VOLUME VIII, NO. 13
MARCH 30, 1955

TRANSITION IN RELIGION

THESE are days when the question of religion is very much in the foreground of debate. Religion has become politically important in the struggle against communism, so that the "religion as a weapon" sort of revival has become fairly common in the United States. In Europe, as recent events have made clear, Catholicism has had considerable success in its effort to obtain greater control over education. In Mexico, the Party of the Revolution continues its efforts to free the people of superstition, but finds progress extremely difficult, due to the hold on their minds which a combination of poverty and hopelessness has given to the Church.

Meanwhile, another kind of revival has been advocated by Arnold J. Toynbee, whose ponderous *Study of History* lays great emphasis on the importance of religion to the survival of Western civilization. Whether or not one agrees with Toynbee's evaluation of the role of religion, there can be no doubt of the fact that his attention to the subject marks some sort of awakening to the power of human aspiration and devotion as a historical force. His account of "true religion," moreover, as given in the New York *Times Magazine* (Feb. 20), bespeaks what may be called the "new universalism" in religious thought. He writes:

> I would define true religion as being right belief and right feeling taking effect in right action. Without right action, right feeling and right belief have no virtue in them. By right belief I mean recognizing that (*a*) we human beings understand and control only a tiny fraction of the universe and (*b*) that there is a presence in the universe which is spiritually greater than we are and which is Absolute Reality. By right feeling I mean awe in the face of the mystery of the universe and humility in the presence of Absolute Reality. By right action I mean trying to bring one's self-centered self into conformity with this spiritual presence behind the phenomena. I have tried to put my definition in terms that hold good for the religions of the Indian family (Buddhism and Hinduism), as well as for those of the Palestinian family (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), with which we in the West are better acquainted so far.

Except for the fact that Mr. Toynbee's definition seems to evade the pantheistic content of Far Eastern religions (the Self, in its highest aspect, is Absolute Reality), this is an admirable attempt to make the meaning of religion inclusive of all faiths. It is difficult to imagine a scholar of Toynbee's stature *and popularity* making a statement of this sort a century ago. Actually, there are men in many of the Christian denominations who are speaking of religion in this way, and whose efforts are bound to produce a broadening effect as the years go by. The interest of psychotherapists in religion, or rather in the part played in mental and emotional health by philosophical attitudes often identified as "religious," has frequently been noted in these pages; also, the turning of certain philosophers to the problems of religion. Among the latter, C. J. Ducasse of Brown University has given close attention to the question of immortality of the soul, and W. T. Stace of Princeton recently created something of a stir with his brilliant analysis of religious concepts and values in *Time and Eternity*.

Stace goes a step further than Toynbee. Toynbee offered a definition which, he hoped, would be broad enough to eliminate all sectarian claims and differences. Stace, however, distinguishes between what are called "religious beliefs" and the true nature of religion. Religion, he holds, is the actual experience of reality, whereas religious beliefs are "those propositions by means of which the intellect seeks to interpret symbolically to itself that inner and ultimate experience which is religion itself." Thus doctrines, beliefs, and claims are not religion, but

only devices which attempt to convey in symbols the meaning of the higher kind of experience men call "religious." Stace turns to the mystics for warnings against the attempt to make into "beliefs" any ideas relating to the ultimate content of religion:

> From the Katha Upanishad: "He who has perceived that which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying, tasteless, odorless, eternal, without beginning, without end... is freed from the jaws of death." Brahman is without physical attributes. He is "colorless, odorless, formless." He is "beyond space, beyond time." But neither can mental or psychological attributes be ascribed to him. He is "mindless," wholly impersonal. No predicates whatever, either physical or non-physical, apply to him. He is undifferentiated unity, indeterminate, "beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still." He is "the Self . . . who is beyond the senses, who is formless, inexpressible, beyond all predicates." "If one knows him as Brahman the Non-Being, he becomes merely the non-existent. If one knows that Brahman is, then he is known as the real in existence."

It is, Stace says, "the rationalizing intellect, anxious to do away with the Mystery of God," which attempts "to make religious truth palatable to common sense and logic." But the ultimate content is beyond speech.

The various religions, then, are various systems of symbolism, not of "truth," and there is a sense in which their "truth-content," or symbolic accuracy, may be destroyed in a moment by the delusion that they are something more than *symbols*—that they are in fact the truth itself. Every great religion affords clues to this danger. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, for example, there is this often-quoted passage:

> When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught. When thy mind once liberated from the Vedas shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shalt thou attain to devotion.

Thus, according to this view, belief in doctrines is all that is possible for those who are still in a state of delusion: doctrines or beliefs are *substitutes* for knowledge, not knowledge itself. This view of religious truth is even more emphatically put in Buddhist scriptures, and becomes almost the sole content of Zen Buddhism, which is filled with virtual contempt for doctrinal religion.

Stace offers philosophical analysis and criticism of the field of religion. Another writer, Arnold Kamiat (in *The Ethics of Civilization*, Public Affairs Press, 1954), subjects the practice of religion to a similar scrutiny. In popular opinion, the forms of religious observance are regarded as an essential part of religion. Kamiat proposes that a distinction ought to be made between religious practices and religion itself—between Spirit and *the things* of the spirit. He writes:

> There is a great deal of commotion today over the question of starting the school day with a prayer or a reading from the Bible, as well as the question of released time for the indoctrination of school children in theological beliefs. This is called introducing religion into the public schools. It is nothing of the sort. It should be spoken of as the introduction into the public schools of the mechanics of religion.

It follows that there is no reason to suppose that the spirit of religion is present wherever the mechanics of religion are in evidence. It is even likely that the spirit of religion may be barred and excluded by mechanical practices, so that the pursuit of those practices in the name of religion becomes a terrible deception. As William Lee Miller wrote in the *Reporter* last summer, "Our coins and stamps... now proudly assert 'In God We Trust,' while an even more compulsively anxious security system intimidates government employees, teachers, Army officers, scientists and citizens generally, censors books, almost closes our borders to immigrants, warps our politics, and proclaims to the world that we do not even trust our brother, whom we have seen."

By this time, perhaps, it will have been seen that two basic questions are involved in any proposed reform of religion, or reform in the

beliefs and practices of religion. The first question is: Can very many people hope to qualify as "mystics," and thereby be in a position to free themselves of the subservience to doctrine? What, as the old question has it, about "the masses"? Don't they have to have religion, too? And if the refinements of metaphysical analysis are beyond them—if the austere commitments required for a life of inner perception do not attract them—must we not make some sort of peace with the compromises of doctrine and the illusions of belief?

The second question grows out of the first: Do the popular forms of religion inevitably conceal and lead away from the path to mystical truth? Could not the symbolisms of religious practice and devotional performance constitute a kind of portal to inward mystical religion?

The answer to the first question must be of necessity a speculation, depending upon one's estimate of the rate of human progress, and the capacity, in a given civilization or culture, for abstract thinking and ethical aspiration. There are, however, clues to be studied, indices to be evaluated. The United States, for example, affords a culture which is relatively free of the cult of national heroes and particularist traditions, and ought, therefore, to be able to give hospitality to impersonal religious thought. The heritage of America is a heritage of great principles—the bequest to posterity of the Founding Fathers. Not a Great Man, but a Great Idea about All Men, is the genius of American civilization. Accordingly, insofar as American culture is distinguished by unique values, those values derive from abstract thinking about the Nature of Man, the Rights of Man, and the Potentialities of Man.

We would answer, then, that the capacity of Americans for philosophical religion may be much greater than we suppose. The same answer would apply to all individuals and cultures in which major ideals of any sort arise from reflection on principles instead of from reverence felt for a Great Man who lived in the past or a Great Leader who lives in the present.

The second question involves more complex considerations. It raises, first, the problem of the origin of religions, and then the matter of their role in the formation, organization, and support of civilization. If one adopts the view that religion gradually developed from efforts to give "system" to the irrational fears of primitive, savage tribes, and to lend supernatural meaning to the economic pursuits of agriculture and hunting, etc., then the second question is almost meaningless. But if it may be assumed that religions have grown up from the original pantheistic ideas of extraordinary men—properly called "teachers" because of their understanding of the needs of their fellows—then we may urge that every great religion at the outset was precisely what the question implies—a portal to the inner life of mystical perception.

From a practical point of view, the chief function of a religion in a man's life is to give order and precedence to his ends. Religious or philosophical conviction enables a man to establish what is for him the Highest Good, and to determine what is in harmony with the realization of that good and what opposes. On this basis he can plan his life and make his decisions.

The wholly mature man, then, is the man who is able to accomplish this ordering without any sort of external pressures or persuasions. He has the discipline to struggle toward the certainty he wants, and having reached it, he orders his life accordingly. This is the solution of his personal problem. Ethically, however, the solution of his personal problem is only a small part of his development, for both religion and philosophy propose that the truly developed man is also the man in whom the sense of self has expanded to include other human beings, and even the whole of life. Such a man, then, by definition, grows to final maturity only as he enters the service of others—be comes, that is, a teacher. It is here, perhaps, that his wisdom is most severely tested. For now he must take upon himself the difficult

task of communicating attitudes which cannot be conveyed by ordinary means of instruction. Understanding the truths of maturity involves the actual *experience* of maturity, which is possibly the reason why the word "initiation" is found in some form or other in the traditions of all the mystical religions.

Since the ideas of progressive education are by no means new, but have been put into effect by every teacher who recognizes that learning is a matter of growth, and that growth is a matter of trial and experience, ancient teachers nearly always attempted to incorporate into the social order a kind of finite symbolism of the larger purposes of life. There is, for example, the "work" of the soul in refining its perceptions and enlarging its horizons; and this is paralleled in the daily "work" of self-support and economic services to the community. So it is that in many ancient religions, the duties and functions of daily life are accorded a semi-sacred character, in virtue of the higher functions in the life of the soul they are made to represent. So each myth, each tale of daring and discovery, hides an inner, secret meaning relating to the struggle, the trials, and the yearnings of the soul.

This, or something like this, we think, is the origin of all the great theocratic systems of the past. The social order was intended to represent an earthly symbol of the transcendental order. It is this correlation of the inward and the outward life, of the earthly and the heavenly scheme of things, which gives the dramas of Shakespeare, for example, their extraordinary power. Through this correspondence, the events of ordinary life whisper the secrets of the universe to those whose ears are alert, and the dramatist, when he assumes the role of teacher, articulates the correspondence so that the promise of the fulfillments which come from maturity may be brought near at hand for an hour or two. This is the meaning of the "Mystery" play, which employs the arts to intimate the grandeur and dignity which are a part of truly human life.

Where, then, in this scheme of cultural and human development, does the great revolutionary epoch of Western history fit? It fits, we think, as a kind of "natural" reaction to the corruption of religious institutions. We could even argue that a further cause of the rejection of religion and religious culture by the West was an accession of self-reliance, which required a complete repudiation of the old, dead forms of religious observance before a new beginning could be made. When religious customs become a confinement rather than a channel for the flow of human aspiration, they must be broken down and destroyed. Whether the iconoclasm is performed by a Gotama Buddha or a Voltaire, a Thomas Paine or a Karl Marx, will depend, we suspect, upon the quality of the culture whose time has come for change—upon the salvage value of its existing beliefs and institutions. Those who choose Marx for their liberator do not deserve any better, and the new bondage which may result provides in turn a kind of penance for being unwilling to accept their liberation except at the hands of a brutal and ruthless materialism.

We have here, it is plain to see, a theory of history which is almost Hegelian in its primary implications. It is that the spirit in man is forever seeking to fathom the meaning of the diversities of life, and is pressed on in this quest by inexpressible yearnings of the heart. If the individual, or the community or culture decides to settle upon some temporary synthesis—some time- and place-bound version of truth and meaning—a lapse into decadence inevitably follows, bringing a cycle of static culture, and the triumph of orthodox symbols and practices over the impulse of the soul toward freedom and *individual* confirmation of its intuitions of truth.

Periods like the present, then, which are marked by religious turbulence, by reactions back and forth at every level of religious thought and practice, may be seen as times of tremendous readjustment when the forms of existing culture may be shaken to their foundations. The pleasant

serenity of ancestral custom may be rudely disturbed by alien storms and acts of piety violated by vulgar interruptions. On the one hand, for example, a saintly man like Vinoba Bhave may be attacked by an enraged populace for leading into a Hindu temple some Untouchables who for centuries have been barred from the community of worship by caste rules; or, on the other, pious Hindus may be shocked by the insults of Communists who have been taught that religion is the opium of the people.

The transformation of the religious scene in India of today is perhaps the most interesting phase of this entire transition. India is the home of the most philosophical religion the world has known—her influence upon the forms of religious faith known to man has been incalculable. The scholar who wishes to locate the purest expressions of spiritual devotion, the subtlest formulations of metaphysics, inevitably turns to the great scriptures of India. Likewise, the identification of religion and culture has been most complete in India.

We are not prepared to offer an intimate analysis of the secularization of Indian religion, since this would call for more detailed knowledge than we possess, but the gross evidence of excesses in the caste system, in the peculiarly inhuman condemnation as "unclean" of the Untouchables, and the custom of suttee are sufficient to suggest a corruption of original intent which may explain the vulnerability of Indian culture to the vigorous claims of Western "materialism." Asked recently by Waldemar Kaempffert, science editor of the New York *Times*, what would be the effect of industrialism on India's folkways, customs, and religious beliefs, Prime Minister Nehru said: "I think that the pattern of change in India will, in general, follow the pattern of social change in the West. Beyond that I cannot go."

The Prime Minister spoke of the progress gained in the elimination of caste distinctions, at least in places of employment, but added: "It is by no means certain that the caste system will disappear entirely." He pointed out that eighty-two per cent of India's people live in villages, where social changes proceed very slowly.

It is Nehru's hope that India may gain the benefits of industrialization while avoiding its evils. Meanwhile, the problem of religious adjustment remains paramount. A writer in the *Eastern World* for last November summed up the situation well:

> The educated Hindu of today frequently suffers from a sort of split-mind, sympathizing sentimentally with the old faith, yet believing rationally in that which his developing State demands of him. It seems that unless some advance in the understanding of this problem—far more difficult than is generally believed—is soon achieved the internal conflicts will worsen to everyone's disadvantage. The frontal attack made by European-type secularism upon established, if logically indefensible, beliefs has not hitherto been digested, and a spiritual reintegration is plainly clamoured for, which will demand the best of India's theologians. Heart, conscience, and civil duty have been sundered already too long, as India is well aware, and the alchemist who can recombine them will earn the world's, as well as India's homage.

REVIEW
THE POLITICAL MANIA

THE Reece Committee Report, pulpy fruit of a House of Representatives Committee investigation of tax-exempt foundations, has already received in the liberal press the ridicule it so amply deserves. This report, which appeared on Dec. 19, 1954, declared that some of the larger foundations—among others, the report singled out the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation for censure—"have directly supported 'subversion' in the true meaning of that term." It seems that some of the scholars belonging to learned societies given financial aid by these foundations have dared to show an interest in socialist and collectivist ideas, while the educational divisions of the foundations are charged with having conducted a "vast propaganda" in behalf of internationalism and "world government."

Writing in the *Nation* (Jan. 15) on the Report—"a 943-page book paid for by the taxpayers"—Paul Blanshard observes:

> This book may well go down in history as a classic in moronic Americana, an irruption of malice in blunderland, and certainly the worst book of 1954. . . . The foundations under fire in this inquiry were not even given an opportunity to testify in their own behalf. They were railroaded to censure by a fanatically reactionary committee staff whose "evident opposition to foundation activity may well be characterized as pathological"—to quote the minority report.

The idea of a private endowment or foundation for the public good is very old. Plato, for example, bequeathed his Academy to his successors, adding to it an endowment of productive land. Medieval society was in many respects dependent upon the endowments of the religious orders for social services—in England, the monasteries maintained the roads and conducted the schools, colleges, orphanages, and hospitals. The modern foundation, however, is usually secular, being devoted chiefly to the purposes of education, social betterment, research, and propaganda. William Orton, writing in the *Encyclopædia of the Social Sciences* (a reference work, incidentally, to which the Reece Committee Report strenuously objects, as financed by the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Russell Sage Foundations, and "to a large extent propaganda for communism and socialism [!]"), says this of modern foundations:

> How completely the typical large foundation of today is a product of modern conditions is attested by the fact that of the more important extant foundations in America, only seven originated in the nineteenth century. "As generally understood today," says Frederick P. Keppel, "a foundation is a fund established for a purpose deemed 'charitable' in law, administered under the direction of trustees customarily operating under State or Federal charter and enjoying privileges with respect to taxation and continuity of existence not accorded to 'noncharitable' trust funds. The fund is to be used for a designated purpose, broad or narrow as the case may be, the donor specifying whether the principal is to be kept intact or whether not only interest but principal may be spent for the purpose named. Though the practice is not uniform, it is the tendency to designate the former as Foundations and the latter as Funds."

Amusingly enough, a substantial portion of Mr. Orton's article is given to patient defense of modern foundations against what may be termed "radical" objections. Since these foundations come into existence at the will of men who are fabulously wealthy, critics argue that the economic basis of the foundation "is the concentration of wealth in a small class in a capitalistic society, its psychological basis the building of personal prestige or the salving of conscience and its ideological basis the regulation of important functions of education, melioration and control to agencies of militant individualism." Orton counters the demand for public supervision of foundations by pointing out that governments are usually intent upon immediate objectives, whereas the foundations are free to support programs having long-term or even uncertain ends. On the tendency of foundations to support the status quo, he writes:

> Foundation policies, like their trustees, reflect to some degree their economic origins. It is no derogation of the able and public spirited men who serve in this manner to remark that their ideas are hardly likely to run counter to the basic trends of the society that has produced the foundations or that their policies are likely to be palliative or ameliorative rather than radical. Cases on which their influence has been exerted in positive hostility to radical ideas or activities, although not absent from the record, are few and hard to substantiate; more important, perhaps, is the effect of an attitude of hopeful expectation on the part of those who would like to benefit by endowment in the future. The increase in publicity of foundation activities on the one hand and of public and professional vigilance on the other is probably a sufficient—and is in any case the only—safeguard against undesirable tendencies.

This mild apology for the conservativism of foundations appeared in 1931. Rep. B. Carroll Reece (Tennessee), however, in 1954, arguing for his investigation, insisted that he had evidence of a "diabolical conspiracy" to use the resources of foundations for "the furtherance of socialism in the United States." The Reece Committee's star witness, Aaron M. Sargent of San Francisco, supporting this contention, offered such testimony as the following:

> The Rockefeller Foundation . . . has aided the introduction of Communist practices in our school system. . . .
>
> The Ford Foundation used its financial power to attempt to resist the will of the people of Los Angeles in connection with a pamphlet known as the "E in UNESCO," and it includes the international declaration of human rights. Mr. Paul Hoffman, the president of the Ford Foundation, personally appeared before the Los Angeles Board of Education and sought to prevent the removal of these pamphlets. (Quoted in the *Nation.*)

Another instance of Foundation wickedness is an interest in "a new and revolutionary philosophy—one based on the teachings of John Dewey." The movement sponsored by the "radical intellectuals," and given aid and comfort by the foundations, began, it seems, a long time ago: "As early as 1892," Mr. Sargent told the Committee, "they sought to establish the federal income tax to pave the way for national federal socialism."

Another Committee witness filed a list of books intended to show the harm to the nation worked by the plotters of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace in encouraging the circulation of, say, Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* ("slightly leftist"), and Clarence Streit's *Union Now* ("globalist and submersion of national interest"). When still another witness started in on Stuart Chase for showing an interest in "collectivism and social planning" in a recent book, an unsympathetic member of the Committee irreverently asked, "Do you think Stuart Chase or Mickey Spillane has done more damage to America?"

The Reece Report is frightening enough, but not because of anything the foundations have done, or encouraged to be done. It remained for Robert M. Hutchins, president of the Fund for the Republic (an independent foundation established by the Ford Foundation "to support the traditional liberties of the American people"), speaking before the National Press Club in January, to add up the accomplishments of the Reece Committee. According to an account in the New York *Times* (Jan. 27):

> Dr. Hutchins described the majority report of the committee as a "wild and squalid presentation" that afforded "a picture of the state of our culture that is most depressing."
>
> "We may as well state it plainly: The Reece investigation in its inception and execution was a fraud," Dr. Hutchins said. "Nobody in his right mind could suppose that the great accumulations of wealth left by our richest men were being intentionally used by their trustees to overthrow the institutions of this country. . . ."
>
> Representative Reece, Dr. Hutchins said, was a winner in his attack on the foundations.
>
> "Without firing a single serious shot, without saying a single intelligent word, he accomplished his purpose, which was to harass the foundations and to subdue such stirrings of courage, or even of imagination, as could be found in them," he asserted.

> The "newer orthodoxy" is an "odd thing," Dr. Hutchins remarked.
>
> "For example, it requires us to be against McCarthy, but not too soon or too much, not in such a way as to arouse too much animosity in too many of those who might have a different opinion. If, for example, we say that rumor and gossip are an inadequate basis on which to condemn a man or a group, we are told that of course we are right but that in this case the rumor and the gossip are so widely believed that people would think bad thoughts of us if we insisted on proof.
>
> "So it comes to this: We must ourselves adopt an un-American attitude because if we don't we may be regarded as un-American by those who have an admittedly un-American attitude. We are all dedicated to the great American tradition, but the battle cry of the Republic is, what will people say?"

Mr. Hutchins noted that the Reece Report warns the foundations to be "chary of promoting ideas, concepts and opinions-forming material which run counter to what the public currently wishes, approves and likes." Replying, he pointed out that if the foundations accepted this counsel, they would abandon one of the functions which justify their existence—the supplying of "risk or venture capital in the field of philanthropy."

But if Mr. Hutchins is correct in his general assessment of the effect of the Reece Committee's activities—that they will discourage even the gentle probings of foundation-financed scholars and researchers in the direction of social alternatives and possible reforms—then the time has come to question seriously the role of the legislator and his opinions, actual or pretended, in American society. If it is really possible for a man like Mr. Reece, two or three other Representatives, and a small staff of "researchers" to work up a 943-page volume of testimony which takes fright at John Dewey, the *Encyclopædia of Social Sciences*, Paul Hoffman, Stuart Chase, and even poor Dr. Kinsey (who is said to be subverting morality in a more conventional way), and by this means to intimidate the administrators of sums which probably amount to $100,000,000 a year, then we should probably give up hope of any progress from either legislators or foundations.

For this is evidence that we are really victims of the political mania. Neither Mr. McCarthy nor Mr. Reece alone is a national disgrace. The disgrace is nationwide, that we listen to such men and take seriously, in the manner that Mr. Hutchins describes, what they say. Actually, we have already become "communists" in the sense that we attach to correct political opinions (heaven knows what correct political opinions are in the United States, these days—unless they are simply so innocuous as to give no offense to anyone) the same fanatical importance as the communists do. The fact that their version of "correct" is different from ours is a mere detail, since the chief delusion of authoritarian systems is the supreme value placed on *political* opinions.

For years we have noticed that men of intelligence and conscience feel an obligation to take a position on political questions, or even to work for some party or other, on the ground of social responsibility. We are beginning to wonder about the "realism" of this policy. If the behavior of legislators is so easily responsive to anticipations of "what people will say"—if national and local politics are at the mercy of demagogues to this extent—then it may be that men with social interests should turn their energies into other channels, and let politics go hang. We cannot believe that this would mean the ruin of the country. It would be more ruinous, we think, to continue to hope that politics can restore to culture the vigor and courage which, as Mr. Hutchins remarked, it now lacks. It is our culture, not merely our politics, which is sickly unto death.

COMMENTARY
THE JUDGMENT OF RELIGIONS

ESSENTIALLY, there are two sorts of judgment of religion. The first is the judgment a man makes in his own behalf, selecting the ideals, teachings, doctrines, and methods he finds best for himself. Then there is another judgment which becomes increasingly necessary as a man reflects upon the needs of his fellows.

But this second judgment is a hazardous one, for what has any man to do with the religious life of others? Yet every parent has this problem, every teacher, and every cultural leader.

The most obvious factor of importance in religious teaching is the opportunity it provides for moral freedom. By absolute standards, then, the best religion is the religion which insists upon complete freedom of choice. Yet for some individuals, communities, and even perhaps societies, a religion of unguided self-decision would seem like a formless abyss—or no religion at all. Meanwhile, other men would see in a religion of precise commandments and dogmatic utterance only an intolerable thralldom of the mind and spirit.

Puzzling, perhaps, over these differences among men, and in their religions, Thoreau wrote:

> When, in the progress of a life, a man swerves, though only by an angle infinitely small, from his proper and allotted path (and this is never done quite unconsciously even at first in fact, that was his broad and scarlet sin,—ah, he knew of it more than he can tell), then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act. When once we thus fall behind ourselves, there is no accounting for the obstacles which rise up in our path, and no one is so wise as to advise, and no one so powerful as to aid us while we abide on that ground. . . . For such the Decalogue was made, and other far more voluminous and terrible codes. . . .

What is the path back to inward religion from the threatening decalogues—from the severe manuals of the mechanics of righteousness to the dictates of the heart?

When can a man be sure that he can trust his heart? When should a teacher call upon his fellows to trust *their* hearts and to abandon reliance upon outside authority, whether earthly or supernatural?

These are questions which must be answered in the judgment of religion. The only *bad* religion, it seems to us, is the religion which seeks to suppress the ideal of moral independence, as though it were a "sin," and rests its claim for authority on human weakness, on the alleged incapacity of man, ultimately, to know for himself.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

A SUBSCRIBER recently mailed us an impressive issue (Jan. 3) of *The Commonwealth*, Official Journal of the Commonwealth Club of California, devoted to a symposium entitled, "What Kind of Individual Do We Want Our Schools to Produce?" The contributors endeavor to take the issues of "traditionalism vs. progressivism" out of the area of strife, so that cardinal points stressed by each school of thought may be seen in an impartial light. Thus, the Commonwealth Club carries out its avowed purpose, "to afford an impartial forum for the discussion of disputed questions."

We select the following from a staff-written summary:

> In assessing the school's product, the controversy over "progressive" vs. "traditional" education is unavoidable. The "progressive" concept of educating the "entire" child in the school (or "child centered school") is criticized for neglecting thorough training in elementary subjects. To understand this controversy as it may affect the school product, we briefly review and compare these two approaches.
>
> Although the traditional or classical theory is not currently so popular at the theoretical level, practice is still largely based on this theory especially in colleges and in secondary education. Elementary schools deviate from this theory to a variable degree.
>
> The "progressive" theory has had quite an influence on the elementary level. Up to 8th grade the pupil is heavily influenced by "progressive" education, although in higher grades the student is more influenced by "traditional" education.
>
> The various distinctions between the two theories and practices appear to be as follows:
>
> The first distinction is in "what learning is." On the traditional or classical theory, learning is the acquisition of prescribed information and intellectual skill. There is a distinction between what one knows and what one can do. Education of character is not a special problem. The emphasis is on education of the intellect, on cultural subjects; tests are on the basis of information the pupil possesses.
>
> In the "progressive" theory the approach is problem-solving or satisfaction-teaching. Knowledge is gained by application of information to a problem. The theory is that what one knows is what one can do. In the extreme, modernistic, progressive school this approach is carried to the point of entertainment with the theory that "if children like it, they will learn it." The knowledge gained is fragmental and not categorized according to cultural subjects.

Those who responded favorably to our lead article of some months ago, "Fratricide Among Educators," will undoubtedly also approve the tone pervading the *Commonwealth* article. In the midst of vehement, sometimes violent controversy, a few salient facts easily come to be overlooked—such as that the "modern" or "progressive" educator is dominantly concerned with helping youngsters "achieve a more satisfying childhood." In our frenetic culture, especially, this necessitates giving a great deal of attention to problems of emotional unbalance, and those who work with grade-school children are very much aware of the fact that traditional education simply does not do enough for enough of the children—however satisfactory it may have seemed in a different social setting. On the other hand, as children grow older, there is a crying need for strenuous mental discipline. Thus it is natural for parents and educators particularly sensitive to this need to regard the concept of "child-centered" education as often a threat to adequate mental and lingual preparation—especially if ultimately allowed to dominate every curriculum in the high school.

In reading Robert Ulich's *Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom*, the following passages by Rousseau seemed particularly relevant to questions involved in the current educational debate. For instance, much of the philosophy of the "new education" teachers is expressed by this passage:

> Direct the attention of your pupil to the phenomena of nature, and you will soon awaken his curiosity; but to keep that curiosity alive, you must not be in haste to satisfy it. Put questions to him adapted to his capacity, and leave him to resolve

> them. Let him take nothing on trust from his preceptor, but on his own comprehension and conviction: he should not learn, but invent the sciences. If ever you substitute authority in the place of argument, he will reason no longer; he will be ever afterwards bandied like a shuttlecock between the opinions of others.

The need for intellectual, philosophical and logical training is also approached in satisfying manner by Rousseau, and integrated with the above. On the discipline of the intellect he wrote:

> When he [the child] asks a question, be your answer always calculated rather to keep alive than satisfy his curiosity; especially when you observe he has a mind to trifle rather than be instructed. You ought to pay less regard to the terms of interrogations, than to his motives for enquiry. This conduct becomes of the greatest importance when a child begins to reason.
>
> The sciences are connected together by a series of propositions, all dependent on some general and common principles, which are gradually displayed. The philosophers make use of these; with us they are as yet out of the question. There is another chain of reasoning, of a different construction, by which every particular object is connected to some other, and points out that which succeeds it. This order of succession, which, from our natural curiosity, keeps alive our attention, is generally peculiarly adapted to children.

Here, we submit, is provided what may be taken as an attempt to synthesize. the dominant considerations of those who represent both schools of thought today. True experience, learning by doing, is not irreconcilable with intellectual training which acquaints youth with the basic principles and problems which underlie our culture as well as our sciences.

Our appreciation of *The Commonwealth's* editorial slanting, as indicated by the preceding selection, is a general one, but if one gazes overlong at the title of the symposium, a criticism of its wording easily springs to mind—why should children be spoken of as "products" of the school? But a dynamic balance between those who honestly favor one sort of pedagogical influence as against the other is at least apt to keep the general public from being complacent about the ends and aims of the school. Any endeavor to present opposing views as possessing complementary values should tend away, in the final analysis, from a mechanical estimate of teaching, regarding it as a means of producing determinable results.

FRONTIERS

Deceptive Nostrums

THERE is little doubt that a trend of some magnitude is represented by percipient criticism of the "tyranny of the consensus." Books such as Allen Valentine's *The Age of Conformity* and David Riesman's *Individualism Reconsidered* are a part of this, as also such articles as Edgar Ansel Mowrer's in the *Saturday Review* for Feb. 5. Mowrer, as we said in reviewing his article, "is concerned with exposing the all-pervasive notion that frictionless uniformities constitute the highest good in human and social relationships." An appreciative note from Joseph Wood Krutch draws further attention to the importance of this type of warning:

> "The lead article in the Feb. 23 issue," Krutch writes, "interested me especially. Mowrer's rule about not urging people to do together what they could do better alone strikes me as the best and simplest statement I have ever seen of something I had never quite been able to phrase. I have often thought that there is a sort of conspiracy against effective people by the ineffectual who insist upon their joining committees, making surveys, etc."

Popular reflections of philosophical dissatisfaction with "too much conformity" are to be found in many places. The magazine *Coronet,* for instance, has dealt with the same psychological subject at the level of dubious medical panaceas, in successive articles entitled "Penicillin Turns Killer" and "Sleeping Pills Are Worse Than Dope." Discussing the medical profession's growing candor in respect to the dangers of cure-alls—like penicillin—Lawrence Galton correlates a great deal of pertinent information in *Coronet* for November, 1954. The passages we quote seem of considerable independent interest as well as illustrative of the critical "trend":

> It was only in 1949 that the first account of a penicillin fatality was published by a doctor after one of his patients, a 39-year-old woman with severe asthma, who had received penicillin several times, was given an injection in her own home and died three hours later.
>
> In October, 1952, in the *New England Journal of Medicine,* a similar case of death from penicillin was described—this time with a doctor present. In January, 1953, a group of doctors from the Veterans Administration Hospital at Hines, Illinois, reported six cases of severe reaction, one of them fatal and the others the next thing to it. And in May, 1953, another group of doctors from Northwestern University Medical School and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology reported five fatalities. The latter two reports, appearing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association,* emphasized something even more disquieting—surprise that there had been so few other reports of sudden death from penicillin.
>
> Said one report: "This is puzzling in view of the ease with which this series was collected in a short period, and the widespread and perhaps indiscriminate use of this particular antibiotic."
>
> There is a growing suspicion, even an outright conviction, among many medical authorities, that far more deaths have been caused by penicillin than have been officially reported.
>
> Penicillin has been injected and swallowed by the ton-loads in diseases which it cannot help. Even nurses, who should know better, take penicillin without reason. Laymen may gulp penicillin tablets left over from a serious illness. Often they have insisted on injections for trivial illnesses and doctors have yielded.
>
> One of the worst practices—condemned repeatedly by medical authorities—is the use of penicillin as a kind of substitute for diagnosis. When in doubt, sometimes even when a little rushed, some doctors have prescribed a shot of penicillin without knowing what the patient's trouble was but hopeful it was something the drug would conquer.

Another article in *Coronet* for January strikes a similar note of warning in regard to "cheap and easy to get sleeping pills." Mort Weisinger writes:

> Tonight, as on every night of the year, tens of thousands of sleepless Americans will woo the sandman the "easy way." They will scorn such unguaranteed methods as taking a hot bath, drinking a warm glass of milk or counting sheep. Instead, they will break through the sleep barrier by dosing themselves with barbiturates, commonly known as sleeping pills.
>
> For many, this pre-bedtime ritual of swallowing one or more brightly colored capsules to insure slumber may become an unbreakable habit. Few

realize it, but this is a habit which can ultimately destroy them, mentally and physically.

According to Dr. Thomas Parran, former Surgeon General of the United States, sleeping-pill addiction has become one of the country's major health problems.

The sleeping pill menace must be curbed. Physicians harassed by sleepless patients should prescribe a harmless, non-habit-forming sedative instead. Wherever possible, they should treat not the symptom but the cause of whatever disturbance is preventing the patient from sleeping in the first place.

The point, here, is that a "conformity-minded" public literally begs the highly-paid advertising man to sell cure-all nostrums. In the field of medicine, we are beginning to see numerous examples which show that both a profession and the public it serves can be endangered by popular fads. But what happens in terms of medicine is only a reflection of what happens in terms of religious, social and political mores. A reversal of this trend will, we feel, only be effected by wider appreciation of present-day society's few "eccentrics" who like to read the philosophical and psychological fine print before they purchase ideas, educational programs, foreign policies or medicines.

The common denominator between Mowrer's "frictionless uniformities" and the eager buyers of sleeping pills and drug-store penicillin is, clearly, ritual. Lots of people like rituals, in church and state, and when the liking becomes a craving, a union of church and state appears, as it did during the Middle Ages. But what does "union of church and state" mean, in psychological terms? Simply authority, comforting authority, as to what is good—leaving to the individual only the task of buying his indulgences or his nostrums. A man is thus able to place the responsibility for his salvation, either spiritual or physical, upon the shoulders of a power higher than himself; then, in turn, since no energy need be wasted in the difficult business of making decisions, he can focus all his attention upon procuring the nostrums—and believing in them.

One form taken by the desire to purchase nostrums is belief that all can be made right with the world if one's government possesses a large enough army and navy. Propaganda in support of armed preparedness is never difficult to sell in a culture addicted to the nostrum psychology. But "Pay the specialists and let them fix things" is a poor policy, for the specialists soon acquire a sizeable stake in the sale of their commodities. The professional military man, or the physician who finds the dispensing of penicillin and sleeping tablets as profitable as it is simple, is hardly likely to want to do himself out of business. In other words, a nostrum-bound public imposes a severe strain upon the ethical sense of its authorities, and unusual men with unusual consciences are needed to protest the misrepresentations which inevitably occur. A "frictionless uniformity" is a willingness to be sold—more, evidence of a *desire* to be sold, and the men who can manage mass sales are able to excuse their purveying on the ground that, after all, you have to give the public what it wants. An excellent passage from Macdonald's *Root Is Man* here comes to mind:

> If what most people want is one's criterion of value, then there is no problem involved beyond ascertaining what in fact people *do* want—a question that can indeed be answered by science, but why *should* one want what most people want? The very contrary would seem to be the case: those who have taught us what we know about ethics, from Socrates and Christ to Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Gandhi, have usually wanted precisely what most people of their time did *not* want, and have often met violent death for that reason.

What these unusual men wanted was not, certainly, pumped-up faith in easy solutions and quick cures. They were a poor market for nostrums of any sort, and undertook an entirely different and opposite course of salesmanship for what *they* had to offer.