

GREAT REFORMERS: PLATO

DIOGENES LAERTIUS has preserved the story that Plato, after meeting Socrates, burned the poetic tragedies of his youth and determined to devote the rest of his life to philosophy and to the regeneration of human society. Some may think, as a recent critic has said, that after this decision Plato allowed his imagination to wither, but we prefer the view that Plato's literary genius, instead of drying up, made him the most readable of all philosophers. That he was also the greatest is an opinion that will probably evoke criticism, but express it we must, for caution in such matters is hardly appropriate.

"Out of Plato," said Emerson, "come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought." The late Alfred North Whitehead, most eminent of contemporary thinkers, remarked that the entire European philosophical tradition consists of "footnotes to Plato." In recent years, however, Plato has been more attacked than admired. Shortly before the war, a Moscow professor, departing somewhat from the official Soviet line, claimed that Plato was the Founder and Father of Fascism, with Menshevist tendencies as well—in short, a Trotskyite. At about the same time, an English socialist had similar difficulties, but expressed them with greater intelligence. In the concluding chapter of his *Plato Today*, Mr. R. H. S. Crossman wrote:

. . . I still find the *Republic* the greatest book on political philosophy which I have read. The more I read it, the more I hate it: and yet I cannot help returning to it time after time. For it *is* philosophy. It tries to reach truth by rational discussion and is itself a pattern of the disinterested research which it extols. It never bullies or deceives its reader or beguiles him with appeals to sentiment, but treats him as a fellow philosopher for whom only the truth is worth having.

So Mr. Crossman, who in one place in his book whisks Plato into Nazi Germany and has him

listen admiringly to one of Herr Goebbels' speeches, becomes, as he admits, the Devil's Disciple, recommending Plato, not because he wants to, but because he cannot help it. The integrity of Plato's thought is for his severest critics a magnet more powerful than the repulsion of Plato's "aristocratic" social system. This is something to ponder.

What shall we say in Plato's defense? Simply this: Plato's entire works and even what we know of his life give the lie to the charge of "Fascism," in the invidious meaning Fascism has for the present generation—and it has, so far as we know, no other meaning at all. Plato, it is true, was an aristocrat. But his was the aristocracy of knowledge, not of blood, although his own blood was the best in Athens. Machiavelli, not Plato, was the prophet and intellectual designer of the Fascist society. In the *Republic*, Plato offered striking illustrations of the principles of social usefulness and family impersonality, we may think, in order to be sure that they would be thought about and argued about. It is also clear that Plato meant his *Republic* to have an allegorical meaning, perhaps somewhat after the manner of Eastern symbolism in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. According to Dr. Paul Friedlander of the University of California (Los Angeles), Plato's classes of society were intended to represent three constituent principles of human nature, factors which each individual must learn to relate and govern, within himself.

Plato was not the enemy of the individual, but his champion. He was, that is, the champion of moral freedom. Consider the simplicity of his position. In the *Apology* and the *Crito* both, he says in effect: Obey the established law of your community; obey it cheerfully and willingly, when some material good is at stake. But when a question of ultimate right and wrong is before

you, choose what you know to be right, though it cost disobedience to the community and even your life. This, as Ernest Barker has pointed out, is the exact opposite of the counsel of Hobbes, who held that a man should submit to the State in matters of conscience, and revolt only to save his life.

Plato has been called "anti-democratic." He was, indeed, opposed to rule by the indiscriminating mass, whipped on by demagogues. Socrates, his teacher and beloved friend, was condemned to die by the restored Athenian democracy in 399 B.C. Actually, Plato lived during a period of the decay of Athenian democracy. The traditional virtues of the Greeks were dying out along with the old aristocratic institutions. Unbelief in religion and cynicism toward private and public morality were everywhere gaining ground. Aristophanes, in the *Clouds* and in other plays, regrets the loss of the discipline once imposed by the aristocratic order, while Thucydides describes without comment the *realpolitik* spirit of Athenian "democratic" imperialism in its cold-blooded negotiations with the Melians, followed by the slaughter of all the Melian males and the enslavement of the women and children. Melos was an ancient Lidice, as ruthlessly destroyed.

If Greek civilization was to avoid collapse into some ancient form of tyranny, an inner discipline must be found to provide the principle of order in human relations. Plato saw that freedom of thought, without idealism, meant opportunism and selfish rationalization. Logic would serve only the credo of self-indulgence and the lust for power. In the Dialogues, Thrasymachus (*Republic*) and Callicles (*Gorgias*) represent these emerging attitudes, with which Socrates must deal.

The future of Greek civilization lay in a choice between an inner ruler or an outer despot, and Socrates and Plato chose to serve the cause of the inner ruler for the individual man. We cannot say that they failed entirely, because their cause still lives, although Athens, ten years after Plato's

death, was conquered by the Macedonians, and thereafter was ruled by a long succession of despots, starting with Philip and Alexander.

If it be asked what Plato's practical influence might have been, had he had opportunity to mold a society, the question can be answered, for Plato did have one such opportunity, although briefly, and under difficult and limited circumstances. In 367 B.C., the youthful Tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius II, invited the philosopher to visit his island empire and to become his adviser. The first Dionysius had been a ruthless conqueror, hated alike by workmen and aristocrats, historians and traders. When Plato first visited Sicily, in 388 B.C., Dionysius I asked him what he sought, and when Plato said, "A virtuous man," the bloody ruler dismissed the quest as a waste of time. His son, however, had other pretensions, and prevailed upon Plato to visit Syracuse again. Plutarch describes the rejoicing of the people at Plato's coming, and there was, he says, "a general passion for reasoning and philosophy." Plato hoped to persuade Dionysius to remove or lessen the iron military dictatorship established by his father over the Sicilian Greeks and to win the leading citizens of Syracuse from their life of luxury and pleasure-seeking. That the philosopher made at least some progress toward this objective is evidenced by Plutarch's report of a religious ceremony in Syracuse:

. . . when the priest, as he was wont, prayed for the long and safe continuance of the tyranny, Dionysius, it is said, as he stood by, cried out, "Leave off praying for evil upon us."

He had, apparently, been thus far convinced that the military dictatorship of his father was wrong and ought not to be continued. But Dionysius had other counselors with less arduous disciplines to offer. Much blood had been spilled to secure the Sicilian empire, now maintained by force of arms, and to lose it to Platonic idealism was not to the liking of the young Tyrant's military commanders. They undermined his confidence in Plato, and after some face-saving devices by Dionysius, the philosopher returned to Athens.

This episode in Plato's life shows that he was no ivory-tower thinker, but a man willing to try to put his principles into practice. The difficulty, here, was that, unlike the programs of dictators and demagogues, the Platonic society required the exercise of moral intelligence by at least the leaders of the people. And this was not forthcoming.

What, actually, do we owe to Plato? First, there is the living example of Socrates, an unforgettably vivid experience for the reader of Plato. Socrates is the questing spirit of man. He is humble and he is incorruptible. Antisthenes, founder of the Cynic School, a friend and admirer of Socrates, is reputed to have said, "If a boy is destined to live with the gods, teach him philosophy; if with men, rhetoric." Socrates taught as if everyone—youths and aged alike—were some day to live with the gods. He could contemplate no lesser objective in life.

Socrates is a man who would be satisfied with the truth and nothing else. When the priest said, "We must be reverential toward our hallowed institutions," Socrates said, "I am looking for the truth." When political leaders asserted that unsettling questions and investigations would undermine the unity of Athens, Socrates said, "I am looking at the truth." When a jury of 500 told him that he must cease from talking to the young men of the city, cease from asking his eternal questions, Socrates said, "I am looking for the truth," and went to his death to keep what truth he had—and to find more, if any there be beyond death.

Obviously, Socrates was not a practical man. He held that truth is more important than well-being. It is to Mr. Crossman's credit that he understands and appreciates Socrates, if not Plato. People like Socrates, he writes,

are so uncompromising that they are quite unpractical; so simple that they make wise men look fools. oblivious of the disastrous results of their idealism, they demand truth even where it may ruin a class or a city or a nation: and if their wickedness is

pointed out to them, they merely reply, "where truth is concerned, compromise is impossible." All that is good in our Western culture has sprung from this spirit, whether it is found in scientists, or priests, or politicians, or quite ordinary men and women who have refused to prefer politic falsehoods to the simple truth. In the short term, they often do great harm; but in the end their example is the only force which can break the dictatorship of force and greed.

That is what Plato believed, and his conviction made his portrait of Socrates an eternal and living inspiration to the human race. Read the *Apology*, the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*. Read them over again, slowly, and read them aloud to your family and your friends. There is no use writing about the philosophy of Plato at any length. He does not need to be explained. Understand Plato, and you will understand Buddha and Christ. You will understand, also, Thoreau and Emerson, Tolstoy and Gandhi, and—we say it freely—you will understand more of yourself.

Plato began a movement that continued directly, through the Platonic Academy, for 900 years—until the Christian Emperor Justinian drove the Platonists of the sixth century A.D. from Athens (embezzling the endowments of the Academy), in order to preserve the purity of the Christian faith from pagan contamination and the prestige of the imperial university at Constantinople from a rival center of learning. Through Plato, the leading ideas of the Orphic mysteries of ancient Greece became rational principles of philosophical inquiry, being transmitted with supreme artistry, in dialogue form, to become the foundation for virtually all that is aspiring, noble, disciplined and morally determined in Western thought. We take from Edward J. Urwick's *The Message of Plato* the following summary of the content of Plato's philosophy. Appropriate to the Socratic method, the summary is in the form of questions which Plato sought to answer:

What is knowledge? How is it possible to know anything? What is it that is known? Is there such a thing as absolute truth, or permanent fact in and behind the ever-changing universe? Is there a

knowable reality? And if so, is it one or many? What are the faculties of cognition? What are the correct processes and methods of learning, of separating truth from error? What is happiness or pleasure? Is good conduct based upon knowledge—and of what? Can society get that knowledge, and so manage itself satisfactorily and scientifically? Are there any real teachers of political or ethical knowledge? If so, upon what is their teaching based?

Now it may be admitted that most readers will weary at times of Plato's exhaustive analysis of these questions. Even the *Republic*, that parent of all subsequent Utopian literature, may drag in places for the reader who is used to the staccato prose of modern writers. But Plato is serious about these questions, and for most of them he has provided serious answers. It is worth some effort to find out what they are. The dialogues we have mentioned contain many of his answers, and if, to these, be added the *Symposium* and the *Timaeus*, the thought of Plato will be no stranger to the reader.

Plato has a system, and yet Platonic dogma and Platonic orthodoxy are expressions alien to the Platonic spirit. There can be no blind belief about matters that any man can verify from experience and reason out for himself. On such questions, Plato employs the dialectic, the method of reasoning from point to point to reach a final conclusion. The reader of the dialogue can check each step along the way. And when Plato treats of a subject which transcends the limits of ordinary experience, he leaves the sphere of literal discussion and rises—not lapses—into myth. This, he says, repeating his allegory, may suggest to you what may be the case—what occurs to man after death, or before birth—or how the universe was formed. Plato *prevents* his readers from making dogmas of what he has to say concerning the great mysteries of human existence, because, instead of laying down "teachings," he spurs the imagination of the reader with a myth which cannot be taken literally.

The fact that Plato was a deeply religious man is seldom clearly understood by the modern

reader. We owe to the researches of Werner Jaeger, possibly the greatest living classical scholar, our knowledge of the fact that Plato was regarded by his pupils and associates in the Academy as a teacher who expounded the doctrine of the religion of "The Good." Aristotle, although hardly a "loyal" Platonist, composed an elegy to Plato, inscribed on an altar after the latter's death, in which he spoke of his teacher as

... the man whom it is not lawful for bad men even to praise,

Who alone or first of mortals clearly revealed,

By his own life and by the method of his words,

How a man becomes good and happy at the same time.

Now no one can ever attain to these things again.

The altar was dedicated "To Friendship," and Jaeger believes that this means "The Friendship of Plato," for the members of the Academy called themselves "friends," and "Plato's friendship," Jaeger adds, "was holy to them all, because it was the innermost bond of their community."

There is a fitness, then, in the study of Plato, to turn to those for whom Plato is in truth a teacher of The Good, and to leave to others the scholastic treatises which neglect the spirit for the letter of his works. One such devotee of Plato was Thomas Taylor, a translator and commentator of the eighteenth century. And, more recently, there is Mr. Urwick, with whose counsel we may conclude this all-too-brief and inadequate review:

Put aside, if you can, the academic interest, and read the Platonic dialogues through, looking for consistency, not inconsistency, for the One and not the Many. Then you will hardly fail to realize that, when Socrates is searching for the explanation of cognition, of reality, or of the standard of right and wrong, his quest and his interest are totally different from ours, in quality and in kind. He is out to find *life*, and the whole secret of life. It is all in all to him: not a theoretical interest, not a metaphysical or philosophic interest, but just everything that matters, the whole key to the soul's well-being. For this "reality" or "ens" or "essence" (a dead thing with a lifeless name in all our philosophies) is, for him, the

living Good and the living God. He *must* find it, and he *must* know it—in order to become good, in order to find salvation. It was not knowledge or truth which he sought, as we seek knowledge and truth. . . .

His eternal questions—what do we mean by knowing? How is knowledge possible? are not our questions. We want to explain the possibility of cognition, the functions of sense and intellect in relation to a knowable universe, and the metaphysical implications of all this. But his question always meant—How are we to know Goodness in order that we may be good and a source of good to the world? . . .

He confused metaphysics and ethics and politics, you say? Of course he did—a noble confusion, which vitalized the truth instead of dissecting it. For how can there be separation in such a quest? . . . He *could* not think of a real cause which was not good, nor a Good which was not Nous (Wisdom), nor a universe which was not both Nous and Good at bottom—and nothing else real, nor a true society which was not the incarnation of Goodness. All his questions therefore were but aspects of the single search for the secret of life for, . . . that flame of knowledge which purifies the soul even as it illumines it and reveals all things to it.

Letter from **SWITZERLAND**

GENEVA.—In the thirteenth century, on a meadow on the Rutli, above the Uri Lake, a band of determined lovers of justice and freedom came together in the night. Clasp hands over a fire, they swore the Pledge of Rutli:

We want to be a single united nation of brothers,
Not to be separated in any trial or danger.
We want to be free as were our fathers
And prefer death to slavery.
We want to keep our faith in the Supreme Spirit,
Nor shall we ever fear the might of man.

Through dogged courage and persevering efforts, these men won the precious freedom which was first confirmed by pact on August 1, 1291. History tells how through the following centuries the Swiss Confederation was formed from this nucleus. The last to join it was the Republique de Geneve, in 1814.

This night of August 1, 1948, we are sitting on the hill of Cologny, before the old residence of Lord Byron. At our feet lies the great lake, studded with illuminated boats. Above Geneva, whose lights glitter in the dark waters, rises the flood-lit cathedral. A soft radiance reveals two high-flung flags: the Swiss flag—White Cross on red field (like hands clasped over the historic fire); and the Key and the Eagle on red and yellow field, the flag of Geneva. Across the lake, the massive Jura is silhouetted against the starry night; and on its Swiss slopes one can already watch the bonfires springing orange against the sapphire background. Around us gathers a quiet crowd carrying the red lanterns bearing the white cross. The people wait, silently imbibing the unreal beauty of the scene. A little below, a platform and loud speakers have been erected.

Chants rise in the night to open the celebration. They tell of the undying spirit of freedom. Meanwhile the enormous bonfire is lit. With a high sigh it bursts, crackles and leaps into the air, filling all with its fragrance. While it lights the surroundings with an orange symphony, the Deputy-Mayor and the Pastor of Cologny deliver two short addresses. Both are clear-eyed patriots who try to inspire their countrymen. Both speak of the corrupting power of the times; they see the dangers of the stampede for pleasure, of the

greed for money. Have the people forgotten the spirit which made their nation? Will they sink into selfishness and forsake the old ideal of joyous, hard work? Are they losing their traditional steadiness? In these days of unrest and anxiety, will the peace of Switzerland serve only as an egocentric satisfaction, leading to pride and narrow-mindedness, or is it to lead other nations towards the path of *real* peace, which is that of the soul? People are eager to ask God's blessings on all they do, but they never question whether their actions deserve to be blessed and perpetuated. What is needed? Discrimination between the permanent and the transitory, a new sense of life's evaluations. Each action should contribute to the good name of the country, as the country's good is dependent on the good name of its individuals. If, each day, we aim at making our actions purer, we need fear no man or power. We would stand erect, scanning free skies, and we would perform God's will on earth. That is the real citizenship. That is what Switzerland should stand for. From this fire, we must kindle our own, carry it forward, as the torchbearers are this very night carrying the Olympic Flame.

On these words, the assembly rose and intoned the national hymn. The soul of the people seemed to stir. Profoundly moved, we wished that the spirit of this hour might endure and triumph over all the deadly tendencies of the day. Switzerland might then remain as the heart, maintaining the system of poor, sick Europe, in spite of the illness of her members. Will there come from this heart the impulse toward a healthy European Federation, to serve, in turn, as the pattern for a wider World Federation? None can say, but all may work with the aim that citizens of their countries, everywhere, may be eager to become citizens of the world.

In the smallest Swiss villages, similar scenes were being enacted. Fires were lit on every slope. As we went away, a group of visiting Swiss-Germans gathered on the deserted hill. Sitting near the fire, they sang to themselves and to the night the folk-songs of their mountains—songs of love to the Motherland.

Who will deny that in learning to love one's country well, one may learn to love Humanity the more?

SWITZERLAND CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

TOPOLOBAMPO

READING *A Southwestern Utopia*, by Thomas A. Robertson (Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles, 1947) makes you wonder if not only the forces of human nature, but the winds, the tides and the law of gravity as well, are against utopian enterprise. But it makes you believe, too, that as long as men dream about and hope to establish an ideal community life for themselves and their children, they will continue to found utopias, and you will not be sorry that this is so.

The failure of the Credit Foncier Colony at Topolobampo, in Mexico, is a sad thing to read about, but it is not tragic. There was too much courage, too much happiness, too much real cooperation, until its final dissolution, for the decline of Topolobampo to wear the air of tragedy. And why should a socialist colony, any more than a man, want to be immortal in the flesh? The people went broke instead of becoming prosperous. Sometimes they competed with peon labor at peon wages, just to have enough to eat. Big lobbies in the United States were against them. The characteristic human indifference to altruistic enterprise was against them. Their own varying incompetences were against them. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 administered the *coup de grace* to what was left of the Colony after the Credit Foncier Company died a natural death. But the living on the land, the quality of their lives together—that, no disaster can erase.

The Bay of Topolobampo (Hidden Waters) opens out into the Gulf of California, on the West coast of the mainland of Mexico. It is not far North, across the Gulf, from the southern tip of the great peninsula, Baja California. Here, in 1872, an American engineer, Albert Kimsey Owen, conceived his plan for an ideal socialist society which would be the nucleus for creating a new center of land and water transport, and, in time, of industry. Here, virtually unknown except

to the Mayo Indians, was a large natural harbor with a safe, wide channel to the open Pacific. Here, on the shores of Topolobampo Bay, Owen saw "the site for a great metropolitan city." Years later, describing his musings on his first visit to Topolobampo, he wrote:

To the north and east stretched a level plain of grass and chaparral, the night, the stillness, the expanse of mountain-locked water. . . . On that water, now without a sail, will one day come the ships of every nation. On this plain will dwell happy families.

Owen was a socialist, and fourteen years later, in 1886, the Credit Foncier Colony, based on Owen's socialist plan for "Integral Cooperation," was planted in the Mexican State of Sinaloa, on Topolobampo Bay. In the course of a few years, five hundred men, women and children came to join the colony. Owen was a man of influence, with many friends, and his publicity had been more effective than was good for the colony. Families descended on the nucleus of pioneer settlers with no more equipment for coping with this wild country than wide smiles, happy hearts, and a vast ignorance of the vicissitudes of frontier existence. These people couldn't be sent back. But absorbing them into the colony was a serious blow to Owen's original plan of starting out with a hundred strong men, carefully selected, to get the settlement ready. Several parties burned their bridges behind them and set out for Topolobampo without even telling Owen they were coming. He let them stay.

Through the years, Owen was at the Colony very little. He spent his time trying to raise money to complete the project as originally conceived. This involved the building of a railroad from Kansas City to Topolobampo, thus cutting 600 miles off the transcontinental route, which would afford a considerable saving on freight. Both President Porfirio Diaz and General Gonzales (later President) of Mexico approved Owen's plans and provided generous concessions. President Grant, in the United States, also thought well of the idea of the railroad. But obstacles were many, both the unexpected as well as the

expected sort. A shipwreck in which Owen was almost the sole survivor was one disaster that forced him to start all over again.

The socialist aspect of the colony, as usual, brought out the best in the better people, and precipitated other qualities in the rest. The colony finally split on the issue of "private property," thus proving, once more, that mine and thine are vigorous forces in any secular community, but not proving much of anything else. One tires of the pontificating that socialism won't work. It will work, has worked, is working, under compulsion, today. What is wrong with socialism is not its opposition to the mine-and-thine view of material possessions, but the pretense that you really can get rid of private property with a big stick to frighten the reformed and propertyless population into staying that way. The big stick only transfers the sense of possession to some group with the power of coercion, like the Communist Party of Russia. But genuine democratic socialism, when it is achieved, will have to be some kind of anarchistic socialism, or it will not exist at all.

So, when colonies like Topolobampo are studied for their "social significance," it is necessary to bear in mind that they are *voluntary* associations, and what success they achieve, even though slight, is something relatively new on the face of this planet, or relatively rare, at least, in these degenerate days.

Mr. Robertson, who writes the story of Topolobampo in *Southwestern Utopia*, spent his childhood there as the son of a colonist. The first half of his book gives the history of the ups and downs of the settlement such as the digging, with primitive equipment, of a canal seven miles long, 25 feet wide and 15 feet deep, to bring water to the parched fields of the colony farmers, only to find the flow too sluggish, the water-level often too low, and finally, the loss by the colonists of title to the canal through some complicated skullduggery and mismanagement. The second half recounts personal reminiscences of life in the colony.

There are some interesting, if not very effective, illustrations in the book, which has 261 pages and costs \$4.00. It is a pity this book is so expensive, as we should like to urge its purchase. Mr. Robertson is not a "writer," as some of his sentences make plain, but this he admits, and he has a good story to tell—it makes you want to know more and more, and to take off, tomorrow, for Topolobampo, to see where it all happened. Naturally, too, you can't help thinking that Owen's idea is still good, and that it ought to be carried out.

We wish, also, that Clarissa Kneeland's serial account of her experiences, and her brother's, at Topolobampo, published in the Fresno *Clarion* from February, 1945 to April, 1946, could as easily be obtained by interested readers, for life in the Colony shaped her young girlhood and either gave or developed in her attitudes which gladden the heart of all of us utopian dreamers—the ones that spend their lives pounding typewriters, anyhow. But the Fresno *Clarion's* files of this series are exhausted, so you'll have to enjoy Mr. Robertson's book without benefit of the sidelights provided by Miss Kneeland.

COMMENTARY SUBVERSIVE ATTITUDES

ABOUT a month ago, a MANAS reader, en route to San Francisco, fell into conversation with another traveler. Before long, the talk turned to social subjects. Discussion ranged from Army life and the waste of war to condemnation of military conscription, and passed to the social problems of the Central Valley. There was great agreement between the two. The traveler, it developed, was an engineer in the employ of either the State or one of the agricultural counties of California, and he was personally interested in the problems of the Central Valley Project, expressing himself emphatically on the subject. Finally, the MANAS reader, thinking that here, perhaps, was an opportunity to gain another subscriber for the paper, asked the engineer for his name and address, offering to send him some copies of "a magazine" containing articles on the subjects they had discussed.

Right at this point, the friendly acquaintance ebbed. The engineer was plainly disinclined to reveal his identity. And it was fairly plain, also, that he regretted speaking so freely about the state of the nation, and more particularly, certain situations in California. We doubt if he went so far as to suspect the MANAS reader of being "radical," or even tinged with pink. The conversation had involved social, not "political," criticism. Vague fears that he may himself have said something "out of line" made him want to keep his name and address a secret.

The story of this encounter reached the MANAS editorial office with an appended comment: "There must be thousands of people just like that engineer, in civil service jobs throughout the country. Their opinions are excellent, but sterilized by fear. What do you do about a thing like this? How can you combat such vague apprehensions, which divide intelligent, useful citizens in public service from their social manhood? They don't even say what they are

afraid of, and even if they did, what could you say in return? They are resolved to 'play safe' in all matters where only the shadow of a threat to their jobs is concerned."

We have no direct answer to questions like these, except, perhaps, to point out that, here, in the moral attitudes of average people, is the critical zone of the subversion of democracy. A man who is afraid to identify himself openly as having enlightened social opinions is a man who by his passivity is inviting totalitarian rule. If a Congressional Committee could investigate, by sociological methods, the situations which produce such fears, and study, also, the institutionalized attitudes which make his timidity seem "right," we might then begin to get at the roots of the parasite which is sapping the energies of democracy.

CHILDREN ... AND OURSELVES

ON August 18 this column contained a lengthy sentence which read: "One of the figureheads of conservatism, for instance, Henry Ford, had a great deal to teach to fervent, liberal youth, not because Henry Ford's ideas were 'right,' and the revolutionary tendencies of young socialists and anarchists 'wrong,' but because Henry Ford lived his convictions and was a consistent man." That sentence should never have been written. It evolved out of a common human tendency to choose a handy example to illustrate a point, without first making sure that it is based on adequate information. Troubled by the feeling of insecurity which accompanied the vision of a set of words irrevocably preserved by linotype, the writer proceeded to read *The Legend of Henry Ford* by Keith Sward. Mr. Sward convinced us that we were not only wrong in insisting that Henry Ford was a consistent man, but wrong, also, in listing him as a "figurehead of conservatism." There is, of course, a measure of truth in the feeling that Mr. Ford somehow stands for "individualism" as against Statism. But Mr. Ford's life as a man of wealth was a life of confusion rather than of either conservatism or consistency. He was extraordinarily resilient, but his intelligence seems to have been insufficient to allow him consistency.

We are not very happy about that sentence appearing on August 18, which all this circumlocution in a subsequent issue should make plain. But we do have the feeling that by miscasting Henry Ford we provided an opportunity for raising a fundamental point in the education of children. (Now we are adroitly maneuvering from self-castigation to self-approval. A further excuse we might insert here, by the way, is that we really wanted to use Herbert Hoover for our illustration, instead of Ford, but were deterred by political ghosts. Applied to Hoover, we could defend our sentence.)

In any case, we claim that the most effective way for teaching the young to be thoroughly honest is to cultivate the habit of confessing our mistakes in detail. Parents mistakenly labor under the misapprehension that to confess an error is to weaken their standing with the child. We say mistakenly, because no one ever fools a child for very long. He *feels* our dishonesties more acutely than our errors, even if he cannot isolate and analyze them. And while we may continue to impress a child by our own assurance, this can easily produce a feeling of awe, remoteness or fear, rather than love and understanding. If we are afraid to confess mistakes, we are encouraging our children, not to avoid mistakes, but to avoid admitting that they make them. Most children lie very crudely, whereas our concealment of error is much more difficult to detect. But we cannot teach honesty without practicing it, and no one is so infallible as to have no mistakes to admit.

In an educational situation, there is absolutely nothing wrong with being wrong. The fountainhead of education is the communication of constructive attitudes of mind. If we view our own errors constructively, we are performing a useful task. So we say to the child, "I said that thing about Henry Ford, but it wasn't so." And the child says, "Why did you say it if it wasn't so?" And we say, "Because I was careless and because I was sure that *some* man would be a good example of what I was talking about. But now I shall have to go back and admit my mistake and try to clear up any possible damage, which is a very hurtful thing to one's pride." The child says, "What is pride, Father?" and we say, "It is a peculiar little thing inside every person which fools him into thinking that he is smarter than he really is." Then perhaps the child says to us in conclusion, "Father, that is just like the time when I" And, lo, we have discovered a brotherhood in honest confession, which is of no small value.

There are almost innumerable examples in the usual parent-child relationship where deceit is

consistently practiced by the parents, supposedly on the utilitarian ground that their prestige must be maintained. Many of us who are honest (more often self-deprecatory) when among those we consider to be our peers, maintain an ostentatious false front when with our children because we feel obliged to give them a sense of security in *our* wisdom; or, to be less charitable, we enjoy the feeling of omniscience that is possible only in the presence of inexperience. But no man's wisdom gives security to anyone else, and we must consider our children as our moral equals rather than our moral inferiors.

When children ask parents about details in their own lives as young people, how many will give the unvarnished truth? How often will they highlight their fairest achievements and leave the child with the feeling that he is far inferior, since he knows that *he* cannot feel "that way" and work "that hard" and be that noble all the time. We like far better the attitude expressed by a radio comedian: "When I was a boy I used to have to walk five miles to school through the snow, barefoot. That is why I only went three days."

Of course, it is possible to go too far in the opposite direction. There is a difficulty in passing from self-esteem to honesty without over-indulging in self-ridicule. This can be harmful. Each human being, however comical some of his actions, possesses a basic dignity. One need not confess himself to be a fool to children because he has made mistakes, but there is the need to convey to them the idea that adults admit to being on a difficult journey of learning, just as are the young, and that they refuse to be discouraged by the constant and pressing need for reformation of our common foolishness.

A harsh word to a child, or even any arbitrary statement, needs to be thought over carefully. (Children, we distinctly recall, think about such things a great deal.) And if we can further explain ourselves at a later time, or admit a degree of error, it will mean a great deal to almost any young one. The knowledge that we have been

"thinking things over" shows that we respect them as human beings, and there is no finer psychological gift we can deliver to them than this.

FRONTIERS LIFE AND SOUL

GOOD newspaper reporters have a sure instinct for converting the news of scientific discoveries into questions of popular interest. About ten years ago, during the heyday of virus research, hardly a month went by without some stirring, report of how biologists, seeking the causes of infectious disease, were beginning to unveil the "mystery of life" itself. Viruses, we were told, are neither animate nor inanimate, but both, depending upon where they are. In isolation from a living host, the virus is a crystalline protein without the capacity for self-reproduction; but inside some living organism it may become a voracious destroyer, multiplying and producing—such diseases as infantile paralysis, influenza, measles and the common cold.

The virus of each disease is believed to be specific. One of the larger varieties, the tobacco mosaic virus, is 15 microns in diameter and has a length of 280 microns. (A micron is 39.37 millionths of an inch.) Although, apart from the organisms which they infect, viruses seem inanimate, it has been found that they respond to some sort of magnetic force which they exert on one another, even at a distance. When the liquid in a virus solution is evaporated, the tiny rods arrange themselves in parallel groupings, although never compactly, for a repulsive force also operates to keep them about five diameters apart. If ultrasonic rays are used to break the rods into pieces, they will afterward unite, end to end, in odd lengths, but the joint uniting the pieces is so strong that further ultrasonic treatment makes them break somewhere else.

So, the mystery grows. Viruses are not only intermediate entities between the living and the lifeless: they are also submicroscopic, semi-organic magnets, but with effects different from ordinary magnetism. The question remains: How do viruses spread infection? After summarizing the recent work of Dr. Wendell M. Stanley,

pioneer in virus research, John J. O'Neill of the New York *Herald Tribune* asks:

Can a virus remain outside a cell and by use of its long-range forces operating through the ectoplasm, or skin, of a cell reproduce itself inside? And can that same process operate from cell to cell?

If the possibilities suggested by Mr. O'Neill are real—and there is no reason to suppose they are not—viruses may be thought of as so many little Svengalis with "evil eyes" that may be turned, for reasons unknown, upon the cell structures of living organisms, infecting them with deadly disease. Another cheerless discovery, made by Swedish scientists, is that the infantile-paralysis virus "lives harmlessly in all human intestines, giving rise to the disease under circumstances yet unexplained."

We don't know exactly what to make of all this, except the fact that, year after year, the revelations of virus research keep reminding us of the work of a forgotten French biochemist and physician, Antoine Béchamp, who, judging from his published papers, seems to have anticipated some of these modern discoveries. Béchamp had no electron microscope, and he failed to impress his nineteenth-century colleagues with his theory of "microzymes," but the similarity of Béchamp's transition-zone, uniting the organic and the inorganic worlds, to modern virus theory is dramatic and suggestive. And Béchamp's present-day supporters claim to have good evidence that the French critic of Pasteur understood the nature of infectious disease far better than his more famous contemporary. (Borderland science on this subject makes fascinating reading: see E. Douglas Hume's *Béchamp or Pasteur?* [London: Daniel, 1932]; H. Charlton Bastian's *The Origin of Life* [Putnam, 1911]; and Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Great Door* [Paris: Charpentier], unfortunately, available only in French, except for a portion which appeared in English translation in the *Magazine Digest* for July, 1939.)

The Atomic Energy Commission, now a front-line source of scientific news, is getting its

share of metaphysical questions. At a press conference in July, a correspondent for some New England papers asked the scientist members of the Commission whether they were "getting at the secret of where life begins." A guarded "yes" from Dr. James A. Jensen, director of the Biological Division, brought another question:

"If you are finding out what life is, what is it that departs at death?"

Stumbling a bit in this uncharted area, Dr. Jensen replied, apologetically, that according to available information, "when life departs, death begins." He added that "the precise thing" that happens at death—"the spiritual aspect of it, has not been investigated scientifically." What else, actually, could an honest scientist answer?

The only recent scientific pronouncement on this subject we can recall is the statement of Prof. F. A. E. Crew, of Edinburgh University, made in January, 1938, at the Indian Science Congress at Madras, to the effect that brain surgery offers no support to the view that the soul leaves the body at the moment of death. "If there is a soul," he said, "it can be detached from the individual little by little, and all that is specifically human can be lost long before death." One wonders by what means a surgeon, engaged in brain dissection, would identify the detachment of the soul from the body.

For serious testimony on the psychic aspect of death, we are reduced to the unorthodox reports of men like A.J. Cronin, who tells of feeling, at the time of the death of a child-patient, "with positive and terrifying reality, an actual sense of passage in that dim little side room." Or of Sir Auckland Geddes, eminent British physician and Ambassador to the United States from 1920 to 1924. In the *Forum* for January, 1939, Geddes recounts the inner experience of a man who hovered between life and death—one who "suddenly realized that my consciousness was separating from another consciousness that was also me." Such reports, taken together with the views of scientists like Weir Mitchell in the last

century, and Alexis Carrel in this, accumulate what might be called a body of empirical evidence for metaphysical ideas concerning the soul and its relation to the body. Even the clairvoyant visions of Andrew Jackson Davis, extraordinary sensitive of a century ago, may have a legitimate place in this sort of psychic research, for Davis was rather a "seer" than a medium, and his strange autobiographical volume, *The Magic Staff*, is as much a part of the literature of unorthodox medicine as of conventional Spiritualism.

The fact is that, up to the present, there has been little sense of the possibility of serious scientific investigation into questions like those asked of the Atomic Energy Commission. Simply to be expected to deal with the problem of what happens to the soul at death makes the average scientist feel that he has been thrust into a world without familiar landmarks, full of nameless possibilities. But sometime, somehow, a beginning must be made. This asking of questions is the first step.