VOLUME VIII, NO. 35
AUGUST 31, 1955

THE BIG SHUFFLE

IT might as well be faced that we live in a period shaped by unsettling events rather than by unsettling ideas. We should doubtless be much happier human beings if we were able to rally around a nucleus of revolutionary conceptions such as animated the great changes in social arrangements and relations at the close of the eighteenth century. Those were great days, when great ideas moved men to do great things.

But today, men feel themselves confined by circumstances and wait in apprehension for the next jolt to come, not knowing where or when it will occur. And, not unnaturally, at a time when the familiar sources of security seem to be drying up, men prepare to change their faiths. A chaotic eclecticism takes the place of well-defined convictions and the frothy belief that "anything can happen" is revealed by the increasing presence of the fantastic and magical in the popular literature. Even an invasion from Mars acquires a specious credibility from the secret hope that some irrational power may free us from the grim logic of external events. After all, if the flying saucers are going to give us trouble, we can forget the kind of a world our fathers built and that we are struggling to maintain. The saucers easily become a symbol of blessed irresponsibility, an odd sort of vicarious atonement for neglect of issues of our own making.

Such a period is also a time of testing of the rational spirit among intellectuals. Serious men are bound to try to stretch the systems of thought in which they have grown up to include the ungovernable phenomena of a radical revolution gone sour, of physical science which has discovered the secrets of the devil, and of apathetic populations drugged with the pleasures of a sensate culture. Many find that the old systems won't stretch, and they turn with a sudden relaxation of skepticism to the faiths abandoned by a previous generation of cultural leaders. Some years ago, the *Partisan Review* chronicled aspects of this trend in a series of articles entitled "The Failure of Nerve," which was later followed by another series, "Religion and the Intellectuals."

There is this obvious question: How much of the "looking around" for something new or different to believe in is explained by oppressing anxieties, and how much of it grows out of deliberate reassessment of one's convictions? In any period of the shuffling of convictions, a great confusion of motives is bound to be present, so that, to find out what is really happening in a period like the present, it is necessary to get behind the barrage of controversy and to examine the flow of authentic thought. Actually, this may not be possible. There may be too much confusion, or the flow of thought may be as yet not well enough defined. What we can be sure of, however, is the inevitable weakening of past systems of thought, and this may be a process which must take place before there can be any real hospitality to new ideas.

One illustration of what is happening to old systems of thought is presented in a prize-winning essay in the *New Statesman and Nation* for May 21. This British liberal weekly offered 100 pounds for the best essay by a youth or student under twenty-six on the subject of "Faith and Reason." The contribution of "joint first prize-winner," A. J. Wicken, is remarkable for its tight coherence and clear development, yet it is far from an encouraging essay. The lucid quality of this work seems largely a result of narrow definitions of "Faith" and "Reason." Young Mr. Wicken writes with a Byzantine calm and one may mourn the lack of fervor in a discussion which, at the end, confesses that "conditioning" is the cause of the viewpoint presented, as it is also responsible

for other views which are opposed. This champion of "Reason" concludes:

> So I am a child of my times. Having spent seventeen years of my life learning how to appreciate and assess evidence I now find myself compelled to use the method of reason and evidence whenever possible. And when it is a matter of choosing ends, where the rules of evidence do not apply, I must remain agnostic.
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> I am not prepared to say that intellectual consistency, or the life of reason, is absolutely more desirable, or better, than faith. Different people have different psychological requirements and each will live, and ought to live, the life that best satisfies his needs.

In short, the essay is a trim, modest, and debilitated version of nineteenth-century agnosticism. In some measure, the editors of the *New Statesman and Nation* must accept blame for the limited meaning of "Faith" in this essay, since the writer makes it plain that faith, in the terms of the contest, has been equated with "belief in religious doctrines." But however the contest was set, its winner is plainly agreeable to the view that faith means belief without evidence, while reason always employs the facts which are supplied by science. The "articles of faith" which Mr. Wicken finds himself unable to accept are the virgin birth of Christ and his resurrection. Even if these beliefs are what the *NS & N* wanted discussed as suitable representatives of Faith, Mr. Wicken, in adopting this limitation, himself submitted to the trivialization of the whole affair, for by what authority is the scope of faith restricted to the dogmas of institutional religion? This attack on the question seems itself to be a mutilation of Reason. The author also admits that his devotion to reason may break down in an emergency. After giving the environmental causes for his reliance on reason, he adds:

> Naturally, my circumstances may not always be so fortunate as they are at present. My health might break down, my personality might change so as to make people despise me and I might have experiences for which there is no explanation in the textbooks. And should any or all of these things happen, I should not be surprised if changes were to occur in my beliefs and I were to feel an attraction for religious faith.

The great agnostic, T. H. Huxley, must be stirring restively in his grave, when such limp versions of the "faith" of the earnest atheists of the nineteenth century can win prizes in Britain's leading liberal magazine!

Toward the end of his essay, Mr. Wicken propounds a dilemma from which he sees no escape:

> If one is accustomed to solving one's day-to-day problems by the method of reason, how can one resort to the method of faith, of belief without evidence, in other departments of life? This is the problem of the thoughtful man who has been brought up on the methods of science, and a very acute problem it is. It is no answer to say that there are questions, for example moral questions, with which science cannot deal. For although scientific procedures can help us to determine only means and not ends, intellectual integrity forbids him to use unverifiable or unverified beliefs in choosing his ends. There are many, of course, who do not feel the urge to consistency, for example men who are eminent mathematicians and physicists, yet are prepared to subscribe to metaphysical beliefs on a paucity of evidence that would be scandalous in professional matters. Whether or not one allows such inconsistency depends on the pressure of circumstances and on one's childhood and subsequent training.

All that Wicken has really added to the agnosticism typical of the nineteenth century is his admission of this dilemma—that if the scientifically inclined man cannot act rationally until "all the facts are in," and if circumstances press decisions upon him, he will either while away his days in ivory towers of reserved opinion, or throw his rationalism to the winds. The system, in short, won't stretch. It seems fair to say that this essay, with its unimaginative advocacy of reason, digs at least as deep a grave for rationalism as it does for faith.

Yet this, we are bound to conclude, is the sort of essay that the *New Statesman and Nation* wanted, for if not, why award the hundred pounds to Mr. Wicken? This journal, we reluctantly observe, prefers fighting at the barricades for an

over-simplification of the issues between fruitful consideration of new definitions of both faith and reason.

We have only to compare the mood of this essay—the youth of the writer is irrelevant, here—with the determined optimism and aggressive humanitarianism of past generations of agnostic writers, to realize that vitality has fled this once vigorous system of ideas or belief. Further, a comparison of this sort of faith with this sort of reason does not even begin to address itself to the kind of thinking that seems to be shaping the religious attitudes of the future.

Last year, in a series of radio broadcasts entitled "Man's Right to Knowledge," Paul Tillich, graduate professor of philosophical theology at Union Theological Seminary, discussed Religion over the CBS system. Dr. Tillich's remarks move in a universe of discourse which is never entered by the old sort of arguments about faith and reason. He sets out by noting that, according to some theologians, "the meaning of religion is that man received something which does not come *from* him, but which is given *to* him and may stand against him." Then there are critics of religion who argue that religion is a psychological episode in human history, with "no place in the scientific stage in which we are living." In his comment on these two views, Tillich embodies what seems to us the new spirit of religious thought. He writes:

> If we analyze carefully these two groups of arguments, we discover the surprising fact that although they come from opposite directions, they have something definite in common. Both the theological and the scientific critics of the belief that religion is an aspect of the human spirit define religion as man's relation to divine beings, whose existence the theological critics assert and the scientific critics deny. But it is just this idea of religion which makes any understanding of religion impossible. If you start with the question whether God does or does not exist, you can never reach Him; and if you assert that He does exist, you can reach Him even less than if you assert that He does not exist. A God about whose existence you can argue is a thing besides others within the universe of existing things. And the question is quite justified whether such a thing does exist, and the answer is equally justified that it does not exist. It is regrettable that scientists believe that they have refuted religion when they rightly have shown that there is no evidence whatsoever for the assumption that such a thing exists. Actually, they have not only not refuted religion, but they have done it a considerable service. They have forced it to consider and restate the meaning of the tremendous word *God.* Unfortunately, many theologians make the same mistake. They begin their message with the assertion that there is a highest being called God, whose authoritative revelations they have received. They are more dangerous for religion than the so-called atheistic scientists. They take the first step on the road which inescapably leads to atheism. Theologians who make of God a highest being who has given some people information about Himself, provoke inescapably the resistance of those who are told they must subject themselves to the authority of this information.
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> When we say that religion is an aspect of the human spirit, we are saying that if we look at the human spirit from a special point of view, it presents itself to us as religious. What is this view? It is the point of view from which we can look into the depth of man's spiritual life. Religion is not a special function of man's spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions. The assertion has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of religion, . . .

How would you relate this statement to the ideas of faith and reason? Is it a "reasonable" statement? To some it may seem brilliantly reasonable! What about the element of faith? Well, there is a profound sort of faith in this statement, as we read it. There is faith, first of all, in the capacity of man to grasp the essential truths of his life without having to accept revelation from some outside being. But is this "scientific?" Is it based upon "facts"?

This question of facts will bear some examination. In the context of the implied definition of "facts" of Mr. Wicken's essay, the premises from which Dr. Tillich's argument moves have hardly any standing at all. They are the product of reflective intelligence. They will not be found in any scientific textbook. Are they then "facts"?

The answer to this question is different from the answer that can be returned to a question about what are called "scientific" facts. A scientific fact is a "public truth." That is, you can demonstrate by objective proof that it is true. But of Dr. Tillich's statements, you can say only that they *may* be true, or true by an individual estimate. An individual can be completely convinced of their truth, but he cannot convey that conviction to another by the performance of an experiment.

We are obliged, therefore, to consider that there may be different orders of facts. One order is comprised of physical facts. Dr. Tillich, presumably, is dealing with an order of facts which involve human reactions to beliefs and claims, and with the basis of philosophical perception. If you refuse the dignity of real existence to facts of this order, you can wholly ignore what Tillich says, but then you are securely impaled on the horns of the dilemma formulated by young Mr. Wicken. And if things get tough you may, with him, seek the wide havens of irrational dogma, confessing the inadequacy of reason.

On the other hand, if you find what Tillich says reasonable, and his account of the nature of religion a deeply informing explanation of both the weaknesses of dogmatic theology and the origins of atheism or materialism, then you must accord his "facts" legitimate status in an order of reasoning which, if not "scientific," is nevertheless of paramount importance. For the price of denying the reality of this sort of fact is the danger of being driven to abandon reason itself.

Our own conclusion is that Dr. Tillich is a representative of the reviving current of authentic philosophy in modern thought. There may be a return to religion, such as Mr. Wicken is personally rejecting, but there is also a return to philosophy, along steep paths of disciplined thinking which are never ascended by timid souls. W. T. Stace of Princeton has several times been mentioned in these pages as clarifying the issues of religious philosophy for modern man. Last week's discussion of Zen Buddhism, as presented by Alan Watts, is further evidence of this trend. Prof. Ducasse's work, A *Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion,* is a most impressive instance of the endeavor to regard the problems and issues arising from religion in an impartial light.

Perhaps we can argue that the disturbing events of our time, while frightening many men, are leading others to recognize the necessity for philosophical thinking. This, it may be, is part of the great shuffling process that is producing, day by day and year by year, the major and minor precipitates which carry away untenable hopes and faiths. And as this process continues, we may some day be able to discern areas of thought uncluttered by the debris of the past—places where areas of thought uncluttered by the debris of the past—places where great ideas may again take root.

REVIEW

OPTIMISM ABOUT A HIGH PLACE

MOST of our readers, presumably, will allow the contention that friendly speculations concerning the recent conduct of President Dwight Eisenhower do not necessarily indicate a political coloring or partisanship on the part of this journal. We would also like to advance the view that the best way to free oneself of political partisanship is to show a readiness to discuss the ideas and the proposals of men playing an active role in statecraft in terms of philosophic and ethical values. This approach, however, as was obliquely implied by a devastating criticism of the psychology of presidential political campaigns recently published in *Etc.,* seems virtually foreign to those who seek office—of the Chief Executive or some other—in the United States. Yet there is at least the remnant of an old and wise tradition which calls upon each citizen to look with respect and a measure of good will upon anyone chosen by the electorate to speak for the country; now, perhaps, is one of the most important times for recalling this attitude of mind—apparently buried within a few generations after the death of the Founding Fathers.

The immediate inspiration for talking about a President of the United States comes from remarks available to every citizen. In news reels, over television, and in interviews with the press, we have all had ample opportunity to note the trend and the emphasis in the President's remarks regarding hopes for peace in the future. It seems apparent that these remarks are rather unusual, not because thousands of people have not said the same thing year in and year out, but because they also express a hope for future trust and confidence, a willingness to put the best foot of this country forward *first,* and an optimism about what can actually be accomplished in the next few months. Most of the expressions from the highest rostrum in the land have been of an entirely different nature—during the reign of a number of Presidents. It has even seemed as if one who is elected to the presidency believes he must flatter his constituents by nursing the egocentric belief that the United States has always been in the right, is now almost exclusively in the right, and can only righteously wait until others take the steps that will bring peace between the nations. Eisenhower has not been saying this. When he speaks of the hope that we will be "wise enough to do our part" in eliminating the habit of "nationalistic abuse," he indicates that this is something more than rhetoric by his expressed willingness to confer with Soviet delegates wherever and whenever this is practicable.

Some will recall a press interview with the President at the time when the historic discussions reported during the latter part of July were first under consideration. Significantly, we thought, this interview began by a remark by one of the newsmen to the effect that Eisenhower "would simply have to run for President again" in the next election. Mr. Eisenhower didn't simper over this compliment, but rather took thoughtful exception to it, adding a well-placed rejoinder. What the President said was that, so far as he knew, he had never acquired a reputation for telling others what they must do or when they should do it, and that he felt this same right of private decision should be accorded to him. Those who saw the President at this time, and who noted the simple impromptu phrasing of his "peace program," may well entertain the hope that all over the world an increasing number—perhaps even some of the Russian officials—will look at the President as a man of obvious integrity and sincerity.

Some of the more impressive paragraphs of Mr. Eisenhower's remarks, considered in this context, followed his report that at the Geneva Conference "we talked a very great deal, not only about officials visiting back and forth, but increasing opportunities for citizens of each country to go more freely within the other to learn for themselves what their opposite numbers in the other country looked like and how they felt and how they lived." He continued:

> One thing is indisputable. For one week of argument and debate that sometimes was, to say the least, intense, never once did we have a recurrence of the old method of talking to constituencies in terms of invective and personal abuse and nationalistic abuse. And that in itself is a great gain and one that I hope we shall never lose. There was a beginning of this kind made and if we are wise enough to do our part, it is just possible that something to the great benefit of man may eventuate.

A curious commentary upon Mr. Eisenhower's apparent graduation from the school of ordinary political platitudes occurs in the Summer *Antioch Review.* The writer, Robert E. Fitch, a professor of

Christian Ethics at Pacific School of Religion, accepts the genuineness of the President's "piety," but is not so sure that this is the way for the Christian word to be preached in modern times. Dr. Fitch has done some research in terms of the President's childhood upbringing among the River Brethren, and feels that while all of this is ethically sound, it may not enable the President to be sufficiently "practical." Dr. Fitch comments:

> One might wish that, instead of having a Presbyterian foreground to a pietist background, Ike had a genuinely Presbyterian background. For the culture of Calvinism, unlike the culture of pietism, embraces an explicit social discipline. Scratch a Calvinist and you provoke a lawyer, a constitutionalist, a politician, at his best a statesman, in any case one who knows that there is no simple transfer from personal morality to public morality, and who is attentive to the pressures, the intricate manipulations, and the specific devices by which lofty ideals are to be adjusted and enacted into social institutions.
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> Ike's pietism qualifies him as hero in a democracy. But does it qualify him as the political leader of a democracy? Apparently he sees far enough beyond his heritage to be able to propose a legislative program which articulates the principles by which he believes we should live. But can he crack the whip, will he wield the big stick, will he exert the forceful leadership that might enact these principles into the law of the land? There are times, indeed, when he seems to hope to govern like Aristotle's God, merely by exciting the appetite of the rest of the world, so that it is instinctively drawn toward his virtues. But if he were to model himself after Calvin's God, rather than Aristotle's, he would know that mankind, left too much to the voluntary impulses of the heart, would turn away from the arduous aspiration after righteousness and would only revel again in sin.

Some, however, may hold themselves and the world fortunate that Eisenhower's introduction to essential Christian ethics came by way of the River Brethren rather than by way of a powerfully organized religious constituency. Why is it so impossible to believe that there *is* a "simple transfer from personal morality to public morality," especially when the assumption that ethics must somehow give way to "politics" is recognized by our best critics to lie at the root of many critical problems?

In another portion of his article, Dr. Fitch inadvertently builds a strong case for this very point:

> While any general may be cautious about going to war, and while a general in a democracy may sincerely believe that peace is a higher value than war, it is not often that we come across a general who, in the eyes of the plain people, actually appears as a symbol of peace rather than as a symbol of war. The critical testimony came in Ike's NATO days when he was living in France, and when the French people, never too ready in recent times to idealize an American, spoke of him as a "peace general." At this moment we note that it is Ike, against a Knowland, a McCarthy, a Radford, who keeps a restraining hand on the bellicose tendencies in parts of our government. Is it possible that the pacifism of his devout mother still has an influence on the President in these days of his greatest responsibilities? When Ike chose the army as a career, he rejected pacifism as an absolute; but now that he serves as the civilian President of a democracy, it is likely that he has a new understanding of peace as one of the great values in society. And one may believe that his present passion for peace gathers reinforcement from the religious aura with which it was surrounded in the days of his childhood. If this interpretation is correct, then Ike's love of peace is the only point at which his otherwise simple piety is complicated by a dialectical tension. He could not accept peace as an absolute; but, even after a career at arms, he could make the establishment and maintenance of peace one of his great objectives.

There is, it seems to us, much to support the thought that this background of pacifist religious philosophy may serve to work wonders for the world during the next ten years. As the ancient *Bhagavad-Gita* indicates, it is not the absolute choice between bearing arms and refusal to bear arms that is of vital import, but rather the attitude of mind held by those who must make decision between the two. According to the implicit philosophy of the *Gita,* one may make either choice in the spirit of truth, if not "nonviolence," and with a balanced perspective which results in actions unprejudiced by preconception.

COMMENTARY
THE NEW SPECULATORS

THIS seems a good issue in which to take note of the number of people who are not "writers," yet who—as part of the "Big Shuffle"—are putting together books which express their attempts at philosophic synthesis.

We have noticed this mainly through books which are received by MANAS for review—books which have no real market in the book trade and are issued more at the instance of the author than the publisher. What is distinctive about them is the drive to philosophical interpretation of the world. They combine an enthusiastic attempt to add a "psychic" or a "spiritual" factor to the account of the world, but seldom show awareness of the transient validity of theories of life and nature which unite elements of this year's physical, biological, and social science with recent findings of psychic research, the various strands of thought then being tied together by the personal intuitions of the writer.

But even if these books are regarded as the high-level "hobbies" of their authors, they represent a response to an admirable compulsion—an attempt to bring to order the irreconcilable factors of modern thought. How much better a determined, if immaturely drafted, attack on these irreconcilables, than a smooth and plausible ignoring of their existence!

Such writers, whether young or old, will win no contests in the *New Statesman and Nation.* Their works will hardly be noticed in the organs of specialized fields, since specialists, and editors catering to specialists, have a horror of speculations which range from one narrowly defined pasture to another, offering, finally, grand conclusions which flout the most important taboos of conservative scientific composition.

What such books and essays do accomplish, however, in combination with other influences, is a reworking of the soil of philosophical thinking. It is true, of course, that established journals of opinion have no means of coping with such material. A serious journal, to hold its audience, must preserve some frame of reference shared in general by its readers. The editor must work with a sure instinct within that frame or lose the feeling of orientation that he supplies to his readers.

These books, however, are interesting evidence of the tendency to break out of familiar contexts of explanation and analysis. The more of them the better!

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

EDITORS, "Children . . . and Ourselves": *Time* for June 6 told of the educational work of Carmelite Janvier, a woman who, herself physically handicapped, has spent her life helping schoolchildren in New Orleans to overcome similar difficulties.

> She talked to troubled pupils, tested the backward, visited broken homes, worked from early morning until late at night on every sort of problem that children are heir to.

But one point impressed me—she did not believe in segregating the backward from the so-called "normal" children. Among them was

> . . . a little girl so badly afflicted that she could barely see, could scarcely talk, nor could she walk without the fear of stumbling. Though school officials warned that she would be cruelly teased and taunted, Director Janvier saw to it that she was allowed to go to school as if she were normal. It was one case in many, but nevertheless symbolic of Carmelite Janvier's life work. "That child," says she, "became a favorite. She meant so much to the children in her class. She couldn't live long because of her handicaps, but she stayed with the children until she died, at about the age of twelve. She was happy, and they were the richer because of her."

Now, in our neighborhood, there is a mother who once spent a long time explaining to me that she wanted her child to play with children just her own age, with similar interests. She wished to pigeonhole the child, and allot her play-time to children as nearly like herself as possible. There was at that time a young boy in the neighborhood who was mentally retarded. He enjoyed playing with the other children, who were kind to him, and answered his repeated questions about the same things over and over again. This boy seemed to expand, to grow more "normal" when with other children of varying ages and aptitudes. He enjoyed being with adults, too, following them about and asking his endless questions—but adults who took the time to answer him found that he could be led to a concentration on one subject, and if his endless questions were turned back to him, he could, painfully, but slowly and with increasing sureness, give his own answers.

Some of the neighborhood parents lacked the ability to accept this child as easily as the children did. They insisted, "He should be in a private institution," or "He shouldn't be around *our* children." But when he was with the other children, he was happy and contented and occupied.

The question is, what are the schools to do with such a boy? With the heavy teaching load imposed on teachers in our crowded schools, we can understand how difficult it would be to give special help to such a child—yet such children could learn much, and teach much, it seems to me. This point was emphasized by contrast when a young teacher, fresh from college, expressed delight that her first teaching assignment was to be in a small town where the children "have high IQ's," rather than in a town nearby, where the children vary widely in IQ ratings. She felt herself unequal to the difficulties the latter schools would provide.

The writer of the foregoing covers a good deal of territory. To begin with, the matter quoted from *Time* provides an excellent commentary on selections reproduced here from Lillian Smith's *The Journey.* Mrs. Smith was concerned with the way in which helpful parental attitudes toward the handicapped young can aid the *children* to find themselves. Director Janvier's emphasis is upon something quite different, though complementary. Cannot the *community* learn from those who suffer from mental disability? Since disabilities of all kinds are part of the human equation, is this not truly a community problem?

This reminds us of the customs reported to prevail among "primitive" peoples. There the men, women, and children whose mental capacities were confused were shown special deference. Somehow the gods were testing them,

in a way that any in the village or land might some day be tested. So was it not natural to show extra consideration? This "primitive" approach seems, on second thought, to be advanced far beyond the typical attitudes toward mental unbalance in civilized countries, and to reflect a basic wisdom, supported by unassailable logic.

As our correspondent indicates, children do not themselves point the finger of scorn at those who are handicapped in such fashion. It is the nature of the child to accept, to show a tolerance for even extreme differences, unless and until the prejudices of their elders have affected them. Of course, the issue here is really philosophical: Does one wish to protect himself and his family from supposedly undesirable elements in the community, or does he wish to *serve* the community, as a whole, to the best of his ability? An application of the ethics of any of the great religions of the world suggests that only the latter view represents the flowering of man's spiritual potential.

A different application of the same form of idealism is described in Claire Hutchet Bishop's study of the Communitarian Movement in France, *All Things Common.* The Communitarians regard the transgressors of their laws, when members of the community, as *contributing* to the education of all—not as subjects for punishment. What is important? That each person within the communal center have varied opportunities for enlarging perspectives. One who breaks communal law either proves that the law is a good one because of unfortunate consequences, or, if the action works out well in spite of being "against the rules," perhaps the law is in error!

So we should guess that might be the case with the parent mentioned by our correspondent, who wished to isolate the handicapped child and keep her own brood in the groove of familiar behavior and reaction. With an open mind, such a parent might discover that the very handicaps which seem grotesque can stir pity and tenderness in her child, whereas exclusive association with those of her own age who are competitive in regard to conventional values would fail to stir hidden sympathies. That, we think, explains why some men and women, as well as children, learn from those who suffer emotionally or mentally. These "unfortunates" are, obviously, not in competition, and can therefore be viewed in another light.

We cannot subscribe, though, however ideal the theory, to a program for presently including mentally retarded children in our public schools. These children do need the sympathetic attention of teachers, older and wiser than the one mentioned—who wanted to be associated with those who had high IQ's and were therefore "easier to teach." The handicapped children need association with the "normals," but this association can, we think, best take place where there is the opportunity for parental-child education in the neighborhood. Helplessness and need are fine teachers, but have less show in the classroom. If all schools were genuine embryo communities, as many "Progressives" have dreamed they might someday be, the situation would be different.

FRONTIERS

"Do it Yourself"—the Indian Way

NOT since Scott Nearing's *Economics for the Power World* (John Day, 1952) have we come across a study of economics as simple and understandable as *The Village Exchange,* a pamphlet just published in India. In fact, the pamphlet reads so easily and is so interesting that the unschooled editor of this Department suspected that it wasn't really on economics at all, but was just common sense, until we read the comment of Mrs. Joan Robinson, well-known Cambridge economist, who said, after studying the project on which the pamphlet is based: "I teach my students price, parity and production. But I have learned a great deal from you today. It will help me to teach my students better. I would tell them that they should come here to learn practical economics."

The Village Exchange--Programme for Industrial Extension in West Bengal describes an effort to rebuild the Indian economy from the grass roots of village life. It (the effort) began on Dec. 26, 1954, and in six months showed sufficient promise to make it worth writing about. While the results, compared with the magnitude of India's problems, may seem microscopic, the principle that has been proved in practice is of vital importance. That principle is so simple—even so obvious—that it would probably have been ignored if Indian patriots and social workers had not been saturated with Gandhian thinking, and if the need of the villagers were not so great.

What actually happened was this:

> The first practical step to bring this scheme into being was taken on Dec. 26, 1954, in an obscure village in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. A carpenter carved out a small wooden lampstand in his spare time with a piece of waste wood. He estimated its price to be five annas [an anna is worth a little more than a penny]. But he could not sell it in the market because nobody in the village had five annas to spare and nobody outside was interested in such a crude product. So he took the lampstand to a blacksmith of the same village, who, in the same way, made a razor in his spare time with a piece of rusty steel he was throwing away. In the blacksmith's estimate, the razor, too, was worth five annas, although he, too, did not take it to the market for the same reason as the carpenter's. But the blacksmith's wife had use for the lampstand, and the carpenter for the razor. The village worker in the area had already spotted their mutual needs and got each of them to work for the other. So the two articles were made and simply exchanged for each other. By this manner a way was found to produce new wealth of the value of ten annas.

It is a question which to present first—more of the facts about this "project," or the theory which explains and supports it. Both are extremely interesting, and both are needed for the total picture. It will be best, perhaps, to quote from the Development Commissioner, Sushil Dey, for a summary of what had happened by June 15—less than six months later—and then go on to the theory. Mr. Dey said in a report of that date:

> The work has now advanced beyond the stage of experiment. More than 500 villages all over the State are engaged. The number of small producers of all categories—not only artisans, but also farmers, day-laborers and even professional people, including women—now participating and adding to their incomes through this means is well over 2,000. The value of new goods and services produced and disposed of (that is, marketed) is about Rs. 9,000 [a rupee is worth 21 cents]. It may be remembered that the vital feature of this scheme is that anything which is produced is sold automatically, because every producer in this system, by virtue of producing something in specific demand, increases his economic power to consume the products of others at the same moment. In this way, 2,000 people in our villages, as already stated, have increased their real earnings by Rs. 9,000 in five months' time. Some of this additional income has been directly used to improve their standard of living; but most of it has been voluntarily invested in small items of capital improvement. An entirely new process of capital formation has thus come into existence and is expanding on its own momentum.

Now for the theory: India's central economic problem is quite clear—the country is poor. Of India's total population of 380 million—more than 80 per cent of whom live in small villages—only a small proportion are what might be termed "comfortably situated," by Western standards. Pumping a lot of money obtained from foreign loans into the Indian

economy is not a real solution. Money, used intelligently, will help, but what the great rural population of India needs is buying power, and even if a sudden expansion of industrial capacity were possible, who would buy what was produced? Moreover, the transformation of India into a modern industrial nation patterned after the West is not viewed with enthusiasm by many Indians. In the first place, enormous sums would have to be borrowed, and with money comes foreign influence and threat of control. In the second place, too rapid a change in the economic and social relations of the Indian people would produce serious maladjustments in the people themselves. Every intelligent counsel urges a maximum self-sufficiency upon Indian leaders, in behalf of both political independence and natural, harmonious growth.

There is, then, this chronic and widespread condition of poverty in the villages of India. One solution would be the revival on a sound economic basis of small-scale village industry. There was a time when the Indian economy was far better balanced than it is now. India's artisans of centuries ago were famous throughout the East, and even in Europe. For a number of reasons, however, among which must be counted the British conquest, the ancient skills of Indian artisans and craftsmen fell into disuse. Agriculture on a primitive basis remained the only means of subsistence in many areas.

How to revive village or cottage industry: that is the problem. The obstacles are great. In the first place, the villager cannot compete with machine-made goods. He takes too long to make them and in most cases he cannot make them as well. And if he cannot compete in the open market, why should he waste his time making things that his neighbors in the village are too poor to buy?

This was the situation which confronted the development workers at the village level. Then a great idea dawned. Why couldn't the village workers exchange their goods with each other? This would not be barter, exactly, since prices would be set at about the market value. Money, however, would not change hands; instead, credits and debits would be issued.

This general plan was put into practice, with the following results. Capital was created, as in the case of the carpenter and the blacksmith. Often goods obtained by exchange eliminated the need for cash purchases. Most of the new capital was used to improve methods of production—better tools were bought with the money. So, as a matter of course, there was a gradual grading up of quality and efficiency. There was also a small capital accumulation among the villagers. Eventually, the credit position of some of the villagers was strengthened to the point where they were able to borrow from funds held in readiness by the Development Authority of the Government, and to make further steps of expansion in their methods. Concerning this program of financing, Mr. Dey writes:

> We are taking care to see that the item of improvement we are financing is small in each individual case, so that the increase in output resulting from it may not exceed the local capacity for its absorption. We have realized that this local capacity originates from the increase in output of other producers. Therefore, we are also taking care to see that the improvement is not pushed only in one line of enterprise, but several lines simultaneously, so that the expanded supply in each may provide the market in the expanded supply in others. We are thus deliberately aiming at diversification of enterprise, balancing the growth in each direction by growth in other directions. We call this the *Principle of Multilaterial Expansion.* The application of this principle implies that we are spreading our loan and training aid over a wide range of village enterprise. It also means that the individual sum advanced in each case is small. There is a further important rule we are following. We call it the *Principle of Marginal Improvement,* because the improvement we are trying to promote in each specific enterprise at each stage is one that does not represent a big jump from the level or margin of the prevailing technique, but one that is just over this margin. The loans are, therefore, many in number, but small in each case, and of short duration.
>
> We are getting excellent results. We are encountering no marketing problem; and recoveries of loans advanced are punctual. In the last five months, during which this new scheme has been worked, the total loan given out in such small sums in specific support of this scheme has been Rs. 3,125.

Some of this has already become due for repayment, and not only has there been not a single instance of default, but there have been many debtors who have offered to repay before due, so as to borrow again.

A later step of this program has not been mentioned. After the economy of a village has been strengthened by diversification of production and the confidence of the villagers in their capacity to improve their condition is evident, attention is given to the special sort of production in which that village may have natural advantages. If there are clay deposits in the area, a ceramic industry may be considered. Choosing to move in this direction involves a reversal of the original plan, which involved diversification of effort. Now the effort is focussed on specialization, for restoration of the village economy on a higher level and permanent basis. Eventually, village industry so developed will take its place as a natural element in the national economy, having acquired, by gradual steps, the skill, efficiency, and modern methods necessary for competition on the open market.

The most exciting thing about this program is that it begins with practically nothing but an idea. The villagers take the initial step by using their idle time to increase their production. They deal in a private market which frees them from the oppressive competition of the large factories. When they have saved enough money by additional income gained in this way, they improve their methods and become better producers. Then they become responsible borrowers. And from the entire process is born incalculable confidence and enthusiasm. When Dr. Ernest E. Neal, an economic adviser of the Technical Cooperation Mission from the United States, asked a villager how Community Projects help in the village industry program, the villager gave him this answer:

This is a village programme. It is not a Community Projects program. It is true that we got inspiration and some guidance from the project officers, but it is now a village programme.

As we form more capital from the exchange programme, we will go in for better tools. This village movement will keep in touch with Community Projects for guidance.

It is not entirely clear who published this pamphlet, nor have we any information as to its price. However, it is probable that copies can be secured from the office of Mr. Sushil Dey, Development Commissioner, West Bengal, Raj Bhavan, Calcutta 1, India.

We should like to add, finally, one thing. This project is an enterprise in education. Its success depends upon the initiative of the villagers, so that the helpers supplied by the Government do as little as possible beyond planting suggestions. The stress is on function. One of the government workers says:

Our own staff play only a peripheral, fractional and marginal part. The gathering of village producers becomes a regular habit for conducting exchange transactions. Slowly, it begins to crystallize into a stable organization. We refrain from giving it any formal and official recognition until a clear demand for such recognition comes from the villagers themselves. For the same reason, there is no offer from our side to register the organization as a cooperative society. We are content to watch the cooperative idea and habit take root in the villagers' minds and actions. We refrain from even giving a standard name to the new scheme. It is enough merely to explain its content and help the villagers in gaining an insight into its implications as they continue to conduct its operations from day to day. Soon they invent their own names for the work, which vary from area to area. We also refrain from prescribing forms and registers for maintaining the accounts which have to be kept. The villagers assign this task to those who are literate among themsdves, sometimes to the village school teacher, sometimes to the village level worker himself. They devise their own local forms, which, again, display a considerable variety and ingenuity. As the work increases in volume and becomes more complicated, the villagers, grappling with it all the time, continue to grow up with it, exhibiting a deeper grasp and greater capacity to shoulder increasing responsibilities. It is a real thrill and a real privilege to be called upon to help it gently forward, here and there, from time to time. Watching it, we have begun to learn a great many things ourselves. It is a process of education for ourselves, no less than for the villagers who work for it.

As we said at the beginning, this is the kind of economics that seems to make a great deal of sense.