect, as a distinctive act, springs from the hope of gaining a pseudo-identity—the identity one might have in fact by arriving at opinions and convictions independent of any group belief.

We come at last back to our extraordinary individual—the man, like the artist we described, who is constrained by his own wholeness and intuitive singleness of purpose to be insensible to social pressure and immune to the compulsions of mass-beliefs. How does one get to be such a man—acquire his freedom, and the fearlessness which ought, perhaps, to be spoken of as indifference to influences which cow others into conformity?

We cannot answer this question. It is like asking what will make a man want to "grow up," want to eradicate his partisanship and the weaknesses which make him do injustice to others. Yet there is a first step which can be described. This is to gain the habit of recognizing and honoring the few men who have a clear idea of what they want to do with their lives, and who admit no obstacle to doing it. This, really, is the sort of identity we all long for. It is the kind of distinction which costs effort, and for which, therefore, we are offered many institutional substitutes, many "symbolic" badges which promise virtue by association.

It is a question, finally, of honesty with ourselves, for the driving force in all human beings which seeks identity is sure to find a balance somewhere—in either the self or the smothering crowd.

REVIEW

INVITATION TO A COLUMN

HAVING recently recommended Milton Mayer's articles in the *Progressive*, we reflected that many of our readers are also enthusiastic about Joseph Wood Krutch, and that others might well come to be so. Mr. Krutch, drama critic, teacher and author of wide repute, and frequent contributor to the quarterly *American Scholar*, now writes a column titled "If You Don't Mind My Saying So" for that publication. In the absence of Emerson and Thoreau, Mr. Krutch does very well at what might be called "reflective essays," and is even apt to convert a regular reader to the habit of philosophical thinking.

We have long envied Mr. Krutch his ability to combine urbanity with kindly irony, directness and simplicity of speech, and ideas with insight. Whether he writes as a "non-specialized" naturalist (*The Twelve Seasons*, *The Best of Two Worlds*, *The Desert Year*, and *The Voice of the Desert*), as a philosopher and critic (*The Modern Temper* and *The Measure of Man*), or as a student of drama (*Modernism in Modern Drama*), Krutch expresses beautifully the thoughts many of us may have almost, but not quite, been ready to formulate. His dislike for the growing specialization in every field, including the arts and education, is affirmatively expressed; spending but little time on direct castigation of the foreshortened views of the specialists, he illustrates how many and great are the rewards for those whose thinking breaks out of orthodox ranges at will—or even, if you prefer, at whim.

Perhaps one of the secrets of Krutch's success as an unspecialized writer is his unashamed devotion to leisure and contemplation. As he once remarked, "the one generally accredited to be the most successful savior of the western world did not keep up 'an endless amount of activities.'" "He never," continued Krutch, "so far as we know, hurried. With all mankind to save he took 40 days off for contemplation." Though not

interested in "saving" anyone, in the atonement sense, let alone the world, Krutch continually demonstrates how a man may save himself—illustrating, in his *American Scholar* column, that thinking and writing can be a pleasure.

The first year of Krutch's official attachment to the *Scholar* was completed in last winter's issue. At that time he recapitulated some of the thinking found in his *Measure of Man*:

Everyone knows that what disintegrated along with some billions of plutonium atoms was the last small vestige of physical security for the civilian which TNT and the airplane had left us. So also, however, did various other things less immediately recognized. Even ten years later, optimists and pessimists are still concerned chiefly with the question of whether the new era is bright with the prospect of new powers and prosperity, or whether it is only a new era of destruction. But two fundamental premises vanished into thin air along with those certain material particles which ceased, at that instant, to be material at all. And the two premises were these: (1) that what we called our "control" over nature really was effective, and (2) that physical science had at last made the physical universe intelligible.

The first premise is no longer tenable because a force can hardly be said to be under control if it threatens to destroy all civilization and possibly all life. The second is not tenable because the physical universe has turned out to be so different from what was confidently assumed that some leading scientists are already expressing the opinion that it is radically unintelligible—that no image we can ever form of it will correspond to what actually is. Should we manage somehow to escape self-destruction, then it may possibly turn out that the abandonment of these two premises will affect the future of civilization quite as much as any new power the atom can be made to release.

The metaphysical consequences, if we survive to enjoy them, may be salutary as well as immeasurable, and we may be waking at last from a long bad dream. It may seem a pity that blessings should come as thoroughly disguised as they sometimes do. Whoever arranged this one appears to have outdone himself—if he really did wrap up a boon in that package. But who knows? They say that God works in mysterious ways. Possibly they are sometimes even as mysterious as in this instance they seem to be.

Mr. Krutch, however, is not much interested in God by way of belief, though he occasionally grants Him courteous entrance to his paragraphs in metaphorical terms. If he has regard for an older view of Deity, it stems solely from the fact that, in our day, few people try to see nature's creatures and nature's laws as part of a Whole. Our college courses in the natural sciences are given to detailed plant and animal dissection, and yet, as Krutch points out, the richest creative period in English literature embodied a rich *feeling* for plants, animals and birds. In the current issue of the *Scholar*, Krutch deplors the fact that "nature study is now usually relegated to the kindergarten or the elementary schools, and even there it is tending to become more and more a laboratory science." He continues:

From the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, some familiarity with plants, animals and birds was one of the recognized elements in "The Education of a Gentleman." Now, except in isolated and more or less accidental cases, even the biological courses, which have replaced the natural history American colleges used to offer, are intended for and taken only by students headed toward medicine or some scientific specialty. They are likely to begin with the dissection of the cat. But they rarely have anything to offer the student of, say, literature, who might like to know something about what the nature poets he does study seemed so strangely concerned with.

Not long ago I spent a week on the campus of one of the older colleges of the Eastern seaboard which prides itself upon being a liberal arts college and nothing else. Adjoining the campus is a fine stretch of woodland presented by an alumnus and planted with a beautiful array of native and exotic flowering shrubs and trees. When no student or faculty member I had met could tell me the name of one of the most striking, I sought out the one and only member of the botany department. He smiled condescendingly. "I," he said, "am a cytologist. Doubt if I know a dozen plants by sight." Now cytology is a very important subject. But are the secrets of the cell as essential a part of a liberal education as some nodding acquaintance with plants

and animals? Perhaps it was this very college which produced the immortal student of romantic and Victorian literature who thought the "pimpernel dozing by the lea" was some sort of furry quadruped taking a nap.

Though Krutch's further remarks in respect to hurting and killing small creatures would hardly make him a favorite among readers of *Sports Illustrated* and *Field and Stream*, he is never simply a ranter. However truly killing for pure sport must, philosophically, be regarded as pure evil, Krutch remains temperate:

Despite all this, I know that sportsmen are not necessarily monsters. Even if the logic of my position is unassailable, the fact remains that men are not logical creatures, that most, if not all, are blind to much they might be expected to see, and that the blind spots vary from person to person. To say, as we all do, "Any man who would do A would do B" is to state a proposition mercifully proved false almost as often as it is stated. The murderer is not necessarily a liar, any more than the liar is necessarily a murderer. Many have been known to say that they considered adultery worse than homicide, but not all adulterers are potential murderers and there are even murderers to whom incontinence would be unthinkable. The sportsman may exhibit any of the virtues—including compassion and respect for life—everywhere except in connection with his "sporting" activities. It may even be too often true that, as "anti-sentimentalists" are fond of pointing out, those who are tenderest toward animals are not necessarily the most philanthropic. They, no less than sportsmen, are not always consistent.

For a last sample of Krutch's column, we turn to an essay on "leisure"—finding notice of the startling fact that, at present, factory workmen have much more leisure than intellectual workers, with the future promising extension of this trend. The professor in college who must meet the requirements of pyramiding university enrollments, the writer busy with publishing output, are likely to have less and less time. But the intellectual worker needs interests to make his product worth consumption, "and without leisure he cannot have them." "It used to be said," continues Krutch, "that a pure specialist was a pure idiot, and it may very well be that the

specialist will have to specialize more and more, presumably becoming in the process more and more of an idiot."

In the future, naturally, only a member of the working class will be expected to have any leisure, and those who used to be called the "underprivileged" will enjoy all the privileges. When we do take all this for granted, then, I suppose, the revolution will be complete. The workers will be not only the bosses but also the cultural elite, while bureaucrats, managers and politicians will be, in fact, what they have often somewhat hypocritically called themselves, namely, "servants of the people."

Many a college professor, without half meaning it, has advised his son to take up some manual trade at which he could make a decent living. In all seriousness, he may someday be giving the same advice for a different reason: "I don't want you to miss the finer things of life."

When the process is complete, then, for the first time in history, most men, rather than merely a few, will enjoy leisure and the culture which goes with it. If there is a minority whose special tasks keep them busy all their waking hours, that was, after all, formerly the fate of all *except* a minority. And minorities may well be sacrificed to the greatest good of the greatest number.

I had to admit that I probably hadn't thought the thing through, but I have been trying ever since to find my way around in this future. Now I am able, for instance, to imagine two factory workers discussing the cultural limitations of either their boss or the chief engineer of the research department. "After all it's not his fault. He has had to work hard all his life and he doesn't enjoy our advantages. I doubt if he reads one book a year outside his specialty. But do you think you would if you came home tired after a twelve-hour day? Under those circumstances you and I also would go to sleep in front of a TV set."

Enough space has now been given to Mr. Krutch's work to bring us charges of copyright infringement. However, we hope the editors of the *Scholar* will make allowance for our intent. Krutch is always good and his column alone makes a subscription to *The American Scholar* worth while. Readers will have noticed, moreover, that in recent years MANAS has discussed *American Scholar* articles with

increasing frequency. Krutch writes for the *Scholar* because the people who edit and read it appreciate him and this, in turn, gives evidence of the high quality of the magazine.

COMMENTARY
TRIBUTE TO POETRY

POETRY, in our slight knowledge and experience of it, can be as confining and as conventionalized a form of expression as any other, yet it can also be completely free. It follows that a poet has a better chance than most men to find a level of interpretation of experience which speaks as accurately as possible to the human condition. By "accurate" we mean that it may throw a light which is bright enough to identify with fidelity a quality of life, but not so brilliant that it becomes an insistent thesis or a wildly sectarian cry. Essayists, too, have this opportunity, but we might distinguish between the essay and the poem by saying that the poem is a kind of "gift" to the mind and the feelings, whereas the essay has not the same sort of dramatic unity.

This is by way of introduction to another poem by John Beecher, taken from his recent portfolio, *Land of the Free*. Mr. Beecher muses on an insidious transformation. The poem is, we think, a very nearly perfect portal to the sort of diagnostic reflections which every man of this time ought to be pursuing:

AN AIR THAT KILLS

Times were worse then
Jobs were hard to get
People were suffering more
but do you know
a man could breathe

It's as if the oxygen
were all exhausted
from the atmosphere
That's how I feel
and why I quit

Same land same sky same sea
same trees and mountains
I painted then
I guess the light went out
I saw them by

Don't make politics
out of what I say
It's just that something isn't here
that used to be

and kept us going

We have lost a great inheritance. But can we, then, generate a new atmosphere for those who will come after us? Restore to nature, purified, the tainted air of our time?

CHILDREN and Ourselves

Editors, "Children . . . and Ourselves": Your article for Aug. I began by deploring "generalizations" and then went on to generate a number of them. The suggestion that the universities of America are, just now, probably more "intellectually alive" than those of Great Britain seems rather irresponsible—and it is so regrettably easy for prejudicial ideas to gain permanent lodging from simple exposure to such premises. The MANAS writer appears to have read one series of articles in the British publication *Encounter*, and, at the same time, been impressed by a critical review of Harvard produced by present undergraduates. Now, rather biting criticism on the part of undergraduates is fairly old hat, and, even if the criticism is exceptionally good, this only indicates, does it not, that Harvard is stuffy—stifling rather than energizing any promise of intellectual life which might be burgeoning? Wasn't there, furthermore, a report of "student motivation," as revealed on the various campuses of the University of California, indicating that American students answer "generally" to the same description given of British students by the *Encounter* writers?

The point of our Aug. 1 essay was that intellectual vitality, in any setting, is a cyclic affair. The corollary might be, to speculate further, that even temporary stagnation plays a definite role in stimulating discontent and constructive radicalism. Since every relationship between human beings also seems subject to the ebb and flow of psychic and mental tides, it is no insult, we think, to suggest that a given institution or a given cultural tradition may currently represent a certain point in an "over-all" cyclic period. Any professor who takes his work seriously—by "work" we mean the quality and quantity of the vital relationships that he is able to establish with undergraduates—should at least be encouraged by the realization that fifteen good students in one year, followed by three the next, does not necessarily mean that either he or the younger generation has lost the capacity for thought. There are cycles of enthusiasm which follow cycles of ennui or despair.

Our correspondent is quite within his rights in hoisting us on our own petard when it comes to "generalizations." The trouble is that, aside from statistical surveys, one cannot say anything without indulging in some attempts at general evaluation, and, in the writing of a column, it is necessary to let the chips fly freely even when one realizes that the result will not be a balanced or perfect creation.

We are happy to be able to feel, however, that the university atmosphere of the United States is improving—or, at least, that indications of vital critical thinking are fairly abundant. This partly for the reason that none of the nations of the earth has for so long, among both professors and undergraduates, reflected that worship of material success for which America is chiefly noted. While the universities of the United States were acquiring this dubious reputation, Oxford and Cambridge were beacon lights for another view of the nature and destiny of man—combining classical background with considerable penetration on the ethical issues of political and economic affairs. During the 20's and 30's, American Rhodes Scholars, temporarily on leave from the "factory" tempo of most universities in the States, began to discover that a totally different view of the meaning of university life was in vital existence in England. Such mundane matters as regular class attendance and "true-false quizzes" were relatively unimportant at Oxford, and respect was shown for creativity. But since the advent of World War II, Great Britain has been forced to consider "the higher learning" in a light quite different from that afforded by tradition. A non-traditional socialist government and impinging economic problems have made Britain cognizant of a host of conflicting "practical" issues to which the university of the States had long played host. Meanwhile, the influx of older students at American universities—men who had seen the war and something of the world—helped to create an atmosphere where leaching philosophical questions were no longer beyond the pale. Student publications, heretofore

usually trite or high-schoolish, took on a different tone; we have observed, for instance, the craftsmanship and earnestness in such an effort as *Symposium*, currently published by a group of students at the University of California, Santa Barbara. And we feel that the report of a U. of C. faculty committee on "student motivation," to which our questioner alludes, was very much in tune, actually, with the feelings of articulate undergraduates. This committee was very much alive "intellectually," and its evaluation of student motivation was also an essay on University shortcomings.

The essays and editorial comments appearing in *i.e.*, *The Cambridge Review*, seem to us to be symptomatic of a long overdue trend. It is true that the editors or the writers of *i.e.* reject the supposition that "Harvard must be quite a worthy institution—else its undergraduates would not be sufficiently stimulated to bring out such a publication," remarking that "the university has done absolutely nothing to encourage this effort." But, for some undergraduates, at least, Harvard has become a forum—just what the typical American university of the past has not been.

All this, we must admit, becomes a welcome excuse to quote further from the special "Harvard" issue of *The Cambridge Review*. Our only side comment is that Harvard must have played some part in providing the mechanical background, if nothing else, for such incisive writing. Harvard professors may have misinterpreted the radical meaning of "the classics," as *i.e.* editors insist, yet must have contributed something to the articulation evident in *i.e.* The editorial writers sprinkle their 100-page critique with such paragraphs as the following—which will find approval, we are sure, from some faculty members:

By constantly forcing the students to prove themselves in competition and by never taking its job as more than mere law enforcement, Harvard neglects its proper aim; to bring out the best in the best students. Harvard neglects all its real talent. (When it organizes a special grouping like the Society of

Fellows, it does not hold to the terms of the original aim: it just fosters more uncreative, more imitative work.) The University does not encourage thought and art because it does not understand their simplest aspects, their simplest relations to life. The University constantly rewards mediocrity and forces the talent into hypocrisy, however unconsciously. It goes so far as to call the creative students neurotic. It undercuts them; it does not support them. Dull-edged standards administered by dull-edged tutors and graders penalize and complicate the lives of initially clear-eyed thinkers and artists. Original thought here is a myth. The University confuses the excitement of experimental methods applied to real practical behavior with the dead pedantry of applying pseudo-scientific jargon to a medium already once removed from life, as for example when critics pretend that their terminology does scientific justice to the flux of literature.

But the editors do not stop with excoriation. Some radical proposals follow. These Harvard undergraduates, at least, are not particularly frightened about skeletons in the traditional closet, and frankly assert that a worthy institution should be more concerned with its very excellent students than with guaranteeing degrees for "the masses":

If the Ph.D. system were to be gradually abandoned (which would mean that Harvard would have to devise a means of more flexibly estimating degrees of scholarly and intellectual mastery) Harvard would have to have more self-confidence; the tutors would come much closer to their tutees. The reciprocal student-teacher relationship would replace what is now a rather broken-down one-way railroad. In this change the Ph.D. student, who would ultimately become a full-fledged teacher, or scholar, would benefit even more than the undergraduate; in both cases a human warmth would animate the material and the conditions of study. Time would assume its proper magical power to heal and teach and correct and bring to fruition. Under such a system the tutors might soon be undergraduates who are simply a little older than their fellow workers. The professors would be less inclined to pretend to rigid authority. They would have to correct by giving their feelings and their thoughts on the subject. This means giving explanations, not grades. The best discipline is argument, either through another work of art or through new thought as the teacher improvises along unknown paths. If the final A.B. degree cannot be abolished, its importance must be

curtailed. By choosing to work with the people of talent, and this may mean putting the mediocre students through a vastly cruder, if more pertinent, course than they take at present, the University will begin to get beyond the mediocrity that now encoils its body. Harvard must have the courage and confidence to work with the talented students no matter how much they resist initially, because the moment they see that someone cares, they will work. And we are not Communists when we say that the present apathy at Harvard stems ultimately from adherence to the hideous Puritan ethic that still rides the back of all American enterprise.

At the root of the whole critique supplied by *i.e.*, we think, is an attempt at basic revaluation of what we shall call "statistical materialism." Literature, the editors insist, is not to be judged by any obvious relevance to contemporary necessity, but rather on the grounds of its integrity and critical insight. It is not simply rhetoric to insist that "the University confuses the excitement of experimental methods applied to real practical behavior with the dead pedantry of applying a pseudo-scientific jargon to a medium already once removed from life, as for example when critics pretend that their terminology does scientific justice to the flux of literature." "The flux of literature" is the whole field of evaluative thought, whether expressed in fiction or fulmination. We do not care whether excitement over the fundamental issues of learning appear in *Encounter*, in a University of California report on "student motivation," or in the *Cambridge Review*; the whole picture betokens vitality, and fits with the determination of a number of American educators to eliminate, or at least diminish, huge classes—encouraging return to philosophical argument between students and teachers.

FRONTIERS Ominous Shadows

ONE hears rumors, and runs across instances, of what is happening among men who have more reason than others to anticipate the horrors of nuclear war. It is only the prominent who are noticed publicly and rebuked—men like J. Robert Oppenheimer, of whom there are but a few. One hears, for example, of a talented mathematician whose work is concerned with the ballistics (there is probably a more impressive word) of nuclear projectiles. If he visits a modern house, he looks at all the glass and moodily shakes his head. All that will go, he tells his host. He doesn't really see the glass, but only the yawning openings that will remain after the blast—that will remain, that is, if the bomb is dropped many miles away. Then there is the engineer who has left the aircraft industry to start a new life with a poultry farm. Raising poultry, from all reports, is a tough way to make a living, but living in the shadow of the engines of nuclear nihilism is tougher.

So it is a question of what is going on behind the façades. A recent book suggests one answer. Maxwell Griffith, author of *The Gadget Maker* (Lippincott, 1955, and Pocket Book, 1956), doesn't make it clear where he stands, but he certainly draws an effective picture of the confusion which haunts at least some of the bright young men in the engineering profession. *The Gadget Maker* is the story of youthful success in the design of aircraft. Brack, Mr. Griffith's somewhat dubious hero, studies mathematics nights to qualify for the more advanced projects going on at Amcraft, where he began as a draftsman fresh out of MIT. So far as we are concerned, the book has two high points of description: the first, when the author describes the setting for engineering studies at MIT; the second, when Brack reads for the first time an account of the effects of atomic bombing. The impression of the engineering school is strictly the author's contribution, for Brack is still far too young and ingenuous to be capable of the

devastating analysis of this Hall of Scientific Learning Mr. Griffith provides—which could, in fact, be printed alongside of the recent evaluation of Harvard, published by the undergraduate quarterly, *i.e.*, without anyone noticing a change of pace.

Brack's reaction to the report of what the bomb did to Hiroshima, on the other hand, bears the full impact of sudden horror and sickening realization upon a young engineer when he realizes the kind of a trade he is practicing. He sits up all night, grappling with a hysteria he cannot exorcise. Finally, however, he finds a solution. He designs a guided missile to be used in *defense* against atomic attack—a shining monster that is to be shot up into the air in battalions, and which, robot-like, will respond to radioed directions from the ground to find targets and destroy them. This is Brack's consolation, and for him it works.

A minor theme which dulls the splendor of Brack's resolve, however, is the decision of his employer, Dave Humber, to sell the business to people who can take pleasure in making planes for war. Humber has some sort of change of heart—or perhaps he began listening to his heart—after recovering from an illness. He explains to the men who work with him and for him:

"I don't know if I can explain it or not, but when you've had a close call like I've had, you start seeing things in a different light. You'd be surprised. When I was in the hospital, just waking up in the morning was a big event. Every night when I went to sleep I wondered if I was going to wake up. I was scared I was going to die, and I don't mind admitting it. When I die, I die—that's the way I feel about it. I'm gone, finished. I don't have any kids to leave behind; all that's going to be left of me when I'm gone is what I've done during my life. This factory, a few patents—that's what my accomplishments boil down to. I may be an atheist or a heathen or a deist or anything you want to call somebody who feels that way, but that's the way I've always felt and I'm not a big enough hypocrite to change my ideas at this stage of the game. Still, I've got some time left. How much, I don't know, but I want to use it doing something worth while, and making Amcraft into a

munitions factory isn't my idea of something worth while."

When an associate objected to the nasty expression, "munitions factory," Humbler asked, "What would you call our work for the last six or seven years, . . .?" His associate pointed out that *somebody* had to do it. The next interchange is worth quoting:

Whitelaw, holder of the silver star and member-in-good-standing of the American Legion, was profoundly disturbed. "But, Dave, you do have certain obligations to your country. If you were a meat packer or something, it would be different, but you're a manufacturer of airplanes. You can't just fold your hands and say what you will or won't do."

"But I can, Major. A man's brain is the one thing left to him that he can control absolutely. He doesn't have to use his brain in any way that he doesn't want to, and nobody can do a damn thing about it. They can kill him or throw him into a concentration camp or break his mind, but the one thing they can't do is make him think."

Sighing, Humbler carefully smashed his cigarette into a ashtray. "I've worked for one war," he said with a tone of finality. "That's enough. I don't intend to spend my last few years working for the next one."

In this scene, Humbler's farewell to the bright young men he has trained, the old flyer and brilliant designer glanced at Brack's plans for the guided missile. He saw its efficiency and momentarily enjoyed the economy of its conception—

. . . yet in that instant he understood definitely why he objected to the missile, hated it. The ideal airplane was no airplane at all: it was simply a weapon for killing, complicated but fundamentally as crude as a rifle bullet, a pike, a stone-age dub.

"You really want to know why I'm not going to have anything to do with this thing?" he asked with a kind of intense excitement. Then he gave an answer that caused Brack and Whitelaw to glance quickly at one another, that seemed to them both to be the queer and illogical and meaningless blather of a sick and ailing mind.

"Because there's no man in it, that's why."

This is Humbler's message to the future, a withdrawal in tired disappointment. Brack achieves another kind of adjustment from the thrill of being "project engineer" on the guided missile. But he has first to overcome his revulsion for atomic warfare, or rather to transform it into enthusiasm for a defensive weapon. Brack's reading of the book, *The Effects of Atomic Weapons*, which he finds in the Amcraft technical library, occupies several pages of description, building to a climax. It begins with mere physics:

It was interesting, instructive reading. He learned that the much-mentioned ball of fire observed in atomic explosions was a homothermal sphere of incandescent air approximately one hundred times brighter than the sun as viewed from the earth. This fireball, spitting neutrons and deadly gamma rays, lasted about ten seconds after expanding to a diameter of six hundred feet in fifteen milliseconds. Then rising like a gas balloon, the hot gaseous bubble rose until, cooling, it began to condense into water vapor smoke, and radioactive oxides of fission products. Finally, the dust-filled smoke and gas encountered the stagnant air at the base of the stratosphere and began to spread, forming the famous mushroom cloud.

The book went on to the effects on structures, then on human beings:

An examination of the areas in Japan affected by atomic bombing shows that small masonry buildings were engulfed by the oncoming pressure wave and collapsed completely. Light buildings and residences were totally demolished by the blast and fire. Manufacturing buildings of steel construction were denuded of roofing and siding, and only the twisted frames remained. Nearly everything above ground at close range, except reinforced concrete smoke stacks, was destroyed. . . . for the atomic explosions under consideration, houses and other obstructions of comparable dimensions may be treated as small perturbations which do not appreciably affect the main evolution of the blast.

Now the bomb is the "hero" of the tale—the dwellings of humans mere "perturbations." For Brack, the account takes on a fascination, its "scientific dispassion" contributing unbelievable horror:

About 20 minutes after the detonation of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima there developed the

phenomenon known as *fire storm*. This consisted of wind which blew toward the burning area of the city from all directions, reaching a maximum velocity of 30 to 40 miles per hour about 2 or 3 hours after the explosion. . . . The wind was accompanied by intermittent rain.

Details are not spared in the account of death by radiation. At the end, the book turns to problems of emergency in a city that is bombed. There are passages like this: "Underground construction or concrete walls 2 feet thick would provide this degree of blast protection. . . . The discussion of shelters . . . has been based on the tacit assumption that there will be sufficient warning for air attack to permit people to take shelter." The final paragraph contains these words:

It has been the purpose of this book to provide the essential and technical information that will permit the necessary plans to be made for dealing with the new and unusual situations that would arise as the result of the explosion of an atomic bomb. The organization, preparation, and the techniques designed to deal with these situations involve considerations beyond the scope of this book.

Brack now begins to get the point, although not a point intended by the authors:

Having read this peroration, Brack read it once again. Then he did a thing he could not remember ever having done before, a thing few sober mortals ever do when alone. He laughed out loud, laughed irresistibly, whooped with laughter. It was incredible, ridiculous. The scientist-authors had used three hundred pages to detail a new Inferno, a hell-on-earth where roof tiles blistered and steel girders were less than burnt straws, where shadows cast by a smaller, hotter sun were etched upon granite stones and the flowered patterns on delicate silk kimonos were seared into the flesh of women's breasts, where poisoned air jellied human bones and cooked red blood into watery stews, where the wounded, living sperm was left unknown to mock love, perhaps to curse the sons and the son's sons forever; and then—*then!*—suggesting earth-quake-proof buildings and buried shelters as palliatives, they had concluded with a feeble last line of hope, a scholarly implication of Volume II to come, a work of wider scope.

Brack slammed the book shut. *Beyond the scope of this book!* Where had he heard that before?

Then he knew. It was a ludicrous kinsman to the classic, condescending phrase that had been sprinkled throughout all the technical textbooks he had ever studied—the *simple proof is left to the student*—that trite, blindly arrogant phrase dismissing explanations of the theorems that seemed obvious to book-writing professors long lost in the refinements of advanced science.

Since this shows Mr. Griffith's capacities, and since our space is gone, we shall leave the passages on MIT for the reader to look up for himself. One general question, however, occurs. Has Mr. Griffith had difficulty in finding a character to embody his feelings? Is Brack really the man to sit up all night with a book on the atom bomb, finally shaken with hysteria at what he learns?

Perhaps there is truth in the way Brack rationalizes his doubts, and concentrates on "defense," but his terrible awakening seems too easily forgotten. Brack's exchange of glances with Whitelaw at Humbler's explanation of why he won't make any guided missiles comes fifty pages after Brack has read about the bomb. Could he be so insensitive to Humbler's feelings? What lowered the shades in his mind? If Mr. Griffith has an explanation, we didn't get it.

But we are grateful for the insights of the book, even if they make Mr. Griffith's leading character seem contradictory and unreal. Maybe all we can have is unreal men, until awakenings like the one which came to Brack are made to last.