

## THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

THE former Central European peasant looked up from a New England field he had been cultivating for twenty years—part of a small family farm worked by his wife, his two sons and himself—and smiled at a friendly passer-by. He held up a potato and exclaimed, "I can buy heem cheaper in the A & P!" spat, and went back to his digging.

There seemed to be something malignant in his comment; not in him, nor in his words, but in the fact which they represented. For it was true that, figuring everything, including his own labor, it cost him more to grow a potato than it would have to buy it from a chain store a few miles away. And if Mickey, this hardworking peasant who drove himself and his sons from sunup to dark, whose wife was psychopathically devoted to thrift—she and her babies had almost starved one winter when her husband had been working for a stake in the city—if Mickey and his family couldn't make a go of a small family farm, who could?

The predicament of Mickey and of thousands of American-born farmers like him has been haunting sociologists for some fifteen or twenty years—ever since they began to suspect that something had gone wrong with the traditional rural economy of the United States. The portent was ominous. To say that the family-size general farm could no longer survive in the economic struggle for existence was like hanging Thomas Jefferson in effigy. The roots of American culture are—or were—in the small, family farm. It was the only brake we had against the socially disintegrating effects of urban industrialism. Tillers of the soil represented a stabilizing conservatism of the right sort. American youth learned about the dignity of hard work on the family farm, where they also acquired self-reliance and Yankee ingenuity, a pastoral simplicity and a character-building respect for the fruitfulness of Nature. The failure of the family farm would

amount to a dying out of virtue from the land, a kind of betrayal by both heaven and earth.

This is a commentary not on the vision of Jefferson, nor on the countless men-in-the-street as well as those in public life who have echoed his ideas, but on the common failure of us all to rethink the Jeffersonian ideal anew with each generation. The fact of the matter is that industrialized farming is displacing the family farm, all over the United States. It was not only the dust storms that drove the Oklahomans and Texans to California: tractors pushed from behind. "Blowed out and tractored out," the Okies said. The "successful" farmers, today, are the specialists, the cash crop farmers. The migrants in California's Central Valley call them "windshield farmers," men who oversee from automobiles the operations on their thousand-acre domains.

While California is the "pioneer" in industrialized agriculture, the trend is nation-wide. Saying "Good-by to the Homestead Farm" in *Harper's* for May, 1941, Dr. Paul S. Taylor of the University of California called attention to the same industrializing process that is taking possession of farms "from New Jersey to California and from North Dakota to Florida." In 1940, twenty-five thousand Middle Western farmers in the Corn Belt could not find farms to rent; the Wheat Belt is already invaded by "virtually a factory system of production," and important sections of the Cotton Belt are subject to power farming. Dr. Taylor, an authority on agricultural labor and a man who has been called "the conscience of the liberal movement in California," makes this comment:

One result of mechanization is bigger farms and fewer men. Another is transformation of the occupation itself. Steadily, and in recent years rapidly, it is doing to farming what machines have done to domestic handicraft production over the past

century. The results of the process to both industry and agriculture are decidedly upsetting, if not revolutionary. Where industrialization of agriculture runs its full course the term "farmer" no more suggests a man with hand on the plow than "manufacturer" now means what it once did—a maker of things by hand.

For a thorough study of the impact on human beings of this agricultural "industrial revolution" and its effect on the social relationships of rural communities, the reader should turn to Dr. Walter Goldschmidt's volume, *As You Sow*, published last year by Harcourt, Brace. This work presents careful research on three California towns—Wasco, Dinuba and Arvin. Wasco started out about forty years ago to become a farming community populated by a small group of families who planned a measure of cooperation for their common benefit. It is of interest that at the very outset, the circumstances of the economic environment contributed to the defeat of the "community" aspect of their effort. Speaking of the way in which the colonists solved the all-important water problem, Dr. Goldschmidt remarks: "It is characteristic of our American culture that this solution was derived not from a higher concentration on cooperative effort, but on an individual basis." The farmers finally obtained effective irrigation through power brought in by a large utility company, enabling each one to do his own pumping, which had the effect of wiping out "one of the focal points of community effort"—cooperative irrigation.

So—continues the author—the course of Wasco's star was set by the nature of her physical and social environment. Long before the community existed, the agricultural enterprises were established against which her farmers had to compete, and the pattern was set. The very plan of establishing a colony on irrigated lands inevitably called for the production of cash crops at a high cost with abundant cheap labor. Though the hardships were to be great and many farms were to be lost in the struggle to bring Wasco into the pattern, it was inevitable from the outset that she should be set up on an industrialized basis. That is, inevitable in an economic sense. For the cash outlay for expensive

equipment necessary to pump water meant producing high value cash crops. And in order to realize the necessary return to cover these costs the new farmers had to compete with established enterprises. Thus they were immediately caught in the established pattern of farming.

It is this competitive compulsion, originating, first, in the large-scale farming which characterized even the earliest developments of California agriculture—there never was a period of widespread, pioneer, homestead farms in California history, as in other parts of the country—and, second, in the program of intensive cash crop production, pervading the farmers of the State with a speculative, get-rich-quick psychology, which created the conditions suffered by agricultural labor, today. California's most important crops are notably subject to wide price fluctuations, while farm products which enjoy a stable market value are among those which must be imported into the State in large quantities. Meanwhile, the landless labor force bears the heaviest burden of disaster in times of economic depression, and in good years is an absolute necessity to the profits of the farmer. High California land values are dependent upon an adequate supply of cheap seasonal labor.

Wasco, in its present development, may be regarded as a typical farming community of the Central Valley. But within the limits of profitable California agriculture, as presently constituted, are two extremes, represented, in Dr. Goldschmidt's study, by two other towns, Dinuba and Arvin. Dinuba forms the center of a number of "farms of modest proportions," averaging 57 acres each, while Arvin's farms—among them the larger portion of the Di Giorgio holdings—average 497 acres. Whereas in Dinuba the population is fairly homogeneous, sharp lines divide the wealthy Arvin farmers and their managers from the laborers who constitute more than 80 per cent of the population. While it has been argued that Arvin is a much "younger" town than Dinuba, and therefore might be expected to reflect social immaturities, population figures show that this

community affords little attraction to permanent settlers, more than half the residents (in 1944) having lived in Arvin only four years or less. This latter situation reflects transience rather than a sudden influx of families, for there were more children in Arvin's schools in 1940 than in 1944.

Dr. Goldschmidt's comparison of Dinuba with Arvin is detailed and revealing, throwing considerable light on the underlying causes of the eleven-months-old strike of the field and shed workers of the Di Giorgio Farms. Dinuba, while subject to the inevitable conditions imposed by intensive specialty farming, has a population evenly divided among farm operators, farm laborers, and workers in the town. The relatively small average farm of Dinuba has a noticeably democratizing effect on social relationships in the community. Relatively few families are in poor circumstances, and there is no wealthy class with social ties in distant urban centers. They are all Dinuba people. In Arvin, on the other hand, neither growers nor laborers exhibit a normal resident interest in community affairs.

The general public has been made aware of the conditions in California agriculture by the Great Strikes of the 30's—a total of 180 between January, 1933 and June, 1939—and by such books as Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and McWilliams' *Factories in the Field*. Today, the problem is again being pressed into the foreground by controversies arising out of the Central Valley Project, which will be, when completed about 1955, one of the largest irrigating systems in the world. (It will also generate some 450,000 kilowatts of hydroelectric power.) Put briefly, the Bureau of Reclamation, authorized by Congress to construct two great dams and a 350-mile system of irrigation canals and to administer the distribution of water, takes the position that Reclamation Law already in force will require all growers contracting to receive Project water to be limited to 160 acres each (or 320 acres, under California's community-property law), and the Bureau has prepared contracts under

which farmers holding excess lands (in excess of 160 or 320 acres) will be obliged to reduce their holdings to conform to the 160-acre limitation. The logic behind this procedure is that public tax-financed irrigation should benefit the people at large—in this case, the small or medium-size farmer (although 160 acres is not a "small" farm)—and not provide water-subsidies to great combines in agriculture. On the other hand, the large farmers argue that the Reclamation Law was written to apply to *new* lands opened up for homesteading, etc., and should not be interpreted as having force with respect to private holdings already under intensive cultivation.

Supporters of the Reclamation Bureau's position have the weight of traditional equalitarian and social thinking behind them: the history of 75 years of injustice to agricultural labor; the spreading pattern of "bigness" in agriculture, with consequent destruction of democratic social relationships in America's rural communities; the fact that a medium-size farm (52 acres) can be operated with almost the same efficiency as larger holdings and that smaller units "are more productive of total commodities, total income, and people supported." The opposing view of the large farmers is simple and obvious: to apply the 160-acre limitation to their holdings would be expropriation (they would be paid, of course, for their land, which would be sold in smaller units to other farmers).

This issue will undoubtedly come up again for extended debate in Congress. So far, attempts to exempt California lands from the 160-acre limitation have failed, while the attack on the Reclamation Bureau's policy, spearheaded by California's Senator Downey, has recently succeeded in obtaining the discharge of Michael W. Straus, Commissioner of Reclamation, and Richard L. Boke, the Bureau's regional director in California.

Senator Downey, who has written a book, *They Would Rule the Valley*, in criticism of the Bureau policy, asserts that contracts between the

Government and California Irrigation Districts cannot, for a number of technical reasons, be enforced. Meanwhile, Director Boke announced in 1946 that "two contracts have been completed, with others in various stages of negotiation." (*Nation*, Sept. 21, 1946.) In 1944, Jerry Voorhis (predecessor of Congressman Richard M. Nixon from the Twelfth District of California) proposed that the 160-acre limitation be applied only to new lands made available for agriculture by Project water, and that the ownership of presently irrigated lands be left undisturbed. This amendment, offered as a substitute for the Elliott amendment to the 1944 Rivers and Harbors Act, Mr. Downey claims, was regarded as "impracticable" by both sides, and the Elliott amendment, which would have entirely exempted the Central Valley from the 160-acre limitation, was rejected by the Senate, it being argued that the fundamental land and water policy of the Federal Government, applying to all States, ought not to be hastily set aside in California. Mr. Downey has since offered a measure (S. 912) which would have the same effect as the Elliott amendment.

This controversy over public policy in regard to land ownership in California is of major importance to the country at large, not only economically and politically, but also from the viewpoint of basic social philosophy. It has in it all the ingredients of prolonged conflict and seems, thus far, to be without any sort of compromise solution. With the joining of the issue, three time-honored articles of faith come into head-on opposition: first, the Jeffersonian principle that the small land-owner and farmer shall have equality of economic opportunity; second, that property rights shall not be interfered with by "radical" schemes of socialization; and third, that every American has the right to become as rich as he possibly can, and that acquisition of wealth is the best obtainable evidence that the American Dream is being fulfilled.

It should be evident that a culture whose economic relationships are shaped by these motives is bound to be always in unstable equilibrium, and that with the closing of the frontier and the growth of monopoly in industry, the conflict between such motives must become more sharply defined. Now that agriculture, as well as manufacturing, is taking on the pattern of the class struggle, with the proletarianization of the small farmer and the increasingly intimate relationship between government and all forms of industrial enterprise, the old libertarian conceptions of American democracy seem depressingly rhetorical. *How*, within this emerging pattern, can the principles of human freedom and equality be applied? We see no immediate solution at all—certainly no easy one—and in the long run the objective, we think, will have to involve the voluntary and gradual elimination of the characteristic motive of unlimited acquisition, and the substitution of cooperative enterprise for the "rugged individualism" which has so largely created the present dilemma. That this solution promises to be extremely difficult is no reason for ignoring it—if, indeed, it is the only solution. From the viewpoint of government, the desirable policy should involve not only decentralization with respect to smaller farms and cooperatives, but also decentralization of government power itself, and the transfer of administrative power, whenever possible, to local units of government. Meanwhile, the suggestion of Dr. Goldschmidt that we accept the pattern of industrialized agriculture as inevitable and support the unionization of farm labor and other equalizing conditions, although no permanent solution, seems a necessary and immediately needed step, in view of the lack of a cooperative psychology in California. Dr. Goldschmidt points out that one effect of agricultural industrialization has been the emphasis on "money" values in rural life:

It is not merely that crops are grown for cash and sold in the market, but it is that cash returns dominate the behavior of the farmers in every facet of

their activity. The value of production for household use, when weighed in the scales of cash returns, is found wanting. Sharing of implements and trading labor are so rare as to appear unique in California's fields. A cash settlement is the solution, and practically all share arrangements are handled on a rental basis.

It is natural, perhaps, that the need for cooperation should appear most urgent in the area where profit-taking has outrun by far all other motives in agriculture, and where the psychological and moral basis for cooperative enterprise is most seriously absent. And all the more reason, then, for recognizing that "pioneer" industrialized agriculture in California has also precipitated a type of social problem in advance of its acute development in other regions.

In principle, it would seem a mistake to hope for a satisfactory settlement between the large farmers and the Bureau of Reclamation through aggressive enforcement of the 160-acre limitation. Doubtless, it is "logical," from the viewpoint of social idealism, to conceive of a nation of not only family-size farms, but of family-size industries, with General Motors, General Electric, and even R. H. Macy—as Joseph Di Giorgio laconically proposed—divided up in the name of economic democracy. But to realize this dream we should have to delegate to the State—the Federal Government—a measure of power that would establish all the potentialities of totalitarianism in the name of social reform.

A less dangerous pattern of opposition to monopoly in industry has been developed in the Scandinavian countries, notably in Sweden and Denmark, by consumer cooperation, with retention of power, democratically, by the people themselves. (See Marquis Childs' *Sweden: The Middle Way*.) There is no reason to suppose that a similar program in the United States would be without similar effect.

Already, in California, at least one venture in cooperation on the land is under way, in an attempt to work out, in practical terms, a solution for the more obvious social shortcomings of

California agriculture. The Tuolumne Cooperative Farms, in Modesto, comprises a 155-acre tract operated by George Burcham and Wendell Kramer and their families. Here, an attempt is being made to develop year-round farming and home-industry employment and to take advantage, self-consciously, of the educational opportunities of a natural, rural environment for children and youth. So far, the major cash crop is alfalfa, which is gradually being supplemented by other activities—a cow dairy, a goat dairy, and an apiary. The plan is to make each of these projects capable of supporting a single family, in cooperation with the other members of the enterprise. The home-industry for winter employment is woodworking, and the Co-op was able last year to dispose of the products of this project to a wholesale distributor. Startling financial success cannot yet be reported of the Tuolumne Cooperative Farms, but the undertaking is only four years old and must be regarded as still in its primary stage of development. A major encouragement arises from the fact that Tuolumne enjoys the eager interest of many who share the ideals of the Co-op, and that considerable inventiveness along similar lines is being exercised by others desiring to contribute to a new pattern of community life in California.

## *Letter from* **FRANCE**

A COLLEGE TOWN.—It was certainly interesting to read, in a recent issue of *MANAS*, the thoughts of the Italian correspondent on education. Many of the features he points out—long hours, emphasis on classical studies, neglect of mechanical work—are as true of French as of Italian schools today. American students visiting France are impressed with the wide scope of knowledge of their French brethren, especially in subjects like history and languages. The emphasis on the artistic-literary aspects, however, is easily noted in the selections from literature used in language courses, and one of the things students find easiest in foreign-language composition is a poetic description of a spring day or hike in the mountains, replete with rich vocabulary. (Nevertheless, Americans need not feel inferior in language capacity—after a comparable length of time of study, conversational ability is, on an average, equal with students of both countries. The main difference is that here, as in Europe generally, considerably more time is spent on languages, and most take six years of one tongue and four of another—in France, usually English and German.) A person who passes the state examinations at the end of his secondary school studies is one who is able to retain a vast amount of knowledge in a number of fields. (The level of difficulty often induces discouragement, and indifference to failure.) All but the "cream of the crop" are similarly eliminated from professional schools and universities by highly competitive examinations. This system perpetuates the idea of a social class of intellectuals, who are expected to occupy themselves in intellectual pursuits.

Recently I was asked what the main intellectual, artistic and philosophical movements are in the United States today—a question much more difficult to answer for the U.S. than for France, partially because a certain group in French society is constantly concerned with these

questions. This leads to the notion that Americans are too busy making money to deal with them.

During the summer there are seminars and conferences at which people gather to meet and exchange views. At one of these, ways were being discussed in which to meet the pressing problems of France and of the world. A period was set aside for discussion of "social problems and non-violence." Just as in the United States such a group would make a bee-line for the Negro problem, and hover around it in earnest attempts to find suitable techniques for remedying the situation, here in France the big social problem is class distinctions, with their accompanying attitudes that are often as traditional and illogical as those associated with race relationships in the States. It was pointed out that an "intellectual" who wished to communicate his ideas on social progress to a group of workers, or to bosses, would have to be able to throw a bridge over the gap that exists between them as people. The story was told of a minister who had a parish among some workers in an industrial area. He tried to be near the workers, live among them and adopt their routines. But those of his parishioners who did not resent his efforts in this direction did not appreciate them, since they felt it was not natural for a pastor to try to live like a worker. Those present at the discussion were no more successful in concretizing possible fields of action than similar discussions in the United States (at least before the advent of groups like CORE). They did, however, express their feelings and concern in similar suggestions: always act as a friend toward him you desire to convince, never compromise with your principles of social justice, build up friendships and understandings through more frequent contact between members of varying groups, seek to establish not an attitude of charity but of justice toward men.

FRENCH CORRESPONDENT

## REVIEW

### NOTES ON "CULTURAL LAG"

WALT WHITMAN, as everyone knows, nursed wounded soldiers during the American Civil War. What is not so generally known is that he wrote a book about his war experience, creating in effect a new type of war literature. Several years ago, when a new edition of *Whitman's Specimen Days* was published, V. S. Pritchett called attention to the poet's clean break with the classical manner of writing about war. Whitman was not absorbed in gallantry, but appalled by the impotent suffering of thousands of men. The traditional chronicles of war, before his time, were devoted to military dignity and professional virtue. The stories were always told by military leaders or their admirers. As Pritchett says,

War, the most lawless of activities, was given a frame of decorum; you might not always fight by the code of honor, but there was a code of honor and, above all, you spoke and wrote in accord with it. . . . The precise horrors of war are sometimes mentioned in the Classical records, but, generally, classical clichés are preferred: carnage, slaughter, and so on. . . . men are merely shot. Sometimes they are blown up. The aftermath was not minutely described. "Bloodshed," "carnage," generalize it.

But Whitman was not a retired commander writing "for history." He was a dazed civilian, working in military hospitals, seeing the gangrenous limbs, the amputations, smelling the ether. He watched men crawl behind bushes to die. He wrote the last letters home of dying soldiers. He saw, from the inside, at the bottom, the first modern war. Thousands were buried without identification. "It struck him," Pritchett observes, "when he saw the burial trenches, that the typical soldier of this first modern war was unknown. That discovery marks the beginning of the modern attitude to war. We write as followers, not leaders."

Horrified by the impersonal inhumanities of the Civil War, and ignoring the "grand" military tradition, Whitman urged, gropingly, "that a new

way of warfare was necessary to America." His innovation, in other words, was not merely literary. He cut through the "glory" of war to the core of the matter—its effect on individual human beings. Whitman's vision might have been a lever to change the acts of men in regard to making war, instead of only writing about it from a new point of view.

This is where the "cultural lag" comes in. We are still imitating the verbal approach of Whitman to war, and, have done practically nothing to find a new way of settling the differences among men. We have borrowed his "realism," but neglected the personal example of what he did about the sufferings of men in war. John Hersey's "Hiroshima," published by the *New Yorker*, was a polished job of writing which told what the atom bomb did to human beings. It avoided the clichés, just as Whitman did. Hersey accomplished self-consciously and deliberately, as a matter of literary technique, what for Whitman was a compulsion of the spirit. Hersey wrote as a modern journalist but Whitman was a voice crying in the wilderness, and still is.

To add only journalistic skill to the descriptive perspectives of the previous century is a form of the cultural lag. But what is this "cultural lag," itself? Fundamentally, it seems to be the historical pattern of a society which believes that rhetoric is a workable substitute for inner moral compulsion—which, despite its pretensions to "science," confidently expects to be saved from the consequences of its collective action by some sort of divine intervention.

We were warned. The "good gray poet" told America. John Ruskin told the English, and Karl Liebknecht told the Germans. Heinrich Heine foresaw, a century ago, the kind of a Europe Europeans were making for themselves. That strange Swiss, Amiel, had similar things to say about American democracy. But neither Europe nor America has really honored its poets, its revolutionaries, its esthetes and its mystics.

We will listen with care and appreciation to intelligent analysis of our degraded and dishonored state. We value the searching description of our neuroticisms, but sneer at the hardy individuals who are trying, in their own way, to be "normal." Meanwhile, the lag continues. R. H. S. Crossman, in the *New Statesman and Nation* for July 17, discusses two books on the second World War, books by Major-General J. E. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell Hart. Modern war, it seems, has not only outrun civilian comprehension:

The fact is that total war cannot be conducted by the old type of professional soldier of which Rundsted — Liddell Hart's favorite German—and Fuller are examples. Precisely because it is total it offends his artistic sense and his code of honor. Instead of expressing his personality in a battle of wits against an enemy trained in the same tradition, he finds himself the servant of a senseless juggernaut, controlled by the politician, the scientist and the planner. Like the professional diplomat, he belongs to a dying civilisation. That is why during the Second World War the professional soldier on both sides tended to become a "pacifist," sceptical of the crusade which the politicians preached. . . . The German Generals were nearly as defeatist as the French—until Hitler proved them wrong! The British and American Generals arranged the Darlan affair, and were ready to accept the surrender of Badoglio, long before the invasion of Sicily if the politicians and public opinion had not forbidden it as "immoral." In Russia most of the Generals were liquidated before the war started, because they, too, were unreliable. This is not a mere accident. Today the code of honour of the professional soldier is in conflict with the crusading spirit of total war, which reached its Fascist climax in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and its democratic in the radioactive ruins of Hiroshima.

So the soldier obeys the scientists and politicians, and loses sight of his moral code. The scientist believes, as one of them, Harold Urey, has said, in contributing to "whatever direction my own government and the responsible officials believe that we should go." And the responsible officials are, of course, executing the will of the people.

The cultural lag, in other words, is a product of personal irresponsibility, writ large and inherited by one generation from another. The first step in overcoming it, as anyone should be able to see, is to stop giving it a high-sounding sociological label and then accepting it as though it were cosmically ordained and written in the stars.

## *COMMENTARY*

### **A POSITIVE OBJECTIVE**

A COMMUNICATION of particular thoughtfulness comes from a reader in Texas stimulated, apparently, by our article, "We Are All Philosophers" (MANAS, June 9). This writer explains that he was moved to formulate a philosophy of life by the desire to furnish some guidance to his sons with respect to fundamental questions, and "from the wish to base my political activities on sound concepts." As the theme he develops seems to us one of importance, as well as one neglected by most political reformers since the days of Mazzini, we reproduce the views of this reader.

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My first conclusion was that if one is to discard materialism it must be done by the conscious substitution of some other objective. What both religion and philosophies have largely done is to make evident the deficiencies of materialism without furnishing a new and positive objective.

In examining the history of mankind it appeared to me that, whatever one may think about whether civilization has progressed or not, one thing was certain,—that man, century by century, has more and more demanded (and secured) recognition of his significance as an individual.

Logically and soundly this recognition has been always earned by personal achievement. The sense of achievement may have had no social connotations. It may have been the awareness of the victory obtained by logical thinking.

It appeared to me, therefore, that the expression of one's personality and the experiencing of victories over one's environment are the only really satisfying experiences of life. These experiences transcend materialism and appear to me to be the only satisfactory philosophy of life.

This philosophy has been long recognized. What has been less well recognized (along with the right, and need, of self-expression) is the stern responsibility of the individual for the effects or results of his freedom of choice and action.

(I have a near relative, a brilliant student, who—so far as I ever learned—never seemed able to comprehend this matter of responsibility. The result was—as I get the picture—that his life constantly bordered on the anti-social. There was disorder about his life which not only prevented real accomplishment but made it impossible for him to work with others with mutual satisfaction.)

Man recognizes no limits to his possibilities for achievement. Individual limitation is by inclination modified by environment,—that is opportunity. No one person's ambition or goal need extend further than the best possible use of his initiative and intelligence. Educational opportunities have almost nothing to do with essential success. As Bernard Shaw says, "Intelligence is what enables a man to get along without an education; education is what enables a man to get along without intelligence."

It therefore appears possible for every person to furnish his spiritual house with what he has made for himself, rather than with what he has gotten from others. He views (with the only real satisfaction of life) what he has achieved rather than what he has accumulated.

The application, politically, is that whatever legislation tends to advance the inclination to personal achievement—personal significance—is right, provided it is strictly coupled with responsibility for the results. *Liberty* is freedom of self-expression, coupled with full responsibility for the choices and acts accompanying the use of freedom. . . .

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

WHAT is the best way to teach "morality" to children? There are two conventional approaches to this problem, neither of which can be even slightly recommended in this column. The first is to let the church do the teaching, and the second is to try to convince children that they must be circumspect in all of their actions in order not to suffer at the hands of society. Neither the parent who feels that the problem of moral education may be left to religious institutions nor the parent who thinks that morality is a matter of expediently following social opinion can be said to be concerned with awakening the individual moral consciousness of the child.

Yet there are a great many philosophically minded parents left over after these two categories have been accounted for. Whether these parents realize it or not, their attitude of concern qualifies them as philosophers, for the first thing that such a parent discovers is that he must *himself* determine what morality is, before doing much about the children. Then, it is necessary to realize that morality is not something we can inform our children about with sanctimonious authority; they must develop *their own* moral perceptions. Morality, as regards children and ourselves, is chiefly that Language of Values which we try to speak with our children as with other fellow human beings.

It is probably a universal experience of parents that when their children reach a certain age, the parents suddenly feel a new kind of responsibility, for they are intuitively, if not intellectually, aware that everything they say as to what is good or what is bad in human relations will become in some way a part of the life of their young. Often there is a complete reversal in attitude; from being carefree and thoughtless, parents may turn into the very strictest of moralists. If their thinking begins at this late date, of course, they are severely handicapped—since

they will be tempted to utilize the most rigid and wooden categories of right and wrong, and the most rigid and wooden methods of enforcing them. But even for those who have given time to the problem of selecting the major values of their own lives, this new feeling of responsibility may be a serious matter.

The worst mistake one can make in "teaching" morality to children is in assuming that the heart of righteousness lies in refraining from doing all the things we desire to do. No act can be moral unless it is desired; that is, unless a person determines to follow a certain principle of behavior. He cannot be moral without thought, although he can *act* or refrain from acting because of fear, or act instinctively. Those who act "by instinct" or "intuitively" may conceivably be fine human beings, yet they cannot be "moral" in the strictest sense without the consciousness of choice.

If this idea of morality is carried to a logical conclusion, it will suggest to the conscientious parent that even the child whose instinctive actions seem entirely free from enmity or aggressiveness should nonetheless be led to see that a different course *could* be followed—in order that the child may understand the problems of others and the emotions that he will sooner or later encounter in his relationships.

Perhaps the simplest definition of morality is that it constitutes intelligent concern for the welfare of other beings, a determination to act always in recognition of the fact that others are ends in themselves and not merely means to our ends. If we accept this definition, we must at once realize that the first requisite of morality is to refrain from moralizing at or about others. If each human being is an "end in himself," an independent soul with a destiny to create, we have to regulate our own attitude so as to encompass the widely divergent and complicated choices of others. We may support or oppose some things that other people do, but we need to recognize the folly of trying to *impose our views* upon them or

of allowing ourselves to be disturbed or angry at their ideas or behavior. It seems obvious that morality in a democratic society can have no other basis, and that only from such a basis can we proceed to discipline our own emotions.

We shall, of course, recognize, as suggested in every religion known to the world, that many of our emotions do need to be restrained and controlled. Nor are these emotions limited to aggressiveness and hate. A percipient thinker once wrote that, "of all tyrants our own affections are the fiercest lords," thus calling attention to the necessity of refusing to be blinded by a purely emotional state in dealing with any human problem, even though that emotion be affection or love. True morality, then, implies the ability to stand aside from one's emotions and to view them selectively. If we cannot reconcile the emotions we feel with the type of action we consider to be the most constructive, we must, so to speak, drain those emotions of their energy and allow new and subtly different feelings to take their place—ones which will coincide with our principles of morality. And it is here that the necessity for "desiring" everything we do becomes apparent. If we recognize, study, and then carefully seek to modify an original emotion through the use of our mental faculty, we are avoiding the destructive inhibitions which have long been the legitimate worry of psychiatrists. If we can understand our own emotions we will not need to repress them; instead we can subtly transform them or give them a different direction. This is, in part, Freud's theory of sublimation. But we also insist upon a crucial addition to all Freudian theory—that there is a moral self within man which may be called the soul, and which is always aware of the necessity for establishing the rightness or wrongness of an act.

The child does have a sense of right and wrong. We can help it to manifest most constructively by allowing freedom of choice to the child while practicing a reasoned and persevering discipline upon ourselves.

# FRONTIERS

## Ingredients of Western Culture

THERE is a view of Western culture which, simply because it is assumed, almost without exception, to be the whole truth, we have long wanted to discuss. It is that the good things of our civilization are the product of the combined influence of Hellenism and the Hebraic-Christian tradition, and that our best future lies with a revival of these sources of inspiration. This is the monotonous refrain of such efforts at cultural "synthesis" as the annual Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, held in New York. It is the burden of the message of educators like Sir Richard Livingstone in England and of philosophical commentators on public affairs like C. E. M. Joad. The latter puts it simply:

The inheritors of a religious tradition, we live in an age which is to all intents and purposes without religious belief. . . . the ethical principles which the Greeks announced, the Christians developed, the humanists endorsed and the plain man borrowed from all three, are being rapidly lost. It is hard to resist the conclusion that it is time they were returned.

The Harvard Report on *General Education in a Free Society* offers a variation by referring to the three great themes of American culture as (1) the supernaturalism of Christianity, (2) the rationalism of Hellenic thought, and (3) the naturalism of science—neglecting, however, to discuss the obvious incompatibility of these views.

It is this easy reference to Greek philosophy, Christian religion, and, in the last case, modern science, as though they form a happy and harmonious formula for a great civilization, that condemns all such thinking as superficial, and therefore, irresponsible, whether in connection with the problems of education or as applying to the larger social and moral issues of our time.

In the first place, it is not difficult to show that Greek philosophy, instead of being "developed" by Christianity, was perverted to the

purposes of special theological pleading by most of its Christian inheritors, the major exceptions to this rule including such thinkers as John Erigena in the ninth century, Meister Eckhart in the thirteenth century, and Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth century. Augustine, for example, who may be regarded as a principal founder of both Christian theology and Christian mysticism, imported into Christian thought many of the leading conceptions of the Neoplatonic philosophers, but in doing so he identified the highest principle of Reality, the *One* of the Platonists, with the personal God of Hebrew tradition, thus establishing the greatest of moral contradictions at the very root of Christianity. The pantheistic *One* of the Platonists is a divine abstraction, severely impersonal and wholly devoid, conceptually, of any of the attributes of an anthropomorphic deity. Greek thought founded on such first principles as Platonic metaphysics provides breathes an entirely different moral atmosphere from the sin-laden vapors of orthodox Christian theology. The punishment, as a heretic, during many centuries, of anyone who dared to revive the original spirit of Greek philosophy bears practical witness to this fact.

The most successful synthesis of Greek and Christian ideas was accomplished by Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, where as an artistic *tour de force*, the poet used the purely historical events of the Christian account of redemption as material with which to "decorate" the timeless metaphysical structure of the Neoplatonic cosmology. But this was a fusion accomplished in literature, not in life. And Dante himself, if we may believe Gabriele Rossetti, was rather a Pythagorean than a Christian, who wrote in the cipher of the *Fideli d'Amore* to avoid the claws of the Holy Inquisition. The Christian tradition, as a body of organized doctrine—not the example, so little followed in the West, of Jesus of Nazareth—has always been the merciless enemy and persecutor of the free spirit of Greek philosophy, and a Hellenism which can win the good will of the

theologian, ancient or modern, is an emasculated brand.

With reference to the Harvard Report, what sort of education may we expect from teachers who blandly ignore the mutual exclusiveness of Christian supernaturalism and scientific naturalism? Is it that both these "traditions" are now suffused with sentimental value because they happen to be "ours"?

These comments are by no means intended to imply that modern educators and philosophers are expected to retire into their closets, to emerge after a few days or weeks with a final resolution of these inner conflicts of the Western cultural tradition. This would be asking, not merely "too much," but what seems virtually impossible, for either the present or an easily ascertainable future. But what is entirely possible is an honest statement of the problem—a fair warning to both students and all others who will listen—telling them that the West has never possessed even the first principles of a consistent religious or moral philosophy, and that the "great themes" of our culture represent theories of life which are in violent contradiction and which ought never to be required to lie down quietly together, like the lion and the lamb.

The claim that these themes constitute together the origin of European and American greatness has the general effect of concealing the vast moral and intellectual confusion their spurious combination has fathered in the modern mind. We need, not, as Sir Richard Livingstone suggests, to reverently restore these elements in our thinking, but to look at them again, consciously, thoroughly, and critically.