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GREAT REFORMERS: GAUTAMA BUDDHA

THE concession of human greatness to Gautama Buddha by the West is closely akin to the reverential regard expressed by the world for Gandhi on the occasion of his death. It is also related to the formless tribute in feeling paid by conventional Christians to the memory of Jesus; with this difference, that Jesus, as "the Son of God," need not, can not, be understood, nor any reasonable estimate formed of him, while Buddha, even though nothing more of him be known, was "only" a man—although a man whose greatness, now that conscious disdain for "heathens" is passing away, gains grudging admiration.

In view of the avowed "humanness" of Buddha, there seems a negligent irresponsibility in the typical rationalist comment that Buddhism is a religion of Pessimism. Quite apart from the fact that Buddhist conceptions of the hereafter have never been known to produce the moody despair of salvation characteristic of certain Christian sects, nor even the "aloneness" admitted by agnostics like Herbert Spencer as death approaches, it seems unjust to regard as "pessimistic" a view of humanity which contains the possibility of Buddhahood for every human being. This alone makes Buddhism a religion of hope, with promise of happy earthly life, regardless of whether Nirvana is extinction, as some critics claim, or an absolutely unconditioned life of the spirit, as philosophical Buddhists suggest.

Quite possibly, the confusion about Nirvana arises from the fact that for most of us, personal identity is very largely a matter of conditions, and to be stripped of our virtues, as well as our weaknesses and imperfections, in preparation for a life eternal seems to promise no *real* immortality at all, but only an abstract continuation of something from which every trace of the "me" has been removed. But in any event, a Buddhist would assure us that there is not the slightest chance of anyone being sent off to Nirvana until he is quite willing, and even eager, to exchange his me-ness for the all-embracing sense of "I," in which not only all human beings, but the entire universe, is rooted.

In Buddhist terms, the trouble with the modern world is that the people in it are fiercely devoted to some kinds of conditions, while despising and fearing others, and are, at the same time, disinclined to consider the nature of conditioning as a problem to be solved in terms of some basic principle applying to all conditions. Men talk superficially and sentimentally of their philosophy of life, but their real philosophy is made up of a series of private deals they are trying to make with the Universe, and which they hope the Universe will keep. There is the small storekeeper who, late in the evening, says musingly to his wife that three thousand a year is all he asks; no more—he's not greedy. They could be comfortable and happy on three thousand a year, and he wonders if God could be interested in a little thing like that. A mother wants her boy not to be hurt in the war, or her daughter to be happily married; just this, only this, would be the perfect condition for her. The adolescent boy who longs for a cut-down Ford, the stage-struck girl who dreams of echoing applause, the tired city-dweller who takes melancholy pleasure in reading the advertisements of rural real estate—all are ready to make deals for their heart's desire. Either they want this or that special "thing," or they hope for stabilization of the "conditions" which represent their ideal of happiness and contentment.

As a young man, when he was still known only as Gautama, heir to a small kingdom in

northern India, Buddha was impressed by the fact that the law of averages seemed against the lasting satisfaction of human desire. Legend, and possibly history, relate that Gautama had himself grown up in the "perfect environment," according to ordinary standards. He began, that is, where later reformers ended, in theories of human betterment. He had everything he wanted, culturally as well as materially, yet still he was haunted by vague dissatisfactions, depressed by ennui. His discovery of human suffering was the beginning, for him, not of a share-the-wealth program, but a psychological investigation of the causes of pain.

It will increase our understanding of Gautama Buddha if we recognize at the outset that he was not interested in compromise solutions of the human problem. A modern reformer who refused to accept the inevitability, with its accompanying anguish, of death, would probably be deemed insane. But Buddha would not accept death. That is, he believed that there must be a way of regarding and even experiencing death, so that it would not be an evil at all. He started out by trying all the methods of reaching to knowledge that were currently approved in his time. He had the equivalent of a university education from his father, but that told him almost nothing about suffering. He learned from wanderings about the city that disease and death were regarded as inescapable evils by everyone. Then, as wise men were said to live in seclusion as hermits, he mingled with them and did what they told him to do. He practiced "mortification" and went without food. Finally, he stopped this because it seemed silly to torture and weaken his body, and he was not getting any wiser. Then he did something which reveals the foundation of his conviction about man, about truth, and about the processes of nature: he sat down beneath a tree to think things through, and he determined to do nothing else until he had reached finality on the things he wanted to know about. Millions of Buddhists, for thousands of years, have believed he succeeded.

The practical issue of Buddha's meditations were the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path. In modern terms, it might be said that he provided for those who would follow him a psychology of desire and a grand affirmation of the power of the human will. These two, will and desire, he said, are the sources of power in human life. The conflict between will and desire was made a reasonable undertaking by the study of causation, and Buddha was himself an object lesson in the "desirability" of overcoming desire. He was no withered ascetic who bore the marks of agonized self-denial, but a man whose presence awoke chords of kindliness in the cruel, renewed resolve in the flabby, and hope in the miserable. In common with Socrates, not wickedness, but ignorance, he held to be the cause of sorrow. Any man, he said, can overcome ignorance. Any man, therefore, can overcome pain and be free.

The appeal of Buddha to modern man is in his rational approach and his empirical method. He cautioned his followers to believe nothing on personal authority. "For this," he said, "I taught you—not to believe merely because you have heard, but when you believed of your own consciousness, then to act accordingly and abundantly." Belief without action was as idle as acceptance of authority. Indeed, the knowledge to which Buddha urged on his disciples was the product of reflection combined with positive behavior according to the Law, and it was this law which, more than anything else, Buddha taught.

While Buddha wrote nothing down, certain of his sayings were recorded by his disciples, and among these the verses forming the *Dhammapada* are perhaps the essence of his positive ethical teachings. They begin:

1. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon.

2. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a

> pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

This, basically, is the root of Buddha's teaching. All the complexities of Buddhist metaphysics, with which we are here little concerned, grow from this affirmation about the power of thought. Ultimately, all causation is psychological. The two poles of reality, in Buddhism, are Karma and Nirvana. Karma is the principle of Objectivity, of action and cause and effect; Nirvana, the principle of Subjectivity, the motionless heart or center of all reality. A Buddha, through perfect knowledge of the Law of Karma, ceases to be a personal focus for the play of cause and effect in himself, gaining thereby the peace of Nirvana. And yet, as a teacher, he remains in the world, "demonstrating," so to say, the reconciliation within himself of Being and non-Being—Karma and Nirvana.

There is no "God" in the Buddhist system, no divine creator apart from the universal consciousness of which all beings are embodiments. There is no occasion for prayer, therefore, nor votive offerings, nor for priests as intermediaries between God and man. The Buddhist monk can never be anything more than an exemplar to the laity—one who has determined to give more of his energies to the search for truth than other men; and, if he is able, to be something of a teacher, too.

Historically, the influence of Buddhism has probably been greater in extent and greater for good than any movement begun by any known religious teacher. Buddha, it has been said, was without any "historical sense." It is true that both Buddhist ethics and metaphysics relate only to the individual and that there is not even the slight "social consciousness," in the modern sense, that one finds in his contemporary, Lao Tze, in China. But Buddhism succeeded in transforming human society at its source in the people themselves. It was not the forbidding doctrine of the extinction of all desire which Impressed itself upon the masses of Asia, but the warmhearted sympathy of the teacher. As G. Lowes Dickinson has said, "What touched them in him was the saint and the lover of animals and men. And this love it was that flowed in streams all over the world, leaving wherever it passed, in literature and art, in pictures of flowers or mountains, in fables and poems and tales, the trace of its warm and humanizing flood."

From India Buddhism spread north to Tibet, where its deeper metaphysical system created an entire culture founded on religious devotion—a culture which over centuries developed fantastic embellishments of superstition and monkish formalism, but which nevertheless retains to this day the deep impress of Buddha's compassionate genius and his ardent spiritual striving. In time, Buddhism claimed much of China, Japan, Burma, and even exerted its civilizing influence over the simple tribes of desolate Central Asia. Ceylon became the home of popular Buddhism, in contrast to the more erudite and subtle versions of the Law, preserved in Tibet, and said to have been taught by Sakyamuni to his disciples for their ear alone. In India, Buddhism finally gave way to the forces of Brahmin orthodoxy, but before this happened, the great King Asoka, 250 years after Buddha's death, having been involved in a bloody war, proclaimed his conversion to Buddhism and thereafter devoted himself to spreading the doctrine of the Law and to pervading his rule with the moral verities of Buddhist teaching. He sent missionaries to all parts of India, and even to Egypt and Greece. Through Asoka, Buddhism, instead of a Hindu reform, became a great world religion, and its fame attracted travelers from China who came to study its truths in India and to carry home the texts expounding the Law to their countrymen.

The four truths are simplicity itself. The first affirms the fact of Suffering. The second sees the cause of suffering in the many forms of uncontrolled desire which choke, haunt and drive men throughout their lives. The third finds the victory over suffering to result from the cessation

of desire, and the fourth presents the path of righteousness and knowledge.

But the truths need to be examined in the light of philosophy, which leads to conviction of the "three characteristics"—

> (1) The impermanence of all finite things; in this sense (2) their lack of "soul" or their "unreality"; and therefore (3) their final unsatisfactoriness. As one becomes aware of the fact of impermanence and of its implications, one tends to substitute for the ignoble craving for what is subject to corruption the noble craving for the "incomparable security of a Nirvana free from corruption." (Irving Babbitt, *The Dhammapdda.)*

While Buddhist teachings include elaborate metaphysical doctrines, the vindication of the ethics taught by Buddha lies in immediate psychological experience. The doctrines are, so to say, "rationalizations" of ethical conviction. If a man could gain power over life and death, as Buddha taught was possible, this achievement implied a corresponding knowledge of the processes of life and death, or rather, a vision of the continuousness of life. Probably the most inviting aspect of the Buddhist tradition concerning the soul and its migrations is the extreme subtlety of this doctrine, and the reticence with which it is associated in the teachings of Buddha himself. Asked categorically if there was such a thing as "soul," he remained silent, refusing either to confirm or deny, and he later explained to Ananda, his disciple, that he would have no dogmas on the subject repeated in his name.

No more than any other great religious reformer could Buddha prevent his followers from crystallizing and materializing his teachings, but he did succeed in impressing upon them indelibly the rule of tolerance, of kindness and love for all living things, self-reliance in the search for truth, and the absolute sovereignty of moral Law. No heretic has ever been punished in Buddha's name, no great war of conquest prosecuted to save Buddhist civilization, and no threat of damnation has ever enabled a Buddhist priest to enslave cowering multitudes of believers. Instead, Buddha taught, as Edwin Arnold's incomparable poem has it,

> Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,
> None other holds you that ye live and die,
> And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
> Its spokes of agony. . . .
> If ye lay bound upon the wheel of change,
> And no way were of breaking from the chain,
> The Heart of boundless Being is a curse,
> The Soul of Things fell Pain.
>
> Ye are not bound! the Soul of Things is sweet,
> The heart of Being is celestial rest;
> Stronger than woe is will: that which was Good
> Doth pass to Better—Best.

Letter from SWITZERLAND

GENEVA.—The International Press Conference here has just closed. Late into the night, across the lake, the lights of the UNO blazed as a sign of the efforts men are making to clear up some of the war's *débris* and in its place to build a world free from fear and doubt. The League of Nations died, yet despite the first failure, attempts to bring the world into better cooperation continue. The insulting discourses of certain delegates were given no publicity; some were not included in the record of the Proceedings of the Conference. Emphasis, on the contrary, was put on the constructive propositions and their fruits. And there seems no doubt but that a broad line of action has been laid down which will insure the freedom of the press, while attempting to purify and to educate the public mind at every turn.

The work of Mrs. Roosevelt a few months back on The Rights of Man caused certain awakenings in Switzerland, whose slow, cadenced life has not been disturbed very much by the war's turmoil, but whose interests are now being directly affected by the outcome of such devastating conflicts. Switzerland's constitution is, as every one knows, a model in applied democracy. The Swiss as individuals are sturdy, dependable, thrifty, perseverant and freedom-loving. They will not brook any interference in their national life or in the ways of their thinking. They are independent to the point of pride, and were it not for such remarkable men as Calvin, Paracelsus, Pestalozzi, Dunant, etc., whose revolutionary ideas roused them from their contented ways in religion, medicine, education and social work, the Swiss would have succumbed to a tendency to close their minds to the possibility of learning about other nations and their ways of life.

The Swiss is slow, but get him to understand a practical plan which has a moral aim and which follows ethical lines, and you may find in him a patient and a steady collaborator. He will put his hand to the grinding mill and die, if necessary, for the application of principles.

Faced with the quick and precipitous American mind, he recoils. He does not understand light humour; he does not respond to what he considers the cock-sure boasting of younger, impetuous races. When the American Dakota plane fell in the Alps, it was with an indulgent smile that the Swiss narrated on their radio the sweeping statements of American officers who were sure they could climb and vanquish in no time the great rocks. While they made their futile sallies, the Swiss army and mountaineers prepared quietly and in silence, knowing that the advice of their experience must sooner or later be sought. And when it was, there were none more devoted, none more intent to save the stranded Americans. Nor did they boast of what they did, nor retort with "I told you so!" People sometimes become irritated at the quiet self-assurance of the Swiss. Thinking it complacency, they fail to note the fine qualities from which it grows—the self-reliance and spirit of independence which the Swiss have always shown in the hour of their need.

The war closed Switzerland within the confines of her frontiers. Only through her efficient organization and the self-sacrificial labour and thrift of her people was Switzerland able to pass successfully through those years of threatened famine. She not only increased her production while she withstood the greed of those who brought pressure to bear from without, but at the same time fed countless starving refugees and cared for the sick sent here to regain their health. Armed to the teeth, her men thoroughly trained, her mountains fortified, she was prepared to resist to death, if needs be, while remaining strictly neutral and never interfering beyond her own frontiers. It is partly the fault of circumstances that she has become to many, irritatingly self-centered. Peace may now open for her new contacts and fresh vision; but time is needed for

her readjustment to the rapid changes which have taken place in the surrounding world during her period of isolation.

There are no great millionaires in Switzerland as one finds in America; on the other hand, there are no paupers. Equitable distribution and work are assured to all, though there are still limitations of class which cause tacit barriers in society, especially among the old established families of Geneva. The French Swiss poke fun at what to them is the heavy slowness, both physical and mental, of the German Swiss, while the German Swiss has no desire to emulate his French neighbour. And the Italian Swiss preserve jealously their old traditions. Each group retains its racial characteristics in its own cantons, but when it comes to a national issue, they are one and inseparable. The common beauty of nature which they all enjoy puts a balance in their souls; in gazing on their snow-capped mountains which all love to climb, the Swiss forgets his petty disputes. Workmen stop their motor lorries to commune with the beauty of mountain, lake, or the magic of sunset hour. Crowds on the lakes in summer are quiet, and the country which they love in their quiet way, they keep clean and neat from an innate sense of civic pride and responsibility—and this without police supervision. In fact, one seldom sees a policeman, even at crowded street crossings in cities. It seems natural for the Swiss to live in accord with the harmony of Nature, which is a stranger to man's incessant rivalries.

SWITZERLAND CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE NEW CHINA

FOREVER CHINA quickly converts you to the view that a man should love the country he writes about. For even if he ignores or minimizes the weaknesses of the people—and Robert Payne, who wrote *Forever China,* does not do this—there will always be a kind of "touch" with other human beings which the writer creates for his readers, and without this touch a book is not worth reading at all. Mr. Payne taught English Literature in Chinese universities during the war years when China was isolated by enemy armies from the rest of the world. First at Chungking, then Kunming, he shared the lot of Chinese teachers and students, ate their food, lived in their houses, was bitten by their bugs, worked, hoped and dreamed with them.

His book has nearly 600 pages, packed with the experiences of daily life in China. There is the constant presence of hunger, disease and death. But there is also the irrepressible exuberance of life, of children playing, of girls singing, and the incessant murmur, fecund with humor, curiosity and cheerfulness, of Chinese crowds. On the street, one is as likely to meet a bandit being led to execution as a gay wedding procession. Death is as evident as life in China, the one inseparably a part of the other.

Whatever one has known or read of China, the mood, the accumulating intensity, the pictorial strength and mounting enthusiasm of this book will surely reach into and fill the mind and heart with unforgettable impressions. In the universities, for example, the usual relationship between students and teachers was often reversed, for the hunger for learning of the students made their teachers—especially the European ones—regard these young Chinese with awe. A Dutch professor of hydraulics said to Payne:

> They live on nothing and they work like madmen. I gave them an examination a little while ago. One of my best students fainted during the examination. I found that he had been studying for sixty-four hours without stopping, without having any food. He finished the paper—the whole paper—in about half an hour, and then he fainted. This is the kind of thing we are faced with—students who continually sacrifice their health for the sake of knowledge. And yet what use will be their knowledge if they are dead before they practise it?

The textbooks are old, out of date, the students undernourished, most of them penniless, hiding as best they can the ravages of consumption which often overtake their weakened bodies. They live and work on, supported by a little coarse rice, but mostly by their dream of tomorrow's China. As the Chinese soldiers fought, guerilla fashion, so the students fought for knowledge, using what tools they had, conscious that they, too, were shock troops for China's freedom.

It is impossible to tell what will be born in China from the collective will of China's student youth, from the undramatic but endless self-sacrifice of her scholars and teachers, from the Himalayan patience of the common people. To judge China from the corrupt officialdom which books and press reports elaborate would be to miss almost entirely the deeper life of the Chinese people. The corruption they suffer undoubtedly represents a kind of death-throe that was part of the old China, and should not be ignored, but this political faithlessness is only a single aspect of the great ferment that is affecting China's vast domain.

A strange atmosphere of serenity pervades *Forever China,* despite constant intrusions of the violence of war. Payne converses with pale, slender-handed professors, only to learn that they have killed dozens of the enemy. One, an anthropologist, wore his bloody past as simply as his fabulous learning. Incidents of heroism and daring become almost commonplace, a thing expected in this book—there are so many for Payne to describe. And Payne himself, a poet whose prose lightly veils but does not conceal the harshness, the occasional cruelty and acceptance of suffering that is inevitable in China, today,

seems at home in all this welter of life and death. He was with the Loyalists at Madrid and Barcelona; in Vienna, he joined in a sudden plot to shoot Hitter from a window when his triumphal procession went by. Throughout the book, interludes from Payne's memory of torn and struggling Europe unite the bravery of the Chinese with courage and sacrifice in other parts of the world.

But more than anything else, the figure of an American journalist, Bergery (that is not his real name), joins the heart of China with the heart of the West. Bergery is Payne's friend whom he loves, and who dies while Payne is in China. Bergery is a kind of Thomas Wolfe of European civilization. The whole Renaissance speaks with broken heart through him. His letters, scattered among the pages of *Forever China*, make a book within a book. His dreams are so vibrant with life, his person so abandoned to his hopes, that whether they are possible or not matters little to the reader, who realizes that what dreams *are* possible will be like Bergery's in spirit. He said in one of these letters:

> "When I was young I dreamed of bringing the tides of East and West together, and from the maelstrom of these conflicting currents, I imagined a miracle—there would be dry land. I had hoped to see before I die the white crest of the wave of the Orient leaping high in the air and becoming rock—a new nation built out of uncharted seas. It may be so. The East is fluid, and we ourselves are rigid in spite of our inventiveness. . . .
>
> "And do you know, sometimes I have the feeling that we are outside of history. During the last twenty or thirty years we have avoided history, we have run away from her, we have run away from all traditions. The revolution of nihilism is not history; and we are all nihilists now. In our own age, when the most precious things of man, whole cities and civilisations, can be destroyed by bombs, history stands still and culture progresses by infinitesimal fragments of experience, or else withdraws altogether. . . .
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> "One evening, at Changsha, I lost my hope for the future, and found it again. Do you remember when we walked together towards the two remaining pillars of the University of Hunan? So great was the impression made upon me that it reminds me of the explosion of a depth charge. I was weak, and believed in nothing. Now I believe only in your Universities. Just as the prophets and ascetics went into the desert, where they were forgotten by men, and returned bringing with them the glory of a culture new-formed, so I believe that out of small groups of men who painstakingly set out to understand the nature of the civilisation they live in, learned scholars and young men enthralled with the genius of their country, we shall see the beginning of the revival so long expected. The wars will come to an end. Pray God they do not find us with only our weapons in our hands! . . ."

Bergery died in the mountains of China, a millennial vision of one great human race on his lips, saying, "Then perhaps, since we shall be all of one blood, there will be peace." Chinese Buddhist priests recited their ritual, and Payne repeated the burial service of the Church of England and inscribed on the unpainted cross that marked Bergery's grave, "He loved China."

Mr. Payne is a man of delicate perceptions, one fitted to convey the refinements of Chinese culture, to value and to intimate the nuance of human values as they have been transmitted across countless centuries by the oldest civilization in the world. And while he reproduces as few writers have been able the spirit of Chinese art, calligraphy, and poetry, there is also an earthy appreciation of the forces of nature which are so intimate a part of life on this raw frontier of China's history. Time, the moment, and a sense of eternity blend in this book. The savagery of war, the struggle of men and the cry of national and human aspiration are seen and heard against the setting of ageless mountains, torrential rivers, and hues of sunlit brilliance that make each day appear as the dawn of a new creation. So it seems, as Mr. Payne tells it in *Forever China.*

COMMENTARY
THE WILL TO BE JUST

THE recent rulings of the Supreme Court against legal enforcement of racial covenants among landowners constitute a vindication of the faith of the people of the United States in their form of government. The decision of the Court was simple: it said, in effect, that State courts cannot enforce real estate agreements intended to prevent negroes from acquiring homes in white neighborhoods. While such agreements may be adhered to voluntarily without violation of the law, under this decision no State can compel the carrying out of racial covenants. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution provides that all citizens are entitled to "equal protection" under the law, and, as Chief Justice Vinson declared, "It cannot be doubted that among the civil rights intended to be protected from discriminatory State action by the 14th Amendment are the rights to acquire, enjoy, own and dispose of property."

The Constitution records the agreement of the people of the United States to live together under the guidance of a few basic principles. The success of a government based on the Constitution depends entirely upon the faith of the people in the truth of those principles and in the determination of public officials to apply them in public decision. In these cases of racial covenants, the Supreme Court decision should go far in assuring negro citizens that a government dominated by white men may also be a government that will act on principle.

Through the years, negroes have suffered frequent and consistent injustice at the hands of the courts of the United States. Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (Vol. I, Chap. 26) gives documentary evidence of this, and it is worth anyone's time to read "Road to Glory" in Irving Stone's *Clarence Darrow for the Defense* for a poignant account of what negroes have had to endure when they chose to claim their rights as citizens. Now, 12 million negro Americans have been given reason to believe that these wrongs are regretted, that the appeal to principle has meaning and power in the United States.

Governments can do and have done many terrible things, but the worst they can do is to destroy the hope of justice in human beings. Conversely, the best thing a government can do is to increase the faith of men in one another, by expressing their will to be just. It is not too much to say that political progress can be measured in no other way.

CHILDREN
. . .and Ourselves

"MY private opinion is," wrote a Gifford lecturer at the University of Glasgow in 1937, "that only if you can appreciate nonsense can you appreciate sense." This, of course, is a condensed way of suggesting the importance to education of a sense of humor, which this particular writer perceived, as have many parents, to be closely related to a general sense of proportion or "fitness." The sentence quoted above, by a little manipulation, may lead us to another consideration in respect to the educative potentialities of humor. By implying that he likes "nonsense," the writer is telling us that he is a man who can laugh at himself—who ever heard of a solemn, self-important person defending "nonsense"? Unless one's "sense" of humor is subtle enough to disclose amusing traits within himself as well as in others, he has no genuine humor at all. Humor speaks a universal language, and indicates its true presence only when one is laughing *with* others, rather than at them.

It should be evident to all observant adults that children who grow up in a home atmosphere permeated by a lively and subtle sense of humor are well equipped to face the small reverses of life. There appears to be something almost mystical about the manner of transmitting a sense of humor, however, since in the first place humor is hard to explain in logical terms, and since few of the natural occasions for an interchange of humor between parents will be easy for the child to understand. Yet many readers may be convinced, as we are, that the child does gradually become aware of the *spirit* of "humor" itself by continual exposure. This is perhaps because a true sense of humor is a flow of nature, present in each small action, its mood conveyed by facial expressions and bodily postures. It probably makes its deepest impression in young children when it manifests as a sort of quizzical resilience in the face of minor tragedies or exasperating events in the life of a home. When a recently returned shopper drops a carton of eggs on the kitchen floor in the presence of a child, the remarks that follow and the general spirit with which the messy event is surveyed will leave a profound impression upon the child. There is quite a difference between the exclamation, "Damn," accompanied by an expression of blank and utter dismay, and a remark such as "Well, the floor is clean and they're better scrambled anyway."

Though any single example may be weakly inadequate, there can be little doubt that it is of great importance for the child to learn that there is no disaster which cannot be viewed philosophically, even if the damage is total and the philosophy restricted to a humorous remark. The child who breaks a toy and relapses into a prolonged depression is preparing himself to be a dark pessimist in later years. A word or two, at the time, by parents who can demonstrate their own ability to rise above a petty annoyance, will suggest that there is a more mature way of meeting disaster that the wearing of gloom.

Since the "comics" now make their appeals to the sensational rather than the humorous (especially those strips designed for the child-public), it is obvious that our popular culture does not of itself provide a good training ground for humor. We need more books like A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* and a wider circulation for the few we do have of this sort. Milne's stories are educational masterpieces and can be recommended as models. In the first place, these children's stories are good reading for adults and can be fully enjoyed only by those who do acquire an adult perspective. This should be an absolute requirement for any humorous literature to be read to children in the home, for the literary stimulus ought to be shared. While the child will first see only the simple outlines of a fairy-story type of presentation in the events which occur to Milne's characters, he can be gradually acquainted, through his parent’s perception of the other dimensions. Each one of the Milne characters,

while purely imaginative, exemplifies some typical human quixotry. Eeyore, the gloomy donkey, forever looks at the Dark Side of Things. A single cloud on the horizon spoils Eeyore's day. When a child who is vaguely familiar with Eeyore shows a proclivity for being pessimistic, a parent is entitled to laugh gently at the child and call attention to his identity in spirit with Eeyore. This is quite feasible, for Eeyore is neither bad nor disgusting, he is even likable; he is simply unaware of the thralldom in which he is held by his own glum outlook. So if a child is asked to look in the mirror to see if he reminds himself of Eeyore, he is less shamed than being reminded of a pleasant, imaginative world from which he may possibly learn something. Then, too, since not even the parents who read this column will be perfect, it might, on occasion, be wise to confess a momentary gloom to the child by saying something like, "I am being Eeyore today." Such little devices are not really devices at all, but means to emotional equality between parents and their young. And the feeling of equality is an essential of psychic balance in the home. With such a background, a child may avoid a number of unnecessary, meaningless and bitter fights with other children by his ability to see the ludicrousness of a certain quarrel, and above all by the ability to poke fun at himself without losing any real dignity.

We, of course, want our children to take themselves seriously. But if we and they are to be really serious, we must be objective about our present incapacities. Both we and our children are in constant need of a wider view, a more objective picture of ourselves and our doings. And that is the signal value that we can bequeath to ourselves by cultivating a sense of humor.

Another recommendation which may be made without reserve proposes an entirely different form—the musical fantasies of Gilbert and Sullivan. We have here, once again, the combination of a simple story with humorously instructive overtones and undertones. The Lord High Executioner of *The Mikado* cannot sever the head of any offender against the royal ordinance on flirting because he would first have to decapitate himself; he is an object-lesson as to why self-righteousness is ridiculous, and why the judgment of criminals a matter to be approached with great care.

The child who listens to the repeated playing of a Gilbert and Sullivan album will at first pick up only the faintest idea of the plot—which is sufficient for the time—plus some sense of melodic beauty and rhyme, but he will also see that his parents are deriving a further enjoyment from the renditions and will be curious about the meaning of the whole procedure until it is gradually revealed to him through answers to his questions. Gilbert and Sullivan are also instructors in bravery, for all bravery begins with our capacity to see something in temporary misfortune other than dispair. All of the "tragic" events of *The Mikado* are redeemed from somberness by the humor which accompanies them.

There is no antidote to the cheap and increasingly vulgar humor in which our culture abounds except the development of a finer and more rewarding taste. It is impossible for a child's introduction to an enlivening, philosophical humor to begin too soon.

FRONTIERS
Body and Mind

IF the specialists in organic chemistry and surgery make as much "progress" in the next fifty years as they have since 1900, and if the reports in the technical journals of their present achievements are only half true, believers in human freedom will have some interesting questions to answer in the twenty-first century, and perhaps before.

Modern medicine already has a considerable catalog of magic substances that exercise a powerful effect on the psychological and emotional components of human beings. Thyroid extracts, it is said, "will increase intelligence and change personality." Glutamic acid, a substance found in wheat gluten and many plants, changes gloom to vivacity and steps up "mental and physical alertness." The sulfa drugs are known to have a variety of psychological effects. The time may come when "personality" will be sold in a capsule and "normality" be dispensed in a nice proportion of bottled hormones.

Surgery, too, is making its contribution. The Portuguese neurologist, Egas Moniz, pioneered the technique of relieving human beings from "worry" by severing the neural pathways between the prefrontal lobes of the brain and the thalamus. The theory of this operation is that habit-patterns of ungovernable temper and anxiety become fixed through these pathways; cut the pathways, and the patient has a new start. According to the report of successful cases:

> Melancholics became cheerful. Worry, fear, hate disappeared. The world which had seemed so dark became a delightful place. Indeed, the good humor was sometimes embarrassingly excessive.

Another type of brain operation, involving removal of three-quarters of a frontal lobe, seemed to transform an unsuccessful stockbroker into a terrific salesman who soon became a millionaire. After the operation, he showed "greater persistence, greater optimism and self-confidence and a lack of tendency to worry." But post-operative tests also showed "a deterioration of the intellectual functions, particularly in the faculty of discrimination."

Without resorting to the fantasies of the science-fiction magazines, it is possible to imagine a chemist of the future saying to a surgeon, "Go ahead, make me a Frankenstein, and I'll feed him the right hormones and hire him out as a baby-sitter."

On the side of the more cosmic aspects of modern science, research in solar radiation implies that even the vagaries of the stock market are linked by mechanistic law to events occurring light-years away. There is now on view in Los Angeles a machine which matches security prices with the curve of solar radiation, the point being that the response of the market to the solar dictator lags a few months behind, giving the speculator plenty of time to buy or sell according to the instruction of this latest wrinkle in scientific astrology. To a plain man reading the prospectus, it seems that you can't lose.

Meanwhile, Dr. Petersen of St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago informs us that sunspots in 1948—"probably the biggest sunspot year in nearly two centuries"—will stir up all kinds of hell on earth. Sunspots mix up the weather, including, doubtless, even California weather, and this, as Esculapius once remarked, upsets the human organism. The manner of these disturbances is set forth by Dr. Petersen:

> With mental and physical fatigue there may be obvious reflections in frenzied states, sexual excitement, dancing manias, religious exaltation, crime waves, strikes and revolts. . . . And with all this, epidemics of disease.

Calvin, it seems, was only a beginner in arguing the case for predestination. His theory rested on the logic of a single revelation, but the scientists present us with a vast encyclopedia of facts drawn from the experiments and observations of thousands of research workers. Mind, they say, is a natural substance—peculiar in kind, "invisible yet material." A sharp knife can

release a flood of optimism and profit and loss are governed by the stars. It is all working out pretty much as Bertrand Russell predicted in 1925, in his Introduction to Fredrick Lange's *History of Materialism.* Setting the problem as a controversy between the "vitalists" and the "mechanists," in which the vitalists stand for some nonmaterial force in life, he observed:

> It will be a severe blow to the vitalists when protoplasm is manufactured in the laboratory, but they will probably take refuge in saying that their theories only apply to multicellular organisms. Later, they will confine vitalism to vertebrates, then to mammals, then to men, and last of all to white men—or perhaps it will be yellow men by that time. Ordinary scientific probability suggests, however, that the sphere of mechanistic explanation in regard to vital phenomena is likely to be indefinitely extended by the progress of biological knowledge.

Mr. Russell, as anyone can see, is on the side of science and the Mechanical Man, or was in 1925. But what neither he nor any of the exponents of chemical personality point out is that by offering to explain men wholly in terms of mechanical processes, they are shutting out the entire universe of true human excellence. Why is it that we admire and thrill most of all to the spontaneous act of genius, the unrehearsed humor, the sudden brave decision and the uncalculating kindness?

What, after all, is real in human life—the deep purposes we believe to be our own, or the physical, mental and emotional situation in which we work? At risk of sounding complacently self-assured, we are driven to say that this popular questioning of human freedom ought not to constitute a real problem at all, and would not, except for the strange reliance of men upon the technologists of psycho-physiology for definitions of the human being. Actually, the implications read from the progress of medicine seem nightmarish in the extreme, when, because a drug seems to sharpen intellectual facility, it is claimed that *mind* is secreted in matter, is matter itself. Will tuning the strings of a violin eliminate need for a musician?

We may learn from modern physiology that human freedom is subtler by far than some of its enthusiastic champions may have supposed—learn, perhaps, that John Dewey was closest to the truth when he said that freedom is knowledge of necessity. But even the simplest of men ought to be able to see, in principle, that discovery of natural, mechanistic process is itself an emancipation from its rule. The most free are those who have the most control over their own psychological and emotional processes, and the physical and biological sciences constitute a vast analogue to this personal experience of control—they are means to greater freedom, if we can learn to use them *for* freedom. It might be better to be poor and have an anxiety neurosis, than to be a millionaire without worries and without the "faculty of discrimination."

The test-tube theory of human nature may work well when applied to the plastic material of the psyche—the part of man which is fittingly described as an intricate complex of conditionings. But it can never apply to, nor affect except to hide, the creative side of man's nature. The web of life may be seamless, but the weaver is free.