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THE QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

THIS is not, as yet, a scientific question. Whether or not the matter of immortality can ever become a scientific question, or should, will probably depend upon the evolution of science itself, and the development of methods of investigation which will not cheapen or destroy the content of such inquiries. Meanwhile, the question remains an important one, if only for the reason that human beings seem determined to wonder about it, no matter what they are told by the authorities of their day.

A reader who has given some thought to the subject writes to say:

> . . . proofs of immortality seem singularly unrewarding. It seems to me that about the only thing that can be done is to ask questions or point out considerations which can, so to speak, direct a man to his own intuitions about immortality. For example, a question which occurred to me when I was a very small boy is this: What would have happened if my father and mother had never met? Suppose each of them had married someone else. Would I ever have come into existence? For me, at least, this sort of question points to the very center of the problem. I don't know whether or not any sort of answer can be given.

We heartily agree with this reader, suspecting that this is one question concerning which answers from anyone else *ought* to be unsatisfactory. At any rate, we have never come across an "argument" for immortality that seemed final or conclusive, since, as this reader suggests, the most important evidence in the matter is bound to be subjective.

It is an interesting literary excursion to turn to an anthology of quotations—say, Stevenson's—and to read all that is said on immortality. The quotations in Stevenson are grouped under six headings: Definitions, Apothegms, Belief, Doubt, Unbelief, and Immortality and the Soul. "Belief" is a category where meet some strange companions—Cicero and Harry Emerson Fosdick, the New Testament and Charles Darwin. Under "Doubt" are found both sage and not-so-sage observations. W. M. Slater, for example, has remarked, "Man's ignorance as to what will become of him after he dies never disturbs a noble, a truly religious soul," while H. L. Mencken unhappily classifies himself by what he says of others who differ from him:

> I do not believe in immortality and have no desire for it. The belief in it issues from the puerile egos of inferior men.

We went to the pages of the anthology to find a passage of Emerson's in which, according to recollection, he said that the best "proof" of immortality is man's universal longing for it. It wasn't there. Yet we found something by Sir Thomas Browne which seems to contain the root of all essential conviction about immortality:

> There is surely a piece of Divinity in us, something that was before the elements, and owes no homage to the sun.

The thing to do, it seems to us, in brooding about immortality, is to let the skeptics have their say in full measure, and then see what is left to work with. Quite obviously, no one has an easy answer for the problem raised by our correspondent—suppose his parents had each married someone else: would he exist?—except in terms of a rather elaborate scheme of explanation. The argument for immortality, if there is one, will rather have to be in terms of fundamental values, leaving the "technology" of the process to be explained by wiser generations possessed of greater certainty.

But if immortality presents technical problems, there are strong feelings which suggest that the problems may possibly be worked out. Some years ago, in a book, *Education and the*

Good Life, Bertrand Russell told of an experience with his young son:

> I find my boy still hardly able to grasp that there was a time when he did not exist; if I talk to him about the building of the Pyramids or some such topic, he always wants to know what he was doing then, and is merely puzzled when he is told that he did not exist. Sooner or later he will want to know what "being born" means, and then we shall tell him.

Russell, apparently, is, or was then, quite confident of knowing what "being born" means. The modern skeptics, it seems to us, have fallen upon evil days, and have made certain denials out of their doubts. Mr. Russell, we submit, apart from a little physiology, knows no more about what it means to be born than the orthodox preacher who explains that the soul comes into being through an act of creation by the Deity. Among unbelievers, we like David Hume far better, who had the good sense to examine, in his essay on the Immortality of the Soul, the various contentions and possibilities. Early in his discussion, he says:

> Matter, . . . and spirit, are at bottom equally unknown; and we cannot determine what qualities inhere in the one or in the other. . . . Abstract reasonings cannot decide any question of fact or existence. But admitting a spiritual substance to be dispersed throughout the universe, like the ethereal fire of the Stoics, and to be the only inherent subject of thought, we have reason to conclude from *analogy*, that nature uses it after the manner she does the other substance, *matter*. She employs it as a kind of paste or clay, modifies it into a variety of forms and existences; dissolves after a time each modification, and from its substance erects a new form. As the same material substance may successively compose the bodies of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds: their consciousness, or that system of thought which they formed during life, may be continually dissolved by death, and nothing interests them in the new modification. The most positive assertors of the mortality of the soul never denied the immortality of its substance, and that an immaterial substance, as well as a material, may lose its memory or consciousness, appears in part from experience, if the soul be immaterial. Reasoning from the common course of nature, and without supposing any new interposition of the Supreme Cause, which ought always to be excluded from philosophy *what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable.* The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth; and if the former existence noways concerned us, neither will the latter.

We have it then on good authority—the authority of the most influential skeptic in the history of Western thought—that if immortality be true, the question of whether a man would exist at all if his present parents had married other people should present no special difficulties. It should not, that is, to any of those whose philosophy of immortality accords with David Hume's analysis. For the believer in pre-existence does not regard the child as the "product" of his parents, who are only the agents of his birth, and not his creator. The Buddhists would see no problem at all in the question, since they would say that, by a change of parents, his endowments might alter somewhat, and the circumstances of his life, but that he would bring the same personal inheritance of moral qualities with him, to be worked out in whatever conditions are provided by that birth. So with all the reincarnationists, for whom pre-existence of the soul is a primary dogma.

But this, one may say, is not "proof." Indeed it is not, nor is there much hope of gaining proof from piling quotation upon quotation, nor in citing the world's great religions and philosophers. Originally, we sought the quotation from Emerson, about the longing for immortality being its best proof, in order to set beside it a passage of opposite indication by Hume, who argued that the human fear of death might be taken to show that it is indeed the end. He wrote:

> . . . as nature does nothing in vain, she would never give us a horror of an impossible event. She may give us a horror against an unavoidable event, provided our endeavors, as in the present case, may often remove it to some distance. Death is in the end unavoidable; yet the human species could not be preserved had not nature inspired us with an aversion towards it. All doctrines are to be suspected which are favoured by our passions; and the hopes and fears which give rise to this doctrine are very obvious.

And now, honest controversialist that he is, Hume admits the special advantages in argument enjoyed by the skeptic:

> It is an infinite advantage in every controversy to defend the negative. If the question be out of the common experienced course of nature, this circumstance is almost if not altogether decisive. By what arguments or analogies can we prove any state of existence, which no one ever saw, and which no way resembles any that was ever seen? Who will repose such trust in any pretended philosophy as to admit upon its testimony the reality of so marvelous a scene? Some new species of logic is requisite for that purpose, and some new faculties of the mind, that they may enable us to comprehend that logic.
>
> Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to Divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth.

Hume is so provocative a writer that his polemics are sufficient to make the reader adopt an opposing position, simply for the pleasure of fencing with him. Moreover, it happens that there are ready answers to these concluding questions. Countless millions—the great majority of the human race—have "reposed such trust," among them the subtlest minds of which we have record. And since Hume wrote, at least two generations of scientists have devoted themselves to exploring "new species of logic" relating to immortality.

For if, by common agreement, metaphysics cannot "prove" immortality, and if, despite Hume's tongue-in-cheek reliance on "Divine revelation," the authority of religion is no more acceptable, then perhaps the new methods of science may provide an answer. This, at any rate, was the view of William McDougall, who, in 1937, in the opening editorial of the first issue of the *Journal of Parapsychology* (issued at Duke University), revealed the background of concern which spurred this eminent psychologist to a lifelong interest in psychic research. "What," McDougall asked, "are the relations of mind and matter?" This is the key question in any inquiry into the possibility of immortality. He continued:

> Are mental processes always and everywhere intimately and utterly dependent upon material or physical organizations? Do the volitions, the strivings, the desires, the joys and sorrows, the judgments and beliefs of men make any difference to the historical course of the events of our world, as the mass of men at all times have believed? Or does the truth lie with those few philosophers and scientists who, with or without some more or less plausible theory in support of their view, confidently reject well-nigh universal beliefs telling us that the physical is coextensive with the mental and that the powers and potentialities of mind may be defined by the laws of the physical sciences?

Ever since the first formal attempt by a quasi-scientific body (the London Dialectical Society, in 1869) to lend assured credibility to the findings of psychic research, devoted men have been cataloging the "miracles" of Spiritualism, clairvoyance, telepathy, and other phases of psychical phenomena, in the hope that if these mysteries could be shown to represent transcendental facts, a new and more inspiring account of the nature of man would be acceptable to scientific thought. Great masses of evidence have been accumulated, some of it fascinating, some of it dully inconsequential. But a large part of it is suggestive of some dimension of reality which escapes familiar methods of scientific investigation and is entirely overlooked by the modern world view.

But does all this evidence "prove" immortality? Far from it; although, as we read the record, there are *aspects* of psychic research which seem confirmatory of *aspects* of certain metaphysical doctrines or theories concerning the prospect of a life after death.

On the whole, the situation remains much as our correspondent described it, so far as "proof" of immortality is concerned. The mode of reflection on the question that seems to us to be most profitable is to take a position—either affirmative or negative—and to develop all the implications of that position to the fullest extent. What sort of life and philosophy is consistent with immortalist conviction? Are there theories of

immortality which impart a larger meaning to human existence, even in its details?

We are arguing, here, for the value of considering the *possibility* of immortality, contending that serious thought on the subject will broaden any point of view, even as it did Hume's; and this, we think, will be true, whether or not one finally agrees or disagrees with Hume.

We find Hume useful on immortality, and on occasion even like what he says, because he is properly paradoxical, somewhat in the manner of Buddha, who reached an opposite position. For instance, after having effectively abolished belief in egoity and practically every form of philosophical idealism for the next couple of centuries, Hume had this to say of his system of negation:

> I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends, and when, after three or four hours of amusement, I return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot kind it in my heart to enter into them any further.

He is a worthy combatant, who left open the door to future investigators:

> For my part, I must plead the privilege of a skeptic, and confess that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis that will reconcile these contradictions.

Letter from
CENTRAL EUROPE

INNSBRUCK.—The six to seven millions of Austrians read quite a lot of daily papers. Most of these are concentrated in Vienna, but even small towns have their own.

Few of these papers can be called "independent," as most of them are owned by a political party. Until a short time ago, even the "Allied" occupation authorities issued daily papers, trying to make the Austrians either friends of the Americans, the British, the French, or of the Russians. The Soviets still issue an *Osterreichische Zeitung,* whereas the Western Powers have sold their journals to Austrians.

Except for a couple of Communist papers, most of these newspapers belong either to the Austrian Peoples Party (Roman Catholic) or to the Social Democratic Party (Marxist). Other publishers issue weekly illustrateds, but their importance has faded since the German illustrateds are on the market again, especially the *Münchener Illustrierte, Quick* and the *Revue.* One of the German illustrated papers, called *Stern,* has even arranged for part of its edition to be printed in Vienna, adding a few pages to cover Austrian events.

During the first years after the war and until about two years ago, there were signs that the Central Europeans (Germans included) would develop an interest in the foreign press as well. For a while American periodicals enjoyed preference. There was a time when the European editions of *Life, Time, Reader's Digest, Ladies Home Journal* and others dominated the kiosks. Today, one can still get these publications at international corners in Bonn, Cologne, Hamburg, Vienna and Graz, and in towns occupied by USA troops, but in general they have vanished.

It must be realized that until 1945 the Central Europeans were cut off from other countries for a number of years, that their own periodicals had suffered the privations of war, and that the people, in their defeat, for psychological reasons expected the victors to possess better magazines. This feeling extended beyond the area of the press. Something which no tobacco expert could have foreseen happened: Austrians and Germans started preferring Virginia tobacco—the "American way"! But during the past couple of years, be it in regard to cigarettes, motor cars, movies, or publications, the Central Europeans have returned to their own products.

There are a number of causes for this return. The most prominent one, of course, is that their own products have reached a quality that seems to make them independent of foreign output. So far as the press is concerned, however, other reasons are also important.

Take for example the special issue of *Life* on Germany, of May 10, 1954. Of course, the American magazine's attempt at a general survey was welcomed and fully appreciated. And the answer to critics on the Central European side could always be that the Germans would naturally not see themselves as the others would see them. But not only the Germans—other Central Europeans, such as Austrians, had objections to offer. First of all, it was said that the pictures were not exactly typical. The presentations were not balanced. Trivial problems were treated as pompously as important ones. Wonderful views were left out, while ordinary scenes were pictured, and the color printing made them difficult to recognize.

But the chief reason that *Life* and other American magazines suffer a growing unpopularity—or, at least, do not win the popularity they might deserve for other reasons—is the manner in which illustrations and advertisements get mixed up. The Central European buys his own papers under the supposition that he will get, for his money, interesting photos and text, without too much distraction from the advertisements. Opening an American illustrated, however, he feels somewhat

offended. It looks to him like a playground for advertisers, with a few pictures strewn around to satisfy the claim of that "necessary evil," the reader; and he notes that while the photos mostly appear in black and white, the advertisements dominate with the most stirring colors.

To divide a page by a middle-line from top to the bottom and use the inner halves for texts and photos, while the outer ones are preserved for advertisements is something incompatible with the custom and taste of Central Europeans. They dislike the American way of publishing, when, for instance, in *Life*, Nobel Prizewinners and brilliant teachers are, in terms of space and shades, shoved into the background by kitchen clocks and rubber shoes.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
"ENCOUNTER"—A BRITISH MONTHLY

WE have found that the regular reading of a British publication or two is a welcome assist to one's general education. The *Manchester Guardian Weekly,* for one, is often a source of useful material, and we now call attention to a new British monthly, *Encounter,* currently in its third volume. Among the authors who supply *Encounter* with consistently good writing are such men as Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, Herbert Read, Walter de la Mare, W. H. Auden, and Hallam Tennyson, grandson of the poet.

Encounter is sponsored by The Congress for Cultural Freedom, located in Paris, but is published in London (7 John Street, Bloomsbury, S.W.I.). The two editors are Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, and most of the writers are English, but the magazine also prints valuable translations from the French and German, and reflects an interest in present affairs in India.

Two articles in the December number deal with Vinoba's movement for Indian land reform. Hallam Tennyson provides background on the philosophy and psychology now inspiring the movement known as "Bhoodan." For those who have not yet read a sequential history of the Bhoodan Movement, Tennyson's article is an excellent summary. Here is evidence of Vinoba's sharpness of mind as well as breadth of ethical perspective:

> When criticized with breaking up Indian land into tiny fragments through the redistribution carried out by the Land Gifts Mission, Vinoba quickly replied that the fragmentation of hearts concerned him more than that of holdings. Told that his ideas added up to Communism minus violence, he gave a cryptic smile: "Perhaps. But then you might say that two people were identical—except for the fact that one breathed and the other was a corpse."

Another paragraph indicates that Vinoba, like all true Gandhians, chooses to incarnate something of his preceptor's example rather than to content himself with emotional reference to his teacher. We are reminded that Gandhi once said that Vinoba "understands my ideas better than I do myself." Tennyson continues:

> Like Gandhi, Vinoba makes no use of conscious oratory. His words, pointed and well-phrased, carry authority from the heart.
>
> Vinoba never mentions his master by name when he is speaking in public. That is where he is so different from other successors: and the difference is significant. He is a candle lit at a neighbouring flame, that burns now with its own steady and separate light. This is proof that it is not a new religion that has been founded, but a new dynasty.

Following Tennyson's article is a companion piece by a former secretary of the Socialist Party of India, Minoo R. Masani, who has served with distinction as Mayor of Bombay, Ambassador to Brazil, and Member of the Indian Parliament. Mr. Masani adds details which fit well into the background provided by Tennyson, showing that Bhoodan is a vigorous growth, and not a mere wave of sentiment.

Then, in the same issue of *Encounter,* Ignazio Silone, contributes "The Choice of Comrades." Silone, in our opinion, is always good whenever and wherever he writes, and his presence in *Encounter* did much to compel our attention to the magazine. At the end of this article—concerned with the importance of one's intellectual companionships—Silone tells why, as a once ardent socialist, he now feels it more necessary to make autonomous decisions, and to rely less and less upon ideologies and party programs:

> We have come a long way now from the very simple situation in which some of us revolted against our family surroundings and went over to the side of the proletariat. The proletariat of this world are no longer in agreement among themselves; they are no longer the incarnation of a myth, and if one were to follow them blindly and unconditionally one might find oneself where least one wants to be. The initial choice must now be followed by another. To judge men, it is no longer enough to see if they have calloused hands, one must look into their eyes. There is no mistaking the look of Cain. Do we side with the inmates of the slave labour camps or with their gaolers? This dilemma we can no longer evade, because the executioners themselves are forcing it on us. Threateningly they demand: "Are you with us or against us?" We must call a spade a spade. We are certainly not going to sacrifice the poor to the cause of freedom, nor freedom to the poor, or rather to the usurping bureaucrats who have climbed on the

shoulders of the poor. It is a matter of personal honour to keep faith with those who are being persecuted for their love of freedom and justice. This keeping faith is a better rule than any abstract programme or formula. In this age of ours, it is the real touchstone.

It should be apparent from the foregoing why humanism in general, literary or philosophical, means very little to us. Perhaps the time for it will come again, but at present we feel very remote from the serenity and harmony it represents. To us it seems that the self-complacency of man implicit in humanism has scant foundation nowadays. Mankind today is in poor shape. Any portrait of modern man, if at all faithful to the original, cannot but be deformed, split, fragmentary—in a word, tragic.

Silone continues:

What is left in the end? I do not think I have the right to speak of faith, but only of a certain trust. This trust is founded and turns on something more than the compassion of Albert Camus. It is founded on the inner certainty that we are free and responsible, and it turns on the absolute need of finding a way towards the inmost reality of other people. This possibility of spiritual communion is surely the irrefutable proof of human brotherhood. Love of the poor is born (or reborn) from it, as an obvious corollary the truth of which no disillusion, since it is not a love based on self-interest, can place in doubt. How can one resign oneself to the thought that in so many human creatures born to poverty and wretchedness, man's noblest faculties are stifled? To live one's life, ignoring the fundamental obligation which this implies, is no longer, it seems to me, morally conceivable. This is not to be interpreted, however, in political terms of power or tyranny. To use the poor as a steppingstone to power, and then to betray them, is undoubtedly the most wicked of all sacrileges, because of all human beings they are the most defenceless. Nor can this suffice as an indication of how to solve every problem. Humbly we must confess that we have no panacea. All we have—and it is a great deal—is this trust that makes it possible for us to go on living. The sky above us is dark, and this small circle of light barely enables us to see where to place our feet for the next step.

As long as there remains a determination to understand and to share one's understanding with others, perhaps we need not altogether despair.

The February *Encounter* contains an article "On Vulgarity," by Albert Dasnoy, a translation from the French. Here, as in Silone's writings, one finds deprecation of most current trends in attitude and culture. But what seems distinctive about *Encounter* writers is their evident determination to offset these criticisms with balancing hopes for the future. Dasnoy's analysis of cultural weakness is followed by the suggestion of man's capacity for realizing better standards. Here is the criticism:

One would only have to take the knick-knacks from a lower-middle-class drawing-room, or a shop full of religious trinkets, and install then in an archaeological museum, in order to be fully persuaded of the insignificance and absurdity into which popular taste has sunk, and the scandalous way in which such things are forced upon our sight. We may as well recognize that the phenomenon is unprecedented in human history. It is surely not without significance that the word itself, "vulgarity," should have come to be used, in its present sense, towards the end of the 18th century. The word was needed then, in a way that it had not been needed before.

And here the evidence of regeneration:

It is a fact that this taste has now reached the lowest depths of aberration. All over Europe and America, organisations are springing up for the purpose of re-educating the æsthetic taste of the masses and bringing them back to more reasonable ideas. Appeals to reason have some chance of being listened to.

A discussion of "Human Freedom" by two authors is found in the February *Encounter*. Terminating the dialogue, Maurice Cranston writes in a mood now beginning to reappear in the discussions of scholarly contemporaries:

Does either of us believe in the freedom of the will? If this is a matter of unpredictable volitions, evidently not. On the other hand, we both maintain that men are morally responsible for their characters because they form their own characters. If this is "free-will," then we do believe in it. Neither of us seems to find "free-will" a very felicitous or appropriate expression, but it does serve to designate a genuine philosophical problem, and one which, we are also agreed, is something much more than a purely academic one.

COMMENTARY
LAPSE OF MATERIALISM

IT is hardly an exaggeration to say, as this week's lead article does, that David Hume "abolished belief in egoity and practically every form of idealism for the next couple of centuries." Hume's case against psychic or "spiritual" individuality is virtually a classic of modern materialism, appearing by quotation as the "clincher" in most attempts to refute the claims of believers in immortality. Whenever, Hume said, I try to find my "self," what I discover is some species of sensation, so that I must conclude that there is no self at all, but only a train of sensations, which generates the notion of Self. The self, therefore, whatever it is, cannot survive sensation, and since death means the end of sensation, it also means the end of self.

Hume seems never to have asked himself about the identity of the "self" which pursued the investigation—the self as subject which sought the self as object! But this argument, perhaps because it seems so obvious, has never made much of an impression upon Hume's admirers.

Our present point, however, is that Hume carried the field in modern psychology and much of modern philosophy. Until recent years, no academic reputation could survive a contradiction of Hume's famous analysis, and we recall, within a decade, a complaint that a college professor lost his job because he confessed a belief in immortality! The case was no doubt exceptional, yet that it could happen at all, or be suspected of happening, illustrates the vast influence of Hume and the position he asserted.

Lately, however, there has been a noticeable weakening of academic insistence on human mortality. Some of this capitulation is no doubt due to the alertness of campus conformists, who realize that the winds of popular feeling are beginning to blow the other way (the well-known "return to religion," and the political unpopularity of materialism and atheism), but an honest reconsideration of philosophical and even metaphysical issues is also going on. What we now have to be careful to avoid, perhaps, is being swept away by an indiscriminate rush to get on the band wagon of belief in Higher Things—including uncritical versions of immortality.

Fuzzy-minded acceptance of a philosophical idea soon transforms it into a merely pious idea, and we don't want this to happen to the idea of immortality! It is too important.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

IN favoring competitive report cards for grade schools, the California Senate Investigating Committee on education recently proclaimed that our children need an early introduction to the psychology of the competitive world; further, that any other method of reporting results of the child's activities in school to parents comes dangerously close to "socialism." Before attempting a little destructive analysis of this view, let us see if any sort of case can be dredged up in support of a "competitive system" in the school.

There is one thing that can be said. It seems reasonable to hope that every child will have early experience with what is called "success" and what is called "failure." Whether or not we use these terms, and whether or not we place a high value on what society calls success, there are times when both grown-ups and children are found wanting in given situations, and have need to face the fact and understand it. A competitive system certainly gives ample opportunity for experiencing what *someone* regards as success and failure. The trouble is—and this is why we are dubious about the logic which usually supports "capitalist free enterprise"—that successes and failures gauged in economic terms have only a quantitative measure. The successes and failures that are truly important are psychological, having to do with the *quality* of a person's response to a difficult situation. True success is attained by the man who solves the problem of his own personality, who meets the challenges of his nature together with the challenges proposed by his complicated interrelationship with others of differing opinions, but from whom he can learn.

These observations, it is today necessary to add, are in no sense meant as endorsement of a socialist system of economy. All present socialisms likewise fail to take into account the important dimensions of *psychological* success and failure, and, further, we have seen no evidence that those who live in a socialist economy are any more likely to perform their tasks for love of their work or from pride in the goods produced. Here, we think, is the root failure of both "systems" as we have seen them in Western history, and in this respect we might possibly learn a great deal by extending the observations of our child psychologists to the problems of society—rather than the other way around, as the "pro-competition" people would have it.

For instance, every teacher and every psychiatric counsellor knows that children learn from work only when they are using some art-form or producing some object which they *desire* to produce. This would correspond, in the world of parents, to contributing to a product which may command respect from both producer and consumer alike. We *do* make it possible for children, through the revised curricula of our grade schools, to work with the things and towards the ends that matter to them. The capitalist system, on the other hand, is primarily geared to profit. Success in our society, unfortunately, as everyone knows, is measured less by the quality of a product than by profit and loss reports. But socialist systems do not fare well in this respect, either. Men who are commandeered for industry are certainly no more likely, in fact less so, to have an intimate personal interest in what results from their labors.

The "system" that we find greatest pleasure in endorsing hasn't been invented yet—probably because this whole problem properly belongs to the domain of psychology and not to economics at all. But if it is true that children develop their more worthwhile and endearing qualities when encouraged to follow out their own inspirations, to select the field of artistic creativity which appeals to them directly and intimately, then it must also be true that the emphasis on competition in the economic world is extremely dubious—especially in respect of its prospects for bringing the maximum development of human beings.

As has been already noted, a competitive system does enable a child—or a man or woman—to be "tested," in some sort of way, early in life. But the success exhibited is, from a philosophic point of view, apt to be of the wrong sort. Just as it is important to recognize human differences—as was emphasized last week in relation to parents who have difficulty in recognizing mental inadequacy in their children—so is it necessary to assimilate a scale of values in which success and failure are seen to be part of the fabric of human experience, but wherein *neither* success nor failure is regarded as in any sense final. It seems particularly dangerous, moreover, to allow success and failure to be identified with economic ends. Whenever college youth measures success in terms of economics a considerable psychological risk is engendered. For each one who "succeeds" there will be many who "fail." And those who fail will carry with them the feeling of their inadequacy throughout life—unnecessarily.

Quite a few of the noblest minds in human history would have "failed" in economic competition, perhaps because of ethics too elevated for the market, or simply because material things meant little to them. We all know this rhetorically, but our society seems largely oblivious of the fact.

For some reason or other, no one involved in the Senate Investigating Committee seems to have considered the possibility that more than one sort of progress report for children in school is possible—and highly desirable. Fixed standard grades, even, could have a legitimate function; they might help to round out the total picture for the child, so long as he realized this arbitrary means of judging is only *one* method of evaluation, and not, in either a social or personal sense, the most important. Parent-teacher conferences can also be beneficial, and should serve as a means of parent education. In fact, we should commend such conferences on the specific problem of "grading" children, especially if all four of the means reviewed by the Committee were used together. For mothers and fathers, apparently, need enlightenment very badly on the subject, so that they will not depress their children by showing displeasure whenever a youngster's work reveals less comparative excellence than that of some of his schoolmates.

Finally, teachers need opportunity to help parents realize that the child who is "slow" one year, or for two or three years, may accelerate at a later date—that rates of growth vary with each individual. Perhaps it is because those who actually work with the young realize this so clearly that they wish to protect children from unfavorable evaluations of a sort which can only delay, if not destroy, the optimism needed to meet new intellectual challenges.

FRONTIERS

King Mongkut of Siam

IF the rest of you movie-goers are anything like the moviegoers of this department, you probably laughed at and enjoyed the Hollywood version of *Anna and the King of Siam*, even if wondering how much the producers had added to the original tale to make it palatable to a Western ("white") audience. Did the king *really* have the harem girl flogged and then burned to death with her lover?

On this last question, we shall have to wait for more detailed information; meanwhile, in the March *Eastern World* is an article on the real King Mongkut of Siam which makes the "Anna" story both ridiculous and an outrage. The contrast between Mongkut as he lived and served his people and the portrait drawn by the English governess he hired to educate his children is so great that the film seems nothing less than an act of stupid barbarism. Alexander B. Griswold, who was a U.S. Army Staff Officer in Asia during World War II, writes in *Eastern World* about the achievements of Mongkut, who was, Griswold says, "one of the greatest men Asia has ever known."

Mongkut was born in 1804. At the age of twenty, he became a Buddhist monk, for it was the custom of all young Siamese to wear the Yellow Robe for at least a few months to gain a more intimate knowledge of their faith. Ten days after Mongkut became a monk, his father, the king, died unexpectedly and the council decided to place Mongkut's half-brother on the throne because he was older and had been the practical ruler of the country for many years. Mongkut remained a monk, perhaps in self-protection from palace intrigue, and the training in Buddhism which was to be only an interlude of months grew into a career lasting twenty-seven years. Only after the death of his half-brother did he return to the life of a layman and become the ruler of Siam. Griswold comments:

> A westerner might suppose that such a long withdrawal from the cares of ordinary life would be the worst possible preparation for a ruler. On the contrary, it gave him an acute sense of reality and a knowledge of people he could not possibly have got amid the artificialities of palace life.
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> Prince Mongkut learned at first hand the meaning of humility and self-abnegation, the meaning of loyalty and friendship. In accordance with usual practice, he made long pilgrimages on foot to different parts of the country, living on such food as the peasants and fishermen put into his begging-bowl. His travels gave him a knowledge of geography that was rare in those days of poor communications, while his friendly talks with the people gave him an insight into the minds and needs of his future subjects such as no Siamese ruler had ever had.

Mongkut also imposed upon himself the austerities of the "meditative" monks, becoming schooled in psychological practices which, Griswold says, give the practitioner "complete control over all the functions of his body and his mind." However, Mongkut became dissatisfied with the results of this course of discipline and resolved to investigate what the Buddha himself had taught on the subject. Accordingly, he went to another monastery where Pali was known, mastered the language in which the Buddhist scriptures were recorded, and "plunged into a painstaking study of the texts." This was the beginning of a great resolve by Mongkut to restore Buddhism in Siam to its ancient purity. Shortly after 1837, when he became the abbot of a monastery, he founded a sect which took "Adhere to the Doctrine" as its principle.

Such was the man who, in 1851, at the age of forty-seven, became the King of Siam.

Mr. Griswold relates that the Siamese, when asked by visiting Americans what they think of *Anna and the King*, have a way of "politely changing the subject." In view of Mongkut's true story, this seems an almost unimaginable restraint on the part of the Siamese, who regard Mongkut as the creator of modern Siam (Thailand). As a reporter, the English governess, Anna, was utterly unreliable. She returned home in the 1870's and published two books on her "adventures"—*The English Governess at the Siamese Court* and *The Romance of the Harem*. While these books are claimed to give "a full and faithful account" of the author's life and observations in Siam, Griswold says:

> Anna was a careless observer and a credulous listener. Her frequent mistranslations of Siamese phrases show that she never mastered the language. Apparently she never thought any piece of scandal improbable enough to require checking. Like many Victorian ladies she was always ready to suspect the worst.
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> She depicts the king as a ferocious monster. Some of the things she says about him may be due to honest errors, but a great many are deliberate fabrications—designed perhaps to satisfy her malice against a man whom she did not like, or perhaps to make her books sensational and therefore more readily saleable.

While Anna praises Mongkut's scholarship and political good intentions, she also "charges him with a long list of depravities that were largely her own invention." Thus, as Griswold notes, Hollywood and Broadway (Broadway for the musical comedy, *The King and I*) are only partly responsible for the slander of the Siamese king, since "the real fault is in the basic source material." Here is Griswold's account of Mongkut's achievements as a ruler:

> During his seventeen-year reign he transformed the country's whole outlook. Establishing diplomatic relations with England, France and America he opened the land to a life-giving flow of foreign commerce. He set up printing presses, built roads and canals, and issued the first modern currency to take care of the requirements of his country's expanded trade. He reformed the administration, installed foreign advisers in government departments, called in English officers to improve the army and organize a police force. He stimulated education at home and sent young men abroad to study. He reaffirmed the freedom of religion and encouraged the Christian missionaries in their educational and medical work. He raised the condition of the slaves and insisted that the law should treat all ranks of men impartially. The Siamese remember King Mongkut for all these things.

Even more interesting is the story of Mongkut's reform of Buddhism, well on the way before he became king, and which he did not attempt to further by kingly authority.

As seems to happen with all religions, Buddhism in Siam had undergone changes during the centuries since the Hinayana doctrines had been brought to that country from Cambodia in 422 A.D. Since the study of Siamese Buddhism has been a special interest of Mr. Griswold, his account of the religious situation in Siam in the early years of the nineteenth century is of particular value:

> The Buddhist religion was professed by the entire nation. But it was in the hands of a rather lackadaisical monkhood, whose beliefs were a strange distortion of the great doctrine preached by the Buddha in India more than 2,300 years before. The Buddha, rejecting magic and ritual, had taught an ethical and psychological system in which the gods had no significant place; he had had but a single aim—mankind's release from suffering—and proposed a very direct method of achieving this aim by discipline of self and kindness to others. But in the course of time the Doctrine had become largely a matter of form and ritual, mystical trances and observances to assure rebirth under happy conditions. In their desire to store up a credit balance that would entitle them to a fortunate rebirth, people were inclined to neglect major virtues in favour of mechanical "acts of merit," each of which had a predetermined value—so much for endowing a monastery, so much for presenting food to monks; so much for freeing a caged bird, so much for giving alms to a beggar. But if Buddhism, with its countless opportunities for merit-making, took care of the future life, there were the everyday problems of present existence to be faced—finding money, warding off accident and disease, softening the heart of the beloved. These matters were controlled by myriads of unseen spirits who haunted land and sea and sky. There was a spirit in every tree and rock, in every pool and stream, in every cloud and star. Spirits caused rain or drought, good crops or bad, success or failure in love and gambling and warfare. Though their malice was easy to incur and hard to escape, they could be placated with offerings of food and flowers or coerced with spells. Today only the simple take such spirits seriously; but in those times nearly everyone, no matter how cultivated, believed in them and devoted much effort to their propitiation.

Finding the Siamese versions of the Buddhist scriptures inadequate as a basis for reform, Mongkut sent to Ceylon for another set—seventy volumes in all—and with the help of the best Pali scholars in Siam set about comparison and revision. Among his friends were a French Catholic Bishop who taught him Latin, and an American Presbyterian minister who taught him English. They lent him books and helped him to study geography, astronomy, and even

comparative religion. These influences assisted Mongkut in his project of Buddhist reform. Griswold writes:

> As he learned more about Christianity he saw a great deal of good in it, for its ethics were surprisingly close to the ethics of Buddhism; but he would not accept its Bible stories. More than once he gently said to his Christian friends: "What you teach people to do is admirable, but what you teach them to believe is foolish."
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> But if there were foolish stories in the Bible, were there not just as many in the Buddhist scriptures? The Buddhist writers conceived of the earth as a flat disk surrounding a central mountain on which the gods dwelt: was that not just as contrary to science and common sense as the Biblical account of the Creation? The Prince was too honest to deny it. The absurdities ought to be rejected and the real Doctrine preserved; but how? A critical study of the texts, not in the spirit of faith, but in the light of reason, should give the answer.
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> Prince Mongkut had seen how easy it is for mistakes to creep into manuscripts, and he knew that four hundred years had elapsed between the Buddha's lifetime and the writing of the scriptures—four hundred years during which the teachings had been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.
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> In a touching passage, which was surely genuine, the Buddha had authorized a certain scepticism. He had begged his disciples not to accept any belief merely because it was handed down by tradition or preached by some respected teacher—even himself; they must test every belief with their own powers of reason. This was the criterion Prince Mongkut and his followers used, and the reconstruction of the true Doctrine followed naturally. The miracles were exaggerations, the accounts of gods and demons simply parables that had become confused with historical record, the absurd cosmography a spurious insertion.
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> When the errors were stripped away, the Doctrine reemerged as a moral system of incomparable beauty. It was this doctrine to which the reform sect must adhere.

The propitiation of spirits, the selling of spells and love philtres were all put aside, and the supporters of Mongkut's reform gave themselves wholeheartedly to "devotion to learning, freedom from superstition, zeal for restoring the great ethical and moral principles to their proper place." To incomprehensible chants in Pali Mongkut added sermons in Siamese, urging that "Buddhism was to be the heritage of the whole people, not merely the monks." The Prince and his followers attracted crowds of listeners:

> Again and again they preached the five main precepts—abstention from falsehood, theft, murder, intoxication, and adultery. They urged both monks and laymen to realise the necessity of self-restraint, kindness, and tolerance in daily life.

Not all Buddhists, of course, embraced the reform. The traditionalists in the monasteries were disturbed at the prospect of change, but the new sect began a leaven in Siamese Buddhism which was to influence the entire nation, while the good sense of Mongkut's program, as Griswold puts it, "attracted many of the best minds."

The program of publishing the essentials of Buddhist philosophy continued after Mongkut became king, and later his son, King Chulalongkorn, manifested a similar devotion by editing and printing at his own expense the whole of the Pali *Tipitaka*, published in thirty-nine volumes in Bangkok in 1893. Copies of this edition of the *Tipitaka* ("Three Baskets," comprising the Pali canon of Ceylonese or Hinayana Buddhism) were "lavishly distributed among the scholars and scientific establishments of Europe and America," according to the *Hastings Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics.* Helped by his younger brother, Chulalongkorn also continued the modernization of Siam begun by his father.

So runs the story of the life and accomplishments of a man who was as great in his way as any of the European empire-builders of the nineteenth century, yet who confined his enterprise to the service of his own country, and at the same time devoted his best energies to the moral regeneration of his people through the purification and revivification of their religion. Who, then, deserves to be regarded as the more "civilized" of the two—Anna, or the King?